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PERSON-PLACE ENGAGEMENT AMONG RECREATION VISITORS

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BACKGROUND

In the definition of leisure, outdoor recreation in a natural setting may be a leisure experience. Williams, Patterson and Roggenbuckl (1992) said that the outdoor recreation setting is the context for a recreator's experience. While the setting has a physical reality it is also emergent in the experience of each visitor. The context is not simply the setting. The present researcher views the context as the relationship, the interaction between person and place.

Out of this interactive relationship, the perceived setting emerges in the experience of the participant and is, therefore, a phenomenon expressed uniquely in the individual. Self-referential data will further professional understanding of place-facilitated leisure needs operating among visitors.

METHODOLOGY

Q-Methodology was the vehicle of choice to explore person-place interactions among recreation visitors to a rural lake-based park. A Q-Method approach was used because of its effectiveness in illuminating operant subjectivity, in this case subjective response to a rural outdoor recreation setting. The Q sort technique was used to gather data from human subjects. Each subject accomplished a Q sort by rank-ordering a set of 42 statements (Q set) provided by the researcher. The author constructed the Q set out of previously conducted in-depth interviews with visitors to the selected study area (Wilson, 1995). In the interviews, visitors to the study area vocalized subjective accounts of person-place experiences. The task of each subject in the present study was to rank-order the 42 items

of the Q set from "most like me" to "most unlike me," forcing a self-referential, platykurtic normal curve for each subject. Responses were factor analyzed using Stricklin's (1990) Q analysis programs for personal computer.

RESULTS

Four centroids were extracted and Varimax rotated to yield four factors (person types) constructed out of analysis of all responses of the subject sample (P set). The author gave these factors descriptive labels interpreted out of the analyzed data. Person types that were analytically constructed are:

- *purposive dawdlers*, who draw energy from direct experience with physical features;
- *time-out escapists*, who draw energy from a social context antithetical to their daily lives;
- *close-encounters escapists*, who draw energy from communing with non-human influences; and
- *place abstractors*, who draw energy, existentially, from a tranquil natural ambience.

IMPLICATIONS

Characterization of visitor interactions with rural recreation sites using self-referential data can provide essential information to managers and administrators who are stewards of rural park lands. Traditional management practices that base decisions on visitor demographics and activity preferences can result in over development of sites and displacement of recreators for

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whom place is facility. A more ecologic management environment would promote natural features as well as built features in nearby open spaces, thereby supporting depth of human experience in recreation, leisure, learning, and refuge among visitors.

Leaders of groups participating in experiential programs in the outdoors, particularly in backcountry expeditions, can increase group management effectiveness and enhance personal benefit to participants by taking into account the various modes in which individuals engage themselves with the physical setting.

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