Particularism vs. Universalism in Hiking Tourism

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Introduction

This study explores domestic hiking as experienced on a long distance trail in Israel–the Israel National Trail (INT)–as a social, emotional, ideological-political, and cultural system. The INT is a north-south running 1000 km cross country trail walked by an estimated 55,000 hikers each year. According to the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel which designated and maintains the trail, the trail's hikers are primarily Israelis, with only a few international tourists[2].

While the nation of Israel promotes the INT as an experience to showcase the beauty of Israel and to build political support for its Zionist agenda (Katriel, 1995), the motivations of Israelis hiking the trail have yet to be investigated. This is important because one such framework to help explain these diverse motivations for hiking the INT is Parson's (1977) universalism-particularism continuum of motivations.

One of five pattern variable constructs envisaged by T. Parsons in his general theory of Action (Parsons, 1977; Parsons & Shils, 1951), the "universalism-particularism" continuum measures individuals' orientation in social interaction with other human-beings, objects, activities and behaviors (Joseph, 2012; Turner, 1999, chap. 9). On this continuum, orientations range from formally detached relationships (universalism) to personalized relationships (particularism). The universalism-particularism continuum–as distinct from the "push-pull" framework–offers a new way of considering motivations, place identity, and place-attachment in recreation and tourism research that enhances and adds new perspective to the current research.

We suggest that the hiking system on the trail is a universalistic form of mobility, based on general and universal components, and at the same time particularistic, bearing standards and components particular to place identity, culture, and nation (Eisenstadt & Ben-David, 1962).

The INT (see Fig. 1) provides a suitable case study for applying this theoretical perspective in the context of Israeli society, as the hike was and remains a popular mode of teaching, learning and experiencing the "Land of Israel." In order to maintain and promote emotional affiliation to the country as a "place," youth movements, schools, and children of all ages hike in places that are deemed important to the cultural and political revival of the State of Israel.

"Place" implies a location and integration of society, culture and nature and generates psychological and emotional links between people and places (Golledge & Stimson, 1997). The meanings people ascribe to place create and configure social differences, defining us (insiders) and them (outsiders) and what belongs to a place (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Williams, 2002). Proshansky (1978) attributes the link between places and identity to the role that places play in forming and affirming a sense of personal identity. The concept of "place identity" refers to those dimensions of self that define personal identity in relation to physical environment by means of patterns of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies.

The place attachment construct is conceptualized as the extent to which an individual values or identifies with a particular environment (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2003). Kyle, Graefe, Manning, and Bacon (2003) expand on the place attachment construct through two of its dimensions: place identity and place dependence. These refer to the instrumental purposes and values that recreationists ascribe to a setting because of its specific attributes for facilitating leisure experiences.

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[2] At the present time, hiking on the INT, as well as two smaller trails that attract primarily international Christian tourist-pilgrims (the "Jesus Trail" and the "Gospel Trail"), is the subject of neither monitoring nor surveying.

Fig. 1. The Israel National Trail.

All the above constructs are particularistic in nature and provide a setting for strong affiliation to places, especially hiking trails in general and the INT in particular.

Motivations, benefits and consequences of hiking

Hiking is a slow-paced simple mobility characterized by intermittent face-to-face relationships with other people, places, and events (Urry, 2007). Analysis of the motivations, benefits and consequences of hiking indicate two venues of actor-object relationship: universalistic and particularistic. The long list of universalistic motivations and benefits discussed in the leisure and tourism literature includes escapism, curiosity, solitude, spirituality, religious and cultural motivations, physical and mental well being, exercise, skill acquisition, health, self-reflection, reflexivity, self-development, nature, environment and landscape as a venue for walking, relaxation, and, finally, interacting with others, or "communitas" (Turner, 1969; Turner & Turner, 1978), companionship, camaraderie and identification with a group (in some societies, this final motivation is particularistic in orientation) (Amato, 2004; Arnold, 2007; Goldenberg, Hill, & Freidt, 2008; Hill, Gomez, & Goldenberg, 2014; Kyle & Chick, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; Solnit, 2000; Svarstad, 2010; Timothy & Boyd, 2015).

In the case of particularistic motivations based on actor-object relationships, the most important components of the activity are specific to place identity, culture and nation. Motivations in such cases include love of country, ideology, and an emotional connection to local community (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Sandell, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Urry, 2007; Williams, 2002).

