Cable Wakeboarding for the First Time: How Young People Make Sense of Risk in Adventure Recreation

Erika Wall

Abstract
Cable wakeboarding can be defined as a risky adventure recreation activity in which young people are the primary participants. Based on interviews and observations focusing on cable wakeboarding in Sweden, young people’s understanding of the risks associated with this activity was analysed. According to the thematic content analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes, the participants’ interpretations of risk were related to the social/spatial context of the adventure recreation activity. Furthermore, the analysis resulted in the identification of two themes: the content of the cable wakeboarding information and procedures, and the city beach community. Overall, the participants’ sense-making of risk in adventure recreation was explored and found to be framed by local attachment and a combination of individualistic and collectivistic perspectives of risk.

Keywords
Sense-making of risk, risk, leisure, cable wakeboarding

Introduction
In everyday life, young people encounter various risks, which they assess and manage in different ways. In many cases, individuals are involuntarily exposed to certain risks, but there are occasions in which individuals choose to take risks, not least in the context of various leisure activities—including climbing, skydiving, jetskiing and white-water rafting—which have been previously defined using terms, such as lifestyle sports (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011), outdoor sports (Van Bottenburg...
Cable wakeboarding, the focus of the present article, can fit into several of these categories, but is herein referred to as adventure recreation (Lynch et al., 2007).

Cable wakeboarding is an example of a risky adventure recreation activity in which accidents primarily affect young people, who are also overrepresented among the practitioners of the sport (Baker et al., 2010). Adventure recreation activities are typically outdoor activities that require some degree of physical exertion and endurance—and almost invariably some degree of risk (Lynch et al., 2007).

In the present study, the focus is on young people’s voluntary risk-taking when cable wakeboarding. Cable wakeboarding, like wakeboarding, was adapted from snowboarding (Hostetler et al., 2005) and involves riding a board while being towed by a carrier suspended from a circuit of moving cables that are fixed a few metres above the water’s surface. The risks associated with cable wakeboarding are primarily accidents with injuries to the head or neck (Baker et al., 2010). Cable wakeboarding is a relatively small-scale activity, yet it is not possible for participants to fully understand all of the abstract systems they may encounter (Giddens, 1991).

Since cable wakeboarding requires someone to operate the cables, it is particularly interesting to look at the relationship between the operators and the wakeboarders when studying how young people make sense of the risks they may encounter when participating in adventure recreation activities. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate how young people make sense of risk while cable wakeboarding for the first time.

**Background**

Risk is often described as an organizing principle of modern society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). It is a concept with a great variety of definitions not only because of its frequent colloquial use but also as a result of its increasing use in the social sciences. Risk has been emphasized as a central theme when studying young people and it has been argued that risk involves framing the complexities of emerging adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Green et al., 2000). In the present study, risk is understood as a phenomenon that is created within social processes; it is a relational concept that varies according to time and place (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). As such, risk must be understood in relation to specific contexts and is, thus, historically, socially and spatially context-bound (e.g., Boholm, 1998; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Lupton, 1999a; 1999b; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003).

Research concentrating on the socio-cultural context of risk is often concerned with how people perceive risk and how, in interactions with one another, they create shared understandings of risk (Lupton, 1999a; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). One element of this is the sense-making of risk (Weick, 1988; Weick et al., 2005), namely, how a specific risk is made understandable by relating it to various socio-spatial contexts. The process of meaning-making is inherently social; since an individual’s meaning-making is shaped by direct and indirect social interactions, they react to the environments that surround them (Weick, 1988). This means that the specific situation and context in which the risk arises is crucial to the interpretation of the
risk. In interactions with other people, an individual can evaluate and re-evaluate specific risks or unexpected situations (e.g., Boholm & Corvellec, 2011). That is, with no previous experience or knowledge of the risk and/or situation, meaning-making does not revolve around the right way to relate to the risk so much as it sets out to create a reasonable understanding of the risk encountered (Weick et al., 2005). This theoretical understanding of risk is especially central when it comes to the adventure activities studied here, though, as Simmel (1971) argued, adventures can be understood as a certain form of experience in which individuals choose uncertainty.

Regarding the sense-making of risk among young people, Wall and Olofsson (2008) suggested a two-dimensional model in which risk is materialized and given meaning in terms of dimensions of individualism and collectivism, and local attachment and local detachment. In other words, young people make sense of risk based on social contextualizing and the understanding of the specific risk is related either to the individual himself/herself or to a broader community. This viewpoint defines whether the risk is understood as based on individual or collective perspectives. Also, young people make sense of risks in relation to a spatial context in which the degree of local attachment of the risk is central (Wall & Olofsson, 2008). Therefore, similar risk perceptions can hide different understandings of the risks encountered.

