

Immigrants Utilizing Parks in Columbus Ohio

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science in
the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning

2020

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Abstract

Research indicates that immigrant populations in the United States require recreation and outdoor park programs. A dearth of resources for physical activity among immigrants exists in urban communities (Wielnad, 2000). Additionally, research shows that recreation and leisure are crucial components of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Parks and recreation improve the quality of life and self-esteem in many. In 2000, the American Recreation Coalition reported that 90% of people who utilize the parks and recreation spaces are satisfied with their health improvement (Metroparks, 2019).

Harvard University researchers stated that fifteen minutes of physical activity a day can result in boosting the life span by three years (Khazaei et al. (2016)).

Eighty-five percent of Americans believe that walking can have a positive impact on reducing anxiety and feelings of depression and two-thirds stated that walking helps to stimulate their thinking (Crafts & Perna, 2014)

According to the American Planning Association and the National Recreation and Park Association, parks play an important role in shaping successful cities by attracting consumers, businesses, and increasing the number of people visiting, which enhances the economy of the designated areas (CompleteCommunitiesDe.Org).

Public open spaces are key to building and guarding the environment within neighborhoods (Wieland, et al., 2015).

Besides that, open spaces in neighborhoods can encourage physical activity, which is important for residents (Tanja, 2019). Moreover, a study conducted in 2011 on parks in Seattle, Washington indicates that residents save \$64 million in medical spending because of physical activity that took place in the park (Kirk, 2017).

This paper examines the manner in which the design of public recreational parks in Columbus, Ohio may deter the utilization of parks by immigrants who seek a space to socialize and experience a sense of belonging and who also deserve equal access to resources that can improve their health outcomes.

The research consists of a literature review and an analysis of research interviews with the objective of understanding park utilization by immigrant communities. In my preliminary analysis, I focus on seven points: the benefits of public parks for urban residents; the state of immigrants in American cities; the growing need of urban immigrants for recreational space in cities (as well as benefits provided by and barriers to the same); racial differences in leisure behavior as delineated in the marginality-ethnicity framework; the state of public parks in the city of Columbus, Ohio; and the state of immigrants in Columbus, Ohio.

I subsequently collected and analyzed data at five public parks in Columbus known for being utilized by immigrant populations and present the findings in this paper. I conclude by examining the limitations of park systems in meeting the needs of immigrant residents for recreational public parks in Columbus, Ohio, and providing recommendations.

Dedication

Dedicated to the Students at The Ohio State University

Acknowledgments

The path toward this thesis was circuitous. The COVID-19 pandemic changed many traditional thesis norms. This has been a unique experience and never would have been accomplished without my thesis advisor and committee members.

Foremost, I sincerely express my deep gratitude to Dr. Jason Reece for accepting me during this time of uncertainty. Although COVID-19 continues to influence the lives of students and academics, Dr. Reece's patience, encouragement, and immense knowledge guided me without fail. Dr. Reece gave me the freedom to research a subject of great importance to me and enhanced my results by supplementing my academic pursuit with practical knowledge as a professional City and Regional Planner.

I extend my deepest thanks to Dr. Kim Burton as my committee member for all her support during my thesis work. Her kind participation in this thesis and generosity with her time and experience set me up for accomplishment. Finally, I thank The Ohio State University for the privilege of being a student at this fine institution.

VITA

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Field of Study

Major Field: City and Regional Planning

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I. Benefits of Public Parks for Urban Residents

Studies show that the demand for recreation and leisure has become a crucial component of a balanced and healthy lifestyle (Croff, 2019). Recreation provides the health benefits of reduced risk of disease, diminished obesity, an enhanced immune system, and increased life expectancy (Sasidharan, 2004). Additionally, according to the World Health Organization, green space positively influences mental health and interaction with nature reduces anxiety and stress (Urban green spaces and health. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016.).

A University of Washington study concludes that visual and physical access to green space restores human minds and focus. Green space also improves mental and physical health as well as job and school performance (University of Washington, 2018).

Urban areas with green spaces encourage the well-being of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods (Kelcey, 2019). According to *The Atlantic*, public parks increase community cohesion as well as property values. Public parks can stimulate economic growth and enhance social connectivity and provide a sense of identity to individuals within a community (Campbell, 2016). Parks attract visitors and businesses, hold festivals, and can increase property values (conservationtools.org).

Open public spaces are key to building community and improving quality of life in neighborhoods (Craft & Perna, 2004). As the U.S. population continues to grow, the need for public recreational space increases. An evaluation of the largest 85 cities in the U.S. (with an aggregate population of 57.2 million) found that health savings from parks were valued at \$3.08 billion (R-Marselle & Korn, 2019).

Research shows that visiting a park for thirty minutes per day can reduce the

prevalence of illness, including depression and high blood pressure, by up to 7%-9%, respectively (Crew, 2016). Community members also report experiencing joy when they utilize public spaces rather than watching television (Oldenburg, 2014). When public meeting places, where community members can effortlessly and regularly gather for pleasurable interaction, are available real life is readily substituted for watching television (Khazaei et al., 2016).

Public parks and spaces can also be considered “third places.” The term “third place” is used to denote a place where leisure and socialization are offered, as distinguished from first place “home” and second place “work.” According to Oldenburg, the third place refers to areas that allow people to socially interact (Ray,1989).

