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Cannabis Usage in Tourism: A Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT The present study aims to investigate the social forces that shape tourists’ motives in consuming cannabis while on vacation. The underlying premise of this paper is that cannabis consumption in tourism is driven and influenced by the wider process of the normalization of cannabis use in Western societies and, therefore, should be examined in this context. Using a grounded theory approach, this study suggests four umbrella groups of motivations to consume cannabis while traveling: experimentation, pleasure and diversion-seeking, quest for authenticity, and accessible purchasing. Each category is illuminated and discussed, respectively, in the light of four theoretical explanations: loosening of social control, the leisure behavioral continuum, shaping and manifestation of social identity, and smuggling as a deviant career. Given the lack of previous research, it is suggested that these explanations can be viewed as an initial framework for further investigation of this under-explored topic. The paper concludes by examining several theoretical and epistemological issues revolving around the relationships between cannabis use, tourism and everyday life.

KEYWORDS: marijuana, motivation, normalization, grounded theory

Introduction

Both cannabis use and tourism can be viewed as practices that take place in leisure time in Western society (Kraus, 1984; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). However, the social connotations usually ascribed to tourism and cannabis consumption are very different. While tourism is usually appreciated and encouraged, cannabis use is mostly regarded as an undesirable and deviant leisure activity, for both the individual and for society (Rojek, 2000). Such social connotations have impacted the direction of research in both areas, and as a result, scholars have generally examined cannabis use in daily life as a form of deviant behavior that is largely socially condemned (Becker, 1953; Goode, 1970). For this reason, such research has

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traditionally associated frequent cannabis users with other small groups (e.g. hippies, musicians) located on the fringes of society (Becker, 1963; Merton, 1968; Rojek, 1999).

A similar attitude can also be found in tourism literature, where cannabis use is usually referred to as a characteristic of non-institutionalized forms of tourism, such as tramping, drifting and backpacking (Cohen, 1973; Adler, 1985; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Westerhausen, 2002). Such an approach considers cannabis use in the context of tourism to be part of the drug-tourism phenomenon, defined as the ‘…phenomenon by which the tourist experience involves all of the awareness, the consumption, and the usage of drugs which are considered to be illegal or illegitimate in either the visited destination or the tourist’s country of origin’ (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005: p. 239). However, nowadays, smoking cannabis has become much more commonplace in the everyday leisure time of many individuals in Western societies, leading contemporary studies to point to a process of normalization of the use of cannabis, along with other recreational drugs such as ecstasy, GHB, and amphetamines, in Western societies (Parker et al., 1998; Hammersley et al., 2001; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). The literature discussing this normalization process argues that cannabis consumption is becoming a common activity among various groups in the West, and that it is usually related to particular leisure activities (e.g. nightclubbing), contemporary sub-cultures (e.g. rave), or simply to social trends regarding cannabis (e.g. Korf, 2002).

In light of this attitudinal change toward cannabis use, the current study aims to discuss the social forces that shape tourists’ motives to consume cannabis while traveling. From an epistemological point of view, this holistic approach toward tourism and daily life is in line with the position of Moore et al. (1995), who advocate studying tourism in the context of individuals’ everyday lives, rather than in fragmented domains. Thus, the underlying premise of this paper is that cannabis consumption in tourism is driven and influenced by the normalization process of cannabis use in Western societies. Accordingly, tourism is regarded here as a unique domain in which some of the ramifications of this process can be examined.

We approach the goal of analyzing cannabis use in tourism and its relationship to larger social forces through a three-step grounded theory approach which involves: (1) identifying and clustering the motivations of tourists who consume cannabis while traveling; (2) discussing the origins of these motives by considering the social forces involved; and (3) offering explanations regarding the link between the observed phenomenon of cannabis use in tourism and the social forces that are involved in the context of each of the suggested categories. The results are then discussed by examining cannabis use in tourism in the context of the broader normalization of cannabis use in Western society. In this manner, we seek to produce theoretical propositions regarding the social forces related to cannabis use, which, in turn, can facilitate discussion of the relationship between cannabis use and tourism.

In his book *Pot Planet: Adventures in Global Marijuana Culture*, Preston (2002) illustrates the ways in which cannabis can become the predominant theme in a tourist’s journey and discusses particular tourist destinations that have become associated with cannabis consumption. However, tourists vary, regarding the centrality of cannabis use to their travel experiences, as some individuals travel primarily to
consume cannabis-related products, while for others cannabis use is not the key motive of the trip. This study does not distinguish between such types of tourist; rather, it considers cannabis use in tourism more broadly, focusing on the motives of users and social forces involved. Additionally, this study does not intend to provide a comprehensive summary of destinations associated with cannabis use.

**Consuming Cannabis**

Perspectives toward cannabis use differ according to the way in which scholars understand the initial motive for consuming cannabis products. Generally, most of the social studies on cannabis use agree that ‘feeling high’ is the obvious result of smoking cannabis and, therefore, is most likely directly linked to the motive to consume. Social researchers, however, are divided concerning the manner in which they address the role of this sense within the investigation of cannabis use.

