

# A GEOGRAPHER'S VIEW ON RECREATION: "ZUSAMMENHANG," THE CONNECTEDNESS OF IT ALL

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**Abstract.**—This paper traces the history of geography to a present understanding of recreation geography. A synthesis of current trends in the research and teaching of the subject are also offered, and future research ideas are proposed.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

I am indeed honored to have been asked to speak to you in the Founder's Forum. However, in the interest of full disclosure, I must confess that I am not one of the original founders. In fact, I didn't even attend the first NERR meeting in 1989. I was at the SERR meeting that year, and I am pleased to recognize my friend and mentor, Dr. Kenneth Chilman, in the audience. If not for his support and encouragement while I was a grad student at Southern Illinois University, I would probably not be here today. Ken introduced me to Tom More when I moved to the northeast and the rest is history. So I would like to dedicate my talk to Ken Chilman.

So if I am not a founder, who the heck am I? Maybe I am an old timer, but one thing is for sure: I am a geographer. And I believe that while our educational backgrounds may be different, I hope that at the end of this talk you will feel like a geographer as well.

I have three things I want to share with you today. I want to give you a bit of geographic literacy through a quick and basic history of geography. Next, I want to define what I believe to be recreation geography. And then I want to pose what I consider to be the most pressing issues of recreation geography for our future.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

The study of recreation is a discipline with a long history in geography. It has evolved over time and has unique and identifiable themes. Yet most recreation geographers

tend to incorporate one or more of these themes in their teaching and research. The main themes emphasized in teaching recreation geography center around resources, including national parks and the like, economic studies like travel behavior, tourism, or regional geography, social factors including demographics and special populations, planning (applied), human dimensions, best exemplified by ecotourism, or some combination of these factors.

Since we may look at recreation or tourism through a different set of glasses, we may feel that our approach, say behavioral, sets us apart. Recreation geographers are different from the tourism specialists, possibly because of the outdoor recreation aspect of the former and regional geography for the latter. And yet, definitions for recreation, leisure, and tourism all generally have the same components. I use the Library of Congress Classification as the basis of the comparison. All our disciplines, Geography, Travel, Recreation, and Leisure fall under "Class G."

So let me get to the history of recreation geography from its humble roots to contemporary times. It is hoped that a synthesis of these ideas may unite us all under the theme Leisure Studies and allow us to employ our skills in an applied and theoretical field of inquiry.

## 3.0 HISTORY

The ancient Greek scholar Eratosthenes is often called the "father of geography." Eratosthenes was born around 276 B.C. in Libya. As head librarian and scholar at Alexandria, he wrote *Geography*, which means "writing about the earth" in Greek. Nearly 1,400 years later, Ibn-Khaldun wrote his history of the world titled *The Muqaddimah* in 1377. He is considered to be the first to study the human-environment relationship, which today is known as one of the five themes of geography.

So, when do we get to the recreation part? I am going to summarize the key events in geographic history that I suggest bring us to our present understanding of recreation. A history of recreation geography can be summarized in a series of interconnected stages. The

stages are exploration, concept, economic and custodial, mass use and descriptive, applied and environmental, social, and human dimensions.

### 3.1 Exploration Stage (pre-1850)

This early stage was important in the development of geography since it defined it as a separate and identifiable discipline. Early explorers who traveled did so because it was fun and exciting. Sure there were financial rewards, but the excitement of traveling to some new and exotic location might have fueled an interest in our world and perhaps so, for fun! What were the motivations of Columbus for his travels between 1492-1504? Magellan's voyages from 1519-1522 are noteworthy as well. And these guys did it all without GPS or even decent maps.

Speaking of maps, it wasn't until 1569 that Gerardus Mercator created his map of the world. As important as it was then, since it preserves conformality in maps—the shape of things in small areas—we still find the Mercator Projection map useful today, especially for marine navigational purposes. Maps, as we all know, help us find our way. And since travelers or explorers like to know the way, maps are the chief tool that geographers can share with the world. How many of you used a map to find your way to The Sagamore?

