



From the inside out to the outside in: Exploring the role of parks and protected areas as providers of human health and well-being[☆]



Francesc Romagosa^{a,*}, Paul F.J. Eagles^b, Christopher J. Lemieux^c

^a Department of Geography and University School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 08193 Bellaterra, Catalonia, Spain

^b Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, N2L 3G1 Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

^c Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University, N2L 3C5 Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 October 2013

Received in revised form

26 June 2015

Accepted 26 June 2015

Keywords:

Parks

Protected areas

Natural environment

Human health

Well-being

Management

Health promotion

ABSTRACT

Research consistently documents positive links between human contact with nature and health and well-being. Recent work has explored the role of visitation to parks and protected areas in providing health and well-being benefits. This conceptual paper identifies the state-of-the-art research findings on this issue from an interdisciplinary perspective. The results reveal increasing understanding of the positive relationships between park and protected area visitation and the associated health and well-being benefits to the visitors. It also establishes the need for better collaboration between park and protected area and health institutions, which will require new and innovative transdisciplinary partnerships in order to better understand salient issues, realign common interests where appropriate, and effectively integrate empirical evidence into relevant policy, planning and management. Recommendations are made for specific knowledge user groups, such as policy makers, social and health professionals, protected areas professionals, and researchers, with the ultimate objective of better linking human health and well-being and protected areas policies to enhance delivery mechanisms for health promotion activities.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- Visitation to parks and protected areas plays a vital role in human health and well-being.
- Public health and protected areas' agencies should collaborate more intensively.
- The "Healthy Parks, Healthy People" program has become paradigmatic.
- There is a need for further research on the effects of parks visitation on health.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. The relationship between human health, well-being and the natural environment

The concept of "ecosystem health" has been applied widely in ecology and the environmental sciences over the past 25 years

[☆]Francesc Romagosa carried out the writing of the paper during a postdoctoral research stay at the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies of the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), funded by the Spanish government (José Castillejo fellowship).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Francesc.Romagosa@uab.cat (F. Romagosa).

(Costanza, Norton, & Haskell, 1992; Lackey, 2001). Environmental degradation (i.e. air and water pollution, forest and wetland destruction, etc.) frequently causes poor human health, while environmental protection (i.e. creation of parks and protected areas, appropriate environmental management, etc.) contributes positively to human health. Hence, the key contributions of ecosystems to human well-being through the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services are increasingly recognized (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003). This thinking was documented in The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion of 1986 (World Health Organization, 1986) which advocated the protection of natural and built environments as well as the conservation of natural resources as essential in any health promotion strategy.

This charter appears to be the very first document to delineate an agenda for public health, explicitly connecting human health to nature (Dakubo, 2011). However, as the Canadian Parks Council stated 20 years later, “while a healthy ecosystem is recognized as essential to human health, it seems that the development of programs that use the natural environment as a foundation to promote human health have only been explored in a very preliminary way” (Canadian Parks Council, 2006, p. 1).

Humans depend on nature for material needs (food, water, shelter, etc.), as well as psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs (Frumkin, 2001; Katcher & Beck, 1987; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995; Suzuki, 1997; Wilson, 1984, 2001). The dependence of humans on nature, and the benefits gained from interacting with the natural environment have recently become emphasized through investigation by several academic disciplines (i.e. environmental sciences to social sciences, and especially by psychology, medicine and public health policy). This research indicates that parks and other forms of protected areas contribute significantly to human health and well-being by providing access to the natural environment, yet it seems that their potential to contribute to health have been unacknowledged and under-utilized (Lemieux et al., 2012; Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St. Leger, 2005; Maller, Henderson-Wilson, Pryor, Prosser, & Moore, 2008). This assertion may seem paradoxical since some of the first parks and protected areas were created under the belief that human contact with the natural environment fosters psychological and physical well-being and reduces the stress of urban living (Jones & Wills, 2005).

1.2. The present study

This paper argues that parks and protected areas constitute a crucial resource for human health and well-being for both individuals and to communities. We apply the concept of health, from the Ottawa Charter, as “a resource for everyday living, which allows us to manage, to cope with and even change our environments” (World Health Organization, 1986). Well-being is defined as “a state of successful, satisfying, and productive engagement with one’s life and the realization of one’s full physical, cognitive, and social-emotional potential” (Gil & Bedini, 2010, p. 17). This positive approach implicitly understands health and well-being as interdependent concepts.

