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Recommended Citation

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**Narratives About the Role of Recreation, Place Attachment, and Community Attachment
and their Effects on Youth Future Orientation in New Hampshire**

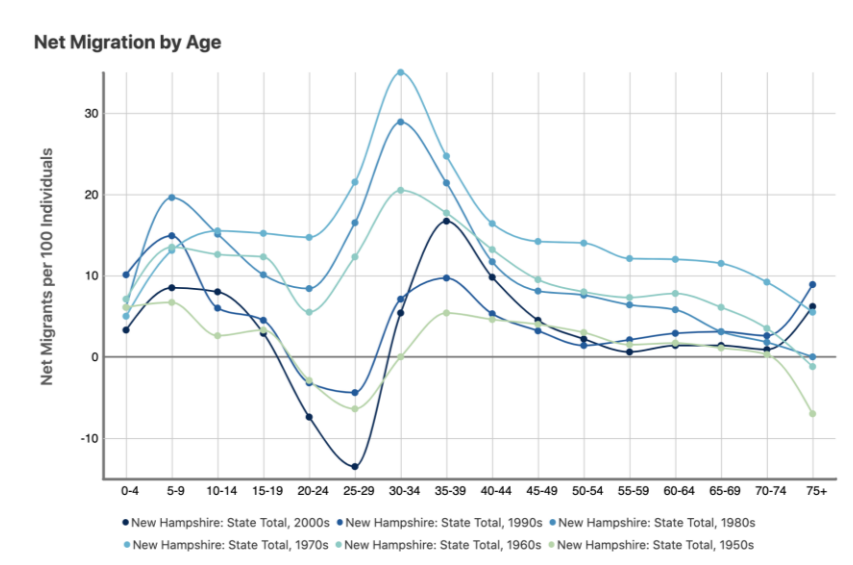
Hannah Falcone

Introduction

Two months since you got back
How have you been and are you bored yet?
The weather ain't been bad
If you're into masochistic bulls**t
And every photograph
That's taken here is from the summer
Some guy won Olympic gold
Eight years ago, a distance runner
And that makes a lot of sense
This place is such great motivation
For anyone trying to move
The f*** away from hibernation

Noah Kahan, a music artist who attended high school in Hanover, New Hampshire, has recently risen to fame for one of his songs *Homesick* that encapsulates the experience and frustrations of growing up in small New Hampshire/Vermont towns. The irony of the song title, as well as the unhappiness expressed in the song lyrics emphasize the emotions young people may be processing as they make challenging decisions about their futures in their hometowns. This pop culture reference exemplifies larger statewide concerns in New Hampshire about the migration and population stability of young people in the state. For many years, New Hampshire has observed a pronounced migration pattern among its young adults. As captured by the chart below, throughout the past 50 years, New Hampshire has observed a repeated steep decline in the overall number of people between the ages of 29-29. In addition to this, although migration is

a small factor, its older population continues to grow as a result of the aging current population of New Hampshire.



These population and migration trends are a concern for New Hampshire policy makers because of the population required to provide human capital and to consume the state's goods and services (Johnson, 2012). A 2022 press release from the NH Governor to promote the InvestNH housing fund suggests this is an issue NH state government feels is salient since expensive housing is one of the key barriers to younger adults remaining in the state. A 2017 study conducted by StayWorkPlay New Hampshire reiterates this concern, citing repeatedly that expensive housing was a primary reason young adults gave for wanting to leave the state. Additionally, as found by this study, young people are attracted to New Hampshire for its natural resource amenities, its safety, and tax affordability. These also may be reasons why it is successful in attracting certain out-of-state migrants. Although there has been a recent increase in diversity in the state of New Hampshire, it is still predominantly white as evidenced by this brief from the UNH Carsey School (2019). This study also finds that there is a greater amount of diversity among the younger population than among the older population in the state, however

the question of retention as the population ages remains. It also suggests that more migrants to New Hampshire are not members of a minority population. Finally, there is also data to suggest that many young people raised in New Hampshire leave, but eventually return when they are ready to raise families, pursue a career, or both (Johnson, 2012).

While state policies exist to benefit both established adult populations moving back into the state as well as general migration into the state, not much policy effort has been directed towards retaining youth talent raised in the state of New Hampshire. A few studies have been conducted regarding older adults in the state of New Hampshire. For example, a study conducted by Stay Work Play New Hampshire in December 2017 found that 51% of the NH adults aged 20-40 surveyed were born in the state. Approximately 21% of these individuals described themselves as friendless, 59% were satisfied with life in NH and 30% said they were likely to move. This study also recorded various qualitative reasons participants gave for liking or not liking life in NH, including: “the wages around here are low, but the rent is so high,” and “the local political scene is dominated by an older demographic that is resistant to change.” While it is beneficial to have this data and it is somewhat transferrable to the younger NH population, there is a gap in understanding the messages NH youth receive and process considering their futures in the state.

