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Does blue space matter to place-specific environmentally responsible behavior for sport tourists? A mediation model with spatial effects

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify the importance of “blue space” with place-specific environmental responsibility among sport tourists. A main tourist motivation may be the acquisition of ecological and environmental knowledge. Such experience may encourage tourists’ environmental behaviors. In a tourism context, site and place can play a vital role in pro-environmental behavior and ecological behavior intention. In terms of nature-based tourism destinations, green and blue spaces could be attractive in providing effective resources for environmental experience and behavior. Academics and practitioners alike have suggested the importance of nature-based tourism destinations concerning green space to encourage tourists’ environmental behaviors. How and why blue space, distinct from green space, affects environmentally responsible behavior is little understood. Blue space is defined as “health-enabling places and spaces, where water is at the center of a range of environments with identifiable potential for the promotion of human well-being.” Given the space, nature, and conditionality of blue space, there could be a different effect on environmental behavior for tourists compared with the effects of green space. In this context, tourist activity and experiences in blue space could be more related to environmental behavior through increasing perception, emotions, and restoration in landscape design than of experiences in green space. Accordingly, based on the theory of environmentally responsible behavior and spatial cognition theory, we develop a place-specific mediation model to test the spatial effect of blue space on the association between the environmental preference for tourism destinations and environmental behavior. Accordingly, Florida is selected as a study area with participants being water-based sport tourists. This is because many attractive tourist resources for water-based activity, practice, and culture are located in the blue space of Florida. Data collection will be undertaken via a two-

step process. First, we will acquire geospatial data for proximity, type, and quality of blue space from a secondary source (e.g., Florida Geographic Data Library). Second, for water-based sport tourists, individual-level data collection will be conducted to measure their frequency and involvement in water-based activity, perceived value, satisfaction, and responsible environmental behavior. This will be achieved using MTurk. To analyze the data, we will conduct spatial mediation analysis incorporating a spatial lag term and a spatial error term together with geographically weighted regression (GWR) with a visualizing map to examine local variations and spatial clusters (High-High and Low-Low) in the association via ArcGIS (version 10.9.1), GWR 4, and SmartPLS 3. We cannot provide results here, as data collection is ongoing. However, in our attempt to answer the question “how and why blue space is explicitly, significantly, and spatially important for environmental behavior”, this research will contribute to tourism literature by revealing the spatial effect of blue space on place-specific environmentally responsible behavior. In terms of practice, we will also provide tourism practitioners with information on location-based blue space linked with environmentally responsible behavior.

Key words: blue space, place-specific environmentally responsible behavior, sport tourists, a mediation model with spatial effects

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