

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE 1997-1998 MISSOURI STATE PARKS PASSPORT PROGRAM

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Abstract: Service quality is increasingly important to park managers. Recreation and park evaluation measures the implementation and outcome of programs for decision-making. Decisions based on evaluations are often concerned with improving the quality of the program for participants. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the Missouri State Parks Passport Program (MSPPP) by measuring the program's success in achieving the objectives and by ascertaining participants' perceptions. Based on the results, the researcher concluded that MSPPP partially achieved the objectives of the MSPPP. Most of the participants felt satisfied with the prizes of the program.

Missouri State Parks Passport Program (MSPPP)

Missouri state parks and historic sites are considered the masterpieces of the state by Missouri Department of Natural Resources Division of State Parks (MDNR DSP). To help people realize and appreciate the value of Missouri state parks and historic sites, the employees of MDNR DSP lead many activities, such as nature walks and nature education programs. The Missouri State Parks Passport Program (MSPPP) is one of these programs (Missouri Masterpieces, 1997). MDNR DSP designed the MSPPP to attract new visitors to the state parks system, promote off-peak visitation, and encourage repeat visitors to explore less known state parks and historic sites (MDNR DSP, 1995). The program includes 78 sites, 76 state parks and historic sites in Missouri and the National Frontier Trails Center in Independence and the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center in Kansas City which are owned by the MDNR and leased to those cities. MDNR DSP promotes the MSPPP by sending direct mail to people who completed the Camper Award Program, using statewide news releases, and distributing booklets at sport and trade shows.

Participants must visit all sites in the MSPPP and have their passport booklet stamped to verify that they completed the program. Each participant who completes this incentive program receives prizes (six theme patches, a passport banner, a \$25 gift certificate, a passport T-shirt, and five free camping coupons) from MDNR DSP (MDNR DSP, 1997a).

The Need for Recreation Program Evaluation

From September 5, 1995 to December 31, 1996, 461 participants completed the 1995-1996 MSPPP (MDNR DSP, 1997b). From April 1, 1997 to April 30, 1998, 108 participants completed the 1997-1998 MSPPP (MDNR DSP, 1998). However, no evaluation exists for the program. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the MSPPP by measuring the program's success in achieving its objectives (to attract new visitors to the state parks system, promote off-peak visitation, and encourage repeat visitors to explore less known state parks and historic sites), by ascertaining participants' perceptions of the MSPPP and how participants learned about the MSPPP.

Evaluation is the key to make program planning successful (Farrell & Lundegren, 1991). The goal of evaluation is to determine the value of something so that good decisions can be made (Henderson, 1995). Researchers determined classifications of evaluation in leisure services organizations. Edginton and Hanson (1992) suggested that there are customer orientation, program orientation and organizational orientation to evaluate the recreation programs. Farrell and Lundegren (1991) indicated four classifications of evaluating programs that were administration, leadership or personnel, program and areas and facilities. Henderson (1995) described five classifications (5Ps) in evaluation: program, personnel, participant, place, and policy/administration. This study concentrated on program and participants evaluation.

Many possibilities exist for developing program evaluations (Henderson, 1995). Bennett (1982) suggested seven program evaluation levels: input (time, cost, staff), activities (type, delivery of program), people involvement (number of people, characteristics of people), reactions (satisfaction, like or dislike for activities), KASA (knowledge, attitudes, skill and aspirations) objectives and changes, practice change (application of knowledge, skill), and long-term impact on quality of life (social, economic). Henderson (1995) mentioned that trying to access everything usually results in poor conceptualizations. One of the challenges of program evaluation is to make sure that a researcher does not evaluate too many criteria at once. The seven levels identified provide a framework for making decisions about what aspects of a program may be most important to evaluate (Henderson, 1995). In the MSPPP evaluation, the researcher focused on people involvement to ascertain the participants' demographics. Additionally, the researcher focused on reactions of satisfactions to determine the participants' perception of the satisfactions.

