Kayaking the Thousand Islands: Exploring the Effects of Paddling Recreation on Place Attachment

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Abstract

This project explores some of the ways in which individuals may create a sense of place attachment through a case study of paddling recreation in the Thousand Islands. Such connections are often regarded as important influences on attitudes towards conservation and development. Tourist experience on kayaking tours was studied through participant observation and interviews with participants and key respondents in the local tourist industry in order to evaluate whether or not these short but intensely experienced trips can indeed facilitate feelings of connection to the Thousand Islands region within a relatively short period of time.
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<td>FABR</td>
<td>Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve</td>
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<td>SLINP</td>
<td>St. Lawrence Islands National Park</td>
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<td>SOP</td>
<td>Sense of Place</td>
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<td>TES</td>
<td>The Ecotourism Society</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNWTO</td>
<td>United Nations World Tourism Organization</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Tourism Organization</td>
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<td>World Travel and Tourism Council</td>
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Section 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

“To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and know your place” – Relph, 1976:1

The idea of place does not often cross the minds of people in their everyday lives, because the concept in itself can be quite ambiguous. Place is significant because it is something that is differentiated from all other locations, since it is incorporated in unique ways into a person’s sense of self-identity; of where they are or should be, want to be, or do not want to be in the world. It can be difficult to define place, but “place has become a shaping partner in our lives, we partially define ourselves in its terms, and it carries the emotional charge of a family member or any other influential human agent” (Ryden 1993, p. 66). We live and breathe place in our everyday existence; it is ubiquitous. People have different definitions as to what makes a place important to them; place can be intertwined with a sense of identity and being at home, and can also involve feelings of alienation. These concepts of place are fundamental to our experience of the world. This project will aim to take a comprehensive look at concepts of place attachment through a review of past and current literature while at the same time begin to uncover the ways in which individuals foster a sense of place while kayaking through the Thousand Islands.

Place is becoming increasingly important, as people are beginning to lose touch with it. A slew of ‘non-places’ are appearing as a consequence of supermodernity; highways, grocery stores, and hotels are examples of non-places, as they are not rational, historical, or concerned with identity (Augé, 1995, p. 78). A sense of placelessness is evolving as modern civilization continues to develop. There has been a 'time-space compression' as movement and
communication times shorten; people are less likely to experience the places around them while getting to their end destination. People are finding it more difficult to connect with familiar places, as well as their natural surroundings due to the increasing homogenization of society (Massey, 1994, p. 146).

Though it can be difficult in today’s modern society to connect to place, tourism can be important as provides people an opportunity to see new places, and perhaps forge bonds with these new environments. The tourism industry continues to grow, and shows little signs of slowing: according to UNWTO tourism trends, “international tourist arrivals will increase by some 43 million a year, compared to an average increase of 28 million a year during the period 1995 to 2010”. Alternative forms of tourism including ecotourism have started to become popular among travelers for many reasons, especially as concerns surrounding climate change grow. Alternative tourism such as ecotourism can often provide tourists with a sense of solitude, environmental, and cultural awareness through uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel (TIES). Unlike mass tours, which are large in scale, standardized, and pre-packaged, ecotours often involve site seeing in a particular environment, and can involve hiking, walking, canoeing, camping, rafting, etc.

1.2. Context

The ecotourism industry often puts emphasis on natural, as opposed to artificial elements. Essentially, ecotours should allow one to foster a sense of place much more than a mass tour. Indeed, there are issues with the sustainability of the ecotourism industry, such as tourist visitation and overflow to fragile ecosystems, and off-site impacts such as increased carbon emissions (Lindberg et. al, 1997). However, this project will not specifically address these problems, as this paper does not aim to determine the soundness of this particular industry.
Forms of mass tourism are prominent throughout the Thousand Islands region. Boat tours/cruises are an extremely popular tourist activity, especially in the towns of Kingston, Gananoque, and Brockville. For instance, Brockville’s 1000 Islands and Seaway Cruises “has played host to tens of thousands of visitors annually aboard their fleet” (1000islandscruises.com). These tours take place on large motorized site-seeing boats, and tend to involve scripted, pre-recorded interpretations of the history and ecology of the Thousand Islands.

However, one of the best ways in which to experience a natural area, especially the Thousand Islands region, is through paddling recreation. This project will focus specifically on kayaking ecotourism; the commonly defined ‘semi-wilderness’ recreational area of the Thousand Islands has long since been popular among boaters and tourists, and its secluded areas are best accessed by non-motorized watercraft. In terms of the phenomenology of paddling, kayaking provides people with a unique connection to the water and landscape. Unlike other forms of conventional watercraft, only one person is needed to operate a kayak. Kayaking is quiet; there is no motor, and there are no loud distractions disturbing the fauna. Different from canoeing, in which a person is elevated, kayaking places the individual physically very close to the surface of the water. The kayak’s long and narrow hull allows one to move through the water quickly and easily. Kayaking is a sport which is accessible to people of all ages; a kayak is typically much simpler to operate than a canoe, and it requires minimal operating instructions (Frontenac Outfitters); as well, due to its smaller size, one is able to take a kayak into varied environments in which they may not be able to go with conventional watercraft. Furthermore, kayaking provides excellent wildlife and scenery viewing, and can be combined with hobbies such as photography, fitness, hiking, and camping (Frontenac Outfitters). There is a sense of personal power which comes from kayaking; the ability to move oneself fluidly with the ability to increase and
decrease speed simply by adjusting one’s stroke. Kayaking allows for a deep appreciation of the landscape; to be able to physically touch the water and see the surrounding land from a different perspective can be awe-inspiring.

The geographical area of this study is defined by the Thousand Islands region, which is located along the border between Northern New York state and Southeastern Ontario, and spreads from Kingston to Brockville on the Canadian side of the border. The region begins where Lake Ontario drains into the St. Lawrence River, and ends around St. Lawrence County on the American side. Both Canada and the United States share the Thousand Islands; Ontario Thousand Islands communities include Brockville, Cornwall, Gananoque, Kingston, and Prescott, while American communities include Alexandria Bay, Cape Vincent, Clayton, Henderson Harbor, Sackets Harbor, and Watertown. The research for this particular project took place in Gananoque, Ontario (see Figure 1). Interpretive kayaking tours were facilitated by the 1000 Island Kayaking Company.

The Thousand Islands provided an excellent area for this study, as they are rather prominent and frequently visited. Geographically, the islands are quite distinctive in their layout and geology. The islands also have a rich history, and are well-known and popular among tourists (see section 2.2 for details). Tourism and history have shaped the Thousand Islands over the years, and this has given them their unique spirit (see section 2.7 for details).
1.3. Rationale and Objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore concepts of place within the realm of paddling recreation. Tourist experience on interpretive tours facilitated by the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company has been observed in order to discover whether place-based education and setting can have an impact on the place attachment of recreational kayakers. Participant observation as well as semi-formal interviews with kayaking tour participants as well as industry professionals offers insight into the ways in which people create a sense of place attachment, and what it means to have a sense of place.
1.4. Structure

The structure of this report consists of five sections. Section Two is comprised of a detailed scholarly literature review outlining various SOP philosophies, tourism trends, place authenticity, SOP in relation to and outdoor activities, as well as conservation awareness. Section Three outlines the case study, and discusses the methods employed and the data gathered through semi-structured interviews and a participant observation journal. Section Four details the particulars of the investigation, with a discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Lastly, Section Five concludes the project.
Section 2

Literature Review

2.1. Background

Tourism is an important industry as it is an integral part of modern Western experience. Tourism trends continue to grow; in 2011, it contributed 9% of global GDP, or a value of over US$6 trillion, and accounted for 255 million jobs (Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2012, 2012). It is a service which can sustain and enhance a local economy, as well as create a sense of place-based identity (Stedman, 2002) for both locals and visitors; especially when recreational and/or outdoor activities are involved. With recent shifts in today’s capitalist economy, the middle class has made changes in their vacationing lifestyles and are now beginning to choose alternative tours over traditionally popularized mass tours. Recent research has deemed that people tend to crave authentic experiences which can be difficult to find in today’s largely globalized world (Casey, 1993; Castells, 1997). Nature-based tours offer a distinctly unique tourist experience, as they offer a chance to discover adventure while at the same time provide an opportunity to return to the natural environment\(^1\). This literature review will examine emerging tourism trends, as well as provide an in depth analysis of the philosophy of Place, and how this concept can contribute to improved alternative tourism practices.

