

## **Tacit Hierarchising within Online Communities of Hillwalkers**

### **Abstract**

This research explores how Munro-baggers – hillwalkers aiming to climb all 282 Scottish mountains over 3,000ft/914m - hierarchise themselves and others as serious leisure participants. This increasingly popular hobby contributes to Scotland's economy and profile, but its sparse literature insufficiently analyses the influence of Stebbins' (1982) Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP), the recent reappraisal of Serious Leisure (e.g. – Veal, 2017) or the influence of online communities. Therefore, we critically revisit the SLP to re-evaluate Munro-bagging. Through phenomenological interviews, we explore how Munro-baggers hierarchise each other, tacitly and otherwise, offline and online, through their activities' perceived characteristics. Moreover, ambiguities and overlaps are explored and the interplay of contexts analysed. We identify factors influencing Munro-baggers' perceptions of seriousness amongst fellow hobbyists, taxonomising participants by their perceived characteristics of seriousness. Findings suggest that they draw upon quantitative and qualitative judgments of hobby-relevant activities and qualitative judgments of certain ad hominem characteristics. Moreover, the expansion of the pastime beyond its originally temporospatial boundaries into online spaces is found to influence the extent to which actors categorise or hierarchise each other and the characteristics used to do so.

### **Keywords**

Munro-bagging, Serious Leisure, hillwalking, adventure tourism, mountain tourism, ethnography, netnography

### **Introduction**

Hillwalkers, mountaineers and climbers, who toil in pursuit of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1982), increasingly use the internet to immerse themselves remotely in leisure communities which would otherwise be denied by temporospatial boundaries. In this chapter, we explore a theoretical lacuna around digital mobilities as we link debates surrounding mobility studies and media communications (e.g. – Hollett, Phillips & Leander, 2017) with those discussing ephemeral ways of moving and being with social media (Møller & Robards, 2019). Exploring how physical work rubs up against the virtual, we examine online socialisation in the context

of Munro-baggers, and how digital context influences their perceptions of self and each other - something neglected within extant theory. We discuss their apparently hierarchical, tacit or formal classifications and their influence upon Munro-baggers' experiences.

Munro-bagging is an expanding socio-cultural phenomenon largely neglected within academic literature. A form of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982; Stebbins, 2007; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014), it entails systematically climbing the 282 Scottish mountains exceeding 3,000 feet (914 metres) high. Over 6,000 hillwalkers have 'bagged' every summit (Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2018), 'compleating' a Munro 'round' and graduating from Munro-bagger to Munroist. Several times this number are partway through (ibid). The pastime is becoming more socialised through hillwalkers' websites, enabling peer-to-peer interactivity and user-generated content. This potentially broadens Munro-bagging, breaking its location-specific, temporospatial boundaries and providing additional contexts for participant interactions, construction of self, and community formation. This research explores how Munro-baggers gauge seriousness within online communities, and connects these insights to discourses as an evolution of new directions in tourism theory and practice. Taking a pursuit which has unfolded informally online, we demonstrate empirically the complex ways in which serious leisure tourists find new meanings in space and place, expressing primal competitiveness and social connection in a virtual space. Rather than simply suggesting that online opportunities are progressive and sustainable in the new epoch of travel developments, we also acknowledge that they are confounding and fascinating, as tourists are motivated towards 'being human' in a hybridic, computer-generated time-space configuration. We propose that a dystopia is also potentially developing, as participants elicit old behaviours by socially positioning themselves in an alternative playground, using technologies which may generate inequalities, as social orderings pervade beyond the leisure-scape.

