

Trajectories of geocachers through tourism, serious leisure and social  
worlds theory.

Patricia Ivan

Norwegian school of hotel management  
Faculty of Social Science  
University of Stavanger

A dissertation submitted to University of Stavanger in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the Degree of MSc in International Hotel and Tourism Leadership

June, 2016  
Advisor: Trude Furunes



Universitetet  
i Stavanger

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,  
NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**STUDY PROGRAM:**

Master of Science in International Hotel and  
Tourism Leadership

**THESIS IS WRITTEN IN THE FOLLOWING  
SPECIALIZATION/SUBJECT:**

Tourism, Leisure, Social Worlds, Serious Leisure,  
Geocaching

IS THE ASSIGNMENT CONFIDENTIAL? NO

**TITLE:**

Trajectories of geocachers through tourism, serious leisure and social worlds theory.

**AUTHOR** Patricia Ivan

**ADVISOR:**

Trude Furunes

**Student number:**

223172  
.....

**Name:**

Patricia Ivan.....

**ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF 2 BOUND COPIES OF THESIS**

Stavanger, ...../..... 2016

Signature administration:.....

## Abstract

*Geocaching is a leisure game that appeared in the summer of 2000 and it is mainly based on searching and placing geocaches (small boxes) with the help of GPS signal. The aim of this study is to investigate and to review the relationships between the concepts of leisure and tourism in regards to the nature of the game as serious leisure and review the social worlds organization of it. A qualitative approach with semi-structured personal interviews among 12 players with different levels of involvement in the game has been conducted. The belonging of Geocaching as serious leisure activity has been tested empirically in relation with the trans-situational typologies of social worlds theory. Also it has been verified whether the social worlds theory is fitting the Geocaching reality. The key results brought up concepts of saturation, translated into few game resources that is not allowing the game to be leisure, and retrogression concerning long time players who don't have a frequent activity in the game. The retrogression players belong in the social worlds tourist typology. Geocaching has been confirmed to be a serious leisure activity, and the social worlds typologies have helped to differentiate the level of geocachers implication in the game. This study can be transferred to other types of social world organization where are involved serious leisure participants.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, leisure, serious leisure, serious leisure rewards, social worlds, Geocaching, trans-situational social types.*

## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	11
1.1 The research focus and objectives.....	11
1.2 Research context.....	14
1.1.1 How to geocache .....	14
1.1.2 The Geocaching business .....	20
1.1.3 Potential benefits.....	21
1.2 Theoretical overview.....	24
1.3 Research questions and methodology .....	26
1.4 Research structure.....	26
2. Literature Review .....	27
2.1 Leisure and Tourism.....	27
2.1.1 Recreation definition.....	27
2.1.2 Leisure .....	27
2.1.3 Tourism .....	28
2.1.4 Tourism and leisure .....	29
2.2 Serious leisure theory.....	31
2.2.1 Serious leisure career stages .....	33
2.2.2 Serious leisure rewards .....	33

2.2.1 New leisure .....	35
2.3 Social worlds theory .....	36
2.3.1 Character of social world as a unit of social organization.....	36
2.3.2 Social worlds types.....	37
3. Methodology.....	40
3.1 Introduction .....	40
3.2 Research design.....	40
3.3 Measurements.....	41
3.4 Research sample .....	42
3.5 Data collection.....	44
3.6 Reliability.....	45
3.7 Reflexivity .....	46
4. Results .....	47
4.1 Tourism, leisure or both? .....	48
4.1.1 Tourism .....	48
4.1.2 Leisure .....	51
4.1.3 Both tourism and leisure.....	51
4.2 Serious leisure.....	53
4.2.1 Volunteering .....	53
4.2.2 Personal rewards.....	55

4.2.2.1	<i>Personal enrichment</i> .....	55
4.2.2.2	<i>Self-actualization</i> .....	57
4.2.2.3	<i>Self-expression</i> .....	58
4.2.2.4	<i>Self-image</i> .....	59
4.2.2.5	<i>Self-gratification</i> .....	59
4.2.2.6	<i>Re-creation</i> .....	61
4.2.2.7	<i>Financial return</i> .....	61
4.2.3	Social rewards.....	62
4.2.3.1	<i>Social attraction</i> .....	63
4.2.3.2	<i>Group accomplishment</i> .....	64
4.2.3.3	<i>Contribution to maintenance and development of the group</i> .....	66
4.2.4	Career stages.....	67
4.3	Social worlds .....	70
4.3.1	Geocaching as social world .....	70
4.3.1.1	<i>Voluntary identification</i> .....	70
4.3.1.2	<i>Partial involvement</i> .....	72
4.3.1.3	<i>Multiple identification</i> .....	73
4.3.1.4	<i>Mediated interaction</i> .....	74
4.3.2	Trans-situational social types .....	75
4.3.2.1	<i>Strangers</i> .....	76

	7
4.3.2.2 <i>Tourists</i> .....	76
4.3.2.3 <i>Regulars</i> .....	78
4.3.2.4 <i>Insiders</i> .....	79
5 Discussion.....	81
5.1 Summary of results.....	81
5.2 Tourism, leisure or both.....	82
5.3 Serious leisure.....	84
5.4 Social worlds .....	87
5.4.1 Types of involvement.....	87
5.4.2 Trans-situational social types .....	89
5.5 Contribution .....	91
6.1 Conclusions .....	91
6.2 Limitations.....	93
6.3 Further research .....	93
References .....	95
Appendix.....	97
Appendix A. Interview questions.....	97
Appendix B. Trans-situational social type frame questions.....	99
<i>Strangers</i> .....	99
<i>Tourists</i> .....	99

<i>Regulars</i> .....	99
<i>Insiders</i> .....	100
Appendix C. Geocaching Interview Notes .....	100

## List of Pictures

<b>Picture 1</b> (Ivan,2015) A geocaching box can be seen behind the stones .....	16
<b>Picture 2.</b> (Ivan, 2015). A traditional geocache box.....	16
<b>Picture 3.</b> (Ivan, 2015). The treasures of the geocache. ....	17
<b>Picture 4</b> (Ivan, 2015). The logbook. ....	17
<b>Picture 5</b> (Ivan, 2015) Travel Bug Front .....	18
<b>Picture 6</b> (Ivan, 2015) Travel bug back.....	19
<b>Picture 7</b> (Ingsve, 2015). CITO group at Saltvik, Norway .....	20
<b>Picture 8</b> (Geocaching.com retrieved 02.12.2015) Map of Geo Tours.....	23



## List of Figures and Tables

<b>Figure 1</b> Dimensions of Geocaching (Boulaire&Hervet 2012, p.214).....	24
<b>Figure 2:</b> Figure developed by the researcher after serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001) and social worlds theory (Unruh, 1979, 1980) .....	25
<b>Figure 3</b> Relationship between leisure, recreation and tourism (Hall,2003, p. 5).....	30
<b>Figure 4</b> Social rewards satisfaction level in regards with players' level of social worlds implication. Figure developed by Patricia Ivan. ....	85
<b>Figure 5</b> Trajectories in serious leisure with tans-situational social worlds. Figure developed by Patricia Ivan. ....	87
<b>Table 1</b> Characteristics and types of participation in social worlds (Unruh, 1979, p.122) .....	39
<b>Table 2</b> Data collection participants .....	45

## Foreword

Since I moved in Norway to study the Master Program in International Hotel and Tourism Leadership, I discovered a new type of leisure unknown for me before, Geocaching. By the time, I had to come with the master thesis proposal I knew that I wanted to get more insight of this new type of leisure.

First, I would like to thank my tutor, PhD. Trude Furunes at the University of Stavanger, for her dedication to the present master thesis and for lighting up my ideas, to the University of Stavanger Library team for their help in finding me all the scientific literature in a short time. To all of geocaches who had volunteered to share with me their enthusiasm, stories, and passion they have in the game. To my dearest friend, PhD. Georgiana Dragota for her moral support and feedback. To my family for their help and to my life partner who has introduced me in this type of leisure and has offered moral support.

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Matei, thank you for coming in this world and picked me as your mother.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The research focus and objectives

Geocaching is a treasure hunt in modern times, “based on the geolocation of objects (called geocaches) which are hidden and have to be found by players (called geocachers). The coordinates of a cache are transmitted by its creator to a website dedicated to geocaching community such as geocaching.com and once uploaded, the coordinates become available to the entire community” ( Boulaire& Hervet, 2012, p.211) .

The game is defined as a „ real-world, outdoor treasure hunting game using GPS-enabled devices. Participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the geocache (container) hidden at that location.” (Geocaching.com)

The Geocaching game has been stated as a serious leisure activity by Stebbins (2009) in his article “New Leisure and Leisure Customization”, since it is an activity of recent invention undertaken in free time (Stebbins, R. A. 2009,p.78). Serious leisure is achieved in a career form, through the systematic pursuit of the leisure activity (Stebbins, 1992, as cited in Stebbins, 2001). Serious leisure participants of Stebbins’s theory are divided into amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers. For our Geocaching case, the focus will be centered on volunteers.

For all the types of participants in serious leisure such as the amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers, six qualities are given: persevere, career, personal effort, durable benefits, identification and unique ethos<sup>1</sup>. Through the last quality, “unique ethos” serious leisure participants are linked to the social worlds theory of Unruh (1979,1980) that is defined as:

---

<sup>1</sup> More detailed theoretical overview about the serious leisure participants and their six qualities can be found in this dissertation thesis in the page 32.

Social world must be seen as a unit of social organization...Generally larger than groups or organizations, social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership lists, or spatial territory...social worlds must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants. Characteristically, a social world lacks a powerful centralized authority structure and is delimited by 'effective communication and not territory' nor formal group membership. (Unruh, 1979, p.115)

In this thesis, the researcher has given special attention to the social world theory as the Geocaching game, chosen as case study, generally fit the theoretical description of the social worlds theory. Moreover, the theory offers a scheme to help categorize and analyze the trans-situational social types. The typologies are divided into: strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders.<sup>2</sup>

Another approach for the present master thesis, are the concepts of tourism and leisure, as a consequence of the Geocaching program named GeoTours, that calls for tourism and aims to help local administrations to advertise their heritage and increase their number of visitors.

Therefor the two constructs of "leisure", such as Stebbins frame the game and "tourism", as GeoTours aims to be, are juxtaposed in the geocaching activity. The main question arises if Geocaching is after all a leisure activity, a tourism tool or both?

The concepts of tourism and leisure had been long debated by the scientists in the quest of a delimitation between them. Some conclude that tourism and leisure it is a "separate phenomena that are clearly fuzzy and overlapping" (Crick, 1989 as cited in Moore, Cushman, & Simmons, 1995, p. 68). Hall & Page (2002) see tourism and recreation as part of a wider conceptualization of leisure. On the other hand, leisure defined as an accessible, low

---

<sup>2</sup> Detailed theoretical out-line of the trans-situational social typology is described in the present thesis, pages 36-39.

cost, low effort and often home based activities, and by contra part tourism “requires significant effort to resource difficulties such as education and income” (Kelly, 1990 as cited in Moore et.al 1995, p. 70)

Brown and Veal (1988, p.181 as cited in Moore et.al 1995, p.71) note that the leisure industry "encompasses those organizations and individuals primarily involved in the provision of goods, services and facilities to individuals or groups in their leisure time”.

The same article also cited Smith (1988) describing that the tourism industry is "the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure and leisure activities away from the home environment".

## Objectives

Since there is not a clear delimitation for the concepts of tourism and leisure that can fit the Geocaching activity, the first objective of this study is concerned whether Geocaching is a form of leisure, tourism or both in the perception of geocachers.

It has been stated by Stebbins (2009) that Geocaching is serious leisure, but research is lacking to support the statement empirically, due to the newness of the activity, (Stebbins, 2009, p.82). Therefore, the second objective of this study is to construct evidence for Stebbins’s statement.

The third objective is to create empirical evidence for the social worlds organization of Geocachers, and verify if the theoretical frame of social worlds can be applied to the game’s reality. As a framework tool, the trans-situational social typology scheme of Unruh (1979) will be used.

The forth objective is to verify the proposed model (Fig. 2, p.25) reliability in the Geocaching case.

## 1.2 Research context

The Geocaching game appeared in the summer of 2000, as a result of the GPS signal available for everyone. The initiator David Ulmer hid a treasure near his home and posted the coordinates on the web, and challenged people to find it (Schlatter& Hurd, 2005, p28).

A geocacher can “collect” caches, place caches, or do both of them. In order to find the hidden cache, the coordinates along with some details (hint) are posted on the web page dedicated to Geocaching.

“Geocaches can be found all over the world. These locations can be quite diverse. They may be at your local park, at the end of a long hike, underwater or on the side of a city street.” (Retrieved from Geocaching.com)

Geocaching world counts with 10 million subscribers from over 180 countries that have placed 2,6 million geocaches. The general profile of the geocacher varies between schoolchildren to retirees, most of the geocachers are college graduates and 70 % have a median income of 60.000 \$/year (Travel-Geocaching.com).

### 1.1.1 How to geocache

To be an active member, you have to create an account on the webpage [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). The basic account is free, but it has more information that is restrictive over the caches. The premium account costs 10 \$ a month, or 30 \$ for a year subscription. The payable account provides access to premium only geocaches, keeps you update when a new cache is available, the features can be used as well on the phone application.

In a conversation with Lucian Popa, a geocacher, about the benefits of premium account he states “*the most important advantage of premium is that I can get access to the*

*hints, sometimes is difficult to find a cache without them. When you download the maps with the caches on the phone you don't get the hints on the free account, and this can cause you some trouble to find it. However, on the other hand, this can represent an extra challenge in finding the "treasure" and sometimes can be fun as well."*

Geocaching has an application for the phone, considered useful as most of the smartphones has GPS incorporated and makes the hunt easier. The application with Android is free and those for iPhone have a cost of 10\$.

Some of the geocaching members choose to share their account with families, as it may happen that they geocache together or each family member by itself.

If a geocacher place caches to be found, they are responsible for its maintenance, it is often that "mugglers" defined in the glossary terms of Geocaching.com as: "non geocacher. Based on "Muggle" from the Harry Potter series, which is a non-magical person" find the cache and remove it from its place. As well, the term "muggled" defined by the same glossary means: "the discovery of a geocache by a non geocacher. When a cache has been "muggled", it usually means it was dismantled or removed by an unsuspecting non-player".

According to geocaching.com, "geocaches vary greatly in size and appearance. In the field, you will see everything from large, clear plastic containers to film canisters to a fake rock with a secret compartment. "

There are different types of geocaches, the most common is the *traditional geocache*, a waterproof container of different sizes and contains minimum a piece of paper and a pen to write the names of those who find it also called logbook. The series of pictures show a traditional geocache hunt.

One can geocache around one's house, local area, regional, national and abroad the country of residence, there are no spatial boundaries for collecting or placing caches.



**Picture 1.** A geocaching box can be seen behind the stones (Ivan,2015)



**Picture 2.** A traditional geocache box (Ivan,2015)





**Picture 3.** The treasures of the geocache. (Ivan,2015)



**Picture 4.** The logbook. (Ivan,2015)

As it can be seen in the picture 3, the cache contains different “treasures”. In the rules of geocaching.com it is clearly stated what can be inside of the box such as:

A cache always contains a logbook or log sheet for you to log your find. Larger caches may contain a logbook and any number of items. If you take something, leave something of equal or greater value in return. It is recommended that items in a cache be individually packaged in a clear, zipped plastic bag to protect them from the elements. Quite often you may also find a Trackable, a sort of geocaching "game piece". Explosives, ammunition, knives, drugs and alcohol should not be placed in a cache. Respect local laws at all times. Please do not put food or heavily scented items in a cache. Animals have better noses than humans, and in some cases caches have been chewed through and destroyed because of food items in a cache.

