THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

A Paper By
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In this year of the bicentennial of the nation, it is well to ask if the future will be like the past as far as urban recreation is concerned. The purpose of my talk today is to share with you my review of the past for clues to the future. Personally, I have concluded that there is much that is likely to continue but that there are some subtle differences in recreation trends that may offer opportunities yet unexplored.

The Same But Different

At the start, it might be well to distinguish between the desire to recreate and actual participation, especially if history is to be used as a foundation. It seems that the urge to play, to have fun, to enjoy, to gain refreshment from recreation and to expand one's horizons have been with civilized man for centuries. However, the manner in which these are expressed over time seems to vary to the extent that they may even seem different.

For example, is there really very much difference between the excruciating excitement we receive from such thriller movies as The Towering Inferno or the Exorcist and that about 1700, watching a public whipping or hanging? While the medium may be different, the effect is quite the same.

A contemporary of today's recreation might not recognize the costumes nor what was taking place if he looked in on activities of early 1700 in Dutch New York. But there, he would have seen: (Dulles, 1965:33)

Dancing, Card-playing, Tick-tacking (a type of backgammon), Playing at Ball, at bowls, at ninepins, taking jaunts in Boats, Wagons or Carriages.

The names of the activities are much the same as today but the manner in which participation takes place is quite different.

Today, we utilize even the slightest provocation for a celebration, one very important form of recreation. Even the most serious of events is often converted into a party today, just as many years ago. In the early 18th century, commencement at Harvard (Dulles, 1965:31) gave occasion for special celebration.

Some spend the Time at Pins (that toilsome play)
Others at cards (more silent) pass the Day.
In rings some Wrestle till they're mad outright,
And then their Antagonists they fight.

On horses some ride full Tilt along
Are seen; while on each side a Numerous Throng
Do gaze . . . .
Others (as brutish) do propagate their Kind:
Where amorous Lads to shady Groves resort,
And under Venus with their Misses sport.

In early New England, where fireplaces were no match for the penetrating cold of winter, it was common practice for families as well as guests to roll up together under blankets, a practice called bundling. Although not intended as a recreation activity, it turned out that way. A young man was properly separated from his date by means of a bundling board running down the middle of the bed. However, there were occasions, as the young lady extended the hospitality of her bed, when she took the thoughtful precaution of "confining her petticoat to her ankles." (Dulles, 1965:28) Certainly, the recreation of love-making is no different today except that the rules of the game and the places may vary.

As we review the lists of activities that were popular one to two hundred years ago, they read almost the same as those of today. Some striking differences should be noted, of course. Bear-bating is no longer a popular recreation and TV did not compete with parlor games in 1700. However, it is somewhat disquieting to realize so little has changed. But, is this really true? Considering the manner in which these take place, there is great difference.

Swimming, for example, could be found in both 1776 and 1976, but what a difference. It was exclusively a male sport, usually in the nude and in a secluded water hole. It took the emancipation of women's dress, the removal of malaria as a threat to tropical beaches, the explosion of automobile access to water and the technology of construction and maintenance of swimming pools to revolutionize swimming as an important form of recreation.

Bowling, even within my lifetime, has shifted dramatically from very low repute to a sport highly respected for all ages and social status. Fishing has changed considerably over time. Simple angling, most generally pursued by rough-hewn outdoorsmen and low income groups in the past, has been developed into a multi-strata market, varying with income, age, type of fish and even social status. Adventuring in the outdoors has been on our activity lists for many generations. However, the manner in which it is carried on today in governmentally owned and professionally staffed parks is far different from the former outdoor activity on fenceless open range land or forests.

Certain urban entertainments, such as theater, had been a part of European life long before we transferred them to this country. It was only high society of America, however, that could enjoy these diversions at the start. But, this changed over time.

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of the theater as entertainment reaching out to all classes of people. It saw the beginning of variety, minstrel
shows, and the circus; the establishment of amusement
parks, public dance-halls, concert saloons and beer gardens;
a revival of horseracing and the rise of spectator sports.
(Dulles, 1965:98)

The name may be the same but the expression is different.