2.2. Defining Sense of Place

Place can be said to be “the link between location and personal identity” (Daugherty, 2010, p. 2). Transcendentalist poet Henry David Thoreau famously escaped to a cabin in the woods of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts from 1845 to 1847 on a journey of self-

\(^1\) There are debates as to what constitutes ‘authentic’ nature and whether or not ‘authenticity’ is possible in tourism; see section 2.4 for details.
discovery; to live simply and to get back to nature by escaping the ‘frivolities’ of modern life. Essentially, Thoreau aspired to become part of the larger whole; “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life (...) and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau, 1962, p. 172). In a sense, Thoreau was a pioneer in sense of place research. Walden provided him with a sense of place and belonging, and an almost religious understanding of nature. Thoreau was not the only author to allude to concepts of place in his writing, as other notable Romantics also wrote extensively on sublime nature and belonging. Place is incredibly important to human identity, but oftentimes it can be a difficult concept and feeling to define, since “many people live in, use, or perceive a particular place” (Basquiat, 2010, p. 7).

According to Lewicka (2011), the first academic use of the term place attachment came about in 1981, with Stokols and Shumaker’s article, “People in places: a transactional view of settings”. However, the concept of place was discussed long before formal definitions appeared, as both philosophers and human geographers grew increasingly interested in the subject (Lewicka, 2011, p. 207). Though place delineations may vary, it is clear that each individual has their own SOP. Everyone views place differently, and people form their relationships to places based on different criteria. Some may be attracted to beauty, while others may have a spiritual connection, whereas others may feel a social and/or historical connection to the place (Stewart & Williams, 1998, p. 22). Moreover, a landscape or community feature may be important to one person, but it can be repelling to another (Basquiat, 2010, p. 7).

Place can be construed as material and non-material (transcendental), but a person’s mental construction acts as a bridge between these two dimensions to form a SOP (Basquiat, 2010, p. 6). However, there are numerous definitions of SOP, and there are also many facets to
the concept. SOP research within tourism studies typically involves four categories: the natural environment, the community, recreation activities, and tourism spaces (Amsden, Stedman, & Kruger, 2011, p. 38). Furthermore, SOP typically involves multiple concepts of place meaning (Kudryavtsev, Stedman, & Krasny, 2012; Lewicka, 2011): the emotional bonds people create in relation to place are typically deemed place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Altman & Low, 1992; Williams, Riden, McDonald, & Uysal, 1995). These bonds are complex and difficult to describe (Amsden, Stedman, & Kruger, 2011; Stewart & Williams, 1998; Basquiat, 2010). Some researchers have deemed the inexplicable draw of an environment as “spirit of a place”; environmental poet Gary Snyder writes,

> The sum of a field's forces [become] what we call very loosely
> the 'spirit of the place.' To know the spirit of a place is to realize
> that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made or parts,
> each of which is a whole. You start with the part you are whole in.

(Snyder, 1999).

According to Snyder, spirit of the place is a holistic concept and involves a connection to the place through self-identity. The spirit of a place can be shaped by personal and/or family history in relation to a place, or simply by the experiences one has in a place (Basquiat, 2010). Additionally, Vaske and Kobrin (2001) contend that place dependence speaks to the ability of a place to satisfy one’s needs through its ability to provide a space for activity and personal enjoyment. And when one feels that a place completely embodies their sense of self thereby fostering a sense of inherent belonging, place identity is achieved (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Tuan, 1977). However, not all places appeal to every person, and though many places can invoke feelings of comfort, many can also cause uncomfortable sentiments. In terms of relevance to SOP
research, this particular study involves all four categories of typical SOP inquiries, and is mainly concerned with the bonds people create or in some cases, do not create with the Thousand Islands region.

Regarding wild places, some people want to be “positively grounded” there (Casey, 1993, p. 212). It is becoming increasingly difficult to find natural places which have been untouched by human influence (see section 2.6). Society as a whole has advanced dramatically; functions such as globalization, mobility, and technology have changed the way people relate to the world, as well as the way societies function (Lewicka, 2011; Stewart & Williams, 1998). Travel and tourism have become much easier and considerably faster since modern transport systems have decreased travel times. People are now able to reach their destinations much sooner, and with fewer interruptions. However, as a consequence, the fact that the journey becomes increasingly effortless means that it is less likely to impinge on the traveler’s imagination (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 49). In order to maintain bonds with the local community and the natural environment, it is important to feel a sense of attachment to places. In this paper, it is hypothesized that kayaking is a good vector for fostering place attachment, as it provides a way in which to bond with the water and landscape, as well as with the community, through social interaction.

2.3. Tourism and Emerging Trends

The tourism industry continues to expand at an accelerated rate, and is in fact one of the fastest growing economic sectors the world has known (UNWTO, 2012). Formerly, mass tourism was the norm; however, a new sort of tourism has evolved, popularly known as ecotourism. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people"
(TIES, 1990). Emphasis is typically placed on conservation of both ecologically and culturally significant land and resources, building empowered and sustainable communities, and fostering conservation awareness and environmental appreciation through interpretation (TIES). Some researchers have argued that tourism focused on special interests with an emphasis on activities can foster emotional attachments to surrounding areas (Trauer & Ryan, 2005, p. 482), and nature-based tourism, which “is any type of tourism that relies on experiences directly related to natural attractions and includes ecotourism, adventure tourism, extractive tourism, wildlife tourism and nature retreats” (Sustainable Tourism Online) provides an excellent opportunity for this. It could be inferred then, based on former research, that kayaking tourism can increase a sense of place attachment, as it is a special interest recreation activity.

Nature-based tourism, along with sustainable, cultural, community, and ethical tourism (Smith & Duffy, 2003; Leksakundilok, 2006), are sub-categories of alternative tourism, which is often labelled as a soft and green form of tourism. Soft tourism is typically portrayed as slow, cautious, holistic, value-conscious, quiet, natural, and concerned with conservation/preservation of nature and culture. Alternatively, hard tourism is fast, aggressive, sectoral, price-conscious, loud, unnatural, and growth/development-oriented (Butler, 1990, p. 42).

Most critics of ecotourism agree that the industry needs to be carefully monitored, if resource preservation and conservation awareness are the ultimate goals; sustainable tourism is not always financially self-sustaining if it is small in scale; conversely, if it expands rapidly, its environmental sustainability is questioned (Pociovalisteau & Niculescu, 2010, p. 153). Munt (1994) claims that new tourism is dominated by “travelling, trekking, and trucking” (p. 49), as an effort on the part of the tourist to escape traditional vacationing destinations which are popular and busy. Unlike the previously mentioned proponents of ecotourism, Munt claims new tourism
is an excuse for individuals, primarily the middle class, to flaunt their status and alternative lifestyle choices: “new tourisms have begun to be conceived (especially among the new petit bourgeoisie) as reflecting personal qualities in the individual, such as strength of character, adaptability, sensitivity, or even ‘worldliness’” (Munt, 1994, p. 51). Another negative of eco-tourism is its tendency to promote place-based identities through its marketing of attractive images and pre-defined areas of importance; essentially, what tourists should look for, what they should explore. Furthermore, eco-tourism can be seen as intrusive due to its dependency on communities and use of culture as a resource (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 120). Lastly, the promotion and advertising of already scarce wild places can defeat efforts to prevent them from becoming even rarer (Leopold, 1966, p. 289).

