Benefits and Constraints Associated with the Use of an Urban Park Reported by a Sample of Elderly in Hong Kong

Kam Hung\(^a\) & John L. Crompton\(^a\)

\(^a\) Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University, Texas, USA

Published online: 18 Feb 2007.

To cite this article: Kam Hung & John L. Crompton (2006) Benefits and Constraints Associated with the Use of an Urban Park Reported by a Sample of Elderly in Hong Kong, Leisure Studies, 25:3, 291-311, DOI: 10.1080/02614360500409810

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614360500409810

Please scroll down for article
Benefits and Constraints Associated with the Use of an Urban Park Reported by a Sample of Elderly in Hong Kong

KAM HUNG and JOHN L. CROMPTON
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University, Texas, USA

(Received October 2004; revised April 2005; accepted September 2005)

ABSTRACT The purpose of the study was to explore the constraints and benefits associated with the use of an urban park by a sample of elderly people in Hong Kong. The proportion of elderly in the population of Hong Kong is increasing rapidly. Although a substantial body of research on leisure and the elderly exists in western societies, no previous research on this subject in Hong Kong has been reported, and it seemed likely that cultural differences would lead to some different perspectives. A purposive sample of 25 elderly respondents, 13 within Tsuen Wan Jockey Club Tak Wah Park and 12 outside the park, were interviewed. Representatives from three age cohorts, 60–69, 70–79, and 80 and over, were selected. The major constraints associated with not using the park more by both park and non-park users were poor health, being too busy, and poor park management, which incorporated crowding, the poor hygiene of other park users, and illicit behavior in the park. Non-park users cited a number of additional reasons. Respondents perceived that multiple health, social and psychological benefits accrued from park use. Cultural differences were identified suggesting that the implications for facilitating urban park use in Hong Kong may be different from those in western societies.

KEYWORDS: Hong Kong, elderly, constraints, benefits, aprk use

Introduction

The average annual growth rates of Hong Kong’s population in 1991, 1996, and 2001 were 0.6%, 1.8%, and 0.9%, respectively. However, the 65 years old and over population in 1991, 1996, and 2001 increased by 8.7%, 10.1%, and 11.1%, respectively (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2001). The proportion of those aged 65 and over is projected to rise markedly, from 11% in 2001 to 24% in 2031 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2002), reflecting a reduced fertility rate and increases in life expectancy (Philips, 1995). According to the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (2002, online), ‘Hong Kong has experienced a continuous decline in mortality during the last two decades, with a
corresponding increase in expectation of life. The expectation of life at birth for males increased from 72.3 years in 1981 to 78.2 years in 2001; while for females, the increase was from 78.5 to 84.1 years … By 2031, the expectations of life at birth will be 82.3 years for males and 87.8 years for females’.

This rising population will result in a corresponding increase in demand for services for the elderly (Kwan, 1990). Well-structured community services contribute to helping the elderly better cope with the challenges of aging. These include not only traditional social welfare services, but also leisure services. There is evidence that social welfare services for the elderly have emerged as a concern of the Hong Kong government. The government has invested effort in sustaining the physical and economic well-being of the elderly by providing medical services, housing assistance, a monthly allowance, and implementing a pension scheme. Further, according to Chi and Chui (1999), the Hong Kong government has had a policy of providing such community services since the 1970s. Thus, for example, day-care centers, multi-service centers, social centers, and outreach teams have been established to provide community care for the elderly. However, despite these beginnings the overall investment in maintaining the psychological and social well-being of the elderly in Hong Kong has been small relative to that in other affluent societies.

One consequence of this is that Hong Kong has one of the highest suicide rates among the elderly in the world (Chi et al., 1997). Chi and Chou (2001, p. 232) point out that: ‘Over 30 percent of the suicide deaths occurring in Hong Kong were of old people aged sixty or above, while this group of people only comprised 14 percent of the total population’. Depression and decline in health are the two main causes of suicides in later life in western societies (Teague & MacNeil, 1992). Liu et al. (1993) reported that depression is a serious problem among the elderly in Hong Kong, with approximately 11% of males and 15% of females reporting they are depressed. Social support has been recommended as an intervention strategy for helping the elderly to recover from depression (Chi & Chou, 2001).

Deprivation of social contacts can lead to a decline in both physical and psychological well-being of the elderly (Iso-Ahola, 1980). The vice-president of the China Research Center on Aging pointed out that among the things that can be done to address this problem is providing high-quality services for them (Wu, 2003). The available research suggests that most elderly in Hong Kong spend their time watching television at home, just sitting, looking out of a window, or taking a nap, rather than going out and socializing (Kwan, 1990). Involvement in leisure activities has long been recognized as a useful way of alleviating feelings of being isolated, bored and unhappy. Hence, it has been suggested that a greater focus on meeting the leisure facility needs and delivering services to the elderly would contribute to their enhanced psychological and social well-being (Iso-Ahola, 1980).

