

Considering Ethnic Groups in Recreation Provision Decisions

Kindal Shores Hunt David Scott¹

Introduction

Recreation and park departments are in the business of providing benefits to constituents (Driver & Bruns, 1999). To provide benefits, service providers make decisions about what should be provided, to whom, and how to deliver these services (Crompton, 1999). The policies adopted for provision reflect our ideas about ethnic and race relations, and the role that leisure plays in facilitating assimilation or maintenance of ethnic group boundaries (Ravenscroft & Markwell, 2000).

Although Western society has mandated legal equity in business, housing and education, equality has not yet been achieved (Emerson, Yancy & Chai, 2001; Waters & Eschbach, 1995; Yinger, 1993, 1994). Within racial groups, ethnic boundaries often mimic resource and income distinctions. For a given city, groups often live in ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, have similar socioeconomic status (SES), share a common history and provision goals (Anderson & Massey, 2001; Jogrowsky, 1996a, 1996b).

As a result of these factors, advocacy groups often mimic ethnic group boundaries (Olzak, 1983; Sanders, 2002). Because advocacy groups resemble ethnic group boundaries it is necessary to examine how park and recreation provision models impact ethnic groups. Moreover, since resources are provided according to neighborhood, SES, history, and agency goals, it is still more important to examine how our provision decisions impact ethnic groups. Recreation service providers should be attuned to this issue for two reasons. Recreation has the ability of leisure to empower individuals (Henderson, 1997). When recreation is leisure, it has been described as a space of time when individuals are most free (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). As such, recreation can provide opportunities for creation and maintenance of ethnic identities and values (Kleiber, 1999). Since leisure can serve these important developmental functions, service providers must be aware of how their provision decisions impact ethnic groups. Also, the social benefit of improving community understanding is a viable undertaking providers might consider. As noted by Sessoms (1993), "By returning to the original understanding of the mission and by demonstrating the value of parks and recreation to the resolution of other social ills, parks and recreation may discover the community support they once knew" (p. 8). Leisure research has demonstrated that alleviation of social problems can be an important contribution and a viable position of PARDS (Witt & Crompton, 2002; Hunt, Scott, & Richardson, 2003).

Methods for Discussion

Three major paradigms exist for understanding ethnic groups. The perspectives of competition, assimilation, and pluralism will be examined. This paper will achieve three goals: 1) Ethnic group relationships according to competition, assimilation, and pluralism theories will be reviewed, 2) The relationship between widely used recreation provision models and value assumptions about ethnicity will be identified, and 3) Benefits and drawbacks of major provision models for ethnic groups will be discussed.

Results

Conflict and Competition

The fundamental assumption of general conflict and competition theory is that conflict is a basic element of human social life. Although two distinct branches of theory have evolved, conflict and competition theory can be understood as the source and outcome of ethnic group contact (Park, 1950).

First, conflict occurs because individuals are motivated to act in accordance with their own interests. People pursue needs, values, goals, and resources that they define as important. Conflict arises because different people want different things. This is often the dividing line along which advocacy groups form. Second, when individuals or groups want the same thing but there is a limited supply of the commodity, competition results. Each group leverages its resources to secure the scarce commodity. However, stratification of income and influence is unequal. These structural

¹ Doctoral Student; Associate Professor Recreation, Texas A&M University Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, 2261 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-2261, (979) 845-5349, fax: (979) 845-0446, email: khunt@rpts.tamu.edu.

inequalities provide differential opportunity structures based on groups' differential "weapons" for competition (Farrington & Chertok, 1993).

Modern conflict and competition theorists emphasize that ethnic population boundaries remain relatively stable over time and that ethnic group membership often coincides with the creation of a group niche in the labor force, a distinctive residential community, and a common set of goals (Barth & Noel, 1972). Theorists claim that ethnic groups are mobilized for competition, which includes competition among ethnic groups for elected and appointed offices, tax dollars, and other types of political power (e.g. resource provision).

Assimilation

Assimilation theory has received the most attention of any explanation of race and ethnic theory and continues to be the primary theoretical framework for sociological research in race relations. Yinger (1993) described assimilation as a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or smaller cultural groups meet. Assimilation has widely been described with the famous metaphor, the melting pot, and can be understood according to four dimensions: cultural, structural, biological, and psychological assimilation.