Applying the universalism-particularism continuum to the motivations for hiking sheds light on the ambivalent and multiple meanings of motivations and benefits. This is important, as, according to Slavin (2003, p. 1), "motivations and purposes to embark on a journey, of which hiking is one mode among many, may be blurred, ambivalent, focused, or multiple."

Methodology

Our two research questions were: a) what are hikers' motivations for hiking the INT, and b) is it possible to differentiate between the universalistic and particularistic systems of hiking on the trail? Our theoretically informed and empirically based exploratory study was conducted according to the following methodology:

Based on the literature, a questionnaire containing 44 questions was formulated. The closed, open and multiple option questions dealt with the following themes: (a) personal and demographic characteristics (sex, age, country of origin, education, occupation, place of residence, income and religion); (b) motivations for hiking; (c) the experience of hiking the INT and other trails in Israel and abroad; (d) the hiking itself (thru hiking, hiking in parts, length and direction of hiking, daily distance hiked, daily hiking goals, hiking partners, resting places, expenditures, satisfaction and achievements); and (e) place attachment, place identity and self-definition.

The next stage in the research was content analysis. First, the data was organized into main categories. Next, all the resulting categories were classified and graded on the continuum from universalism to particularism. The questionnaire was distributed to hikers via the internet. Altogether, 210 questionnaires were completed in full by domestic hikers between March 2013 and March 2014. In terms of gender structure, the Israeli hikers were found to consist of nearly equal percentages of men and women: 57% and 43%, respectively. In terms of age structure, the hikers fell within two primary age groups: young hikers on the one hand and hikers over the age of 50 on the other hand.

Findings

Our findings provided answers to the both research questions (regarding hiker motivations and the possibility of differentiating between the universalistic and particularistic components of the INT hiking system). The following table (see Table 1) displays the major universalistic and particularistic assemblages of the hiking system on the INT.

Table 1
Universalistic and particularistic assemblages: level of identification by respondents (%).[a]

Categories	Universalistic assemblage	%	Particularistic assemblage	%
Motivations	Love of nature	91	Social "Communitas"	92
	Physical and athletic motivations	68	Hiking as manifestation of nation and state building	76
	Self-reflection, reflexivity and self-development	64	Love of country	74
	Serious leisure	56	Ideology	22
	Spiritual and cultural motivations	42		
	Religious motivations	2		
Experience and behavior	Hiking as discipline and technique	69	Hiking with companions	88
	Hiking as end or means	66	Becoming one with the land	77
	Multidimensional structure and experience	47	Identification with the land	76
	Body & soul	36	Hiking as affiliation to the land	52
Achievements of hiking	Hiking itself	13	Sociability	15
	Mental and spiritual motivations	12	Knowing the land	13
	Happiness, satisfaction and enjoyment	11		
	Physical, health and body	9		
Obstacles to hiking	Physical difficulties	41	Social constraints	6
	Mental difficulties	13		
	Health difficulties	10		

[a] Percentages were calculated based on the number of responses to each question (missing responses were not counted). Only questions that were answered by more than 80% of all respondents were counted.

Use of the universalism-particularism continuum highlights the prevalence of the particularistic orientation and the power of place attachment and place identity constructs among Israeli hikers. It also underscores the relatively weak presence of universalistic components among Israeli hikers, in contrast to most of the literature regarding long distance hiking trails.

Discussion & conclusions

This study characterizes the INT hiking system as both universalistic and particularistic in nature and highlights the crucial role of particularistic attributes among Israeli hikers. Our first conclusion is that the motivations for hiking need not be completely "blurred" and "ambivalent," as using the universalism-particularism continuum to establish the orientation of hikers can help us better understand their intentions. This continuum, however, is limited in that it does not always recognize the multiple natures of motivations.

Our second conclusion is that although the universalism-particularism continuum in some ways resembles the "push-pull" framework for the study of mobilities (for example, migration, tourism and leisure), and although particularism may be thought of as fundamentally a pull factor and universalism as fundamentally a push construct, our study demonstrates that the universalism-particularism continuum significantly enhances our understanding of the push-pull framework by providing it with variegation and nuances.