Some scholars discuss the sense of ‘feeling high’ in the context of drug influence on individuals. Accordingly, this body of literature tackles cannabis usage through concepts from approaches traditionally associated with drug taking, such as addictive behavior, risk taking, and deviant behavior (for a literature review, see Earleywine, 2002; Hammersley et al., 2001). Generally speaking, these studies are based on the premise that cannabis use is an abnormal behavior that must be corrected or investigated accordingly (for a critical review on the research on cannabis health effects, see Earleywine 2002, Chapter 7). By accepting this premise, such researchers take a moral stance toward cannabis use.

Conversely, contemporary studies indicate a social transformation with regard to cannabis use (Parker et al., 1998; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). This body of literature suggests that cannabis consumption should not be explored solely within traditional frameworks of abnormal behavior, chiefly due to the normalization of cannabis use in contemporary society. It suggests that in light of empirical findings regarding the popularity of cannabis use in contemporary society, the aforementioned traditional approach toward cannabis limits our understanding of cannabis use as a normalized social phenomenon. Similarly, the popularity of cannabis use challenges the deviant approach toward cannabis use, which assumes that such an activity violates the norms governing the investigated society.

As noted by Goode (1970), the intellectual difficulties in understanding the initial motives to ‘feel high’ have led to the tendency to explore motives of cannabis users in terms of psychological addiction. Goode (1970), however, points to two alternative approaches in understanding cannabis use: the recreational and the sub-cultural models. The recreational model summarizes the main attributes of the cannabis user and stresses the pleasure-oriented nature of this activity. This point of view has become very popular among contemporary scholars who choose to classify cannabis as a recreational drug. In addition, this approach can also be related to Riemer’s (1981) suggestion to view ‘deviance as fun’ or as a simple pleasure-seeking activity. The second model suggested by Goode (1970) stresses social denominators, such as norms, values and beliefs, which differ from one group of users to another. Like other leisure activities that are investigated as attributes of specific groups in society (Bourdieu, 1984), cannabis use can be understood by taking common characteristics of the user’s sub-group into account. For example,
Hammmersley et al. (2001) suggest incorporating social identity theories into the examination of cannabis consumption. A similar approach, which takes into account the role of social identity in shaping tourism activity preferences, was recently employed with respect to gay tourism, as well as to the issue of destination choice among ethnic minorities (see Clift et al., 2002; Jamal, 2003).

Another explanation for cannabis use can be drawn from the theory of deviant opportunities which suggests that under conditions of weakening social control, individuals who lack self-control are unable to resist the temptation to commit deviant acts (Hirschi, 1969; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), the interaction between (1) lack of self-control and (2) perceived opportunity usually fosters deviant behavior such as cannabis use. Specifically, individuals who are deficient in self-control have personalities that predispose them to use cannabis (e.g. Arneklev et al., 1993). Peretti-Watel and Lorente (2004) point to the weakening of social control during leisure activities which enables adolescents to start smoking cannabis. Such notions of the weakening of social control have been employed in the tourism literature to explain tourists’ unusual behavior. For example, Turner and Ash (1975) suggest that tourists’ distance from their home society allows them to ignore the power of norms and values that govern their daily lives.

An alternative to the traditional approach to the study of the sense of ‘feeling high’ can be found in the much-celebrated work of Howard Becker (1953, 1963). In his analysis of the process by which one becomes a marijuana user, Becker (1953) suggests that new smokers undergo a social process in which they learn to enjoy smoking marijuana. Becker’s findings show that marijuana-related sensations (i.e. the sense of ‘feeling high’) are not necessarily pleasurable; therefore, the process through which one learns to enjoy these sensations is an essential part of the social process of becoming a marijuana user. According to Becker, this process begins when the smoker first learns the technique of smoking marijuana. Only then can the smoker identify the feelings caused by the drug and connect them to pleasure. Consequently, Becker concludes, both of these ‘lessons’ through which the novice smoker becomes a marijuana smoker are social in nature.

The references to cannabis use in the tourism literature reflect a range of conceptualizations and perceptions of cannabis use in society. Several studies address cannabis use as a characteristic of non-institutionalized forms of tourism (Cohen, 1973; Adler, 1985; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Westerhausen, 2002). As mentioned earlier, this body of literature can be regarded as a reflection of the approach that views cannabis as a deviant behavior since it frames cannabis use within the practice of non-traditional forms of travel. It should be noted, therefore, that these researchers tend to examine cannabis use in tourism without examining the relevancy of this practice in daily life. This is particularly problematic, as scholars who address the notion of deviance and tourism stress a loosening of social control in tourism which enables individuals to engage in what are considered to be deviant activities (such as cannabis use) in their daily lives (Uriely & Belhassen, 2006).

