

Who Are the Consumers of Public Park and Recreation Services? An Analysis of the Users and Non-Users of Three Municipal Leisure Service Organizations

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ABSTRACT: It is apparent that municipal park and recreation organizations face a major marketing problem. This analysis reports data from consumer research studies conducted for park and recreation agencies in three U.S. cities. The primary intent of these market studies was to assess the extent to which adults utilized public sponsored leisure services and facilities. Factors which inhibited citizens from making more use of public recreation resources were also identified.

Data from the three city study indicates that municipal park and recreation agencies serve a narrow and limited range of adult clients. The issue of non-use and its implications for the financing and pricing of public leisure services is addressed. Target marketing is recommended as a key strategy for dealing with the substantial variation in the patterns among consumer segments.

KEYWORDS: non-use, constraints, target markets

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The intent of this paper is to provide some answers to the following question. Who uses public sponsored park and recreation services and who does not? A review of the literature provides very little insight into who are the consumers of local government leisure services. It appears that a number of municipal leisure service organizations have a limited knowledge of people who use their services and why they use them.

Over the past decade, several authors have noted the substantial amount of non-use or underutilization of urban park and recreation areas. Carberry (1975) in his analysis of park use in Nashville, Tennessee, estimated that only one of ten adult residents ever utilized a public park and/or recreation facility in that city over a 12 month period. Gold (1976) indicated a similar pattern.

Most urban parks are underutilized or unused by a majority of the population they were intended to serve and the phenomenon of non-use is common in both urban and suburban areas . . . neighborhood-type public parks accommodate only a small portion (5 percent) of the total population.

While these assertions raise serious questions about the impact of public sponsored park and recreation services, they were primarily based on casual observation rather than empirical data.

Studies of constraints or barriers in the use of recreation and park facilities and programs are relatively recent in origin; most were completed within the past decade (Mueller, Gurin and Wood, 1962; Bangs and Mohler, 1970; Grubb, 1975; Hatry, et. al., 1977; Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Survey, 1977). For the most part, these studies have been exploratory in nature, concerned primarily with identifying the variables involved from a relatively narrow, preselected list of constraint factors. The greatest value of these studies has been to demonstrate the substantial impact of these barriers on a large proportion of the population. The studies consistently found that personal factors (e.g., lack of time, lack of money, personal health reasons) dominated the list of constraints identified by respondents. A lack of time was cited as the overwhelming reason for not participating more in recreation activities. Constraints which were more directly under the control of park and recreation authorities such as inadequate facilities and personal safety concerns were found to impede the participation of a much smaller proportion of potential park users.

This analysis reports data from three consumer research studies conducted for park and recreation authorities in Metropolitan Dade County, Florida; Austin, Texas; and Springfield, Oregon. A prime objective of each of these market studies was to assess the extent that adults utilized public sponsored leisure services and facilities. In each investigation equivalent instrumentation and data collection procedures were used. The intent of this paper is to integrate the findings from the three cities to provide comparative demographic and activity profiles for both the users and non-users of public leisure services. The analysis addresses three questions:

Who are the consumers or users of municipal park and recreation programs and services?

Who are the non-users of these services (Does the person who stays away, differ from the person who participates, and if so, how?)?

What factors prevent non-users from utilizing publically provided leisure services?

Methodology

The consumer data was collected by telephone interviews in Dade County, Florida; and Springfield, Oregon; and by personal household interviews in Austin, Texas. In the case of Dade County and Springfield, geographical size and resource limitations, ruled out serious consideration of using household

interviews. Compatibility in the collection process was facilitated by the use of equivalent survey instruments. The Austin survey addressed a number of issues beyond the scope of the Dade County and Springfield consumer studies. In addition to investigating the extent to which adults used park and recreation facilities and those obstacles which prevented use, the Austin survey addressed a series of planning and visitor safety issues. The excessive length of the Austin questionnaire precluded the use of telephone survey method. However, the wording and sequencing of the items included in the Austin study to assess use/non-use and constraint issues were identical to those used in the Dade County and Springfield telephone interviews. Personal contact with respondents, either over the telephone or in person, was deemed essential because many of the questions dealt with respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward local government provision of park and recreation services. The opportunity for interviewers to clarify or probe for reasons behind respondent answers enhanced the depth and quality of the collected data.