This brings up to the nineteenth century. I am going to claim that Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter may be the first recreation geographers. Alexander von Humboldt's travels, experiments, and knowledge transformed science as it was known in the Western world in the nineteenth century. Charles Darwin described him as “the greatest scientific traveler who ever lived.” He is widely respected as one of the founders of modern geography.

In 1820 Carl Ritter became the first chair of geography at the University of Berlin. His seminal work, *Die Erkunde, or The Science of the Earth in Relation to Nature and the History of Mankind; or General Comparative Geography as the Solid Foundation of the Study of, and Introduction, in the Physical and Historical Sciences* was published in 1817. Whew, and you thought your dissertation title was long! Anyway, he is credited as one of the founders of modern human geographers. Ritter's idea that the earth was

created for human need had religious implications. Yet while controversial at the time, it is important since his idea connected humans and the environment.

During this time, disciplines began to branch off into the physical and social sciences. In fact, after the breakup of social sciences into smaller and defined groupings, Ritter declared the general failure of the new disciplines in recognizing “zusammenhang” or the harmony of interconnectedness.

There is little debate that von Humboldt and Ritter were instrumental in the development of modern geography (Martin and James 1993). Their search for knowledge led them to learn about the interconnectedness of all things found on the Earth. But the wealth of information describing the Earth was beginning to be much too much for a single scholar to absorb.

Though I refer to this as an exploration stage, we need to note some of the important events that were taking place in the new world. For instance, the Boston Commons were established in 1634, and who can forget the Great Ponds Act of 1641, which enabled the Massachusetts Bay Colony to protect inland waters for “fishing and fowling?”

### 3.2 Concept stage (1850-1912)

Technical advances began in this period with the first aerial photography in France and in the American Civil War. And William Morris Davis was born. William Morris Davis is often called the “father of American geography” for his work in not only helping to establish geography as an academic discipline but also for his advancement of the study of physical geography.

Also in the United States, George Perkins Marsh, a Vermont geographer published the important work titled *Man and Nature* (1864), perhaps the first definitive work on the human impacts on the Earth and obvious precursor to the environmental movement and carrying capacity issues in recreation some hundred years later. In 1874, the updated and revised *The Earth as Modified by Human Action* was published. The interconnectedness of humans in a natural environment was thus explained to a wide audience.

While the works of these geographers were setting the framework for geographic studies, Isaiah Bowman may be credited for really highlighting the importance of field work in leisure. I believe geographers by nature tend to be wanderers, willing to explore new regions and to seek information. Geography field trips are commonplace in today's classes. In 1929, the Secretary of the Interior, recognizing Bowman's contribution to scientific inquiry, invited Isaiah Bowman and others to serve on a National Park Service Educational Advisory Board.

Key events taking place during this stage include Frederick Law Olmstead's design of New York City's Central Park in 1853, and in 1886 Congress authorized the military to take charge and protect and manage Yellowstone and, eventually, other early National Parks.

### **3.3 Economic and Custodial Stage (WWI to WWII)**

Following the First World War, geographers began to assess the importance of rural lands. Farm lands, forest and range lands were plentiful in the United States. Studies collected information about these lands in order to inventory the resource base of the nation. If the land was inappropriate for agricultural purposes, recreation alternatives were considered. McMurry (1930) investigated the land inventory in Michigan and noted the lack of undeveloped waterfront properties in the Great Lakes region, and coincidentally, higher property values for waterfront lands. The economic advantage of nearby water resources is without question in the hydro-power industry, but this was a novel idea in the early twentieth century. The large expanses of undeveloped lands in northern Michigan had escaped this development, and McMurry argued that the lands could be appropriately used for recreational purposes. Yet a full geographic study would be needed, including a biogeography inventory.

