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Introduction to special issue on 'Leisure, Tourism and Risk'

Perceived risk and safety are often regarded as factors that have the potential to influence leisure and tourism decisions. In particular, risk is referred to as a constraint to leisure and tourism participation, namely as a reason for not participating in a leisure activity or tourism experience (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Bianchi, 2006). However, research work in the area of adventure tourism and high-risk leisure activities reveals that risk is actively sought by some individuals (Lyng, 1990; Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993). Several studies have been conducted on risk, yet the motivations, behaviours, and emotions of individuals who voluntarily seek and/or avoid high-risk activities and experiences in leisure and tourism environments remain relatively unexplored.

For example, the relationships between risk and emotions have not been explored in detail. A number of studies (Warr & Stafford, 1983; Ewert, 1986; Warr, 1990) highlight that perceptions of risk are related to the arousal of specific emotional states, such as fear. Ewert (1986, p. 45) claims that 'fear is often anticipated in certain experiences or social situations which constitute a threat or risk'. Similarly, Lupton (1999) emphasises that feelings of fear and anxiety are closely related to perceived risk. However, the relationship between risk and fear seems to be unclear. As Rountree and Land (1996) point out, perceived risk and perceptions of fear are independently influenced by different variables. Furthermore, Warr (2000, p. 454) states 'there is corroborating evidence that measures of fear and measures of

perceived risk do not measure the same phenomenon and do not behave similarly with respect to other variables'. This argument emphasises the need to conduct further research on risk in order to understand whether and how it is related to specific emotional states.

More research is also needed to identify the most effective methods to collect data on risk. In this respect, the question arises as to whether the methods employed to investigate risk in leisure and tourism settings provide an in-depth understanding of the complex array of emotional states related to an individual's experience of risk. In addition, the ethical implications of conducting research on risk should not be ignored by tourism and leisure scholars. As previous studies (Jamieson, 2000; Melrose, 2002) reveal, conducting research on risk may expose both the researcher and the respondents to physical and psychological dangers.

Whilst a wide array of studies have been published that focus attention on risk, there exists a paucity of empirical data concerning perceptions of risk in specific leisure and tourism contexts, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The limited quantity and variety of studies of risk within leisure and tourism contexts in Africa, Asia and Latin America stands at odds with the central position that risk often occupies, both directly and indirectly, within leisure and tourism experiences. Consequently, this special issue of 'Recreation and Society in Africa, Asia & Latin America' aims to provide a forum for expanding current understandings of the linkages between leisure, tourism and risk and the implications of these links for wider society.

In the first article, Robert Fletcher provides an analysis of a recent media campaign launched by Colombian tourism authorities centred on the slogan 'Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay'. His paper explores how this campaign contributes to the construction of a 'public secret', namely something generally known but not explicitly articulated (Taussig,

1998). The author examines how this 'public secret', which evokes seemingly contradictory perceptions of safety and risk, plays an important role in attracting foreign tourists to the country.

Martina Shakya is the author of the second article, entitled 'Local Perceptions of Risk and Tourism: A Case Study from Rural Nepal'. Her work explores the impacts of tourism on poor, rural host communities in Nepal through the theoretical lens of the vulnerability concept and with a particular focus on risk. This is followed by Emily Falconer, who investigates risk, excitement and emotional conflict in women's travel narratives. By looking at the emotional, sensual and embodied journeys of female backpackers in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the author provides an analysis of their risky and frightening narratives.

The last article of this issue is by Gisele M. Schwartz, Danilo R. P. Santiago, Giselle H. Tavares, Cristiane N. Kawaguti, Paula M. Abruhez, and Sandro Carnicelli Filho. The authors explore perceptions of risk, violence, competitiveness and emotions among a group of Brazilian video game players. Their work casts light on the relationships between risk and the virtual environment, which have been relatively neglected by tourism and leisure scholars.

A notable aspect of the papers presented in this special issue is that risk is discussed from both the perspective of industry and consumers. The first two articles, by Robert Fletcher and Martina Shakya, analyse the meanings of risk from an industry perspective. It can be argued that risk is implicitly and explicitly referred to as a negative component for the development of a tourist destination. Robert Fletcher's work, for example, emphasises the importance of risk management in carefully manipulating how risk is represented, in this case in order to attract more tourists to Colombia. The idea that risk has a negative component is also emphasised by Martina Shakya, whose study discusses the relationship between the (positive) benefits of tourism and its (negative) risk-related costs. In contrast, Falconer's and

Schwartz et al.'s work highlights that consumers' experiences of risk may assume different meanings, not necessarily negative. In this respect, Emily Falconer claims that risk plays a positive role in the construction of backpackers' travelling narratives/experiences. The idea that risk can be positive from the consumers' perspective is further emphasised by Schwartz et al., who relate risk to pleasure in their exploration of Brazilian video game players' experiences. Despite these different perspectives, the four articles share a common theoretical stance on approaching risk; that is the rejection of the concept of objective risk and the emphasis on the perceptual and subjective nature of risk.

Overall, this special issue provides a significant contribution to our knowledge of risk in leisure and tourism. One of the most important contributions can be related to the specific contexts in which risk is investigated. Much literature has explored perceptions of risk in leisure and tourism environments (Ewert, 1986; Lyng, 1990; Celsi et al., 1993), yet research has mainly been focused on Western countries. These articles explore perceptions of risk in contexts that have been relatively neglected by tourism and leisure scholars, such as Colombia, Nepal, India, and Brazil. This is a significant contribution to knowledge, considering that perceptions of risk vary over time and space. Furthermore, the work on which the papers are based advances our understanding of risk from a methodological perspective. While quantitative methods have traditionally been employed in the investigation of risk, these papers use both quantitative and qualitative techniques. By employing qualitative methods, the articles also unveil the variety of emotions, perceptions and patterns of behaviour related to risk, which are of fundamental importance to obtain an in-depth understanding of people's experiences of risk in leisure and tourism contexts.

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