## **Review of the theory**

### **Extant classifications of Serious Leisure participants**

As a progressive debate, we note several authors who have provided models of serious leisure stratification from its inception with Stebbins (2007) and the adoption of Unruh's (1980) classification of participants in social worlds - 'strangers', 'tourists', 'regulars' and 'insiders'. Building on recent conversations and acknowledging increases in online socialisation, we

return to Stebbins (2017), who finds leisure behaviour increasingly complex and multi-dimensional. Kofan & Ewert (2019) have reinvigorated debates around the motivations of serious leisure participants, whilst Heidari, Heydarinejad, Saffari & Khatibi (2019) have investigated leisure behaviour as a structural model of serious leisure and place attachment. Munro-bagging provides potential as a trope to understand tourism practices more broadly. Unruh's (1980) 'strangers' have little apparent understanding or appreciation of the pastime but may gain peripheral, unintended and uninterested experiences, often serendipitously. Therefore, this study explores these illusive practices where 'Tourists' sporadically undertake the pastime, whilst 'regulars' make frequent Munro-bagging trips, and 'insiders' have sufficiently extensive skills, experience and networks to influence peers and access special resources - an interesting travel phenomena when extrapolated into online spaces. Elkington & Stebbins' (2014) classification of serious leisure adherents as 'neophytes', 'participants', 'moderate devotees' and 'core devotees' differs from Unruh's (1980) taxonomy, focusing less on attitudes, more on 'career' progression. Brown's (2007) 'occasional', 'recreational', 'wannabe', 'competitive' and 'hardcore' categories reflect actors' assumed social positions, but their generic nature ignores the processes which Munro-baggers undertake, and actions observed online. Moreover, Stebbins' (2007) classifications largely overlook how leisure dynamics change over time (Veal, 2017) as actors develop.

### ***Munro-bagging 'seriousness' and leisure***

Munro-bagging requires knowledge, planning, perseverance, fitness, self-sufficiency, stamina, navigation skills, determination and nerve. Considering Stebbins' (2007) SLP categories of 'serious', 'casual' and 'project-based', Munro-bagging is 'serious' - a substantial, fulfilling pursuit requiring specialised skills and knowledge. Neither purely hedonic nor 'casual' leisure, its adherents make short-term sacrifices for long-term goals, deferring gratification - the breathlessness and fatigue of climbing to gain the summit, and the nondescript Munro to 'tick' an objective. The 'casual' leisure attributes of being short-lived, immediate and free of skill are inapplicable. Nor is Munro-bagging 'project-based', being both fulfilling and longitudinal. Rather, the six qualities of 'serious leisure' - perseverance, career progression, durable benefits, unique ethos, identification with the activity - and the need for effort, training, knowledge and skills (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014), are all present.

## *The SLP*

The SLP (Stebbins, 1982) represented a generational advance in understanding leisure (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013), reconceptualising it (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). Stebbins (2012) described four leisure categories distinguishing serious leisure: systematic yet unpaid pursuit requiring special skills, knowledge and experience; devotee work, which is self-enhancing and feels like leisure but contributes to a participant's livelihood; casual leisure as hedonic, short-lived but intrinsically rewarding work requiring little or no training or skill; and project-based leisure which, whilst short-term, may require planning, effort or skill, or be reasonably demanding. He (ibid) allocated serious leisure six qualities: the need for perseverance; the need for skill, knowledge or training; its potential to become a career; its unique ethos; the sense of identity derived from it; and the durable benefits enjoyed by participants, such as self-fulfilment, belonging, self-expression and fun. Though comprehensive, Veal (2017) found it neglected the significance of other areas of life, such as work and family, in terms of self-actualisation, which shapes 'leisure lifestyle'.

Serious leisure may underpin a social world of actors, organisations, practices and events binding together participants (Unruh, 1980) and providing meaning, solidarity and self-identity (Rojek, 2000). Such communities are distinctive, recognisable to members, and contain subcultures with norms, belief systems, values, styles, guiding principles, moral standpoints, and standards by which members are judged (Unruh, 1980). Serious leisure may therefore be a conduit to nurturing community (Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013), bestowing social benefits (Brown, 2007) such as cultural nourishment, entertainment and relaxation (Dumazedier, 1974). Elkington & Stebbins (2014) extended the SLP by adding Geography, arguing that it is usually space-specific. However, the burgeoning nature of online community participation amongst leisure enthusiasts has challenged the geographical specificity of even those pursuits which appear located in one place, such as Munro-bagging. Stebbins (2006) suggested that the contemplation and reflexivity permeates serious leisure - perhaps explaining why Munro-baggers often elongate the experience pre- and post-activity, and justifying linking involvement and commitment in serious leisure theory (e.g. – Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004).

