

Commitment/Involvement and Recreation Specialization

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research in recreation behaviour has focused attention on the concepts of commitment, involvement, and specialization. Little (1976) proposed that the process of specialization entails the development of behavioural, affective, and cognitive systems related to the focus of specialization. He suggested that frequent and/or intense activity in the domain of specialization would lead to interest in and pleasure with that domain and the development of complex constructs associated with the domain.

The whole process is viewed as iterative and each of the three systems are considered mutually reinforcing, in that, development in one enhances the probability of reciprocal increase in the others. Hence, a specialization continuum can be envisaged on which individuals at different levels of development in their speciality can be located. Little's conceptualization is significant in that it emphasises the role of the affective component of specialization in the overall process.

RECREATION SPECIALIZATION

Bryan (1977), in his description of recreation specialization, noted the crucial importance of the affective system, which he termed variously commitment or involvement. However, the majority of subsequent empirical research in this area has tended either to exclude commitment/involvement entirely or express it in terms of indicators such as club membership and ownership of specialist literature and/or equipment. This emphasis on observable indicators may lead to erroneous conclusions as to the level of specialization.

Wellman et al. (1982) incorporated the affective component of specialization (which they termed centrality) into an overall index in their study of white water canoeists. While the notion of centrality proposed by these authors is valuable, the fact that it is subsumed into an index makes it impossible to evaluate its unique contribution to the understanding of the linkages between the affective domain and specialized behaviour. In a more recent study, Schreyer and Beaulieu (1986) operationalized commitment in terms of "importance". Results of their study of wildland recreation indicate a positive relationship between level of commitment and complexity of environmental perception, but the uni-dimensional nature of the construct fails to capture the complexity of the affective component of specialization appropriately. To date, the lack of recognition and the limited way in which the area of commitment/involvement has been operationalized has been a major deficiency in the study of specialized behaviour in recreation.

RECREATION INVOLVEMENT

Recently, a number of authors have pointed to this deficiency (McIntyre, 1989; Selin and Howard, 1988; Buchanan, 1985) and have proposed that the affective component should take a more central role in the empirical analysis of specialization in a recreation context. McIntyre (1989) suggested that this affective component is appropriately viewed as a multi-dimensional construct, termed "enduring involvement", which is comprised of three dimensions; attraction (importance and enjoyment), self-expression, and centrality. This study demonstrated that, in the case of ORV campers, enduring involvement was moderately predictive of the choice of recreation setting.

In the past, empirical research in recreation specialization has centred on the recreation activity. Williams (1984) proposed that three basic choice elements are relevant to decisions about

recreation participation, namely, what to do (activity), where to do it (setting), and who to do it with (companions). On this basis, an holistic view would suggest that there is an equal chance for any one of these three to become the focus for specialization.

DISCUSSION

This paper proposes a modification of the specialization loop developed by Little (1976) which more clearly conceptualizes the relationship between the conventional indicators of recreation specialization and enduring involvement. On this basis it is proposed that these indicators are, in essence, a reflection of activity involvement, setting involvement or social group involvement. In other words, the recreation specialization continuum recognised by Bryan (1977) is actually a manifestation of differing levels of involvement with an activity, a setting, or a group of companions.

On the basis of this proposition, it is suggested that future research in specialization in a recreation context should focus on the relevance of the various levels of involvement to recreation choice behaviour. Such studies could build on the empirically based understanding of the role of involvement in information processing (Petty and Caccioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1980) and could benefit from the insights provided by involvement research in consumer behaviour (Kapferrer and Laurent, 1985).

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