

Race, ethnicity and outdoor studies

Trends, challenges and forward momentum

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The commitment of outdoor recreation professionals to embrace social justice efforts including race and ethnicity has grown with the worldwide dynamic shifts in society. Similarly, research efforts have increased exponentially. As parks and outdoor spaces become depositories for multicultural enjoyment, park managers are faced with new challenges in blending environmental and social justice factors via new perspectives and forward thinking.

The multifaceted subject of outdoor recreation, parks and leisure studies has enabled exploration for more than fifty years across race relations and cultural diversity (see Gramann, 1996; Henderson, 1998; Rodriguez & Roberts, 2002; Sasidarhan, 2002; Chavez, Winter & Absher, 2008). Such studies are meant to be of benefit across international borders. We have come a long way yet continued progress requires innovation and development of new theoretical frameworks. A variety of sample studies based in different countries are thus included in this chapter to ensure balance of global perspectives and sample methodological approaches. Furthermore, the need to break down barriers to recreational enjoyment in parks and other natural spaces persists. In this chapter, I offer a taste of the following: exploring the landscape; sample theories, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches; why geography matters; and an overview of barriers and constraints. I close with a few recommendations for future research.

Exploring the landscape and experiencing natural surroundings

From rugged individualism and the conquering-the-mountain days of Roderick Nash and his seminal work on *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Nash, 1967) to the first ever *Black and Brown Faces in Americas Wild Places* (Edmonson, 2006), the United States has contributed to the advancement of popular literature as well as scholarly research agendas (see Chavez *et al.*, 2008); each mode has become an integral part of the other. Various annotated works and edited compilations have aided in our empirical understanding of attitudes and experiences (e.g. Gramann, 1996; Roberts & Rodriguez, 2002; Chavez *et al.*, 2008; Stodolska, Shinew, Floyd & Walker, 2013) with acknowledgement of how the popular literature has supported our scholarship. Crossing continents, Gentin (2011) also provides a review of outdoor recreation and ethnicity in Europe.

Focusing on the British minority experience, Rishbeth (2001) argues that, in previous studies, what transpired is that 'landscapes have a symbolic dimension, and aspects of landscapes can be recognized as familiar or alien, welcoming or excluding' (p. 351). She maintains that white British people experience nature differently from other minority ethnic groups, and consequently, 'to treat people equally, it is important to respond to their diversity' (p. 351). Rishbeth suggests that landscape architects and managers take this into consideration while implementing inclusive design of outdoor spaces. Every community has disparate needs based on community characteristics, the physical environment and context. Rishbeth's research into British studies concluded that the outdoor/green space experience can be enjoyed by everyone because a landscape is 'an honest reflection of contemporary society that embodies a dynamic and multi-faceted culture' (p. 364).

It is my conviction that outdoor spaces can be even more effective when programmes are designed with diversity and respect for cross-cultural differences in mind. In modern society, we see variety in many sectors of life, including cuisine, art, music and fashion. Letting this openness to an inclusive cultural identity permeate into outdoor recreation and individual/collective experience of landscapes, I believe, would ultimately contribute to a richer human experience. Understanding how ethnic minorities explore the landscape, and how park and protected area managers engage all people to ensure positive experiences when immersed in the natural environment, continues to be strewn with both challenges and opportunities.

Sample theories, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches

Many years ago, Gramann (1996) indicated that research on parks and leisure, and the outdoor recreation behaviour and mindset of various ethnic groups, had been sparsely carried out since the 1960s. Several practical issues related to policy and programme development, planning, and daily open space operations have been brought to light over the years. Gramann's suggestion was that further studies should use surveys and focus groups, and include education of managers and planners to shed light on the problems, and ultimately 'increase visitation and political support from traditionally underrepresented populations' (p. 58). Since then, other scholars have indeed built upon this research, many of whom profess more qualitative work is necessary (see Sasidharan, 2002; Chavez *et al.*, 2008; Stodolska *et al.*, 2013).

