The FLAG (Fits-Like-A-Glove) model and destination activities of Slow Food members

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ABSTRACT

How do tourists decide whether to undertake destination activities that are similar or different to those they usually do at home? This paper examines the choice of destination activities undertaken by members of the Slow Food movement that tourists usually do at home in the destination based on in-depth interviews. The results suggest their food activities were similar at home and in the destination. The Fits-Like-A-Glove (FLAG) model provides a theoretical explanation of this behaviour as it views each individual choice as influenced by *habitus*, that is, in the moment of decision making, the individual depends on prior social and historical forces that shape his/her experience. Slow Food members were influenced by their habitus to choose their destination activities. This model is recommended for future studies to explore the relationship between activities at home and in the destination of other interest groups.

Keywords: destination activity, FLAG, habitus, Slow Food, travel motivation

Travel and tourism continues to be the world's largest industry; in 2011 it contributed 9% of global GDP (over US\$6 trillion). The worldwide travel and tourism is expected to increase its GDP contribution from US\$6.9 trillion in 2013 to US\$10.4 trillion in 2023 (Hoek, Luning, Stafleu, & de Graaf, 2004). This rapid development of tourism and travel is due in part to macro-economic growth and also to technological advances in transportation. Past studies have extensively examined the motivation to travel of tourists and their decision making process in undertaking activities in their destination (Cohen, 1979; Decrop, 2006; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Stanley, 2002). A substantial number of contextual factors influence tourists' vacation activity decisions, including factors such as culture, social networks and the physical environment. Tourists' decisions might be influenced by personal factors such as age, family situation, occupation, personality, and lifestyle (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). Different approaches can be applied to explain this decision making including rational choice models, constructive choice models, and Fits-Like-A-Glove (FLAG) choice models (Allen, 2002; Woodside, 2006). While rational choice and constructive choice models posit that individual choice is made after certain consideration or calculations; the FLAG model views each individual choice is influenced by *habitus*, that is, in the moment of decision making, the individual depends on prior social and historical forces that shape his/her experience. The FLAG model was introduced by Allen (2002) and adopts a process approach of decision making based on practice theory (Woodside, 2006) found in the work of Bourdieu (1984, 1990). Bourdieu considers that a person's social history has a long lasting impact on habitus or daily activity. For example an athlete who trains on a daily basis will

perform their actions spontaneously and instinctually. Practical experience is defined as being “composed of the entire complex of understandings, feelings, and actions evoked in situ” (Allen, 2002, p. 519). According to the FLAG choice model, people make decisions based on their feeling, past experience, and the circumstances of the environment at that particular period of time. The FLAG model has been used to assess the decision making of a group of secondary students in the choice of post-secondary institution (Allen, 2002) but has not been applied in the decision making of tourists. Instead, choices about activities undertaken in a destination are usually considered to be driven by novelty or sensation seeking. However, it may be that the increasing frequency and ease of travel means that some tourists are interested, when on holidays, in maintaining aspects of their home lifestyle rather than changing it. This suggests the use of the FLAG choice model to explain aspects of tourists’ decision making.

Tourists might not always have chosen to undertake particular activities in a destination when they make their travel decisions and instead, in many circumstances, tourists’ destination activities are decided upon after arrival in the destination (McKercher & Chan, 2005). Recent studies have found that tourists tend to participate in similar activities to those they are loyal to and practice regularly at home when they are in a destination (Brey & Lehto, 2007; Smith, Pitts, & Litvin, 2012). A study by Brey and Lehto (2007) demonstrated that the more a tourist was involved in a certain activity (e.g. playing golf at home), the more they would undertake the same activity in a destination (e.g. playing golf in the destination). A later study by Smith, Pitts, and Litvin (2012) supported the above finding and found the tourists’ motivation to travel to a destination is not activity-driven but destination-driven, suggesting tourists would travel to a destination without thinking about those possible activities they might undertake, but when they arrive to a destination, they choose those closely related to their daily activities at home. Both Brey and Lehto (2007) and Smith et al. (2012) examined this phenomenon without providing a reason to explain this particular behaviour of tourists. In the present study, we offer a theoretical foundation to describe why this is happening.

A group of Slow Food members were chosen as target of this study to explore whether they destination activity preferences would be influenced by their involvement with Slow Food. The Slow Food movement is a non-profit foundation with over 20 years of history, and with over 100,000 members in 150 countries around the world. The philosophy of Slow Food is based on acquiring *good, clean, and fair* food. Good food is defined as being tasty and diverse, and produced in such a way as to maximise its flavour and connections to a geographic and cultural region. Clean food is sustainable, and helps to preserve rather than destroy the environment. Fair food is produced in socially sustainable ways, with an emphasis on social justice and fair wages (Schneider, 2008). Slow

Food members share similar food values related to the consumption of food. Members value knowledge of traditional producers and variety of places where food is produced, local recipes, and flavours (Social Report, 2009). In this study, we examined whether these Slow Food values would be carried through when members travelled to other destinations.

A qualitative research approach was adopted at this exploratory study attempts to uncover new insights into the attitudes and behaviour of Slow Food members. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 43 Slow Food members from Australia, Argentina, Taiwan and Italy concerning their travel. A total of 22 females and 21 males were interviewed. A Slow Food convivium (chapter) located in regions of these countries was first contacted to arrange member interviews. The snowball sampling method was used after the first interview in each region to identify respondents. One researcher spent approximately one month in each location to conduct the interviews. Each interview ranged from 20 to 50 minutes. Interview continues until the data reached the level of 'saturation' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Most members were over 40 years of age and the majority had been Slow Food members for over three years. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the respondents, transcribed by the authors and then subjected to analysis. Members were asked to describe their daily food consumption behaviour, their activities in the destination and consumption behaviour in the destination. Data was managed using NVivo 9.2 and analysed using thematic analysis first by country/region and then merged into one single set of data. Three main themes were identified: (1) members' travel motivations, (2) food lifestyle at home and (3) destination activities.

