

A TYPOLOGY OF PLACE ATTACHMENT AND ACTIVITY INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract: While previous research suggests that place attachment and activity involvement impact visitor perceptions, it has not examined the simultaneous effects of these affective constructs. This study develops a typology of both place attachment and activity involvement. It examines variations between attachment-involvement levels and visitor evaluations of quality. Results indicate that evaluations do vary significantly across the typology with the more attached/more involved visitors evaluating the setting and experience more positively. Such evidence suggests that future research utilize and expand upon the typology. Implications for management of quality recreation experiences are discussed.

Introduction

The study of place attachment and activity involvement continues as an important topical area in the recreation research community. These constructs were designed to measure the extent that an individual values or identifies with a particular setting or activity, respectively. Several studies have explored how these constructs relate to important attitudinal and behavioral variables (Dimanche, Havitz, and Howard, 1993; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson, 1992; McIntyre, 1990). This research indicates that activity involvement and place attachment have an impact on perceptions of both the recreation experience and setting. These studies have focused on either activity involvement or place attachment rather than examining both constructs together in the same research effort. Recreation, however, is a complex phenomena involving not only settings, but experiences within those settings. In light of the dynamic nature of the recreation experience, examining both constructs may provide a more complete framework for integrating the

affective domain into management action. Such an approach would create a framework that would allow for the simultaneous examination of place attachment and activity involvement with other key attitudinal and behavioral variables. For this framework to be useful, it should at least be significantly related to key managerial variables.

One type of managerial variables which has received much attention at the national, state, and even local agency level is customer satisfaction, service quality, and general visitor evaluations. Increasingly, managers are being required to increase efforts which maximize satisfaction, perceptions of service quality, and general visitor evaluations of the agency, setting, and experience. Understanding the role that place attachment and activity involvement plays in determining such evaluations may provide a more justifiable reason for integrating the affective domain into existing management plans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the utility of a combined place attachment-activity involvement typology. Moreover this research seeks to examine how various levels of this typology relate to visitor evaluations of the experience and setting. Specific study objectives are: (1) To examine the relationship between a place attachment-activity involvement typology and setting evaluations, and (2) To examine the relationship between a place attachment-activity involvement typology and experience evaluations. Results may help managers understand how the typology relates to specific evaluations as well as which typology level is most suited to a specific visitor evaluation. This exploratory research may also assist the research community to understand the linkages and distinctions between involvement and satisfaction evaluations.

Methods

The data for this study was obtained from a comprehensive research project conducted at the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in 1993. Funding was provided by the USDA Forest Service. Research objectives for the larger project included gathering information pertaining to current users, use patterns, economic expenditures, and preferences for management. The sampling frame was constructed to include the diversity of activity types and settings found within the National Recreation Area. The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, named for Virginia's highest peak, includes over 115,000 acres of National Forest Land available for public use and enjoyment. It provides a variety of recreation opportunities in both frontcountry and backcountry settings. Specific activity pursuits common to this area include camping, hiking, nature study, auto touring, off-road bicycling, and horseback riding.

Data Collection Procedures

The study utilized both a brief on-site interview and a more detailed mail survey. Visitors who were contacted within a randomized time block were asked to participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate provided answers

to a few brief questions. These questions dealt with trip variables and requested the respondent's address for the purpose of mail-back follow-ups. A mail survey was then given to respondents to be completed and returned after the completion of the visit. Postcard reminders were sent out 10 to 15 days after the initial on-site contact. Participants who did not respond within one to two weeks of the postcard mailings were then sent a second copy of the questionnaire with a cover letter explaining the importance of their participation. As a final request, a postcard reminder was sent in order to encourage participation among previous non-respondents. Data collection started in mid May, 1993 and ended in mid October, 1993. Specific sampling times and locations were chosen in a systematic way to obtain, as representative as possible, a sample of users. Total sampling time was 790 hours.

