



Recreationist–environment fit and place attachment



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 23 October 2014

Keywords:

Recreationist–environment fit
Place dependence
Place identity
Social bonding

ABSTRACT

Place attachment implies affective bonds between people and their surroundings, while R–E fit describes the compatibility between recreationists and recreation settings. Close connections exist between R–E fit and place attachment since R–E fit shares some common ground with critical antecedents such as destination attractiveness. However, related research that touches upon this issue is still sparse so far; therefore, this study proposed and tested the relationships between six dimensions of R–E fit and three dimensions of place attachment.

A convenience sample of hiker on trails of Yangmingshan National Park in Taiwan was chosen to be interviewed. Data were collected by using face-to-face interview. The procedure resulted in interviewing 392 hikers. The results showed that all dimensions of R–E fit except facilities have significant positive impacts on place dependence and place identity. In addition, interpersonal opportunities and operation/management have significant positive impacts on social bonding.

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1. Introduction

Research in people–place relations systematically grows. According to Lewicka (2011), there has been an acceleration of growth of place-related publications in environmental psychology. Of the 400 she identified, more than 60 percent were published in the last decade. Ittelson, Franck, and O'Hanlon (1976) proposed five modes of experiencing one's surroundings: environment as external physical place, as self, as social system, as emotional territory, and as setting for action. Each mode demonstrates its specific meaning for the person–place relations. For example, the mode of environment as emotional territory moves the experience exclusively into the realm of emotion and association as might be the case with artists or poets drawing inspiration for their work from particular settings. Basing on the five modes, Schreyer, Jacob, and White (1981) proposed that place attachment represents a user's valuing of a recreation setting and that this valuation consists of two dimensions: functional meanings and emotional-symbolic meanings. Subsequently, some scholars (e.g., Brown, 1987; Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Shumaker & Taylor, 1983) used place attachment to examine the person–place relations from a

psychological perspective, describing the meaning places have for people in terms of two place attachment dimensions: place dependence and place identity. Place dependence reflects the importance of a resource in providing amenities necessary for desired activities (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983), who proposed the initial definition of place identity, suggested that the physical setting in which place identity develops may be persistent and repetitious over time, resulting in enduring components of place identity. Components of place identity include cognitions that represent memories, ideas, feelings, and attitudes. Place identity reflects the symbolic importance of the place and may lead to a sense of belonging/purpose that gives meaning to life (Tuan, 1980).

The concept of fit has been prevalent in the management literature for almost 50 years. Research into the person–environment (P–E) fit in management generally focuses on matching individuals to various work environments. Kristof (1996), for example, proposed two types of person–organization (P–O) fits: the supplementary fit and the complementary fit to measure the congruence between employees and organizations. Other researchers have focused on the residential environment (Kahana, 1982; Lawton, 1979). The P–E fit in a community context is deemed as a key antecedent of residential satisfaction and well-being (Kahana, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Kahana, 2003). Recently, Tsaur, Liang, and Lin (2012) extend the fit concept from institutional to recreational contexts and conceptualized recreationist–

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environment (R-E) fit as the compatibility between recreationists and recreation settings. The compatibility is present when recreationists and recreation setting meet each other's needs unidirectionally or bi-directionally, and/or when recreationists and recreation managers share similar values. In their model, three types of fits were proposed: the supplementary fit, requirements-abilities fit, and needs-supplies fit. The supplementary fit indicates the value congruence between recreationists and site managers. The requirements-abilities fit evaluates the degree of fit between recreationists' capabilities and skill requirements necessitated by the environmental setting's characteristics. The needs-supplies fit assesses the level of fit between recreationists' needs and what the recreation setting supplies.

Place attachment implies affective bonds between people and their surroundings and the desire to maintain the relationship with the place over time (Hernández, Martín, Ruiz, & Hidalgo, 2010), while R-E fit describes the compatibility between recreationists and recreation settings. Intuitively, some connections may exist between R-E fit and place attachment for recreationists and recreational place. For example, recreationists get more satisfaction visiting a certain place than other places (i.e., place dependence) when the natural resources supplied by this place meet their specific activity needs (i.e., needs-supplies fit). In addition, destination attractiveness (Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005) and activity involvement (Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004) have been identified as critical antecedents of place attachment. While reviewing literature, the authors found that destination attractiveness shares similarities with needs-supplies fit of R-E fit, so does activity involvement with requirements-abilities fit of R-E fit. For example, the core attributes (i.e., unique natural or cultural resources) of destination attractiveness share common ground with the natural resources dimension of R-E fit.