In the above description of what may contain the cache box it is mention the Trackable, this is another type of geocaches, it is also called *travel bugs*. The item becomes a hitchhiker that is carried from cache to cache (or person to person) in the real world and you can follow its progress online. (Retrieved from Geocaching.com). This travel bug can be visualized in the next two pictures.



**Picture 5.** Travel Bug Front (Ivan,2015)



**Picture 6.** Travel bug back (Ivan,2015)

Other types of geocaches are: *Puzzle Caches* when first have to be discovered the coordinates in order to find the treasure. *Multi-Cache*, involving two or more locations, usually having clues of the future places from one cache to another finalizing with a traditional cache. EarthCaches are:

A special geological location people can visit to learn about a unique feature of the Earth. EarthCache pages include a set of educational notes along with coordinates. Visitors to EarthCaches can see how geological processes have shaped our planet, how we manage its resources and how scientists gather evidence. Typically, to log an EarthCache, you will have to provide answers to questions by observing the geological location. (www.Geocaching.com)

Offline events promoted by Geocaching are Mega and Giga Events Cache where players gather as groups to Geocache. A frequent event organized by smaller associations such as locals or regionals are *Cache In Trash Out Event*, known as CITO. The purpose of this event is to preserve natural areas. Geocachers meet to improve nature with cleaning, planting trees and other type of activities related with nature preservation.

One such example is a gathering that was held in April 2015 on the beach of Saltvik, Norway, where a group of geocachers met to geocache and to clean.



**Picture 7.** CITO group at Saltvik, Norway (Ingsve, 2015)

### 1.1.2 The Geocaching business

Groundspeak Inc. based in Seattle, is the founding company of Geocaching. It is owned by Jeremy Irish, Elias Alvord and Bryan Roth, helped by 70 employees and over 400 volunteers worldwide who review the caches, moderate discussions online, translate.

Geoawares are other type of volunteers who use their knowledge in geology to review and publish EarthCahes.

In an interview with the CEO of Groundspeak (Matt Rosoff,2011) he describes how they started to stand up as a company:

*“The company has never taken a dime of outside capital, has no debt, and spent no money on marketing until the last year. The founders first made money by selling a batch of 144 geocaching t-shirts. Since then, they've added revenue from premium memberships, online advertising, a \$10 iPhone app, reselling GPS devices from*

*companies like Magellan and Garmin, and marketing ventures with companies like  
Timberland, Geico, and Jeep.”*

Ihamäki(2013) states that the economic side of Geocaching is often overlook, and gives the example of Monroe County in United States that in 2012 had an economic impact of 887 million \$ and created 14.000 jobs.

Overall there are several ways for Groundspeak Inc. to sustain their business and provide indirect a financial impact on the communities where caches can be found<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1.3 Potential benefits

On the personal level, Geocaching can bring multiple benefits such as physical activity but “the level of physical activity will vary according to the person and the caches that are chosen.”( J. Kevin Taylor, DuAnn Kremer, Katherine Pebworth, and Peter Werner as cited in Human Kinetics) and, educational benefits over different subjects such as orientation, mathematics, history. Below it is more largely described the social and tourism benefits Geocaching brings.

#### *Social benefits*

The Geocaching activity is voluntary based. Once you start to geocache automatically, you are a member of the Geocaching community worldwide, since you have access to the caches posted online everywhere in the world. Many use one account for their whole family, as Geocaching can be considered as a family leisure activity. Some choose to geocache alone, or with their friends.

---

<sup>3</sup> No information was found about their financial state.

The community of Geocaching is segmented into multiple associations (Boulaire&Hervet 2012, p.212) like country association: Geocaching i Norge ([www.gcinfo.no/](http://www.gcinfo.no/)), Geocaching in Spain ([www.geocachingspain.es/](http://www.geocachingspain.es/)), regional Geocaching as, Sørlandet, Norge ([www.geokaperne.no/](http://www.geokaperne.no/)), or local geocaching Geo Bergen, Norway ([www.geobergen.no/](http://www.geobergen.no/)). Not everyone who geocaches take part directly into the smaller associations, it is a voluntary action to be a member. The benefit of being part of a smaller community is to share ideas, discuss about geographical distribution of caches, take part and organize local Geocaching events.

#### *Geo Tours and tourism benefits*

Many local administrations see Geocaching as an additional activity for their local tourism attractions as well as a promoting tool for their visitors [www.geocaching.com/travel](http://www.geocaching.com/travel) , describes GeoTour as : “A collection of geocaches that take geocachers on a tour of a specific area. They can be along a trail, through historic sites, in a park, and even in the middle of an urban area. At each stop, you can introduce family-friendly activities, interesting facts, stories, and the best parts of your destination. “

In the Picture 8, can be seen a map with the distribution of GeoTours worldwide. Some destinations choose to promote a route; such is the case of Alsace, France:

“Geo Tour Alsace will lead you along the famous Wine Road, into the hills to explore the region’s numerous castles, past memorials of the area’s often turbulent history, into the workshops of local artisans, and to many more exciting and unexpected adventures”

(Booklet Alsace GeoTour2014/2015)



**Picture 8.** (Geocaching.com retrieved 02.12.2015) Map of Geo Tours

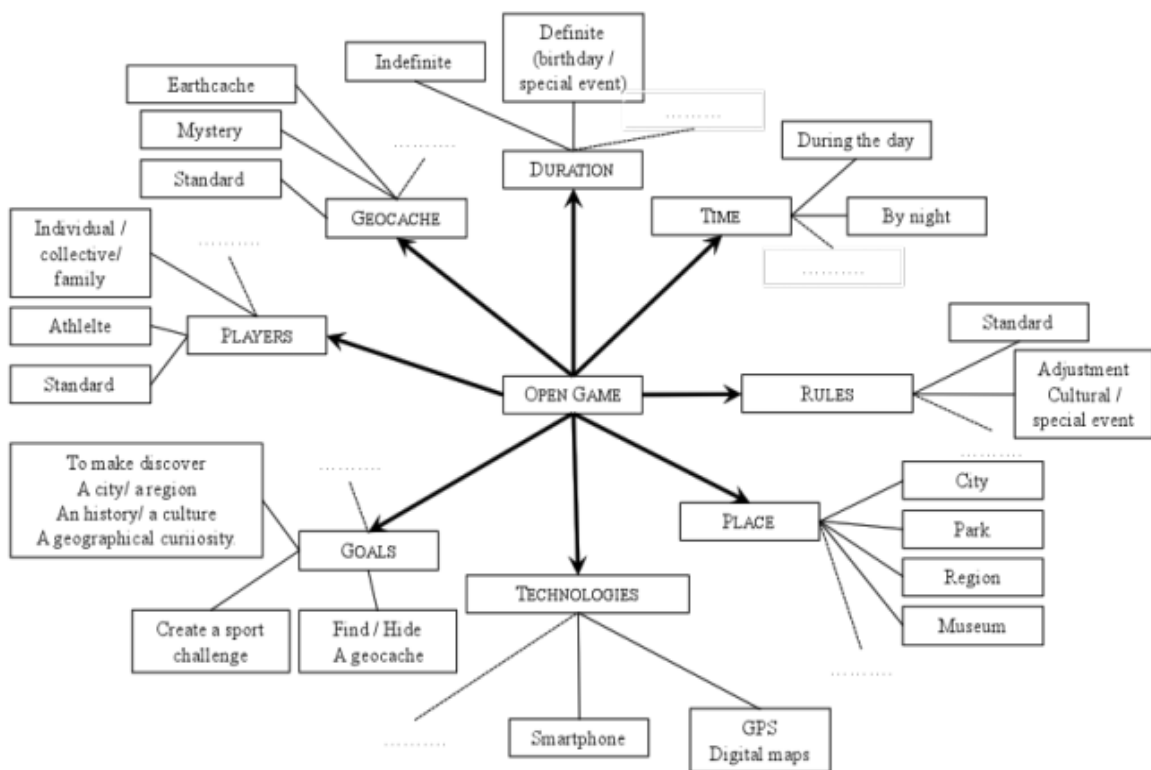
In an interview for Seattle Times regarding the Geo Tours, the designer of the program Mark Sherman, vice president at Groundspeak mentions that: *“What those destinations want is to attract visitors”*. In the same article it is indicated that the company estimates for every dollar spent by a tourist on geocaching will result in about 20 \$ spent by tourists on hotels, restaurants and the like. (Sommers, 2012)

The activity is defined by Geocaching.com as *“a turnkey marketing program that enables you to tap into this vast group of people by creating a destination for the entire geocaching community. And with measurable data, you can monitor the return on your investment.”*

The cost of implementing the Geo Tour by the destination is 2500 \$ and to maintain and promote it annually the sum is 1,250 \$. (Sommers Johanna, 2012). On the Groundspeak website, a guide of step by step implementing program can be found.

By its nature caches can be found everywhere in this world, from around the house, to distant places in the world. Some people use Geocache to explore new places when they travel, or use it as an additional leisure activity at the time of traveling. It is not necessary for a cache to be into a Geo Tour in order to make tourism.

Boulaire&Hervet (2012, p.214) resumed in Figure 1, the geocaching dimensions and tourism alliances potential. Starting from where, when, and how long it can be played, the types of geocaches existing to collect, typology of players regarding their membership. As well are framed the motivations of the geocachers and technologies used to be able to play.



**Figure 1** Dimensions of Geocaching (Boulaire&Hervet 2012, p.214)

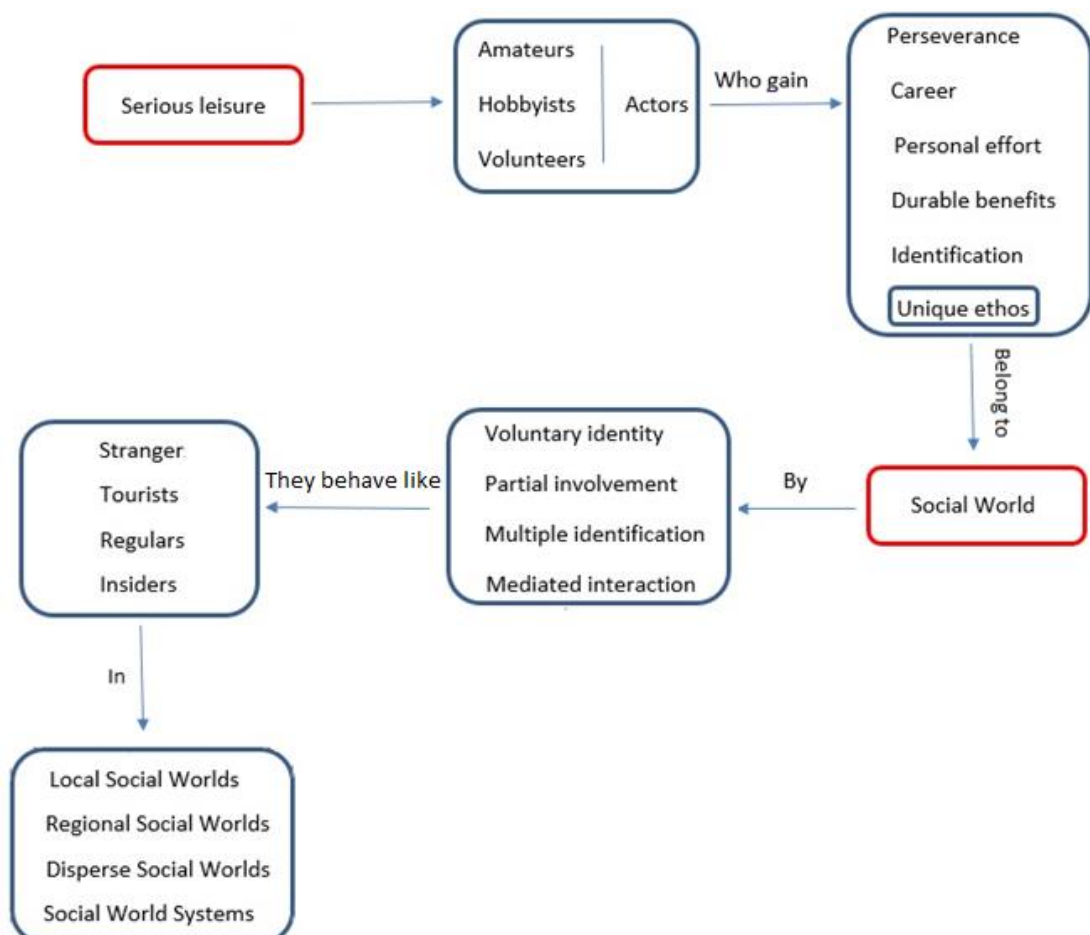
### 1.2 Theoretical overview

First, the literature review is attempting to delimitate tourism and leisure constructs, describing the differences and similarities between them. Figure 2 (page 25) is a scheme of the main scientific literature used, centering on the Serious Leisure theory



(Stebbins, R) and Social Worlds theory developed by Unruh (1979,1980). The theories are related by “unique ethos” which is one of the qualities of serious leisure. Unique ethos in the Stebbins’s view refers to the social worlds where the serious leisure participants are involved.

The theories were chosen as they reflect the game of Geocaching, and to the best of the researcher’s knowledge these theories have not been combined in previous studies. The theories fit as a framework to analyze the Geocaching game. The following Figure 2 (page 25) is developed by the researcher of this master thesis, and shows a unique presentation of the two theories combined.



**Figure 2:** Figure developed by the researcher after serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001) and social worlds theory (Unruh, 1979, 1980)

### 1.3 Research questions and methodology

In order to accomplish the research objectives, four research questions are at the base of this master thesis:

1. From the point of view of geocachers, is the Geocaching game a form of tourism, leisure or both?
2. Is Geocaching a serious leisure activity?
3. How do geocachers relate to social worlds?
4. Is the trans-situational social typology (Table 1, page 39) fitting the geocachers reality?

For this dissertation, the Geocaching game has been chosen as a case study for investigating the relationships between the concepts of leisure and tourism in regards to the nature of the game as serious leisure and the social world organization of it.

In order to investigate the matter, a qualitative approach is implemented through in-depth interviews with geocachers. The applied technics are inductive using observation of geocachers in order to find the suitable theory and, deductive approach, once found the most appropriate theory, observations were again conducted to find new perspectives over the theoretical approach. Figure 2 is the proposed model and will be used as a frame for analysis.

### 1.4 Research structure

The thesis is formed by six parts. The first part, introduction, specifies the focus with the objectives of this dissertation thesis, followed by the context of the study, and the proposed conceptual model.

In the second part the literature is reviewed. The third part inhales reference more specifically of the methodology used to achieve the results. The fourth chapter describes the results. The fifth chapter covers the overall discussion regarding tourism and leisure; serious leisure, and social worlds theoretical findings. The sixth chapter present the conclusion and suggestions for further research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Leisure and Tourism

For a better understanding of the concepts of leisure and tourism, the term recreation shall be introduced with a short review.

#### 2.1.1 Recreation definition

Recreation and park emphasis, developed in the mid nineteenth century through local programs promoting reading, exercise, outdoor recreation, sport (Cross, 1990 as cited in Smith and Godbey, 1991), but most scholars regard recreation as “activity” or “experience”.

Generally, recreationist tended to view tourism as a profile-oriented enterprise, while recreation and park services was a welfare-oriented movement. (Smith and Godbey, 1991)

#### 2.1.2 Leisure

Leisure came as a phenomenon of industrialization meaning “free time” or “state of mind”. Smith and Godbey (1991) mention that first studies of leisure included time use, community life and participation in free time activities. Dumazidier (as cited in Smith and

Godbey, 1991) defines leisure as the “the free time from productive work, thanks to technical progress and social action, for man’s pursuit of a non-productive activity, before, during, or after the period of his productive occupation”

Reid, McLellan and Uysal (1993 as cited in Moore et.al (1995) identified five concepts of leisure in the scientific literature. The first refers to the definition about leisure stated above.