Byrne and Wolch (2009) focused their approach on geographic perspectives on park use, with a keen eye on political, cultural and environmental justice landscapes. Park spaces are shaped and undeniably function from both from the behaviours of visitors and various 'historical, socio-ecological, and political-economic processes' (p. 1) that lead to different uses of parks; often these are determined by geography, which reflects a certain class, age, gender and race/ethnicity of people. Citing many seminal papers and studies, Byrne and Wolch (2009) acknowledge the ethno-racial differences that mark visitation and use patterns in all parks, no matter their type or location. Therefore, in an ideal world, the processes recommended by outdoor recreation researchers and practitioners (e.g. park managers) must reflect the dynamics – and diversity – of park use. Yet, in reality, such considerations of how racial diversity elements factor into park visitation have a decided influence on use or non-use of park spaces are rarely made in both research and practice.

In her review of minority park use across Europe, Gentin (2011) indicates topics such as outdoor recreation patterns, access to green space and non-Western immigrants' perception of nature saturate the literature. Yet, Gentin notes the results are 'difficult to compare', because different methods have been used including differing categories to discern ethnic affiliation.

Among the implications for future research, not only do European scholars need to become more sensitive towards ethnic affiliation, it seems to me that anyone exploring this topic needs to understand that the within-group heterogeneity of ethnic minorities must be taken into consideration.

Stodolska *et al.* (2013) discuss how most leisure literature on ethnicity in the 1990s focused on cultural and structural assimilation. These are well-known constructs in the world of sociology and have been explored for decades in outdoor recreation. This assimilation framework, broadly, is relevant today not only in the United States and Canada, but also in European countries, where the heavy influx of Hispanic/Latino populations is evident, and where African and Asian immigrants crossing borders continues to take place. Hence, each situation has to be – ideally – evaluated on a case-by-case basis and according to geography.

One important conceptual framework in the analysis of race relations growing in the recreation field is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Roberts (2009), for instance, addresses CRT in relation to ethnic diversity and outdoor recreation in response to white privilege through combating racism. Hence, the importance of exploring these patterns, especially in regards to nature-based leisure and green space use, should be everyone's prerogative, not just that of a privileged few. More work is encouraged to explore this valuable theory.

Geography matters

The global literature on race and green space offers a broader perspective of the context of culture and belonging. Due to global shifts in the geographic and socio-economic landscapes, characterised by increased mobility, integration and an increasingly complex 'melting pot', multicultural perspectives today are necessary to include in outdoor recreation research and to challenge dominant perspectives.

Public open spaces, landscapes, sense of place: a global perspective

Askins (2009) explored individuals from African, Caribbean and Asian descent regarding use of, and perceptions related to, the English countryside. Over time, the word 'rural' in the UK was construed as meaning a nature place outside the city. Askins also stressed the emotional connection of individuals with nature, offering insight into perceptions of green spaces across racial backgrounds. Consequently, Askins suggested a 'transrural' concept of rurality based on mobility and desire to break down 'dominant notions of rural England as only an exclusionary white space, and reposition it as a site within multicultural, multiethnic, transnational and mobile social imaginaries' (p. 366).

Challenging Anglo constructions of rurality beyond existing norms, it has been asserted throughout the literature how rurality as a concept in itself, including 'nature place', is more often perceived as 'a space of whiteness'. In England, as one of several examples, the very thought of the British countryside is associated with whiteness (CABE, 2010). By dubbing rural spaces as portals for racism and racist thinking, while conversely classifying the urban environment as open and welcoming of all races, one avoids owning the responsibility for racial narratives, which continue to be perpetuated over time. Thus, a sense of segregation persists as these perceptions of urban and rural imaginaries remain in place – when, in reality, there should be no ownership of public green spaces by any one dominant culture over another.

