Tourism Management 31 (2010) 274–284

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tourman

Destination attachment: Effects on customer satisfaction and cognitive, affective and conative loyalty

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 30 September 2008
Accepted 9 March 2009

Keywords:
Place attachment
Customer satisfaction
Loyalty phases

ABSTRACT

Tourists may develop attachment to a destination because of its ability in fulfilling specific goals or activity needs and/or because of its symbolic meaning and thus, attachment could be an important measure of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Despite its significance, only limited research has been conducted to determine the likely influences of emotional associations or meanings tourists attach to the places they visit on their satisfaction and future behavior. This study therefore explores the role of attachment in predicting satisfactory holiday experiences and destination loyalty. Results of the structural equation modeling show that positive emotional and cognitive bonds with a place could indeed affect an individual's critical assessment of a destination and his/her loyalty to the place. Implications of the study are discussed.

1. Introduction

Academics and practitioners alike concur that customer satisfaction and loyalty are an integral part of doing a business. Almost no business can survive without establishing a loyal customer base (Gremler & Brown, 1996). While numerous research documented in hospitality and tourism journals has examined usefulness and applications of loyalty, studies on destination loyalty and its relations to other constructs are still lacking (Back & Parks, 2003; Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Oppermann, 2000). Emerging research, undertaken almost exclusively in recreational and leisure literature and recently in tourism (e.g., Gross & Brown, 2006, 2008; Gross, Brien, & Brown, 2008; Lee et al., 2007; Gu & Ryan, 2008), suggest variables such as place attachment or place bonding to be an important part of the self and to evoke strong emotions that would influence a person's behavior, including loyalty (Brocato, 2006; George & Alexandru, 2005; George & George, 2004; Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005; J. Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2007; Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Simpson & Siquaw, 2008). Exploring the nature and the extent of place attachment among visitors would be useful for destination authorities in planning and marketing for tourism and outdoor recreation services (Ankre, 2007; Brocato, 2006; Gross & Brown, 2008; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Warzecha, Lime, & Thompson, 2000). Development of attached visitor base is important, as they are less likely to change their choice of the place despite the offerings of the alternatives (J. Lee, 2003; Wickham, 2000). Attachment may influence what visitors see, think and feel, and that increased knowledge about a place, as well as an emotional connection may improve the likelihood that individuals will demonstrate favorable evaluations and loyalty toward the place (Brocato, 2006; Schultz, 2000; Walker & Chapman, 2003). Examples from the business world (e.g., Marriott Hotels, Rosewood Hotels) evidence that managers have started to recognize the importance that 'place' holds in the minds of consumers (Brocato, 2006). Creating a sense of place is now seen as a competitive weapon that will increase patronage and profits (*Hotels*, November 2004).

Past research viewed place attachment either as an outcome variable (e.g., predicted by activity involvement and place characteristics (Gross & Brown, 2008; Hou et al., 2005; Hwang, Lee, & Chan, 2005), motivations (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004), and commitment, demographics, specialization and previous experience (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Kyle et al., 2004a), or as an antecedent variable (e.g., predicting consumer loyalty, customer satisfaction with interpreters, perceived crowding, spending preferences, leisure participation patterns in the studies of Alexandris, Kouthoris & Meligdis, 2006; George & George, 2004; Hwang et al., 2005; Kyle et al., 2004a). While in most of the above studies links among the variables were convincingly established, an understanding of how place attachment relates to a person's evaluation

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doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2009.03.007

of holiday experiences and his/her loyalty toward a destination is limited for a number of reasons. Firstly, past research implicitly assumes that place attachment and satisfaction are complementary constructs in certain important ways, but this relationship was not explicitly defined or explored in a destination context (George & George, 2004). Brocato (2006), J. Lee (2003) and Lee et al. (2007) propose that satisfaction with a setting could lead to a sense of place attachment (i.e., high levels of satisfaction with a setting, based in part on the setting's attributes which facilitate social interactions or participation in a favorite recreation activity, may lead to the formation of attachments). Additionally, Halpenny (2006, p. 205) argues that positive emotional and cognitive bonds with a place, developed through both direct experiences and/or indirect experiences (e.g. media exposure), could also affect individual's critical assessment of a setting. In other words, tourists' evaluation of a destination could be "affected by a view through sentimentally-tinted 'rose-colored glasses'" (Halpenny, 2006). Secondly, past research unanimously considered place attachment as a precondition to explain loyalty (J. Lee, 2003) (i.e., all other things being equal, the greater the psychological attachment to the relationship, the more loyal the visitors are). In the majority of previous studies, loyalty was centered on repeat purchase patterns of the same brand over time (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2006; George & George, 2004, with exceptions of J. Lee, 2003). According to Oliver (1997), however, loyalty needs to be conceived, as a causal chain composed by cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty and action loyalty.

Considering the call for further research (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2006; Kyle et al. 2004a; Stedman 2002, 2003; Walker & Chapman, 2003), the present article sets out to examine the direct and indirect role of attachment in predicting satisfactory holiday experiences and sequential development of loyalty. More specifically, the study aims to understand (i) whether a sense of place influences tourists' evaluation of current experiences and future loyalty intentions, and (ii) whether the satisfaction construct mediates the relationship between place attachment dimensions and sequential phases of loyalty intentions toward a destination. Based on a review of literature, a model was posed to extend the previous work by including place attachment and customer satisfaction and examining their relationship with a key managerial variable, destination loyalty. The following is divided into four. Conceptual development of, and empirical research on place attachment and its dimensions are presented in the first section. The concepts of loyalty phases and place satisfaction follow this. Next, the research methodology is outlined. The results of the study are then interpreted in the light of previous research findings.

2. Place attachment

The process by which humans form emotional bonds to places is known as place attachment. In other words, the sense of physically being and feeling 'in place' or 'at home' can be considered as a sign that an individual has created an emotional tie to a place. This concept has been used by recreation researchers and managers to explain different behavior of leisure, such as recreationists' setting preferences, management preferences and activity participation (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). Some define place attachment as the affective bond, an emotional linkage of an individual to a particular environment (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Low & Altman, 1992). Other definitions for place attachment include: a state of psychological well-being resulting from accessibility to a place or a state of distress upon separation or 'remoteness' from a place; an emotional investment with a place (Hummon, 1992); and "the extent to which an individual values and identifies with a particular environmental setting" (cf., Moore & Graefe, 1994, p. 17).

