

The Rest of the Story

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A polemic is defined as “a controversial argument against a prevailing doctrine” (Webster, 1989). By definition, it is unbalanced since it sets out to be deliberately controversial and to selectively use information to bolster its particular position. I find it ironic that More accuses an extensive cohort of researchers of bias, and responds by offering a determinedly one-sided perspective to attack them. He fails to acknowledge the merits of the perspectives offered by the conventional mainstream literature which he attacks. Essentially, he is hoisted by his own petard. My intent in this commentary is to review “the rest of the story.”

The terms “fraud” and “deceit” in the polemic’s title have no place in a leading scientific journal. Indeed, More’s use of them in this paper is both fraudulent and deceitful because he states, “I do not doubt the integrity or good intentions of those who propound [the concepts he attacks]”. The paper does not accuse individuals of engaging in deliberately false or misleading actions. Rather, the discussion revolves around what More perceives to be inadvertent outcomes that arise when people of integrity misapply concepts, inaccurately implement them, or implement them legitimately in inappropriate contexts. Nowhere in the manuscript does More allege “fraud” or “deceit.” This type of pseudo-sensationalistic “headline” designed to grab the reader’s attention while misrepresenting the article’s contents belongs in the tabloid press, not in a scientific journal.

More’s misrepresentation in the title of the content of the paper is indicative of what follows. The polemic is replete with generalizations and noticeably devoid of criticism of specific contributions. To criticize in the abstract, without citing examples of specific failings in the empirical literature which constitutes the basis of the mainstream scientific literature serves only to arouse suspicion about the legitimacy of the generalizations being made.

I concur that there are occasions when “researchers provide ‘products’ that please agencies”. The goal of such research is to legitimize a position rather than being predicated on a search for truth. As one commentator observed, “The fees for such studies are like religious tithes paid to a priest to come and bless some endeavor” (Curtis, 1993, p. 7). However, there is a defense mechanism built into the system. The idea that the research community is a pliant, coherent entity of “hired prize fighters”, uniformly committed to “providing ‘products’ that please agencies” is absurd. The re-

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sponse to such pseudo-science is likely to be an outcry from that large segment of the research community which is offended by what they perceive to be unethical work.

An example of this with which I have had substantial personal involvement as a critic is the "economic impact" research which has been undertaken by "big name" consultancy firms, commissioned by supporters of major league sports franchises to justify the massive public subsidy of facilities for these wealthy owners. [In 2003 dollars, the capital cost of facilities used by the 125 teams in the four major leagues was almost \$24 billion of which the public sector contributed \$16 billion]. The mischievous, deliberately misleading "research" promulgated by these studies to justify public investment has been subjected to sustained, aggressive attack by a highly visible segment of the academic research community, so the legitimacy of these consultants' research reports is now widely discredited even in the popular press. If mischievous "research" of this nature was prevalent in the parks and recreation literature as More alleges, then precedent suggests a counter body of "real" research would emerge empirically discrediting the findings. More is unable to cite such a literature in his paper which I find to be confirmatory evidence indicating "The Emperor has no clothes."

More's tirade in his opening paragraph alleging the recent emergence of elitism is puzzling. The most significant trend in the past five years in recreation management reflected in budget appropriations, conference session attendances, and the profusion of articles in the field's popular and scientific literature has been the burgeoning interest in "at-risk youth" which has gradually metamorphosed into "youth development." Increases in funding for these programs have been substantial. For example, at the federal level the Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers legislation offers substantial grant allocations for after-school programs. Its funding has increased from \$40 million in 1998 to \$900 million in 2001, and this is only one of multiple federal programs available to enhance youth development. These programs are decidedly not elitist. The major beneficiaries are More's "low income people in general and the working class in particular".

More contends that "the discourse on recreation is driven largely by concerns over money (the budget), and power (prestige)". I concur with the dominant role of the budget, but believe that if there is any merit in More's perception of the role of power, then it must reside in his own context of working in a federal agency. Certainly, I see no evidence of concerns over personal power driving the debate at local and state levels of government whose expenditures account for over 90% of the public investment in parks and recreation. The disinterested, self-serving bureaucrats to whom More alludes are the caricatures that I read about in texts and occasionally in newspaper articles. Those whom I know are dedicated, committed, public servants who believe passionately in what they do, exert extraordinary efforts to translate their passion into effective program outcomes, and don't give any thought to gains in personal power.

