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## Rationale of active leisure : understanding sport, tourism and leisure choices in the Finnish society = Przesłanki aktywnego wypoczynku : rozumienie sportu, turystyki...

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Idō - Ruch dla Kultury : rocznik naukowy : [filozofia, nauka, tradycje wschodu,  
kultura, zdrowie, edukacja] 10, 121-127

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2010

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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## **Rationale of active leisure – understanding sport, tourism and leisure choices in the Finnish society / Przesłanki aktywnego wypoczynku – rozumienie sportu, turystyki i wyboru sposobu spędzania wolnego czasu w społeczeństwie fińskim**

Submission: 29.09.2009, acceptance: 3.10.2009

**Key words:** sport tourism, serious leisure, sociology, Finland

**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine whether leisure choices of Finnish sport tourists reflect serious leisure in the forms of transitions of work-like qualities into leisure; profit hypothesis; social pressure, cultural norms and social identification in a post-industrial society.

The theoretical framework is based on Stebbins' conceptualizations of serious leisure adapted to the Protestant ethics and rationality by Weber, and the structuralist constructivism by Bourdieu. The study utilizes abductive argumentation in hermeneutic tradition. As a conclusion of thematic analysis of four ideal types of leisure justifications will be presented.

### **Introduction**

Sport related tourism has become one of the biggest and fastest growing niche markets of tourism since the 1990's. It is estimated that 15–30 percent of all international tourism today is related to sport and physical activities, and that the share of sport tourism in industrial countries is approximately 1–2 percent of the GDP's [Hudson 2003; Ritchie & Adair 2004; Chalip 2001; Standeven & de Knop 1999]. Sport and activity tourism is a social and economically significant phenomenon also in Finland, because both tourism and physical activities play an important role in Finn's leisure. Finns (population of ca 5,3 million) make nearly 40 million trips a year and over 70 percent of the Finnish adult population participates in physical activities at least once a week. Over a million Finns practise sport and physical activities at least five times a week and 90 percent of Finnish children and youth associate with physical activities. The potentials of sport tourism are also supported by the fact that there are ca. 30 000 sports facilities in Finland that are available for tourists. [KTM 2006b, pp.20–21; SLU 2007a; SLU 2007b; Vuolle 2000, pp. 28–31; OPM 2008].

International studies on sport tourism have mainly focused on customer profiling and the economic impact of sport events. Profiling studies illustrate interesting specifics about the geographic, socio-economic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural factors of sport tourists, but generally their offerings remain on a detail-level. The connections between profiles and their societal connections remain often undiscussed in these studies. Research on sport events on the other hand has mainly focused on the economics and tourism promoting and generating impacts of sport events [Hinch & Higham 2004; Gibson 1998a; Gibson 1998b; Gibson 2006a; Ritchie & Adair 2004, p.11].

The aim of this paper is to examine how and to what extent the justifications of leisure choices by Finnish sport tourists reflect the ideas of serious leisure. Sport tourists are defined as travellers who actively participate in sport and physical activities during travel. Serious leisure on the other hand refers to the changing and vague relationship between work and leisure. Traditionally defined leisure implies to freedom, choice, self-enrichment, relaxation and pleasure. From the protestant viewpoint and as a memory of agricultural society leisure is still seen

