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Visitors' Evaluation of Destinations:How are place valued as places to visit?

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Visitors' Evaluation of Destinations: How are places valued as places to visit?

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key word

Evaluation method, Evaluation grid method, Caption evaluation method

Abstract

This report elaborates a lecture that was given by the authors at the University of Ryukyus. In the lecture, the emergence of values of places as attractions for visitors was discussed. Visitors' evaluation of places was then dissected into four elements, and relationships between the elements were explained with reference to the means-end chain model. Finally, the application of the evaluation grid method and the caption evaluation method to tourism studies in an attempt to elicit such relationships was proposed with presentation of the author's own past applications.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a phenomenon that emerges from discretionary interactions between people and environments (Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993). Indeed, destinations need to be visited to function as tourist attractions and tourists need places to visit to actualise their touring experiences. However, tourism is not necessarily a prerequisite for the existence of places. Indeed, many places, such as Palace of Versailles, which are now recognised as tourist attractions, were originally constructed as places that were not open to ordinary visitors. Also, many cities like Paris primarily accommodate residents and their activities while residually serving tourists. Finally, a number of places exist serving human residential, manufacturing or commercial needs, or functioning as habitats of non-human species, without attracting visitors at mass level.

The above observation is a reminder that, while any places or things may become tourist attractions if they are regarded as so by a certain number of people, not many of them are destined to be tourist attractions. This way, seemingly inseparable relationships between people and places in tourism settings appear to be context-dependent rather than inevitable. In other words, the questions of what can be the objects of visit and how they can draw attention of visitors is open to discussion and is thus worth academic investigation.

The lecture presented some theoretical frames and possible methods for the empirical investigation. One possible approach is to focus on what marks a historical district as a place to visit through the secondary data sources, such as newspaper articles. Recognising the significance of such an approach, the lecture focused on analysis of primary data obtained through responses by actual and potential visitors.

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2. Relationships between tourists and places

The above-argued relationships between people and places for the emergence of tourism as a social phenomenon can be explained in the push–pull framework (Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002). In this framework, push factors refer to the specific forces that influence a person's decision to take a vacation while pull factors refer to the forces that influence the person's decision of which specific destination should be selected (Kima, Leeb & Klenosky, 2003). In tourism studies, push factors have been conceptualized as motivational factors or needs (Kima, Leeb & Klenosky, 2003) whereas pull factors have often been targeted in studies of tourism destination image as its constituent.

While some view push and pull factors as relating to two separate decisions made at two separate points in time—one focusing on whether to go, the other on where to go, other researchers have suggested that push and pull factors should be considered to be related fundamentally to each other (Klenosky, 2002). Among the researchers taking the later standpoint, Dann (1981) has pointed out, potential tourists in deciding, where to go may also take into consideration various pull factors which correspond adequately to their motivational push (p. 206). The lecture also emphasises on the latter standpoint, viewing visitors' evaluation of places as the product of mutual influences between visitors and what they encounter, gaze on and interpret.

3. Constituents of visitors' evaluation of places

In the studies of tourism destination image, which relates to the subjective mental views that people have of a place (Chon, 1990; Lawson & Baud-Bovy, 1977; Milman & Pizam, 1995), two components, which are cognitive and affective components, have emerged significant as its constituents. Whereas cognitive components relate to the physical features (Hanyu, 1993) and can be regarded as derived from fact (Boulding, 1956), affective components are concerned with the emotional quality of destination (Hanyu, 1993). Many authors point to the link between these two in that affective components are derived from cognitive components (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Gartner, 1993; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Russel & Pratt, 1980; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989).

It can also be claimed that there are hierarchical relationships between these two components and goal-oriented mental states. In marketing studies, Gutman (1982) proposed a means-end chain model, which refers to the idea that attributes of an object are means to achieve certain objectives, which are then the means to achieve more ultimate objectives or satisfy values. In the model, he proposes hierarchical ladder-like relationship between physical attributes at the bottom of the ladder, consequences of the attributes in the middle, and values, which are higher level abstract mental states, at the top. Although Gutman (1982) do not use the concepts of cognitive and affective components, the attributes exemplified by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) include some elements that seem to correspond to cognitive components, such as “sparkling taste” and while both the attributes and consequences include affective-component-like elements, such as “refreshing”.

There may also be further goal-oriented components between affective components and values, which are defined as beliefs “about a desirable end state that transcends specific situations and guides selection of behaviour” (Solomon et al., 1999, p. 104). In the field of consumer behaviour, a “want”, which is defined as “internal forces that prompt behavior

toward solutions” (Cohen, 1981, p. 200), is usually placed at the most concrete end, and is regarded as a manifestation of a “need” (Solomon et al., 1999; Foxall et al., 1998). These hierarchical relationships may also exist in visitors’ evaluation of places.