“The second is an Aristotelian view which sees leisure as a state of being and places value on contemplative pursuits “(deGrazia 1964; Pieper 1952 as cited in Moore et.al (1995). The third concept creates the idea of therapeutic and reformist themes, explained by the fact that leisure is the “chance to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups. The fourth is about the leisure as a state of mind by expressing the self to attain pleasure.

The last concept raises from summarizing the other described above and refers to the self-determination activities and experiences.

### 2.1.3 Tourism

Smith (1989) as cited in Moore et.al (1995) notes that tourism "does not have a real, objective, precise, and independent existence"

A worldwide accepted tourism definition is from World Tourism Organization (1981, p.89, as cited in Hall, 2003, p.8) “any person residing within a country, irrespective of nationality, travelling to a place within this country other than his usual place of residence for a period of not less than 24 hours or one night for a purpose other than the exercise of remunerated activity in the place visited. The motives for such travel may be (1) leisure (recreation, holidays, health, studies, religion, sports); (2) business, family, mission, meeting.”

The literature discusses whether “tourism is correctly defined as an industry in its own right or simply as the result of the overlap of various other industries” (Leiper 1990b, 1992; Smith 1991 as cited by Moore et.al (1995).

Hall (2003) refers to tourism as “primarily relates to leisure and business travel activities, which center around visitors to a particular destination, and which typically involve an infusion of new money from the visitor into the regional economy.”

#### 2.1.4 Tourism and leisure

The concepts share a few areas of commonality as they are all in the spiritual search (Cohen, 1979, Pieper, 1948 as cited in Smith and Godbey, 1991). The desire for authenticity is another common thing, and nonetheless both tourism and leisure/recreation are linked to the existential quest for meaning in industrial life. (Smith and Godbey, 1991)

Hall. et.al. (2004, p.5) explain the figure below about the relationship among leisure, recreation and tourism. “Work is typically differentiated from leisure, but there are two main realms of overlap: first, business travel, which is often seen as a work oriented form of tourism; and, second, “serious leisure,” which refers to the breakdown between leisure and work pursuits and the development of leisure career paths with respect to hobbies and interests “ (Hall.et.al.2004).

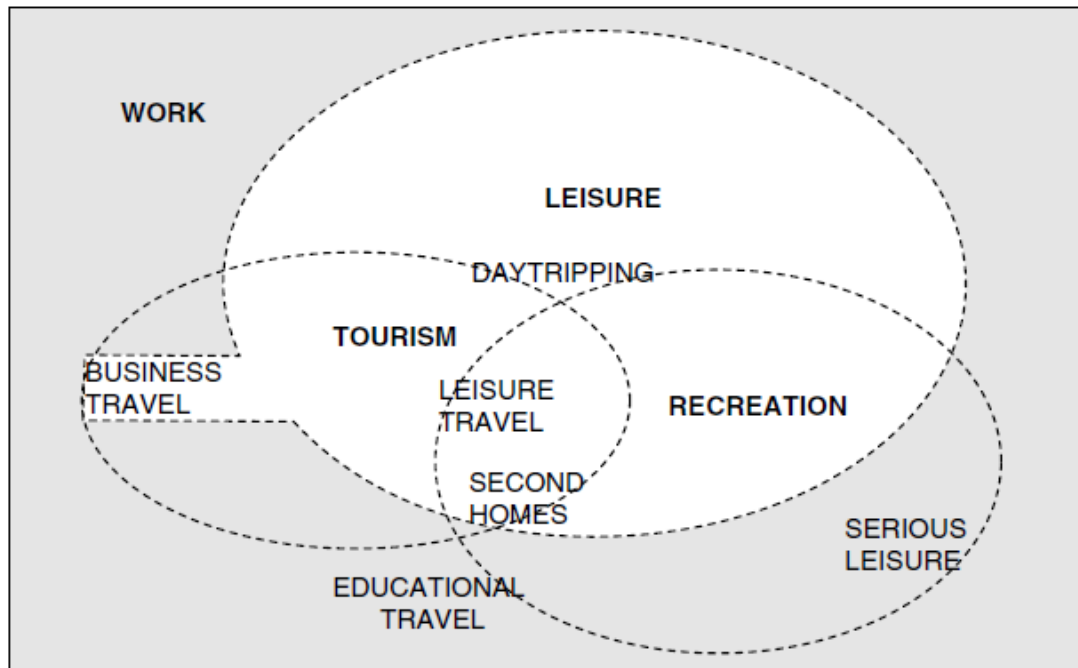


Figure 3 Relationship between leisure, recreation and tourism (Hall, 2003, p. 5)

Leiper, (1990a as cited in Moore et.al, 1995) compares touristic leisure with other types of leisure in seven factors.

The first refers to the departure and return, as tourism involves a greater movement away from one's place of residence, giving a higher freedom and change that are not found at same intensity in other types of leisure. The second involves the duration of the travel that often greater than in other forms of leisure. The frequency of traveling is smaller in travel than in other leisure, making it more vividly and remembered, counting as the third factor. Fourth, according to Leiper (1990a), "tourism offers people a wider variety of opportunities for socializing than is available in other leisure". The fifth factor consider the travel costs, which is higher than in other leisure. Sixth, refers to travel as an exclusive form of leisure, since in a year time few people will have traveled to another country. In addition, the last factor regards the travel memory, as it is more intense than in other type of leisure experience.

## 2.2 Serious leisure theory

Robert A. Stebbins, made the first reference to the serious leisure concept in 1982, defining serious leisure as *“a systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience.”* Stebbins, R. A. (2001,p.3).

As the definition states, the serious leisure participants are divided into three types.

*The amateurs* who are described as being linked to the professionals in areas as arts, science, sports, entertainment.

The second type are *the hobbyists* who lack of professionalism but they have small publics who are interested in what they are doing, they can also be divided into five categories: “collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants, players of sports and games and enthusiasts of the liberal arts”.

And the last type of *volunteers* as the name indicates they are engaged in volunteering, Stebbins notes that “the career volunteering is connected with an organization of some sort, the scope of this leisure is possibly even broader, perhaps including the kinds of helping devoted individuals do for social movements or for neighbors and family.” (Stebbins, R. A.2001, p.6).

On the other hand, the volunteering action it is defined as (Jon Van Til, 1988 p.6 as cited in Stebbins, 2001, p.5)

A helping action of an individual that is valued by him or her, and yet is no aimed directly at material gain or mandated or coerced by others. Thus, in the broadest sense, volunteering is a helping activity that is engaged in not primarily for financial gain and not by coercion or mandate. It is thereby different in definition from work, slavery or conscription

Chambré (1987, p.118 as cited in Stebbins,2011, p.45) defines volunteering as” a work like activity wherein a person accomplishes a task without remuneration. At the same time, the activity is freely chosen, provides many a satisfying experience.”

Volunteers are inspired by two main motives: altruism and self-interestedness those last ones being inspired by the special rewards found in all types of serious leisure. (Stebbins, 2011.p.46)

To the three natures of serious leisure are given six qualities (Stebbins 2001, p.6). The first quality of serious leisure is *persevere* which come along with positive feeling despite that the participant passed through hard moments such as confronting danger, handling embarrassment, or being stressed. The second quality is the *career* with the participant has stages of achievement or different types of involvement. The third is based on the *personal effort* in acquired knowledge, training and skills. The forth is the number of *durable benefits* or outcomes. Stebbins (2001, p.6) include terms as self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image social interaction, belongingness and lasting physical products of the activity. The fifth quality is the *identification* with the chosen pursuit.

The sixth quality is the *unique ethos*, the central component of it, is the special social world that develops when enthusiasts in a particular field pursue their interests in it over many years.

In order to achieve those qualities, the participant has to be involved into a serious leisure activity, as those qualities cannot be achieved into an “unserious” leisure. (Stebbins, 2001).



### 2.2.1 Serious leisure career stages

Stebbins's in through his exploratory research within career stages has given the following definition:

A leisure career is the typical course, or passage, of a type of amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer that carries the person into and through a leisure role and possibly into and through a work role. The essence of any career, whether in work, leisure, or elsewhere, lies in the temporal continuity of the activities associated with it. Moreover, we are accustomed to thinking of this continuity as one of accumulating rewards and prestige, as progress along this lines, from some starting point, even though continuity may also include career retrogression.

Volunteers might have careers in more than one organization at the same time, for those the career continuity lies on their reputation involving the knowledge, skills, and image. (Stebbins, 2001, p.10)

Stebbins (2001, p.10) refer to the serious leisure participants who sooner or later will pass through five career stages in their activity such as: the beginning lasting as long as needed for the interest to take root. The development take place when interest has taken root and the activity becomes "more or less routine and systematic", establishment is reached when the participant has "moved beyond the requirement of having to learn the basics of their activity", maintenance stage is when the career is fully developed and participants can enjoy the practice of it. Stebbins mentions that those who face decline are doing it because of deteriorating mental or physical skills.

### 2.2.2 Serious leisure rewards

Studies of Stebbins (1992, 1996, 1998 and Arin & Pedlar, 1997, as cited in Stebbins 2011, p.11-12) using qualitative methods for the direct exploration of the true nature of serious leisure (amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers) has led to ten distinctive sets of rewards, as findings have reported that serious leisure activity outweighs the costs, and

usually the participants find a high level of personal satisfaction into those activities.

(Stebbins, 2001)

Personal rewards:

1. Personal enrichment (cherished experiences)
2. Self-actualization (developing skills, abilities, knowledge)
3. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed)
4. Self-image (known to others as particular kind of serious leisure participant)
5. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction)
6. Re-creation (regeneration) of oneself through serious leisure after a day's of work
7. Financial return (from a serious leisure activity)

Social rewards:

8. Social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants, with clients as a volunteer, participating in the social world of activity)
9. Group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project; senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic)
10. Contribution to maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in making the contribution)

The rewards are more or less routine values that attract and hold its enthusiasts. Every serious leisure career both frames and is framed by the continuous search for these rewards, a search that takes months, and in some fields years, before the participant consistently finds deep satisfaction in his amateur, hobbyist or volunteer role. (Stebbins, 2001, p.13)

The three types of social rewards given by Stebbins (2001) are experienced in nearly all the serious leisure activities, one such reward come from meeting people, making new friends, taking part in the affairs of the group. Serious leisure participants become members

of a vast social world, complex mosaic of groups and events, networks, organizations and social relationships. A second social reward is when the group accomplishes something significant. In addition, a third reward has to do with the maintenance and development of the group.

### 2.2.1 New leisure

The term of “new leisure” (Stebbins, R. A. 2009,p.78) is “any activity of recent invention undertaken in free time”.

The concept of “leisure customization” created by Godbey, defined as: “contemporary trend where leisure is shaped to the taste of particular categories of participants. The commercial side of the new leisure is considered, as is its utility for leisure education. “

Stebbins (2009,p.78) notes that “new leisure activities are a diverse lot, found in serious, casual and project-based forms. They also appear to be created at a much greater rate today than earlier, in a significant part because of conditions and processes leading to globalization” where globalization is defined as “ tendency toward internationalization of ideas, practices, artefacts and the like, whether their world-wide spread at this time is still partial or now complete. These days word of an interesting new activity spreads quickly through the mass-media and the Internet”

Due to the social change, the new leisure activities invention occurs more frequently showing the significance of leisure in the lives of the people in the world. Nowadays are more leisure activities to get involved into, but not all of them get to be established as a leisure and accepted by the society. (Stebbins, 2009).

The article, “New leisure and leisure customization” enumerates a series of serious leisure activities descriptions among them Geocaching described as: “A high-tech treasure

hunt similar to orienteering that uses the technology of the global positioning system (GPS).” Stebbins indicate that the descriptions of leisure activities must be seen provisionally as “a systematic exploratory research on an activity is normally the most valid way to determine how it should be conceptualized and categorized. By dint of their newness such research is lacking” (Stebbins, 2009, p.82)

## 2.3 Social worlds theory

The “unique ethos”, is the sixth quality of the serious leisure making the link between the two theories of serious leisure and social worlds. The quality refers to the point when the enthusiasts of serious leisure develop a social world connection. (Stebbins, 2001)

Unruh (1979,p.115) defines social worlds as:

Larger than groups or organizations, social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership lists, or spatial territory. A social world must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices, which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants. Characteristically, a social world lacks a powerful centralized authority structure and is delimited by effective communication and not territory nor formal group membership.

### 2.3.1 Character of social world as a unit of social organization

The organizational focus is created with the coordinated effort of social actors, involving various products, activities, experiences, life-styles and technologies. The social world is not the only unit of the social organization that shares the same concerns, rather is the social world’s capacity to redefine, negotiate and splinter the focus from other types of social organizations (Unruh,1980, p.283).

As the central authority structure does not exist and spatial boundaries miss, Unruh (1980,p.227) describes four types of involvement in social worlds.

The first is *voluntary identification*:

To enter in a social world is free, accessible and occasionally unnoticed, involvement must largely be seen as voluntary. Not everything done in social worlds is purely voluntary or optional. Guidelines, expectations and rules certainly exist, but overall character of involvement seems to be one of take it or leave it rather than enforced conformity. (Unruh,1980, p.227)

*Partial involvement* is the second form, this “type of social actor can be involved in a portion of the total “goings-on” of any social world. (Unruh,1980, p.227)

The third feature is *multiple identification*, where “participants can be involved in more than one social world. “ (Ditton, R. B., Loomis, D. K., & Choi, S. 1992, p.36). The *mediated interaction* is the last feature of social worlds, and deals with the reliance on channels of communication rather than face-to-face interaction. (Unruh, 1980, p.279; Ditton, R. B., et al.1992, p.36).

### 2.3.2 Social worlds types

In order to categorize members into the social worlds, Unruh (1979, 1980) developed four social types: strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders who are organized around orientation, experiences, relationships and commitment.

The *strangers* have little commitment to the on-going experiences and activities of such worlds, but must be considered “involved” (Unruh, 1980, p.281) . Strangers are best portrayed as having four major characteristics: naiveté in orientation to a social world, disorientation in the experiences of social worlds, a superficiality or ephemerality inn relationships and detachment in terms of commitment to their social world. (Unruh,1979, p.117)

The *tourists* are “generic type of social world participants who are involved simply out of curiosity and with little, if any long standing commitment to the on-goings of specific social worlds. Tourists must be reasonably aware of the social world in which they are involved, but they are committed to that world only insofar as it remains entertaining, profitable or diversionary” (Unruh, 1980, p.281) .

Nevertheless, this typology must not be confused with the typical geocachers who travel in order to enjoy their leisure activity.

The *regulars* “are habitual participants who are integrated into the social world’s on-going activities. Unlike strangers and tourists, regulars must be seen as having a significant degree of commitment to their social world through good times and bad. Thus regular organizations, events, and practices are those, which provide an enduring organization and structure for social worlds “(Unruh, 1980, p.282). Regulars are characterized by: regularized and routine activity, integration into the world’s everyday experiences, relationships of familiarity with other participants and attachment to the social world and commitment to its on-going function (Unruh, 1979, p.119).

*Insiders* may be “the owners and operators of certain settings, groups, or organizations which serve as meeting places for social world activities. Insiders are simply those who know the intimate details and workings of a social world. Insiders are characterized by their orientation to a social world which functions to create one’s near total identity; experiences which are focused on the creation of the world for others; intimate relationships with participants; and a commitment to the world’s activities which necessitate engaging in recruitment of new members. “(Unruh, 1979, p.120)

In the following Table 1 (Unruh, 1979) summarize the above theoretical review in regards with the trans-situational social types of social worlds and its characteristics serving

to delimitate one typology from another. “ When read from left to right, furnishes us with a map which charts the changes in orientation, experiences, relationships, and commitment for those social worlds who move from strangers, to tourists, to regulars, to insiders( the process is clearly not necessarily linear, nor inevitable)” (Unruh, 1979,p.121).