Individuals form emotional bonds to places by developing relationships over time with particular settings (Brocato, 2006). According to Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992), the personal experience and social interaction are the fundamental dimensions that make the person to attach meaning to a space and that make it a place as part of one's identity (Kılınç, 2006). Moore and Graefe (1994) note that individuals' attachment to a particular place generally starts to develop after one visit or more, although it may be possible to develop strong feeling for places one has never visited (Lee, 1999).[1] Halpenny (2006) argues that even for the first-time visitors, a sense of place attachment may have formed prior to their first visit to the destination. This could be based on stories about the destination from friends and family, or mass media. Contextual and cultural issues have been reported to influence ascription of a meaning to a place (Kyle & Chick, 2007; Kyle & Johnson, 2008).

Attachments can be formed between people and buildings, environments, homes, objects, landscapes, neighborhoods, towns and cities (Cresswell, 2004). Attachments may be set up both with real places and also with mythical, hypothetical and imagined places and those real places mentioned may vary in scale and specificity, from very small scales to the nations, to planets or to the universe (Low & Altman, 1992). Place attachment, like sense of place, "involves an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions in reference to a place" (Low & Altman, 1992, p. 5). For this study place attachment is defined as an emotional, cognitive and functional bond with a place (Halpenny, 2006).

3. Place attachment: Dimensions

The experience one encounters in an environment can be both physical and social in nature. Place attachment literature has found support for two types of attachment, one focusing on the physical attachments formed and the other focusing on the interpersonal relationships developed within the environmental context (Brocato, 2006; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuch, & Watson, 1992). Recent studies on place attachments have added affective and social components to the construct (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005). A number of studies examining the effect of place attachment dimensions on various dependent variables in recreational contexts have shown that dimensions do not always act uniformly in spite of being moderately and positively correlated (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Williams & Vaske, 2003).[2]

Place dependence is described as functional attachment to a place, based on its importance as a setting for specific activities (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Place dependence, or functional attachment, reflects the importance of a resource in providing amenities necessary for desired activities (Williams et al., 1992). *Place dependence* is derived from a transactional view that suggests people evaluate places against alternatives. From this perspective, individuals evaluate places according to how well those places meet their functional needs (Brocato, 2006). In this study place dependence conceptually

[1] Thus far, this attitudinal construct has been examined extensively in the context of residential or park settings.

[2] For example, Kyle et al. (2003) examined place attachment's (i.e. place identity and place dependence) effect on visitors' spending preferences for revenue collected from recreation use fees on Forest Service lands in the US. Their findings indicated that, overall, respondents scoring high on the place identity dimension were more inclined to support expenditures directed toward the preservation and restoration of the natural environment whereas respondents scoring high on the place dependence dimension were more inclined to support expenditures directed toward facility development and expansion.

represents the conative domain and embodies the actions or behavioral tendencies of an individual regarding a place (Borden & Schettino, 1979).

Proshansky (1978) defines *place identity* as "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment" (p. 155). Place identity is the connection between the self and a particular setting that consists of a collection of "memories, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about physical settings as well as types of settings" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Not all environments have a strong link with a person's self identification process, however individuals often identify with places which reflect their own identities (Brocato, 2006; Kyle et al., 2004b; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Place identity is the symbolically important connection between an individual and a setting (Stedman, 2002) and a psychological investment with a setting that has developed over time (Williams & Patterson, 1999). A visitor, therefore, may develop attachment to a destination because of its holiday activities (e.g., good location for diving, skiing) and outstanding scenery or because of what the location symbolizes.

Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001 conceptualized affective attachment as an emotional bond with particular setting. A person's emotional bond with a place has been incorporated into place attachment measurement scales, but was usually combined with measures of place identity rather than treated as a separate subdimension. In line with conceptual division of place attachment into three attitudinal components (affective, cognitive and functional), research by Brocato (2006), Halpenny (2006) and Kyle et al. (2004a, 2005) demonstrates that place affect is distinct from place identity and it measures emotional or affective attachment.

4. Place attachment, satisfaction and loyalty

Loyalty has become a critical part of destination marketing and management research due to increasing competition and recognition of the importance of loyal visitors (J. Lee, 2003). Loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999, p.34). Formation of loyalty has received a growing interest from researchers and the links between such concepts as consumer involvement, service quality, satisfaction, image, motivation and loyalty have been heavily researched (Han & Back, 2008; J. Lee, 2003; Wickham, 2000). Past research, adopting the proposed conceptual sequence of loyalty (Oliver (1997), supports the claim that satisfaction is a major antecedent of loyalty (J. Lee, 2003; Sui & Baloglu, 2003). Valle, Silva, Mendes, and Guerrio (2006) reported that greater levels of satisfaction resulted in increased likelihood of repeat visit and a keen willingness to recommend the destination to others. In the consumer behavior literature satisfaction is defined as "the consumers' fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or the service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under or over fulfillment" (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). Stedman (2002) describes place satisfaction as a multidimensional summary judgment of the perceived quality of a setting. It is viewed as the utilitarian value of a place to meet certain basic needs ranging from sociability to services to physical characteristics (Stedman, 2002). The strong relation between customer satisfaction and loyalty has led the maximization of visitor satisfaction to become one of the primary objectives of destination managers.

The question of the link between place attachment and customer satisfaction has become the subject of a number of researchers (Fleury-Bahi, Felonneau, & Marchand, 2008). The research however does not provide concurring results. Researchers are divided in their conceptualization and examination of the link between place attachment and satisfaction. Some researchers suggest that satisfaction with a setting could lead to a sense of place attachment (Brocato, 2006; Lee, 1999). For example, Lee and Allen (1999) found that Myrtle Beach visitors' destination attachment was predicted by satisfaction with the sun, sand and beach destination. Hou et al. (2005) measured visitors' opinions about the varied components of destination satisfaction and found that satisfaction with attractiveness of a destination, together with involvement, predicts destination attachment. Satisfaction with site attributes may enable the individual to perform favorite activities, which in turn brings about the opportunities for other positive outcomes such as social interactions, skills testing, the achievement of personal goals, and the acquisition of memories (Brocato, 2006). Brocato (2006) reports that as customer satisfaction becomes more favorable, place identity, place dependence, social bonds and affective attachment should increase.

