Photo-based participatory research: exploring the objectives of visiting a historical district

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Abstract

This study quantitatively investigates relationships between visitors’ objectives for visiting a historical district, using photo-based participatory research. Thirty Japanese undergraduates majoring in commerce and 27 Japanese adults with an interest in architecture and/or town planning were asked to photograph noteworthy settings in a historical district and rate to what extent each setting portrayed nine objectives on scales. The ratings were subjected to exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The findings offer insights into visitors’ objectives, particularly their perception of commercialisation and perceived relationships between the pursuit of novelty and of well-known things, which are suggested to be affected by visitors’ characteristics.

I. Introduction

While there are a variety of places that account for tourists’ visits, one way to classify those places is to make a distinction between those that are primarily intended for tourists and those that are not (Schmidt, 1979). Historical districts, which are a type of non-tourist-oriented destination, are often heavily visited due to their historical significance. Having aspects both as a heritage site and as a tourism destination, such districts usually incorporate various elements, such as historic relics, residential resources and commercial facilities, and as a result, could accommodate visitors’ various objectives. This study attempts to explore those objectives of visiting a historical district as a tourism destination, and especially the relationships between these objectives, in order to investigate how those objectives mutually contradict or harmonise with one another. This investigation is expected to yield worthwhile insights not only for researchers, but also for managers of historical districts, who are pursuing economic development of districts along with their conservation.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Nature of a Historical District

While varying in their geographical scale and structure, historical districts often have main clusters of historical features, which, in Ashworth and Tunbridge’s (2000) words, can be described as “historical gems”, where “the historic resource is both so dramatic, extensive, and complete and also so valued as to dominate their urban morphology, their identity and their policy options” (p. 156). These historical elements are arguably the core attraction for visitors. In fact, the opportunities for visitors to appreciate the past have been regarded as the main attraction of heritage sites (Lynch, 1972; Millar, 1989; Moscardo, 2000).

However, historical places as tourism destinations do not merely hold traces of the past (Caffyn & Lutz, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Palmer, 1999), but take on aspects of the present. Except from small regions that are isolated from commercial areas, a historical district is often located in a larger municipality and is amalgamated with modernly developed objects. Such modernisation is, if not always, often driven by motives to attract visitors, for instance, in the form of commercialisation, which, as Richards (1996) claims, is in an inseparable relationship with tourism. These manipulations may also benefit visitors in a sense that many visitors demand contemporary facilities (Ashworth, 1988; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000) such as modern hotels.

Consequently, a historical district as a tourism destination entails diverse characteristics reflecting not only its nature as a place that has not evolved primarily for tourism, but also recent manipulations often intended for tourism. Although the universal characterisation of such a district is difficult due to variety among districts, some examples of districts’ observable features are provided in the explorative study of

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evaluations of a historical district in Japan by Naoi et al. (2007), who utilised personal interviews based on the frameworks of Repertory Grid Analysis and Laddering Analysis with use of photographs of settings. Those features include historical elements like old houses, commercial facilities, modern objects including vehicles and telephone masts, people, plants and topological entities. While the historical items can be regarded as the reflection of the district’s past-oriented nature, the modern objects and some signs of commercialisation can be attributed to more recent manipulations. The presence of people may also be the consequence in part of the district’s role of attracting visitors.

2.2 Visiting Objectives

These elements of a historical district as a tourism destination could attract visitors with various objectives. This can be explained by the means-end chain model (Gutman, 1982), which maintains that the attributes of an object are the means to achieve certain objectives. In this manner, the aforementioned features of a historical district could accommodate various visiting objectives. For example, the results of Naoi et al.’s (2007) study illustrates that physical features of a district could positively or negatively relate to the realisation of the following objectives:

- Walking around
- Seeing townscape
- Doing shopping
- Doing things as I like
- Seeing something famous
- Seeing, experiencing or obtaining something worth telling others
- Relaxing
- Appreciating something outside my daily life
- Being convinced that I have visited the right place

While the explanation of all the results should be sought in the original article, the findings highlight the positive relationships between the presence of people and objectives of seeing/visiting something famous, being convinced that the place is worth visiting and seeking something outside one’s daily life. Similar relationships are also observed in relation to perceptions of shops.