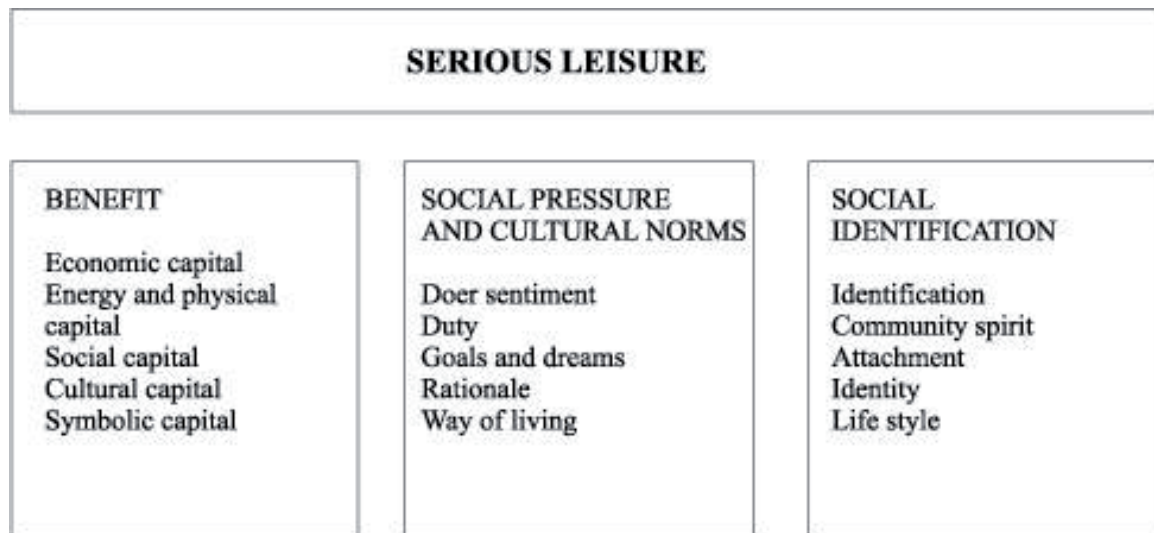


Figure 1. Serious leisure as basis for sport and tourism justifications  
 Rycina 1. Poważny wypoczynek jako podstawa oceny sportu i turystyki

as laziness and wasted time [Hinch & Jackson & Hudson & Walker 2006, p.11; Hanifi 2005, p.171; Liikkanen 2009, p.7; Jones & Green 2006].

It is estimated that the traditional definition of leisure as an outcome of work and an opposite of obligations does not serve social research or the use of the concept of leisure. In fact, many leisure activities, such as sport tourism include obligations, commitments and responsibilities that can be seen as parallel to many “important work-like” activities. This raises a question of how sport tourism and like contradictory activities can be classified as leisure activities at all. In fact there are plenty of situations when leisure as a concept is far closer to the definition of work than the traditional definition of leisure [Jones & Green 2006, pp. 33–34].

### Aim, theory and methodological choices

The aim of this paper is to examine how and to what extent the justifications of leisure choices of Finnish sport tourists reflect the ideas of serious leisure. The starting point of the abductive argumentation is the assumption that protestant ethics is (still) prevailing in the Finnish society, and has contributed to the changing relationship of work and leisure. The concept of serious leisure draws the attention to the utilitarian aspects, to the influence of social pressure and cultural norms and to the connections between social identification and leisure choices (figure 1). Firstly, the commitment to certain serious leisure activities can be explained by using the profit hypothesis, which is applicable to Bourdieu’s field theory and the ideas of participation aiming at economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Secondly, commitment to serious leisure

is interpreted through social pressure and cultural norms, when individuals are tied to an activity by the expectations and needs of the significant others. Thirdly, a sense of social identification tends to lead to the individual undertaking compensatory behaviours to maintain and enhance social identity, and subsequent participation in the activity [Jones & Green 2006, pp. 41–43].

The methodological approach is based on abductive argumentation and hermeneutics that utilise three levels of interpretations in understanding the leisure justifications of Finnish sport tourists. Abductive argumentation refers to the theory bound analysis where the impact of previous knowledge is recognizable, but not purely deductive in terms of theory testing [Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, pp. 97–99]. The first level interpretations stem from grand theories in sociology, namely the protestant ethics and the western rationality by Max Weber [1920/1980; 1920/1989], and from the structural constructionism by Pierre Bourdieu [1990]. The second level interpretations are reflected through research theories where leisure choices are observed through the concept of serious leisure first presented by Robert A. Stebbins [1992]. The third level of interpretations is based on the empirical data of fourteen Finnish sport tourists who were interviewed for this study. As a result and conclusion of the dialectic relationship between these different levels, I present the fourth interpretation of the culturally bound leisure choices of Finnish travellers. The aim then is to understand individual action through the general objectives, and to expand subjective experiences into commonly shared beliefs and regularities in a specific society [Bourdieu 1990; Weber 1920/1980; Dilthey 1989].

