

**Making an original contribution to the leisure literature:
what does this look like? (Editorial)**

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Making an original contribution to the leisure literature: What does this look like?

As an Associate Editor of the *World Leisure Journal* and a reviewer for many journals, I see manuscripts rejected or returned for major revisions because the study's original contribution is not articulated. Articles can be theoretically and empirically relevant but can still omit an explanation of the contribution they are making. In a landscape of increasing manuscript submissions and diminishing acceptance rates, authors must be intentional in this process and clearly outline the value and significance of their research. *But what does an 'original contribution' mean, and how can I apply it to my research?*

To make an original contribution to knowledge, a manuscript must provide original insight into a phenomenon by advancing knowledge either incrementally or by progressing understanding in a way that provides revelation (Corley & Gioia, 2011). However, the former should be adopted with caution as it offers the weakest form of contribution.

To make an incremental contribution to knowledge is to fill a gap in the literature, which is the most common and, perhaps, default approach by many in and beyond the leisure discipline. For example, examining an area of leisure that is under-researched or neglected, or applying an existing leisure theory to a new leisure context, such as a new geographic area, cultural context or a new leisure activity. This is a necessary aspect of research, as it helps in the contextualisation of theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011). However, it offers small marginal advances in our thinking about a phenomenon, it devalues the work, and it conceals the author's engagement with theory (Doran et al., 2022). Further, it can often present a descriptive account and fails to expand the frameworks of analyses through developing relevant concepts, theories and methodologies (Silk, Caudwell & Gibson, 2017). Alone, this contribution claim is not deemed significant enough for many journals, leading to editorial and reviewer decisions to reject submitted manuscripts (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Crane et al., 2016; Doran et al., 2022; Rodriguez Sanchez et al., 2019; Sigala, 2021). Instead, authors should seek ways to make a revelatory contribution in addition to an incremental one.

A revelatory contribution offers something novel, unexpected, interesting, and surprising (Corley & Gioia, 2011). At first, you may think that your findings are expected and support earlier work, thus unsurprising and unoriginal. But with further interrogation of your data and of the underlying assumptions or the consensus in a body of work, you may uncover nuances that have previously been undetected. For example, identifying a lack of consistency in the literature (e.g., conflicting evidence or contradictory views) and explaining how your research provides new empirical insights that can resolve this debate/conflict, enabling us to better understand and explain the phenomenon compared with how we could before (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Crane et al., 2016; Doran et al., 2022; Sigala, 2021). Alternatively, you may wish to reframe or deconstruct an issue or a concept, enabling you to look at it differently and offer new questions not previously asked (Bramwell, 2015; Doran et al., 2022; Rodriguez Sanchez et al., 2019; Xin et al., 2013).

Another approach that can offer a revelatory contribution is the application of theories and concepts from alternative disciplines (beyond leisure and its sub-areas of sport, travel and tourism, hospitality, festivals and events, and arts and culture). This is considered to offer more originality and a stronger contribution than (re)testing a known leisure theory in a new leisure context (Rodriguez Sanchez et

al., 2019) (gap spotting/incremental contribution), as it contributes to leisure's theoretical advancement (Bramwell, 2015). Theories from psychology, economics, sociology, management, and marketing disciplines are most often used (Doran et al., 2022). To further enhance the originality of this contribution, it is best to modify the borrowed theory/concept to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the leisure context you are studying. Otherwise, it will only make an incremental contribution to the original discipline from where it was borrowed.

Another strategy authors can adopt is making a consolidatory contribution to the leisure literature (Doran et al., 2022). This is a dedicated literature review of scholarly work, but it must advance knowledge in some way. To address the subjective nature of narrative reviews, scholars tend to adopt a systematic approach to this. However, simply restating the frequency of publications on a subject in specific journals or commenting on the most/least prevalent themes or methodological approaches does not advance knowledge and offer an original contribution. Instead, scholars who adopt this approach should look for conceptualising new connections between previously separate issues or processes or by refining and developing new categories, typologies, frameworks, models or theory (Bramwell, 2015; Doran et al., 2022; Sigala, 2021; Xin et al., 2013).

The aim of this editorial is fourfold. First, it is to encourage authors to clearly articulate the value of their manuscript. This must be front and centre in the abstract and introduction sections and consistently referenced throughout the manuscript. Secondly, to embolden authors to be intentional and confident when doing this and not devalue or downplay their work by solely adopting the incremental contribution claim of gap spotting. Thirdly, we want to support the theoretical advancement of leisure and encourage scholars to engage in theoretical and methodological critique, wider social science debates, and consider the impact of their work. That's why we now accept industry case studies and methodology research notes alongside empirical articles. Finally, the Editors, Editorial Board and reviewers of the World Leisure Journal advocate the development of others, and we welcome submissions from researchers at all stages of their careers. We hope that the focus of this editorial is of use to early career researchers or a handy reminder to more experienced scholars.

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