ALBERTA RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION

AN APPLIED RECREATION RESEARCH NETWORK FOR ALBERTA (ARRNA)

A Report Prepared by

Thomas L. (Tim) Burton

TAVIS CONSULTING

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the project on *Development of A Provincial Recreation Research Framework* is to provide '… a framework within which it will be possible to assess priority research areas for recreation practice, on the basis of anticipated benefits and government priorities'. A second purpose is to consider the potential for creation of a provincial research network consisting of researchers, practitioners, government agencies, policy institutes, consultants, and others with a stake in the improvement of our understanding of the nature and characteristics of leisure in Alberta, and the effectiveness and efficiency of recreation delivery systems in the province.

Specifically, the project is composed of four parts:

- A review of dominant issues and concerns pertaining to the state of leisure and recreation research in the province - in particular, the state of relationships between leisure researchers and recreation and parks practitioners;
- Outline of a framework of varying types of research, which should enable a better understanding of how different projects and studies fit into a continuum based on knowledge generation and practical utility;
- Outline of a suggested approach to the development of a provincial applied recreation research network; and
- Outline of a beginning agenda for applied recreation research in the province.

This report presents the findings of all four parts of the study.

2. DIFFICULT RELATIONS

Issues

Despite the lip service paid by recreation and parks professionals and organizations to the importance of research in the field, there is considerable anecdotal (and some empirical) evidence to show that many recreation and parks practitioners are either hostile - or, at least, indifferent - to leisure research. A cursory examination of the numbers of subscriptions to major leisure research journals shows, for example, that subscriptions from practitioners amount to fewer than two per cent of the total. In common with so much of the general public, many practitioners view research as the preserve of privileged people out of touch with the real world, communicating in journals that only they read, in a pseudo-scientific language irrelevant to everyday practice. There are, of course, some professionals who are convinced that research can be helpful to practice; but, even among these, many are not at all sure how to make it so. In particular, they regularly cite a lack of time and human resources to make effective use of research findings and materials. Thus, whether for reasons of perceived irrelevance or lack of resources, there are many in recreation practice who simply discount the value of leisure research.

There are several reasons for this attitude, the most important of which are:

- a misconception about the place of research within the field;
- inadequate dissemination of the findings of research;
- an inability on the part of many in the field to use the findings of research;
- the absence of a value framework for interpreting the findings of research;
- the formulation of policy and management strategies which ignore research findings;
- a lack of replication of research; and
- the use of an unnecessarily limited set of research paradigms by researchers.

Each of these will be addressed in turn.

The Place of Research

Contrary to popular belief, research is *not* the exclusive handmaiden of practice. Much research has little or no immediate relevance to issues and concerns in the everyday world. In many instances, the purpose of research is far more basic: researchers are driven by a need to know and to understand, regardless of the question of usefulness. In other instances, the principal basis for the evaluation of research is, indeed, its utility for practice. In short, research covers the spectrum from the highly exploratory to the firmly practical. This is generally not well understood by many of those in the field of practice who often assume that all research should be immediately useful.

Lack of Dissemination of Research

Arguably, the greatest limitation of research for many practitioners is its lack of suitable dissemination. While there are many avenues for disseminating the findings of leisure and recreation research, most are not well suited to practitioners. The principal outlets for academic research are the refereed journals, such as *Leisure Studies* and the *Journal of Leisure Research*, but few of these are read by practitioners. Most are written by researchers for other researchers. They employ jargon, favour an academic style, and place heavy reliance upon conceptualisation, development of theory, and statistical manipulation of data. They are, quite simply, unattractive to those in practice; and, usually, they quickly frighten away the few practitioners who do venture between their covers.

Another source of research information for the practitioner can be found in the work of private consultants and market research companies. The problem here, however, is that these businesses carry out contracted work for particular clients and, understandably, are reluctant to provide information about their findings to others. Indeed, in many instances, they are expressly prevented from doing so by contractual agreement. While some private sector research does find its way into the public domain, most remains private information for particular clients.

Governments are also a potential source of research findings for recreation and parks practitioners. But here, too, there is a problem of access. Much government research has restricted circulation - not because it is secret, but simply because nobody in government thinks to let people outside know that it is available. Much, also, is never published, but simply gathers dust in a government office somewhere. Practitioners - and, indeed, other researchers - are simply unaware that this research even exists. And, then, if they do become aware of it, they frequently face a bureaucratic maze in trying to get access to it simply because nobody has authorized its release.

Lack of Ability To Use Research Findings

Even when research materials are communicated to practitioners, however, there are problems caused by the inability of many in the field to make adequate use of the findings. This is especially true where significant statistical expertise is required to fully comprehend the results, or where some basic knowledge of research method is essential to understanding. Most people in recreation and parks practice have only a rudimentary knowledge of statistics and research methods, and baulk at research reports that require anything greater than this. There are journals, such as the *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, which carry reports of research specifically directed to practitioners. But many in the field are simply not equipped to make effective use of this material.

