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A photo-elicitation approach to exploring the place meanings campers ascribe to the Ningaloo coastline, north-western Australia

Abstract:

Although there have been numerous studies of the meanings ascribed to terrestrial places, their applicability or otherwise to coastal and marine places has received limited attention. Through the process of photo-elicitation, this paper explores the meanings ascribed to a remote coastal camping environment, with the coastline of Ningaloo Marine Park in north-western Australia the focus for this study. Thirty participants were provided with digital cameras and the ascribed place meanings were explored when their photographs were discussed in subsequent in-depth interviews. Key meanings related to the physical environment providing opportunities for escape, participating in multiple marine-based activities, bonding with family and like-minded people, and a rewarding experience that makes everybody happy. This emergent meaning of “everybody’s happy” progresses our understanding of the affective elements of place, especially those realised by families and groups of friends. The paper concludes with the important implications of this meaning, and of a paradoxical perspective on isolation evident from the interviews, for managing coast-based recreation.

Keywords: coasts, emotional connections, Ningaloo Marine Park, physical environment, place attachment, place meanings

Introduction

Coastal areas, including oceans, beaches and adjacent hinterlands, are popular settings for tourism and recreation activities (Needham & Szuster, 2011), and, with its very long coastline, this is particularly true in Australia (Maguire, Miller, Weston & Young, 2011). Not only do the majority of Australians live within 50 km of the coast, but beaches are also one of the favourite locations for annual holidays and recreational activities (Harvey & Caton, 2003; Maguire, et al., 2011). They are seen as Australian national icons, embodying natural places of sun, sea, surf and sand (James, 2000). While most recreation activities take place at local beaches, Australians will travel hundreds of kilometres to distant beaches as their favourite holiday destinations (Maguire, et al., 2011). Coastal recreation visitation levels are increasing within Australia and globally (Moskwa, 2012; Needham & Szuster, 2011). A survey within Victoria revealed that 87% of residents had visited the beach at least once within a 12 month period (IPSOS, 2007), and 90% of respondents from south-east Australia nominated beaches as one of their top three most valued recreational environments (Maguire, et al., 2011).

The challenge for managers of coastal recreational areas is frequent usage can result in degradation of these natural areas and a decline in the recreational and aesthetic quality that attracted visitors in the first place (Bell, Needham & Szuster, 2011; Petrosillo, Zurlini, Corliano, Zaccarelli & Dadamo, 2007). Ways to plan and manage these areas is required (Shafer & Inglis, 2000) leading to a need for research examining the social and environmental values of coastal recreational settings and the intersection of these values with visitor activities (Dimmock 2012). There is little research into these important socio-cultural relationships between visitors and coastal and marine environments (Dimmock, 2012), which is surprising given the importance visitors often place on these settings (Moskwa, 2012).

For the past three decades managers of terrestrial recreational areas have relied on place concepts as part of efforts to include socio-cultural, meaning-orientated dimensions into natural resource management (Farnum, Hall, & Kruger, 2005; Trentelman, 2009). Place concepts allow managers to refine their understanding of visitors' setting and management preferences, and activity participation (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004). By including place concepts, management decisions and strategies may become more responsive to visitor experiences and needs (Manzo, 2008). A focus on place concepts in coastal and marine environments seems prudent given the recent growth of marine tourism and the special management challenges faced by managers of coastal settings in incorporating both terrestrial and water-based activities and environs (Moskwa, 2012).

The term "place" describes a geographic area that has been given value or meaning by an individual, with personal experience distinguishing place from ordinary space (Galliano & Loeffler, 1999; Trentelman, 2009; Tuan, 1977). Over time, geographic spaces become infused with material, biophysical, social and meaning-rich elements, which are created and maintained through individuals' interactions with the setting, socio-cultural backgrounds and preferences for particular environmental settings (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003; Trentelman, 2009; Young, 1999a). Place meanings articulate values an individual ascribes to a setting. They are constructed and reconstructed through continual experiences with the place and are personified by the characteristics of the setting (Manzo, 2008; Stedman, 2008). Over time, individuals develop attachments to these meanings and continually rely on a place to foster and support these meanings and their subsequent place attachment during repeat visits (Stedman, 2008).

The meanings ascribed to a place are not apparent by solely examining the biophysical attributes or people within a place. They emerge as a result of the interaction between the biophysical attributes and social and political processes (Cheng, et al., 2003). As such,

meanings are socially constructed and re-constructed through shared history and culture, objective and tangible setting attributes, and previous experience (Williams & Patterson, 1996; Wynveen, Kyle & Sutton, 2010; Young, 1999a). Additionally, the psychological motivations of an individual to visit the place can influence how the place is viewed, constructed and re-constructed. Individuals often travel to particular places to fulfil specific psychological needs, potentially resulting in them constructing and interpreting place meanings in the context of these needs (Young, 1999a).