Robert Park provided an initial understanding of assimilation with his Race Relations Cycle. This was built upon by Milton Gordon (1964). Although they presented different models of assimilation, both theorists agreed that in Western society, assimilation has typically been a euphemism for Anglo-conformity.

Cultural Pluralism

Pluralism (a.k.a multiculturalism and ethnogenesis) evolved as a response to the persistence of ethnic groups despite emphasis on assimilation. Although ethnic groups have achieved assimilation in some areas, "a set of social processes and conditions that encourage group diversity and maintenance of group boundaries has emerged. In short, cultural pluralism has emerged.

The foundations for cultural pluralism had been laid many years before by Horace Kallen (1882-1974) who argued against nativist sentiment claiming that membership in ethnic-cultural groups was not a membership one could readily abandon. Writing in *The Nation* in 1915, he argued that democracy applied to ethnic groups as well as individuals. That is, ethnic groups should be given the means and rights to exist as they please. In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazer and Moynihan (1970) acknowledged that assimilation seemed to have taken root in European immigrants by the third generation—however, ethnicity had not declined. The pluralism perspective deals with ethnic minority adaptation as more than one-way Anglo-conformity and emphasizes attempts at creation and manipulation of distinct ethnic identities despite strong assimilation pressure. From this perspective, majority and minority groups retain major characteristics of their ethnicities and "inherit" characteristics of other ethnic groups. Thus, a modern ethnic group is one part home-country heritage and one part common culture.

The value assumptions associated with competition, assimilation, and pluralism theories influence how we interpret our world. In addition, we take these value assumptions to work with us. As leisure service professionals, each provision and program decision we make *reflects our view of the community*. At the same time, the decisions we make *impact our community*.

The Competition Perspective

When we regard the world as a competitive environment, recreation services and park lands, are perceived as scarce resources. Since park and recreation agencies work to improve the social welfare in a community, several provision models focus on remediation of existing disparities between ethnic groups. Provision models and theoretical frameworks that assume unequal access to resources include environmental justice (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Salazar, 1996), social justice (Henderson, 1997; Mowbray, 1992), comparative need (Godbey, 1999; Scott, 2000), compensatory equity (Bowker & Leeworthy, 1998; Crompton, 1999; Foley & Pirk, 1990) and the marginality hypothesis (Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1992). Environmental and social justices have focused on redistribution of unequal environmental and cultural resources, respectively. Providing resources based on residents' comparative need recognizes that some individuals have a greater need for recreation services relative to others as a result of life stage, SES, or constraints. The marginality hypothesis posits that people's access to resources and opportunity is a function of their status in society. Marginalized groups (ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, individuals with low socio-economic status etc.) have disparate access and opportunity for recreation. Compensatory equity is a provision model that provides more services to those that have less (Crompton & Lamb, 1986). Each of the above perspectives assumes that resources and opportunities are overwhelming available to upper-income, ethnic majority citizens. Since minority groups that do not possess the power and prestige to compete for these resources, these groups must be compensated.

As with any provision decision, understanding that ethnic groups are competing for services and providing services with to those with fewer competitive “weapons” has both benefits and drawbacks. Benefits include psychological equity for all citizens, equal access to facilities and services, and opportunities for inter-group contact resulting from social and cultural equality. Drawbacks are likely to be reduced political support, discounting of minority groups’ achievements, and reinforcement of ethnic group boundaries.

Leveling resources for competition can provide psychological benefits for all citizens. Equity Theory has been applied to study how individuals respond emotionally to differential resource distribution (Messick & Cook, 1983; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Findings indicate that people are uncomfortable when inequity is apparent and are consistently motivated to restore equality in the face of an injustice—regardless of whether they receive greater or fewer resources as a result. This emotional response to undeserved benefits or unwarranted suffering can be negated with psychological or real restoration of equality. Although majority groups usually prefer psychological restoration of equity, restoration of real inequity through the provision of recreation resources to ethnic minorities will relieve the dissonance and discomfort majority and minority residents’ experience.

Provision of resources to ethnic minority groups will also level the competitive playing field. Following the argument outlined by Foley and Pirk (1990) in “Taking Back the Fields,” providing easy access is a first step to counteract the marginalized position many ethnic minority groups are placed in by society and allow lower status groups to participate in their own neighborhoods. For example, by providing a community center or natural gardens in a traditionally Hispanic area of town, Hispanic citizens achieve a measure of social and environmental justice. Thus, the competitive field has been “leveled” (Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993; Foley & Pirk, 1990).