Overall, though tourism can contribute to SOP, it can also take away from it, since it often subscribes to the Massey’s idea of time-space compression, due to the fact that one often has to travel significant distances by modern transport to experience far-off or remote locations. There are definite complications to tourism and SOP, but there are positives as well. Evidently, the answers to questions of tourism and SOP are not necessarily as simple and straightforward as one might think.

2.4. Place Authenticity

Let’s sit down here, all of us, on the open prairies, where we can’t see a highway or fence. Let’s have no blankets to sit on, but feel the ground with our bodies, the earth, the yielding shrubs. Let’s have the grass for a mattress, experiencing its sharpness and its softness. Let us become like stones, plants, and trees. Let us be animals. Think and feel like animals. (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 2005, p. 258)
Generally, “ecotourists are motivated to experience a natural environment that is perceived as intact and generally pristine. Though some level of environmental degradation may be overlooked or tolerated, noticeably degraded landscapes will be unappealing to most visitors” (Lindberg et. al, 1997, p. 6). But what constitutes a pristine or authentic ecosystem? It is difficult to define an authentic landscape or place, because there are competing understandings of just what authenticity entails and how to recognize it. Some may believe that human influence makes a place more genuine, while others may think it takes away from the originality of a place.

In many ways, social processes define human relationships with the earth. Essentially, nature and places are socially constructed. Because humans and the environment are inherently intertwined, when addressing questions of place authenticity, some major questions arise. For instance, is it possible for a place to exist without human understandings of the area as a place? What makes a place natural? It could also be questioned as to whether or not authenticity is even plausible in tourism, as the very presence of a tourist in pristine wilderness problematizes the concept (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 133).

Society typically defines nature as a place that has been untouched by human influence; however, environmental historian William Cronon argues that wilderness is actually a product of ‘civilization’; it is a modern Western cultural invention. People want to visit areas of beauty in order to have a ‘wilderness experience’. However, this experience has been characterized by society (Cronon). Wilderness has been permeated by the core values of our culture who in many ways idealize it (Cronon). For tourists, wild places become recreational areas. As more and more tourists seek these environs out, the wilderness becomes tamed, and “comes to reflect the very civilization its devotees sought to escape” (Cronon, 1995; p. 77).
Cronon sites the removal of Natives from native lands to create “uninhabited” wilderness as an example of an invented/socially constructed form of nature. Those who value pristine landscape are often urban dwellers who have never had to live off the land. Inevitably, problems arise when trying to make distinctions as to what constitutes the natural, and modernity has in many aspects threatened place authenticity, it has become even more critical for people to maintain and protect both the uniqueness and character of places (Stewart & Williams, 1998, p. 21).

With focus on the preservation of natural resources and cultural and ecological awareness, ecotourism provides some options in terms of maintaining place authenticity. Traditionally, mass tours have been criticized for their lack of authenticity and disregard for community, while eco-tours are often seen as more genuine and culturally sensitive (Munt, 1994, p. 50). Mass tourism usually places emphasis on scheduled events and activities in a controlled setting. Typically, tourists do not forge their own memories on these tours; they simply repeat the experiences had by others. Furthermore, mass tours are often seen as culturally insensitive due to their damaging nature, mostly on Indigenous communities. Ecotourism is much more unstructured and its focus on the natural can allow people to have a much more intimate connection to the land and community.

However, researchers have questioned whether or not it is possible for tourists to form bonds with places that equal the ties locals can have to a given place. Some researchers are skeptical about this concept, due to tourists’ (often) artificial viewpoints towards both the land and the communities visited (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). There are indeed studies which reinforce these doubts: Morgan’s (2009) study on place found that place attachment is not strengthened by short, infrequent visits, after surveying participants in a Missouri cave.
interpretation program. Participants’ place attachment to the area was not significantly different before and after the singular cave tour. Semken et al. (2009) performed a similar study in which they observed place attachment to the Grand Canyon. After surveying 386 geology students in Arizona, it was discovered that students who had never visited the canyon before felt some level of place attachment, but their connection to the place was not as strong as those students who had previously visited the site (Semken, Butler Freeman, Bueno Watts, Neakrase, Dial, & Baker, 2009). In terms of an explanation for the differences in findings of these studies, it can be difficult to hypothesize. Perhaps it was differences in the methodologies, the nature of the places themselves, or the respondents polled.

There have also been past studies which dispute the above mentioned theories that people cannot develop a deep sense of place after a single visit to a particular site. In 1994, McCool and Martin conducted a study on community sentiment and residence length, and found that there was a very small correlation between length of residency and place attachment. It was discovered that place attachment can occur quickly and that one does not have to be a long time resident of the place in order to become positively attached to it (McCool & Martin, 1994). In addition, Stewart et al. (1998) interviewed visitors to a national park in New Zealand and learned that symbolic place meanings could be developed even after short visits to the parks through guided tours, interpretation materials, leaflets, and display panels (Stewart E. J., 1998). This shows that interpretation of one’s surroundings can have an integral impact on a person’s SOP.

2.5. Outdoor Activities and Sense of Place

Similar to the Romantic poets who yearned for sublime nature, nostalgia and romanticism surrounding a place might come from remembering a place that no longer exists; or a place we wish existed (Basquiat, 2010, p. 6). Place authenticity is vital for the alternative tourist, because
most do not want the landscape to lose its unique character. Tourists often choose alternative
tourism because it provides them with a sense of wistfulness (Kianicka et al., 2006). Many want
to escape the pressures of everyday life and go to a place where they can enjoy the pleasures of
simplicity and the natural environment (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Indeed, “recreation is
valuable in proportion to the intensity of its experiences, and to the degree to which it differs
from and contrasts with workaday life” (Leopold, 1966, p. 272).

Heritage, place, and culture have the ability to construct identities, and AT has the unique
ability to foster knowledge of these constructs through educational interpretations (Urry, 1995;
Graham, 2000); unlike mass tours which typically cater to broad audiences and include few
interpretive resources. As a tourist to a new area, it is possible to become strongly attached to an
area as SOP is developed; one does not necessarily have to be historically and socially connected
to the place (Stewart & Williams, 1998). Kianicka et al. (2006) observed tourist-place relations
in an interview-based study in Alvaneu, an alpine village in Switzerland. It was discovered that
locals’ sense of place was influenced by aspects of everyday life such as social relationships,
whereas tourists shape their relationships to place according to esthetics, which they experience
through participation in leisure activities. In fact, the activities in which people participate while
experiencing a place have the biggest impact on their SOP (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Kianicka et
al., 2006). Recent publications point to tourist attraction to seasonal homes, as well as places of
recreation (Beckley, 2003; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Williams & Van Patten, 1998).

In terms of place attachment, personal involvement in outdoor activities is paramount,
because participation forms a learned attitude (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Specific experiences that
emphasize solitude, socializing, and connections to the natural environment are key in terms of
fostering SOP through recreational activities (Amsden et al., 2011). However, solitude can often
be interrupted as wilderness travel can be foiled when confronted with “mechanized substitutes”; according to Aldo Leopold, it is useless to “execute a portage to the tune of motor launches” (1966, p. 270).