Absence of an Appropriate Value Framework for Interpreting Research

In order to make good use of research findings in recreation and parks management, it is essential that an organization have a clear vision of its mandate and purposes. All organizations, whether public, commercial, or not-for-profit, have a value orientation - although this is often not very clearly articulated and is frequently not well known throughout the organization and to the general public. Yet, knowledge of such a value framework is central to the interpretation of research findings. What, for example, will a national park authority make of a research finding that most of its visitors prefer urban-style accommodations, if it has no vision or value orientation for itself? How does

a municipal recreation and parks department respond to a research finding that increasing the fees for swimming at local pools by 50% will reduce levels of use by only 10%, thereby increasing overall revenues - but that virtually all of the dropouts will be from low-income families? What can a practitioner make of findings like these in the absence of an articulated value framework? No matter how sophisticated a piece of research may be, not much can be done with its findings until there is a frame of accepted values within which they can be set. Unfortunately, such a value orientation often does not exist - or, where it does exist, is often not regularly employed when research findings are considered.

Policy and Management Insensitivity to Research

Much policy and management in public recreation is insensitive to research. Or, perhaps more correctly, research often takes second place to politics in the formulation of policy and management strategy. Many times, recreation and parks practitioners find themselves >strapped= by the political circumstances in which they operate. Weak, inefficient, and even inequitable programs are maintained because of policy considerations. Facilities, for example, are sometimes located where it is convenient rather than where population considerations suggest that they should be sited. Particular recreation programs may be offered not because research or experience has demonstrated a pressing need, but because special interest groups have lobbied successfully for them. Often, recreation and parks organizations cannot, or will not, make use of research findings simply because of such considerations. Then, of course, there is the opposite case, where research findings are employed not to discover and assess actions and alternatives, but to support an already-determined policy or management strategy. The misuse of research in this way is as insensitive to the true nature of scientific inquiry as is the wholesale disregard of whatever research findings do not accord with previously determined political considerations.

Lack of Replication

One of the principal problems with most recreation and leisure research is an almost total lack of replication. As a result, it has been virtually impossible to establish trends. And trend analysis is, of course, what most often interests practitioners. One enlightened exception to this in Canada was the series, *A Look At Leisure*, which employed the findings of the quadrennial Alberta Provincial Recreation Surveys to chart some trends in leisure behaviour in the province (Alberta Recreation and Parks, Various dates). This case, however, was notable precisely because it was an exception – and one that no longer exists. For the most part, research in the recreation and parks field is *once-off* and stands alone. There are many good - and some bad - reasons for this. Replications rarely get published in refereed journals, so academics don=t like doing them. Government research agencies have too many pressing problems that need first time investigation to consider repeating previous studies. Many governments have even been unable - or, more truthfully, unwilling - to repeat general leisure participation surveys on a regular basis, even though, with all their limitations, these are the simplest way of obtaining continuing census-type information. Funding for leisure and recreation research is volatile, so the continuity of funds that is an essential requirement for effective replication cannot be guaranteed. As well, past research results are rarely stored and made available in a form that will facilitate replication. But, whatever the reasons, the result is that recreation and parks agencies know precious little about trends of any kind - except, perhaps, trends in visitor and attendance levels (which can be obtained from admission records rather than research).

Limited Research Paradigms

Most leisure and recreation research has relied upon quantitative methods employed within the logical positivist tradition of research inquiry. The debate that has waxed and waned for more than two decades in much of the social sciences concerning the relative place and importance of qualitative research methods, such as ethnographic studies and phenomenology, appears to have finally caught up with the leisure and

recreation field during the past few years. But, the social survey is still the dominant methodology for most leisure and recreation research. As well, much of this research is atheoretical, ahistorical, and cross-sectional in character. As a result, it is largely non-cumulative. Research findings typically lack context and historical perspective.

While this situation has changed somewhat during the past decade or so, there is still a perception that many researchers in our field appear to be *endless beginners*, constantly reinventing the wheel. Moreover, the paramount interest seems to be in the size and dimensions of the wheel, rather than its functions and meanings for people. By this is meant that much leisure and recreation research is obsessed with what people do, how often, with whom, where, and at what cost - rather than why they engage in their chosen pursuits and what they experience from engagement. None of this is very helpful to practitioners, who could stand to know much more about what people seek from their programs and facilities, why they travel to the places they do, and how satisfied they are with their services.

Overlapping Worlds

It is not unreasonable to conclude that research is not a welcome part of the everyday lives of recreation and parks practitioners. Yet, this need not be the case. In such fields as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, and architecture, there is a mutual understanding among both researchers and practitioners of the array of intricate relationships that exists between them. Neither is master and neither is servant. They exist in separate but overlapping worlds - part of the same family, albeit, at times, difficult relations. This is the first thing that leisure researchers and recreation and parks practitioners must recognize. Having done so, they can then move on to consider where their separate domains converge, and how they can make these points of convergence work to the benefit of both parties.

In fact, it would seem that there are four important steps to be taken if progress is to be made in this regard. First, it is necessary to review various classifications and typologies of research, so that one can better determine the kinds of research that are

most helpful to practitioners. Second, procedures must be devised that will encourage, promote and facilitate the kinds of research that practitioners need to have available to them in their work. Third, a framework should be established that will bring researchers and practitioners into regular and frequent contact so that latter's needs can be clearly communicated to the former. Finally, a process needs to be developed for creating an applied recreation research agenda. These four conditions are the subject of the remaining four sections of this report.

