



Place attachment and recreation experience preference: A further exploration of the relationship



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ABSTRACT

Place attachment and recreation experience preferences (REP) have received increasing attention in natural resource management, with previous literature (Anderson & Fulton, 2008; Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004) indicating that REP predicts place attachment development. This study expands current insight into the relationship between the two concepts. Specifically, we tested two predictive models: the first explored the influence of REP dimensions on place attachment dimensions as tested in previous research; the second explored the influence of place attachment dimensions on REP dimensions alluded to, but not tested, previously. Contrary to expectations, our results did not support the model in which REP predicts place attachment development. Interestingly, our results support the second model and indicate that select place attachment dimensions predict REP dimensions. This positive influence of place attachment on REP dimensions empirically supports the notion that attachment to a setting may influence motivations to visit that setting. Specifically, findings suggest that meaningful social relationships nurtured within the resource encourage visitors to learn, be more knowledgeable, or teach about the resource, and experience quiet, solitude and personal growth. Additionally, respondents' dependence on the resource motivates them to be among others like themselves. Overall, our findings suggest the complexity of REP–place attachment relationships.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Place attachment has emerged as one important concept in recent outdoor recreation research. Managers should be aware that both the influence of experience on place attachment and the relationship of place attachment on the motivation to visit matter and influence each other. Exploring the relationship between place and recreation experience preference may enable resource managers to gain new insights and help further understand the development of visitor motivations. These insights can contribute to more appropriate site development, including social interactions and exchange of knowledge.

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1. Introduction

Effective natural resource management relies on understanding the complex relationships between human experiences and the settings within which they occur. One approach has been to explore the bonds people develop with places (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Conceptualized as place bonding, place attachment, and sense of place, these bonds measure the intangible value of places and have received increased research and management attention during the last decade (Williams & Stewart, 1998).

Early explorations in leisure research primarily focused on describing and measuring place attachment (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminof, 1983; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989; Williams & Vaske, 2003). More recently, attention has turned toward understanding the development of place attachment and its relationship with other variables. One line of investigation explores the influence of recreation experience preferences (REP) on development of place attachment (Anderson & Fulton, 2008; Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). Within the recreation context, researchers use REP scales to measure motivations that drive behavior as well as to gauge the psychological, social, and physiological outcomes associated with this behavior (Driver, Tinsley, & Manfreda, 1991). An underlying notion in REP–place attachment investigations is that outcomes associated with natural resource recreation motivate individuals to interact with the resource and thus facilitate place attachment

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(Kyle, Mowen, et al., 2004). The few empirical studies available suggest a significant positive relationship between REP and place attachment (e.g., Anderson & Fulton, 2008; Kyle, Mowen, et al., 2004). These studies assume that REP leads to the development of place attachment, even though previous research recognizes that motivation may also act as an outcome variable (e.g., White, 2008) and place attachment as an antecedent variable (e.g., Warzecha & Lime, 2001).

Thus, we posit that place attachment should also be examined as an antecedent variable that influences the outcome variable of recreation motivation. In other words, in addition to the finding that REP influences development of place attachment, connections to a place are likely to motivate a person to visit that place. For example, individuals with strong symbolic/emotional attachment, such as a symbolic connection to a place of historic or religious significance, may be more motivated to visit it for experiences such as learning or connecting with their heritage. This latter argument of place attachment as an antecedent variable influencing the outcome variable of recreation motivation has been suggested by Fredman and Heberlein (2005) and Kyle, Mowen, et al. (2004), but so far has not been tested. Therefore, given the increasing attention to place attachment and REP in natural resource management, this study aims to expand previous insights into the relationship between the two concepts. We examine two predictive models. The first model, following previous research, explores the influence of REP on place attachment dimensions. The second model explores the influence of place attachment dimensions on REP. From a management perspective, this study increases our understandings of the role of place attachment in encouraging visitors to experience natural places. Additionally, it provides insight into how place attachment may predict recreation behavior.

