



THE EXPERIENCE OF VISITING HOME AND FAMILIAR PLACES

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Abstract: This paper identifies and seeks to explain a relatively novel topic in tourism studies: individuals' experiences in returning to previous places of significance and familiarity in their lives. The topic is labelled VHFP (Visiting Home and Familiar Places) and is linked to but conceptually independent of VFR studies. It is argued that VHFP can be understood by considering foundation work in neuroscience as well as integrating contributions from human emotions, memory, time perception and the psychology of possibility. Several studies are proposed to develop this topic by employing varied paradigms of inquiry and a range of familiar and innovative methods. **Keywords:** going home, emotions, time perception, memory, neuroscience. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

It is the core argument of this paper that there is an understudied category of travel which may be broadly captured by the expression VHFP- Visiting Home and Familiar Places. This category of travel is seen as conceptually independent of VFR-Visiting Friends and Relatives travel- although there are potential links as well as dissimilarities. Our interest in going “home” in this context is defined as visits to the constellation of locations and their associations which individuals experience during their periods of growing up (cf. Coles & Timothy, 2004; Duval, 2004; White & White, 2007). This interest also encompasses a concern with past relationships and reflections on previous activities. Additionally we will also consider locations where individuals have spent considerable time and consequently feel familiar and have extensive previous knowledge of the setting. In the VHFP formulation we are not interested in tourists and visitors returning from their travels to their current home or place of residence (Maoz, 2006).

The paper consists of two interrelated sections. In the first section the aim of the discussion is to provide a rich understanding of the experience of returning “home” or to very familiar places. This goal will be pursued by considering a suite of interrelated concepts in the

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areas of emotion, human memory, cognition, identity and the perception of time. It will be argued that taken together these concepts provide prompts and directions for tourism researchers to investigate this somewhat understudied form of travel. The second aim of the paper, which is addressed in a separate and subsequent section, is to identify specific studies deriving from these conceptual foundations. These studies include proposals for direct empirical work as well as investigations of tourism sector involvement in this kind of travel.

The motivation for exploring this topic is twofold. Tourism researchers, like their wider circle of social science cousins, need to be alert to phenomena which have been partially neglected since marginal topics can sometimes reveal core points about the major concerns of the study field. For example tourism researchers have been concerned with issues of identity and self perception for some time (Bowen & Clarke, 2009; Clifford, 1997; Cohen, 1984; Pearce, 1982; Ryan, 2002). It can be proposed that the phenomenon of VHFP travel is related to these issues and may offer new insights (Duval, 2004; Lew & Wong, 2005). A second motivating force for the interest in tourists going home lies in the challenges such travels raise in the commercial world. If VHFP travel matters to quite a few people, in what ways can tourism marketers and destination managers shape, stimulate and successfully support this kind of tourist experience? Again it would seem appropriate to not just ask the question but to analyse the topic and begin its assessment and measurement.

In contemporary society, particularly in western cultures and among the more affluent members of those societies, the prevailing pattern of where people come from and why they are there in any workplace or community is a jigsaw of identity related stories and accounts (Desforges, 2000; Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006). A corollary of this diversity is that there are many possible patterns in the VHFP experience. In brief, the phenomenon in which we are interested is messy and multi-faceted but arguably challenging and worthy of careful and considered attention.

HOME AND FAMILIAR PLACES

It is a truism that everybody comes from somewhere. Blainey (2004) reminds us that historically most people lived, worked and died quite near to the places they were born. For more contemporary times Urry (2000), Coles and Timothy (2004) and Hall (2005) have all observed that mobilities related to employment opportunities have created new issues in people's connections to places as well as challenges to their identity. The relocation brought about by twenty first century mobility can be conceived as involving several patterns and sequences. For some adults their own childhoods have involved a shifting tapestry of living in diverse places as their family moved from setting to setting. Some of these individuals have repeated the shifting patterns of their past and have a rich assembly of "homes" or familiar places to which they might choose to return. Others, by way of contrast, experienced

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