3. TYPES OF RECREATION RESEARCH

Classifications and Typologies

It is important to begin any consideration of classifications of research by identifying purpose. Cullingworth (1965) observed that '… the usefulness of any particular classification will depend upon the purposes for which it is required … no classification will suffice for all purposes … and classifications are not mutually exclusive'. This sage observation has often been ignored in the rush to develop classifications and typologies of varying and diverse kinds in leisure and recreation – based on such things as leisure behavior, recreation and parks resources, organizational systems, and more. It is vital to remember that any framework for leisure and recreation research must be based upon a clear understanding of its purpose. In the present case, the objective is to develop a framework that may be used both to classify past and ongoing studies and to assist in setting priorities for future research – specifically, studies and projects that will be useful to recreation and parks practitioners.

Classifying Leisure and Recreation Research

There have been many attempts to classify leisure and recreation research. In most instances, these have been derived from attempts to classify the concepts of leisure and recreation directly. More than 30 years ago, Burton (1967) proposed a classification of recreation demands and supplies based on activity, recreation resources, and activity-resource relationships. Later classifications were based on such variables as: factor and cluster analyses of leisure activity (e.g. Burton, 1970; Allen, Donnelly and Warder 1984); the nature of the leisure experience (e.g. Harper, 1981; Gunter, 1987); categories of leisure constraints (e.g. Iso-Ahola and Mannell, 1985; Jackson and Scott, 1999); leisure needs (e.g. Tinsley and Johnson, 1984); and various kinds of recreation resources (e.g. IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas, 1994). In a recent text, Burton and Jackson (1999) developed a fivefold framework for reviewing leisure studies based on purpose: *understanding leisure*, *exploring leisure*, *experiencing leisure*, *delivering leisure*, and *debating leisure*. The most valuable classification for present

purposes, however, is Driver's (1989) typology of recreation research applications.

Types of Research Applications

Traditionally, when discussing relationships between research and practice, the distinction has been made between *pure* and *applied* research. Yet, this is not a helpful distinction, since all research can be thought of as having some actual or potential application. A far more valuable approach lies in efforts to distinguish between different types of research applications, based on the idea that scientific knowledge can be applied in several general ways. Driver's (1989) classification is intended to distinguish between different kinds of leisure research according to their utility to recreation and parks practitioners. It organizes research into four types (Table 1).

Table 1
DRIVER'S TYPES OF RESEARCH APPLICATIONS

Research Pursued For Its Own Sake: Research that seeks to acquire new knowledge - with no perceived instrumental purpose or reward, except incidentally.

Research Carried Out To Build Upon An Existing Body Of Knowledge*:* Research that sets out to add incrementally to what is already known, to build a storehouse of knowledge.

Research Undertaken In Order To Advance Professional Knowledge: Research that sets out to improve the body of theory underlying professional practice.

Problem-Oriented Research: Research that aims at the resolution of real world problems.

Source: B.L. Driver. (1989). 'Applied leisure research: Benefits to scientists and practitioners and their respective roles'. In E.L. Jackson and T.L. Burton. (Eds.). *Understanding leisure and recreation: Mapping the past, charting the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc., pp. 597-609.

First, *research can be pursued for its own sake*. In this case, the acquisition of new knowledge has no perceived instrumental purpose or reward - except incidentally. There need be no other justification for this type of research than the thrill of the chase. Certainly, there are many scientists and academics whose motivation is simply the desire to know and to understand. Einstein, for example, was interested in understanding relativity and the relationship between energy and mass. Whether his theories would ever be applied bothered him little. In fact, in 1932, he commented that: ' ... there is not the slightest indication that (nuclear) energy will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will'. (Cerf & Navasky, 1984).

Second, *research may be carried out to build upon an existing body of knowledge*. The purpose here is to add incrementally to what is already known, to build a storehouse of knowledge. A great deal of the research into motivation in leisure and sport falls into this category (Iso-Ahola, 1999). This is, in fact, how the majority of human knowledge has been acquired - although not necessarily through research, since logic and experience are also ways of adding to what is already known. Research may have no immediate purpose beyond this. Thus, an important application of research may simply be to promote further research.

Third, *research may be done in order to advance a body of professional knowledge*. This kind of research is different from the kind that simply extends the general store of knowledge. It is specifically oriented to professional activity. The skills that characterize a profession are derived from, and supported by, a fund of knowledge organized into a consistent body of theory. The members of the profession are engaged in applying this well-defined body of theory to everyday practice. The purpose of research in this situation is to improve the body of theory and, hence, professional practice. Much of the research into the carrying capacity of national parks and wilderness areas that has been developed over the past quarter century in North America falls into this category (Manning, Lime and Hof, 1996).

Finally, *there is the kind of research that aims at the resolution of real world problems* – what may be called *problem-oriented research*. It may involve the introduction of a new product or program, such as occurred for in-line skating in North

America. Or, it may seek to devise an improved way of delivering an existing product or program. As well, this kind of research includes efforts to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of program, facility and service delivery, as has been the case with a variety of studies of alternatives ways of delivering public leisure services that have been carried out during the past decade (e.g. Glover & Burton, 1998; Burton & Glover, 1999). The central aim of such research is to address and resolve practical problems and concerns.

