

A RESTORATIVE DEFINITION FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

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Abstract

This paper challenges the traditional “re-create” definition of recreation, offering in its place a restorative orientation based on Attention Restoration Theory. It will be argued and demonstrated that we are not in the business of “re-creating” something that has been lost, but rather, in the business of restoring people’s mental well-being that has been fatigued. Outdoor recreation researchers and managers should be concerned with restorative environments and experiences, not the “re-creating” of lost human properties and benefits. The paper begins with a demonstration to illustrate the difference between restoration and re-creation, follows with a conceptual presentation of Attention Restoration Theory and the components of restorative environments, and ends with some psychophysiological evidence from natural and outdoor recreation environments that support a restoration approach to recreation resource management. The conclusion proposes that we are restoration recreationists, with a philosophical role not much different from restoration ecologists, restoration architects, and restorative psychologists.

1.0 Introduction

The term, Recreation, is an extension of the basic word, Recreate. Recreate, in turn, infers “to create anew” (Guralnik, 1974, p. 1188). Recreation, in its most generic sense, means to re-create something anew in people, something that has been lost during people’s non-leisure time. This re-create definition of recreation has never been satisfactory to me. The question arises, recreate what? What is lost during non-leisure time that is recreated during our leisure time? And, how does it

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occur? Not in the practical sense, but in a theoretical sense. What are the psychological and physiological qualities that underpin the creation anew during recreation? What is the theoretical foundation and/or process by which the recreate of recreation occurs?

The basic purpose and premise of this paper is to challenge you by saying “We (outdoor recreationists) are NOT in the recreation business, but rather, the restoration business.” In most situations we are not involved in the process of creating anew something that is lost within humans, but rather, restoring something within them that has been weakened or fatigued. This restorative definition of outdoor recreation will be developed by addressing four major themes entitled: The ARGUMENT, DEMONSTRATION, ART, and EVIDENCE.

2.0 The Argument

Kelly, (1996) states that

“recreation stems from the Latin *recreatio*, which refers to restoration or recovery. The term implies the re-creation of energy or the restoration of ability to function. Recreation contains the concept of restoration of wholeness of mind, spirit, and body. It presupposes some other activity that depletes, tires, or deteriorates that wholeness” (p. 25).

There are several key words in Kelly’s statement that support the argument for a RESTORE rather than RECREATE, definition of outdoor recreation. A restorative definition for outdoor recreation argues that *recovery* is involved, where an *ability to function* is restored, involving the *mind* and *body*, and presupposes some other process that leads to *tiring* or *deterioration* within humans that prevents functioning as desired. Unfortunately, Kelly does not elaborate to provide a psychological and theoretical foundation for how the tiring or deterioration occurs, nor how the restorative process occurs involving the mind and body. But fortunately for us, Kaplan (1995) in his elaborations of Attention Restorative Theory (ART) and restorative environments/experiences, does provide a psychological and theoretical explanation for the deterioration and recovery processes involved.

Attention Restoration Theory will be discussed in theme three, The ART, of this paper but it suffices to say here that based on Kelly's (1996) definition of recreation and Kaplan's (1995) theory of restoration, that it is the premise in this paper that outdoor recreation does not re-create something that is lost in humans, but rather, it restores people's minds that are fatigued. It is wholeness of the mind in terms of recovery from mental fatigue that restorative recreation is concerned. Outdoor recreation researchers and managers should be (1) concerned with restorative environments and experiences, NOT (2) re-creating of lost human properties and benefits.

3.0 The Demonstration

To demonstrate the difference between the processes of restoring and recreating, the function of a pencil will be used. A wooden pencil, when sharpened, fully functions to aid in the writing of words on a piece of paper. But should one write for an extensive period of time, wearing the lead down until it no longer extends from the end of the pencil, the pencil can no longer function as when in its original state. Now, the worn-down pencil can be easily restored to its original functioning condition by simply sharpening the pencil again. In this scenario, the pencil was not recreated, it was simply restored. However, if one were to take a hammer and smash the pencil, both wood and lead, into splinters and dust, the pencil would need to be recreated anew before it could function in its original state as a writing device.