Sample Size and Selection

In all three cities care was given to selecting a representative sample of adult respondents. In each case, the size of the sample actually drawn was substantially greater than minimum requirements for accuracy (Table 1). Allowing for a confidence level of 95 percent, the calculated estimate of error did not exceed ± 4 percent. In effect, the chances were 95 out of 100 that the reported sample figures did not differ from the actual population values by more than three or four points.

Table 1
Sample Sizes and Accuracy Estimates

<i>City</i>	Total Responding Sample	Calculated Error Estimate
Austin, Texas	3,595	$\pm 3\%$
Dade County	1,523	$\pm 3\%$
Springfield, Oregon	421	$\pm 4\%$

In the Dade County and Springfield consumer surveys, the random digit dialing method was used to select respondents. All telephone prefixes were identified initially to serve as appropriate sampling frames. The telephone companies in each city provided the total number of phones which were connected in each prefix area. The number of interviews drawn from each telephone prefix was weighted to proportionally reflect the number of phones connected in each prefix area. A random digit dialing procedure was used whereby interviewers were provided with sets of four-digit random numbers and instructed to dial those numbers in each prefix area until the predetermined

quota of interviews had been completed in that area. This procedure ensured that unlisted numbers, recent connections, and those who had recently moved, would have an equal opportunity of being contacted. Once a household had been contacted by the random dialing procedure, an adult household member was interviewed (an average of 13 minutes) by trained interviewers.

Data for the Austin survey were collected by personal interviews which were administered by a team of trained interviewers. The city is divided for planning purposes into ten zones. The size of each zone ranges from about 20,000 to 40,000 persons.

It was intended that the survey results should be generalized to each zone as well as to the city as a whole. This accounts for the relatively large sample size. Between 340 and 395 interviews were conducted in each zone. All residential blocks within each of the ten zones were located on a census dime-file map. A random procedure was used to select fifty-seven blocks in each zone. Seven dwellings were selected from each block for interviews. They were selected by counting all the dwellings on the block and dividing by seven. Initially, personal interviews averaged about twenty-five minutes each. However by the end of the survey period as interviewer familiarity with the instrument increased, the completion time was reduced to approximately 15 minutes.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents were asked the extent to which they used eight major park and recreational facilities and services within the past year. Responses were categorized along a continuum consisting of four response categories: "not at all," "less than once a month," "once a month or more," and "almost daily" (Table 2).

Perhaps, the most striking point to emerge from an overview of the data is the substantial portion of adults who report *never* using most public sponsored recreation facilities. The majority of the data is consistent from one city to another. Only in the case of parks and playgrounds and swimming pools is there substantial variation in utilization rates. While adult residents in Austin make significantly greater use of public parks and pools, and substantially less use of community education programs, their utilization (or lack thereof) of the five other service areas closely resembles participation rates in Dade County and Springfield. Given the substantial geographic, demographic and recreation supply differences among the three cities studied, the consistency of the findings across facilities is quite remarkable.

In all three cities, only parks and playgrounds are used by a majority of adult residents. In contrast, only ten percent of the population used highly specialized recreation facilities such as tennis courts and golf courses with any degree of regularity.

The finding that a majority of the services attracted approximately only one in five adult residents has important implications. While obviously valued

by an active minority of users, the issue that must be raised is the degree to which the operation and maintenance of these facilities should be supported by tax funds. Only parks and playgrounds (and swimming pools in the case of Austin) can be characterized as “public” goods in the sense that a substantial proportion of citizens use them and thus accrue direct benefits from their existence. The majority of facilities would be classified as “private” goods in that the primary benefits of use are confined to a small group of citizens rather than to the majority. The question confronting public park and recreation managers in this circumstance is “why should all city residents pay through the tax system for the operation of specialized recreation services like tennis and golf when only a small percentage of residents use them with any degree of regularity?” It is very difficult to justify tax support for the development and maintenance of facilities when the benefits of direct use are confined to a small minority of the tax-paying public.