In this regard, it is worth noting that there is a distinct kind of problem-oriented research that is of particular concern to the recreation and parks community. This is research that addresses *common* problems faced by practitioners. There are some issues and concerns that are common to many, if not all, agencies and organizations involved in delivering recreation and parks services: measurement of benefits; assessment of the economic impacts of major new facilities and special events; schemes and methods for conducting integrated strategic planning for recreation, sports, arts, parks, and playgrounds; systems and procedures for developing consistent community involvement in recreation and parks provision; and more. Practitioners need *templates* to address these kinds of activities, and they look to research to assist them in developing such templates.

Driver's four types of research occupy points along a continuum. At one end is the kind of intrinsic research that has no immediate anticipated application. At the other end is the problem-oriented kind of research where the focus is purposefully applied: it addresses a specific practical issue or problem. The remaining types occupy positions in between. Practitioners are primarily interested in the last two categories - and, especially, the final one. Typically, they want immediate answers to pressing problems. They are also usually attracted to the type of research that, while not addressing an immediate problem, is aimed at furthering the general body of knowledge that underpins professional practice. Academics, on the other hand, are often driven by the wider questions that generate the first two categories of research. They are interested in conducting research simply and solely for the new knowledge that it will bring, or because it will build upon and augment an existing body of knowledge, which may or may not have immediate application. The truth is that many leisure researchers have no

great interest in the problems of recreation and parks practitioners, while many practitioners neither care for nor comprehend some of the more esoteric interests of researchers. It is this, more than anything, which has led to the difficult relations between leisure researchers and recreation practitioners that was discussed earlier in Section 2. Yet, despite this significant divergence in orientation, there is a large area of common interest, and considerable benefits can accrue to both researchers and practitioners from carrying out the problem-oriented type of research that addresses practical issues and concerns.

Research for Practitioners

It bears repeating that none of the various classes of research described above is illegitimate. All have a place in the lexicon. However, consideration of the Driver typology from the perspective of the needs of the practitioner inevitably leads to the conclusion that the kind of research most necessary is *Problem-Oriented Research*. Projects in the *Enhancing Professional Knowledge* category are also important to practitioners, though less immediately applicable to particular problems and issues that they face. It is one thing, however, to identify the need for applied research in this way. It is quite another to determine how such research can be carried out successfully. This is the subject of the next section of this report.

4. NURTURING PROBLEM-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Advantages to Researchers and Practitioners

There are considerable advantages that can accrue to both researchers and practitioners from carrying out the problem-oriented type of research that addresses practical issues and concerns. One of the most significant identified - by Beaman (1978), Burton (1988), Driver (1989), and others - is *enhanced problem definition*. Because practitioners identify and view problems differently from researchers, their involvement in defining a research question frequently offers alternative perspectives and insights to the researcher. Conversely, the researcher can often provide a detached view of a problem, something that the practitioner may not be able to do because of an ongoing involvement in it. The latter may simply be too close to the problem to see it clearly. The result can be a new way of examining and addressing a problem and, possibly, a new research approach to it.

A second advantage noted by both Burton (1970) and Driver (1989) derives from the fact that *practitioners often have access to data that are not readily available to researchers*. Many kinds of data are collected by recreation and parks agencies in the course of their everyday activities. These include attendance figures, expenditure numbers of various kinds, information about the sizes and types of groups participating in particular activities or attending particular events, and more. Such data are rarely employed for research purposes, yet may be amenable to research treatment. By working with practitioners on problem-oriented projects, researchers will often gain access to these kinds of data.

Even today, in an atmosphere that advocates and fosters multidisciplinarity, most researchers tend to address problems from distinct disciplinary viewpoints. Yet the real world defies disciplinary compartmentalization. Another advantage of problem-oriented research, then, is that *it reminds the researcher that real world problems invariably require multidisciplinary solutions* (Driver, 1989). As well, both the researcher and the practitioner come to appreciate that some problems are either unsolvable or only partially solvable, and that some cannot be readily encompassed within standard research designs.

In addition, many are long-term and changing in nature, so that solutions tend to be incremental rather than total. The researcher=s tendency to state problems in overly complicated terms will tend to be curtailed when engaged in problem-oriented research, while the practitioner=s often naive faith in the ability of research to solve all and any problem will likely be reduced significantly.

A final advantage of problem-oriented research noted by Driver (1989) is that *it provides both the researcher and the practitioner with insights into the other=s view of the world*. Each functions in a different institutional setting, speaks a different language, and operates under a different set of workplace values. Thus, writing reports that are understandable to the practitioner will often enhance the researcher=s communication skills, while participation in developing hypotheses, preparing research designs, and building research instruments will help to expand the practitioner=s horizons.

Eight Conditions for Nurturing Problem-Oriented Research

While it is evident, then, that problem-oriented research can benefit both researchers and practitioners, this kind of research activity does not simply come about of its own volition. Deliberate action must be taken to foster and nurture it. The particular conditions that will allow problem-oriented research to be initiated and flourish must be purposefully created. What are some of these conditions?

Several writers have addressed this question, and most have responded with a list of ideal requirements (e.g. Beaman, 1978; Burton, 1977 & 1988; Driver, 1989; Driver & Koch, 1981). These lists encompass a wide variety of suggestions, but central to all of them has been the requirement that the researcher and practitioner work closely with each other on all aspects of the research - from problem definition, through research design, data collection, and analysis, to interpretation and implementation of the findings. A common theme in all of the writings is, first, that the researcher must abandon the *ivory tower* and move into the operational setting; and, second, that the practitioner must step back from the frenzy of everyday activity to reflect on purposes, objectives, and means - the essential prerequisites to proper problem-oriented research.