The majority of place meaning research has been conducted in terrestrial environments, focusing on how natural areas influence feelings of residents and visitors towards the environment (Beckley, Stedman, Wallace, & Ambard, 2007; Davenport & Anderson, 2005; Stedman, Beckley, Wallace, & Ambard, 2004). This focus has resulted in limited research on place meanings ascribed to coastal areas and marine environments (Garrod, 2008; Wynveen, et al., 2010 are exceptions). There is also a clear lack of research in relation to place and other visitor values as they apply to coastal recreational settings where visitors are not necessarily “resident”, i.e. from adjacent towns or cities, but travel vast distances to stay and recreate at these settings.

The value and attraction of aquatic environments are well known (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Wynveen, et al., 2010) with a number studies of place meanings conducted on rivers of economic importance and high tourist visitation (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Davenport & Anderson, 2005). Davenport and Anderson (2005) found that the local community viewed the Niobrara Scenic River in central Nebraska as “a tonic”, “nature”, “identity”, and “sustenance”. Bricker and Kerstetter (2002) focused on watercraft users of the South Fork of the American River in California and identified five themes of meanings – environment and landscape, human and social, heritage and historic, commodity and facilities, and recreation.

Wynveen et al. (2010) shifted the focus from rivers to marine environments by identifying and documenting place meanings recreational visitors ascribed to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in north-eastern Australia. Ten meaning themes were identified including abundance and diversity of wildlife and coral, unique natural resources, experiences with family and friends, and sense of connection to the natural world. The physical attributes of the marine setting significantly contributed to the participants' place meanings as the authors' analysis identified that in terrestrial settings the mere presence of water is considered important, but rarely was its importance to meaning formation described in such detail as in their study. While an important first step, the study focused on visitors taking day-trips to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, rather than visitors who choose to have a longer association with such an area through camping and undertake recreational activities along the adjacent coastline for an extended period. The latter, importantly, is the focus of the study reported in this paper.

Given the limited focus on place meanings attributed to coastal and marine areas, the aim of this study was to explore place meanings visitors ascribed to the coastline of the remote Ningaloo Marine Park. Its contribution is threefold. First, it adds to the limited body of knowledge regarding place meanings ascribed by visitors to coastal and marine settings. Second, it describes and analyses meanings obtained through extended exposure, by visitors who have committed to travelling and staying for a period of time in a remote location. Third, these meanings are sourced from visitors *in situ*, in the act of recreating and meaning construction, rather than post-visit as has been the case in other related studies (e.g. Wynveen et al., 2010; Eisenhauer, Krannich & Blahna, 2000). Such information is instructive for managers of recreational and leisure settings, as managing places relies on understanding the differing meanings visitors' ascribe to a setting (Young 1999b). It is especially important for

managers of coastal environments given the increasing levels of visitation and the increased potential for conflicting meanings to occur.

Study site

The Ningaloo Marine Park encompasses Ningaloo Reef, one of the largest fringing coral reef systems in the world (Cassata & Collins, 2008; Wilkinson, 2008) with only a shallow lagoon separating the Reef from the Australian mainland (Collins, Zhu, Wyrwoll, & Eisenhauer, 2003). It supports a diverse array of marine life including whale sharks, dugongs, manta rays, sharks, migrating humpback whales and several species of turtles (Sleeman et al., 2007). The Marine Park was originally established in 1987 to protect the Ningaloo Reef, with the boundaries extended in 2004 to encompass the entire 300 km length (CALM & MPRA, 2005).

The nearest capital city (Perth) is over 1,200 km distant (Fig. 1), with this remoteness reflected in the low visitor numbers to Ningaloo Marine Park of approximately 200,000 visitors per year (CALM & MPRA, 2005). A range of activities are available including swimming, snorkelling, fishing, boating and diving (CALM & MPRA, 2005). Visitors can camp along the coast in Cape Range National Park, at a number of pastoral stations (where the main land use is rangeland grazing), and in several caravan and camping parks in the small coastal communities of Exmouth and Coral Bay (Smallwood, Beckley, Moore, & Kobryn, 2011).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

A recently completed human usage study of this Marine Park identified that 55% of respondents had visited previously, with 44% of these always staying at the same location (Beckley, Smallwood, Moore, & Kobryn, 2010). This is high site fidelity and suggests strong place attachment. As such, three coastal campsites associated within the southern section of

Ningaloo Marine Park were chosen as the study sites (Fig. 1) as few studies have been undertaken there given access difficulties due to poor roads and large distances to nearby service centres. The first study site was Coral Bay, which provides camping and hotel-based accommodation with facilities including a petrol station, supermarkets, bakery and nature-based tourism businesses. Only those camping were included in this study. The other two study sites were located on pastoral stations abutting the coastline of the Marine Park. The 14 Mile Campsite on Warroora Station provides unpowered sites and no other facilities (other than a refuse dump) and 3 Mile Campsite on Gnarlaloo also provides unpowered campsites but with basic facilities including showers and toilets.

