Exploring Resident’s Xeriscaping Preference: The Influence of Ecological World View and Place Identity

Marena Sampson

BACKGROUND

- Most municipal water in Phoenix goes towards residential landscaping (Balling & Gober, 2007)
- By switching from irrigation to xeric (desert) landscaping, households can cut 40-70% of water use (Hilaire et al., 2008)
- Residents have cultural and historical aversion to xeric landscaping (Sokol, 2005)
- Previous research: White, male, higher income and education may lead to higher xeric preference (Larsen & Harlan, 2006; Larson et al., 2009; Yabiku et al., 2008)
- The longer you live in Phoenix, the less you prefer xeriscaping (Larson et al., 2009; Larson et al., 2017; Yabiku et al., 2008)
- It’s unknown how identity with the desert affects landscape preferences

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do socio-demographics and identity with the desert influence residents’ preference towards xeriscaping as a water conserving landscape choice?

METHODS

This research utilized specific questions from the larger 2018 Phoenix Area Social Survey (12 neighborhoods, N=496). These questions were analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares analysis.

EXPLANATORY VARIABLES:

- Income
- Length of Residence
- Education
- Place Identity
- Hispanic vs Non-Hispanic
- Pro-Ecological Worldview (NEP Scale)

DEPENDENT VARIABLE:

Combination of landscape preferences for both front and back yards:

- 4: xeric front + back
- 3: xeric + mesic, xeric + oasis, xeric + other
- 2: oasis front + back, oasis + other
- 1: mesic front + back, mesic + oasis, mesic + other

RESULTS

- Respondents: 60% female 57% college degree or higher
- 78% Non-Hispanic 41% earn $100,000 or more annually
- Neutral identity with the desert (mean = 3.48 on a 1-5 scale) and a fairly neutral ecological worldview (mean = 3.71 on a 1-5 scale)

Explanatory Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Xeric Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Household Income</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Hispanic</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Residency</td>
<td>-.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Ecological Worldview</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Place Identity</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.180</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Variables with an * indicates a significant relationship with xeriscape preference at the p<0.05 level

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Expand landscape literature to include additional variables related to identity, such as place dependence
- Work to foster identity with the desert! These types of connections can be more effective than policy alone (Inman & Jeffrey, 2006)
- Phoenix has a unique opportunity with our desert mountain parks.
- Programs to increase park interest and visitation
- Education programs about water conservation and xeriscaping at parks
- Further research needed to explore if identity with the desert leads to actual xeric landscaping

SIGNIFICANCE

- In other studies, education is a strong predictor of environmentally responsible behaviors and sex a predictor of xeric preference – not supported by this study
- Other socio-demographic findings strengthen previous research
- Untested relationship between identity with the desert and xeriscaping was found to be positive

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant number DEB-1637590, Central Arizona-Phoenix Long-Term Ecological Research Program (CAP LTER).