

CHANGING ETHNIC POPULATIONS IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN: ETHNIC INPUT IN LEISURE SERVICES PROVISION AMONG MICHIGAN PARK AND RECREATION DEPARTMENTS

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Abstract: The rate of ethnic population change in the U. S. is rapidly changing the social fabric of the nation. Following a multicultural concept of inclusiveness of ethnic groups and their subcultures in the mainstream of community life, the quality and diversity of community life can be enhanced. Leisure and recreation can serve as important means of providing social cohesion and social identity among the various ethnic groups as well as integrating these groups and their subcultures into community life, for example, arts and crafts, music, dance, food, clothing, and literature. Recreation managers in the State of Michigan were surveyed to examine the extent to which ethnic groups were involved in recreation department decision making or various input areas, for example, decision making for strategic planning, policy making, designing the department mission statement, and surveying and marketing leisure services. Results of the survey indicate that no change versus positive change is dominant in ethnic input in management decision making across 12 decision making areas over the last 10 years. Recommendations for recreation agencies are suggested.

Introduction

The population of the U. S. is growing increasingly older as well as ethnically more diverse. U. S. Bureau of Census estimates that 81 percent of the increase in the U. S. population will occur in ethnic groups and by 2005 Latino/as are expected to be the largest such group increase. This growing diversity brings with it different challenges and opportunities. The challenge for the recreation manager is to meet both the wider cultural needs of these groups as well as their unique subcultural

needs and tie both into a package that addresses quality of life issues in the community. Merchandising subcultural arts, crafts, clothing, food, dance, music, etc. in such a way as to create demand from persons outside of that subcultural group will be a challenge for recreation departments, for example, concerts, plays, dance, festivals, demonstrations of art skills, crafts, language, etc.

This multicultural approach advocates inclusion of ethnic subcultures into the mainstream of community life, promoting intergroup understanding and appreciation, and constructive relationships. This approach will preserve the uniqueness, pride, vitality, and cohesiveness of community subcultural groups and add to the diversity and quality of life of the community. Subcultural groups also share in the resources of the community which integrates them into community life while preserving their uniqueness (Karlis, 1998 and Ivan Ramos et al, 1998). Leisure and recreation can be both instrumental and a positive force in accomplishing this goal. A 1998 survey of recreation, park, and leisure-service educators in the U. S. and Canada listed serving an increasingly diverse society (race, age, gender, etc.) as the most important challenge facing the leisure-service field in the twenty-first century (Kraus, 2001).

This goal is particularly challenging as the forces of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and exclusivism are slow to disintegrate in our society. One only needs to recall recent examples of bias in hiring, housing, quotas for enrollment, restricted membership in sporting clubs, etc. Moreover, recreation managers need to examine their own perspectives toward ethnic groups in their community.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of recreation managers in the State of Michigan of ethnic populations in their communities and the extent to which they, as recreation agency managers, receive input from ethnic populations in their communities in various recreation agency decision making (input) areas, for example, decision making related to strategic planning, policy making, marketing, and merchandising recreation services and areas.

Objectives of the Research

1. To ascertain the extent of change of ethnic populations in the State of Michigan from 1990 to 2000 and recreation managers' perception of ethnic population change in their communities.
2. To examine recreation managers' perception of ethnic population usage of recreation facilities and park areas in their communities during the last ten years.
3. To examine the perceptions of recreation managers regarding the extent to which recreation managers in the State of Michigan need to manage resources in their communities/service areas to accommodate the needs of ethnic populations.
4. To examine recreation agency management/decision-making (input) areas and the perceived extent of change of ethnic population input in each agency input area over the last decade.

Sample

The sample is a listing of park and recreation organizations/agencies both public and private who are current members of the Michigan Recreation and Park Association (MRPA). A self-administered questionnaire was mailed to each listed member of the MRPA, a total of 633 members. A stamped self-addressed envelope was not enclosed with the data collection instrument and there was no follow-up mailing. A self adhesive return address label was enclosed with the data collection instrument. This label was used by 128 or 89 percent of the respondents. A total of 143 completed questionnaires were returned, a return rate of 22.5 percent.

The Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument was a three-page mail-out questionnaire consisting of an introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and welcoming the addressee to participate in the survey. The introduction was followed by three sections, the first section consisted of 14 questions asking recreation providers the extent of change of ethnic populations in their community "during the last 10 years and to the best of your knowledge" in providing input into the park and recreation

department decision making areas concerning the provision of recreation services and areas, for example, decision making concerning strategic planning, policy making, and marketing and merchandising recreation services and areas. The second section contained five questions related to the community and the recreation department (community population, kind of agency, for example, community park and recreation department, number of employees, percent minority employees, and annual budget). Section III contained six questions related to the respondent (job title, years with the present agency, years in the leisure services profession, respondents' perception of change in ethnic groups living in their community, perception of respondent concerning the need to manage resources in their community to accommodate the needs of ethnic populations, and the race of the respondent).

Findings-Describing the Sample Population

Agencies surveyed are community recreation agencies (63%) followed by county, township, or regional park and recreation departments (23%). Other agencies surveyed are community education or community services (7%) followed by private clubs, community family centers, Special Olympics, state park, a special district for recreation, and a YMCA (6%). The average number of agency employees was 35 (s.d. 53.5) with a reported minimum of no employees to 293 employees.

The job title reported most frequently was that of Park and Recreation Director/Superintendent/Executive Director (46%), Program Director/Supervisor (15%), Park Administrator/Director/Manager (10%). Other job titles were: Director of Community Education/Services, Director/Coordinator Senior Programs, Program Director/Supervisor, Assistant/Associate Director of Parks and Recreation, and Recreation Coordinator (26%).

The average number of years reported with the present agency was 12.3 (s.d. 9.7) with a range of one-third of a year to 42 years. The average number of years in the leisure services profession was 16.9 (s.d. 9.8) with a range of one to 42 years. Seventy-six respondents (53%) are female and 64 (45%) are male. The sample population is 95 percent Caucasian. One respondent is African American and two respondents are Hispanic.

Findings—Population Growth in the State of Michigan and Recreation Managers' Perception of Ethnic Population Demographic Growth in Their Communities

Table 1 indicates that the overall rate of population growth in the State of Michigan was 6.9 percent from 1990 to 2000, a change in population growth from 9,295,297 to 9,938,444 persons. All ethnic populations are experiencing growth with the highest growth among Asians and Hispanics followed by African Americans, American Indian and Alaska Natives, and Whites. The percent change of growth in the state of ethnic populations from 1990 to 2000 was 68.1, 60.6, 9.3, 5.1, and 2.7 percent respectively.

Concerning the extent of perceived change of ethnic groups living in their community, 66 percent of respondents indicated an increase, one percent indicated a decrease, and 33 percent indicated no change in ethnic groups living in their community. A few open-ended comments to this question were:

"Both of the local communities have seen their populations of Hispanic persons grow as many become permanent residents as compared to the migrant majority of Hispanics only a matter of a decade ago. Most rent their homes at present, but that will slowly change and they will find themselves taking a greater part in the direction the local agencies take and possibly even their local state parks."

"Unsure never tracked."

"University campus is ethnically diverse but rest of county other than tribal members, is still 'Lily White.'"

"Larger Middle Eastern population."

"Don't know."

"Went from 10% to 30%."

When asked about the extent of change in ethnic group use of recreation facilities in their community or service area during the last decade, 59 percent of the respondents stated that there was increased use of their recreation facilities.