In contrast, a number of researchers argue that customer satisfaction judgments could be influenced by the type and level of place attachment (Fleury-Bahi et al., 2008; Halpenny, 2006; Mowen, Graefe, & Virden, 1997; Scott & Vitardas, 2008; Wickham, 2000). For example, Scott and Vitardas (2008) report that members of a community who feels a strong sense of attachment to their community would also feel more satisfied with the service delivery of their local government. In other words, respondents who feel a strong sense of attachment to the city tend to rate the council's performance as being more satisfactory than those respondents who exhibit lesser feelings of attachment (Scott & Vitardas, 2008). Results of the Fleury-Bahi et al. (2008) study suggest determination of satisfaction through place attachment. Mowen et al. (1997) studied the relationship between place attachment and experience evaluations. Their study provided researchers with a basic understanding of how place attachment might influence a person's satisfaction with a recreation area and interact with other variables that influence the recreation experience. Wickham (2000) examined the place attachment and activity relationship and its impact on satisfaction with recreation experience and settings. A series of regression models, used to test the relationship between place attachment, involvement, human territoriality and satisfaction, showed significant effect of place attachment on satisfaction with the experience. Building on the theoretical model proposed by Oliver for studying the relationship between service quality, satisfaction and loyalty, and on the conceptual process of Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) that suggests involvement and psychological commitment are antecedents of loyalty, J. Lee (2003) examined the causal relationships between place involvement, service quality, place satisfaction, attachment and destination loyalty. Their research showed that both place attachment and customer satisfaction were significantly and positively related to destination loyalty. Their research, however is limited because (i) possible link between place attachment and customer satisfaction is overlooked and (ii) potentially differing extent of the impact exerted by dimensions of the place attachment on customer satisfaction is not addressed.

4.1. Attachment and loyalty

Destination attachment could be significantly predictive of tourist's loyalty towards a holiday: higher the attachment, higher the loyalty and vice versa (Alexandris et al., 2006; Brocato, 2006; George & George, 2004; Lee et al., 2007; Simpson & Siquaw, 2008). While the past research has established the link between place attachment and loyalty, the majority of research viewed

loyalty as a one-dimensional construct. In their research on consumers' loyalty in a skiing resort, Alexandris et al. (2006) conceptualized loyalty as "continuing purchase of the service" and used three items to measure the visitors' intention to continue skiing in the specific resort. George and George (2004) took "frequency and intensity of past purchases" and "intention to revisit" as surrogates of loyalty in their research on the mediating role of place attachment on destination loyalty. "Days spent recreating a particular place" was used to operationalize behavioral loyalty in the study by Lee et al. (2007), who reported that high satisfaction leads to actual repeat visit to a destination. "Days spent, miles hiked along the trail, and proportion of use" were the representatives of behavioral loyalty in research by Kyle et al. (2004a). Simpson and Siquaw, 2008 used word-of-mouth communication intention as an indicator of loyalty.

According to Oliver (1999), loyalty develops through different stages. These stages are (1) a preference over competing brand attributes (beliefs), (2) along with an affective preference (attitude) toward the product, and (3) a greater intention (conation) to purchase the product above and beyond that for competing product offerings. In other words, consumers become loyal to a service first in a cognitive manner, followed by an affective 'like' or 'dislike' of the service, and later in a conative sense (Back, 2005; Oliver, 1997). Thus, the consumers' loyalty and commitment to the service provider builds as each of the loyalty phases are passed. Oliver (1999) argues that consumers can be loyal at each phase relating to different elements of the attitude development structure. At each loyalty stage, different factors influencing loyalty can be detected (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006).

Cognitive loyalty is based upon the product information available to the customer (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). For example, if one bank offers higher saving rates than other banks, cognitive loyal customers may keep on using the bank as long as it offers the highest interest rates (Oliver, 1997). Cognitive loyalty was reported to be the weakest form of loyalty (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Cognitive loyalty is largely influenced by the consumer's evaluative response to experience, in particular to the perceived performance of an offering relative to price (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Affective loyalty is based on consumers' affect-based attitudes to a product, and attitudes to a product are based upon an established relationship between the consumer and the product. If the consumer has favorable attitudes to a product they will develop affective loyalty to the product. Affect is more deeply encoded in the consumer mind than cognition, which is more subject to counterarguments (Oliver 1997). While affect is found to be stronger than cognition, affective loyalty is not a perfect predictor of behavioral loyalty (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). The customer may be satisfied with the product in the service category and hence they may become affectively loyal to many brands in the same category. Conative loyalty, consumers' behavioral intention to keep on using the brand in the future (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001), is argued to be the strongest predictor of behavioral loyalty compared to cognitive and affective loyalty (Pedersen & Nysveen 2001). Despite the many attempts to consider links between different loyalty phases, relatively little empirical research has been conducted on testing the relationship between attachment, satisfaction and sequential loyalty in tourism.

5. Model development

Past research sought to understand what variables are most likely to influence the level of attachment a person will have with an area (e.g., motivations (Kyle et al., 2004b) involvement (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003), destination attractiveness (Lee & Allen, 1999)), and what influence place attachment will have on other managerially important variables (Wickham, 2000) (e.g., fee and spending preferences (Kyle, Absher & Graefe, 2003), return intentions (Brocato, 2006), and pro-environmental behavior (Halpenny, 2006)). Recently, researchers have started to integrate place attachment into tourism research. Based on the review of the relevant literature, we pose a framework to address the need for understanding the relations between place attachment, satisfaction and loyalty (Fig. 1). Researchers have examined the nature of the relationship between place attachment and satisfaction in recreation and residency literature and determined that place attachment impacts on satisfaction (Fleury-Bahi et al., 2008; Halpenny, 2006; Stedman, 2002; Wickham, 2000). A sense of belonging and being identified with a place and the feeling that being at the particular place contributes to the definition of oneself could clearly promote positive evaluation of the people, services and atmosphere (Wickham, 2000). However; there is little research examining the link between place attachment and customer satisfaction in the tourism literature. Therefore, it is hypothesized that tourists' satisfaction with holiday is relatively dependent on the level and the nature of attachment (Fig. 1).

$H_{1a,b,c}$: The level and the nature of place attachment directly and significantly influence customer satisfaction.