Improving leisure services for the elderly requires an understanding of the benefits they seek from them and the constraints that inhibit their use of such services. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore constraints and benefits associated with the use of an urban park reported by a sample of elderly people in Hong Kong. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, no research on this topic has been undertaken in Hong Kong. A body of literature in this area exists in western societies, but the elderly in western and Asian societies may differ in traditions, social
Benefits and Constraints of Urban Park Use

environment, personality, education, perceptions of the roles of elderly people, and so on. Hence, it is probably unreasonable to assume that the perspectives of Hong Kong elderly will be the same as those of elderly in western countries.

Overview of the Constraints and Benefits Literatures

The literature on constraints to leisure participation and the benefits sought from such participation is vast. A brief overview of it is offered here to provide context for the study. The early constraints literature assumed that constraints resulted in leisure non-participation (Jackson & Scott, 1999), but this changed in recognizing that in addition to non-participation, constraints may also explain changes in the frequency and intensity of leisure participation (Jackson & Dunn, 1988).

An important conceptual advance occurred when it was demonstrated that constraints do not necessarily lead to inhibited participation, but that people sometimes negotiate constraints so they participate in a leisure activity even though constraints are present (Crawford et al., 1991; Kay & Jackson, 1991). Crawford et al. (1991) argued that: ‘leisure participation is heavily dependent on negotiating through an alignment of multiple factors, arranged sequentially, that must be overcome to maintain an individual’s impetus through these systemic levels’ (p. 314). The notion of negotiation was confirmed by Kay and Jackson (1991) who reported that respondents maintained their desired level of participation despite the presence of constraints.

Early models of leisure constraints were offered by Jackson and Searle (1985) and Jackson and Dunn (1988). Crawford et al. (1991) built on this work to develop their widely-accepted model which recognized three categories of leisure constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal constraints are those associated with an individual’s psychological state such as personality, interests and attitude towards leisure. Interpersonal constraints relate to interactions between a potential leisure participant and others such as family and friends (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Structural constraints are external environmental factors such as lack of facilities and inconvenient transportation, which can frustrate potential leisure participation. Jackson et al. (1993) suggested these three categories of constraints could be conceptualized as operating hierarchically. They postulated that intrapersonal constraints guided leisure preferences. When these were determined, then concern was directed to interpersonal constraints, reflecting the challenges of finding compatible others with whom to engage in the activity and to coordinate with their needs and schedules. Finally, if both of these categories of constraints were surmounted, then structural constraints have to be addressed.

Two different approaches have been adopted to studying leisure constraints experienced by the elderly. One approach has been based on life span comparisons in which the constraints of the elderly have been compared with those in younger age cohorts, while the other approach has focused exclusively on the elderly without a comparative framework. The array of constraints among the elderly that have been identified by these approaches is extensive, as summarized in Table 1. The list reflects differences in samples, contexts, research designs, activities focused upon, and statistical approaches. The earlier studies shown in Table 1 tended to
Table 1. Leisure constraints of older adults reported in past studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrapersonal constraints</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards leisure</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling too old to learn new activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of self-discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not getting a feeling of accomplishment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of crime</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of making mistakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends don’t do them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling too old to learn the activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of compassion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling guilty about doing them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not wanting to interrupt daily schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of planning required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interests</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal constraints</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of companion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that family and friends would not approve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear others would make fun of participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.  
Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being too busy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy with doing other things/activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy with work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to make too many decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having more important things to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/money</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of physical ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having the skills needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing how to do them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being no good at activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having anyone to teach the activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too crowded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/accessibility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Numbers refer to ranks of constraints. X indicates constraint was identified in the research. Adapted from Buchanan & Allen (1985).
address constraints that affected leisure participation in general, while the later research tends to narrow the focus to constraints associated with a specific activity.

With respect to benefits, Gray and Greben (1974) offered the following perspective on recreation practice:

We should have discovered long ago the nature of the business we are in, but we have not. Only now are we beginning to rethink what recreation is. In the emerging view it is not activities or facilities or programs that are central; it is what happens to people. (p. 33)

They go on to discuss some of the implications of this. Among them, they declare:

We must evaluate everything we do in human terms. The critical questions are not How many were there? or Who won? The critical question is, What happened to Jose, Mary, Sam and Joan in this experience? (p. 47)

In contemporary times, this conceptualization has metamorphosed into ‘the benefits approach to leisure’ (Driver et al., 1991), which is now widely recognized in North America as a significant step forward in leisure service delivery. It is an outcomes-oriented approach which requires that the selection and delivery processes of leisure services are guided by the benefits that participants seek from participation (Driver & Bruns, 1999).

This approach requires there to be an understanding of what benefits older people seek from leisure activities. Some research work on leisure benefits sought by the elderly has been reported (Tinsley et al., 1985; McPherson, 1991). A tentative conclusion from this limited body of research is that the array of benefits sought varies. For instance, Tinsley et al. (1987) found that some older women identified companionship as the primary benefit sought, while others – especially those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds – sought to satisfy their need for power through their leisure experiences. McPherson (1991) reported that benefits sought differed across elderly cohorts of 60–69, 70–79, and 80 and over, while Tinsley et al. (2002) reported differences among elderly groups of different ethnic backgrounds (African American, Hispanic, Asian and Caucasian) in the benefits they sought from visiting Lincoln Park in Chicago.

