

A Hierarchy of Campsite Attributes in Dispersed Recreation Settings

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1. Abstract

This study reviews campsite choice research for common attributes that people use to choose campsites. A typology is developed that breaks down site attributes into three categories: necessity attributes (those that are necessary for providing a minimum quality camping experience), experience attributes (those that relate most closely with the preferred experience outcomes desired by recreationists), and amenity attributes (those that are least important to overall campsite choice, but may help in making the final decision). From this typology, a model was developed as a guideline for campsite choice.

2. Study Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to reexamine “the campsite choice literature in search of common elements” (p. 197) to develop a typology of site attributes and “propose a tentative model of campsite choice in dispersed recreation settings.” (p. 197)
- The following hypotheses were tested:
 - | H1: “Campers’ importance ratings would follow this order: necessity attributes scoring highest, followed by experience attributes, and finally amenity attributes.” (p. 200)
 - | H2: “Experience attributes should show statistically significant correlations with appropriate outcomes.” (p. 200-201)
 - | H3: “Necessity attributes should not be significantly correlated with any outcomes.” (p. 201)

3. Findings

Response rate: 83%

3.1. Literature Review for Campsite Attributes

- Seven attributes were common across nine studies:
 - | Level ground
 - | Distance to water
 - | Shade/shelter

- ┆ Scenic beauty
 - ┆ Screening from other sites
 - ┆ Distance from other sites
 - ┆ Size of site
- Some attributes are site specific and “may be highly sought after in the settings where they are found (e.g., islands)” (p. 199)

3.2. Campers’ Attribute Importance Ratings

- Ratings support H1. (p. 202)
- The only overlap in attribute categories is the experience attribute “good fishing nearby” was not significantly different from two necessity attributes (“good place to tie up boats” and “shade”) (p. 202)

3.3. Experience Attributes and Preferred Outcomes

- Correlations support H2. (p. 202)
- There is a strong link between the outcome “quality fishing” and the attribute “good fishing nearby”
- The outcomes “peace and solitude”, “getting away from others”, and “viewing scenery/wildlife” are correlated with privacy attributes “screened site” and “out of site/sound”
- There was a correlation between “getting away from others” (outcome) and “good fishing nearby” (attribute)

3.4. Necessity Attributes and Preferred Outcomes

- Correlations support H3. (p. 203-204)
- Of the 21 attribute/outcome combinations, only one correlation was found – “boaters who placed a high value on camping also tended to prefer campsites with a good boat tie-up area” (p. 204)

4. Key Discussion Points

- For the Deschutes River, with a nationally recognized fishery, anglers may consider a campsite attribute that provides better access to fishing areas to be a necessity attribute, whereas other areas lacking fishery renown may consider this attribute an experience or amenity attribute.

4.1. A Tentative Model of Campsite Choice

- A three stage hierarchy of attribute importance providing the basic guidelines for choosing a campsite:
 - ┆ Stage 1, Necessity Attributes – “level ground, shade or shelter, nearby water, and other characteristics that supply basic camping needs” (p. 205) – site specific considerations may apply

- | Stage 2, Experience Attributes – “enhance the overall experience” (p. 205) – various decision rules may apply (e.g., “elimination-by-attributes”, “lexicographic”, or “compensatory” (p.205))
 - | Stage 3, Amenity Attributes – if there are still choices after Stage 2, campers will move to Stage 3 to help make the final decision
 - Discrepancies to this process may exist due to certain constraints:
 - | Group members may have different outcome goals
 - | There may be a need to choose a site quickly “because of competition from other users, fatigue, or threatening weather” (p. 205)
 - | Users may not have all the information (e.g., “there is no way to know if better unoccupied sites lie beyond” (p. 205))
 - Ideal Conditions – “time is unlimited and there is a wide variety of sites” (p. 206), users will go through the three stage process
 - Constrained Conditions – “the choice process can be aborted anytime after a site is found that reaches the minimum threshold for all necessity attributes” (p. 206)

5. Management Recommendations

- If necessity attributes are known, managers can better help users identify desired campsites
- If experience outcomes are known, “managers can help ensure that the campsites provided will enhance those goals rather than interfere with them” (p. 207)
- For developed settings, managers will want to be sure to include necessity attributes and provide for experience attributes that “increase the likelihood that campers’ experience goals will be met” (p. 207)

6. Research Design

- Literature review of campsite choice studies
- Survey research with a random sample from a population of 13,000 persons who purchased boating passes

6.1. Study Area

- Literature – nine different recreation settings
- Survey - 100-mile stretch of the Deschutes River, Oregon

6.2. Data Collection Instruments

Survey - mailed questionnaire

6.3. Study Population

- Literature – six studies that included camper surveys
- Survey - recreational boaters identified as campers

6.4. Sample Size

Survey – 343 campers

6.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions

Eleven campsite attributes were listed on the questionnaire and respondents were asked to rate each using a “Likert-type scale with choices ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important)” (p. 201)

6.5.1. Necessity Attributes

- Campsite attributes “that generally are necessary to provide even a minimum-quality camping experience” (p. 199)
- Results of survey ratings include these attributes for the Deschutes River: “flat ground, shade, good place to tie up boats” (p. 201)

6.5.2. Experience Attributes

- Campsite attributes that are “important contributors to a higher-quality experience” (p. 199) and are “closely linked to the outcomes sought by participants in outdoor recreation” (p. 199)
- Results of survey ratings include these attributes for the Deschutes River: “good fishing nearby, screening from other sites, out of sight and sound of others” (p. 201)

6.5.3. Amenity Attributes

- These attributes are the least important for choosing campsites and may be used as “tiebreakers in the choice process if more than one site can provide a preferred experience” (p. 199)
- Results of survey ratings include these attributes for the Deschutes River: “away from railroad tracks, free of cattle grazing, doesn’t have much bare ground” (p. 201)

6.5.4. Preferred Experience Outcomes

- These are the reasons people are at a particular location recreating
- For the Deschutes River, a “five-point Likert-type scale (1, not important; 5, extremely important)” (p. 202) was used to gauge participants reasons for visiting the river
- The questionnaire included the following reasons for participants to rate: “quality of trout and steelhead fishing, riverside camping, getting together with friends, peace and solitude, getting away from other people, and viewing scenery and wildlife” (p. 202)
- The reasons with the highest ratings were considered the preferred experience outcomes

7. Theories Used in Study

N/A