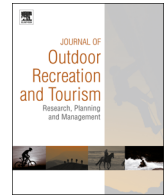




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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jort

The contribution of cultural ecosystem services to understanding the tourism–nature–wellbeing nexus

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 February 2014

Received in revised form

11 June 2015

Accepted 13 June 2015

Keywords:

Nature-based tourism

Cultural ecosystem services

Psychological well-being

Jurassic Coast (UK)

ABSTRACT

The benefits provided by natural resources and their relationship with human well-being have been explored through the literature in diverse ways. Most significant in these discussions is the role of nature in fostering psychological well-being by relieving the human mind of stress, restoring cognitive capabilities and promoting feelings of rejuvenation. Tourism and leisure experiences in natural areas provide a unique opportunity for people to engage with nature and to benefit from these engagements in such ways. This discussion paper argues that a more nuanced understanding of the tourism–nature–well-being nexus can be achieved by employing the concept of cultural ecosystem services to understand how benefits from nature arise for people and what they mean for them. Cultural services are defined by the [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment \(2003\)](#) as the 'non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems' and important overlaps can be identified with the ingredients understood to be required for psychological well-being. It is argued here that by aligning these concepts more closely, a deeper appreciation is possible of the ways in which nature tourism interactions influence human well-being. The paper will draw on empirical evidence from the Jurassic Coast (UK) to illustrate how benefits arise in the context of tourism to a coastal setting and how a proposed cultural ecosystems framework helps to make sense of them. It argues also that cultural ecosystem services and psychological well-being play an important role in tourist motivation and satisfaction and as such, they should be more central in tourism management.

Management implications: This paper provides original insights into how a cultural ecosystem services framework can help to make sense of the tourism–nature–wellbeing nexus. This perspective advocates an approach to environmental and tourism management which not only takes into account human impacts on natural resources but also how natural resources impact on human psychological well-being. This provides a novel lens through which to manage tourism activity such as by ensuring maximum opportunities for sustainable engagements with nature. Tourism management can also benefit from understanding the importance of these 'non-material benefits of nature' in tourist motivations, expectations, behaviours and levels of satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Evidence through the literature has established the idea of a strong relationship between nature and human well-being and a great deal of this is given over to considerations of the psychological and restorative benefits of nature interactions (e.g. [Ulrich, 1979](#); [Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989](#); [Pretty et al., 2007](#); [Hartig, Kaiser, & Strumse, 2007](#); [Bratman, Hamilton, & Daily, 2012](#)). Such evidence asserts that nature plays an important role in relieving the human mind of stress, restoring cognitive abilities, promoting relaxation and calmness and also in engendering a sense of energy and re-energization. Tourism has also been documented to enhance

quality of life and psychological well-being through engendering benefits such as increases in self-esteem and competence as well as feelings of relatedness and identity formation ([Bushell, 2009](#); [Moscardo, 2009](#); [Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012](#); [Dolnicar, Lazarevski & Yanamandram, 2013](#)).

It is argued that tourism in nature thus plays a special role in augmenting these benefits by connecting people with the natural environment, enabling bonds with nature to be re-kindled and a sense of environmental stewardship to be re-invigorated. Such connections can avoid, what [Gossling \(2002\)](#) found to be an increasing alienation of people from the natural environment due to lifestyles which are no longer perceived to be linked closely with the ability of the environment to provide resources. Tourists, unburdened by daily pressures, are able to spend more time

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interacting with and in nature, and may even be motivated to visit certain destinations for the psychological well-being benefits they engender which could in turn, shape behaviours in those destinations. Harmon and Putney (2003) for example, asserts that a 'protective impulse' may develop for landscapes which are valued precisely for their ability to enable people to 'reflect and reinvigorate themselves' (p24). Since these benefits arguably play a role in tourist decisions about where to visit, they should be taken into account in decisions about managing landscapes to enable people to benefit in ways which enhance well-being.

Such documented contributions to well-being from nature interactions have important overlaps with the 'non-material benefits of nature' or cultural ecosystem services idea put forward by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2003). This assessment asserts that people obtain well-being benefits from ecosystems through 'spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic experience' (p8). Strong resonances can be detected with these ideas and the determinants of psychological well-being which are purported to be linked with areas including self-esteem, purpose in life, optimism and relatedness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Diener et al., 2009; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008) which can be influenced by interactions in nature. There appears therefore, to be compelling reason for aligning these concepts more closely within the tourism discourse to deepen understanding of the tourism–nature–wellbeing nexus. This may provide important clues for capturing cultural ecosystem services in different environmental settings by understanding their effects on psychological well-being, as well as shedding light on how psychological benefits from tourism–nature interactions shape tourist motivations, behaviours and satisfaction.

