

## **Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Senses of Place**

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The concept of “sense of place” typically is used to refer to an individual’s ability to develop feelings of attachment to particular settings based on combinations of use, attentiveness, and emotion. Despite the assumed positive values of a sense of place, critics point out that places are more than simply geographic sites—they are also fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction and memory, and they “contain” overt and covert social practices that embed in place-making behaviors notions of ideology, power, control, conflict, dominance, and distribution of social and physical resources. This paper traces emerging scholarship about sense of place as a social construction, and offers examples from leisure, outdoor recreation, and tourism development. Place and sense of place are seen as socially constructed, always in the process of being created, always provisional and uncertain, and always capable of being discursively manipulated towards desired (individual or collective) ends. A research program about leisure and the politics of place awaits development, but should focus on language and discourse, and should begin with the question: how are leisure places socially constructed with political consequences?

**KEYWORDS:** *Place, sense of place, discourse, language, political aspects of place*

In a local antiques store, I recently came across a curious, though charming, display of old photographs. The black and white images were carefully arranged on a small wooden table that had been covered with a hand-crafted lace doily. Most of the photos were curled at the edges and all were slightly faded. The pictures showed families who had lived long ago, the women in long dark dresses and shawls, the men in their best suits, children in bows and buckled shoes, all gazing seriously at the camera. Farmhouses, barns, cows, and mountains filled the backgrounds; family pets stood by, as stately as their owners. A hand-lettered sign next to the display listed prices, and offered a clever marketing slogan to entice potential buyers: “Instant Ancestors!” it read.

The notion that one can accumulate relatives along with their lifestyles and cultures simply by purchasing old photographs is enchanting, even if fanciful. Yet, in these first few years after the millennium, with the memory of the events of September 11, 2001 still fresh, we hear more and more frequently about people being drawn to images of the past, to times that

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seem slower and more peaceful, where life gives an appearance of being “richer” than what is offered in this contemporary fast-paced, highly mobile world. Postmodern theorists might explain these longings as the dreams of people seeking places of connection and meaning in a chaotic world—places that might offer “grounding” in terms of community and landscape and history, such that one’s life can be made less isolated and more fulfilling.

Academics and popular writers offer the term “sense of place” in an effort to capture such sentiments, and the phrase seems to resonate. Who among us has never felt nostalgia for a place and its people, especially a place once known intimately? Who among us has never tried to capture the feelings remembered from a place by hanging artwork on a wall, taking photos of a place, or displaying favorite mementos of place? Who among us has not longed for a place once lived, in all its substance and fullness, and dreamed of returning to live there again?

The concept of sense of place is used colloquially to refer to an individual’s ability to develop feelings of attachment to particular settings based on a combination of use, attentiveness, and emotion. The very same setting can mean very different things to different individuals associated with it. Popular conceptions of place tend to be geographically-based, in that the sense of place tends to be drawn around and linked with a known physical setting—one’s home, an area in a park, a favorite shop or scene in town, and so on.

Despite the assumed positive values that accompany the notion of sense of place, critics have recently emerged from a variety of academic and public contexts. Their analyses suggest that places are more than simply geographic sites with definitive physical and textual characteristics—places are also fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction and memory. To take for granted the objectivity of place, and to focus only on its physical features, is to ignore Soja’s (1989, p. 6) caution that, “We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.”

The purpose of the 2001 Opening Session of the Leisure Research Symposium was to explore issues about sense of place under the rubric of “leisure and the politics of place.” I take that directive to refer to the broadest possible range of overt and covert social practices that embed in place-making behaviors notions of ideology, power, control, conflict, dominance, and distribution of social and physical resources. This paper traces emerging scholarship about sense of place, and offers examples from the contexts of leisure, outdoor recreation, and tourism development. A basic assumption guiding this analysis is that sense of place is important both individually and socially, and only through analysis of the collective, constructed potential of place will social and cultural power be made manifest.

#### “Place” in Recreation, Leisure and Tourism

Consideration of the meanings of place, and concern with how place emerges and evolves from undifferentiated space, are topics that have be-

come increasingly prominent in contemporary scholarly writing. An extensive literature related to conceptualizing space and place has emerged from the disciplines of geography, landscape architecture, psychology, rural sociology, urban planning, and literature (see the early influential work of Tuan (1974) and Relph (1976), among others). Early traditions of space/place research applied a positivistic model, with theory and methods grounded in scientific empiricism. Scholars evaluated the objective characteristics of physical settings and sought to understand how place meanings could be related to specific settings and to the behaviors enacted in those settings.

