RESEARCH SESSION ABSTRACTS

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National Recreation and Park Association 2237 Belmont Ridge Road
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PREFACE

Welcome to the 47th year of research sessions at the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Annual Conference. We are grateful for the opportunity to once again gather in person and provide research posters presentations of this year's NRPA Research Sessions (NRS). We hope you find this book of abstracts a beneficial way to review a sample of the existing research related to parks and recreation.

The NRS abstracts are intended to advance park and recreation research and provide practical application for park and recreation professionals and providers. Each abstract contains an overview of the research with an eye to how to apply the research to practice and how it is relevant to the day-to-day management of park and recreation programs and facilities.

Our goal is to continue to strengthen the research-to-practice connection and ensure that research is provided in the service of the profession and the overall benefit of society. We believe that the authors' onsite poster presentations. Contact information for the lead author is also provided at the end of each abstract.

The organization of NRS is a collaborative effort. We would like to thank the NRPA education team for their invaluable assistance and dedication to this year's endeavor. We also extend our thanks to the reviewers, whose commitment to service and the profession is much appreciated. Each NRS proposal was assigned both an academic as well as a park and recreation professional reviewer. And of course, none of this would be possible without the many researchers. Thank you.

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ASSESSING SPORT FACILITY QUALITY IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

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Introduction/Rationale

Park and recreation departments are responsible for managing a large inventory of sport fields, courts and other playing areas. Research drawing on social ecological theories has established the importance of these spaces in promoting physical activity and community engagement (Sallis et al., 2008). However, the post-war boom in spending on parks and recreation was followed by a prolonged era of fiscal conservatism that resulted in flatlined or declining budgets, making it difficult for park and recreation managers to maintain their physical infrastructure (Dustin & McEvoy, 1982). This has led to concerns regarding the quality of public recreation facilities, particularly in urban areas characterized by dense populations and high use (Rigolon, 2016). Nevertheless, few studies have comprehensively assessed the quality of sport facilities maintained and managed by urban park and recreation departments, which provides critical information for park and recreation professionals to make informed decisions regarding physical improvements, staffing and programming. The purpose of this study was to comprehensively assess all sport facilities managed by a large, urban parks and recreation department in the northeastern United States.

Methods

There have been considerable advancements in assessing the quality of parks, playgrounds and other recreation facilities, with observational audits considered the best option for assessing the quality of recreation facilities and the surrounding community. A modified version of the Community Stakeholder Park Audit Tool (CPAT; Kaczynski et al, 2012) was utilized to assess the entire inventory of sport facilities managed by an urban parks and recreation department, which totaled 1,569 unique facilities at 259 sites.

Modifications to the CPAT were informed by discussions with leaders from the park and recreation department and focused primarily on expanding the assessment of facility quality to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Far below average) to 5 (Far above average). The observational instrument was pilot tested to assess feasibility and inter-coder reliability for facility quality ratings, which was strong (α = .793). On-site observations were conducted by trained undergraduate research assistants using iPads from April 2024 to December 2024. To date, observations have been completed at 1,495 unique facilities from 234 sites, with missing data only due to facility closures for maintenance and renovations.

Results

Observations were conducted at 276 athletic fields, 385 ball diamonds, 454 basketball courts, 33 hockey courts, four ice rinks, 44 miscellaneous courts, 43 swimming pools and 256 tennis courts. Matched observations were conducted at approximately 15 percent of these facilities to assess inter-coder reliability for quality ratings, which was strong (α = .838). Observations started with an assessment of the safety and appearance of the surrounding community, which indicated that the most common concern was heavy traffic (37 percent), followed by excessive litter (22 percent), poorly maintained properties (18 percent), and graffiti (17 percent). The least common safety and appearance concerns were vandalism (five percent), lack of eyes on the street (five percent) and evidence of threatening persons or behaviors (six percent). Sport facilities were coded as usable if they had all the necessary space and equipment available for use (i.e., soccer field is lined with two goals). Based on these criteria, about three-quarters of facilities were usable (76 percent), yet this proportion was higher for basketball courts (92 percent) and miscellaneous courts (89 percent) than athletic fields (75 percent), tennis courts (69 percent), ball diamonds (67 percent) and hockey courts (67 percent). Approximately two-thirds of the facilities had lights (67 percent), yet this proportion was higher for basketball courts (84 percent) and hockey courts (85 percent) than athletic fields (63 percent), tennis courts (58 percent) and ball diamonds (56 percent). Overall, the average quality of facilities was coded below the midpoint of the 5-point Likert scale (M= 2.49, SD= 1.03), with only 16.5 percent of facilities rated above the mid-point (i.e., above average). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in facility quality based on facility type ($F[7,1488]= 4.137$, $p< .001$). Post-hoc multiple comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments revealed that the average quality of basketball courts (M= 2.56, SD= .99), miscellaneous courts (M= 2.85, SD= .99) and

tennis courts (M= 2.59, SD= 1.22), were all significantly greater than ball diamonds (M= 2.27, SD= .95). No other statistically significant differences between facility types were found. Interestingly, coders made note of whether the facility was in use during each observation, and ball diamonds were only being used during three percent of observations, which was lower than the rate for basketball courts (24 percent), miscellaneous courts (21 percent), and tennis courts (15 percent).

Application to Practice

The results of this research highlighted key aspects of the surrounding community that might impact the use of urban sport facilities, which included heavy traffic and concerns stemming from the appearance of other elements of the physical infrastructure. In general, court-based facilities (e.g., basketball courts and tennis courts) were more likely than field-based facilities (e.g., athletic fields and ball diamonds) to have all the necessary space and equipment available for use and were also more likely to have lights that would facilitate use during evening hours. The quality of most facilities was rated average or below average, with ball diamonds rated significantly lower on average than several types of courts (e.g., basketball, miscellaneous and tennis).

This information will be utilized by park and recreation leaders to make informed decisions regarding facility upgrades and maintenance. In addition, the observations have provided specific and actionable feedback to inform park and recreation leaders of the facility-specific elements that are required to increase quality (e.g., improve surface, replace equipment and install lights). Finally, this information will be integrated with data on both in-house and permitted programming to understand potential associations between facility quality and usage. The research team comprised a mix of leaders from parks and recreation, nonprofit and academic backgrounds who will also discuss their experiences with translating this research to practice.

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CO-DESIGNING OUTDOOR SPACES FOR PLAY WITH YOUNG TEENS: YOUNG TEENS WANT PLACES TO BE ACTIVE AND SOCIAL

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, 81 percent of teens globally are inactive. It is during adolescence that physical activity declines (Guthold, 2019). The need to support youth physical activity is urgent. There are many factors that contribute to a lack of physical activity for youth. It is important to consult with youth to better understand how they use and desire to use outdoor spaces for activity (Costa et al, 2020). The purpose of this case study is to examine the process of co-designing outdoor play and recreation spaces with children ages 11to13. This project took place over the course of 12 weeks with 16 youth in an afterschool program in Texas. Designers and a researcher were embedded in the program with the youth and the youth workers.

The aim of the project was to:

1. Work with tween and teen youth to co-design a play space for their age group
2. Learn from the youth:
    a. What motivates young teens to be active?
    b. What do young teens feel is important in the design of outdoor spaces for activity?
    c. Which equipment is attractive to young teens in outdoor play and activity spaces?