The Overuse of Natural Environments

More offers a critique of four ideologies that he believes are contemporary ideologies whose implementation militates against low-income, working-class people. His first, "the overuse of natural environments, with its attendant emphasis on mechanisms to restrict use" is something of a red herring. He espouses an extreme rather than mainstream position, which is advocated by a vociferous but small constituency arguing for greater limitations on use. Having created this straw man, he then proceeds to burn it.

Although this seems to me to be a non-issue, More's preference for any limiting of visitors that needs to be done to avoid degradation of the resource or experience is first-come, first-served. This is puzzling since it surely creates most hardship for the working-class whom he purports to champion. If they have less "time flexibility enjoyed by the more affluent" and fewer financial resources, then surely it is they who can least afford to absorb the loss of time and money involved when they show-up and are refused admission because the facility is at capacity.

Business Ideologies in Natural Resources

More chastises public agencies for adopting the marketing framework that has proven useful in the private sector, observing "Unfortunately, its fit with public goods (including merit and social goods) has always been uneasy at best". The problem here is not with any inherent weakness in the marketing framework, rather it is with its misapplication. Indeed, More recognizes this in his concluding summation sentence in this section of the paper, "Wise use of these tools will embody the restraint of recognizing the primary of the public mission and the public good".

Long ago, I observed: "Herein lies a fundamental distinction between marketing in the public and private sectors. Public agencies are required to allocate resources and distribute services equitably, whereas private sector organizations direct resources only at the most responsive market segments" (Crompton & Lamb, 1986, p. 40); and "The performance of a government or social service agency is measured against three criteria: equity, effectiveness, and efficiency . . . and there is an emerging recognition that public services should be evaluated first on the grounds of equity. That is, is every individual being treated fairly?" (Crompton & Lamb, 1986, p. 168).

Equity is the critical component which has to be added to the classic private sector marketing framework when it is adopted in the public sector because equity decisions dictate the choice of target markets from which all other marketing mix decisions flow. When public sector marketing is applied appropriately, it fits well with the notion of public goods. In the 1980s, I was invited by William Penn Mott who was the National Park Service Director to present a session on "Marketing" at a Convocation of the National Park Service in the Tetons which brought approximately 700 of the agency's superintendents, regional office personnel, and head office staffs together.

There was one caveat which Bill Mott insisted upon, "You will not mention the word *marketing* once during the course of the presentation, because if you do the NPS people will tune you out." So I went through all my visual materials, and removed the word, "marketing." In its place, I substituted the phrase "Enhancing Visitor Satisfaction." Nothing else in the presentation was changed. In short, the marketing framework if it is thoughtfully adapted, works fine in the context of public parks. It is the word "marketing"; the connotations of revenue production and exploitation which accompany it; and its thoughtless application that are the problem. When Bev Driver introduced the term "Benefits Based Management" in the late 1980s, it was apparent to me that it was essentially a synonym for public sector marketing, but it had the major virtue of not having the negative baggage associated with the word marketing.

Marketing has nothing to do with making money—unless that is the organization's objective. The marketing framework and set of techniques/activities is a problem solving framework which can be used to guide an agency to achieve whatever service delivery objectives the agency specifies. In the public sector often these will have nothing to do with revenue.

More's key concern seems to be a failure for agencies to recognize they "have responsibilities and duties other than their own welfare; they cannot manage their resources simply for their own benefit". I concur that the private sector model of marketing is conceptually undergirded by the notion of voluntary exchange which is premised on self-interest, and that its mindless application to a public sector context may lead to the outcome More describes. However, in recent papers we have explicitly rejected this model as being inappropriate for the public sector, and replaced it with a marketing model undergirded by the notions of redistribution and reciprocity exchange rather than voluntary exchange (Novatorov & Crompton, 2001a, b). These models formally specify the preeminence of equity, public need, and public service in delivering public sector park and recreation services.