These research traditions have carried over into leisure, recreation, and tourism contexts. Researchers have attempted to describe the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of an individual's sense of place as it relates to specific recreation, leisure or tourism sites. A variety of examples are available. Lee (1972) studied the place meanings developed by different groups of recreationists gathering at parks and other outdoor recreation settings. Williams et al. (1992) analyzed the attachments of individuals to wilderness areas in Georgia and Montana. Moore and Graefe (1994) studied people's uses of and sentiments about rail-trails. Mitchell et al. (1993) described activity-oriented and emotion-oriented visions of recreationists visiting the Wenatchee National Forest in Washington State. Hull, Lam and Vigo (1994) studied people's recollections of physical landscape features damaged by Hurricane Hugo. Stokowski (1996) studied transformations of place images expressed by residents in two Colorado communities as those towns evolved from mining to tourism dependence. While most of these authors studied a specific site, places were not only seen as inert physical backdrops to human activity. Fishwick and Vining's (1992) analysis of students' experiences of Illinois State Parks led those authors to conclude (p. 57), for example, that the park sites were experienced as combinations of "setting, landscape, ritual, routine, (and) people" and in contrast with other places.

Whether using quantitative or qualitative scientific approaches, the body of research about place in outdoor recreation, leisure, and tourism has at least five defining characteristics. First, much of the research is site-specific and case study based; there are few comparative analyses of places, and fewer still comparing senses of place across types of settings. Second, researchers typically ask subjects to focus on positive place values—and have not typically asked questions about negative sentiments associated with place. This method tends to limit analyses to only a narrow segment of a (presumably) more complex spectrum of place relations. Third, researchers have tended to define physical space by its objective, resource-based qualities. Settings are conceived as physical sites towards which recreationists orient, and alternative theories about place are rarely in evidence. Fourth, social, cultural, and managerial contexts of places are also usually treated as stable and predictable elements of a recreation experience. The relation of these characteristics to development of an individual's sense of place remains poorly theorized. Finally, with only a few exceptions, the unit of analysis in leisure-oriented place research has typically been the individual. Sense of place is

seen as an outcome of an individual's cognitive and emotional states and his/her activity dependence at particular recreation sites. Very little research in leisure, recreation, and tourism addresses issues of how sense of place comes to be shared across people as a *collective* feature of society.

### Challenges to Traditional Approaches

To conceive of place as a concrete physical setting within which people act is a logical approach that draws from positivistic research philosophies. Clearly, places exist in objective, tangible form, and people do orient their daily activities around sites of work, of play, of family and community. Political issues associated with the tangible, self-evident characteristics of place are numerous, and include questions of access (who is present at a site and who is absent or excluded); questions of location (where should places be located relative to user needs and preferences); and questions of equity (what can people do here, what can they not do here, and how do activity conflicts affect user groups). Such questions reflect issues of managerial concern in recreation, leisure and tourism—problems that are assumed to be “fixable” by the application of science and administrative will directed toward achieving efficient and equitable resource management decisions. While these are certainly important and deserving areas of inquiry, alternative conceptions of social reality raise different kinds of concerns about the politics of place.

Recent theories associated with the philosophy of postmodernism, for example, call into question the very foundations of concepts like “site,” “place,” and “setting.” Interpretive and critical scholars in all disciplines charge that traditional approaches cannot account for sites that are not physically present. For example, how should place be defined when technological advances allow the creation of cyber and hyper “sites” that are invisible or even imaginary, where power relations between and among participants are unclear, and where rules of social engagement are uncertain? Many other questions about place and sense of place are introduced from the perspectives of postmodernism: What circumstances lead to the social creation of places? What are the symbolic values of places, and how are these meanings incorporated into management decisions? How do groups and communities of people come to share meanings about place? How is place represented and produced across a society (and how might it differ across groups and societies)? What are the social and political consequences of different versions of place realities? Which spokespersons are allowed to define place boundaries, or tell the histories of place, or interpret the meanings of place? How do different conceptions of place exert influence on people and groups? How is place manipulated for social good or evil? With these types of questions, the politics of place assume dimensions that go well beyond basic managerial concerns.