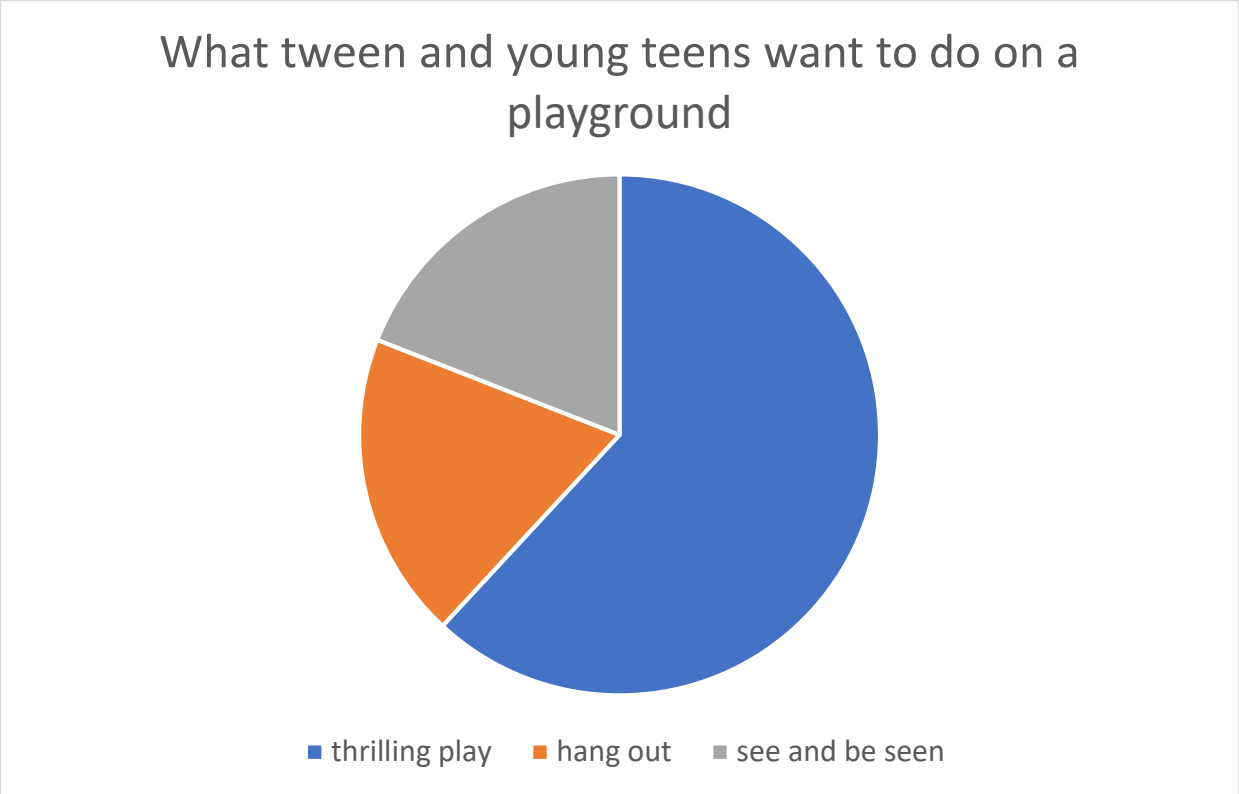
The co-design research process

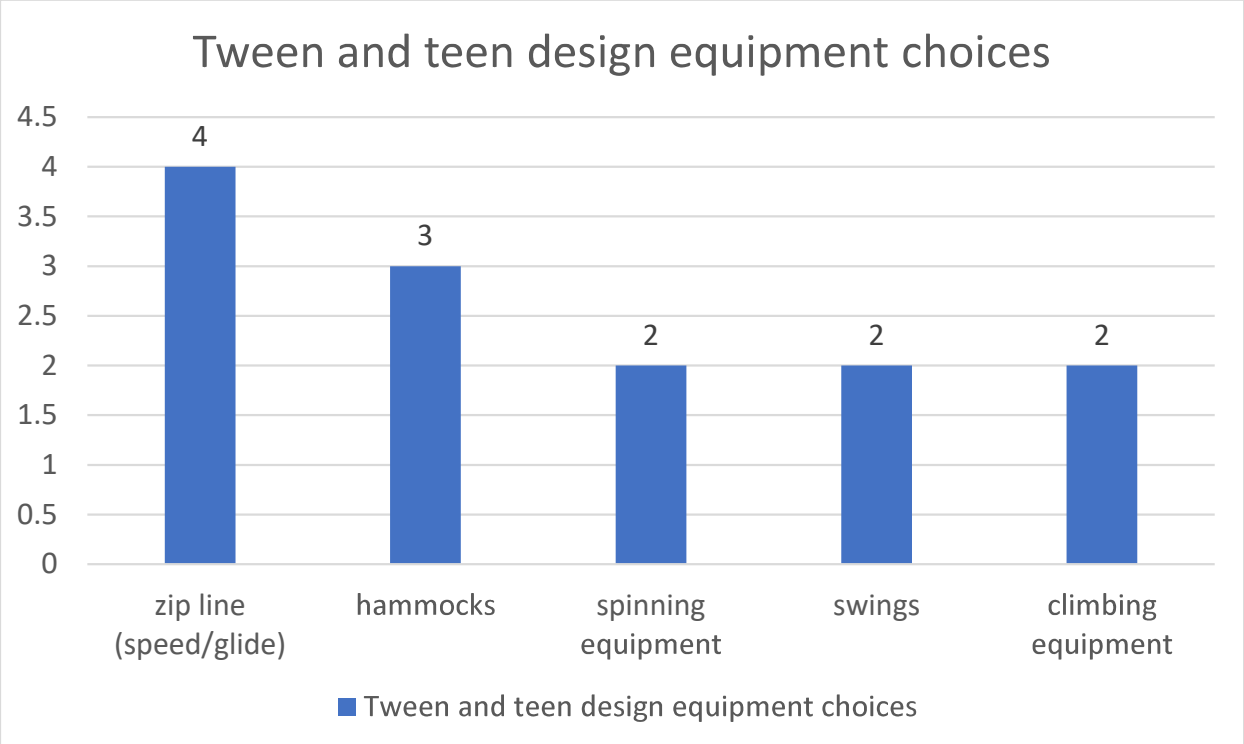
1. Providing the youth an overview of the design process
2. Introducing youth to playground designers

3. Forming groups to work on ideas
4. Asking key questions:
    a. What would you like to do in the space?
    b. What motivates you to be active?
    c. What do you like to do to be healthy?
    d. What are some examples of fun activities that you do in your free time?
    e. How can we make this happen in the space?
5. Sketching and making 3D representations of ideas
6. Repeating the process of asking key questions and sketching ideas until the youth and the designers are satisfied
7. Working with designers to determine what is possible given the space that is available and a realistic budget
8. Putting together proposals for the play space
9. Presenting the proposals to a jury panel for feedback and decisions about what to construct

Summary of key points from the study

- When working to design a space with tweens and teens, it is important to ask questions about what they like to do, what motivates them, and what they would like to happen in the space, rather than asking what kind of equipment they like.
- When working with tweens and teens to design a space, key questions should be repeated in a process that goes hand-in-hand with sketching, modeling and design.
- Tweens and teens desire spaces for thrilling activity and social gathering.
- Tweens and teens especially like to "see and be seen."
- Tweens and teens like to have activities that 'take them back to their childhood.'
- Inclusion, equity and environmental concerns are at the forefront of tween and teen minds.





Numbers represent the small co-design groups (out of 4 groups) that selected the specific equipment

Take-aways

Co-design with tweens and teens takes time. When working to design a space with tweens and teens, it is important to ask questions about what they like to do, what motivates them, and what they would like to happen in the space, rather than asking what kind of equipment they like. When working with tweens and teens to design a space, key questions should be repeated in a process that goes hand-in-hand with sketching, modeling and design.

Tweens and teens desire spaces for thrilling activity and social gathering — this is how they play. Thrilling activities such as ziplining, climbing, spinning and swinging were all part of the proposals of the co-design groups. While each group had a different design plan, all groups included thrilling elements. The design groups also included special gathering spaces in their plans so that they could watch the other youth as they use the thrilling elements. In addition, spaces to hang out with others in smaller groups for private conversations. For this, the youth selected hammocks and meeting points to encourage hanging out with others.

The youth also expressed the desire for play activities that "take them back to their childhood." This is why they selected swings, in particular.

The youth also showed that inclusion, equity and environmental concerns are at the forefront of their minds. This can be seen in the way they designed their play space proposals.

The tween and teen play space designs:

Group 1: Rainbow for inclusion

This group emphasized inclusion and design to address social isolation. Their design had a rainbow theme and included play features such as swing bays as well as tire swings to 'take them back to childhood.' Their design also incorporated different types of spinning, a zipline and trampoline. They included spaces to gather and watch the activities as well as semi-private spaces to "hang out." Their rationale included the importance of being active and spending less time using devices, and the importance of wellbeing and mental health. **"We need a place to be together to promote inclusion and reduce social isolation." (Group 1)**

Group 2: Dance and hang out

This design was centered around a dance floor with seating for taking a time out and also watching the dancing. They incorporated hammocks for resting and hanging out. They also included thrilling elements such as a zipline, trampoline and spinning. They designed a walking path around the periphery. Their emphasis was on an attractive space with something for everyone so that people would want to spend time in the space, and experience what it is like to have fun "like a child again."

"We need a place to bring us back to childhood." (Group 2)

Group 3: Promoting health for the community and the ecosystem

A play structure for climbing, sliding and gliding on banister bars was the centerpiece of their design. The space also included a zipline and hammocks at the edges of the space. The emphasis of the design was to have "something different, not boring" so that tweens and teens would stay active and reduce stress. They included a group gathering space as well as smaller seating areas for hanging out. They emphasized the importance of sustainability in the design, and making the most out of the natural features that were already in the space.

"We want an area for play will help us to stay active and reduce stress." (Group 3)

Group 4: Thrill for all abilities

This group proposed a zipline that is accessible for persons with physical disabilities. Their emphasis was on inclusion and thrill.

"People with disabilities have the right to play and need spaces to be together with everyone.'

Seven Considerations for co-designing play spaces with and for young teens

1. Ask the youth what they would like to do in the space and what is important to them.
2. Link what they like to do with different types of equipment and design elements that can make this possible.
3. Make time to repeat the questions and reformulate designs, rather than expecting a design to be created in one session.

4. Consider that tweens and teens enjoy thrilling play.
5. Incorporate places to hang out and socialize.
6. Include spaces where the youth can "see and be seen."
7. Consider that tweens and teens are concerned about social inclusion as well as the natural environment — make sure you are listening and responding to their concerns in your co-design.

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CONSTRUCTING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC REALM: REIMAGINING FUNDING MODELS FOR INCLUSIVE CITIES

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Introduction/Rationale

Urban planning faces a critical challenge in the development of public spaces, encountering diverse obstacles and strategies in funding and implementation. This research tackles the pivotal challenge of understanding funding models for public spaces in urban planning and design, aiming to illuminate pathways towards vibrant and equitable urban environments. Stemming from a specialized public realm design consultancy, the study dives deep into unraveling the intricacies of funding, construction and advocacy for communal spaces in America. It merges a comprehensive literature review and a thorough comparative analysis of nine major American cities, analyzing three project typologies in each of the nine cities. These case studies serve as crucial signposts, offering insights pivotal to fostering more inclusive, sustainable, and efficient approaches to funding and sustaining public spaces.

Aligned with the National Recreation and Park Association's principles, this study seeks to shed light on funding dynamics and their direct impact on municipal parks and recreation. It navigates through the complexities of sustainable public space funding models, advocating for a fundamental reevaluation of public space role and value within urban landscapes. This research seeks to unite theory and practice, advocating for the crucial role of public spaces, while paving the way for informed decision-making and fostering more equitable and vibrant urban environments through interdisciplinary collaboration and analysis.

Methods

Literature Review: An extensive survey of literature on urban planning, public space development and funding models was conducted to establish foundational knowledge and pinpoint existing gaps in the field.

Case Study Analysis: A deliberate selection of nine major legacy industrial and sunbelt

cities, spanning different latitudes and populations ranging from 300 thousand to 2 million, was made to assess city governance structure and public space funding models. From each city, three distinct public space typologies — signature, connective, and neighborhood parks — were chosen for in-depth analysis on project origins, stakeholders and funding sources. Signature parks boast high budgets and broad appeal, while connective parks focus on linking neighborhoods and neighborhood parks cater to local residents with a mix of amenities in residential areas.

Results

The investigation yielded significant findings across various facets of public space funding and development. Notably, the study discerned a spectrum of reliance on public-private funding models evident in diverse cities' public space projects, showcasing the nuanced approaches taken. Additionally, the research uncovered a mosaic of financial support drawn from multiple sources, highlighting the web of funding that sustains these projects. Factors influencing higher spending per capita, notably institutionalized power dynamics and the presence of private philanthropy, emerged as pivotal influencers in shaping funding allocations. It's worth noting that the qualitative nature of these findings stems from the study's scope, which encompassed nine case studies. Ultimately, these insights culminated in the formulation of recommendations aimed at advocating for sustainable and equitable public space funding models contextualized to varying urban landscapes.

Application to Practice

The outcomes of this research carry direct implications for professionals engaged in landscape architecture, parks and recreation, and park governance. By illuminating varied funding models and development approaches within public spaces, this study equips urban planners, policymakers and stakeholders with actionable strategies applicable across diverse urban settings. These insights have the potential to reshape policy decisions, foster innovative funding methodologies and steer the creation of more inclusive, sustainable and accessible public spaces. Thus, this research offers tangible pathways for practitioners to enhance their approaches to public space development and governance, paving the way for more impactful and community-oriented initiatives.

