

## **“The Parks Are Being Loved To Death” and Other Frauds and Deceits in Recreation Management**

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Many common concepts in recreation and leisure research originate from the “interests” of four groups: users, legislators, managing agencies, and researchers. These interests, and their ties to social class, make frequently discussed concepts like overuse, business-like management for public agencies, benefits/values, and sustainability ontologically suspect. A functionalist approach is advocated as an alternative. Researchers need to be aware of the “political” context of research concepts to avoid pitfalls in their application.

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### Introduction

This paper is a polemic about “interests” in public-sector recreation research, management, and policy, and their influence on the concepts used in research. The central “fact” of recreation research is the agency budget, an annual “event” requiring constant justification. Much recreation and leisure research, especially at the applied end of the spectrum, is undertaken to provide such justification. The primary function of concepts such as “benefits,” spiritual values, overuse, carrying capacity, and “future generations arguments” is to help justify agency budgets or to advance specific priorities within those budgets. Furthermore, many of these concepts are based in elitist conceptions of the good or desirable, an elitism that comes at the expense of low-income people in general and the working class in particular. There has been little discussion of social class issues within the recreation literature and, in some cases, such discussion has been studiously avoided (Cranz, 1982). Americans have traditionally considered America to be a middle-class country (Cassidy, 1995), and the nation’s parks in particular have been seen as a neutral ground where all classes can mingle freely (Cranz, 1982; More, 1985). Although such mingling was a central objective in Frederick Law Olmstead’s conception of park design, the historical record shows a different picture. Social inequality has always been with us, growing rapidly after the Civil War and peaking in the 1920’s (Hurst, 1998), and class considerations have always dominated park design and management (Cranz,

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1982; Domosch 1996; Taylor, 1999). Today, inequality has grown dramatically since the “golden” era of the U.S. economy in the 1950’s and 1960’s, affecting virtually every aspect of American life and policy (Cassidy, 1995; Hurst 1998; Marger 1999). It would be unrealistic to believe that recreation resources and policy are exempt from these influences. The contemporary social climate requires that we recognize the pattern of interests that shape policy and the relationships between those interests and the very concepts we use in research and management.

To illustrate, consider an historical example: Despite lip service to the “melting pot” philosophy, the great American urban parks of the 19th century often were designed by and for the upper or upper middle classes who sought to preserve them as areas for social display (Cranz, 1982), emphasizing passive leisure pursuits, cultural improvement, and refined manners (Rosenzweig, 1987). By contrast, Taylor (1999) points out that many working-class people lived in small, crowded quarters and worked long hours of brutal, mind-numbing work. For them, public spaces like parks became the primary location for exercising, playing games and sports, drinking, organized social gatherings, courting, and lounging—things that they often could not do indoors. Inevitably, their behavior conflicted with middle- and upper-class mores, so a range of controls was instituted to regulate working-class behavior (Taylor, 1999). For example, immigrants such as Germans, with their love of beer, sausages, and “oompha” music, were despised (Cranz, 1982), and the activities they preferred—music, dancing, and drinking—could be effectively controlled through park policies like prohibition, permitting, early closure, etc. But such policies require justification. Then, as today, few people would be likely to announce publicly that they disliked Germans, so justification needed to be couched in “higher minded” ideas—appreciative use, protection of spiritual values, improvement of the poorer classes, and the like. Yet the effects of such concepts are plain—the exclusion of uses desired by the working class. I believe that we need to recognize that the same processes—with the same outcomes—shape recreation policy today. We need to examine our own “higher minded” ideas, asking where they come from and whose interests they serve.

### Interest, Class, and Policy: The Social Context of Contemporary America

Any discussion of social class and ideology almost inevitably must begin with a consideration of Karl Marx. Marx is, of course, a controversial figure in the history of thought even today, principally because of his politics and their application (or misapplication) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, if one can set his politics aside, what remains is an analysis of society in terms of interests; that is, to properly analyze a concept or policy, Marx would advise us to ignore lofty goals and aspirations, focusing instead on finding out whose interests are served. Who makes out? Which groups are advantaged or disadvantaged by a particular action, concept, or policy? In his doctrine of historical materialism, Marx argued that the dynamics of society originate in

economic or productive activity (McLellan, 1973; Heilbroner, 1992). Each of us requires food, shelter, clothing, and the other material necessities of life. These necessities give us interests, and it is out of these interests that a society's culture arises—the structures of law, religion, education, and politics that help us solve problems, along with the belief systems those structures entail. Under a capitalist system, individuals and groups compete within the culture to fulfill their needs. Their ideology—belief structure—is a function of their competing interests—an outcome rather than a cause. In recreation, we need to consider the idea that some of our most central concepts—carrying capacity, benefits, spiritual values, etc.—may fit this same mold; they may be outcomes rather than causes; they may be responses to situations that serve to enhance our own interests rather than to illuminate underlying truths. Typically, we have focused on the competing interests of various user groups as an influence on policy. But policy also is shaped by other interests, particularly legislative interests and those of the managing agencies. And researchers themselves are not disinterested. A more complete understanding of these interests is necessary to understand recreation policy as a whole.

The interests of these players stem from, and are determined by the social context of contemporary America. I have noted that economic inequality has been present throughout U.S. history. In the era that followed World War II, however, it reached its lowest ebb; an exceptionally strong economy divided the spoils of economic growth remarkably evenly (Cassidy, 1995; Hurst 1998; Marger, 1999). Perhaps even more importantly, expectations were rising: while you might not be doing well financially, it was reasonable to expect that your children would do better.

The optimism of the 1950's and 1960's gave way in the early 1970's as inequality increased. From 1973 to 1993, the bottom 40% of American families saw their incomes decline in real terms. Living costs increased dramatically, as did the average family's debt level (Cassidy, 1999). At the same time, the top 20% of the population did remarkably well, garnering nearly 50% of the aggregate income produced in the United States in 1994 (Hurst, 1998). The top 10% fared even better; economist Edward Wolfe estimates that, at present, about 85% of the country's financial wealth is owned by the richest 10% of households (Cassidy, 1999). The booming economy of the late 1990's has ameliorated these effects somewhat and income gains have been made by all classes except the poor (Federal Reserve reports . . . 2000), slowing the rate of growth of inequality (Jones and Weinberg, 2000). Yet the "typical" worker has received little of these gains—the median hourly wage among men was slightly less in 1999 than in 1989, while for women it rose only 4 percent during this period (Mishel et al., 2001). Consequently, inequality remains at an historically high level (Figure 1), and some economists estimate that it will take two decades of evenly distributed, sustained economic growth to return the country to the prosperity of the early 1950's and 1960's (Marger, 1999). These circumstances make it difficult to consider contemporary America as a middle-class country. Instead, Cassidy (1995) de-