Instrumentation

While a variety of demographic and behavioral variables were assessed in the larger survey, the present study formulated a typology of place attachment-activity involvement. A 25-item Place Attachment instrument was measured using an adaptation to the Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) scale which was comprised of place identity and place dependence sub-dimensions. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they felt about specific statements (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Such statements included, "This place says a lot about who I am" and "This place is the best place for doing the outdoor activities I enjoy." The Activity Involvement scale used in this study was a modified version of McIntyre's (1990) enduring involvement instrument. This 13-item scale included Attraction, Centrality to Lifestyle, and Self-Expression sub-dimensions. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they felt about specific statements such as, "this activity plays a central role in my life" and "I find that a lot of my life is organized around this activity." Like the place attachment scale, respondents evaluated statements based on a 1 - 5 scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The reliability of both the place attachment and activity involvement scale was acceptable with Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities of .98 and .87, respectively.

Together, place attachment and activity involvement were combined into a four level (or 2 X 2) typology (Table 1). This typology was formed by splitting both constructs into "high" levels and "low" levels according to the median split method. This 2 X 2 typology was then compared with setting evaluations and experience evaluations. Setting evaluations emphasized the physical site and were assessed through two items. The first item asked respondents to evaluate the importance of the site to facilitating their activities (1 = not very important to 7 = extremely important). The second item involved a comparison of the study site to other, similar sites visited in the past year. This item was reverse coded with 1 = much better and 5 = much worse. Experience evaluations dealt with internal psychological states and focused on expectations and overall satisfaction judgments. Again, this involved the use of two items. The first asked respondents to rate the area

based on expectations (1 = much worse than expected to 5 = much better than expected). The second item asked respondents to indicate their overall feelings about the quality of their visit to the site (1 = extremely dissatisfied to 7 = extremely satisfied).

Table 1. A Place Attachment and Activity Involvement Typology

High Activity Involvement**	High Activity Involvement
Low Place Attachment**	High Place Attachment
Low Activity Involvement	Low Activity Involvement
Low Place Attachment	High Place Attachment

** Place Attachment median = 3.69 on a 5 point scale

** Activity Involvement median = 3.44 on a 5 point scale

Analysis

The purpose of this study is to test if any differences exist between a 2 X 2 typology of place attachment-activity involvement and four specific visitor evaluations. Given the categorical nature of the typology and the interval/ordinal nature of the visitor evaluations, a One-Way ANOVA was an appropriate procedure to test for overall differences between the typology and the dependent variables. In order to better discern which typology categories were different across specific evaluations, Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were also applied.

Results

The response rate for this research was sixty-seven percent with a total sample size of 528. The averages for the five-point place attachment and activity involvement scales were 3.71 and 3.46, respectively. After the typology was created via a median split method, cell sizes could be ascertained. The first cell (low place attachment/low activity involvement) represented 171 respondents. The second cell (high place attachment/low activity involvement) contained 79 respondents. The third cell (low place attachment/high activity involvement) contained 90 respondents. Finally, the fourth cell (high place attachment/high activity involvement) represented 174 respondents. There were 14 missing cases excluded from the analysis for a final sample size tally of 514 responses.

The One-Way ANOVA test indicated that overall differences existed across experience and setting evaluations. A total of four F-tests were conducted. All but one F statistic exceeded 10.0 and were significant at the .001 level (Table 2). This indicates that there are significant differences in visitor evaluations across a place attachment-activity involvement typology. More specifically, post-hoc tests indicated that those with high

levels of both place attachment-activity involvement (Cell 4) had more positive setting evaluations than either mixed levels of place attachment-activity involvement or low levels of both. Significant group variations also existed across experience evaluations. Post-hoc analysis indicated that those with high levels of place attachment-activity involvement also had the highest overall satisfaction evaluations (Table 2). The relationship between typology

categories and the comparison of the visit to personal expectations item did, however, deviate from patterns found in the former analyses. Here, those with the highest levels of place attachment (Cells 2 and 4) had the higher visit evaluations compared to personal expectations regardless of activity involvement levels (Table 2). Thus, it seems as if activity involvement plays a lesser role in influencing this type of experience evaluation.