A similar geographic assessment took place about the same time in Hawaii by Freeman (1929). This economic study, proclaimed "The third business, if it can be so-called, so far as bringing money into the territory is concerned, is the tourist business" (Freeman 1929 p. 274). Little was said about this new industry other than about its rapid growth, and the importance of

some 20,000 military personnel nearby in the growing city of Honolulu. These two studies provided the first geographical inquiry into the potential of recreation use of land.

For our history lesson, the formation of the National Park Service in 1916 and the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933, were instrumental public land management initiatives.

### **3.4 Mass Use and Descriptive Stage (1950-1969)**

Following WWII, the economy strengthened, we had a chicken in every pot and the two-week vacation became the norm as mom and pop and 2.3 children hopped into the Chevy wagon to take a two-week vacation to our National Forests And Parks.

And we had The Multiple-use Sustained-use Act of 1960. Notice that word sustained. We need to be reminded about that. Anyway, this "Act declares that the purposes of the national forest include outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed and fish and wildlife. The Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture to administer national forest renewable surface resources for multiple use and sustained yield." Pretty powerful stuff, eh?

A really important event during this period is the formation of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) in 1958. I even got a hard copy of this reference. Basically, with all this increased use in a society free with time and income, we needed to conduct an inventory of outdoor recreation resources in the United States, evaluate national outdoor recreation requirements in 1976 and 2000, and prepare recommendations to meet those needs.

Years later I read the work of Clawson and Knetsch (1966) and their theory of the recreation experience. These guys really helped me make the connection between my passion for participating in recreation and the research of it. Consider the idea of an evolving recreation experience and five unique stages: anticipation and planning, travel to the site, on-site activity, return travel from the site, and recollection of the trip.

### 3.5 Applied and Environmental (1970-1983)

The country became unified around the environmental theme in 1970, and I believe geographer George H. Stankey is one of the chief proponents to advance recreation geography. He received his B.S. and M.S. degrees in geography from Oregon State University and his Ph.D. in geography from Michigan State University. His work in wilderness planning and management was through the eyes of a geographer (Stankey 1977).

This era ended on November 8, 1983 with the resignation of Interior secretary James Watt.

### 3.6 Social Impacts and Partnerships (1983-1993)

The classic *One Third of our Time* text by Chubb & Chubb (1981) may have really heralded the Social Stage I bring up now. Consider this premise. One third of our time was for work (or school), one third of our time was needed for our bodies (sleep and eating and so forth), leaving one third of our time for recreation. Gosh, how I miss the recreation. Other geographers like Dan Stynes at MSU looked at this free time in the form of second homes in upstate Michigan.

Several anthologies were published during this time, including several geographers from South Carolina. These papers were important since they offered a synthesis of current research, something that we all need to do every once in a while. This includes the work of Lisle Mitchell and Bob Janiskee (Mitchell & Smith 1985, 1989; Janiskee & Mitchell 1989).

### 3.7 Sustainable (1994-2006)

I am going to stop citing folks about now, so I will not offend anyone that I exclude from my list. But if we look at the evolution of the NERR Symposium and the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, we can note the *zusammenhang* of our discipline with so many others. Key words in each title are geographic in nature. The Five Themes of Geography are Location, Place, Movement, Region, and Human - Environment Interaction. So let me read some of the titles from the NERR Proceedings. I have highlighted the words that are clearly “human-environment interaction’ in nature by underlining them.

Level of Experience and Perception of Conflict Among Canoeists on the Delaware River (Todd and Graefe 1989).

Sport Fishing in New York State: Trends Toward the year 2010 (Dawson and Brown 1990).

Economic Effects of State Park Recreation in Pennsylvania (Strauss and Lord 1991).

Domestic Travel Trends: An Exploratory Review and Analysis of the Northeast Market (Warnick 1992).

Valuing Linear Trail Development: The Case of the Raccoon River Valley Trail (Robertson 1993).

Estimating Social Carrying Capacity Through Computer Simulation Modeling: An Application to Arches National Park, Utah (Wang, Manning, Lawson and Valliere 2001).