### Sport tourism – serious or casual leisure?

According to the multilevel framework offered by Weber, Bourdieu and Stebbins I firstly evaluated the seriousness of leisure from the utilitarian perspective where serious leisure was seen parallel with the attempts to gain rewards and benefits [Weber 1920/1989; Bourdieu 1990; Stebbins 2001, p. 6]. For my interviewees benefits of active leisure were mostly related to health benefits and thus, produced energy capital. Active life style was seen as a rational investment in oneself that lead to a life that is high in quality and long in years. Cultural capital on the other hand, was illustrated mainly in the forms of general interest, curiosity and learning about new cultures, languages and skills in physical activities. To some extent quest for cultural capital seemed to stem from the working life requirements, but to the most part, cultural capital illustrated functions of casual leisure. Social benefits of active leisure were associated with the possibilities of interaction with families and friends. A quest for social situations can also be interpreted as an instrument for other more disguised (usually economic) purposes. This became evident especially in the narratives of incentive travelers to whom social settings generated forms of capital and (Bourdieu's) distinction. Economic capital was not as evident in tourists' leisure justifications as previous studies and profiles let assume. Economic benefits were mostly expressed through the evaluations of sport travel in the cost-benefit axis. Activity trips were weighed for example by their distance, price and quality level, forms of travel and activity possibilities in the destination. Also weather conditions, such as sunshine, warm temperatures and certainty of snow can be interpreted as forms of economic capital.

The last distinctive forms of capital were expressions of symbolic and the so called aesthetic capital. Contrary to the symbolic-elitist presuppositions of the motives of sport tourists, symbolic aspects seemed to have of little importance for the interviewees. To a certain extent, motives of leisure were connected to the bodily beauty expressions, to dress and equipment codes of certain sports, and to travel to far distances and exotic destinations. In most cases however, leisure was justified by other reasons and even then when there was a certain level of references to style, taste or fashion they were consciously approached as an 'outsider of the field'. Aesthetic capital became evident in admiration of beautiful sceneries, seasonality and quest for (flow) experiences. Although the achievement of this type of capital was goal oriented, the expected outcome referred mostly to wellbeing and socio-emotional renewal,

and this way resembled casual forms of leisure. The differences between serious and casual leisure were mostly defined by the levels of consciousness, goal orientation and motives of the activities.

Secondly, alongside with utilitarian aspects, serious leisure was observed from the viewpoint of social pressure, expectations and cultural norms. Together with many other post-industrial societies, also Finland can be labeled as a consumption society where experiences and entertainment are highly valued. At the same time, protestant work ethics is assumed to be (still) prevailing, although the impact of religion in regulating people's lives has decreased. Social pressure and the impact of cultural norms in sport tourists' leisure choices became evident in various ways. First of all, the doer sentiment meant active life style in everyday and touristic settings. Active way of living was considered to be a rational way to live one's life. For some interviewees, active life style seemed to have become almost as an obsession with some level of addiction. Rush and hurry in daily practices together with the attempts to be efficient were connected to the functions of the doer sentiment. Dearer sentiment was illustrated in organized and programmed daily routines also during seemingly leisure hours. Busy life style was characteristics also to the daily routines of some retired travelers.

Serious leisure and the protestant ethos were also expressed in goal-orientations and persistent attitudes towards leisure. Goals in leisure were found in the cottage life, studies and travelling. Goal-orientation reflected some level of orderliness of the life courses and leisure, which for on seemed to offer a sense of security and continuity in daily life. Leisure choices also reflected the ethos of duty and rationality. Sense of duty was illustrated as a work-like feature of leisure, which meant that it was allowed to relax only after "work" (i.e. physical exercise). The work-like nature of leisure reflected the changes of the Finnish working life. It seems that while the length of the average working day has become shorter, at the same time the increased amount of leisure is filled with activities that increase the rush and duties. The evermore vague relationship between work and leisure seems to have an impact in the growing amount of duties during leisure. As if the amount of doings and obligations – whether work or leisure related – needs to equal in an invariable amount. Additionally, the sense of duty was expressed in obeying healthy life style as well as general and public health recommendations. Rational and healthy ways of living seemed to correspond with the signs of salvation, in times when the meaning of work has changed. Finally, serious leisure was connected to the ways of living, which refer to the



relatively stable and structurally determined forms of behaviour, attitudes and perceptions. Active leisure was justified by traditions and the ways of living acquired in the childhood.