Methods

This study used photo-elicitation, where participants take their own photographs which are later discussed as part of an in-depth interview (Jacobsen, 2007; Loeffler, 2004). Pictures or images can evoke emotion and capture large amounts of information within a single representation. When used as part of the research process they can allow participants to reflect on aspects of their lives or prod underlying memories. Photographs can also induce deeper aspects of an experience than words alone, stimulating the release of emotional thoughts and statements about a concept (Harper, 2002; Loeffler, 2004). Given the paucity of information on meanings ascribed to coastal recreational settings, photo-elicitation is an ideal method for exploring the complexity of place meanings ascribed to Ningaloo.

It has been applied in terrestrial place studies (see Amsden, Stedman, & Kruger, 2011; Beckley, et al., 2007; Stedman et al., 2004) and seemed particularly suitable for this study given the potential participants were on holidays and taking photographs is part of this experience. Asking them to take photographs reduces the perception of research-related intrusion (Garrod, 2008) as photographs taken by participants may have been images they

would have taken anyway. Also, because the focus of the interview is on the photographs rather than the participants, they should feel more at ease and provide deeper insights on the subject in question than through interviews alone (Garrod, 2008; Loeffler, 2004).

Data collection

During July 2009, which is peak visitation for the region (Smallwood, et al., 2011), visitors camping at each of the three study sites were asked to participate in the study if they had camped at the site at least twice previously. It has been suggested that an attachment to a setting begins to develop after one or more visits (Gunderson & Watson, 2007). Participants meeting this criterion were provided with a digital camera and asked to take up to eight photographs of why they liked visiting the site and/or what it was that made them return. An interview was arranged a few days (typically 2-4 days) after camera distribution to allow participants time to take photographs while not allowing so much time that the novelty of taking photographs had subsided and they became disengaged (Stedman, et al., 2004).

As photo-elicitation uses photographs as the driver for obtaining in-depth information, semi-structured interviews were undertaken. A list of questions and probes were established *a priori* to guide the interviewer as required. The digital photographs were loaded on to a laptop computer for ease of viewing and general questions relating to visit and visitor characteristics (for example type of travel group, life-cycle stage, frequency of visitation) were asked at the start of each interview. Discussion of the photographs followed, specifically the intention behind the images and their value or contribution to the participant's experience. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and at the conclusion, a CD containing a copy of their photographs was provided to the participants. While the interview was focused on the participant who took the photographs, if other members of the participant's group were present they were encouraged to provide comments as well. In

approximately three quarters of the interviews undertaken, other group members (e.g. partners, friends) were present and provided comments which also formed part of the subsequent analysis.

Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim, with the participants' description of their photographs in the interview text used to label what each photograph represented or was intended to represent. Once the photographs were labelled, these were assigned to a series of broad categories based on textual analysis of the interviews and previous place studies to allow for the initial exploration of place meanings. The photographs were assigned an additional label if they contained a marine element (e.g. seascape) or pertained to a marine activity (e.g. photograph of fishing rods). This was to assist in determining the extent of the influence of the marine aspect of the coastal setting.

The interviews were coded for content with key blocks of text assigned codes. Following the initial coding, interview transcripts were re-read to ensure consistency across all transcripts and to adjust, expand and condense categories as required. Coding was undertaken using the *QSR NVivo* software program (Version 2.0), a qualitative data analysis tool that allows for the creation of code trees, or grouping together of like/similar codes into hierarchical structures. Two of the researchers coded and re-coded using a shared set of codes until they achieved 85% inter-coder reliability. Finally, the coded blocks of interview text and photograph labels were re-examined to ensure there was a reflection and consistency in meanings between the two approaches.