The most complete list of requirements for the conduct of successful problem-oriented research has been compiled by Driver (1989), and modified by Burton (1991). This will form the foundation for the discussion that follows. Driver lists eleven conditions, which were compressed into eight by Burton.

[1] *The problem must be relevant and researchable*. There must be a readily identifiable problem that is relevant to the practitioner=s concerns and is capable of actually being researched. There is no point in pursuing a problem which does not lend itself to research investigation - perhaps because the research instruments to address it do not exist and cannot be developed adequately at the time, or because there is no clear evidence that the problem is relevant to the practitioner=s domain. If there is to be any chance of success for problem-oriented research, it must begin by demonstrating that the problem is, in fact, researchable and is relevant to the practitioner=s responsibilities.

[2] *The researcher and the practitioner must have a common understanding of the nature and characteristics of the problem, and of its significance*. If there is disagreement about what precisely is the problem, the research is doomed to failure. Regardless of who first identifies it, the problem must be jointly defined and understood. Ideally, both parties should have a personal and mutual interest in the problem. Certainly, their interests must go beyond their narrow and immediate occupational needs. The researcher should be interested in something more than just another publication. The practitioner should be concerned with more than meeting just another program target.

[3] *The research effort must be genuinely cooperative*. All too often, the researcher takes charge of a problem brought forward by the practitioner, and then makes no further contact until the research is completed. All too often, the research is then found to be inadequate, or lacking in some important respect. The practitioner should be involved in all phases of the research - even if only in an advisory capacity. Preferably, the practitioner should assist in defining objectives, reviewing methods and instruments, examining findings, and writing reports.

[4] *The researcher and the practitioner must each understand the other=s needs and responsibilities*. It is imperative that the researcher knows of, and acknowledges, the institutional, budgetary, and time constraints faced by the practitioner. At the same time,

the practitioner must accede to the researcher=s need to adhere to the appropriate rules of scientific inquiry. Each must recognise the professional requirements of the other. Mutual trust and respect must be established and fostered. This requires considerable face-to-face interaction and demands willingness to compromise. Also important here is the recognition by each of the other=s performance evaluation systems. Practitioners should recognise that most researchers do not obtain great recognition within their own communities for doing problem-oriented research, which limits what they can do. Researchers, on the other hand, should understand that practitioners are evaluated primarily on the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and, hence, need usable research findings.

[5] *The researcher and practitioner must understand their basic differences.* Those who pursue careers in research are generally quite different from those who engage in professional activity. Where the researcher is often tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty - and, indeed, sometimes appears to welcome such conditions - the practitioner prefers unequivocal solutions. The timelines that are general route markers for the researcher are often precise mileposts for the practitioner. Researchers and practitioners are quite different in the ways in which they approach and address problems. It is essential that each recognize this simple fact.

[6] *The mechanisms for carrying out the project must be mutually agreed.* Because of the kinds of differences just discussed, it is essential that the mechanisms adopted for the organization and conduct of a particular problem-oriented research project are mutually defined and agreed to by both parties. Inevitably, this will involve compromises. What is important about compromises, however, is not that they exist, but that both parties can live with them.

[7] *It is vital to maintain the scientific credibility of the research.* Poor quality research will be of little help in resolving real world problems. The researcher will succeed only in losing the respect and trust of the practitioner. Neither the researcher nor the practitioner should attempt to read more into the findings of the research than is justified by the method and the results.

[8] *The researcher should be involved in the early application of the research findings*. If researchers are involved in the application of the findings of their work, they offer a valuable resource to the practitioner. They can clarify findings, answer methodological questions, interpret instructions, and generally assist in employing the findings to address the problem that precipitated the research in the first place. As well, this involvement makes it clear that the researcher really cares about the practitioner=s problem, and does not see him or her simply and solely as a convenient source of research funding.

Creating the Conditions

Each of these stated conditions for nurturing problem-oriented research is admirable, but how are they to be brought about? This was specifically addressed by Burton (1991). First, and most important, there is a need for the kind of communication between researchers and practitioners that dwells on processes rather than outcomes. Symposiums and conferences are not very helpful in promoting problem-oriented research - except, perhaps, as a means of illustrating and encouraging it. Conference papers that outline the findings of problem-oriented research projects show how useful this type of research can be to the practitioner. But they do not demonstrate how to go about doing it. What this requires are presentations that describe how a project was carried through.

The same thing can be said about articles in applied research and professional journals. These can play an important role in alerting practitioners to the findings of particular problem-oriented projects and in demonstrating what can be achieved through such research. But, again, they do not show how such projects are carried through. They focus upon the results of the exercise, not its organization and conduct.

The primary need, then, is to build bridges between researchers and practitioners in leisure and recreation. But, as John Updike once observed, the trouble with bridges is that they have no content, only traffic. Thus, the types of bridges to be built are what count. They must carry the kinds of traffic that both sides need - information on how best to go about developing and conducting problem-oriented research.

