



THE CONTRIBUTION OF VACATIONS TO QUALITY OF LIFE

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Abstract: The contribution of vacations to people's life satisfaction and Quality of Life (QOL) has recently attracted substantial attention among tourism researchers. Yet, most QOL scales do not include vacations: 7% explicitly measure vacations whereas 42% only include items relating to vacations within the broader Leisure domain. Leisure and vacations, however, differ substantially in nature with leisure referring to regular home-based activities and vacations being infrequent leisure activities away from home. As a consequence of the common amalgamation of vacations with leisure, there is limited knowledge about the specific contribution of vacations to people's QOL. The present study (1) presents empirical evidence for the contribution of vacations to QOL, (2) determines the extent of this contribution, and (3) investigates variation in the extent to which vacations contribute to the QOL of different people. Results indicate that vacations contribute to the QOL of the majority of people, are as important a QOL domain as Leisure and People, and that QOL means different things to different people at different points in their life, representing an individual and dynamic concept. **Keywords:** quality of life, life satisfaction, vacations, holidays, heterogeneity. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Vacations are an integral feature of modern life for many people in developed nations and represent a possible avenue for individuals to pursue life satisfaction (Rubenstein, 1980). Hobson and Dietrich (1994) observed that there is an “underlying assumption in our society that tourism is a mentally and physically healthy pursuit to follow in our leisure time” (p. 23), and therefore a factor in increasing QOL.

Yet it remains unclear whether vacations—as opposed to leisure time at home—contribute to people's QOL, to which extent, and whether people differ in the extent to which vacations contribute to their QOL. This is the contribution of the present study. Specifically, we will (1) provide empirical evidence for the contribution vacations make to

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people's QOL, (2) assess the extent to which, for the general population, vacations contribute to people's QOL, and (3) for the first time, investigate whether vacations affect the QOL of different market segments in different ways, indicating domain heterogeneity in the marketplace and, consequently, opening up opportunities for successful target marketing by tourism destinations and industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality-of-Life

QOL has been defined in many ways, as is the relationship between QOL and life satisfaction. Some researchers define QOL in terms of life satisfaction. For example, Meeberg (1993) views it as "a feeling of overall life satisfaction, as determined by the mentally alert individual whose life is being evaluated" (p. 37), while Rejeski and Mihalko (2001) suggest that QOL is "a conscious cognitive judgment of satisfaction with one's life" (p. 23). Others define life satisfaction to be a component of QOL: Cummins, McCabe, Romeo and Gullone (1994) state that personal values, as well as life conditions and life satisfaction, interact to determine QOL, suggesting that the significance of either the objective or subjective assessment of a particular life domain is interpretable only in relation to the importance the individual places on it.

In this current study, we understand QOL to mean "an individual's subjective evaluations of the degree to which his or her most important needs, goals, and wishes have been fulfilled" (Frisch, 2000, p. 220). The present study is guided by the satisfaction hierarchy model (Lee & Sirgy, 1995), the premise of which is that overall life satisfaction is functionally related to satisfaction within a number of individual life domains (e.g., personal health, work, family, love, money).

Due to the fact that objective measures of life conditions account for only a modest proportion of individuals' subjectively reported QOL and/or well-being (Diener & Suh, 1997; Haas, 1999), we use the disaggregate, subjective well-being approach which focuses on "individuals' subjective experience of their lives" (Diener & Suh, 1997, p. 191); that is, their "own internal judgment of well-being" (p. 201) as opposed to using aggregate social indicators. This approach is justified by Campbell, Converse, and Rogers' (1976) investigation that concludes that the subjective perception of well-being is not necessarily associated with objective criteria typically included in social indicator measures of QOL.

We limit our investigation to generic QOL measures, as opposed to specific QOL measures developed for people in very specific circumstances, for example, people with cancer.

Conceptualization of Vacations within the Leisure Domain

According to Hall and Page (2006), a universally accepted definition of leisure, tourism and recreation is impossible, because the definitions change according to their purpose and context. In addition:

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