In Rossman's (1989) survey, four models for conducting recreation program evaluation were determined. The researcher used Satisfaction-Based Evaluation to conducting in this study. Data about participants' satisfaction with program services can be used to determine the worth of program services. Participant-reported satisfaction with leisure participation is an well-accepted measure of leisure outcome (Beard & Ragheb, 1980).

Many possibilities exist for developing program evaluations (Henderson, 1995). Bennett (1982) suggested seven program evaluation levels: input, activities, people's involvement, reactions, KASA objectives and change, practice change and long-term impact on quality of life. In the MSPPP evaluation, the researcher focused on people involvement and reactions.

Effective program planning needs program promotion. Programs will succeed only if visitors are aware of what the organization is offering (Compton et al., 1980). Compton et al. (1980) mentioned there were many promotion techniques that could be used, such as newspapers, brochures, televisions and radios. Televisions and radios were increasingly important because of high accessibility. Brochures were one of the most broadly used and effective methods. In Tew et al.'s (1999) study, the recreation agencies heavily relied on printed promotional material, such as seasonal program brochures, posters, and newspapers. In addition, understanding participants' reasons for participation helps leisure service managers understand participants' needs. Moreover, successful programs not only consider participants' needs but also provide satisfying opportunities (Farrell & Lundegren, 1991). Beard and Ragheb (1980) identified variables influencing leisure satisfaction: gender, knowledge of leisure, leisure value, leisure attitude, income and age. There was a strong relationship between participants' perceptions and satisfaction. Ragheb (1980) indicated that satisfaction gained from leisure activities greatly increased participation in activities.

Demographic variables are helpful to profile visitors and affect leisure activity choice and participation (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996). In Busser et al.'s (1996) study, males were more active than females and participated in more outdoor activities.

Methodology

The researcher collected data by a mailing survey and following by two follow-up letters. The survey contained four parts and four pages. The first part of the questionnaire included eight questions to determine how participants learned about the MSPPP, to measure the MSPPP's success

in achieving the MSPPP objectives and to ascertain participants' perceptions of the MSPPP. The participants rated the reasons from 4 (very important) to 1 (not at all important). The participants' satisfaction with the program's prizes, services and overall satisfaction with the program were 5-point scale ranging from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied). The researcher used 3-point scale for the ease of completing the program ranging from 1 (too short) to 3 (too long).

The second part of the questionnaire included participants' demographic profile. The questions included participant's sex, age, educational level, marital status, employment status, race/ethnicity and annual household income. The third part of the questionnaire was open-ended for participants' comments about the MSPPP. Participants wrote their opinions and suggestions for the MSPPP. The fourth part of the questionnaire was to determine participants who were new visitors or repeat visitors to the state parks and historic sites.

The subjects were participants who completed the MSPPP between April 1, 1997 and April 30, 1998, and who were 18 years and older. The total valid population of the study was 98. The total number of valid questionnaires for data analysis was 90. The response rate was 91.84 %.

Results

The first part of the questionnaire includes the question of the respondents' sources of learning about the program. In Table 1, only one respondent (1.1%) learned about the program from radio and 2 respondents (2.2%) learned from news releases. The majority of the respondents (52.8%) learned about the program from other sources. In these sources, 16 respondents (34%) learned about the MSPPP from the information in state parks followed by the Missouri Resources magazine and friends.

According to the results, MDNR DSP partially achieved the objectives of the MSPPP. First, the MSPPP did not attract many new visitors to the State Parks, State Historic Sites and the other facilities. All of the participants were repeat visitors to the State Parks (Table 2). Secondly, MDNR DSP promotes off-peak visitation to the state parks.

Table 1. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Sources of Learning about the Program

Sources of Learning about the Program	Frequency	Percent
Direct mail	11	12.4
Exhibit at a sport and trade show	11	12.4
Family	6	6.7
Flyer	8	9.0
Friends	16	18.0
<u>Missouri Resources</u> magazine	19	21.3
Newspaper news release	2	2.2
Poster	6	6.7
Radio	1	1.1
Other	47	52.8

In Table 3, the participants visited the sites mostly on weekends (94.4%) and weekdays (88.9%). The months with most visits were from April through August (Table 4). Third, MSPPP encouraged repeat visitors to explore less known State Parks and Historic Sites (Table 2). The participants did not visit some of the less known State

Parks and Historic Sites before participating in the program. The 1997-1998 MSPPP provided opportunities for participants to visit 78 sites. The MSPPP not only encouraged the participants to revisit sites they had already visited but also encouraged them to visit new sites.