Objectives: Following this poster session, attendees should be able to (list 3)

1. Understanding Funding Dynamics: Participants will gain comprehensive insights into the diverse funding sources impacting the development and maintenance of public spaces within urban environments.
2. Community Vision-Driven Development Challenges: Attendees will recognize the significance and complexities of community vision-driven projects, particularly focusing on the journey from conceptualization to securing funding, enhancing their comprehension of the challenges inherent in funding such initiatives.
3. Formulating Advocacy Strategies: Participants will develop strategies and recommendations to advocate for sustainable funding models tailored to unique city contexts. This will enable them to contribute to the development of effective and inclusive approaches for public space financing and development.

Tables and Figures

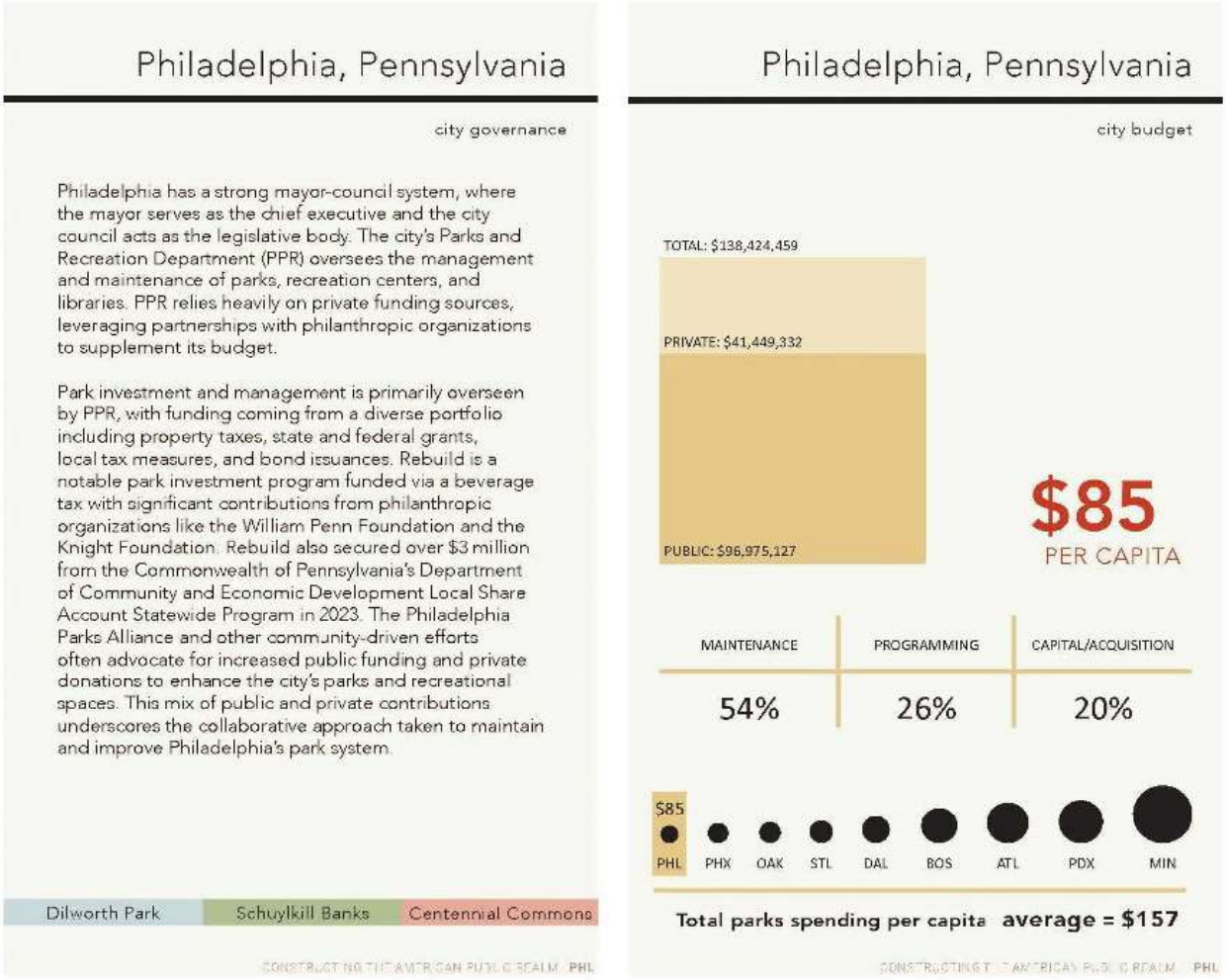

Figure 1: Case study analysis of City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (figure represents 1 of our 9 city case studies)

Figure 2: Case study analysis of Dilworth Park funding profile, the selected signature park for Philadelphia case study (figure represents 1 of our 27 project case studies)

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FITNESS MEMBERS CARE ABOUT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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Introduction

Municipal recreation organizations continue to increase the scope of services, offering more unique programs and fitness spaces. As competition in the recreation and fitness industry increases (Dias et al., 2019), municipal recreation and fitness centers are having to compete for new clients while keeping existing members (Macon, 2020). According to recent studies, just 50 percent of recreation and fitness clients extend their membership for more than one year (MacIntosh & Law, 2015), and since acquiring a new customer is five times more costly than retaining an existing member, operations must understand factors that influence membership continuation and use this knowledge to respond to the expectations of existing customers to achieve a better return (Dias et al., 2019). Studies have explored various factors that play a role in the intention to repurchase. One factor is service quality evaluation which provides insight into customer behavioral intentions such as the intention to continue or repurchase (Baker & Crompton, 2000) and to use products again based on previous experiences (Oman et al., 2016). Another factor is the price, which is the amount of money paid by customers for the value of the product or service purchased (Eberhardt et al., 2009). There is a definite balance between the service provided by a municipal recreation and fitness center, its pricing point and the customer's perceived value of the service (Howat & Assaker, 2016; Freitas & Lacerda, 2019). Limited evidence in the literature from different industries suggests that price significantly influences customers' decisions on the intention to continue usage or repurchase (Kotler & Keller, 2015; Jobber & Chadwick, 2016). Sociability has been defined as the enjoyable social interactions customers derive from the satisfaction of being with others engaged in the same activity, sharing mutual enjoyment (Milne and McDonald, 1999). Baldacchino (1995)

supported the idea that family, friends and other connections could be viewed as significant social factors influencing service quality (Nunkoo et al., 2017).

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to develop a model for the fitness industry encompassing a second-order service quality factor, which includes five original SQ first-order latent variables (Walker et al., 2017) with an additional latent variable of social, and a price item, to predict continuation of membership in the municipal recreation centers. Our model proposes that continuation is influenced by price and SQ.

Methods

Data was collected using a 15-item scale that measured five factors of service quality (Staff, Programs, Equipment, Locker Rooms, and Parking lot), a membership continuation item, service value (price satisfaction) item and four items measuring social interaction, with additional demographic items. A random sample of members from three recreation fitness centers in North Texas received an email with a link to the survey. A total of 353 complete surveys were analyzed.

Results

A structural equation model generated through AMOS software was used to test the relationships. The squared multiple correlation was .463 for continuation, this shows that 46.3 percent of the variance is accounted for by service quality and price. the fit indices of the model were within the recommended range (CFI = .955, TLI = .947, NFI = .923, P CMIN/DF = 2.33 < 3, RMSEA = .062, SRMR = .06). The findings show that price has a positive and significant direct relationship with intent to continue (B = .511, t = 10.750, p < 0.01). There is a significant and positive relationship between Service Quality (SQ) with intentions to continue (B = .260, t = 4.842, P < 0.001). There is a positive and significant relationship between price and service quality (B = .506, t = 8.345, p < 0.001). we also found that price mediates the relationship between service quality and continuation intentions, and it is significant (p = 0.016).

Conclusion

The results emphasize the importance of the price point and the quality of the service when deciding to continue membership.

IMPROVING COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH PARK ACCESS: TEXAS HEALTH PARKS DECISION SUPPORT TOOL

AUTHORS

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Introduction/Rationale

As urbanization continues to intensify, there emerges a growing and critical need to empirically understand the role of parks in fostering community health and equity (Maller et. al., 2008; Rigolon 2016). This understanding is vital for justifying and guiding urban planning and public health strategies that are increasingly focused on creating equitable, healthy and sustainable living environments. Parks play a multifaceted role in urban ecosystems, contributing not just to physical health through encouraging active lifestyles, but also to mental well-being, social cohesion and environmental resilience (Joseph & Maddock, 2016; Wood et. al., 2017; Threlfall et. al., 2018; Wan et. al., 2021). The challenge lies in creating and implementing approaches that can link these benefits, thereby providing empirical evidence to support the development of policies and initiatives that prioritize green spaces as key components of the built environment for the betterment of community health and social equity.

In recognition of this need the Texas Healthy Parks Decision Support Tool (DST), developed through a partnership between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Department of State Health Services and Trust for Public Land (TPL), was created. This tool integrates the Texas Outdoor Recreation Inventory with CDC PLACES census-level data, encompassing variables related to mental and physical health, social vulnerability and environmental health (CDC PLACES, 2023). Its design caters to the needs of community leaders, park providers, and health providers, offering a nuanced framework to address health disparities and foster healthier communities. Particularly impactful is the tool's capacity to transform data into actionable insights, bridging the critical gap between theoretical understanding and practical application — in this way it seeks to help shape

future and current land use to strategically improve access to nature and recreation for all Texans.

Methods

The Texas Healthy Parks DST scores communities across Texas on various criteria, integrating these scores with other data layers and tools like queries, custom scenarios, park impact reports and map printing. Communities were classified as either urban or rural to reflect their distinct needs. In urban areas, the focus is on providing residents with access to natural spaces within the cityscape, whereas in rural areas, the emphasis is on access to wildlands and immersive natural experiences. The tool is innovative in providing rural areas with data-driven insights previously unavailable, leveraging the ParkServe® mapping platform to map park access.

The tool also includes metrics for Destination Parks, such as National Monuments and State Forests, which are vital for both urban and rural communities. These parks offer unique natural experiences and are weighted more heavily for rural areas in the analysis. The tool assesses 30-minute and 90-minute drive time access to these parks, facilitating gap analysis to inform the creation or expansion of park access. The community needs analysis involved collaboration with a technical team, including experts from the Texas Department of Health Services, TPWD and TPL. This analysis used health data, particularly focusing on conditions affected by the COVID-19 pandemics and evaluated metrics like social vulnerability, park access and environmental factors like pollution and urban heat. Additionally, a statewide conserved lands inventory was created using multiple databases, which local practitioners can edit using the ParkServe® park boundary data editing tool. Some of these features can be seen in **Figure 1**.