I take this as a clue to our recreation patterns of the future. It
seems that in the future we can expect continuing change into innovative ways of
providing for kinds of recreation that have been with us for a long time. Inves-
tors, developers and designers might well use this concept to their advantage
and look again to older forms of recreation for new and creative ways of
presenting them.

Clues to the Future

From review of both past and present recreation what clues and cues to
the future can we find? For the next part of my discussion, I would like to
highlight several items that seem to be on the horizon if not already on their
way. The first four deal with the behavior of the recreation participant and
those that follow are more concerned with development. In my opinion, the
psychology and sociology of recreation are not so well refined that recreational
behavior is predictable—not as precisely as we would like. The following is
drawn as much from observation as from research study.

Nostalgic Revival

My first clue is what I refer to as nostalgic revival. It takes no crystal
ball to see a greatly renewed interest in things gone by—even by those who are
too young to have lived in the nostalgic past. Whether this is reaction to the
insecurity of the present, the renewal of faith in former values or merely the
lack of appeal of things new—I cannot be sure. But, it is happening and promises
to continue.

Among the pace-setters are the thrill rides in our amusement parks. Both
the parachute jump and the roller coaster of Coney Island are being replicated
today in Texas. (Holder:1976,1) Not borne of a prefab and plastic fun technology,
these items are being reconstructed almost exactly as they were in the twenties.
The only modification is that of greater capacity. The largest roller coaster
of the world is planned to be open this month at Six Flags Over Mid America in
St. Louis. Ours in Texas, the Cyclone of Astroworld, will not be the largest
but will stretch 3,200 feet long, will be made of 450,000 board feet of Douglas
fir and will use 37,000 bolts and 10,000 gallons of paint. (Lewis: 1976,1AA)
Even
the construction does not yield to modern technology.

Apparently, the country has just begun to mature enough to recognize its
artifacts of early settlement, its shrines and its places of confrontation.
Visiting sites important to history and lore is an increasingly important recrea-
tion activity. Only now could this begin—the nation was too young to notice
before. Increasingly, the proponents of historic reuse, rather than supporters
of new design, are winning redevelopment battles in urban America. Only those structures with special historic characteristics are being singled out as museums—the trend is toward conversion to contemporary use, and I see a continuation of this trend.

Personal Involvement

I see greater and greater desire for involvement by the individual in recreation. This is not to say that we are losing out on spectatorism. But, the ability to choose his own recreation, on his own terms rather than by prescription, seems to be on the increase.

In a way, this is likely to make it more and more difficult for planners and developers. After all, if the public seeks less-planned and less-ordered recreation, how does one plan for it? Already park administrations in our cities are facing this problem.

However, if we recognize this as a trend, we may be able to respond. An excellent example of response today is that of the commercial development of gardening. As reported recently, astonishing numbers of Americans seem to be finding new and personally satisfying pleasures in "an almost atavistic yearning to grub in the dirt, sow seeds, nudge nature with fertilizer, watch wondrous things grow, then literally taste the fruits--and vegetables--of their loving labors at their own tables."(Pots, Plots: 1976,9) The US Department of Agriculture estimates that this summer, some 37 million, or 51 percent of American households will be tending garden.

While I doubt if we will abandon group activities or spectator recreations, I see the drive of self-involvement becoming increasingly important in future recreation.

Narrowing Patterns

The clue of narrowing patterns seems contradictory in face of an ever-increasing range of recreation activities and opportunities. However, I see this topic as a readjustment toward greater selectivity of preferences. When we have limited choice, our preferences do not show. However, in the face of abundance, a person can be more selective.

Therefore, I see this clue expressed in two ways. The growing family will do a great deal of experimenting—touching and tasting the variety of recreations available. Then, personal preferences, influenced by life style, costs, mobility and social status, will narrow the selection to a smaller number. Second, within any one area, variety will have to be maintained because selectivity becomes common practice. We have seen this in marketing automobiles. I can remember when there were only three body styles and one color--black. Now, hundreds of combinations of body styles, colors and power trains are available to satisfy a proliferated demand.

