

Landscape Planning for Nearby Outdoor Recreation – Implications from an Exploratory Interview Study

Barbara Degenhardt & Matthias Buchecker

Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research, Switzerland

barbara.degenhardt@wsl.ch

matthias.buchecker@wsl.ch

Keywords: Nearby outdoor recreation, recovery, work load, strain, motive, behavioural resource, landscape management, peri-urban.

Introduction

Environments that promote recovery and recreation are a fundamental resource of modern society. Empirical studies suggest that the experience of nature is an important motivation for outdoor recreation activities in general, as well as for nearby outdoor recreation. But this need for natural areas for recovery and recreation is in conflict with the current landscape development in peri-urban areas in Switzerland and in Western Europe in general. Competing forms of land use in these areas, such as settlement, road construction, and nature conservation increase the pressure on nearby recreational areas.

Most of the existing research, particularly in Switzerland, that has been done on nearby outdoor recreation behaviour focuses on forest recreation and neglects recreation in open country. However, recreation in open country, or in combination with forest recreation, seems to be of importance as well, especially if one considers that people practicing outdoor activities repeatedly mentioned landscape preferences for openness and diversification. Moreover, in most of the research, on-site visitor surveys using short and/or full-structured questionnaires have been preferred. These methods make it difficult to gain insight into less obvious, but also behaviour-relevant factors for nearby outdoor recreation and the relationships between those factors. To gain more insight into it, we explored the decision strategies of nearby outdoor recreationists.

Methods

The city of Frauenfeld (22000 inhabitants) in the East of Switzerland was chosen as the case study area. Relying on a theoretical sampling strategy, in June/July 2005 we contacted, participators in the three most common outdoor recreation activities in Switzerland; namely walking/hiking, biking, and jogging. The sample included both men and women, from different age groups, who were contacted at three different sites in forest and open country during the week and at the weekend according to a time and place scheme. The response rate was 46 percent and 18 problem-focused interviews were conducted with 8 walkers/hikers, 6 bikers and 4 joggers.

The central questions of the interview guideline were: What causes people to use the nearby outdoor recreational area? With which aims do people use the area? What factors are relevant for which routes of the recreational area they use? When do they use it alone and when do they use it in company with other people? What are the relationships between those aspects? The interviews were analysed by qualitative content analysis using the software NVivo 2.0.

Results

Five domains of factors were identified; namely loads, strains, motives, behavioural resources, and characteristics of the nearby outdoor recreational area.

Out of 25 loads, 21 related explicitly to the life domain of work, two loads to the private life domain, and another two to both domains. Loads were sub-classified into three dimensions. Firstly, demands related to the (work) activity itself such as concentration demands, or emotional work. Secondly, the loads of the social context in which the activity is embedded such as the type and quantity of social contacts. Thirdly, the loads related to the physical environment in which the activity has to be fulfilled such as the noise level at work.

The dimensions of strains were all related to personal strains and were further classified into psychological and physical strains. Psychological strains include cognitive capacity, emotional constitution, and psychological exhaustion. Physical strains include physical tension, pain, and depersonalisation.

The motives for using the nearby outdoor recreation in daily life also had a focus on personal, social, and environmental aspects. Mood-regulation, and personal growth are examples of the motives that relate to the persons themselves. The motives with a social focus include motives such as generativity and intimate communication. Motives related to the environmental aspects refer to, for example, the experiences of certain landscape elements.

Characteristics of the nearby outdoor recreational area that influence people's behaviour were classified into four types: 1) environmental characteristics with personal meaning such as places of biographical importance, 2) natural-geographical characteristics referring to, for example, flora, geographical features, and weather, 3) constructional characteristics such as intensity of development and infrastructure, and 4) social characteristics of the environment such as crowding, and noise level.

The behavioural resources that moderate the realisation of use motives were also classified into personal, social, and environmental conditions. Personal conditions relate to, for example, time, knowledge, and state of health. Social conditions refer to the availability of companions and the needs of their companions. Environmental conditions include amongst others factors of the inside

and outside living conditions, and characteristics of the access area. The focus of the presentation will be directed towards the different behavioural resources.

Outlook

The results of this explorative research will provide a basis for the development of a questionnaire-based household survey and provide input data for the development of a GIS-based suitability map for the use of nearby outdoor recreational areas.