In addition to the path between attachment and satisfaction, researchers in the field of recreation have attempted to understand how place attachment relates to customer loyalty (Alexandris et al., 2006; George & George, 2004; J. Lee, 2003). Although the relationship between place attachment dimensions and customer loyalty has been examined previously (Kyle et al., 2004a), a number of issues await researchers' attention. Firstly, the relationship between place attachment and attitudinal loyalty has been scantily tested in a destination context. This is intriguing since tourists are likely to develop emotional attachment with destinations they visit, and this psychological attachment could be an important antecedent and a sensible measure of tourist loyalty to a destination (George & George, 2004; Lee, Backman, & Backman, 1997). Secondly, the relationship between place attachment dimensions and sequential phases of attitudinal loyalty has not yet been examined. Measurement of attitudinal loyalty is suggested by Backman & Crompton (1991), as it can assess additional variance that behavioral loyalty does not explain (cf. Back & Parks, 2003). The proposed relationship (Fig. 1) between place attachment dimensions and sequential loyalty is based on previous destination loyalty research in a forest setting (J. Lee, 2003) and on a brand loyalty model of Back and Parks (2003). Previous research substantiates that place attachment would influence cognitive and affective loyalty (termed as attitudinal loyalty) and then conative loyalty (J. Lee, 2003). The direct path between place attachment and conative loyalty was not included in the present model, as it was reported to decrease the model's fit indices (J. Lee, 2003). The causal relationship between satisfaction and loyalty was also established in the literature (Back & Parks, 2003; J. Lee, 2003; Sui & Baloglu, 2003; Valle et al., 2006; Yuksel, 2008). Based on previous research, the model claims that the level and the nature of place attachment directly and indirectly relates (through satisfaction) to destination loyalty. We therefore hypothesize that:

$H_{2a,b,c,d,e,f}$: The level and the nature of place attachment directly and significantly influence cognitive and affective loyalty.

$H_{3a,b,c}$: The level and the nature of place attachment indirectly influences loyalty through customer satisfaction.

$H_{4a,b,c}$: Cognitive loyalty determines affective loyalty which in turn contributes to conative loyalty and there is a positive association between cognitive and affective loyalty.

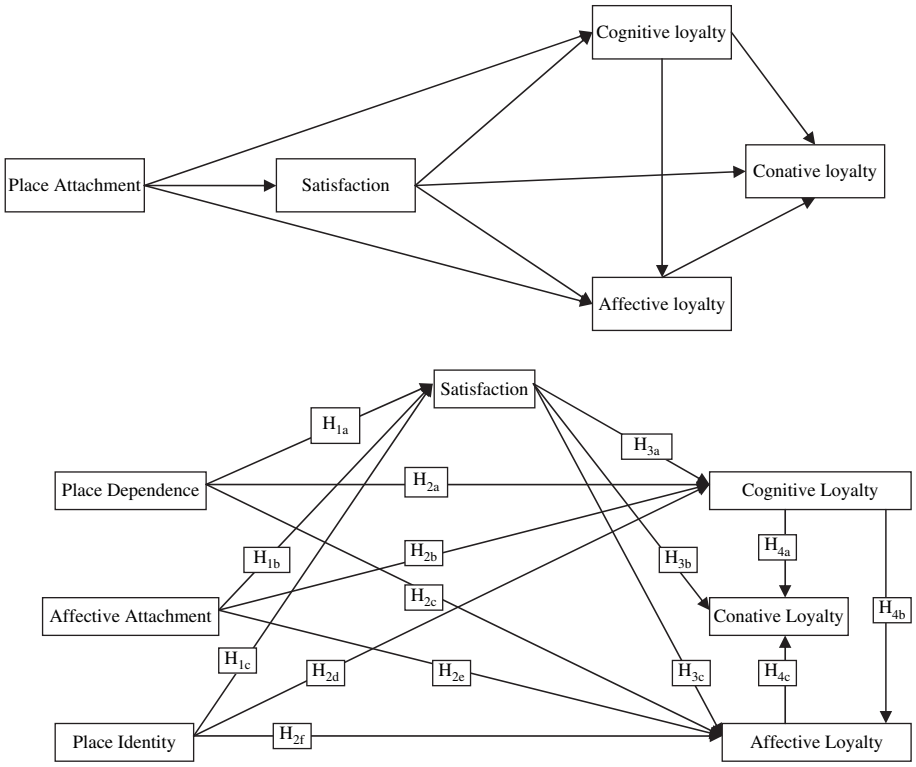

Fig. 1. The hypothesized relationships among attachment, satisfaction and loyalty.

Overall, the present model is expected to contribute to the understanding of how cognitive and affective processes of attachment influence current evaluations and more importantly future consumer behavior, which may be impossible to understand and difficult to predict without knowledge of these processes.

6. Research method

This research examines whether dimensions of place attachment influence customers' assessment of satisfaction and their attitudinal loyalty toward a destination. A self-reply questionnaire was developed for this purpose. The short version of the Williams and Vaske (2003) scale, as adjusted and tested by Alexandris et al. (2006), Brocato (2006), and Kyle et al. (2004a), was adopted to measure place attachment. Kyle et al. (2004a) tested this scale with three different recreation groups (hikers, boaters and anglers), Alexandris et al. (2006) tested it with skiers and Brocato (2006) with service users. They reported good psychometric properties. The questionnaire was designed into multiple sections. The set of questions in the first section deals with demographic details of the respondents. The next section attempts to understand travel motivations of the respondents, their level of interaction with locals and how they find Didim. The following section was designed to assess attachment levels of the respondents, their satisfaction with the holiday destination and their loyalty intentions. Three statements were used to measure the participants' level of place dependence, another set of three items measured participants' affective attachment and three statements were employed to examine participants' level of identification with the place. As stated earlier, the statements were borrowed from previous studies (e.g., Kyle et al. 2004a) and they were modified in order to be used in the context of a destination. More specifically, place identity was measured with three items (Table 1). Place dependence was also measured with three items (Table 1). Affective attachment was measured by a set of three items (Table 1). A five-point Likert type (strongly disagree (1) up to strongly agree (5)) scale followed the statements. Three items, borrowed from Oliver (1997), Back (2005) and Back and Parks (2003) were used to measure participants' satisfaction with holiday in Didim. In line with recent conceptualization and operationalization of loyalty in the consumer behavior literature (Oliver, 1997, 1999), we examined the direct and indirect effects exerted by place attachment on different phases of loyalty. Hence, three phases of loyalty examined in this study were cognitive, affective and conative. *Cognitive loyalty* was measured by four items borrowed from Back (2005), and Back and Parks (2003). These four items relate to destination attributes and their superiority relative to competitors. A three-item scale (from Back & Parks, 2003) was utilized to measure *affective loyalty*. The affective loyalty items reflect the degree to which a customer 'likes' the destination and its services. A two-item scale (from Back, 2005; Back & Parks, 2003) was adopted to measure participants' *conative loyalty* toward the studied destination (i.e., commitment and purchase intentions are used to determine if participants were conative loyal). A five-point Likert type scale (1, strongly disagree; 5, strongly agree) followed these statements (Table 1).