As evidenced by the previous section, place attachment can be developed through direct experience that is “long-term, frequent, and positive” (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1980). According to Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), residence links and neighbourhood ties are the best predictors of place attachment. However, people can also become attached to a distant place, or a place they have never been before, if it provides them a setting where they can achieve their goals (White et al., 2008). It is also possible for people to develop deep connections to a place without ever visiting it before (Warzecha & Lime, 2001), since learning about place meanings in other ways such as written and oral communication can also develop place meaning (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012). Environmental education is key when fostering SOP, as interpretive guiding by locals and/or insiders can create high levels of intimacy with a place due to emotional and physical exchange of information (Casey, 1993; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Though some researchers argue that personal interactions with a place do not necessarily lead to deeper bonds and connections to the place in question (Cresswell, 2004), Bricker and Kerstetter’s (2000) study on whitewater recreationists illustrated that more highly specialized individuals scored higher on place identity questionnaires than did less specialized individuals, which was likely due to their expertise and knowledge of the natural environment/area. Evidently, place philosophy is a relatively new field of study, and the assessment of paddling recreation on sense of place is unusual.
2.6. Conservation Awareness

According to Pociovalisteau & Niculescu (2010), “ecotourism contains a significant portion of human wilderness interaction that, coupled with the education provided, tend to transform tourists into strong advocates for environmental protection” (p. 153). Many programs are now trying to foster reconnection to the natural environment through “field-walks, map-making, reflective writing, and conversations” (Kudryavtsev et al., 2012; Wason-Ellam, 2010). There have been numerous studies over the years which point to the relationship of SOP and environmental awareness and conservation. Researchers Vaske and Kobrin (2001) and (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) found positive links between place identity and pro-environmental behavior such as recycling and water conservation. Oftentimes, those who have a greater SOP are more committed to solving environmental problems and more adamant about the protection of resources (Kaltenborn & Bjerke, 2002; Stedman, 2003). Stedman’s (2003) study of place attachment of property owners in the northern highlands lake district of Wisconsin found that landscape attributes are important in constructed meanings of place; the stronger the place attachment, the more likely it is people will care for the environment. There are strong correlations between place attachment and willingness to actively contribute to solving environmental problems as well as pro-environmental behavior as evidenced by Kaltenborn et. al’s (1998) study of residents on Spitsbergen, Norway, as well as (Walker & Chapman, 2003) survey of visitors to a Canadian National Park. Brehm et al (2006) regression analysis and surveys of residents in rural communities of Utah and Wyoming showed that nature related place meanings strongly predicted concerns over the protection of natural resources (Brehm et al., 2006).
2.7. **History of the Islands/ Case Study Context**

This project was primarily a case study of paddling recreation in the Thousand Islands. The methods undertaken for this research project were predominantly qualitative in nature. Participation in various kayaking tours facilitated by the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company allowed for the collection of data.

As this project is focused on the Thousand Islands region of Ontario, it is necessary to provide contextual background information surrounding the islands as a place. The Thousand Islands have long since attracted summer visitors, campers, cottagers, and boaters due to their beauty, recreational capacity, and easy-access from major cities such as Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. The islands truly have a unique history and geography; they form a chain-like pattern across the river, and have varied topography, taking character from the Canadian Shield as well as Maritime coastal areas, with a mix of forested regions (Ross, 2003). There are roughly 1830 islands in total, and each has its own landscape; pitch pine, hemlock groves, willow-lined bays, granite ridge tops, shoals, reed beds, and marshes are some prominent natural features. Wildlife is abundant, and includes fauna such as white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit, chipmunks, blue heron, painted turtles, rock bass, and red fox, to name a few. The zebra mussel population has grown significantly over the years, filtering the algae, and making the water in some areas transparent (Ross, 2003). Some islands have been developed with houses and cottages, while others are still quite rugged, with wilderness campsite areas. Parks Canada has recently provided landing launches specifically for kayaks and canoes. In order to make the islands even more accessible to paddling recreationists, the Paddling Trails Association and the FABR are working on a paddling trail network (G. Ketcheson, personal communication, May 2012).
Historically, humans were thought to have come to the Islands around 9000 BP. There were two main Indigenous groups on the islands; the Algonquins and the Iroquois, and by the year 1600, French explorers became interested in the islands’ natural resources. The islands were slowly developed, however, as their popularity grew, land ownership began. Developers knew that people would be attracted to the natural features of the island, therefore it was important that the land be kept natural (Ross, 2003). Nevertheless, houses, hotels, cottages, and even castles began to appear, and by the late 1800s, the Thousand Islands were renowned as being a superior resort area. Today, many people visit the islands not only for their natural features, but also to view the spectacular homes and cottages, including the unique Napoleon’s Hat home (Ross, 2003); see Figure 2. Interestingly, many of the islands have been personified; most have names, many for significant people and/or ships who sailed through the river. For instance, the Admiralty group of islands were named after lords and senior naval officers.

Evidently, the Islands are distinctive as a place, both for their historical and geographical features. They are so distinct, that the UNESCO Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve (FABR) was implemented in order to conserve the land and heritage features of the area. Parks Canada is also active in the conservation and maintenance of the islands. St. Lawrence Islands National Park (SLINP) is located within the FABR.

Figure 2: Napoleon’s Hat cottage. from www.hatsimages.com
Population growth in Ontario has led to the expansion of second home investment as well as recreation-based economies (Mason, 2008). As a result, various paddling organizations have responded to increased interests in nature based leisure activities. Paddle Canada is the nation’s non-profit recreational organization which supports paddlers, and sets national standards for sea and river kayaking as well as a national program for canoeing. Paddling programs emphasize environmental awareness as well as the preservation of the canoe and kayak as part of Canada’s heritage (Paddle Canada). For-profit paddling companies have also expanded as per increased demand for outdoor recreation. Within the Thousand Islands, the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company is a notable provider of interpretive paddling tours. The company specializes in outdoor education and adventure tourism through programming for all ages and ability levels. The company aims to provide visitors with experiential connections to the Thousand Islands through interpretation of the history, geology, and ecology of the place. The company offers various types of tours, and conforms closely with TIES definition of ecotourism.

The demographics for Thousand Island kayaking tours usually “include young urban professionals with stable employment who make slightly more than the average income. This includes couples between the ages of 35 and 55, who are willing to travel within a three hour radius for a one day tour” (S. Ewart, personal communication, June 2012). Families are also common, who are “looking for a unique bonding activity in a semi-wilderness setting” (S. Ewart, personal communication, June 2012). Business groups are prominent as well, as kayaking provides a good setting in which to practice teambuilding skills. Most people who come on kayaking tours are “looking for distinctive, shared experiences which they would not necessarily be able to experience within their own means” (S. Ewart, personal communication, June 2012). Uncommon kayaking tourists include new Canadians, as well as extreme adventure seekers, who
typically look for activities which garner more of an adrenaline rush, such as white-water paddling. Currently, Paddle Canada and 1000 Islands Kayaking Company are attempting to build water safety awareness in order to break down perceived barriers of risk; a new initiative to get a larger demographic involved in paddle sports and outdoor recreation activities (S. Ewart, personal communication, June 2012).

The 1000 Islands Kayaking Company offers various types of tours, including half-day, full day, and weekend guided group tours. All tours explore the FABR. Full day trips include a “Local Flavours” lunch, a program of the FABR which role models community sustainability as well as connectedness to place and the economy through responsible local food purchasing and environmental stewardship (Local Flavours). Weekend trips include camping and a tour of the Admiralty Islands. “Paddle the Arch” is a specialty tour offered by the company which is particularly interesting as it explores six paddling trails of the FABR. Paddle the Arch is a non-profit fundraiser, with the money going towards paddling trail improvements. In 2012, tours included the Admiralty Islands, Rideau Canal, Newboro-Jones Falls, Navy Islands, Frontenac Park, and Charleston Lake. Historical, natural, and cultural heritage are emphasized through interpretation by the kayaking guides. Tours for this particular research included two types; a training session for SLINP employees, and Paddle and Pint evening tours.