So, the narrowing of individual preferences does not necessarily translate into reducing the number of options—just the opposite.
Guidance and Interpretation

As recreation participants, we are not born with understandings and skills in all recreations. While we may have the desire to recreate, it takes a degree of experience to enjoy it. It is axiomatic that we enjoy best those things we understand and perform well.

I see increased opportunities for offering schooling in all recreational skills, from photography to understanding nature. No longer will we assume that everyone coming to our service areas understands all about the activities. At beaches, we will need instruction in body surfing, snorkeling, swimming and even fishing. Urban recreational development of forests with exhibits and interpretation of nature is already obtaining excellent response.

Package tours of local points of interest, once laughed at by the sophisticated tourist, are bound to expand in the future. But, a much larger array of options and better guidance and interpretation will have to be offered.

Already, the National Park Service is providing an increased amount of interpretation of natural and historical resources. An experimental program last year showed strong popular support for their interpretive programs dealing with energy. (Samson:1975)

Although the topic of guidance and interpretation seems to contradict the trend toward higher individualism and free choice, it is really of a different order. While I see less demand for prescription, I see increased demand for description.

My next set of clues includes those more directly related to land development.

Mass Transportation

Although mass transportation in our cities seems to be inevitable, it seems to be difficult to obtain. Certainly, this topic has great bearing on location of recreation activity areas in the future.

The critical importance of transportation and access has been dramatically demonstrated by the recent history of our urban park and recreation areas. As people moved away from them and into suburbia, downtown parks died. Only those parks that have been redesigned for new uses and accessible by new transportation have recovered.

As we build new amusement parks, it may be well to consider locations best served by mass transportation. It was at such locations that they began, back before the automobile—a spot just outside town, readily accessible by trolley car. I have fond memories of hiding behind the station, waiting for a trolley car to stop. Then, boys being what they are, we tied the trolley down so the car wouldn't run and took great satisfaction in hearing the motorman pronounce great epithets on our heads as he tried to start the car.

It seems to me that social stigma and inconvenience are the two major barriers to mass transportation in America. My experience living in Canada last year proved
to me that both of these obstacles can be overcome.

When mass transit is installed, no matter the mode, recreational use should be a legitimate part of feasibility. Transportation agencies do not always recognize this. Not long ago, for example, when attempting to set up a weekend recreational study in Houston, we discovered that it was unlawful for the highway department to collect weekend traffic data—all highways were designed to weekday business traffic standards.

Short-Range and Flexible

Important to recreational land development is a trend toward shorter and shorter planned life. Generally, this is contrary to the bias of planners, engineers, landscape architects and architects—those most directly responsible for design and planning.

I am now beginning to see merit in the short-range and flexible. Because so many external factors influence the success of recreational ventures, it is well to have long-range plans but conditioned by very flexible short-range contingencies. Too much earthmoving and too much costly construction, both below and above ground, can demand so long a period of gestation that a new market may be missed. It is common for the public sector to hear complaints from constituents regarding the long delays between land acquisition and opening of parks for public use.

The new thinking behind new product development by leading manufacturers reflects this trend. A marketing expert for new products stated not long ago that the nine-month market study is now six months overdue. The three-year payout period is 18 months too long. (New Products: 1972).

Certainly, our new recreation developments must recognize the increasing risks in satisfying changing taste and use.

Clustering

It seems less and less likely that the single-purpose and isolated development for recreation can succeed. There are many gains to be obtained from grouping facilities and services for recreation. And, as transportation becomes more critical, clustering will become an even more important principle.

Already, we have seen small and isolated theme park operations fail. They lacked a large enough mass to provide adequate destination power on their own. This may be accomplished either by including a great many features within one complex or grouping the complex together with others that are compatible.

Obviously, this demands higher capitalization and, in the case of multiple-owner complexes, a great deal of collaboration and cooperation, especially at the planning stages.