The items gathered from previous studies were adopted to be used at a destination context and their suitability was checked out by a small sample of ($N = 38$) visitors and university staff ($N = 11$). This procedure helped finalize the statements included in the questionnaire. The study sample consisted of individuals visiting Didim for their summer holidays. Didim was chosen for the study, as it is a mature destination, attracting domestic and international visitors in high volumes over a couple of decades. Didim is located on the north shore of the gulf of Güllük opposite the Bodrum peninsula, west coast of Turkey. Home of the antique city of *Didyma* with its ruined Temple of Apollo, Didim is a growing district, consisting of a number of other small districts including *Altınkum* (which means *golden sand*), *Gümüşkum* (silver sand) and *Sarıkum*

Table 1
Items used in the attachment questionnaire.

Place dependence
For the activities that I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by Didim are the best
For what I like to do, I could not imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by Didim
I enjoy visiting Didim and its environment more than any other destinations
Affective attachment
Didim means a lot to me
I am very attached to Didim
I feel strong sense of belonging to Didim
Place identity
I feel Didim is a part of me
I identify strongly with Didim
Visiting Didim says a lot about who I am
Satisfaction
I am happy about my decision to stay in Didim
I believe I did the right thing when I chose to make my holiday in Didim
Overall, I am satisfied with decision to make my holiday in Didim
Cognitive loyalty
Didim provides me superior service quality as compared to other places I have been to
No other destination performs better than Didim
Overall quality of Didim is the best as a tourism destination
I believe Didim provides more benefits than other places
Affective loyalty
I love staying in Didim
I feel better when I stay in Didim
I like Didim more than other destinations
Conative loyalty
If I am given a chance, I intend to continue making my holiday in Didim
I consider Didim to be my first holiday choice

(yellow sand). Didim has become a very popular summer holiday resort and is genuinely attractive with its unspoiled environment, long sandy beaches, clear blue sea, ancient ruins to visit, and its own microclimate, benefiting from hundreds of days of sun a year and warm winters, allowing residents and visitors to enjoy the famous beaches and water sports even in January (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didim). The construction of the new *Didim D Marina* and growing demand for the second homes from abroad are expected to encourage further tourism in the area.

There was not a complete sampling frame available for visitor population and it was not possible to undertake a probability method of sampling. A convenient sampling method was therefore chosen and considering the type of the analysis, a sample of 200 was deemed sufficient. Reviewed literature suggests that sample size should not be small as SEM relies on tests which are sensitive to sample size, as well as, to the magnitude of differences in covariance matrices. Although there is little consensus on the recommended sample size for SEM, Garver and Mentzer (1999), and Hoelter (1983) proposed a 'critical sample size' of 200. In other words, as a rule of thumb, any number above 200 is understood to provide sufficient statistical power for data analysis (Hoe, 2008). Depending on the number of variables used for latent constructs, sample size under 200 generally means parameter estimates are unstable and significance tests lack power (Garson, 2005). It must be noted that the chi square is highly sensitive to sample size especially if the observations are greater than 200 (Hoe, 2008). The questionnaires were administered to tourists during a five-week period in the peak summer season 2007 (July–August) in order to decrease any risk of under coverage due to the administration period. Didim Hotels, chosen from the list of hotels, published by the Culture and Tourism Ministry were chosen for questionnaire administration to allow respondents to fill in forms in a comfortable environment, since administration process can lead to biases. Hotels from different star range (2 hotels from five-star, 1 hotel from four-star and 3 hotels from three-star) were selected in order to adequately represent visitors coming to Didim and to mirror the present lodging preference of international visitors. Five trained graduate students helped the researchers conduct two-page questionnaires with tourists. 300 questionnaires were distributed in the selected hotels (the number of questionnaires administered in each of the star categories was proportionate to their preference rates) and 246 were returned. This process resulted in 224 useable questionnaires for the analysis. The response rate which is (224/300) 0.74 suggests that sample bias could not be an issue, as the higher the response rate the lower the sample bias (Fowler, 1984).

7. Analysis

The data was first examined for outliers and extreme values and the distribution of normality was checked. An inspection of skewness and kurtosis results indicated that their values were in the acceptable range (-1 to $+1$), lending support for the normality in the distribution of data (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). Following this procedure, each scale was subjected to a reliability analysis to control the internal consistency of the scale items. Data were then analyzed using a structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS 5 in order to test and analyze interrelationships among latent constructs and their measured variables (Reisinger & Mavondo 2006). The SEM can be used to examine the nature and magnitude of postulated dependence relationships and at the same time assess the direct and indirect relationships of these variables (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006). The SEM is developed to evaluate how well a proposed conceptual model that contains observed multiple indicators and hypothetical constructs explains or fits the collected data (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The SEM procedure was an appropriate solution for the measurement of the proposed causal relationships among the unobserved constructs in this study that were set up on the basis of prior research and theory (Hair et al., 1995; Reisinger & Turner, 1999; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

8. Results

Forty-eight percent of the respondents were male and the age of the respondents ranged between 19 and 75. The majority of the respondents were English (51%), followed by Irish, Scottish, German and French. This reflects the distribution of foreign visitors to the town. Thirty percent of the respondent stated that this was their first visit to Didim, 35% indicated that they had 2–3 past visits, another 12% stated 4–5 previous visits and 22 percent had more than 5 past visits. The measurement model was validated using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Before estimating the model, the reliability estimates of the measurement items was verified using the Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the constructs in the proposed model. The alpha values range from 0.78 to 0.88 (see Table 2),[3] exceeding the minimum hurdle of 0.7 (Hair et al. 1995). The standardized maximum likelihood loadings and fit statistics that resulted are provided in Table 2. The model χ^2 is 350.1 with 168 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.000$). Because of the likely effect of large sample size on the chi-square values, other fit indices were also

[3] Reliability tests reveal that all dimensions measured in the proposed model have acceptable coefficients of alpha (.86 for place dependence, 0.88 for affective attachment, 0.78 for place identity, 0.80 for satisfaction, 0.86 for cognitive loyalty, 0.79 for affective loyalty and 0.79 for conative loyalty).

Table 2
Confirmatory factor analysis results including standardized loading estimates.