Because New Hampshire will need many people of a younger demographic to provide human capital and contribute to their communities, it is justified to explore attitudes toward and measures of retaining the state’s younger population. Elements of recreation, both at a young age and into the teenage years, may create a “stickiness” that encourages youth to remain in the state where they grew up. However, little is known how policy makers, administrators and program providers across the areas of education, workforce, and quality of life sectors view recreation and

larger community engagement as an important tool in retaining youth in NH. This qualitative study investigates the narratives of the efficacy and utility of recreation as a youth retention tool through the concepts of future orientation, place attachment, and community attachment. These concepts are necessary to examine to understand the factors that contribute to youth decisions to stay or leave. The findings presented in this paper may uncover best practices and policy directives for youth retention through meaningful recreation experiences in New Hampshire.

Literature Review

To lend context to administrators' perceptions of the youth retention issue in New Hampshire, a thorough examination of existing literature related to youth future orientation as well as place and community attachment is crucial. First, the idea of future orientation will be explored to identify how it is that youth make decisions related to their futures. Then, the concept of place attachment will be discussed and in the final section, community attachment. These two sections will provide context for whether feelings of fondness for a place or a community influence the decision to stay or leave. All three of the focuses of this review are united by one common thread: their correlation with meaningful recreation experiences, which can steer future orientation as well as grow place and community attachment. These are the components of "stickiness" which will contribute to overall youth retention.

Future Orientation

Future orientation is the subjective view youth have of their futures, which contribute unconsciously to their decision-making processes as they maneuver through life. As young people come of age, they begin to make decisions based on their perceptions of what they expect

their futures to be like, including their envisioned future for their quality of life in a specific place. In turn, the decisions they make impact the courses of their lives (Sharp, 2020). In addition to traditional choices surrounding educational and career decisions, some examples of these youth decisions are choosing where to live in relationship to their childhood homes (Ronnlund, 2020), selecting extracurricular or recreational involvement to participate in, and deciding how to spend their free time (Sharp & Coatsworth, 2012). Factors of identity also have influence over an individual's future orientation, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and race, as well as experiences individuals undergo alongside their families and community (Seginer, 2009). As Sharp (2020) specifies in her article, future orientation is comprised of two separate ideas: future aspirations and future expectations. While aspirations are often idealistic, lofty and ambitious, expectations tend to be grounded and closer to reality, although they are also reported as optimistic. As youth grow older and gain understanding of their abilities as well as factors that constrain them, their lives become increasingly like what they previously depicted as their future expectations. The formation of these future aspirations and expectations are closely tied to the interactions youth have with the people, locations, and experiences that surround them, also known as the ecological systems theory. It is these interactions with their surroundings that shapes youths' perspectives of what they can accomplish in the future, and what they can experience and accomplish in the area where they grow up (Sharp, 2020). The recreational experiences youth encounter at a young age in their hometowns are critical in not only preparing youth for the future but demonstrating that there is potential for success in the state where they were raised.

In addition to these benefits offered by recreational opportunities, a 2005 study across three countries found that access to recreational opportunities provides youth with the

opportunity to develop their identities, a process which shapes their perceptions of what they can accomplish in the future (Coatsworth). The “self-defining activities” enabling identity development were those which resonated with youth skills and interests and which youth participated in freely. Activities prescribed by work or by jobs were not found to have the same benefits, as youth did not choose to participate in those activities of their own free will. Of the five activity categories discussed in the data, youth ranked academic and work activities as inspiring the least amount of flow and personal expressiveness. This is consistent with other studies that have found that academic and work settings are not effective in offering a space for youth involvement and identity development. In determining this data, this study measured factors of flow, personal expressiveness, and goal-directed behavior which help youth come to understand what they are capable of and what they feel passionate about (Coatsworth, 2005). An additional study observing youth participation in “self-defining” activities found that most young adults can identify a few activities they participate in as such. Additionally, this study found that boys reported lower expressive identity scores in academic and work-related activities than did girls. Beyond identity development and shaping youth future decision making, the study found that self-defining activity involvement was linked with overall youth wellbeing (Coatsworth 2006).