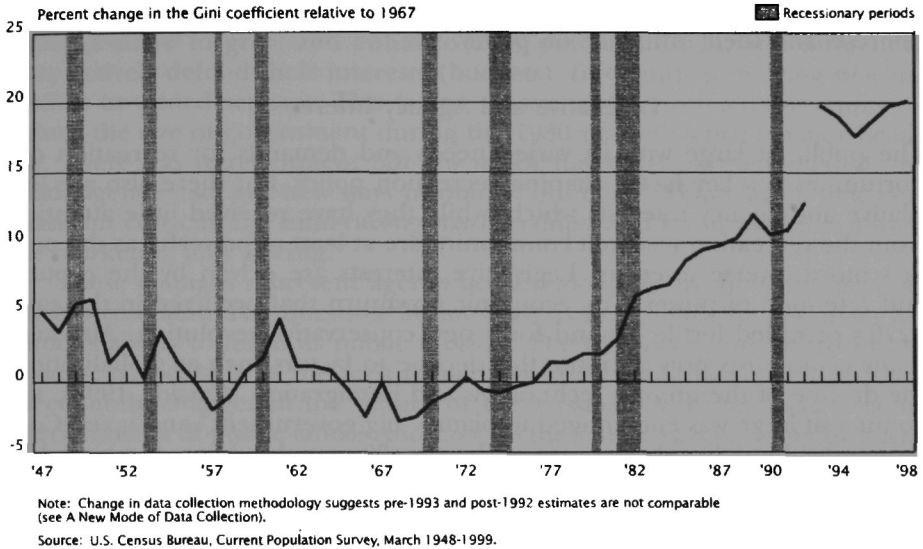


Figure 1. Change in Income Inequality for Families: 1947-1998

scribes four general classes: an immensely wealthy elite at the top; an underclass, increasingly divorced from the rest of society, at the bottom; while in between are an upper echelon of highly skilled, highly educated professionals who are doing reasonably well; and a vast swath of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who continue to struggle with declining living standards.

Quantitative estimates place about 57% of the American population in the working class or below (Gilbert and Kahl cited in Hurst, 1998). These tend to be people with a high school education or less and an annual income of less than \$25,000 (1990 dollars). In particular, the working class (as opposed to the poor) tends to be service workers in the lowest paid clerical or blue collar jobs; they are hairdressers, tool and die makers, cashiers, telephone operators, barbers, waitresses, hotel desk clerks, nursing home orderlies, security guards, mechanics, and secretaries (Rubin, 1994). These people have not fared well over the past 25 years, and are experiencing minimal gains in the present economy. Considerations of both time and money complicate their lives. For example, they may be shift workers, often holding more than one job. Husbands and wives may work on different shifts creating complex childcare responsibilities. And the difficulties of class may be compounded by the effects of race, ethnicity, and gender (Rubin, 1994). These also are the people who are most dependent on public-sector recreation opportunities, and who are most at risk in current debates over recreation policy. When we consider *public* recreation policy, it is appropriate to ask if public agencies have responsibilities or duties to serve these people. Unfortunately, the needs of working-class families may not coincide with the in-

terests of those who form recreation policy, so we need to understand those interests and their influence on policy.

### Legislative and Agency Interests

The public at large with its varied needs and demands for recreation opportunities is a key factor shaping recreation policy. But there also are legislative and agency interests which, while they have received little attention from the recreation research community, are at least as powerful as the public's more diverse interests. Legislative interests are driven by the capture and retention of power. The economic downturn that occurred in the early 1970's provided fertile ground for a new conservative revolution. Although many economists now attribute this decline to factors such as globalization, the decline of the unions, technology, and immigration (Cassidy, 1995), the country at large was encouraged to blame "big government" and taxes. Consequently, the political discourse of the past 30 years has been dominated by libertarian calls to cut taxes, limit spending, and generally reduce the size of government. Such considerations clearly have dominated legislative interests over the past three decades, and continue to exert considerable influence.

In this environment, the public agencies responsible for managing recreation resources have not fared well. Most if not all have had to cope with budget reductions, often without corresponding reductions in responsibilities. The situation is grim: at the federal level, a General Accounting Office (1998) report to Congress on the recreation fee demonstration project noted the following:

- The federal land management agencies have accumulated a multibillion-dollar backlog of maintenance, infrastructure, and development needs.
- The quality and the scope of visitor services at federal recreation sites have been declining. Some sites have closed facilities while others have reduced their hours of operation or are providing fewer services.
- The condition of many key natural and cultural resources in the national park system is deteriorating, and the condition of many others is not known.
- Despite annual increases in federal appropriations for operating the national park system, the financial resources available have not been sufficient to stem the deterioration of the resources, services, and recreational opportunities managed by the agency.

The USDA Forest Service (2000) alone has accumulated an \$812 million backlog of maintenance needs, and former Forest Service Chief Michael Dombeck stated that the Agency has only enough money to maintain 17% of its roads (Davila, 2000). When the needs of state, county, and municipal lands are added, the funding problem becomes nearly unimaginable.

Yet agencies have "needs" and interests that extend well beyond their officially designated responsibilities. They are not simply passive entities that

expand or contract with changing fiscal tides. Like all social organizations, agencies strive to grow and enhance their power, prestige, and influence. They actively defend their interests (budgets), frequently proposing new initiatives or added services. This is one reason why conservative attempts to reduce the size of government during the 1980's failed to make major headway. There was retrenchment but few major functions were eliminated. Instead, agencies sought new ways of doing "business." There was a new emphasis on cost cutting, fund-raising, partnerships, and business-like methods like marketing and pricing.

These changes represent agency accommodations to the shifting political environment. The question we must ask is how such changes affect an agency's ability to fulfill its public mission. The enhancements are relatively obvious, particularly in the area of budgets and maintenance. But do they effect subtle changes in the nature of the mission? Will they lead to commercialization of public lands? And how do these new ways of doing business affect the distribution of benefits across social classes? Perhaps more importantly, at least from the perspective of this paper, is that when there are budgets to be defended or initiatives to be proposed, agencies require supportive documentation, providing a natural link to the research community. And with potentially large contracts in the offing, there is ample incentive for researchers to provide "products" that please agencies.

### The Interests of Researchers

A final self-interested group is the community of recreation/leisure researchers. Research often is presented as objective, unbiased, independent, and value free. Yet it would be absurd to suppose that researchers are not susceptible to the same pressures and influences as the other groups. Marx put the issue bluntly, claiming that bourgeois intellectuals often are nothing more than "hired prize fighters" for capitalism (Marx, 1967, p. 15). Perhaps even more to the point is Bertrand Russell's (1945) suggestion that when evaluating philosophic ideas it is always wise to know who pays the philosopher.

Applied research in general occurs within a context largely determined by managing agencies. In the case of recreation research, some researchers (like myself) work directly within a managing agency. The agency approves research topics, regulates the budget, grants promotions and other rewards, and approves publications. This does not mean that agency researchers are simply mouthpieces for management or that their research is somehow tainted, but it does suggest that the agency sets the research context, and we would do well to bear this in mind when interpreting results.

University researchers fare little better. Although they preserve a veneer of independence, agencies still offer them grants, contracts, and consulting fees, employ their graduates, and offer internships to their current students. Clearly, there is ample incentive for university researchers to please management interests.

