National park visitors' attachment to a place, quality perceptions and visit intention

Marjo Neuvonen, Eija Pouta, and Tuija Sievänen

MMV4
Management for Protection and Sustainable Development
Montecatini Terme (Tuscany, Italy) - 14/19 October 2008
Background

- Increasing importance of Park tourism (Metsähallitus 2008)
  - <1 million visits (2001)
  - 1.6 million visits (2007)
- Change in the economic base of rural communities
- Nature tourism is seen as an opportunity to revitalize rural, declining communities
Aim of the study

• ’Protected areas as a generator of rural vitality’ – project
  • what kind of economic and social impacts the national park has on the surrounding rural community, and what kind of interaction the NP visitors and the rural community have?

• This sub-study aims to explain the intentions for future visits
  • place attachment
  • satisfaction with the services in rural communities
Aim and recreation management

- which tourism services affect the intention for future visit
- does the perceived quality of those services have an effect on visitation or are the drivers of new visits related to inner factors of visitors
- are recreation services and improved maintenance programs motivated
- knowledge based argumentation for financing park management
Framework

- Novelty seeking
- Attitudes towards countryside and nature protection
- Visiting history
- Satisfaction to services as a whole
- Place attachment
- Intention to visit
- Interest to use countryside services
- National Park and surrounding community
- Experiences of the surrounding community
- Social bounds local culture
- Background variable - socioeconomic variables - distance to destination - main activity - motives to visit
Framework

- place attachment
  - dependence
    - functional attachment to a place
    - reflects importance of place in providing features and conditions for activities
  - place identity
    - emotional bond an symbolic importance of a place
- consumer satisfaction and loyalty
  - perceived quality of services, environment and personnel
- gender, age, education, income and travel cost
Hypothesis

- H1: connection between place attachment and service satisfaction
- H2: place attachment has two dimensions: 
  - DEPENDENCE, IDENTITY
- H3: service satisfaction consists of components
- H4: positive association between place attachment and visit intention
- H5: positive association between all satisfaction components and visit intention
Measurement

- **Visit intention**
  - Intention to visits in the region in future 5 years?
  - Binary: Yes / No

- **Place attachment**
  - Place dependence (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$) and place identity ($\alpha = 0.74$) were both measured with four items

- **Satisfaction**
  - 16 items (3 components based on factor analysis)
Structural equation model

- combination of structural model and measurement model
- causal structure of the relationship between the variables
- linear equations to transfer the structure into observational model
- path coefficients, variances and covariances
- ML-estimation
- goodness of fit measures
  - $pr > \chi^2$ the value $> 0.05$
  - CFI, GFI, (NFI) values $> 0.90$
  - RMSEA values $< 0.08$
Data

- Visitor surveys in three national parks in Southern Finland
  - Seitseminen
  - Linnansaari
  - Repovesi
- In co-ordination with Metsähallitus
- Response rate 63-72 %
- N = 736

- Surrounding countryside
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Established Visitors (2007)</th>
<th>Seitseminen 1982 44 000</th>
<th>Linnansaari 1956 29 000</th>
<th>Repovesi 2003 70 000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of services in the park</td>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>Less developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of services outside the park</td>
<td>Less developed</td>
<td>Well developed</td>
<td>Less developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Photos © Erkki Piilola, © Metsähallitus
Results

- 64–71% planned to revisit the park and 55–68% the surrounding area
- Linnansaari national park differed from other two parks
  - Highest reported place dependency
  - Highest satisfaction to
    - local services
    - local hospitality
  - Highest travel costs
Estimated SEM –model

“those who were already attached to a region/park and satisfied to local tourism services and hospitality were also more likely to revisit the area”

- $\beta_1 = 0.280$
- $\beta_2 = 0.176$
- $\beta_3 = 0.196$
- $\beta_4 = 0.106$
- $\beta_5 = 0.131$
- $\beta_6 = 0.210$
- $\beta_7 = 0.099$
- $\beta_8 = -0.033$
- $\beta_9 = 0.097$
Most comprehensive explanatory factors for visit intention

Correlations among exogenous variables

e1-e2 $R^2=0.22$; e1-e3 $R^2=0.41$; e1-e3 $R^2=0.32$ ; Dependence – identity $R^2=0.620$
Results compared with hypothesis

- H1: Place attachment -> service satisfaction
- H2: Two dimension of place attachment was found
- H3: Components of satisfaction 1) services, 2) landscape and environment, 3) hospitality
- H4: positive association between place attachment and visit intention
- H5: positive association between satisfaction to local services and hospitality and visit intention
Discussion

- Next:
  - More detailed model with latent variables
  - Include visit history into the analysis
- SEM–model is a useful tool to test causal relationship between factors
  - provides more comprehensive framework compared to econometric models like Travel Cost Model (travel costs had only a minor effect)
  - same relationships were found in all three parks when they were
Implications for park management

- **Psychological involvement/Attachment** to the region strongly determine respondents’ willingness to revisit the area.
- … this effect is even stronger among those who are satisfied in tourism services.
- In the literature “frequency of visits”, “activity importance and involvement”, “recreation specialization” (past experience, personal involvement) = > place attachment.
- Satisfaction to tourism services has smaller role in visit intentions.
- …still, high quality of tourism services like shops, transportation, lodging, restaurants and hospitality attract visitors.
THANK YOU!