Conversely, recent research suggests that cannabis use should be seen as an extension of other similar behaviors pursued during one’s leisure (e.g. Josiam et al.,
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1998; Sellars, 1998; Bellis et al., 2000, 2002; Carr, 2002). In his conceptualization of the continuum between leisure and tourism, Carr (2002) bases his findings on studies that compare cannabis use in tourism to its consumption in daily life. He concludes by suggesting a model of a behavioral continuum between leisure and tourism relating to pleasure-oriented activities, such as alcohol use, drug use and sex activities. In so doing, Carr’s (2002) work implicitly demonstrates the relevancy of the normalization process of cannabis to the investigation of cannabis use in tourism. Similarly, works such as those of Sellars (1998) and Bellis and his colleagues (2002) are also based on the assumption that drug use in tourism should be studied in relation to tourists’ leisure-related behaviors.

Methodology

The current study uses a grounded theory approach seeking to highlight emerging social concepts (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). In this approach, theory is generated initially from data or if existing theories seem appropriate these may be elaborated upon by measuring them up against new data (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Grounded theory was particularly appropriate since there is no strong theoretical basis regarding tourists’ motives for consuming cannabis during their vacation. Relying on an iterative process, in which data from one interview were analyzed before conducting the next interview, information gained from each interview was introduced into subsequent interviews (Char-maz, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Dey, 1999). As this phenomenological approach examines how people construct and make sense of their social world, by investigating tourists who used cannabis this study presumes a connection between the meanings that these tourists attribute to their social worlds and the social processes they are part of and that are represented in their interviews. Consequently, theoretical propositions provided are grounded in the information gathered directly from 18 in-depth interviews and observations of tourists who used cannabis during their travel, placing emphasis upon individual accounts of experience.

Procedure

This study relies on ethnographic data obtained during 2000–2002. Potential participants were identified through a snowball sampling technique. Three main sources were utilized to identify potential participants: (1) personal ties with one of the authors; (2) during observations at tourism destinations; and (3) publicized announcements of an ongoing research project regarding drugs and tourism. With regard to the later source, the advertisements were publicized in various sites on the Internet, including websites promoting drug-oriented parties, travel websites, and student communities’ websites. Additional advertisements were also publicized on billboards located at various Israeli university campuses and at travel supply stores in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The observations used for this research project were carried out by one of the authors in marijuana tourism destinations, including the Netherlands, Egypt (the Sinai Peninsula), and India (Himachal Pradesh). In the Netherlands, the author stayed two days in a dormitory room...
occupied by seven international tourists (excluding the observer). The chosen hostel, where the observations were conducted, is located in Warmoesstraat (Warmoes Street) and it is close to cannabis-related attractions. In the Sinai Peninsula, the author spent one week in Bir-Swair beach in the basic huts zone. In Northern India, he spent a total period of two months in four backpackers’ enclaves (Riley, 1988): Mananli, Daramsala, Kassol and Pushkar. It is important to note that although the conclusions of the study are also based on the field notes taken during the observations, the evidence provided throughout the paper are from the semi-structured interviews. It should be noted, however, that the findings presented correspond with the observations. In this sense, the usage of observations aimed to increase our familiarity with the context of this research and, in turn, to support the credibility of our arguments.

Interviews

The main source of data is 18 in-depth interviews conducted with 13 Israelis, three Europeans and two Americans who used cannabis during their travel. It is important to note that the interviewees represent various forms of travel, such as backpacking and mass ‘packaged’ tourism. The interviewees range from 19 to 29 years of age; of these, 12 are men and six are women. Data collection was directed by theoretical sampling and progressed from open sampling methods of identifying individuals and locations to discriminate sampling (i.e. deliberate and directed selection of individuals and locations to verify the core category and theoretical propositions set forth) (Charmaz, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Dey, 1999). Most of the interviews were conducted with homecoming tourists in their home/office, with the exception of four interviews which were conducted during observations abroad. All 18 interviews were carried out by the same interviewer. The majority of interviews were recorded (with the consent of the interviewees) and lasted between one and three hours. The length of the interviews reflected the participant’s ability to articulate their motives for consuming cannabis during their vacation. In the course of the interviews, participants were encouraged to speak about their experiences with drugs in the context of both routine and tourism. A variety of issues including information about the destinations and the events where they consumed drugs, their travel motivations, the meanings they assign to their drug and travel experiences, the patterns of their drug acquisition and usage, their fears and worries, and their precaution practices were addressed. Interviewees generated their own thoughts and notes were made about the topics raised. Once participants had exhausted their own ideas, themes found in previous interviews were introduced but only if these topics had not been raised spontaneously. The tape-recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis. Each interview was analyzed before the next interview took place. Interviews conducted in Hebrew were translated into English. During the translation process, two people with knowledge of both languages were consulted in order to increase the credibility of this process. The transcripts were then analyzed to determine the presence of any themes; data were gathered until saturation, which signaled the end of data collection.
Data Analysis

Data were coded at three levels: first, data were examined line by line; next, through data reduction (i.e. organizing information relevant to the topic and discarding unrelated information), data were compared and contrasted to create categories; and, finally, we moved from data analysis to concept and theory development. Accordingly, the text created by interviews, observations, and notes was closely examined and resulted in the generation of several concepts central to the participants’ articulation of the context and the significance they assign to their drug experience. Themes that arose were consistent across interviews. The data analysis process, therefore, started with the transcription of each interview, highlighting concepts introduced, writing memos, linking concepts together, arriving at core categories, and finally integrating categories by creating links between them. The process was repeated until we arrived at the stage where no further categories emerged.