Regarding adventure recreation, risk has attracted considerable interest in literature and has proved to be a central component in various definitions of adventure recreation. For example, the concepts of adventure recreation and lifestyle sports include an element of risk, albeit to varying degrees (e.g., Lynch et al., 2007; Wheaton, 2004). Indeed, in some cases, there are even references to risk recreation (e.g., Lynch et al., 2007). Different perspectives on risk can be found in the literature on adventure recreation (Gstaettner et al., 2018). The link between risk and leisure has been especially pinpointed when studying young people (Bjarnadóttir, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2004). Among the many themes addressed are the factors that influence young people’s risk-taking (Graham et al., 2018), including their decisions to engage in risky recreational activities (Creyer et al., 2003), the quality of the experience and the risk perception associated with high-altitude rock climbing (Delle Fave et al., 2003), changes in risk perceptions of adventure recreation over time (Morgan & Stevens, 2008) and subjective perceptions of risk (Pereira, 2005). In several studies, risk was considered an important concept due to the choice to participate in activities despite the risk of accidents and/or injuries; such studies focused on various adventure recreation activities, including parkour (Kidder, 2013), scuba diving (Dimmock, 2009; Morgan & Stevens, 2008), high-altitude mountaineering (Pereira, 2005), various forms of downhill skiing (Pawelec, 2013) and mountain biking (Creyer et al., 2003).

As for how participants perceive the risks of adventure recreation, there is consensus in literature that inexperienced participants tend to perceive the activity as riskier than more experienced participants (Morgan & Stevens, 2008). Literature also agrees that people who take part in risky activities often seek the same experience again (Creyer et al., 2003; Fluker & Turner, 2000; Pidgeon et al., 2003). Participation in such sports seems to stem from the same motives as traditional sports, along with the search for emotional release (Zhou et al., 2019). Some researchers have
argued that people who like adventure recreation are searching for a sense of fear and distress in what amounts to an expression of perceived risk (Priest, 1993; Priest & Stevens, 2008). Meanwhile, Martha and Laurendeau (2010) showed that those participating in high-risk sports, that is, skydivers and paragliders, perceive their own vulnerability to serious injury as higher than that of others. However, the focus on risk in terms of such activities has been challenged and Brymer and Feletti (2020) argued that many other activities might be related to a greater number of injuries and even death. Meanwhile, as Lynch and Dibben (2014, p. 180) expressed, ‘it is not necessarily true that participants pursue risk for the sake of risk-taking’. Therefore, participating in risky activities might not be an expression of risk-taking but an acceptance of the possible risks associated with the activity (Brymer, 2011; Lynch & Dibben, 2014).

Studying young people’s participation in adventure recreation activities from a risk perspective is especially relevant. During emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), young people are constantly faced with uncertainties related to cultural norms and values. For example, young people’s everyday life decisions are related to the thoughts and actions of their peers, topics discussed in media and society, and so on (Graham et al., 2018). Therefore, Graham et al. (2018) argued that youth perspectives of risk are under evaluated when it comes to how young people perceive, interpret and act regarding a risk. As such, additional information is needed to better understand how young people who participate in adventure activities make sense of the risks related to those activities.

**Method**

The present study is based on in-depth interviews, informal conversations and observations. These methods were used to gather data on individuals’ experiences and actions when first attempting cable wakeboarding and on the socio-spatially defined context in which the activity took place.

**Data Collection**

This study was conducted at a lakeside public park, hereinafter called ‘the city beach’, where cable wakeboarding was offered. The park is located close to the centre of a Swedish city (approx. 60,000 inhabitants). The chosen time for data collection was daylight hours during the annual city festival in the summer of 2013. The festival consisted of a wide variety of activities, including music, cultural and sporting events and farmers’ markets. Among the many events on offer were a number of adventure activities, including trips in a rigid-hulled inflatable boat and the chance to try out cable wakeboarding. During the chosen data collection period, there were many tourists, as well as locals, at the city beach and opportunities to try out various adventure activities, creating a potential sample population of people spontaneously trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time. Data were collected on the spot by the author and an assistant.

The data collection focused on young people, specifically those who chose to try out cable wakeboarding for the first time. Their experiences were elicited before and
after they tried out the activity. Also, the organizers responsible for the operation of the cable were included in the study.

The data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews (four informants), informal conversations (twelve informants) and observations (during five full days at the city beach), all made within the area of the city beach. The in-depth interviews and informal conversations were carefully documented through extensive field notes and the in-depth interviews were also audio recorded.

Due to the characteristics of the social setting at the city beach, which were framed by continuous small talk among various people, it was easy to ask people about participating in the study and ask background questions on demographics. That is, participants were recruited among those who had been observed participating in cable wakeboarding. The in-depth interviews were retrospective, whereas informal conversations were made before the participant tried out cable-wakeboarding for the first time and the in-depth interviews were made afterwards.

