

The Marginal User as the Justification for Public Recreation: A Rejoinder to Crompton, Driver and Dustin

Thomas A. More
Research Social Scientist, USDA Forest Service

Introduction

My original paper questioned if our interests as researchers or managers affected our epistemology—the concepts we use for analysis and discussion. I believe that they do, eventually supporting a bias against lower income groups in the delivery of recreation services. Clearly, the reviewers think differently and have vigorously and appropriately defended their mainstream positions within recreation research. I am indebted to Drs. Crompton, Driver, and Dustin for their thoughtful comments, but ultimately I remain unconvinced: I believe that, while there may be advantages to the mainstream positions, these concepts have other dimensions that the research community has been slow to expose in part because the concepts are interlinked in non-obvious ways and, in part, because they are grounded in social values that are so much the products of our time that we fail to question them.

In responding to the reviewers concerns it is tempting to quibble—to raise the sort of “Yes, buts” described by Dustin on a point by point basis. But to focus on such quibbles risks missing broader points important in the discussion. Therefore, my response centers on five main topics that cross the issues raised by the reviewers:

1. Are the concepts I describe really “frauds and deceits”? Are they as tendentious as I suggested?
2. Are managers, researchers and legislators really as biased as I suggest? Have I done our profession a significant disservice by suggesting they are not disinterested public servants?
3. What is the relationship between functions (my solution) and benefits? Aren't they really the same thing as both Driver and Crompton propose?
4. What does it mean for something to be a ‘public’ resource? How can investments in “public” recreation be justified?
5. While I've been critical, I seem short on solutions. What else can be done?

Address correspondence to: Thomas A. More, USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 968, Burlington, VT 05402; Email: tmore@fs.fed.us.

Acknowledgement: I am indebted to Thomas Stevens and James Averill, University of Massachusetts, for their help throughout the paper, and to Mark Weaver, College of Wooster, for his help with the political science literature.

Among the many issues raised by the reviewers, these five seem crucial to me.

Frauds and Deceits?

All three reviewers suggest that I'm pushing the envelope to claim that the concepts I discussed are actually "frauds and deceits." Crompton, in particular, seems to have had a sort of semantic tantrum over the title, suggesting that it is scandalous and inappropriate in a scientific journal. I am unrepentant. While I admit that the title was aggressive, thirty-five years of reading technical literature in various fields has convinced me that all sorts of titles are used (for a similar example, see Leamer, 1983). I have, however, included the traditional colon in the title of this response, which I trust will render it more acceptable. Crompton also suggests that I should have identified specific individuals and studies for criticism. While I could have done that, it seems inappropriate; why should a discussion of ideas require attacking someone directly? Unfortunately some ideas are so closely associated with specific people—benefits with Driver and marketing with Crompton, for example—that they are inseparable from their creators. This surely testifies to the immense impact these researchers have had on the field. But my goal was to discuss leading concepts and to suggest that there are other interpretations of them than the ones we typically see in the literature. Dustin, in particular, with his emphasis on the "Yes, but . . ." suggests that there is at least one other legitimate view of each concept. I believe this is true. Most important ideas in our field exist as arguments that support multiple viewpoints because they are grounded in assumptions. All I have done is to question some of those underlying assumptions. Consider overuse. We are perfectly willing to believe that overuse of national forests and national parks is a problem, a belief buttressed by all the research on crowding, capacities, and site deterioration. And that same research helps justify public opinion: "Parks in JEOPARDY", a brochure published by the National Parks Foundation (n.d., emphasis in original) and disseminated widely by the National Park Service contains the following statement: "Our parks are in danger . . . Superhighways sidestep the mountains and lead directly into the parks, bringing hundreds of millions of people each year, many of whom unintentionally damage the wonderful natural resources they came to observe, photograph, and enjoy."

Is it really true that many of the "hundreds of millions" of visitors damage the parks each year? When I last visited Yellowstone (1999) I spoke informally with a permanent ranger who claimed that their planning studies showed that only one person in 10 leaves the Park Loop Road to take any kind of walk in the woods at all, and far fewer people venture into the backcountry. I was unable to confirm this claim in subsequent calls to Yellowstone, but it has the ring of truth, and I've heard similar statements made about other parks. Just how much are the parks really in jeopardy? I don't wish to minimize the threats to Yellowstone or to any other park, and undoubtedly