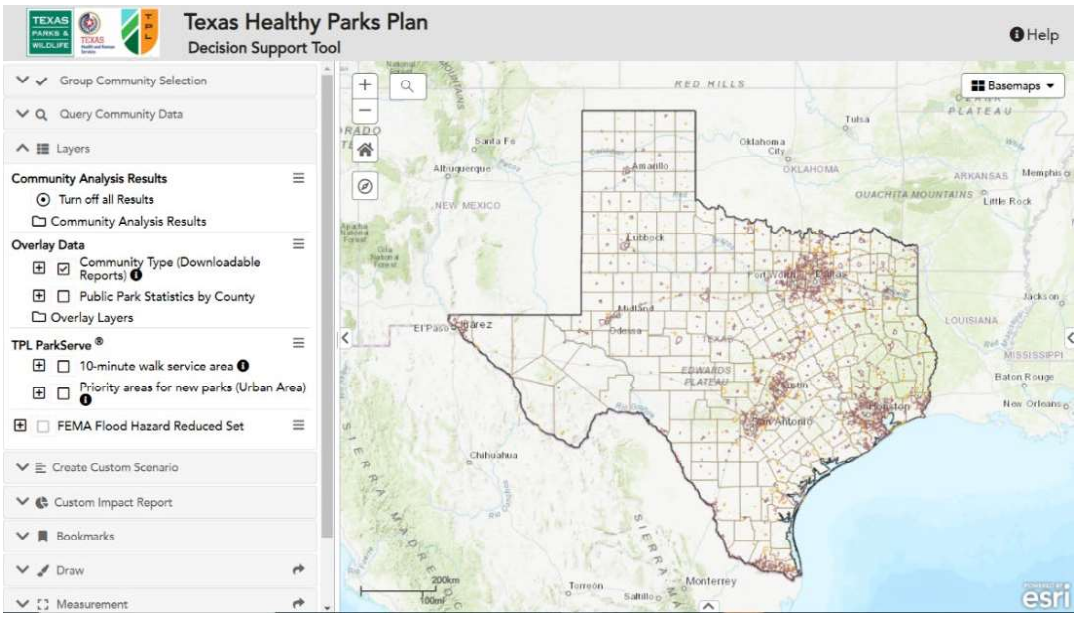

Figure 1. Operation of the Texas Health Parks Plan Decisions Support Tool

Results

The Texas Healthy Parks DST provides essential insights for local communities and healthcare practitioners to effectively utilize parks and greenspaces in enhancing community health, ensuring equitable access, and fostering long-term resilience. It bridges the gap between conceptual understanding and practical implementation, focusing on delivering health benefits to diverse populations. Through two case studies, set in contrasting environments of Houston's urban landscape and Cameron County's rural setting, the tool demonstrates its adaptability and utility in different community contexts. These case studies exemplify how the tool can guide specific interventions tailored to the unique challenges and needs of various communities, thereby playing a crucial role in nurturing healthier and more equitable living environments.

In Houston, a city grappling with public health challenges like high sedentariness, loneliness and environmental challenges, the tool aids in identifying neighborhoods like Gulfton that are marked by extreme urban heat islands. Initiatives like the Greener Gulfton movement, which developed a Community Action Plan to mitigate urban heat through urban forestry and enhance health and academic achievement, provide an example of how communities can advocate for change, based on results from the DST. The Texas Healthy Parks DST simplifies the process of identifying areas lacking park access, struggling with

community health issues and areas of high social vulnerability, in addition to the environmental variables. This tool enables strategic planning for park placement to serve more community members effectively, especially in high-priority areas identified through its analysis features.

Cameron County, with a significant Hispanic and Latino population and a population with notable poverty levels, shows how rural communities can utilize parks for health promotion. The Cameron County Parks and Recreation Department (CCPRD) integrates health services into its parks, offering screenings, education and recreational programs. The tool's data on social vulnerability and health needs assists in pinpointing communities lacking access to large parks and recreational areas, guiding the CCPRD in targeting its resources effectively, especially for its summer programs aimed at disadvantaged youth. The ability to combine and analyze multiple factors like health and social vulnerability showcases the tool's capacity to aid in strategic planning and resource allocation, ensuring that initiatives reach the segments of the community with the highest disparities.

Application to Practice

The Texas Healthy Parks DST is a valuable asset for a broad spectrum of entities, including city governments, development boards, academic groups and public health organizations. Its versatility allows these diverse groups to effectively identify areas in need of improved park access, which is essential for enhancing overall community health. City planners can use the tool for urban development strategies, ensuring parks and greenspaces are integrated into cityscapes thoughtfully. Development boards can leverage the tool’s insights for sustainable community projects, prioritizing areas where park access can significantly impact residents' quality of life. Academic institutions can utilize the tool for research and study, exploring the relationship between park accessibility and public health outcomes. Public health organizations can apply the data to tailor health interventions and programs, especially in communities with limited access to recreational spaces. The tool’s comprehensive analysis capabilities also make it valuable for environmental advocacy groups, landscape architects and real estate developers, who can use the insights for environmentally conscious planning and development.

By providing detailed, data-driven assessments, the Texas Healthy Parks Decision Support Tool opens numerous possibilities for enhancing urban livability, promoting public health and fostering sustainable community development across various sectors. An example selected by the audience can be explored in real time to further demonstrate the strength of potential planning analysis.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERSECTIONS: EXPLORING COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT THROUGH LEISURE AND COMMUNICATION

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Introduction:

Globalization has made us a more connected planet and given us more opportunities to learn about how similar we all are. Through the intersection of communication and leisure studies, this paper will explore Community Attachment theory (Janowitz, 1967). Rothenbuhler et al., (1996) define community attachment as "identification with the community combined with an affective tie. Attachment implies feeling a part of the community - seeing oneself as belonging. Attachment also means that this sense of belonging is positively evaluated, that one is happy and proud to belong. In this way the community and self are articulated together with the community being a contingency for one's own happiness." (p.447).

The intersection of where you live intersects with how you communicate your personal identity, your interests, your priorities and your demographics. By examining how we communicate, we can see how bonds are formed within the community. These bonds then translate to how attached we are to our community based on the strength and number of bonds. The purpose of this paper is to look deep into community attachment at the components that create attachments to one's community and how leisure and communication can impact those ties. These intersections serve as opportunities for leisure service providers and communicators to harness the power of these attachments to strengthen the community even more.

Methods

This study is an analysis of the current research in community attachment theory. This includes the various fields of research that have used community attachment theory and the various international applications of the theory.

Application to Practice

The components of community attachment provide an opportunity for practitioners to articulate who is already attached to their community and why. Acknowledging that every community is different, Community Attachment theory gives practitioners the tools to be able to specify within their own community who and identify why. Then through the tools of communication, one can look at ways to reinforce those attachments. Additionally, what leisure opportunities and communication can do to facilitate reaching those who are not attached and begin to build a relationship.

It is essential to study communication and leisure studies in tandem since "communication activities … especially the use of public communication media, are seen as essential for the growth and maintenance of attachments to and involvement in the communities in which we live" (Rothenbuhler et al., 1996, p.446) and leisure involvement has been proven to have a positive impact on place attachment (Tao et al., 2022).

Objectives: Following this session, attendees should be able to

1. Identify and recognize the demographics, interests and levels of engagement of individuals already involved within their community.
2. Examine effective communication strategies which strengthen communities.
3. Analyze how leisure activities contribute to building relationships in diverse communities.

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PARK EQUITY POLICY SCAN: THE STATE OF THE FIELD FOR MUNICIPAL POLICIES AIMED AT INCREASING PARK ACCESS

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With 100 million people lacking access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home, cities need new tools and strategies to meet the scale and urgency of the nation's park equity divide. Present-day inequities in park space and outdoor access are often the result of a long history of inequitable policy decisions. Changing these local policies — the laws, regulations, procedures of governments and other institutions — is a way cities can enable the systemic shifts needed to address the disparity in access to quality parks and green spaces at scale.

In recent years, innovative strategies to address park equity have emerged across the United States, however, there were no tools or processes available to systematically identify and classify park equity policy approaches. The overall purpose of this project was to develop, test, and validate a Park Equity Policy Scan framework and data collection tool to systematically document and describe the state of the field for policies aimed at increasing equitable access to park space.

Methods

Through literature review and topic expert interviews, researchers developed a framework of eight municipal-level policy categories that increased equitable access to parks. Next, a data collection tool was developed to systematically identify and capture local policies that supported the framework of policy categories. The data collection tool led researchers through a series of questions focused on the presence of an identified policy, the corresponding link to the identified policy, identifying specific policy language, the type of document where the policy was found (e.g., municipal code and comprehensive plan), and an open-ended section for any notes related to the identified policy. The tool was used to collect data for 25 U.S. cities, representing a variety of population sizes, geographic locations and percentages of racial/ethnic minority residents. After document review, the tool and data collection were validated through interviews with city leaders in 19 of the 25 cities. The interviews conducted with city leaders were then analyzed using a coding framework for each policy category to aggregate themes in the data.

Results

Through the data collection tool and interviews with city leaders, 244 policies were identified and documented across the eight categories in the Park Equity Policy Scan Framework. Policy scan results revealed that Parks Needs Assessments (found in 92 percent of cities), Public Finance (80 percent), and Land Use (72 percent) were the most common policies related directly to parks departments. The data collection tool and instructions manual were highly effective at identifying local policies aimed at increasing access to parks and green space, with all policies accurately identified at least 80 percent. Through the interviews, city leaders reported that public finance, parks needs assessments, and parkland dedication were the most impactful policies in their cities.

Application to Practice

This research is a foundational step to understanding what policy levers cities are using to address park equity as well as which policies are considered most impactful. This framework allows cities to understand key policies that influence park equity and identify opportunities to update or adopt policies to increase park access.

Objectives

- List the policy categories that influence park equity.
- Gain an understanding of the current state of park equity policy in the United States.
- Identify the most common park equity policies.

PROMOTING WATER SAFETY THROUGH AGILE AGENT-BASED MODELING: A NOVEL TOOL TO QUANTIFY IMPACT

AUTHORS

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Introduction/Rationale

Parks and recreation demands both resource-effective action and impactful community health promotion. However, evaluating the real-world impacts of injury prevention strategies is enormously difficult. Water safety programming, though a staple nationwide, carries immeasurable long-term gains. To address this gap, we employed an innovative methodology increasingly adopted in public health-agile Agent-Based Modeling (a-ABM). This novel, adaptable computer simulation integrates real-world data and stakeholder expertise to model priority interventions and project expected 10-year outcomes. Thereby enabling data-driven comparison of the lifesaving potential for various water safety initiatives before resource-intensive implementation. While parks and recreation is the leading provider of swim lessons and training nationally, drowning remains a top killer of children. Strategic resource allocation relies on quantifying the impact of proposed interventions. Our participatory simulation models high-risk subsets to identify effective, synergistic drowning prevention strategies with the greatest mortality reduction.

