

FACTORS THAT ATTRACT AND REPEL VISITATION TO URBAN RECREATION SITES: A FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

David B. Klenosky
Department of Health & Kinesiology
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2046
klenosky@purdue.edu

Cherie L. LeBlanc
U.S. Forest Service

Christine A. Vogt
Michigan State University

Herbert W. Schroeder
U.S. Forest Service

Abstract.—The mix of natural features and manmade elements in urban and metropolitan areas presents unique challenges for resource managers and planners. While some elements of the urban landscape (e.g., forested areas, parks, water features, and museums) may attract or encourage visitation, others (e.g., industrial and commercial activity, odors, noises, crime, litter, and perceived class/racial/ethnic differences) may negate and even trump the positive elements, thus repelling or deterring visitation. Interestingly, while a great deal of research has examined the positive factors that attract people to open spaces and recreation/tourism settings, relatively little has been done to understand the impact of factors that might repel, deter, or otherwise lead a person to avoid a particular urban/metropolitan site or destination. This paper seeks to address this gap in the research literature by outlining a conceptual framework and research effort (just currently under way) that is designed to develop a more complete understanding of the features and attributes at urban sites that repel or deter visitation—as well as those that attract or encourage visitation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

While most recreation research looks at attractive places, our focus in this research is on less appealing places. This may include brownfields with contamination issues or other sites that cities and communities are thinking about reclaiming and developing for housing, businesses, retail, and recreation—or to attract tourists. In the heavily industrialized Calumet region of Illinois and Indiana, the impetus for the current study, various development and redevelopment projects are under consideration or in progress. At the same time, this area underscores the inherent challenges involved in such redevelopment efforts. Areas like Calumet are prevalent across the Midwest and the United States and in other countries as well.

In the early 1900s, the Calumet region emerged as a center for steel production and processing because of its central location in the country, access to Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes, and extensive railroad network. Over the years Calumet has attracted a variety of steel-related industries including railcar manufacturing, oil refining, automotive production, and numerous other large-scale extractive and material processing operations. Since declines in the steel industry during the 1970s and the closing of several major plants and industrial sites, Calumet has become a classic example of the Midwest “rust belt landscape.”

Today Calumet is a mix of commercial operations and large-scale factories/industrial facilities, prominent waste disposal sites, a proposed Superfund site, other brownfield sites, major transportation resources (including three interstate highways, key rail corridors, and manmade waterways), well established residential communities, and a unique set of environmental resources (e.g., lakes, rivers, ponds, and marshes; elements of prairie and savanna ecosystems; and several rare plant and animal species). A central feature of the Calumet area is Lake Calumet, which

was originally a natural lake roughly twice its present size. About a quarter of the lake has been transformed over the years into land and other portions have been dredged from the original depth of 6 feet to a depth of 30 feet to accommodate large commercial boating traffic. The area north of the lake was once the Chicago Municipal Landfill noted for its large incinerator and methane gas vents/plumes visible to traffic on I-94, a major interstate connecting Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. As an example of recent attempts to reclaim portions of the Calumet region for recreation use, the landfill was closed about 10 years ago, capped with 6 feet of blue clay, and transformed into the Harborside International Golf Course—a 36-hole links-style championship golf course, with a 24,000 square-foot Prairie-style clubhouse, an upscale golf school, and a practice area.

Just south of Lake Calumet is Hegewisch Marsh, adjacent to the Chicago neighborhood of Hegewisch. Hegewisch Marsh was recently chosen to become the future home of the Ford Calumet Environmental Center (FCEC). The building design for the FCEC was developed through a major architectural competition incorporating LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) sustainable design principles. The winning plan draws on the metaphor of a nest and calls for materials for the 27,000-square-foot building to be drawn substantially from available/discarded elements in the immediate area—e.g., salvaged steel from the mills and processing facilities, floorboards and wood from factory floors, and slag which is widely available in local wetlands and on brownfield sites. Hegewisch Marsh site is located on a major migratory flyway and in order to keep birds from flying into the environmental center building, a screen on the façade and porch consisting of metal bars will be positioned to look like a basket surrounding the structure. This screen will be visible to birds, giving them a chance to slow down while adding shade to the building, and effectively serving as a blind for viewing wildlife in the area. Many other environmentally friendly design elements are being incorporated into the project like geothermal heat pumps, earth tubes, a biomass boiler, wind turbines, and water collection systems—elements that will become part of the educational component

of the center and site. The project is expected to cost \$14 million and to have the potential to attract more than 100,000 visitors per year to the region. The key question we ask in this research project is: if an attraction such as the FCEC is built, will they come? Or will the fact that the site is located in an area that some view as unappealing deter or inhibit visitation?