Urban Waterfronts
Our research at Texas A&M University has shown us that there is great recreational potential in the redevelopment of urban waterfronts.

Most U.S. cities were built on water—lakes, rivers, canals and the seacoast. Yet, this water resource, for the last two hundred years, generally has degenerated in quality, especially for recreation. Such waters were taken over for shipping, water supply and waste disposal. Now, we are seeing more and more project plans for redevelopment of such waters for recreational use.

A pace-setter for this renaissance has been San Antonio, Texas. Instead of avoiding the downtown core, hundreds of thousands of citizens and tourists alike make heavy recreational use of the River Walk, as the downtown horseshoe bend of the San Antonio River is now known. (Gunn, et al.: 1972, 1974)

Because of the heavy use pressure and the small size of the river, recreation activities have been successfully limited to viewing the beauty of the water and semi-tropical plants, to strolling alongside the water, to taking tour boat rides (and occasionally a paddleboat ride) and to participating in the several food, shop and entertainment places along the walk.

It not only provides much-needed recreation for a very diverse population but has served as a catalyst for renewing business investment interest in downtown rather than suburbia.

There is much unrealized potential along waterfronts in many cities of the United States.

Multiple Management

Recreation is increasingly placing more and more demands upon ownership and management. The larger land areas needed for clustering; the more costly land areas required for better access and resource assets; the heavier investments needed because of clustering and greater variety of activities—all demand more and more from ownership and management.

This I visualize will require more mixes of separate private owners and more mixes between public and private owners as demonstrated by the San Antonio River Walk.

The water is controlled by the San Antonio River Authority. Through collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers and the city, proper construction of water channelization, dams and other structures has been accomplished.

The waterfront, up to flood level, is owned and managed by the city parks department. The beautiful trees and flowering plants, the walkways, the lighting and the ranger control are under their supervision.

The Conservation Society was the power behind the protection of the water in the first place—way back in the twenties. Now, it is a focal point for protection of the landscape and restoration of historic buildings.

The Paseo del Rio Association is the private enterprise organization that
provides the restaurants, hotels, shops, and river boats a means of speaking for business and private owners along the horseshoe bend of the river.

The River Walk Commission is a city-sponsored governing body that establishes rules and regulation for design and development, including all quality standards.

All this sounds like a fragmented and complicated scheme. It is. But, through excellent cooperation and collaboration, the River Walk gives the recreation visitor the impression of a very well-designed and managed single entity. It proves that a complex of importance and success need not be a single design and development project by one owner and developer. Throughout urban recreation in the future, I see the need for more mixes of recreational management, such as the park-business mix in San Antonio.

Cautions for the Future

All of this appears to be very optimistic and I see ample evidence for this point of view. Most of the factors we can measure today suggest that opportunities will continue to increase, even during periods of adjustment in the economy and in energy.

However, there have been external factors in the past—factors outside the decision-making of individual developers—that have exerted both positive and negative influence on development. The chances are that they will be equally influential in the future.

Three such factors have been well researched and documented. Discretionary income—the great increase for millions more Americans since World War II—has had a major impact. Fluctuations in the future will continue to have impact on recreational participation. How we resolve our transportation and energy problems will have great impact on the location success of recreation complexes. And, how the time allocation between work and play change in the future can have major impact on recreation development and management.

To these three factors—discretionary income, mobility, time—I would like to add a few that also have had important influence in the past.

Skill, Knowledge and Desire

The energy crisis demonstrated that the American people were willing to give up some uses of fuel for conservation but were not willing to take it all out of their recreation energy budgets. I predict that with even more stringent measures in the future, such as higher prices and rationing, we will find the American public demanding access to recreation. Why?

Travel and access for recreation has now become a right of the public. This is an American right, as important to people as freedom of speech.

Furthermore, our high schools, colleges universities and technical schools are reaching millions more people, thereby increasing our knowledge, interest in the world and concern over our own personal well-being. This is a powerful force
for recreation.