Leveling the competition for recreation resources may also result in greater equality and an increase inter-race contact and understanding. According to Ping and Berryman (1996), providing opportunities for social and culturally equality during discretionary time may facilitate intergroup participation. In a study of Chinese teens (N=117), the authors observed that as recreation access improved, minority participation increased. Self-esteem and acculturation then had significant, positive increases. Chinese students with higher levels of self-esteem participated more often outdoors and with non-Chinese people for recreation. By facilitating ethnic group resource equality, intergroup contact and co-participation was fostered.

The most obvious drawback of compensatory equity provision is that the citizens in power rarely support this provision model. Similar to ethnic group competition for resources, park and recreation agencies are in competition with other local government services for financial resources. To receive adequate funding, the park and recreation agency is advised to position the agency around an issue that is important to the citizenry and local government officials (Crompton, 1999; Hunt, Scott, & Richardson, 2003; Johnson Tew, Havitz & McCarville, 1999). The citizenry that are most visible and vocal, as well as local government officials are traditionally Anglo men. Although this high status majority group may support some level of resource sharing, government officials and voting citizens have preferred market and equality equity models over compensatory equity in empirical studies (Crompton, 1999). Gaining political and financial support to implement programs for ethnic minorities will be challenging.

A less obvious drawback of differential provision is that providing special opportunities to a group can minimize achievements (Blanchard & Taylor as cited in Taylor & Moghaddon, 1994). This outcome has been identified as one drawback of affirmative action programs in the United States. Affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to women and ethnic minorities may lead to the perception that successful members of these minority groups were less qualified. Extending this argument to provision, providing a new recreation center in an Asian community may lead citizens to discount the efforts the Hispanic community who financed and built their own center.

Finally, recognizing and providing services for competitive groups (that are often ethnically homogenous groups) may inadvertently reinforce subjective ethnic boundaries. The idea of *bounded solidarity* suggests that group solidarity that is most likely to manifest as a reaction to real or perceived competition (Sanders, 2002). In addition, by focusing on ethnic group resources for provision, interaction between groups is limited which reinforces the subjective boundaries of ethnic groups. Although reinforcing ethnic group boundaries is not necessarily negative, this must be considered when making a competition based provision decision.

The Assimilation Perspective

Adopting an assimilation perspective for park and recreation provision decisions is alternately beneficial and detrimental to ethnic minority residents. Provision models that support assimilation include: expressed need (Godbey, 1999; Mercer, 1973), normative need (Godbey, 1999) equality equity (Crompton, 1999; Curry, 1987), and created need (Godbey, 1999; Dustin, 1999). Using expressed need, the activities individuals currently participate in determine future program offerings. Demand for future programs and services are based on use-history (Godbey, 1985; 1999). Normative

need relies on similar assumptions as assimilation theory. At a base level, humans are assumed to be the same and have similar needs for recreation. Normative need models assume that every human being needs x acres of free space and x opportunities for participation (Godbey, 1999; Mercer, 1973). Opportunities are again equally provided across space and for each constituent with the equality equity provision model (Crompton & Lamb, 1986). Finally, created need relies on the adoption of desirable recreation preferences. Recreation professionals teach constituents to value specific recreation activities (Dustin, 1999, Godbey, 1999).

These provision models are beneficial because they are easy to implement, facilitate inter-ethnic cooperation, and allow opportunities for social acculturation. Drawbacks of the assimilation perspective are the potential to alienate clientele, undermine identity development, and force Anglo-conformity.

The assimilation perspective has been the traditional model for policy making at the national level and has trickled-down to at the community level (Zimmerman & Allen, 2003). Thus, implementing provision based on assimilation ideals is simple--One of the models discussed above is probably already in place (Driver & Bruns, 1999). In addition, the pragmatic reliance on current participation trends makes budget decisions straightforward and easily defensible.

Basing provision decision on the assimilation perspective can foster intimate contact and cooperation between individuals of different ethnic groups (Scott, Witt & Foss, 1996). Providing the same recreation offerings to everyone according to normative need or expressed need, will necessarily facilitate co-participation between any ethnic minority residents that choose these offerings. Contact hypotheses of race have suggested that the suppression of prejudiced attitudes could be achieved through contact, integration, and assimilation. For contact to be successful a superordinate goal must be the focus of the recreation activity. A superordinate goal has been defined as "Goals that have a compelling appeal for members of each group, but that neither group can achieve without participation of the other" (Sherif, 1966, p. 89). This is a risky strategy, because failure in cooperative tasks can lead to increased hostilities and the out-group being blamed for the groups' failure. On the other hand, the benefits of intimate contact and goal achievement can contribute meaningfully to community ethnic relations.