The desire to appreciate the districts’ historical features is implied by “Seeing townscape”. “Walking around” may also reflect Orbasi’s (2000) description of the role of walkable environments of a historical city to provide visitors with opportunities for a sense of discovery as one of its central appeals. Demand for commercial services is evidenced in the form of “Doing shopping”. Furthermore, in contrast to some of the negative views about the perception of commercialisation (Boorstin, 1964; Herbert, 1995; Mathieson & Wall, 1982), positive relationships between shops and the realisation of “seeking something outside one’s daily life” may suggest that novelty in the district does not necessarily have to be compromised when pursuing benefits from commercial services. In light of these arguments, relationships between heritage-oriented objectives and purposes related to commercial services seem to be worth examining further.

It is also observed that some of the nine objectives may be regarded as mutually incompatible. For example, whereas “Seeing something famous” seems relevant to the notion of tourism as the discovery or the appreciation of well-known objects (Brendon, 1995; Hashimoto, 1999), “Appreciating something outside my daily life” may support the significance of the quest for novelty (Lee & Crompton, 1992) as a visitor’s desire. Literally, novelty does not appear to derive from already known elements, and thus these two objectives may be regarded to be incompatible. Nevertheless, some argue that visitors need to be familiar to some extent with visited objects to appreciate their novel and unusual characteristics (Goss, 1993; Krippendorf, 1987). This claim is plausible as visitors, who are often in contact with the visited places only temporarily, may not have enough time to understand and appreciate something truly novel to them. Furthermore, the tourists’ typologies proposed by Cohen (1972) and Smith (1989) imply that the balance between novelty seeking and familiarity seeking could be negotiable. The manners in which quests for novelty and already known objects relate to each other appear to need further examination to add value to these arguments.

Although Naoi et al.’s (2007) study elicited relationships between the district’s features and objectives, the relationships between the objectives were not fully examined. Such an examination was attempted in another study (Naoi et al., 2009) with use of slide experiments conducted on non-visitors. However, in the results of exploratory factor analysis of the ratings, all the above-mentioned objectives, except shopping, were found to relate to the same latent variable. This may be attributed to the use of slide experiments on subjects who were not actually visiting the targeted district and, therefore, probably lacked the feeling of real visitation.
2.3 Research Purpose

On account of these issues, this study aims to investigate the relationships between the above-mentioned desires in a quantitative manner with use of participatory research involving photographing by subjects. In contrast to the aforesaid study using slide experiments (Naoi et al., 2009), the subjects were required to evaluate photographs that they themselves took in the targeted district. This method is believed to enable real-time assessments by subjects (Chenoweth, 1984, MacKay & Couldwell, 2004, Oku & Fukumachi, 2006), foster their active involvement (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004), deepen consideration of their views and experiences (Garrod, 2008, Markwell, 2000) and facilitate the evocation of their experiences (Loeffler, 2004). The method, therefore, is expected to palliate, to a certain extent, the drawbacks of the aforementioned study using non-visitors, which did not incorporate subjects’ actual visiting experiences.

III. Method

3.1 Researched District

The research was executed in the Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter in Kurashiki-shi, Okayama Prefecture (Okayama-ken), Japan. The quarter covers 15.0 hectare and includes buildings dating from the Edo period (1600-1867) (Dunton & Winter, n.d.). This district was selected for two reasons. First, it has been one of Japan’s Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings, as designated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan (n.d.), since 1979. At the same time, this district attracted the largest number of visitors (3,242,000) among the top 10 tourist sites in Okayama Prefecture in 2008 according to the latest statistics of Okayama Prefectural Government (n.d.). Therefore, this district can be claimed to have aspects both as a historical place and as a tourism destination.

3.2 Subjects

Two categories of subjects, namely 30 undergraduate non-residents (15 females, 15 males) who majored in commerce, and 27 adult non-residents (12 females, 15 males) with an interest in architecture and/or town planning, participated in the research. The former group was called the undergraduate group and the latter the adult group. The average (mean) age of the undergraduates was 20.4 and that of the adults was 39.9. None of the subjects resided in Kurashiki-shi on the day of their participation.