The links between management and the research community are important because they influence the nature of professional discourse within the field. Researchers often constitute a large part of the program at professional meetings and conferences. Their articles fill professional journals, and they often are directly responsible for socializing the upcoming generation of managers. So what researchers think and write makes a difference in recreation management, especially in the long term. That is why it is so important to fully acknowledge the influences that shape the content of our thought, including the influence of management interests.

### The Discourse on Recreation Management

The discourse on recreation management consists of the issues that we debate and the concepts we use to debate them. These issues and concepts arise from the interaction of the four groups cited: legislators, the public(s), the managing agencies, and researchers. The various publics involved in recreation make their wants and displeasures known through a variety of media and public involvement mechanisms and need not concern us here. Similarly, legislative interests, while occasionally dealing with recreation issues, have been concerned primarily with budgets, taxes, and reducing the size of government. While these conservative fiscal interests are seldom recreation specific, they have been a dominant determinant of the political environment within which agencies have had to operate during the past 30 years. Of more immediate interest is how the content of the professional recreation discourse is shaped in this climate.

Central to my thesis is the idea that the discourse on recreation is driven largely by concerns over money (the budget) and power (prestige). Obviously, these are not independent: power (and its associated prestige) depends on the ability of an agency to work its will (accomplish its goals) which, in turn, depends on its financial resources (the budget). The budget is the central mechanism that brings the four groups together in dialog; it is the budget that is argued over; it is the budget through which different points of view and different priorities are expressed. However, the four groups do not share power equally in the budgetary process. In the long run, the public is the most important group but in the short run, legislative interests prevail. Agencies generally propose budgets but legislators hold the purse strings. And, as noted, for the past 30 years the dominant legislative interest has been to reduce spending as well as the size of government. In this austere fiscal climate, both agencies and legislatures have eagerly embraced alternative funding sources; in recreation agencies this has translated into an emphasis on user fees, partnerships, and new ways of doing business. But also as noted, neither agencies nor legislatures are likely to admit directly that money drives their concerns. What they need are higher-minded ideologies to provide justification and several exist.

In the remainder of this paper, I examine four ideologies: (1) the overuse of natural environments, with its attendant emphasis on mechanisms to restrict use; (2) the need for government agencies to adopt more business-

like practices, e.g., customer orientations, pricing, and marketing; (3) values and benefits, including existence value, benefits-based management, and spiritual values; and (4) sustainability. Obviously, these are not independent; this list is hardly exhaustive, and many of the concepts overlap, yet all represent much discussed topics in recreation management. For each I will attempt to specify whose interests are advanced by the concept and how it is tied to social class considerations.

### *The Overuse of Natural Environments*

Concerns about the overuse of natural environments have been a central theme of the recreation research literature for nearly a half century. These concerns focus on two areas: biophysical impacts such as site deterioration, erosion, changes in ecological characteristics, and species disruption, and psycho-social impacts like crowding and recreation quality. When not discussed individually, these concepts are incorporated into concepts like carrying capacity, visitor impact management and limits of acceptable change. Overuse also is linked to future generations arguments and to control via fees and other rationing methods.

Our interest in overuse is hardly surprising: documentation that "the parks are being loved to death!" is a call to action. As a problem, overuse helps justify budgets. Positions are needed, regulations must be passed and enforced, and facilities and environments must be repaired or restored, all serving to enhance agency power (control) and prestige.

But the concepts serve other interests as well. Overuse also offers a rationale for those who would like to see people removed from natural environments altogether. Many radical conservation groups, having fought timber, grazing, and mining interests, now use the overuse argument to condemn recreational use on public lands (Lemann, 1999). Some deep ecologists argue that wild places should be for wild things, bemoaning Forest Service policies that treat wilderness as a form of recreation (Sessions, 1995). And purists argue that once altered, natural environments cannot be restored to a truly natural state. The biological analogue of these arguments is that natural environments should be reserved for the ecosystem services they provide: clean air and water, maintenance of gene pools, etc. According to the argument, recreational use that threatens such services should be discouraged as a matter of policy.

Future generations arguments also suggest the need to forego current use to preserve natural environments for future generations. Where would we be if our forebears had not had the foresight to set aside Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Grand Canyon? The National Park Service itself was established with the dual (and often conflicting) mandates of enhancing public use and enjoyment and protecting resources for future generations. Clearly, for some, concern for future generations is a major reason to limit current use.

Limiting use prompts a discussion of the mechanisms by which it can be accomplished. Although "first-come, first-served," lotteries, and reservation systems are common, fees have received the most research attention



recently. They are popular with management agencies (and, hence, with researchers) because fees do much more than limit use. When there is revenue retention, fees provide the agency with an alternative source of income as well as a degree of independence from legislative interests (LaPage, 1994). Fees also reduce the need for appropriations, freeing monies for other uses. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that there is great enthusiasm for fees within research, legislative, and management communities (cf. Fretwell, 2000). Undoubtedly, it is the revenue aspect of fees that gives them their greatest appeal—their role in controlling use is secondary.

How legitimate are these concerns of overuse? Often, the vast majority of use an area receives occurs on a very small percentage of the land. For example, an early study of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, MN, found that over half the visitors used only one-tenth of the access points in the study area (Lucas, 1964), and uneven spatial distribution has been a nearly universal finding of subsequent studies (Manning, 1999; Newman et al., 2001). Are the parks being loved to death, or is overuse mostly a manifestation of the interests of agencies and researchers? When we are told that parks are loved to death, often it is by a person or group with a particular agenda. In other words, the parks themselves are not being loved to death in the abstract but *at this particular budget level*. I do not mean to imply that there are no problems. Certainly, there are fragile areas and problems with cars and other vehicles, and it is wise to preserve a range of experiences. However, these problems must be seen in relation to the budget and to our national political will to provide and fund public lands. Over the past 30 years, there has been a systematic degradation of the ability of natural resource agencies to respond to problems. For example, between 1987 and 1993, southern Appalachian national forests received 97% of planned funding for timber programs but only 47% of planned funding for recreation programs (Morton, 1997). How many problems associated with overuse could be eliminated if there were funds to repair, replant, restore, regrade, and redesign? The key point is that overuse needs to be seen not in the absolute but relative to an agency's capacity to respond to it—that is, relative to the budget.

Unfortunately, advocates of use limits seldom specify just whose use should be limited. Where use is to be rationed, I believe exclusion will correlate with income almost inevitably. Low-income people will be the first to be excluded, and exclusion will reach upward in the income scale as access is increasingly restricted. The actual mechanisms of exclusion probably make little difference; pricing obviously excludes by class (More & Stevens 2000; Reiling, Cheng & Trott 1992), but where mechanisms like lotteries or waiting lists are involved, low-income people tend to have limited access to information—they are unable to manipulate the system as easily as wealthier people. The simple first-come, first-served allocation method also is problematic because working-class people seldom have the time flexibility enjoyed by the more affluent. Ultimately, however, first-come, first-served may prove to be the most equitable of all allocation mechanisms for public recreation resources. It is simple, easily applied, and widely understood.