there are parking and other logistical problems to be confronted, but the National Park Foundation's claim still seems exaggerated. Yet the research literature is so replete with studies of crowding, carrying capacity, experience degradation, visitor impacts, etc., that it would be difficult for anyone to believe that overuse was not a major problem. An even more interesting point was brought to my attention by Bill Borrie: if overuse is such a problem, why do we focus so exclusively on restricting demand (pers. comm., William Borrie, University of Montana, June 6, 2001)? Why don't more researchers issue clarion calls to increase supply? While we cannot produce more unique areas like Yellowstone, there are certainly other spectacular areas that could be conserved for recreation, as well as many attractive areas closer to or within urban centers that could help significantly to alleviate recreation demand pressures. With the population slated to double by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, online, www.census.gov), where is the collective voice of the research community in calling for supply increases? Something else must be going on, and I suspect that it's budget justification. For example, it is not surprising that the National Park Foundation's brochure also includes requests for donations of either time or money. Together with management, researchers have laid the foundation for an interpretation of use levels emphasizing restrictions that, while it may not be actually untrue, presents a one-sided, agency-oriented view of the world. Science requires that the validity of such claims be examined within a broader context.

A similar point can be made about marketing. I agree with Crompton that marketing is simply a tool to be used for good or ill depending on the organizational goals, and I sympathize with his frustration over the hostility and misunderstanding it has provoked. But the business ideology goes well beyond the analytical use of marketing. For example, USDA Forest Service units are now encouraged to develop business plans, adopt business-like accounting procedures, encourage customer orientations, conduct marketing surveys, etc. None of these procedures are harmful in and of themselves, and they represent reasonable agency adaptations to the currently dominant political environment that values market solutions to public problems (as I noted in the original paper). But ideas are interconnected, and equity concerns are easily lost in agencies increasingly dominated by fiscal management. In fact, I suspect that equity often is viewed as a constraint upon management and that people who raise equity concerns are often considered troublemakers. I have spoken with managers who have zealously adopted the new business paradigm and who now see their function as optimizing agency revenue. I also have the sense that in at least some resource management agencies recreation has become the new "cash cow"—a "commodity" to offset declining timber management revenues. When timber was king, managers who "got out the cut" supposedly were favored within agencies, and I can imagine a similar situation arising with respect to recreation revenues. In this atmosphere, anyone who maximized revenue could be considered an excellent public servant, and recognized as such in annual performance evaluations.

This is hypothetical, of course. I would have no worries about equity if Crompton ran the world. Unfortunately he does not and the management community is filled with people who have not read the latest issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research*. In fact, even Crompton admits to having recently revised his views in response to the critiques of Dustin and others (Novatorov & Crompton, 2001). How much hope, then, can there be for equity concerns to penetrate massive, regulation-ridden management organizations? Crompton is more optimistic than I.

The crucial point is that we recognize that many claims we make come within an argumentative context and depend upon assumptions, suggesting there is at least one other perspective with something legitimate to be said for it. Unfortunately, only one side is usually presented as truth. Typically it is the side on which our bread is buttered.

The Sinister Professionals?

Driver and Crompton both suggest that I have been negative and condescending to the community of park and recreation professionals—including both managers and researchers—and to the legislators who support them. They argue that recreation professionals are dedicated people who do well offering leisure opportunities to improve society, and they take pride in our field's collective attainment. Their view should be popular—it represents the way we like to think of ourselves; it is especially useful for researchers who hope to obtain agency grants or consulting contracts to present management as knights in shining armor. To me, however, such a belief seems naïve, not unlike the view of the scientific method we learned in 7th grade, and I doubt anyone versed in the public administration or political science literature could take it seriously. Realism would serve us better.

First, note that to be self-interested is not to be evil or disingenuous; it is simply to be normal. When thinking of us as consumers, economists assume we have utility functions that we seek to optimize. Yet when civil servants arrive at work, we expect them to put aside personal goals and objectives and act solely for the public interest. Over the past 40 years, this view of public officials as disinterested has been successfully challenged by public choice theory in economics (see, for example, Buchanan, 1978; Buchanan & Tullock, 1962; Tullock, 1965; Dunleavy, 1991). Originally put forward by Gordon Tullock and James Buchanan, public choice theory applies standard economic analysis to public-sector decision making. It assumes that the factors governing the behavior of public officials, whether elected or appointed, are no different than those governing the behavior of people in other situations. Like the rest of us, officials have utility functions that they seek to optimize, and this is a key influence on policy. For example, Downs (1967) proposed that bureaucrats are motivated by both self-interested and altruistic motives. Self-interested motives include power (both within and outside the agency), income, prestige, convenience (minimizing effort), and security. Altruistic motives include personal loyalty (to the immediate work group and