If an agency chooses to operate "like a private-sector firm" that is a managerial decision made by individuals who have made a decision to ignore the broader objectives of a public agency, it is not *ipso facto* a consequence of adopting a marketing framework. It is not the framework that is inappropriate, it is the objectives.

I concur with More's observation that fee increases are likely to have a disproportionate adverse impact on participation by low income people. However, there are other dimensions of this issue which More does not address. First, he discounts the notion that there are a multitude of other factors other than price which inhibit participation by low income individuals (Howard & Crompton, 1984; Watson & Herath, 1999). Thus, if the goal is to increase participation among low income people, then reducing or abolishing fees is likely at best to have only marginal impact on that target group.

A second dimension of pricing that More disregards is its role in facilitating appropriate income redistribution. At the local and state levels, the primary sources of funds for subsidizing park and recreation services are

sales and property taxes. Both are regressive. That is, they tend to bear much more heavily on low-income groups than on higher-income groups because they generally represent a larger proportion of a poor person's total income than of a wealthier person's income (Crompton & Lamb, 1986). Since most users of public park and recreation services are middle and higher income groups, the use of regressive taxes to fund these services means there is a perverse income redistribution i.e., a situation where the wealthier elements in society are subsidized by those at the lower end of the income scale. In short, the key question is, if (say) 5% of low income people use a subsidized park and recreation service, and they represent only 10% of all users, why should the other 95% of low income people be required to subsidize the 90% of users who are wealthier than they are? By charging a price, low income groups are able to avoid paying for those services they do not want or use, rather than being forced to pay for them through the tax system.

Further, public resources are finite, not infinite, so there is an opportunity cost associated with all revenues that are foregone. Thus, failure to price effectively so as to minimize consumer surplus is likely to penalize poor people, because it reduces the public funds available to offer other services that may be desired by a larger number in the low income cohort. A policy of heavily subsidizing those who are willing and able to pay is not in the best interest of the economically disadvantaged.

Pricing is a balance between the benefit principle and the ability to pay principle. More wants to abolish the former and gear the latter to the small proportion of low income users who cannot afford to pay which would create a large consumer surplus. The negative consequence of this strategy is substantial, since the relatively wealthy would be subsidized by regressive taxes. This makes no sense to me. Pricing is not incompatible with social justice. Indeed, if used appropriately, it can facilitate it. Certainly, it contributes more to social equity than allowing everyone in free.

More contends that closure of facilities "is ethically preferable to a solution like user fees which simply squeezes out the most voiceless among us". This section of his paper dealing with what he perceives to be limitations of the economic efficiency role of pricing essentially reiterates what he has argued previously in this journal (More & Stevens, 2000). However, among the empirical findings of that earlier article, More and Stevens reported, "When asked if they would favor a policy that keeps fees at present levels but reduce services" (p. 348) there was no statistically significant difference between mid-and upper-income respondents and low-income respondents. Elsewhere in that paper the authors reported, "A majority of our sample, including low-income people, preferred fees to service reductions" (p. 353). This finding has frequently been confirmed in the empirical literature on pricing in this field (see Kim & Crompton, 2001, for a review of this literature). More elects to ignore the preferences of low income people expressed in his data, in favor of his own view of what constitutes the most appropriate ethical solution. This position surely leaves him open to the charge of hypocrisy (perhaps even fraud and deceit!), given his sweeping condemnation of the re-

search community for perpetrating concepts that “are based in elitist conceptions of the good or desirable.”

Benefits and Values

My perspective on benefits ties back to the notion of public and private goods. I sympathize with More’s criticism of justifying public investments in parks on the basis of personal (private) benefits since, by definition, taxpayer investment in parks classifies them as merit or public goods, not private goods. The substantial public investment (I am wary of the term “subsidy” because it implies a negative benefit-cost ratio which frequently is inaccurate (Crompton 1999, 2000, 2002)), can only be justified by public benefits that accrue to “all” citizens. In a democracy, this is probably operationalized as over 50%, perhaps modified somewhat to accommodate equity concerns. This directs that the focus should be on the public economic, social, and environmental benefits that accrue, not on private benefits. In most cases, these are context specific. Parks can be designed, managed, and programmed to facilitate the particular public benefits which communities deem to be important in their context.