In addition to activity involvement, social behavior plays a significant role in shaping youth future orientation. A study conducted by Trommsdorff found that the relationship between socialization and future orientation is reciprocal; the social interactions experienced by youth shaped their ideas of the future and their ideas of the future influenced who they interacted with. Another key finding from this study is that adolescents who received low support from their educators and parents had less structure in their future orientation and did not perceive

themselves as being able to influence their future. Youth who received support from their educators and parents were much more confident and optimistic about their future (Trommsdorff 1983). Another factor that often leads to community attachment is group activity participation. Beyond social bonds created by homophily, social capital, or focus theory, a 2015 study by Sharp et. al found that youth who were more involved in structured group activities had better overall educational, psychological and behavioral outcomes. The highly and moderately involved youth in this study also had better grades, higher future education expectations, as well as being less likely to be involved in substance use. Another study finding is that little to no involvement in external activities is associated with negative youth outcomes.

Place Attachment

Place attachment is a strong emotional connection between an individual and a setting that holds importance or significance to them. These feelings may arise due to a significant experience transpiring in a place, due to being raised in a place and interacting with it throughout developmental years, or because of ongoing routines and actions in relation to a place (Altman & Low, 1992). Many articles primarily about place attachment suggest that it is closely related to community attachment, since a primary motivation for visiting physical spaces is the social interactions that occur there (Colistra et. al, 2018; Trentelman, 2019). Other scholars have suggested that place attachment can be identified as being on a two-pronged scale of place identity and place dependence. Place dependence relates to a setting providing conditions to support a specific recreational activity an individual enjoys, such as rowing a boat on the river or going mountain biking on trails in the forest. Place identity relates to individuals becoming used

to the natural settings around them and eventually identifying with these physical features of a space (Brown & Raymond, 2007).

Another factor that may influence the development of place attachment within an individual is spiritual connection with a natural setting. As explored by Schmidt and Little, spiritual experiences and instances of strong emotions are often experienced by people who choose to recreate outdoors. Although the individuals involved in this study held different religious beliefs or none, comparable spiritual experiences were attained in their favorite nature spots. The participants were similarly not able to put these feelings into words, describing the emotions the setting evoked as “fuzzy” or “intangible” yet fully accepted by the individual having the encounter with the outdoors. These experiences with nature are additionally deeply impactful to these individuals because they provided them an escape from everyday life, enabled connection with themselves on a spiritual level, and granted a sense of freedom unattainable in other settings. These deep emotions based around the idea of spirituality further an understanding of the idea of place attachment and one of the reasons why natural settings are attractive to individuals (Schmidt & Little, 2017).

In addition to spiritual aspects of place attachment, the consistent natural setting in which a child is raised can be the cause of a strong bond of place attachment. In a 2010 article by Morgan, developmental place attachment is explored and associated with the attachment figure. This model describes the youth pattern of exploration and adventure into unfamiliar portions of the physical environment, then when the child experiences anxiety, other overwhelming feelings, or are tired, they turn to the familiar physical environment they are most familiar with for comfort and emotional regulation. Some findings of this study included examples of prominent moments when study participants returned to their childhood settings for comfort and emotional

regulation and additionally overall themes related to why participants returned to these settings. These included intense periods of grief, strong love for a developmental childhood setting that evolved from feeling “nurtured” or “raised” by a space, feelings of pleasure in seeing and experiencing nostalgic spaces, and senses of security and identity evoked by familiar settings.

Beyond childhood places mattering to individuals, a 2001 study conducted by Gustafson found that places can represent different feelings, such as freedom, self-discovery, experience, knowledge, to individuals at different points in their lives. This is especially true for people who are mobile throughout their lives and do not spend much time in one area before moving on. The feelings evoked by these spaces visited by individuals at different key points in their lives came to be meaningful due to the developmental growth they came to represent.

Community Attachment

As discussed by various place scholars, community attachment is a concept that greatly overlaps with place attachment although it specifically originated in community sociology literature. Although it remains an elusive concept to define, it is generally regarded as particular individuals’ sentiments towards a community and their “rootedness,” or desire to remain in or return to that community. Community attachment develops due to interactions individuals have with other members in the community and shared experiences between a population. The size of a particular community is also important to consider as the larger a community is, the weaker the bonds are in that community and thus there is less overall community attachment (Trentlemen, 2009). Physical place does matter in the conversation surrounding community attachment. An article by Brehn et. al adds that a common space the community resides in is helpful to the development of community ties (2006). This is due to specific terms or local slang becoming

adopted for physical features of a place and common relatability to a given setting within which members of the community reside.

Three other factors that lead to the formation of community attachment are homophily, focus theory, and social capital. Homophily is the idea that individuals who have identities in common such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, form connections more often than individuals who do not. Race and ethnicity are the best predictor of whether individuals will bond due to homophily, followed closely by age. Homophily can also be understood in a geographical context, as individuals who live in and frequent the same areas are much more likely to encounter people than those that live further away and thus are more likely to bond with them. Homophily can also be ideological, meaning that individuals with similar beliefs are more likely to bond. Comparable to the idea of homophily, focus theory states that individuals who are rallied around a common cause or physical location, such as community soccer or a local church, are more likely to become connected to each other. Finally, social capital occurs when individuals in the same community or group come together and achieve goals that would not be attainable by one individual alone. Social ties form due to investment in the other individuals in that group. (Colistra, Bixler & Schmalz, 2018).