Thirdly, sport, tourism and leisure choices were observed as channels of social identification and group dynamics. Different forms of social worlds in leisure are seen as reactions to otherwise boundless and *anomie* nature of post-modern societies [e.g. Stebbins 1992; Stebbins 1997; Jones & Green 2006]. Nevertheless, the justifications of leisure in this study did not reveal any specific attachments to certain subcultural forms of social identities or worlds. It was however, possible to detect some common targets of identification. Instead of single subcultures that illustrate serious leisure, social identification targeted to the larger cultural features. Generally speaking, a certain ethos of western freedom of choice was characteristics to the leisure justifications. Sport, tourism and leisure were areas and objectives of wanting and desiring things. Paid work drew the rough lines and preconditions for leisure possibilities, but in the end, final and detailed alternatives were dependent on the individual choices. Finnish, western and post-industrial backgrounds were seen as taken-for-granted presumptions of leisure choices. Social identification then referred to the connotations of a 'desire' culture and self-determination. It seems that there was a right to decide about one's own life and a right to construct one's life style through consumption, life control and quest for flow experiences that emphasize individuality and independence rather than quests for social identification.

### Conclusion: New types of sport tourists

According to the abductive thematising and as a conclusion of my study I constructed a typology of four ideal types of travellers based on their leisure justifications. This construction was made according to the expressions of the typicalities and illustrative logic of the ways of living and life style choices of the interviewed tourists. The typology is parallel with the Weberian ideal type construction, where ideal types function as tools of understanding human action [Weber 1922/1978, p. 20].

**1. Dutiful performers** were those to whom the Protestant doer sentiment, ethics and the sense of duty were most obvious in leisure choices. This type was keen on active, intensive and demanding sport participation with goals in competitions and career development. Active leisure was mainly justified by health benefits and attempts to gain energy capital. The reasons for non-participation were mainly

illness, injury or a fear of them. Tourism on the other hand was not particularly important for this type. If trips were taken however, they were usually sport related, such as golf and marathon trips.

Although the work-like ethos characterised the leisure of this type, leisure and work were explicitly separated. Leisure was filled with challenges, goals and the rationales of the doer sentiment, but was considered to be a separate sphere of life from work that work however, had enabled. The overlapping and mix of work and leisure was believed to lead to problems in one's wellbeing on a long term basis. The separation of work and leisure illustrated dispositions of systematics and control in life, but it did not mean that the two needed to be similarly oriented.

The doer sentiment of leisure and especially sport participation became evident also in fulfilling the duties in life as if resting and idleness were permitted only after physical activities. Sense of duty was also attached to the compliance of the healthy way of living where recommendations of nutrition, physical activities, weight control and bodily measures regulated the life of this type. Controlled and disciplined life style was considered to be rational, which in turn can be interpreted as either a form of economic and symbolic capital, but also as behaviour shaped by social pressure and cultural norms. What is essential in both interpretations is the existence of rationale that according to Weber was a special feature of Western societies and a prerequisite of the capitalist economic system. The specialities of the Western rationale transform practical-rational life practices into economic activities [Weber 1920/1989, pp. 43–57]. Physically active and healthy ways of living can then bear the fruit of capitalism and protestant ethos.

**2. Nature lovers'** leisure justifications related to the close relationship with the natural environment. Possibilities to be physically active in natural settings were considered as important motives and reasons for sport, tourism and other leisure activities. In this regard the study supported the previous knowledge about Finn's close relationship with the nature [e.g. Vuolle 1992; Silvennoinen & Tyrväinen 2001; Hemmi 1995; Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2001]. Close relationship with the nature was usually acquired in the childhood. Concerns about the pollution and loading of the environment were strongly expressed. Moving in the nature offered casual leisure experiences of refreshment, relaxation and silence. At the same time, serious leisure interpretations were evident when moving in the nature was connected to the utilitarian aspects of gaining energy, aesthetics and cultural capital.

The vague relationship between work and leisure was seen especially in the summer cottage life that is culturally a typical Finnish phenomenon. Cottage life illustrated the transformation of work-like qualities, such as planning, goals, projects and hard work into the leisure. For some interviewees, cottage life resembled (voluntary!) labour camp conditions. Moving in the nature was seen as a precondition of environmental education, which in turn illustrates the paradoxical relationship between moving in the nature and environmental protection.

The nature relationship did not specifically reflect the profit hypothesis or social identification through active leisure. Nature relationship can be perceived as a culturally bound norm that is shared by Finnish people more generally. One reason for that is that in a sparsely populated country such as Finland, the natural environment is and has been geographically and experimentally near to the population. Nature's "offerings" were rather possibilities for solitude, quiet and peace than attachments to the community spirit and social identification. Cottage life was not justified by the special social dimensions either, although time in summer cottages was spent together with families and friends. The basic functions of cottage life related to the transformation of every day life into a new space and environment. Despite the protestant and utilitarian hypothesis it would be overestimated to state that Finn's nature relationship is purely based on utility or distinction attempts. Rather, the main reasons for moving in the nature were aesthetic experiences that enabled peace, quiet and recreation in the natural settings.

