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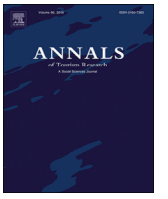

Tourist skills

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ABSTRACT

This study extends the theoretical debate on skills as an important element of tourism as a practice. Analysing qualitative data on train and canal boating tourism in the UK, we discuss how some tourism practices require both specialist and commonplace skills, while others only need the latter. Moreover, every tourism practice is skilled, and all skills are learned and portable from the context in which they were acquired to new situations and practices in tourism. Any tourism practice requires a skill-kit: a complex of skills that emerges to facilitate a given tourism practice. Therefore, the tourist skills make tourism practices largely effortless and enjoyable, allowing tourists to respond creatively and with confidence to the variations of the surrounding environment.

Introduction

Increasingly central to everyday life, a growing array of tourist practices become enfolded into weekly and annual schedules and routines. Most tourist places and spaces emerge through corporeal, collaborative and creative practices; a beach becomes a tourist site when families, equipped with spades, shovels and buckets arrive to build a sandcastle together (Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004). Such tourist practices mobilise embodied interactions with humans, non-humans and various materialities (van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2012), and meanings thereby become sedimented by repeated mundane and unreflexive tourist performances (Edensor, 2001, 2007). Critically, however, all tourism practices require different skills to maximise enjoyment, ensure their successful completion and encourage adaption to diverse circumstances.

This paper deploys practice theory to study canal and train tourist practices in the UK. It responds to the observation by Lamers, van der Duim, and Spaargaren (2017) that only a few scholars have utilised practice theory, for instance, in accounting for how practical tourist requirements change, and how practices compete to attract practitioners (e.g., James, Ren, & Halkier, 2019; Lamers et al., 2017; Lamers & Pashkevich, 2018; Lepoša, 2018; Rantala & Valtonen, 2014; Rantala, Valtonen, & Markuksela, 2011). We seek to extend theoretical understanding by focusing on the importance of *skill* in tourist practices – a subject recognised in studies of social tourism (McCabe, 2014) but barely substantively theorised, even though any practice depends on the acquisition of skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

We take as our starting point Shove, Pantzar, and Watson's (2012) contention that the key elements of any practice are meanings, materialities and competences. Yet while meanings – 'motivations, states of emotions, aspirations and ideas' (Bargeman & Richards, 2020: 4) – have been extensively scrutinised (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010) and materialities have also been the focus of recent attention in tourism research (Rantala et al., 2011), competences – particularly skills – remain underexplored (Patchett & Mann, 2018; Pearce, 2005). Extant studies typically focus on those skills necessary for undertaking specialist adven-

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ture tourism activities (Richards, 1996; Shipway & Jones, 2007; Steen Jacobsen, Denstadli, & Rideng, 2008). Yet, critically, many tourism practices are often performed unreflexively and are contingent on the acquisition of different kinds of skill. Tourists become competent by following skill-dependent norms and learning how to plan holidays, travel on specific modes of transport, negotiate cultural differences, attend to key points of interest, and generally engage with spatial and material worlds. Accordingly, this paper seeks to better conceptualise the acquisition and performance of tourist skills.

Rather than investigating only specialist abilities gained through (lengthy) training, our key contribution lies in our focus on *commonplace* tourist skills, mundane, attentive, practical forms of know-how essential to successful tourist practices. While it has been acknowledged that 'some clients need a great deal of support to develop the skills and competences to be tourists' (McCabe, 2014: 354), there has been little dedicated analysis of how these skills facilitate different tourism practices. Furthermore, both academic and industry accounts tend to focus on how tourist practices are defined through one specialist skill. For instance, a boating holiday can be defined solely through the skill of boat handling. However, this is but one skill of many required for a boat trip. This leads to our second key contribution: any tourist practice requires a *skill-kit* consisting of many skills, both specialist and commonplace. Commonplace skills are essential to the enaction of crucial everyday, habitual tourist practices, like planning a trip, sightseeing or cooking (Edensor, 2001). Conversely, the specialist skills foregrounded in extant literature are typically only required for specific holidays and selective specialist activities.

Additionally, we identify two key characteristics of tourist skill: skills are learned and portable. While Andersson (2007), for instance, recognises the importance of learning specialist skills, we show that all tourist skills are learned. And while Pearce and Foster (2007) identify how skills learned in tourist contexts can be later used in professional life, we exemplify how skills learned in everyday life are adapted to tourism environments. We thus address Hanks' (1991: 19) identification of the key question as to 'how one describes the detachability of … skills from the participatory contexts in which they were acquired.'

Through an analysis of train and canal tourism, we exemplify how tourists use existing skills and acquire new skills that facilitate confident tourist practices. The paper is structured as follows. We first contextualise our discussion by identifying relevant concepts in practice theory and its resonance with tourism. Second, we zoom in on skill as an element of practice and on how specific skills are enacted in tourism. Subsequently, after discussing our research methods, we show that all skills required for boating and train tourism are learned and portable. Finally, we show that these skills subsequently form a skill-kit, an unreflexive, fluid and ever-emerging bundle of skills that tourists draw upon in endeavouring to accomplish diverse practices. This helps us to better understand the key role skills play in tourist decision-making, behaviour and experience as tourists choose trips and activities that match or challenge their existing skills.

Practice theory and tourism

Practice theory offers new ways of theorising both small-scale undertakings and larger socio-cultural processes by paying attention to the non-discursive, habitual and routinized enactments of social life (Nicolini, 2012; Spaargaren, Weenink, & Lamers, 2016). This practice turn (de Souza Bispo, 2016) stems from an interweaving of scholarly traditions as varied as ethnomethodology and actor-network theory (Cetina, Schatzki, & von Savigny, 2005). Accordingly, strands of practice theory have different theoretical underpinnings and are applicable to different contexts (Bargeman & Richards, 2020). This paper takes as its starting point the influence of Giddens' structuration theory (1984) on contemporary formulations developed by Schatzki (1996, 2002), Shove et al. (2012), Reckwitz (2002) and Spaargaren et al. (2016).

