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New Canadians and National Parks: Managing Protected Areas for Ethnic Diversity

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Introduction

Parks and protected area managers face a multitude of challenges in a rapidly changing world. The very notion of what constitutes a protected area and how such places ought to be managed “have been completely transformed within the span of most contemporary park managers’ careers” (Hanna, Clark and Slocombe, 2007, p. 1). Many of the most significant challenges in protected areas management transcend park boundaries and are associated with larger patterns of global change (e.g., population growth, increasing urbanization, military conflict, climate change, burgeoning demand for natural resources and shifting demographics) (IUCN, 2005). Although such changes may have negative ramifications, they also present opportunities for new methods of framing and addressing complex problems.

Parks Canada has identified four social trends of relevance to managing for visitor experience: 1) aging population, 2) increasing urbanization, 3) changing experiences desired by tourists, and 4) increasing demographic complexity arising from immigration (Jager et al., 2006). The purpose of this paper is to explore the implication of the fourth of these trends. Despite the current Parks Canada mandate to protect nature and culture “on behalf of [all] the people of Canada,” Parks Canada has historically had limited information and nominal agency goals dedicated to identifying with or understanding foreign visitors, recent immigrants or new Canadian groups (Parks Canada Agency, 2002, para.1). Planning for diversity is vitally important as Canada continues to grow as a multicultural society and welcomes immigrants from around the globe (Hung, 2003). This is especially important when one considers that ethnic minority groups participate in nature-based recreation less than other North Americans (Hung, 2003; Floyd, 1999; Johnson et al., 1998) and are under-represented in Canadian national park visits (Jager et al., 2006). This paper focuses on exploring how new Canadians understand, experience, identify, value, and emotionally and culturally connect with Canada’s national parks.

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³ Calgary Census Metropolitan Area: A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of a large urban core with a population of at least 100,000 together with adjacent urban and rural areas that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core (Statistics Canada, 2001). The Calgary CMA includes the City of Calgary and the City of Airdrie, the Towns of Chestermere, Cochrane and Crossfield, the Villages of Beiseker and Irricana, the Municipal District of Rocky View (No. 44) and the Tsuu T’ina Nation Reserve (Sarcee 145) (Statistics Canada, 2001, p.1)

⁴ These recommendations flow directly from the context of this research projects focus on new Canadians, and these recommendations were not global recommendations to Parks Canada or other agencies on general policy.

Methods

We conducted 11 focus-group sessions with new Canadians (foreign-born newcomers to Canada who migrated between 1996 and 2006) in the City of Calgary Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)³ (Bain, Quinn & Rettie, 2007). Each of these focus groups was comprised of between 5 and 12 participants, with 105 people consulted in total. Themes and questions revolved around perceptions of nature and national parks: awareness and understanding, attitudes and experiences, expectations, values, and emotional and cultural connections and suggestions for the future.

We taped and transcribed all focus-group sessions and employed qualitative data-management software – NVivo 7 (QSR International, 2007) – to aid in the analysis. We conducted four complete passes through the data, employing theory-driven coding, overt and latent emphasis coding and in-depth analysis, to arrive at a final framework of emerging themes and sub-themes (or nodes and sub-nodes). All of these steps ensured that the data analysis was unbiased, credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable and this data analysis produced significant results.