upwards through the agency to the broader society), commitment to the specific mission, pride in performance, and desire to serve the "public interest." Downs combines these motives to create five "bureaucratic personality types": climbers seek to maximize power, prestige and income; conservers are equally egoistic but want a quiet future life; zealots are strongly committed to specific programs; advocates identify personal welfare with agency loyalty; and statesmen strive to implement their own view of the general welfare. While there are other models of bureaucrats and their behavior, these types describe the general kinds of people who inhabit agencies, and it is reasonable to assume that the different types will respond very differently to new proposals or ideas. In effect, they behave as any other normal, self-interested individual behaves. This theorizing became sufficiently mainstream to win Buchanan a Nobel Prize in 1986—hardly the caricature Crompton suggests.

As initially developed, public choice theory was the darling of libertarians since it suggested that, as bureaucrats were not disinterested, we should limit the size and scope of government. More recently, however, it has been adopted by liberals and neo-Marxists as well (Dunleavy, 1991). In short, many political and economic theorists now assume that government institutions have an inherent set of interests that make them active players in policy analyses and in the development of decision alternatives. For example, agency loyalty (listed above as an altruistic motive) may cause some officials to consider agency welfare in complex decisions. And surely we cannot condemn someone who is ambitious and wants his or her program to be thought successful and central to the organization so that he or she might rise within the organization. Yet it is precisely this kind of motivation that sets up self-interest. And, it is this active, self-interested world of agency needs and motives that I believe we have failed to acknowledge as an influence on both recreation epistemology and recreation policy. As a friend suggested to me, we should remember that every decision at every level is political.

Let me give two specific illustrations from recreation management and research. The first issue concerns the nonuse of urban parks, a problem originally posed by Seymour Gold (1972). Following Gold's lead, I inventoried summer use of the entire park systems of two mid-sized (population ca. 40,000) Massachusetts cities (More, 1990). In both cities, most use was confined to 3 or 4 large parks, while many smaller parks received little on-site use. Clearly there is an allocation problem. Although nobody sits on their benches or uses their other facilities, low use parks still must be maintained, draining resources from the more productive (in terms of on-site use) parks. William H. Whyte (1991) obtained similar results for small New York City plazas. Yet I learned quickly that I could not speak about the nonuse issue directly. Directors of urban park systems have budgets to defend and must impress the mayors and city councils they serve. They seek success stories to support budget requests, so discussions of nonuse are unlikely to be popular. An even more telling incident came when I was asked to write a summary paper on urban parks research for a respected parks journal. I included a

discussion of nonuse and the allocation problem but received a call from the editor in which I was told "I can't possibly print that!" I suspect the editor's concern was for the potential impact such a claim would have on the institutional support for the journal. Although I argued that I had empirical support, I quickly realized that it was an argument that I would not win. Unfortunately, I confess to simply deleting the offending paragraph in order to publish the rest of the paper.

The second illustration concerns the current controversy over the recreation fee demonstration program that I discussed in the original paper. The federal agencies involved derive significant amounts of discretionary revenue from fees, so they are understandably committed to the program. Each agency has someone who heads the program. It is reasonable to assume that these people are anxious to do a good job and make their program successful—everyone wants to look good in front of the boss. But this wish to succeed creates a specific interest that sets up a desire for a particular kind of information—specifically, research that validates the program's success. Is it surprising, then, that so many research reports speak glowingly about fees? To the extent that these people can affect research funding, researchers can be tempted to "spin" their results to please them. In fact, such spinning is probably unconsciously done—often we deceive ourselves by not recognizing the interrelationships between concepts. I believe that fee research, both pro and con, and my own included, must be interpreted with a careful eye towards the ends of the researcher(s). It can be difficult for anyone in any organization to take a stand against a popular program, and the research literature should be read with this in mind—researchers have their personal goals and objectives every bit as much as anyone else. Look for the spin in the adjectives describing the results, and when a particular finding is emphasized (or de-emphasized).

While self-interest may not be uncommon in the management community, can't we assume that university researchers with tenured positions and academic freedom can be free of such bias? Unfortunately, scientists fare little better. Stanford political scientist Chandra Mukerji (1989) used oceanographers at Woods Hole to examine the system of scientific research in the United States. She noted that this country's system of "soft money" research funding was set up by Vannevar Bush at the end of World War II. From a political science perspective, it is best conceived as a set of complex interrelationships and dependencies between the state and the scientific community. The state provides funding at various levels over time enabling it to maintain a scientific labor force against future needs. In return, the scientific community provides services to the state. These services include the "blessing" of essentially political positions through reports, testimony, consulting and the like. Scientists can convince themselves that they are autonomous because there is little overt supervision of their day-to-day work. However, the state retains control through the adjustment of funding priorities, peer review of research proposals, periodic decisions about re-funding, etc. In short, there is a box; a velvet-lined box, to be sure, but a

box all the same. Some scientists learn to manipulate the system and do well; others are less successful. And those who try to work outside the box are likely to find themselves without funding for graduate students, equipment, travel, and other accoutrements that support advancement in academic life. Just how independent are we to question agency policies and priorities?