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In general, urban recreation areas can be viewed as a mix of natural features and manmade elements. While some elements of the urban landscape (e.g., forested areas, parks, water features, zoos, nature centers, and museums) may attract or encourage visitation, other features or attributes (e.g., distance/accessibility, industrial development, commercial activity, odors, noises, litter, crime/security, safety/health concerns, and perceived class/racial/ethnic differences) may negate and even trump the positive elements, thus repelling or deterring visitation. Interestingly, while a great deal of research has examined the positive features and associations that attract or draw people to open space areas and recreation/tourism settings, relatively little has been done to understand the impact of elements that might repel, deter, or otherwise lead a person to avoid a particular site or destination, especially one that might be located in a diverse urban/metropolitan area.

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action (TRA) provides a useful conceptual framework for examining the factors that could influence the likelihood of engaging in specific behaviors, such as visiting a particular urban recreation site. The theory holds that volitional behaviors can be predicted based on cognitive factors such as beliefs (i.e., beliefs about the attributes and outcomes associated with a behavior), subjective norms (beliefs regarding social pressures to either engage in or not engage in a specific behavior), attitudes (overall evaluation of performing a behavior), and intentions (likelihood of performing or not performing a behavior). The components of the TRA model have been productively employed to study a number of recreational activities including camping (Young & Kent, 1985), hunting (Rossi & Armstrong,

1999), and biking (Ajzen & Driver, 1991), as well as resource management and development issues such as wildfire and forest fuels management (Vogt et al., 2005), recreation pricing preferences (Kerr & Manfredi, 1991), and facility development options (Bright, 2003).

The following sections provide an overview of prior research and describe our conceptual orientation toward three key elements of the TRA that are examined in this research: beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. In addition, we consider the potential for incorporating the concept of place attachment as an additional explanatory construct into an expanded TRA model (shown in Figure 1).

2.1 Beliefs about Recreation Sites

Prior research has examined the positive features and associations that attract or draw people to open space areas and recreation/tourism settings. For example, Schroeder and Louviere (1999) showed how recreation usage can be affected by a variety of site features including the type of vegetation (i.e., whether grass and/or trees were present at the site), type of terrain (flat versus rolling hills), and the presence of water resources (none, stream/pond, river, lake, etc.). Other researchers in the travel and tourism literature have used push-pull theory to study the forces that “push” people to travel away from home as well as those that attract or “pull” individuals to visit particular tourism destinations (Crompton, 1979; Pyo et al., 1989; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Turnbull & Uysal, 1995; Klenosky, 2002; Kim et al., 2003). The “push” factors explored in this line of inquiry have included the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, prestige, health and fitness, and social interaction. The “pull factors” have centered on beliefs about site features such as an area having a desirable climate, scenic areas, natural resources, unique cultural/historical attractions, outdoor recreation areas and facilities, affordable airfares, etc. Although the push-pull framework provides a useful way to think about site/destination choice behavior, the theory considers only the positive aspects of a site that attract visitors; it does not incorporate the impact of factors

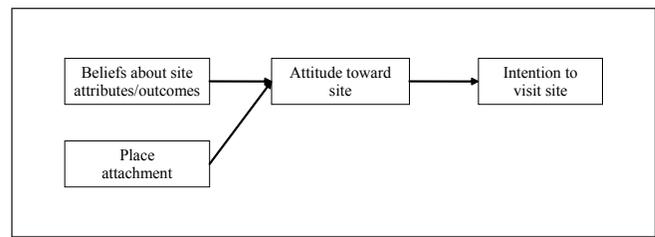


Figure 1.—Expanded TRA Model.

that might repel, deter, or otherwise lead a person to avoid a site or destination.