Trans-situational Social Types

**Strangers                      Tourists                      Regulars                      Insiders**

Characteristics of Participation in Social Worlds

<i>Orientation</i>	<u>Naivete</u> Use of “thinking as usual”; simplistic understanding	<u>Curiosity</u> A desire and eagerness to “know «goings on of social world-, appreciation of world as is.	<u>Habituation</u> Orientation toward frequent and sustained presence; display of personal interest	<u>Identity</u> Orientation which is primary to life experiences. Social world is a major component of identity.
<i>Experiences</i>	<u>Disorientation</u> Confusion and uncertainty in all contact with a social world	<u>Orientation</u> Orientation toward learning and sighting components of social word; seeks authenticity	<u>Integration</u> Experiences aspects of social world in a wholistic and routinized way	<u>Creation</u> Many experiences in a social world are created and constructed for the other types
<i>Relationships</i>	<u>Superficiality</u> Relationships are ephemeral and highly transitory, if they exist at all	<u>Transiency</u> Relationships are fleeting and transitory; discarded once experienced achieved	<u>Familiarity</u> Relationships are on a first name basis with personal, “familial” interest displayed	<u>Intimacy</u> Relationships may be highly intimate and personal with warm friendships developing
<i>Commitment</i>	<u>Detachment</u> Commitment is marginal if existent; “doubtful loyalty” and marginality	<u>Entertainment</u> Commitment to on-going concerns of world only insofar as they entertain	<u>Attachment</u> Commitment is relatively long term and sustained through good and bad	<u>Recruitment</u> Commitment to on-going world is paramount. New participants recruited

**Table 1** Characteristics and types of participation in social worlds (Unruh, 1979, p.122)

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This descriptive research study, aims to analyze the Geocaching community's perceptions over concepts of tourism and leisure. Another objective is to demonstrate Stebbins's (2009) statement that Geocaching is serious leisure and to give insights of the social worlds organization of the geocachers and discover if they behave according to the trans-situational social worlds theoretical framework.

### 3.2 Research design

The present dissertation uses a descriptive qualitative research method, where both inductive and deductive techniques are used (Neuman, 2014, p. 48). Inductive approach includes observation of geocachers in order to find the suitable theory, and, once found the most appropriate theory, a deductive approach was applied, where observations were again conducted to find new perspectives of the theoretical approach

The geocaching game is used as a study case. The qualitative research design was chosen since the aim is to describe perceptions, feelings, behavior of the users in the context given.

Advantages in using qualitative method that it is "particularly good at deriving meaning" (Ruddell, Sirakaya-Turk, Uysal, Hammitt, & Vaske, 2011), as it describes, captures, displays and preserves meaning of the "insider" perspective. As well has an "empathic understanding as it recognizes that humans are not sterile objects of study but a swirl of



emotions, passions, desires, thoughts, beliefs, anticipations, deliberations” (Ruddel et. al, 2011, p.116)

The study followed the proposed model, (Figure 2, p. 25) of serious leisure and social world theory combined. The model has been used to reach the objectives of the study.

### 3.3 Measurements

As a measurement tool, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to the Geocaching players was used. Questions were designed by the researcher to cover the serious leisure theory sets of rewards theory and social worlds trans-situational typology. Follow-up questions and probes were used to receive better insights of their experiences and perceptions.

The interview guide contains 40 questions (Appendix A). In order to determine if Geocaching is indeed a serious leisure activity questions 26 to 31 refer to social rewards, examples of some questions are: *“How do you feel you contribute to the geocaching community?; Did you refer the geocaching game to others? “* . Personal rewards questions are from 32 to 38, examples of questions are: *“What is the best memory regarding geocaching? ; Do you use geocaching as time enjoyment after your work hours? “*

The first nine questions in the interview have the intention to discover the involvement of the player in the game, such as: *“ For how long have you geocached? How many caches have you collected?”* Depending on the player’s commitment, questions from Appendix B were asked to help in framing the players into the trans-situational social typology.

The 40 questions (Appendix A), cover intentions of delimitating whether Geocachers practice tourism or leisure, and to prove previous literature theories, discussed in relation

to Geocaching. Generally, depending on the geocacher profile, some questions were skipped or added.

The interviews were recorded and transcript verbatim. An interview guide notes (Appendix C) was used for each respondent in the moment of the interview, where the researcher made short notes over the perceptions that she had while the interview took place.

Generally, the interviews took between 20 and 60 minutes, some respondents were more open to share their experiences while others had to be followed up in order to get a more developed answer.

### 3.4 Research sample

The unit of analysis of the present master thesis will be the Geocaching players. Given the nature of the game, a player can geocache in different countries of the world, for this reason there is no precise geographical scope of the sample.

Of a total of twelve respondents, nine were originally from Romania but some of them living and geocaching in other European countries. The other three respondents were originally from Hungary, Czech Republic and Norway.

Two types of sampling had been used: the snowball sampling also called chain-referral and purposive sampling. The snowball sample it is used among Geocaching players who possibly refer to another player, snowball sampling is convenient in order to get general insight of the phenomena. Neuman( 2014) notes that is appropriate when one wants to sample a social network of people or linked organizations, such is the present case of Geocaching.

The purposive sampling involves approaching subjects with certain characteristics. (Ruddel et. al , 2011, p.99) and with “ a very specific purpose in mind” (Neuman, 2014). As it was mentioned above, the purpose of its use is to answer the question regarding the trans-situational social types of geocachers and therefore among the respondents will be cases of specific population in order to fulfill the theory framework. This type was considered the most appropriate in order to find if the social world’s analysis frame can be applied to Geocaching game.

The saturation method is applied, therefor will be conducted interviews “until categories and the theoretical framework are sufficiently saturated based on the subjective decision of the researcher “, were saturation is considered to be reached when “no new concepts or categories emerge during interviews.” (Ruddel et. al , 2011, p.130)

Saturation was achieved after two interviews from each social world typology (Stranger, Tourist, Regular, Insider) therefore was made another interview to each typology group in order to verify if a new concept will be added.

For the Stranger typology was found only one subject, as this typology is not frequently met. Three Regulars and three Insiders were interviewed. For Tourist typology were interviewed five subjects, as two of them had a regression during the years in their activity, from Regulars to Tourists.

The most of respondents for the actual study didn’t provide the researcher previous information about their involvement in the game, all the information has been given at the moment of the interview. For three of the interview volunteers, the researcher had a previous knowledge of their involvement in the game. Therefore, the researcher has not search for a specific typology to interview.

### 3.5 Data collection

The respondents of the actual study were picked up among Geocaching players. The researcher personally contacted five of the respondents, and the rest of respondents were contacted on the Internet through social media groups, such as Geocaching Rogaland, Geocaching Romania, Geocaching Norge. The groups were found on the social media page Facebook.

Different geocachers from Rogaland area in Norway were contacted several times, by personal messages and official messages posted through the Facebook page of Geocaching Rogaland, the researcher did not get any answer, or geocachers were not interested in helping to create data for the research. After two weeks from the official post on the Rogaland Geocaching Facebook page, a geocacher contacted the researcher for an eventual interview that took place.

The situation was different when the same message was posted on the Romania's Geocaching Facebook page, in five minutes after the announcement the researcher received messages with volunteers who wanted to share their experiences. Several personal interviews were done in Romania, and others were done through Skype due to the large distances between the volunteers of the research and the researcher.

The interviews took place between December 2015 and January 2016. The language used for the interviews was Romanian, as it is the researcher's native language; therefore, eight of them were conducted in this language and four interviews in English. The Romanian interviews were translated into English by the researcher.

Interviews took place in different places that were established between the interviewer and researcher, such as: library, home of the researcher, cafeterias and for those on the Internet, through the program Skype.

Table 2, shows the profile of the interview participants, the suggested trans-situational social typology from social worlds theory, along with the age and gender of the respondent. The location in the table refers to the countries where the geocachers are based, and where the interview took place. The respondent's average age was 33, predominantly men.

<b>Interview N°</b>	<b>Suggested typology</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Interview place</b>
<b>1</b>	Tourist	37	Female	Norway	Home
<b>2</b>	Tourist	40	Male	Norway	Home
<b>3</b>	Tourist	33	Male	Romania	Home
<b>4</b>	Insider	31	Male	Romania	Cafeteria
<b>5</b>	Insider	32	Female	Romania	Cafeteria
<b>6</b>	Regular	40	Male	Romania	Cafeteria
<b>7</b>	Regular	28	Male	Denmark	Skype
<b>8</b>	Regular	22	Male	Norway	Library
<b>9</b>	Tourist	28	Male	Romania	Skype
<b>10</b>	Stranger	35	Male	Belgium	Skype
<b>11</b>	Insider	37	Male	Romania	Skype
<b>12</b>	Tourist	37	Male	Norway	Home

*Table 2 Data collection participants*

### 3.6 Reliability

Since the reliability in a qualitative study reference also to a strong consistency of observations, techniques such as interviewing and photographs are used to create this consistency (Neuman, 2001). As the research conducted is qualitative, methods like recording the interviews make notes on the interview guidelines and taking photographs of the Geocaching activity were used as instruments to reach reliability.

In order to touch the authenticity of the study, the researcher tried to take the interviews face-to-face without using a channel of communication as Skype, but in some cases was difficult to achieve. The researcher tried to create a peaceful and joyful atmosphere in order for the subjects to feel confident sharing their experiences.

### 3.7 Reflexivity

As the researcher is not involved into the researched game, this matter could have caused different outcomes as the case study was viewed from an outsider's point of view. On the other side, if the researcher was involved into the activity it would have created a more precise scope sample such as geocachers in Rogaland, Norway. As probably, she would have been actively involved into the geocachers social world, and would have created stronger connection with the community, especially in Rogaland area.

The interviews took place during the wintertime. It is presumed that if the interviews took place in late spring or summer, geocachers might have reported more activity, probably some players could have been framed under a different typology.

If the time was more extended the researcher might have found more typologies of Strangers, and the dissertation could have been more accurate.

## 4. Results

This part presents the detailed perceptions and experiences of geocachers' testimonies acquired during the interviews. The testimonies follow the theoretical approach presented in this study, such as: tourism and leisure, serious leisure and social worlds. As well intends to answer the four research questions. If from the point of view of geocachers, they practice a form of tourism, leisure or both? If Geocaching is serious leisure, as Stebbins states in his article, "New leisure and leisure customization". How geocachers relate to social worlds? And if the trans-situational typology fit the Geocaching reality?

Some statements of the players are accompanied by a brief comment, and in some cases is makes reference to the four trans-situational typologies of strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders in the social worlds theory (Unruh, 1979).

Strangers are characterized as having feelings of naïve, as they think simplistic, are disoriented- "feelings of confusion and uncertainty" are reported, superficiality in their relationship that are "ephemeral and highly transitory" and detachment from their commitment as is marginal if exists.

Tourists on the other hand are reported to have curiosity, "a desire and eagerness to know the 'goings on' of the social world", to be orientated towards learning and seek authenticity, but to have relationships that are transitory," discarded once experienced achieved" and their commitment is only as long as it is entertaining.

Regular typology characterizes with habituation in showing "frequent and sustained" presence, as well the experiences are routinized and their relationships are showed with 'familiar' interest, and their commitment is "long termed and sustained through good and bad".

For the insiders the social worlds is a “major component of identity” and in terms of their experiences they construct a social world for the other typologies. Insider’s relationships are “highly intimate and personal with warm friendships developing” And they recruit new participants in terms of their commitment. More details about the social worlds trans-situational typologies can be read in Table 1 (page 39).

#### 4.1 Tourism, leisure or both?

In order to get a clear difference between tourism and leisure, respondents were asked if they practice Geocaching while they travel, followed up by questions that measure their activity during their holiday and the travel purpose. To delimitate whether they do tourism or leisure, the participants were asked where they enjoy to do it, and where their hobby take place the most, if was in their home area or outside of their home base. As for the leisure, geocachers were asked if they activity take place after their working hours.

##### 4.1.1 Tourism

All of the interview participants admitted that when they travel they do Geocache. Differences were found the main purpose of the journey. For most Geocaching, was seen as an extra activity in their destination while for others Geocaching was the main purpose.

For this player, both situations are met, when the game is the main purpose and in other occasions, the reason to travel is different. He makes an important statement that “for me is no tourism without Geocaching”.

*“Sometimes I travel with the purpose to Geocache, but sometimes I travel and as a side effect I geocache, it happens frequently.*



*At this stage, for me is no tourism without Geocaching, I cannot see to go somewhere without looking for at least a box, it might be the only box in town, it might be more boxes, it might be a bit more far away from my destination, but I go and search because I want that location to show up on my map, and it is nice to remember, and I will say "when I was in that town, and look I found that box"" (Regular, 28)*

The same typology "regular" as the other respondent, this geocacher travels with the main purpose of the job and as an extra activity, he plays at the destination Geocaching. However, he states that while he is in his home country he travels with the purpose of Geocaching.

*"Yes, I geocache but the main purpose is the job, I have been in 16 countries in 2015 and in 10 of them I have been 2 times. Inside of the country, I travel with the purpose of Geocaching. (Regular, 22)*

For this tourist, the situation is different as retrogression in the game is a factor. As she states that, "before we went every week" and now she is only Geocaching in holiday.

*"If we are going in a holiday we always look for some caches but before we went every weekend, even in the week" (Tourist, 37)*

For this insider the traveling is constructed around the interesting boxes to be found.

*"I travel considering geocaching, the experience showed me that the caches show me some places that I could not find in any tour guide. When I decide that I will travel somewhere I search on the website to see what boxes are, I look at those with favorite, I read about them and I will create the itinerary in such way to reach the areas with boxes. When I travel, the geocaching investigation is part of the homework planning. "(Insider, 37)*

Given the nature of the game, variables such as touristic attractions of a location, city dimensions, and amount of Geocaching players a specific area has, can have a major impact on the local players of Geocaching. The players can reach saturation in their leisure game depending on the variables above specified. If it is low activity in the area, such reduced local players, eventually all the boxes in the area can be found in a short time. Therefore, can be affected the involvement of the players in the game and in the other types of activities related with Geocaching.

This player enjoys to Geocache while traveling, even if he still has caches to find in his home base.

*"I still have to find in town, is discovering the town through Geocaching, I know this town, I've been on that street 5-10 times in my life, but is nicer outside my city"* (Regular, 40)

For this player, saturation has come in between and consequently he has to travel in order to keep playing.

*"I like to Geocache away because I discover new places, and there are not so many around the house, mostly are discovered"* (Tourist, 40)

This another player, has a plan to avoid saturation in the game.

*"When I travel, in the area that I live I find boxes, but I cannot search all of them because I will remain without boxes to find in the city."*

*"I haven't discovered all of the caches in my area, I live in Denmark, and I don't know the language, and there are many mystery boxes that are well done and require to listen a recording and I don't know the language enough to be capable to understand"* (Regular, 28)

As this player mentions, maintaining caches is another form of playing the game once you have achieved saturation.

*“Where we live the boxes are over, but we use the area where we are based to maintain the boxes, it is also this one a way to practice the game. “ (Insider, 31)*

#### 4.1.2 Leisure

All of respondents admitted that they geocache after their working hours, most of them see it as a weekend activity, as they have long working hours, and family duties that come first.

This regular player considers geocaching as a leisure activity for the weekend, but he mentions that it can take place also after the working hours in case of a business trip.

*“Not after working hours, is more like weekend activity, if I travel with the job and I get bored at the destination after working hours, I search boxes” (Regular, 28)*

Meanwhile for this regular player, geocaching can take place as well during the working hours. From the point of trans-situational social type, in terms of his orientation has reached a certain “frequent and sustained presence” (Table 1. Page, 39)

*“Sometimes I do it during the working hours, in the lunch break, I take my sandwich on the way and I go to find a box.” (Regular, 28)*

#### 4.1.3 Both tourism and leisure.

So where is the place where geocachers enjoy to geocache more: home or abroad? Depending on the involvement and the home base location of geocachers, the answers were different. The players transmitted no clear differentiation, as all of them answered that they practice it after their working hours, and all of them answered that they practice it while

they are traveling. It has been mentioned that sometimes is used as an extra activity for the place they visit while traveling.