Results

Thirty participants across the three study sites contributed to the study. Theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008) was reached with this number, with no new themes or further explanation of

existing themes provided by the last few participants. The visit and visitor characteristics of these participants are summarised in Table 1. Collectively the participants in this study covered all life cycle stages from raising children to empty nesters, with a smaller number of single individuals contributing to the study.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The participants took a total of 206 photographs, with a mean of 7 photographs per participant (range 3-16). The photographs were assigned to three broad categories – physical environment (34%), recreational activities (29%) and social situations and ties (37%), similar to previously identified place meanings (see Eisenhauer, et al., 2000; Smaldone, Harris & Sanyal, 2008). Also identified were those that featured marine aspects or elements (Fig. 2). Apparent from Figure 2 was the dominant marine influence on the physical environment category. There was a more equal split between marine and terrestrial focus for recreational activities and social situations, suggesting the importance of the coastal setting for these participants – they need and use both terrestrial and marine environments.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

When the photographs and the interviews were analysed together, because the meaning behind the photographs is in the accompanying stories (Stedman, et al., 2004), four broad categories of place meanings emerged (Table 2). These centred on those identified from the photograph analysis as well as a fourth category – “everybody’s happy”. This category was evident from the interviews as positive emotions were revealed by the participants through their reference to the photographs and were not self-evident from the photographs themselves. Table 2 presents a summary of the categories and the meanings identified and the quotes below have been selected as illustrative of the meanings evident through the four categories.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Physical environment

For many participants, camping along the Ningaloo coast provided an escape, from the cold of the southern winter, to warm, beautiful, natural surroundings and geographical isolation. The sheer size of Western Australia meant that participants could drive for a day within a single state and reach a warmer climate than the one they left at home:

“The biggest main reason is that in one day you drive from Perth [capital of Western Australia] and you go from winter to summer, that is pretty cool. I don’t know how many places you could do that in the world, especially towing a boat. But 1200km and you are in summer, shorts, t-shirt...drinking a beer.”

The beauty of the physical environment provided an opportunity to escape through the wonder of nature. Participants’ imaginations were captured by changing tides, creatures in rock pools and the array of colours surrounding them.

“They like looking at the hermit crabs in the water and other things in the rock pools. It was just a wonderful little spot, it is an artist’s pallet really, all these colours and you are sitting there and everywhere you look, like we were sitting on these rocks and the water was coming underneath and was coming out into little water features and there was blowholes and blowing up air every time a wave came through.”

The ocean and associated coastline created a feeling of seclusion and isolation, particularly the expansiveness of the physical environment. Rather than being a negatively perceived landscape devoid of human life, this was seen as a positive, as a way to escape and enjoy unspoilt beauty and wilderness that seemed to extend forever.

“That one I love (Plate 1) because of the rugged coastline and just how it disappears off in to the horizon and it is empty. Just being able to be access something so wild and expansive and kilometres of coastline – you just can’t beat it.”

INSERT PLATE 1 ABOUT HERE

A considerable amount of planning and preparation goes into undertaking holidays along the Ningaloo coast. Due to the distance, isolation and cost of supplies, visitors need to ensure they are well prepared and have everything they need. Rather than detracting from the experience, it seems to add to it. The rewards that come from all that planning and preparation are too good to miss.

“It is a bit of a mission to get here so it is a bit more rewarding when you do and then you get big waves.”

“...holidays here are hard work getting here and all the rest of it, but the best holidays we have ever had have been here.”

Recreational activities

A number of marine and terrestrial based activities are available along the Ningaloo coast, including fishing, surfing, snorkelling, four-wheel driving, walking or just relaxing. This diversity in activities was a key attraction for a number of participants:

“It has snorkelling, surfing, fishing, it has got everything”

“It is like you can always go walking, there’s bocce, they play mah-jong, the boys go out fishing...”

Additionally, being able to conduct multiple marine-based activities in the one location was seen as something that could not be readily found elsewhere.

“You have got options here because it is just like a big swimming pool, you can snorkel and you have got the fish, where else can you do that. Even the Great Barrier Reef you have got to get on a boat and go out a long way...”

Some, however, relied on the Ningaloo coast to provide the right conditions for their one activity of interest:

“The surf, if there wasn’t surf here we wouldn’t come here, because the surfers in the family wouldn’t be interested.”

Social situations and ties

Bonding with family and like-minded people was central to this category of meanings. Holidays to Ningaloo coast provided families with the opportunity to reconnect and strengthen bonds. Many participants who were parents mentioned they looked forward to “*just be with the kids, as parents who are time poor at home*”. For some, it was the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time with their children, rather than being at work.

“This is a photo (Plate 2) with my daughter’s first fishing rod and it is pink and Dad is teaching her fishing. Dad’s massive flannelette shirt, it is very cute. We both work, I don’t work full time but I still work, and it is awesome just to spend the two weeks with the kids, just full-time together and enjoying it.”