After a decade of working on empirically measuring these public benefits, I believe that two conclusions are clear. First, the particular benefits sought from parks have to be specified at the outset and subsequent design, management and programming efforts have to be focused on those ends. That is, most desired benefits do not automatically emerge merely because a park system exists. Rather, parks have to be consciously designed, managed and programmed to achieve the desired ends. This appears to be consistent with More’s notion of functionalism: “What is essential is that we be clear about the functions that we expect a particular resource to serve”.

Second, given this prerequisite, it is likely that every local and state park system has the *potential* to deliver some public benefits. Their magnitude will differ. In some cases, the benefits will be sufficient to cover all costs, while in other cases revenues accruing from user prices reflecting the incremental personal (private) benefits that do not accrue to non-users will be needed to strengthen the benefit-cost ratio.

At the federal, and to a lesser extent, state level, as More points out, the notion of existence value (I prefer the term “psychic income”) is a key element to the justification of taxpayer investment. However, the magnitude of this is not a philosophical issue as More implies, rather it is an empirical issue which can be addressed either by surveys/polls (votes) or by contingent valuation (willingness to pay taxes) approaches—both of which are workable strategies. To selectively use Grand Canyon National Park to demonstrate the inequity of psychic income is inappropriate. Grand Canyon is part of a system of national park units which recognizes that an array of different opportunities are needed to accommodate the different types of experiences which people seek. Indeed, the most heavily used NPS facilities are the Gateway West and Gateway East Recreation Areas which probably service the disadvantaged groups of concern to More quite well.

In my view, the benefits movement is a major step forward. It provides park advocates with an opportunity to empirically demonstrate to elected officials and taxpayers that the public benefits that accrue exceed the tax funds invested in them, and/or that they can contribute to alleviating the problems/issues in the community which are of primary concern to elected officials and taxpayers. If advocates fail to do this, then they should not expect support for parks at budget time.

I concur with More's view that the claim of benefits research "warrants hard, critical examination". In the last five to ten years an impressive volume of research has emerged which does just this, and it appears to be expanding exponentially.

Sustainability

In an ideal world, I would concur with More's protest at the emphasis on financial sustainability when this is divorced from the central public-private goods conceptual framework. That framework offers the only conceptual basis with which I am familiar for determining the appropriate balance between tax investment and revenue enhancement. Unfortunately, the political reality is that parks are positioned low on the priority list of budgeteers for tax investment, and "economic sustainability" ensures they remain functioning. The key question is, "if non-tax income is removed would it be replaced by tax investment?" If the answer is "no," and I believe that More would probably concur that in many cases the answer would be "no," then the consequence would be park closing or lowering of service standards.

This is particularly the case in New York City which More selects as the context to illustrate his argument against financial sustainability. In this city, the budget declines have been dramatic. More contends that using commercial rents to sustain the proposed Brooklyn Bridge Park is inappropriate because it means surrendering some of the potential park acreage to commercial use. When viewed in a vacuum, all park advocates probably would agree. However, when the alternatives are either this option or no park at all, a large majority are likely to conclude that the park's partial commercial use option is preferable. This is the only realistic option available in New York City.

Consider the context. Since 1970, there has been a 66% reduction in park and recreation staff in New York City, from more than 6,000 full-time employees to less than 2,000. In 1986 parks and recreation's share of the City's budget was .82%, in 2001 it was .4%. In 1963, the New York City department employed 1,900 gardeners and assistant gardeners, and today there are 27. In this context, it makes sense to me that park advocates would seek a funding source to sustain the upkeep of a new park, because without it the probable outcome is not an attractive park but rather the creation of more depressing, derelict, unkempt urban open space.