In the last analysis, I agree with Crompton and Driver that the recreation field is filled with “dedicated, committed public servants who believe passionately in what they do, [and] exert extraordinary efforts to translate their passion into effective program outcomes . . .” (Crompton). What they seem unable to grasp is that it is this very commitment and dedication that sets up the differential filter through which research findings must pass. It is this passion and dedication that leads administrators to strive mightily to keep their systems going even if it means using regressive techniques that displace low-income users. It is this passion and dedication that makes them desire research results that support their positions, while dismissing as aberrant those that do not. And these are, after all, the agency personnel whom researchers must please if they wish their funding to continue. Under these circumstances, how likely are we to develop the alternative literature that Crompton suggests should be so readily evident?

Benefits Versus Functions

All three reviewers question the relationship between functions and benefits; Driver in particular argues that what I mean by functions is the same thing that he means by benefits, begging the question of the relationship between the two concepts. Clearly I must disentangle them.

While the concepts are close, I think there are significant differences. First, from a research perspective and for systems-based explanations, function is the term of preference; it is used extensively in biology, most social sciences, and philosophy (Lycan, 1996). For example, it would seem odd to explain the heart by analyzing its benefits; instead, we speak in terms of what it does—its functions. Similarly, two standard dictionaries of sociological terms contain multiple references to various aspects of functions (function, functionalist alternative, functionalist imperative, etc.) but contain no reference to benefits (Jary & Jary, 1991; Johnson, 1995). Benefit, by contrast, is standard coinage in economic theory where it is used either as a specific technical measure of value (as in willingness to pay studies of consumer’s surplus) or more generally as in benefit/cost analysis. Driver, of course, adapted the concept to explain recreation activities. However, when used in this way, it is important to note that benefit contains an implicit value judgment that function does not (i.e., to say something is a benefit is to say it is necessarily good). In this sense, function is the more appropriate analytical term.

The relationship between functions and benefits is shown schematically in figure one. Major recreation activities like camping, hunting, going to the movies, or sailing are actually systems of behavior—organizations of more