The pluralism of practice-based approaches has produced an avowedly open-ended ontology (Nicolini, 2012). Here, we adopt the following working definition that combines key ideas and elements of practice:

> Social practices are shared, routinized, ordinary ways of doing and saying, enacted by knowledgeable and capable human agents who – while interacting with the material elements that co-constitute the practice – know what to do in a non-discursive, practical manner (Spaargaren et al., 2016: 8).

The following four notions constitute the key theoretical pillars for our subsequent analysis. First, analysis within a practice theory framework focuses on social *practices* and not individual practitioners. Social life is conceived as a field of interconnected practices through which people, as 'carriers of practice' (Shove et al., 2012: 126), (re)produce their world and themselves. Practice theorists argue that a focus on social contexts and practices more fruitfully discloses how socio-material environments co-constitute human behaviour (Spaargaren et al., 2016). According to this praxeological perspective, participants are *in* practice, their actions framed by rules, general understandings and practical know-hows (Schatzki, 1996). Practices attract and enrol new recruits who then become their carriers and create and transform a community of practice, 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 98).

Second, practice theorists emphasise '*doing* over thinking, practical competence over strategic reasoning, mutual intelligibility over personal motivations and body over mind' (Warde, 2013: 18, our emphasis). Their expansive focus explores how seemingly trivial, small-scale individual performances are part of larger complexes and bundles of practices (Shove et al., 2012). Social structures, invisible routines, rituals, collective traditions and ingrained habits ensure that people go about their daily lives in an intuitive, unreflexive, non-discursive and routinized manner that gives social life a sense of order, predictability and control. Only when routines are broken, practices collapse or new objects, environments or ideas are introduced, is a more reflexive mode of doing temporarily mobilised until new norms are established or things return to a pre-existing order.

Third, practice theorists foreground the *material* dimension of practices by emphasising the critical role of the body and socio-material interactions. Nicolini (2012) shows how social practices are interlinked with different materialities and their use requires competences and practical know-hows. Materialities are employed, manipulated and constructed by skilful practitioners; conversely, different material arrangements impose order on individual practices.

Fourth, all practices are composed of various *elements* (Schatzki, 2002). However, different theorists use different concepts to analyse how these contribute to organising practices. Here, we follow Shove et al.'s (2012) theoretical framework wherein practice consists of three broad elements: materials, competences and meanings. Material elements range from objects, tools and infrastructures to physical settings and the human body. Competences encompass skills, practical know-hows, knowledge and techniques. Meanings comprise emotions, motivations, and aspirations. Practices thus emerge when all three elements are linked and diminish when they are broken. For example, Lepoša (2018) explores how leisure boating on Sweden's coast has changed from being practised on small boats in basic conditions to the incorporation of domestic practices on increasingly bigger, comfortable boats. This exemplifies that when new materialities or environments are introduced, either new competences are required, or existing ones must adapt. Once links become consolidated over time through regular enactment, practices become un-reflexive and fine-tuned.

Tourism is 'a set of ongoing organising practices' (de Souza Bispo 2016: 174), co-constituted by different institutional structures, organisations, materialities and actors (James et al., 2019). Shove et al.'s (2012: 99) concept of 'practices-as-performances' resonates with notions about unreflexive habitual enactions and their accommodation by the organisation of tourist spaces and mobilities (Baerenholdt et al., 2004; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Edensor, 2001). A practice theory approach therefore provides a valuable conceptual context for considering how tourist skills are acquired and performed at particular times and places and shaped by specific materialities, knowledge and competencies (Hui, 2013).

Extant studies analyse particular tourist practices. Rantala and Valtonen (2014) and Valtonen and Veijola (2011) show how sleeping is materially mediated, collectively enacted and organised around shared values and understandings. Rantala et al. (2011) examine how the socio-material practices of wilderness guiding are heavily intertwined with weather-related skills. Barry (2018) explores packing bags while Lamers and Pashkevich (2018) investigate how polar tourism practices of travelling and eating form various complexes. Though these studies acknowledge skill as an element of practice, none pay it close theoretical attention. We now more specifically focus on skill as one element of competences, analysing the skills that facilitate confident tourist practices.

Towards understanding tourist skills within practice theory

Skill is a practical know-how that is tacit, subjective and context-dependent, partly intuitive, largely implicit and deeply embedded in experiences (Ingold, 2000a, 2000b). According to Edensor (2007: 204), tourism is 'an interactive and contingent process which succeeds according to the skill of the actors, the context within which it is performed and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience'. By analysing boat and train tourism practices, our overarching contention is that various skills, both commonplace and specialist, are integral to these performances. Although typically associated with artistic and artisanal endeavours (Patchett & Mann, 2018), we maintain that commonplace skills facilitate most tourist practices; like specialist skills, they are learned, absorbed and performed in tourism of all kinds.

Three critical dimensions of skilled practice resonate with practice theory discussed above. First, skills develop in relation to surrounding socio-material environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shove et al., 2012). Skills are thus not things-in-themselves but facilitate effective interaction between individuals and their place-specific surroundings (Ingold, 1996). Practice is often mediated via tools and materialities; as Patchett and Mann (2018: 24) explain, 'skill is dynamically co-produced between different bodies (both human and non), technologies and materials in and across a variety of temporal and spatial scales, contexts and settings.' Vannini (2011) exemplifies such adaptations in ferry travel in British Columbia, where skills of spatial and temporal orientation are critical for islanders to successfully catch the correct ferries.

