

Sports Tourism Demand in England: Economic and Physical Activity Tradeoffs

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Aim and Question

Tourism contributed 9% of the GDP of the UK economy, with a value to England of £91.7bn in 2016 and day trips accounting for £53.5 bn of this. Tourist Day visitors are trips of greater than 3 hours duration away from the home environment to engage in leisure, recreational and social purposes. Activity tourism is a rapidly growing segment of this market, and refers to either sports tourism (Weed, 2006), or adventure tourism (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). Activity tourism is now viewed as a central component of current UK policy as outdoor recreation is perceived to be more likely to contribute to achieving health and well-being outcomes for the nation than traditional sports, which have been the focus of existing physical activity policy (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2015). The aim of this paper is to evaluate the role that outdoor sport activities play in Tourist Day visitor activity to inform both economic and physical activity policy outcomes. The research question addressed is:

Does activity tourism within Tourist Day visits contribute to achieving both economic and physical activity policy outcomes?

Theoretical Background

Drawing upon the economic theory of household production (Downward et al., 2009), it is recognised extensively in the tourism literature that visitor expenditure, which is central to the economic impact of tourism, is closely related to the duration of visits. This is because they are viewed as a symbiotic economic exercise of consuming time and other resources. The current research draws upon this time-allocation theory to explore the trade-offs also predicted by the theory in exploring the economic and physical activity consequences of Tourism Day visits. This has not been undertaken in the existing literature.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The data used in this study is drawn from The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey which collects data on the behaviour of the English population aged 16 years old or older in an annual rolling cross-section of approximately 45,000 individuals. Interviews take place every week and only one interview is undertaken per household. Data in this study draws on responses from 2012 to 2016 on a subsample of 5,004 individuals. This is because since 2012 the duration of a trip was only measured for a random sample of visits rather than all visits and other questions, such as expenditure during visits, are only asked once during the last week of each month.

A three-stage least squares estimator was employed to explore the determinants of the expenditure associated with, and duration of, the Tourism Day Trips. This is to account for the endogenous nature of the two dependent variables. The key independent variables included in the analysis comprise the activities undertaken, which includes sports. Other key confounding variables were included drawing on Brida and Scuderi (2013). Literature identifies the need for such analysis as it has not been undertaken before (Thrane 2015).

Results

Based on valid instrumental variable estimates of the structural equations describing the components of demand, the key results obtained are that expenditures and the duration of visits are causally and positively related, as emphasised in the literature through correlations. However, the impact of specific activity variables on expenditure and duration is more complex. For example, walking and field sports are positively and negatively related to expenditures respectively. However, they are also negatively and positively related to the duration of the trip. Whilst this might suggest that economic impact is more readily established from walking as an activity, which would have obvious physical activity benefits as well, once the interactions between expenditure and duration are accounted for, only field sports have a positive impact on expenditures.

Conclusion and implications

The research makes contributions through exploring unique data, applying research techniques that the literature establishes as necessary but lacking and critically informing existing literature which emphasises the symbiosis between expenditure and duration on trips. The results suggest that developing sports activity tourism to meet both economic and health and well-being outcomes needs to be carefully balanced and not simply rely on single equation insights or the symbiosis of expenditures and duration. Policy and management of sports tourism thus needs to be nuanced.

References

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