



## Research note

## Testing visitor produced pictures as a management strategy to study visitor experience qualities – A Swedish marine case study



Andreas Skriver Hansen\*

Unit for Human Geography, Department of Economy and Society, School of Economics, Business and Law, University of Gothenburg, P.O. Box 625, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 11 June 2015  
 Received in revised form  
 28 April 2016  
 Accepted 11 May 2016

## Keywords:

Outdoor recreation management  
 Visitor experiences  
 Visitor produced pictures  
 Qualitative method  
 Sweden

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to test how visitor produced pictures can be applied in recreation management in order study, and potentially also monitor, different visitor experience qualities. To support this goal, a case study from Sweden is introduced wherein visitor produced pictures are the main methodological approach. The case study took place during summer 2014 and involved 41 participants who via smart-phones took pictures of their important recreational experiences. The results revealed six different categories of experience qualities in the visitor produced pictures: natural elements, social situations, cultural environments, recreational activities, emotional reactions and disturbing factors. These categories are described with special attention to possible management implications and a better understanding of visitor experience qualities. Furthermore, the paper suggests how new technology might be useful for recreation managers. The paper concludes that visitor produced pictures have considerable potential as an informative and efficient strategy to capture and study visitor experience qualities. The development of visual methods as a monitoring approach should therefore receive more attention in recreation management.

## MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This paper suggests that recreation managers should base their management actions and activities not only on information such as visitor numbers, profiles and spatial behavior. Furthermore, the paper presents a new opportunity to gather information about important visitor experience qualities. However, doing so involves several management implications, including:

- An emphasis on the importance of studying visitor experiences in recreation planning and management;
- An integration of qualitative methodology into recreation management, for instance via visitor produced pictures;
- An increase in managerial competences and training in the work with social science based, qualitative methodology;
- An understanding of the need for visitor involvement and the potential in new technology in recreation management;
- Recognition of the need for more collaboration between managers and researchers, especially concerning manager education.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, recreation management involves the use of information based on visitor monitoring, such as visitor numbers, profiles and spatial behavior. Unfortunately, management activities that involve the use of information on visitor experiences are

rarely prioritized by managers (Elands & Marwijk, 2008). This is problematic, especially because recreation management “includes managing both material and symbolic [...] landscapes” (Hall, Gillbertz, Horton, & Peterson, 2013, p. 122). From a management point of view, information on visitor experiences is thus important to acquire because experiences can reveal details about the physical, cognitive, and affective outcomes of recreational participation in a given setting (Jacobsen, 2007). These outcomes can be both positive and negative, but they have in common that they

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [andreas.hansen@geography.gu.se](mailto:andreas.hansen@geography.gu.se)

influence visitor attitudes and opinions, and thereby also visitor satisfaction (Manning, 2011). In order to secure high quality experiences and high levels of visitor satisfaction, visitor experiences therefore need to be examined by recreation managers as parameters and guidance for management decisions and planning measures. Indeed, it is an essential part of what has been referred to as experienced-based management, where management and monitoring of high quality experience opportunities is put forward as a fundamental part of recreation planning and management processes (Bushell & Griffin 2006; Floyd & Graham 1997; Graefe, Thapa, Confer & Absher, 2000; Manfredo, Driver & Brown, 1983; Priskin & McCool 2006).

To gain information and knowledge about visitor experiences is, however, not an easy process, as it concerns moving beyond the study of visitor numbers and movement to a focus on the experiential content and different symbolic meanings that visitors associate with different recreational settings (Eisenhauer, Kranich, & Blahna, 2000). This calls for new thinking about how to study visitor experiences and relate results to management practices (Williams 2007). In this regard, a particular challenge is that studying visitor experiences requires experiences to be examined on an individual level (Dorwart, Moore, & Leung, 2010; Elands & Marwijk, 2008; Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, recreational experiences often contain very detailed content, which can be difficult to express or describe to other individuals not sharing the same experience. Looking broadly in the literature on visitor management, methods such as questionnaire surveys and interviews have most commonly been employed to study visitor opinions, attitudes and behavior (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995; Ruane, Quinn, Spencer, & Flanagan, 2011; Wray, Harbrow & Kazmierow, 2005). However, when it comes to acquiring information about visitor experiences, these methods often come short, as the depth and details of information they provide is limited. This is especially the case when it comes to retrieving more qualified information about what experiential qualities visitors appreciate or seek in a given setting (Bushell & Griffin, 2006; Ryan, 2000). Consequently, recreation managers are in need of alternative method approaches that allow them to gain a more precise understanding of the visitor experience. In order to address this situation, the main aim and contribution of this paper is to explore and suggest how such a method approach can be developed and used in order to study, and potentially also monitor, visitor experiences as a central part of recreational management.