A third place is also one where people may freely raise concerns and enjoy the company and conversation that surrounds them. Most third places attract people who are willing to volunteer and host regular informal social gatherings beyond the realm of work and home (Wolch et al., 2020). Parks, cafes, post offices, pubs, Main Street, beer gardens and other third places enhance social vitality (Ray,1989).

By providing the foundation for the full functionality of democracy, the third place promotes public equity. It encourages positive interaction among residents and offers community support to the individual. The third place promotes public balance as a result of increased public interaction. The nature of the third place is shaped by a playful mood and a regular clientele which is different from other fields (Wexer et al.,1992). It offers the benefits of a home, which is valued for the support and psychological comfort that it offers (Gill, 2006). Third places act as a centerpiece of the community. Public parks are third places, as they offer offers socializing, walkability, inviting designs and recreational

activities. Gene McGarry, Project Director at Hill International, states: “Parks reflect the people who live, work, and play in the surrounding neighborhood. They inspire a sense of community and are central to a city’s quality of life. This epitomizes the third place” (Kirk, 2017).

Not only are parks beneficial to humans, but humans are beneficial to parks as well. Community engagement is paramount for national park agencies due to the critical role that community support plays in “successful long-term protection” of these sites as well as the future of national park agencies as relevant institutions (Mannigel, 2008). Park agencies continue to work to achieve the goal of diversity and engage communities’ values (Eagle, 2014). However, studies indicate that immigrants face constraints in recreational design that eliminate full utilization of public parks (Kloek & Buijs, 2015).

II. The State of Immigrants in American Cities

The foreign-born population in the U.S. has dramatically changed from 795,000 in 1970 to 42.4 million in 2014. A desire for religious freedom, flight from persecution and family ties are important factors spurring migration (Massey et al., 2014). Over the last twenty years, the U.S. has experienced population growth in urban areas due to the increased flow of immigrants.

Immigration currently accounts for 13% of the population in the U.S., with the highest number of immigrants living in areas surrounding cities (Madsen et al., 2014). John Feinblatt, Chairman of New American Economy, states that immigrants strengthen the economy by paying taxes, owning businesses (which create jobs), and working for industries. However, immigrants experience inequitable distribution of resources (André

& Koji, 2014).

Lack of access to socioeconomic resources may lead a population to become withdrawn (Fernandez et al., 2018). In 2018, the World Bank members stated that integration of immigrants into American society has always been a challenge as immigrants find it difficult to adapt to American culture and society. Successful integration of immigrants into American society depends on where they settle, and this can be difficult in communities that discriminate against immigrants (Ohio State News, 2019). A study from The Ohio State University by Professor Jeffery Cohen, Douglas Crews, and student Alexander Tuggle found that many immigrants experienced discrimination resulting in physical and mental health issues including high blood pressure and high blood sugar.

Relatedly, several recreation and park systems were constructed before 1980 and over 40% were built prior to 1960 (Rubenstein, 2009), therefore also established prior to the influx of immigration. In 1995, Jamal and Getz introduced the collaborative community planning based process to achieve the goal of creating a destination for sustainable communities (Jamal et al., 1995).

The participation of immigrants in recreation activities at parks is lower, which can create a negative impact on immigrant communities (Aizlewood et al., 2006). When it comes to stakeholder participation in parks, that of immigrants is limited (Lew et al., 2007). As mentioned above, community participation and support are important to protected areas and national parks. That said, tourism and conservation issues should be addressed in the planning and management of these sites, requiring high levels of community participation (Jamal & Stronza, 2009)

III. Urban Immigrants and Public Parks in American Cities

According to the Journal of Ethnic Minority Groups and the Design of Public Open Space, “an inclusive landscape” is one where the desire for connection to land is strong even among people struggling to meet basic needs. While, Outdoor Recreation introductory Programs (ORIPs) encourage and motivate immigrants to participate in outdoor events, immigrants still face challenges and difficulties assimilating in American public spaces, including parks. Some of these challenges including language barriers, income limitations and cultural differences, which create barriers to the use of public parks on the part of immigrants (Peters, 2011).

Additionally, Richard Florida, an urban studies theorist and economist, argues that metro areas do not fully prioritize green spaces. His work shows the lack offset for public spaces, especially green spaces, and demonstrates that low-income areas tend to suffer more compared to high-income areas (Richard, 2017).

Similarly, the proximity of an urban location to a green space contributes to the inequality we see with accessing these spaces. Richard Florida conducted a study on 10 large city Metroparks, sharing that Metroparks officials report future outcomes for parks using state-of-the-art special analytics techniques. These techniques and tools separate variables and control other factors to analyze green space at the census level by using images of urban vegetation and geographic information system (GIS). While the imagery looks great, it doesn't reflect the accuracy of the physical site. This particular reporting process misses important information regarding income, race, education, age, and density from the census (Florida, 2019).

Additionally, Migrants experience limited access to recreational facilities and public amenities (André & Koji, 2014). The cost of visiting public recreational parks is a significant obstacle for immigrants with low socioeconomic status (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015). Preliminary research reports that lack of transportation is another outstanding impediment to participation among immigrants in outdoor recreation (Floyd, 2001).