2. Background

2.1. Place attachment

Early humanities and social science scholars used the subjective experiences and meanings associated with a “place” to differentiate it from “space.” An underlying notion was that people often developed a special relationship with a place and that this relationship provided meaning to them (Tuan, 1980). Terms such as sense of place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) and place attachment (Low & Altman, 1992) have been used to describe these human–place bonds. Human geographers, such as Tuan (1975, 1977, 1980) and Altman and Low (1992), have given considerable attention to place attachment. More recently, academics and practitioners in natural resource management and outdoor recreation have also integrated place attachment into their work (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989; Williams & Stewart, 1998). Within the outdoor recreation context, early studies conceptualized place attachment as two dimensional—place identity and place dependence (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Place identity describes the emotional/symbolic ties with a place and refers to those dimensions of the self that describe an individual's identity in relation with his/her physical world (Proshansky, 1978). In other words, place identity describes the bond between an individual's identity and a place. Place identity has also been described as a relationship with a place symbolic of an individual's identity. For example, Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson (1992) describe the US national parks as symbolic of American identity.

The second dimension, place dependence, describes the degree to which a place satisfies the needs or goals of an individual (Schreyer, Jacob, & White, 1981). In a recreation context, a place

may become special because compared to other places it is the preferred place to participate in a certain activity. For instance, a hiker may become dependent on a certain trail if that particular trail satisfies the hiker's goals and there are no other substitute trails nearby. Thus place dependence is functional rather than affective in nature (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001).

Beyond place identity and place dependence, places are often considered special because of the social ties and interactions that they support. The interactionist-based theory of place attachment posits that memories of a setting as well as past, current, and potential future interactions with the setting lead to meaning development and ultimately attachment to that setting (Milligan, 1998). For example, community residents have reported that the primary reason for considering a place special was “family/friend related reasons consisting of interactions among family and friends, family activities, family traditions or heritage and because of memories associated with people at these locales” (Eisenhauer, Krannich, & Blahna, 2000, p. 432). Given that places support the development of meaningful social relationships, it is likely that these places become meaningful too (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005). This potential of a place to nurture or sustain meaningful social relationships has been referred to as social bonding. Social bonding has therefore been considered as another dimension of place attachment beyond place identity and place dependence (Kyle et al., 2005).

Besides understanding the underlying dimensions of place attachment, the increased importance of considering intangible values of places in natural resource management has resulted in a body of literature focusing on the relationship between place attachment and other variables. These studies have examined place attachment as an antecedent, as well as outcome variable. For instance, studies have shown that higher levels of place attachment positively predict sensitivity to impacts (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Warzecha & Lime, 2001), environmentally responsible behavior (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001), support for recreation use fees and spending in a national forest (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003), civic action (Payton, Fulton, & Anderson, 2005), and authentic experiences (Budruk, White, Wodrich, & Van Riper, 2008). In contrast, other research has demonstrated that increased experience use history (Backlund & Williams, 2004; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001) and activity involvement (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; Moore & Graefe, 1994) positively influence place attachment. However, while these studies are beginning to provide some understanding of the associations between place attachment and other variables, much regarding place attachment's ability to predict recreation behaviors remains unknown (Hammit, Kyle, & Oh, 2009).

2.2. Recreation experience preferences (REP)

Motivations refer to the forces that arouse and direct behavior (Iso-Ahola, 1999). Within the outdoor recreation context, motivations have been examined through an experiential approach that focuses on the desired goal states attained through participation in outdoor recreation (Manfredo, Driver, & Tarrant, 1996). This approach is based on expectancy theory (Lawler, 1973) which suggests that “people engage in activities in specific settings to realize a group of psychological outcomes that are known, expected, and valued” (Manning, 2011, p. 168). Consequently, attempts to understand why individuals engage in recreational pursuits view leisure behavior as more than just an activity, and instead as an experience within a particular setting with psychological, social, and physiological outcomes.

Developed by Driver and colleagues (e.g., Driver, 1983; Driver & Brown, 1986; Driver & Knopf, 1977; Driver & Tocher, 1970; Manfredo et al., 1996), REP scales identify recreation motivations and explore

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