A frequently expressed solution to this issue is the “quid pro quo” argument. That is, residents should support the tax subsidy of recreation and park facilities they do not use, since others subsidize the facilities they do use. The data in Table 3 indicate the fallacy of this approach. They reveal that 41 and 40 percent of the adult residents in Dade County and Springfield, do not use any public recreation facilities on a regular basis. Furthermore, when parks and playgrounds are excluded from the analysis, it appears that only one-third of the adult population in either city use any of the remaining facilities regularly.¹

Table 3
The Number of Facilities Used at Least Once a Month

City	n	Number of Service Areas							
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more
Dade County	1508	41%	17%	12%	10%	7%	5%	3%	5%
Springfield	421	40%	19%	13%	10%	5%	5%	4%	3%

Differences in Use Patterns Among Income Level

Table 4 shows substantial differences in facility use patterns among the four household income categories. Overall, there appears to be a strong relationship between income level and non-use. With the exception of park use in Austin, respondents in the lowest income category were the least frequent users of all eight facilities in all three cities. Conversely, adults in the highest income categories were the heaviest users of almost every facility type. Indeed, the use levels of those reporting household incomes of over \$30,000 in many instances were double or even triple those of people in the less than \$10,000 category.²

Table 4

Extent To Which Adults In Four (4) Income Groups Use Major Public Recreation Facilities

	Not At All			At Least Once A Month		
	<i>Dade*</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>
GOLF COURSES						
Less than \$10,000	97%	95%	NA	2%	2%	NA
\$10,000 to 20,000	94	91	NA	4	4	NA
\$20,001 to 30,000	92	85	NA	3	6	NA
More than \$30,000	88	84	NA	6	7	NA
ORGANIZED SPORTS						
Less than \$10,000	88	91	96	8	6	4
\$10,000 to 20,000	81	87	81	11	9	15
\$20,001 to 30,000	72	83	75	20	11	18
More than \$30,000	70	82	71	22	13	19
PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS						
Less than \$10,000	64	21	64	22	47	20
\$10,000 to 20,000	50	14	49	30	49	24
\$20,001 to 30,000	44	17	46	38	49	30
More than \$30,000	38	18	38	38	48	20
RECREATION CENTERS						
Less than \$10,000	87	79	82	8	11	4
\$10,000 to 20,000	85	80	66	8	10	13
\$20,001 to 30,000	82	79	71	11	12	6
More than \$30,000	82	79	90	11	11	4
SWIMMING POOLS						
Less than \$10,000	84	39	80	10	35	5
\$10,000 to 20,000	80	36	54	12	38	18
\$20,001 to 30,000	75	37	50	13	36	25
More than \$30,000	80	37	47	15	36	22
TENNIS COURTS						
Less than \$10,000	89	82	89	6	10	4
\$10,000 to 20,000	80	81	82	10	10	5
\$20,001 to 30,000	76	74	83	13	12	4
More than \$30,000	71	72	81	19	14	6
COMMUNITY EDUCATION						
Less than \$10,000	NA	94	91	NA	3	5
\$10,000 to 20,000	NA	92	79	NA	4	10
\$20,001 to 30,000	NA	85	74	NA	8	10
More than \$30,000	NA	83	71	NA	10	14
SENIOR SERVICES						
Less than \$10,000	NA	97		NA	2	
\$10,000 to 20,000	NA	97		NA	2	
\$20,001 to 30,000	NA	96		NA	2	
More than \$30,000	NA	96		NA	3	

*Income categories for Miami-Dade County ranged from: Less than \$12,000; \$12,000 to \$20,000; \$20,001 to \$30,000; to more than \$30,000.

These data suggest that primary clientele of the leisure service agencies in each of the cities are upper and middle income groups. When parks and playgrounds are excluded, in almost every case more than 80 percent of the poor did *not* use the facilities at least once a month.