Additionally, common barriers to immigrants' access to public parks include family obligations as well as lack of time and energy, given that many work long hours (Stanis et al., 2009). Moreover, accessibility plays a major role in understanding the challenges minority groups experience when attempting to access local parks (Kwan & Weber, 2003).

In recent years, studies in cities like Denver and Minneapolis have identified inequalities in access to parks among immigrant and minority groups. For example, immigrants and minorities tend to live in areas that lack parks compared to the spaces and amenities available to affluent residents (HealthyPlacesByDesign.org).

Explore leisure and community constraints experienced by immigrant women in Canada. The study concludes that language difficulties, as well as a lack of daycare availability and community support, constrain immigrants from leisure participation in parks (Ruble & Shaw, 1991).

An additional study conducted in a small urban community in Minnesota concludes that immigrants from Somalia, Cambodia and Mexico share similar challenges to access to public places due to lack of familiarity and community support, leading to limited exercise and physical activity among these populations (Mohamed, 2015).

A recent survey commissioned by the park service in the U.S was conducted to observe the participation of different populations in the parks system. The study concluded that there are 307.2 million visitors to public parks: 81% were white while 9% of the park visitors and users were Latino, 7% were African American, and 3% were Asian American. This data points to the lack of diversity in accessing national parks (irma.nps.gov).

In summary, minorities make up approximately 20% of the visitors to national parks. The national parks commissioners acknowledge that challenges exist among diversity groups and national parks (Rott, 2016).

Parks are a mirror for values that Americans treasure (Dilsaver, 2009). However, immigrants are often times having trouble gaining access to these spaces for a variety of reasons. To address this, public parks need to be enhanced and new goals must be defined to include minorities in order for parks to survive and adequately serve future generations (Tweed, 2010).

IV. Marginality Ethnicity Framework

The marginality hypothesis dictates that low participation in outdoor activities amongst ethnic minorities is in large part due to limitation of access to socio-economic resources. This phenomenon (of limited access) occurs mainly because of historical injustice and discrimination. The marginality hypothesis involves indicators that may be used to study the influence of systemic marginalization in the United States (Robert, 1979).

In this study, access to recreational facilities, such as parks, pools and memorial centers, are analyzed. Several dominant factors amongst marginalized groups, many

pointing to the lack of access to recreational facilities, stand out in this study. These factors include limited employment opportunities, low levels of education, and systematic discrimination.

Minority groups in America often times have limited access to employment opportunities. The racial discrimination that exists in American society plays a large role in this phenomenon. This lack of opportunity leads to a lack of resources such as transportation and excess funds that are necessary for accessing recreational destinations and activities.

Systematic unfamiliarity with available resources amongst marginalized communities in the American society is another significant reason for the differences in leisure participation. Often times, minority groups lack knowledge of the existence of such activities and the importance of participating in recreational areas.

Discrimination on the part of officials at recreational facilities is another major influence on minority groups. Many minority groups opt to stay away from recreational centers to avoid the profiling or substandard treatment that they may receive from the centers. Some African Americans indicate that many of the recreational facilities are a reminder of the discrimination suffered during slavery and the fight for equality (Robert, 1979).

Ethnicity is the shared identity between people that includes language, customs, or religion. Differences in ethnicity plays a major role in the participation (or lack thereof) of people in outdoor recreational activities. The United States encompasses a vastly diverse society. Many immigrants from places such as Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean end up in America in search of employment or academic opportunities. The differences

in cultures and in ethnicities amongst the American population certainly has a significant influence on access to and use of many activities, including outdoor activities for leisure.

Subcultures or ethnic minorities share varied cultural value systems, norms, and other socialization patterns that acutely influence recreation behavioral patterns (Floyd, 2019). Values that attract people of white descent in American societies to parks and other outdoor recreational centers are not necessarily the same values of all minorities and immigrants. The ethnicity theory supports two significant ways that cultural factors can be used to identify how a group of immigrants engages in different outdoor activities. For instance, Native Americans prefer relaxing in the wilderness to escape urban life, whereas immigrants view the wilderness as a form of oppression and a symbol of subjugation (Khazaei et al., 2013).

The study indicates that while the white majority considers parks to be a place of leisure and escape from the daily bustle of urban life, many African Americans steer clear from parks because of the reminder of the segregation, as well as subjugation meted out to their forefathers. For example, many African American adults avoid visiting parks because of the way they have been raised by their parents who experienced discrimination under Jim Crow laws.

“Park attendance in America is culturally embedded, meaning children who are raised going to parks will grow up to take their children. Many African Americans do not go to parks because their parents and grandparents could not take their children” (Hurst-Missouri, 2016). Additionally, the omission of African American history is quite common at public parks and recreation areas. This disparity in leisure activities across the ethnic divide is a major factor in who participates in outdoor recreational centers.

Ethnic disparities are restricted as per the selections of leisure events (Floyd, 2019).

Researchers based their argument on the disparate experiences of Black Americans, who are sometimes immigrants and often experience inequality in resource distribution (Smith, 2019). Thus, educational background and occupation are limiting factors determining how immigrants utilize recreational amenities. Fear of exposure is another deterrent to participation in public spaces. Immigrants who have fled their countries to evade conviction often fear participation in activities that may expose them (Borkar & Kurhade, 2019).