The development of a sense of community attachment based on these three concepts (homophily, focus theory, social capital) is beneficial to youth who experience it. Youth who perceive they are loved and appreciated by the larger community around them, composed of supportive adults and peers, will develop a sense of security. This feeling of security, as well as a general feeling of belonging, will equip a young person with the confidence they need to be successful in making future decisions and accepting opportunities (Crespo et. al, 2013). In their article, Gundy et. al describes community attachment as a key component of overall adolescent

wellbeing and adds that a key component of community attachment is knowing others in the community share similar values and understanding (2011). By way of the formation of social groups where youth feel safe to be themselves, community attachment promotes youth exploration of identities, a key component of adolescent development.

As mentioned previously in this paper, youth involved in structured group activities were found to have better overall educational, psychological, and behavioral outcomes besides growing closer to the group community as a result of participating in said activities (Sharp et. al, 2015). In addition to community activity involvement leading to better personal outcomes for youth, another study found that youth involved in an early development childhood program had a greater emotional connection with their community than youth not involved in the program. They were also less likely to have mental health issues and more likely to become engaged with the community they lived in later in life (Hasford, Loomis & Pancer, 2013).

Literature Review Summary

Since recreation experiences can have an influence on the development of place and community attachment and the formation of such community and place relationships can influence youth future orientation, all three of these concepts are the tools to create “stickiness,” or overall youth fondness and attachment to a particular location and community. Youth future orientation is primarily composed of influences of personal identity, parental and peer opinions, and perceptions of what they can achieve in the future. It can also be influenced by fondness and attachment to a particular community. Place attachment and community attachment are the reasons why meaningful recreation experiences in a particular setting can lead to youth future orientation in that same setting. Thus, it is important to understand that natural landscapes have

an influence on people that experience them and can create spiritual, familiar, and nostalgic feelings of fondness. Community attachment unites individuals in similar situations through social capital, homophily, and focus theory. These relationships have the potential to become significant enough to influence future orientation. The components of future orientation, place attachment, and community attachment are the solution to increasing youth desire to live in New Hampshire, through participation in meaningful recreation activities.

Methods

This study was created using existing qualitative data collected for another University of New Hampshire research project funded by a UNH CoRE Initiative: the NH Youth Retention Initiative. Based on the population and migration issues described in the introduction, this data was collected to address the issue of New Hampshire youth outmigration and to develop initial findings that would guide the next steps of this multi-phase study. The initial data was collected with the aims of 1) exploring youth future orientation from a stakeholder perspective, 2) expanding the number of career and educational opportunities viewed as relevant to NH youth retention efforts, 3) determining state-wide themes from area-specific instances of youth future planning, and 4) consolidating stakeholder perspectives across the fields of policy work, education, and programming. The specific research questions for this project were the following: “What messages about educational opportunities, employment opportunities, retention, and quality of life are circulating within NH?” and “What messages are youth and families receiving about educational opportunities, employment opportunities, retention, and quality of life within NH?” These questions, and iterations of these questions, provided data by which to explore the secondary research questions within this study.

This study takes a methodological approach guided by ideas from Syed and McLean (2022) in their article, who question the idea of opportunities to seek and live a “good life” when taking into consideration the obstacles that society places on individuals through the presence of master narratives. Master narratives put structural constraints on individuals, affecting their experience in life. Reviewing the opinions of stakeholders on how youth make decisions about their futures reveals some of the master narratives that may be affecting the decision making of these New Hampshire youth, including whether to stay or leave. Syed and McLean (2022) suggest youth agency is not an individual matter but rather they experience the ripple effects of the macrosystem, exosystem, etc. While this data was initially collected for the purposes of another project, examining it with this philosophy in mind allows for additional insight as to how to increase youth retention in the state.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to collecting this data, IRB approval for research involving human subjects was sought and approved. In this study, a series of 32 Zoom interviews lasting approximately between 30-60 minutes were conducted with stakeholders who either fit into the category of Administrator (15 participants), Agenda-setter (10 participants), Program Provider (6 participants), or Other (1 participants). In addition, three focus groups were held with stakeholders involved in either career/education counseling or youth programming. A semi-structured interview guide was used. These questions were based around state retention, educational and vocational goals, and support of development of New Hampshire youth as it related to the goals of each stakeholder. Each interview or focus group session was audio recorded and transcribed for future reference.