This player tells that he enjoys geocaching both at home and away as he discovers new places in his hometown.

*“Both the same. I discover new places due to geocaching, but I discover new places in Sandnes as well”* (Regular, 22)

Same perception of pleasure while geocaching home and abroad is given by this another player.

*“I don’t think so I have some preferences”* (Tourist, 37)

For this tourist typology player, the pleasure to geocache lies on his mood to practice the game despite of the location.

*“It doesn’t matter, really doesn’t matter, where I want to find boxes”* (Tourist, 28)

Considering the social worlds trans-situational types, in terms of experiences, this regular player could be considered that he has reached integration, referring to “experiences aspects of social world in a wholistic and routinized way” (Table 1, Page 39). As he sees a good opportunity to participate to events and place caches in his home city, hence he experiences different aspects of the social world.

*“Away, you discover new places, but also home is fun you participate to events, place caches”* (Regular, 28)

This insider sees himself as a promoter of the city through geocaching showing to others what it can be found and seen, sustain the trans-situational typology of insider-experiences-creation that refers to “many experiences in a social world are created and constructed for the other types” (Table 1, page 39)

*“Abroad, in your home town you show the others that come to visit what you have”*

(Insider, 31)

For this player, saturation has come in between and for this reason, he enjoys to play while he is abroad.

*“Abroad, the city you already know it, is home and you don’t have any new places to find”* (Tourist, 33)

## 4.2 Serious leisure

In order to determinate if geocaching is indeed a serious leisure as Stebbins (2009, p.82) states it, four dimensions of the serious leisure theory had been verified. If the game is based on volunteering, if the participants feel they get personal and social rewards, and the career stages of the game. The sets of rewards were extracted from Stebbins theory on serious leisure (2001)

### 4.2.1 Volunteering

Most of the players had started to geocache being introduced by a friend who was already involved in the game.

This regular tells how he started to play Geocaching, and given the fact that he passed through tourist typology when he started to play along with someone, the orientation- curiosity of trans-situational type can be applied, the theory mentions that “a desire and eagerness to know ‘goings on of a social world’ appreciation of the world as it is” (Table 1, page 39) can fit this testimony, as he continued to play by himself driven by curiosity to find interesting boxes as he mentions in a later statement.

*“I spend the summer with someone that played, we went together in different locations and I found with her boxes, ever since I started to search by myself” (Regular, 40)*

Someone introduced this insider and the new player assumed a promoting role of the game.

*“From someone we know who played and meanwhile she let it down but we started to promote it, we liked very much. We both found it out and we agreed on keep on playing” (Insider, 32)*

Meanwhile this another tourist has started to play due to an advertise of the game, and she continued self-taught in the game. Same curiosity of the trans-situational social types can be found also in this testimony.

*“I read about it in some magazine or on the internet, and then I was thinking that was quite good idea what to do in the free time. I went on the geocaching website and there I read a little bit more and I found that it was fun so I just continued with it.” (Tourist, 37)*

This player-insider is thankful of his introduction in the game by his friend, even if at the beginning he found it a bit odd. Can be stated that he passed through the Strangers trans-situational social typology in terms of his orientation that regards the “thinking as usual; simplistic understanding”, and in terms of experiences such as: “confusion and uncertainty in all contact with a social world” (Table 1, page 39) as he mentioned odd feelings in the beginning of his trajectory as a geocacher.

*“Well, a friend introduced me in this game, we were together in Venice, and at one point he told me lets search some boxes. It was a bit strange for me at that moment, but I went along him and that’s the way I started to discover interesting stuff” (Insider, 37)*

One of the participants at the interview is a Geocaching reviewer for seven of the East European countries as: Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia,

Bosnia and Herzegovina and was asked if he gets any payment for the work he is doing. Confirming the fact that geocachers that make more effort for their passion are involved as volunteers.

*“I don’t receive money, but I get the premium user for free. But the rest, all the work is voluntary. The activity is not so high in those seven countries and that’s why it is only me, in other parts of Europe, where higher activity there are more reviewers inclusive into a single country.” (Insider, 37)*

#### 4.2.2 Personal rewards

To the amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers of serious leisure theory, Stebbins has given six qualities such as: persevere, career, personal effort, durable benefits, identification and unique ethos. Out of those qualities were formed two sets of rewards regarding personal and social outcomes. First, the personal rewards that are centered into seven distinctive types, such as: personal enrichment, self-actualization, self-expression, self-image, self-gratification, re-creation and financial return, are extracted.

##### 4.2.2.1 Personal enrichment

Personal enrichment is described by Stebbins (2001) as having cherished experiences.

This regular mentions that his favorite experience took place while he was geocaching and a life threatening moment succeeded, he could not come down from the mountain and a helicopter picked him up.

In terms of his trans-situational typology, can be seen a clear commitment “through good and bad” (Table 1, page 39).

*“I have just one favorite. I do not know how to explain it; I went up on the Dale hills (Sandnes, Norway). And I couldn’t come down and a helicopter picked me up and took me town. It was like life dangerous. I called to the police and they send two police with dogs, it was freezing and raining. It took them 1,5 hours to arrive and one of them was on my left side at 30 meters and the other one under me 20 meters. And they said one to another that they cannot arrive at me, and they asked for a helicopter, that is what I said to the police from the beginning. “(Regular, 22)*

This other insider had a funny experience while geocaching in a cemetery during the night. In this statement can be seen how relationships get “personal, with warm friendship developing” as she shares experiences with another player.

*“It is one with the cemetery in Toplița (location in Romania). It was night, we were tired, and we had to find the box. It was hard to find the road to the cemetery, in the end we got there tired, cold, and a 58 years old gentlemen was with us, he is as well a player. It was fun, because it was 23:00 in the night and we were searching for the box with the flashlight laughing and speaking to the deaths in our search of the box. “(Insider, 32)*

Meanwhile this other insider cherishes a moment of personal fulfillment at the end of an international geocaching event organized by the insider.

For this insider, the trans-situational social typology regarding his personal fulfillment can be perceived as a form of his orientation towards life experiences and social world seen as a major component of his identity. In the same time, this statement calls for another characteristic: creation. (Table 1, page 39)

*“Now it comes in my mind one, it is linked of an international event, the one from Sighișoara (popular tourist city in Romania) 8 years ago and was the final satisfaction when I felt the participants happy and delighted of what they have saw and experienced. Their smile*



*and feedback I will always remember. We had participants from all over Europe. Half of or more of those 100 participants were from outside Romania, they had this education of giving a feedback. I put a lot of energy to organize the event; beside I was away from home.”*

(Insider, 37)

This regular felt that his favorite moment laid in perseverance of searching a famous box.

*“I have searched the most rated box in the city. I have search it for two weeks, every day, evening, day and I was thinking where might be that box, after two weeks I found it. The box is difficult, hard to find, interesting and laborious”* (Regular, 40)

#### 4.2.2.2 Self-actualization

The self-actualization deals with developing skills, abilities and knowledge (Stebbins, 2001). This regular has developed new geographical knowledge and new abilities to find caches.

*“Yes, definitely and I also learned a lot of geography. New ways to find caches”*  
(Regular, 22)

This insider tells that she developed the thinking strategies, especially placing and finding a box. Recognizing persons by their caches.

*“To place boxes, I developed a 6<sup>th</sup> sense of placing them, I developed my thinking. When you start to play, you know already how thinks the other one who places the boxes. Sometimes I know the geocacher who place the box, I just check who post it and I can expect certain things from that geocacher. For example, “ID “is peculiar, does hand-made, and you can expect strange places.”* (Insider, 31)

This tourist who has reached saturation has developed an ability to discover caches without a GPS, just by looking at the location's potential.

*"Maybe placing, collecting. One time my boyfriend found one, without knowing that was something there at all, he didn't have the GPS with him at that time and he said "this place is looks like it could be a geocache here" and he looked for it and was really some cache there" (Tourist, 37)*

#### 4.2.2.3 Self-expression

Self-expression manage how the serious leisure participants express their skills, abilities, and knowledge already developed. Most of the respondents stated that they don't possess any special skills or abilities as geocaching is not a game that requires special skills.

Physical abilities in some sports like climbing and swimming were useful for this player. T5 caches, refer to the difficulty five of caches that challenge the player with difficult physical or mental abilities.

*"Climbing was useful, I do also T5 caches. And sometimes I swim for them" (Regular, 22)*

This insider rely on his personal abilities of perseverance, adventure spirit.

*"Hmmm...I suppose a characteristic, the perseverance and the gamer spirit and adventure." (Insider, 37)*

For this regular, the other sports he practices helped him in geocaching.

*"Personally the fact that I enjoy to go out in nature, to climb, to run, helped  
"(Regular, 40 )*

#### 4.2.2.4 Self-image

Self-image is how others know you as a serious leisure participant. For all the geocaching participants in the interview, the friends and relatives knew about their implication in the game, some knowing more and some less about their level of involvement.

This regular is open to share his geocaching experience with others, and the people around him know his implication in the game.

*“I think I bored everyone with this. Some know more, some less. Some are coming with me”* (Regular, 28)

His perseverance in finding a cache in every day of the year make his leisure activity visible to everyone around him.

*“Yes, it is hard to hide when you have to cache every day a new one”* (Regular, 22)

#### 4.2.2.5 Self-gratification

Self-gratification is described as the combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction. All of the geocachers mentioned that they feel satisfaction, in different kind of ways, some when they find caches, some when are connected with the community, some when they receive a positive feedback. Disappointment feelings in the same cases have been mentioned, for example if they receive a negative feedback, or they don't find a box.

For this player the challenge is a result of satisfaction.

*“Satisfaction it is reached when it is hard to get to the box, because it is well hidden or hard to find. If it is small and you just get it, easy the satisfaction is not that big. It might not be difficult but might have something tricky that require thinking more in depth. The tricky it is the satisfied I am.”* (Regular, 40)

This player feels satisfaction whenever he discovers a new box, but the satisfaction is deeper when the mystery type of caches is discovered. As well, he mentions that the game is more interesting as he plays it outside of his home country.

*“Yes, every time I discover a new box, especially when I discover mysteries. It is like woowow. If I would be in Romania, the game will not be so excited because there are not so many interesting boxes to find. But if you play in another country is better.”* (Regular, 28)

Again, satisfaction is met when a box has been discovered, as disillusion comes when a box is not in his place and the player has spent time searching for it.

*“Yes, when we find box. Because I really don’t like to search for some cache and not find it.”* (Tourist, 37)

Satisfaction for this player seem to be also when challenge to be found is in between.

*“Yes, especially when you look for boxes a lot of time and you find them.”* (Tourist, 40)

This regular has told the same situation.

*“Yes, when I have been searching for 30-40 minutes and I find it”* (Regular, 22)

This tourist, mentions first the disappointing moment when you don’t find were is supposed to be and doesn’t have inside what comes in the cache description.

*“It is disappointing when you have to get to a box and you know that the trackable is inside and it is not there! Is sad....disappointing. But I cannot say I had extreme disappointments because I didn’t found a box”* (Tourist, 28)

#### 4.2.2.6 Re-creation

Also called regeneration is about of oneself through serious leisure after a day's of work. Results from subchapter 4.1.2 Leisure are the same with the re-creation rewards, as they both measure leisure time after the working schedule.

#### 4.2.2.7 Financial return

All of the geocachers mentioned that they do not consider a major financial impact of their hobby and what they spend is well spend. A few mentioned time as an investment.

This tourist tells that he didn't made big investments on geocaching, and boxes don't require nothing expensive.

*"Not at all, stuff that we find we place it in boxes, usually food boxes that doesn't cost that much, and the small gifts inside.... Well I have a lot of kinder eggs toys"* (Tourist, 28)

This player finds recyclable boxes as a way to keep the investments in the leisure activity down.

*"I can't say I spend too much. Yes, sometimes I buy trackable, boxes. Time is an investment, but not necessary... time anyway runs whatever you do. I try to do recyclable boxes."* (Regular, 28)

The GPS has been mentioned to be bought for Geocaching purpose, but it has been used for other purpose as well.

*"No, it was just the GPS and I use it also in other purpose"* (Tourist, 40)

This insider tells that the investment is the time.

*"It is ok, it is an investment that ....you invest in a passion, the biggest investment is time."* (Insider, 37)

Another insider tells that is not about the moment but on the passion that you put to realize something that you like.

*“When you do something that you like, you don’t put accent on money. Still I spend money, if I will stay and think how to make money out of Geocaching I would not have the same pleasure, it will always come “how to do more”. And it is better to leave it like this and live out of my job.”* (Insider, 32)

Thus, this insider tells that trying to do something for their passion, such as promote it brings a higher amount of money spent.

*“Not so much, it affects us as much as we advance from a simple player to organize an event. Mostly is there where enters lagers amount of money. The boxes to maintain have some cost, the 60 flyers for the event. But still we have the association and we can ask there for money.”* (Insider, 31)

#### 4.2.3 Social rewards

In this part are considered the three social rewards: social attraction, group accomplishment and the contribution to maintenance and development of the group (Stebbins, 2001). The level of participant’s implication in the game have strong involvement with their outcome for the social rewards. The results can be better seen from the perspective of the trans-situational frame of social worlds. Therefor the so called “insiders” and “regulars” are more engaged into social activities and interested in their outcomes than the “tourists” who are not interested by the social rewards and do not have a strong communication with the rest of the players.

Frequently the Geocaching groups of Facebook social media platform are seen as official associations by the geocachers, predominantly the typology of tourists. They consider

themselves as members, even if it is just a virtual platform. Some of them take part as well in a real world Geocaching NGOs, predominantly Regulars and Insiders trans-situational social types.

#### 4.2.3.1 Social attraction

Social attraction as a reward, mean the associating with other serious leisure participants, in the social world of activity.

Most of geocachers communicate with other leisure participants through Facebook groups dedicated to Geocaching and mainly those belonging to the trans-situational social typology of “insiders” and “regulars” are involved in creating associations and have personal meetings and events.

Participants to the interview were asked if they are affiliated to any other organization of Geocaching.

This regular consider the belonging in a Facebook group as an affiliation to a regional organization.

*“No, only to the Facebook group” (Regular, 22)*

Meanwhile, this tourist has been present to only one event and he consider himself a part of the worldwide organization of Geocaching.

*“No, I heard about it, but no, I pay membership to the Geocaching.com. It was once one event that we went. It was in Hamar” (Tourist, 40)*

This tourist had been a host for an event made by a smaller organization of Geocaching, but he, personally, doesn’t take part of it.

*“No, it is an organization; I was a host but nothing else” (Tourist, 28)*

This regular is planning to be a member of a national organization of Geocaching.

*“No, but I will subscribe to the national one” (Regular, 40)*

This tourist, he sees himself associated into a Geocaching organization through Facebook page, but he doesn't take part of the local activities of Geocaching group.

*"No, only in the national through the Facebook group, but not on the locals"*

(Tourist, 33)

On the other side this insider is a paying member of a Romanian Geocaching organization.

*"Yes, I am member of AGER association, on a national level"* (Insider, 31)

And this other has founded the national NGO of Geocaching in Romania.

*"Together with other seven geocachers we found the NGO"* (Insider, 37)

This regular has knowledge of the existence of a national Geocaching organization in Romania, and he is decided to take part soon. He makes the distinction between a Facebook group and a NGO of Geocaching, even thou he sees language as a barrier in becoming a member.

*"No, at the moment in Romania is an association, I will sign up soon. In Denmark there are not associations, from what I know, it is a Facebook group, it is not NGO of Geocaching, and even if it will be...it will be in Danish"* (Regular, 28)

#### 4.2.3.2 Group accomplishment

This reward points out to the group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project; have senses of helping, being needed and being altruistic.