Slow Food members expressed a diverse range of travel motivations; travelling for reasons such as business, pleasure, learning a language, and to visit family and friends. However, members shared a similar food lifestyle at home and in the destination. Among all 43 respondents, there were more similarities in their food lifestyle and their destination activity choices than dissimilarities. Across different culture, age, profession, and gender, all members expressed their strong commitment toward the basic values of Slow Food and undertook such practices daily. All Slow Food members were concerned with getting fresh ingredients for their everyday dishes, and most of them shopped at traditional markets and supported small-scale producers. Members liked cooking for family and friends and did so regularly. When members cooked, most avoided using precooked packages or canned food. Most of the interviewees had dinner with family members every day and went to their parents or grandparents place for food gatherings on weekends. Members were quite knowledgeable about different food cultures and history of food from different places. Slow Food members embraced and executed the Slow Food philosophy in their daily food consumption and purchasing behaviour. Members accepted the basic values of Slow Food, shared these values with others and were highly

involved with Slow Food values. Members manifested Slow Food through their actions and behaviours by choosing where to buy, what to eat and how to cook their daily food intakes and these behaviours have become their habitus. Members cared about this issue, and read and searched for new information related to food and culture. Despite differences in their cultural background, gender, and age, the interviewees shared similar values toward food and were aware of finding the right ingredients for their daily meal consumption. Members considered their food supplier as co-producers, who formed part of a food production cycle and were interested in practicing eco-gastronomy and slow tourism (Labelle, 2004; Sugiyama & Nobuoka, 2007).

When asked about the different types of activities they undertook in the destination, Slow Food members mentioned enjoying undertaking food related activities. Cooking was an activity members did every day at home and also during their holidays. Members mentioned that they enjoyed cooking on vacation and tried to do it as much as possible. Some members liked to read restaurant menus in their vacation destination and had preferences for joining food tours or cooking courses. Wherever member travelled for their holidays they visited local markets in the destination and ate at local restaurants. Most of them were open-minded in trying new ingredients, like kangaroo meat or unfamiliar street food. Food might not be the main reason for them to travel, but their food search and consumption behaviour was similar to that at home. Few members mentioned they were cooking on their holiday trips:

...the house is quite small, equipped with a kitchen, a BBQ, firewood...since we know so many people around, we always have parties with local people and my friends [when travelling] in Uruguay (R9, male, lawyer, mid-50).

Most days we will go to a market, and that will be our morning. We will go around the local market, we will shop and we will get the things we need for that day. And then the afternoon, often we would go to do the tourist things, and then we will come back at night, we will sit and have a drink together with our friends, and something to eat and then we will cook a lovely dinner while we drink some wine and then we go to bed (A9, male, retired, over 60).

Other members mentioned while they were travelling, they would shop from small producers as they do regularly at home:

That is what we like. We shop as local do. And we get to know them, and when you go to the same place often the shop keeper gets to know you and they give you better things, or something special or they put extra in, they give you better advice when you are buying cheese and that sort of things, 'cause they know you (A9, male, retired, over 60).

We shop in the village. There are still little shops; it is still an old style village where you can find a little bit of everything in the village. There are also big supermarkets, but we prefer going into the small shops (I10, male, painter, over 60).

The result of this study suggests this tourist group undertake many destination activities that fit with their habitus. In the original study by Allen (2002), a group of secondary students were found inclined to choose a post-secondary school based on the embodied, holistic experience of a perfect-fit aroused in an in situ encounter with possible options. The FLAG decision model suggests that habitus is one reason why Slow Food members showed consistency in their behaviour at home and in their travel destination; members practiced Slow Food philosophy not only in their daily lifestyle but also when they chose their destination activities. Members were committed to the Slow Food's values of good, clean and fair food, eco-gastronomy, and slow tourism. Members practiced these values consistently even when they were on vacation. Slow Food lifestyle has become habitus for members and they carried it wherever they go by choosing food activities that were a perfect-fit for them (Allen, 2002; Woodside, 2006).

This is the first use of the FLAG model in a study related to tourists' decision making. However, the study has only examined one group with particular food interests and the findings may not be generalised to other groups. The findings do offer a new approach to the study of the destination activities of tourists. In prior tourism literature, tourist's travel behaviour was often considered to escape from the ordinary and to seek novel sensations different to their ordinary lives at home (Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Malkin & Rabinowitz, 1998). Instead of looking at the novel or adventurous activities that visitors undertake in a destination, we can also examine how and why tourists do similar activities on a holiday as they usually do at home. Tourists that have a particular interest at home might often carry this interest as part of their habitus to wherever they go. The reason that tourists choose similar activities they do at home and in the destination is influenced by their past experience which can be explained by the FLAG choice model. Other groups such as distance runners and cycles may similarly run or bike in most destinations they go (Axelsen & Robinson, 2009; Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010). Future research may also look at the profile of visitors comparing new and novel activities with those undertaken in their lifestyles at home. Instead of considering tourists are undertaking "adventurous activities different from home" (Buckley, 2007; Crompton, 1979; Patterson, 2002), future study might consider to investigate tourists are undertaking "similar activities of their own interest" in the destination.

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