Immigrants are used as a broad subject in the planning field. However, Immigrants are rarely factored into community engagement or planning processes in communities (Anahita et al., 2013).

This trend of limited immigrant engagement in parks takes place in Columbus, Ohio as well, which is not surprising given that many immigrants in this city are less likely to own a car compared to the dominant groups. For many, the lack of transportation (and inadequate public transportation) presents numerous barriers to participating in leisure or recreational activities.

More significantly, the cultural habit and themes of the national and local parks tend to disregard ethnic minorities in the community. Many immigrants in the city lack parks systems in their countries of origin, and the subsequent exclusion of their culture in the parks serves as a major problem that bars their participation. Also, the fear, racism, prejudice, and lack of representation due to perceptions of suburban residents deter them (Nur, 2016). Prejudice, racism, and discrimination of immigrants in urban and rural areas make it difficult for them to take part in recreational activities.

Parks that incorporate elements from immigrants' home countries can have a powerful effect (Rishbeth, 2001). Community engagement is paramount for national park agencies due to the critical role that community support plays in "successful long-term protection" of these sites as well as the future of national park agencies as relevant institutions (Mannigel, 2008). That said, designing more inclusive planning processes that account for "emerging social and environmental issues" has been identified as one of the main solutions that should be incorporated.

Immigrant culture is frequently depicted as a homogeneous entity, and immigrants are thought to enjoy green space in a culturally specific way that is incompatible with the way "natives" enjoy green space. That said, planning systems must be increasingly developed to be more inclusive to attract people to use the green space (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

Although there is a trend of establishing green space and nature parks where there are large immigrant populations, engagement remains low. Such populations remain an important but less-engaged stakeholder as a group. The focus of both scholars and practitioners' efforts have been on the engagement of immigrants and minority groups as visitors instead of partners in planning and decision-making activities. Participatory engagement could be especially beneficial (Cohen & Chavez, 2013) contend that migration is usually considered to be one of the most important factors that lead to diversity in human progress and dynamism.

Human progress is linked to migration as the latter allows for variation of resources and innovations which in turn contribute to trade and ultimately, to the economy. Additionally, immigrants are often perceived as go-betweens of social and

cultural change. Hence, progression of complex global culture is enabled coupled with broadening of the mental prospect of the original residents (Cohen & Chavez, 2013).

V. Columbus, Ohio: Public Parks

Columbus is one of the largest cities in the United States. Since 1851, it has a long history of developing parks and recreational resources on a city and regional scale (Terrien, 2017). Columbus now maintains a total of 370 public parks (Terrien, 2017). The City of Columbus Recreation and Parks department promotes connectivity among neighborhoods through parks that are essential to the well-being of its residents. It has implemented sports, gardening, fitness and other programming for residents (Terrien, 2017).

In 2014, a master plan was implemented to improve Columbus public parks and recreation centers, with the goal being to “enrich the lives of citizens.” The public open spaces are intended to improve the quality of life in cities (Terrien, 2017).

Park Systems and Management in Central Ohio

Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks is a public agency that provides services to local residents of Central Ohio, including, safe, clean, and natural areas and activities for engagement. Metroparks serve 19 natural parks with 230 miles of trails and 27,700 acres of land located in seven different counties in Central Ohio.

The map below indicates the locations of metro parks in central Ohio.