2.8. Conclusion

The literature review was divided into three main components: place, tourism, and history. It began with a brief definition of SOP, and exemplified the various concepts of place meaning including place attachment, dependence, and identity. The tourism section provided a brief overview of various types of tourism including mass, eco, alternative, and nature-based varieties. The concept of SOP was then expanded in subsequent sections. Place authenticity was
discussed, as the changing world has brought about changes in the way people view and relate to places. Outdoor activities and conservation awareness were mentioned, as these factors affect the way individuals interact with places: recreation activities impact the way in which people relate to a place, while environmental and place-based education are important constructs in terms of conservation efforts and instillation of pro-environmental behavior. The final section gave a contextual background discussion of the history and geography of the Thousand Islands, which illustrated the regional concepts of the study.
Section 3

Methods

3.1. Methods Employed

The methods employed for this study included semi-structured interviews and a personal diary in order to gain increased understanding of the experiences of both veteran and inexperienced recreational kayakers. Since this study was primarily an ethnographic research study, participant observation was utilized as a research method. PO provides an excellent way of collecting qualitative research in a non-invasive fashion. It was an especially helpful analytical tool in the data collection for this particular project, as I was able to record my observations in the field in the aforementioned diary. According to Dewalt and Dewalt, participant observation is “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (2002, p. 1). Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999, p. 91) contend that participant observation is useful, as it:

- Helps to identify and guide relationships with informants.
- Allows the researcher to see how things are organized and prioritized, how people interrelate, and observe the cultural parameters.
- Helps the researcher become known to the cultural members, thereby easing facilitation of the research process.
- Provides the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants.

Observations were recorded in the field, and aided in the creation of open-ended interview questions which were later posed to the kayaking tour participants. Benefits of this observation method included insight into the lifestyles of outdoor recreationalists, understanding
of the feelings and interactions between kayakers, and increased perception of context.

Participation in two different types of tours occurred, all of which were facilitated by the 1000 Island Kayaking Company. The first guided tour was a training session for SLINP summer student workers (See Figure 3). The second tour was a “Paddle and Pint” social tour. The third and fourth events were “Paddle and Pint” socials that did not involve any kayaking; however, these events allowed for interactions with individuals outside of the kayaking setting. Kayaking culture was used as a vector for result interpretation. A Participant Observation Journal was kept during the tours and socials. According to Merriam (1988), elements which should be included in a participant observation evaluation include a description of the physical environment, a detailed account of participants, and a recording of the activities and interactions which occur in the setting.

Figure 3: Interpretive tour photo #1, SLINP trip, from www.1000ikc.com
3.2. Data Gathered/Analysis of Information

Semi-Structured interviews were conducted as suggested by McKracken’s Long Interview Method (1988). According to McKraken, a specific methodology is required when undertaking semi-structured interviews. A four-step method of inquiry must occur, firstly with a review of past and present literature, which aids in the creation of the interview questionnaire (in regards to this project, a list of possible topics and questions was created). Next, a review of the cultural categories must take place, with an examination of the investigator’s own personal experience in relation to the topic. This also acts as an attempt to familiarize oneself with cultural assumptions. The third step is a discovery of cultural categories, where the interview questionnaire is constructed with both floating and planned prompts. Subsequently, step four follows with a discovery of analytic categories, where the investigator sorts the data, and looks for associations.

Five interviews with key respondents involved in both industry and conservation took place for this project. Each interview occurred separately, and were each recorded and fully transcribed. Most interviews occurred in an office setting, except for one which occurred at an outdoor site, at the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company. Interviews occurred with industry professionals from the government sector, PC, and 1000 Islands Kayaking Company, as well as non-industry tour participants, one of which was an experienced kayaker, and the other who was a first-time kayaker (see Figure 4). All respondents consented to be identified, except for a government official who preferred to remain anonymous. Respondent variety was beneficial, as this allowed for the viewing of the paddling experience through different lenses of understanding. The respondents were chosen mainly for the variety they offered to the project. It
was important to have a responded from different sectors, as methodologically, it allowed for a holistic understanding of kayaking and SOP.

The interviews followed a fairly standard format, and were guided by the question guide which was created before the interviews took place. Some of the open-ended questions included:

- What do you like about kayaking?
- What did you expect to gain from the tour?
- What do you like about the Thousand Islands?
- What makes a place important to you?

Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour in length. Two reasons determined the decision to undertake five interviews. Firstly, interviewee responses were becoming somewhat saturated and less varied. After five interviews, there was enough information to inform an analysis of findings, due to the fact that there was a respondent from each sector. Secondly, this project was smaller in scale, and therefore its limited scope did not allow for a plethora of interviews.

After the interviews were complete, they were manually coded and analyzed for categories, relationships, similarities, and themes. Interview analysis was directly related to the objectives of the research project. Interviews were coded with the following major themes: wistfulness/nostalgia, escape, solitude, socializing and interpretation, connection to the natural environment, and connection to community. The themes emerged through the respondents themselves, as they commented on the questions posed. The interviews were then directly related back to the relevant literature outlined in the scholarly review. A full discussion of findings will take place in the following section.
**Figure 4: Table of Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Title/Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura*</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Non-Profit</td>
<td>Executive Director, Paddle Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Owner/Operator, 1000 Islands Kayaking Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Experienced Paddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>First-Time Paddler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Name has been changed.
Section 4

Discussion of Findings

4.1. Details

This section will discuss the findings from both the participant observation journal as well as the semi-structured interviews. The results presented are based on themes, some of which emerged from the scholarly literature review, and others which arose from the interviews themselves. As mentioned in section 3.3, themes include: wistfulness/nostalgia, escape, solitude, socializing and interpretation, connection to the natural environment and heritage, and home. My understanding of these topics, for the purposes of this project, is as follows:

- **Wistfulness/nostalgia**: A certain yearning and/or sentimental longing for a place that one has either visited, or never visited before. While nostalgia looks backward, wistfulness-looks for something that might not be present.

- **Escape**: A way in which to leave daily routines and troubles behind by departing one’s regular environment for a completely different one.

- **Solitude**: A sense of peace and quiet that is achieved when immersed in an environment.

- **Socializing and interpretation**: Camaraderie and interaction while in a group setting, as well as the environmental and historical education provided by kayaking guides.

- **Connection to the natural environment/heritage**: Feelings of rootedness and/or link to a place for its natural or historical features.

- **Home**: Connection to a place due to community features or family ties.
4.2. Results/Discussion

4.2.1. Wistfulness/Nostalgia

“What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” (Tuan 1977; p. 6)

It was discovered that places which invoke vivid, emotionally driven memories were significant places for the respondents. When asked, “what makes a place important to you?” Laura, Scott, and John all mentioned places where when growing up, they had happy, meaningful memories. Laura, a government sector employee, mentions that she thought the Thousand Islands “feel like northern Ontario” which reminded her of Algonquin Park, which was “not super wilderness, but a place to go away, camp and have fun”. Similar to Laura, Scott, the owner/operator of the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company, said that whenever he had “some kind of memory associated with the place, it becomes a lot more important”. When asked whether or not he had a favourite place, he did not hesitate to answer. He discussed a place he felt safe as a child; a place that he continues to visit today. This particular place, called Rock Dunder (in the Frontenac Arch), provided him with a sense of adventure and allowed him to intimately experience the outdoors, through swimming and cabin-living. In high school, he enjoyed providing unique nature experiences to his friends through field parties and paddling excursions to places like Rock Dunder. Providing such types of outdoor entertainment allowed him to gain a solid reputation as being an outdoorsman of sorts, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

John, an experienced kayaker, also spoke about the past. After living in rural areas and small towns for many years, he felt that these were areas in which he found a sense of stillness. He compared this to visiting Toronto for a weekend, and went on to say that it was “a place that
doesn’t appeal to me…there’s too many people and there’s too much noise and there’s too much stress and worry and hurry. Then I come back home and I feel much more at peace”.