	Place dependence	Place affect	Place identity	Satisfaction	Cognitive loyalty	Affective loyalty	Conative loyalty
Dependence1	0.79						
Dependence2	0.88						
Dependence3	0.80						
Affect1		0.71					
Affect2		0.73					
Affect3		0.77					
Identity1			0.72				
Identity2			0.78				
Identity3			0.72				
Satis1				0.76			
Satis2				0.81			
Satis3				0.69			
Cognitive1					0.79		
Cognitive2					0.85		
Cognitive3					0.68		
Cognitive4					0.81		
Affective1						0.84	
Affective2						0.88	
Affective3						0.84	
Conative1							0.78
Conative2							0.83
Reliability	0.86	0.88	0.78	0.80	0.86	0.79	0.79
Average	0.82	0.74	0.74	0.77	0.79	0.86	0.77

χ^2: 350.1.
Df: 168 ($p < 0.000$).
CFI: 0.99.
NF1: 0.98.
NNFI: 0.98.
RMSEA: 0.07.

selected to measure the fit of the tested model. Other indicators of the model's fit included a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.99, normed-fit index (NFI) of 0.98, non-normed fit index (NNFI) of 0.98, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.07. Values of CFI, NFI, and NNFI range from zero to 1.00 with a value close to 1.00 indicating good fit (Bryne 1998). The error measures should not exceed 0.1 and ideally lie between 0.05 and 0.08 given that at least some error can be expected (Turner & Reisinger, 2001). Given the large sample size and the number of measured items, the results of the measurements showed a good model fit. Thus, the fit statistics suggest that the constructs are unidimensional and fit the data well (Childres, Carr, Peck, & Carson, 2001). The majority of loadings between the measurement items and the latent constructs were greater than 0.7 and the overall fit of the model is acceptable (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006). All indicator loadings for the constructs in the model were significant at 0.05 and the reliability estimates were adequate, showing convergent validity (Table 2). The discriminant validity means the indicators for different constructs should not be so highly correlated as to lead one to conclude that they measure the same thing. This would happen if there is definitional overlap between constructs. The correlation method was chosen to examine the discriminant validity with 0.85 as a rule-of-thumb cutoff (Garson, 2005). As shown in Table 2, all correlations between attachment scales and other scales were below 0.85, providing the evidence of discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was thus further examined by the correlation of estimate between constructs with the variance extracted measure (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994) Average Variance Extracted[4] varies from 0 to 1, and it represents the ratio of the total variance that is due to the latent variable. According to Dillon and Goldstein (1984) and Bagozzi (1994), a variance extracted of greater than 0.50 indicates that the validity of both the construct and the individual variables is high. All constructs meet this conservative test of discriminant validity, as the variance extracted estimates from each construct exceed the squared correlation between each construct. This shows that each construct is statistically different from one another (Tables 2 & 3).

A structural model with seven constructs was estimated using Maximum Likelihood (ML). As a first step in assessing the hypothesized relationships, the structural equation model was evaluated by examining the (1) chi-square, (2) variance explained estimates and (3) fit indices. The chi-square goodness of fit statistic for 3 degrees of freedom was 6.11, $p = 0.10$. The insignificant χ^2 suggests that the hypothesized model mirrors the pattern of covariance contained in the data. As Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993) note, the χ^2 should be regarded more as a measure of fit than as a strict test statistic. Thus we next turn to more complete examination of the fit indices following the recommendations in the literature. For the hypothesized model, the non-normed fit index (NFI) was 0.99 and the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.99, which exceeds the standards recommended by Baumgartner and Homburg (1996). The RMSEA was 0.07, which is within the suggested standard by Hair et al (1995). In looking at the variance explained for the structural equations, 0.60 of the variance Conative loyalty, 0.64 in affective loyalty and 0.61 in cognitive loyalty was explained by the hypothesized model. As a package, these indicators are consistent in pointing an acceptable fit of the hypothesized model to the data.

Fig. 2 shows the standardized, theoretical paths linking destination attachment and satisfaction and loyalty. H_{1abc} suggests a direct path linking attachment dimensions and customer satisfaction. The paths between destination attachment and satisfaction were supported (0.44, $t = 5.43$, $p = 0.000$ for affective attachment, and 0.21, $t = 2.63$, $p = 0.008$ for place identity), except for the path between place dependence and customer satisfaction. The analysis

[4] The variance extracted estimate, which measures the amount of variance captured by a construct in relation to the variance due to random measurement error average = (sum of squared standardized loading/sum of squared standardized loading + sum of indicator measurement error − sum of the variance due to random measurement error in each loading = 1 − the square of each loading).

Table 3
Factor correlations[a]

Dependence	100					
Affect	0.80	100				
Identity	0.83	0.81	100			
Satisfaction	0.65	0.78	0.77	100		
Cognitive	0.82	0.77	0.82	0.58	100	
Affective	0.80	0.83	0.81	0.81	0.82	100
Conative	0.69	0.81	0.80	0.80	0.78	0.84

[a] High correlations among attachment, satisfaction and loyalty may suggest that these constructs are conceptually close. It must be noted that despite the high correlations, say at 0.85 level, the constructs could be absolutely distinct, with no overlap in meaning or content.

further suggests significant direct effects of destination attachment on loyalty phases ($H_{2a:}$ place dependence–cognitive loyalty = 0.39, $H_{2b:}$ place affection–cognitive loyalty = 0.20, $H_{2d:}$ place identity–cognitive loyalty = 0.29), (H_{2c} (not supported): place dependence–affective loyalty = 0.09, $H_{2e:}$ place affection–affective loyalty = 0.25, $H_{2f:}$ and place identity–affective loyalty = 0.15) and indirect effects of destination attachment on loyalty behaviors through consumer satisfaction.

The next set of hypotheses concerns with direct effects of consumer satisfaction on loyalty behaviors. H_{3a}, predicting that consumer satisfaction is associated with cognitive loyalty, is not supported by path estimates of 0.01 ($t = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$), but the others are supported (H_{3bc}). According to the results, customer satisfaction does not hold an important role in building cognitive loyalty. It appears that relationships between customer satisfaction and three loyalty dimensions are different in magnitude. Furthermore, cognitive loyalty has a significant influence both on affective loyalty and conative loyalty ($H_{4a,b}$). The path between affective loyalty and conative loyalty however seems to be stronger compared to the path between cognitive loyalty and conative loyalty (0.40 vs. 0.25, $p < 0.000$). Overall, the estimates for paths examined support the hypotheses, suggesting that the level and type of attachment predict customer satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty. As the place attachment increases, so does the satisfaction levels and loyalty intentions. In other words, the present analysis reveals that 'Place Attachment' and 'Customer Satisfaction' are important antecedent variables affecting customers' loyalty intentions.