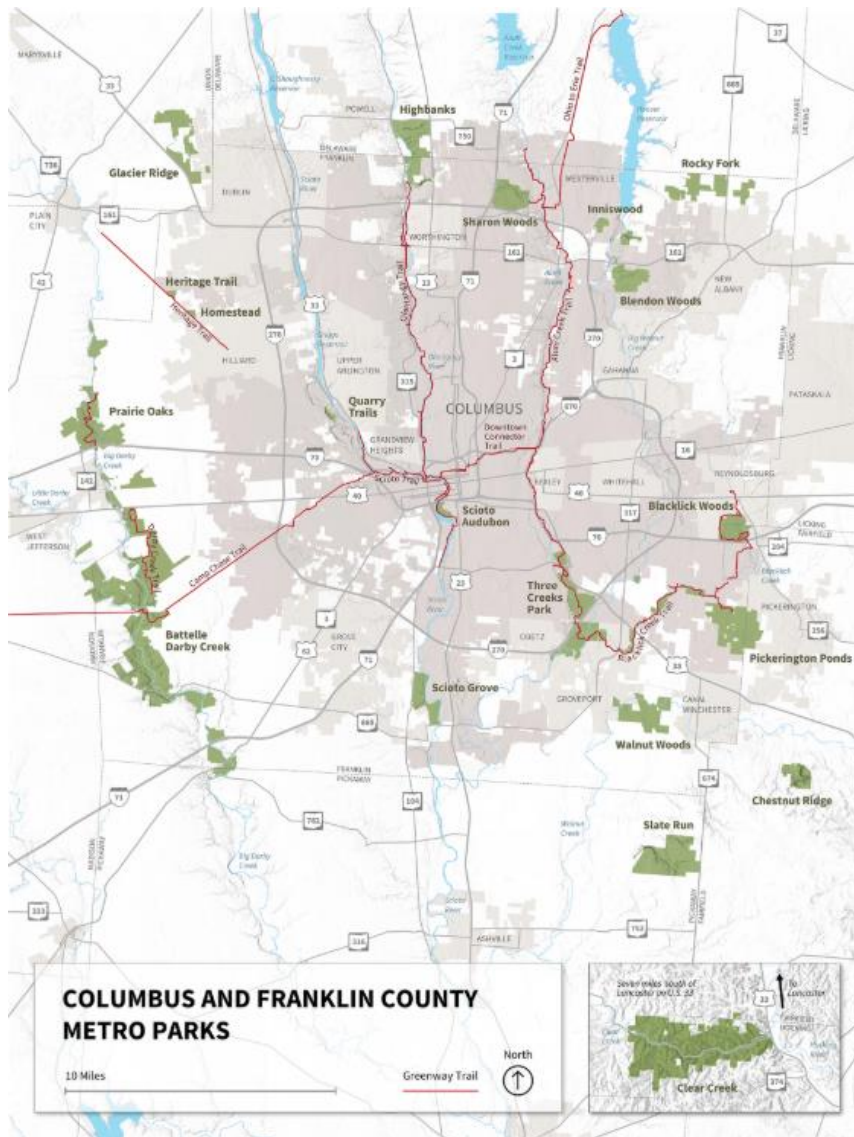


Figure 1: Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks

Source: Metroparks, (2019)

According to an interview with City of Columbus staff, Columbus continues to utilize an old version of an agreement between the Recreation and Parks department and the Metroparks. Although, the City of Columbus has created a new agreement, the old agreement continues to be used as a reference.

For instance, because Columbus Recreation and Parks has no rangers, and instead relies on Columbus Police, there was a huge void in coverage for the trails. Rangers riding bicycles are a welcome presence for trail users. The referenced agreement allows Metroparks to use rangers to patrol Columbus bikeways and help with safety and enforcement of the trails throughout the city. Because of this agreement, people tend to misunderstand the difference between the City of Columbus Recreation and Parks department and the Columbus and Franklin County Metroparks.

That said, Columbus Recreations and Parks and the Metroparks have similar missions: to protect the waterways and the environment and to ensure that visitations are safe. The Metroparks have few parks in Central Franklin County which is part of the county tax base. The presence of rangers is positive as promotes safety for its visitors.

Speaking to differences between the two agencies, the Metroparks maintain about 80% of parkland in its natural condition, while Columbus Recreation and Parks focuses on recreation. The city of Columbus Recreation and Parks department has 29 recreation centers and several buildings for public use. Conversely, the Metroparks have few buildings in their parks and few nature centers with picnic shelters. The city of Columbus Recreation and Parks department also has an outdoor education center that includes science and programming.

In 2015, the Columbus Parks Commissioner initiated a plan to enhance the financial strategy of the Metroparks. The plan was to enhance new ideas and opportunities that would assist the park staff and the communities around Columbus, Ohio (Metropark, 2019). In addition, the city of Columbus Parks and Recreation programs focus on providing services that improve citizens' physical health, mental

health, and environment, while also having a positive impact on the city of Columbus.

VI. Columbus, Ohio: State of Immigrants

Columbus, Ohio is home to more than 155,000 people from Bhutan, Somalia, the Republic of Congo, India and Mexico (Terrien, 2017). Former Ohio Governor John Kasich created an office that offers opportunities to immigrants based on three important goals: education and training, jobs, and growing businesses.

The Migration Policy Institute, which studies the impact of immigrants on communities in the state of Ohio, concluded that immigrants demonstrate educational and economic initiative by enrolling in colleges and finding employment that matches their level of educations and skills. This points to the notion that the immigrant population of Columbus positively impacts the economy (New American Economy, 2015).

In 2012, census data reported that 27,075 minorities are business owners (Terrien, 2017). Approximately 458 immigrants' own businesses and employ nearly 60,000 residents (New American Economy, 2015). The Office for New American Opportunity reports that many Asian and Hispanic immigrants enter the healthcare, agriculture and technology workforce. Former Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman asserted that immigrants bring cultural diversity, new ways of thinking, vibrancy and economic benefit to the city (New American Economy, 2015).

The map below indicates that there was an increase in the immigrant population from 1970 to 2009. The number of foreign-born immigrants has changed dramatically in neighborhoods, with immigrants growing from less than 3% in Columbus neighborhoods during 1970, to 13.1% or greater by the year 2009.