In addition, visitors’ personal factors and contexts could also influence visitors’ evaluation of places. According to Horiuchi (1998), consumption can be influenced by products’ attributes, personal factors and contexts. Product attributes are products’ appearance or performance. Personal factors include characteristics, such as personality or life-style, which can be attributed to individuals rather than to their surroundings. Contexts refer to the environments that influence consumer behaviour, and could be physical, social or temporal.

The possible hierarchical relationships between aforementioned components in visitors’ evaluation of places are summarised as in Fig. 1.

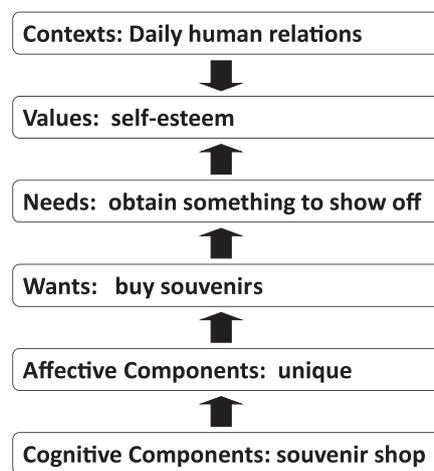


Fig 1: The possible hierarchical relationships in visitors’ evaluation of places

4. Proposed methods

4-1. Use of prepared photographs

Use of photographs has been considered as a method to present settings of a tourism destination as objects for subjects to evaluate. As suggested by Brown, Richards, Daniel and King (1989 as cited in Son & Pearce, 2005, p.24) and Munson (1993 as cited in Son & Pearce, 2005, p.24), photographs portray environmental situations more accurately than verbal description alone. One approach to utilise photographs as stimuli is to employ photographs prepared by researchers. For example, Son and Pearce (2005) asked subjects to rate the extent to which photographed features represented the image the subjects have of Australia. Likewise, a study by Prebensen (2007) utilised pictures of Norway’s attributes. Q method, which requires subjects to state their views about destinations after classifying various photographs, was employed by Fairweather and Swaffield to elicit visitors’ experiences (Fairweather & Swaffield, 2001, 2002). As for more quantitative approaches, some authors (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997, 2000; Naoi, Airey, & Iijima, 2009; Naoi & Iijima, 2004) employed slide experiments to investigate subjects’ image or evaluation of destinations.

Employment of photographs selected by researchers may, however, fail to fully capture subjects’ evaluation of elements that they think are relevant to their evaluations (Garrod,

2007) Some researchers indeed have analysed the contents of photographs that subjects took for their studies of natural environments (Cherem & Driver, 1983; Oku & Fukamachi, 2006; Taylor, Czarnowski, Sexton & Flik, 1995), urban environments (Haywood, 1990), a historic site (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004) and a historic seaside resort (Garrod, 2007). Such an approach is expected to allow to focus on elements that are relevant to them (Garrod, 2007), to deepen consideration of their views and experiences (Garrod, 2007, 2008, Markwell, 2000) and to facilitate the evocation of their experiences (Garrod, 2007).

4-2. Evaluation grid method

The evaluation grid method [Repertory Grid Hatten Shuhō], which was first proposed and applied by Sanui and Inui (1986) in the field of architectural psychology, is the combination of two separate methods: the repertory grid analysis and the laddering analysis. The repertory grid analysis is based on Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory. The notion of the construct refers to the ideas behind the actual discrimination that the subject makes between phenomena (people or objects) in the environment. Constructs are defined and revealed through the pattern of choices and discrimination that people make among elements given to them to assess (Downs, 1976). The repertory grid analysis is one of the methods that attempt to reveal subjects' constructs by providing them with several sets of elements to be compared.

The laddering analysis is a method to identify hierarchical relationships between attributes of objects, evaluations, and higher levels of abstract mental states, such as values, in accordance with the afore-mentioned means-end chain model. This method has been used in the fields of Marketing (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988; Gengler & Reynolds, 1995) and Architecture (Maki, n.d.; Sanui & Inui, 1986) in order to establish how physical attributes of a place or product are related to human values. This analysis causes subjects to think critically about the connections between the product's attributes and their personal motivations, by being repeatedly asked "Why is that favourable/unfavourable/important for you?" once an attribute of an object element is mentioned by a subject as a reason for their preference of the object among the others. It is also likely that affective components or goal-oriented mental states rather than physical attributes of an object are mentioned. In such cases, it is necessary to ask "ladder-down" type of questions, for instance, about how subjects think things should be in order to meet their objectives (Sanui & Inui, 1986).