Table 2. One Way ANOVA of visitor evaluations across a four group Activity Involvement and Place Attachment Typology with Tukey's Post Hoc test for group differences.

Visitor Evaluation	F statistic	Low Place Attachment	High Place Attachment	Low Place Attachment	High Place Attachment
		Low Activity Involvement N=171	Low Activity Involvement N=79	High Activity Involvement N=90	High Activity Involvement N=174
Importance of the site to their activities (1 not important - 7 very important)	33.43**	4.67 (A***)	5.58 (B)	5.34 (B)	6.05 (C)
Comparison of the site to similar sites visited in the past year. (1 better - 5 worse)	10.57**	2.62 (A)	2.04 (B,C)	2.56 (A,C)	1.84 (B)
Comparison of the visit to personal expectations (1 worse - 5 better)	10.53**	3.57 (A)	3.88 (B)	3.54 (A)	4.00 (B)
Overall satisfaction rating (1 dissatisfied-7 very satisfied.)	5.31*	5.81 (A)	6.19 (B)	6.04 (A,B)	6.24 (B)

* Sig. at .01 level

** Sig. at .001 level

*** Cells with at least one corresponding letter are not statistically different from another with the same letter

Conclusions and Implications

This study suggests that a typology of place attachment-activity involvement can be a useful tool in which to segment visitors according to varying evaluations. Place attachment and activity involvement exhibited positive and significant relationships with setting and experience evaluations. This finding partially confirms previous work focused upon the relationship of activity involvement and service quality (Dimanche & Havitz, 1995), but may also contradict other studies such as Applegate and Clark's (1987) research on birders, who noted that the most committed birders were less satisfied with their experience. Clearly, further research is required before a positive linkage between satisfaction and attachment/involvement is established. Future studies could expand upon this exploratory research by comparing the typology to other key satisfaction measures such as the service quality instrument or site-specific managerial preferences and evaluations. While the 2 X 2 typology represents an important step in considering the collective role of activity involvement and place attachment, this framework could be further expanded. Given that both instruments are multi-dimensional, the typology could be further broken down by sub-dimensions. Interval scales could also be used as an alternative to a typology. Such modification may help researchers and managers understand which types of place attachment and which types of activity involvement contribute most to varying visitor evaluations.

One implication which may be taken from this study is the positive relationship between place attachment, activity involvement, and setting/experience evaluations. Public recreation agencies are increasingly being asked to provide not only a breadth of diverse recreation opportunities, but are also being asked to provide a satisfactory level of quality of those opportunities. At the site specific level, outdoor recreation managers are increasingly held accountable for satisfaction and are evaluated by visitor evaluations. Thus, positively influencing attachments to recreation settings and involvement with particular activities may be a viable strategy to increase visitor satisfaction. Such a strategy could include tactics such as improvements to educational programs designed to increase site appreciation, conducting site or community involvement events, or providing activity workshops at the site. Given that many outdoor recreation sites are under the purview of the public domain, issues of equity must first be addressed before implementing actions based on the "more is better assumption." Indeed, efforts to force an increased place attachment or activity involvement upon occasional users may have the undesired consequence of decreasing visitor evaluations.

The findings of this study suggest that evaluations are different across a typology of place attachment and activity involvement. Future studies should recognize that recreation activities do not occur unto themselves, but require settings. Likewise, the setting is actualized through

activity experiences which occur on their site. The outdoor recreation profession has been very adept at categorizing and managing for physical setting attributes as well as inventorying activity types. The field has been less successful in defining the personal meaning of places/activities and incorporating these affective states into management frameworks. The present study adds to the increasing volume of attachment/involvement research designed to address this issue.

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