To ensure the study remained focused and to achieve the purpose of the study, the data were collected based on the following themes: information, including the information given by the cable wakeboarding organizers and how it was grasped and understood by the participants; the experience itself, including the participants’ experiences trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time and the ways in which they reacted to the potential risks involved; past experiences, including participants’ stories about their own and others’ past experiences of other types of adventure recreation; actions, including the participants and organizers’ actions before, during and after the participants tried cable wakeboarding for the first time, such as how they interacted with friends, other participants (both friends and strangers) and the organizers.

Close attention was paid to how the participants and organizers moved about the site, the places where the various activities were held and the ways in which those activities were linked to the specific conditions at the site. The manner in which the participants and organizers acted relative to the city beach location was included in the of data collection.

The observations included as much detail as possible about the socio-spatially defined context of the cable wakeboarding activity. Some individuals generated more data than others; twelve people were not only observed at the city beach but also participated in informal conversations and four of those individuals also participated in in-depth interviews. Of the twelve study participants, nine were first-time cable wakeboarders (four men and five women aged 16 to 25 years) and three were organizers (three middle-aged men). The participants were duly anonymized and given with new names for the purpose of the present study. They can be grouped into the following categories based on their participation in the data collection process:

- Cable wakeboarders who participated in in-depth interviews, informal conversations and observations: Andrew, Anna and Emma.
- Cable wakeboarders who participated in informal conversations and observations: Alexander, Ellen, Malin, Martin, Sofia and William.
- Organizer who participated in an in-depth interview, an informal conversation and observations: Daniel.
Organizers who participated in informal conversations and observations: Rolf (employed to help the wakeboard participants) and Hampus (volunteer at the park).

All of the data collection was carried out in accordance with the Swedish Research Council’s (2011) guidelines for research ethics. At the start of all in-depth interviews and informal conversations, as well as when we photographed identifiable individuals, the participants were informed about the project. The information was given both verbally and in writing and those who chose to participate in in-depth interviews, informal conversations and/or photographs confirmed their decision by signing an informed consent form. This form contained information about the overall purpose of the research, its broad outline, the methods to be used, the possible risks involved, the financing sources, the research institution responsible, the fact that participation was voluntary and the right of the participants to withdraw their consent at any time. Only individuals who gave informed consent to participate were referenced specifically within the field notes. Other persons, situations and settings were described in the field notes and/or photographed in ways in which no specific person could be recognized. For example, the field notes included comments such as ‘a group of middle-aged women who passed by’, and photos that included individuals who were not informed about the study or who chose not to participate were taken from behind and/or from afar so that the images did not include recognizable faces.

The data consisted of audio recordings, transcripts, field notes and photographs. The transcripts and field notes were analysed using thematic content analysis, as described by Braun et al. (2019). Underlying themes in the participants’ experiences of cable wakeboarding for the first time were sought while reviewing the data. Specific parts of the transcripts and field notes were marked and grouped during the process of analysis. Preliminary themes were identified and the relations between the themes were given extra focus. Effort was made to identify themes that were as clear as possible, but these themes were not considered mutually exclusive. The themes, which are discussed in detail in the next section, offered information about patterns in describing shared meanings of the sense-making of risk while cable wakeboarding for the first time.

**Results**

First, the context of the city beach will be described, followed by a discussion of the analytical themes related to how the young people trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time made sense of the risk involved. The context of the city beach was clearly defined in spatial terms as it was a place to which people chose to come and where they happily remained for long periods. During the city festival, a number of free activities were offered at the city beach, along with a café selling drinks and snacks, as illuminated in the field notes:

The sun is shining and people at the city beach are enjoying the warm weather. People hang out, play volleyball, have a coffee, sit in the café, sunbathe, go longboarding or cable wakeboarding. (observation, day 1)
According to one of the organizers, the city beach was experienced as ‘a nice place to hang out’ where people could gather to enjoy a relaxed ‘beach atmosphere’. People went to the city beach to sunbathe, swim, picnic and enjoy the sense of community, but the focus was definitely on wakeboarding. Although not all visitors tried it, cable wakeboarding was central to the site, both literally and socially:

As I approach, I see people amusing themselves at the city beach. A small girl trundles past me on a skateboard, her mother behind her, keeping a firm eye on her. I hear shouts and applause from the wakeboard landing stage. It seems a good wakeboarder had just pulled off a great trick, and the spectators at the city beach were showing their appreciation. (observation, day 2)

At the city beach, the wakeboarding area was placed next to the pedestrian and cycle paths and often attracted passers-by who stopped to watch. People of all ages went past. During the data collection period, the visitors consisted mainly of young people, but adults also spent time there. As far as gender was concerned, there was a roughly equal proportion of males and females among the visitors. The city beach attracted both residents and temporary visitors, such as tourists attending the festival.