Findings

The motives of tourists who use cannabis should be distinguished according to the context and the significance they assign to their drug experiences while traveling. In this regard, the findings of the current study point to four plausible groups of tourist motivations: experimentation, pleasure orientation, quest for authenticity, and purchasing. This classification is not derived from the character of the toured sites, but rather from the general nature of the experience that the interviewees reported. Nonetheless, it should be stated that some of the sites associated with cannabis consumption could be predominantly characterized by the presence of single-motive driven visitors. For example, in the beaches of Sinai, most of the respondents during our observations connected their cannabis use to a sense of pleasure but it is important to note that characterization and analysis of destinations associated with cannabis use are beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, it should be acknowledged that this classification should not be seen as a typology of tourists, although the findings are frequently presented as classifications of tourists (e.g. the experimenting tourist) in order to simplify the discussion. More than half of the respondents included descriptions of various traveling experiences in different destinations and contexts, and most expressed a blend of motivations for cannabis use. The heterogeneity of experiences and motivations found within individual tourists’ reports, in combination with the small sample size of this study, prevents us from making statistical generalizations to all tourists and/or destinations. Accordingly, the classification of motives is used here as an analytical tool which allows a systematic examination of the social forces involved in shaping the motives to consume cannabis while traveling.

Cannabis Experimentation and the Loosening of Social Control

The first group of motives identified was experimental motives in which tourists are mainly motivated by the novelty of cannabis usage and by, as those tourists see it, the opportunity to consume cannabis during their vacation. For example, an
Israeli woman in her mid-20s reported that her first and only experience with cannabis was in Amsterdam:

*Interviewee*: I am not the typical marijuana user that you are looking for. Me and my husband visited Amsterdam six years ago and I felt that this is the right place to try it...I can’t clearly explain my decision right now. I guess it was the legal authorization mixed with the tourist industry that related to grass (marijuana). Of course I heard about marijuana, but I grew up as a good girl and it was always out of the question...

*Interviewer*: Were you not afraid of telling people that you had tried marijuana in Amsterdam?

*Interviewee*: I did not tell everyone, but now I can say that I tried it. Nowadays it has become so popular, that one has to try it. At least I can say that I tried it once and did not feel anything...

*Interviewer*: Does it matter that it took place in Amsterdam?

*Interviewee*: It’s safer. Not everyone tolerates this drug. For example, if I mention that I smoke marijuana while visiting Amsterdam throughout a lounge conversion it is much more legitimate than saying that I smoke it during daily life.

*Interviewer*: Why?

*Interviewee*: Because it is legal in Amsterdam and you can just go to a coffee shop and buy it. It is almost part of the visit in Amsterdam.

In this particular case, the interviewee stressed that her initial cannabis experience in Amsterdam did not engender a similar pattern of use in her daily life. However, the findings of this study indicate that many of the experimenters (i.e. those who report experimental experiences with cannabis during their travels) changed their attitude towards cannabis after traveling. Some tourists reported that they had started using cannabis products once they returned home, while others reported that after their vacation, marijuana smoking became a major leisure activity. For instance, a 23 year old engineering student reported that after he returned from his vacation, cannabis smoking became one of his two hobbies. In the beginning of the interview he stated:

Before the trip to South America, I smoked ‘grass’ once in a while. I became exposed to marijuana in the end of my military service. We rarely smoked, only once a month in a social event.

At the end of the interview, he was asked to describe the current role of cannabis in his daily life, and he answered:

*Interviewee*: Two of main hobbies nowadays are soccer and ‘grass’. But since I started studying I barely have free time for long grass smoking sessions. So what I do is combine the two hobbies.

*Interviewer*: How?

*Interviewee*: I am a member of ‘Hapoel Beer Sheva’ (an Israeli soccer team). So what I have started doing is to take a ‘joint’ with me when I go to see soccer games on weekends. The truth of the matter is that I have only started smoking grass at soccer games since I came back from my trip. Look, I haven’t got the time for both grass and soccer, nor am I prepared to give up either of these hobbies, so I combine them.