Yet what defines sense of place, and by whom, matters. Newell (1997) studied populations from Senegal, Ireland and the United States to find out their favourite place and reasons for such

preference. Places allowing for social interaction and recreational activities, such as sports and entertainment, were favoured by the Senegalese, but far more similarities than differences were identified among other cultures and nationalities. Therefore, here we find common ground on which to build, while remaining sensitive to cultural differences and recreational desires. Study results show park and woodland users wish to work together with park managers to create an environment that all – regardless of background, age, physical ability or race – could enjoy unhindered. Also evident is that open space management involves central considerations for issues of safety, community enhancement and involvement, social interaction, inclusion and cooperation.

An interesting point posed by Byrne and Wolch (2009) references how parks have been, throughout history, places for ‘social control’, namely for ‘disciplining working class and racialized bodies, and redirecting ethno-racial and class tensions’ (p. 755). There is general acknowledgement that parks represent ‘urban spaces with considerable potential to offset the social and environmental problems facing cities in the new millennium’ (p. 755). Scholars have analysed and discussed park visitor perceptions, and what such individuals and groups expect to receive from their park experiences. Consequently, it is not only nature that shapes an individual or society; it is society itself – and the individuals within it – that shape the natural space.

Hence, geography matters as much as ecology, cultural ideology and political landscape, so it is my belief that what lies at the intersection generates particular experiences for visitors. It is imperative, therefore, that such experiences remain positive. Subsequently, nature–society relations, and a view of any cultural landscape, offer a unique perspective on environmental justice and the political dynamics that support or hinder it. There is no doubt that urban parks, for instance, have faced problems not only with respect to considerations such as public health, ecosystem damage or visitor discrimination, but also issues from a geographical perspective; that is, while some parts of a city provide green spaces, these are often lacking in other areas, which reflects an uneven distribution of green spaces in urban environments, broadly. These insights are important to note both from a theoretical and practical perspective, and thus merit further study.

The next logical step would be to move from consideration of public access to parks, to attitudes of discrimination and racial inequality that still surface based on use. Depending on the geography and/or political and cultural environment, not everyone has or feels they have the same quality of access to open green spaces as members of another race or culture. In essence, ‘the cultural landscape perspective shows us how landscapes can become racialized, shifting the scale of environmental injustice from the home, the factory or the neighborhood to entire landscapes’ (Byrne & Wolch, 2009, p. 756).

Challenges and seeking balance

Balancing biodiversity and the human dimension

International commitment to protecting biological diversity has drawn together different agencies, nature experts and professionals, which include, among others, leaders of Indigenous peoples, rural union leaders and advocates for the poor. I cannot emphasise enough that to preserve an outdoor space, appropriate for recreation opportunities, without hearing the voices of different stakeholders is neglectful. Protected natural areas around the world have life to give; no wonder the land can support a community’s needs only when its managers are knowledgeable about those needs. As beautifully stated by Sexton *et al.* (2013), ‘The more we know about our audiences, the more knowledge we have to contextualize the management issue . . . reaching

beyond traditional networks of stakeholders is vital to effectively representing diverse public opinion' (p. 146).

Furthermore, according to Naughton-Treves, Holland and Brandon (2005), 'By global mandate, in addition to conserving biological diversity, protected areas are to provide economic benefits at multiple scales, alleviate poverty, protect threatened cultures, and promote peace' (p. 244). There is, however, a constant challenge to reach these goals despite population growth, political instability and mounting demands on the resources being protected. One positive outlook is that professionals and scholars are working diligently in outdoor recreation and parks, studying both the local people and ecosystems, and seeking effective governance for protected areas. Similarly, I believe that in multicultural environments, even in developed countries, park management – without awareness and knowledge of who is using parks and how – will fail.