This data was analyzed to understand stakeholders' perceptions of the importance of recreation and quality of life attributes to youth future orientation and retention in the state. A grounded theory approach was used. First, open coding was conducted using NVIVO to understand general themes occurring across several transcripts. The researchers discussed the emerging themes in terms of their quality, conditions, and consequences on youth future orientation. Once open coding was complete and a final code list was secured, axial coding was completed with the entire set of 32 transcripts. Four themes were developed to describe stakeholder perceptions of how recreation opportunities influence future orientation. Methods for ensuring reliability included regular researcher meetings to discuss emerging themes during open coding and memoing during coding.

Findings

From the data, the stakeholder perspectives on the factors affecting how youth make decisions related to their future resulted in four main findings. The first finding is that administrators perceived that recreation opportunities did not matter as much when it came to youth making decisions about their futures, it was more related to career and education opportunities. The second finding is that there is a significant lack of New Hampshire state branding, but stakeholders related this perceived branding to include outdoor recreation opportunities unique to the state of New Hampshire. There was a shared perception that New Hampshire should be better branded as a means of attracting and retaining more youth to these recreation opportunities. A third finding is that there is a lack of youth-driven opportunities in the state, including a dearth of opportunities for youth to contribute to decision-making organizations. Finally, the last finding is that there is a large assumption that youth will leave

New Hampshire in order to pursue an education or a particular career path, then return later in life to raise a family or contribute to the workforce in the pleasant setting of New Hampshire.

Finding 1: Education and workforce opportunities have a larger impact on youth future orientation than recreation opportunities

Throughout the study, a significant portion of interviews indicated that a common perception is held among many stakeholders that youth make migration decisions based on future opportunities available to them rather than around recreation availability and quality of life attributes. Many interviews suggested that youth migration patterns were caused by high cost of higher education and living:

"if we can't control our cost of education, then [the youth are] going to continually go somewhere else... for their education. And then see, 'oh, it's a little bit cheaper here.'... 'I have the same exact things that I would have in New Hampshire, but here, and I can afford... a nice two-bedroom apartment.' Ya know, that doesn't have you know, horsehair walls."

On this topic, nearly everyone agreed that the cost of living in New Hampshire is high and not feasible for young people pursuing higher education or just beginning in the workforce. Other interviews, like the following, suggested that job opportunities simply paid more in other states: "And so if we look at New Hampshire versus Massachusetts, a lot of those 17, 18-year-olds that aren't looking to go back to college are actually securing jobs across the border because they are getting paid more for those blue-collar jobs." Overall, many interviews were focused around the impact education and workforce opportunities had on youth future orientation, meaning that it is likely youth are also focused on college and career opportunities and not taking

into consideration the quality-of-life elements of where they end up living. It suggests youth are willing to make lifestyle tradeoffs (e.g., living away from family in NH) in order to have better career opportunities.

Additionally, many interviews agreed that certain career paths that are appealing to youth may not be available in the state of NH, encouraging them to venture beyond the state's borders to pursue a particular program or career training opportunity. This sentiment is expressed in the following excerpt from one interviewee.

“a lot of them are looking at really targeted subject areas, you know, like that Cornell might be the best school to offer the one thing that they're super interested in. So it's not like, ‘Oh, hey, I don't want to come to UNH and I want to get out of New Hampshire.’ It's just that another school might have exactly what they're looking for.”

While stakeholders acknowledge that New Hampshire has natural amenities that are appealing to some, both the high cost of living in state and more appealing career and education opportunities in other states pull youth away from NH. There is a shared sentiment in many interviews that some youth have a desire to live in certain parts of New Hampshire but are unable to afford it. One interviewee talks about how she knows many youth would love to live in the Seacoast area but it is simply not within their price range.

“I think that there's enough places in New Hampshire that you can find...what you're looking for, but only if you can afford to live there. You know, like they could never they love, they love the Seacoast, and a lot of their friends live. They couldn't afford an apartment in Portsmouth, or Dover or anything like that. There's no way.”

While there is conversation about the appeal of the natural amenities of New Hampshire, there is a lack of discussion of youth connection to their communities throughout the data, a finding that will be discussed later on in this section.

Finding 2: There is a lack of New Hampshire branding, and perceptions of possible branding are highly associated with a narrow focus on outdoor recreation opportunities in the state.

A second finding that was consistent across the interviews is that New Hampshire lacks a sense of statewide branding and often overfocuses on outdoor recreation. This lack of branding makes it difficult for people, especially young people, to identify with the state and develop senses of place and community attachment. The below quote from an interviewee captures this sense of lack of branding well:

“Which is to say, not at all. But they should be working together, because there's some major issues. Workforce is a huge issue that the companies like [Company A, Company B, and Company C], all major companies, they can't get...workers and Company C pays \$60,000 starting wages...and I think it's because...young people look at that place and...they don't see anything that's attractive and, nor does the region do a good job of packaging and selling its natural amenities.”