Most of the "Tourist" trans-situational social typology respondents have not participated in a geocaching event. The situation is different with those who are "Insiders" as they are involved into creating and participating into events. "Regulars" have also a high



participation rate to the geocaching events. Participants in the interview were asked if they participate at Geocaching events.

This insider proudly states that he organizes together with his wife Geocaching events. Also gives details of how participating in Geocaching events have been modified since they are involved in the game.

*“Yes and we organize. The first event we went it was GeoFest 6. We went from Thursday and there were approximately 60 person, and at GeoFest 7 we went from Monday...we prolonged. We met with others, we talked, we stayed in the tent, and we searched also outside of the event.”* (Insider, 31)

This tourist mention that he does not enjoy participating in Geocaching events.

*“No, I didn’t participate. I don’t like it”* (Tourist, 33)

This regular has been present in 15 events both in his home country and in Norway.

*“Yes, I think 15 events, both in Hungary and Norway”* (Regular, 22)

This regular has been present in local meetings and he is planning to take part of national events of Geocaching.

*“I haven’t been on those nationals, but I will go. For the moment only in the local meetings among us”* (Regular,40)

This regular has started not long ago participating to events, finding them pleasant and helpful in the case he is traveling in a new destination.

*“Yes, to many I participated. From September (2015) I started to go. Wherever I catch an event, I go. Alternatively, if I go into a new city, a new location I organize an event to meet the local geocachers. I started to do this thing after I learned from my mistakes, meaning that ... I went in excursions and I have not thought to create an event cause in this*

*way people do not know that you are there. In this way you do an event, you meet with X and Y, exchange ideas, impressions, trackable and all sort of things.” (Regular, 28)*

#### *4.2.3.3 Contribution to maintenance and development of the group*

All of the respondents recommended the game to others despite of their level of involvement in the game. Moreover, they all stated that have learned something from Geocaching.

This player has seen an improvement of his skills in the game in time since he got involved. He spreads the word about Geocaching by playing along with newcomers in the game.

*“I have recommended and I learned some others to play, and now they play and they have taught others to play as well. I learned to search for hidden stuff, to use navigation systems, use the phone for GPS, foreign languages due to the mystery caches. The attention I highly developed, you see different the things after you play for a while. “ (Regular, 28)*

This insider has seen herself improving skills in using phone new technologies, and she admits that recommend the game to others.

*“Yes, I recommend, I didn’t know how the applications work on mobile phone before I started to play. I am not a big fan of using the new technologies. The phone is to call and answer, and then I started to learn how to use it” (Insider, 33)*

This regular sees his financial contribution to Geocaching a help to improve the game, and the feedback he gives to other players.

*“I recommended the game, and I write good logs, and also I am a paying member and help them to improve their website, and I think that is a contribution” (Regular, 22)*

This insider considers the feedback as a high contribution to the game, both for the owner of caches and for the entire community. In addition, he has experienced through Geocaching more administrative tasks that has improved his experience as a manager.

*"I recommended and it is hard to say how many things I've learned. A thing that comes into my mind it is linked to give and receive and be thankful of what you receive. I have learned that somehow recently, that the log that you write is a form to thank the others that they placed the box. And I know it as a cache owner, the one that I see that writes more than that he found it, says somehow "thank you", and makes me do more. And I know also from other geocachers, when someone writes you about your box it is something special and is a form of be thankful.*

*And I learned a lot about friendship, especially at those events that are at a higher scale, I learned what it means a real project manager, what means the interaction with people in stress conditions if you want to organize lots of things in a short term then comes the stress, I could tell a lot about that. "(Insider, 37)*

#### 4.2.4 Career stages

Most of participants in the interview are having a period of low activity during the wintertime due to the cold, snow and darkness. Respondents mentioned that they would play as long as they will live and are in physically and mentally healthy conditions to search for the boxes.

The career stages of a geocacher as a serious leisure participant can be affected by moments of home life instability or in their relationships with the love ones.

Some of the participants mentioned that they don't play as much as they have done it in the beginning, due to the few caches to find in their local area and the not so frequent travelling, mentioning a period of stagnation.

For this insider, home routine has changed and therefore the activity in the game has been stagnated.

*"In the period when my child was born, when they were under one year almost I haven't play or not so much." (Insider, 37)*

The geocaching activity for this player has been influenced by the personal relationships. And he signals a problem to geocache while the ground is covered by snow, as a cache might get mugged.

*"Well...I think it was between 2008-2013, 69 boxes found in this period I don't considered played, because my last girlfriend didn't like the game, and alone it was like...neehhh..and from 2013 I reached to 370 because my new girlfriend likes the game. In the winter it is more complicated, it is stagnation and not because of the boxes, but because of the weather. The boxes that can be found in the city, most of them they are accessible also in the winter, but there are areas that I will not start to search for them for example where I see it is fresh snow around, automatically someone will get suspicious that I make a path to somewhere, and that means that maybe will be a possibly destroyed box, because the suspicious one will think "Why someone will make a path over there, for sure it is something there" (Tourist, 28)*

This tourist signals the retrogression in his leisure activity, stating that in the beginning he and his geocaching partner were actively involved, but in time saturation in the game played an essential factor in their lower activity.

*“We were quite active on 2010; sometimes it passes two, three months without Geocaching” (Tourist, 40)*

This insider tells that she doesn't geocache at all because it is too cold, and she considers that this situation might be everywhere in the world. She uses this wintertime to connect and keep in touch with other Geocaching players.

*“Yes, in this winter period each year, and I think it is not only here, it is everywhere. In this time we don't go to search, it is too cold, but we call others.” (Insider, 31)*

Winter is mentioned as well for this other player.

*“In the last month due to the winter time I haven't searched, but in the rest of the time, yes” (Regular, 40)*

This tourist tells that in the beginning she was more involved in the geocaching activity, but now it has been reduced.

*“We are not slaves of Geocaching anymore; we were a little bit in the beginning. And yes, each winter I stop, we tried you know when we were on ski to find something, because it was on our way where we were going to skiing, buy not all the time was possible to find when its snow, some are difficult because they are under the snow” (Tourist, 37)*

This regular admits that he will play as long as he will be fit physically and mentally to do it.

*“Until I will die, I don't see why to stop. Let's say that in the future I will not be able to climb, but at least a box I will find. Or maybe I will not have time to play as much, but once at six months I will try to find a box. I really don't see why to stop” (Regular, 28)*

Another similar appreciation comes from this insider.

*“As long I will live on this world I will practice it “(Insider, 37)*

The following regular mentions that he never stopped from playing, and, plans to do it until he will be able physically.

*“I didn’t had any time interruption, until I die, until I can walk” (Regular, 22)*

This tourist sees himself playing as long as the game will be.

*“As long as the game will exist. New boxes will always be” (Tourist, 28)*

### 4.3 Social worlds

#### 4.3.1 Geocaching as social world

Serious leisure theory has intersection points with the social worlds theory in the case of Geocaching game such as; the voluntary participation in the game and some components of social rewards set.

##### *4.3.1.1 Voluntary identification*

As described in the subchapter 4.2.1 “Serious leisure- Volunteering” the players were introduced by their friends and was a free chosen activity. The voluntary identification in the social worlds makes reference to the accessibility in the chosen activity and, voluntary involvement.

Beside of what has been reported in the subchapter 4.2.1 there must be an expectation of rules and guidelines. In the Geocaching game, there are some general rules that Geocachers must respect in the moments of placing, finding and no commercial advertising in meetings. All of the participants in the interview said that they know the general rules from word of mouth or they have read it on the Geocaching web page.

To subscribe to be a member of Geocaching is free, but most of the respondents did upgrade their account to premium as this type gives them more insights of the caches, and other benefits. Geocachers were asked about their knowledge of the games rules.

This insider has knowledge of the rules from the reviewer of caches about the rules.

*"Yes, I heard the official regulations from the reviewer"* (Insider, 31)

Similar situation is found at this tourist who has heard about the rules.

*" Uhhmm yes, I haven't read them, I've heard them"* (Tourist, 33)

The situation is different with this other tourist who has read the rules of the game.

*"I have read the official regulation"* (Tourist, 40)

This regular, goes to the rules every time when he hides a cache.

*"Yes, I read them. Always when I hide a cache I read them to be sure I do it right"*

(Regular, 28)

This tourist admits that he has read the rules a few years ago.

*"I read them a few years ago, I don't know if something has changed"* (Tourist, 28)

This regular feels very involved in the game therefor he has read the regulations.

*"I read all of them actually. I am so much into it so I read it."* (Regular, 22)

The following testimonies mention that most of the players pay the member fee and are officially registered.

*"Yes I participate as a registered member and I am premium"* (Regular, 28)

*"Yes, registered member, premium"* (Regular, 22)

*"Yes, premium"* (Tourist, 28)

#### 4.3.1.2 *Partial involvement*

The theory regarding social worlds – partial involvement (Unruh, 1979) stated that the social actor can't be involved in all of the total "goings-on" of the social world. The respondents have confirmed the statement, even though the "insider" typology are the ones who make a difference, as they can be involved in all of the goings-on of Geocaching such as: collecting, placing, maintaining, create and participate to events. The geocachers had been asked about what they do the most in geocaching and what they like to do in their leisure the most.

This insider tells that he enjoys to communicate with other players and to find caches.

*"I like to hide, communicate with others and find"* (Insider, 37)

This tourist is different from the other tourist typology as he puts in the first place communication with other geocachers, and only after comes searching.

*"Communicate with the Geocaching community, and searching are the most important, hiding, I don't hide, because to hide just for the sake of it, no, and to do an elaborated box takes me a lot of time, which I didn't have until now."* (Tourist, 28)

This regular enjoys the most to cache, and he has a favorite type of caches, those called multicaches.

*"The challenge, mostly I like multicaches, I don't like mysteries, I like to go outside not to be inside solving math problems."* (Regular, 22)

This player puts the finding as the highest ranked activity, and tells a bit of the feeling one has when is owning a cache.

*"The three of them are ok. To find is the nicest moment. When you become owner, to have your own come along also disappointment, the X come and breaks the box, or place*



*it wrongly, or writes a log and don't put relevant information. It is possible to be disappointed of the feedback received; when you search instead it is more beneficial."*

(Regular, 28)

#### *4.3.1.3 Multiple identification*

The multiple identification refers to the fact that participants can be involved in more than one social world. The interview participants supported this statement as all of them are involved in other social worlds and leisure activities. Most of those are strongly liked with the outdoor nature of Geocaching and usually geocachers mentioned that they combine Geocaching with their outdoor passions as they go hand in hand.

This insider tells his experience with other outdoor leisure activities and how Geocaching is combined with them.

*"Organized no, but I do other sports like biking, traveling and photography. All of them go hand in hand with geocaching. It is another motivation Geocaching to the outdoor activities, for example if I make biking route, I will choose one that I can find boxes as well. Gives me another outcome of my biking experience in that area. I stop to collect caches.*

*"(Insider, 37)*

This tourist enumerates in what other types of leisure he is involved.

*"Yes, taking a walk, snowboarding, climbing, kayak, biking" (Tourist, 28)*

This regular support the first statement described above, that Geocaching could be done in the same time with the other leisure activity.

*"Yes, many. Biking and climbing. You see, those two I was doing them before geocaching, and now I combined them and I do the three of them. Generally everything that*

*means outdoor sports or kayak. Everything that you do outdoor you can link it with Geocaching.” (Regular, 28)*

This other regular has a strong serious leisure sport activity beside Geocaching.

*“Salsa I do it since 1990 and running, I usually run around 5-10 km daily in spring, summer and autumn. I participated to cycling contests, I trained. “(Regular, 40)*

This tourist mention that has different activities in the spare time beside Geocaching.

*“Yeah, like in free time? I am reading, training, going for a walk, yoga, jogging, biking in the summer, I am a lot outside. And in winter I am more inside, I go in gym, and home. I would like to go in winter for a walk but it is too cold and too dark” (Tourist, 37)*

#### *4.3.1.4 Mediated interaction*

The theory about the mediated interaction in social worlds deals with the reliance on communication channels rather than face to face communication, is stated as well that the local worlds are not so dependent on channels of communication.

As mentioned in subchapter 4.2.3.1 of serious leisure almost all of the geocachers rely on the modern channels of communication, more specifically Facebook Geocaching groups of different geographical areas, and the forum of Geocaching.com. On the local level the respondents who like to connect with the community use communication mobile applications such as: Whatsapp.

The respondents have been asked if they are active on the communication platforms of Geocaching and witch one they use.

This tourist mentions that he is subscribed to the newsletter of Geocaching but he does not communicate with other geocachers.

*“I am subscribed, I see what comes up but I don’t communicate, and I belong to the Romanian Facebook group only that” (Tourist, 33)*

This insider is communicating with other geocachers through different internet communication platforms dedicated to Geocaching and on the local level, she communicates through Whatsapp.

*“Yes, I am active on the communication platforms, and I also use Whatsapp” (Insider, 31)*

This Regular communicates on a local level through Whatsapp and he checks the official website of Geocaching.

*“Just Whatsapp to communicate and I check the website Geocaching.com “(Regular, 40)*

This regular mentions that he is only active on Facebook groups dedicated to Geocaching.

*“Only on Facebook I am active, not on the Geocaching forum, and on local Facebook groups I post only when I have something to say” (Regular, 28)*

This other regular uses beside Facebook groups dedicated to Geocaching also the forum of Geocaching official website.

*“Yes, forum and the Facebook groups of Norway, Hungary and Rogaland” (Regular, 22)*

#### 4.3.2 Trans-situational social types

Unruh (1979, 1980) has developed four social membership typologies in order to categorize them into social worlds. He has divided them into strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders in regards with their orientation, experiences, relationship and commitment.

A different set of questions (Appendix B) beside those from Appendix A have been asked for each presumed typology.

#### *4.3.2.1 Strangers*

For this typology have been interviewed only one subject. He has stated that he has not tried Geocaching, but have heard of it and know generally how it works. He communicates with other Geocaching members.

From the point of view of orientation and experiences can be said that he has a “simplistic understanding” of the game, and “uncertainty in all contact with a social world” as well in terms of commitment can be stated that is “marginal” (Unruh, 1979).

The subject was asked why he didn't start to play:

*“No particular reason, I just didn't get to it...”* (Stranger, 35)

What he thinks about Geocaching:

*“I think it is something very interesting, a complex activity combining various elements-if done right”* (Stranger, 35)

And if he plans to try it in the nearby future:

*“I would like to try it this year. Exactly, seems perfect for children, like a treasure hunt.”* (Stranger, 35)

#### *4.3.2.2 Tourists*

All tourist seems to have started Geocaching because it is fun, confirming the theory of trans-situational social types. They are characterized by slightly or no communication with the community. Geocaching activity takes place without having a specific frequency, and they will play as long as it will remain a fun activity.

For this typology has been observed that due to saturation in the game, players retrocede from regulars to tourists, as in some cases have been reported that is not like it was in the beginning.

Geocachers were asked how long they intent to play, how they characterize their activity in the game until now, and what they have learned.

This tourist clearly states the retrogression in her leisure activity, and, describes the routine of a saturated player in order to find new caches.

*“Well, now I don’t do it as often like in the beginning, before was everything very close and I found a lot of them and I was doing it very often, now if I want to do it means that I have to stay in the car and drive somewhere” (Tourist, 37 )*

This other saturated tourist mentions that geocaching takes place while he is on holiday.

*“Very unregularly, often if we go on holiday we always find a cache” (Tourist, 40 )*

This tourist plans to do it until is fun experience confirming the commitment as “only insofar is entertaining” (Unruh, 1979).

*“Until it is still fun. I don’t want to stop but it is less as it was from the beginning” (Tourist, 37)*

*Same feeling of fun is found in this other following tourist typology.*

*“I think it is fun” (Tourist, 37)*

*“I take part because it is fun” (Tourist, 28)*

This player has found that Geocaching gives her the opportunity to discover new places in her home city.