In a realistic, contemporary world, multiple forms of management should be required to operate a park or outdoor space inclusive of multiple perspectives. Diversity, in itself, is not a subject that can be tackled with generalisations. Similarly, park managers need to be cognisant of differences, and adapt both management styles and policies accordingly. Beyond training, taking the pulse of the community would prove unavoidably beneficial. Still, the greatest park management challenge is striking a balance between conservation, development and visitor use. Active community involvement in management decisions is becoming commonplace to embrace in pursuit of this balance.

Community engagement including immigration

A growing topic of importance relating to immigration and immigrant wellbeing and achievement from a psychological perspective continues to expand (see Jay & Schraml, 2009). Immigration of people to highly developed countries (e.g. the USA, Russia, Germany, Canada) has caused a major shift in the global population in recent decades. Indisputably, immigration has social consequences. Citizens of the receiving countries will react in different ways to immigrants, who may or may not assimilate quickly into the dominant culture of the place or even outdoor space. Theories on prejudice and inter-group relations are therefore relevant in the context of engaging communities; the study of relations between immigrants and the society of the receiving country is, consequently, crucial in understanding related challenges from a multicultural and multi-ethnic perspective relating to the outdoors (see Lanfer & Taylor, 2005)

Different societies view nature, parks, and thus outdoor recreation, with different lenses. What constitutes enjoyment in one culture may not be shared by members of another culture. In Europe, the wilderness and enjoyment factors are given centre stage. For example, Sweden, whose first parks were established in the early 20th century, embraced its 'mountain lands, virgin forest, deciduous forest, swamps, archipelago, and old agricultural landscapes' (Curry, 2009, p. 231). National Parks in England and Wales were designed in the 1950s for purposes of 'access and amenity' (Curry, 2009). South Africa, on the other hand, gave precedence to game reserves preservation and eventually mixed in tourism development with its conservation efforts. According to Curry, all these examples indicate the assortment of primary motivations in park design, and this diversity ties in with the immigration argument. If a South African nature lover immigrates to Wales, for instance, a completely different scenario and different habits when it comes to parks and outdoor recreation will be faced. Imagine different races and beliefs converging together in one place; the differences could be loud and stark, yet unavoidable.

When people immigrate to a new land, they often retain links with their homeland as it is difficult to sever ties with one's country of origin. Is what they did in their home-country parks acceptable or considered 'appropriate' in their new homeland? The answer is often 'no', leaving

them and park managers alike frustrated with fears and prejudices before being able to cross cultural boundaries of acceptance.

In parks and outdoor recreation settings, using the symbols of one culture rather than another may lead to one group feeling excluded, and vice versa. In places where multicultural tension and conflict prevail, use of cultural icons, accordingly, may provoke an undesirable emotional response. For example, in the USA the traditional National Park Service uniform is known affectionately by Americans as the prominent 'Green and Gray', yet to many Hispanic/Latino visitors this is representative of Mexican border patrol, evoking great fear and making community engagement, at times, more challenging (e.g. Roberts & Rodriguez, 2008; Roberts & Chitwere, 2011).

People of different cultures living in a foreign land generally live a dual life. With both feet on two sides of a fence, they experience the art of being both bicultural and binational. A policy of inclusion, therefore, cannot ignore one side of the fence in favour of another; rather, this complex reality must be acknowledged and discussed in depth.

Barriers and constraints to access

Constraints for racial minorities visiting parks and public lands have been explored for several decades. Social scientists have studied participation rates and experiences of ethnically diverse groups at different types of outdoor recreation areas, as well as barriers to visitation (see Gramann, 1996; Roberts & Rodriguez, 2002; Chavez *et al.*, 2008; CABE, 2010). Over time, theories have been developed and best practices created for managing outdoor programmes and geographic areas as we know them today. Reaching out to and engaging a continuously changing population, as well as cultivating mutual respect and understanding, have led to great progress. So why do barriers persist?

Despite demographic shifts across the globe, racial and ethnic groups, and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, remain underrepresented among visitors to public lands. How nature and the outdoors are appreciated, experienced, or even accessed, may differ across cultures. It is my conviction that we must therefore continue to understand what people care about and why, as well as how outdoor recreation resources are viewed, valued and are being used by our changing communities.