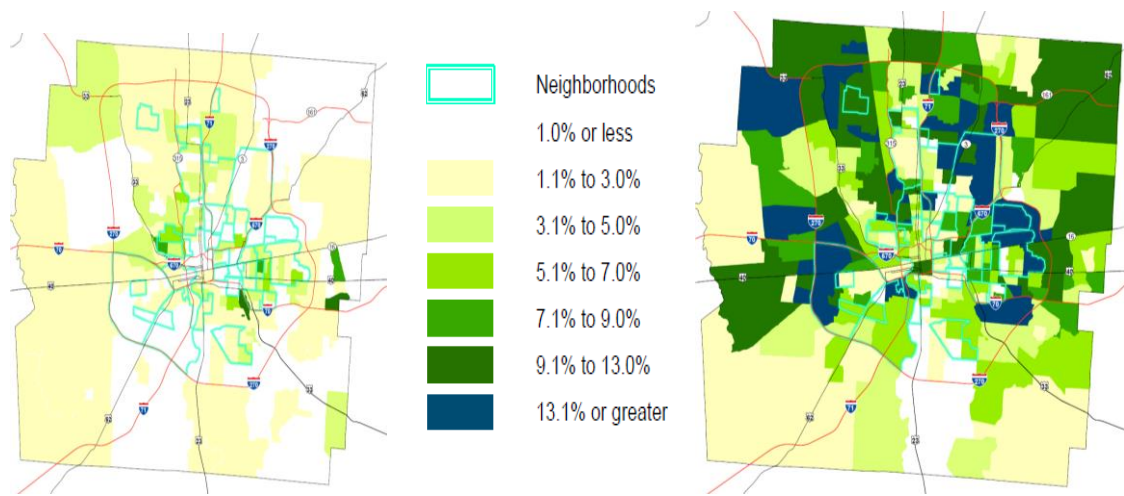


Figure 2: 1970 vs 2009 immigrant population in Columbus

Resource: Kirwan Institute, 2016

The city of Columbus Ohio is home to thousands of immigrants today, and those immigrants live in various neighborhoods around Columbus (American Immigration Council, 2020).

The map bellow indicates that the majority of immigrants in the City of Columbus originate from Mexico, India, Eastern Africa, China, Taiwan, and Korea.

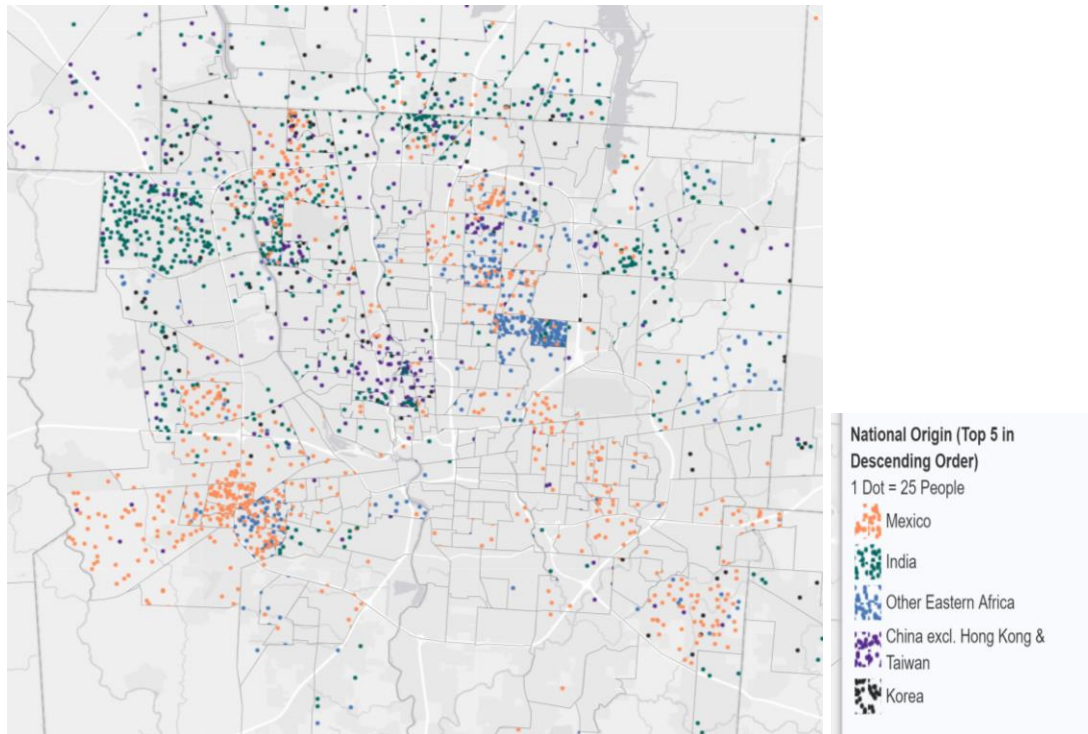


Figure3: *Where our foreign born residents living?*

Resource: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

According to Datausa, immigrants in Columbus, Ohio are mostly from Central South Central Asia (21,938), Central America (19,438), Eastern Africa (15,990), and Eastern Asia (15,305) Ohio State University Professor Douglas Crew stated, "These migrants are creating their own mental constructs so they can be happy and survive in what can be a difficult, stressful environment" (Ohio State University, 2019). Many immigrants in Columbus face discrimination that results in an increase of physical health issues including obesity and mental problems including stress.

Immigrants are often marginalized since they form a minority in communities. Discrimination is often projected towards them in all aspects of life including housing, schooling, business, health, and public security. Immigrants are perceived as

“outsiders” and discriminated against because of their religious traditions, status and skin color (Jones-Correa, 2012). Due to migrants being subjected to the above-mentioned, their mental state is often in a disarray. Likewise, migrants are often prone to be obese due to lack of adequate access to healthcare.