During the five days we were there, we noted a strong sense of community in the city beach that permeated the entire area and attracted those curious about trying out cable wakeboarding. Both the organizers and the more experienced wakeboarders invited beginners to try it out. The organizers of the cable wakeboarding activities at the city beach offered a number of different pricing options based on how long a ride the participant wanted. During the data collection period, many chose a trial offer of two 4-minute rides for 200 kronor. All of the necessary equipment could be borrowed onsite. Many of the young people who came back several times over the course of the festival were from the local area; among those who tried it for the first time, the geographic spread was greater.

Altogether, the analysis showed that the context of the city beach was focused on cable wakeboarding, and, during this specific period, the opportunity to try out cable wakeboarding framed the whole setting. As such, visiting the city beach meant being tempted to try out this specific activity.

Sense-making of Risk Based on Content and Community

The analysis of the data identified two themes in terms of how young people made sense of risk while cable wakeboarding for the first time: the content of the information and procedures for trying out wakeboarding and the community at the city beach. Together, the themes framed the young people’s process of sense-making when trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time.

Content

The first analytical theme that emerged from the analysis was content. Thus, the results show that the content of the information on risk and safety that the participants received from the organizers from interactions before, during and between cable
wakeboarding, formed the basis for how the young people made sense of risk while trying out cable wakeboarding.

Before the young people at the city beach were able to try out cable wakeboarding, they were individually given verbal information on how to cable wakeboard. It was explained what they should do to get up on the wakeboard again if they fell into the water and how best to position themselves in order to continue wakeboarding. The organizers explained hand signs that the participants should use to communicate with those operating the cable. When the go-ahead to trying out cable wakeboarding was given, a series of further instructions focused on how to complete the ride. Safety was thus an unspoken part of the information about the actual business of cable wakeboarding.

In addition to personal safety equipment, there were also lifebuoys and a rescue boat at the city beach. The following excerpt from the field notes illustrates how the organizer handled a potential rider:

The organizer spends about five minutes carefully instructing Sara (on) how to cable wakeboard. He helps her find the right wetsuit, helmet, life jacket and wakeboard. The two of them then go down to the landing stage, where the organizer continues to explain and instruct as he helps her. The organizer says, ‘It’s like learning to ride a bike. When you’ve got up on the board, the speed will help you balance’. The organizer is completely focused on Sara and the cable speed for the whole time she’s wakeboarding. Whenever she falls in, he turns it off immediately and the cable stops. While Sara is having her turn, the organizer shouts instructions to her: ‘Now you’re leaning the wrong way, go with the momentum, don’t fight it, breathe calmly!’ (observation, day 1)

During the interviews, the participants hardly talked about risk in relation to their experiences of trying out the adventure recreation activity, but they were well aware that accidents might happen, as they were told by the organizers. Possible accidents were described by the young people as accepted as part and parcel of the wakeboarding experience. The fact that some of them were quite prepared for mishaps is evident in the following statement:

I’d been warned that belly flopping and getting water up your nose were the worst, so I was ready for that. But, as a worst-case scenario, I really hadn’t thought of that (laughs); you wouldn’t, would you? It was like, just a belly flop and water up your nose? That wouldn’t exactly be the first time, so I was ready for it. (in-depth interview with Andrew, day 3)

Meanwhile, some of those who tried cable wakeboarding felt uncertain about the lake’s cold, dark water:

I can’t believe I’m doing this. I don’t usually feel at home in the water. I was dreading it when we were sat watching, but everyone was so excited and cheered me on, so I knew I wanted to have another try, and now it feels great. I reckon it had to be their instructions and pep talk that meant I’d even think about trying it again. (informal conversation with Sofia, day 3)

The participants focused on what they experienced and the impulse to try something new and exciting. The activities on offer were described in a positive way as
something exciting (as in the quotation above); even though cable wakeboarding clearly has its risks, it was not something about which the participants chose to talk. Furthermore, whether risk was mentioned and/or what was defined as a risk varied according to personal previous experience. Similarly, some participants described that past individual experiences, that is, experiences of various winter/ski sports, helped normalize things that they assumed others might define as a risk, such as high speeds.