In the evaluation grid method, constructs elicited by the repertory grid analysis are employed as the starting point of the laddering analysis. By providing subjects with frameworks and almost the same controlled environments, this method helps to minimise biases caused by researchers' subjectivity, their lack of experience or uncontrollable factors. The lecture presented an application of the evaluation grid method to study visitors' evaluation of a historical district (Naoi, Airey, Iijima & Niininen, 2007) with 58 photographs taken by the authors as the stimuli and with 30 undergraduates as the subjects. Fig 2 illustrates the results concerning the subjects' evaluation of people. It appears that the presence of people may be perceived favourably or unfavourably depending on whether they are related to a sense of activity, the touristic atmosphere or the oldness, and that consequently leads to the perceived accomplishment of certain objectives.

4-3. Caption evaluation method

As Garrod (2007) maintains, while use of photographs taken by subjects may be effective in collecting visual data, the takers' viewpoints that the photographs reflect should be interpreted. The caption evaluation method [Caption Hyouka Hou], which is Koga, Taka, Munakata, Kojima, Hirate and Yasuoka (1999) in the field of architectural psychology, is a method that employs photographs taken by subjects and attempts to investigate their written reasons for photographing settings. Subjects are required to take photographs of settings in a targeted place and write the reason(s) why each setting was perceived favourably or unfavourably in response to the following three points in an open-ended form:

- What elements did you notice?
- What characteristics of these elements did you notice?
- How do you perceive the noticed characteristics?

The first and second questions were posed to extract characteristics of a noticed element, and the third question was expected to elicit how subjects think about the characteristics of the element. As to the analysis, Koga et al. (1999) propose the identification of relationships between the elements (words) on the basis of the responses to open-ended spaces.

The lecture presented the application of the caption evaluation method by Naoi, Yamada, Iijima and Kumazawa (2011) to study a historical district with 30 Japanese undergraduates who majored in commerce and 27 adult non-residents with an interest in architecture and/or town planning. Fig 3 shows the results of the 27 adult non-residents.

The results imply the favourable perception of old buildings and the architectural unity,

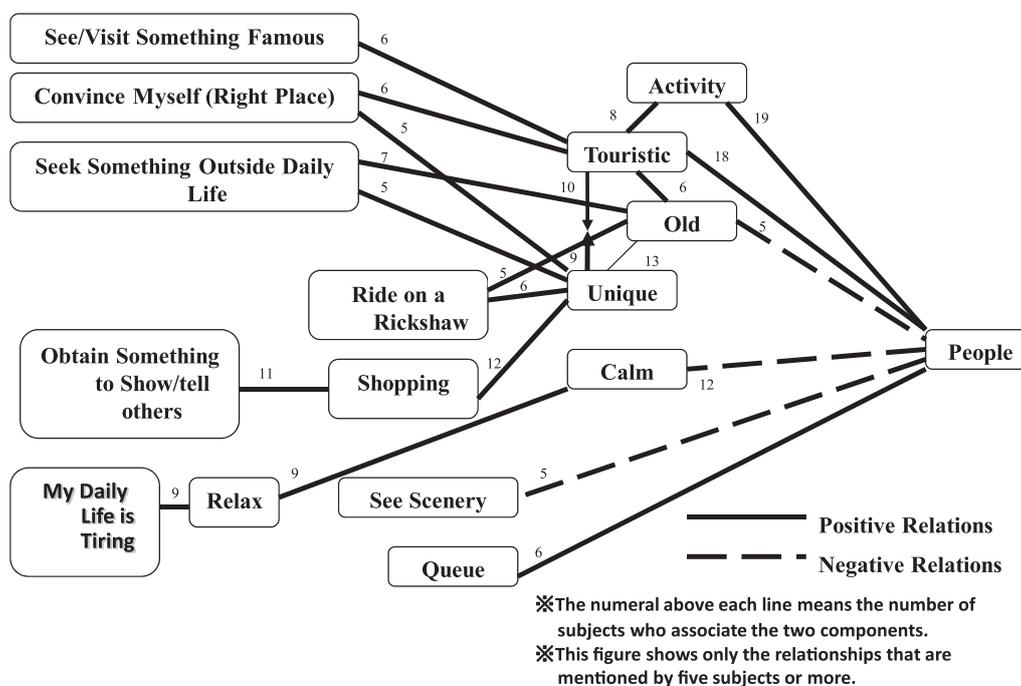


Fig 2: The results of the evaluation grid method (Naoi, Iijima et al., 2007)

and the unfavourable view of electricity poles and cars. In addition, the significance of alleys as the means to accomplish desires to walk and explore is suggested. This is probably one of few applications of the caption evaluation method to research evaluation of a tourism destination.