INSERT PLATE 2 ABOUT HERE

A significant portion of time was spent reconnecting with children through teaching them skills specific to the marine environment. Learning responsibilities such as boat handling and how to clean fish provided a unique opportunity for parents to pass on skills while spending quality time with their children.

“There is a lot of bonding with the kids and teaching them as well, like boat handling, how to catch fish, how to clean fish, skills that they don’t often need but they keep up when they come up here. Like we were saying the other night, tying knots with the kids, how to do the boat radio...”

Other participants commented that trips to Ningaloo allowed them to meet like-minded people, who share similar interests.

“Yeah, people are just really nice because you meet like souls. Because people who like camping and are living this type of life, they are the only ones who come here.”

Over time, these like-minded people form important friendship groups. Many participants commented that they visited the study sites at the same time each year as they knew that others in their friendship group will do the same.

“Because we come in July every year, over the years we have made quite a few friends. Like we had a sundowner here last Wednesday with about 40 people... But that is why we don’t change the two weeks, because there are others that come up for the same two weeks. There are about six boats and there is a bit of camaraderie between us all out on the water.”

They start to look out for one another, on the water and around the campsites. A feeling of community is created by like-minded people enjoying the coastal environment. It was enhanced by the number of participants who come back every year to the same camping spot. Living in such close quarters means that everyone keeps an eye on everyone else and is quick to lend a hand when a ‘neighbour’ is in trouble.

“I mean everyone knows everyone – how many years have people been coming here and nothing gets flogged, nothing gets stolen. If someone has a problem everyone rallies around and fixes it up and that sort of thing and helps out. It is a good community...”

Everybody’s happy

A meaning new to place studies, and strongly related to the current interest in emotional aspects of place (Ramkissoon, Weiler & Smith, 20102), is the experience of Ningaloo coastline contributing to everybody being happy. There was a perception among participants that holidays at Ningaloo are enjoyed by all family members as this coastline had something for everyone. Fathers (or others) go surfing, the children play nearby on the beach while mothers relax on the shore – all in the one convenient location.

“Yeah, my husband likes to surf, so it is important to find somewhere where the surf breaks aren’t too far away and with the nice swimming beach and a nice camping area.”

So this place really has it all and everybody is happy. Mum is happy with the beach, the kids are happy with the beach and the surfing is just around the point and that is pretty important for our family, as surfing is a real major aspect... And also, the snorkelling is just fantastic.”

Comments from interview participants described how having a number of activities available in one setting resulted in the view that “everybody’s happy” with a holiday at Ningaloo.

Participants felt that all members of their group had the ability to partake in their own activities without impacting upon the experience of others.

“We come here because it suits all of us. We come here because there is surf, my husband and my son surf...so that is really important and I love the lagoon where I can swim and snorkel and the girls love that too.”

It was also perceived as a safe environment for children to play, while there were also activities to entertain adults. As a result children enjoyed the holiday just as much as the adults – something a number of participants indicated was hard to find elsewhere.

“If you want to go to the beach you can, if you want to go fishing you can. It is hard to find somewhere where the kids will enjoy it as much as the adults.”

This aspect is predominantly emotionally-based focusing on the positive emotions expressed by an individual in being able to achieve recreational, leisure, and other personal goals concurrently with others, but there are activity and social-based elements as well. This meaning is also illustrative of social construction of place through the creation of contentment in knowing that others in their travel group enjoyed recreating and camping at Ningaloo just as much as they did and were just as happy to spend time there. While not all members of each respondent’s travel group were interviewed to determine if indeed everybody was happy, the perception of group contentment was strongly expressed by study participants and those other group members who contributed comments during the interview process.

Discussion

For participants in this Ningaloo coast study, being at the interface of land and sea was obviously significant in ascribing meaning. The importance of being located at this coastal recreational setting was evident from both the photographs and interviews. By being at this place, both marine and terrestrial activities were possible, people bonded over common activities, and most importantly, being able to undertake these activities led to perception everybody's happy. This affirmed and reaffirmed a strong emotional connection with Ningaloo as a place.

Having ready access to the marine environment was clearly important to participants, as evidenced through the analysis of the photographs. The high percentage of physical environment photographs with a marine influence indicated the importance of the ocean. This was not surprising given the known attraction of the sea and the essentiality of its presence for many highly-valued activities (e.g. surfing and fishing). The lower percentage of photographs of recreational activities with a marine element may be attributable to the camera type. If the cameras had been water-proof, there may have been more photographs actually taken by participants while fishing, surfing or snorkelling.

