



Setting-dependent constraints on human restoration while visiting a wilderness park



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ABSTRACT

Contact with nature can promote health and well-being through providing opportunities for restoring diminished psychological resources. Among those factors relevant for experiencing restoration are having a sense of being away from stress and daily demands. However, only little is known about how perceived interdependencies (in terms of social, behavioral and cognitive aspects) between settings usually relied on for restoration and those settings where stress and demands are encountered may impact having a sense of being away, and thus influence perceived restoration. In a visitor survey ($N = 115$) conducted at the Wilderness Park Zürich those perceived setting interdependencies that might influence having a sense of being away were assessed. The relationship between perceived setting interdependencies, having a sense of being away and restorative outcomes was analyzed by employing a structural equation model. The perceived setting interdependencies accounted for 26% of the explained variance for experiencing being away and had a negative indirect and total effect on perceived restorative outcomes. The more setting interdependencies a park visitor reported, the lower were the ratings for having a sense of being away and restorative outcomes. Researchers and practitioners who work with restorative environments and related domains are encouraged to further elaborate on setting-related aspects that may promote or hinder experiencing being away while spending time in an environment that is usually used for restorative purposes. These insights may be used to improve restoration of depleted psychological resources, to promote health and well-being, and thus to increase the overall visiting experience.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Researchers and practitioners who work with restorative environments and related domains are encouraged to further elaborate on setting-related aspects that may promote or hinder experiencing being away while spending time in an environment that is usually used for restorative purposes. These insights may be used to improve restoration of depleted psychological resources, to promote health and well-being, and thus to increase the overall visiting experience. In this case study, the restorative effects of the park can be influenced by park management by

- keeping crowding effects low; and
- providing environmental conditions which stand in contrast to the urban environment.

Both measures would enhance the sense of being away, which is one crucial component of restorational effects.

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1. Introduction

In many western, industrialized countries, daily life is defined by a heavy workload, stress, and a sedentary lifestyle (WHO, 1986; Hansmann, Hug, & Seeland, 2007; Prentice & Jebb, 1995). Physical activity in daily life is decreasing (Brownson, Boehmer, & Luke,

2005), while workload is increasing (Kompier, Cooper, & Geurts, 2000). A likely consequence is that the amount of perceived stress also rises because stress is perceived when people believe or experience that their personal resources can no longer match the demands they encounter in daily life (Lazarus, 1966). A vast body of literature on health and well-being provides persuasive evidence that a sedentary lifestyle, heavy workload and increasing stress are associated with growing incidences of coronary and heart diseases (e.g., Krantz, Berntsson, & Lundberg, 2005), increased likelihood of developing tumors (e.g., Fisher, Fitzgibbon, Glasgow, Haire-Joshu, Hayman, Kaplan, Nanney, & Ockene, 2011), and higher overall mortality (Kopp & Rethelyi, 2004).

Maintaining or increasing health and well-being thus becomes a major challenge for those individuals who experience stress (e.g., due to a heavy workload). Recreation is a promising factor for finding relief from stress and daily demands because it enables people to recover from depleted resources and fatigued attention (Hammitt, 2004). Recent research in the domain of restorative environments suggests that recreation especially in relatively natural environments can be associated with increased (self-reported) well-being and both mental and physical health (e.g., Bowler, Buyung-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010; Abraham, Sommerhalder, & Abel, 2010). The well-being benefits of recreating in relatively natural settings can often be explained by restoration of depleted resources, such as the psychological resource to direct attention. Those environments that not only permit but also promote restorative processes are commonly termed restorative environments (Hartig, 2004).

1.1. Attention restoration

Research on restorative environments often focuses on the extent to which individuals experience attention restoration when spending time in different environments. One theory that guided many of these studies is the attention restoration theory (ART) proposed by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) and Kaplan (1995). ART assumes that people need to direct a certain amount of attention to cope with daily demands and tasks – for example, when focusing on traffic or concentrating on the job. ART further proposes that humans have a limited cognitive capacity of directed attention. This capacity will diminish as concentration needs to remain on a high level over a longer period of time (e.g., Kaplan & Berman, 2010). Once the psychological resources for directed attention are depleted, mental fatigue will follow. Experiencing mental fatigue is associated with several negative outcomes. For instance, mentally fatigued individuals likely need a longer time for planning tasks and are less flexible in solving problems, which are constraints of task performance in general (e.g., Baker, Olson, & Morisseau, 1994; Lorist et al. 2000; van der Linden, Frese, & Meijman, 2003).

