

PLACE ATTACHMENT OF LOCAL RESIDENTS WITH AN URBAN FOREST AND PROTECTED AREA

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Abstract

Urban forests are important components of cities, providing many benefits to society. They are places for outdoor recreation activities, refuges from hectic city life and valuable habitats for wildlife. Understanding the attachments that local residents form with urban forests will enhance land managers' ability to address deeper landscape meaning and place-specific symbolic values in natural resource and urban planning decision making (Williams & Vaske, 2003).

Place attachment of local residents with a forest in Vienna was measured and correlated with past experience and attitudes about nature conservation. The peri-urban forest of 2,400 hectares of size is part of the Danube Floodplains National Park and is managed by the forest department of Vienna. One part of the area was declared as a biosphere reserve in 1977. Suburbs of Vienna, rural communities, areas of intensive agriculture and the Danube River border the forest. About 150,000 inhabitants live within a few kilometres of distance to the borders of the forest. It is a traditional recreational area which is intensively used (Arnberger, 2006).

A postal survey among local residents was carried out in spring 2006, using a modified Dillman approach (1978). More than 600 residents answered the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of about 50%. More or less all residents had visited the forest; about one-fifth visited the forest several times per week. Respondents assigned high place attachment values to the forest. Factor analysis was employed to determine the underlying dimensions of the respondents' place attachment, producing two dimensions (place dependence and place identity) and explaining 69.0% of the total variance. Length of residence increased place attachment scores, and the more residents feel attached to the forest, the more they were satisfied with it. Elderly people and frequent users depend more on the forest, but were less supportive of nature conservation issues.

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Key Words

Local residents, Postal survey, Place attachment, Urban forest, Vienna

Key References

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