The broad descriptions of the categories identified here share some similarity to those found in other aquatic- and marine-based studies (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Wynveen, et al., 2010). Aesthetic beauty, facilitation of desired recreational activities, escape from the everyday and experiences with family and friends were all key meanings identified by Wynveen et al. (2010) in their study of recreational visitors to the Great Barrier Reef. A review of coastal camping in New Zealand identified the ability of undisturbed beaches to evoke feelings of awe, inspiration and fostering a sense of wonder (Collins & Kearns, 2010). This is a similar sentiment to that expressed by participants in this study in their description

of the colours of the rock pools or the vast expanse and kilometres of coastline. In addition was the sense of community that developed when regular campers returned to the same campground each time, thereby renewing acquaintances (Collins & Kearns, 2010; Garst, Williams & Roggenbuck, 2010). In this study, they formed important friendship groups based on shared experiences of camping and boating.

Marked differences and new contributions to our understanding of place meanings, here attributable to the coastal recreational setting but potentially with broader applicability, include a paradoxical perception of isolation, the notion of “everybody’s happy” and the contribution of climate. The expansive coastline helped to enhance feelings of isolation and escape and provided the perception of Ningaloo being a remote location that was difficult to get to. However the description of community created through sharing similar experiences creates an interesting paradox. Participants felt they were isolated from the outside world yet were keen to establish, maintain and greatly appreciated social connections with others in adjacent campsites.

“Everybody’s happy” is a new place meaning evident from this study and one that helps explain emotional connections to a place based on feeling positive emotions because of enjoyment by individuals *and* collective groups. The meaning has many facets. Part pertains to social bonding within groups with families and friends spending time together in a place they enjoy visiting. Part is activity-based with many centrally located activities for group members to partake in without inconveniencing others. Last and most importantly, is the emotional aspect related to positive emotions associated with achieving or participating in pleasant and goal-compatible events (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). These positive emotions can include enjoyment of one’s own chosen activity or goal while feeling guilt-free because other group members are able to chose whichever path, activity or goal gives them greatest pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Tourism and recreational experiences are important generators of happiness, and therefore are an important tool for advancing an individual's quality of life (Kler & Tribe, 2012). And, in this instance, knowing that this happiness is shared with others may increase these positive emotions. Marketing research has demonstrated that sharing pleasurable experiences with others and having them say positive things about the experience enhances individual enjoyment and increases confidence in personal judgments (Raghunathan & Corfamn, 2006).

Climate has been little mentioned to date in place studies although other aspects of the physical environment have been explored (Beckley, et al., 2007; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Wynveen, et al., 2010). In this study, it is one of the chief drivers for visiting the Ningaloo coast during the Austral winter. Participants became reliant on Ningaloo to allow them to escape the cold and have 'some fun in the sun'. However, visitors to the area during other seasons may not allocate as much importance to the climate as these participants did. Knez (2005) has examined the connection between place and climate and suggested climate is encased in places and instinctively influences the way people interact, experience and remember a place. He further hypothesized that where an individual was raised may influence their recreational site choices, with individuals raised in towns or cities in warmer climates seeking warm places. South-western Australia's Mediterranean climate (warm summers, cool winters) may explain participants pursuing warmer winter conditions for their recreational activities. The relationship between climate and place is probably not specific to coastal settings; however, warmth may be more important where water-based activities are involved.

The photo-elicitation technique used in this study provided essential information on how visitors' value Australia's coastal recreational settings, for which such information has been lacking to-date (Dimmock, 2012). Visitors were receptive to the idea of taking photographs, probably as this is often an activity undertaken while on holiday. In addition, scheduling interviews a few days after the cameras were distributed appeared to keep the purpose of the

study in the participant's mind, resulting in in-depth discussion of photographs. Taking advantage of technologies such as digital cameras and laptop computers made this research technique feasible in a remote location. Photographs also provided an ideal platform for exploring, in the subsequent interviews that centred on these photographs, the emotional elements of place (Beckley et al., 2007).

Particularly valuable was obtaining visitors' perceptions, values and images while they were visiting and experiencing the coastline and not after they have returned home. Other studies (e.g. Wynveen et al., 2010; Eisenhauer, et al., 2000) surveyed or interviewed post-visit and may have associated issues of fading memories and adjustments in reflections. It may be that this *in situ* method contributed to revealing the nuances associated with "everybody's happy", an apparently implicit and important place meaning for these coastal campers. Additionally, those interviewed in this study had visited a number of times and were staying for extended periods, providing insights for managers on this important cohort of repeat, long-stay visitors and their demands and needs.

