

My Favourite Place – Exploring Reasons for Place Preference

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In this paper, we investigate sense of place in the context of *favourite places*, exploring the reasons people give for preferring their favourite places over other places. We conducted an online survey in which we asked 114 respondents to tell us about their favourite places in New Zealand, through textual descriptions and specific, structured questions. Our results show that favourite places are most strongly preferred for their attractiveness, their intrinsic value, and the feelings of safety they engender. Economic value and genealogical links were least important in place preference. Beach environments were also given as common reasons for place preference, and activities were an important factor, with people mentioning friends and family, weather and recreational pursuits such as walking and beach activities. Our analysis also showed correlation between place attachment, identification and spiritual connection for favourite places.

Keywords: sense of place; place preference; favourite places; cultural ecosystem services; volunteered geographic information; crowd sourcing

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1 Introduction

Increasing urbanization and climate change are impacting many of the kinds of environments that support mental and emotional well-being. The protection of favourite places is thus an important consideration for government, residents, policymakers, urban planning groups, and management organizations. A better understanding of the reasons people have for preferring some places over others can enable policymakers to make thoughtful decisions about the community and landscapes, as they consider people's sense of place values during urban planning and management.

Favourite places are places people prefer or like more than others (Korpela, 1992). Favourite places are often located in common areas such as parks, recreational facilities, forests, and in natural settings (Johnsen, 2013; Lecompte et al., 2017; Manzo, 2003; Sampson and Goodrich, 2009), and are liked for their scenic beauty, the activities they support (Brown and Raymond, 2007), or the goods and services they provide (Kantola et al., 2018). They may be visited for their restorative benefits (Korpela and Ylén, 2009), allow self-reflection and thought (Proshansky, 1978), and improve people's well-being, happiness, and enjoyment in life (Korpela et al., 2020).

In this paper, we describe the results of a study that collected data about favourite places in New Zealand from 114 respondents and the reasons for their preferences. We used a web application¹ called 'My Favourite Place' to collect responses to 16 place statements using a 7-point Likert scale; the name and location of respondents' favourite places and text descriptions explaining why they were important.

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Our study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which are the most important reasons for place preference?
2. How are different reasons for place preference correlated with each other?
3. What kinds of activities do people associate with their favourite places?
4. How are favourite places geographically distributed?

2 Related Work

A number of studies have investigated people's attachment to specific places such as the Otways region in Victoria, Australia (Brown and Raymond, 2007); Brittany, France (Lecompte et al., 2017); Westland, New Zealand (Sampson and Goodrich, 2009); Bannockburn, New Zealand (Stephenson, 2008); Camden, England (Lai et al., 2020); Akaroa, New Zealand (Stephenson, 2008); the Kangaroo Islands, Australia (Brown and Raymond, 2007); and the Appalachian Trail in United States (Kyle et al., 2004). However, these studies focus on the locations chosen by the researchers and the values people attach to them, rather than specifically identifying favourite places.

A range of different aspects of people's experiences of place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), known broadly as sense of place, have been studied, including physical attributes (Kyle et al., 2004), social relations, recreational activities, background knowledge, ancestry, place attachment and place dependence (Brown and Raymond, 2007), pride (Magee et al., 2016), place identity (Brown and Weber, 2013), names and locations (Lai et al., 2020), occupation (Sampson and Goodrich, 2009), and landscape values (Brown and Brabyn, 2012). Again, these have not been connected to people's preference for particular favourite places, and our research addresses this gap.

The study of place has been previously investigated through the use of text, with methods including: extracting text from blogs or magazines that refer to activities, attractions, events, locations, and other miscellaneous topics (Adams and McKenzie, 2013); creating place profiles from geo-referenced Twitter tweets about users' activities and events they had attended (Lai et al., 2020); and extracting text descriptions attached to images for place information (Bahrehdar and Purves, 2018) or place description (Wartmann et al., 2021). We make use of similar analysis methods to some of this work (e.g., word clouds, part of speech tagging), but apply them to a new problem: the study of place preference.

3 Method

We created a web application that asked respondents to: identify a favourite place by clicking on a map; provide the name of the place as specifically as possible; explain why it was their favourite place, and answer the 16 statements shown in Table 1 using a 7-point Likert scale. The statements were designed to reflect different aspects of sense of place, and were extracted from the literature (see Table 1 for references). The order of the statements was randomized for each respondent.

Ethical approval was obtained² and participants for the study were recruited through social media postings on selected, relevant fora on seven different platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, Pinterest, and Tumblr). In the time period from the 6th of June 2020 to the 31st of December 2020, 114 responses were collected from 60 males and 54 females of which 104 were citizens or residents, while 10 were non-citizens or non-residents. 25% of respondents were between 20 and 29 years old, 21% between 30 and 39, 21% between 40 and 49 years of age and remainder were outside these age groups. COVID-19 movement restrictions were in place in New Zealand intermittently during that period.