An alternative conceptual framework from the tourism literature that does incorporate the impact of negative elements in travel/site choice is Um and Crompton’s (1992) facilitator-inhibitor model. This approach views visitation as a function of two factors—“facilitators,” beliefs about destination/site attributes that help to satisfy a potential traveler’s specific motives; and “inhibitors,” beliefs about destination/site attributes that are not congruent with the traveler’s motives. The facilitators examined by researchers using this framework have included need satisfaction factors (degree of novelty, challenge, and relaxation to be experienced), social agreement (inclinations to act in accordance with social group opinions), and travelability (possessing available resources and qualities needed to travel). The inhibitors examined have tended to center on factors that constrain leisure behavior (cf., Crawford et al., 1991) such as time, money, distance, access, family constraints, and general destination-related factors such as safety/security concerns and health concerns. In addition, empirical applications of the facilitator-inhibitor model (Um & Crompton, 1992; Botha et al., 1999) have tended to focus on travel to out-of-state and foreign destinations. The model has been applied to study visitation to museums (Tian et al., 1996) but has not yet been used to study recreation visitation in other urban settings. More importantly, the model has not been used to examine the impact of the negative environmental factors (e.g., industrial development, commercial activity, noise, odors, litter) or other negative social/demographic factors (perceived racial/ethnic/social-class differences, crime, unemployment)

that might inhibit site visitation in a diverse urban/metropolitan area.

Other studies that have examined the impact of negative environmental factors on recreation and tourism behavior without using the facilitator-inhibitor model have also been reported in the literature. For instance, Schroeder and Anderson (1984) conducted a landscape preference study to examine perceptions of personal safety and scenic quality in urban parks. A related area of research has focused on perceptions of crowding and resource quality in outdoor recreation settings (Heberlein, 1977; Manning et al., 1996, 1999; Vaske et al., 1980, 1986). Winger and McKean (1991) used regression analysis based on visitor records and weather/climate data to model the impact of poor/low visibility levels on the length of stay in a national park setting. Recently, Klenosky (2005) used a conjoint analytic approach to investigate the impact of negative or degraded environmental features (i.e., industrial structures, odors, and noise) on recreation site choice decisions for three key recreation activities—golf, fishing, and bird watching.

When negative site features and attributes have been studied, they have usually been addressed independently of positive factors. Thus research has yet to examine positive and negative site beliefs together and has yet to consider questions such as whether positive and negative site beliefs would operate in an additive/compensatory manner (i.e., where positive site features would overcome or compensate for negative site characteristics) or whether these beliefs might operate in a non-additive/non-compensatory manner (where the presence of a strong negative factor would negate any/all positive site features).

2.2 Attitude toward Visiting a Recreation Site

In general, we assume that a person's attitude toward visiting a particular recreation site could be positive, neutral, or negative. That is, one could be attracted to the idea of visiting a site, indifferent about a site, or repelled/repulsed by the idea of visiting a site. This view is similar to the word of mouth (WOM) and

service complaining literature (e.g., Richins, 1983) in that consumers could range from “zealots/champions” (i.e., highly loyal purchasers/users and say nothing but good things about a product and are highly likely to recommend the product to others), to neutrals (who might or might not be users and that may or may not think or say much of anything about the product), to complainers/haters/avoiders (non-users who are likely to say negative things about a product and who may even discourage others from buying).

2.3 Intention to Visit a Site

Intention to visit a site refers to the likelihood that a person would visit a site. That is, a person could range from being highly likely to highly unlikely to visit a particular site. The TRA holds that intentions are the primary determinant of a person's likelihood to engage in a particular behavior.

2.4 Place Attachment

Over the past decade, recreation researchers have become increasingly interested in exploring the emotional and symbolic bonds or attachments that people form with places, landscapes, and recreation settings (e.g., Eisenhauer, Krannich, & Blahna, 2000; Kyle et al., 2004; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Schroeder, 1996; 2002; 2004; Shumaker & Taylor, 1983; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989; Williams et al., 1992; Williams & Vaske, 2003). While a number of concepts have been examined in this line of inquiry, including “sense of place” (Shamai, 1991; Williams & Stewart, 1998), “place bonding” (Hammit et al., 2003), and “special places” (Schroeder, 1996, 2002; 2004; Eisenhauer et al., 2000), the bulk of the research conducted to date has focused on the concept of “place attachment” (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989; Williams et al., 1992).