This dynamic can be clearly demonstrated by considering the motivation of love of country. Although this motivation can function as both a push and a pull factor, classifying it according to its particularistic orientation adds an important new dimension to our understanding of the motivation. Similarly, "communitas," or interacting with others, can also be understood as both a push and a pull factor, although in the Israeli context, it is clearly particularistic in orientation (whereas in other societies it is a universalistic motivation).

The particularistic attributes of Israeli hikers emerge perhaps most vividly in the context of "communitas." The literature typically relates to the religious form of "communitas"—a term referring to an intense feeling of community spirit and solidarity, togetherness, and equality, and to what allows a community to share a common experience, usually through a "rite of passage" (Turner, 1969; Turner & Turner, 1978). However, the manifestation of communitas in Israeli society has many faces

involving people and their connection to the land and country. Israeli "communitas" is part of an ethos that stresses the importance of family, friends, community, and country, and Israeli culture is perceived as an integral part of one's extended family.

On this basis, we argue that hiking the INT is an element of Israeli society's traditional sense of collectiveness and is one component of a 'ritual of socialization' by which solidarity and personal commitment to one another are part of the nation building process. In this way, hiking the INT is political, as reflected in its role in political ideological socialization in Israel. In this process, place identity plays a particularistic role, serving to generate psychological and emotional links between people and places.

Cresswell (2006) describes "mobility" as the dynamic equivalent of "place," and the meanings that people ascribe to places are necessarily political (Williams, 2002, pp. 353–354). In the case of Israel, they are strongly embedded in the Zionist state building process and the practice of socialization, which promote hiking as a means of reinforcing attachment to the Land of Israel (Katriel, 1995).

Future research in this ongoing study will further pursue the motivations and behavior of hikers according to categories such as domestic and international tourists, by personal attributes, and by the comparative study of other trails around the world. Future research will also use other methods such as open ended interviews, analysis of blogs and Facebook groups, participant observation, and the self-biographies of hikers during the hike.

Parsons' pattern variable construct was found to complement and interact reciprocally with theories of leisure and tourism based on functions and structures such as place attachment, place identity, means-end theory, activity involvement, and commitment (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Kyle et al., 2003; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; Williams, 2002). But the pattern variables construct offers additional value when employed as a continuum, by making it possible to refine the meanings of leisure and tourism activities in the context of culture, ideology and politics. This is its main contribution to both the empirical research and the current tourism literature.

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The impact of eWOM density on sales of travel insurance

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Online word-of-mouth (eWOM) is considered to be among the most important and credible drivers of consumer behavior (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). This is particularly important for the travel industry (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009), where the impact of eWOM has been studied for a range of travel services including hotels, restaurants, and even destinations (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). However there is no research on the impact of eWOM on sales of travel insurance, which tends to accompany almost every type of tourism activity. Research has shown that travel insurance is taken by a large proportion of international travelers, but that a third of all travel claims made are not fully accepted by the insurance providers (Leggat & Leggat, 2002). As such, the negative experiences of prior customers is expected to have a strong influence on the purchasing decision. In this research note, we examine the impact of the density of negative eWOM on sales of travel insurance.

Online word-of-mouth has been shown to be an important market signal of reputation (Amblee & Bui, 2011). The two most commonly used metrics to measure eWOM are volume and valence. Volume refers to the number of messages while valence captures the nature of the message, be it positive, negative, mixed or neutral (Liu, 2006). Volume has been shown to be consistently and strongly correlated to sales (Amblee & Bui, 2011), while research on the impact of valence has been mixed. The aggregation of all reviews, expressed by the average customer rating has been found to have no relationship with sales (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Chen, Wu, & Yoon, 2004; Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2012), while other researchers using individual-level or attribute-level metrics of valence have found relationships of varying degrees of strength and direction (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2009). In particular, it has been shown that negative eWOM communications have a greater influence than positive eWOM on purchase decisions, even though there are significantly more positive reviews than negative reviews (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Park & Lee, 2009). This has been attributed to a negativity bias (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, & de Ridder, 2011). This is especially true for utilitarian products such as insurance, where consumers give greater weight to negative reviews (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

While the impact of volume and average customer rating have been relatively well explored, little academic attention has been given to *density*, which is another important eWOM metric. eWOM density is defined here as the ratio of the number of customers posting a review about insurance company i during time period x to total number of customers who purchased travel insurance from

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