

Leisure Time Preference: The influence of gardening on garden visitation

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Executive Summary

Leisure preferences have been accounted for by a variety of variables, including gender, age and race; and by personality and other internal attributes. It could be hypothesised therefore that there would be a relationship between the different but associated leisure activities chosen by people. However to date, little attention has been paid in this area. This study uses a survey of residents in southern England (n = 397) to identify the preferences for visiting and revisiting a garden that is open to the public, (i.e. a visitor attraction), based on the respondent's interest in gardening.

Logistic regression was used first to identify which factors best predict the likelihood that the respondents would report that they had visited a garden in the year of the study. It was then implemented to identify whether they sometimes like to revisit a garden. Three predictor (independent) variables were assessed in each case. First, whether the respondent has access to a garden space; secondly, their level of enthusiasm for gardening as a hobby and thirdly, how enjoyable they thought a visit to a garden attraction would be. The results show that both models were statistically significant, (chi square = 43.460, p = 0.000 with df = 6 and chi square = 36.488, p = 0.000 with df = 6). In respect of visiting a garden, the respondents' enthusiasm for amateur gardening made a statistically significant contribution to the model. Respondents who quite liked gardening were slightly less likely to visit a garden than the enthusiastic gardeners. The strongest predictor of making a visit was perhaps unsurprisingly, those that thought a visit would be very enjoyable. This had an odds ratio of 2.01 indicating that these respondents were twice as likely to visit as those who thought a visit would be only quite enjoyable or quite or very unenjoyable. However, the result was not statistically significant, which suggests the presence of an omitted variable. The figure rose to six times more likely in respect of revisiting the same garden and this was statistically significant (p = 0.041). In light of these important results, further analysis was undertaken to establish the characteristics of the respondents based on the two key variables and why they might revisit. To conclude, an interest in gardening is not the most important factor in predicting garden visiting.

Keywords: Leisure preferences: garden visiting: gardening: revisiting: visitor attractions

Introduction

Given the wide range of leisure opportunities and possibilities open to individuals, it is understandable that considerable attention has already been given to studying leisure preferences. However, whilst it might seem intuitive that there are links between leisure activities that have common features, little research has been undertaken on this specific topic. So whether hobbyists, for example amateur artists or cricket players, visit art galleries or attend professional cricket matches has received little or no attention. Understanding the preferences of visitors to leisure attractions is essential for operators, if the attractions are not only to remain viable but also to offer the best visitor experience possible. This study uses gardens in southern England as its context, to consider the relationship between gardening as

a hobby and visiting gardens open to the public. Gardens are a useful field of research, as Crouch (2009) notes, gardens signify identity, status, cultural capital and social/cultural relations. These relations may be of 'power, culture, race, class, and gender' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2010, p. 499).

Literature Review

Leisure preferences have been accounted for by a variety of factors, including socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age and social class; and by personality and internal attributes. Preferences can also be understood in terms of facilitators and barriers such as time and money and the surrounding environment; physical, natural, social, economic and political environments have all been the foci of attention. Numerous studies have considered a range of theoretical constructs too. In contrast, this study aims to identify the influence of one leisure activity upon another, specifically an individual's interest in gardening on the propensity to visit and revisit a garden.

Fearnley-Wittingstall (2002, p. 6) suggests that 'A love affair with a garden seems to be an especially English form of love' and gardening seems to be more popular in England than many other countries of the world. A report by Mintel Group Ltd (2010) showed that a quarter of the British population 'really enjoy' gardening as a hobby and a further quarter do garden, but are not enthusiasts. A similar number (24% of adults) had visited a garden in the 12 months prior to August 2012 (Mintel Group Ltd 2012). In total, there were over 35 million visits to English gardens in 2014, spending almost £1.3 million (VisitEngland, 2015) but according to Connell (2004) children form only 16% of visitors (the lowest of any visitor attraction).

