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Events Tourism in Mountain Parks: Two case studies of visitor characteristics and outcomes related to special events held in Jasper and Banff National Parks, 2007.

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The results of three studies conducted in 2007 that were designed to investigate special events visitors, their experiences in the mountain parks and the outcomes associated with special events in Banff and Jasper National Parks. Special events are defined in this study as temporary events that are held in Canada's national parks, which are one-time or annually recurring events not directly related to the daily functioning and long-term planning and management of the national parks. The aims of the project were threefold: a) to study visitors who participate in special events; b) to study the experiences and outcomes of visitors to mountain parks who attended special events; and c) to examine the relationship between visitors to the events and the events' contexts.

The methodologies used to study event visitors and each study's findings are briefly described next. Melissa's Road Race, an annual running event held in Banff National Park is described first, followed by a report on the Franco-Albertan Festival held in Jasper National Park.

Case Study 1: Melissa's Road Race – Banff National Park, September 2007

Background

On September 27, 2007 the 28th running of Melissa's 10 kms and 22 kms Road Race was held in Banff National Park. Nearly 4,500 runners participated in the Race, 1,500 ran in the 22 Km race and the remaining runners took part in the 10 Km race. Approximately 65% of race participants were repeat entrants in 2007, 35% were new participants; this was unlike previous years where there was a 50-50 split between new and repeat entrants.

Methods

Melissa's Road Race data was collected with mail-back questionnaires that were distributed in-person to every third race delegate who pickup up their racing tags and bibs in Calgary and Banff prior to race day. One-thousand two hundred questionnaires were distributed, 393 usable questionnaires were returned,

generated a 33% response rate. Aside from an overrepresentation of female versus male runners, the survey sample appears to be fairly representative of Melissa's Road Race participants. The survey instrument was designed to capture data on participant's socio-economic characteristics, travel patterns and plans to return to the Park, relationship with the Race and Banff National Park, motivations for traveling to the Park and the Race, and knowledge about the Park.

Results

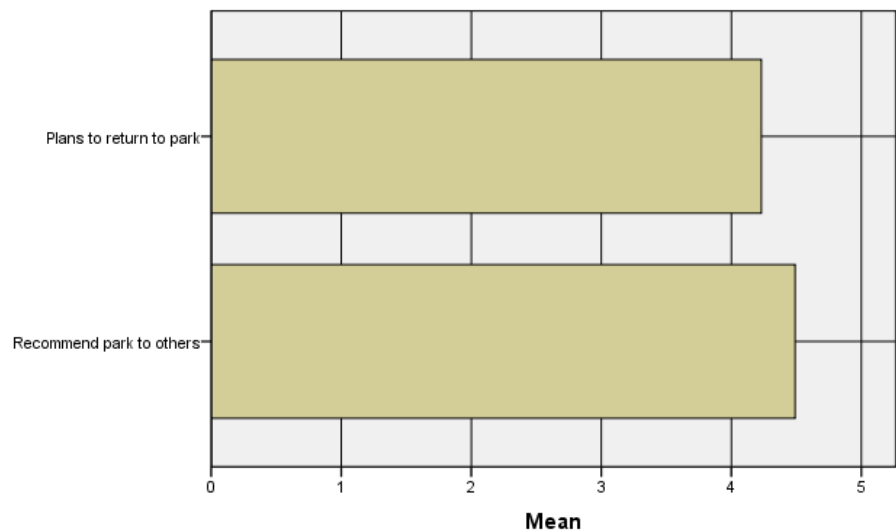
Visitor characteristics of

Race participants

surveyed:

Respondents ages ranged from 15 to 70 years of age; the average age was 40 years. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were female, 32% were male. More than half of respondents reported an annual household income of more than \$80,000 per year; 22% reported

household incomes of more than \$140,000 per year. Study participants were also highly educated with 90% reporting the completion of at least one post secondary degree.



Respondents indicated a frequent pattern of travel to parks and protected areas; 72% reported they have visited parks several times a year or at least once per month in the last year. Another segment of Race survey participants reported very low patterns of park visitation; 27% stated they only visited one per year or less than once every three years. The sample was composed of experienced visitors to Banff National Park; the average number of years participants has visited Banff National Park was 19 years.

In general, participants appeared to have low information needs (due to their extensive experience with Banff N.P.), but were sensitive to park fees, parking and crowding issues, and the expense of Banff as a destination.