These cases illustrate two opposing approaches to viewing cannabis experimentation while traveling. The first approach views the tourist’s experiment as a functional means to maintain the social order in the tourist’s country of origin since it enables the individual to try the forbidden drug away from home without breaking the norms that govern his/her society. The second approach sees the tourist’s experiment as a corridor that may lead to similar use of cannabis in his/her country of origin.
Another example of the relationship between tourism and cannabis usage in daily life was illustrated by a 26 year old Masters student who reported that he initially tried marijuana before traveling to South East Asia as part of his preparation for a backpacking trip. Cannabis use as a part of pre-trip preparations can be seen as a unique example of the way in which the tourist experience influences daily life even prior to the trip. Hence, this illustration acts as supportive evidence for the corridor approach, wherein cannabis use in routine life is caused or enhanced by cannabis use in tourism. Alternatively, employing Schade and Hahn’s notion of psychic journey, where the periods before and after the trip are regarded as part of a journey (cited in Parrinello, 1993: p. 240), enables us to see pre-trip cannabis use as a part of the tourist’s experience, rather than as a durable change in the pattern of cannabis use.

Moreover, the motive to experiment with cannabis while traveling can be explained as a loosening of social control while traveling. This argument can be strengthened by examining social theories from deviance studies (Becker, 1953, 1963; Hirschi, 1969), and theories that stress the lessening of social control in the context of tourism (Turner & Ash, 1975; Shields, 1992). With regard to the former, labeling analysis determines that the usage of cannabis in most Western societies should be treated as deviant behavior as most people in these societies regard such behavior as law- and norm-breaking since the use of marijuana is prohibited (e.g. Becker, 1963). Note that all the interviewees in this study come from societies where the use of cannabis is either illegal or illegitimate. Furthermore, traditional social theories would argue that in order to preserve social order, laws must be enforced (Hirschi, 1969). Hirschi (1969) proposes a theory that addresses the issue of deviant activities and social control. The premise of Hirschi’s theory is that every one of us is attracted to what is considered deviant behavior. However, the fear from social sanctions deters us from acting upon such ‘temptations’.

Consequently, the relevancy of the normalization process of cannabis use in daily life to the examination of ‘experimenters’ should be seen in light of the observation that ‘individuals abroad are often free from the social constraints of work and family that restrict their substance use...’ (Bellis et al., 2002: p. 1031). The notion that while on vacation individuals feel that they are free from norms that govern their daily life is quite familiar in tourism studies (MacCannell, 1973; Turner & Ash, 1975; Shields, 1992). For example, Shields (1992: p. 150) defines the ‘liminal zone’ as an area where ‘social conventions...are relaxed under the exigencies of travel and of relative anonymity and freedom from community scrutiny’. As a result of the weakening of the power of social control, the ‘temptation’ to use cannabis, using Hirschi’s terminology, can be fulfilled. In other words, tourism can be seen as a unique context in which individuals can satisfy their cravings to try the ‘forbidden fruit’ without taking the risk of being labeled as deviant (for a discussion on risk taking and drug use in tourism, see Uriely and Belhassen, 2006).

Recreational Motives and the Leisure Behavioral Continuum

Recreational motives are associated with tourists’ perceptions of cannabis as a recreational product during a pleasure-oriented vacation. In other words, in this
context, cannabis is perceived by tourists as a complementary product of fun-seeking while on vacation. In line with Cohen’s work on phenomenological modes of tourist experiences (1979), recreational motives in this study can be subdivided into the following components: pleasure and compensation. One example of recreational motives which deal with pleasure and are associated with cannabis consumption is demonstrated in the vacations of Israelis to the beaches of Sinai. Although this example combines pleasure-seeking with a specific destination, cannabis users do not necessarily always travel to specific destinations in order to use cannabis. Nonetheless, the interviewees revealed that the accessibility of cannabis in some resorts plays an important role in their decision-making. It is important to mention, however, that the process by which cannabis, as a tourism product, becomes accessible to tourists in holiday destinations is beyond the scope of this research. Moreover, interviews with recreational users revealed that most of them had used cannabis as part of their everyday leisure activities prior to their travels. These findings support the contemporary argument that cannabis use is normalized and popularized in Western countries.

Recreational motives, however, also involve a sense of escapism and compensation from some of the ‘soft evils’ of modern life such as boredom, alienation and stress (Wang, 2000: p. 19). Such a sense of compensation is exemplified by a Swiss male tourist in his late 20s who visits Amsterdam several times a year:

I wanted to think about the crazy life that I have created for myself...I’m a ‘good boy’. I did everything ‘by the book’ during my all life: at school, in law school...for that reason I wanted to cut myself off from this entire headache before starting my training period as a lawyer. Maybe in the future I will do it again...and run away for a couple of months. Until then, I can always smoke a joint after a stressful day at work instead of taking a day off.