**3. Free-floating consumers** justified their leisure and life choices more generally with a certain western 'taken-for-granted' right to travel, consume and construct one's life style as one wishes. Leisure choices were perceived as more or less purely matters of wanting, desiring, organizing and preferring things. Work was considered as an important part of life that enabled leisure possibilities, but in the end even was considered as a matter of actively constructing and arranging life into a certain fashion. Leisure constraints were seen mainly seeming and as challenges to be overcome. The functions of leisure and especially physical activities related to one's own self fulfillment and bodily projects that emphasised the right to control and determine one's own time and space. Travelling was important to this type and together with other leisure choices offered possibilities to gain flow experiences and forms of cultural and symbolic capital. Life was supposed to be fun, pleasant, balanced and controlled! Nevertheless,

the descriptions of the self-determination or consumption were not expressed in an arrogant manner, but rather as things to be taken for granted. The desire or taken-for-granted ethos was, however, questioned when the interview discussion turned to the environmental issues of sport and tourism. The awareness of the environmentally non-friendly impact of one's own behaviour for example in terms of air traffic use and wasteful consumption elicited feelings of bad consciousness. At least for a moment, leisure justifications turned into excuses, shame and moral issues.

The separation between work and leisure was explicitly made and perceived as a result of self-determination. The starting points of one's life choices were labelled by cultural centrism and the mentality of "*it is a jackpot to be born in Finland*". The most essential aspect of leisure was to construct it so that it offered possibilities for "a real life".

Sport participation was a possibility of life style choices. For the free-floating consumers socialisation to physical activities and tourism had happened already in the childhood and through one's own life history. Physical activities were seen as forms of embodiment that enabled controlling one's own personal sphere of life, which was restricted from others, often even from the very closest people. What was essential was not the spectrum of activities or the doer sentiment, but rather the right to control and determine one's own time and space.

As a tourist this type resembled a destination bound tourist, who is distinctively a modern individual. As a citizen of the global village this type has legitimated the right to consume cultures and destinations all over the world [Selänniemi 1996, p.175]. The right of travelling became evident in plans, wishes, desires and attempts to travel now and in the future, within the economic criteria of course. Serious leisure was evident in the legitimating of wanting and possibilities, especially in terms of gaining symbolic and cultural capital. Tourism and sport offered possibilities to increase cognitive as well as skill and experience related forms of capital. On the other hand, positive experiences were not measured according to the economic criteria, which implies that the elitist references of sport tourism did not apply to the tourists in this study. Economic criteria were, however, assumed to enable leisure choices. The justifications of sport and tourism did not explicitly illustrate arrogant quests for (flow)-experiences or attempts to gain symbolic capital, although travelling to exotic and long distance destinations together with practising unique and special activities in destinations can be interpreted as attempts to increase certain forms of symbolic capital.

Social pressure did not seem to push to free-floating consumers towards certain kinds of leisure choices. Leisure was rather a question of constructing one's own life path, which was characterised by hard working ethos or idling or indulgence depending on the situation. On the hand, postmodern norms emphasize experiences, consumption and life control. The individualism that was connected to this type did not illustrate career related individualism, but rather individualism that influences the totality of the every day life courses. In the end the goal was targeted to the most conscious set of choices that contributed to the construction of the holistic and controlled life rich in experiences.

4. Although the leisure justifications of the sport tourists in this study seemed generally individualistic, for the **sociable movers** the leisure motives and reasons related to the social aspects. Quest for social situations in both work and leisure was typical especially to the male and retired participants of the study. Sociability can be interpreted as a pursued capital, but also as a basis for life choices in general. Challenges at work, the control of rush and hurry, work during leisure hours and all in all one's own capacity and wellbeing were largely based on the resources stemming from social relations. For example the developments of modern technical devices, such as mobile phones and lap top computers were feared to replace face-to-face interaction. Social situations were evaluated important both in work and leisure, and close relationships and other social encounters considered as important sources of wellbeing.