Future generations arguments are easily dismissed. Often, they are applied uncritically in meetings of like-minded people, and are little more than an effort to grab the moral high ground in a debate by making the speaker sound farsighted. Factoring future generations into present decisionmaking can be difficult when alternative visions of the future conflict; those who use such arguments conveniently forget that they have been used to justify odious social policies like the Nazi eugenics program. Similarly, those who use such arguments often speak about future people in the abstract, failing to recognize that members of future generations are likely to embody a host of differences—they will be born black, white, or yellow; rich or poor; in particular locations, etc. So, it is reasonable to raise questions about whose use should be constrained in the present, and what sorts of people will obtain the benefits in the future. As noted earlier, constraints on present use probably will favor the upper middle class. When someone at a public meeting says, "We need to do X for the sake of future generations!" what you should hear is "We need to do what *I* want for the sake of future generations!" The key to understanding such arguments is that a decision that benefits (harms) a particular group in the present will benefit (harm) future individuals born into that group (More, Averill & Stevens, 2000).

Much of the dialogue about use is concerned with its problematic quality—site deterioration, crowding, reduced quality, etc. It is equally important to point out that an excellent case can be made for the need to *increase* the use of natural areas. Part of this case is biological, part is social. Biologically, the long-term health and well-being of natural areas requires an interested population with the political will to solve problems, protect endangered species, and protect and enhance the areas themselves. This depends, in turn, on maintaining a population that is deeply concerned about natural environments. Such concern is unlikely to be fostered by policies that discourage peoples' active use. Indifference, rather than excessive recreation use, is the real long-term enemy of natural environments. Today's complex, urban society offers many recreational opportunities that compete with a love of nature—television, video games, the Internet, and a host of others. To be involved, people need to be *encouraged* to participate. Policies that discourage participation among broad segments of the population ultimately promote indifference, increasing the exposure of natural environments to development and other threats and, in the long run, actually reduce public support for management agencies (Skocpol, 1991).

Socially, too, a case should be made for encouraging participation, especially in specific activities. Much outdoor recreation research shows that the activities included are profoundly social; that is, participation occurs in family or friendship groups. Put less formally, camping, picnicking, hiking, and the like are shared activities that strengthen social bonds. In the context of our current societal ills, they are activities that strengthen both individuals and families, and, therefore, should be encouraged rather than discouraged as a matter of policy. If we are serious about the conservative agenda of teaching "family values" then what could be better than a family picnic, a

day at the beach, or a visit to a park? Shouldn't we actually be subsidizing these experiences to encourage participation? In sum, many of the claims made about the overuse of natural environments strike me as being problematic. While I do not dispute that there are problems in some areas, many claims protect the interests of elite users at the potential expense of others. Clearly we need to recognize that overuse occurs at least in part because the agencies have been systematically stripped of their capacities to respond. We also need to evaluate this discourse socially to systematically identify the winners and losers it engenders.

### *Business Ideologies in Natural Resources*

The business/marketing literature that exhorts public agencies to adopt more businesslike methods is a second currently popular ideology. Undoubtedly, the ideology owes much of its popularity to the conservative cast of the times. As noted above, the rapid growth of inequality that began in the early 1970's provided fertile ground for a conservative revolution. The collapse of Communism, symbolized by the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, further validated the free market system, as did the subsequent globalization. Public agencies and programs have not been popular in this political environment; indeed, government often is seen as the problem while the private sector, guided by Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand," is presented as the solution.

In this political environment, agencies quickly adopted the new businesslike methodology, undoubtedly as an attempt to protect their interests. The "customer vocabulary" gained prominence, accompanied by the panoply of other marketing/business techniques. Outsourcing, partnerships, the idea of self-funding agencies, and even privatization all grew in popularity as declining budgets forced new ways of "doing business." But, while innovation is always generally welcome, and while I do not doubt that we can learn much from the business/marketing literature, I think our response to it needs to be more tempered than it has been to date; the business/marketing approach to public service comes with a set of costs that is seldom discussed.

The first step in putting the business/marketing ideology into perspective is to understand that it constitutes a paradigm—it is an interrelated set of concepts, propositions, and assumptions that constitutes a unique way of viewing the world. As such, it is likely to deal very well with some problems, but less well with others. Its success in the private sector suggests that it is one of the most powerful sets of tools ever devised. It offers a host of concepts—brand names, market segmentation and penetration, image, pricing strategy, etc.—to help agencies think through problems *from a particular perspective*. That perspective is, of course, that of the private sector firm for which it was originally devised and which it serves so well. Unfortunately, its fit with public goods (including merit and social goods) has always been uneasy at best. For example, Myers (2001) critiques the business/marketing language as applied to higher education, questioning the wisdom of treating students

as customers, while a new report describes the Internal Revenue Service as “broken” because, in part, of the “customer service” orientation the agency was forced to adopt during the 1990’s (Johnston 2001). The difficulty arises from our failure to distinguish key differences between public agencies and private firms. In the private sector, the firm is sovereign. Its sole responsibility is its own welfare; its sole criterion for success is its return on investment. There may be other goals, of course—satisfied customers, social responsibility—but these are necessarily subordinate to the overriding goal of enhancing the firm’s welfare. Public agencies, by contrast, are subordinate to their mission; they are created in response to a public need, and it is that need which must take precedence; the agency is simply a mechanism to resolve the need—a means to a public end. As a result, agencies have responsibilities and duties other than their own welfare; they cannot manage their resources simply for their own benefit.

Unfortunately, the business/marketing language blurs the line between public and private enabling it to serve as a language of excuses. With the lines blurred, I think it is fair to assume that recreation management professionals will draw selectively on concepts, embracing those that enhance their interests and ignoring those that do not. Thus, people who do not come because of fees can be dismissed as “not our customers” or unpopular functions become “not one of our core values.” What is missing is a strong recognition of public duty or responsibility.

In adopting the private-sector language, we accept the language of the firm as dominant. The language is important because it establishes the way we frame problems and our response to them. It also specifies roles for the particular players in the process. Thus, a “customer” is someone who buys something from someone who owns it (Dustin et al., 1987). But who owns the public lands? Is it the public, with the agencies simply managing the lands as a public trust? Or is it the agencies who respond just as private-sector firms would to changing demand patterns? These different conceptions imply different roles and potentially different courses of action.