It is important to note that the substantial underutilization of public recreation resources by low income is *not* primarily attributable to monetary cost considerations. In all three communities, less than ten percent of those making \$10,000 or under felt fees and charges levied for park and recreation services were an obstacle to their participation. The significance of this finding, however, can be attributed to a much more fundamental problem. The most frequent reason cited by low income adults for their lack of participation was a lack of awareness of services available to them. Valid observations regarding price constraints could not be possible for a largely uninformed consumer segment.

While it is apparent that these leisure service organizations face a substantial challenge in attracting the urban poor, one obvious implication from the findings is that these agencies must redesign their pricing policies to reflect the fact that the great majority of users of publicly provided facilities have the ability to pay a reasonable price for park and recreation services.

Differences in Use Patterns Among Age Groups

With the single exception of senior citizen programs, young people consistently exhibited higher participation rates in all service areas from one city to another. Table 5 shows the substantial differences in the usage patterns of the five age groups in every area. Participation rates erode with increasing rapidity as respondents' ages increase. The rate of decline is particularly acute when the 55-64 year age bracket is reached. The table reveals that in all three communities, the proportion of adults 55 years and above who use major park and recreation facilities (with the exception of community parks and senior services) is less than ten percent.

It appears from the data that the most serious service gap with respect to age occurs with those residents between 55-64 years of age. In addition to their restricted participation rates generally, this age group appears to make very little use of specialized senior services. In the two cities for which data were available, twice the proportion of those over 65 years of age used senior services compared to those aged 55 to 64 years.

With the over 50 age group constituting one-third of those of voting age in each of the cities studied, the minimal use displayed by older adults has important implications. The lack of participation by this sizable group is particularly significant in light of recent findings which show a strong relationship between the extent to which people use park and recreation services and their degree of support for public leisure service organizations (Crompton, 1983a; Howard, 1983). A consistent pattern emerged in which the largest proportion of those willing to spend more for leisure services were heavy

Table 5
Extent To Which Adults In Five (5) Age Groups Use Major Public Recreation Facilities

	Not At All			At Least Once A Month		
	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>
GOLF COURSES						
18-24 years	93%	89%	NA	4%	6%	NA
25-34	95	90	NA	2	5	NA
35-54	90	90	NA	5	5	NA
55-64	96	90	NA	3	5	NA
65 & Over	97	96	NA	2	2	NA
ORGANIZED SPORTS						
18-24 years	68	82	66	21	14	20
25-34	78	83	69	15	11	22
35-54	78	87	85	15	8	11
55-64	93	98	100	6	2	0
65 & Over	96	98	97	1	2	0
PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS						
18-24 years	43	7	26	37	57	20
25-34	36	7	33	42	58	36
35-54	49	20	54	32	57	15
55-64	70	49	64	19	23	15
65 & Over	84	61	64	9	17	8
RECREATION CENTERS						
18-24 years	80	80	60	14	13	21
25-34	83	77	74	11	13	21
35-54	84	79	84	10	10	8
55-64	88	90	88	7	6	6
65 & Over	92	89	83	4	5	3
SWIMMING POOLS						
18-24 years	74	26	47	18	39	14
25-34	78	25	42	14	31	25
35-54	77	37	63	13	33	18
55-64	89	75	65	7	12	6
65 & Over	93	86	94	3	7	3
TENNIS COURTS						
18-24 years	70	70	47	17	19	13
25-34	79	76	82	12	13	6
35-54	78	77	85	14	12	3
55-64	90	96	98	8	3	0
65 & Over	97	98	97	2	0	0
COMMUNITY EDUCATION						
18-24 years	NA	95	87	NA	3	7
25-34	NA	88	67	NA	8	14
35-54	NA	87	84	NA	9	8
55-64	NA	94	94	NA	2	6
65 & Over	NA	97	94	NA	2	3
SENIOR SERVICES						
35-54	NA	98	94	NA	1	3
55-64	NA	94	75	NA	4	12
65 & Over	NA	84	39	NA	9	23

users, followed by medium users, then light users and finally, the least enthusiastic about supporting park and recreation opportunities were non-users. Without substantial effort to improve the very low participation rate of older adults, it appears there will be little incentive for this increasingly prominent age group to support park and recreation departments through the political process.