However, if environments, routines or lifestyles are altered, the acquisition of new skills or the adaptation of existing skills are required. This context-dependency underpins a second property: skills are not merely reiteratively applied to exterior objects. Rather, a skilful practitioner is constantly attentive to the evolving conditions of an emergent task and continually improvises in situ (Ingold, 1996, 2000b). Yet this is possible only once the practitioner has developed a practical and sensory attunement to tasks. Vannini (2011: 1032) exemplifies how catching the right ferry is a creative, skilful task that requires insider responsiveness to ever-changing sailing schedules and contingencies. A successful performance of catching the ferry calls for 'care, judgement, and dexterity in revising lines of action as journeys to the ferry terminals unfold'.

Accordingly, a third quality emphasises that skills are not innate (Ingold, 1996), but socio-culturally acquired in a specific environment: all, even the simplest of skills are learned. Ingold (2000a) argues that skills can never be simply copied while Lave and Wenger (1991) point to the 'evolving, continuously renewed set of relations' (ibid.: 50) between newcomers and experienced practitioners in a community of practice. Participation is a fundamental form of learning conterminous with absorption into a 'culture of practice' (ibid: 95). As practitioners gradually acquire skills, they also unreflexively absorb culture-specific group values and unwritten rules of behaviour, developing skilled identities as they become part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

While existing tourism literature mainly focuses on specialist practices and skills, especially in sports and adventure tourism (Shipway & Jones, 2007; Steen Jacobsen et al., 2008), some authors address more mundane skills: for instance, Scitovsky (1992) discusses how skilled consumption is required to maximise well-being and appreciate novelty. Similarly, Cogoy (1995:

176) argues that consumption skills help to achieve 'comfortable dwelling'. He (ibid: 171) identifies *planning skills*, alluding 'to the consumer's knowledge of possible input combinations', and *ability skills* that 'refer to the labour performance of the consumer [such as] to drive a car'; both are needed "to obtain the desired result: 'enjoyment of life'". Cogoy's approach, however, unhelpfully juxtaposed cognitive and embodied skills, yet as we demonstrate, knowing cannot be detached from doing; even those tourist activities usually conceptualised as 'unskilled' require a complex of commonplace tourist skills.

In a tourism context, Richards (1996: 26), following Scitovsky (1992), introduces a hierarchical notion of skilled consumption, arguing that tourism activities can be grouped into 'low-skill, low stimuli' and 'high-skill, high stimulation' endeavours. Skilled consumers seek activities that require a high level of skill, while unskilled tourists tend to avoid stimulation, choosing 'unskilled leisure consumption' (ibid: 26) – shopping, beach holidaying or visits to theme parks. Similarly, Andersson (2007) suggests that acquired skills may determine tourists' choice of holiday. He juxtaposes a package holiday as sought by those who are 'short of … skills' and yachting as an activity requiring 'tourism skills [that are] under constant development through new experiences and discussions with other sailors' (Andersson, 2007: 56). We contest this division and show in our analysis that all tourism practices are skilled.

Other work examines skills from a perspective that foregrounds knowledge. Tsaur, Yen, and Chen (2010: 1038) argue that skill in tourism is '*knowing* how to perform' (our emphasis) and develop a threefold skill measurement scale consisting of: onsite travel capability, pre-trip preparation and emergency response. Similarly, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) review tourist skills in the context of knowledge and learning, identifying four categories of skills aligned with learning outcomes: cognitive, affective, psychomotor and personal development. Pearce and Foster (2007) examine the generic skills backpackers gain, also developing a framework consisting of 42 items that facilitates an assessment of learning outcomes in terms of the different generic skills learned from travelling.

Categorising tourist skills in the above-described ways can make them seem one-dimensional and dualistic, and lead to an over-emphasis on specialist skills. These studies primarily develop typologies of tourist skills that may be instrumentally applied to future trips, careers or everyday life as learning outcomes (e.g., Scarinci & Pearce, 2012). Often imprecisely using the terms *skill* and *knowledge* interchangeably, such accounts sidestep any conceptualisation of how skills facilitate different tourist practices. Finally, these studies prioritise the specific abilities and outcomes of individual practitioners rather than focusing on shared tourism practices.

Consequently, the more commonplace skills needed to support quotidian tourist practices have been overlooked. Notable exceptions are Löfgren's (2015) analysis of the seemingly mundane mobilities of both tourists and commuters on trains and Chen and Mak's (2020) discussion of girlfriend getaways. Löfgren analyses train users' engagement with trains, platforms, ticket machines and crowds. In highlighting their taken for granted practices, he (2015: 191) suggests there are distinctive 'skills of handling rhythms, switching between different kinds of movements and standing still, [and] synchronising one's movements to others.' Chen and Mak (2020) identify skills as one of the four types of mutual dependence and explain how girls depend on each other's skills (photography, make-up, dressing, communication, languages) while travelling.

By adopting a practice-based approach, we further zoom in on skills to show how people *do* tourism, not what they think or know about it. We analyse 'practical competence over strategic reasoning' (Warde, 2013: 18) and demonstrate how skills are learned and portable and help tourists to repeatedly practice tourism confidently. We emphasise that in addition to the specialist skills needed for more challenging activities, attention must be paid to what we term *commonplace tourist skills,* practical forms of know-how required in everyday tourist practices and routines. In addressing this gap, we first outline our research background and methods before turning our attention to the acquisition and practice of skills necessary for engaging in train and canal boating tourism.