3. Conclusions and future prospects

The results of the presented past applications of the evaluation grid method and the caption evaluation method imply that the structure of evaluations of a historical district as a tourism destination is far from simple unlike a bipolar framework of favourable or unfavourable. This highlights the importance of deliberately established theoretical frameworks and methods like the ones mentioned in the lecture to proceed towards understanding of the system of certain objects being regarded as tourist attractions. Managerially also, extraction of relationships between the evaluative components may be useful because managers of a historical district may find ways to make the district's existing features appeal to those mental states of visitors, which is particularly useful for many non-tourism oriented destinations whose physical environments are often difficult to tailor-make.

The methods introduced in the lecture admittedly have some downsides. One is the possible small sample size due to the length of time subjects need to complete the session, and also the difficulty in gathering subjects at the same place for a long time. The small sample size may also necessitate the exclusion of attributes of the subjects, such as their socio-demographic and psychological characteristics, from the scope of investigation and, consequently compromise the scope for generalisation of the results. Finally, the lecture touched heavily on object-based evaluations. Cederholm (2009) proposed the concept of Being Tourism, which is based on the idea that there may be instances in which the fact that visitors are with a certain person(s) in a certain context may play a greater role in determination of their visiting experiences than the characteristics of the visited environments. Quantitative and qualitative approaches targeting visitors in field settings together with structured methods as explained in the lecture may help advance studies of visitors' evaluations of places.

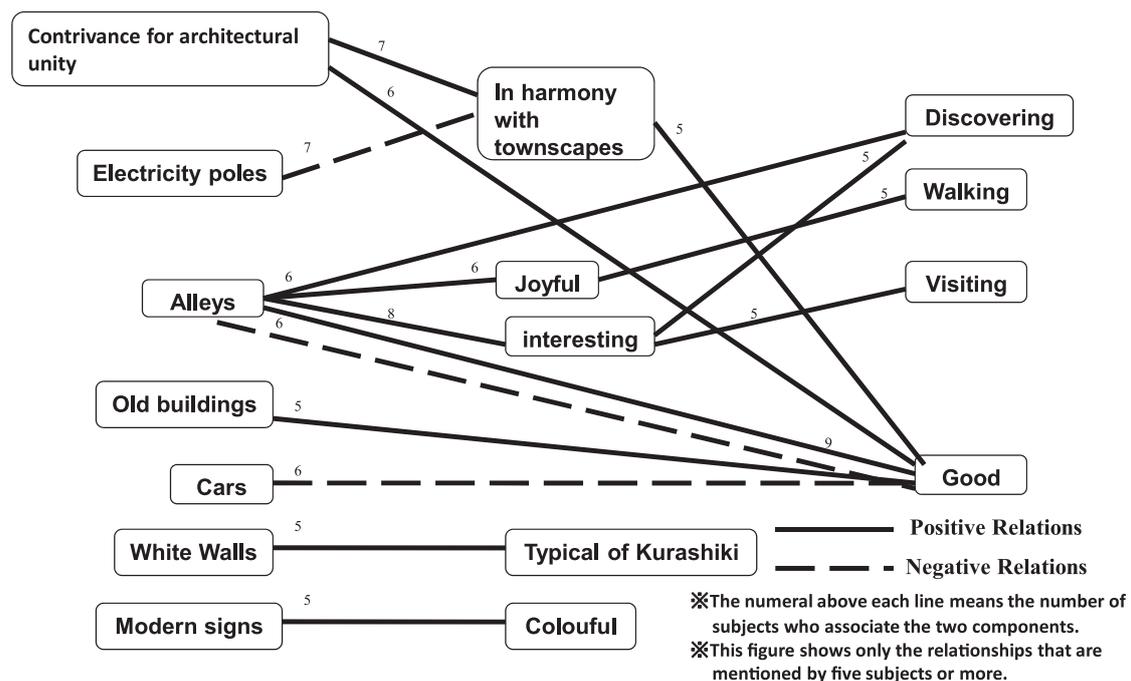


Fig 3: The results of the caption evaluation method (Naoi, Iijima et al., 2011)

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