The idea of the agency operating like a private-sector firm raises questions about the wisdom of the self-funding agencies, privatization, and social inequality. The benefits of self-funding—covering operating and maintenance costs (and other costs, if possible) through various forms of revenue generation—have been well described by LaPage (1994). It is popular with legislators who no longer have to cover the costs with tax dollars that can then be spent elsewhere, and it is popular with agencies that believe it offers a respite from the vagaries of legislative funding. And it is popular with reformers and others who seek to promote an economically efficient allocation of resources that avoids having nonusers subsidize the recreation preferences of users (cf., Rosenthal et al., 1984). But there are problems with these arguments. For example, Vermont state parks have had a legislative mandate to employ fees to cover their operations and maintenance costs since the early 1990’s, and they have modified their fee program accordingly. However, between 1995 and 2000, attendance at Vermont state parks

dropped from 866,074 to 716,204, a decline of 18.6 percent (Jacobson, 2000). Over the same period, census figures show that the Vermont population *increased* 4.46 percent while the median household income rose to unprecedented levels. So, more people have more money, but state park attendance is declining. Is this a desirable trend? What would it take to reverse it? While the decline might be attributable to the increased affluence that enabled people to make other choices, I think it is more likely attributable to the regressive effects of the fees, since research has shown clearly that those who dropped out came disproportionately from low-income households (More and Stevens, 2000). Put more strongly, I think we can now take it as proven that user fees for public recreation areas are regressive and have devastating effects on participation by low-income users (either eliminating or substantially reducing their use). The few studies that have documented this empirically (cf., Reiling et al., 1992; Schneider and Budruk, 1999; Schroeder and Louviere, 1999; More and Stevens, 2000) are made much more robust by the fact that their findings are exactly what basic economic theory predicts:

- If you raise the price of a good or service, the quantity purchased declines;
- Those who drop out of the market first are generally those with the least money;
- All taxes levied directly on consumption are regressive, impacting low-income people more severely than upper-income people.

What is actually more interesting is all the reasons we give ourselves (and our agencies) to show why these basic economic principles do not apply in our case, since managers are anxious to justify the fees and researchers are anxious to please managers. There are, of course, a large number of empirical studies, usually of the attitudinal or “willingness-to-pay” type, that support fee programs. More theoretically, some have argued that, for resource-based recreation at least, low-income people are already priced out by high travel and equipment costs (Clawson and Knetsch, 1966; Vaux, 1975). Others simply shrug and say “Everybody must make choices. If outdoor recreation means enough to them, people will forego other opportunities in order to participate” (a version of the economic efficiency argument, see below). I have even heard some researchers claim that low-income people are not our concern since they are served by other social programs!

All these arguments are false. The empirical surveys can usually be easily dismissed. Often they survey only on-site users who have already paid a fee, or they ask vague questions like “What percentage of the cost of recreation provisions should be paid by the user and what percentage by the government?” (a question I have used myself). What can a response to such a question mean? Suppose someone asked you a comparable question about healthcare? How much do *you* know about the structure of healthcare costs? How much faith should we put in your answer?

The idea that we need not be concerned about low-income people because they have already been priced out or because they are served by other

programs tends to misunderstand the nature of the problem by misunderstanding the population. The hardcore urban poor represent only 10 percent of all poor people (Skocpal, 1991); poor people are distributed throughout the country in small cities, towns and rural areas, and often have access to recreation facilities via pooled resources, borrowed equipment, etc. But the real problem is with the huge numbers of working-class Americans who are neither poor nor immobile but who are not well paid and do not benefit from other social programs. These are the people at the margin who are likely to suffer most from the regressive pricing of public facilities.

Many techniques have been proposed to mitigate the effects of pricing on low-income people (cf., Crompton and Lamb, 1986; Collins and Kennett, 1998), but the two most common in practice are probably free days and volunteer programs that provide access in return for labor. Most USDA Forest Service fee facilities now offer free days as do many state parks, museums, and the like. Unfortunately, I suspect that free days, however well intentioned, are little more than sops to the consciences of managers and researchers. Working-class lives tend to be complicated, with people often working more than one job (Rubin, 1994). Children and childcare make the situation more complex. How effective, then, can a free Tuesday possibly be? The luxury of being able to adjust your own schedule is restricted largely to the middle and upper-middle classes (Heymann, 2000), so the "free day" technique may largely benefit them. Some healthy scientific skepticism is appropriate here—I think public agencies that utilize free days ought to be required to demonstrate empirically that this is an effective method of delivering recreation services to low-income people. I very much doubt such proof would be forthcoming.

And then there is volunteerism, or "work-reaction" as it is sometimes called—a program in which low-income people and others can volunteer to earn free access to public recreation resources. For example, the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire currently offers a \$20 annual pass to the forest in return for 16 hours of voluntary labor, which values people's labor at \$1.25/hour. Similarly, when a former head of the Indianapolis Parks Department was asked how a 13-year-old girl from a poor family who lived in a trailer could participate, he described the city's "work-reaction" program which allows youths to earn free program access by volunteering to "clean windows, floors, empty trash, stuff envelopes, pull weeds, serve as coaches' aides, etc." (Urban Parks Institute, 2001). How effective are such programs likely to be in encouraging participation from low-income people?

Economic efficiency is another central tenet of the business ideology, so much so, in fact, that Crompton and Lamb (1986, p. 329) consider improving efficiency to be the "strongest single reason for advocating expansion of use pricing in the public sector." I have critiqued the use of efficiency in recreation more thoroughly elsewhere (More, 1999) but reprise it here for the sake of completeness.

Economic efficiency (not to be confused with efficiency as used in everyday language) is concerned with finding the optimal allocation of scarce

resources by balancing demand and supply through a system of pricing that provides feedback signals to both producers and consumers. In the private sector, markets distribute goods efficiently across consumers. For example, if a shirt costs \$30, you, as a consumer, will choose either to buy it or not, basing your decision upon its value to you. Your decision (along with similar decisions by a great many others) signals the producer to produce more or less, to raise or lower the price, etc., so that, in the long run, supply and demand are balanced efficiently and an optimum balance of resources is achieved. In the public sector, however, the pricing system has not operated, leading to an inefficient allocation of resources. Suppose, for example, that two families want to use a day-use state park. To the first family, a day of swimming and picnicking is worth \$25 (their willingness to pay), while to the second family it is worth only \$10. If the price is set at \$15, then the first family will participate while the second will do something else. But if the government subsidizes the experience at little or no cost, both families will participate leading to crowding, site deterioration, and other undesirable consequences (Rosenthal et al., 1984). In this way, then, efficiency theorists argue that fees can accomplish many important management goals (see Crompton and Lamb, 1986, chapter 13). For example, fees can discourage crowding or shift use to off-peak times (Manning et al., 1984). They help show the economic value of programs, thereby enhancing managers' abilities to make rational decisions about programs. They can ensure accountability, reduce undesirable behavior, and stimulate private-sector service, production, and delivery by avoiding unfair competition. Little wonder, then, that researchers were quick to advocate pricing to enhance economic efficiency.

Unfortunately, social inequality distorts the efficiency hypothesis to a point where it is virtually unusable in public policy. There are two key reasons for this. First, efficiency assumes that the value of a resource is indicated by our willingness to pay for it (as in the above example); there is no corresponding recognition of the *ability* to pay. A wealthy family with an annual income of several hundred thousand dollars is likely to view a \$20 national park entrance fee as negligible. But a working-class family earning \$30,000 is likely to view the situation differently; that is, the experience might be equally desirable to both, but the choice is much more difficult for the family with limited means. In fact, it is easy to imagine situations where marginally interested wealthy families (low-value users) get access to resources when very interested (high value) working-class users get excluded simply because of differences in their ability to pay.