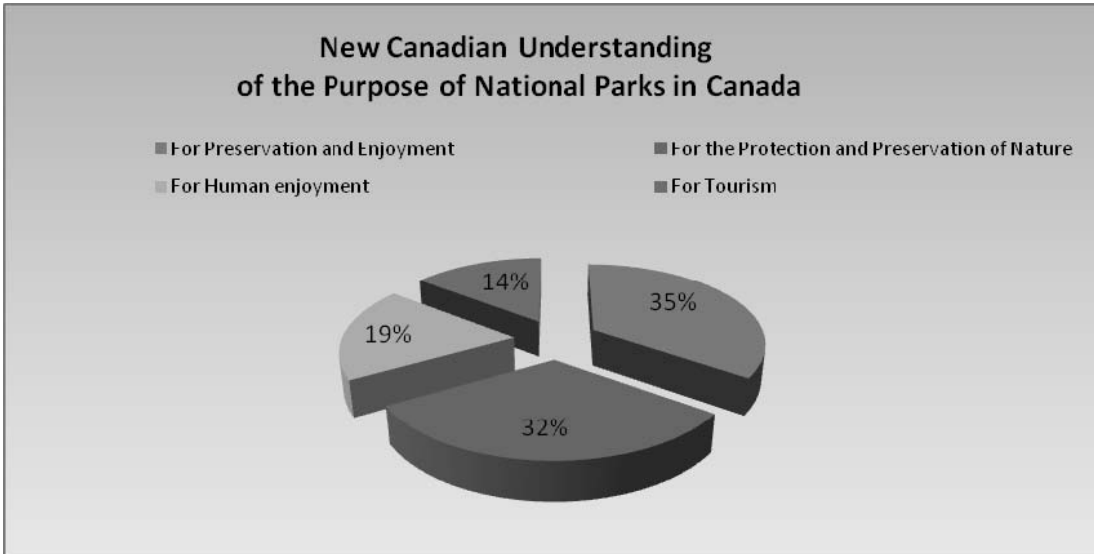
Results & Discussion

Positive Aspects of Experiences in National Parks

Project results demonstrated that new Canadian participants were aware and knowledgeable of many aspects of Canada’s national parks. Focus-group participants presented a general knowledge and awareness of Canada’s national parks, park activities, and the purpose of Canada’s national parks.

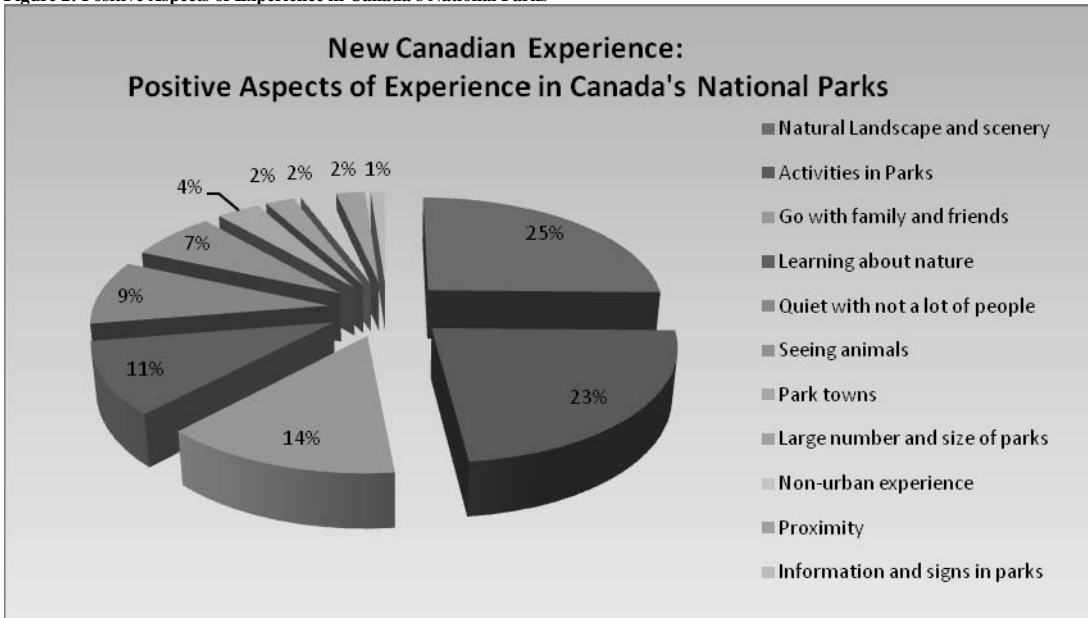
Four primary perceptions of the Parks Canada mandate emerged from the results with participants indicating that the mandate was for: the protection and preservation of nature; for human enjoyment; for both preservation and enjoyment; and for tourism. Overall, the majority of participants discussed a national park purpose that accurately emphasized both the protection of nature and/or human enjoyment (Fig 1).

Figure 1: Overall Distribution of Perceptions of the Purpose of Canada's national parks



In order to gain insight into new Canadian preferences for park experiences, participants discussed their expectations of and experiences with parks or protected areas within their home countries and within Canada. The positive aspects of participant expectations and experiences were similar within participant countries of origin and within Canada. Most common to all positive participant experiences in Canada's national parks was an appreciation for natural landscape and scenery, activities in parks, experiences shared with family and friends, and learning about nature (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Positive Aspects of Experience in Canada's National Parks



Valued Aspects of Nature

We employed Kellert's (1993) conceptual framework for organizing and describing the meaning, feelings, values and beliefs associated with nature. The integration of Kellert's basic value categories facilitated the interpretation of participant responses, identifying the humanistic, aesthetic, moralistic and naturalistic values of nature as most relevant to new Canadians.