The overview of literature indicates that an ongoing effort has been invested in western countries in identifying leisure constraints and benefits among the aged. This provides a framework for pursuing related research in Hong Kong. The lack of research on the relationship of leisure and aging in Hong Kong means that the potential role of leisure in improving the quality of later life remains vague. The increasing number of older people and the high rates of depression and suicide among the elderly in Hong Kong suggest the urgency of investigating constraints and benefits so that leisure services for the aged population can be more effectively delivered.

**Study Context**

This study was undertaken in Tsuen Wan Jockey Club Tak Wah Park in Hong Kong. The 1.7 hectare park is managed by Hong Kong’s Leisure and Cultural Services Department. Most visitors to it are retired elderly persons. It is designed in the Chinese-garden style. It is intended to give a feeling of ‘visiting a place of scenic beauty’ to visitors, and to provide a resting place in the busy commercial
center of Tsuen Wan District. Special features within the park include: a tile-roofed house with courtyard and a mid-lake island; a stone bridge and a pavilion built on the island with fish in the lake; a ‘magnificent mountain’ constructed by rockeries that are made of Taihu rocks which are renowned in China; various themed gardens; and sitting-out areas of various sizes which are decorated with artificial mounds and rock features, where grass and different types of trees are grown.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 25 respondents, 13 of whom were inside the park. It is likely that for some individuals constraints might be sufficiently strong that they inhibit any park visitation. Conducting interviews solely with respondents in the park would exclude those who experienced these strong constraints. Thus, in addition to exploring the constraints and benefits associated with park use by elderly who were in the park, 12 elderly people from outside the park also were included in the sample. It was recognized that some of the individuals who were identified as ‘non-park visitors’ might on another day be visitors, but such mis-categorization could be addressed ex post facto after the interviews were conducted and the respondents’ status had been empirically verified. The sites of interviews outside the park – all within half a mile of the park – are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The area in which interviews were conducted. The circle represents a one-half mile radius of Jockey Club Tak Wah Park. Source: Centamap (n.d.) Map of Hong Kong. Retrieved April 15, 2004, from Survey and Mapping Office, Lands Department, http://www.centamap.con/cent/index.htm. Reproduced with the permission of the Lands Department, Government of HKSAR.
Purposive sampling was used in order to ensure representation of individuals from the three elderly cohorts shown in Table 2. The cohort parameters were suggested by McPherson (1991). The sample size was not determined \textit{a priori}. Rather the strategy was to continue to interview people in both sample groups until the amount of new information which was forthcoming was minimal, i.e. almost all of what was being stated had been mentioned previously by others. The study’s intent was to gain insights into dimensions relating to constraints and benefits associated with park visitation, not to measure the distribution of these constraints and benefits within a population.

Interviews were conducted in Cantonese, which is the most common language in Hong Kong. One of the authors approached older persons in the park whom she thought might be qualified to participate in the study. Those chosen were greeted and asked their age in order to identify whether they were age-qualified to participate. Qualified persons were invited to be interviewed. The purposes and procedures of the interview were explained to them. Participants were required to show an understanding and a willingness to participate before an interview took place. They were also told that they could withdraw from the interview at any time.

The interviews were tape-recorded, unless respondents requested that this did not occur. Note-taking was done for the three interviews in which interviewees rejected being audio-taped. Interview transcripts were translated from Cantonese to English. In the case of the non-tape-recorded interviews the translation was done immediately after the interviews were completed in order to keep memory loss of data to a minimum.

**Sample Profile**

All participants were at least 60 years of age. Nearly half of them had no formal education. A greater proportion of female participants were uneducated than males. This may be because, in the past, education for males was considered to be more important than for females in China. The role of females was generally confined to taking care of family duties for which formal education was not considered necessary. The situation has changed in recent years. More females now go to school. This might explain why none of the female participants in the 70–79 and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside the park</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outside the park</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
80+ cohorts had formal education, while all of the female participants in the 60–69 cohorts had some formal education. The poverty and wars that characterized China’s past may explain why male participants who were aged 80 or above were either not educated, or educated only up to primary-school level.

From 1945 to 1956, the population in Hong Kong increased from 650,000 to 2,490,000 (Elderly Service Center in Chai Wan District, 1980). Much of the increase was stimulated by the communist takeover in China and the subsequent Cultural Revolution. A majority of elderly in Hong Kong were born in mainland China (Ikels, 1983), and most participants in this study reported that they had emigrated to Hong Kong from mainland China. The need to earn money by getting a job was the reason most of them cited for not having a secondary education.