## *Serious Leisure and Identity*

Taylor & Kay (2015) partially anticipated Veal's (2017) request for greater consideration of social identity by exploring how engagement underpins participants' self-identities and the meaningfulness of their occupations. Veal's (2017) focus on pursuit specialisation and its effects was partially foreshadowed by earlier calls to link the SLP and specialisation (e.g. – Lyu & Oh, 2015) – although these remain largely unanswered. More robust challenges to the SLP emanated within feminist studies, and especially the accusation that 'serious' is masculinised, overlooking the importance to females of talk, humour and friendships in addressing normative gender discourses and constructing subjective identities (Green, 1998). Shaw (2001) asserted that, to overcome gendered constraints, inequalities and oppression, women use 'leisure as resistance', so individuals' empowerment through the reconstruction of entrenched, gendered ideologies should underpin the serious leisure concept. Wearing's (1998) shift to poststructuralist analysis enabled deeper exploration of diversity, intersectionality and difference across multiple sites of power, especially through 'leisure as space', enabling women 'enlargement of the self' (p.188). This has enabled leisure's role to be understood within the contexts of women's lives, social relationships, physicalities, attitudes, gender identities, sexual relationships and work (Dilly & Scraton, 2010), rather than these factors being considered discrete and separable.

### **Research design, method and data collection**

The first author has been a Munro-bagger since 2001 and has informally frequented Munro-bagging websites since around 2012. From 2019, formal, empirical, 'insider' research commenced to observe 'digital tribes' (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007) and the online socialisation of identity-construction on hillwalkers' websites. A preliminary netnographic approach addressed Elkington & Stebbins' (2014) lack of focus on communities and cliques highlighted by Veal (2017). Rather than analysing specific interactions and adopting a purely netnographic approach, broader a priori themes were explored in ethno-phenomenological interviews with Munro-baggers. Questions were minimal and open-ended, and participants led the discussions, in which 'seriousness', 'leisureliness' and hierarchised perceptions of Munro-bagging activity emerged (though not expressed in those terms). Although the research makes no claim for generalisability, it used a broadly representative sample of Munro-baggers. Few data exist on Munro-baggers but most participants are from Scotland, and a large minority from England and Wales (SMC, 2018). Although women comprise around 40% of Munro-bagging

website users, it is nearer 25% on the hill. Most Munroists take over two decades to complete their round, although some take a lifetime and others complete quickly, a tiny minority undertaking continuous rounds (SMC, 2018). All participants were consciously Munro-bagging. Convenience sampling was used, with the author recruiting hillwalking friends, inviting participants through social media, and then contacting participants recommended by the first and second wave of interviewees. The initial participants recruited a further 16 participants. Whilst two were Munroists (had summited all the Munros), several were nearing 'completion', most had climbed 10-30 Munros, and others were casually climbing Munros but making few sacrifices and did not expect to 'complete'. The 28 participants were split exactly by gender and location between Scotland and Northern England. After 33 interviews, five participants provided insights in 20-50-minute follow-up interviews, before saturation was acknowledged in accordance with Guest, Bunce & Johnson's (2006) criteria. Interviews were conducted in neutral venues such as hotel lobbies, recorded digitally, and a research journal maintained of non-verbal communication, impromptu thoughts, emotions and observations. Transcripts were analysed by deep reading and Template Analysis to identify themes and sub-themes (King & Horrocks, 2010).