Basing on the above argument, we speculate that R-E fit is a critical antecedent of place attachment and could offer two important advantages over other antecedents. First, R-E fit captures the most critical factors that have been used to characterize the cause of place attachment in previous research (including destination attractiveness, activity involvement, and recreation benefits). Second, it is grounded in research that has shown the nature of interaction between recreationists and recreation settings is consistent with the nature of place attachment. Understanding the antecedents of place attachment can provide important managerial implications helpful to increase recreationist' satisfaction and loyalty. Accordingly, this study proposed and tested the relationships between six dimensions of R-E fit and three dimensions of place attachment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Place attachment

Place can be thought of as a social construction formed by specific interactions between individuals and contexts with specific properties (Lagolopolus, 1993). Through personal attachments to places, people acquire a sense of belonging and purpose that gives meaning to their lives (Tuan, 1980). Scannell and Gifford (2010) organized the diversity of person-place bonds into a tripartite framework, in which place attachment consists of person, process, and place dimensions. The person dimension describes who is attached and whether the attachment is based on individually or collectively held meanings, the process dimension describes the affective, cognitive, and behavioral content of the person-place bonds, and the place dimension describes the qualities and specificity of the place to which one is attached.

Since place attachment was conceptualized, related research issues have gained much attention in natural resource management. Most studies treated place attachment as multidimensional. Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) proposed a two-dimensional operationalization: a functional "place dependence" and an emotional/symbolic "place identity" to measure place attachment. This kind of framework then enriched by other scholars (e.g., Casal, Aragonés, & Moser, 2010; Kyle et al., 2003; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004), but there are also other frameworks where place dependence and identity are conceived as separated from place attachment (e.g., Giuliani, 2003; Hernández, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006), or yet other ones where the place attachment is a subdimension of place identity (e.g., Lalli, 1992). Essentially, place identity, place attachment, and place dependence can be viewed above all as cognitive, affective, and behavior dimensions, respectively (Casakin & Bernardo, 2012).

Much of the leisure experience is closely associated with social relationships. According to Kyle, Graefe, et al. (2004), if meaningful social relationships occur and are maintained in a leisure setting, then it should be likely that the setting shares some sentimental meaning given that it provides the context for those relationships and experiences. Therefore, they included a third dimension of place attachment, called "social bonding," in the framework conceived by Williams and Roggenbuck (1989). The social bonding attained through place attachment can be regarded as a corollary to place identity given that self-identity is formed through both relationships with a place and relationships with others (Smith, Siderelis, & Moore, 2010).

2.2. Recreationist-environment fit

Theories of P-E interaction have been prevalent in the management literature for almost 50 years, and it is against this interactionist backdrop that the concept of P-E fit emerged (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). P-E fit research is generally characterized by matching individuals to various levels of their work environments (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Kristof (1996) described person-organization fit as "the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both" (p. 4). Kristof proposed two types of the P-O fit: supplementary fit and complementary fit. The latter consists of needs-supplies fit and requirements-abilities fit. Supplementary fit occurs when a person "supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals" in an environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 269). The needs-supplies fit is achieved when organizational supplies (i.e., financial, physical, and psychological resources as well as task-related, interpersonal, and growth opportunities) meet employee demands. In addition, organizations demand contributions from their employees regarding time, effort, commitment, and abilities. The requirements abilities fit is achieved when employees' abilities meet these requirements.

Two theories that touch upon the concept of fit in recreational contexts are attention restoration theory (ART) from environmental psychology and affordance theory from ecological psychology. ART (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) asserts that for restorative experience to take place a setting should possess compatibility; that is, it should be a good match between personal desires and environmental characteristics. Affordance theory explicates that affordances are the environmental characteristics that allow specialized individuals to execute certain actions (Turvey, 1992). Basing on ART and affordance theory, Tsaour et al. (2012) conceptualized the R-E fit concept and also developed a correspondent R-E Fit Scale (REFS) to

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