The cable wakeboarding setting was based on communication between the organizers and the young people interested in trying it out. The participants were asked about any experiences of various adventure recreation activities, their abilities and any obstacles to their participation in cable wakeboarding. To ensure this openness, the organizers asked questions about previous experiences with similar activities, including water sports and snowboarding. Due to the nature of their communication and the focus on the procedures needed to cable wakeboard, the risks associated with cable wakeboarding were rendered invisible, despite the participants’ awareness of the risks to which they were exposed when engaging in such activities:

I’ve done a lot of seasons as a ski instructor, so I think that for someone who doesn’t ski, they’d probably say that what I do is some sort of extreme sport. But that’s not what it is if you do it all the time. And not when you compare it with the people I go out with all the time, who might jump even higher or jump further. So, yeah, I like that kind of thing. They’re the sports that are most fun—skiing, mountain biking, climbing—things that leave you needing the loo and, well, nervous. (in-depth interview with Anna, day 2)

Regarding the first theme, content, the details aforementioned illuminate how risk was an unspoken part of the information shared between the young people trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time and the organizers. In addition, the participants described trying out this particular adventure recreation activity in relation to their experiences of other kinds of activities, mostly various winter sports, where the eventuality of accidents was defined as similar to the risks associated with cable wakeboarding, as well as a natural and acceptable part of adventure recreation.

**Community**

The second theme that emerged from the analysis was *community*, which describes how the characteristics of the social context of the city beach informed each participant’s individual experience of risk while trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time. In order to try out cable wakeboarding, interested individuals could not just turn up at the city beach, join in and then disappear from the area. Instead, the wakeboarding was arranged so that everyone had an initial turn lasting 4 minutes, after which they were expected to remain in the area to rest and be given further information and instructions before their second 4-minute session. This meant that they had to spend at least one hour in the area. Between rides, all of the participants socialized with one another in the area. Those who arrived as a group also chose to socialize with other people while they waited for their turn. The social setting invited a wide range of social interactions; many stayed all day and some returned several days in a row.
Further, the flow of information in the direct interactions between the organizers and the participants contributed to the participants’ sense of safety. The organizers’ actions significantly affected how the participants experienced the situation. As people wakeboarded, they actively communicated with the organizers and with friends and onlookers onshore. Therefore, each participant’s interpretation of the situation, including any risks, was an ongoing process in which they made new risk assessments in the course of participating, as the following observation shows:

At the cable, there’s a gang hanging out on the landing stage, waiting for their turn. They all seem to be experienced wakeboarders and the atmosphere is cheerful as they watch a guy who’s good at it. A series of excited shouts and shared laughter (can be heard). The rider out on the water goes for one of the jumps but crashes as he lands. The riders on the landing stage stop talking and look out at the rider in the water, and someone says, ‘Shit, he came down hard on his arse, that must’ve hurt.’ Rolf, who’s operating the cable, shouts to the rider, ‘How are you doing?’ The rider answers, ‘I’m okay.’ He gives a thumbs up too. Rolf waits until the rider has got hold of the rope and then he restarts the cable. The rider gets back up on the board and carries on, seemingly unaffected by his somersault. The rider then pulls up at the landing stage and is greeted by cheery shouts, laughter and high fives. The others shout, ‘Awesome ride!’; ‘Bloody hell, that was committed!’ (and) ‘That didn’t do your arse much good!’ The rider laughs and chats with the other riders. On the shore near the landing stage are a few younger guys, checking out the talented riders, (including) the way they ride and hang out together. I ask the rider who’d fallen in if he’s okay. He answers with a laugh, ‘Hell, yes, it’s cool. A pain in the arse, that’s all. It happens. You know, no pain, no gain, hahaha’. (observation, day 2).

The vast majority of the young people who participated in the activity concentrated on themselves in terms of their interpretations of risk and safety while cable wakeboarding for the first time. An example of this was the way in which the respondents who tried cable wakeboarding said that ‘everyone crashes’, while their interpretation actually related to themselves—’So, I’m going to crash too’. Their interpretation of the anticipated risks facing all participants was thus based not on an overall perspective on risk but on their individual one. Meanwhile, the shared experience was central to the situation because the social context of the city beach was crucial to each individual’s practise. In fact, there was a continuous, active attempt from the organizers to make every individual feel welcome and a part of the community:

I hang out here all the time (laughs). Even when I’m not working, I hang out here. The place and the people—the atmosphere is unbeatable, and I think everyone who comes here feels it. Cable wakeboarding is a sociable activity—even if the actual ride is an individual thing, everything to do with it is cool. But I feel that’s the same with all board sports. (formal interview with Rolf, day 3)

Taking part in an adventure activity as a way to socialize helped the participants normalize any associated risks related to trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time. Applying a participatory perspective when analysing the data shows that a sense of community was central. The participants focused on the sense of community in experiencing something new and exciting together. One said how important this social cohesion was in relation to their sense of safety:
When you come around this way (towards the landing stage), it’s nice to see everyone standing (and) watching; it feels sort of safe. (in-depth interview with Emma, day 2)

Therefore, the second theme shows how the community was central to the young people’s experiences of this adventure recreation activity. Participating in the activity was not limited to the wakeboarding itself but included participating in the community of the city beach. As noted earlier, the activity was organized so that interested persons were expected to remain in the wakeboarding area for at least an hour, but they often stayed longer than that. In this setting, informal social relations were built and beginners became included within the social milieu characterizing the setting of the city beach.