This quote, and many others in the data set, expresses a desire for places in New Hampshire to make an effort to appeal to young people through marketing and “selling” what they have to offer. Stakeholders also remarked that “natural amenities” are an appealing resource associated with the state, highlighting the importance of recreation opportunities in the minds of stakeholders. The following quote from a stakeholder interview illustrates this effectively: “You could be working in New Hampshire and popping in your kayak...by 4pm.” A second quote

supports this: “it's that quality of life, it's that access to the trails and the amenities, the ability to go out in your backyard and go for a walk in the woods.” Throughout the interviews, there is an overemphasis on outdoor recreation as the perceived branding strategy portrayed by stakeholders. Primarily, outdoor recreation elements are mentioned, and stakeholders expressing that these opportunities are what the state has to offer to youth and to everyone else potentially interested in moving to the state. A few interviewees mentioned that not every young person in the state has access to outdoor recreation opportunities such as these due to information and financial barriers.

“I do think access is a big part. Relationships and access is such a big part of this, right? Because when you have access and resources, it's Pat's Peak. It's just a normal experience in the winter, right? Or if you even more, it could be water, Water Valley or whatever other thing is, right? Or a summer camp or whatever. And if you don't really have that access, you might not even know that particular thing even exists. And because you don't know, relationships that people are leveraging and in fully utilizing all the State has to offer, you're limited in what you think is possible.”

Countless interviews describe that recreational amenities are a key part of the appeal to entice youth to stay in New Hampshire. A good example of this is found in the following recreation worker's interview about how skiing encourages attachment to place in youth, and thus all youth in the state should be connected with a skiing experience.

“it's an example of how New Hampshire can message to younger people in a more direct way. So, Cannon Mountain is part of the state park system at Franconia State Park and it's a beautiful state park. All people get to [ski free if they're 65 or older]. I thought I want to flip that around. I'd like to make sure that every family in inner city Manchester knows that when their

kid turns 10, they have, you know, three ski lessons and seasons pass at Cannon. Because we believe that if kids are exposed to skiing or snowboarding, they're going to fall in love with it. And there are too many kids in this state who live in New Hampshire and don't have that opportunity.”

However, as the previous quote points out, privilege and access play a role in these aspects. There is an implication throughout the interviews that outdoor recreation is a large part of what the state has to offer, but there is also the underlying suggestion that these opportunities are not within reach or even attractive for all youth. An example of not all recreational activities being attractive to youth is found throughout many interviews as well, many interviewees describe youth being drawn to places that are bustling and full of energy, the type of place that some may argue New Hampshire lacks. One interview describes a need “to create places where people want to bump elbows” meaning that if you do not have this kind of a place, then your area lacks “vibrancy” which is attractive to youth. Without these places where people want to bump elbows, the same interviewee empathizes that youth do not want much to do with such a place: “You know, there weren't many cultivated or curated recreational activities. So, just nothing to do. And so, if I were there I'd want to leave probably too.” This excerpt underlines the perceived stakeholder tendency for youth to move towards big cities: there's always something going on. New Hampshire needs to better brand itself in order to have a shot at competing with the appeal of a big city setting, there are areas in the state where youth want to live but not all youth may know about them or be able to afford them.

Finding 3: There is a lack of youth community engagement and youth driven experiences in the state. Youth recreation opportunities that are currently available are not meeting the needs of the population.

A third common thread across the interviews is that in the state of New Hampshire, there is a lack of funding support for recreation and youth driven opportunities in the state. This is important because the presence of funding for recreation as well as these larger opportunities could possibly increase the quality and quantity of such opportunities for participation. There is also a dearth of opportunities for youth voices to be heard and valued in local communities. Finally, the available youth recreation opportunities are simply not meeting the current needs of the population. The sentiments about the lack of recreation support for youth are present throughout many interviews, some workers in the field of recreation express using volunteers due to lack of funding, and a New Hampshire camp director echoes this sentiment by expressing that soon, summer camps will not be able to keep up with rising minimum wage:

“you know, camps are exempt from minimum wage, and I don't think that would necessarily change if a \$15 minimum wage became a reality here in New Hampshire – but if that's what now we're competing with, in the end we're in competition with McDonald's, where a kid can make four or five times what he's going to make working a summer camp job. That's going to make it hard for us, for sure. [Camp Name] pays really well in the grand scheme of things compared to other summer camps and we still pay lousy.”