*“I found nice places, even in Prague, that I didn’t knew that exist” (Tourist, 37)*

This tourist has found Geocaching useful for educational purposes on a personal level, statement that proves the orientation towards “learning and sighting components of social world” (Unruh, 1979)

*“I learn to use GPS, I learned about places, persons, go to places especially abroad, you discover new places, history.”* (Tourist, 40)

Meanwhile this other see Geocaching as a way to discover new things.

*“It is interesting, because I see new places, discover new things”* (Tourist, 33)

And other tourist mention how Geocaching has influenced his imagination.

*“I learned to imagine where could fit a new box”* (Tourist, 33)

#### 4.3.2.3 Regulars

All of the players who are considered regulars have a large number of boxes found and a short time since they play. Players who are involved in the game have a constant activity during the year and they feel much attached to their passion. Regular geocachers take part in all of the on-goings of Geocaching.

This regular tells about his future challenges to take in Geocaching, and mentions how Geocaching motivates him to have an outdoor experience. In the same time the statement approves the integration characteristic of the trans-situational type.

*“I like to hike but I don’t like to go out without having a goal I have to reach. Every single day I collect. There is a matrix in the game, and I want to fulfill the matrix in finding one cache every day. I have almost everything green. I want to find a cache in every European Country”* (Regular, 22)

This other regular does not have a clear plan in Geocaching, and his activity in the game might be variable from one day to another. However, when he arrives in a new place, he has purposed himself to find at least one box.

*“I don’t have a standard. I can search in one day 50 or in three days 100, there are days when I don’t search at all because I am busy with the job, I don’t have time to search. But what I do if I go into a new city is to try to find at least one box in that specific city. Or to organize excursions with friends where that’s the main activity to find caches.”* (Regular, 28)

This regular in change is motivated to find by searching an interesting box made.

*“The adventure to find a nice hidden box, or to find a new place wherever you go. Wherever I go, I cannot stop completely to play. Wherever I go, I find at least one box, no matter how small or is it.”* (Regular, 28)

This regular has in mind to change his geocaching pattern, and go for the most difficult ones.

*“I have in plan to move the finding achievements in the matrix from the easy zone to T5. I would like to have 1000 of T5, but I don’t know when I will do it. Anyway, T5 is not a priority if in that specific place there are not.”* (Regular, 28)

This regular tells about his frequency in geocaching. And he states that he will keep play actively until his age for retirement.

*“In four months I found almost 100 caches, once at a few days I find one or two. I think I will play for the next five years”* (Regular, 40)

#### 4.3.2.4 Insiders

The insider’s main motivation is linked to the community relationship, organizing events, promoting and helping to develop the game. As well in finding boxes and maintain

them. All of the insiders consider themselves part of the organization; they have daily contact with the game, considering their role in the community as strong.

This insider tells that he likes in the game to communicate with others and to discover new places by finding caches.

*"I like the meetings and the fact that I discover new places"* (Insider, 32)

And he likes to organize events.

*"I organize events"* (Insider, 32)

This other insider would like to achieve a Mega and Giga event in his home country, Romania.

*"I would like to achieve a Mega event in Romania and then a Giga"* (Insider, 31)

As an organizer of events consider himself as a role model for other players.

*"As long as we are an example for others, I think our role is quite important. Now it depends how others see it"* (Insider, 31)

This insider characterizes the relationship with other geocaching participants is.

*"We have a lot of friends, but we don't know each other's private life"* (Insider, 32)

This other insider sees Geocaching as an opportunity to get into another's player thinking.

*"The places I discover, I like to see the world through other's eyes, and I liked the people I met in this game."* (Insider, 37)

As the game gives the experience to connect with people, locations and live experiences.

*"It motivates me the experiences, the places, the people"* (Insider, 37)

The testimony describes how an insider has put himself different challenges to make the game more interesting for him.



*“I had all sorts of personal challenges, I’ve tried to fulfill the calendar with 365 days, I achieve it. I tried to find all the types of boxes, I found myself challenges. To find in many countries, to find the archives, the web caches that don’t exist anymore, and others...”*

(Insider, 37)

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Summary of results

The case of Geocaching resulted to be relevant regarding the concepts of tourism and leisure, serious leisure and social worlds theory, yet no clear boarder was found among the tourism and the leisure concepts. Some of the players use Geocaching as a form of tourism, due to their saturation activity in the game. Others practice it as a leisure form during their traveling and as well after their working schedule.

After analyzing the data, findings regarding the sets of rewards, the voluntary participation in the game, and, the career stages that are characteristics of serious leisure, it can be confirmed that Geocaching is a serious leisure activity such as Stebbins mentions but without providing empirical data for it.

Relevant differences concerning serious leisure theory in the case studied, were found in the personal rewards more specifically, the “self-expression” reward, did not seem relevant for the players, as no special abilities are required to play the game. In addition, differences were observed for all the social rewards set, since the level of involvement in the game seemed to have a decisive role for the importance of the social rewards in the game. The more involved the players are, the more they feel socially rewarded by the game.

Winter periods have been reported with low activity in the game. The career stages can meet retrogression with the saturated players, referring to those that had exhausted the game resources such as: boxes to find in a specific area as players don't have the possibility to hide more caches, as they have reached the maximum boxes to place or the nearby area is already full with boxes. In such cases saturation point is reached and travel is required in order to keep a constant activity in the game.

Social worlds theory has been also confirmed through the Geocaching case. The four types of involvement and the trans-situational social typologies are generally according to the theory.

"Strangers" typology had a low representativeness in this actual study, since this specific subjects in Geocaching are not so frequent.

"Tourist" was the most present typology in the interview. For this type, a new concept of retrogression has come up, as the tourist players have had in the beginning of their activity in the game a higher involvement but in time, they had exhausting the resources in the game, some of them have descended from regulars back to tourist.

The "regulars" and "insiders" are the typologies that is consider almost identical to the theoretical overview in terms of their orientation, experiences, relationships and commitment.

## 5.2 Tourism, leisure or both

Results of the research question concerning if Geocaching is a form of tourism, leisure, or both couldn't make a clear boarder whether Geocaching is just a form of tourism or just a form of leisure. Nevertheless, both concepts of tourism and leisure were found to be specified among Geocachers players.

In the definition of leisure (Godbey , 1991) “the free time from productive work, thanks to technical progress and social action, for man’s pursuit of a non-productive activity, before, during, or after the period of his productive occupation” most of respondents in the interview found themselves as being participants of Geocaching as leisure after or during their working time, as well due to the technological progress of smart-phones that offer Internet, GPS incorporated in the phone and the Geocaching application that is instantaneously updated.

As tourism has not an “independent existence” (Smith 1989, as cited in Moore et. al 1995) the concept of geocaching as a motivation to realize the travel came up among the players. For the most respondents, the game is not the main reason to travel. Situation looks different when it comes to the social typology of “insiders” as their level of involvement is high so does the purpose of travel is Geocaching. Therefore, they make the exception of seeing Geocaching as a leisure activity in their travel.

Variables such as residence of the geocacher, popularity of the game in the regional area, are determinant factors if a player does tourism or leisure. When geocachers have found everything in their nearby area of living, they must travel to find other caches (finding caches resulted to be the most pleasant activity among the respondents). Meetings with other geocachers, placing and maintain caches are not so frequent; therefore, the rest of the activities besides finding caches doesn’t provide a high leisure time activity.

Despite of the different variables that might influence the practice of tourism and giving the fact that leisure is hard to be practiced in case of saturation, some of respondents added that it is more interesting to geocache as a tourist as they already know well the place they live and it is nothing new to discover.

### 5.3 Serious leisure

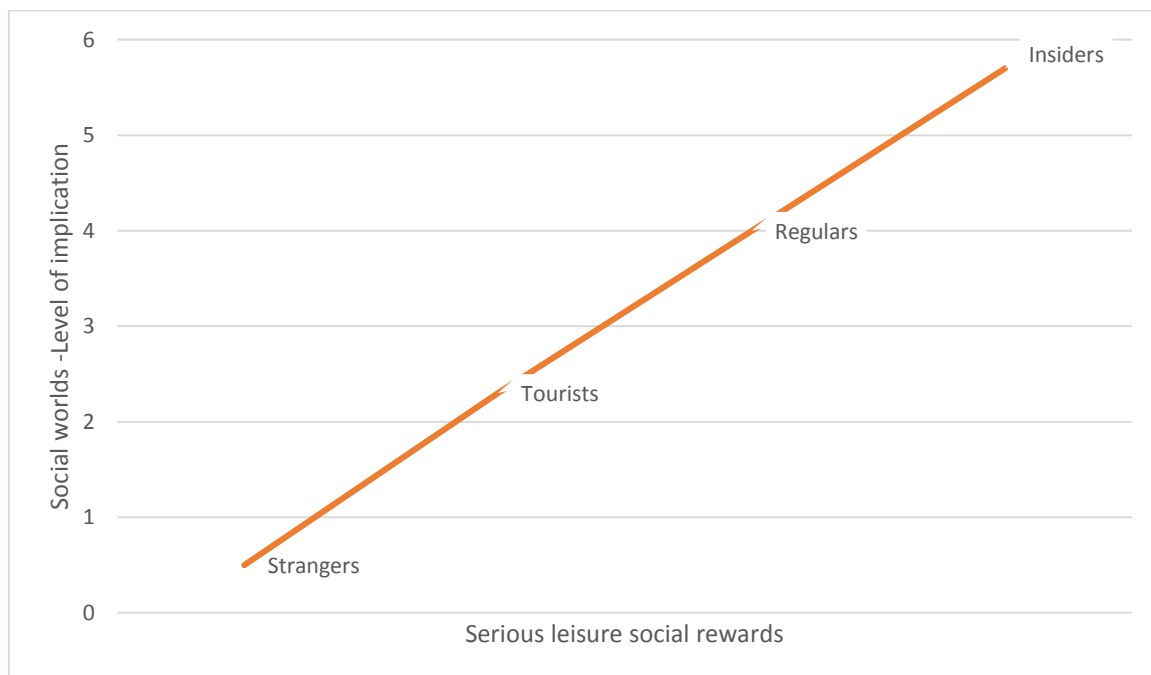
The empirical data collected, reveal that Geocaching is part of serious leisure as Stebbins (2001, p.3) mentions in his serious leisure concept defining it as “... *volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical cases, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience*” where the term of volunteer is indicated to be “*connected with an organization of some sort, the scope of this leisure is possibly even broader, perhaps including the kinds of helping devoted individuals do for social movements or neighbors and family*”. Resulting from the interviews all the respondents mentioned that they started to participate into the game voluntarily as they were introduced in most cases by someone they know who played the game.

As Stebbins (2009) stated, and empirically verified by the researcher if Geocaching is indeed serious leisure, a series of parameters extracted from the serious leisure theory have been applied in order to test it empirically the statement of Stebbins: the voluntary participation into the game, the personal and social rewards and career stages.

All the subjects in the interview regardless of their involvement in the game reported to feel and experience all the distinctive sets of personal rewards.

The social rewards result, as can be seen in the Figure 4 (pag.85), reported that only “regulars” and “insiders” are subjects to this type of rewards and they enjoy the social part of the game the most. As for the other typologies, they reported no interest in the social side of the game. Figure 4 (pag.85), show that as higher the level of involvement in the game is the higher are the social rewards. For instance, a tourist does not feel so much social reward as an insider does.

As for the personal rewards, only one reward has been mentioned not to be relevant for the geocachers, the so called “self- expression” as they mentioned that playing the game doesn’t require special skills, but they admit having rewards feelings as the game introduce them into new abilities or new knowledge. Another aspect to consider is that Strangers might have another feelings regarding the self-expression reward, as they are new into this game, and might find it challenging. As well an outsider of the game might see Geocaching as a difficult game due to the skills one need to start practice it. Skills can be translated for the game into: computer skills to know how to search for boxes on the website, to know how to use the GPS coordinates, to know how to search boxes and so on.



**Figure 4** Social rewards satisfaction level in regards with players’ level of social worlds implication. Figure developed by Patricia Ivan.

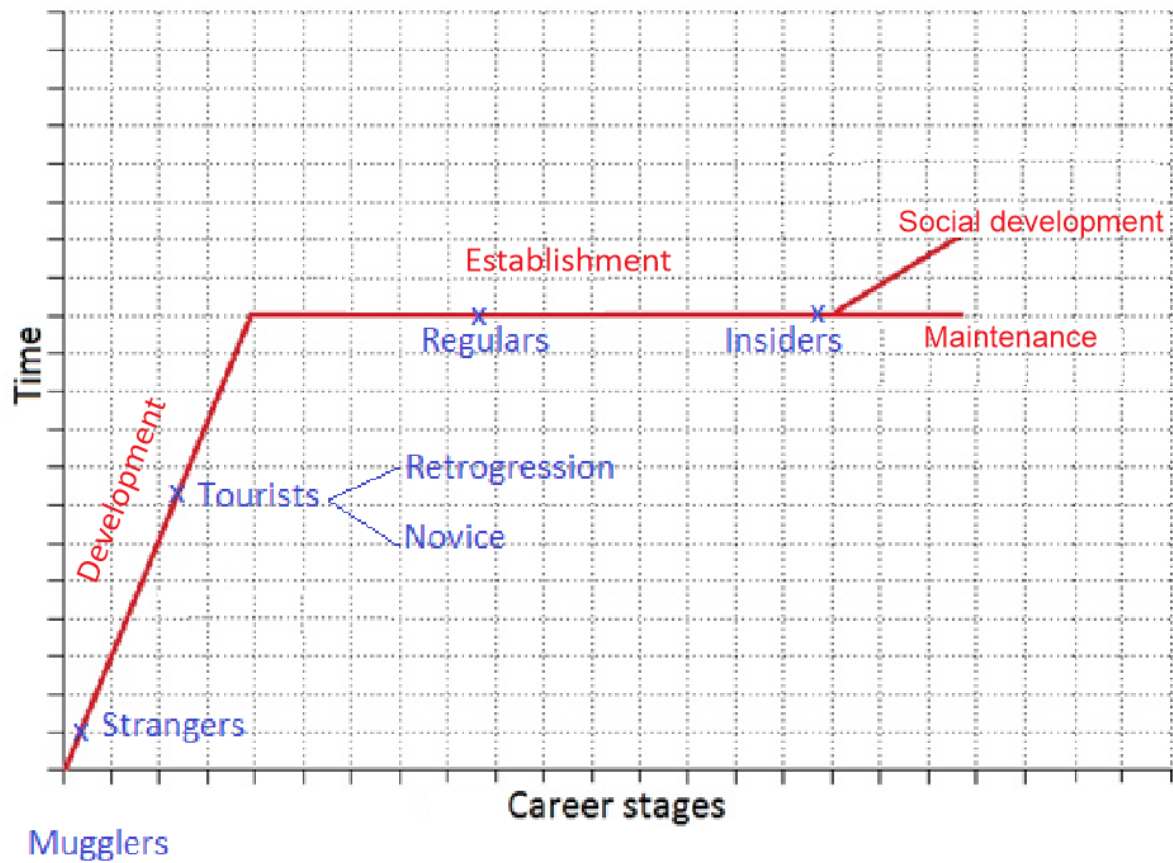
Career stages in Geocaching as it can be seen in Figure 5 (pag.87), show that there is a quick development from tourist to regular. Taking the social world trans-situational typology as a framework, the time that takes from being a «Stranger» and becoming a «Regular» is very short, an explanation can be found for instance, that in the beginning, a

geocacher that has many caches to find in his local area, and is involved also into placing caches, as well connecting with the community in order to expand the knowledge about his passion. Therefore, an established stage of a «regular» can be maintained finding different challenges to remain on this stage or developed as an insider, no decline was mentioned by the geocaches involved in the interview although some of them experienced retrogression from being a «regular» back to a «tourist» as it can be seen in the tourist typology, where novices (those who are new beginners in the game) can be found as well. Figure 5 (pag.87) show that insiders are manifesting their serious leisure into social development of the game, such as promoting, helping the organization, and maintain the caches they own.