Similar to the previous respondents, Graham, Executive Director of Paddle Canada, mentioned a place he had been in the past, which had emotionally resonated with him. Though he did not grow up in Arizona, the Grand Canyon was a place which he struggled to define. His eyes were bright as he recalled his time there. He searched for words to adequately describe his connection to this place, but it seemed as if no words would ever really define his feelings; “until you go [to the Grand Canyon] and experience it, you never…ah…you know, you just wouldn’t believe it. I could spend months there…being engaged”. He then related this experience to the Thousand Islands region; “even here in the Great Lakes in the Thousand Islands there’s moments…there’s those fleeting little areas where you can’t see any boats, or boating channels, or lights, or cottages…and you just get that little glimpse of what it would’ve been like 10 000 years ago”. According to Basquiat, “nostalgia and romanticism may lead us to remember ourselves to a place that no longer exists or never did exist” (Basquiat, 2010, p. 6). Graham appears to yearn for a past without human influences. Thought this may not be deemed nostalgia in the traditional sense, his sentiments show a wistfulness for what once was; a place that no longer exists in the Thousand Islands, due to the impacts of tourism development and modernization.

4.2.2. Escape

There was significant consensus among all of the interviewees with respect to the escape kayaking in the Thousand Islands provides. All respondents said that the Thousand Islands provided a place in which they could “get away” from things. Laura said that she could “go out into the Thousand Islands and get into some quiet areas away from people (…). There are so
many provincial parks, creeks, and rivers, and you can just really feel like you’re away from it all”. Graham, John and Ben all said that kayaking gave them an opportunity to escape work pressures, and daily routines. As he looked about his office with a jaded expression, John said that he used kayaking as a way to get outside, and escape his indoor job. Similar to John, Ben said that he always looked for opportunities to stop thinking about the things he resented. Though he liked his job, he thought it was really nice to get away from it; “I find that when I’m actually seeing something else I’m appreciating the scenery, I’m interacting with other people, and my mind is taken away from the things that I usually have to think about like work, and it’s a good feeling. It provides a difference for me in my everyday life. I don’t dislike my everyday life, but I do enjoy having access to nature.” As I participated in various tours, I found myself reveling in this notion of escape. Though I was conducting research for a scholarly paper, it certainly did not feel like I was. Being in a kayak so close to the water, I felt almost a part of the landscape itself; I felt my worries and priorities melt away. To be part of the ebb and flow of nature is something that many people rarely experience, due to their indoor lives. It is easy to forget that there is an entire world outside the confines of ‘society’.

According to Graham, a major benefit of kayaking is its tendency to recharge a person spiritually and mentally; “I’m not thinking about work and stress as much, or the day to day rush. It’s like a reset button”. Similar to the previous respondents, Scott also said kayaking was a way in which to get away from everyday life. He said when kayaking he feels “relaxed, excited, and connected (…) everything changes. Shoving the boat off the shore is just one of those moments where I really feel like the things behind you just disappear and you don’t need to worry. It allows you to be in the moment a little bit more”. Furthermore, when Scott was asked why he though people visited the Thousand Islands, his response was mainly for an escape from their
everyday life, as “things really seem to disappear after a while once you get out there”. I myself often feel wrapped up in life; in what seems important at the time. I feel especially humbled when I step outside. In many ways my worries are insignificant when in the big picture of life, and many of these feelings arose in me after spending a significant amount of time outdoors in the Thousand Islands while being a participant observer on various tours.

The consensus among the respondents can be identified in the scholarly literature. The literature deems that people tend to crave authentic experiences (Casey, Castells). This authentic experience, for the purpose of this paper, appears to be something that is different from the everyday routine. Evidently, for this particular group of kayakers, it is difficult to get outdoors while working office jobs. Kayaking is special because it not only allows them to be in nature, but it allows them to appreciate the environment, themselves, as well as the others with them. The feeling of escape seems to make the respondents more excited about not only about kayaking, but about the Thousand Islands as a recreational resource as well.

4.2.3. Solitude/Socializing

Two respondents recalled aspects of solitude as being an important part of their kayaking experience. After mentioning the various frustrations of canoeing with another person, and paddling a tandem kayak, John said that he liked the peacefulness of kayaking, and the fact that it is an individual sport; he can be in his own boat, completely by himself, without anyone else yelling at him, or telling him what to do.

Graham also spoke of solitude, saying that with kayaking a person can get into secluded areas where there is no one around. Though kayaking is primarily an individual activity, socializing was an aspect that four out of the five respondents said that they enjoyed about the sport. Connecting with other people was a major theme drawn out from the interviews.
According to John, kayaking allows you to connect with nature and with others at the same time; instead of focusing on electronics, it allows a person to have time to think, and appreciate human interaction. He also mentioned that you end up building ongoing relationships with fellow kayakers, because you see them on other tours, unlike the Thousand Islands boat/cruise tours where you typically do not speak with anyone. Similar to John, Ben said that kayaking allowed him an opportunity to meet new people in his community, and build relationships with those people. Indeed, Graham said that kayaking is a way to build communal ties, and have a community that’s more like-minded; “when you go out with paddlers you’ve met for the first time, there will always be a whole bunch of similar interests and hobbies, which are probably going to be much more aligned than with the stereotypical motorboat crowd”. Consistent with the others, Scott said that one of his favourite things about the Thousand Islands is the social life and the feeling of a close-knit community atmosphere. Indeed, according to Amsden et al. solitude and socializing are important in terms of fostering SOP through recreation activities. Through participant observation, and conversations with various tour participants, it appeared that one of the biggest draws of kayaking tours was the fact that it could be done in a group.

Though solitude and socializing at first seem antithetical, they actually seem to fit together in the world of kayaking. People seemed to thoroughly enjoy the group atmosphere; oftentimes, it was the same people coming out on Paddle and Pint tours, week after week. It was obvious that most people knew each other. Kayaking gave them an opportunity to participate in a sport they enjoyed while connecting with friends, and exploring their local community. Sometimes, people were quite talkative, and other times, they would simply stop socializing, or break off from the group, and paddle on their own. This seemed to be completely acceptable among the group, and almost expected. I sensed a sort of paddling culture; a culture I have
noticed with other sports such as running. These people clearly had the same interests both within and outside of the kayaking realm, and kayaking in a group provided a shared experience, where they could enjoy each other’s’ company, as well as the surrounding environment.

Tied in closely with solitude and socializing is interpretation, due to its tendency to promote conversation awareness and intimacy with the environment (Casey 1993, Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Tours with the 1000 Islands Kayaking Company are often guided, and many of the respondents said that this type of interpretation added to their overall experience. Three respondents mentioned storytelling as an integral part of the tour. Laura said that she liked any kind of tour that could give the inside story about a place, including the background and ecology of an area. Thinking back to other places she had been, she said that she felt connected to places when she had learned some kind of story about the place, because “you can attach more meaning to what you’re seeing…the interpretation adds a lot.” Similarly, Scott said that he feels much more connected to the history and geography of an area after he learns about it. John also mentioned the benefits of interpretive storytelling. He talked about bland, prerecorded speeches which are often given on boat tours, which he disliked because it offered no personal connection to the place. He contrasted that with kayaking ecotours, where “every single guide has a completely different story, which is really nice”.

Interestingly, though they may appear unrelated, solitude and socializing are two integral parts of the kayaking experience. Ben said that with kayaking, you can be next to somebody one minute, engaging them in conversation, then drop back whenever you want; “it’s a nice way to engage with people…often randomly, as it were. You have the opportunity to get into conversations but you can get out of them if you want to [laughs]. It’s solitary, but not solitary…it’s a really wonderful experience”. Scott said that he would often paddle solo, which
recharged him spiritually and mentally. With friends, he wouldn’t get that feeling as much, but he very much enjoyed connecting socially with other paddlers. He mentioned that kayaking is unique, as it is one of the few sports which a person can do socially, but they are in their own boat, which “separates it from all the other water sports…at the end of the day, you’re on your own. You are able to connect with nature and the water, and the kayak itself is a tool which allows you an intimate way to do that”. Similar to Scott, John said that being on the river alone was extremely peaceful and that he got away from things and connected with nature, which provided him good stress relief. However, going kayaking with the recreational club allowed him to meet a wide variety of people that he would not have met otherwise. He went on to say that “people who kayak seem to be a lot more relaxed a lot of the time, and they seem more interested in nature, and they’re not in a big hurry”.