The theory further assumes that restoring the psychological resources for directed attention is a key factor for maintaining health and well-being (Kaplan, 1995). Particularly, spending time in relative natural environments for recreational purposes likely supports the process of restoration (Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998; Kaplan, 1995) as environmental characteristics provide the opportunity to let one's mind wander, which implies that an individual does not have to strain his/her psychological resources to willfully direct attention on specific aspects of the environment. To be considered restorative, environments should thus provide a setting that is perceived as psychologically distant from everyday demands, fascinating, coherently ordered, and compatible with what one wants to do and must do in that setting (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan et al., 1998; Kaplan, 1995; Hartig, 2004). Although relatively natural environments are considered to more likely be restorative than built environments (Kaplan, 1995), the

idea that restorative processes depend only on environmental characteristics is too simplistic. Research on restorative environments concerns transactions that join a person and an environment (Hartig, 2004), implying that whether or not these person–environment transactions promote restoration is predominantly a question of what a person brings to the exchange with the environment (e.g., experiences, expectations, etc.). The term “environments usually or typically relied on for restoration” is therefore used instead of “restorative environments” throughout this study to emphasize that whether an environment promotes restorative processes or not is relative to what an individual brings to the human–environment transaction.

Additionally, the specific kind of restorative experience has to correspond with the type of depleted resource. Sleep might for example not be appropriate to recover from depleted social resources for which restoration could require pleasant activities with those persons with whom relational bonds have been weakened (Hartig, Catalano, & Ong, 2007; Hartig, Catalano, Ong, & Syme, 2013). Theorizing in restorative environments research still requires further understanding of the possible impact of social, cognitive or behavioral processes on restorative outcomes. Bingley (2013) reported that a woodland work setting could be associated with negative effects on health and well-being for those people who depend on income from forest work, and von Lindern, Bauer, Frick, Hunziker and Hartig (2013) found that forest professionals reported lower restorative outcomes of forest visits during leisure time compared to individuals who had no forest-related occupation. The constraint of restoration mainly took place through an impaired sense of being away. Apparently it would be worthwhile to investigate “having a sense of being away” in more depth. It is not precisely clear what exactly a sense of being away is from a psychological perspective, nor which psychological conditions promote or constrain having a sense of being away. Thus the question arises: Which (psychological) conditions foster or constrain recovery of depleted psychological resources through having a sense of being away while spending time in an environment that is typically relied on for restoration?

A promising approach is to not only focus on environmental characteristics that enhance an individual's probability to experience restoration, but to also take the human–environment transaction into account. In this regard the behavior setting theory by Barker (1968) provides useful insights.

1.2. Restoration in the light of behavior setting theory

The behavior setting theory integrates the psychological, social, and physical aspects of environments. It combines these aspects in complementary relationships with specific behavior and social roles (Wicker, 1992), resulting in so-called “behavior settings” (BS). In the course of a day, people usually move from one BS to another, and as they assume different roles they also use different functions of BS. For instance, the BS changes both from “home/family” to “work” when physically leaving the home to go to the workplace, but also when deciding to stay at home and work in the home office.

Interaction between humans and physical objects is essential for BS (Barker, 1978). BS are therefore defined by individuals, physical objects and behavior involving interaction between individuals as well as between individuals and objects. With regard to recreation and restoration, a BS can be defined as one or more individuals who perform any kind of recreational behavior in an environment that is usually relied on for restoration. The behavior setting theory offers an approach to assess restorative effects in terms of having a sense of being away. It implies that every BS has its specific characteristics that hinder or foster (or even evoke) particular behavior (Schoggen, 1989). It is further believed in

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