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Crowding and Congestion in Banff Alberta Canada

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Crowding and Congestion in Banff, Alberta Canada

Key Words: Banff, Crowding, Congestion, Over-tourism

Issues surrounding human use and crowding in Banff National Park have been discussed for decades but since 2017 the issue has garnered ever more attention. Various media report that affected stakeholder groups perceive the Banff and Lake Louise townsites, front country and to lesser degree backcountry to be overcrowded and threatening the quality of experience and physical environment. If this perception is to continue it may result in physical, reputational and economic harm to the area and asset. *This abstract presents research scheduled to be carried out in the summer of 2019 with initial results anticipated for September of 2019 in time for the TTRA conference.*

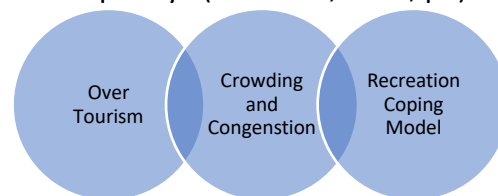
Over Tourism, Crowding and Recreation Coping

Over tourism is a relatively new term used to “describe destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably” (Goodwin, 2017, p1). At the core

of over tourism are the constructs of crowding and congestion which have been studied in park settings for decades (Manning & Valierre, 2001).

Definitions attached to over tourism

suggest it shares many characteristics with crowding and congestion. The Recreation Coping Model (RCM) provides an effective framework for measuring and understanding crowding and congestion in park environments. The model approaches crowding and congestion in the following manner:



1. Displacement (temporal, spatial and absolute)
2. Rationalization
3. Product Shift
4. Direct Action

Research Methodology

To carry out a study of crowding and congestion in Banff for the summer of 2019 based on the Recreation Coping construct within a quantitative approach. Data collection will involve face-to-face intercept surveys in several locations throughout the summer. The samples will include

tourists and residents and measure for difference in the two. Analysis will involve descriptive, bivariate and segmentation analysis.

Background to Recreation Coping Research

Recreation coping research origins are attributable to the broad field of carrying capacity research, which arose out of biological background and later managerial concerns over maintaining quality outdoor recreation experiences amid increased visitor use (McCool & Lime, 2001). Wagner's (1964) early work on carrying capacity has been cited as a conceptual precursor to Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) model of stress and coping which has acted as a theoretical framework for much of the work in this area (Stewart & Cole 2001, Miller & McCool, 2003). Over time, it was determined that this approach produced weak results. That is, despite obvious crowding and stress both observed from a managerial perspective and reported in findings, overall satisfaction remained relatively high (Stewart & Cole, 2001; Schuster & Hammitt, 2000). A possible explanation for this dilemma was that those individuals who were particularly sensitive to such stressors had chosen another area, or had been displaced, while those individuals who were less sensitive to crowding and congestion were present at the research sites.

Today it is widely accepted that the weakness of the density-crowding-satisfaction model is explained by the behavioural response of displacement (Dawson & Watson, 2000; Robertson & Regula, 1994; Manning, 2003). At present the recreation literature identifies four possible coping strategies including displacement, rationalization, product shift, and direct action, all with some variation. The majority of literature tends to cite three of the categories, often omitting direct action (Manning & Valliere, 2001; Peden & Schuster 2004). Miller & McCool (2003) used seven categories (although four were sub-categories of displacement) and added direct action as the fourth. Individual recreation coping strategies are defined below.

Displacement can be defined as changing one's location (spatial displacement) or time (temporal displacement) of participation to respond to or avoid stressful situations. One could also simply decide to leave the location with no intention of resuming the activity (absolute displacement) (Miller & McCool, 2003). Rationalization is a cognitive response that is based on one's level of investment in the activity, to reduce internal conflict brought about by stress the individual may choose to rate the activity highly regardless of actual conditions (Manning & Valliere, 2001). Product shift suggests that visitors may alter the definition of the recreation opportunity in congruence with the conditions experience (Manning & Valliere, 2001). Direct action, as used by Miller & McCool (2003), suggests that the coping strategy involves the individual contacting a peer, or more likely an authority figure, to seek remedial action to a stressful situation (this is also referred to as environmental change).

Application of Recreation Coping Model

Recreation coping research has been applied to a variety of outdoor recreation settings with fairly consistent results given the variation in methodological approaches. The two studies most relevant to the proposed investigation are Miller & McCool (2003) who use Transactional Stress Theory as a conceptual framework and Manning & Valliere (2001) because of their unique application of recreation coping to a group of residents rather than the more common approach of visitors at a specific site.

Manning & Valliere (2001) conducted a study to examine the level of displacement, rationalization, and product shift for residents adjacent to Acadia National Park in Maine, and to explore the relationship between perceived levels of use and coping strategies. They chose to examine residents because “local residents may comprise an especially interesting population for a study of coping in outdoor recreation because they are likely to use their local park often and they are likely to have used the park over a relatively long period of time” (p.414). Nearly half reported forms of displacement, while 35% reported rationalization and only 6% reported no use of coping strategies. They concluded that recreation coping strategies are real and people do engage in them.

Pavelka & Draper (2015) qualitatively applied the Recreation Coping Strategy to Alberta’s Bow Valley residents and found near unanimous use of temporal and spatial displacement based on individual’s level of resource knowledge. They also found support for rationalization and product shift among residents. Peden & Schuster (2004) used a qualitative approach with visitors to High Peaks Wilderness Area in New York and reported that emotion-based responses, or in this case rationalization, was the most common form of coping followed by displacement. Schneider (2000) examined recreation conflict and coping strategies in urban proximate wilderness areas in the American southwest. She used a quantitative method and reported that forms of distancing or spatial and temporal displacement were most prominent.

Anticipated Results

Researchers for this study anticipate results similar to those presented in the literature. That is, a high degree of displacement with presence of rationalization, product shift and to a lesser degree direct action. Application of the Recreation Coping Model to Banff Alberta is especially timely given the growing level of concern surrounding crowding and congestion.

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