I would argue that in recreation we seldom are involved with the process of creating anew something that has been destroyed and lost, rather we are involved in the recovery and restoration of a worn-out, fatigue condition to a wholesome functioning condition again. Granted, there are exceptions, such as when a person loses their ability to function due to injury or sickness and a recreation therapist is required to help the person learn anew a lost skill or function. But seldom is outdoor recreation most concerned and involved with recreation therapy as a profession.

4.0 The ART

The psychological and theoretical basis behind a restorative definition for outdoor recreation is Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan 1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, 1998). ART provides an explanation for both the fatigue and recovery aspects of the proposed restorative definition of recreation (Kelly, 1996; Ulrich et al. 1991).

4.1 Attention

The *Attention* component of ART concerns two types of mental focus or attention states utilized by humans while processing information and functioning in various environmental settings. The first type of attention is *Involuntary*, which requires little effort on the part of humans in terms of keeping focused on the environmental information to be processed. It is employed when the stimuli, both in terms of content and process, are interesting, involving, and automatically hold our mental alertness and focus. As a result, involuntary attention is a pleasurable mode of environmental information processing and functioning, and therefore, comes at no cost to humans. Unfortunately, not all environmental stimuli are interesting and involving in terms of information processing and functioning requirements. In fact, the majority of our everyday existence may find us in environmental settings where the stimuli we must deal with are not the most interesting and involving, yet must be processed and acted upon. In these situations humans must call upon *Directed* attention. Directed attention involves a forced and burdensome form of focused attention that requires great effort to remain with the information and task functioning at hand. The stimuli that must be dealt with may be mentally demanding, and of little interest in terms of desired mental involvement.

While humans seem to be quite efficient at using directed attention, it comes at a mental fatiguing cost and can be employed efficiently for only so long of a period. As the mind (and perhaps body) fatigues from the forced attention required, the mind often wanders to more appealing stimuli; thereby decreasing the efficiency of directed attention. When this occurs, a recovery period is necessary, where humans can recover from mental fatigue and restore the ability to once again use directed attention when called upon.

4.2 Restoration

The restoration process involves recovery from the cost and pain of directed attention and mental fatigue. Kaplan (1995) has theorized that the restoration process involves the recovery of a worn-out inhibitor control mechanism that is employed by humans during directed attention to ward-off or inhibit more appealing stimuli from dominating our attention. The means by which the inhibitor control mechanism is restored is to not use it; to use no-cost involuntary attention instead of the

costly directed attention. How is this done? By seeking environmental settings where the dominant form of information processing and functioning is involuntary attention. Kaplan identifies such environments and experiences as *restorative*. Restorative environments and experiences provide for states of INVOLUNTARY attention, where the inhibitor control can recover and we restore the ability to again use DIRECTED attention when needed.

4.3 The Restorative Environment

A restorative definition for outdoor recreation depends entirely upon the availability of restorative environments, of which it is argued that most outdoor recreation environments qualify. However, this qualification is not automatic and does not lack a theoretical basis of what psychological components are necessary for an environment to have restorative qualities. Kaplan et al. (1998) postulate that four psychological components must all be present for an environment to be restorative: Being Away, Extent, Fascination, and Compatibility. Since the restorative definition of outdoor recreation depends on restorative environments, and restorative environments depend on the four components, the components will be briefly discussed (see Kaplan 1995, and Kaplan et al. 1998 for a detailed discussion).

4.3.1 Being Away

Restorative environments must offer the opportunity and qualities to be in a different geographical and/or physical location that is removed from the everyday routines and purposes-tasks of one's life. It is not restorative to just be away to a different environment if everyday routines (i.e. work) and tasks accompany you. Also, as Kaplan stresses, where one is being away *to* is every bit as important as to where one is being away *from*. The Being Away component is not the same as escape or even temporary escape, for the environment one is going to and its qualities are of utmost importance to the restoration process.