4.2.4. Connection to the Natural Environment/Heritage

The literature suggests that people form their relationships to places based on different criteria, such as natural beauty, spirituality, or history (Stewart and Williams, 1998). These varied aspects of place attachment were drawn out from the interviews, as oftentimes interviewees had similar reasons for their desire for the Thousand Islands, but in almost all cases had different personal experiences which fostered their individual senses of place.

Kayaking can be used as a vector to support and maintain connections to the environment. SLINP actively promotes paddling; route maps are offered online for nine well-maintained paddling trails, making the islands easy to access and navigate. All of the respondents were attracted to the natural beauty of the Thousand Islands, and thought that kayaking was an especially good way in which to experience the islands. John enjoyed the fact that a kayak allowed him to be close to the water, which allowed him to connect with nature, unlike the big
tour boats where he only saw the cottages, not the particulars. He said that kayaking was a good way in which to get him outdoors, and “appreciate the natural environment more” which made him want to do other outdoor activities such as camping. Ben said though he lives in Gananoque, he hadn’t been out on the water much; so kayaking allowed him an “opportunity to actually get to know the river, and the islands on the river”. He went on to say that what he liked most about the islands was the history attached to the St. Lawrence seaway, and felt a part of that history when he was kayaking the same waterway as his counterparts had long ago; he enjoyed the natural things which had been unchanged by humans.

According to Graham, kayaking is a good way in which to get people outside. He thought that it was quite possible that a lot of Kingston residents probably never ventured out into the islands, unless they went on a boat cruise or happen know someone with property on the river. However, he said that it is very easy for people to experience the islands if they are provided with some kayaking skills. According to the literature, the activities people participate in while experiencing a place have the biggest impact on their SOP (Prayag & Ryan, 2012, Kianicka et al., 2006). Therefore, it would be beneficial to promote kayaking throughout the Kingston community, as this could forge more intimate bonds to the place, and perhaps motivate people to take care of the place.

Conservation awareness was another theme drawn out from the interviews. Laura said that the goal of outdoor education is to help visitors connect to the Thousand Islands region so that they care about it. Indeed, from a governmental perspective the management of outdoor recreation activities “works to promote sustainable recreation while protecting the land and wildlife that make the area a popular tourist destination” with specific programs geared towards conservation, ecosystem protection, and sustainable lifestyles. This offers a way in which to get
people thinking about their natural environments, as well as a way to promote connections to the place. Kayaking is a good way for people to really see a natural area. Since working for Paddle Canada, Graham said that he has seen changes in peoples’ attitudes towards the environment after paddling programs. More people are concerned about things such as mining and logging which could potentially shut down ancient paddling pathways and portage trails. According to him, there has been increased awareness regarding threats to wilderness and waterway routes, especially with development.

A positive about kayaking is that it slows people down considerably. They are then able to take in their surroundings, and appreciate the natural area. You are close to the water, so the benefit is that you can “see what’s actually in our waterways, like the snakes and the turtles. Your imprint on the planet is a lot less with kayaking than it is with a lot of the other tourism activities” (Graham). After kayaking a considerable amount, some of the respondents felt more responsible for the Thousand Islands as environmental stewards. Scott said that he wants to explore the islands even further and see “how they lived and breathed”. In his position as a private sector entrepreneur, he felt that it was necessary for his company to role model good stewardship, in order to preserve and protect the natural resources that people want to enjoy. In his experience, “a connection to the place is one of the first steps in making more conscious decisions. So if somebody doesn’t have any emotional connection to a place, then they’re much less likely to really care about it and treat it as their own”. John modeled Scott’s sentiments when he began to speak about the importance of taking care of a place. He mentioned that we should have the same respect for a place that we have for ourselves. Similarly, Laura said that once a person has enjoyed a place, then it is their responsibility to take care of it, and make sure that others can take pleasure in it as well.
While on the kayaking tours, I noticed the guides often promoting conservation awareness and ecological protection. While touring the Admiralty Islands, it was common for guides to point out various flora and/or fauna that were unique to the region. Thwartway Island in particular is an ecological gem, as there has been little human interference, which has kept the wetlands unspoiled. When the paddlers were actually able to see and interact with the unique biota, they seemed much more engaged and interested in learning more about the island. As evidenced by researchers Kudryavtsev, Stedman, & Krasny, and Wason-Ellam in the literature review, interpretation is key when fostering connections between people and the environment. Participant observation and interviews supported this claim. Since kayaking allows people to get closer to nature, into areas which they would only be able to explore while paddling, it allows them to see and interact with the environment in a more intimate fashion. This exposure and recreational use of a natural environment often inspires environmental awareness and a willingness to protect the natural resource which has been enjoyed (Brehm et. al, 2006).

The spirit of a place is emphasized through the non-profit industry though the promotion of heritage. Heritage is evidently an important aspect to a place, as the spirit of the Thousand Islands could be felt by many of the respondents. Ben said one of his favourite things about being on the water was being immersed spiritually in nature. Remembering back to the Paddle and Pint tour, which was his first ever kayaking experience, he said it was nice to be in a natural environment, away from cars. Reminiscing back to various tours, John liked when the kayakers were taken into special places like Half Moon Bay. He enjoyed this particular area, because it felt peaceful and sacred; he could feel the history there. He also liked the shipwreck, because this provided him with a sense of the past as well. According to Jenkinson, spirit of the place is
related to the physical, but it is primarily metaphysical (2010, p. 46); the feelings John encountered in the Bay echoed in both the land and history of the place.

Interestingly, John’s feelings surrounding Half Moon Bay were very similar to my own, which I had previously recorded in my participant observation journal while on a tour with the SLINP summer training group. I have never experienced anything like Half Moon Bay. Immediately upon entering the narrow channel, I felt a strong sense of spirit; I can only describe it as an ethereal feeling. The channel was short, and carved rock towered above us on either side. All fifteen of us could fit into the small bay if we squeezed together. The guide proceeded to tell us that Half Moon Bay was used as a venue for non-denominational religious ceremonies since 1887. People would gather; and continue to gather, in small boats to sing hymns and listen to music. She also said that Half Moon Bay had the “highest cathedral ceilings” which I thought was rather endearing. I felt that there was a strong spirit of place here. I could feel the history in the place. I felt as if I was more in tune with nature here than I was anyplace else on the tour. There were no motorized boating crafts, or distractions. There was only the natural environment; the soft rippling of the water and the birds in the distance. The place permeated with meaning; Jenkinson contends that “the spirit of a place can emanate from the land and into the people who inhabit or visit it” (2010, p. 44), and I know I felt this resonate within myself, as well as with others on the tour, after conversations with the tour participants both while sitting in our kayaks in Half Moon Bay and after the tour concluded. Interestingly, Half Moon Bay was the trip highlight for most of the participants on tour (see Figure 5).
An integral part component of outdoor education, according to Laura, is to help people create connections to a place so that they care about it. Since tourists often shape their relationships to place through esthetics which they experience through leisure activities (Kianicka et al.), it is crucial to bring paddling tourists into places such as Half Moon Bay, where they can experience first-hand the natural features, history and overall spirit of the place.