Research background and methods

Our empirical material is based upon mobile ethnographic studies (Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2010) of two forms of transport tourism in the UK, train travel and canal boating. 18th century canals, constructed for carrying cargo started to become obsolete with the arrival of the railways and slowly fell into disuse by the second half of the 20th century. Subsequently, many of these waterways were restored for leisure and tourism; nowadays, they are promoted for activities including boating, walking, angling and cycling (Kaaristo, Medway, Burton, Rhoden, & Bruce, 2020). Similarly, after the 19th to the mid-20th century railway boom, many lines were closed after which diverse railway enthusiast societies worked to save the most scenic heritage branch lines. Today, these railways provide access to many tourist destinations, activities and events, but also function as transport attractions in themselves. Both train tourism and canal boating are increasingly popular as vacationers seek to slow down in their search for quality time and experiences.

We collected data between 2013 and 2019 in northern England for two research projects studying embodied mobile tourist experiences. Train travel and canal boating were chosen because they illuminate dissimilar tourist practices. The train tourists are passengers, following established routes and timetables, whereas canal tourists hire the boats, choose their routes and are responsible for steering the boats. Hence, train tourism only relies on commonplace skills while boating tourism requires both specialist and commonplace skills. However, there are also similarities between the two practices: both are types of transport tourism and hence mobility is integral to the experience. By analysing these two practices we have been able to develop a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of tourist skills.

The first author undertook twelve journeys on regular diesel trains along the historic Leeds-Settle-Carlisle-Barrow-Lancaster route that spans the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District National Parks and is popular among tourists. The second author

collected data on canal boating during fifteen boat trips with holidaymakers on hired, self-drive narrowboats on the Ashton, Bridgewater, Macclesfield, Trent and Mersey, Rochdale and Peak Forest Canals, which together constitute the popular circular route, the 'Cheshire ring'.

Research participants were recruited before and during journeys, and both authors undertook interviews and participant observation. Self-reflexivity (Pink, 2015) proved especially important as the researchers were learning how to practice train and boating tourism. While skills were not the initial focus of the studies, both interview schedules included questions about them. We observed that tourists who possessed the skills needed would often have little to say about them – skills were so ingrained in their practices that they conceived them as unimportant or self-evident. On the other hand, those who lacked necessary know-hows provided detailed reflections on various skills, directing our attention to this element of practice.

Key challenges included making initial contact with research participants, undertaking lengthy research journeys and overcoming issues posed by conducting mobile interviews in difficult environments (with background sounds interfering with recording quality). We conducted 29 interviews on trains and 20 on canal boats, with 26 men and 23 women, all British domestic tourists, aged between 19 and 82. Interviews, fieldnotes and voice memos were subsequently transcribed and coded using NVivo data management software. Thematic data analysis was conducted in two stages: first, the researchers independently identified key themes in the data; second, they reviewed these codes collectively with focus on skills, and re-coded some initial interpretations.

Analysis: train travelling and canal boating skills

A practice-based perspective offers an understanding of tourism as consisting of situated interactions, mundane performances and routines, wherein tourists are knowledgeable actors who reproduce these practices. Here, we identify two key characteristics of tourist skills: skills are learned and portable. We start our analysis by showing that any tourism practice requires skills that are either newly learned, adapted from previous practices, or combine both. We conclude by showing that learnability and portability are the preconditions for a skill-kit to emerge. As we demonstrate below, the tourist skill-kit is a fluid bundle of both *specialist* and *commonplace skills* that unreflexively emerges anew every time tourists engage in a practice.

Learning tourist skills

All skills are learned and developed over time either in a community of practice, where mentors teach newcomers (Lave & Wenger, 1991), or as part of an individual's ongoing development in a particular socio-cultural environment (Ingold, 2000a), some in early childhood, others over a lifetime. Boating tourists, for instance, explain that learning how to handle a boat is more efficient and enjoyable under the guidance of experienced boaters, since the process involves reflexively acquiring and developing specific, specialist skills solely required for boating. There are also many other, commonplace skills, such as those needed for cooking or gazing – that both boating and train tourists acquire in carrying out mundane practices. These skills develop more casually as practitioners learn them on their own. Learning these commonplace skills is less demanding and typically more unreflexive, partly because many have already been learned in other circumstances and are subsequently adapted to tourism contexts. To exemplify, we discuss how tourists 'grow' (Patchett & Mann, 2018: 201) into the skills of boat-handling (a specialist skill) and gazing (a commonplace skill).

As Shove et al. (2012: 71) insist, "at any one moment, 'a practice' consists of a composite patchwork of variously skilled, variously committed performances enacted and reproduced by beginners and by old-hands alike". For Lave and Wenger (1991: 31) 'learning is integral and inseparable part of generative social practice in the lived-in world'. Learning does not happen by acquiring knowledge transmitted via instructions or by replicating the performance of others; it occurs through the developmental cycles of that community where learning is distributed among co-participants through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Critically, once acquired, skills are not fixed but evolve over time if practised. This process is evident in the boating community as boaters undergo apprenticeships and learn necessary skills as well as norms and values to 'become part of a community of practice as skilled dwelling inhabitants of the waterways' (Bowles, 2015: 42). For a canal holiday on self-driven boats, specialist boating skills are essential, for at least one member of the onboard party must possess them.

Novice boaters must learn the key skills of boat-handling and operating the locks. Skills of interacting with your own and other boats, locks, bridges, ropes and windlasses are learned and established within the boaters' community of practice. When the second author encountered her first lock on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, an experienced boater, Robert, 45, stayed onboard while sending the author onto the towpath to 'work the lock', one of the first skills taught to a novice boater. To empty the lock so that the boat could enter it, the initial task was to attach the windlass (a L-shaped key to unlock paddle gear) to the spindle on the lock and wind up the paddle to let the water out. A sequence of tasks needed to be skilfully completed: once the water level drops enough, the lock gates can be opened by pushing the lock beams, but as the author found out, this is unfeasible until the water level is at the exact same level in the lock and the canal behind. Once the gates are open, the boat is steered into the empty lock and the gates are pushed to close. At this point, the paddles are wound back down again so that the lock may fill and raise the boat up to the requisite level for further travel.

