

Place Attachment as Basic Condition for Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction in East African Wetland Users

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Abstract : The current status of wellbeing and life satisfaction of subsistence farmers in a wetland in Uganda and the contributing role of place attachment has been assessed. The aim of this study is to shed light on environmental factors supporting wellbeing in a wetland setting. Furthermore, it has been assessed, how the emotional bonding to the wetland as 'place' influences the peoples' wellbeing and life satisfaction. The results shed light on the human-environment-relationship. A survey was carried out in three communities in urban and rural areas in a wetland basin in Uganda. A sample (n=235) provided information about the attachment to the wetland, the participants' relation to the place of their residence and their emotional wellbeing. The Wellbeing Index (WHO-5) was assessed as well as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (RSE). Furthermore, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was applied as well as the Place Attachment Inventory (PAI), which consists of the two intertwined dimensions of place identity and place dependence. Beside this, binary indicators as 'feeling save' and 'feeling comfortable' and 'enjoying to live at the place of residence' have been assessed. A bivariate correlation analysis revealed a high interconnectivity between all metric scales. Especially, the subscale 'place identity' showed significances with all other scales. A cluster analysis revealed three groups, which differed in the perception of place-related indicators and their attachment to the wetland as well as the status of wellbeing. First, a cluster whose majority is dissatisfied with their lives, but mainly had a good status of emotional well-being. This group does not feel attached to the wetland and lives in a town. Comparably less persons of this group feel safe and comfortable at their place of residence. In the second cluster, persons feel highly attached to the wetland and identify with it. This group was characterized by the high number of persons preferring their current place of residence and do not consider moving. All persons feel well and satisfied with their lives. The third group of persons is mainly living in rural areas and feels highly attached to the wetland. They are satisfied with their lives, but only a small minority is in a good emotional state of wellbeing. The emotional attachment to a place influences life satisfaction and, indirectly, the emotional wellbeing. In the present study it could be shown that subsistence farmers are attached to the wetland, as it is the source of their livelihood. While those living in areas with a good infrastructure are less dependent on the wetland and, therefore, less attached to. This feeling also was mirrored in the perception of a place as being safe and comfortable. The identification with a place is crucial for the feeling of being at "home". Subsistence farmers feel attached to the ecosystem, but they also might be exposed to environmental and social stressors influencing their short-term emotional wellbeing. The provision of place identity is an ecosystem service provided by wetlands, which supports the status of wellbeing in human beings.

Keywords : mental health, positive environments, quality of life, wellbeing

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