Moreover, 60 percent of the respondents indicated that ethnic populations increased use of their park areas over the same time span. Several open-ended responses to two questions on recreation facilities and park areas were:

Table 1 — U. S. Bureau of Census Data, State of Michigan, 1990 and 2000

	1990	2000	Percent Change
Total Population	9,295,297	9,938,444	6.9
White	7,756,086	7,966,053	2.7
African American	1,291,706	1,412,742	9.3
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	55,638	58,479	5.1
Asian ¹	104,983	176,510	68.1
Hispanic ²	201,596	323,877	60.6

¹ Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other Asian

² Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Hispanic or Latino

"More use of certain facilities by people from the Middle East."

"Increase reservations of shelters and lodges and sections."

"More use by Hispanic population."

"Group use of facilities."

"Hispanic groups renting facility."

"More are renting our pavilions for functions."

"We have a variety of ethnic groups visiting our day use but very few in our campgrounds."

"Many Hispanic families are using the park/soccer field."

"Ethnic groups from out of town use our parks and attend our festivals."

Respondents' were asked to indicate the extent to which recreation managers in the State of Michigan need to manage resources in their communities to accommodate the needs of ethnic populations. The response scale ranged from one "not at all" to 10 "very much." Sixty percent of the responses reported six (6) or above, 17 percent reported a scale of five (5), and 21 percent of the responses indicated four (4) or lower. Examples of respondents' comments to the open-ended option for this question were:

"I would prefer to have resources aimed at age groups, ability, and income level rather than ethnicity."

"We should be striving to accommodate the needs of everyone in our communities."

"It depends upon community and use patterns."

"Provide for everyone equally."

"My perspective is that public agencies, such as the one I work for, need to direct their efforts towards

what will best serve the majority of the users, no matter what their ethnic background might be. I was brought up the 'melting pot' and 'majority rule' concepts of society/community and prefer to see activities that promote and celebrate 'assimilation' rather than separation of cultural backgrounds."

"Some what, but I believe immigrants and ethnic groups should assimilate to the American way of living."

"All recreation managers should strive to tailor programs and facilities to meet the needs of the populations they serve and ethnicity of that population should absolutely be one of many criteria considered when planning programs/facilities."

"Are their needs different?"

Findings-Extent of Ethnic Involvement in Recreation Department Input Areas

Extent of ethnic involvement in agency decision making during the last 10 years (1992 to 2002) or to the best of the respondents' knowledge was measured on an 11 point scale. Zero indicated no change, +1 to +5 indicated positive directional change whereas -1 to -5 indicated negative directional change. Table 2 indicates that managers in the sample population indicated either no change or positive change in ethnic persons input into recreation managers' decision making in twelve recreation department input areas:

- agency decision-making
- policy making
- recreation programming
- department rules and/or regulation
- recreation area and/or site planning to accommodate the needs of ethnic groups in the community
- signage in recreation buildings, structures, and/or areas that is multilingual
- recreation department employment of minorities from different ethnic groups
- department mission statement
- recreation marketing strategies
- recreation merchandising
- recreation marketing
- surveying user needs among different ethnic groups in the community

Of the twelve department input areas an average of 67 percent of the respondents indicated that the extent of change involving ethnic populations in

recreation department input areas from 1992 to 2002 (or to the best of his/her knowledge) was "no change." The percent of managers agreeing with a no change input from ethnic populations ranged from 56 percent to 77 percent across all input areas (Table 2). By rank order the highest areas of no change were:

1. Change in surveying user needs among different ethnic groups in your community/ service area
2. Change in the recreation department's mission statement to reflect changes in the ethnicity in your community
3. Change in signage in recreation buildings, structures, and/or areas that is multilingual
4. Change in departmental rules and/or regulations in response to ethnic change

By rank order the lowest areas of no change were:

1. Change in recreation department employment to employ minorities
2. Change involving ethnic populations in department decision making
3. Change in recreation marketing strategies for ethnic populations
4. Change in department policies that are the result of ethnic change

An average of 30 percent of respondents indicated that ethnic populations in their communities had input or a "positive change" in various department input areas (Table 2). The percent of recreation managers agreeing with a positive change ranged from 18 percent to 60 percent. In rank order the department input areas reported as having the highest positive change were:

1. Change in recreation department employment to employ minorities from different ethnic groups
2. Change in recreation programming
3. Change involving minority populations in department/agency decision making
4. Change in department/agency policies that are the result of ethnic change
5. Change in recreation marketing strategies

Input areas that had low reported positive change in rank order were:

1. Change in signage in recreation buildings, structures, and/or areas that is multilingual
2. Change in the recreation department's mission statement

3. Change in surveying user needs among different ethnic groups
4. Change in departmental rules and/or regulations in response to ethnic change
5. Change in recreation merchandising in response to different ethnic groups
6. Change in recreation marketing in response to different ethnic groups

Conclusions

1. In light of: a) the rate of population growth, particularly among Asians and Hispanics in the State of Michigan, b) agreement among Michigan park and recreation managers that ethnic populations are increasing in number in their communities, and c) recreation managers' perceived increased demand on recreation facilities and park areas by ethnic populations in their communities, it would seem appropriate that recreation managers in the state would increase involvement of ethnic populations in recreation agency input areas during the last decade in such department input areas as planning, surveying user needs, and marketing. The data indicate that this is not the case. Overall, it appears that recreation managers are not extending themselves to recognize the increased diversity associated with different ethnic groups in their communities/ service areas. The opportunities lost are the increase in the diversity and quality of life within the community, for example, music, art, dance, food, games, sports, clothing, crafts, language, literature, customs, and various trade skills.
2. Ninety-five percent of the sample population is Caucasian. If the sample is truly reflective of the population of membership in the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association, then the association is dominated by a white middle class membership. Respondents' place of residence was located on a Michigan state map. Sample respondents are located in all areas of the state including the Upper Peninsula.
3. Ninety-three percent of the sample population represents public leisure service agencies of which 90 or 63 percent are community park and recreation departments. Forty-six percent of the respondents are directors or

superintendents of recreation followed by supervisors and park managers (25%) with an average of 12 years of work experience at their present location and an average of 17 years in the leisure services field. The sample population represents seasoned leadership in the field.

4. An average of 30 percent of the respondents indicated that ethnic populations were involved in various departmental input areas, however, an average of 67 percent indicated "no change" in ethnic population input into park and recreation department input areas during the last decade as described in Table 2. Departmental input areas that rank highest, "no change," are surveying user needs, developing the mission statement, signage, and rules and regulations (group size, time limits, equipment, sound levels, etc. that impact user behavior in park and recreation areas and subsequently affect user enjoyment). These are areas where recreation managers need ethnic population input due to the different needs of ethnic groups that are, in part, a reflection of their varying cultural backgrounds.

Recommendations

1. Recreation managers must adopt an attitude of bone fide involvement of ethnic populations into management decision making in agency strategic planning and problem solving related to long-range objectives. This attitude must be reflected in the department mission statement, strategic planning, and the annual operating plan.
2. Establish a system of continual contacts with members of ethnic populations. Individuals, families, organizations, and recreation groups who have a vital interest in their culture as well as that of the general community. A combination of methods of public input into management decision making such as: public meetings, public workshops, surveys, advisory committees, continual contacts by way of news conferences, newsletters, newspapers inserts, news releases, paid advertisement, public service announcements, a network of individual contacts, and solicitations. Additional methods are task forces, focus groups, hotline, plebiscites or polls.

3. Examine needs assessment techniques for relevance in identifying the needs of ethnic populations, for example, questions related to recreation participation that are reflective of their subculture and lifestyle. Ethnic population input into survey design and data collection, multilingual wording, and appeal in merchandising recreation services can assist managers in understanding community subcultural groups.
4. Recruit members of ethnic populations as members of the state recreation association (MRPA), community park and recreation boards, and regional/state advisory groups as well as community organizations to achieve representation.
5. Provide staff training programs that permit self examination, awareness of ethnic needs, and tools necessary for managing communication and interactions with various ethnic groups.

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