Understanding the place attachment of campers along the southern Ningaloo Coast, Australia

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Joanna M. Tonge      Date
Awards and conference presentations:

Awards

Best PhD Student Paper: 16th International Symposium on Society and Natural Resource Management: Tyranny of “Or”: Conservation or Development (ISSRM 2010)


Runner-up Best Student Paper: 48th Australian Marine Sciences Association Conference: Crossing Boundaries (AMSA 2011)

Runner-up 3MT Presentation: School of Environmental Science, Murdoch University 3 Minute Thesis Presentations (2011)

Conference presentations


Abstract

Place attachment and place related concepts were developed to examine bonds individuals form with places. Place concepts have been adopted by managers of natural areas to help refine their understanding of visitor preferences. These concepts, consisting predominantly of place meanings and place attachment, have been studied extensively in terrestrial natural areas with limited focus on marine and coastal areas. Therefore this study aimed to use a mixed-method approach to understand place meanings ascribed to coastal areas and the effect of place attachment on pro-environmental behaviours and support for management actions.

The qualitative method photo-elicitation was employed to ascertain meanings ascribed to Ningaloo Marine Park and its adjacent coastline. Analysis of participant photographs and interviews identified four categories of meaning – physical environment, recreational activities, social ties and emotional connections – with each nuanced by the presence of water. This analysis identified a new form of emotional connection – everybody’s happy – which described the enjoyment of all members of a group with a holiday to Ningaloo. This was included in a subsequent quantitative visitor survey along with more traditional dimensions of place attachment and questions pertaining to pro-environmental behaviours and management actions.

Structural equation modelling identified place identity as the only dimension to have a significant effect on on-site behaviours individuals would do themselves, telling others to do these same behaviours, and off-site conservation actions. To identify the relationships between dimensions of place attachment and support for management actions each dimension was clustered based on level of attachment, with these
clusters subjected to multivariate stepwise correlation modelling (via PRIMER) with the management actions. No significant relationships were found, other than with one cluster within the everybody’s happy place attachment dimension.

The thesis concludes with a research agenda suggesting further reflection on the construction of place identity and its influences on perceptions of leisure settings. Also required is consideration of the newly identified and reconceptualised construct – everybody’s happy – and its broader applicability beyond this coastal-based study.
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