Convenient sampling was utilised given the possible difficulty of randomly requesting subjects to join a long-time research. The researchers decided to obtain the cooperation of organisations that would assist their sampling of subjects. Five bodies, consisting of two universities, one architectural association and two non-profit organisations, provided assistance for this research.

While the undergraduates were recruited on the campus of Okayama Shoka University by one of the authors, the adults were invited through advertisements posted at the prefectural association of architects and two non-profit bodies involved in town planning, as well as by emails sent to current and former architecture or design students of Okayama Prefectural University. The adult subjects selected for this study belonged to at least one of the three bodies consisting of the prefectural association of architects and two non-profit bodies related to town planning, and/or had a job related to architecture, and/or had studied higher-education courses related to architecture or design.

As Oku and Fukumachi’s (2006) study indicated, the kinds of photographs subjects take may vary depending on the type of subject. In this sense, this study may provide further insights into evaluations of historical districts.

3.3 Procedure

In the case of the undergraduate group, for the convenience of each subject, five sessions were undertaken over the period between 28 October 2006 and 14 July 2007. None of the subjects had ever resided in Kurashiki-shi at the time of their respective session. The session for the adult group was conducted on 16 March 2008.

After assembling at about 10:00, the subjects were given a map showing the area designated as the Kurashiki Bikan Historical Quarter. They were then asked to walk around the designated area for about an hour and take from ten to 20 photographs of settings which they thought were impressive as places to visit, either in a negative or positive sense. The designated area is indicated in blue in the map below (Figure 1). The subjects were instructed also to photograph settings with noteworthy sounds or smells, if applicable. In total, 408 photographs were collected from the undergraduate group, and the adult group produced 476 photographs.

All the photographs were developed during a lunch break of about one hour, and the subjects were asked to choose the ten photographs they found the most impressive, either in a favourable or unfavourable sense. One undergraduate
selected only nine photographs by mistake. As a result, 299 photographs for the undergraduate group and 270 photographs for the adult group were retained for the subsequent steps. The subjects then rated to what extent each photographed setting was perceived to portray the aforementioned nine visiting objectives (Naoi et al., 2007) on five-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very strongly).

IV. Analyses and Results

The collected data, which are ratings of the photographed settings on the nine scales by the subjects, were subjected to two types of factor analysis by each of the two subject groups, the undergraduate and adult groups. Photographs for which missing values were observed were not utilised for further quantitative analyses. Accordingly, 289 photographs for the undergraduate group and 248 photographs for the adult group were subjected to the further analyses.

4.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

First, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the ratings to elicit latent dimensions lying behind the nine objectives and the relationships between the dimensions and the objectives. The number of latent factors was determined so that each component had an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. As relationships between factors might not be orthogonal, Promax rotation, which takes account of the possibility of factors correlating with each other (Field, 2000), was employed. In order to derive solid relationships between the latent factors and objectives, some items were deleted in the course of EFA. In the case of the undergraduate group, items that did not load sufficiently on any factor (“relaxing”: .383 on Factor 1 and .332 on Factor 2) were excluded after the first round of EFA. Then, the items found to present an unclear loading pattern (“Seeing townscape”: .364 on Factor 1 and .474 on Factor 2) after the second round of EFA were deleted. Turning to the adult group, the items found to present an unclear loading pattern (“Seeing, experiencing or obtaining something worth telling others”: .515 on Factor 1 and .405 on Factor 2) according to the results of the first round of EFA were ruled out. After the second round of EFA was conducted, the items that did not load on factors clearly (“Seeing something famous”: .322 on Factor 1 and .463 on Factor 2) were excluded.

4.2 Results of EFA

The results of the final EFA for the undergraduate group and the adult group are illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. The analyses generated two factors for each group. The factors were labelled with reference to items that loaded distinctively on each component. For the undergraduate group, the first factor was labelled Confirmations as items related to conviction of visiting the right place, seeing famous and obtaining something worth telling others loaded distinctively on this factor, which implies confirmation in light of others’ views. The second factor was named Walking as it relates strongly to doings things freely and walking around. Likewise, for the adult group, the first factor was termed Relaxation through wandering as it relates strongly to relaxing, seeing townscape and walking around while the second was labelled Shopping.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Covariance Structure Analysis was performed based on the results of the preceding explorative factor analysis to test the factor structures. Chi-square p (the probability that a chi-square statistic equals or exceeds a chi-square value calculated by chi-square test against the null hypothesis that the model fits the data) of over 0.10 (Yamashita, 1998), AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) of over 0.90 (Moreland & Beach, 1992 as cited in Yamashita, 1998, p. 152), and RMSEA (Root Mean Square of Approximation) of under 0.10 (Yamashita, 1998), were employed as the indices indicating that the model sufficiently fits the data.