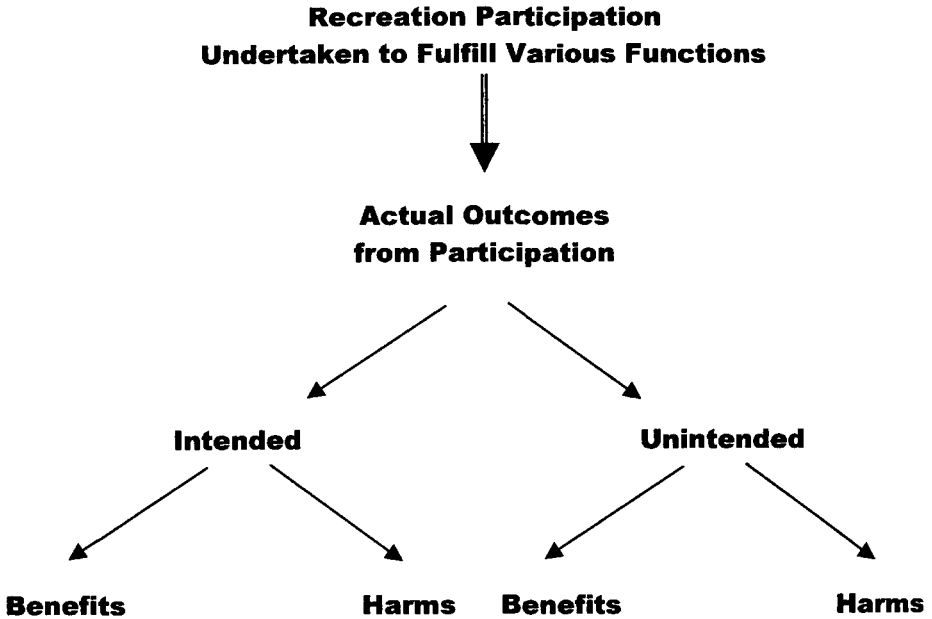


Figure 1. The benefits of recreation

elemental thoughts, feelings and actions. As with the heart, these activities are important for what they are “designed” to do—for their biological, psychological and social functions. Participation yields consequences or outcomes, which will be either intended or unintended. It is these consequences that participants evaluate as benefits or harms. For example, a family picnic might result in outcomes that produce several intended benefits like relaxation or the experience of natural beauty. Intended harms might include the direct cost of the outing, the opportunity costs of foregone activities, or having to endure the presence of a disliked relative. Unintended benefits might include making new friends or finding \$5 in the parking lot, while unintended harms covers scraped knees or bruised feelings. Thus intended benefits and functions may correspond closely but the epistemological difference between functions and benefits is confirmed by the fact that while there can be unintended consequences and benefits, it is logically impossible to have unintended functions.

To be useful in budget justification, benefits research must support two claims:

1. That the benefits claimed are systematically and reliably produced by the budgetary expenditure (i.e., they must be intended), and,
2. That the purported benefit is actually good.

The first claim is that a benefit must exist and be attributable to management actions. It is not sufficient to say that we simply create the oppor-

tunity for benefits to occur because anything can occur almost anywhere. Because two people meet and fall in love on a hiking trip does not mean that love is a benefit of recreation areas. Unintended benefits cannot justify public expenditure. Rather, we must show that our management actions are actually responsible for producing the benefit systematically and reliably. When I doubted spiritual benefits in the original paper, I doubted this claim (i.e., that they could be attributed to management actions).

To show that the benefits are systematically and reliably created, we need more information about process. Present benefits research seems “black-box”—that is, we ask people on structured questionnaires what benefits they receive and they give us some sort of answer (of dubious reliability because we lead them with the questions). Instead, we need show how each benefit in the current list works. How are the benefits of hiking produced by putting one foot in front of another along a trail of difficulty x ? What is the link between a person’s actual behavior, the associated experience, and the accretion of a specific benefit? These processes need exploration. I suspect that when we do, the list of benefits may well be much smaller, but claims about them also would be tighter, more closely reasoned, and better justified.

The second claim is that the potential benefit is actually good. When I questioned humility in the original paper, I doubted this claim. Why is humility necessarily good? Aren’t there times when it might be considered pathological (just as temporary escape could be maladaptive in specific situations)? Driver notes that some managers have actually targeted humility as a benefit, suggesting that when I go to their particular sites, someone has decided that it is desirable for me to feel humble. This seems inappropriate to me. It is not sufficient to argue that everyone assumes that every item in the current list of benefits is good; each must be thought through on its own terms and in the context of specific situations. A related difficulty concerns just how far can we go in engineering experiences. Or, even more appropriately, how far *should* we go, at least in the public sector? I am ambivalent about experience engineering. On the one hand, the private sector does it all the time—roller coasters or scary movies are designed to make us feel afraid, sad novels are written to produce tears, etc. But is it appropriate in the public sector to try and control what people feel? What justifies using public funds to produce humility? Aren’t parks and recreation areas the very places we go to escape such engineering? This seems to me to be an area where we need considerable thought.

Finally, the current list of benefits also may reflect a middle/upper-middle class bias. Most frequently, research on benefits has used questionnaire studies of various user groups. Questionnaires contain an inherent bias toward the articulate and well educated. Moreover, as Crompton noted, the affluent are over-represented at many recreation facilities, so we can assume that the populations surveyed contain data principally drawn from middle and upper middle class user populations. When managers target such benefits, isn’t it possible that they will be constructing experiences “designed” to appeal to the upper-middle class? Phillip’s (1999) excellent question: “Are we welcome?” can apply to low-income people as well as to minorities.

The Marginal User and the Justification of Public Recreation

Crompton makes several excellent points in his discussion of fees. I agree that fees are only one of multiple factors that inhibit participation by low-income people, and I agree that many states and municipalities rely heavily on other forms of regressive taxation to finance services (although I fail to see how adding yet another regressive element improves the situation). Yet we have a crucial difference: I think Crompton (and I suspect Driver as well) treats the fee issue from an economic perspective while Dustin and I tend to see it as a moral issue involving duties to those who are less well off. This difference in focus is profound and may be the reason why we talk past one another in debate. It is also the reason why I am completely comfortable denying Crompton's charge of hypocrisy—to an excluded, marginal user, it makes little difference what most other low-income users believe. These perspectives deserve further exploration.