The author learned this sequence with the experienced boater, who meticulously described each successive task from the boat's stern so that she could learn by doing. Some individual practices vary, for each boater has to tailor what works best for them. The author learned that the windlass should never be placed on the ground in case it gets lost in the long grass. Robert suggested the author place it on the lock beam while pushing the gates open whereas Michael, 79, another experienced boater,

warned against this practice having occasionally seen the tool fall into the canal with the momentum of closing the gates. These productive relationships between newcomers and experienced skilled practitioners are critical; as Lave and Wenger (1991: 94) note, 'mastery resides not in the master but in the organisation of the community of practice of which the master is part'.

However, not every master-novice relationship is characterised by the same level of dedication and attention. In tourism situations, 'shortcuts' are created to speed up the learning process. Boat hire companies can deploy a model to demonstrate how to operate a lock before tourists go onboard, others mentor boaters through their first lock. Tom, 35, details how after a short basic induction, he and his partner were left to their own devices:

> Before we went, I knew absolutely nothing. I did get a few books on the canals, including one on the architecture of the canals. […] So I knew a bit about some of the history of canals […] but I knew next to nothing about handling a boat. I had to learn how to tie the ropes, which took me ages. How it tends to work is, they give you a crash course, they give you an hour or two training on the locks, on how to tie up the boat, they allow you to practice a bit, they show you how windlass works. I was pretty nervous to take a boat out for the first time.

Yet, not all tourist skills are learned intentionally in the community of practice; most commonplace skills are acquired gradually by observing and imitating others, 'through the repeated and often wordless performance of tasks' (Ingold, 2000b: 239). Among train tourists, gazing out of the window at the passing landscape forms a crucial part of a journey that many anticipate (Watts, 2008) – and this practice, too, requires skills which are learned. Many purposefully take a train because they want to 'enjoy the scenery' (Susan, 65) on the way to their destination, while some deliberately travel along train routes that they know well through car travel, because they want to experience 'how the route feels by train' (Jessica, 32). Skill and emplaced knowledge are required to enjoy gazing at the passing landscape as an aesthetically valuable time-creating and time-passing activity. As Adler (1989) and Urry and Larsen (2011) have amply demonstrated, the travel gaze has emerged from different historical and cultural processes (Büscher, 2006; Larsen, 2001). These aptitudes resonate with Grasseni's (2004) concept of 'skilled vision', an embodied, idiosyncratic way of knowing and perceiving the world.

Tourists travelling by train tend to unreflexively mobilise a skilful, concentrated gaze that endows the route with deeper meanings, wherein landmarks are identified, and views anticipated. Such skills are accumulated through regular practices, reading and undertaking repeat visits. Many train tourists note that frequent travel along the same routes enables them to notice details and become attuned to slight changes in the landscape, leisurely routines that make travelling replete with pleasurable anticipation. A novice might be less likely to notice these variations. For example, during an interview with Jason, 42, he suddenly asked his mother if she also saw the bird; she nodded in confirmation. The first author was surprised because she had not noticed anything. Jason explained that,

> You're getting used to what you can see in certain areas, like you normally see quite a few buzzards around here [and so] we look out for them.

However, knowledge is only one element of skilful gazing. Train tourists must also adopt an attentive, embodied mode of gazing that enables them to temporarily stand up to view something on the other side of the train carriage or change their seating position to see picturesque landmarks. At other times, the travel gaze might be less directed but still attentive and prolonged, requiring an 'attentional performativity' (Hannah, 2013: 242) that facilitates the identification of key elements within the field of view and an ability to discern details. Usually, these competences are acquired when travel companions guide each other's gaze or through trial and error, as Mark, 56, explains:

> Interviewer: Oh, here's the viaduct [*as the train slows down slightly*].
>
> Mark: When we went to Settle we sat on the opposite side. So, on the way back we chose to sit on this side. We worked that one out ourselves! We missed so much last time.

Travelling by train and boat are skilful practices that tourists 'move along with' (Hui, 2013: 903) and develop a habitual physical and social comfort in accomplishing. These 'skilled movements' (Mullins, 2009: 247) shape human-environment interactions and result in meaningful experiences. Extensive repetition within these environments fosters the gradual acquisition of skills through which tourist-practitioners develop abilities to perform necessary tasks through instinct and automation, without having to concentrate on remembering the right sequence of movements. Any tourist skill 'is the product of training the body in a certain way: when we learn a practice, we learn to be bodies in a certain way' (Reckwitz, 2002: 251). As demonstrated, some practices like boating tourism require acquisition of specialist skills that are learned purposefully through immersion in a community of practice. Conversely, other tourism practices such as train travel require commonplace skills that are learned unreflexively outside any formal community through observation and imitation, trial and error. Having discussed how tourist skills are learned, we now discuss the second characteristic of tourist skills – portability.

The portability of skills

As we show above, people must learn multiple skills to carry out various practices. However, engaging in new tourism practices does not necessarily require learning new skills. Tourism entails many mundane activities such as using transport, eating and

sleeping during which tourists adapt their existing skills to tourism contexts. This leads to our second key characteristic, namely, that skills are portable from the participatory context in which they were acquired and habitually used – both everyday life and tourism settings – to other tourism situations.