Discussion

In the present study, adventure recreation experiences, specifically the experiences of young people cable wakeboarding for the first time, were examined. Due to the riskiness of this activity (Baker et al., 2010), a risk perspective was used to explore how the participants made sense of risk while trying out a new activity. The decision to try an adventure activity, such as cable wakeboarding, involves choosing to put oneself into an unfamiliar situation with strangers in order to engage in an activity associated with accident-related risks of varying degrees (Baker et al., 2010). In order to cable wakeboard, the rider has to work with the cable operator (e.g., Lynch et al., 2007). To manage this uncertain and risky situation, the participants had to have confidence that the technology used to run the cable would work, the cable was installed correctly, the equipment was suitable and tested as fit for purpose and so on, which meant that their relationships with the organizers became central. The organizers’ operation of the cable, how and what information they gave, and their actions all formed the expert system that the participants encountered (e.g., Giddens, 1991). In effect, the organizers served as the guarantors of the participants’ safety.

In light of the theories of the sense-making of risk (Weick, 1988; Weick et al., 2005), the present study indicates that the participants’ sense of safety when cable wakeboarding was framed by a trustful relationship between the organizers and the participants. The processes of confidence building and sense-making of risk (Wall & Olofsson, 2008; Weick, 1988; Weick et al., 2005) intertwined in a way that was especially visible in the participants’ stories of how they experienced risk and danger, along with the organizers’ information, instructions and actions, as captured within the themes of content and community. The findings plainly show that these themes were the key elements in people’s sense-making of risk, giving the interpretation that the activity of cable wakeboarding was perceived as mostly safe.

The social context that was created around the activity in question was found to be significant in the process of interpreting the risk. This supports previous theory and research in which risk was understood as something that was socially constructed (Lupton, 1999a; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Specifically, when analysing the data in relation to the social dimensions highlighted within the theory of sense-making of risk (Wall & Olofsson, 2008; Weick, 1988; Weick et al., 2005), it became clear that the participants’ understanding of the potential risks involved with cable wakeboarding was evaluated and re-evaluated while they discussed the activity with
the other people in the cable wakeboarding area. In other words, their understanding of risk was affected by the (temporary) social relationships they formed within the context of the city beach. These conversations can be understood as an expression of the need to create a reasonable understanding of the potential risks encountered (Weick et al., 2005) by meaning-making through interaction (Weick, 1988).

As previously mentioned, in their research on how young people make sense of risk, Wall and Olofsson (2008) identified two theoretical dimensions of meaning-making related to the social (individualism and collectivism) and spatial (local attachment and local detachment) contexts framing the interpretation of risk. The present study shows that the participants’ sense-making of risk was largely related to the socio-spatially delimited environment, which formed the context of the adventure activity. Trying out cable wakeboarding at the city beach was framed as more of a social activity (community) than a risky and challenging type of adventure recreation (e.g., Lynch et al., 2007). This supports Wall and Olofsson’s (2008) research on making sense of risk in relation to specific social and spatial contexts, which they described as dimensions of individualism and collectivism, and local attachment and local detachment. Here, the process of sense-making was clearly locally attached to the city beach and framed by this specific context.

Regarding the social dimension (individualism and collectivism), one can argue that the participants in the present study understood the risks related to cable wakeboarding from an individual perspective due to their individual experiences of trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time and how they expressed their experiences of participating in this adventure recreation activity. However, the strong community of the city beach led the participants to describe their individual experiences trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time in relation to that community, indicating that the risk was made sense of from a collectivistic view (Wall & Olofsson, 2008). Therefore, the process of the sense-making of risk was characterized by a heavy reliance on the organizers and others taking part in the cable wakeboarding at the city beach, which could be classified in terms of the themes of content and community and framed by trustful relationships among those trying out cable wakeboarding for the first time.

In this social community, one could say that the process of meaning-making was coloured by the trust felt by every single participant in that particular situation—despite the knowledge that cable wakeboarding entailed a series of greater and lesser risks. As such, the young people trying out cable wakeboarding at the city beach made sense of the risks associated with the activity through their interactions with others, framed by the social-cultural context clearly attached to the specific place (local attachment, Wall & Olofsson, 2008), whereas the riskiness of the activity was given meaning by a combination of individual and collective perspectives of the risk (Wall & Olofsson, 2008).