The dominant moral philosophy underlying most economics of the benefit/cost genre is utilitarianism (Sagoff, 1988). Within a utilitarian framework, a decision is justified when it produces the greatest good for the greatest number for the greatest length of time. So, if a user fee makes 90% of the users better off through improved maintenance, etc., but it excludes 10% at the margin, it is clearly justified in utilitarian (economic) terms. Immanuel Kant, by contrast, found such thinking contemptible. Persons, he argued are always ends rather than means, and every person within the same moral community has the same rights as all others. Consequently, we cannot sacrifice the few for the benefit of the many. Framing the problem as a moral issue within Kant's deontological framework places a much greater emphasis on the marginal user. Similarly, Rawls (1971), argues in his "second difference principle" that social inequality in a society should be arranged to the advantage of the least well off. The point should be clear—we cannot ethically manage public recreation services in a way that creates second-class citizens, especially when those citizens are at the bottom of the economic scale.

Most recreation areas and programs provide service to people in a variety of income classes. Even in programs that draw heavily from the upper brackets, there is always someone on the edge and it is likely that a price increase will cause some in each income bracket to drop out. In upper income brackets dropping out may reflect a lack of commitment. But in the lower brackets the reason for dropping out is more likely to be financial. These are the marginal users—the ones who will be forced out by a fee increase—and it is they who are the proper focus of public recreation policy. To understand why, we must ask a deeper question: Why do we have *public* parks and recreation at all?

John Dewey (1927/1954) traced the origin of "public" to the consequences of acts. Dewey argued that the consequences of a private action are entirely confined to its participants. But often (perhaps even usually) acts have social consequences that extend beyond those immediately involved to

affect others. These social consequences are not necessarily public, however. According to Dewey (1954, p. 15, 16): “. . . the line between public and private is to be drawn on the basis of the extent and scope of the consequences of acts which are so important as to need control, whether by inhibition or promotion . . . The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for. Officials are those who look out for and take care of the interests thus affected.” Thus the public sector is justified in intervening only where there are negative externalities that require systematic control, or when the market fails to produce sufficient levels of something positive so that it requires government action. Public recreation, I presume, falls into the latter category.

But for whom does the market fail? Sometimes it fails even for the wealthy—few of us can afford our own, private wilderness area. But most often it fails for low-income people—those who depend on low cost public recreation because they have few alternatives. Generally, the middle, upper-middle and especially the upper classes have many private recreational opportunities available to them. They do not need public golf courses because they can belong to country clubs; they do not need public pools or tennis courts because they can belong to private health clubs; they do not need public playgrounds because they have backyards and can purchase elaborate, high quality play equipment. In short, there usually is no significant recreational problem for them that, in Dewey’s terms, requires systematic care by the public sector. But, as we descend the economic ladder, access to private options becomes increasingly less possible and the need for public intervention grows greater. Why do we have public beaches, playgrounds, tennis courts, golf courses, etc.? The answer, quite simply, is to enable people to participate who could not do so otherwise. That is the primary “function” of *public* recreation.

The same is true for other public institutions: public colleges and universities serve many functions, but their primary function is to educate qualified students who cannot afford private opportunities. Public health clinics serve those who cannot afford private care. And a central function of public libraries is to make books and other education materials to those who cannot afford them. I agree with Crompton that many users of public recreation services are from the middle and higher income groups; if we provide heavily subsidized services, these knowledgeable groups will take advantage of them. But I cannot support his solution. Although Crompton recognizes that fees place an undue burden on low-income people, he advocates pricing to redistribute income and free public funds for “other services that may be desired by a larger number in the low income cohort.” Unfortunately, this strategy defeats the central function of public recreation by pricing out those very people for whom the service is most important. Perhaps instead of pricing, we should examine the mix of services offered to make it more appealing to low-income people, or, more probably, public agencies ought to be doing more outreach. If youth recreation programs have been successful (I

defer to Crompton's greater knowledge), I suspect it is because they have a clarity of purpose (function) that many of our other programs currently lack.