Conclusion

This qualitative study of visitors recreating and camping on the coast has revealed place meaning categories shared with terrestrial place studies and the small number of marine place studies – the physical environment, recreational activities and social situations and ties. Most importantly, it has revealed a new meaning coalesced around "everybody's happy". This meaning sheds further light on affective place concepts, an area suggested in need of further research (Ramkissoon, et al., 2012). As a meaning, "everybody's happy" seems highly relevant to those recreating with friends and family distant from home, where the time and energy taken to reach the destination suggests a significant investment by all concerned. As

such, its development in this study has important implications for future tourism and recreation studies, far more so than for place studies focused on residents.

The other important conceptual contribution by this study is the paradox of “isolation”. On one hand, the physical environment at Ningaloo evoked a sense of isolation and escape due to the expansive landscape devoid of human presence. Travelling vast distances through sparsely populated and scarcely vegetated country probably added to this perception of distance and isolation. On the other hand, a number of participants sought to camp in close proximity to others, forming important friendship groups and a sense of community. This finding leads to the first of two implications for managers. Visitors aspire to opportunities for both isolation and interaction. Fortunately for site planners, who are generally predisposed for practical and environmental reasons to meeting the needs of group campers, this supports campgrounds centred on facilities that enable interaction. It is also important in this planning that the perception of isolation is retained by preserving landscapes adjacent to and beyond campgrounds that are free from human presence.

The second implication is having camping located at places where multiple activities are available within walking distance of campsites. This practical feature of these Ningaloo study sites seemed central to “everybody’s happy”. The increasing predisposition of park agencies to relocate campsites some distance from focal points, often for reasonable environmental and social reasons, requires careful thought if it could potentially jeopardise the realisation of “everybody’s happy”. Key to the meanings for many of these campers was a variety of activities meeting the needs of their (diverse) family or friendship group in one place. The implications of such a meaning for all members of a family or group have not been previously explored or the implications for management considered.

The exciting challenge now for future research is to further explore this additional meaning of “everybody’s happy”. It seems to characterise recreational activities, so related studies in other recreational settings would help rapidly advance our understanding of this emergent concept. This study importantly has also improved our understanding of the values the coast holds for Australians, especially the more remote (and by default more poorly researched) areas. It seems we appreciate its isolation, but through and with the company of friends and family.

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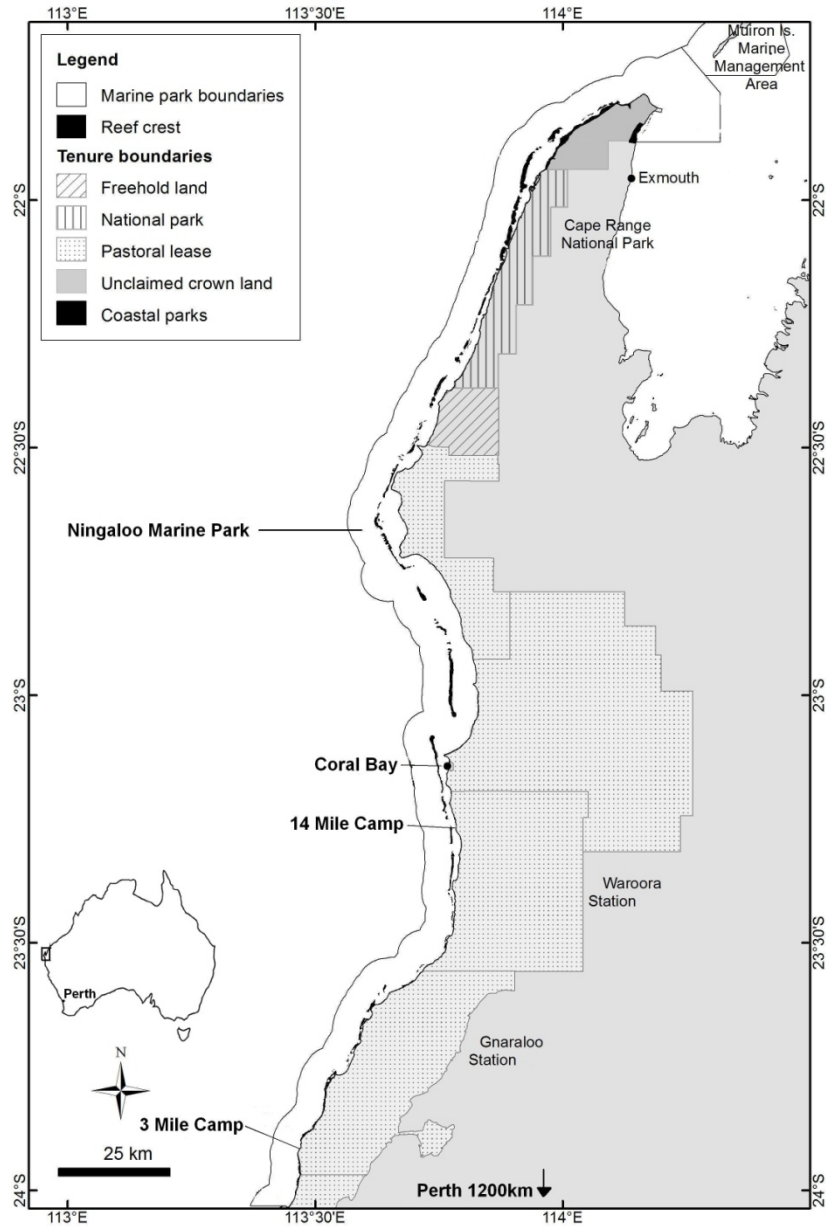