Framework

We utilized an agile Plan-Do-Check Act (original 1959; modified: 2023) as a conceptual framework to investigate and quantify the impact of regulatory and environmental educational campaigns to increase water safety. The agile data framework has seven basic ways that customers shape recreational programs and services.

Use Case

Aquatics is a favorite recreational activity for people of all ages, yet the hidden and often overlooked dangers have unintended morbidity and mortality outcomes. Every year, thousands of people, from toddlers to seniors, die from unintentional drowning (4,528 to

5,092 between 2018 and 2021 in the United States alone), a behavior amenable to intervention. Drowning is a leading cause of injury death among toddlers and children alike and the third leading cause of death among Americans ages 1 to 44, and distinct populations are at greater risk (e.g. non-white, low-income, males and first-generation Americans).

The Problem

Evaluating the long-term, real-world impact of injury prevention strategies is enormously difficult, requiring years-long study after resource-heavy implementation. This paucity of outcomes data severely hampers evidence-based decision-making regarding resource allocation and program planning.

Our Solution

To address this critical gap, we employed an innovative methodology increasingly used in transportation and public health sectors-agile Agent-Based Modeling (a-ABM). This novel, flexible computer simulation integrates real-world data patterns and stakeholder expertise to model community interventions and quantify expected outcomes over a decade. Unlike static statistical models, this systems-based tool simulates granular person-to-person interactions responsive to parameter changes — enabling timely comparison of various interventions' impact potential once parameterized. Thereby, a-ABM elevates injury prevention efforts from reactive to strategic — providing a virtual testbed to identify data-driven priorities with the greatest lifesaving potential before demanding significant investments. The adoption of participatory modeling approaches revolutionizes planning in parks and recreation.

Methods

Our interdisciplinary team developed an agile Agent-Based Model (a-ABM) to simulate drowning deaths over a 10-year period based on interactions around water. We parameterized the model using detailed Florida drowning fatality data from 2016-2022, analyzing age, sex and race-specific risk patterns. National water safety experts, park/recreation leaders, academics and medical examiners advised on modeling priorities.

Guided by the data and stakeholders, we selected and programmed three interventions in the a-ABM:

1. Parent water safety education campaign tailored for toddlers — the highest-risk group
2. Tourist water safety education campaign — another high-risk pool
3. Regulation mandating proper fencing around all residential swimming pools — The computer simulation quantified expected drowning mortality reduction from 2023-2033 for each intervention individually and combined.

Results

The toddler water safety campaign is expected to reduce drowning deaths by 15.3 percent over 10 years, saving an estimated 22 lives. The tourist campaign shows a similar 15 percent mortality reduction. However, pool fencing regulation demonstrates the greatest standalone impact, preventing 29 percent of drowning fatalities by restricting unsupervised water access. When these three interventions are implemented together — with modest compliance estimates of three percent campaign effectiveness and 30 percent fence compliance — the combined mortality reduction is 32 percent, equivalent to approximately 45 lives saved in our community over a decade. This synergistic, collaborative approach leveraging education and regulation demonstrates significant lifesaving potential for high-risk groups.

Application to Practice

This agile modeling approach enabled timely quantification of the long-term impact of collaborative drowning prevention strategies before resource-intensive real-world implementation. Our reliance on granular local data and water safety practitioner expertise to inform the parameters and interventions was critical for maximizing applicability. We encourage wider adoption of participatory agile Agent-Based Modeling approaches to data-driven decision-making and strategic resource allocation for injury prevention and health promotion initiatives within parks and recreation departments nationwide. This systems-

based methodology can lend invaluable foresight regarding expected outcomes and guide collaborative efforts toward the greatest recreational impact.

RECRUITING FEMALE OFFICIALS: UNDERSTANDING WHY MORE DO NOT OFFICIATE

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Rationale/Introduction

Sport officials impact the quality and competition level of sports programming. Today, recreation and interscholastic sport programs face a shortage of qualified officials impacting the ability of the organizations to continue offering sports programming. Orr (2023) reports "since the 2018-2019 season approximately 50,000 individuals have stopped officiating" (para 1). Females make up a pool of potential officials that may be overlooked as only 9.36 percent of the 35,813 respondents to the 2023 NASO officials survey were females. Potentially hindering the recruitment of female officials is that of the 1,925 female respondents in the NASO study 50.91 percent shared feeling unsafe because of the actions of coaches, players, fans, or administrators while 11.13 percent shared feeling uncomfortable or feeling threatened by members of the officiating ranks (NASO, 2023).

Overall, sport officials believe parents are a predominant cause of sportsmanship issues, while coaches are primarily responsible for improved sportsmanship (NASO, 2023). The declining behavior of fans, parents, coaches and players along with its impact on the retention and recruitment of sport officials (Scott & Jordan, 2022, Jordan et al., 2019; Forbes & Livingston, 2013; Gray & Wilson, 2008; Sabaini 2001), burnout and stress (Voight, 2009; Dorsche & Paskevich, 2006, Folkesson et al., 2002; Rainey, 1994; Rainey, 1995; Rainey & Hardy, 1999), abuse of officials (Kellett & Shilbury, 2007; Folkesson et al., 2002) and strategies for coping with stress (Warner et al., 2013; Voight, 2009; Wolfson & Neave, 2007) has been under investigation for approximately 28 years. To explore ways to recruit more female officials the current investigation sought to understand the experiences of current and former female athletes specifically seeking to garner their thoughts related to officiating, perceived challenges of officiating, and recruitment of female officials.

Method

Upon IRB approval, the exploratory study sought input from students who were former high school athletes or current college athletes attending sport management, recreation, and exercise science courses at a mid-major university. The sample included 15 females (five college athletes and 10 former high school athletes). The researcher followed an interview guide that could be adapted to include follow-up questions as the interview progressed. The interview began with demographics questions (e.g., sports played and years played). The interview progressed to include questions to understand their experiences related to the topic of sport officiating (e.g., knowledge of friends or family members officiating and experiences they had with an official). The interview ended with questions related to sport official recruitment (e.g., would you be interested in officiating, have you been asked to officiate, and suggestions for training, support and recruitment of female officials). Interviews were taped with permission and then transcribed. Interpretive analysis was used to arrive at the theme that described experiences participants shared.

Results

Participants played a variety of sports in high school including basketball, cross country, tennis, track and field, softball and volleyball. Collegiate athletes were current members of the basketball, cheerleading, cross country and soccer teams. Years of athletic experience ranged from one to more than 20 years. Five participants had officiating experience at the recreation, sport camp or interscholastic level. Most participants shared officiating experiences they had as high school students. Within this group comments from coaches, players or fans creating harsh atmosphere were the number one reason for quitting. Sports officiated included basketball and soccer. Eleven (11) participants reported knowledge of family or friends that officiated. Officiating basketball at the community recreation and interscholastic level was the most prominently reported followed by soccer. Overall, study participants were willing to officiate with 9 yeses and 4 maybes. The majority of these respondents would be willing to officiate at the community recreation and interscholastic level. Eleven of the respondents reported never being asked to officiate, while two (2) participants had been asked by their coaches and one (1) volunteered to officiate.

Three themes emerged in association with challenges the participants thought they might experience if they officiated. Gender roles were the most named challenge. This was connected with officiating being seen as a male-dominated activity and being perceived as not good enough or strong enough to officiate. This theme was also linked with the idea that they would be competing with males for a spot as an official. Finally, the theme was associated with the perception that some thought women should not officiate. Time was the second most referenced challenge. In this instance participants explained having enough time to officiate. The final perceived challenge involved sportsmanship concerns. This is related to the atmosphere in the facility, the harsh environment created with constant criticism of officials, aggressive behavior toward officials and unsportsmanlike conduct toward officials by fans, parents, players and coaches.

Participants did not believe there were any sports that females should not officiate. However, they were split evenly related to the ability of a female official to earn the respect of players, coaches and fans. Reasons this may be difficult included not having a relationship with the parties, the players, coaches or fans not knowing them as an official; needing to earn respect by making the right call; and not being taken seriously because they were a woman. Others felt it would not be difficult because coaches knew females worked just as hard as males, especially if for those with experience coaching both males and females. Another reported being professional from the time entering the gym would help them to earn respect.

Participants felt the main way to recruit more female officials was to get the message out better. This was reflected in statements such as "since, I was never asked maybe to advertise more in the high schools," "I mean honestly. I feel like they could just put the word out there. There is literally nothing," "get it out there just a bit more," and "reach out to athletes, we're good people. We're open to making money because we can't get fulltime jobs or parttime jobs".

A second component of getting the message out involved being open to female officials. For instance, "be open to looking outside who is currently officiating to recruit more younger officials and females. I feel like most are older men" or "develop a message that it could be 'me' that is the official." Closely related to this was the idea of providing future female officials with role models that look like them. For instance, "send current female officials to recruit future female officials so they may see role models in the position."

Final recruitment ideas shared included using social media to recruit potential officials, promoting officiating as a part-time opportunity. Participants also suggested providing opportunities to gain information about officiating and experience through seminars/training at high schools. Another aspect of training could include a more experienced and respected official working with the new officials to bring them into the fold, teaching them how to manage different situations and being available to talk through things with them.

Application to practice

The investigation provides current sport and recreation professionals with insights from a potential pool of sport officials available to them. The information shared highlights challenges the participants believe female officials may face allowing sport administrators to develop means to equip new officials to address different challenges and situations. It also allows league administrators to develop policies and procedures that may help mitigate potential challenges officials face. Finally, the information shared by the current and former athletes highlights potential current ideas to help sport and recreation administrators recruit and retain new sport officials with a focus on a potential untapped pool of future officials.

Objectives: Following this poster presentation session, Attendees should be able to

1. Understand potential barriers/challenges faced by female officials.
2. Understand ways to recruit former female athletes who become sports officials.
3. Understand ways to support former female athletes once they become sport officials.

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RE-IMAGINING OST PROGRAMING: RESULTS FROM A COMMUNITY STUDY FOCUSING ON UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER NEEDS

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Introductions/ Rationale

Communities are increasingly looking to out-of-school time (OST) activities to support young people's overall health and development. Park and recreation agencies (DPR) are among the largest providers of OST programs nationwide, offering safe, engaging and welcoming places to go when schools are not in session. Nationwide, 67 percent of DPR agencies offer programming targeted specifically to teens. High-quality OST programs promote positive youth development and offer a safe space where youth can explore their potential.