Consequently, this study proposes that the ‘loosening of social control’ explanation is mostly appropriate for those experimenters who do not use cannabis in their daily lives. It furthermore proposes that an investigation into the consumption of cannabis while traveling must examine those tourists who do use cannabis in their daily lives and continue to do so while traveling. Although there have been only a few attempts to compare tourist and leisure behavior (e.g. Moore et al., 1995; Carr, 2002), there are some researchers who point to a possible connection between leisure and tourism, regarding cannabis usage. For example, Josiam and his colleagues (1998) report an increase in cannabis consumption among a majority of surveyed American students traveling in South America during spring break. Also, based on a review of the current literature on pleasure-oriented destinations, Carr (2002) suggests a conceptual model that indicates a tourism–leisure behavioral continuum. Carr (2002) proposes that the pleasure-oriented behavior of tourists is basically an extension of related behaviors undertaken at home. Additionally, Carr (2002) argues that the existence of a tourism culture encourages people to behave in a hedonistic manner to a degree that may not be acceptable in their country of origin. Carr’s (2002) notion of a tourism–leisure behavioral continuum seems to apply to the findings of this study. In other words, consumption of cannabis as a pleasure-oriented activity in daily life may lead the individual to engage in extensive cannabis consumption during his vacation at pleasure-oriented destinations.
Consequently, in terms of economic and marketing research, the use of cannabis in pleasure-oriented destinations could be viewed as a complementary product. According to the American Marketing Association, complementary products are those products which are used or sold jointly with other related products (American Marketing Association, 2004). In line with this definition, in the case of the pleasure-oriented tourists, cannabis should be viewed as a complementary product accompanied by other products that are part of their fun-oriented vacation. This connection between cannabis and pleasure-oriented vacationing may explain the accessibility of cannabis in many resort destinations such as Ko-Samui in Thailand (Cohen, 1982; Scheyvens, 2002).

Cannabis Authenticity and Tourists’ Identity
The third type of motive is defined here as the search for cannabis authenticity. In this case, the tourists are motivated by the quest to see the sources of the cannabis industry, such as by visiting the village of Melana in northern India and/or the Rif Mountains in Morocco. In the case of Melana, tourists reported that they were drawn by an interest in seeing the village where the valuable ‘Melana Cream’ (a well-known brand of Indian hashish) is grown and imported to Amsterdam. Similarly, tourists who visited Morocco reported that they wanted to see the plantations of cannabis and the way the famous hashish is produced in the local factories. It would be reasonable to argue that most of the Europeans who consume cannabis are familiar with Moroccan hashish, given the prominent role of Morocco as a hashish supplier in the world and specifically in Europe (Tremlett, 2003; Europol, 2004).

This quest for authenticity can be paralleled to the motivation of wine tourists who visit vineyards in Australia, France and South Africa (see, for example, Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). Such a quest is illustrated in the following comment by a male tourist from New Zealand in his mid-20s who was interviewed during observations at one of Amsterdam’s coffee shops:

Amsterdam is a ‘must’ place for pot smokers…the Cannabis Museum…the coffee shops, the smart and the home-grow shops, the Cannabis Cup competition. Anybody that loves pot should arrive to Amsterdam at least once in his life. Similar to the wish of every Jew to be in Jerusalem, every pot smoker wants to be in Amsterdam – which is the capital city of cannabis.

This quote also illustrates the role of the visit to cannabis-related destinations as an interesting version of heritage tourism, in which tourists choose where to travel in order to maintain their social identity (Poria et al., 2003). In this case, cannabis users, who identify with a distinct group, or in Becker’s (1963) terminology as ‘outsiders’, ascribe a broad cultural meaning to their tourism cannabis use. Traveling in the Melana village in India, a male Israeli interviewee in his mid-20s said:

I read about this village before I came to India in a traveler magazine, but anyone who visits India has probably heard the name of this village during his journey. Personally, I was interested in seeing how they produce their famous charas. Besides, it is a very unique experience. The locals are sacred and therefore tourists cannot touch them. During the visit one must stick to the pathway in order to avoid physical contact with the locals. Therefore, if one wants to buy the ‘home-made products’ one must wait for the dealer to come to the pathway…There are
more villages around Parvaty Valley in which you can see the production of charas. However, Melana is the most famous one...A visit to Melana is an important part of the journey in India for smokers who are interested in the culture and not only in the weed.

Therefore, traveling to cannabis-oriented destinations can be seen, from a socio-psychological perspective, as a manifestation of belonging to a cannabis culture. The notion that identity is created and reinforced by consumption has already been presented in cultural studies (e.g. Featherstone, 1987) and was insightfully illuminated in the context of cannabis consumption by Hammersley *et al.* (2001). Indeed, scholars stress the significant role of leisure activities, particularly, in the process of constructing individual identity (Wearing & Wearing, 1992; Jamal, 2003). This argument is based on the premise that unlike routine activities, leisure and tourism activities are an outcome of free choice. However, such a socio-psychological analysis of consumption emphasizes that it is the symbolic meaning of the product that is consumed rather than the product itself. Furthermore, the notion that social membership may explain individual behavior and consumption in tourism is addressed in various perspectives, such as belonging to a homosexual community (Hughes, 1997) or belonging to an ethnic minority (Jamal, 2003). Essentially, such research is based on the seminal work by Tajfel (1982) on intergroup relations. Tajfel (1982) suggests that group membership can determine individual behavior in the group (*ingroup*) and outside it (*outgroup*).