If a “place” is not merely an objective site with physical features, though, what else is it? An alternative is offered by Soja (1989, p. 79), who explained

that the term “place” has typically been used in at least two different ways: first, to refer to physical settings, as a context for social action (the traditional conceptualization); and second, as a referent for socially constructed contexts of interpersonal interaction and practice. In the first instance, place refers to a tangible site (a park, a beach), while in the second instance, place may be non-physical space (for example, a computer network of academicians) that is continually re-created and reproduced. Zerubavel (1996) carried this idea even further, explaining that sites can also be conceived as “texts”—a concept that includes not only written media such as documents, books, and brochures, but also spoken, visual and non-verbal media including photographs, architecture, advertisements, performance media, and the artifacts of material culture (the system of national parks and forests might be seen as one example of a social text). Thus, even while an individual might develop a personal sense of place around a specific site, the “social place” known and understood across sets of people is created and reproduced through interpersonal interaction, formalized in social behavior, and ultimately persists in collective memory.

### Constructing Place

If place is socially constructed, then, the creation of a sense of place can be seen as a social (not merely individual) task. While any individual can apply imagination to create a *personal* sense of place, much of what a person knows about places, or feels about places, or does in places, is initially mediated by others. Sociologists Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner wrote (1964, p. 1) that, “the reality of the world is sustained through conversation with significant others.” It is not simply that others teach a person about the objective qualities of a given place. Rather, people actively *create* meaningful places through conversation and interaction with others. As Ryden (1993, p. 241) observed, “places do not exist until they are verbalized, first in thought and memory and then through the spoken or written word.” The reality of place emerges and is confirmed in the common symbolic languages and discourses of people.

Because the significance of place emerges through interaction with others, language is central in formation of a sense of place. Place affiliations are sustained by rhetorical (i.e., in the classic sense: persuasive) uses of language, with participants using stylistic devices such as icons, imagery, argumentation, symbols, and metaphors, among others. The derived symbols of place are formalized through use into coherent language structures and appear to people as narratives, myths, fables, and the like. One of the most common of these forms is the place narrative. Johnstone (1990) illustrated this in her study of place-making through story telling. She explained (p. 5), “Just as narrative structures our sense of self and our interactions with others, our sense of place and community is rooted in narration. A person is at home in a place when the place evokes stories, and conversely, stories can serve to

create places." Stories represent, pattern, and express the meanings of place across society, and as Stegner (1992, p. 202) reminded, "No place is a place until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments. Fictions serve as well as facts."

The social and cultural values of place, then, become sustained in the language, culture, and history collectively experienced, imagined, and remembered across groups and communities of people. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995, p. 1) wrote, "The making of places—our homes, our neighborhoods, our places of work and play—not only changes and maintains the physical world of living; it is also a way we make our communities and connect with people." The power of place is not only in its aesthetic or behavioral possibilities, or its iconic status, but in its ability to connect people in society, encourage development of personal and social identities, and reinforce socio-cultural meanings. These are fundamental qualities of community.

Writing about the social construction of community and its places, Cohen (1985, p. 118) observed that people "construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity." The social processes of place creation reinforce individual identities, and shape and support collective identities. Relph (1976, p. 34) noted that, "The relationships between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements." The creation of place and senses of place through community involvement is theorized to have very positive values for society, as Daniel Kemmis (1990, p. 117), the writer and former mayor of Missoula, MT, observed: "What holds people together long enough to discover their power as citizens is their common inhabiting of a single place." The story of one's life is always the story of one's life in relation to others and in relation to the meaningful places created and contained in one's surroundings. As Entriken (1996, p. 217) explained, "Place and place identity reflect in part the narrative strategies we employ to regain a sense of wholeness, connecting self to milieu. . . . The boundaries between place and self, the two central components of geographic identity, have become blurred in modern life."