Repeat visiting of attractions in general has been frequently identified (Darnell and Johnson, 2001) and Gallagher (1983) showed that 49% of the visitors in her survey had visited the garden before. From the visitor's perspective, repeat visitation offers a more comprehensive understanding of what a visit to a particular garden might be like and hence whether to return or not. For the garden operator it offers increased income with less expenditure on marketing. Gallagher's survey also revealed the wide variation of the number of repeat visitors between gardens (ranging from 27 – 72% of visitors).

Gardens are places where gendered power relations are enacted (Taylor, 2008) and differences in participation due to gender have been explained in three key ways 'gender-specific cultural socialization, gender differences in socioeconomic resources, and gender differences in domestic and symbolic labor' (Katz-Gerro and Jaeger, 2015, p. 417). Taylor (ibid.) notes that male gardeners tend to undertake the heavy garden tasks and the female gardeners carry out the lighter duties. However, in the absence of men, the women undertake all the gardening roles. In terms of garden visiting, women have been shown to be the more frequent visitors than men (Connell, 2004) and Fox & Edwards (2008) also demonstrated that men were more likely to be 'secondary participants' with women the 'prime movers' of a visit.

Several studies have considered older gardeners (including in the UK for example Bhatti (2006)) who using qualitative data identified the problems of gardening in the 'Fourth Age' due to decline in physical abilities or the death of a spouse or partner. Other studies demonstrate that prior to that age interest in both gardening and garden visiting increase (for example, Connell, 2004).

Taylor (2008) has also described the classed identities of gardeners in England, revealing differences in the appeal of various planting schemes and access to cultural (and horticultural) capital. This is reflected in garden visiting too, with the middle classes demonstrated as the more frequent visitors (Connell, 2004). Most gardens that open to the public are comparable to those of the middle and upper classes but Willes (2014) suggests that larger gardens such as Hidcote and Sissinghurst, which are two of the most popular gardens to visit in England, may be closer to the experience of 'ordinary gardeners' because of the small gardens which together create the whole. A more modern and nuanced definition of class has been developed by Florida (2002) who suggests that there is a creative class as well as the service class and working class. Designing their own gardens may well lead some of this creative class to visit a garden for inspiration and ideas. Other demographics, such as race or ethnicity have been discussed in other countries but have yet to be explored in detail in relation to gardening and garden visiting in England.

Ashton-Shaeffer & Constant (2005) identified seven factors as motivations for gardening, namely: intellectual, stimulus-avoidance, friendship building, social interaction, physical fitness, skill-development and creativity. The sensory benefits of a garden, the peace and tranquillity are also important benefits (Kaplan and Kaplan (1989); as are an appreciation of nature (Clayton, 2007) and the physical and mental health benefits and the production of domestic produce (Freeman et al. 2012). Gardening is also portrayed as an activity that is enjoyed when time is perceived as flowing slowly (Zuzanek, 2006). Very similar reasons for visiting a garden have been identified including being out of doors, admiring the plants and scenery, social interaction with family or friends, the tranquillity, the opportunity to relax and the spiritual/restorative quality (Ballantyne et al. 2008; Fox & Edwards, 2008).

Methodology

In order to obtain the views of gardeners as well as occasional and frequent visitors to gardens, a resident survey was carried out in the 'BH' postcode area in southern England, which has a population of approximately 400,000 people. For efficiency, a randomly generated cluster sample of 50 postcode units was obtained to identify households and then residents within the household were selected on the basis of having the 'next birthday'. A total of 993 questionnaires were delivered in the autumn of 2012, at the end of the garden visiting season. A response rate of 40% was achieved with 397 completed questionnaires being returned.

Initially, basic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were established using cross-tabulations. Data was then recoded to whether the respondent has access to a garden space (from initially five to two variables); their level of enthusiasm for gardening as a hobby

(from eight to three) and four levels of how enjoyable they thought a visit to a garden attraction would be (from five), in each case ensuring that the value of 0 was assigned to the absence of the characteristic of interest, e.g., no garden. These three predictor (independent) variables were then assessed using logistic regression to identify which of the three factors would best predict whether a respondent had visited a garden in that year and subsequently whether they like to revisit the same garden.