Even though the city of Columbus has a rich history of park development, the literature review indicates that gaps do exist, including language, culture, income and safety that limit access of immigrants to public parks. Approximately 75% of the visitors of regional parks and trails in Columbus consist of dominant white groups (Jones-Correa, 2012). Most immigrants do not fully utilize public urban recreational spaces. In some neighborhoods, public parks are perceived as a place of crime (Jim, 2009).

Neighborhood parks in both urban areas and low-income areas are often perceived as highly disputed areas since they are communally owned. For that reason, as communal resources, such parks have little basic supervision, security, or protection. Therefore, public parks are often vulnerable to being taken over for objectionable happenings.

One limitation of this study is that it does not explore the community perspective of non-English speakers. This is a crucial component to understanding the needs in their communities and should be studied further in the future. However, time constraints currently limit the study to English-speaking participants who are willing to volunteer information. The findings of this study were limited to immigrants’ communities around the city of Columbus, Ohio and parks near neighborhoods where immigrants live. Future studies should explore a more inclusive community perspective in Columbus, as well as and other cities or regions in the United States.

VIII. Case Study

Research Question

This case study is focused on immigrant participation in the city of Columbus public parks. This paper highlights the challenges immigrant populations face when it comes to visiting parks in Columbus. The research is important as it can support the need City of Columbus officials and planners to re-examine parks as a third place that should incorporate immigrants.

This study assessed the factors that impede the utilization of public parks among immigrants in Columbus, Ohio based on qualitative methods (observation and phone interviews). The research was conducted in five public parks near immigrant neighborhoods and close to areas they frequent. This study found that the design of park elements does not integrate immigrant cultural values. The research presents findings from a qualitative exploration of immigrant utilization of public parks in Columbus. The research sought to explore how parks were being utilized as a space to socialize and if immigrants felt a sense of belonging. Finally, this research sought to answer the following question: How do the design elements of parks and socioeconomic factors deter the utilization of public recreation parks among the immigrants in the city of Columbus, Ohio?

Literature Review

Based on the literature review, scholars have discussed the importance of open spaces, third places and recreational spaces. In addition, scholars have stated that immigrants' backgrounds, including language, gender, and income, create hurdles to accessing recreational facilities.

Methodology

This study utilized qualitative data collected through a literature review and phone interviews. The literature recommends that there is a limitation when using interviews, as they are based on individual perspectives and actions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Although people have fixed attitudes, they will respond to various situations based on their point of view (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

For this study, I collected data at five community parks including: Northbourne, Chase land, Sharon Woods Parks, Northern Wood, and Westgate. I deliberately targeted those parks as they are near neighborhoods known for diversity. A cluster of immigrants from Somalia are located in the northeast side of Columbus, Hispanics /Latinos are located on the west side of Columbus, and immigrants from Nepal/Bhutan are located in the north east and east sides of Columbus (Terrien, 2017).

Research Design

This study uses qualitative research interviews and a literature review. The qualitative approach provides the benefit of reliability of collected data and allows for comparisons with confidence amongst diverse survey periods (Gill et al., 2008).

Consequently, the literature review for this project is based on the data available on the lack of integration and diversity in outdoor recreation parks. The literature review outlines common issues among immigrant populations, including lack exercise, gender issues, physical and mental health problems, and the correlation between these issues and a lack of utilizing parks. Academic journals mentioned outdoor recreation trends among immigrants and underrepresented communities in the United States. Other journals are significant to this study as they discussed issues involving park design and

locations that lead to segregation between immigrations and other community members.

Phone interviews were conducted with local agencies including Somali Community of Association of Ohio, Bhutanese community of central Ohio, and Ohio Hispanic Coalition. Due to COVID-19, phone interviews were limited and voluntary.

In this study, the research sought to explore the views, opinions, beliefs, and experiences of immigrants on the use of recreational parks through other case studies and correlate that to immigrants in the City of Columbus.

Measurement/Instrumentation

This study relied on qualitative data that primarily uses stakeholder interview responses as a unit for analysis and means of comprehension. Qualitative research provides the development of concepts that are important in understanding a social phenomenon in a natural setting, offering due emphasis to the experiences, meanings, and views of the subjects (Pope & Mays, 1995).

Synthesis of Interview Data

The researcher used a descriptive analysis method based on the obtained content to classify verbal information for categorization and summarization. Public data from the US Census and Social Explorer were used to understand the demographics near park spaces. I sought to draw out patterns from insights and concepts associated with the obtained data.

The following questions were used as a guide:

- What is current condition of the designated parks including the number of activities?

- How many people do you see utilizing the parks?
- Do you see other immigrants utilizing the parks?
- What amenities provided are important in the parks?
- How strong is your sense of belonging when utilizing the park?

Unlike European Immigrants, migrants from Somalia came to the U.S due to a Civil War. Bringing their culture and religion with them, many believe this presents a challenge for Somali citizens to be able to assimilate with others (Stephanie, 2017).

Several minority groups face challenges when accessing parks, and it is a critical issue as many park managements teams lack understanding of immigrants' cultures and social connectivity. Many Somalians like to practice their native language with their children even though they can speak English but they fear harassment speaking their language in public. Therefore, Somali families are more likely to spend time at home or in enclosed space (like the mall) due to fear of crime or harassment (mopedia.org).