Differences in Use Patterns Among Racial Groups

Substantial differences exist between the cities studied with respect to the degree to which racial groups use public park and recreation facilities (Table 6). In Austin, whites generally exhibit the highest use levels for almost all facilities, with Hispanics the next highest and Blacks the lowest. However, in Dade County, usage patterns displayed by Hispanics and whites were very similar. While there were significant differences in use rates between these two groups, in Dade County, Blacks made significantly higher use of parks and playgrounds, swimming pools, recreation centers and organized athletic fields. The only consistent finding across the data for both cities was that Blacks were much lower users of golf courses and tennis courts, particularly when compared to whites.

These findings suggest the persistence of participation rate differences between the races. Kraus (1968) discovered a strikingly similar contrast in participation rates between Blacks and whites in his study of Black populations' use of public recreation services in the New York City area fifteen years ago. Kraus found that Blacks made heavy use of sports fields and swimming pools, and only minimal use of tennis and golf facilities.

There are several probable explanations for the comparative lack of involvement of Blacks in sports such as tennis and golf. Facility use may be a function of availability and accessibility. Quite possibly differences in use patterns may reflect discrepancies in relative access to facilities. Compared to the other two ethnic groups, Black citizens may have less access to tennis courts and golf courses, either because such facilities are not located in close proximity or because the cost of admission is perceived as prohibitive. Second, each of these sports require relatively expensive equipment. This equipment expense is likely to be a deterrent for a larger portion of Blacks than the other ethnic groups. Third, and perhaps most important, there may be less cultural tradition or interest among Black citizens in these types of activities (Washburne and Wall, 1980).

Although overcoming the latter two explanations poses a serious challenge for leisure service organizations, park and recreation managers can more immediately address the issue of accessibility. It is essential that public leisure service agencies carefully evaluate the supply distribution of their services with respect to involvement by various client groups, particularly Blacks. The data from the three cities suggest that park and recreation agencies can best satisfy their Black clientele by focusing their resources on parks and

Table 6

**Extent to Which Adults In Three (3) Different Racial Groups Use Major
Public Recreation Facilities**

	Not At All			At Least Once A Month		
	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.*</i>	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>
GOLF COURSES						
Blacks	98%	96%	—	1%	2%	—
Latins	95	96	—	2	2	—
Whites	91	89	—	6	5	—
ORGANIZED SPORTS						
Blacks	72	89	—	20	6	—
Latins	83	89	—	12	7	—
Whites	82	85	—	11	9	—
PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS						
Blacks	44	26	—	41	37	—
Latins	56	17	—	28	39	—
Whites	55	20	—	27	48	—
RECREATION CENTERS						
Blacks	73	70	—	19	16	—
Latins	86	68	—	7	19	—
Whites	89	82	—	7	9	—
SWIMMING POOLS						
Blacks	77	49	—	19	27	—
Latins	79	33	—	12	41	—
Whites	84	37	—	9	35	—
TENNIS COURTS						
Blacks	85	82	—	1	2	—
Latins	95	96	—	2	2	—
Whites	91	89	—	6	5	—

* Data on racial composition not available for Springfield

playgrounds for which there is widespread public support, as well as upon sports fields, recreation centers, and swimming pools, those facilities which blacks use most.

Constraints Inhibiting the Use of Park Facilities

With the increased recognition that many adults do not regularly use public recreation resources, the identification of participation barriers is of vital importance. Hopefully, once recreation and park managers have a more complete understanding of what obstacles impede the use of their services,

Table 7
Factors Which Prevent Greater Use of Public Park and Recreation Services and Facilities