The humanistic value was of greatest relevance to new Canadian participants as they revealed a strong appreciation for and emotional and familial attachment with nature, including feelings of awe, inspiration and respect in nature. An emphasis on experiencing national parks with family and friends and/or having the opportunity for family-based activities were recurring themes of importance to participants in conjunction with positive national park experiences. Specifically, participants emphasized friend- and family-oriented experiences and activities, including general family outings, family camping, teaching children about nature, visiting with friends, barbecuing and picnicking with family and friends and recreation for children.

Negative Aspects and Barriers to Experiencing National Parks

Focus groups also included a discussion of the negative aspects of experiencing nature and national parks. The majority of these negative aspects manifested as barriers that limited and/or prevented participant experiences in national parks, including: limited time and money, high cost of visiting parks, transportation issues and lack of information (Fig. 3). Working overtime, multiple jobs, raising children and getting settled into a new city puts stringent limits on new Canadian leisure time. Low-paying jobs, increased housing costs, and other start-up costs limit finances for leisure activities. Having a limited income with high start-up expenses prevents purchase of an automobile, which limits transportation options. The lack of essential information about national parks impedes the potential for, and knowledge of, national park experiences. Thus, these barriers are interconnected and act collectively to inhibit the potential for new Canadians to experience national parks.

Figure 3: Barriers to Experiencing National Parks



These barriers were interpreted with a range of relevant empirical and theoretical literature to focus on meanings, implications and potential recommendations for change. Relevant theories and models included marginality theory (Scott & Munson, 1993; Carr & Williams, 1993), ethnicity theory (Washburne, 1978), opportunity theory (McDonald & Hutchison, 1987), discrimination theory (Floyd, 1999), the Andersen and Newman Model (Anderson & Newman, 1973), the Klobus-Edwards Model (Klobus-Edwards, 1981) and the Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation Model (Gómez, 2002). This investigation provided several relevant ways to interpret and explain participant responses and experiences, emphasizing a few major components and/or interrelationships within different theories and presenting a plethora of factors that influenced new Canadian participant's presence and/or absence in national parks.

Drawing on the integration of these relevant theories and models and resulting from the key insights and findings of this research, we created more comprehensive and cohesive conceptual model to explain and depict the situation of new Canadian participants: the Ethnic Diversity and Park Participation Continuum Model (Fig. 4). This model attempts to reflect, explain, describe and anticipate the numerous interconnected factors that influenced participant experiences, in the hopes that the model can better explain the presence or absence of ethnically diverse participation in national parks and other natural areas. In particular, this model places emphasis on the interconnection and influence between historical factors, predisposing factors, intervening/enabling factors (both motivating factors/opportunities and limiting factors/barriers) and an outcome continuum, which ranges from presence/participation to absence/non-participation.