There are many Hispanic/Latinos in the community who don't utilize the parks as often because they were designed to serve traditional American sports like tennis, basketball, and baseball. An initiative to create a soccer field for immigrants from the Hispanic/Latino Communities arose; however, the community continues to have challenges accessing neighborhood parks.

The community members don't feel like there is any sense of ethnicity in their neighborhood parks (Hispanic Latino Collation member. Personal, Communication, 2020). Hispanics often live in neighborhoods where facilities are sparse, while also experiencing a fear of immigration enforcement. This results in limited engagement with public and social spaces. This is also one of the reasons that lack Hispanics/Latinos

tend to have low participation in physical activity (Larsen et al., 2014).

According to Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio, several Bhutanese/Nepal residents in Columbus Ohio face fears and mental health issues due to the history and trauma they experienced as they fled from oppressed governments in their countries. Therefore, the Bhutanese community of Central Ohio hosted a program that helped more than 5000 people yearly with training and integration with the new life and society (Bonnis & Wiggins, 2019).

Many immigrants feel safe in an enclosed space where they can have access to things like food and playgrounds. In comparison, they often feel vulnerable and the ideal solution is to avoid taking the risk. For instance, they prefer visiting the parks during the day and being with similar groups.

Similarly, immigrants utilize the parks during special times and holidays. As the people in the City of Columbus continue to grow and the number of immigrants increases, it is crucial to understand varying cultures and backgrounds in order to successfully to monitor and design parks that serve all.

Finally, the city is aware of changes in demographics yet there is a lack of creating strong bonds among immigrants and parks. This could be because immigrants' values, cultures, and views of parks, as well as a sense of belonging, varies from one group to another. Also, re-creating and investing in parks that have been present for a long period of time is expensive.

IX. Conclusion

By examining the limitations of park planning in Columbus, Ohio to meet the justified needs of immigrants, I continue to assert that Immigrants in Columbus are

becoming an important part of developing the city. Their impact on the neighborhoods should shape park design. Understanding immigrant use of third places is critical. This research is important as it provides an essential understanding when it comes to planning parks and the significance of integrating immigrants in the planning process.

Park planners should be involved in the process of assimilating immigrant communities in parks. To that end, there is a need to provide an advocacy policy that allows planners to design parks that consider the social and economic situations of immigrants and incorporate cultural signs that make minority groups feel included.

Comprehending the culture is necessary when fashioning park designs. Planners must understand the need to incorporate immigrant participation in the planning process. The natural resource managers and general management of the parks in the City of Columbus should incorporate immigrant perspectives and experiences into their programs and planning.

There is a clear need for aligning recreational programs in Columbus with the needs and concerns of its diverse communities, including immigrants and local ethnic minorities. Increasing awareness, addressing safety concerns, and improving the parks for immigrants by incorporating ethnic elements is of paramount importance.

Research Limitations

Additional research limitations include the outbreak of COVID-19, which led to the suspension of educational activities. The pandemic has led to policy measures by the government that require people to stay at home and maintain social distance.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to visit the parks and conduct an observational study and in-person interviews.

The in-person approach would have provided an in-depth perspective of the use of recreational parks in the City of Columbus. More importantly, the spread of the disease meant that it was challenging to attain a high sample group for the study.

Given that the research design adopted a qualitative approach, it lacks statistical representation. Instead, it provides a perspective-based approach. Even though analysis of the data allows for comparisons made, the statistical representation would have provided a deeper and stronger confidence level of the findings.

Recommendations

Diverse languages, interpretation and translation are essential to neighborhoods and interaction with the parks. According to John Muir who penned the following in his Yosemite notebook: "I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens and get as near the heart of the world as I can." (John,1896). Essentially, although there is a strong connectivity between people and nature there also needs to be inclusive language and signage as well. Incorporating and interpreting inclusive language can result in building stronger bonds between immigrants and nature.

Inclusive language and translation provide a sense of place to immigrants. For example, a member from the Somali community stated that immigrants from Somalia lack a sense of belonging, which prevents them from accessing parks. The Columbus park system need to incorporate signs in various languages that also encourage residents to incorporate their ideas and utilize the parks. For instance, a Hispanic Collation member stated that, "Immigrants need to be advocated for and encouraged to utilize the parks as its impact their health and mental status."

However, currently the park operating team is unable to communicate with immigrants in a manner that is inclusive and encourages immigrants to be part of the public parks. A City of Columbus Parks and Recreation member stated that “the park employees lack an understanding of immigrants’ cultures and values; therefore, engaging immigrants in the park system is challenging and connectivity issues become escalated”.

Advocacy for immigrants on behalf of park leaders and managers is essential to creating a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. For instance, parks can be a place for crime; however, in addition to providing security patrol, encouraging a sense of belonging could motivate immigrants to protect their neighborhood parks and ultimately could help reduce crime. Ethnic festivals are another opportunity, as they can attract other neighborhoods and community members and build a sense of community, cohesion and belonging. These programs and activities also honor that group and enhance the confidence level among immigrants and others.

Finally, providing inclusive amenities and activities in parks can increase attendance on behalf of immigrants, with the potential for an increased assistance to keep the parks well-maintained. For example, building soccer fields and other ethnically inclusive structures, in addition to the existing amenities and planting areas, will create a sense of belonging.

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