Table 2. Frequency of Respondents' Visitation

Sites	New Visitors		Repeat Visitors		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
State Historic Sites	12	13.6	76	86.4	88	100
State Parks	0	0.0	88	100.0	88	100
Other Facilities	13	14.6	76	85.4	89	100

Table 3. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Time of Visit

Respondents' Time of Visit	Frequency	Percent
Weekdays	80	88.9
Weekends	85	94.4
Holidays	41	45.6

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Visiting Months

Participants' Visiting Months	Frequency	Percent
January	13	14.4
February	24	26.7
March	31	34.4
April	59	65.6
May	62	68.9
June	72	80.0
July	63	70.0
August	66	73.3
September	63	70.0
October	46	51.1
November	21	23.3
December	12	13.3

In Table 5, most of the participants determined "discover new places and things" and "increase my knowledge of Missouri State Parks" were very important reasons for them to participate in the program. "Develop friendships" and "use my physical abilities or skills" were the least important reasons. Most of the participants felt satisfied with the prizes and services (Tables 6 & 7). The participants (76.4%) felt very satisfied with the overall satisfaction toward MSPPP (Table 8) and thought the ease of completing the program (87.8%) was about right (Table 9).

Ninety participants responded and returned useable questionnaires. Eighty-nine participants indicated their sex, 43 males and 46 female. The average age was 55.3 years old. The largest group of participants' age was between 50 and 59. About one third of the participants had college (27%) or high school (34.8%) degrees. Most of the participants were married (87.6%) and more than half (53.9%) of them were retired. Almost all (96.6%) of the participants were White American. The largest percentage of participants' annual household income was between \$20,000-\$29,999 (28.6%) (see Table 10).

Table 5. Frequency and Percent of Importance of Respondents' Reasons for Participation

Reason	Perceptions										M	SD
	very important		moderately important		slightly important		not at all important		Total			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1) avoid the hustle and bustle of daily life	32	37.6	22	25.9	18	21.2	13	15.3	85	100	2.86	1.09
2) attracted by prizes	17	19.8	38	44.2	27	31.4	4	4.7	86	100	2.80	.81
3) challenge my abilities	23	27.4	26	31.0	19	22.6	16	19.0	84	100	2.67	1.08
4) develop friendships	12	14.6	27	32.9	28	34.1	15	18.3	82	100	2.44	.96
5) discover new places and things	75	83.3	12	13.3	3	3.3	0	0.0	90	100	3.80	.49
6) increase my knowledge of Missouri State Parks	65	72.2	21	23.3	3	3.3	1	1.1	90	100	3.67	.60
7) relax	51	59.3	25	29.1	9	10.5	1	1.2	86	100	3.47	.73
8) use my physical abilities/skills	10	12.0	33	39.8	25	30.1	15	18.1	83	100	2.46	.93

Table 6. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Satisfaction with the MSPPP Prizes

Prize	Perceptions										Total	m	SD		
	very		somewhat		neither		somewhat		very						
	satisfied		satisfied		satisfied nor		dissatisfied		dissatisfied					dissatisfied	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				F	%
1) six theme patches	76	85.4	9	10.1	4	4.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	89	100	4.81	.50	
2) passport banner	55	63.2	20	23.0	9	10.3	2	2.3	1	1.1	87	100	4.45	.86	
3) passport T-shirt	70	77.8	17	18.9	0	0.0	1	1.1	2	2.2	90	100	4.69	.74	
4) \$25 gift certificate	81	90.0	8	8.9	1	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	90	100	4.89	.35	
5) five free camping coupons	79	90.8	6	6.9	2	2.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	87	100	4.89	.39	