4.3.2 Extent

Being away to another environment is not sufficient for restoration, for the scope of the other environment must be considered. Restorative environments have to offer elements of being away to new *worlds of mental exploration*. The component of extent refers to other worlds of environmental information to process and function within. The everyday environment we

commonly function within can become quite familiar and limited in scope of new information to process, or can become quite demanding in terms of uninteresting information to process, thus offering few new worlds to explore. Outdoor environments contain many elements of extent, providing "other" settings and worlds of information that are extensive in scope yet fascinating to explore. And, as pointed out by Kaplan (1995), these environments need not be of wilderness area dimensions, for even small environments (i.e., Japanese gardens or vest-pocket parks) can provide the component of exploration and extent.

4.3.3 Fascination

Environmental stimuli and information that are fascinating, that call forth involuntary attention and hold it, rank high on the qualities of restorativeness. Fascination refers to just not novel content and exciting processes within the environments (i.e., hard fascination), but also to elements of soft fascination, such as water flow, sunsets, snow fall, and the whistling wind. Movement need not always be involved either, for the structure and form of mountain ranges can occupy our attention for intense periods of time.

4.3.4 Compatibility

Compatibility concerns the element of agreement or fit between how one wants to function, both mentally and physically, within an environment and how that environment affords the opportunity to function as desired. It refers to the environmental fit between human intentions and environmental affordances. Environments that demonstrate a great deal of congruity between individual inclinations, environmental patterns, and the actions required by the environment, have restorative properties.

4.3.5 Restorative Experience

Environments then, of which outdoor recreation environments can be an example, are restorative if they contain all four of the psychological components of being away, extent, fascination, and compatibility. They are restorative in the sense that the four components promote the use of involuntary attention, which in turn promotes the recovery from directed attention and mental fatigue, resulting in restorative experiences for humans. Restorative experiences occur when environmental stimuli are fascinating, compatible, and allow being away to another world, where directed

attention does not have to be used. In these situations the pain and fatigue of directed attention can recover.

5.0 The Evidence

Is there empirical support for ART and the restorativeness of certain environments and associated experiences? Two recent special issues on “Restorative Environments” in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2003) and *Environment and Behavior* (2001) address this question, to which the interested reader is referred. Many of the 13 articles contain data collected using the Perceived Restorativeness Scale (PRS) developed by Hartig and colleagues (Hartig et al. 1997). The PRS, as well as other data collection methodologies, are supplying an accumulating body of support for the theory of restorative environments. In addition to the psychological evidence produced by the use of the PRS, some authors have produced physiological evidence that suggests certain environments contain recovery and restorative qualities (Ulrich et al. 1991).

Recent work yet to be published, by C.Y. Chang and colleagues in Taiwan, provide psychophysiological support for outdoor recreation and restorative environments. Twelve images of outdoor environments selected to represent the four components of restorative environments, were viewed by 110 laboratory subjects. Psychological response (using the 23 item PRS) and physiological response (recording brain wave activity, muscle tension, and blood volume pulse) were measured for each of the hypothetical restorative environments. Results of the two methodologies lend positive and similar support for the restorativeness of the environmental images.

6.0 Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to present a restorative definition for outdoor recreation, based on the premise that outdoor recreation is more about the process of restoring people than recreating them. The “re-create” definition of recreation was rejected in favor of the “recovery and restoration” definition of Kelly (1996). Attention Restoration Theory and the concepts of restorative environments/experiences were offered as a psychological and theoretical foundation for the argument of a restorative definition for outdoor recreation. A linkage between the concept of restorative environments/experiences and a restorative definition for outdoor recreation was inferred by posing the question,

“can the recovery, restoration, and wholeness of mind, spirit, and body that Kelly defines as recreation be similar to the recovery, restoration, and psychological well-being that Kaplan (1995) defines as restorativeness? You know my answer.

In conclusion, recreation resource managers are about the business of restoration. They are “human dimension restoration managers” and/or “recreation resource restorationists.” As such, their role is similar to that of: (1) restoration ecologists, whose mission is to restore worn-out environments to some original, natural condition; (2) restoration architects, who refurbish run-down buildings to their original state, and (3) restorative psychologists, who help mentally fatigued and dysfunctional individuals to again function as they once did.

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