This leads to the second, related objection: Using economic efficiency weights decisions toward the preferences of the affluent. Since efficiency assumes that value is indicated by willingness to pay, it ends up treating dollars as votes so that the more dollars you have, the more votes you get. This is fine for private goods traded on markets in the private sector, but it is not acceptable for the public sector.

Most economists have been reluctant to give up the notion that the value of something can be determined by a person's willingness to pay. However,

they seldom extend these ideas to a nation struggling with a huge disparity in wealth. Efficiency and equity (fairness) exist together as a tradeoff (Okun, 1975) so that an efficient allocation of resources is not necessarily a fair one. Again, that may be fine in the private sector, but most public-sector agencies, including recreation agencies, are required to consider equity (Crompton and Lamb, 1986). Efficiency is a poor guide to public recreation policy in a country deeply divided by class.

If we are unable to convince legislators of the value of public recreation so that appropriations are not forthcoming, and if even small fees have substantial impacts on low-income families, what, then, is an agency to do? There are two choices: shutting down (closure) or privatizing. Neither is likely to be palatable to management since both involve a loss of agency stature. But shutting down sends a clear message to the public that the agency lacks sufficient funds to operate a particular program/facility. I believe this is ethically preferable to a solution like user fees which simply squeezes out the most voiceless among us. Privatization is similarly ethically superior. While it is a complex topic with many options (Crompton, 1998), I prefer complete divestiture so that the user would pay the *complete* cost of the recreation. Self-funding agencies actually may be the worst possible solution from an equity perspective. Since even nominal fees squeeze out working-class users, the vast amounts of public money still poured into municipal, state, and federal recreation management agencies accrues increasingly as benefit to the upper middle class. The net result is that former working-class users who have been priced out but who do pay taxes, end up subsidizing the recreation use of the comfortably well-off—a reverse transfer of income in Crompton and Lamb's (1986) terms. Privatization avoids this evil by insuring that *all* costs (not just operation and maintenance costs) are borne by the actual user. All we need to do is to admit to ourselves that recreation is essentially a private good with little public or social merit.

In sum, interest in the business/market literature arose in the early 1980's as agencies adapted to a shifting political environment that emphasized funding reductions. Taken as a whole, the literature comprises a powerful set of tools that can offer great insight into problems. Unfortunately, however, these applications blur the line between public and private, enabling agencies to pursue their own interests at the potential expense of the public interest. Wise use of these tools will embody the restraint of recognizing the primacy of the public mission and the public good.

### *Benefits and Values*

A third ideological category concerns the closely intertwined concepts of benefits, values, and benefits-based management (now the Net Benefits Approach to Leisure, or NBAL, in its current iteration [Driver et al., 2001]). Benefits represent the good news for management, particularly when budgets require justification. As noted, agencies propose budgets while legislators must be persuaded that their proposals are worth funding. Little wonder



then that research on benefits is so popular with management. The concept of “benefits” actually may be the best example of how our interests affect our epistemology: Driver et al. (2001) note that the concept was developed expressly to convince legislators of the value of recreation and to provide documentation for funding requests.

There are problems, however, and what we can generally term “the benefits approach” has been extensively criticized (cf., Kelly, 1993; Dustin and Goodale, 1997; More and Kuentzel, 1999) and defended (Driver et al., 2001). Interested readers should examine the arguments themselves. At present, it is sufficient to ask if our interests (as researchers and managers) lead us to overstate the positive benefits associated with recreation, and if the substantive benefits involved are linked to social class at all.

Do our interests lead us to overstate the case for the benefits of recreation? Driver et al. (2001) argue that it is impossible to know since the total benefit of leisure services is unknown. However, that response seems to assume a sort of quantitative estimate; my present focus is on the concepts involved. Driver and Bruns (1999) list a total of 104 specific benefits that research has attributed to leisure, including 61 personal benefits (wellness, mood change, stimulation, etc.), 24 social benefits, 11 economic benefits, and 11 environmental benefits. They insist that the scientific basis of each is well established in the research literature. Unfortunately, I have a less certain reading of the literature: As I argued above, researchers are not disinterested, especially where research is linked so directly to budget justification; some scientific skepticism may be appropriate and healthy. For example, one category of benefit is “humility.” I do not doubt that people report feelings of humility on questionnaires (designed by researchers to make such responses easy). But why is humility a benefit? What makes having such a feeling an objective improvement in a person’s life? Since benefits are decided by managers in conjunction with key stakeholders, does that mean that managers have decided that you should feel humble when you visit a particular area? Why? What is the difference between humility and awe? Or humiliation (the process of attaining humility)?

Humility may be an easy target, but similar questions also arise for other benefit categories. In some situations, competition and its associated achievement are obvious benefits. In other cultural contexts, however, they can be seen as antithetical to the development of cooperation and altruism. And for every child who leaves the youth sports field victorious, at least one other goes home in defeat. If we are anxious to accept credit for the benefits of recreation, shouldn’t we also accept the blame for the hurt feelings, broken bones, and other negative consequences that occur so often during participation (More and Kuentzel, 1999)?

The benefits approach ducks this issue by claiming that managers do not create the benefits, they only provide opportunities for them to occur. But shouldn’t we require that to claim something as a benefit, its occurrence must be more than accidental?—that there needs to be a direct, causal link between management actions and its occurrence? For example, if I find

change on the ground in a public parking lot, there is clearly an economic benefit to me in addition to the slight exhilaration (another benefit) that I feel. However, does this mean that “opportunity to find change” can be counted as a benefit of public parking lots and enter the public debate over such areas? Clearly, the benefits claimed need to have at least something to do with the purpose of having the facility or program.

There are other problems as well: the benefits chain of causality acts as a multiplier to extend the benefits of recreation (see More and Kuentzel, 1999; and Driver et al.’s. 2001 response) and the benefits approach, while considering negative impacts, fails to consider opportunity costs—the positive benefits of *not* going to aerobics, of *not* having hiking trails, of *not* creating a public park. The point, however, should be clear: With budgets to justify, managers expect help from researchers in making the benefits of their program as large as possible. Such a perspective does not encourage critical thinking.

Benefits theorists are well aware of the conundrums that the concept contains (Driver and Bruns, 1999) and argue therefore that what constitutes a benefit is best determined by managers in consultation with key stakeholders. Unfortunately, we can expect managers to act in their own interests, choosing selectively among the benefits. And there may be a differential selection process in stakeholder selection that militates against working-class interests; working-class people are among the most voiceless of Americans and tend to be quite fatalistic (Rubin, 1994; Sennett and Cobb, 1973). The upper classes are articulate and well attuned to the processes of public involvement while the poor are represented by vigorous advocates. Consequently, there may be a tendency for managers to select benefits preferred by the middle and upper middle classes—those who have the knowledge, skill, and endurance to benefit from the planning process and who represent more politically powerful constituents. This is not a fault of the benefits approach *per se*, but it does represent a difficulty in its application.