The case of Great Britain

A comprehensive British report (CABE, 2010) investigates various relationships among ethnicity, urban green areas, inequality, health and wellbeing. The report concludes that 'some of the most acute effects of deprivation are felt by black and minority ethnic communities living on a low income in urban areas' (p. 2). This is attributed to a poor standard of life due to an inadequate local environment with detrimental effects to health and wellbeing. Although people, including low-income minorities, appreciate the value of green spaces, they tend not to use them (at all or more perhaps infrequently) because of the quality and safety issues. A total of 50 per cent of study participants claimed they would use outdoor areas more if these issues were addressed; 60 per cent of participants believed they would see positive change in their health condition, while 48 per cent thought it would also be beneficial for their mental health. Interestingly, nearly half of all participants thought better, cleaner outdoor spaces would assist in improving their relationships with friends and family.

While the report found that African-Caribbean women, as well as Bangladeshi and Pakistani people (broadly), were more likely to report bad or very bad health in comparison to the

general population, the CABE report concludes that improving urban green space contributes to improved health and enables positive local neighbourhood transformation. The greatest barriers to achieving this goal, though, remain the political and economic landscapes, which often are not conducive to progress due to many external considerations.

Economic and political landscape

I still find it fascinating that, historically, parks in the United States were originally conceived as spaces for exclusion (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). Indeed, urban park designers promoted a 'park's image as natural, sanctifying, wholesome, and white, counter-posing it against a city construed as artificial, profane, insalubrious, and colored' (Byrne & Wolch, 2009, p. 747). A drive for gentrification further displaced poor and vulnerable residents, the majority of whom were people of colour. For instance, Byrne and Wolch explain that, to build Central Park, African and Irish residents were evicted from Seneca Village and this area was unfortunately destroyed to make way for the park. With time, parks became more accessible and the issue of cultural diversity started to gain notice. Still, many park managers did not stop the imposition of rigid behavioural rules and dress codes 'to inculcate cultural norms of the elite within working-class and immigrant visitors' (p. 747). Hence, the rules for park use constrained how such groups enjoyed these spaces (Taylor, 1999; Byrne & Wolch, 2009), thus creating a divide between rich and poor, haves and have-nots. Unfortunately, the economic and political divide persists, creating barriers to access to those most vulnerable and deprived when resources for beautification are pooled in affluent areas to the detriment of struggling neighbourhoods.

In addition, Byrne and Wolch (2009) mention there are other factors to consider, aside from the economic and political landscape (e.g. addressing climate change).

Recommendations for future research

Many scholars propose recommendations that merit further study. Smith and Floyd (2013), for example, suggest that creating unique racialised patterns of access will give policy makers a picture as to the spatial consequences of growth. Such an instrument could prove useful in targeting groups that are marginalised. Therefore, to change, one must first understand, and it has been made clear throughout the literature that, due to the dynamic nature of racial and ethnic contexts, we have not yet arrived at a full understanding of this topic, which varies by geography.

For many youth, environmental education programmes with their schools are the gateway to eventually experiencing outdoor recreation. Two ingredients are needed for well-rounded programmes: multiracial audiences and racially diverse educators. Consequently, research on outdoor and environmental education could be strengthened and potentially better understood by means of a Critical Race Theory framework (see Roberts, 2009).

Another point of greater diversity in parks and outdoor recreation users also ties in to the need for a more ethnically diverse workforce in public land agencies and outdoor organisations. Research, for instance, should address how and why what Park (2007) refers to as equity, diversity and inclusion is something that should be the norm to create cultural synergy in the workplace; this, in turn, would lead to welcoming more diversity among park visitors.