Beyond this, many of the stakeholder interviews express a concern that education is severely underfunded in New Hampshire. An overarching concern between these two elements of importance in youth quality of life is that there is no one to advocate for these concerns on a state policy level. “They might give lip service to it but, obviously, you know, as they say budgets are a reflection of our priorities, and I think it speaks loud and clear that higher education in New Hampshire is not a priority for policymakers.” From the sentiments reflected in other interviews,

this also extends to recreation funding in the state of New Hampshire. Many interviews referenced a need for youth to have their voices heard in order to increase their satisfaction with quality of life in New Hampshire. “Chambers [of Commerce] should have youth numbers on them, young professional networks should be encouraged by area organizations or could be a, an institution like Plymouth state or UNH or Keene. So there are lots of ways to influence that so I think those are some institutional vehicles that we can really include that voice.”

Opportunities for teenagers to participate in recreation is limited, most Parks and Recreation opportunities are structured around families with young children and older adults, as reflected in interviews with parks and recreation workers across the state. One quote that reflects this is from an individual who recounts what happened after a teen center in the area was closed.

“Again, a little history in [town name], [number] years ago, there was a vibrant teen center. It was [name of center]. They did a lot of fundraising because of course, the at risk the 14- to 17-year-old, it's a tough, tough age group to be in anyways...So when the YMCA moved into town, they primarily said ‘Oh, we got to take over the teen center.’ Well, the currently how structured the Y....or when it was moved in town YMCA is more of a gym, athletic facility, they go in and out, no programming space, nothing the teens can call their own...Now, there's nothing for teens to do in the summer. And I call them pods. If you watch in the summertime, there's a bunch of them there. They had just got out (aged out) of summer camp. But they're not old enough to get employment yet. And they're just walking around in packs downtown.”

Where teenagers are involved in recreation is through summer employment. Multiple parks and recreation officials interviewed described their departments as hiring youth seasonally, as evidenced by the following quote: “We work with the athletic department over at [Town Name]

high school to try to get those 15-16 year olds to apply. So we usually have a nice built-in system to get them to keep coming back to us where what say usually most of the time they're here, and we get them in young 16, 15.” Other officials mentioned the hiring potential of teenagers, but none mentioned programming designed specifically for them. Additional areas identified by interviewees where recreation and general community involvement falls short for youth in New Hampshire include diversity and cultural awareness, lack of spaces specifically for youth, and financial inhibitions. A quote encapsulating the diversity aspect of this missing piece can be found below:

“When it comes to ethnicity. I hear that at times...[youth]...yearn for more relationships that are cross cultural...Their experiences are also limited based on the immediate communities that they're involved with, and the circles that are involved with. And a lot of times for them, they just don't like the fact that there's not a lot of representation with those who are decision makers, or those who have influence like teachers and administrators. Even sometimes as far as workers that work for after-school programs or coaches. So, there's just not a lot of representation from an ethnicity standpoint.”

According to the interviews, lack of diversity in the state of New Hampshire, lack of funding for meaningful youth recreation experiences, and no space for the youth voice to be heard is resulting in recreation experiences being unfulfilling for youth. There were also many interviews which did not mention recreation at length, but instead referred to education experiencing a lack of funding in the state, signifying that recreation funding is likely experiencing a similar lack of funding.

Finding 4: There is an assumption youth will leave New Hampshire and return later in their lives.

Another common theme across many of the interviews conducted is an overarching assumption that youth will leave New Hampshire and then return later in their lives when they are ready to enter the workforce or start a family. Many interviews conducted implicated that youth get bored of NH and are attracted to amenities present in other states, such as the “sexiness” of big cities like Boston: “I think a lot of young people want to go to the large city where there's a bigger population and they think that there's more jobs that are there, more opportunities for them to experience.” Stakeholders interviewed also identified the natural features of a different location, such as a warmer climate, as being appealing to youth: “And then [the youth] go OK, well, I'll just, you know, I went to University of Tampa, I might as well stay in Tampa because it's warm.” In terms of what draws youth back to New Hampshire eventually, some stakeholders cited seeing New Hampshire as a safe place to raise kids:

“I had this guy tell me, I was on...one of the NPR talk shows, and there were people calling in about rural America. And this guy said “You know...when I was 14, my buddies and I were walking home from school, and we had those candy cigarettes...And so we ...were pretending like we were smoking because they could blow,” He said, “Four people called my mom and told her that they saw me smoking.” He said, “I couldn't get wait to get out of that little town when I was 18.” But he said, “When I was 30, and I had children, the idea that there are people who might keep their eyes on my kids, was pretty appealing. And so I moved back to a town like that.”