Effective OST programming brings a wide range of benefits to youth, families and communities. OST activities can support social, emotional, cognitive and academic development, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health, connect youth to supportive adults and mentors, build life skills, connect youth to enrichment activities, and provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth.

OST programs also provide a significant return-on-investment, with every dollar invested saving at least three dollars, through increasing youth's earning potential, improving their performance at school and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency.

A focus on middle school years is of high importance. Middle school is a crucial development period for youth in which they form behaviors and practices that affect their future. OST activities can provide multiple benefits on academic and social development that help these youth navigate adolescent years preparing them for success. They can provide safe places to have fun, be engaged and learn. However, communities across the country tend to see declines in OST participation after elementary school. This holds true in Alexandria. Several reasons have been identified for lower rates of participation including

those stemming from poverty/financial barriers, lack of awareness about OST programs, concerns about safety in traveling to programs, lack of connection with adults engaged in the programs, and negative perception or stigma and perceptions that OST programs are an activity for younger children. Middle schoolers are also more autonomous and less interested in taking part in adult-supervised activities outside of the school day. They prefer to spend time with friends and are less likely to participate in programs if their peers are not involved or do not support their participation. In order to deliver OST activities that teens and tweens will embrace; youth need to be at the design table. Lastly, there are simply fewer activity offerings for this age group.

The Youth Support Network - ACT for Alexandria, with financial support from City of Alexandria, Virginia (City) and Frank & Betty Wright Foundation, commissioned Weber Moore Partners, LLC to conduct a community-wide landscape study (study) to document and map the current state of the OST and community programming for K-12 students in the City (program landscape) and identify the hopes, needs and barriers experienced by youth, families and providers related to OST activities with a focus on middle and high school students (program analysis). The study recommendations are intended to inform the continued development of the Alexandria Youth Support Network and serve as a community-wide call to action about the value and importance of expanded learning programs for our children and youth.

Methods

This study was conducted over the course of 18 months, utilizing a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques and analysis were leveraged during this project securing insights from 5,785 community members. The study was designed with commitment to:

- Work towards systems change.
- Bring a racial equity and social justice lens.
- Center on family and youth voice in research and discussion.
- Share generated data and information broadly with nonprofits, city agencies, funders and other stakeholders in our community.

A social marketing model was used to guide inquiry design. Social marketing is a systematic and strategic planning process that adopts strategies used by commercial marketers resulting in an end goal of improving personal or societal welfare. This consumer

orientation positioned OST as a commodity that people purchase (with time, effort and/or funds). Lines of inquiry were developed using the 4Ps+ of the marketing framework (product, price, promotion, and place-plus-policy considerations) to better understand what community members and OST providers (target audiences) currently know, believe, do and desire related to OST programs and to build activities with recommended strategies to optimize participation in OST activities. Findings were analyzed along the 4Ps+ categories for each investigation and then formulated into key takeaways and recommendations.
The landscape study gathered information and insights through surveys and listening sessions/focus groups. Two primary surveys were developed and fielded: one for OST providers (n=128) and one for community members (n=5341) including parents and middle/high school youth.

OST providers and stakeholders were surveyed via a provider survey to gather basic operational information for both the K-12 OST and community programming. The survey was developed in Survey Monkey and emailed to more than 150 organizations offering youth programs in the City of Alexandria. They were also asked about barriers for current programming, as well as questions regarding needs to expand middle school OST participation and programming. Information gathered included:

- Barriers to engaging youth in existing programs
- Resources needed to expand offerings to middle school youth
- Providers perspective on the Youth Support Network role in supporting expanded OST activities for middle school youth
- Trainings of interest to OST providers
- Willingness and ability to participate in common data collection and/or registration processes

The community survey was fielded in partnership by Alexandria City Public Schools and included six questions related to OST in their 2023 Equity Climate Survey. The survey was open to all ACPS pre-K-12 families, staff and students in grades 6-12 to offer their perceptions of the school division in areas including student learning, social emotional support and safety. A slightly modified survey was developed to reach three specific groups: families with homeschool students, families with students in private schools, and an oversample for families with students receiving special education services. Listening sessions/focus groups were held with families (parents/guardians) and middle school and

high school youth. All study components underwent individual analysis followed by synthesis of all findings.

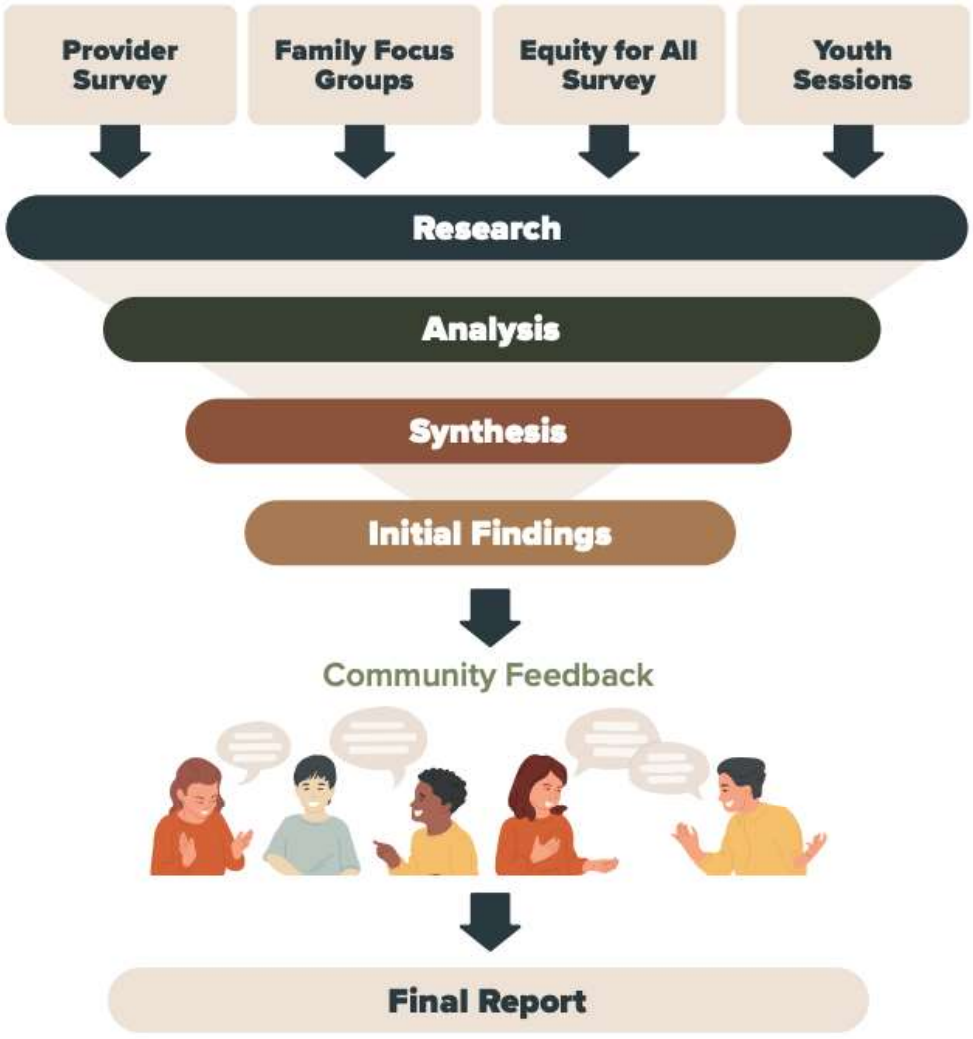
GIS Mapping was used to document geographic location of programs and activities. Following the administration and analysis of surveys, study leaders — working with trusted community leaders — hosted 13 listening sessions for youth and family members of racial and ethnic groups historically disenfranchised communities. In addition, a charrette-style community forum was held to secure additional community feedback on findings prior to preparing a study report and sharing final recommendations.

Key stakeholders on the Youth Support Network (YSN) Executive Committee and Middle School Work Group served as advisors through the study, meeting with the study team and providing guidance on the study design, instrument development, outreach, administration and protocols, including pilot testing the provider survey. Executive committee members also served as activity facilitators during the community forum.

Results

Parents and youth identify having fun as the top desired outcome from participating in OST programs, and there is a broad range of desired activities. They are looking for programs that value diversity, cultural sensitivity and meet youth where they are in both interests and location. Providers identified multiple areas where additional support is desired, with a centralized program locator, support coordinating with schools, opportunities for networking and professional development topping the list.

Key study findings include:



- Many youths do not participate in OST programming. This is an untapped market and opportunity.
- To make youth-informed programming a priority, a culture shift in how we design opportunities and communicate about them is needed.
- One size does not fit all — families and youth want inclusive, accessible, diverse and age-appropriate programming.
- A potentially inequitable geographic distribution of OST activities needs to be further explored.
- A coordinated, community-based approach is needed to support a robust OST environment.
- Better communication and promotion of programs is a must. There is a need to move away from industry terminology; How activities are described needs to match audience needs and wants.
- Professional development/training and technical assistance would support providers in program delivery that meets consumer needs and demands.

Recommended Implementation Priorities

1. Create a way to capture and share information.
2. Advance robust professional development/training opportunities for out-of-school time staff.
3. Develop a comprehensive communication plan.
4. Grow diversity of programs and activities.
5. Expand community-based partnerships.
6. Implement supportive policies**.**

Application to Practice / Learning objectives

Session participants will be able to

- identify strategies for utilizing marketing models to better under youth-serving program needs and demands.
- recognize tools to obtain and incorporate youth and community voice in landscape studies and program assessments.
- apply study methodologies and learnings to their own communities.