Results

Respondent characteristics (see Table 1) showed that 89.5% of the respondents had visited a garden as an adult, confirming the popularity of this leisure activity, whilst 94.2% had their own garden or allotment. In this sample, 17% were enthusiastic gardeners (see Table 2) and every one of them had visited a garden at some point in their lives, with 56.9% of all respondents agreeing that a visit to a garden would be very enjoyable (see Table 3).

The results of the logistical regression (see Tables 4 and 5), demonstrated that both models were statistically significant (chi square = 43.460, $p = 0.000$ with $df = 6$ and chi square = 36.488, $p = 0.000$ with $df = 6$). In respect of visiting a garden in 2012, the respondents' enthusiasm for amateur gardening made a statistically significant contribution to the model. But the differences had little predictive power (Exp (B) = 0.126 for enthusiastic gardeners and 0.106 for those who only quite liked gardening). The strongest predictor of making a visit was perhaps unsurprisingly, those who thought a visit would be very enjoyable. This had an odds ratio of 2.01 indicating that these respondents were twice as likely to visit as those who thought a visit would be only quite enjoyable or quite or very unenjoyable, but this was not statistically significant. This suggests that there is another omitted variable(s). In respect of revisiting the same garden, and in terms of anticipated enjoyment, the odds ratio rose to six times more likely and this was statistically significant (0.041). However, the differences in types of gardener were not significant. The third independent variable, access to a garden was neither significant nor predictive in visiting or revisiting a garden.

Discussion

The results demonstrate the popularity in southern England of visiting a garden that is open to the public, with 90% of respondents having visited in their lifetime and 78% in the year of the study. The best predictor of whether they would make a visit was perhaps unsurprisingly their level of enjoyment, with those who thought it would be very enjoyable, twice as likely to visit. These represented over half of the respondents and there was a statistically significant difference, with 64% women and only 44% men (This could therefore be the omitted variable). However, whilst there were no gendered differences in their enthusiasm for gardening, the women who were the most enthusiastic gardeners were also most likely to enjoy a visit. Women have consistently been demonstrated as more frequent garden visitors (Connell, 2004; Fox & Edwards, 2008) and therefore understanding that the pleasure of their visit is related to their interest in gardening provides valuable data for garden operators.

In terms of age, not only were there again no differences between the ages in levels of enthusiasm but also there were no differences in their levels of enjoyment. The literature

confirms that visitors are more likely to be middle aged rather than younger or older (Connell, 2004) which also replicates in this study their ability and interest in gardening.

Repeat visitors make a valuable contribution to garden income and as Gallagher (1983) showed there are wide variations between gardens as to the number of repeat visitors. Of the residents in this survey, 84% stated that they like to revisit a garden and the logistic regression demonstrated that the best predictor for whether they like to return is again their level of enjoyment. The odds ratio for this was six times more likely and therefore understanding why this is the case is important.

Why gardeners might revisit was therefore examined (see Table 6) and the respondents who quite liked gardening returned most often to experience the sense of place, whilst the enthusiastic gardeners wanted to learn more. The latter was also the most frequently cited reason by those who thought a visit would be very enjoyable, suggesting its importance. There were also statistically significant differences between the enthusiasts who were more likely to want to see how the garden has developed, and the less enthusiastic gardeners revisiting because the garden is local and hence more convenient. Those respondents who thought that visiting a garden is most enjoyable liked to revisit to see more of the garden and how it develops, suggesting that they perceive that there is too much to see in one visit and that perhaps they are taking a more detailed interest too. Further research could establish whether their interest is in the plants, the interpretation, the vistas etc.

This study has demonstrated the important role of lifestyles in visiting gardens and for operators there are key marketing messages and experience delivery that can be facilitated with this knowledge. The main limitation of this study is that the social class of the respondents could not be taken into consideration and as previous research has shown that this is an important variable in both gardening and garden visiting, further research in this area would be valuable.

