



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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## Memorandum

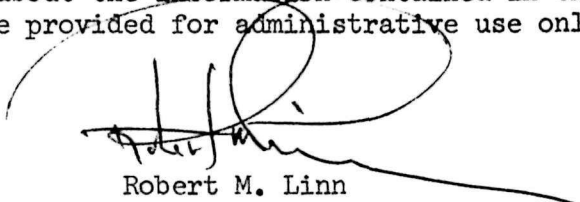
To: Directorate and All Field Directors

From: Chief Scientist

Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

The Office of Natural Science Studies conducts, from time to time, sociological studies to determine the characteristics of people who go to our national parks. The purpose of these studies is to obtain baseline data necessary for additional studies which will be undertaken later. While these data are obtained as an integral part of the scientific work being carried out by the Office of Natural Science Studies, they may also be useful to other divisions for any number of purposes.

Periodically, ONSS will issue short reports similar to the enclosure, in which some information about people in the parks will be presented. These will be technical reports presenting the information and explaining it. How it may be useful to each division will, of necessity, be decided within the division. ONSS will be available, of course, to answer any questions about the information contained in these reports. The reports are provided for administrative use only.



Robert M. Linn

Enclosure

### PEOPLE IN THE PARKS

In an earlier report we discussed some of the sociological factors used by adults in this society to distinguish between parks. These included: distance travelled from home to park; length of stay at park; amount of previous planning required prior to going to the park and the period during a week when a trip to a park was most commonly made. Taken together we were able to distinguish two basic types of parks - the LOCAL and NON-LOCAL. In this report we want to expand the discussion of the factors used by adults to distinguish among and between various parks. Included are the expectations shared among persons as to what kinds of people they may expect to observe while in a particular type of park as well as what some of their expectations are regarding general human behavior and feelings associated with such places.

#### Some Shared Social Meanings of Parks

Whenever we stop to ponder how we define a park, it quickly becomes perplexing. The definition provided by the legal boundaries of an area of land or water along with certain distinguishing cultural features are often the basis upon which we distinguish what is contained within or excluded from particular park lands. The official purposes for the establishment of an area as a park, be it recreation, historical importance, preservation of natural wonders, etc., offer further information about particular parks. Even a broadened conception that all parks, irrespective of particular individual characteristics, can be classified as symbolic of several dominant themes common to all human cultures (see report #11) does not provide a complete answer to what in general terms a park is or is not. To gain a more precise understanding of how the adult members of this society conceive of a park, we studied a number of sociological dimensions shared among the population with respect to the presence of particular people at places defined as parks, what their behavior was like, etc. This approach permits an understanding of how the members of a society conceive of a park and permits an assessment of the extent to which certain social meanings are shared among a population with respect to a park. In short, what are some of the things which adults use in this society to define a park?

#### Whom do you expect to see?

Based upon the findings of a pilot study, we developed a listing of categories of social persons such as parents with children, teenagers, etc., which we used in the quantification phase of the nationwide study. The respondents were asked to indicate which of these categories of social persons they would expect to see when at a LOCAL

and a NON-LOCAL park. The results are presented in Table 1. Notice that the answers were not mutually exclusive, hence the percentages are not additive. For example, 24.7% of the respondents expected to see college students at a LOCAL park. Conversely about 75.3% did not reply that they expected to see this category of persons at a LOCAL park. In a similar manner, 53.7% of the respondents expected to see college students at a NON-LOCAL park. Conversely about 46.3% of the respondents did not reply that they expected to see college students at the same type park. In short, the percentages in Table 1 reflect the percentage of affirmative replies recorded among all appropriate respondents to each category of social persons asked about for a particular type of park. Several aspects of the data are of particular interest.

(See Table 1)

First, for both types of park the dominant defining category of persons expected to be seen is parents with children. In short, if this sociological category were not present the area would not be a park for most respondents.

Second, within each type of park the comparative rank ordering among the social categories is suggestive that some are more salient as essential aspects in establishing a shared definition of a park among persons. Thus the absence of seeing the category of young people on dates while in a park is less likely to be disruptive of the total pattern of expectations than other more frequently chosen categories.

Finally, comparisons across the two types of parks suggest how they differ with respect to a particular sociological category as a defining element. Thus whereas the presence of groups of people who come by bus is a relatively less frequently expected category in a LOCAL park, it is a quite frequently expected category in NON-LOCAL parks. Other comparisons can be seen from the data.

In short, people in a society share a set of expectations about the kinds of persons they will encounter at parks. This is, of course, also true for many other kinds of places besides parks. For example, few persons would expect to see parents with children in a school except on special occasions nor would they expect to see groups of teenagers in a factory or a business office. Whenever such might be noticed, it would act as an incongruous element in a pattern attracting attention by being exceptional. Behavior and feelings which individuals associate with such are frequently unusual and at times hostile, though not by any means always so.

### What are generalized expectations of behavior and feeling?

While the pattern of expectations concerning the presence of particular categories of persons is one way of defining a park, other aspects are important and may enlarge our understanding of the social meanings of parks as shared among adults in this society. We sought to learn something about the expected behavior that adults shared in a park as well as some indication of particular sentiments shared which were also characteristic of going to parks. The respondents reported on whether they had participated in or shared any of the activities and sentiments shown in the accompanying table while in a park. As with the data in the previous table, the percentages are not additive and reflect those respondents who responded affirmatively to each particular example of behavior or sentiment. Several notable aspects of the data are worthy of comment.