Thus, systems of speaking and writing (documenting, inscribing, remembering) our social, natural and cultural landscapes do not only mirror or represent an objective reality. Instead, these communicative behaviors are actively employed to create place realities. The social texts produced from such interactions are both concrete and malleable. They provide fluid but coherent systems of symbolic order that allow observers to imagine their worlds (including its significant places) as stable, reliable, and certain. As Schneekloth and Shibley (1995, p. 18) observed, though, "The tasks of place-making—opening the dialogic space, confirming and interrogating contexts, and framing action—are inherently political and moral acts." While any

given text may appear to be logical and convincing to some groups of people, others may be offended or unmoved by its claims. Thus, texts also function symbolically to distance groups or individuals from one another.

### Issues in the Politics of Place

Understanding the social construction of place and sense of place re-focuses thinking away from the taken-for-granted physical characteristics of space, and toward the possibility that places are always in the process of being created, always provisional and uncertain, and always capable of being discursively manipulated towards desired (individual or collective) ends. Such conclusions lead directly into analysis of the politics of place. As Cresswell (1996, p. 9) explained, places "structure a normative landscape—the way in which ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted across people." He continued, "But value and meaning are not inherent in any space or place—indeed they must be created, reproduced, and defended from heresy." Each effort to create place becomes an elaboration of the beliefs and values of some collection of people, expressed and fostered in their promotion of a preferred reality.

The act of "making places" appears to be such a natural human function, though, that many of the assumptions and social practices that go into it are unobtrusive, often hidden to most participants. While one should not assume that unobtrusive social practices are inherently subversive or exploitive, no explicit guidelines exist for evaluating the claims of place making. This may be problematic, particularly for activities that involve reconstructing spaces in the "public" interest. An example from natural resource management is given by Peluso (1996, p. 136), who wrote, "Changes in the ways resource users and uses are perceived and described (narrated) by powerful resource managers, in both colonial and contemporary settings, contribute to the choice of management strategies and their justification." Management is thus a discursive process—not a practice of applying the "right" solutions to well-defined problems.

One way to deconstruct the activities of place-making is to evaluate the communicative practices used by social actors in advancing their positions. These social behaviors include the use of language and non-verbal imagery in bounding, focusing, and limiting discussion topics; the use of verbal or non-verbal strategies to include or deny participation; and the manipulation of symbols to achieve desired ends. These behaviors, and many others, are circumscribed by the levels of power available to social actors. People have differential levels of access and different skills and abilities relative to participation in public debate and discussion. As Vandergeest and DuPuis (1996, p. 5) observed, "It is not possible to understand the construction of meaning without attention to the means by which local and non-local groups (colonizers, wealthy urban classes, and so forth) can exercise widespread political and economic control over the countryside" by separating public and private resources, by managing the issue agendas discussed in public arenas, or by

investing economically in certain interests. Research about power relationships in social negotiations over places is greatly needed, and the study of “the symbolic creation of landscape, the cultural meanings of aspects of the physical environment and biophysical changes in this environment, and the values and beliefs that sustain these symbols and meanings” (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p. 21) is as warranted in recreation, leisure and tourism as in other contexts.

New models of deliberative democracy emerging in planning, social policy, and critical theory incorporate issues of power as a central concern. Many authors writing about deliberative practices and democratic participation draw from Habermas’ theory of communicative action, a theory that conceptualizes social action as emerging from interpersonal agreements created in language practices (Brulle, 2000). Discourses—the stable, situated, ritualized languages that arise—reflect the cultural and organizational structures of the social worlds which produce them, and offer seemingly rational perspectives for viewing individual and institutional behaviors. The utility of discursive models of democracy is in their ability to critique language practices, and in the hopes that they may foster less politicized, more civic, and more democratic approaches toward collaborative learning, public participation in environmental affairs, and lessening social conflicts (Hajer, 1995; Forester, 1999).

### Leisure and the Politics of Place

If place is to be conceived as socially constructed, then new types of research are needed to understand the politics of place in leisure, recreation, and tourism. The prevailing discourses of leisure—formed around notions of freedom, self-expression, and personal enjoyment—serve to encourage individualism, but these also simultaneously camouflage the political agendas and orientations of participants, managers, and legislating bodies. In this section, several brief examples are offered to illustrate the politics of place as expressed in leisure, recreation and tourism contexts. Drawn from published literature, the examples presented illustrate how issues of power, dominance, resource allocation, and discursive abilities emerge from within research projects focused primarily on other topics (social impacts, tourism development planning, visitor conflicts, and so on). A full research program about leisure and the politics of place awaits development, but should begin with the question: how are leisure places socially constructed with political consequences?