Plans to return to and recommend Banff National Park: Race participants who completed the survey expressed high levels of agreement with questions that utilized a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) through 5 (Strongly agree) to measure their plans to return and plans to recommend Banff N.P. as a destination to friends and relatives. An average response of 4.23 ($SD=.773$, $n=390$) was obtained from visitors when asked if they planned to return to the Banff N.P., and 4.49 was recorded from visitors when asked if they planned to recommend the Banff N.P. as a travel destination to friends and family. Ninety-seven percent somewhat agreed or highly agreed with the statement that they would recommend Banff National Park to friends and family as a place to visit, and 88% stated they somewhat agreed or highly

agreed with the statement that they would return to Banff National Park. Very similar intentions were expressed by Race participants regarding their plans to participate in Melissa's Road Race in the future and recommend it to friends and family.

Travel Patterns: 243 (62%) visitors stayed overnight in Banff or the surrounding region to participate in Melissa's Road Race; their mean average length of stay was 2.4 days. This is an important outcome for tourism businesses in the Banff region, as September is characterized by lower visitation levels and the additional income would be welcome.

Banff National Park sites most frequently visited while at the park for Melissa's Road Race included: Banff town site (86%) ; Front country (32%), Main park attractions (27.3%), and Scenic lookouts along highways and roads (26.3%). A mean average of 1.6 sites visited was recorded.

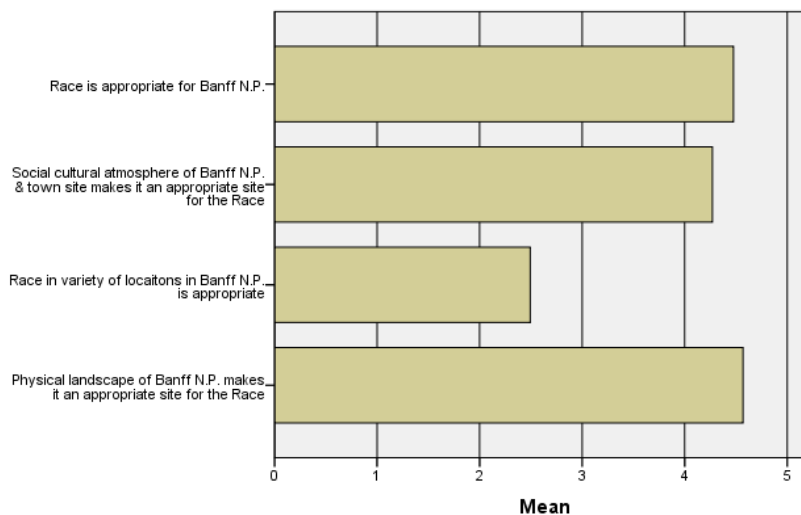
Park and Event management preferences: Race participants expressed high levels of attachment to Banff National Park and concerns about overdevelopment and commercialization of the town site. They felt that Melissa's Road Race was a sustainable form of park visitation, provided it was run in areas of the park (i.e., the town site) that would not jeopardise the natural environments and wildlife of the park.

Participants expressed their lowest level of agreement with the statement that the Race should be held in a variety of locations throughout Banff ($M=2.49$, $SD=1.1$, $n=389$). A conclusion that may be drawn from this and which is supported by responses to open ended questions about the management of sports events in the mountain parks is that a majority of Race participants recognize the necessity of excluding sport competitions and recreation activities from specific sections of the Park due to environmental management and ecological integrity concerns as well as the need to maintain visitor safety.

Melissa's Road Race study strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for future research

Results from the survey of Melissa's Road Race represent an important contribution to our understanding of sport competition special event participants. The results also provide a first glimpse

of visitor characteristics associated with a special event that has a long history in Banff National Park. Finally, the large number of survey respondents who had a long affiliation with Banff National Park provide an interesting comparison with attendees of other special events (e.g., see results below from the Franco-Albertan Festival), who have little to no experience with the mountain parks.



Additional observations include: Holding Melissa's Road Race in Banff's shoulder season does increase the number of individuals who choose to patronize tourism services during this slow season. Melissa's Road Race does not appear to play a major role in bringing in new people to the Park, but it does, based on comments made with the open ended response sections of the survey, appear to reinforce individual's relationships with the Park by providing the opportunity to interact with the Park's natural environment and through the generation of additional meanings and values associated with the Park. These latter phenomena are rooted in the physical, emotional and mental accomplishment of running and competing in the Race and its unique context, as well as through opportunities to interact with friends, family and like-minded physical activity enthusiasts.

Future research: Additional studies of sport events in parks, both events that have a long history in the parks and one-time or newly established events will provide expanded understanding of the impacts of these events for participants as well as parks. Sports and outdoor recreation opportunities, offered within a strongly enforced framework that prioritizes environmental sustainability and protection of natural and cultural heritage, can continue to enable parks' and protected area's abilities to provide physical, emotional and mental wellness to Canadians. On going research of these types of events in parks will foster greater understanding of these outcomes.