In the end, Crompton gets the solution exactly wrong, ignoring four essential factors:

1. Although he cites research to show that most low-income people do not use even municipal parks and recreation programs, he neglects to mention that the primary reason for this is that they lack information and awareness (Howard & Crompton, 1984; Spotts & Stynes, 1984; Gobster, 1998). Surely informing low-income people of the availability of public opportunities is an area where marketing can be truly useful;
2. Raising fees for public recreation forces out marginal users, creating a new class of nonusers: the excluded user. And the tax dollars of excluded users then finance participation by wealthier users;
3. Since public-sector fees often represent only a fraction of total provision costs—for example, operating costs may be covered but not fixed costs like salary—the vast amount of tax money remaining then accrues as subsidies to wealthier users. As before, the bill for these subsidized wealthy users will be paid in part by former marginal users and other low-income nonusers. Where is the equity in that?; and
4. If recreation is not a legitimate public good available for all, then we can save substantial money by privatizing. In Crompton's own example, New York City has halved its park and recreation budget since 1986. Following his argument for the benefits of fees, shouldn't we applaud this reduction since low-income people no longer must pay these salaries? The tax savings then can facilitate social justice by freeing this public money "to offer other services that may be desired by a larger number in the low income cohort." The point is that Crompton's argument works as well for total privatization as it does for fees.

In sum, the central function of public-sector recreation is to provide service to marginal users who cannot afford to participate otherwise. We are not striving to create a positive benefit/cost ratio, we are striving to work some good in the world by helping those who are less fortunate. In doing so, we run the risk of being thought patronizing, like the middle-class mothers of the playground movement who tried to teach their own values to poor children (Taylor, 1999). However, if we consider the marginal user to be unimportant (as Crompton implies when he is willing to sacrifice them to the goal of a low consumer surplus), then we have lost the social justification for public recreation, and the only ethically acceptable alternative is full privatization in which the user pays all the costs. Intermediate positions like those advocated by Crompton and Driver simply use public funds to subsidize the comfortably well-off. Unless we assume that upper-income people need public sector help meeting their recreational needs while lower-income

people do not, the idea that regressive fees promote distributive justice is simply silly.

What Else Can Be Done?

When writing the original paper, I realized that I could not legitimately carp without proposing a solution. Mine was functionalism, by which I meant simply that we should focus clearly on the goal of public recreation—providing service to marginal users. The subsequent discussion, however, revealed three other areas for potential improvement: greater use of rational (logical) analysis (as opposed to quantitative empirical studies), the differentiation of facts and values, and the development of recreation ethics.

Crompton presents a view of the world that seems to me to be empirical, calculable, and measurable. I think he is optimistic. Many higher-level concepts do not lend themselves readily to empirical evaluation, and measurement crudely applied can be more confusing than revealing. Put bluntly, we need less counting and more thinking. We are awash in a sea of data and teach students that truth is to be found in statistical tests. However, rationalism has always provided an alternative to empiricism and, for many students, a course in argumentation might be as beneficial as another statistics course. While some measurement is essential, we could stand to adjust our current balance to assure that the logical foundations of our arguments are sound.

In that vein, we also should pay greater attention to the distinction between facts and values. Although this distinction has been controversial ever since David Hume introduced it in the 18th century, it has held as a point of logic for over 200 years—under standard systems of logic you cannot derive “ought” statements (values) from “is” statements (facts). Recreation research frequently confounds the two, as is the case with “benefits.” Many of our concepts are similarly value laden (efficiency, equity, self-actualization, etc.). Perhaps this is understandable, given that we usually deal with real world management and policy situations that necessarily concern good and bad, right and wrong. Frequently, however, our value judgments are implicit and go unexamined. Are constraints necessarily bad? Why should we want to promote “efficient” solutions in the public sector if they conflict with equity? Often the values we espouse are products of our current social context and may shift over time. The point is simply that good/bad, right/wrong and similar value judgments are complex and need to be thought through rationally on their own terms and in particular contexts.

Lastly, and very much related to the previous two points, we need to develop recreation ethics. As the population grows and resources (both physical and social/financial) grow increasingly strained, we will face increasingly difficult choices, many of which will be moral in that there will be competing sides with just claims. How are we to deal with winners and losers in a decision? Is it more appropriate to cast a problem in economic or moral terms?

Can we compromise wilderness values slightly to accommodate people with disabilities? How ought we to conceive of public resources in a divided society? These difficult questions are the stuff of ethics. At present, environmental ethics seems to me to be caught up in obscure debates over intrinsic value, ecosystem restoration and the like. In a society increasingly divided by class, we will need their help to resolve more practical issues.

Conclusion

Two points are worth re-emphasizing. First, the marginal user is central to the justification of public recreation. The function of public recreation is not to provide benefits per se, it is not to generate a positive cost/benefit ratio, nor is it to fulfill general demand; the purpose of public recreation is to provide opportunities for particular kinds of recreation to those who could not afford to participate otherwise. We do so because we believe, perhaps patronizingly, that they are good for people. If we have lost our belief that family picnics, museums visits, days at the beach, and walks in the woods are legitimate public goods in Dewey's sense of needing systematic enhancement, then the time has come to privatize. But we need to privatize fully; the half-measures advocated by Crompton and Driver are little more than shams, preserving the benefits of "public" areas for the affluent who can pay, while, at the same time, maintaining power and control for agency providers. They are sugarcoating for a bitter pill, and their real purpose is to provide an intellectual rationale to prevent agency administrators from having guilty consciences. But if these activities are genuine public goods (as I believe), then the marginal user is crucial to the justification of public facilities in a deeply divided society.