#### *Leisure and Recreation Places*

One of the classic papers in the social psychology of leisure and recreation is Lee’s (1972) article about the group cultures and spatial organization of visitors to recreation places. Lee’s socio-psychological analysis, though not focused directly on the politics of leisure places, prefigures such a research



program. His study “suggests that outdoor recreational settings might be best understood in terms of the meanings assigned to them by particular socio-cultural groups” (p. 68). That is, individuals and groups create places by developing shared norms and meanings that help organize social experience. Lee’s argument challenges the notion that, “in their ‘free time’ individuals may escape . . . ordinary society with all its normative constraints by seeking refuge in outdoor areas where they may ‘be themselves’ and feel ‘free’” (p. 82). Instead, he suggested, individuals create in leisure the settings of normative order that they subsequently take for granted—but the “real” (i.e., created) social order is particular to the cultural or social group producing that version of reality. Because meanings may vary across social groups, Lee suggested that resource managers must re-evaluate bureaucratic practices and policies to account for the politicized decisions that are built into agency management. These decisions include: how resource interpretation presents specific perspectives on the appropriate stories associated with recreation places; whether planners consider inter- and intra-group relationships when applying planning tools like zoning; and whose normative order is enforced at recreation places. These are all issues that could be revealed by the application of language and discourse analyses.

Lee’s work set the stage for subsequent research work about the interactions of social groups at recreation places, the development of social networks in leisure and recreation, and cultural influences on leisure and outdoor recreation behavior. Some of these topics have been developed further in research about social aspects of wildland-urban interface issues (Ewert, Chavez, and Magill, 1993). While this work has typically not been couched in “political” terms, it includes many topics—cultural pluralism, divergent land ethics, use of resources by native peoples, ethnic identity formation in leisure, diverse recreation use patterns, and intercultural communication—that are of central concern in understanding the politics of leisure places.

### *Wilderness Places and Outdoor Recreation*

Another example of the politics of place in leisure is provided in wilderness research, a prominent area of study in outdoor recreation that has nonetheless been accused of concealing discourses of power and privilege. The “short story” version of American wilderness goes something like this. Early New England colonists considered their town commons as refuge from the vast dark and foreboding wild lands that lay beyond community borders. Over time, though, westward expansion redefined America’s relationship with wilderness. Poets, artists, writers, and historians traveling the frontier created for those back “in the States” images of wilderness designed to elevate the American spirit. This new scenic version of wilderness—grand landscapes of parks and forests, immense rivers and canyons, and bigger-than-life natural features like Half Dome, the Grand Canyon, and Devils Tower—was a constructed ideal, intended to symbolically inspire national identity.

By the early 1900s, that awe-inspiring vision of wilderness was itself transformed to suit new circumstances. The inexorable march of cities and towns

across the landscape, the weaving of highways, rail lines and airports to connect human settlements, the serious purpose expressed by factories, skyscrapers and suburbs, all represented the conquest of nature in the name of human progress. One result of industrialization was that wilderness could not be everywhere—it had to be catalogued, bounded, and legislated. (One is reminded here of the words of former Alaska governor, Walter Hickel, who was once quoted to say, “You can’t let nature just run wild.”) Two federal wilderness acts defined the concept, produced the physical places called wilderness, and arranged for the management of those natural spaces. Once again, the discursive process defined the boundaries and the rationale for wilderness.

Clearly the full story of wilderness is more lengthy and complex, but the overview presented here hints at the politicized nature of wild places. Beyond the physical and symbolic aspects of wilderness, though, the concept is meaningful in terms of recreation research. Considering the (proportionally) few but fervent recreation visitors to wilderness areas, Burch (1984, p. 10) wrote, “Here are peoples where prior generations struggled mightily to escape from the constraints of wild nature . . . only to have a substantial proportion of these present heirs rush into the wilderness seeking ever more excruciating levels of discomfort.” Yet, despite relatively limited numbers of visitors, wilderness research continues to capture a substantial amount of academic attention (and agency resources). One might be forgiven for wondering about researcher and agency bias in this agenda. Why do leisure and recreation researchers focus more on remote, natural landscapes (where people are typically absent) than suburban and urban settings (where people are almost everywhere)? Should not the values of urban life and spaces, the social possibilities of crowding and recreation encounters, and the absence of people at urban parks, make for equally compelling research that has evident social need? That these questions are typically ignored while wilderness research receives substantial attention is a sobering observation about the politics of leisure places.