<i>Obstacles to Participation*</i>	<i>Dade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
		<i>Aus.</i>	<i>Spfld.</i>
I'm too busy; don't have time to go.	39(1)	53(1)	33(1)
I prefer to stay at home.	25(3)	27(2)	26(3)
I never think about going.	18(8)	21(3)	28(2)
The facilities are too far away.	24(4)	13(5)	15(7)
I don't feel very safe.	26(2)	11(6)	13(8)
I use private recreation facilities.	24(4)	NA	20(5)
I don't know what is going on.	22(6)	9(8)	26(3)
I'm just not interested.	16(9)	18(4)	16(6)
I don't have access to a car.	20(7)	11(6)	11(9)
The facilities are of poor quality.	12(10)	7(9)	2(11)
It costs too much.	8(11)	6(10)	6(10)
The staff are unfriendly.	5(12)	3(11)	2(11)

*While as many as 24 constraint statements were included on the survey instrument used in Springfield, the items above reflect only those statements common to instruments used in all three cities.

they will be in a position to take necessary corrective actions. The answer to the question "How can we get more people to come to a facility?" has to be "We don't know, until we find out why they don't come now."

In each community an open-ended question about constraints was used initially. This was followed by a Likert-type scale instrument which described a lengthy list of possible constraints. An effort was made to include statements in the scale instrument which would examine social and psychological as well as physical barriers to park use. Responses are presented in Table 7. Again, the findings were remarkably consistent across all three cities. The item which proved to be the greatest inhibiting factor in each of the cities was, "I'm too busy and don't have time to attend." Over fifty percent of the responding adults in Austin indicated that a lack of time was the most significant deterrent to park use. Two other factors which were cited as severe constraints to participation were, "I prefer to stay at home" and "I never really think about going to a park and recreation facility."

The most evident implication from this data is that a lack of motivation to participate is an overriding reason for less frequent use of public park and

recreation facilities. In fact, overall, five of the top seven constraining factors could be attributed to lack of interest. Apparently, most adults have the money and transportation but not the inclination to devote more time to park facility use. While over two-thirds of all respondents cited at least one of the constraint items indicating disinterest, a lack of motivation could not be explained by differences in age, income, or race. No significant differences were found along these dimensions in any of the three cities studied.

The relatively high proportion of respondents indicating a lack of motivation to participate appears to be disheartening, for ostensibly it seems there is not much that recreation managers can do to influence this lack of interest. However, some of the respondents may mean that they don't give a high priority *at this time* to making more use of public park facilities. It is possible that if different services, more attuned to adult tastes were offered, greater interest could be generated.

It is important to note two other important findings. First, price does not appear to be a serious barrier to participation. "It costs too much to participate" ranked close to the bottom on the overall list of constraints, affecting the participation rate of not more than eight percent of the respondents in any of the cities. Second, staff relations with the public appear exceptionally good in all three communities.

Conclusions

The data from these three city studies suggests that rather than achieving the traditional ideal of "opportunity for all," municipal recreation providers are serving a fairly limited range of adult clients. In none of the cities investigated did a majority of adult respondents report attending more than one public recreation facility or service within the previous twelve months. Only one type of facility, parks and playgrounds, could be truly classified as a "public" resource. While approximately half of the responding adults in all three cities visited a park or playground at least once during the past year, only a small minority reported using any of the other major recreation facilities with any regularity. Golf and tennis consistently demonstrated the narrowest appeal, attracting less than ten percent of the adult population annually. Close to an 80 percent non-use rate was found in all three communities for organized athletics, recreation centers and community education programs. These findings raise serious implications about the manner in which highly specialized recreation resources are financed. There seems to be little justification for all citizens to be expected to subsidize the operation of these facilities when the direct benefits of use are confined to a small segment of taxpayers.

The generalized profile that emerges from the data characterizes adult users as young and more affluent than non-users. A consistently positive relationship between facility use and income was exhibited in all cities. For all facilities, use increased as income increased. Conversely, in almost every instance, as age increased, use declined. Specifically, the data shows munic-

ipal park and recreation agencies face severe challenges in reaching two important and sizeable client groups: the urban poor and those citizens over 54 years of age. Both market segments were found to significantly underutilize public park and recreation facilities and services.

Motivational, rather than physical barriers, were found to be the most serious deterrents to adult use of public park and recreation facilities. A lack of interest, characterized by statements such as, "I never really think about going to a park" and "I prefer to stay at home," was the single greatest obstacle. Inhibiting factors such as cost and transportation, which municipal agencies can more directly influence, were found to restrict a smaller percentage of potential clients.