In physical activities social aspects meant participation in team sports and in travel, trips with and to family and friends. Quest for social situations was considered as a way of living and a natural desire to associate with people. Sense of the global citizenship was characteristics to this type as leisure choices were seen to contribute to the gain of such social and cultural capital that was to influence one's capacity and willingness to act in multicultural situations. However, social situations and aspects did not mean strong social commitments or identification to certain groupings. The need and desire to be socially interactive mainly meant pleasant every day situations and small talk with strangers.

The relationship between work or work-like duties and leisure was most mixed for this type of all four types. Social activities could have been veiled or covered behind other forms of pursuits. For example in business, social skills were seen important. Thus, social capital can be seen to function "merely" as a tool for other goals, such as

economic pursuits. It is however, very difficult to capture the difference between the genuine and the instrumental forms of social capital. Nevertheless, sociability was not parallel with Stebbins' social identification, which means certain level of commitment and attachments to specific certain social communities. For my interviewees, social justifications of leisure meant primarily pleasant social relations and settings.

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### Summary

This paper deals with leisure choices of Finnish sport tourists. The aim is to theoretically and empirically examine whether leisure interpretations of Finnish activity tourists reflect serious leisure. Serious leisure refers to the transfer of work-like qualities into leisure, and is observed and interpreted as an embodiment of profit hypothesis, social pressure, cultural norms and social identification of the members of post-industrial society.

The theoretical framework is based on Stebbins' conceptualizations of serious leisure adapted to the descriptions of the protestant ethics and rationality by Weber and the structuralist constructivism by Bourdieu. The study utilizes deductive-inductive argumentation in a hermeneutic tradition.

Empirical data consists of fourteen theme interviews of Finnish sport tourists that have been analysed with the method of thematic content analysis.

The interview narratives of the Finnish sport tourists indicate that sport, tourism and leisure choices comprise qualities of both serious and casual leisure. According to the leisure interpretations tourists were classified into four ideal types. For the dutiful performers the functions of leisure were most obviously connected to the ideas of duty, work-like doer and performance sentiments, and as forms of energy and cultural capital. For the nature lovers natural environment together with summer-cottage life served as fields of relaxation, peace and quiet on one hand and working circumstances on the other. The free-floating consumers expressed western individuality and self-determination in life style choices. Work and leisure were most blended among the sociable movers who considered social interaction as a key definer of leisure preferences.

### Streszczenie

Praca dotyczy wyboru sposobu spędzania wolnego czasu przez fińskich turystów sportowych.

Celem jej jest teoretyczne i empiryczne badanie czy interpretacja fińskiej turystyki odzwierciedla poważny czas wolny. Poważny odpoczynek odnosi się do transferu cech praco-podobnych i zamiany ich w odpoczynek, który jest obserwowany i zinterpretowany jako odzwierciedlenie hipotezy zysku, presji społecznej, norm kulturowych i identyfikacji społecznej członków społeczeństwa postmodernistycznego.

Rama teoretyczna oparta jest na konceptualizacji poważnego odpoczynku Stebbina przystosowana do opisu etyki protestanckiej i racjonalizacji Webera oraz konstruktywizmu strukturalnego Bourdieu. Praca korzysta z dedukcyjno-indukcyjnej argumentacji w hermeneutycznej tradycji. Dane empiryczne składają się z 14 tematycznych wywiadów z fińskimi turystami sportowymi, które zostały zanalizowane przy pomocy metody analizy tematycznej treści.

Treść wywiadu z fińskimi turystami sportowymi wskazuje, że sport, turystyka i wybór wypoczynku obejmują cechy zarówno poważnego jak i codziennego wypoczynku. Wg interpretacji wypoczynku turyści zostali podzieleni na 4 typy. Dla sumiennych wykonawców funkcje wypoczynku były najwyraźniej związane z poczuciem obowiązku, wypoczynek był formą akumulowania energii i elementów kultury. Dla entuzjastów natury środowisko naturalne i życie w chatce na wsi służyło jako pole dla relaksu, spokoju, z drugiej strony jako okoliczności sprzyjające pracy. Swobodnie dryfujący konsumenci wyrażali swoją zachodnią indywidualność i determinację w życiowych wyborach. Praca i wypoczynek były najbardziej wymieszane wśród społecznych wnioskodawców, którzy uważali interakcje społeczne jako kluczowy wyznacznik preferencji dotyczących czasu wolnego.