All respondents were either married or widowed. Some lived alone, some lived with spouses, and others lived with their children. A majority reported that they had some form of health problem. All except one participant were retired and not currently working. When asked the reasons for not working, a majority indicated that they were perceived by employers to be too old to work. Some indicated that they would like to work if there was a chance. One participant, who was aged 60, shared her frustration at being retired:

I don’t feel that I am old yet. I want to work because I still have the ability to do a job. It would be nice if I could work for a half-day, and do house chores for half a day. But I don’t have a job now. If I was 65 or 70, then it would be fine. I am not so old yet, but nobody wants to hire me. I want to work if there is a job for me. [Have you ever looked for a job?] I don’t search for a job now. I looked for jobs a few years ago. People told me that I was almost at retirement age and I didn’t need to work any more. So I don’t look for jobs any more because I know that I can’t get a job. [Why do you want to work?] I can pass my time more easily if I have a job. It is not because of money. (Female, 60–69, non-park user)

Not all respondents wanted to be employed. Some preferred not working for a variety of reasons including: having worked for a long time, lack of useful skills, poor health, and no need to support their children any more. One participant noted:

I don’t work now. I have been retired for more than 20 years. [So you retired at about 50 years of age?] Yes. [Why did you retire so early?] Because all my children were independent, and I no longer had to support them. (Male, 70–79, park user)

Constraints Associated with Park Use

The constraints reported by each of the three age groups of respondents are reported in Table 3. Although many commonalities were reported, there were some differences in constraints reported by respondents in these three cohorts. For example, those in both the 60–69 and 70–79 cohorts reported that ‘being too busy’ was one of the constraints associated with park use. However, this constraint was not reported by those in the 80+ age group.

Elderly in both the park user and non-user samples were asked to identify any constraints associated with the use of Tsuen Wan Jockey Club Tak Wah Park. Table 4 lists the constraints that they reported. Both groups of respondents reported being unable to walk far as a major constraint to park use. One of the in-park interviewees said:
Table 3. Constraints associated with park use reported by the elderly of three age cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60–69</th>
<th>70–79</th>
<th>80+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poor health conditions</td>
<td>1. Poor health conditions</td>
<td>1. Poor health conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Poor vision</td>
<td>a. Unable to walk far</td>
<td>a. Being ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Being too busy</td>
<td>2. Being too busy</td>
<td>b. Lack of energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Poor park management</td>
<td>3. Poor park management</td>
<td>2. Poor park management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Poor hygiene</td>
<td>b. Poor hygiene</td>
<td>-Drug use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Unethical behaviors in the park</td>
<td>c. Unethical behaviors in the park</td>
<td>-Prostitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Drug use</td>
<td>-Prostitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lack of interest</td>
<td>6. Too far from residence</td>
<td>4. Too far from residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Not wanting to interrupt daily schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Constraints associated with park use reported by park users and non-park users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraints reported by elderly in the park</th>
<th>Constraints reported by elderly outside the park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poor health conditions</td>
<td>5. Poor health conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Unable to walk far</td>
<td>a. Unable to walk far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Poor vision</td>
<td>b. Lack of energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Being ill</td>
<td>6. Being too busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Being too busy</td>
<td>7. Poor park management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Poor park management</td>
<td>a. Too crowded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Too crowded</td>
<td>b. Poor hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Poor hygiene</td>
<td>c. Unethical behaviors in the park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Unethical behaviors in the park</td>
<td>-Drug use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Drug use</td>
<td>-Prostitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Prostitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Weather</td>
<td>8. Having other options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lack of interest</td>
<td>9. Too far from residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Weather</td>
<td>10. Lack of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Not wanting to interrupt daily schedule</td>
<td>11. Other interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Not knowing other park visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Not wanting to interrupt daily schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Too many male park visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits and Constraints of Urban Park Use

My legs are not good. Even though I want to stay here for a longer time, I feel tired after walking here for a while. So I don’t stay here for a long time. My legs don’t have much energy. (Female, 80+, park user)

Being unable to walk far was a reason both for not staying in the park for a longer period of time and for not visiting the park. Poor health also restricted the elderly from participating in some activities in the park. A respondent reported:

I only watch them play Chinese chess. I don’t play chess … My eyes are not good. I can’t play chess with my bad vision. (Male, 60–69, park user)

The following quote shows that being ill can also be a constraint that leads to not visiting the park:

[Have you experiences that prevent you from visiting this park?] Yes. Sometimes I don’t come because my body has had some illnesses. (Male, 80+, park user)

Apart from those constraints, lack of energy prevented some elderly from visiting Tak Wah Park. An outside-the-park respondent said:

I do nothing for fun. I don’t even play Majong. I don’t have enough energy … I am even afraid to go to Tak Wah Park. (Male, 80+, non-park user)

Several respondents indicated that they had more free time compared to when they were young adults. Nevertheless, being too busy was reported as a reason for being unable to visit the park or not visiting the park more often. An in-park respondent reported: ‘I can’t come here more often … I don’t have that much time to come’ (female, 60–69, park user). A similar answer was given by a respondent outside the park:

I don’t have much time. I have to do the shopping, go for Yum Cha,1 do laundry, tidy up the apartment, cook, and so on. (Female, 70–79, non-park user)

Although the elderly were retired from work, other business such as taking care of house chores kept some of them busy and inhibited their park visitation.