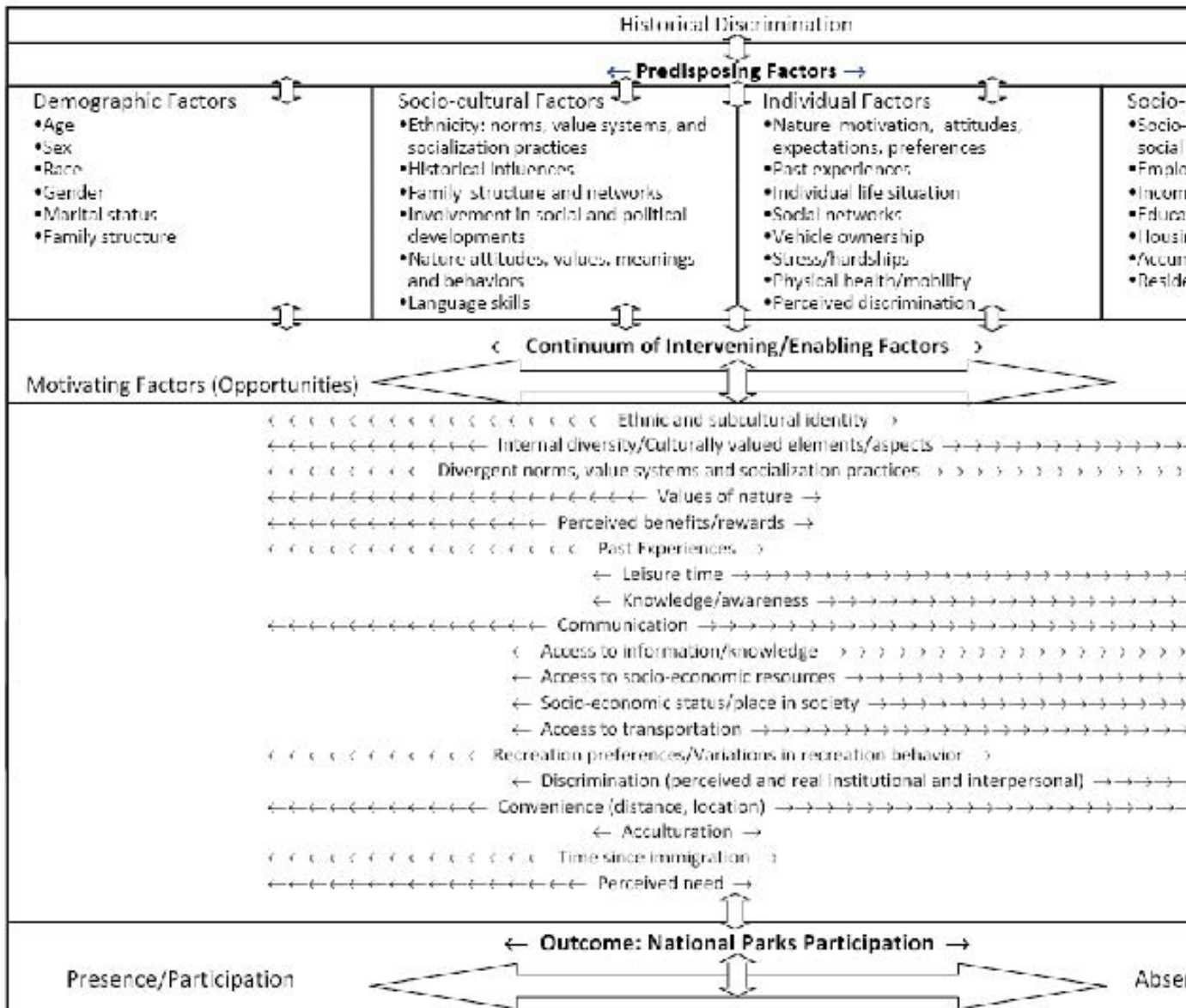
Within this model, predisposing factors represented a wide range of demographic, socio-cultural, individual and socio-economic characteristics and/or factors that are particular to new Canadian individuals and/or groups, drawing heavily from both marginality and ethnicity theory. These predisposing factors were a result of a wide range of both internal and external factors, which seemed to manifest as intervening or enabling factors.

Conditions and situations that create or restrict the potential for participation in national parks were considered, much like the case in the Andersen and Newman model (Allison, 1999). Intervening or enabling factors were also considered factors or variables that attempted to explain the relationship between the predisposing factors – the participant characteristics – and the model outcome – the presence or absence of participation in national parks. The intervening/enabling factors presented within this research project included both motivating and limiting factors to national parks participation. Motivating factors (opportunities) were related to participants' ethnic identity, subcultural identity, culturally valued elements/aspects, internal diversity, values associated with nature/recreation preferences, past experiences and perceived benefits of nature participation (Ethnicity theory). Limiting factors (barriers) included participants' limited access to socio-economic resources, disadvantaged place in society, limited leisure time, lack of information and awareness, lack of transportation access, divergent norms, value systems and socialization practices, perceived interpersonal and institutional discrimination and lack of effective communication (Marginality theory).

In addition to considering the various factors identified within this model and the other two previously mentioned, it is important to recognize the role of acculturation, the diversity of new Canadian individuals and groups, and the need to ensure awareness of and access to culturally sensitive national park

information. Understood together, these factors effectively portray the diversity and the complexity associated with the new Canadian experience and the interconnected nature of the factors motivating and/or limiting the presence or absence of participant experiences in national park participation (the outcome of the model).

Figure 4: Ethnic Diversity and Park Participation Continuum Model



Recommendations

The following four recommendations are proffered to Parks Canada and other protected area managers to more effectively cater to the culturally diverse needs and preferences of recent immigrants, create more positive and accessible nature/recreation experiences and encourage future use and support for natural areas and/or national parks.