Figure 1: Ningaloo Marine Park, reef crest and study site locations.

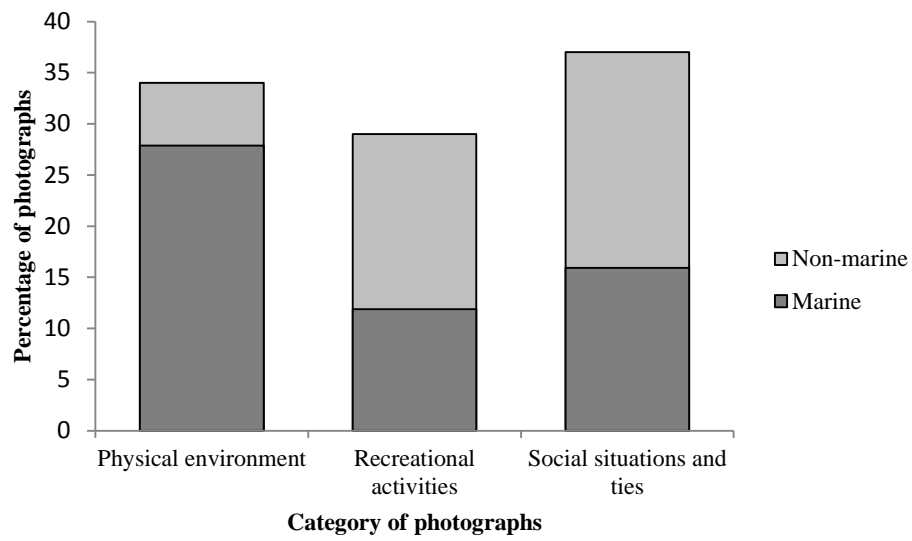


Figure 2: Categories assigned to photographs taken by study participants at Ningaloo and an indication of those that were deemed to feature a marine aspect (n=207).



Plate 1: Participant's photograph representing rugged and expansive Ningaloo coastline.



Plate 2: Participant's photograph taken at Ningaloo of father and daughter with her first fishing rod.

Table 1: Visit and visitor characteristics of study participants at Ningaloo (n = 30)

Visit Characteristics (%)		Visitor Characteristics (%)	
<u>Visitation frequency:</u>		<u>Lifecycle stage:</u>	
More than once per year	23	Raising children, 0-5years	13
Once per year	70	Raising children, 6-12 years	20
Once every 2 years	7	Raising children, 13-17 years	16
<u>Group type:</u>		Independent adult child at home (18+)	6
Family	47	Married or de facto, no children	3
Friends	20	Young single independent adult (18-35 years)	6
Adult couple	33	Older single independent adult (35+ years)	3
<u>First visit:</u>		Empty nest (all children have left home)	30
1980s	27	<u>Gender:</u>	
1990s	13	Female	53
2000s	60	Male	47

Table 2: Categories and place meanings ascribed by study participants to Ningaloo coast (n = 30)

Category	Place meaning
Physical environment	Providing opportunity to escape through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Warmer climate- Wonders of nature- Feeling of isolation due to expansive physical surroundings Physical environment makes experience a well-planned “mission”
Recreational activities	Number of differing marine and terrestrial activities available Conveniently available in the one location Ability to undertake a particular activity (e.g. surfing)
Social ties	Opportunity to reconnect and strengthen family bonds through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Spending quality time with children- Teaching children new skills, predominantly marine based Meet like-minded people who enjoy same activities, holiday experiences Repeat visitation and reconnecting with like-minded people creates feeling of community
Everybody’s happy	Enjoyable experience for all travel group members: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Everybody’s happy as they can partake in own activities in the same location- Children want to visit as much as adults