### 1.1. Visitor experience research

Information about how to study visitor experiences can be found by examining general visitor experience research. In this regard, two influential strings of literature can be identified. The first string of literature goes back to the early 1970s, where motivational and behavioral research was introduced and used to study visitor experience as an integrated part of understanding recreational activity and participation (Manfredo, Driver & Tarrant, 1996; Manning, 2011; Williams, 2007). Influential work includes the Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scale, which main aim was to study visitor motivations related to recreational activity and based on desired experience outcomes among visitors (Driver, 1983; Driver, Tinsley, & Manfredo, 1991; Graefe et al., 2000; Manfredo et al., 1996). The REP scale is interesting as it is one of the first instruments to introduce a broad overview of important visitor experience preferences and benefits in relation to recreational participation. Important categories (or 'domains') include different experience outcomes and benefits, such as personal expression, nature appreciation, a sense of achievement, togetherness, learning, introspection, creativity, etc. (Driver, 1983). These categories have since been described in several motivational

studies (Manfredo et al., 1996).

While the REP offers an excellent way to systematize different experience qualities, it is a very instrumental way of categorizing various visitor experiences (Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998). Furthermore, the REP scale defines visitor experiences on a very broad level as packages or bundles "of specific psychological outcomes which are realized from a recreation engagement" (Manfredo et al., 1983, p. 264). This involves an exploration of visitor expectations, goals and motivations in order to discuss desired experience outcomes among recreational participants (Driver, 1983). Notwithstanding the importance of this information, the instrumental strategy and use of broad categories do not contribute with much detailed information about the actual content and specifics of the various visitor experiences. For instance, using the experience category 'nature appreciation' as an example, what exactly is the 'nature' that is appreciated? These specifics are not described or discussed in the broad categories used in the REP scale. Consequently, the REP scale is difficult to use if the goal is to acquire qualified knowledge about the specific content of various visitor experiences.

Opposite the REP scale, work done within environmental psychology has focused on a closer examination of the specific content of various visitor experiences (Williams, 2004). Representing the other string of literature with great influence on the study of visitor experiences, environmental psychology offers an alternative way to motivational and behavioral studies, primarily by focusing more on explaining the relation between settings, scenery and visitor experiences (Williams 2007). Central to this approach is a close examination of visitor experiences as a study that involves landscape perception and interpretation. In this regard, Dorwart, Moore, & Leung, (2006, p. 308) point out that visitor experiences involve landscape interpretations based on "...an interaction between humans and environment that is dynamic, inextricably linked to the whole psychology of the observer, and immersed in the environment that is experienced". This view entails a close examination of how recreational participants perceive different experience qualities in a recreational setting with special focus on recreational experiences as the result of active human-settings encounters and exchanges (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Moscardo, 2015). This is a relational approach to the study of visitor experiences with lines drawn from hermeneutical and phenomenological thinking (Hansen, Lindberg, & Eide, 2011; Patterson et al., 1998).

An interesting part about research on visitor experiences within environmental psychology is that it is often based on results from qualitative methods, e.g. focus groups or visitor dairies (Gobster & Westphal, 2004; Patterson & Williams, 2002). This stands in contrast to the method tradition involved in studies using the REP scale base, where findings mostly are based on a quantification of visitor experiences (Driver, 1975; Manfredo et al., 1996). Using a qualitative method approach, on the other hand, allows for more detailed studies of visitor experiences, as they often involve 'thick descriptions' of visitor narratives and descriptions (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Nonetheless, even the traditional verbal or written accounts in the qualitative tradition have their limits in terms of capturing the true essence of the experience described by the visitor. For example, an experience quality such as 'clear water' may be described differently and given different meaning by the visitor and manager respectively. As a result, the visitor and the managers may in fact be talking or thinking about two different experience qualities. This may result in misunderstandings, or at worst, cause managers to base their planning and decisions on wrong assumptions about the nature and importance of various experience qualities. Consequently, what is needed is the development of a method approach that is designed to capture and document even more precise information about the specific content of various visitor experiences. In this

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/92347>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/92347>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)