### *Developing Tourism Places*

Wilderness is but one example of what Macnaghten and Urry (1998) call “contested natures.” As they explained (p. 95), “there is no single ‘nature’, only natures. And these natures are not inherent in the physical world but discursively constructed through economic, political, and cultural processes. . . .” An example of the social construction of tourism places is offered by Urry (1995) in his analysis of the making of the English Lake District as a desirable tourist destination. The Lake District, he wrote, owes its popularity to the convergence of place-myths that linked romanticized values of nature, literary and visual scenic appreciation, and passive or ‘quiet’ recreation. The place-myths that support the tourism industries of the Lake District, though, are socially selective (they intentionally attract some types of visitors and not others) and their historic and social variability reveals the continuous work of social production and re-production.

Similar sentiments about the development of tourism have been echoed by Hannigan (1998) in his exploration of postmodern urban entertainment places (casinos, themed restaurants, arcades, and so on). He identified several notable problems with new types of packaged, commercialized, fortified urban attractions and experiences: they are not affordable to all people; their geographic location restricts people who do not own private cars; and their development forces disadvantaged people out of the urban spaces where they live. Hannigan asks (p. 200), "Are we prepared to overlook the cultural diversity in the community in favor of pre-packaged corporate entertainment decisions? Will there be room for leisure activities other than those which can be branded, licensed, franchised, and rolled out on a global scale?"

The politics of place in tourism tend to be hidden behind a pervasive discourse about the assumed economic benefits of destination development, a point made evident in many tourism case studies. Brown's (1995, p. 10) analysis of the invention of New England as a tourist region, for example, reveals how "tourist industries brought natural scenery, leisure time, history, and even childhood memories and personal ancestry into the world of market transactions." She, along with other authors, observes that tourism development complicates issues of ownership of community history and memory; tourism also reduces all types of interactions to functional exchange values. Stokowski (1996) raised similar issues in her study of casino gaming developments in Colorado; her work showed that the meaningful place qualities of history, community and landscape were of secondary importance (if not irrelevant) in those amenity-based tourism developments.

Issues related to the covert power of tourism destinations and the ideology inherent in constructing tourism places are further developed in an atlas that traces the contemporary transformation of the American West (Riebsame et al., 1997). As Limerick wrote in that volume, the New West is characterized by old romantic ideals (symbolized by cowboys, wide-open and majestic landscapes, and mining boom towns) combined with contemporary economics (symbolized by Ted Turner's Montana buffalo ranch, second home developments, and espresso shops). The contradictions of place are illustrated in her example (Limerick, 1997, p. 167) of Sedona, Arizona: "Sedona is, in New Age belief, a vortex—a place where cosmic energies accumulate. Places where cosmic energies congregate are, in the 1990s, places where real estate agents congregate. More often than not, these two congregations prove capable of interfaith services." In other words, the players change, but the ideological patterns of place remain the same.

But not all tourism place issues are cause for cynicism. Ideally, community discussion and public involvement processes can be marshaled to reveal and develop the important social and cultural qualities of place. One example is offered by Hester (1990) who wrote about tourism development in the island town of Manteo, North Carolina. In an effort to guide tourism development processes there, townspeople engaged in a process of identifying significant community places of social interaction and meaning. Hester's analysis suggested that attentiveness to a town's "sacred structure"—

defined as the most highly valued places in a community's common landscape—could produce a better plan for tourism design and development. Not all the places listed as sacred were striking, exotic, or quaint; they were, instead, "humble places . . . that provided settings for the community's daily routine" (p. 10). Understanding the role of these settings in forming a communal sense of place protected both community and individual identity—and reduced the political maneuvering often associated with tourism development.