In the first model for the undergraduate group, paths from
This was repeated until the fit indices reached acceptable improvement. After the inclusion of each path or covariance, covariances whose modification index suggested the greatest indices to be contributory to better fit indices were added. Inclusion in the model was suggested by modification indices, remained significant through these steps.

As a result of the CFA based on the initial model, all the paths appeared significant, and the fit indices, except Chi-square p, suggested the good fit of the model. The model was then modified according to the same procedure as the one used for the undergraduate group. Consequently, two covariances between errors were added to the original model. In the final model, no modification indices are suggested. In the course of these steps, all the paths and covariances, including the ones added according to the modification indices, remained significant.

4.4 Results of CFA

The final model for the undergraduate group is presented as Figure 2. The two-digit figure beside each arrow refers to a standardised estimate of each parameter. This model indicates a factor that leads to the higher scores of being convinced the right place was visited, obtaining something to tell/show others, seeing something famous, and appreciation of things outside their daily lives, and another factor relating positively to walking around, doing things as liked and shopping. The former factor was named “Confirmation” as it implies confirmation in light of others’ views whereas the latter was termed “Walking freely”.

![Figure 2: The Undergraduates (Objectives)](image)

Figure 2 presents the final model for the adult group. A standardised estimate of each parameter is indicated as the two-digit figure next to each arrow. The results show a factor relating positively to relaxation, walking around, seeing townscape, conviction of having visited the right place, appreciation of things outside their daily lives, and doing things as they like. The other factor has a positive relationship with shopping while relating negatively to relaxation. The first factor was labelled “Relaxation through Wandering”, and the second was termed “Shopping”.

### Table 1: Results of EFA for the Undergraduate Group
(Unweighted Least Squares Method, Promax Rotation, KMO 0.841)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1: Confirmation</th>
<th>Factor 2: Walking Freely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>.796</td>
<td>-.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing townscape</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking around</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being convinced that I have visited the right place</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating something outside my daily life</td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing things freely</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>-.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing shopping</td>
<td>-.844</td>
<td>.576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance Explained (%)

| | 50.339 |

Accumulative Variance Explained (%)

| | 50.339 |

### Table 2: Results of EFA for the Adult Group
(Unweighted Least Squares Method, Promax Rotation, KMO 0.841)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1: Relaxation through Wandering</th>
<th>Factor 2: Shopping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>.796</td>
<td>-.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing townscape</td>
<td>.784</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.844</td>
<td>.576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance Explained (%)

| | 54.686 |

Accumulative Variance Explained (%)

| | 54.686 |

Each latent variable to the observable variables as suggested by the EFA (path between an observable variable and the latent variable on which the observable variable loads more heavily) and covariances between the two latent variables were hypothesised. The paths and/or covariances whose inclusion in the model was suggested by modification indices to be contributory to better fit indices were added. This was done first with the reasonable path and/or covariance whose modification index suggested the greatest improvement. After the inclusion of each path or covariance, another round of confirmative factor analysis was carried out. This was repeated until the fit indices reached acceptable levels. As a result, two covariances between errors were added to the original model. All the paths and covariances, including the ones added according to the modification indices, remained significant through these steps.