Quantitative, large scale sampling of sporting event participants is advocated as the chief means of data collection in the future to achieve understanding of sport event-related outcomes. However, qualitative in-depth case studies of specific sport event participants' relationships with the parks they recreate in may provide enriched insight into the nuances of the sport enthusiasts' views and perspectives including their sense of place, attachment to parks and understanding of event management in parks.

Case Study 2: Franco-Albertan Festival – Jasper National Park, June-July 2007

Background

An annual cultural gathering of Francophone Albertans, this was the first time the Franco-Albertan Festival was held in a national park. The Festival, which lasted 2.5 days, featured francophone music and an immersive francophone atmosphere. Food vendors and reserved campground spaces in a Parks Canada campground were additional services that were provided to the attendees. This event was selected as one of the sample events for the Special Events in Mountain Parks Project because: a) it was a cultural event, and b) it was not an event that had occurred previously in the mountain parks.

Methodology

Two questionnaire surveys were conducted to collect data from festival attendees. These were collected in French or English. The first data collection occurred on site at the Franco-Albertan Festival. Research assistants collected background data from Festival participants in French and English and asked them to provide their mailing address so that additional information could be collected regarding their overall experience in Jasper National Park and at the Festival. A total of 249 intercept surveys were conducted

at the Festival. Approximately 500 to 700 people attended the 2.5 day event. Twenty-four percent of respondents were from Jasper, the remaining intercept survey sample were visitors to the area. Twenty-four percent of these visitors were first time visitors to Jasper National Park.

Follow-up questionnaires were sent to festival participants to document satisfaction with the event and the park, motives for attending, travel patterns, and so on. Seventy-five questionnaires were returned: 15% of these respondents were from Jasper, the remaining respondents were largely from other parts of Alberta. Differences between the Intercept and Mail-based surveys were as follows: Fewer Jasper residents and more AFCA members characterized the post-event Mail-based survey sample.

Results

Visitor Characteristics of the Intercept-survey conducted at the Festival (n=249): Nearly one-quarter of the survey respondents lived within the boundaries of Jasper National Park. The remaining respondents originated from other parts of Alberta, however, a few did travel to the park from outside the province. Forty-four percent of respondents had attended the Festival before, and 46% were current members of the Association Canadienne Francaise de l'Alberta (ACFA) or a similar Francophone organization. Sixty-eight percent of respondents spoke French as their first language at home, 74% had spoken French as their first language as a child. The mean average age of festival intercept survey respondents was 39 years of age. Respondents' minimum age was 17 and maximum age was 75 years.

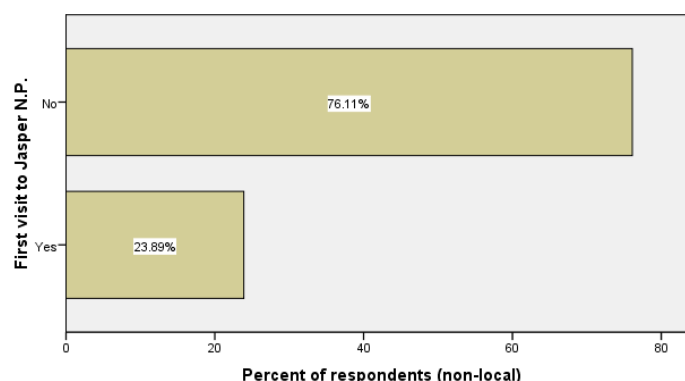
Seventy-six percent of Festival attendees intercepted and surveyed at the Festival had visited Jasper National Park previously, or lived in Jasper full-time; 24 % of visitors (non-residents of Jasper who completed the survey) were first time visitors to Jasper.

When asked to identify their main reason for visiting Jasper National Park during their current trip, 59% intercept survey respondents cited the Festival as the main reason for their visit; however 7% sited Jasper National Park as their main reason, and 9% were mountain park vacationers who decided to attend the Festival upon hearing about it. The remaining respondents were from the Jasper region (24%).

Visitor Characteristics of the Mail-based survey conducted post-Festival

(n=75): Eleven (15%) respondents identified themselves as seasonal or full time residents of Jasper. Fourteen (23%) of the respondents stated this was the first year they had been to

Jasper National Park, and 5 (8%) of the 65 the non-local respondents who attending the Festival admitted to not knowing the Festival was held in a national park prior arriving.



Festival participants who completed the survey ranged in age from 18 to 75 years of age. The average age was 42 years. More females than males completed the survey; 62% of respondents were female, 38% were male. Approximately half of the Festival attendees surveyed reported a household income of over \$80,000 per year, although 9 respondents choose not to answer this question. In comparison with participants in Melissa's Road Race in Banff, a lower portion of Festival participants (10 %) reported household incomes of over \$140,000 per year. Study participants were well educated; 85% of respondents had completed a post secondary diploma or degree, with 10% of respondents reporting completion of a graduate degree.