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Select Figures

Figure 5 Top Three Activities Wanted in OST Programs

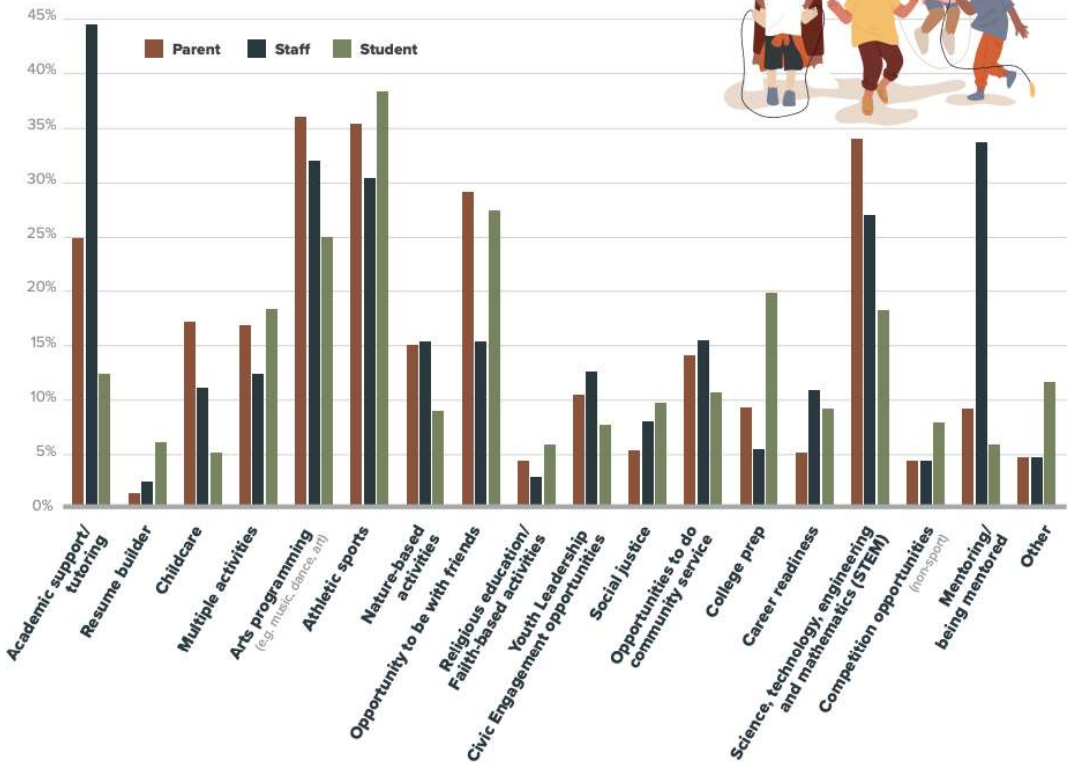
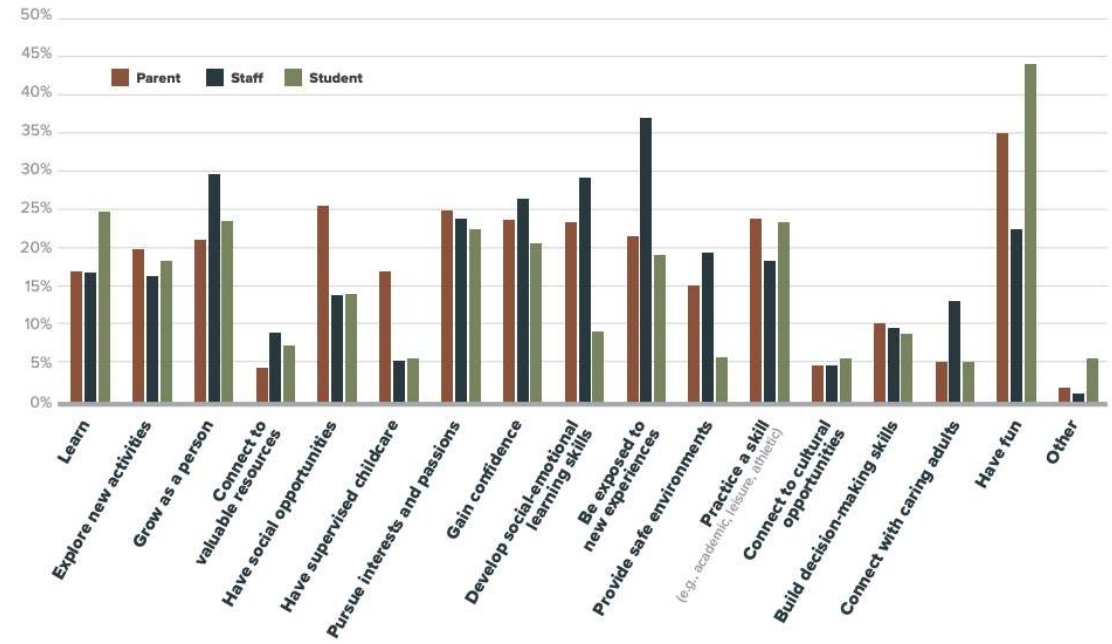
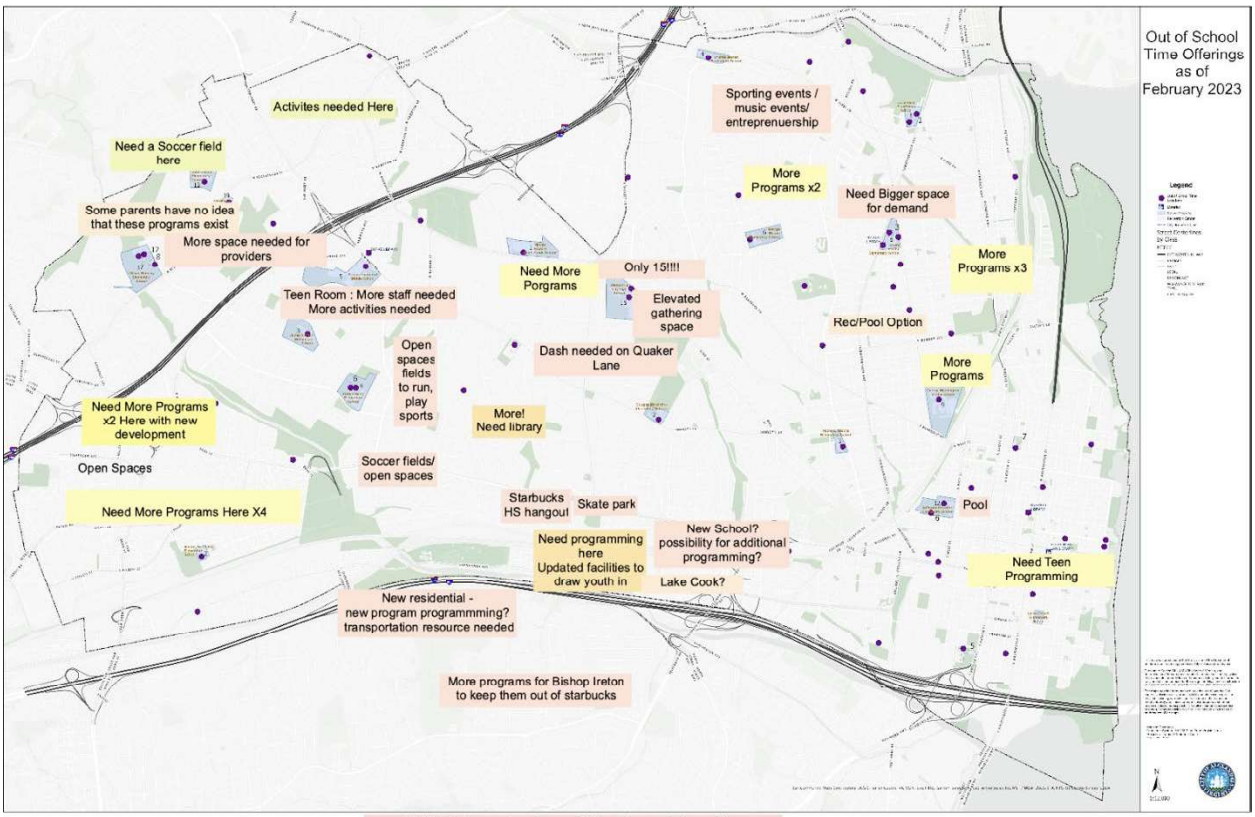


Figure 7 Outcomes You Hope Result from Participating in OST Programs





THE IMPACT OF AWARENESS OF PUBLIC LEISURE RESOURCES ON HAPPINESS AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Introduction/Rationale

A disability is a functional limitation that affects a person's activity in daily life, including leisure activity participation (Ku et al., 2016; Kuykendall et al., 2015). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), nearly half of adults with disabilities do not participate in physically active leisure in their free time, which could lead to chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke and diabetes. Such low levels of leisure

participation among people with disabilities were also found to be associated with poorer quality of life and low happiness (Chemtob et al., 2019; Livneh & Martz, 2014; Shikako-Thomas et al. 2008; Ullenhag et al., 2014). Studies of Korean people with physical disabilities found that certain types of leisure activities, such as leisure-time physical activity and social activity, were positively associated with happiness and life satisfaction (Kim et al., 2021b; Kim et al., 2016). As such, there is a critical need to promote the leisure participation of people with disabilities to improve their overall health and well-being.

Researchers have documented that the diversity and frequency of leisure participation positively correlate with well-being because they tend to enrich cultural and social capitals, prevent boredom and fulfill various psychological needs such as detachment-recovery, autonomy, mastery, meaning and affiliation (Glover & Parry, 2008; Kuykendall et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2014). Similar findings were also found among people with disabilities. For example, Kim et al. (2021a) found that leisure participation plays a significant role in improving life satisfaction among individuals with disabilities by helping them develop effective stress coping strategies (e.g., pursuing problem-solving skills). Moreover, leisure researchers have found that participating in more diverse leisure activities was positively associated with leisure satisfaction and subjective well-being (Guinn, 1995; Lee et al., 2020; Loy et al., 2003).

A growing body of literature suggests that an awareness of public leisure resources has a positive relationship with levels of leisure participation (Ball et al., 2008; McCormack et al., 2008). Some studies showed that individuals with disabilities often report lower awareness of accessible local leisure and recreation facilities and available programs offered in their community, which can in turn be a barrier to leisure participation (French et al., 2001; Lee & Lyu, 2016). These findings highlight the importance of being aware of community leisure resources for both leisure participation and the health of people with disabilities. However, no studies have collectively examined the impact of awareness of public leisure facilities and programs on both leisure participation patterns and health outcomes, especially among people with disabilities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how awareness of public leisure facilities and programs relates to leisure quantity, leisure repertoire, leisure satisfaction and happiness among people with disabilities.

Methods

This study used the data collected from 2018 Korean National Leisure Activity Survey. Awareness of public leisure resources was assessed through two questions. A sample item includes "Are you aware of public cultural and leisure facilities in your local community?". Use of leisure facilities and programs was assessed by asking respondents whether they have used leisure facilities in their local communities. Leisure quantity was measured by asking an average daily leisure time (hours) during weekdays and weekends/holidays. Leisure repertoire (Iso-Ahola, 1980) was assessed by the total number of leisure activities respondents have participated during the past one year. Leisure satisfaction and happiness were measured by a single item, respectively. The sample comprises 10,271 Korean citizens over the age of 18. For this study, we focused on 269 adult respondents ranging in age from 18 to 89 with any types of disabilities. A path analysis using AMOS Version 28.0 was conducted to examine the relationship between the awareness of public leisure facilities, leisure repertoire, leisure quantity, leisure satisfaction and happiness.