Spiritual values provide one example of how benefits can be linked to class indirectly. Our newfound interest in these values is a manifestation of the religious revival that has been sweeping the country. Unfortunately, the causal links between natural environments and spiritual experience are dubious at best. Dwyer et al. (1991) describe a deeply spiritual experience shared by two women in a beautiful natural setting on an autumn day; by contrast, Averill (1998) describes a similar experience that occurred while a woman was cleaning her bathtub! In both cases, the women had been working through deep emotional problems (death/loss), and some stimulus triggered a spiritual response. Our desire to claim spiritual experiences as benefits of natural areas leads us to focus on the trigger rather than on the psychological processes involved. Natural beauty is a common trigger, but so are music, sex, deep sharing, and numerous other stimuli (Averill, 1998).

It is to our advantage to overlook such tenuous causal relationships when we are anxious to sanctify natural areas. The concept of the sacred, while it transcends class lines in and of itself, is a fuzzy concept, enabling it

to be deployed in various ways. I suspect its most probable use will be to buttress the case for excluding particular uses (especially motorized uses, uses involving children, or anything else that generates noise) and, therefore, certain kinds of users. It is, in effect, a policy “club” and we need to know whose ends it will be employed to justify. It is here that the class implications arise.

Finally, there is the economic concept of existence value—the value people place on simply knowing that a resource exists even if they have no intention of using it. Existence value is a profoundly conservative concept that helps rationalize the status quo by inhibiting change (see More, Averill & Stevens, 1996). By valuing what exists at present, existence value also supports the current distribution of benefits and costs. This is desirable for those who are doing well in the present but not so for those who are struggling. It currently costs \$200 to access the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon (Hanscom, 2000). Thus, the benefits of the river are reserved for the comfortably well off; everyone else gets existence value.

Despite these criticisms, I remain sympathetic to the benefits approach. I noted above my belief that family picnics, days at the beach, and other forms of recreation are fundamentally good for people and deserve to be encouraged as a matter of policy. Benefits research at least attempts to understand why this is so. Unfortunately, it also lends itself to hyperbole. The claims it generates warrant hard, critical examination; ultimately the approach will be better off for such scrutiny.

### *Sustainability*

A final popular ideology is sustainability. Today, everyone favors sustainable development, but sustainability is another fuzzy concept that is used in various ways. Often, it is used biologically—we want our developments to be sustainable and not to exceed the capacities of the ecosystems within which they exist. This can be one way to justify maintaining the status quo (including the current income distribution). Sustainability also can refer to financial systems. Consider the case of the proposed Brooklyn Bridge Park (Port Authority agrees. . . 2000). Currently, the Port Authority of New York owns 80 acres of land in the park-starved Brooklyn Heights section that both it and the community want to turn into a park. Some residents have argued for a park that is free of commercial activity and which is maintained by the city or state. But state legislators have insisted that the park be financially self-sustaining. The most likely result is that the “park” will include a mix of restaurants, offices, and a hotel or conference center. How much of this extremely scarce city green space will be consumed by development in the name of sustainability?

The ideology of financial sustainability also pervades thinking at the state and federal levels. For example, both the Vermont and New Hampshire state park systems are expected to be self-sustaining. This can lead to various marketing strategies, including merchandizing. New Hampshire parks use fees in conjunction with merchandizing, corporate underwriting, and vol-

unteers to cover both operational and nonoperational costs (LaPage, 1994). At the federal level, such concerns are exemplified by the current battle over the proposed new visitor's center at Gettysburg (Clines, 1999). The Park Service's plan for a major new facility with a restaurant and gift shop has drawn stiff opposition from locals. Despite "high minded" rationales presented by both sides, the underlying issue is money and who gets it. Sustainability, at least in its financial sense, seems inextricably tied to natural area development. Does anyone wonder what it does to the parks? To our concept of the wild? To our sense of history?

Like existence value, sustainability is a conservative concept aimed at avoiding dramatic action by preserving the status quo. It favors those who have what they want under the current system; those who are not doing well are less likely to favor sustainability.

The four ideologies discussed above illustrate how our interests affect the discourse on recreation management and its linkage to class issues. There may be other concepts as well, but the central point should be clear: We need to understand how our interest affects our epistemology and how this linkage affects the provision of public recreation services.

#### An Alternative: Functionalism

In previous sections I argued that the scientific discourse on recreation and recreation management is at least partially driven by the dominant political discourse. Declining budgets, a desire to shrink government, and a sense that agencies are inefficient so that services are best delivered by the private sector have shaped the way we think about recreation, pushing budget justification and related items like capacities, fees, and benefits to the fore. This argument seems to imply that our most central concepts are merely flotsam and jetsam borne upon ever shifting political tides. But this is not necessarily the case: while the discourse can be influenced, there are also ways to tie it down. One such approach is functionalism.

Functionalism is grounded in systems theory, so much so that it is fundamental to scientific explanation in fields as diverse as physiology, ecology, psychology, and sociology. Generally, functionalism explains phenomena in terms of the functions or purposes they serve within a larger system. Thus, the heart is explained by reference to the purpose(s) it serves within the circulatory system, while social rituals are explained by their functions within a particular social system. Recreation and recreation resources can be viewed similarly. That is, we need to identify the functions that recreation serves within broader systems. These systems could include a person's life as a whole (for psychological functions), the community, culture, or broader society (for social functions), or the biotic community (for biological functions). Put differently, recreation activities and resources are important because of what they *do*—for the person, for the society, and for the biotic community.

In a functional context, public recreation resources (parks, programs, etc.) can be viewed as organizations of natural and social resources set aside to accomplish a set of goals (functions). These goals can be biological (pro-

duction of clean air, species protection), social (the enhancement of families, economic impact), or individual (stress reduction, adventure). What is essential is that we be clear about the functions that we expect a particular resource to serve. Unfortunately, I believe we have tended to lose sight of these goals/functions, focusing instead on the minutia of the mechanics of management—a process that is facilitated by the technification embodied in many of the concepts discussed above.

Why do we have public parks, hiking trails, or teen centers? What is it that we hope to accomplish? These are the questions that must drive recreation policy; concerns about the mechanics of management—carrying capacity, reference prices, brand images and the like—while important, are necessarily secondary to the goals (functions). But in the public sector, they tend to rise to the fore when agency interests are at stake since they provide ways to protect or enhance those interests.

At first glance, the functionalist approach I advocate seems quite similar to the benefits research described above; both focus on outcomes and both are concerned with the “why” question. But functionalism requires that we be explicit about the nature of the suprasystem involved; the functions can only be discerned as consequences within that broader system so that we must be explicit about the structure and processes of the larger system. The two conceptions also differ in terms of goals. The explicit goal of benefits research is to justify budgets by persuading legislators and others of the value of recreation. The functionalist approach, by contrast, seeks to identify the purposes that recreation serves in order to set appropriate policy.