Many appreciate the outstanding recreational opportunities available at Mission Bay Park in San Diego. Essentially, this land was reclaimed from the ocean. The key to its viability as an attractive functioning park area was the

original funding plan which laid down that 22% of the land area would be leased to commercial entities, and the lessee generated revenues would be used to cover the operating and maintenance costs of the park. Without this sustainable dedicated funding source, this park would not be the outstanding popular park it is today. So why would More deny the people of Brooklyn this kind of opportunity? Unless the benefits approach is able to reposition parks from being relatively discretionary to being a central core service in the minds of elected officials and taxpayers, these types of compromises are likely to be a preferred outcome for a large majority of park advocates and citizens.

More's Alternative: Functionalism

More notes, "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." I concur. Indeed, I can identify no meaningful distinction! The two distinctions he identifies reflect a misunderstanding of the benefits approach. I assume the broader suprasystem to which he refers is the main issues/concerns of the political jurisdiction of interest. I have argued that establishing a "position that reflects responsiveness to a community's central concerns is key to an agency's developing and nurturing a broader constituency" (Crompton, 1999, p. 3). This is achieved by engaging in strategies of real, psychological and competitive repositioning. The most important of these is real repositioning, "which means that an agency changes what it does so that desired community priority needs are met through its offerings" (Crompton 1999, p. 5). Surely, this is being responsive to the broader system and, as such, is consistent with More's notion of functionalism.

More's second distinguishing feature differentiating functionalism from the benefits approach is similarly ethereal. He states, "The explicit goal of benefits research is to justify budgets by persuading legislators and others of the value of recreation" (p. 4). In the contemporary vernacular, the implication is that benefits research is all about "spinning." This is the same tired, misinterpreted, shibboleth that has bedeviled those of us who believe in the potential of marketing to advance this field. It is the classic selling approach against which we have railed for over two decades that seeks to foist on people goods or services that parks and recreation agencies can most easily deliver, irrespective of their potential for satisfying the real needs of targeted groups. In contrast, marketing "holds that the social and economic justification for an organization's existence is the satisfaction of customer wants" (Crompton & Lamb, 1986, p. 3). In this context, the "customers" are elected officials, taxpayers and visitors. From my perspective, this is identical to More's functionalist approach which "seeks to identify the purposes that recreation serves in order to set appropriate policy". In short, the only differences between the benefits/marketing approach and functionalism appear

to be semantic. More doesn't take us on a voyage of discovery, he merely changes the nomenclature of the established route.

Concluding Comments

More is both a passionate advocate of parks and a champion of the underprivileged, but in each of the four concepts he discusses, More's arguments undermine rather than bolster his advocacy positions. His first-come, first-served solution to rationing crowded parks is regressive and likely to adversely impact low income groups most, while his advocacy for abolishing financial sustainability would merely lead to fewer parks for all. His polemic against business ideologies and benefits and values is myopic and selective. It disregards key facets of those concepts and by so doing distorts the integrity of the concepts.

More notes in his opening paragraph, "The central 'fact' of recreation research is the agency budget, an annual 'event' requiring constant justification." His advocacy of functionalism doesn't change that reality. The budget still has to be justified by "identify(ing) the purposes that recreation serves". Presumably once those purposes have been identified, then it is still necessary to "justify budgets by persuading legislators and others of the value of recreation," which in More's eyes is the problem with existing benefits research. The difference between functionalism and benefits research seems to me to be merely semantic, and both nomenclatures appear to be equally dependent on an ability to persuade legislators of their legitimacy. At the end of the day, More's functional rationale for research still leads to it being "undertaken to provide... justification".

More's advocacy of functionalism appears to merely reflect the emerging notion of repositioning the field by using a benefits approach. Parks have multiple potential roles. The challenge in a particular context is to determine the role(s) which they can most usefully perform, and to manage them to achieve those desired ends. Identifying society's needs comes first, then parks advocates and managers seek to align with them. Most of More's criticisms come down to the availability of dollars. His "loose functionalism" assumes there will be tax funds available to implement it. There aren't, and there never will be "enough." This means that to expand offerings or even to sustain them, other funds than tax dollars are needed. Thomas More's functionalism assumes the context of his knighted namesake's *Utopia*. Unfortunately, the rest of us operate in a non-Utopian context with all its vicissitudes.

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