Basically the same procedures were employed for the CFA for the adult group, and only the different treatments of data are highlighted here. In the first model, besides the paths from each latent variable to the observable variables as suggested by the EFA and covariances between the two latent variables, the path from “Shopping” to “Relaxing” was also included in light of the relatively significant loading of “Relaxing” on this latent variable as seen in the outcomes of the EFA.
As to the adult group, novelty seeking related positively to relaxation, walking around, and seeing townscape. This result may indicate the subjects’ emphasis on relaxation as well as exploration and may also support Orbasli’s (2000) stress on a sense of discovery offered by walkable environments in a historic place as its attraction. In this sense, the adult group here may be close to the explorer type of visitors, who wish to explore backstreets away from the main thoroughfares and explore the inner states of a precinct (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005). However, the extent to which this result implies the adult group to be explorative is open to question as this factor also relates to the item called “Being convinced that I have visited the right place”. In light of this, the adult group may be argued to perceive walking around the district as a way to follow the established tourist routes, which in Hayllar and Griffin’s (2005) words, are favoured by the browser type of visitors. There seems to be room for discussion on the characteristics of the adult group in terms of their desire to explore and/or secure must-see objects.

Another notable difference between the two groups is observed in the relationships between shopping and the other components. The undergraduate group perceives strolling to be relevant to purchasing activities. This may suggest the subjects’ focus on commercialisation as a source of exploring experiences, possibly due to their major in commerce, and may also question some unfavourable opinions about commercialisation (Boorstin, 1964; Herbert, 1995; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). In contrast, shopping was regarded as counter-contributory to relaxation by the adult group. Based on the above observations, it may be suggested that perceptions of commercialisation in a historical district may be influenced by visitors’ backgrounds.

5.2 Limitations

This study inevitably involves limitations associated with the sampling. The nature of the methodology, which requires sessions that take a long time to complete, may be responsible for this shortcoming. The small sample size also limited the range of the subjects’ variables, such as socio-demographics, psychological characteristics, and travel behaviours, to be examined. As a result, the scope for generalisation of the results was restricted. Another drawback pertaining to the sampling is failure to involve visitors motivated primarily by the enjoyment of sightseeing. Although such a downside may be understandable in view of the importance of and difficulty in securing cooperation
and responses from subjects, it should be noted that this might have narrowed the possibilities of covering the effects of some components, especially contextual factors.

The selection of the district is another source of limitations. Indeed, as Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) argue, the spatial pattern of a historical city as a tourism destination could be diversified by various elements, such as the location, the physical relief, size and cultural and historical variations. This issue may further limit the scope for generalisation of the results of this study, which was conducted in only one specific district. While the coverage of types of historical districts is likely to be limited because of time and budget constraints, efforts to build knowledge through the accumulation of studies treating various cases are necessary.

In light of the burden imposed on the subjects, the number of photographs was limited to between 10 and 20. This and the spread of the participants’ photographing during their picture-taking session may explain another limitation. For example, some subjects might have taken only a small number of photographs at the early stages (Chenoweth, 1984; Garrod, 2007; Stedman et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 1995), or, in contrast, they might have taken many of their photographs at the early stages (Taylor et al., 1995). Although this possible shortcoming cannot be overlooked, allowing subjects to be able to determine their photographing patterns may be desirable in order to elicit their responses based on their spontaneous behaviour.

VI. Conclusions

Despite the above drawbacks, the results of this study offer insights into relationships between tourists’ pursuit of novelty and of well-known things. While these desires may be regarded as contradictory to each other, it may be worthwhile to consider the possibility that visitors’ sense of appreciating famous objects could serve as the basis for their novel experience. The effects of visitors’ characteristics on their perceptions are also implied. In addition to their perceptions of well-known things and novelty, whether commercialisation of the district is regarded favourably or unfavourably may also depend on the visitors.

The acquisition of the above findings may have been made possible by the participatory research model, which enabled assessments by subjects with actual visiting experiences. These implications are expected to play roles as milestones to foster understanding of the relationships between the complex nature of a historical district as a tourism destination and visitors’ also complex objectives. The findings here may also offer suggestions as to how to manage various visitors’ demands considering their backgrounds. In particular, an insight into visitors’ wish to walk around the district may be of benefit to managers who seek ways to extend the areas that visitors venture into although such an attempt may have adverse effects on visitors’ perceptions depending on their characteristics.

Admittedly though, the method employed in this study entails a range of limitations that are mainly attributed to the sampling, selection of sites, and arrangement of sessions. Further studies with use of different types of subjects or districts are expected to overcome such drawbacks. The outcomes of these studies may also lay foundations for more structured investigations of visitors who are motivated primarily towards sightseeing.

References