## **Findings from the data**

### ***Factors considered in Munro-baggers' evaluations of themselves and others***

Interview analysis presented 14 recurring factors which Munro-baggers consider when evaluating involvement. The first three are quantitative and address the objective of Munro-bagging. The first, most common, is the number of Munro ascents achieved - usually the number of *different* Munros summited, as this is more congruent with Munro-bagging than repeating the same ascents, and therefore more 'prestigious'. Interviewees admired people who had "*amassed an impressive number*" or who - as new Munro-bagger, Janice described - were "*closing in on the magic 282*". The second factor is trip frequency, although this allocated less prestige, as someone may have "*caught the bug pretty recently*" or adopt the pastime as "*their latest obsession*" whilst "*cherry-picking the easy Munros and ignoring the tougher ones*", ultimately neglecting the central objective of Munro-bagging. The third factor, length of experience, was considered a reliable indicator of dedication and attachment to the pastime, although Bobby, a Munroist, noted that "*some tough nuts start, finish in a couple of years, and*

*disappear again*". These first three factors are attributable to the participant's level of immersion in the hobby, with cross-sectional immersion (i.e. – intense, possibly fickle, bursts of activity acknowledged in phrases like "*summits this year*") valued less than the longitudinal immersion of "*number of years' experience*" or "*total Munros bagged*". As such they are progressive, allowing walkers to accumulate status.

The second group of factors comprise five qualitative criteria addressing Munro-bagging activity. The first is the inclusion of solo ascents. Most interviewees felt that solo walking demands more self-sufficiency, determination and "*bravery*" in coping with navigation, fatigue, injury and loneliness. Some, like Janice, said they were "*trying to pluck up courage to do a solo hike*" and that solo hillwalkers are "*gnarly, hardy beasts*". The second factor was the inclusion of 'tops' within Munro-bagging rounds. 'Tops' are Munros' subsidiary peaks above 3,000 feet. Many require arduous detours. A third factor is the inclusion of foul weather or winter ascents. Scottish winter mountaineering requires additional skills (e.g. - ice axe and crampon usage, rope work and avalanche risk assessment). Many summer hillwalkers consider winter mountaineering "*out of my league*" and "*strictly for experts*", whilst others pledge to "*get myself trained up when I have more confidence*" at outdoor education centres. The fourth factor is inclusion of multi-day expeditions or classic routes. For example, casual Munro-bagger, Amanda, observed that "*more serious hikers probably wouldn't do Ben Nevis via the Tourist Track with the day-trippers. They'd probably do the Carn Mor Dearg route or one of the gullies on the North Face.*" Such an approach was deemed "*purist*" and "*less mercenary*", as ease of summitting was deprioritised below aesthetic appeal and physical challenge. The final factor in this group is the inclusion of complementary activities. Some, like bothying (i.e. – sleeping in mountain huts), wild-camping, bivouacking or mountain biking, may be needed to reach remote summits, whilst others, like kayaking, may embellish the pastime, providing immersive experiences of nature. Participants doing this are often perceived as "*proper outdoors types*" and "*all-rounders*". For all five factors in this group, observers judge seriousness qualitatively based upon style of Munro-bagging, rather than on numerical values.

The final group comprises six factors which are qualitative but ad hominem – participant-focused, not activity-focused. The first factor is the walker's overseas experience. Undertaking foreign climbs (e.g. - Mont Blanc) is considered positive differentiation. One interviewee called it "*finishing school*" and "*going above and beyond*", whilst another described how returning to the Munros from the Alps was "*a step down*". The second factor concerns self-presentation.

Although several interviewees criticised uncommitted walkers who possess “*all the gear but no idea*” (a common insult, possibly of army origin), most admitted to making assumptions based upon clothing and accessories. Nicola, halfway through her round, recalled an encounter with “*this old mountain goat in a Paramo Alta [expensive weatherproof jacket] which obviously cost him a fortune but was old and battered. You could just tell from his jacket he was a bit of a Jedi [i.e. – a time-served master]*”. Having the ‘right’ gear attracts admiration when worn for functionality and without ostentation. Arthur, an ex-soldier, noted that social media members “*seem to treat the old beardy guys with more reverence than some of them deserve. Some of the younger females who post summit selfies where they’re wearing make-up get more gentle encouragement, like they’re new to Munro-bagging or need a gee-up. But looking at their profiles, some of them have done more than the beardies.*” This reinforces that the androcentric, masculinised interpretations of serious leisure discussed in feminist studies (e.g. – Heddon & Turner, 2012) influence perceptions of men’s and women’s seriousness. The third factor in this group – display of knowledge – is more meritocratic. Munro-baggers are perceived more favourably by offering advice on routes, mountain topography and geography, Highland history and culture, logistics and gear. Less experienced interviewees described such people as “*a mine of useful advice*”, “*a guardian angel in the chatroom*” and “*a mentor to new starters*”, whilst similarly experienced others sought them out as likeminded people.