Overall, consistent through many of the interviews, the general implication was present that youth do not appreciate the qualities of New Hampshire, such as its outdoor recreation attributes

and its “safety” until they leave for a while and then return after they have grown up. According to the interviews, New Hampshire does not mind the leave-and-come back pattern present in the lives of many NH residents:

“So and I mean, you know, that's one of the arguments I've made is when New Hampshire is receiving people in their 30s and 40s. I mean, it's getting people at the prime of their work lives. They've had experience...you know, this is not their first job. They're, you know, the people who migrate into New Hampshire are better educated than the people who are here. And their income, incoming domestic migrants especially, is higher than the income of the people who are leaving. I mean, that's what I was saying to you early on is, many states would do anything to have a migration profile like New Hampshire. To get those people back in their prime. They're the ones who are going to be on the PTA and coach the basketball teams and be in the volunteer fire department - all the things all the social capital that communities need.”

Although this theme was consistent through many of the interviews, there were some that expressed concern that youth would not return once they put down roots somewhere else, like the following: “so they're going to go live in, you know, Massachusetts for a couple of years. But then that's where their friends become...they develop friendships and relationships there, and they don't move back home.” Combined with sentiments from Finding 1, there was a concern that youth would be influenced to pursue educational or career opportunities external to the state and then put down roots there instead of coming back to New Hampshire. Despite this concern, there was still confidence present that many youth would come back to the state due to having family there, upon remembering the natural features and quality of life aspect of New Hampshire

or thinking of it as a safe space to raise a family. Many of the interviewees mentioned narratives like these when recounting how they ended up settling in New Hampshire themselves.

Discussion

As evidenced by the data, New Hampshire stakeholders have not fully considered the ways in which place attachment and community attachment inform the way New Hampshire youth think about their futures. This is apparent due to the lack of funding put into community recreation and education opportunities for youth in the state, as well as the lack of youth voice in communities whose futures depend on attracting new youth or retaining resident youth. As established by Hasford, Loomis, and Pancer (2013), youth with a greater sense of community attachment are more likely to be involved in their communities later in life. New Hampshire needs to grow the components of community attachment: homophily, focus theory, and social capital among young adults in state so that they become attached to the people in their communities rather than to physical features of the state alone (Crespo et. al, 2013). Based on the study findings, homophily could be increased among youth through the provision of additional areas for youth to “bump elbows” and unite over similar life experiences, as described by one interviewee in their description of the importance of bustling downtown areas. This could also be increased by a stronger sense of state branding, giving youth a new identity to bond over. Focus theory could be increased among youth by an increase in recreation program offerings specific to activities young adults are interested in. This would come from additional funding put towards this age group, allowing more programs to unite teens with similar interests, providing more chances for interactions with people with similar hobbies and specific skills. An example of this could be moving forward with the “youth ski for free” program brainstormed by one study

participant. Increased social capital among youth could be built in a similar way, with increased funding for youth recreation opportunities encouraging youth to become a part of something larger than themselves. Another method of doing this would be to provide an outlet for youth to impact the policies in their area. This would build a feeling of attachment to their community and would give them a greater sense of belonging since they have contributed to bettering their surroundings. All three of the methods described relating to homophily, focus theory, and social capital could increase a feeling of belonging among youth in the state of New Hampshire, and therefore drive up retention rates.

In terms of place attachment, it is clear that New Hampshire needs to better define its branding as a state. The data communicates that outdoor recreation features are largely associated with state identity, but also reveals that not all youth have access to these opportunities nor do they identify with those activities. Further development of a state identity tied to financially and physically accessible community recreation activities in a unique New Hampshire setting: mountains, ocean, and forest may increase youth satisfaction with their quality of life. It is clear in the data that a sense of place attachment exists-both for stakeholders themselves and for youth, but this sense of place attachment alone is not enough for youth to remain in state when otherwise incentivized to leave for better career or educational opportunities. From the data, it is evident that stakeholders perceive New Hampshire youth have a strong sense of place identity due to the unique natural features of their state. However, they lack a sense of community attachment since there is not much funding or emphasis directed towards prioritizing youth in their New Hampshire towns. As emphasized by Colistra et. al (2018) and Trentelman (2019) in their articles, although both are important, community attachment is key because a primary reason individuals revisit a specific place is due to the social

interactions that occur there or have occurred there(. If youth do not experience significant enough social interactions, they may not have a reason to stay in the state and may be enticed by the draw of big cities that have more going on.

It is possible that the allure of a new place is irresistible to some youth, as opposed to the small New Hampshire town they grew up in, but the data makes clear that there is not enough state funding devoted to education and recreation opportunities in the state, so it should not be surprising that most youth choose to leave when they are of age. Increasing community attachment among this population by attaining greater funding for in-state recreation opportunities as well as educational options may reduce the desire among youth to be anywhere else in the country.

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