Communication

Over the past history of recreation, communication has been a great force for change.

Looking back to a world before books, we have difficulty in assessing the impact of improved communications. Some have called it the graphic revolution. The universality of books, records, radio, TV and movies now portrays vivid images of recreation objectives.

There are instances where we may have outsmarted ourselves. When we show a distant attraction bathed in crystal clear sunlight, taken with color photography and reproduced in full color, we may be very much disappointed if it rains and cannot reach the vista-point of the photographer when we visit there.

Some argue that the technology of communication in the future, by adding transmission of all sensory elements, can render needless all mobility of recreation. (Boorstin, 1961:109) You will no longer need to travel to the site to participate. Personally, I believe this argument is defeated by an even stronger one--individual recreation must be experienced. Vicarious recreation has its limits.

I cite the factor of communication only to alert us to its possible influence in the future.

Technology

Without doubt, a major factor influencing the recent past of recreation has been advanced technology. Molded fiberglass hulls revolutionized boating in this country. Back-packing has been popularized as much by the availability of lightweight and durable gear as by the environmental movement.

Some argue that the great growth in popularity of skiing was not due to new discoveries of snow covered slopes but to the new styles of winter sports clothing, especially the stretch pants and sweaters worn by female "snow-bunnies" in the lounges of ski resorts.

Scuba diving equipment and wet suits made underwater recreation a reality. Now we are beginning to develop underwater parks.

Of course, the recreation vehicle (camper trailers, vans, motor homes, campers) has dramatically revolutionized travel camping. As yet, cities have not adequately responded to the need for overnight facilities for recreation vehicles.

The eighth annual Offshore Technology Conference, held last week in Houston, predicted the development of Aquapolis, the floating city of the future. A prototype, with many recreational overtones, built in 1975 by Japan and floated to the first International Exposition in Okinawa, proved to remain intact in
Despite of being hit by typhoons 14 times. (World's First:1976, 1D)

Certainly, the directions our future technology take us will have great impact upon recreation, both positively and negatively.

Political Impact

If the political impact upon recreation in this country has been great in the past, shouldn't we anticipate even greater influence in the future?

Many forms of recreation have become the role of government. The federal government now owns and manages over 85 percent of all outdoor recreation land. (Destination USA: 1973, 4/3)

What will be the division of roles between government and private enterprise in the future? Are they competitive or do they complement one another? Should private enterprise have complete responsibility for entertainment and government be responsible only for moral and socially acceptable recreation? (Sessoms, 1976) I see increasing importance being placed upon these role divisions at the same time I see need for greater collaboration.

Political decisions in the future regarding governmental subsidy, incentives and special programs will have great impact upon recreation.

Social Impact

Many things done today, especially those relating to moral and ethical issues, were taboo only a generation ago.

Although some states have certain blue laws, few recreations are restricted on Sundays any more.

Much of society has placed greater emphasis on physical fitness and therefore we are developing more recreational opportunities for exercise in our cities.

What forms of social change in the future can we anticipate and what will be their impact?

Conclusions

I see urban recreation of the future in many ways the same as today—but with a number of clues toward important change.

I anticipate a continued nostalgia revival, greater personal involvement, a trend toward narrowing patterns of recreation, a greater demand for guidance and interpretation, more mass transportation, greater interest in short-range and flexible development, a trend toward more clustering, greater redevelopment of waterfronts for recreation and greater use of multiple ownership and management schemes.

However, to this I would add a list of factors that could dramatically
influence these trends—either positively or negatively—in the future. I call attention to future social impact, political impact, technology, communication, skill, knowledge and desire of the recreation participant as well as future discretionary incomes, mobility and time for recreation.

If these thoughts represent a reasonable view of recreation—the past, present and speculation of the future, I anticipate the need for much more research and education in the entire field so that we can make better decisions in the future—for the good of the recreation participant, for the good of the investor in recreation development and for the good of the environment.
REFERENCES


"World's First Floating City Highlighted at OTC." _The Houston Post_, May 3, 1976.