(See Table 2)

First, the single most frequently reported behavior was looking at the scenery. Over 80% of the respondents reported doing so. Clearly the non-human environment is an important aspect of going to parks. However, other aspects are surprisingly important. For example, the second most frequently reported behavior was observing other people. Additionally important behavior included sitting and relaxing as well as eating.

Second, of eleven categories reported in which at least fifty percent of the respondents had engaged, the majority are oriented to other persons or to the individuals themselves. Thus eight of the categories refer directly or indirectly to other human beings or the respondent as a social person. Only three categories refer to the non-human environment. This finding is compatible with the previously reported observation about going to parks as an activity participated in as a member of a closed social group and supports the continuing development of the understanding of the importance of significant other persons as a major element defining a park experience for an individual.

Third, it is interesting to notice the percentage of respondents who report speaking with persons previously unknown (this refers to people outside of their own groups). Apparently parks seem to facilitate this form of behavior more than other kinds of settings commonly experienced by adult members of the society. Why this should be so will be considered in detail in a later report. Though the finding may appear somewhat contradictory to previous results reported regarding the nature of closed social groups, it is not. In fact, it appears that the comparatively large percentage of intergroup contacts reported occurs as a direct consequence of the participants at a park being there as members of closed social groups.

To summarize, the data in Table 2 suggest that a pattern of generalized human behavior and sentiments are shared among adults while in parks, irrespective of particular activities such as camping, hiking, etc., in which they might be participating. Before considering some implications of these findings, it may be useful to examine some additional factors influencing the extent to which the social meanings of parks are shared among members of a society.

### Cultural beliefs and social meanings

As far as we know all humans share certain beliefs about the world in which they live. For example, most members of Western civilization no longer believe that the world is round. However, not all humans share the same beliefs because they are participants in different cultures. Within each culture there are variations in belief patterns within the more general patterns. Such are usually called subcultures. They arise in response to the different experiences that social groups located differently in the social structure share. Within industrial societies, persons sharing different access to the market place (i.e., social class) tend to share different subcultural patterns of beliefs about how the spatial aspects of the world are ordered. Thus, for example, the middle-class shares the belief that there are basically two kinds of property - private and public. These beliefs are included in the shared organization of space, i.e. there are private places and public places. For example, roads, corridors in buildings, sidewalks, pathways, etc., which connect private property are usually considered public and usable by all. The lower-class shares the belief that all of the world is the property of someone. If you do not know the owner, then you will most likely be unwelcome. An example is the "public" street which becomes the "turf" of groups of youngsters, sometimes defended against intruders as if it were indeed privately owned. In other words, the extent to which some social meanings concerning parks are shared is, in part, a function of the cultural beliefs about space in general held by participants. Studies conducted suggest that there are several aspects of importance:

a) the manner in which a person recognizes how he or she "belongs" in a place like a park. One means used is by how many people there he personally knows. An alternative is how well he understands the operation of rules and regulations governing public behavior in such locales;

b) the previously mentioned general orientation to spatial organization, i.e. all places are owned by someone or, the alternative, some are owned by everyone and some are private; and,

c) the manner in which the person expects and accepts social control over the maintenance of the definitions to be carried out.

One way is interpersonally (i.e. you do not offend your friends' right) and the alternative is on the basis of social roles (i.e. all persons in a park have equal rights).

Taken together these generalized beliefs constitute two subsets found in this culture. Such are preconditions against which the social meanings of parks emerge.

### Discussion

It is clear that not all persons in a society share the same sets of social meanings about parks. On occasion persons sharing different sets of social meanings and cultural beliefs find themselves in the same park land at the same time. What happens then? Most often not much, for reasons previously considered in this series. Sometimes minor annoyances occur among groups and then, if perceived by individuals sharing one set of beliefs, it may result in a complaint to a park official wherever such are present. What do we do then? There is no absolute answer to such a question.

As we know each such event requires careful consideration and action. What the data in this report indicate are that oftentimes the opposing sides of a disagreement among individuals and groups occurs because of differences in views of the world and a park in particular, not because of individually purposefully deviant actions. Knowing this does not necessarily make the management job any easier, but it perhaps enlarges our understanding of the causes of some human behavior as it occurs in parks.

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Table 1. Kinds of people expected at a park - Percentages

<u>Kinds of people</u>	<u>Local Park</u>	<u>Non-Local Park</u>
College students	24.7	53.7
Parents with children	87.0	80.5
Groups of teenagers	53.7	54.9
Adults with a lot of free time	51.1	58.3
Young people on dates	32.0	40.5
Groups of school children	69.4	59.8
Groups of people who come by bus	27.2	71.6
No answers	3.1	5.3

Table 2. Expectations of Behavior and Feelings in a Park

<u>Things felt or done in a park</u>	<u>Percentage of respondents reporting that thing</u>
Observing people around me . . . . .	75.0
Sitting and relaxing . . . . .	69.7
Looking at scenery . . . . .	82.8
Doing what I want to do . . . . .	54.9
Eating or picnicking . . . . .	69.0
Speaking with someone not previously known . . . . .	52.2
Sharing my experiences and feelings with someone . . . . .	53.9
Learning more about nature . . . . .	58.9
Feeling closer to nature . . . . .	57.7
Feeling closer to people . . . . .	50.8
Feeling how beautiful life is . . . . .	61.2