Table 7. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Satisfaction with the MSPPP Services

Service	<u>Perceptions</u>										Total	m	SD	
	very satisfied		somewhat satisfied		neither satisfied nor dissatisfied		somewhat dissatisfied		very dissatisfied					
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
1) facilities' operation hours	25	8.7	43	49.4	4	4.6	14	16.1	1	1.1	87	100	3.89	1.04
2) employees' helpfulness at state parks and historic sites	66	4.2	20	22.5	0	0.0	2	2.2	1	1.1	89	100	4.66	.71
3) locations of facilities to obtain stamps	30	4.5	33	37.9	3	3.4	19	21.8	2	2.3	87	100	3.80	1.20
4) procedure for obtaining prizes	71	0.7	13	14.8	3	3.4	1	1.1	0	0.0	88	100	4.75	.57
5) procedure for obtaining stamps	32	6.4	29	33.0	6	6.8	20	22.7	1	1.1	88	100	3.81	1.19

Table 8. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Overall Satisfaction with the MSPPP

Overall Satisfaction with the MSPPP	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	68	76.4
Somewhat satisfied	18	20.2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	1	1.1
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0.0
Very dissatisfied	2	2.2
Total	89	100.0

m=4.69, SD=.717

Table 9. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Satisfaction with the Ease of Completing MSPPP

Satisfaction with the ease of completing MSPPP	Frequency	Percent
Too short	2	2.2
About right	79	87.8
Too long	9	10.0
Total	90	100.0

Table 10. Frequency and Percent of Respondents' Demographics

Demographics	Frequency	Percent	Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Sex			Employment status		
Male	43	48.3	Employed full-time	30	33.7
Female	46	51.7	Employed part-time	4	4.5
Age			Full-time homemaker	4	4.5
21-29	4	4.7	Retired	48	53.9
30-39	5	5.9	Student	0	0
40-49	8	9.4	Unemployed	3	3.4
50-59	30	35.3	Ethnicity		
60-69	28	32.9	African American	0	0
70-79	10	11.8	Asian	0	0
Education			Latino	0	0
Less than 12 th grade	8	9.0	Native American	3	3.4
High school graduate or equivalent	31	34.8	White American	84	96.6
Some college	24	27.0	Household Income		
Associate degree	9	10.1	Less than \$9,999	3	4.3
Bachelor's degree	7	7.9	\$10,000-\$19,999	10	14.3
Master's degree	7	7.9	\$20,000-\$29,999	20	28.6
Professional school degree	3	3.4	\$30,000-\$39,999	12	17.1
Doctoral degree	0	0	\$40,000-\$49,999	7	10.0
Marital status			\$50,000-\$59,999	5	7.1
Single	11	12.4	\$60,000-\$69,999	5	7.1
Married	78	87.6	\$70,000-\$79,999	5	7.1
			\$80,000 or more	3	4.3

Discussion and Implications

More than half of the participants learned about the program from the information in parks. Other sources were not very effective. That might be the reason why MSPPP attracted more repeat visitors than new visitors. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP establish different promotion strategies based on the differences of the areas, demographics, and motivations. The researcher recommends that MDNR DSP use more brochures to promote the MSPPP. Tew et al. (1999) suggested that seasonal program brochures were the most widely used for promoting programs and the remaining efforts were devoted to non-printed sources, such as word of mouth, television and radio. The researcher recommends that MDNR DSP promote the program on the MDNR DSP web page.

Second, based on the importance score of the reasons for participating in the MSPPP, the participants felt that "discover new places and things" and "increase my knowledge of Missouri State Parks" were the most important reasons for participating in the program. MDNR DSP needs to promote "discover new places and things" and "increase my knowledge of Missouri State Parks". This might encourage more people to participate in the program.

Third, based on the conclusions of the prizes satisfaction score, most of the participants felt satisfied with camping coupons, the \$25 certificate and patches. MDNR DSP should keep and promote these prizes. However, compared to other prizes, "passport banner" and "passport T-shirt" had lower scores. MDNR DSP should consider eliminating these prizes.