Recommendation 1: Address and reduce barriers affecting new Canadians’ park use. Parks Canada and other protected area managers should ensure that: new Canadians are aware of national parks and the many opportunities for experiencing parks; park information is available to new Canadians; and parks are more accessible to new Canadians, especially in regards to accessible and affordable transportation.

Recommendation 2: Undertake an information-sharing initiative to ensure the effective creation and distribution of parks information. Parks

Canada and other protected area managers should undertake a new Canadian information sharing initiative to ensure the effective creation and distribution of basic park information, such as park location, distance from urban areas, transportation options, accommodation options, park fees, other costs, park amenities, potential dangers and safety planning information. This information should be presented in a visually appealing, easy to read format that integrates multicultural perspectives and is available in multiple languages in multiple venues and at a reasonable cost. It is also important that this information be offered in multiple forms to reflect different socio-demographic groups' different search strategies, including print, audio-visual and electronic media (Lee, Floyd and Shinenew, 2002).

Recommendation 3: Ensure that parks are more accessible to new Canadians. Parks Canada and other protected area managers should ensure that national parks are more accessible by offering more affordable options to new Canadians who want to visit parks and protected areas, such as subsidized entrance fees for immigrants or low-income individuals. Parks Canada could also promote existing opportunities for entry into national parks, such as on Canada Day on July 1. Further, Parks Canada could collaborate with local tourism bureaus, in order to ensure that visitors are aware of, and have access to, a variety of public and private accommodation options within parks and protected areas. Parks Canada and other protected area managers could also increase park access by ensuring enhanced affordable public transportation options to protected areas. Newcomer group tours could become integrated into immigrant service agency programs and English as a Second Language educational curriculum.

Recommendation 4: Incorporate the diversity of new Canadians into parks. In addition to combating barriers, Parks Canada and other protected area managers could incorporate the diversity of preferences, values, needs and wants of new Canadians in light of the dynamic, changing nature of Canadian society. Park managers could do this by emphasizing enabling factors and/or elements of great importance to new Canadian groups, including family- and friend-oriented visits, the protection and preservation of nature, and learning about nature and national parks.

Overall, Parks Canada and other protected area managers should ensure that future planning and management of parks and protected areas integrates the diversity of new Canadians' experiences, preferences and levels of acculturation by undertaking additional and ongoing qualitative research with ethnically diverse populations and recent immigrant groups. This research should be undertaken in order to identify how to design and manage national parks for new Canadians by consulting directly with representative individuals and by analyzing successful examples whereby ethnically diverse needs are met elsewhere. Parks Canada should collaborate with immigrant service agencies and ethnocultural organizations in order to facilitate opportunities to undertake ongoing qualitative research with new Canadians, resulting in enhanced national park awareness and access and continually relevant parks experiences and opportunities for new Canadians.

Conclusion

Our research provides direction to Parks Canada and other protected area systems to understand and enhance the experiences of new Canadians within national parks. The recommendations offered to Parks Canada have positive implications for addressing and/or eliminating the many barriers that new Canadian participants face and enhancing new Canadian parks experiences. Overall, this research project has the potential to facilitate the accommodation of the culturally diverse needs, preferences and expectations of new Canadians; to create more positive, culturally-valued experiences; and to encourage future use and support for Canada's national parks. The increasingly relevant and diverse nature of immigration and cultural diversity in Canadian society emphasizes the importance of additional new Canadian research, which could ultimately enhance this research, Parks Canada Agency goals for environmental protection, visitor experience and education, and perspectives on planning for diversity and Canada's national parks.

Furthermore, the results and recommendations of this study are also relevant and have significant implications for natural areas and national parks throughout North America. In the United States, the National Park Service (NPS) has goals and objectives similar those identified in the current Parks Canada integrated mandate, with an implicit goal to preserve parks as a pleasuring ground for the people of today and tomorrow (Floyd, 2001). Yet, as is the case within Canada, "a considerable gap exists between this ideal and the reality of who actually derives pleasure from these national resources" (Floyd, 2001, p. 50). A great number of park systems, natural areas and conservation organizations are faced with the critical challenge of generating significant support from an "increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society," again emphasizing the relevance of this research and the significant need for additional research (Floyd, 2001).

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