CHANGING PERSPECTIVES IN OUTDOOR RECREATION CONFLICT

Arianne Carvalhede Reis, MSc
PhD candidate
Department of Tourism
University of Otago
PO Box 56, Dunedin, 9001
New Zealand
Phone: 64 3 4798187
Email: areis@business.otago.ac.nz

The author would like to thank Eric Shelton for a critical reading of an earlier draft of this paper
ABSTRACT This paper presents current discussions in outdoor recreation conflict literature and proposes a different approach to the study of the conflict phenomenon in outdoor recreation settings. It is argued that important contributions have been provided to the management of potential and ‘de facto’ conflict situations in parks and outdoor recreation spaces by researches in the field. However, in order to advance the theoretical understandings of recreation conflict different approaches to research, as well as different methodologies, need to be more thoroughly incorporated into the research agenda. The present research used a critical interpretivist approach in the analysis of performances and narratives of hunters and hikers in New Zealand in order to contribute an alternative perspective to the conversation.

INTRODUCTION

Social conflicts are, inevitably, an integral part of society (Kriesberg, 1973). As Woehrle and Coy (2000, p.1) point out, such conflicts are an “expected and functional outcome in a social system”. These conflicts are, however, potentially creative as they can act as a catalyst for social and political change (Marx cited in Woehrle & Coy, 2000). Contemporary society, though, has adopted the opposite view, where destructiveness is proposed as the central feature of conflicts. Recognising the inherit ability of social conflict to be either a constructive or a destructive phenomena highlights the importance of not simply preventing conflicts but rather learning to understand them, so they may be conducted or controlled in ways that contribute to positive outcomes for both the social system and the people involved (Woehrle & Coy, 2000).

Recreational conflicts in outdoor environments have been a source of concern for park managers and researchers alike since the late 1960s. The introduction of ‘new technologies of play’ (Deval & Harry, 1981) as well as the increase in participation in outdoor recreation have led to tensions between different groups becoming more evident, resulting in a call for the establishment of new policies for recreation in natural areas. Several management strategies have been proposed by academics in the field and positive advances have been recorded since the initial stages of their implementation. Zoning, social carrying capacity and recreation opportunity spectrum models are a few of the strategic responses proposed by researches in the area that have contributed to the understanding and management of social conflicts in outdoor environments (for early accounts on the topic see: Brown, Finegan & Voiland, 1979; Daniels & Krannich, 1990; Lieber & Fesenmaier, 1983; Lindsay, 1980). However, as Hammitt and Schneider (2000) have recognized, recreation conflict research has gone through different phases and today the research focus seems to have changed, with scholars being more interested in how people handle and react to conflict situations (for some examples of such an approach see: Schuster, Hammitt & Moore, 2006; Schuster et al., 2006). These more recent studies have proved invaluable, as this knowledge will enhance the ability of park managers and others to predict responses for potential conflict situations.

From this brief review it is clear that researchers on recreation conflict have attended to an important practical need and have positively contributed to management strategies related to the identified issue. What has not yet been done, however, is the study of conflict in outdoor environments without management preoccupations underlying the discussions. Although some theoretical studies have been presented by scholars in the field, they have all been framed to serve the practicalities involved with the administration of conflicts. Going beyond this paradigm, this author’s proposition is that the sources of conflicts need to be contextualized, taking into account the motivations and values associated with the natural environment, which is temporally and spatially situated within post-modern, or late capitalist society.
Some colleagues may argue that there are several studies measuring, comparing and discussing values and motivations of outdoor recreationists in conflict, such as the recent works by Vaske, Needham and Cline (2007), Morgan, Newman and Wallace (2007), Wang and Dawson (2005), and Thapa and Graefe (2004). However, as indicated above, there is a lack of qualitative approaches, using a less paradigmatic framework, and that is where I propose a change in perspective.

Hunters and Hikers in Conflict

The conflict between hunters and other recreational users of the outdoors has been the subject of several studies in the tourism and recreation literatures (Deblinger et al., 1993; Donnelly & Vaske, 1995; Schuster et al., 2006; Vaske et al., 1995;). Environmental movements advocating for a ban on hunting as a sportive practice have also populated newspaper headlines and have been the topic of a number of academic works, usually written by scholars from outside the tourism field (Cohn, 1999; Marvin, 2007; Regan, 2001). In nature-based tourism research the topic has been formulated as a conflict between consumptive and non-consumptive use of wildlife (Duffus & Dearden, 1990). Research using these terms has grown exponentially in the last 20 years, probably as a reflection of the significant increase in demand for nature-based activities that the tourism industry has experienced.

In spite of the attention this topic has gained over the last several years, few studies have challenged the dichotomy implicit in these terms, consumptive and non-consumptive, or the hierarchical positioning also implicit in their use (Tremblay, 2001). In fact, several studies to date still ignore the issues permeating the indiscriminate use of the words (Huang et al., 2008; MacMillan & Phillip, 2008) although some authors, especially those working with the so-called consumptive forms of recreation, have acknowledged their discomfort with the terms (Franklin, 2008). It is this author’s argument that this emphasis, on a polarised relation between hunters and other park users, contributes to a problematic management of conflicts, as well as a poor understanding of the sources of the conflict phenomenon.

The present research adopted a critical interpretivist approach to engaging in the discussion involving conflict between hunters and hikers in New Zealand. The main focus of this study was on these experiences as they were performed on Stewart Island, New Zealand’s ‘Third Island’; a location where outdoor recreation plays a crucial part in tourism activities. The island, with a small population of fewer than 400 inhabitants (Statistics New Zealand, 2001), has almost 85% of its land protected as a National Park (Department of Conservation, 2006). Although this status was achieved only in 2002, the remoteness, rough landscape and wildlife of the island have been attracting hunters and hikers for many years. In fact, hunters have been travelling to the island with the sole purpose of shooting whitetail deer since the early 1900’s when the species was first introduced. Hikers, on the other hand, although present since early days, have more recently considerably increased their activity participation on the island. The close encounters and sharing of space that this entails has triggered tensions and conflicts between the groups.

The propositions raised in this working paper are the results of the author’s constant engagement with the hikers and hunters on Stewart Island and on the mainland. Conversations, hikes, pre- and post- hunting rituals, diaries and hut books, all comprise the array of narratives and performances experienced in this research. From these sources, an important issue has been identified: central to the relationship that exists between hunters and trampers are some philosophical issues such as environmental awareness and philosophies, the politics and philosophies of animal rights, animal ethics, and animal consciousness. All of these issues generate contested discourses of human/non-human animal relations that may be associated with outdoor recreation and, more specifically, with hunting as a recreational practice in contemporary western society. To date, this debate has not been embraced by tourism scholars in sufficient depth.
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This working paper argues that environmental philosophies shape modern and post-modern human-human and human-animal relations. Also, these philosophies influence the constructions of nature individuals and groups produce while in the outdoors. Therefore, the understanding of these constructions of nature provides insights to human-human relations in natural environments where these views and practices are performed and lived, as well as confronted. Moving beyond the current approach where academia has given limited contribution to the theorization of the conflict phenomenon, this paper’s call for change is a plea to include performative experiences in considerations of nature-based recreations.

REFERENCES