The fourth qualitative but participant-related factor is membership of clubs, societies, chatrooms, committees or other social entities. One interviewee spoke admiringly of a walker they had met in a youth hostel who had been a member of the Creag Dhu Club, a seminal group of working-class Glaswegian trailblazers. The fifth factor focuses on the participant’s social orientation – their ability to entertain, inform and amuse through anecdotes, interaction quality and community-mindedness. Several interviewees recalled admiring someone who “*was funny, empathetic and supportive*”, who “*loved introducing new people to the hills and sharing their passion*” or who was simply “*great value for money*”. Usually, their positive social attributes were understood in a Munro-bagging context, although the same traits were probably prevalent elsewhere in their lives. The final factor is display of an appropriate ethos. Most interviewees found walkers more attractive companions and accomplished participants if they displayed strong awareness of issues relating to mountain safety, conservation and nature, although there was an aversion to “*holier-than-thou types who preach about everything as if everyone else is some sort of yobbo [i.e. – miscreant]*”. Two interviewees felt that Scottish walkers are more readily respected than English ones due to Munro-bagging being a specifically Scottish pastime



with an ethos distinct from walking in English areas like the Lake District, and differences in terrain, socio-cultural history, and land access laws.

As we have seen, when evaluating seriousness, Munro-baggers appear to consider three categories of factors. The first is quantitative and concerned with the central aim of the hobby, in which all walkers gain status as their ‘career’ progresses. The second is qualitative and concerned with the characteristics of trips undertaken, and some walkers may gain status by adopting practices optional to Munro-bagging. The third is also qualitative but is concerned with ad hominem characteristics rather than Munro-bagging activity and confers additional status only to those who make certain choices which are not prerequisites of Munro-bagging. These categories are summarised below.

<u>Quantitative, activity-focused factors</u>	<u>Qualitative, activity-focused factors</u>	<u>Qualitative, ad hominem factors</u>
Total Munro summits bagged	Inclusion of solo summits	Foreign mountain experience
Frequency of Munro-bagging trips	Inclusion of the Munro ‘tops’	Self-presentation / appearance
Length of Munro-bagging career	Inclusion of Munros summited in winter or bad weather conditions	Display of knowledge and expertise
	Inclusion of multi-day or ‘classic’ routes	Membership of relevant clubs and societies
	Incorporation into trips of additional, related pastimes	Social orientation
		Understanding of ethos

Table 1: Categories and factors considered in Munro-baggers’ evaluations of themselves and others

***Emerging categories of Munro-baggers by their characteristics***

Having used the factors above to determine seriousness amongst peers, Munro-baggers appear to place each other into loose categories, with the most committed and accomplished members

at the top and three further categories beneath – several interviewees specifically referred unprompted to a *‘hierarchy’*, *‘pecking order’* or *‘climbing the ladder’*, suggesting that progression between categories is desirable. Whilst boundaries are indistinct because members of neighbouring categories may share several characteristics, four clear identities emerged from the data, here proposed as *‘hardcore’*, *‘committed’*, *‘moderately committed’* and *‘inwanderers’*.