Fourth, in the MSPPP services, the participants were very satisfied with the "procedures for obtaining prizes" and "employees' helpfulness at state parks and historic sites". However, "locations of facilities to obtain stamps", "procedure for obtaining stamps" and "facilities' operation hours" had lower satisfaction scores than other services. MDNR DSP needs to provide accurate directions and clearer signs to each site. Some of the sites on the list that MDNR DSP provided are not correct. Some participants needed to seek assistance to find some sites and passport stamps. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP check the direction list and make sure the list is accurate. The participants can only obtain the stamps during the operation hours. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP find a way for the participants who do not visit the sites in the operation hours to get stamps.

Fifth, demographic variables affect leisure activity choice and participation (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996). Therefore, making a passport-tracking list is important. If MDNR DSP leaves the name, age, gender, whom did they participate with and address of the intended participants who requested the passport booklet, it would be more efficient for future researchers to study the program. It is also a benefit to MDNR DSP to track who completed the MSPPP and who did not complete the program. It is important to know the reasons why people did not complete the program.

Sixth, MSPPP attracted more White Americans, married, and less educated participants. There were very few minorities, single, younger, above some college degree, and higher income participants. Moreover, there were no students who completed the program. MDNR DSP should target these people for marketing.

Seventh, MDNR DSP may evaluate Missouri parks system by the participants who completed the program. All of the participants visited all the sites in Missouri. Their suggestions may be valuable to MDNR DSP for improving park facilities or settings. If MDNR DSP plans to continue MSPPP, the participants should evaluate the program annually.

Eighth, most of the participants felt satisfied with MSPPP. The participants described the program as a wonderful, educational, enjoyable, and fun program. Some participants also mentioned that it is also a good family activity and provides chances to know some nice parks they haven't known. They will bring family and friends to participant in the program in the future. The researcher and participants suggest that MDNR DSP should continue the program.

Based on the participants' comments, the participants suggested some recommendations for MSPPP. First, many participants mentioned that many stamp ink pads were dry or missing. Some of the participants also had problems getting the stamps after operation hours. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP checks the ink pads and stamps often and also mentions to the participants where to get the stamps after operation hours.

Second, the passport signs were not very clear. Some participants had a hard time finding the MSPPP signs. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP make the signs at each site clear.

Third, some participants preferred more free night stays in the parks. The researcher suggests that MDNR DSP give more free camping coupons to participants.

Based on the results of the study and the literature, the researcher made the recommendations for the future studies and future researchers. First, constraints are the factors that are perceived by individuals to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure (Jackson, 1993). Constraints to leisure participation have captured leisure researchers' attention for several decades because of the role constraints play in leisure decision making. Crawford and Godbey (1987) initially termed leisure as factors that could deter leisure participation and create difficulties to realize the beneficial effects of this participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Future studies about constraints may determine the reasons why people do not participate in the program.

Farrell and Lundegren (1991) indicated four classifications of evaluating programs (administration, leadership or personnel, program and areas and facilities). Henderson (1995) described five classifications (5Ps) in evaluation: program, personnel, participant, place, and policy/administration. Henderson (1995) mentioned that trying to access everything usually results in poor

conceptualizations. This study only concentrated on program and participants evaluation. Future researchers should evaluate the program in the other classifications.

Martilla and James (1979) and Guadagnolo (1985) stated that Importance-Performance Analysis (I-P) is a useful technique for measuring the desirability of product attributes. This I-P is based on research findings indicating that participants' satisfaction is a function of participants' expectations about attributes of a program they consider important and participants' judgments about agency performance on these attributes (Rossman, 1989). In I-P, participants are given a pretest before participating in a program to determine which program attributes are important to them. After participation, the participants are given a posttest with the same items. The process is to determine how well the agency performed in delivering the program attributes (Rossman, 1989). The results of the pre and post measurements are plotted on a two-dimensional matrix. The researcher recommends that I-P would be another evaluative model for evaluating the program. The model determines which item needs the most improvement based on how important the item is and how satisfied the participants feel. The results would help MDNR DSP in its decision-making.

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