The retrogression is mentioned by Stebbins (2001, p.9) where he states that “the benefit of continuity reflects on the participant’s accumulation of rewards and prestige, but as well retrogression”.

Stebbins (2001, p.10) has mentioned decline in the serious leisure career due to “deteriorating mental or physical skills”. The geocachers were asked how long they intend to play the game, and most of them reported “*until I die*” or “*until I can be able to walk*”.

Most of respondents have mentioned a break of temporal continuity during the wintertime, when is it too cold and dark. No positive feelings were mentioned if the activity takes place in winter. As well, the respondents mentioned feelings of fear to be discovered as one could leave tracks on the snow, and curios outsiders of the game, so called mugglers, can destroy the box.



**Figure 5** Trajectories in serious leisure with trans-situational social worlds. Figure developed by Patricia Ivan.

## 5.4 Social worlds

### 5.4.1 Types of involvement

To find if Geocaching is part of a social world as a unit of organization, the four types of involvement, voluntary, partial involvement, multiple identification and mediated interaction, from the theory of social worlds were empirically tested.

The voluntary identification defined by Unruh (1980) calls for accessible and voluntary involvement in a free social world where guidelines, rules and expectations might exist.

The voluntary involvement of social world is similar to the serious leisure voluntary factor. Indeed, Geocaching provide rules and regulations for the players, and to be a

member is free, but in exchange of a fee (premium member) more advantages are given to the players. Therefore, it can be said that voluntary involvement is found among Geocaching players.

The second typology, partial involvement has been found among the players, as a geocacher cannot take place in all the on goings of the game such as: placing, collecting, participate to events, maintain caches. Some of the players enjoy different aspects of the game such as: collecting- for tourists' typology, and taking part in events for the insiders. The level of involvement in the game plays a differentiation factor in being able or not to take place in all of the on-goings of the game.

The multiple identification feature was found among the Geocachers, as all of them are involved in "more than one social world" (Ditton, Loomis, & Choi, 1992, p.36). A majority of the respondents in the interviews mentioned that they are involved in different outdoor sports that they can link with Geocaching, beside all of the respondents had another type of leisure activity that they were involved. Some players take part in organized forms of leisure activities while other are just doing it by themselves.

The mediated interaction deals with "reliance on channels of communication rather than face to face interaction" (Unruh, 1980, p.279; Ditton, et al.1992, p.36). The reliance on channels of communication have been found also among the Geocachers, as they rely mainly on the Facebook group channels related to Geocaching and to the official forum of Geocaching. Depending on the level of involvement in the game and their personality some of them enjoy more to have personal meetings about Geocaching while others don't communicate personally with other members.



#### 5.4.2 Trans-situational social types

The social typologies of Unruh, strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders, had a major relevance in delimitating typologies of players by level of their commitment with the game, and helped to create a more accurate view over the serious leisure theory, especially for the rewards and how they are relevant depending on the level of involvement in the game and the career stages of a serious leisure.

The first component of social types are strangers, and for the present master thesis, the researcher had found only one subject to interview. The response from the stranger in the interview was according to the theory regarding the orientation, experiences, relationships and commitment of trans-situational social type strangers. The respondent had general knowledge of how it works, but no specifically notions of how the game is done. The stranger interviewed, mentioned no commitment at the moment but with a high probability to get involved in the nearby future.

In the second type of trans-situational social types, named tourists were found two typologies. Some of them were involved as novices in the game and their activity was reported not to be so highly active in the game. Main interest is to find boxes and they have few or not at all boxes hidden. No participation at the geocaching events or low involvement in the geocaching community.

On the other hand, the tourists who pass a retrogression in their leisure activity are characterized by being involved in the game for several years, but at the moment they practice it just from time to time, mostly when they are in vacation. This stage can be reached mainly due to saturation in the game, where no more local resources are available to find caches.

Regulars are the third typology, and the theoretical overview match the findings.

Regular players are characterized as having a frequent activity, being involved in several on-goings of the game and building a good relationship with the geocaching community.

The insider's typology theory as well matched with the results as they present a deep orientation towards social world of the game, are creators of experiences for others in the community. Insiders are surrounded by intimate friendships linked with the social world that they participate and are preoccupied in the spreading of the activity.

From the trans-situational social worlds typology frame applied to Geocaching misses another typology of so-called Mugglers reported among the Geocachers, as being those that can destroy their boxes.

A factor that might have affected the social-worlds typology of geocachers is the geographical area where they are based. As they might not have anyone else who plays in their region, or few caches to find. Some of the players reported that have found all of the caches in their local areas and it is nothing new to find, therefore they are not so active anymore, or there are no geocaching community meetings.

Some geocachers stay very short in the tourist typology and they become quickly regulars, having a high activity that might be influenced in some cases of high number of caches to be found in their local areas.

Generally, has been observed that tourists' typology spends longer periods of time and collect less caches than a regular who in a short time collect large amounts of caches or the same number as a tourist who has been involved in the game for years.

Overall can be stated that the two theories complement one each other in the Geocaching case. A better imagine of serious leisure is provided with the help of the social

worlds trans-situational typologies. The social world typologies had provided help to organize the players depending on their level of involvement in the game.

The literature review has mainly centered over serious leisure, using Stebbins's research, and Unruh's Social Worlds theory. Have not been found relevant research regarding serious leisure and social worlds, or the two of them combined. There are studies mentioning social worlds and serious leisure in given cases, but the approach is different.

## 5.5 Contribution

To the knowledge of the researcher, this is the first thesis that combines the two theories of serious leisure and social worlds in Geocaching case, and in a serious leisure activity.

It has tested empirically the Geocaching belonging to the serious leisure typology that Stebbins sustained to be but research was lacking due to the newness of the leisure (Stebbins, 2009).

The thesis had added value in terms of social component of the game in the world of leisure.

## 6.1 Conclusions

The aim of the present master thesis was to discover if in the Geocaching game constructs of tourism and leisure can be delimited. If the game can be framed as serious leisure, as Stebbins (2009) affirms to be, but research is lacking to the newness of the leisure.

As well create an empirical frame over social worlds belongingness of Geocaching, and if the trans-situational social world model can be applied to the Geocaching reality.

After analyzing the interviews, can be mentioned that Geocaching is performed as both leisure and tourism. For the more involved geocachers, the game resulted to be the main reason to travel as for others it has been practiced as a side effect of the travel. Some of the players have reached saturation in their geocaching leisure and in order to perform their activity traveling is required.

The statement of Stebbins (2009) suggesting that Geocaching is a form of serious leisure had resulted to be in line with his suggestion. Geocaching players are involved into a serious leisure activity as all of them reported personal rewards and a high majority social rewards. Geocachers that are not so highly involved in the game reported low social rewards compensation due to their lack of interest in this side of the game.

Can be stated that Geocaching is part of social worlds, as the game and the players rely on different involvement types and the form on which the game take place. Generally, had been reported that the game is in strongly connected with other outdoor leisure activities, or sports, and can be practiced along with them.

Geocaching players can be generally characterized by the trans-situational typology of social worlds. The tourists can be divided in two groups, the novice that fit the theoretical approach and those who suffer retrogression in their leisure career considered as long time players and for them the game is saturated. Regulars and insiders behaved according to the description of the theory. Another typology found among geocachers was missing from the trans-situational frame, so called in this case "mugglers", referring to those who are totally outsiders, have no knowledge of the game existence, and can destroy the caches if they find those.

The proposed model of the thesis had harmoniously combined the reality of the Geocaching game in terms of serious leisure and social worlds approach. The social world

trans-situational type has helped distinguish the types of players, their roles, involvement and outcomes of their serious leisure activity.

## 6.2 Limitations

The results might have been influenced by the winter season of the year when the interviews took place, and the Geocaching activity has been reported low.

Half of the sample was made with players originally from Romania, where the community reported to be relatively small and united; therefore, a more diverse sample from all over Europe could have provided different views on Geocaching regarding the social aspect of the game.

For the trans-situational typology “strangers” was found only one subject, and no “mugger” was found to be interviewed in order to create data for a new trans-situational typology.

## 6.3 Further research

In order to see the applicability of the theoretical model proposed, have to be analyzed other social worlds where serious leisure participants are involved.

Create a rank list of personal and social rewards in the case of Geocaching.

Further study regarding a more in depth analyze of trans-situational social types of social worlds is needed in regards with adding another typology such as in the case of Geocaching “Muggers” or something similar that can fit also other types of social worlds leisure organizations.

Studies of strangers in Geocaching can be added, as this thesis had presented the testimony of only one stranger participant.

As for the serious leisure and social worlds theories, a more focused study in career stages and tourist typology of geocachers has to be conducted in order to create a more accurate imagine.

## References

- Alsace GeoTour. (2014/1015). *Booklet Alsace GeoTour*.
- Boulaire, C., & Hervet, G. (2012). New Itinerancy: the Potential of Geocaching for Tourism. *International Journal of Management Cases*, 14(4), 210-218.
- Danny, S. (2011, 07 06). *Geocaching: the unintended results*. Retrieved 11 24, 2015, from [www.bbc.com: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-14039229](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-14039229)
- Ditton, R. B., Loomis, D. K., & Choi, S. (1992). Recreation specialization: Re-conceptualization from a social worlds perspective. *Journal of Leisure Research*.
- Edward, R. (2011). Qualitative research in leisure, recreation and tourism. In E. (. Sirakaya-Turk, *Research methods for leisure, recreation and tourism* (pp. 114-126.). Cabi.
- Hall, C. M. (2003). *Introduction to Tourism: Dimensions, and Issues*. (H. P. edn, Ed.)  
Melbourne: Pearson Education.
- Hall, C. M., Lew, A. A., & Williams, A. . (2004). *A companion to tourism*. Wiley.
- Ingsve. (2015, 04 25). *CITO event i Saltvik*. Retrieved 11 23, 2015, from [/www.geokaperne.no: http://www.geokaperne.no/?p=480](http://www.geokaperne.no/?p=480)
- Johanna., S. (2012, 07 12). *Treasure hunters lured to tourist destinations with geocaching*. Retrieved 11 23, 2015, from [www.seattletimes.com: http://www.seattletimes.com/business/treasure-hunters-lured-to-tourist-destinations-with-geocaching/](http://www.seattletimes.com/business/treasure-hunters-lured-to-tourist-destinations-with-geocaching/)
- Learn-about-the-benefits-of-geocaching*. (n.d.). Retrieved 12 04, 2015, from [/www.humankinetics.com: http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/learn-about-the-benefits-of-geocaching](http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/learn-about-the-benefits-of-geocaching)
- Matt, R. (2011, 22 07). *These Guys Sold T-Shirts To Turn Their Hobby Into One Of The Hottest Web Businesses In Seattle*. Retrieved 11 25, 2015, from [www.businessinsider.com: http://www.businessinsider.com](http://www.businessinsider.com)

<http://www.businessinsider.com/these-guys-sold-t-shirts-to-turn-their-hobby-into-one-of-the-hottest-web-businesses-in-seattle-2011-7?IR=T>

Moore, K., Cushman, G., & Simmons, D. . (1995). Behavioral conceptualization of tourism and leisure. *Annals of tourism research*, 22(1), 67-85.

O'Hara, K. (2008). Understanding geocaching practices and motivations. *In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1177-1186). ACM.

Schlatter, B. E., & Hurd, A. R. . (2005). Geocaching: 21st-century hide-and-seek. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*(76(7)), 28-32.

Schudiske, E. (2013, 02). *Celebrating Two Million Geocaches – List by Country*. Retrieved 11 20, 2015, from [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com):

<http://www.geocaching.com/blog/2013/02/celebrating-two-million-geocaches-list-by-country>

Smith, S. L., & Godbey, G. C. . (1991). Leisure, recreation and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research,, 18(1), 8, 85-100.*

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *New Directions in the Theory and Research of Serious Leisure* . Mellen Studies in Sociology.

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). Serious leisure. *Society*, 38(4), 53-57.

Stebbins, R. A. (n.d.). New leisure and leisure customization. *World Leisure Journal*, 51(2), 78-84.

Unruh, D. R. (1979). Characteristics and types of participation in social worlds. *Symbolic Interaction*, 2(2), 115-130.

Unruh, D. R. (1980). The nature of social worlds. *Sociological Perspectives*, 23(3), 271-296.



## Appendix

### Appendix A. Interview questions

1. How did you start to Geocache?
2. Why do you geocache?
3. For how long have you geocached?
4. How many caches have you collected?
5. How many caches have you placed?
6. What types of caches have you placed?
7. If you see a trackable would you pick it?
8. How often do you collect caches?
9. How often do you place caches?
10. Did you had any time interruption in your geocaching activity?
11. Where do you Geocache the most, near your house or when you are away?
12. Did you found all the caches around your house?
13. Are you updated if a new cache arrives in your area?
14. How long passes from the moment is posted until you discover it?
15. When you travel do you Geocache?
16. Do you travel with the specific purpose of Geocaching?
17. Do you see Geocaching as an extra activity for the place you travel?
18. Where do you enjoy to geocache more? Home or abroad?
19. Do you participate as a registered member or not?
20. What do you like best in the geocaching game? To place caches, to collect them, to relate with the community?
21. How familiar are you with the Geocaching official regulations?

22. Are you active on the communication platforms of Geocaching?
23. Do you use other type of communication platforms beside geocaching.com?
24. Do you geocache alone? If no, is he/she a member?
25. Are you involved in other type of leisure activity? Which?
26. Do you belong to the local/regional/national world associations of Geocaching?
27. How do you feel you contribute to the geocaching community?
28. Have you participated in any event of Geocaching?
29. Have you made friends while Geocaching or due to the Geocaching game?
30. Do you meet other members in geocaching community?
31. Did you refer the geocaching game to others?
32. What is the best memory regarding geocaching?
33. Do you feel that during the time you have improved your skills in placing, collecting caches? Or do you know more about the regulations
34. Did you find easy the game of Geocaching at the beginning? Do you possess any skills/knowledge/abilities that were helpful in the beginning of your geocaching adventure?
35. Does yours appropriates / friends know that you geocache? Do they know the level of your involvement?
36. Did you had moments of satisfaction during geocaching? Maybe you found a challenging cache?
37. Do you use geocaching as time enjoyment after your work hours?
38. How do you feel about the investments you do in geocaching? For example, travelling to geocache, place and maintain a cache?
39. What motivates you to continue Geocaching?

40. Do you have a meta in achieving a result in Geocaching game?

41. For how long do you intent to Geocache?

## Appendix B. Trans-situational social type frame questions

### *Strangers*

1. What do you believe about Geocaching?
2. Do you know how Geocaching is working?
3. How often do you geocache?
4. Do you know/socialize with other geocachers in real-life or online?
5. Will you continue to Geocache?

### *Tourists*

1. Why did you start to Geocache?
2. How often do you Geocache?
3. What have you learned while Geocaching?
4. Do you relate yourself with other Geocachers in real-life/online?
5. What keeps you Geocaching?
6. Will you continue to Geocache?

### *Regulars*

1. How often do you Geocache?
2. For how long do you Geocache?
3. How often do you place/collect/ talk to others Geocachers?
4. Do you have close friends from the Geocaching community? Were they before  
Geocaching your friends, or Geocaching was what united you?
5. What do you do to keep the Geocaching community running?
6. For how long do you intent to Geocache?

*Insiders*

1. Do you feel Geocaching is part of your daily life?
2. In what percentage?
3. Do you consider yourself part of the organization of Geocaching?
4. How important is your role in the community?
5. Do you have a large network of Geocachers as your friends?
6. How intimate do you consider those friends?
7. Did you refer the game to others?

Appendix C. Geocaching Interview Notes

Interview Details

Interview

number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggested

typology: \_\_\_\_\_

Approach: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8.

Questions to Ask the Geocacher