This data poses a serious challenge to the managers of municipal park and recreation services. It appears that services provided by leisure service organizations and/or the manner in which they are delivered are largely incompatible with the needs of a majority of adult consumers. Sixty percent of the respondents were unresponsive, apathetic or disinterested in the offerings of public agencies.

The data suggests that public park and recreation organizations face a major marketing problem. It is essential that their managers make a conscientious attempt to discover what the adult citizenry wants in the way of service. Historically, agencies have used an undifferentiated strategy in which services have been directed at everyone, or "the average user," rather than at target groups of "specific somebodies" (McCarthy, 1981). Efforts were made to satisfy the maximum number of people by providing an "average" offering. The fallacy of this approach is evident from the results of this investigation; participation rates vary substantially across age, race and income dimensions. To assume that an "average" offering appeals to this diverse spectrum is obviously inappropriate. What is required are differentiated offerings that respond to the specific wants of each of these diverse market segments. This differentiated or target marketing strategy is discussed at great length in an earlier article by Crompton (1983). One of the great challenges facing public managers in adopting target marketing is determining which potential target markets should be given service priority. Obviously, in an era of declining resources, a leisure service agency cannot be "all things to all people."

One conclusion evident from the study results is that the *implied* service priorities of agencies today, appear to be dramatically different from the historical service orientation of public recreation agencies. The recreation movement in this country began as a response to the wretched living conditions of the urban poor, largely comprised of black and immigrant minority ethnic groups. The data indicated that a major, perhaps unconscious, transformation has occurred. Low income groups were found to consistently underutilize public park and recreation resources, with non-use figures exceeding 80 percent for all facilities except parks and playgrounds. Conversely, the primary clientele of all three municipalities were upper and middle income groups. Significantly, that segment of the population which this field was born to

serve—the poor and the disfranchised—is apparently no longer the focus of service delivery. This apparent contradiction raises the question: “Should we get back to our traditional commitment to the disadvantaged or accept that we are primarily serving the more affluent segments of our population?” If we choose the latter, it suggests the need to adjust our service perspective accordingly (e.g., establish higher prices, target already responsive markets). Further movement in this direction would likely involve greater competition with private sector suppliers (a relationship already strained in many parts of the country) but produce revenue for hardpressed operational budgets. Conversely, increased attention to the needs of the poor would require substantial alteration of the current program mix and necessitate attracting those who are currently most reluctant to use service offerings. It would appear that any answers to the issue of priority in target markets must emerge from careful market research. Such an analysis would discover who is being served and by whom (e.g., public or private suppliers) and where service gaps exist. If the role of the public agency is to facilitate delivery of particular services to as many potential users as possible, and to complement the private sector, then in many cases public park and recreation agencies may be required to concentrate their efforts on the least responsive segments, leaving the more responsive segments to commercial or private service agencies.

Certainly, the great diversity in the cities included in this investigation creates the risk of making “apples and oranges” comparisons. While the data is representative for each of the cities individually, it cannot be generalized to all U.S. cities. However, the striking similarity of the findings drawn from such dissimilar contexts may in fact enhance their significance. The findings suggest that regardless of community size or geographic locale, the non-use pattern appears consistent. At the very least, the results of this research emphasize the need for public and park and recreation service managers to move beyond assumption to identify unequivocally the consumers of their services.

Footnotes

- ¹ It is important to note a limitation of the study. Since the individual and not the family was the unit of analysis, it was not possible to determine the degree to which other members of the household used park and recreation facilities. Thus, tax support may be legitimate if other members of the family are users (e.g., it isn't inequitable for me to pay taxes if my wife plays tennis).
- ² It is important not to underestimate the actual extent of low income participation. While a much larger percentage of higher income persons utilize recreation and park facilities, relative to population size, it is quite possible that low income citizens comprise a substantial proportion of overall facility utilization. This occurs simply because there are more people in the lower income levels than in the upper income brackets.

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