

7.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS IN LIGHT OF SOME RELEVANT LITERATURE

It has long been suggested that recreation should be studied as an 'experiential state' (e.g. Driver 1976). More recently, a number of authors have voiced support for the position that understanding the experiential state itself is an important research topic, particularly in the context of leisure and recreation research (Ingham 1987; Kleiber et al. 1986; Manell 1984). However, research in the area of outdoor recreation experiences thus far has provided little detailed understanding and description of the experience itself, evoking responses from participants with little imposition of meaning from the researchers. What are the components of these experiences? What are individual perceptions of these differing components? The predominant approach has been one of looking at the products of the experience (i.e. What are people deriving from outdoor recreation participation?) or measuring experience preferences through pre-determined scales.

The broad objective of the study described here was to understand the nature and dynamics of an outdoor recreation experience from the perspective of participants going through the experience. The research approach, as mentioned earlier, was phenomenological, i.e. participants' perceptions of, and the meaning they attached to, their experiences are of paramount importance. It was also interactionist in line with an environmental psychology perspective, i.e. there is an assumption of a reciprocal and ongoing relationship between individual and environment. The focus, therefore, was on the in situ experience, with data collected during the experiential process. How people perceived themselves and/or their relationships with the physical and social environment were core considerations.

There is no intention here to review the literature on outdoor recreation and studies with particular focus on recreation experiences. There are extensive reviews elsewhere (e.g. Driver et al. 1987; Roggenbuck & Lucas 1987; Scherl 1988a; Stankey & Schreyer 1987). What is worthwhile doing at this point in time is devoting this section to comparing the present study with two similar studies in intent and research design. Those are the studies conducted by Hunnam (1990) on reef experiences in Australia and the one conducted by Graefe et al. (1988) and Williams et al. (1990) on river recreation experience in the United States. Because they are more recent, they also do not feature in the literature reviews cited before. They all attempted to characterise the recreation experience of visitors to a natural area and also had a resource management emphasis (i.e. sought information that was relevant to the management of the area). In fact, as mentioned in the methodology section the present study took into account the coding scheme used by these two studies.

Some observations about these two studies and the study of Scherl (1988a), which served as the basis for the present study, were also made previously when discussing the content analysis method.

7.1 Observations about Methodology and Processes for Content Analysis

All of these studies had open-ended questions eliciting free-flowing responses from visitors about their experiences. Questions in the river study and in the present study ranged from broad to more specific management oriented focuses. The former with the aim of prompting respondents to talk about the most salient facets of their experience without influencing them, and the latter to guarantee that a number of experiential domains and management issues got spoken about during the interview, in case they were not alluded to during the broader open-ended responses. In Hunnam's study it is not clear, however, exactly what these questions were. His study used a more free-flowing interview format where the interviewer would prompt the respondent at appropriate points in time and the schedule of prompts is not reported.

In all of the studies the scales and categories used for coding the interviews were validated against the contents of the interviews. This ensured that scales and categories were capturing the interview contents. In the current study the aim was also to capture the fullest range of observations on visitors' reef experience, reflecting as much as possible their own ways of expressing it. The 297

categories organised in the taxonomic framework captures this range. In addition, for the more focused questions specific lists of categories were developed (some taken from the larger taxonomy). After completion of all of the coding the judges gave suggestions as to how to modify the taxonomy and categories for coding in light of their experience. This modified taxonomy and the categories, which benefited from 10 weeks of coding experience and were validated against 208 interviews, are presented in appendices 8 and 9. It is these frameworks for coding which should be used in further studies.

A somewhat similar approach was adopted by Hunnam (1990) for whom different lists of categories were used to capture the content of the interviews. The first list contained codes related to the type of prompts given by the researcher (13 categories), the second related to the subject of the responses (organised under the headings of *social factors*, *nature factors*, *natural conditions*, *activity factors*, *organisational factors*, *hardware factors* and *personal factors* (27 categories)), the third contained type of experience information (3 categories: *preparation*, *saliency* and *experience*) and the fourth was a valuation code (3 categories: *positive*, *neutral* and *negative*). In addition, he developed specific categories identifying components of a reef experience. There were components of the experience *linked: to a physical activity* (the activity-engagement itself, activity engagement with nature and self-in-activity), *to the natural setting* (the novelty reef experience, offshore novelty, the awesome reef world and intimate encounters with marine life), *with the social setting* (negative and positive group experience, acceptance of the numbers of people involved, support of family or companions and alone-in-the-crowd), *to organisational factors* (the facilitated experience), *to weather and sea conditions* (the mediating weather) and *directly to self* (self pre-occupation). Altogether there were 58 categories of various types, including some related to evaluation and others related to specific subject content.

In the river recreation study, a smaller set of 35 scales were used to summarise the data. They were organised in the following four broad areas: outcome/activity factors (activity orientation, goal directness, competence-seeking, self-definition, centrality of escape, escape versus attraction, curiosity/learning, becoming/realisation and mode of relaxation), social factors (role in decision, social context, interactional context, locus of control, crowding, conflict and role in group), experiential factors (arousal, absorption in activity, scope of attention, depth of focus, presence of emotion, match of perceptual needs with conditions of participation, enjoyment/satisfaction, fantasy, symbolism, spontaneity, environmental sensitivity and centrality to lifestyle), and environmental/managerial factors (setting orientation, managerial preference, services preference, level of information, complacency, importance of environment and predicability of the environment). On both the river and the present study, scales and categories were rated in terms of their suitability to represent the unit of analysis. Hunnam's study only captured whether the codes did or did not represent the interview contents.