Several constraints relating to the management of Jockey Club Tak Wah Park were revealed in the interviews: the park was too crowded, the park was not clean enough, and some illicit behaviors such as drug taking and prostitution were perceived to be occurring in the park:

People are not very hygienic here. Some people spit; some people throw cigarettes on the floor. It is better after the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) alert, but it still exits. (Female, 70–79, park user)

It is not a good place, very crowded and dirty … Sometimes I go to Kowloon Park and Hong Kong Park … Those parks are better than this park in the central area. (Male, 70–79, non-park user)

Some girls from mainland China engage in prostitution there. There are some drug addicts too. It is not safe. (Female, 80+, non-park user)

However, these factors did not affect other respondents’ visiting behavior even though they had similar observations:

There are too many people here. It is too crowded … I always come here; about five to six times a week … There are many older people in this park. This is one of the reasons that brings me here. Most of the visitors to this park are old people. (Male, 70–79, park user)

This participant was concerned that the park was too crowded. However, the presence of many elderly in the park was a positive factor that outweighed concern
with crowding and provided the motive for him to keep visiting the park. Another in-park respondent confirmed that poor management did not necessarily negatively influence visitors’ visiting behaviors:

[How do you feel about this park?] This park is fine, but there are some unethical things going on. Some females are prostituting here. [So how do you feel?] Uncomfortable. [Do you want them to stop coming here?] They have their freedom. They also do this for their living. [Did anyone offer you prostitution?] Sometimes. [They asked you even when your wife was accompanying you?]. Yes. [Will this affect the frequency that you visit the park?] No. [Will this affect your mood when you are in the park?] No. (Male, 70–79, park user)

These observations show that while undesirable factors may be constraints to some participants, they may exert no influence on other participants’ park visiting behavior. Negotiation of constraints may explain this difference. The latter two respondents experienced the same crowding and prostitution constraints as the others. However, the overall attractiveness of the park was sufficiently great for them that it outweighed the negative perceptions and drew them to the park despite those constraints.

Some participants in the park indicated that they did not go when it rained. Hence, weather was a temporary constraint that stopped people from visiting the park. Additional constraints were reported by respondents in the outside-the-park sample (8 through 14 in Table 4). Some of these respondents indicated that instead of visiting Jockey Club Tak Wah Park, they visited other parks or places which were perceived to be more desirably located; a better size or capacity; or fresher air. For instance, one respondent noted:

Tsuen Wan Park is better than Tak Wah Park. It is bigger than Tak Wah Park. The air is fresher there … Besides, there is a big market next to it. After visiting the park, I can shop there. (Female, 60–69, non-park user)

Several interviewees from outside the park indicated that the sitting areas where their interviews were conducted were closer to their residences and they preferred to stay in a familiar place near their place of residence. Some elderly did not visit the park simply because they were not interested in it: ‘I am not interested in visiting a park. I like beaches and quiet places … I like to buy stocks … I like reading’. Thus, instead of visiting a park, the participant engaged in other activities in which he was more interested. Some participants indicated their unwillingness to talk to people whom they did not know:

I don’t go there. I like to spend time with my friends here. We can chat. Sometimes I watch them playing bridge. We always gather here … I don’t go because I don’t know the old people there. (Female, 80+, non-park user)

I am familiar with the people here … I know the people here, so I come here very often to chat to the people that I know. I don’t know many people in Tak Wah Park, but I know many people here, so I don’t go to the park. (Male, 80+, non-park user)

These elderly wanted to spend their time with the people with whom they were familiar instead of making an effort to become acquainted with those whom they did not know.

Some respondents routinized their daily activities, and performed the same activities everyday:
I seldom go to park. I always go grocery shopping in the morning, then go back to cook soup. In the afternoon, I go to Pakin’ Supermarket for shopping … [Are there any parks nearby your residence?] Yes, there are some, but I don’t visit them. [Why?] I don’t have time. I have to do the shopping, go for Yum Cha, do the laundry, tidy up the apartment, and cook. (Female, 70–79, non-park user)

This participant routinized her daily schedule and excluded visiting the park from the daily tasks list. She showed an unwillingness to disturb her daily schedule, so visiting the park was not something that she considered. Too many male park visitors was a constraint identified by a female respondent:

I only stay there for a while. You know, there are so many male elderly there … I visit the park sometimes, but not often. I visit a small park near my place more often instead. I know people there, so I can talk to them. I also sit in other places such as here where I know many elderly. I like to talk to people that I know. I know many people here. We have been living here (Tsuen Wan) for a long time. (Female, 70–79, non-park user)

This respondent was interviewed in a sitting area where female elderly people frequently gathered.