Plans to return to and recommend Jasper National Park: High averages were observed for responses to questions that asked participants if they would return to Jasper National Park in the future and recommend it to friends and family as a travel destination. On a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) an average response of 4.69 (SD=.773, $n=390$) was obtained from visitors when asked if they planned to return to the Jasper N.P., and 4.81 (SD=.488, $n=74$) if they would recommend the park as a destination.

Travel Patterns: The Festival participants could have spent up to 2.5 days at the main Festival site, a fenced municipal park located in the Town of Jasper. A large majority of Festival attendees likely stayed in Jasper National Park for the entirety of their stay, as most visitors rented a campsite at Parks Canada campground. Activities during the Festival included musical entertainment, games for kids, a beer tent, food stands, and a few organized (but poorly attended) outings to main sites located in Jasper National Park.

Non-Jasper resident Festival attendees spent an average of 3.5 days in the Park and 2.4 of these days at the Festival. Local residents ($n=10$) spent an average of 2 days at the event. The longest overnight stay in the Park was 15 days; the most frequent was 3 days. The majority of attendees (55%) stayed at a Parks Canada operated campground. Most (74%) traveled to the Festival by car. The average number of individuals in a travel party was 4 persons. Approximately 57% of travel parties had children traveling in the group.

Franco-Albertan Festival attendees travelled from further away than Melissa's Road Race participants to attend their special event in Jasper N.P. Approximately 15% of respondents traveled less than 200 kms to attend the Festival; at least 50 % traveled more than 230 kms. The mean average travelled was 372 kms. The greatest distance was 2796 kms.

The most common destinations within the park visited by Festival attendees surveyed for this study included the Jasper town site (79.9%) followed by Main park attractions (e.g., Malign Canyon, Mount Edith Cavell, Miette Hot Springs) (62.7%), Front country (mainly paved trails, *near* main park attractions and the town site) (58.6%), and Scenic lookouts along highways and roads (58.9%). Festival survey respondents visited many more sites throughout Jasper National Park during their visit than Melissa's Road Race participants visited in Banff N.P. Festival attendees visited an average of 3.1 sites ($n=60$) and Race participants attended 1.6 sites ($n=386$). This may be explained by the greater distance traveled by

the Festival participants as well the factor that for many of the Festival visitors it was their first time visit to Jasper National Park.

Visitor experience / satisfaction: Festival visitors report high levels of satisfaction with their experience in Jasper and slightly lower satisfaction with the Festival. However, they did express some intolerance of paying park fees and camping fees. The latter fee was unpalatable in part because the Franco-Albertan Festival is traditionally located in a farmer's field each year, and little to no camping fees are paid for this.

Franco-Albertan Festival participants surveyed for this study were asked to note three things they would like to change about their visitor experience during their trip to Jasper N.P. the weekend of the Festival. The top three responses were: a) better organization at the campground; b) smaller campground, with more intimate sites; and, c) more trails and facilities for activities.

A final indicator related to visitor experience was the measurement of perceived importance or and satisfaction with selected Park and Festival amenities and services. The lowest level of satisfaction ($M=3.79$, $n=68$), lowest level of importance ($M=3.03$, $n=68$) and some of the highest variation in respondents' opinions ($SD=1.541$ and $SD=1.10$) were observed for "Park-related learning opportunities." For a specific portion of Festival attendees learning opportunities were important and unfulfilled.

Festival study strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for future research

A low response rate (i.e., 30%) to the main Mail-based survey questionnaire that was sent post event is some cause for concern. It is not entirely clear how representative the final sample ($n=75$) is of the overall population of Franco-Albertan Festival attendees. It is also believed that an unknown number of Festival registrants may have not visited the main festival venue (a municipal park in the Jasper town site), and instead visited and relaxed in the campground where their campers were parked for the weekend. To obtain a more representative sample of Festival attendees the researchers should have also approached Festival attendees in the campground rather than only concentrating on data collection at the main venue.

The survey of Franco-Albertan Festival attendees did provide some potential valuable insight into the unique characteristics of visitors attending a park-based special event with no history of the event being held previously in the Park. Specifically, the observation that more than 24% of visitors attending the Festival were first time visitors to Jasper was noteworthy, especially since they were mainly from Alberta. Based on this it would be interesting to document how other "one-time / non-traditional" events draw new visitors to the mountain parks.

As a result some of these first time visitors required more Park-related learning opportunities. They also presented a very good opportunity to park managers for an information campaign designed to increase their awareness of and connection with Jasper N.P. This information campaign would go beyond facts and figures about Jasper, to help these first time visitors engage in the Jasper experience, generating enriched personal meanings and memories.