As Becker (1963) claims, becoming a marijuana user in a society that condemns the use of marijuana is a social process ‘by which people are emancipated from the controls of society and becoming responsive to those of a smaller group’ (1963: p. 60). The influence of this so called ‘cannabis culture’ and its connection to travel motivations is well demonstrated in Preston’s (2002) book, mentioned earlier in this paper. Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that some of the cannabis-oriented tourists chose to travel to a specific destination as part of their social identification with cannabis users in their country of origin. For example, an American tourist who arrived in Amsterdam specifically to attend the Cannabis Cup defined this contest as a ‘must see’ attraction for the cannabis user. Other expressions such as ‘Amsterdam is the capital city of cannabis users’, or a description of Melana as ‘a must see attraction for dudes’, demonstrate the importance of group membership. The cannabis users also demonstrate their belonging through leisure events such as ‘Legalized Day’ (a worldwide demonstration day for cannabis legalization), which is celebrated annually worldwide. Such activities enhance individuals’ sense of group belonging and may inform their future travel decisions.

**Purchasing Cannabis as a Stage in a Deviant Career**

Similar to American drug tourists who purchase prescription drugs for recreational purposes in Mexican border cities (Valdez & Sifaneck, 1997), the fourth category of motives consists of tourists who travel in order to purchase cannabis in a country in which they do not live, mostly for practical reasons. For example, German tourists report that they buy cannabis for daily use in the Netherlands and return to Germany the same day or a day later. This fourth motive is basically practical in nature and emanates from the easier accessibility of cannabis in the tourist destination. In addition, the ritual of traveling to the Netherlands in order to buy cannabis
fulfills the need for an inversion of ordinary life. This form of cannabis smuggling may also play a key role in the development of deviant career paths (Becker, 1963; Murphy et al., 1990), as drug smugglers are among the Europeans who travel to the Netherlands in order to buy cannabis.

One way to examine this phenomenon is to view it generally as part of the increase in cannabis trafficking all over the world. For example, the National Drug Intelligence (2005) reports an increase in cannabis trafficking from Canada to the United States in private and commercial vehicles. This report also reveals the various sources of cannabis-related products in the United States, such as Mexico, Columbia and Jamaica. It is important to note that it is not suggested in this paper that we consider drug smugglers as tourists, though statistically they are probably counted as such, but rather to focus the discussion on individuals who choose to purchase cannabis for personal use.

Considering that smuggling cannabis is usually rendered a serious offense in many nations, it is surprising that individuals choose to travel and take the risk of being caught. Perhaps traveling in order to purchase cannabis should be examined in a wider context. Obviously, those who travel in order to buy cannabis and return with it to their country of origin use cannabis in their leisure time. Possibly, it is the tourists’ initial tag as ‘law-breakers’ in their daily lives that allows them to commit more serious drug-related offenses such as drug smuggling. In other words, having to violate the law as cannabis users in their country of origin brings about disrespect for the law that may lead users to drug smuggling.

In his book, Becker (1963) introduced the concept of a deviant career which is a stable pattern of deviant behavior resulting from labeling processes. Becker noticed that many people occasionally engage in nonconforming acts without developing a sustained pattern of deviant behavior. Becker (1963) claims that the main reason for this is that most people do not get caught and, therefore, they are not publicly labeled as deviant. In the case of the tourist who purchases cannabis, the individual takes the risk of being labeled as a drug smuggler. According to Becker, in the next stage, the person ‘tends to be cut off…from participation in more conventional groups’ (1963: p. 34). Hence, the tourist returning home who has been labeled as a drug smuggler may be fired from his/her workplace or denied a decent job, forcing him/her to ‘drift into unconventional, marginal occupations’ (1963: p. 34). The applications of this explanation to the current study are twofold. First, it may explain why certain tourists take the risk and choose to smuggle cannabis. Second, it may shed light on the influence of one’s first experience as a smuggler on her/his daily life (in case she/he got caught). Note that Becker’s notion of deviant career was also employed in a study which addresses the phenomenon of cocaine dealing (Murphy et al., 1990).

Conclusion

Cannabis consumption is an issue that has generally received little attention in the tourism literature. Given the lack of previous work, the current study used a grounded theory approach, and its findings can be viewed as an initial framework for further investigations of this under-explored topic. In this study, the motives of tourists who consume cannabis were classified into four groups,
which were followed by four theoretical explanations aiming to illuminate and enrich each of the suggested categories. As noted earlier, the unrepresentative sample and the heterogeneity of experiences and motivations found within individual tourists’ reports do not allow statistical generalization to all tourists and/or destinations. It has, however, raised many issues about the relationships between cannabis use in tourism and in the routine of everyday life, several of which are discussed here.