In both reef experience studies, interviews were literally transcribed and coding was done on written transcripts. The unit of analysis was the string of responses to one question for the present study and the 'remark' for Hunnam's study (i.e. an observation, thought or opinion made by the respondent on a single topic, with all of the remarks about one topic being combined for the whole interview to form a unit of analysis). In the river experience study interviews weren't transcribed. Coding was done on the basis of listening to the whole interview and the coding unit was the whole interview content. Reliability among judges was high in the present and the river experience study (the river experience study using five coders while the present one used two coders). In Hunnam's study the interviews were only coded by the researcher: this means no validation of his judgments and more possibility of personal biases in the interpretation of the data.

Both the river and the present study had a large number of interviews as part of their data set (204 and 208 respectively), whilst Hunnam's study is based on 40 interviews (Hunnam's study had several components—one of which, and the only one referred to here, was perceptions of experiences).

7.2 Observations about Analysis and Results

All of the studies looked at frequency of use of scales or categories to ascertain how salient they were to visitors. The present study, in addition, looked at patterns of use for each category and graphed those patterns of use. Only categories which were used quite consistently by the judges met a certain cut-off point, observed in the graphs, and were used in reporting results.

There are some major differences in the objectives of data analysis and consequently the way results are presented and interpreted. The two reef studies sought to capture the experiences of user groups rather than of each recreationist sampled (as in the case of the river study). The reef studies did not characterise the basic types of experiences *per se* across all respondents, i.e. assuming *a priori* that respondents were all one user group and attempting to sub-group them on the basis of their reported experiences. Instead the present study sought to understand what the overall experience of Lady Musgrave Island and Reef was; whether there were any differences among the three user groups, and, if so, what were they. Hunnam's study only dealt with one user group—day visitors to Norman Reef.

It is interesting to note, however, the similarities among the results of the present study and the river study with respect to depicting different experience types. Their Type 1 experience (Williams et al. 1990) resembles very closely our camper user group experience. Type 1 experience for them is characterised by 'family and friends', 'nature', and 'escape' being more important goals than 'thrills' and 'excitement.' Visitors reporting this type of experience also reveal perceptions of conflict and crowding.

Elements of Type 2 and Type 4 experience resemble our daytrip user group experience. In Type 2 experience going to the river is not seen as an escape but as an opportunity to become involved in something with high importance placed on the thrills and excitement goal. It is not clear from our data whether daytrippers tend to emphasise self-definition and control, which is also part of the definition of the Type 2 experience. Type 4 experience involves moderate activation, but little control, self-definition or meaning. Those seeking this type of experience see thrills and excitement and family and friends as important goals, but have little involvement or experience with the site. They say that this experience characterises novices. Perhaps, our daytrip experience includes elements of both Type 2 and Type 4 experiences from Williams et al. (1990) study, because in our sample there were 14% of daytrippers which were repetitive users and also 65% who have been to the GBRMP before. This could account for a bit more involvement with and concern for the site than if they were all novices. Demographic variables did not play a role in differentiating the type of experiences found in the present study with the group data analyses undertaken so far. All user groups interviewed had a good mixture of demographic variables and analyses using demographic information as dependent variables were not undertaken.

Many of the components of the reef experience identified by Hunnam (1990) for daytrippers to Norman Reef are similar to the ones identified in the current study (see list above). The most salient experience factor found in his study was 'natural setting—the general coral reef community' followed by 'natural conditions—the weather conditions.' These results concur with the ones from the present study (i.e. these experience dimensions are also very salient here, see table 3). In terms of Hunnam's experience components (which he sees as being different than experience factors), 'the novelty reef experience' is the most salient. This again is very similar to results from the present study for daytrippers. Interestingly also is that in both reef studies the social aspect of the experience is not very salient to daytrippers.

There were no comparisons in Hunnam's study among different user groups, but he undertook comparisons on the basis of two individual difference variables which he considered most likely to have affected the reef experience: amount of previous aquatic experience, and amount of time engaged in aquatic experiences during that trip (based on behavioural observations of respondents). Two type of comparisons were made. Data for snorkellers and non-snorkellers, and for people with and without aquatic experience were compared across some experiential factors.

Active engagement with nature was the only experience component identified as having a significant difference in saliency for the snorkellers and non-snorkellers (i.e. this intimate interaction with the natural setting is more special for snorkellers as one would expect). The only significant differences between people with aquatic recreation experiences and those with little or no such experiences were for the experience component—*the group experience* and for two experience factors—*snorkelling activity* and *the trip overall*. Hunnam interpreted these results by saying that people from aquatic experiences are influenced more by the other people aboard on the trip (this component was usually reported as a disappointing side of the trip). He suggests that the large-group reef trip does not cater satisfactorily for the more experienced marine or aquatic recreator.

Another interesting observation between another part of Hunnam's study (a structured survey of day visitors to Norman Reef, N = 1207) and the current study is that 83% of respondents in the former indicated that they were on their first visit to the GBR. In contrast, only 35% of respondents in our study have not been to the GBR before. This indicates that different regions of the GBR may be catering for different types of people. Perhaps the Cairns region attracts the one-time reef visitors, whilst Lady Musgrave Island and Reef, which is located offshore of a region with less tourism but closer to the main population centres in Australia, attracts more repetitive users. In fact, whilst only 22% of the present study's sample were from overseas, in Hunnam's study 84% of the sample (for the structured survey) were from overseas.