From the perspective of park use, Byrne and Wolch (2009) suggest utilising the visitors/park users themselves as vehicles to gauge the direction of change. More geographic-centred research, globally, might also analyse activism in and around urban parks, particularly by marginalised populations. There are facets to park use that are under-explored in the literature. For

example, 'What role . . . are people of color playing in reshaping their access to active recreation areas and urban nature?' (Byrne & Wolch, 2009, p. 755).

Jay and Schraml (2009) indicate an inadequate focus on immigrants when it comes to public policy and planning in relation to urban forests; consisting of prime natural surroundings to explore, studies lack investigation of the recreation habits and patterns of immigrant populations as influenced by their customs and perceptions. To analyse these patterns would go a long way towards enabling migrants' social integration into their new environments as the natural habitat offers 'a strong symbolic identification potential and also a public space for social interactions' (p. 283).

Additionally, Hibbler and Shinew (2002) discussed the matter of enhancing multiracial families' leisure experiences in the USA. Since then, very little research has explored the experiences of the multiracial family and related factors to enhance communications, engagement and/or programming. Similarly, another untapped area in outdoor recreation research, in particular, is the lack of attention paid to biracial and multiracial people (Roberts, 2013). Hence, a global increase in interracial marriages denotes that more multiracial families are being formed, and these families may have unique leisure needs (see also Hibbler & Shinew, 2002) and may experience natural resources differently. As I have written before, 'it is also widely understood that access to parks and open space affords a type of leisure that can be extremely beneficial to individuals on many levels. Yet, barriers to participation for multiracial people continue to exist in the form of social isolation, inadequate facilities, and subtle discrimination' (Roberts, 2013, p. 33). Research is thus needed that provides a deeper understanding of the outdoor recreation patterns and preferences of mixed-race people; such knowledge is crucial for improving the systems of social and environmental justice, while encouraging a new demographic to be stewards of our parks and protected areas.

Although parks are places where people come in contact with nature, the diverse visions of what parks should be can trigger unrest and frustration that must be heeded and explored for a better understanding of community needs. Several ways exist to create dialogue with multicultural populations with respect to the provision of better-quality access to parks. A diverse workforce complemented by programmes that cater to the needs of these underserved populations, are solid steps in the right direction.

Conclusions and discussion

General increased park visitation as well as environmental justice efforts have enhanced health trends and improved quality of life for racial minorities. This, in turn, has brought about increased awareness and support, as well as more frequent park use by minorities. Furthermore, it has been well established that parks and other green spaces can help to reduce the negative effects of deprivation, creating a stronger, sustainable community through its various health benefits (CABE, 2010). Longevity is enabled through a reduction in conditions such as lung disease and depression, and living in proximity to green space has also been found to reduce the large gap in life expectancy between the haves and the have-nots (CABE, 2010). Yet constraints continue to exist, and education and improvement involve a long process, globally, aimed at changing societal norms and challenging exclusions that still exist. Scholars, nature experts, outdoor educators, park managers and landscape designers have their work cut out for them in their effort to challenge the marginalisation of specific groups – from urban America and rural Britain, to the ethnic landscape of Sydney and rural India. For a racially and culturally diverse world to prosper, such diversity must first be acknowledged and respected. Acceptance guides problem solving and can lead to increased park access.

Breaking down racial homogeneity and related misperceptions can, therefore, assist in building a sustainable and just world where everyone has a voice and a story to tell. A diverse perspective is not only needed, it is crucial. In rural areas around the world, for instance, one may find different indigenous tribes with diverse customs living around a nature reserve – all these people are invested in the neighbouring lands and may draw their livelihood from these very spaces. On the other hand urban dwellers value city parks and whatever green space may exist for rejuvenation as well. So, to whom should we listen when proposals for development are presented to relevant authorities? Without voter support of parks and open space in perpetuity, public lands will diminish. Does it matter where people live or where racial minorities tend to concentrate? Whatever the case, the voice of the community across cultures should always be the one resounding voice that matters. Change is not possible any other way.

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