Functionalism also makes a clear distinction between public and private. In the private sector, as indicated, the sole function of importance is the firm’s return on its investment. A knowledge of benefits may clarify how a firm might act to improve its bottom line, but benefits would be only one factor among others like cost cutting, expansion, etc. that could accomplish this. In the public sector, however, functions—the job(s) to be done—have primacy; budgetary considerations are important only because they impact the ability to fulfill functions. The economic theory of public goods suggests that at least some of these functions concern social inequality. Public goods are socially desirable goods that are produced in insufficient quantities by the market because 1) it is too difficult to reasonably exclude users and 2) consumption by one person doesn’t reduce the supply available to others. Examples include national defense, education, highways, police and fire protection, and the like. Traditionally, many forms of recreation have been considered to be public goods—playgrounds, national parks, etc. The private market, for example, is able to produce a few wilderness areas for the very wealthy and some private urban playgrounds. However, when the market fails to produce a sufficient quantity of a desirable good, the price will be high and the units produced will be allocated only to those who can afford to pay. Therefore, when the good is socially desirable (e.g., playgrounds), the government enters production in order to provide the good to those who cannot

afford to pay—a traditional justification for public swimming pools, golf courses, tennis courts, etc. Note that a major contribution of benefits research (cf., Driver and Bruns, 1999) is the attempt to establish why these activities are socially desirable. Conversely, it is always possible to question if some particular form of recreation is actually a private good, so that government provision is unwarranted (cf., Fretwell, 2000). Social desirability, market failure, and social inequality are cornerstones of the public functions of recreation, a point that frequently is lost in current discussions of recreation policy.

Functionalism has been criticized from various perspectives (see review by Abrahamson, 1978). In sociology, for example, some have argued that it is overly organic and teleological. Others have felt it is inherently conservative, helping to justify existing social structures and practices. Despite these criticisms, functionalism remains an important paradigm in today's sociology partly because the idealized functionalism that critics attacked never really existed in practice, and partly because there is no reasonable alternative to functionalist explanations (Abrahamson, 1978; Jary and Jary, 1991). For the present paper, I propose to sidestep this debate by distinguishing between strong functionalism—the sort associated with full-fledged scientific explanations replete with feedback loops and the other accoutrements of systems theory—and weak functionalism which emphasizes understanding the purposes for which facilities exist in the broader context of society. For example, strong functionalism would attempt to account for the existence and persistence of parks in terms of the functions they serve in the broader society. Under weak functionalism, by contrast, we would ask only what purposes the park down the street serves within its community; what is its mission?; what goals and objectives are we trying to accomplish by providing it?

The importance of understanding function is made clear by a question Wilbur LaPage (1976) raised over twenty-five years ago: Why is the federal government in the camping business? It was a reasonable question then, and it continues to be a reasonable question. Why do we have *public* campgrounds, hiking trails, playgrounds, and recreation facilities? It is essential that we be clear about the functions we expect a particular resource to serve. I noted that the United States has experienced a rapid growth in social inequality over the past quarter century. We face these crucial questions: In this social climate, what functions do we want our *public* recreation resources to serve? What is it that we are trying to accomplish by having federal, state, and municipal parks? If we are clear about these goals, we will be able to judge how specific policies and programs enhance or detract from our progress toward our goals. And if we state our goals clearly, we also can debate their legitimacy. In the public sector, for example, I cannot believe that it is acceptable for an agency to manage a recreation resource to further its own interests. Yet in the absence of clearly stated goals, I believe this is exactly what happens. A clear sense of mission may be the single most important component of public-sector recreation management.

### Conclusion

It is time to turn a gimlet eye on the concepts used in recreation and leisure research. Is the central function of benefits research to justify budgets by showing people that what we do is worthwhile? If so, what does that imply about the scientific foundation of the concept? Does existence value exist? What evidence do we have for its existence? Are responses to hypothetical questions on questionnaires sufficient to give it ontological status? What about its logical foundation and ties to other value concepts (cf., Bergstrom and Reiling, 1996)? Is satisfaction the appropriate measure of the quality of recreation experiences? Does it have independent status or is it simply a subcomponent of the current marketing ideology? We tend to take the logical foundation of our common concepts for granted, focusing our attention on the mechanics of measurement. Yet an unsound logical foundation can undermine mountains of empirical work. Our concepts would be more robust if we raised such questions about them.

I also have argued that many of the concepts used in recreation management and research can be tied to social class. For some, like user fees and their supporting concepts from marketing and business, the link is direct. So, too, is the empirical evidence of this link (cf. Reiling, Cheng & Trott, 1992; Schneider & Budruk 1999; More & Stevens 2000). For other concepts (overuse, existence value), the link is less direct and empirical evidence is lacking. For example, I have assumed that whenever concepts justify excluding people, it will almost invariably be working-class people who are excluded. I believe this assumption is warranted but it would be desirable to have empirical confirmation through further research.

More importantly, we must recognize the political context within which our concepts exist. Inevitably, scientific concepts are used for value ends. For example, those who would like to see people kept out of the woods (cf. Sessions, 1995) are likely to point selectively to concepts that buttress their arguments. So we are told that "the parks are being loved to death" but we are not told that this claim must be viewed in relation to the budget. Or if this is acknowledged, remedies such as replanting or restoration are condemned as "unnatural."

Recognizing the political context of our scientific ideas raises an important caveat: each concept I have discerned has an intrinsic validity that is unquestionable, and I do not doubt the integrity or good intentions of those who propound them. There is much that we can learn from the business/marketing literature; benefits research directly tackles the difficult question of finding the good in public goods; and the overuse, crowding, and sustainability of public lands must be of concern in a nation whose population is expected to double by 2050. Yet, when I stand back and realize that these same concepts are used to justify policies that systematically advance management interests at the expense of low-income people, that protect subsidies accruing to elite users, or that require poor children to pull weeds, clean windows, or empty trash to participate in *public* programs in *public*

parks, then I have to wonder what role our concepts played in bringing us to this point. It is the political context that makes the concepts discussed here become not so much the frauds and deceits I implied in the title but half-truths like those that Iago whispers to Othello.

Part of the cure for our myopia is to recognize that the dialogue in recreation management is shaped by the interests of four key groups: the public(s), legislation, management agencies, and researchers. Its nature is influenced not only by considerations of science but also by considerations of power and prestige. This is the point that Marx saw so well. A claim like "The parks are being loved to death!" can be evaluated properly only by understanding the motives/interests of the claimant. Many of our most central research concepts operate similarly. To properly evaluate the claims made by managers and researchers, we need to look beyond their surface validity to understand the broad context within which the concepts are embedded. At present, we are witnessing a massive and historic transfer of public recreation resources from the lower middle and middle classes toward the upper middle class. What we, as researchers, are being asked to provide is the intellectual justification for this transfer. Only if we have a clear vision of what public recreation resources are *for*, can we have a clear understanding of how alternative policies affect our ability to attain these goals. Such a vision is essential to ensure an equitable distribution of public resources.

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