According to Hanks et al. (1991: 20–21), this *portability* of skills relies 'on the commensurability of certain forms of participation' when the learner acquires 'the ability to play various roles in various fields of participation [involving] ability to anticipate, a sense of what can feasibly occur within specific context'. Shove et al. (2012) concur, stating that skills can be learned in one setting and then transmitted and reproduced in others. Touring on boats and trains provides specific spatio-temporal settings that require the adaptation of existing skills learned in other contexts. We exemplify this portability by making links between commuting and train tourism skills and links between home-living practices and boating tourism.

The train tourist's skills differ from those used by the commuter, though they may nonetheless be adapted for tourist practices. Many train tourism practices such as buying a ticket, reading the timetable or locating the right platform require the same skills as for commuting. However, the adaptation also requires adding new skills because train tourists follow different routines, attach different meanings to the train journey, and are guided by other motivations. David, 73, compares the two modes of travel: 'If my destination is work then most likely I work on the train as well. Whilst on this journey I just sit back and relax because I'm on my day out'. The train tourist's skills also include an ability to organise sightseeing around train schedules and visitor attraction opening times, arrange meeting times and places with companions and adopt a relaxed state of mind: enjoying time on the move, gazing out of the window and socialising, requiring commonplace skills that train tourists rarely reflect upon. Jon, 50, for example, laughingly stated that he does not need skills since he is not driving the train.

The dynamism of this portability of skills comes to the fore when additional elements are introduced to the train's sociomaterial environment. This is exemplified by the multimodal skills required for travelling by train with a bicycle. Here, skills learned during commuting are adapted, an adaptation that includes learning new skills for a successful cycling holiday. Trains provide access to various cycling routes, and experience, practical skills and knowledge are essential, as Joshua, 19, an experienced train-travelling cyclist explains:

> It was hard to start travelling by bike on trains and this is why I think most people don't do it. When I first started catching trains about two or three years ago, I was always very anxious about what would happen if I don't get on. It was an intimidating experience because you don't quite know what you're supposed to do, and you don't know if you're breaking any rules. However, now I feel much more relaxed because I know that different train operators have different rules, and they might vary along different routes.

Joshua's reflections reveal that cyclist-tourists face different challenges to other rail passengers, showing that when a new object, a bicycle, is introduced into the situation, new skills emerge, building on existing ones to facilitate the practice of undertaking a cycling holiday by train. Cyclists explain that they must attend to different occurrences than commuters; for example, how many other cyclists await the train and are present onboard as it arrives. Alex, 24, describes his thought process as follows: 'Where can I put my bike? Do I have to stand next to it? Is bike space available? Are there any other cyclists at all? Make sure I'm not scratching anything'. This shows that while tourists are often reflexive about practice, they do not necessarily reflect on specific commonplace skills needed for these practices.

Similarly, boaters possess many commonplace skills that have been acquired during other holidays and in everyday life and are now adapted to facilitate boating trips. For instance, a skilled gaze acquired through previous tourist practices is mobilised so that the slower rhythms of boating foster a heightened visual absorption of surroundings. Sitting in the bow – the front of the boat – and sensorially consuming the environs is a common activity as Barry, 66, elaborates. He points out some of the elements of skilled gazing on boats – for instance picking a sitting place with reduced engine noise – that differentiate the boating tourist gaze from other gazing practices:

> [The canals] give you time to appreciate. You can be sat on the bow of the boat, even if it's only 40 f. long, the longer the better it is because it's much quieter at the bow than the stern because you've always got the engine noise. And you've got this opening before you as the canal twists and turns, the trees, you've got wildlife, birds. And you just get the chance to appreciate it, because you're not moving at 30 or 70 miles an hour.

The various other skilled everyday practices adapted to boating – standing on the stern, cooking in the galley, resting on the bunk or taking a shower – further emphasise that as soon as at least one element of a practice changes (Shove et al., 2012), the practice and the skills involved change as well. Boating tourists use their existing commonplace skills learned elsewhere, for example, the skills of cooking or showering and adjust them unreflexively to the limited space of a boat, often by intuitively following the example of more experienced boaters within the community of practice. This could mean learning through observation and imitation, trial and error, about how to adapt to cooking and negotiating the small galley, making sure to maintain balance and refrain from spilling anything on the moving boat. The choreography of movement instinctively changes from the home-kitchen environment to the boat setting. Touring on a boat also entails imperceptible and unreflexive adaptation of existing skills or learning new skills in making sure there is enough water in the tank for washing up and showering, adjusting the bodily movements in order to shower successfully in the constricted space, and determining when and how the boat's toilet should be emptied.

As Shove et al. (2012: 52) declare, skills are 'typically modified, reconfigured and adapted as they move from one situation or person to another and as they circulate between practices.' Accordingly, we demonstrate that as soon as new materials or

contexts are introduced, existing skills must be adapted and carried over for the new practice to be performed confidently. However, this portability entails not just the adaptation of existing skills but also the learning of new skills that build upon them. Many existing commonplace skills are adjusted to the new practice in new tourist settings. This leads to our final discussion about how any practice requires many skills to be practised successfully.

The tourist skill-kit

Tourism consists of bundles of practices (Lamers & Pashkevich, 2018; Schatzki, 1996, 2002), each requiring a bundle of skills – a skill-kit – to be completed successfully. Learnability and portability of tourist skills, discussed above, are critical for the emergence of and the continuous process of assembling of different skills in the skill-kit. We exemplify the dynamic nature of the skill-kit by discussing planning, a practice integral to any tourism trip, with train tourists' planning skill-kit primarily consisting of commonplace skills, while the boaters' skill-kit combines specialist and commonplace skills.