For the actual mediation analyses, the indirect effects are estimated both with Sobel's and a bootstrapping method using the SPPS-macro provided by Preacher and Hayes (2004). This combined approach to mediation analysis is stated to be more appropriate than traditional single mediation analysis approaches (e.g., MacKinnon. Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Sobel test presents the level of significance of the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through a mediator. The SPSS-macro provides an estimate of the true indirect effect and its bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (Sobel test scores, Z values and probability values are given in Table 4). Both the Sobel test (Table 4) and bootstrapping method revealed that customer satisfaction significantly mediated the effect of place identity, place affection and place dependence on affective loyalty (point estimate for indirect effect of place dependence = 0.236; 95% CI = 0.151, 0.332, $p < 0.05$; place affection = 0.204; 95% CI = 0.119, 0.295, $p < 0.05$; place identity = 0.225; 95% CI = 0.154, 0.310, $p < 0.05$) and conative loyalty (point estimate for indirect effect of place dependence = 0.242; 95% CI = 0.154, 0.356, $p < 0.05$; place affection = 0.203; 95% CI = 0.108, 0.305, $p < 0.05$; place identity = 0.232; 95% CI = 0.157, 0.330, $p < 0.05$). However, there was no evidence of statistically significant mediation of customer satisfaction (point estimate for indirect effect = 0.064; 95% CI = 0.021, 0.158, $p > 0.05$) for the effect of affective attachment on cognitive loyalty. Therefore, hypothesis 3_b that customer satisfaction mediates the effect of affective attachment on cognitive loyalty is rejected.

9. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated effects of place attachment on customer satisfaction and customers' loyalty intentions. The findings support the majority of research hypotheses and provide further evidence for the three-dimensional structure of the attachment construct. The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Apparently, a statistically strong and meaningful link exists between place attachment dimensions and customer satisfaction. This suggests that traditional view, which characterizes place satisfaction as a factor that contributes to place attachment (Halpenny, 2006) needs to be revisited, as place attachment could also predict satisfactory holiday experiences. According to the traditional view,

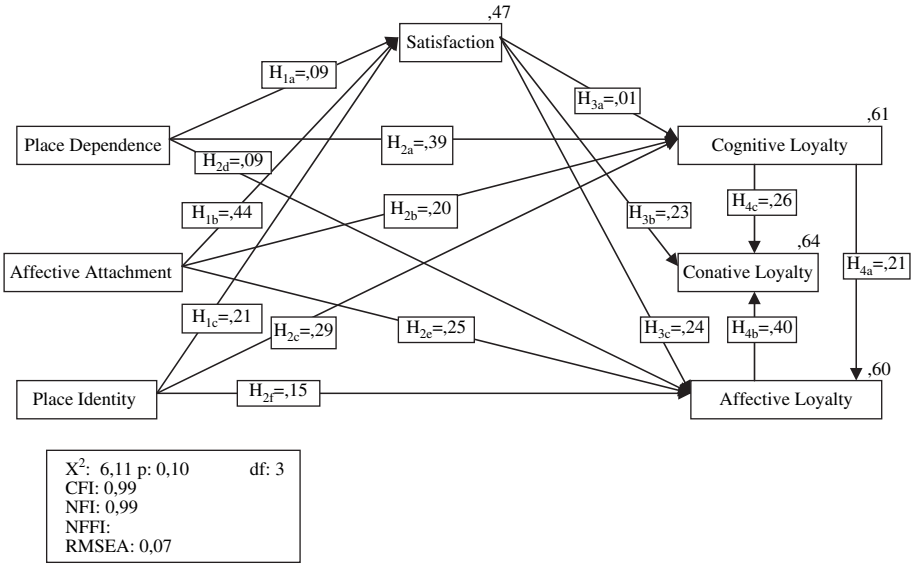

Fig. 2. The results of the examined relationships among attachment, satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 4
Indirect effects of place attachment on destination loyalty through customer satisfaction (Sobel's test results).

Indirect effect	Value	se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	*Z*	Sig(two)
Place identity–Cognitive loyalty	0.081	0.037	0.0084	0.1537	2.1870	0.0287
Place affection–Cognitive loyalty	0.064	0.044	−0.0216	0.1507	1.4677	0.1422
Place dependence–Cognitive loyalty	0.087	0.031	0.0256	0.1489	2.7734	0.0055
Place identity–Affective loyalty	0.2252	0.0394	0.1480	0.3024	5.7145	0.0000
Place affection–Affective loyalty	0.2040	0.0420	0.1217	0.2864	4.8558	0.0000
Place dependence–Affective loyalty	0.2336	0.0383	0.1585	0.3086	6.1006	0.0000
Place dependence–Conative loyalty	0.2428	0.0410	0.1624	0.3231	5.9192	0.0000
Place affection–Conative loyalty	0.2034	0.0447	0.1157	0.2911	4.5461	0.0000
Place identity–Conative loyalty	0.2326	0.0423	0.1497	0.3155	5.4971	0.0000

high levels of satisfaction with a setting, based in part on the setting's attributes which facilitate social interactions or participation in a favorite recreation activity, may lead to the formation of attachments (Halpenny, 2006). Satisfactory visitor experience may then lead to place dependence, which in turn affects the development of place affect and place identity as layers of memories and place-specific meanings develop (Halpenny, 2006). Our results show that positive emotional and cognitive bonds with a place could indeed affect individual's critical assessment of a setting. In Halpenny's words: "His or her evaluation of a setting could be affected by a view through sentimentally-tinted 'rose-colored glasses'" (p. 205).

Attachment dimensions have differential effects on satisfaction and loyalty and that affective attachment has the strongest effect on customers' satisfaction judgments than the other two dimensions (Fig. 2). The result also suggests a strongly significant relationship between place identity and customer satisfaction. This implies that cognitive connection between the self and the destination influences satisfaction and loyalty intentions. An increase in affective attachment or place identity (and to some extent place dependence) is likely to increase favorable evaluations about the current experience. The present result, illustrating that place attachment dimensions do not act uniformly, is consistent with the Kyle et al. (2004a) study (e.g., effects of place identity were noticeably stronger than that of place dependence) and that of Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) which demonstrated the salience of the affective component.

A number of factors may account for the positive link between attachment dimensions and satisfaction. Firstly, customer satisfaction consists of judgment of product and service performance and affect toward the product or service (Brocato, 2006). The cognitive and affective structure of satisfaction is thus theorized to relate to both the cognitive and affective dimensions of place attachment (Brocato, 2006). Secondly, physical features and services at the destination will create both cognitive evaluations and feelings. According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the physical environment influences two types of internal states within an individual; affective and cognitive evaluations and "The first level of response to the environment is affective" (Ittleson, 1973, p. 16). Affective evaluation is a judgment of something as attractive, likable, pleasant, etc. (Brocato, 2006) and it was found to be a better predictor of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty than cognitive evaluation (Yu & Dean, 2001).