*‘Hardcore’* Munro-baggers are the most engaged, committed and skilled. Whilst the word *‘hardcore’* was used by over half of interviewees, other terms included *‘Jedi’*, *‘demi-gods’*, *‘mountain goats’* and *‘old men of the mountains’*. These humorously irreverent descriptions emphasise masculinity and maturity but were used by interviewees regardless of age and gender. Although *‘hardcore’* members may be new to Munro-bagging (e.g. – if their previous mountaineering experience was acquired on difficult foreign terrain), they are perceived to have bagged many Munros. They are *“those gnarly types who take themselves off for days on end...climbing ridges called ‘Suicide Precipice’ or ‘the Widow Maker’ “*. Whilst darkly humorous, this portrait is telling (and not only because climbs called *‘Widow Maker’* do exist). *‘Hardcore’* participants are perceived as physically formidable purists pursuing technical routes - highly self-sufficient, experienced practitioners who summon resourcefulness and perseverance over demanding, multi-day expeditions. Another interviewee mentioned that they *“know where all the secret howffs and dosses [both crude open shelters] are...always have a key to the locked climbers’ huts”*. *‘Hardcore’* Munro-baggers, then, are insiders (Unruh, 1980; Stebbins, 2007) with exclusive resources and expert knowledge of their pastime, the environment and mountain ethos.

The second category is *‘committed’* Munro-baggers, who are hardier and more determined than the average walker, but not extreme enough to be *‘hardcore’*. They may be spotted *“trudging down off the hills in all weathers”* and may *“spend a small fortune every month driving up and down the A82”* to pursue their hobby. In other words, they are relatively undeterred and likely to be focused on the objective of climbing all 282 summits. As Michelle, a Yorkshire-based mid-career Munro-bagger, commented wryly, *“they’ve got their eyes on the prize”*. Others noted that *“they tend to have decent performance gear...wicking inner garments, ultra-lightweight waterproof shells...a lot of them seem to have little campervans”*. The *‘committed’* are perceived to invest heavily in their hobby and embed it within a broader lifestyle - connoisseurs rather than purists, as *“you’ll see them taking classic routes like Ptarmigan Ridge on Ben Lomond, maybe even in winter conditions, but not really any hanging-on-by-your-*

*fingernails' stuff*". They are also portrayed as more social than 'hardcores' and their trips are carefully planned and less flexible – *"you meet quite a few of them in small groups...often middle-aged folks from further afield...always with a definite plan of where they want to go and how long it's going to take to get to point A and B"*.

The third category is the 'moderately committed'. Most interviewees considered this the most populous band. Although its members wish to climb all the Munros, *"most know they might never complete them all"*, perhaps because *"they can only do a handful each year"*. The constraints of family obligations, distance and time are recognised. One interviewee commented that *"you might get these people doing the odd winter walk up one of the easier Munros, but nothing too technical and not in bad weather. You'd probably see them on more popular hills, togged up and looking the part but going up the main paths"*. These infrequent, 'fair-weather' Munro-baggers have modest technical prowess and little inclination to leave their comfort zones, fitting their walking around other activities and people, but displaying reasonable fitness and investing in appropriate gear.

The final category is the 'inwanderers'. Often newbies (Chayko, 2008) or neophytes (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014), they climb infrequently, having only loose plans. As one interviewee commented, *"they're a bit like the charity walkers you see on Beinn a' Ghlo – cheap new boots with no dubbin [waterproof grease] on them, plodding up cart tracks, no map, someone else telling them where to point themselves, no idea what they're climbing"*. Whilst possibly dismissive and elitist, this portrait describes an infrequent, uncommitted visitor with no specialist knowledge or expertise, little experience, low self-sufficiency, and little sense of adventure or mountain ethos. They closely resemble the unacculturated 'strangers' of Unruh (1980) and Stebbins' (2007) or Brown's (2007) 'occasional' participants. They may climb a specific mountain for its Munro status, Munro-bagging in the loosest sense, but have no intention to climb all 282 summits. Indeed, they may be unaware of a mountain's Munro status or ignorant of the concept. Therefore, the obscure word, 'inwanderer' (not to be mistaken for the German 'Einwanderer', meaning 'immigrant') is appropriate, being sufficiently broad to encompass new participants who wish to increase their engagement and those who have drifted uninterestedly into the pastime without expectations. The categories are summarised below:

Hardcore

Committed

Moderately

Inwanderers

Committed

Many summits bagged	Frequent visits	Infrequent trips	Very infrequent trips
Very frequent trips	Some winter and foul weather summits	Fair weather walking	Little / no experience
Multi-day expeditions	Good knowledge	Little winter experience	No / few Munros bagged
Self-sufficient	'Classic' routes	Superficial knowledge	Reliant on others
Purist / 'classic' routes	Length of experience	Acceptable gear	Easiest routes on 'honeypot' Munros
Physically demanding	Good gear	Healthy and fit	Fair weather, summer walking
Exclusive / prohibitive participation	Fit physique	Few / no technical skills	Poor knowledge
Foreign / ultra-experience	Some multi-day trips	'Tourist' ascent routes	No technical skills
Athletic physique		Walking secondary to other holiday activities	Little appreciation of mountain ethos
Appropriate gear			Not necessarily fit and healthy
Length of experience			
Technical skills			
Perseverance and endurance			
Sharing of experience			
Extensive knowledge			
Related mountain pastimes			

Table 2: Categories of Munro-baggers by their characteristics

The 'moderately committed' category, similar to Elkington & Stebbins' (2014) 'moderate devotees', is the second rung up of four, rather than their second rung down of four, as Munro-bagging is inherently committing. Therefore, here the median point is between 'committed'

and ‘moderately committed’, whereas for Elkington & Stebbins (ibid) it is between ‘participants’ and ‘moderate devotees’.

### ***The hierarchising nature of Munro-bagger categories***

Participants considered their perceptions of other Munro-baggers, and others’ perceptions of them. Michelle, a ‘compleatist’, noted that participants could gain ‘prestige indicators’ [our phrase] as their hillwalking careers unfolded, but that this was neither important nor practicable for everyone: “*some people simply can’t get here often enough or are happy just to potter along at their own pace. Night walking and wild camping aren’t for everyone.*” This indicates that many participants do not aspire to more seriousness. Continuing, she commented that “*lots of people manage to bag all the Munros without going too far out their comfort zone – no wild camping, no blizzards*”. Therefore, one may fulfil the core aim of Munro-bagging with limited seriousness. Indeed, someone with 100 summits completed may be considered more ‘serious’ by peers than a Munroist if their methods were deemed more ‘hardcore’, reinforcing the importance of qualitative judgments and the fluidity of categorisations.

Asked about the recognition of categories, Geoff, an English walker with 18 summits bagged over ten years, noted that “*it’s not a formal thing. There aren’t specific labels, and people don’t really think about it, but there is a pecking order, I suppose, and especially online*”. Like most other participants, Geoff believed that hierarchical categories exist, but perhaps unconsciously - tacit hierarchies of seriousness. Most interviewees considered categorisation an inevitable and innocuous aspect of human nature. As Josie, a Munro-bagging newbie from near Glasgow, commented, “*in any social situation, the first thing anyone does is have a sniff around the others to decide if they’re their kind of people. You check out how they talk and dress... ..Oh God, when I say it like that, it’s really depressing and shallow, isn’t it?*” Josie appears correct in assuming that these judgments are heuristics enabling Munro-baggers to find peers whose experiences and aspirations match their own – facilitators of homophilous relationships. However, a minority of interviewees were irked by the phenomenon – for example, Munroist Chris complained “*it’s a bit pathetic really. When you finally get some freedom, it’s a bit sad that people might still want to be top dog or to compete with other people. But I suppose counting Munros instils that attitude.*” Here, providing a wider context of belief systems and expectations, Chris appears half right. There is a hierarchised structure, but it appears more

dependent on qualitative judgments about others' practices than the quantification of outcomes – Munro-bagging is product-driven, but participants make process-driven judgments. Several participants noted that the characteristics by which Munro-baggers judge each other are presented more plainly on websites than 'on the hill'. As Ian, midway through his Munro round, commented, "*it can feel like a dating site where all your vital statistics are laid out for the scrutiny of strangers – 'Munros climbed', 'years a member', 'number of comments', 'number of followers' – it can be a bit in-your-face*".