Skills acquired from previous holidays and everyday life are unreflexively formed within a processual and ever-changing skill-kit that constantly evolves as new practices are introduced and existing ones repeated. In successfully planning a trip both before and during travelling, different skills come together in a distinctive skill-kit. Tourist trips require organising time and space before and during travel, an integrated practice (Lamers et al., 2017) that requires coordination. Boat and train trips of varying duration are undertaken through the 'ordinary and everyday achievement of planning and organising co-presence with other people and with material objects' (Peters, Kloppenburg, & Wyatt, 2010: 349). Like other tourist practices, planning needs 'skills which minimize unnecessary reflection every time a decision is required' (Edensor, 2001: 61). These 'practical organisational activities' (Brown, 2007: 364) – organising time off work, arranging pet care, purchasing necessary holiday items, information searching, booking, planning an itinerary, packing a suitcase – require diverse commonplace skills in order to be practiced with confidence.

Depending on experience and existing skills, the pre-travel planning of routes, destinations, activities and transport can be experienced as routine, enjoyable or disconcerting. For example, Peter, 45, undertaking a fishing holiday and new to train tourism, experienced planning as daunting. He reflected on his practice by explaining how his holiday needed careful planning by familiarising himself with schedules, train stations and the region to be toured. Not knowing the area, he had to plan changing trains at Leeds with his many items of luggage including fishing equipment, taking a connecting bus from Garsdale railway station, and being prepared to find a taxi in case he missed the bus. Organising these activities required many skills Peter lacked, which added uncertainty to the planning process. Not having these skills could result in hesitant, unskilful journeying practices as George, 72, exemplifies: "Maybe you have noticed that yourself: people wait on the platform fairly confident, thinking, 'Well this is my train' but before they get on, they ask somebody and when they get on the train they check again because it requires a confidence. So, to enjoy train travel, you need to be familiar with it."

Frequent train use and consequent familiarity and knowledge of the different leisure opportunities available along train routes produces confidence that the planning of tours will be comfortable. Planning arrival and departure times, making connections that align with scheduled activities or knowing which train to book to join an organised rambling or cycling tour are skills deployed by tourists travelling by train. Along with their orientation skills (Vannini, 2011), experienced train tourists know how to navigate printed or online timetables or use train line apps to develop an itinerary. They do this by utilising skills that unreflexively emerge to facilitate the evaluation of several possibilities and combinations of action. Ian, 63, for instance, uses such knowledge to buy 'the right ticket' and take advantage of special offers such as a 'Rover' ticket that allows tourists to take four routes in eight days. They also know that the size of a station and the distance between platforms influences the time available to make connections. Similarly, a skilful competence and enjoyment in planning is expressed among experienced canal tourists, as Barry, 66, explains:

> Part of the fun of the canal is planning the route: where would we like to go, what would we like to see, what's feasible, which route should we take? How many miles is that route, how many locks? There could be stately homes, there could be museums you want to see; points of interest. Might be a particular hill you want to climb. So you factor all that in. The planning is the great thing.

Moreover, experienced train tourists plan to avoid busy times when trains are crowded because they know the different social rhythms (Löfgren, 2015) that play out over routes at different times of the day, week and season. Equally, train tourists with bicycles are aware that they must check the policies of different train companies on specific routes, knowing that they may be required to reserve a space for their bike in advance. These commonplace skills required for planning are put to work habitually and easily by experienced travellers, whereas a novice tourist will likely have to undertake considerable checking, thinking and doubting – what Peters et al. (2010: 361) call 'active planning'.

However, for some, a bad holiday can be one that has been excessively planned, leaving no room for changing circumstances and disruptions. For travelling is also 'a journey into the unknown' (Brown, 2007: 377) and the tourist cannot avoid coming across the new and unexpected. Consequently, skilled planning must also take place *during* touring, for as Ingold (2000a: 239) declares, 'we know as we go, not before we go'. Accordingly, expertise is required to develop deliberately loose plans that factor in future contingencies. For example, Bob and Edna, an experienced elderly couple travelling on a train as part of a hiking holiday, identify their plans if things go awry:

> If the waiting time would be too long, what would we do? Because we thought about that, we wouldn't go any further, we would change our plans and utilise Lancaster as our destination. We would still just make the most of this day.

In addition to the commonplace skills employed on any holiday, some aspects of planning are specific to particular tourist practices. For instance, when boaters are planning their trips using specialist handbooks (Duggan, 2021) and online route planning tools, they mobilise a skill-kit that contains both specialist and commonplace skills. Calculating the distance, the number of locks or lift- and swing bridges, location of facilities and the exact cruising time require specialist skills only used in boating. During a trip, other specialist skills include the utilising of lock and bridge numbers for orientation and calculating approximate arrival times at winding holes (areas of canal where boats can be turned).

Moreover, expert boaters typically adopt creative and reflexive actions (Rantala, 2010), mobilising adaptative skills in responding to unfolding circumstances, emphasising the fluid and evolving nature of a skill-kit. Canal tourists are aware that the time available for cruising might be reduced or cancelled if it is very windy or raining heavily, and might decide to moor up, spending the day on the boat or visiting nearby attractions in adapting to the agencies of weather (cf. Rantala et al., 2011). Such skills help boaters to adjust to contingencies along the canal, as Kirsten, 32, recognises:

> Actually, the weather, which is probably more important than I really think about, you know. So, if we know it's going to be a really, really heavy rain and we know we're not going to get as far and whatever. Or it's windy or whatever, we're not going to get as far as quickly. So, it's important to kind of give it some consideration.

Mooring up on a rainy day necessitates a recalculating of the route for the remaining trip in terms of the number of cruising hours needed.

To conclude, an important part of tourist planning – just as any other tourist practice – is to possess a well-developed skill-kit that is sufficiently broad and flexible to facilitate practice at hand, irrespective of contingencies. As we show above, tourist skill-kits, consisting of both commonplace and specialist skills, are always changing. They emerge anew through an embodied process in any given tourism situation, as existing skills are often unreflexively mobilised and adapted, and new skills reflexively learned. All tourist practices, therefore, require skill-kits consisting of skills that are learned, embedded and performed in the practising of tourism.