Results

The results of the path analysis are summarized in Figure 1. The model fit indices indicated an acceptable fit between the path model and data ($\chi^2(df=3) = 3.86$; $p = .15$; RMSEA=.05; SRMR=.014; CFI=.98). With regard to happiness as a dependent variable, leisure repertoire ($b = .16$, $p < .001$), leisure satisfaction ($b = .54$, $p < .001$), and leisure quantity ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with happiness. As for leisure satisfaction as a dependent variable, awareness of public leisure facilities and programs ($b = .27$, $p < .001$) and leisure repertoire ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with leisure satisfaction, whereas leisure quantity was not. With respect to the two leisure behavior indicators, awareness of public leisure facilities and programs was positively associated with leisure quantity ($b = .17$, $p < .01$), but not with leisure repertoire. Overall, the model accounted for 20 percent of the variation in leisure repertoire, 20 percent of the variation in leisure quantity, 17 percent of the variation in leisure satisfaction, and 41 percent of the variation in happiness (Figure 1).

Application to Practice

One of the most interesting and meaningful findings in this study was that individuals who were more aware of public leisure resources in their communities tended to have higher daily leisure times and were more satisfied with their leisure engagement, which

led to greater happiness among people with disabilities. In particular, the path coefficients showed that awareness had the strongest influence on leisure satisfaction, the most critical determinant of happiness in this study. This means that one's leisure satisfaction was more dependent on one's knowledge of existing leisure resources (awareness) than leisure participation (leisure quantity or repertoire). That is, the awareness of existing leisure infrastructures and recreation programs can serve as a strong facilitator of a positive feeling of their leisure as well as actual leisure participation among people with disabilities. While it is necessary for the government to facilitate leisure opportunities through public leisure service provision, raising awareness about the provision may be a further important consideration for the health and well-being of people with disabilities. This finding provides additional insight into the existing literature, which has mainly focused on the relationship between awareness and level of leisure participation (Mowen et al., 2007; Gebel et al., 2011; Lackey & Kaczynski, 2009).

An important managerial implication from these findings is that to promote the mental health and well-being of community members with disabilities, leisure agencies should focus not only on the provision of recreation facilities but also on marketing and communication. Ample evidence exists that public awareness campaigns through mass media (e.g., television, radio and newspapers) and social media (e.g., Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube) are effective in increasing park use (Banda et al., 2017; Besenyi et al., 2015; Cowper-Smith, 2015) and promoting leisure-time physical activity (National Recreation and Park Association, 2019). Moreover, implementing awareness campaigns is an attractive option because it is more cost effective and less taxing than major capital projects such as creating new recreation facilities or renovating existing infrastructures.

Additionally, it will be essential to examine the public support for policies associated with the provision of public leisure facilities and programs, given that public opinion might influence policymaker priorities in developing health promotion policies. Tabak and colleagues (2013) suggested that "practitioners can use this information [public support for policies] to tailor communication about public health interventions, including policy approaches. Local health leaders can determine priorities for education and awareness" (p. 6). To date, however, relatively little information is available regarding how well people with disabilities are aware of available and accessible public leisure facilities and programs in their communities. Moreover, much less is known about the specific opinions of individuals with disabilities on improving awareness of public leisure resources. In this regard, we

suggest that leisure program providers and other stakeholders should work together with community members with disabilities to identify the most effective ways to improve awareness and the use of public leisure resources among people with disabilities. Moreover, further research, especially participatory action research, is deserved for identifying awareness-related barriers and facilitators that are more relevant to people with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES: FOLLOWING THIS POSTER SESSION, ATTENDEES SHOULD BE ABLE TO

1. Learn about the ways by which the awareness of public leisure facilities and programs influences leisure quantity, leisure repertoire, leisure satisfaction and happiness among people with disabilities.
2. Understand the important role of the perceived environment in enhancing leisure participation, leisure satisfaction and subjective well-being among individuals with disabilities.
3. Identify strategies to promote the mental health and well-being of community members with disabilities.

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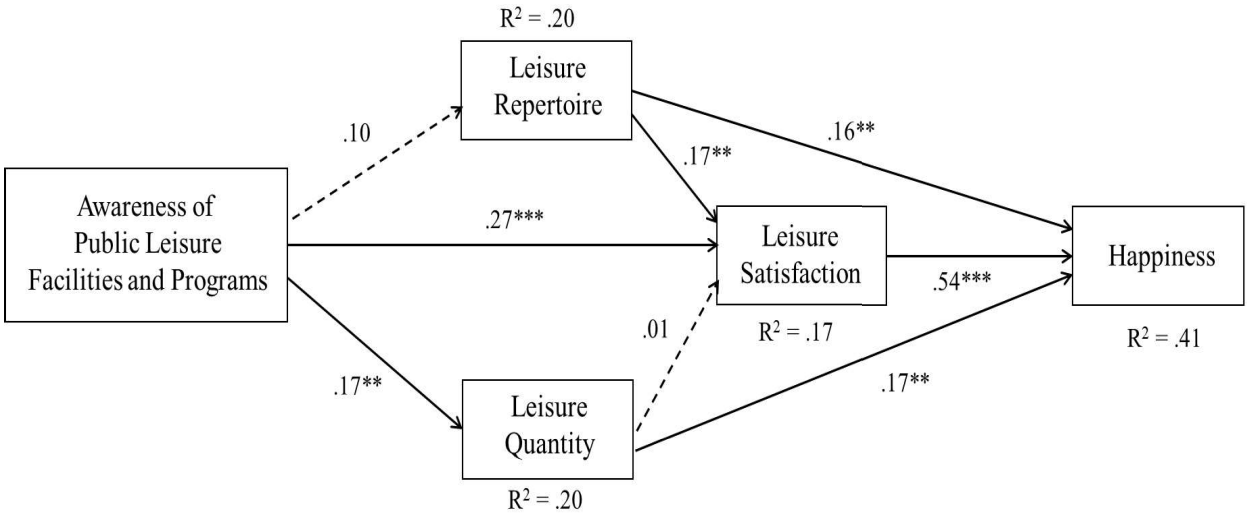
Tables and Figures

Figure 1 Final path model with standardized path coefficients

Note. Dotted paths present the non-significant relationships at .05 level.

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.



WASTE OF TIME OR WORTH YOUR WHILE: INTERNSHIPS IN PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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Introduction/Rationale

Participation in an internship experience in parks, recreation and tourism is highly regarded as one of the most integral components of the educational journey for students hoping to enter the profession. The internship experience is considered a bridge that allows students to apply classroom skills to a real work environment related to their degree field. According to Mullens (2017), internship experiences are the "true vehicle" for assessing student's professional growth. Beggs and Hurd (2010) suggest that internships prepare students for entry-level roles in the profession upon graduation by building their industry network, polishing their professional skills and providing methods to acquire new competences. Silva et. al, (2019), suggest that students participating in internships have smoother transitions into the professional world. Hurd and Schlatter (2007) suggest that students are not fully prepared for full-time employment until they have experienced their culminating internship.

Many undergraduate parks, recreation and tourism programs in the United Sttes require the completion of a field specific internship based on the assumption that these experiences are worthwhile educational pursuits for students. The inclusion of the internship in program curriculum suggests the endorsement of the presumed benefits of experiential learning in parks, recreation and tourism. However, very few empirical studies have been done to explore the rationality of the endorsement, which is particularly concerning, given the various entry points into the field, seemingly low return on the educational investment, and the skyrocketing costs associated with higher education. Leef and Robinson (2022) suggest that despite the accessibility of obtaining a bachelor's degree, changes in demand and return on investment have significantly declined, even for schools offering essential professional training such as law schools, medical schools, engineering and architecture schools and other programs that require degrees for entry into the profession. Results of this study can have implications on industry perceptions of the effectiveness of higher education programs on preparing students for entry into the field on a full-time basis and can impact the sustainability and future of parks, recreation, and tourism programs at colleges and universities.

Methods

This qualitative study consisted of in-depth interviews with a small sample of individuals who completed at least one required internship as undergraduate students between 2009-2019 as a component of the Council on Accreditation of Park, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT) standards. Participants represented institutions from across the United States. Participants were sent a demographic questionnaire via Google forms along with a copy of the informed consent document prior to the interview. For those who were unable to complete the questionnaire prior to the interview, demographic questions were asked at the beginning of the interview. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach via Zoom videoconference software and transcribed using Otter.AI. With the participant's consent, interviews were recorded and used to confirm the accuracy of typewritten notes and the Otter.AI transcriptions.

Results

This study found that many of the participants did not navigate through the four stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, but rather had experiences that were heavily centered on concrete experience and reflection. Participants had similar experiences in terms of the type of work performed which oftentimes included special events, summer camps, meetings and other youth-focused programs. Many of them participated in internships during the summer semester, which is typically the busiest season for parks, recreation and tourism agencies, stating that they did not want to miss out on the spring semester of their senior year participating in an internship that required full-time work hours. Many students had to find internships in areas away from their college or university due to limited opportunities nearby. By selecting a summer internship, participants had to pay for an additional semester of school to complete the internship requirement, which to some meant delaying their ability to find full-time work sooner.

Most participants felt that their internship was beneficial to their overall learning experience, but also mentioned that they would likely not have participated in an internship if it were not required stating that they would have sought out full-time position sooner. While some participants were motivated to complete their internship in order to acquire a full-time job, many of them were motivated to finish their internship to complete their degree. When asked what advice they would provide to practitioners and educators, some participants indicated that would have liked to have had to complete more than one internship during their programs. Others suggested that their institutions provide more support to students to

help them find and secure internships and check-in with them more often to ensure they are getting the opportunities and experiences they are intended to during their internship.

Application to Practice

This study helps to inform practitioners and higher education institutions of the needs of students enrolled in undergraduate programs as it relates to the internship experience. Taking advice from students who have completed internships in parks, recreation, tourism and related professions, former student's experiences can help to inform the structure of internship programs that better meet the needs of students participating in them.

Objective

1. Attendees will better understand former student's experiences participating in required internships in parks, recreation, tourism and related professions.
2. Attendees will be able to identify trends and themes among students who participated in a required internship.
3. Attendees will be able to identify ways to improve internship experiences for students based on feedback provided by former students.

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