Second is the original issue of our interests and their influence on our epistemology. Many years ago when I considered establishing a small consulting business, a retired consultant told me the Great Secret of Consulting: a successful consultant goes into a company, listens carefully, figures out what they want to hear, and then tells it to them! I think we in recreation research do this more often than we like to admit, perhaps even more often than we are aware. We frequently operate in direct partnership with agency managers—they help us formulate study plans and objectives, develop questionnaires, and even co-author papers. Such collaboration is clearly in our interests—it keeps the funding coming and often is recognized as important service by the institutions in which we work. There can be no doubt about the congenial reciprocity of the relationship. But do we pay a price in terms of the independence of our scientific judgment? Consider benefits research: Given that both Driver and Crompton agree that the goal of benefits research is to provide documentation that supports budget requests, isn't the outcome of such research known in advance? Can't we expect that the researcher will discover that there are multiple benefits and that the agency is doing wonderful work that justifies doubling or trebling the budget by appropriations, fee revenues, or whatever means the agency finds expedient?

But just how objective is this? Isn't it just telling the agencies what they want to hear? Can it be considered science, even if cloaked in fancy statistics? Surely this is thinking inside the box at its most sophisticated.

On the other hand, just how objective can we really afford to be? Could you receive funding from an agency and then conclude that what they were doing was unjustified? What would be the chance of your getting a second project funded by them? How would the institution in which you work respond if you managed to offend a major state or federal agency? Dustin suggests that I am "biting the hand that feeds me" for even suggesting that this possibility exists! Again, the point is that there is a box—velvet lined to be sure, but a box nonetheless. We need to understand that to put our research into context. And we need to understand how our interests influence our epistemology, for underneath it all there is the money—the getting of it, the keeping of it, and the justifying of it. It exerts greater influence on the content of our research than we like to think.

References

- Buchanan, J. (Ed.). (1978). *The economics of politics*. London: Institute of Economic Affairs.
- Buchanan, J., & Tullock, G. (1962). *The calculus of consent*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Dewey, J. (1954). *The public and its problems*. Denver, CO: Alan Swallow.
- Downs, A. (1967). *Inside bureaucracy*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dunleavy, P. (1991). *Democracy, bureaucracy, and public choice*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Gobster, P. (1998). Explanations for minority "underparticipation" in outdoor recreation: A look at golf. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 16, (1), 46-64.
- Gold, S. (1972). The non-use of neighborhood parks. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 38, (5), 369-378.
- Howard, D. R., & Crompton, J. L. (1984). Who are the consumers of public park and recreation services? *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 2, (3), 33-48.
- Jary, D. and Jary, A. (1991). *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: The Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd.
- Johnson, A. (1995). *The Blackwell dictionary of sociology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Leamer, E. (1983). Let's take the "con" out of econometrics. *American Economic Review*, 73, (1), 31-43.
- Lycan, W. (1996). Philosophy of mind. In N. Bunnin, & E. Tsui-James (Eds.). *The Blackwell companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- More, T. (1990). *Factors affecting the productivity of urban parks*. Res. Pap. NE-630. Radnor, PA: U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station. 7 p.
- Mukerji, C. (1989). *A Fragile Power: Scientists and the State*. Princeton, NJ: The Princeton University Press.
- Novatorov, E. V., & Crompton, J. L. (2001). A revised conceptualization of marketing in the context of public leisure services. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 33, (2), 186-201.
- Phillip, S. (1999). Are we welcome? African American racial acceptance in leisure activities and importance given to children's leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31, (4), 385-403.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: The Belnap Press of Harvard University.
- Sagoff, M. (1988). *The economy of the earth*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Spotts, D., & Stynes, D. (1984). Public awareness and knowledge of urban parks. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 2, (4), 1-12.

- Taylor, D. (1999). Central park as a model for social control: Urban parks, social class, and leisure behavior in nineteenth century America. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31, (4), 420-477.
- Tullock, G. (1965). *The politics of bureaucracy*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press.
- Whyte, W. (1991). *The social life of small urban spaces*. Washington, DC: The Conservation Foundation.