Conclusion

Practice theories provide a useful conceptual context for analysing different individual tourism practices as co-constituted by socio-material environments and embedded within larger practice-arrangement bundles (Lamers et al., 2017). This paper has sought to uncover the importance of skills in tourism practices. We have focused on various habitually enacted tourist performances, and we demonstrate that having skills is a precondition to engage in any tourist practice. While practices such as boat-handling require more apparent specialist skills, small-scale undertakings like planning train or boat trips, too, require tourists to accumulate skills to engage in their chosen practices confidently and easily.

Firstly, our findings indicate that specialist skills are insufficient for successful tourism practices. Tourists also need to possess a range of commonplace skills – mundane, attentive, practical forms of know-how that are used to support ordinary non-discursive and habitual enactments (Edensor, 2001). These commonplace skills, we argue, are often taken for granted since they are rarely the object of conscious reflection, yet through repetition, they make daily tourist routines effortless and bestow on holidays a sense of order, predictability and control. While our analysis reveals that tourist practices require an amalgam of diverse skills that range from specialist to commonplace, the former have been foregrounded in the extant literature at the expense of the latter.

Secondly, we show that commonplace skills comprise the majority of what we term a tourist skill-kit, a complex of interconnected skills that unreflexively emerge to facilitate a given tourist practice. These skill-kits facilitate effective, adaptable interaction with diverse spaces and objects and ensure the flow of one practice to another. For example, boating tourists may be simultaneously engaged in steering the boat, wayfinding and sightseeing, multiple skills enacted to ensure smooth passage. Similarly, train tourists travelling with bicycles must check the train companies' rules, make reservations for their bikes via train apps and learn to manage the assemblage of platform, bike and train carriage. These examples disclose that any given practice requires more than one skill to accomplish it successfully and that different practices require different skill-kits, each consisting of a bundle of interlinked skills practised with different levels of expertise. The possession of a sufficiently broad and flexible skill-kit fosters a confidence that may encourage tourists to revisit the practice. Crucially, a skill-kit is dynamic, processual and always evolving. As we demonstrate, formation of the skill-kit is a process that is only acknowledged when new skills must be learned, or existing skills adapted.

Thirdly, our findings uncover two key characteristics of tourist skills – all skills are learned, and they are portable from the participatory contexts in which they were acquired. Canal boating skills are likely to be learned as part of a community of practice as specialist skills of boat-handling are reflexively learned from experienced boaters. The community supports novice practitioners in learning skills through collaborative practice. These novices subsequently become part of a community of practice of boaters that offers support for new recruits as well as social connections that are critical for the continuous creative reproduction of practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Commonplace skills are often learned individually and gradually by trial and error, by observing and imitating others, and through repetition. In being adapted to new socio-cultural environments and materialities, they produce the other key characteristic on which we focus: portability. When new materials or contexts are introduced, existing skills are adapted to the requisite new practices through an embodied, largely unreflexive process. We have exemplified this by showing how gazing skills adapt

to different transport modes, how a commuting skill-kit is adapted to becoming a train tourist and home-living skills are adapted to a boat environment. Over time, if practised, all skills become habitual, becoming 'effortless activities' that 'gradually descend into the unconscious' (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010: 83). Our findings provide a basis for better theorisation of skill within tourism practices. While studies of practice theory typically examine how changes in materials, meanings or competences change the practice itself (Lamers & Pashkevich, 2018; Shove et al., 2012), we show that any such changes also require both minimal and more substantial adaptations of existing skill-kits.

As Lamers et al. (2017: 55) contend, a practice theory approach to tourism can 'provide a more sophisticated starting point for managing or governing tourism practices.' A better understanding of tourist skills provides practical implications for destinations to promote or encourage certain activities. For example, the promotion of sustainable practices such as using public transport or recycling has tended to examine how tourist behaviour varies according to social identities or psychological characteristics. The recognition that certain practices may require the adaptation of existing skills and the acquisition of new skills that may gradually turn into habits has been overlooked.

Our findings also provide insights into the potential design and marketing of various tourism products. Our research suggests that the industry would benefit from paying more attention to the commonplace skills needed for tourism practices. This could involve clearly signposting key skills for prospective practitioners. Train companies could recognise the challenges posed for tourists who lack the necessary skills and address this by providing online platforms where novices could communicate with more experienced practitioners. In boating tourism, the websites and marketing material of the hire-boat companies should more explicitly address the skills needed for a canal holiday. Instead of centring solely on relaxation and the slow holiday experience, hire boat companies could reassure potential customers that their existing skills may be easily adapted to the boating environment with the necessary specialist skills taught onsite. This could assuage the fears of newcomers who might otherwise dismiss canal boating as a holiday option due to their lack of skills.

In this paper, we propose that the study of skills offers a new research avenue in exploring the relationship between practices and tourism. Whilst this study focuses on the transport tourism skills, further explorations of tourist skills could focus on the skills needed for different types of tourism ranging from mass to niche activities. Whilst we have discussed portability and learnability of tourist skills, future studies could explore other characteristics such as the ways in which certain skills are formally recognised. More attention could also focus on the progressive development of tourist skills from novice to expert, the frequency of usage as well as the level of reflexivity mobilised in engaging with various tourist skills. Such studies would help us to better understand tourist decision-making, experience and motivation, and explore whether non-participation in tourism could be linked to a lack of certain commonplace or specialist skills.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ilze Mertena: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data collection, Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Maarja Kaaristo: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data collection, Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Tim Edensor: Conceptualisation, Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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