

Satisfaction from Conservation Activities in North America

Introduction

Americans, says pollster Harris (1977), 'have begun to show a deep skepticism about the nation's capacity for unlimited economic growth', and they have even begun to question the benefits of such growth. These same individuals, Harris goes on to report, are eager to learn how to gain satisfaction from non-material experiences. Inglehart (1977) has noted this same shift in other western nations—a shift from an 'overwhelming emphasis on material well-being and physical security toward greater emphasis on the quality of life.' People are not ignoring all tangible indicators of well-being; they are far too practical for that. Instead they are looking for a broader definition of their well-being. Yankelovich (1981) has discussed the adaptive nature of this shift:

'A person who gauges his or her self-worth in terms of a bigger car, a better neighborhood, and a steadily rising income, does well in good times. These signs of success are satisfyingly tangible, visible to others as well as to one's self. When incomes fail to keep pace with inflation, however, the person who gauges self-worth in terms of less tangible quality-of-life values may have a broader range of life satisfactions to fall back on.'

If well-being is important to leading an effective existence, and if this well-being is to be increasingly linked with intangibles, then research must become more concerned with these elusive yet powerful sources of satisfaction. The purpose of this submission is to report on several recent investigations of environmentally responsible behaviours, covering two main themes:

1. There is a clear and stable structure to the satisfactions which people report deriving from daily conservation activities.
2. These satisfactions are independent of satisfactions gained from material things.

Satisfactions

Much of the emphasis in conservation research has been on attitudes (Weigel, 1983) and incentives (Cone & Hayes, 1980; Geller *et al.*, 1982), with insufficient attention given to the satisfactions which people derive from the activity itself. The major body of literature that addresses satisfactions from an empirical viewpoint is referred to as 'social indicators research' (Campbell *et al.*, 1976; Campbell, 1981). Within the limits of this literature, satisfaction is measured in a global sense—often with reference to such content-areas as private life, social life, and public problems (Andrews & Withey, 1976); and very often these measures of satisfaction tend towards a single, gross national product type of measure of well-being.

However, the ecological appropriateness of different daily activities varies considerably. While each behaviour may contribute to some particular form of satisfaction, one would not expect every behaviour to produce the same type of personal satisfaction. For instance, people may gain satisfaction from avoiding the creation of unnecessary waste (a satisfaction from frugality), as well as from having and using certain convenience products (a satisfaction from luxuries). While one would expect an activity such as re-using materials around the house to provide a satisfaction from frugality, one would not expect it to increase satisfaction from luxuries. Thus a multidimensional structure to satisfactions might be expected.

There are two reasons why empirical support for the multidimensional nature of satisfactions would be helpful

to have. First, many conservation activities are repetitive elements of common, everyday behaviours (Simmons *et al.*, 1984–85). A framework for investigating the types of satisfactions that exist at this relatively mundane level of behaviour, could be of considerable interest to intrinsic motivation and social indicators research workers.

Second, in the general environmental literature there are suggestions that some individuals derive considerable amounts of non-economic satisfaction from 'ordinary conservation activities'. If these satisfactions were found to form a coherent and stable structure, then that structure might be useful in making conservation satisfying to a wider clientele and hence larger population.

Satisfaction and Conservation

A multidimensional structure to satisfaction has been reported in several studies of conservation behaviour, both in Canada (DeYoung & Robinson, in press) and in the United States (DeYoung, 1984). These studies have involved separate random samples, as the Canadian survey focused on water conservation while the United States surveys have concentrated on recycling and re-using behaviours. Although the survey instruments were not identical, they did have some portions in common. The findings reported here are derived from those common portions of the surveys. Three satisfactions are examined in detail: *frugality* (i.e. the avoidance of wasteful practices), *participation* in activities that can make a difference in the long run, and *luxuries* (i.e. having access to the material benefits afforded by society).

Frugality:—The relationships between the environmentally appropriate behaviours of recycling, re-using materials, and water conservation, together with their satisfaction-dimensions, have followed a meaningful and stable pattern across all the three items studied. In particular, the respondents have associated satisfaction from frugality (e.g. avoiding wastefulness, saving and repairing things, keeping things running long past their normal life) with household conservation activities.

This finding is particularly interesting because the idea of frugality is intimately tied to a conservation ethic; frugality and hard work have long been the hallmarks of Western culture. While one is regularly reminded that such simple values build character, the respondents in each of the three studies seem to go beyond the utilitarian nature of frugality to suggest that it also provides reward and fulfilment.

Participation:—Respondents have also reported that conservation is an opportunity to participate in a community activity and a way of taking action which can change the world. Satisfaction from participation is not just a general 'sense of satisfaction' but a satisfaction from making a difference—from doing things that matter in the long run.

The satisfaction-from-participation dimension reminds one that humans are not passive beings, willing to accept solutions from kindly others, but rather are active, knowledge-generating and knowledge-utilizing creatures. This information-processing view of participation, and the sense that humans are deeply concerned about this concept, has gained wide support (see Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982). That humans would derive satisfaction from activities which they are deeply concerned about, has an intuitive credibility. The sense of being needed or of having a chance

to influence how things are done, are not luxuries but necessary parts of our well-being. The respondents, as had done others before them, highlighted the importance of having a chance to be involved. They were also aware of the relationship between this satisfaction and conservation behaviour.

Luxuries, and the independence of satisfaction from them:— In each study, a satisfaction-from-luxuries dimension was identified that focused on the pleasures gained from having the comforts and conveniences of modern society. This dimension reflects the satisfaction which people experience in being a member of a thriving community—participating in the good life.

In a hasty analysis, one might conclude that satisfaction gained from luxuries is the direct opposite of the other satisfactions. Yet in all three studies all satisfaction-dimensions have had similar mean scores, and the luxuries dimensions have had generally positive and always very low correlations with the other satisfaction-dimensions. This suggests that satisfaction from luxuries is not the antithesis of satisfaction from frugality or participation.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of significant relationships with any of the conservation behaviours studied. This supports the idea that there is no conflict between a life-style of modern convenience and comfort, and behaving in an ecologically responsible manner. Together, these findings suggest that environmentally appropriate activities might be made to appeal to a broad cross-section of North Americans (the well-off and disadvantaged alike) rather than just to people of a Spartan nature.

Conclusion

One must avoid equating quality of life or sense of well-being with economic standard of living. The North American public is concerned about intangible as well as tangible indicators of well-being. In fact, a shift towards deriving one's well-being from intangible resources would seem an adaptive response to a people-rich but concomitantly resource-poor world.

Despite the common-sense nature of these findings, their application to the plight of the disadvantaged is often overlooked. Clearly, human well-being can be increased in many non-economic ways. Due to the plurality of human satisfaction, people have the potential to improve their quality of life even if they have difficulty in moving rapidly up the economic ladder. For this potential to be realized, however, people must be able to become involved in their environment: they must be able to take actions, to explore, and to experiment, on a daily basis. They must, in short, experience the environment as supportive of their concern to participate and always avoid wastefulness.

Fortunately, the urban environment can be designed and managed in ways that enhance environmental supportiveness (Kaplan, 1983). In fact, creating supportive environments may be vital, in terms of equity and justice, for those of limited resources, as it provides alternate routes to a satisfying existence.

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