However, not everything about the Thousand Islands is seen as being inherently good. Some major negatives that respondents mentioned about the place were motorized watercrafts and private land ownership. Firstly, there was significant consensus among the interviewees with respect to the problems motorboats created. Laura said that the places she enjoyed the most within the islands were the quiet places where the motorboats couldn’t go. When asked how he felt about the Thousand Islands, Graham mentioned that “unfortunately, being so close to population, its heavily used more so by the motorboat crowd and cottage crowd…so that’s how you get to capacity”. He further said that industry representatives are trying not to promote that
type of recreational boating; the FABR and SLINP are trying to attract the paddling crowd to the islands instead. He said what he did not like about the islands was the busyness; “those boats just come whipping around and they’re loud and kind of disruptive”. Indeed, John had similar sentiments. When asked the same question as posed to Graham, John said that what he did not like about the islands were the speedboats. With an annoyed expression, he elaborated on his misgivings: “when those big boats cross the channels, I can’t stand that…they go way too fast. I like calm, and sometimes it gets pretty choppy out there…and when it’s choppy, I’m not really happy”. He thought that when in a motorboat, one misses everything that the place has to offer, because “you’re just speeding by…you’re not noticing the scenery, you’re not noticing the water, you’re not coming in contact with nature”. This then led him into a discussion of the cottages on the islands. He said that oftentimes when he went kayaking, he would notice the big, multi-million dollar cottages, and would think that the public and greater good would sometimes be sacrificed in order to service the private good. Laura also mentioned private ownership, stating that she liked the natural beauty of the area, not the big castles and cottages: “if there was more development, I think that would really change the natural heritage people come for, and the part that I really like…the wilderness. It’s nice to look at an island and see mostly trees, rather than seeing a whole bunch of huge cottages and condos”. Development clearly has an impact on SOP, as evidenced through the interviews. While on tour, I noticed that most people were put-off by the speedboats in particular. Many would complain about the boats when crossing the channels, and some seemed to fear for their safety. As well, I noticed that most of the kayakers were more interested in the natural scenery than the cottages, judging by their excitement to arrive at the more secluded islands to hike and swim.
Consistent with the literature, it was discovered that a sense of place can be developed over time. Laura said that before she worked in the Thousand Islands, she didn’t really know where they were located, or what exactly they were. However, since she has worked within the islands for the last 8 years, she developed a sense of care for the place; “I’ve spend more time here, and that makes me care about it”. Within her particular line of work, she said it was important for visitors to care about the area in order to want to protect it. However, it was also discovered that no time at all in a place can still make a person feel connected to it. Graham said that he will travel a great distance in order to see an interesting landscape. He excitedly went on to say that a place he really wanted to visit someday was Yosemite National Park, because “it seems like it’s out of a movie or something…that big cliff that people climb…and there are waterfalls and forest and the valley floor. Every time I see that, I’m like ‘I got to go there!’ The picture isn’t enough. I have to go experience the place”. Graham’s feelings illustrate some of the researchers thoughts on place attachment to distant places. White et al. and Warzecha & Lime contend that people can become attached to places they have never been before if it provides them a setting where they can achieve their goals.

4.2.5. Home

Family and community were strong themes which emerged from the interviews. When asked the question, “with which place do you most identify?” respondents usually said places in which they had a feeling of being at home. Laura said that she associated home with where her parents are, and other places in which she has friends and family. Though she thought the natural beauty of an area was important, she associated important places with the people there; “I think of my parents’ place and they live out in the country but it’s not very wilderness-y…it’s very agricultural and it’s still a really important place to me because I associate it with family”. When
asked why she thought people visited the islands, her response was that for many, visiting the islands had been a tradition in their family for many generations; they would come for holidays, vacations, and to spend time with family and friends. Similar to Laura, when John was asked “what makes a place important to you?” his response was that the people there were what made it special. Furthermore, if he had a personal history to the place, and spend a lot of time there and fostered good memories, then he felt more connected to that place.

Ben, a first-time kayaker, spoke about his old home in Victoria, B.C, which was a place which made him very happy, since he could walk out his front door and be near the ocean and mountains. This made him feel good, and privileged to live in that particular spot.

While participant observing, I often noticed people discussing their home-places. When engaging the SLINP tour participants in conversation while kayaking, many mentioned the places they grew up. One individual recounted her experiences working as a summer student in BC, her home province. She then related this to her experience working for the summer in Ontario, and discussed the similarities in the natural features between the two provinces. One of the reasons why she enjoyed working in Ontario so much was because the Thousand Islands reminded her of home. She enjoyed the secluded aspects of many of the islands, and how this was similar to some of the ‘wilderness’ of BC. McCool and Martin’s 1994 study showed a small correlation between residence length and place attachment; they contended that place attachment could occur quickly. Through both interviews and participant observation, I noticed that this notion could be quite possible; especially if the place was somewhere the respondents could emotionally identify with, or reminded them of home.
Section 5

Conclusion

5.1. General Conclusions/Recommendations

The goal of this project was to observe how a group of recreational kayakers created a sense of place, and whether short kayaking trips facilitated a sense of place attachment to the Thousand Islands. To fully assess the impact of paddling recreation on feelings of place attachment in this researcher’s opinion would require concrete, objective definitions of nature and place, as well as a more comprehensive examination of the impacts of these features on recreational kayakers. Indeed, a key challenge of this research was identifying what constituted nature and/or ‘wilderness’, since sense of place can often be tied to these concepts of ‘the outdoors’. However, through ethnographic research, it was discovered that:

- Relationships to places can be forged through long-time contact; however, it is also possible to form feelings of place attachment if the place provides a way in which a person can escape their daily routine, can engage in an environment which is both solitary and social, can experience the beauty of nature first-hand, and has the ability to invoke memories of home.

- Place-based education in the form of nature interpretation can increase a person’s sense of place attachment.

- Kayaking allows people to experience places they might not have got the chance to see in a conventional watercraft, thusly increasing their exposure and potential attachment to an area.
It is quite possible that people are more likely to care about a natural area after participating in a recreational activity that allows them to intimately experience a natural environment.

Motorized watercraft and private ownership of islands often take away from the overall experience of a paddler’s SOP.

It is recommended that provincial/national parks as well as the non-profit and for-profit paddling industries continue to offer interpretation programs to increase visitor sense of place attachment through connections to the natural environment and heritage. It is also advised to include secluded areas in interpretive tours, in order to instill in visitors a sense of the ‘spirit of the place’. Another reason to include secluded and/or quiet areas in tours is because the motorized watercraft appeared to take away from the overall experience of most of the kayakers observed in this study.

5.1.1. Closing Thoughts

Overall, SOP is an emerging field of research, but an important one. As evidenced by the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study, place attachment varies; however, whenever I had a casual conversation with a kayaker at a paddling social, or whenever an interview respondent spoke of the Thousand Islands, they spoke with a certain fondness for not only the natural area, but also for paddling recreation. Oftentimes, individuals’ experiences in the islands led them to remember and/or discuss other places they had been which they enjoyed, or places they hoped to visit in the future. People and places are inherently intertwined, and as we move further into a future defined by supermodernity, in this researcher’s opinion, it has never been more important to remain connected to both the environment and ourselves.
References


Appendix A

Interview Question Guide

Authenticity

1. What made you want to come on an eco-tour?
2. What made you want to come on a kayaking tour?
3. What did you expect to gain from this tour?
4. Did the tour fulfill your expectations?
5. Have you ever visited the St. Lawrence Islands in the past?

Place Attachment

6. What characteristics drew you to this particular place?
7. How would you describe this place?
8. Describe your own feelings about this place.
9. How do you feel when a place changes?
10. How has your attachment to the St. Lawrence Islands changed over time? What caused this change?

Place Identity/Rootedness

11. What makes a place important to you?
12. With which place do you most identify? Why?
13. What makes you want to take care of a place?
Appendix B

Research Ethics Approval

July 19, 2012

Ms. Riley Cassidy
Master's Student
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Queen's University
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GREB Ref #: GENSC-051-12; Romeo # 6007035
Title: "GENSC-051-12 Kayaking the 1000 Islands: A Sense of Place"

Dear Ms. Cassidy:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GENSC-051-12 Kayaking the 1000 Islands: A Sense of Place" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D 1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Michael Smith, Faculty Supervisor