This paper argues that psychological well-being is key to understanding cultural ecosystem services and that by aligning these concepts, managers are reminded of the significant impacts that nature has on humans. For tourism management, this nexus is pertinent as an understanding of the circumstances in which tourists derive benefits from nature interactions and the range and depth of those benefits can help to shape encounters for optimal tourist experiences. The evidence regarding the connections between nature interactions and psychological well-being will firstly be reviewed, as well as some of the ways in which this relationship has been explored through the tourism literature. The ecosystem services literature is then assessed to enable a better understanding of how these ideas resonate with the notion of cultural ecosystem services. By drawing on the example of the Jurassic Coast (UK) and how visitors there experience psychological well-being and what this means to them, the paper will explore how a cultural services framework can help to make sense of these benefits and how tourism management can benefit from these insights.

2. Nature and psychological well-being

People experience the natural environment in different ways and gain a prodigious range of benefits from being in contact with it. It is clear from a growing body of literature that 'landscape is conceptualised as a health resource that promotes physical, mental and social well-being' (Abraham, Sommerhalder, & Abel, 2010 p59). In addition to physical health benefits, evidence suggests that exposure to natural environments can have a range of psychological health benefits including improved mood and happiness (Barton & Pretty, 2010; White, Alcock, Wheeler, & Depledge, 2013), reduced stress (Ulrich, 1979), restored cognitive ability (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008) and increased connection to nature (Hartig, Kaiser, & Bowler, 2001). This relationship has been variously explored through the literature, notably in terms of the restoration qualities of different

environments. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) explore the idea that natural environments support the cognitive abilities of humans and state that 'aesthetic natural environments give pleasure; they are satisfying to experience and such settings also support human functioning as they provide a context in which people can manage information effectively' (p196). They assert that this happens largely as a result of restored directed attention which they note is a pre-requisite for effective human functioning and includes amongst other characteristics, the ability to focus on important goals or activities and the ability to inhibit distractions. This effect of a restorative environment is explained in terms of 'Attention Restoration Theory' (Kaplan, 1995) which has also been explored by a number of other investigators (Hartig, Book, Garvil, Olsson, & Garline, 1996; Hartig, Korpela, Evans, & Garling, 1997; Berto, 2005; Korpela, Ylen, Tyrvaainen, & Silvennoinen, 2008) who found that elements of the natural world are effortlessly engaging and enable the fatigued person to recuperate.

Through an understanding that nature not only provides the physical materials which enable people to live well but also that it provides important resources which promote psychological well-being, a much deeper insight can be gained into the human–nature relationship and the reasons why people may seek to engage with nature for such benefits. In the context of tourism, this provides novel insight into tourist motivations whereby people may view natural settings as 'therapeutic environments and places for cathartic experiences' (Ewert, Hollenhorst, McAvoy, & Russell, 2003, p141) and be motivated to visit, re-visit and encourage others to do the same.

The contribution of tourism itself to human well-being has been well documented through the literature (Dolnicar et al., 2012, Bushell, 2009, Mannell, 1999, Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) and it appears to be generally accepted in these evaluations that tourism is a positive experience and a 'mentally and physically healthy pursuit to follow in our leisure time' (Hobson & Dietrich, 1994 p23). Williams and Patterson (2008) discuss the importance of natural areas for enhancing quality of life, in particular for supporting the social, emotional and spiritual dimensions of life which they state are 'often manifest within the context of leisure and free-time pursuits' (p105). Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) also argue that motivation for tourism is derived from the interplay of two forces; escaping of routine and stressful environments and seeking recreational opportunities for psychological rewards. Understanding tourism in nature as a psychological phenomenon provides an interesting lens through which to explore tourist motivations and satisfaction which may have important implications for destination management.

Moscardo (2009) points to some of the psychological benefits of tourism which include improved human capital from the gaining of skills, contributing to new and better work opportunities, improved self esteem through greater knowledge, competence and confidence and increased awareness of natural capital and support for environmental conservation. Similarly, Dolnicar et al. (2012) conclude that social interaction, personal development and individual identity formation are some of the ways in which tourist trips are seen to contribute to quality of life. The concept of cultural ecosystem services re-enforces the idea that the natural environment provides and supports such benefits and this is emerging as an important consideration in managing natural resources. Accounting for these 'non-material benefits' in tourism management could thus prove beneficial in a more nuanced understanding of how nature interactions provide the opportunities for such psychological benefits. The following section draws on the ecosystem services literature to more fully understand these connection and to provide a conceptual bridge for an integrated understanding of cultural services and psychological well-being.

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