One admirable mechanism for this is the workshop or research institute. Workshops and institutes are designed to meet specific and particular objectives. Invariably, they emphasize process as much as, if not more than, product. Research organizations like the *Canadian Association for Leisure Studies* (CALS) could work together with practitioner associations like the *Alberta Recreation and Parks Association* (ARPA) to develop a series of workshops in which the emphasis would be upon the process for conducting problem-oriented research projects. (A way of doing this is outlined in a later section of this report.) They would deal with everything from how to find the right kind of researcher, through defining roles, to implementing findings. They could (and should) include a problem-based learning component, in which the participants face specific problems similar to those encountered in reality, and from which they are expected to learn the concepts and methods necessary to solve them. The workshops would be designed to focus upon different settings - from the rural community to the small town to the large city - and in different substantive contexts - programs, facilities and services.

Consultants are an important aspect of all this. Consultants are middlemen or brokers. They have one foot in the field of practice and the other in the domain of research. They are users of research who ply their trade with practitioners. Of course, there are good consultants and bad ones. The good ones can play a pivotal role in the design, organization, and conduct of workshops on problem-oriented research. They should be encouraged to do so.

Organizational Support

The conditions for nurturing problem-oriented research that have been discussed here will go a long way to improving both the quality of such research and the relationships between researchers and practitioners engaged in it. However, these conditions will not develop spontaneously. There is a need for organizational support for them to occur, in the form of an applied research network that can encourage and foster their development and application.

5. AN APPLIED RECREATION RESEARCH NETWORK FOR ALBERTA (ARRNA)

Characteristics of a Network

The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1998) offers seven definitions of the word 'network', two of which are relevant to the present discussion. They are:

- '… a group of people who exchange information, contacts, and experience for professional or social purposes …'; and
- '… a chain of interconnected computers, machines, or operations …'.

These two definitions capture the essence of the proposed Applied Recreation Research Network for Alberta (ARRNA). It will be a coming together of researchers, practitioners, lay people, and others in the recreation and parks field interested in furthering the application of research to practical problems and professional issues. Furthermore, the most effective way of doing this would be to enable these people to connect with each other both through face-to-face physical meetings and via on-line electronic communications.

More importantly, these two definitions help to distinguish a *network* from an *information system*. Several of the latter have been created in the leisure field over the years - for example, the Leisure Information Network (LIN). The principal characteristic of such systems is that they are made up of materials that are entered into a database or library and are then made available to designated users through a one-way system in which access is controlled by a database administrator or librarian. A network, in contrast, is an interactive system in which information flows among and between members. It may include a database or library, but it goes beyond this to enable group discussion about issues, problems, needs, and concerns pertinent to the network members. A database or library is one-dimensional, allowing users access to information that has been deposited within it. A network is multi-dimensional, permitting members to ask questions of each other, to offer opinions about the appropriateness of information, to

inquire about the availability of resources not included in the database or library, and to engage in debate and discussion about common concerns.

To develop such a network, however, requires that several questions be addressed. What will be the purpose of the network? What will be contained in it? What activities will be facilitated through it? Who may become part of it? How and where will the administration of the network be housed? What will be the guidelines for participation in it? How will the network be financed? In short, there are many important topics that need to be addressed if such a network is to be established.

Purpose

The purpose of the Applied Recreation Research Network for Alberta (ARRNA) would be fivefold:

- first, to provide a repository of information about problem-oriented recreation research studies and projects that have been carried out in the province and elsewhere;
- second, to provide a means for members to access this information;
- third, to offer a means whereby members can communicate directly with each other to seek advice and assistance about problem-oriented research projects;
- fourth, to act as a forum for the identification and discussion of issues and concerns about problem-oriented recreation research; and
- fifth, to take a lead role in the development of an applied recreation research agenda, including establishment of priorities for problem-oriented research projects and studies for recreation and parks.

At present, the ARPA *ListServer* acts, in a limited way, as a means whereby a member can inquire of all other members about the availability of research projects and studies that have been conducted by any of them. The network, however, would be far more versatile, facilitating the establishment of discussion groups, offering direct access to information on deposit, and enabling direct exchange of information between members.

Content and Activities

The content and activities coming under the umbrella of ARRNA would consist of at least the following:

- A library of completed and ongoing applied recreation research projects, in both paper and electronic form;
- An system for on-line exchange of information about ongoing projects that can benefit from research, including opportunities for members to ask each other about research resources they have employed to address common problems;
- On-line discussion forums (chat rooms) in which members can talk about practical problems they face and possible solutions to them, drawing upon the research and professional experiences of each other;
- An ongoing on-line forum for debate and discussion about applied recreation research needs and priorities; and
- Opportunities for periodic face-to-face meetings that address aspects of all of the above – through workshops, seminars, forums, and the like.

These contents of the network emphasize its dual character: as an on-line electronic meeting place as well as an organization for arranging opportunities for in-depth debate and discussion around particular issues in a setting where participants meet face-to-face.

Membership

The membership of ARRNA should be open to at least the following groups and individuals:

- Practitioners in community recreation and parks agencies throughout the province;
- Individuals and groups engaged in, or involved with, carrying out applied recreation research in Alberta, including those in universities and colleges;
- Lay people active in the community recreation and parks field who have an interest in furthering applied recreation research in the province;

- Related organizations in the recreation and parks field (such as arts federations, sports groups, and community associations) that also have an interest in furthering applied recreation research in the Province;
- Government departments and agencies whose mandates encompass recreation, sport, arts, parks, and playgrounds, and who stand to gain from access to the results of applied recreation research projects and studies;
- Consultants – both individual and corporate – whose activities include research, planning, and management for recreation and parks; and
- Corporations and private companies with interests in community recreation and parks, who are prepared to support and encourage applied research.