The difference in the magnitude of the relationship between attachment dimensions and satisfaction is noteworthy but the comparatively lower link between place dependence and satisfaction should not be misleading. The result may be because of the sample composition, their motivation, timing of measurement, and similarity of facilities provided by the town to that of other touristic towns in the same product category, etc. The cognitive evaluation of the place is important, as this helps customer decide whether the environment and facilities would enable him/her fulfill their holiday goals (Brocato, 2006) and consequently this may result in satisfaction. (i) As noted earlier, place dependence refers to the functionality of a destination for a particular touristic activity (Hailu, Boxall, & McFarlen, 2005) (i.e., dependence is a function of how the destination compares with alternatives in the achievement of holiday goals). When the activity being performed at the destination is the dominant characteristic of the experience, the destination may be valued more in terms of its functionality. For example, let us assume that playing golf is the main characteristic of the holiday. The destination will be valued for its golf attributes that facilitate participation and the effect of place dependence on satisfaction should therefore be high. If there is no strong preference for a particular activity (attribute) and the customer is showing inertia to the array of attributes, then the effect of instrumental components on satisfaction may be limited. (ii) Dependence involves comparison of alternative destinations. When the individual lacks experience with (or adequate information about) other destinations, such a comparison could not take place. Moreover, perception in the similarity of attractions across holiday destinations may reduce the effect of place dependence on satisfaction. In other words, as the similarity in functional components of a destination to other destination increases, place functionality may not be entered into the evaluations.

Place attachment appears to be an important factor in the prediction of loyalty intentions toward a destination, which in turn could be a predictor of loyalty behaviors. The strength of the relationship between attachment dimensions and phases of loyalty intentions is dissimilar. This may be because of the corresponding structures of some dimensions with that of the loyalty phases. Due to the structure of the place dependence dimension, its link with cognitive loyalty is stronger compared to the link with affective attachment (Fig. 2). The same is true for place identity, as it relates to affective attachment more strongly than cognitive attachment (Fig. 2). As expected, satisfaction significantly mediates the relation between place attachment and loyalty intentions and there exists a strong relationship between satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Customer satisfaction-affective loyalty appears to be the strongest path. This suggests that customer satisfaction is an important factor for customers to become liking the destination more than its competitors. According to the present results, affective loyalty has a stronger effect on conative loyalty than cognitive loyalty (Fig. 2). This suggests that believing destination performs better compared to other destinations may increase conative loyalty intentions. However, the extent of the increase is expected to be lower than that of the affective loyalty. Destination authorities are advised to invest on affective components of the destination, as ability of the destination to induce positive affection seems to result in greater likelihood of becoming the first choice of the customer the next time. The results provide strong evidence for a significant link between cognitive and affective loyalty. The strong and statistically

significant link between cognitive and affective loyalty suggests that customers believing superiority of the destination quality compared to the others are likely to hold more favorable emotions toward the destination. It also provides some degree of support for the sequential process of loyalty in which customers become "loyal first in a cognitive sense, then later in an affective sense, and still later in a conative sense" (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). Interestingly, while satisfaction is argued to be consisted of cognitive and affective components, the link between satisfaction and cognitive loyalty is statistically insignificant (Fig. 2). Similar results emerged in Back's study, who reported insignificant links between satisfaction and cognitive loyalty in hair saloon/barber and auto repair samples.[5] The present finding seems somewhat contradicting with the common view in that strong loyal bonds to a firm are initially derived from consumers' belief in the firm's superiority in comparison to competitors. Participants are expected to be cognitively driven because of their ability to assess other destinations. Differing antecedents of cognitive, affective and conative loyalty in utilitarian and hedonic services may account for this result (Mano & Oliver, 1993). Utilitarian services rely more strongly on satisfaction, service quality, etc. to build cognitive loyalty, whereas satisfaction with hedonic services builds affective loyalty. What consumers want from a holiday may differ from individual to individual. A holiday can either be purely hedonic or utilitarian (or both). The present sample might have valued hedonic benefits more and this may explain the insignificant link between satisfaction and cognitive loyalty.

Overall, the results of the study show that the level and the nature of place attachment affect tourists' evaluations of current experiences with a destination and future loyalty intentions. The study confirms that place attachment is a multidimensional construct and that loyalty develops sequentially. The extent of the influence induced by place attachment dimensions on loyalty phases differs and this indicates that destination authorities need to take into account certain issues in order to improve customers' particular loyalty attitudes. For example, purchase reinforcement through provision of post purchase information whilst on vacation may give consumers more opportunity to internalize destination attributes and to develop more positive attitudes (i.e., cognitive loyalty). Studies are needed to understand how separate attachment dimensions features in the evaluation of tourism consumptions. The study further lends support to Halpenny's (2006) argument that place attachment determines customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between place attachment and destination loyalty. In other words, place attachment influences formation of loyalty intentions toward a destination directly and also indirectly through customer satisfaction. The study contains limitations which may have implications on the findings. One of the limitations relates to transient nature of tourist at a destination. Tourists' interaction with the setting is sporadic and brief (Kyle et al. 2004b) and therefore they may not develop as strong attachment as residents to a place. The repeat visitor rate is high; nevertheless the results provide evidence for an influence of attachment on satisfaction assessments and continuation of loyalty. The research was carried out during the summer at a single destination. The timing and peculiar characteristics of the destination, other destinations participants been to during their stay and their overall perception about Turkey may have affected the results. The composition of the sample, largely from the UK, implies that culture and nationality may have influenced the results. How individuals ascribe a meaning to a place and how these meanings are manifested in attitudes and behaviors may differ as a result of contextual and cultural issues (Kyle & Chick, 2007; Kyle & Johnson, 2008). Comparative research may shed light on how development of attachment types and levels vary among different cultures. This paper is further limited as it has not examined antecedents of attachment dimensions and their effects in a destination context. Studies are needed to explain whether the pursuit of different benefits from a holiday leads to development of different types of place attachment. Another area of research could be how to form not only affectively but also cognitively loyal tourists, as it exerts significant influence on affective and conative loyalty.

[5] In another study, Back (2005) found a strong link between satisfaction and cognitive loyalty.

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