### The Future of Place Research in Leisure

Jackson (1980, p. 16) wrote: "This is how we should think of landscapes: not merely how they look, how they conform to an esthetic ideal, but how they satisfy elementary needs. . . . A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of . . . work and leisure, and above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organizations which foster such experiences and relationships." To share in a place, according to Jackson, implied obligations toward that place and toward all others who were also present and linked to places in that landscape. A sense of place in the historical sense was not simply a sentimental, mystical, or advocacy relationship oriented to a physical setting. It was, rather, a "rootedness," a set of actions based on values and beliefs, shared across community, and held in memory. Such a notion of place evolves from shared language and discourse, the basic elements of participation with others in society.

This paper has suggested that research focusing primarily on the physical qualities of actual recreation, leisure and tourism places is limiting, and researchers must look to the role of language and discourse to develop richer understandings about the social construction of place and its political ramifications. The practices of social construction will, of course, overlay social networks of relationships and interactions, and each will influence the other, as Gerson and Gerson (1976, p. 203) have noted: "inquiries into the character of images as constituted by *relations* among people is overdue. . . . (For example) to what degree, and under what circumstances, do place ideologies become *institutionalized* and begin to carry the force of compulsion in shaping people's conduct? What are the consequences of varying degrees of *consensus* about the characteristics of the place?" These questions call for new types of research about the ways in which people make lives together, and about how they create and use recreation places as extensions of individual and communal identity and ideology.

Understanding the politics of place in leisure requires knowledge beyond the objective qualities of places; it also requires knowledge of foundational processes related to the social construction of place. To understand "one's own place in the world" requires basic factual knowledge about the physical setting, as well as a more abstract understanding of how place is organized and confirmed socially and culturally. This is what Entrikin (1997,

p. 266) meant when he wrote that, "Each individual's unique experience of being in the world . . . is filtered through the language of collective narratives and public discourses that continually blend spatial scales and move between relatively centered and relative decentered perspectives." Because places are socially constructed, Entriken suggests (p. 266) that we "pay greater attention to the rhetorical rules that work to differentiate places and to connect places to community" and to the "inter-relationships of place, self and community in modern civil society."

Research about the politics of place must advance into analyses of the presentation, evaluation, and negotiation of divergent place discourses created by people engaged in social interaction. A variety of studies are needed, beginning with research about the symbols, myths and icons supporting place claims, their dispersion across groups of people, their expression in built landscapes and in the management of natural landscapes, their persistence in the cultural and historic narratives of people in place, and their ramifications for leisure, recreation and tourism behavior. Such topics are as relevant in analyzing the place relationships of community members as they are in studying the place relationships of people engaged in leisure, recreation and tourism behavior. Under this research agenda, it will become clear that what is visible "on the ground" at any given time is only the working out of one version of reality, promoted by a set of social actors who have succeeded in using their power and position to advance their own ideals.

Beyond these topics, research is also needed about how groups are successful in making place claims, as well as about the circumstances under which individuals and groups fail in their efforts, and the planning mechanisms that may be employed to ensure justice and equity in place management. Much can also be learned from studying histories of the past—as the past once happened, and as it re-happens in the discourses of retrospection and memory—in terms of how narratives of place have traditionally supported or constrained community affiliation, personal identity and civic culture. Such a research agenda has at its heart a critical tendency working towards making a better society for all citizens.

The examples presented in this paper illustrate the contested nature of places, and reveal the efforts made by social actors to shape places discursively. The use of language and discourse analysis methods to study social texts can advance our scholarship, but there are also practical applications in this research agenda. Understanding the uses of language features and discourse methods as they are applied in public discussions can reveal strategies for creating or challenging existing social values of place, and can thus reform practices of public conversation. Having created place (and its politics), in other words, we can continually improve our creations.

Some years ago, when I lived in Boulder, Colorado, a friend came to visit, and we had a particularly lengthy bad spell of weather. Finally, the storm clouds lifted, the sun came out and the mountains emerged. "Ah," said my friend, "my mountains!" That sentiment is not unusual. We each have at-

tachments to certain physical qualities of natural, historic and cultural places. But until we recognize that we can and do make “my mountains” into “our mountains” through shared language, stories, myths, images, and behavior, we will not enjoy scholarly or practical senses of place that sustain our quests to be more closely connected with each other and with all our desired environments.

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