The intent should be to throw a wide net, to permit involvement of all whose activities impinge upon, and can derive benefits from, the enhancement of applied recreation research in the province.

Managing the Network

The principal purpose of ARRNA will be to foster applied recreation research for the use and benefit of recreation and parks practitioners in Alberta. Thus, while it will include members who are not practitioners, its management and operation should be in the hands of practitioners – though overall policy direction should be the responsibility of a Board of Directors that would include others besides practitioners. The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), as the most inclusive organization of practitioners in the province, is the logical parent body for ARRNA. However, it is important that the network not be operated as part of the everyday professional activities of ARPA. This will be to the benefit of both ARPA and ARRNA, since it will allow inclusion of groups and individuals who are not practitioners but who have an active interest in applied recreation research. ARRNA should be a distinct entity with its own responsibilities and resources.

Finance and Funding

A network such as ARRNA cannot be established without cost. At minimum, it will need capital funds to obtain computing and communications equipment for the electronic side of its activities. As well, there will be a need for staff both to organize its activities and events, and to operate and maintain the electronic side of the network. And, of course, space will be required for housing staff and equipment. It is impossible in this broad overview to determine what will be the initial costs of setting up the organization and its subsequent operating costs. A feasibility study would be able to assess these more precisely.

As for funding sources, these could include grants from government agencies and foundations, membership fees, user fees, sponsorships, and (possibly) donations of equipment. Again, a feasibility study would be able to assess these opportunities and resources in more detail.

It is also important to note that all components of the network do not have to be put in place at one single time. It could begin, for example, with the establishment of an on-line service where individuals could contact others for advice and assistance with problems and concerns. The on-line and paper library of research resources could come later, as could the on-line forum for discussion and debate.

An Opportunity

This proposal is embryonic in form. It is merely an outline of what might be done. It is clear that there is a need for a system such as ARRNA. During the past couple of years, while ARPA has been going through a major policy and organizational review, members have increasingly recognized the potential value to them of applied recreation research, and have indicated a genuine interest in furthering its development. Requests for information about how to deal with management problems of various kinds – and specifically asking about any research that may have been carried out bearing on these problems - have appeared regularly in messages on the ARPA *ListServer* in recent months. The principal question for ARPA is whether or not it is prepared to pursue this idea further and in detail. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

6. DEVELOPING AN APPLIED RECREATION RESEARCH AGENDA

The Process

One of the principal purposes of the ARRNA will be to enable the development of an applied recreation research agenda for Alberta that will draw upon the experiences and stated needs of the members of the network. This would be done through electronic and face-to-face forums and workshops organized as part of network activities. It would be improper, therefore, to propose a specific agenda here. It will be helpful, however, to discuss some of the criteria and mechanisms that should guide such a process.

First, of course, the primary focus must be upon *problem-oriented research* projects and studies, with a secondary concern for studies directed at *the advancement of professional knowledge*. As was indicated earlier, while other types of research are both legitimate and important to our growing understanding of the nature and characteristics of leisure and recreation and their significance to individuals, communities, and society at large, the intent here is to engage in research that will enhance professional practice directly.

Second, since resources are inevitably limited, it will be important to establish criteria for setting priorities among projects and studies. One set of such priorities will assess the extent to which any proposed project or study meets the conditions for nurturing problem-oriented research outlined earlier in Section 4 of this report. A second set of criteria would seek to assess the extent to which the expected outcomes of any proposed project or study will enhance the benefits obtained by individuals, communities, and society at large. To do this requires an understanding of the benefits approach to leisure.

The Benefits Approach to Leisure (BAL)

Driver and Bruns (1999) have argued that the benefits approach to leisure (BAL), which has emerged fully only during the past decade or so, '… is not only a philosophy about the roles of leisure in society and how leisure service delivery systems should be managed, but also a system for directing leisure research, instruction, policy development, and management'. Conventional approaches to delivering community

recreation and parks opportunities focus primarily on the inputs to the system: capital, personnel, physical resources, programs, marketing, and the like. The BAL, in contrast, views such inputs simply as the necessary means to realizing desired outcomes or benefits: improved individual and community health, personal growth, community cohesion, environmental protection, and so on. The BAL requires that managers prepare clear statements of the benefits that are expected to result from their management operations.

The basic question that the BAL seeks to address is why any particular recreation program, facility, or service should be provided. It does this by attempting to list the anticipated outcomes, or benefits, – both positive and negative – that will result from the decision to provide this program, facility, or service. The intent, of course, is to optimize net benefits – or, at least, increase them beyond what they presently are. Recreation and parks practitioners and their supporters have argued for more than a century that their programs and facilities add greatly to individual and community welfare. However, this was always a statement to be taken on faith, since specific examples could rarely be either enumerated or quantified. The BAL is an attempt to change this situation.

When researchers first started investigating the BAL in earnest in 1991, it was called Benefits-Based Management (BBM), reflecting a focus on its potential utility as a guide to recreation and parks management. The latter term is still in use in the management context, but has been superseded by the term BAL in general discussion, as the latter encompasses much more than management.