In the present study, the participants’ views of cable wakeboarding for the first time were examined with a focus on how they made sense of risk in this particular situation. However, the results of the study were clearly related to the specific context of the city beach in a small city of Sweden. Therefore, the present findings cannot be generalized to other contexts and other adventure recreation activities. As such, the results from this study must be read with these methodological limitations in mind.
Conclusion and Future Studies

The pursuit of adventure recreation activities has become increasingly common. With individuals voluntarily choosing to expose themselves to various types of risks, ever greater demands are placed on organizers and, indeed, society at large to prevent accidents. The prevention of injuries in adventure recreation activities requires extensive knowledge of how individuals perceive, interpret and evaluate risk (Creyer et al., 2003) and how relations between organizers and participants and between different participants are integral to the specific situation that characterizes each individual’s sense-making of risk (Wall & Olofsson, 2008; Weick, 1988; Weick et al., 2005). Only by considering the specific situation, its social characteristics and its determining factors, can we begin to understand how the individual relates to risk and, therefore, how risks can be prevented. Here, the importance of context in making sense of risk in adventure recreation was highlighted in relation to the themes of content and community.

Cable wakeboarding is an adventure recreation activity that is associated with risk and accidents mostly affect young people who in a higher degree participate in such activities (Baker et al., 2010). However, the concept of risk was not the focus of the interviews and conversations with the participants. Instead, the present study produced an unambiguous result in terms of experiences of safety. That is, all participants said they strongly trusted the organizers and felt safe before, during and after they tried cable wakeboarding. These feelings might be related to previous experiences of other kinds of adventure recreation activities. These results can also be compared to previous research on extreme sports, such as Delle Fave et al.’s (2003) study of climbing, in which risk was proven to be less central to the climbers’ (positive) understanding, which was better understood in terms of motivation and thrill-seeking. Therefore, future studies should analyse the relation between sense-making of risk and motivation to participate in adventure recreation activities.

In addition, the findings related to experiences of safety cannot be considered entirely positive because they also indicate that the trust and sense of community that characterized this particular activity may have contributed to a normalization of the risks associated with the activity, rendering them invisible to the participants. That is, the role of trust as a meaning-making element in the sense-making of risk deserves further attention. Specifically, future studies should explore whether the choice to participate in any adventure recreation activity really is an informed choice built upon reasonable risk evaluation.

To sum up, the findings show that the participants’ interpretations of risk were related to the specific themes (content, community), and the process of sense-making can be understood as framed by the social/spatial context, especially the relationships between the participants and the organizers and the other people in the city beach.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.
References

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Baker, J. I., Griffin, R., Braunegis, P. F., Rue, L. W., & McGwin, G. (2010). A comparison of wakeboard-, water skiing-, and tubing-related injuries in the United States, 2000–2007. *Journal of Sport Science and Medicine, 9*(1), 92–97.

Beck, U. (1992). Risk society: Towards a new modernity. SAGE Publications.

Bjarnadóttir, R. (2004). Modern adolescents’ leisure activities: A new field for education? *Young, 12*(4), 299–315.

Boholm, Å. (1998). Comparative studies of risk perception: A review of twenty years of research. *Journal of Risk Research, 1*(2), 135–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/117453980346715

Boholm, Å., & Corvellec, H. (2011). A relational theory of risk. *Journal of Risk Research, 14*(2), 175–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2010.515313

Braun, V., Clarke V., Hayfield N., & Terry G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences*. Springer.

Brymer, E. (2011). Risk taking in extreme sports: A phenomenological perspective. *Annals of Leisure Research, 13*(1–2), 218–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2010.9686845

Brymer, E. & Feletti, F. (2020). Beyond risk: the importance of adventure in the everyday life of young people. *Annals of Leisure Research, 23*(3), 429–446. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2019.1659837

Buckley, R. C. (2018). To analyse thrill, define extreme sports. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1216. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01216

Cohen, R., Baluch, B., & Duffy, L. J. (2018). Defining extreme sport: Conceptions and misconceptions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1974. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01974

Creyer, E. H., Ross, W. T., & Evers, D. (2003). Risky recreation: An exploration of factors influencing the likelihood of participation and the effects of experience. *Leisure Studies, 22*(3), 239–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/026143603200068000

Delle Fave, A., Bassi, M., & Massimini, F. (2003). Quality of experience and risk perception in high-altitude climbing. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 15*(1), 82–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200305402

Dimmock, K. (2009). Finding comfort in adventure: Experiences of recreational scuba divers. *Leisure Studies, 28*(3), 279–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360902951674

Douglas, M., & Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*. University of California Press.

Fluken, M. R., & Turner, L. W. (2000). Needs, motivations and expectations of a commercial whitewater rafting experience. *Journal of Travel Research, 38*(4), 124–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/004728750003800406

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (1997). *Young people and social change: Individualism and risk in late modernity*. Open University Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in late modern age*. Polity Press.