4 Results

We analysed reasons for place preference in two ways. Firstly, we calculated the weighted mean Likert score (degree of agreement) for each of the 16 statements by weighting each response (from *entirely disagree* with weight 1 up to *entirely agree* with weight 7). Table 1 shows these figures in descending order, and indicates that across all favourite places, the *attractive* value had the highest weighted mean Likert score, indicating that attractive scenery, sights, smells, or sounds are key to people's appreciation

Table 1: Place values. Place value expressions and mean likert scores

Statement (<i>Variable name used for later reference</i>)	Reference	Mean
I value this place for the attractive scenery, sights, smells, or sounds (<i>attractive</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	6.66
These places hold their own value and deserve to be here, no matter what I or others think about them, or even if they are actually used (<i>intrinsic</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	6.04
I feel safe at this place (<i>safety</i>).	Erdiaw-Kwasie and Basson 2018	5.95
I like this place because of its recreational outdoor activities (<i>recreational</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	5.91
I value these places because they provide a variety of plants, wildlife, and marine life (<i>wildlife</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	5.89
I am very attached to this place (<i>attachment</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	5.67
This place is valuable because it represents NZ identity (<i>identity</i>).	Brown and Weber 2013	5.61
I get more satisfaction from visiting this place than any other place (<i>dependence</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	5.60
I identify strongly with this place (<i>identification</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	5.30
These areas are valuable because they are wild, uninhabited or relatively untouched by human activity (<i>wilderness</i>).	Brown and Weber 2013	5.18
These places are valuable because they help produce, preserve and renew air, soil and water (<i>ecological</i>).	Brown and Weber 2013	5.00
This place is valuable because it is a place where people can continue to pass down memories, wisdom, traditions or a way of life (<i>memorable</i>).	Brown and Weber 2013	4.52
I value this place because it is spiritually special to me (<i>spiritual</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	4.46
I like this place because of the stories and myths that links me to this place (<i>relationships</i>).	Stephenson 2008	3.94
I value these places for economic benefits such as tourism, forestry, agriculture, or other commercial activity (<i>economic</i>).	Brown and Raymond 2007	3.51
I like this place because of my genealogical links to the land (<i>genealogical</i>).	Stephenson 2008	3.17

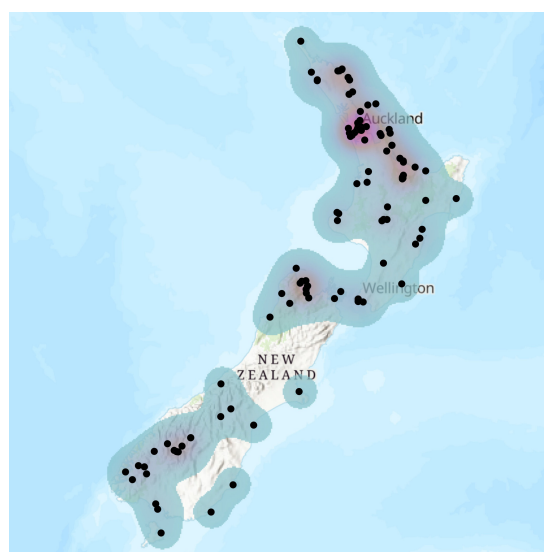


Figure 3: Favourite places

ecological had a correlation of 0.61, all of which are considered moderate levels of correlation (Schober et al., 2018). The first two of these indicates that respondents who valued their favourite place for spiritual reasons often also felt strongly identified with it, and those who strongly identified with their favourite place likely also showed strong place attachment. The third correlation confirms the strong association between wildlife and ecological value, but surprisingly both showed weak correlation with the intrinsic, wilderness, and aesthetic statements.

Favourite places were found in 15 regions across New Zealand as shown in Figure 3: 14% were found in each of Auckland (New Zealand's biggest city) and the Bay of Plenty, 11% in Northland, 10% in the Tasman region, and 9% in islands around New Zealand. The highest average Likert mean score (5.71) was in Northland, followed by Canterbury (5.56), indicating higher agreement with statements across the board. Five regions scored the maximum possible mean score (7) for the *attractive* statement: Marlborough, West Coast, Canterbury, Taranaki, and Manawatu, although these regions had low (2–4) response numbers. The West Coast also scored a high Likert mean score of 7 for the *safety* value.

5 Conclusion

This research has shown that participants valued places most importantly for being attractive, for their intrinsic value, or for feelings of safety associated with them, with comparatively low importance given to economic value or genealogical links. The emphasis on aesthetic beauty, recreation, activities, and wilderness values was also demonstrated with the word clouds, suggesting that favourite places are places of beauty, enjoyment, security, activity, fun, or to visit while on holiday. The results further indicate that walking, beach, and bird watching activities are important, and that beach environments are popular.

Notes


1. <https://myfavouriteplace.massey.ac.nz/favourite.html>
2. Massey University, low-risk ethical approval, Number 4000022298
3. <https://nlp.stanford.edu/software/tagger.html>

Author Contributions

J Richardson developed the website, performed recruitment, data collection, and data analysis, and wrote the first draft of the paper. K Stock initiated the favourite places idea, supervised the study, and revised the paper.

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