To begin, this study highlights the importance of studying cannabis use in tourism in relation to the tourist’s everyday life. By revealing the different motives for consuming cannabis while traveling, the study also points to the need for using multiple theories in order to capture this complexity; however, the findings did not solve the debate about the influence of cannabis use by tourists in their daily lives. Specifically, the ‘corridor’ approach (i.e. consuming cannabis in tourism will lead to similar consumption in daily life) is questioned by the findings regarding those tourists who experimented with cannabis in tourism and did not start using cannabis in their daily life. On the other hand, the second approach, which views cannabis use in tourism as an external experience that prevents individuals from violating the norms within their society of origin, is questioned as well by tourists who start using cannabis after their exposure to it in tourism. Accordingly, future longitudinal studies are required in order to illuminate the link between cannabis use, leisure activities and tourism.

In a related matter, the findings regarding pleasure-oriented motives suggest a continuum between cannabis use in leisure and such use while on vacation. Thus, it seems that the motive to consume cannabis in tourism as a recreational or diversionary product is directly linked to previous cannabis-related experiences. It should be noted that these findings are in line with previous studies that suggest a continuum between leisure and tourism regarding pleasure-oriented use of drugs in tourism (e.g. Carr, 2002; Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). Consequently, the focus on cannabis in this research allows us to examine this continuum in light of cannabis-related theory, such as Becker’s work on cannabis use. Becker’s (1963) theory about the social process of becoming a cannabis user seems to be pertinent in this context. Specifically, Becker (1963) suggests that the process of becoming a cannabis user involves the attribution of pleasure to the physical sense of ‘feeling high’. Such an explanation allows us to conclude that those tourists who consume cannabis for pleasure probably learn to enjoy the influence of cannabis during the routine of everyday life and, in turn, intensify such consumption during vacation time. Conversely, for experimenters, cannabis use is a new activity that individuals do not know how to enjoy, due to their lack of previous experience.

The question that may be raised here is whether individuals can become cannabis users during their vacations. The findings of this study show that in the case of long-term travelers who first experiment with cannabis while traveling and then start using cannabis in their leisure time, this scenario is possible. In this case, individuals learn to ‘enjoy’ cannabis during the trip, and tourism is where the process of what Becker (1963) calls ‘becoming a marijuana user’ starts. Therefore, the current study suggests that the normalization process is not only influencing the motives to consume cannabis while traveling, but is also enhanced by tourism.
related experiences. Accordingly, future studies are encouraged to examine the relationship between the nature of the tourist experience with cannabis and its impacts on the individual’s daily life. In particular, further examinations should address the relationship between elements such as the length of the trip, the frequency of cannabis use while traveling, and attitudinal changes toward cannabis as a deviant activity.

The epistemological contribution of this study to the social examination of cannabis use revolves around the applicability and relevancy of various theories through which cannabis consumption in tourism is examined here. In this regard, Hammersley et al. (2001) suggest that traditional approaches toward cannabis use (e.g. theories of deviance, addiction theories) ‘tend to dichotomize cannabis use in a way that may not facilitate our better understanding of it’ (2001: p. 134), and, in light of the normalization of cannabis use, substitute approaches are required. While their observation regarding the problems of dichotomization that may occur in employing deviance theories is valuable, these traditional approaches still have an analytical merit in examining cannabis use in tourism and, therefore, should not be abandoned. For example, the manner in which the findings regarding experimentation are presented in this study illustrates the relevancy of Hirschi’s (1969) control theory in understanding the motive to try cannabis during one’s vacation. One explanation of the applicability of deviance theories in spite of the normalization process is that, like other social processes, this process should be seen as a gradual transition and not as the latest social fact that requires a fundamental shift toward the theoretical examination of cannabis use.

Finally, the findings regarding the development of cannabis-related attractions illustrate the influence of the normalization process of cannabis on the global tourism industry. Specifically, the search for what is referred to in this study as cannabis-related authenticity has been illustrated above by activities such as trekking to the village of Melana in India, visiting the Rif Mountains in Morocco, and attending the cannabis museum or the Cannabis Cup in Amsterdam. These attractions/activities demonstrate the growing interest in cannabis in the West and should, in turn, be seen as signifiers of the contemporary normalization process of cannabis in Western societies. It should be noted, however, that there are several holiday destinations that are associated with cannabis consumption which have not been covered in this study (see, for example, in Preston, 2002). Future studies are, therefore, encouraged to examine other destinations associated with cannabis consumption, such as Jamaica (Gamradt, 1995; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), Florida beaches (Josiam et al., 1998), and Thailand (Cohen, 1982; Westerhausen, 2002). Specifically, future research may investigate the manner in which these destinations have become associated with cannabis consumption, the affect of this association on the destinations’ image, and the role of both tourists and local tourism authorities in promoting this image.

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References


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