Gilchrist, P., & Wheaton, B. (2011). Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth engagement: Examining the emergence of parkour. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 3*(1), 109–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2010.547866
Graham, L., Jordan, L., Hutchinson, A., & De Wet, N. (2018). Risky behaviour: A new framework for understanding why young people take risks. *Journal of Youth Studies, 21*(3), 324–339. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1380301

Green, E., Mitchell, W., & Bunton, R. (2000). Contextualizing risk and danger: An analysis of young people’s perceptions of risk. *Journal of Youth Studies, 3*(2), 109–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/713684369

Gstaettner, A. M., Lee, D., & Rodger, K. (2018). The concept of risk in nature-based tourism and recreation: A systematic literature review. *Current Issues in Tourism, 21*(15), 1784–1809. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2016.1244174

Hostetler, S. G., Hostetler, T. L., Smith, G. A., & Xiang, H. (2005). Characteristics of water skiing-related and wakeboarding-related injuries treated in emergency departments in the United States, 2001–2003. *American Journal of Sports Medicine, 33*(7), 1065–1070. https://doi.org/10.1177/0363546504271748

Houge Mackenzie, S., & Brymer, E. (2018). Conceptualising adventurous nature sport: A positive psychology perspective. *Annals of Leisure Research, 23*(1), 79–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2018.1483733

Kidder, J. L. (2013). Parkour: Adventure, risk, and safety in the urban environment. *Qualitative Sociology, 36*(3), 231–250. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-013-9254-8

Lupton, D. (1999a). *Risk*. Routledge.

Lupton, D. (1999b). Risk and sociocultural theory. In Lupton, D. (Ed.), *Risk and sociocultural theory: New directions and perspectives*. CUP.

Lupton, D., & Tulloch, J. (2002). Risk is part of your life: Risk epistemologies among a group of Australians. *Sociology, 36*(2), 317–334. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038502036002005

Lynch, P., & Dibben, M. (2014). Maintaining leisure values in adventure recreation events: The role of trust. *Annals of Leisure Research, 17*(2), 180–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2014.911663

Lynch, P., Jonson, P., & Dibben, M. (2007). Exploring relationships of trust in ‘adventure’ recreation. *Leisure Studies, 26*(1), 47–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500284767

Martha, C., & Laurendeau, J. (2010). Are perceived comparative risks realistic among high-risk sports participants? *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 8*(2), 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2010.9671938

Mitchell, W., Bunton, R., & Green, E. (Eds.). (2004) *Young people, risk and leisure: Constructing identities in everyday life*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Morgan, C., & Stevens, C. A. (2008). Changes in perceptions of risk and competence among beginning scuba divers. *Journal of Risk Research, 11*(8), 951–966.

Pawelec, I. (2013). Risk taking propensity among people involved in various forms of winter recreation on the example of skiing. *Central European Journal of Sport Science and Medicine, 2*(2), 39–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/13669870802187691

Pereira, A. L. (2005). The experience of risk in high-altitude climbing. *World Leisure Journal, 47*(2), 38–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/04419057.2005.9674394

Pidgeon, N. F., Kasperson, R. E., & Slovic, P. (2003). *The social amplification of risk*. CUP.

Priest, S. (1993). A new model for risk taking. *Journal of Experimental Education, 16*(1), 50–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/105382599301600111

Priest, S., & Stevens, C. A. (2008). Changes in perceptions of risk and competence among beginning scuba divers. *Journal of Risk Research, 11*(8), 951–966. https://doi.org/10.1080/13669870802187691

Simmel, G. (1971). The adventurer. In D. N. Levine (Ed.), *Georg Simmel on individuality and social forms* (pp. 187–198). University of Chicago Press.

Swedish Research Council. (2011). *Good research practice*. Author.

Tulloch, J., & Lupton, D. (2003). *Risk and everyday life*. SAGE Publications.
Van Bottenburg, M., & Salome, L. (2010). The indoorisation of outdoor sports: An exploration of the rise of lifestyle sports in artificial settings. *Leisure Studies, 29*(2), 143–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360903261479

Wall, E., & Olofsson, A. (2008). Young people making sense of risk: How meanings of risk are materialized within the social context of everyday life. *Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 16*(4), 431–448. https://doi.org/10.1177/110330880801600405

Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies, 25*(4), 305–317. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1988.tb00039.x

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking, *Organization Science, 16*(4), 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133

Wheaton, B. (2004). Introduction: Mapping the lifestyle sport-scape. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference. Routledge.*

Zhou, L., Chlebosz, K., Tower, J., & Morris, T. (2019). An exploratory study of motives for participation in extreme sports and physical activity. *Journal of Leisure Research, 51*(1), 56–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2019.1627175

**Author’s Bio-sketch**

**Erika Wall** is associate professor in sociology and senior lecturer in rehabilitation science, Mid Sweden University. Her research interests centre on how people make sense of risk in their everyday lives. With the help of sociological perspectives on risk, she shows how norms, emotions and gender inform the way people make sense of risk by relating it to different socio-spatial contexts.