Qualitative examination undertaken by Alexandris and Stoldolska (2003) suggests that one reason people of ethnic minorities participate in recreation is to socially acculturate. Interviews of Western-European, Hispanic, and Asian immigrants in Chicago, USA indicated that participation in "mainstream" recreation provided desired opportunities for social and cultural assimilation. Gomez (2002) suggested that parks offered Puerto Ricans opportunities for cultural maintenance as well as selective acculturation.

Assimilation and acculturation may be desirable outcomes for some residents. Conversely, recreation programming that meets the needs of one ideal-type Westerner may alienate other residents. Dwyer and Gobster (1997) highlighted the importance of considering racial and ethnic diversity in recreation resource management. The authors used golf as a context for study because of the historic "under participation" of minorities in golf. Findings from Dwyer & Gobster (1997) suggest that provision models rooted in assimilation can be interpreted as both discrimination and inattention to the desires of minority populations.

In addition to alienating clientele, the assimilation perspective disallows a major function of recreation—identity development and maintenance. By offering one type of program for one type of person, the opportunity to forge a unique identity through recreation is ignored. The Rapoport (1979) and Kleiber (1999) note that leisure participation plays very different roles across the life span. Leisure supports identity development for youth and teens. Identity is strengthened in young adulthood and often redefined through leisure at middle age. Of equal importance is the role recreation plays in the expression of cultural values and norms. Leisure behavior and the motivation for a specific behavior reveal individual and cultural values (Gramann & Allison, 1999). Supporting assimilation through provision models that are ethnically undifferentiated may thwart self-expression during leisure.

An often-overlooked drawback of the created needs model and other assimilationist provision models is that assimilation is promoted according to the values of the majority ethnic group. For this reason, sociologists have dubbed assimilation "Anglo-conformity" (Gordon, 1978). First, expressed need models that rely on current participation trends to determine provision unwittingly discriminate as "past-in-present" discrimination (Allison, 2000). Since provision decisions were originally based on Anglo majority group preferences, relying on past activity patterns reinforces Anglo preferences and constitutes past in present discrimination. Provision according to created need similarly supports Anglo-conformity. According to a study of recreation and park administrators in the southeastern region of the United States, Zimmerman and Allen (2003) concluded that decision makers in park and recreation agencies are overwhelmingly Anglo males. Since created need relies on recreation professionals teaching residents to value activities, Anglo preferences are taught as the ideal.

The Pluralism Perspective

Pluralism recognizes that many ethnic groups co-exist with different values and preferences. Provision decisions based on maintaining diversity to strengthen communities include felt need (Godbey, 1999), the ethnicity hypothesis (Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993), marketing model (Crompton & Lamb, 1986; Johnson Tew, Havitz, & McCarville, 1999) and market equity (Crompton, 1999). Felt need provides residents recreation opportunities based on what residents aspire to do given a minimum of constraints (Godbey, 1999). The ethnicity hypothesis highlights the different recreation patterns of diverse ethnic groups. In contrast to the marginality hypothesis that explained ethnic participation according to access and opportunity, the ethnicity hypothesis uses cultural values and norms to explain differential recreation participation (Baas, Ewert & Chavez, 1993; Brown, 1991; Carr & Williams, 1993). Using a marketing model to provide services and facilities focuses the agency on determining what residents (the customers) want, and then providing these amenities (Howard & Crompton, *in press*). Similarly, provision according to market equity offers residents the opportunity to purchase all services. The agency simply provides what the market demands (Johnson Tew, Havitz, & McCarville, 1999; Crompton, 1999).

Providing services with these models allows identity construction and maintenance, provides a customer-oriented approach, and may increase the support base for park and recreation agencies. In contrast, the expense of meeting differentiated needs is great, as is the potential for a muddled position and agency mission.

Adopting a pluralist perspective to guide resource allocation will result in tremendous differentiation of programs. The vast program options that would follow felt need or market-driven programming would create an opportunity for novel identity development and maintenance (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Neither competition nor assimilation theory were able to accomplish this important benefit of leisure. Competition theory requires one group gain preference and assimilation theory limited options by converging preferences.

