

LINKING URBAN FORESTS AND URBAN TOURISM: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING APPROACH

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Abstract

Urban forests play an essential part in enhancing a city's image, attracting tourists, and increasing tourism experiences. However, few studies have been conducted to examine the linkage between urban forests and urban tourism. This paper for the first time develops and tests a structural equation model that links tourists' perceptions of urban forests, city beautification, tourism experiences, tourism satisfaction, and destination loyalty, based on data collected in February 2008 from 153 tourists in Savannah, Georgia, the USA.

It is hypothesized that urban forests in Savannah make the city more beautiful. The beauty of city then enhances tourists' tourism experience which, in turn, contributes to their tourism satisfaction. In addition, the more satisfied tourists are, the more likely they would revisit again and say positive things about the city to their family or friends or in other words, they would be more loyal to the city. It is also hypothesized that while urban forests can positively affect tourism experience indirectly through their contribution to the city's beauty, urban forests can directly affect tourists' experience, too.

The results indicate that the five latent variables (urban forests, beauty, experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty) are positively related. Specifically, urban forests significantly contribute to the city's beauty ($t = 10.72, p < .001$) and tourists' experiences ($t = 3.99, p < .001$) while the city's beauty also significantly contributes to tourism experiences ($t = 3.30, p < .01$), which, in turn, significantly enhance visitors' tourism satisfaction ($t = 8.28, p < .001$). Finally, tourism satisfaction significantly contributes to the destination loyalty ($t = 12.06, p < .001$). In addition, urban forests explain 72.2% of variances for beauty and 34.8% of variances for tourism experiences. Thus, the hypotheses are fully supported by the model.

The model is also statistically valid as assessed by several measures including the ratio between the Chi-square value and degree of freedom, which is 2.12 in this study, suggesting a fair model fit (Marsh & Hocevar, 1988).

Key Words

Urban forests, urban tourism, structural equation modeling

Key References

Marsh, H. W., & Hocevar, D. (1988). A new, more powerful approach to multitrait-multimethod analyses: Application of second-order confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 73*, 107-117.