**Benefits Associated with Park Use**

The array of benefits identified by respondents is reported in Table 5. All but five of the 13 park users recognized that their health could be maintained or improved through walking and exercising in the park:

![Table 5. Benefits associated with park use reported by the elderly](image-url)

1. **Health-related benefits**
   - Maintain/improve health condition
   - Reduce/avoid stiffness of body
   - Take a rest in the park

2. **Social benefits**
   - Chat to other people
   - Know more people

3. **Psychological benefits**
   - Enjoy pleasant scenery, green environment and fresh air
   - Enjoy quietness in the park
   - Cultivate mind
   - Be able to pass time
   - Be happy to teach or help others
   - Feeling of not being alone
   - Have more pleasant personality
   - Increased life satisfaction and happiness
   - Feeling more comfortable to be in the park
   - Be able to observe people/activities
Walking or doing a little exercise here every day can improve my health …. Doing exercises can keep my body fit. If I don’t move, I will be useless soon. (Male, 70–79, park user)

I always sit or walk in the park …. walking is good for my health …. I can maintain the flexibility of my body. (Female, 70–79, park user)

Some participants indicated one of the purposes that led them to visit the park was to chat with other elderly. A respondent observed: ‘Here there are some people that I can talk to …. There are many older people in this park. This is one of the reasons that brings me here. Everyone is old (here). They are old just like me’ (male, 70–79, park user). Most visitors to the park were old people, and some observed that it was easier to talk to old people since they had similar life experiences and ways of thinking. Apart from talking to people of similar age, some participants felt more comfortable talking to those people who had similar origins. One participant indicated:

I don’t come to this park with anyone. I come here by myself. When I see some people who came from the same village as me in mainland China, we chat. [Are there many of those people from your village?] Yes, there are some. [Which village are you from?] Tung Guan province [Did you know those people before?] I know those persons here. We are from the same village. Then we get comfortable with each other after chatting. (Male, 60–69, park user)

Most participants indicated that they only chatted to those people whom they knew before, rather than people whom they did not know: ‘I usually chat to the other people here … I only chat to the people whom I know. If I don’t see anyone that I know, I will just sit by myself” (male, 80+, park user). Although a majority of participants reflected this view, some indicated a willingness to get to know more people:

I know more people after visiting this park. When I spend more time here, and chat to more people, I know more people here. It is just like you go to Yam Cha in the Chinese restaurant. You will know more people if you visit there frequently. (Male, 70–79, park user)

Several psychological benefits associated with park use were reported. Some respondents expressed their appreciation of the aesthetics and green environment of the park:

Air is fresh here. That is why I come here. The scenery is pleasant here. (Female, 60–69, park user)

We come here to see green trees, and breathe fresh air. This park has some trees. So I come here. (Female, 70–79, park user)

I enjoy the scenery here. You know the air pollution is pretty serious in a city. There are many green trees here, so I can breathe fresh air. (Male, 70–79, park user)

I usually watch people playing chess, sit, walk, and breathe fresh air there (in the park) …. There are many green trees inside the park …. It is good for my health. (Male, 60–69, non-park user)

The park is quiet, so I can sit here and enjoy the quietness. (Male, 70–79, park user)

The Tsuen Wan Jockey Club Tak Wah Park is located in a busy central area where few trees or natural resources can be found. This may contribute to the appreciation of the green environment of the park by the elderly. It provides a place for them to withdraw temporarily from the concrete city. A respondent indicated that practicing
Tai Chi and Ku Fu in the park every day improved his health, passed the time and cultivated his mind:

I visit this park every morning. It is open at 6:30 am. I always come here around that time. I usually practice Tai Chi and Chinese Ku Fu, walk and talk to others. I learned Tai Chi and Chinese Ku Fu from an old person who is from mainland China. He was here to visit his relatives. He practiced Tai Chi in this park during his stay. Since I was retired and was spending my time in the park, I started to learn Tai Chi and Chinese Ku Fu with him. I have practiced them every day since then. While I am practicing, some people also follow my actions. I teach them Tai Chi and Chinese Ku Fu if they are interested in it. It is good for health and can cultivate the mind … This park is close to my residence. I have nothing to do, and have nowhere to go. I come here to practice Ku Fu and Tai Chi … walking or doing a little exercise here every day can improve my health, pass my time, and cultivate my mind. (Male, 70–79, park user)

Similarly, another respondent who offered free dancing classes indicated that the role of being a teacher gave a sense of fulfillment:

I visit the park everyday. It has been 10 years. I teach dancing here. It is free. Anyone who’s interested in it is welcome to join us … I come here by myself and meet my students here. I have many students who have been in my class for many years. I didn’t know them in the beginning. More people joined us later. There are now many students in my class. We have practice every morning … I receive no money from my volunteering. Helping others brings me happiness. I am happy with what I am doing now … I teach Chinese dance. After the class, I join my students for Yum Cha. (Female, 60–69, park user)

A feeling of not being alone was indicated by some in the sample as a reason for visiting the park:

It is good that I can exercise with other elderly together … We always turn on the music, and do exercises together. It is too boring if I exercise alone. (Female, 60–69, park user)

I feel happier here. If I stay at home, I feel lonely. (Female, 80+, park user)

Multiple reasons may lead to a preference for going to the park to meet other elderly. Both respondents above indicated that their children were unable to accompany them most of the time. Feeling alone at home encouraged them to find a place where they could spend their time and stay with others. However, not all respondents preferred to talk to others. Some preferred doing things on their own without interacting with others:

I can sit and relax here. I can observe people passing me by. I observe people’s faces … I always like to stay in the park. It was the same when I was young. I have a special interest. I like to observe people. (Male, 70–79, park user)

To those who do not like to interact with others, sitting alone and observing people can be entertainment. Tak Wah Park offers a place where they can conduct these activities.