A second benefit of adopting policy from this paradigm is that it gives people what they want. In the last decade, attention has been given to providing park and recreation services using the set of marketing tools to meet constituent demand. Pluralism based provision models have the ability to increase resident loyalty and satisfaction. On the other hand, marketing principles call for differentiation of customer needs, selection of a target market, and distribution and promotion to serve the selected market. Target market selection combined with the “ability to pay” distribution model may neglect large segments of the population who the agency is mandated to serve.

Nevertheless, the importance of meeting diverse needs should not be underestimated. Using a customer-driven model for provision may increase the number of active constituents and broaden the agency’s support base. Middle-class, ethnic majority citizens are often “willing to pay” and are the most consumptive users of market-based programs. These same citizens are often opinion-leaders in the community and may take an active role in local government decisions affecting the agency (Crompton & Witt, 1997; Crompton, 1999).

An obvious drawback of the pluralism perspective is the increased cost associated with meeting diverse needs. With each new program an agency offers, the cost of doing business increases exponentially as the cost of equipment, promotion, staff training and hiring must be included. In the current environment of fiscal constraint, meeting the diverse needs of each ethnic group may be desirable but impractical.

Another drawback of celebrating the differences of different ethnic groups is the inability to position the agency with a central purpose. It has been argued that for recreation agencies to be perceived as important and necessary services the agency should select one benefit to “reposition” their services around. Following this logic, it has been suggested that park and recreation agencies focus on their ability to keep youth out of crime (Witt & Crompton, 1997; 2002), provide health prevention and maintenance (Godbey, Payne, & Orsega-Smith, 2002) or select a benefit based on its relative importance and performance within each individual community (Hunt, Scott, & Richardson, 2003). Providing the diverse benefits called for by pluralism contradicts this logic and may muddy the waters when the agency tries to define what business it is in.

Discussion & Implications

Readers may be disappointed that there is no one right way to consider ethnicity when making provision decision. To provide guidance on the empirical relationships between provision models and ethnic group relations, existing provision models should be empirically examined. However, this discussion is purposively non-prescriptive. The purpose is to stimulate thought and discussion among recreation professionals about their own interpretation of ethnic relations and how this bears on provision decisions. Each provision and program decision we make *reflects our view of the community and impacts our community*.

Limitations

Limitations to the understanding of ethnic group perspectives must be acknowledged. First, the three theoretical perspectives examined are not mutually exclusive nor are they the only theoretical perspectives for interpreting ethnic group interrelationships. These theories were selected because Western society has relied on competition and assimilation perspectives to guide policy. For example, Anglo-Afro competition provided the foundation for the United States and assimilation was adopted as the ideal for America during Western European immigration. Finally, pluralism has increasingly been adopted in Western policy. For example, Canada has a national policy, which calls for “celebrated multiculturalism.”

Future Research

To provide guidance on the empirical relationships between provision models and ethnic group relations, an examination of existing provision models should be undertaken. After assessing the theoretical assumptions of a community provision model (i.e. recognizing competition, promoting assimilation, and celebrating pluralism) subjective attitude measures, constituent user patterns and perceptions as well as objective socio-economic status and crime statistics can be interpreted in light of the provision model. Thus, the relative benefits and drawbacks of each provision model can be compared.

In addition, provision decisions may be interpreted alongside continued developments in race and ethnic studies. Newer theories such as Critical Race Theory (Winant, 2000) provide another perspective assessing the impact of provision decisions of community ethnic relationships.

Conclusion

Interdisciplinary knowledge transfer is a key component in making academic research meaningful. The social sciences have achieved a good deal of success integrating abstract theory into practice. For example, elementary school teachers are trained to create opportunities for intimate contact between children of different ethnicities. This has reduced racial tensions in classrooms (Cohen, 1993). New programs are now implemented that provide youth with low status characteristics (e.g. female, African) extra training so that they acquire diffuse status characteristics to overcome the expectations associated with their gender or ethnicity (Johnson, 1994). This same knowledge transfer needs to occur for youth leaders and park and recreation program leaders. Integration of educational and sociologic findings in contact, expectation states, and attribution literature can advance day-to-day ethnic group relationships at our park and recreation programs.

Park and recreation professionals are in a difficult but meaningful position. Decision makers have the ability to impact the lives of individuals both by granting or withholding resources. Each of us should seize the opportunity to examine our own value assumptions to improve understanding and ethnic intergroup relationships in our communities.

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