Public Perception of the Connecticut River’s Quality and Suitability as a Recreational Resource (Mullens and McNally 1999).

Exploration of the Influence of Self-Efficacy on Recreation Participation Levels of Individuals with Visual Impairments Who Use Dog Guides (Harmon and Caldwell 2001).

Emotional Coping Response to Hassles and Stress Experience in Wilderness Settings (Schuster and Hammitt 2002).

Solitude, Nature and Cities (More, Long and Averill 2003)

A Comparison of Residents and Non-Residents on Perceptions of Off Road Vehicle Use and Carrying Capacity (Hughes and Voglesong 2004).

Constraints to Recreational Fishing: Concepts and Questions to Understand Underrepresented Angling Groups (Anderson, Loomis and Salz 2005).

## 4.0 TODAY AT THE NERR 2006

We note that with over 120 research papers to be presented, the NERR symposium has become the largest

natural resource-based recreation and tourism conference in North America (Kyle 2006). At the same time as we have experienced growth in this conference, we see a similar growth in the number of geographers, where a 50 percent growth in membership for the Association of American Geographers from 2000 - 2005 yields 9,000 plus members. Finally, this may be a new era in Recreation Geography with the resignation of Secretary of Interior Gale Norton on March 11, 2006.

## **5.0 RECREATION GEOGRAPHY DEFINED**

I have taught a course in Recreation Geography for about 15 years, and my central definition of recreation geography is this. Recreation Geography is the study of humans participating in some activity at some resource. Three parts: people, activity and resource. For people, we consider the socio-demographic characteristics. Recall much of the ORRRC report dealt with these factors. But more recently, especially in the social impacts and partnerships stage, we find the motivations, desires, and interests being an interest of study.

For activity, this is what people do, be it hang gliding, hiking, driving for pleasure, or even golf. It might also be a shopping trip, or a visit to a museum, or hitting every micro brewery between Bolton Landing and State College.

Then we must do our activity at some place. It might be in our backyard, or the neighborhood park, but it could be Caulker Cay, Montego Bay, or the Arenal Volcano.

Finally, we must consider the job of the planner or manager, who must consider each of the previous three items and provide a safe and enjoyable experience.

## **6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Let me conclude with recommendations for future research. These are the items that demand research and I challenge this group, as leaders participating in the largest natural resource-based recreation and tourism conference in North America.

## **6.1 Climate Change**

Geographers have generally agreed that it is not really global warming but something more appropriately called climate change. That is, when we have a cooler summer in the northeast, we may feel that global warming is not really a problem. But when we measure the aggregate temperature of the earth (approximately 59 degrees Fahrenheit or 15 degrees Celsius) and that increases just a bit, we in the northeast may be a cooler summer. Barbara Carmichael's (1995) research on the potential of ski resort closings is chief on my concern regarding global warming.

I'm heading to Alaska in May to see the glaciers before they're gone!

## **6.2 Changing Demographics**

Check out a population pyramid of Hispanics. Basically recall the length of the bar represents the percentage of Hispanics that are members of that five year age cohort. We see two distinct bulges: one at the bottom indicating infants and another in the mid-20s (coincidentally child-bearing age). What does this mean for recreation planners and managers? Well, it means we gotta' get with the program and acknowledge these recreators may be looking at our parks for something different. What are they looking for? That is for us to research.

## **6.3 MegaCities**

Finally, and sort of tied with demographics, is something termed Megacities. If we look at one of those "night-time" satellite images of the Earth, we see where the developed areas of the planet emit light pollution. What is the largest city in the World? For a long time, I thought it was Mexico City, but I am wrong. Check out Tokyo with over 25 million residents. And with a world population at 6.5 billion, we are in for a fun ride over the next 50 years. Check out one of those dynamic population clocks on the web and you will be impressed.

So do we change the name of this conference to NERRg? I think not! But if I connected us through geography, the *zusammenhang* of it all, I have satisfied my purpose. Thank you.

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