Discussion

A limitation of this study was that the constraints associated with park use identified here do not include constraints experienced by those who were not invited to participate in this study. Thus, for example, constraints to park visitation of those who were working or who stayed home were not explored.
Undertaking this research was methodologically challenging because of the natural suspicion of Hong Kong elderly towards people whom they do not know. Since many of them had no or little formal education, they could not read. This means that collecting information by self-administered surveys is not a viable option. Further, many are fearful of any interaction with anyone with whom they are not familiar who visits them requesting information or that they sign any document. These challenges were compounded by some of the behaviors observed in Jockey Club Tak Wah Park. Prostitution was not an obvious or dominant behavior, but it did occur and park visitors were aware of it. One of the authors is female and she undertook the interviews. The immediate suspicion of many of the elderly males in the park was that she was soliciting. Thus, it made them anxious when they were seen to be talking with her.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are suggestive of some important dynamics in the experience of older people in the parks of large metropolitan areas and the influences of age and cultural context on the constraints and benefits experienced. These dynamics have important implications for attending to older people in the management of urban parks, particularly in Hong Kong, but in other large cities as well.

**Constraints Associated with Park Use**

As Table 1 shows, the constraining effect of deteriorating health has been identified in other studies as the most common reason for reduced participation in leisure activities by the elderly. The older age groups (70–79 and 80+) reported that the ‘park is too far from their residence’, while the younger age group (60–69) did not include this as one of their constraints. This is probably explained by failing health. Lack of companions was reported in previous research as a more prominent constraint among the elderly (Table 1). In this study, ‘not knowing other park visitors’ was reported as a constraint only among those in the 80+ age group where social skills may be declining with diminished mental capacity.

Another distinction among the constraints reported by the three different age cohorts was that those in both the 60–69 and 70–79 cohorts reported that ‘being too busy’ was one of the constraints associated with park use. However, this constraint was not reported by the 80+ age group. This might be because most of those in the 80+ cohort were not responsible for house chores because of poor health, while those in the younger age groups still took care of some house chores in their family. An 82 year old reported:

> I can’t do any house chores now. I don’t even cook now. I don’t need to do anything now. Even if I want to do it, my hands and legs do not allow me to do it since they are so stiff now.
> (Female, 80+, park user)

Several of those in the 60–69 and 70–79 age groups reported that they did house chores at home. For example:

> I help my wife with house chores. I have five family members. My children have to work. If I help with doing the house chores, preparing meals, my sons can take a rest when they get home. All of them are working now. (Male, 70–79, park user)
Table 6 reports constraints associated with park use by the elderly in three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints. This categorization may facilitate park managers implementing strategic plans for reducing or eliminating particular types of constraints. This may be termed Constraint-Based Management (CBM). For instance, to eliminate the impact of intrapersonal constraints that the elderly report, parks could be constructed closer to residential areas, so those who are unable to walk far can more easily visit them. Improved park management could reduce the impact of structural constraints associated with problems of drug use and prostitution.

Some respondents maintained park visiting behavior despite the adverse behavior occurring in the park such as crowding and prostitution, while other respondents did not visit the park because of these same problems. Negotiation of constraints may explain these different reactions to particular behaviors. However, such negotiation should not lead to the presumption that constraints do not keep others from participating, or that they do not reduce the level of involvement of those who do negotiate constraints to use the park, or that the negotiation does not extract some kind of cost in terms of the quality of experience.

### Table 6. Application of hierarchical model of leisure constraints in Hong Kong

**Intrapersonal constraints**

1. Poor health conditions
   a. Unable to walk far
   b. Poor vision
   c. Being ill
   d. Lack of energy
2. Lack of interest
3. Other interests
4. Not wanting to interrupt daily schedule
5. Being too busy

**Interpersonal constraints**

1. Not knowing other park visitors
2. Too many male park visitors

**Structural constraints**

1. Poor park management
   a. Too crowded
   b. Poor hygiene
   c. Unethical behaviors in the park
      - Drug use
      - Prostitution
2. Weather
3. Having other options
4. Too far from residence
Benefits from Park Going