In this paper the term “parks and protected areas” is applied to all types of parks (urban and nonurban) and to all the six categories of protected areas as defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Dudley, 2008). Thus, we take an expansive approach to categorization of these areas.

2. The role of parks in the provision of human health and well-being

2.1. Evidence from the research

While parks and protected areas are well-known for their important contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and maintenance and enhancement of ecological integrity (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003, 2005), their provision of essential ecosystem services, such as clean air, clean water, and carbon sequestration, has not been acknowledged to the same extent (Costanza et al., 1997; Dudley et al., 2011; Naidoo et al., 2008). Their use as spaces for recreation is enormous, but incompletely documented (Hornback & Eagles, 1999; Priskin & McCool, 2006; Stolton, Mansourian, & Dudley, 2010). Parks and protected areas also contribute substantial economic benefits from all of these services, although these are rarely fully recognized and calculated (Dixon & Sherman, 1991; Pabon-Zamora et al., 2008). Yet they also provide an attractive setting for health promotion and the creation of well-being for the human populations that

access these sites.

Stolton and Dudley (2010) identify three ways in which protected areas contribute positively to human health:

- (1) They provide benefits, such as those that come from conscious management of ecosystems against disease, and those related to management activities that contribute to better health (e.g. provision of clean drinking water, soil stabilization, etc.);
- (2) they are sources of medicines, both local (drawing primarily on ethnobotanical studies, to show the wide range of values that these areas contain) and global (looking firstly at plants which are used raw or in only lightly processed form and secondly as sources for materials that are components of pharmaceuticals); and,
- (3) they provide direct health benefits, such as locations for physical exercise and environments for therapeutic activities concerning mental health.

Research reveals multiple motivations for visiting and participating in activities provided by protected areas, including satisfaction from the realization of personal values (Kreninchyn, 2006; Lemieux et al., 2012, 2015; Manning, 2011; Manzo, 2003). Protected area values have been classified as intrinsic (e.g., fauna, flora, ecosystems); on-site goods and services (e.g., plant products, animal products, scientific research and knowledge, education); community-oriented (e.g., culture, identity, spiritual meaning, social well-being, bequest for future generations); and individual-oriented (e.g., existence, physical health, psychological health, spiritual well-being) (Lockwood, Worboys, & Kothari, 2006). While increasing attention has been paid to on-site goods and services of the natural environment in recent years (i.e., the value of ecosystem services and natural capital) (Anielski & Wilson, 2009; Costanza et al., 1997; Howarth & Farber, 2002), less attention has been given to the community and individual health values and benefits that visitors obtain from visitation to, and experiences provided by, protected areas. Indeed, despite the popularity of protected areas as places to visit for recreation and leisure purposes (e.g., physical activity and relaxation), and the large potential for promoting protected areas as places that support human health and well-being, scant research exists on the diverse perceived health and well-being motivations and benefits associated with visitation, much less about specific management and policy interventions and their effects on subgroups (e.g., youth and the elderly, male and female, disabled people, etc.).

Nevertheless, research conducted primarily in the context of urban and suburban parks in developed countries suggests that the social benefits of visiting parks and other forms of protected areas are substantial. A comprehensive literature review conducted to understand better how humans benefit from nature by Maller et al. (2008), found that humans benefitted from the contact with nature in a number of ways, such as viewing natural scenes, being in natural environments, and having contact with plants and animals. Most of these actions in nature can be done in a context of parks and protected areas, mainly because they guarantee a high quality environment, often with good accessibility, infrastructure and services that manage visitation (Eagles, McCool, & Haynes 2002; Eagles & Bushell, 2007).

Furthermore, research has also shown that humans are dependent on nature and there are positive links between the natural environment and human health (Kuo, 2010; Nilsson, Baines, & Konijnendijk, 2007). In this sense, a study made by the Health Council of the Netherlands and Dutch Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment (2004) highlights the indirect connections that can be made between human health and nature, by looking at how nature influences actions or mechanisms which in turn influence health. These

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/92377>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/92377>

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