By considering how these tourists organise themselves and interact online, we can extract implications for tourism, the travel industry, and of a social practice which denotes further opportunities within the serious leisure context. Direction changes, whilst uncertain, are revealed as competitive practices unleashed online, expressing inner tensions around social posturing. We have sought to contextualise these playful yet gently combative behaviours, towards new theoretical insights which could feed managerial processes. How the vehicle of tourism produces nature and society through hybrid forms of tourism mobilities, therefore, combines the fluid reality of climbing the peaks, juxtaposed with online social representations and emblematic posturing. By exploring new forms of serious leisure participation and interaction, theorists and tourism managers have an opportunity to consider how they may impact upon more 'traditional' elements of tourism.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has used semi-structured phenomenological interviews of Munro-baggers, informed by prior observation of online conversations and the extant literature on serious leisure, to explore classifications of participants between Munro-baggers. Emerging themes suggest four broad categories – 'hardcore', 'committed', 'moderately committed' and 'inwanderers' – although these overlap. Categories are hierarchical as prestige, status and recognition increase commensurate to one's progression from 'inwanderer' towards 'hardcore'. However, whilst some walkers aspire to 'career progression' between categories, for others the structure is non-aspirational. Most participants acknowledge loose categories, broadly agreeing on their characteristics. Most find the phenomenon benign, but some find it elitist, hegemonic or annoying. Therefore, it may reduce, increase or not affect enjoyment of the pastime, depending on the participant. Categories appear tacit, unformalized and largely affective rather than cognitive.

The characteristics informing these categories are of three strands: quantitative and relating to the central purpose of the hobby; qualitative and appertaining to Munro-bagging activities; and qualitative but ad hominem (i.e. – appertaining to the Munro-bagger, not their activities). The characteristics with which participants judge and hierarchise themselves and each other are presented more plainly in enthusiasts' websites than was the case when Munro-bagging was situated within its original temporospatial boundaries, limited to time spent 'on the hill'. Moreover, the internet has turned a relatively solitary and geographically remote hobby into one with extensive opportunities for participation within, or at least membership of, social groups, in which members may display their credentials, scrutinise those of others, and interact. Therefore, the removal of time- and location-specificity, and the socialisation of enthusiasts, has facilitated and encouraged such hierarchising and changed the nature of participants' perceptions of self and others in the contexts of their pastime. The research offers deep insights into a pastime of increasing socio-economic importance within Scotland, and the growing influence of online spaces in shaping participant perceptions of self and others.

Finally, we recognise study limitations such as the lead researcher's inability to 'escape' membership of the study population, and its attendant subjectivism. Munro-bagging is niche, and not necessarily representative of the broader nature walking industry. For example, peak-bagging is not UK-specific, but is nuanced by location. Future investigation of these cultural and contextual differences could help to extend the debate.

### **Highlights**

- Munro-baggers informally hierarchise themselves and each other according to the perceived 'seriousness' of their leisure.
- 'Seriousness' is conveyed through a mixture of conscious and unconscious actions and interactions.
- Pastime-specific social media sites have increased the ease, speed and frequency with which Munro-baggers convey seriousness, and the audience size.
- Social media has also extended the temporospatial boundaries of the pastime beyond the hill and the walk, raising questions regarding how this elongated engagement influences serious leisure tourism.

## **Key Questions**

Fort William, a small town but the main urban centre in Scotland's West Highlands, styles itself the 'Outdoor Capital of the UK'. It is adjacent Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain (and Munro), which attracts many ascents from serious mountaineers and casual day-trippers alike.

If Fort William's tourism marketers segmented potential holidaymakers into categories including 'dedicated Munro-bagger' and 'occasional hillwalker', what characteristics might they attach to each of those two segments? (Think about the behaviours and practices of each.)

If using an online strategy specifically to target 'dedicated Munro-baggers', how might the tourism marketers find and attract them? (Think about choices of website, messages, language and imagery.)

How might tourism marketers encourage 'dedicated Munro-baggers' to spread positive messages about Fort William to each other through Word Of Mouth, both offline and online?

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