The benefits reported by respondents indicate that Tsuen Wan Jockey Club Tak Wah Park benefits the elderly not only by maintaining or improving their physical health, but also by contributing to satisfying their psychological needs. Some of the benefits associated with park use are consistent with those reported in leisure research undertaken in western countries. For instance, the need of the elderly for companionship was reported here as in previous studies, suggesting that similarities in psychological needs may exist among elderly who reside in different countries. However, the extent of the need for companionship may be different. Most elderly in Hong Kong lack education. Their financial status is thus relatively low compared to many elderly in western countries, such as the United States. Chui (2001) pointed out:

Most of Hong Kong’s elderly people are poor in physical, financial and social aspects. They are at a disadvantage in facing the threat of urban renewal. The weakening of Chinese traditional values of respecting elderly people and neighborhood care, coupled with the nuclearization of families, all aggravate the plight of elderly people. (p. 158)

Chinese elderly are likely to be more dependent on others for financial income compared to their western counterparts. Also, most Chinese elderly expect to be taken care of by their children in later life. However, diminishing filial responsibility in Chinese society means that many children now move out from their parents’ house after getting married. The loss of job and importance in both family and society leads to a ‘rolelessness’ for these old people. The dependency expectation which was formerly nurtured by Chinese society has resulted in some elderly feeling miserable in later life. One respondent who lived in a nursing home shared his feelings:

My son is away, doesn’t contact me anymore … I am alone all the time. No one can accompany me … I am old now. What can I expect from my life? As long as I can walk, I am ok with it. (Male, 70–79, non-park user)

He showed his unhappiness and depression in the interview. Children may be willing to accompany their parents to engage in leisure activities. However, their working schedules and other domestic responsibilities may prevent this. Some respondents commented on their joy and happiness when they stayed with their children:

I always walk around by myself. My children don’t have time to accompany me. We only spend a little time together when they call me up for Yum Cha. Since I want to meet them, I meet them in the restaurant even though I don’t like the food there. I always cook for myself. I only eat the food that I cook. You know, the food outside is not clean and healthy. It has so many artificial ingredients. That’s why there are so many kinds of diseases occurring nowadays such as cancer. People don’t care about the food they are eating. The food in the Chinese restaurant is imported from mainland China where the foods are not being properly processed. I don’t like the food there. (Female, 80+, non-park user)

She indicated that she only eats what she cooks for herself, since she does not like the food provided in the restaurant. However, she goes for Yum Cha with her children even though she does not like the food in the restaurant since she wants to meet her children. This exemplifies her need for companionship with her children and her willingness to endure other less appealing conditions. It is postulated that
the need for companionship is especially strong among the elderly in Hong Kong; perhaps more so than in western countries because of traditional cultural practices and, therefore, the degree of benefit they receive from socialization when visiting a park may be commensurately greater.

**Implications for Park Management**

Park managers could adopt a Benefit-Based Management (BBM) approach as an effective tool for guiding park management in Hong Kong. BBM requires managers to focus on why a leisure service is delivered instead of simply providing the service to the public, i.e. it inputs the needs and wants of customers into the design of leisure facilities (Driver & Bruns, 1999). In the past, managers often decided what type of facilities should be provided to the public without consulting potential users. However, this approach has been recognized as inappropriate since the services decided by managers may not fulfill the needs of the public who pay for them through the tax system. The BBM approach identifies those benefits that people seek before designing a service and, based on those findings, managers provide a service that is likely to better match the public’s needs.

Driver and Bruns (1999) suggested that delivery of leisure services can be viewed as a production system in which designing a leisure service should be based on the benefits information obtained from service users. To make the concept simpler, BBM can be viewed in the context of General Systems Theory (Driver & Bruns, 1999). Benefit outputs result from a production process, i.e. from interaction with inputs such as capital within the system’s structure. BBM integrates the concepts of General Systems Theory and of modern management science and planning (Driver & Bruns, 1999). The inputs of this system include not only managerial decisions but, more importantly, these managerial decisions are made based on benefit information that is provided by users.

Both Constraint-Based Management and Benefit-Based Management can be useful in better tailoring park services for the elderly. Parks have been reported as one of the most popular recreational and gathering sites for the elderly (Hong Kong Society for the Aged, 1980). The elderly have a tendency to depend upon the physical and social environment in which they live (Chui, 2001). Outside the time spent at home, the next most popular place for spending time is the park (Hong Kong Society for the Aged, 1980).

Depression has been found to be a serious problem among the elderly in Hong Kong with approximately 11% of males and 15% of females reporting they are depressed. Social support has been recommended as an intervention strategy for helping the elderly to recover from depression (Chi & Chou, 2001). Parks, as popular social places for the elderly in Hong Kong, could play an important role in providing social support.

A more focused effort to meet the elderly’s needs through enhanced investment in park services is likely to improve levels of life satisfaction and happiness. To do this effectively, park managers need to better understand leisure constraints and benefits associated with park use experienced by the elderly in Hong Kong. Given the lack of previous research in Hong Kong, this study acts as a stepping stone to enhanced knowledge on these issues.
Notes

1. Yum Cha means ‘drinking tea’ which includes gathering with friends in a restaurant; it is a mechanism for facilitating a social gathering.
2. Tai Chi and Ku Fu are Chinese fitness exercises.

References