Place attachment has been conceptualized in terms of two distinct but related components: “place dependence” (the functional importance of a place in supporting specific recreation activity goals) and “place identity” (the emotional or symbolic importance of a place in a person's life) (Williams, 2000; Williams & Vaske, 2003). Research on this two-dimensional

model of place attachment has provided insight into a wide range of leisure research and resource management issues. For example, the concept has been used to examine influences on resource usage (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Warzecha & Lime, 2001; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Kyle et al., 2004), conflicts among user groups (Watson et al., 1991; Watson et al., 1994), differences in recreation specialization levels (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000), perceptions of fire management practices (Hendricks et al. 2002), reactions to user fees (Kyle et al., 2003), and influences on environmentally responsible behaviors (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Other research has explored factors that might help explain how attachments to places form and develop over time (Williams et al., 1992; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Kyle et al., 2003; Backlund & Williams 2004; Kyle et al., 2004; Kyle et al., 2004).

2.5 Possible Relationships between Place Attachment and Site Visitation Intentions

While prior investigations of place attachment have provided useful insight into the positive attachments or associations that attract people to open space areas and recreation settings, research has yet to provide a sufficient understanding of the negative associations to place that might repulse or repel potential resource users and visitors (cf. Manzo, 2003). The present research seeks to build on these prior efforts by exploring the usefulness of a broader conceptualization of the place attachment concept. Specifically, we propose that in addition to positive place attachments, people also can develop negative place attachments. These negative emotional attachments to place can occur in a variety of ways including exposure to negative information about an area through the media or via word-of-mouth, visiting an area during a disaster or time of war, or having bad personal experiences at a place. While it seems likely that negative place attachment may keep a person from visiting a site, it is also possible that negative attachment may make a person curious and actually draw him or her to a site (Lennon & Foley, 2000). In sum, while it may be safe to conclude that positive place attachment would draw/attract visitation to a site, the potential impact of negative place attachment on visitation seems more complex. A secondary objective of the present research

will be to use this broader conceptualization to develop a measure of place attachment (or adapt/modify an existing measure) that can be used to examine positive as well as negative place attachment. This new/adapted measure will then be used to examine attachment to relatively negative or undesirable recreation places in addition to the positive/desirable places that have been the primary focus of past research. Finally, the new/adapted measure will then be incorporated into the modified TRA model to predict intention to visit both desirable and undesirable recreation places.

Table 1 provides one perspective on how place attachment and place visitation intentions might be related. It is interesting to note that prior empirical research has tended to concentrate on only the top-left cell in the table—positive attachments and favorable intentions to visit a site. The proposed research will provide a framework to explore the other possibilities identified in the cells of the table.

3.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND STATUS

In sum, the present research seeks to build on the foundation of prior research by developing a more complete understanding of the nature and impact of the factors that attract and encourage visitation as well as those that repel or deter visitation. Thus our initial objectives will center on reviewing the extant literature and conducting qualitative research to develop measures of site beliefs and place attachment. This work is currently under way. Our second and main study objective will be to use the framework

Table 1.—Possible relationships between place attachment and site visitation intentions

Attachment to a site	Intention to visit a site	
	Strong	Weak
Positive/Neutral	Likely to visit (typical/normative visitation behavior)	Unlikely to visit (negative site beliefs inhibit/deter visitation)
Negative	May visit out of curiosity (cf., "Dark tourism") or for therapeutic/nostalgic reasons	Avoid site (negative attachment and/or negative site beliefs inhibit/deter visitation)

provided by the theory of reasoned action to explore the relationships among beliefs about these positive and negative factors, attitudes, intentions, and place attachment in an empirical study involving a range of urban recreation sites in the Chicago area. A secondary objective in this phase will be to examine how these relationships vary for different respondent subgroups, such as those with an interest in nature/eco-tourism versus industrial/labor-heritage tourism.

Examining these relationships in the context of relatively negative or undesirable recreation places in addition to the positive/desirable places that have been the primary focus of past recreation research would make a useful contribution to the extant literature in recreation and tourism. In addition to its conceptual contributions, the research generated by this framework should be useful for exploring development options and other strategies for overcoming negative place associations. These findings would provide useful input for those involved in planning for the sustainable development of urban recreation sites in the Calumet region as well as other similar regions of the country.

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