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Table 1: Respondent characteristics

Respondent characteristics		(%)
Gender	Male	36.7
	Female	63.3
Age group	16-44	16.9
	45-64	40.6
	65+	41.3
Visited a garden	Ever	89.5
	In 2012	78.2
Access to a domestic garden or allotment		94.2
Type of gardener	Enthusiast	17.0
	Quite likes gardening	63.8
	Dislikes gardening	19.3
Likes to revisit a garden		84.1

Table 2: Enthusiasm for gardening

(%)		Dislikes	Quite likes	Enthusiastic	p
All		19.3	63.8	17.0	-
Gender	Female	16.6	64.5	18.9	ns
	Male	23.7	62.6	13.7	
Age	16-44	28.6	58.7	12.7	ns
	45-64	19.2	62.9	17.9	
	65+	15.1	67.8	17.1	
Like to revisit	yes	15.8	65.3	18.9	ns

Table 3: Enjoyment of a visit

(%)		Very un-enjoyable	Quite un-enjoyable	Quite enjoyable	Very enjoyable	p
All		2.7	3.6	36.8	56.9	-
Gender	Female	3.3	1.9	30.5	64.3	0.001
	Male	1.6	6.5	47.6	44.4	
Age	16-44	3.6	5.4	42.9	48.2	ns
	45-64	4.0	4.0	34.2	57.7	
	65+	1.4	2.1	37.9	58.6	
Enthusiasm for gardening	Enthusiastic	1.9	1.9	13.0	83.3	0.000
	Quite likes	3.3	2.4	38.4	55.9	
	Dislikes	0.0	8.3	55.0	36.7	
Like to revisit	yes	2.7	0.8	31.2	65.4	0.000

Table 4: Logistic Regression predicting likelihood of having visited a garden in 2012

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Enthusiastic gardener	-2.07	.64	10.57	1	.001	.126	.04	.44
Quite likes gardening	-2.24	.68	10.77	1	.001	.106	.03	.41
Has a garden	-1.21	1.49	.65	1	.419	.299	.02	5.58
Quite unenjoyable	-2.19	1.15	3.64	1	.056	.112	.01	1.06
Quite enjoyable	.09	.78	.01	1	.911	1.091	.24	5.03
Very enjoyable	.69	.78	.80	1	.370	2.002	.44	9.14
Constant	3.61	1.80	4.03	1	.045	37.080		

Table 5: Logistic Regression predicting likelihood of revisiting a garden

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Enthusiastic gardener	.04	.58	.01	1	.944	1.041	.34	3.23
Quite likes gardening	-.34	.66	.26	1	.612	.716	.20	2.61
Has a garden	-18.42	23150.61	.000	1	.999	.000	.00	.
Quite unenjoyable	-2.41	1.39	3.02	1	.082	.090	.01	1.36
Quite enjoyable	.05	.86	.00	1	.950	1.056	.20	5.66
Very enjoyable	1.82	.89	4.17	1	.041	6.178	1.08	35.47
Constant	19.48	23150.61	0.00	1	.999	287773771.9		

Table 6: Reasons for revisiting a garden

Revisiting a garden (%)	All	Dislikes gardening	Quite likes gardening	Enthusiastic gardener	p	Very un-enjoyable	Quite un-enjoyable	Quite enjoyable	Very enjoyable	p
See in a different season	54.7	14.1	64.8	21.1	ns	3.0	1.0	27.4	68.5	ns
Relive a happy memory	38.5	18.6	59.3	22.1	ns	2.2	0.0	28.7	69.1	ns
Experience the sense of place	18.9	13.0	68.1	18.8	ns	4.5	0.0	27.3	68.2	ns
See the garden development	37.3	8.7	62.3	29.0	0.000	3.7	0.0	24.6	71.6	0.045
Too much to see in one visit	29.7	13.0	61.1	25.9	ns	0.9	0.0	20.8	78.3	0.003
Show someone else	41.3	15.9	61.6	22.5	ns	3.4	0.0	26.8	69.8	ns
Convenience/ it is local	28.0	20.0	56.0	24.0	0.048	3.0	0.0	32.0	65.0	ns
Learn more	8.1	6.9	48.3	44.8	0.001	7.7	0.0	11.5	80.8	ns