The first step in the development of the BAL has been to identify and classify the various benefits that both research and experience have shown are outcomes of recreation and parks programs and facilities. Early studies of benefits had led to extensive – and, often, disparate – lists of purported benefits from participation in leisure and recreation activities. In 1990, however, Driver produced a composite listing of benefits, based on a wide-ranging review of publications covering the years from 1961 through 1989 (Driver, 1990). He organized these into four principal groups: *personal, social and cultural, economic*, and *environmental* benefits. This list was updated by Driver and Bruns in

1999, based upon the findings of additional studies carried out through the 1990s (Driver & Bruns, 1999).

Personal Benefits encompass such outcomes as exhilaration, stimulation, avoidance of illness, and reduced consumption of health-endangering substances such as alcohol and tobacco. They have been divided into two subgroups: *psychological benefits* – further subdivided into enhanced health, personal development and growth, and personal appreciation and satisfaction (Table 2); and *psycho-physiological benefits* (Table 3). In all, there are 61 distinct items listed in the personal benefits category.

Table 3
DRIVER AND BRUNS' COMPOSITE LIST OF BENEFITS FROM LEISURE
Personal Benefits (Psycho-physiological)

1. Cardiovascular benefits, including prevention of strokes
2. Reduced or prevented hypertension
3. Reduced serum cholesterol and triglycerides
4. Improved control and prevention of diabetes
5. Prevention of colon cancer
6. Reduced spinal problems
7. Decreased body fat and obesity and/or weight control
8. Improved neuropsychological functioning
9. Increased bone mass and strength in children
10. Increased muscle strength and better connective tissue
11. Respiratory benefits (increased lung capacity, benefits to people with asthma)
12. Reduced incidence of disease
13. Improved bladder control of the elderly
14. Increased life expectancy
15. Management of menstrual cycles
16. Management of arthritis
17. Improved functioning of the immune system
18. Reduced consumption of alcohol and use of tobacco

Source: B.L. Driver & D.H. Bruns. (1999). 'Concepts and uses of the benefits approach to leisure'. In E.L. Jackson & T.L. Burton. (Eds.). *Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty-first century*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc., 349-369.

Social and Cultural Benefits are ones that accrue to a particular community or to society at large as a result of the provision of recreation and parks programs and facilities. They include such things as community satisfaction, family bonding, reduced social alienation, community integration, and enhanced ethnic identity. Driver and Bruns listed 24 distinct social and cultural benefits deriving from community recreation and parks services (Table 4).

Table 4
DRIVER AND BRUNS' COMPOSITE LIST OF BENEFITS FROM LEISURE
Social and Cultural Benefits

1. Community satisfaction
2. Pride in community and nation (pride in place and patriotism)
3. Cultural and historical awareness and appreciation
4. Reduced social alienation
5. Community and political involvement
6. Ethnic identity
7. Social bonding, cohesion, and cooperation
8. Conflict resolution and harmony
9. Greater community involvement in environmental decision making
10. Social support
11. Support democratic ideal of freedom
12. Family bonding
13. Reciprocity and sharing
14. Social mobility
15. Community integration
16. Nurturance of others
17. Understanding and tolerance of others
18. Environmental awareness and sensitivity
19. Enhanced world view
20. Socialization and acculturation
21. Cultural identity
22. Cultural continuity
23. Prevention of social problems of at-risk youth
24. Developmental benefits of children

Source: B.L. Driver & D.H. Bruns. (1999). 'Concepts and uses of the benefits approach to leisure'. In E.L. Jackson & T.L. Burton. (Eds.). *Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty-first century*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc., 349-369.

Recreation and parks services are also generators of significant *Economic Benefits* to communities and society in general. Notable among these are benefits arising from reduced health care costs, increased productivity, local and regional economic growth, and decreased job turnover. Driver and Bruns listed eight separate economic benefits deriving from recreation and parks services (Table 5).

Table 5
DRIVER AND BRUNS' COMPOSITE LIST OF BENEFITS FROM LEISURE
Economic Benefits

1. Reduced health costs
2. Increased productivity
3. Less work absenteeism
4. Reduced on-the-job accidents
5. Decreased job turnover
6. International balance of payments (from tourism)
7. Local and regional economic growth
8. Contributions to net national economic development

Source: B.L. Driver & D.H. Bruns. (1999). 'Concepts and uses of the benefits approach to leisure'. In E.L. Jackson & T.L. Burton. (Eds.). *Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty-first century*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc., 349-369.

The final category of benefits deriving from recreation and parks services consists of *Environmental Benefits*. These are outcomes that affect the natural and man-made environments. They include such things as enhanced stewardship of land and water resources, preservation of particular natural sites and areas, and promotion of an environmental ethic. Driver and Bruns identified seven of these, one of which they further divided into five separate categories (Table 6).

The value of this classification is that it enables us to ask what are the likely outcomes of particular research projects. As suggested above, the classification of benefits can be a yardstick against which to measure what are the intended outcomes of a project in terms of its contributions to the field of practice. If the impressive list compiled

by Driver and Bruns is, indeed, a valid statement of the beneficial contributions of recreation and parks services to our communities and society at large, then it is pertinent to ask how particular research projects contribute to the enhancement of the items listed.

Table 6
DRIVER AND BRUNS' COMPOSITE LIST OF BENEFITS FROM LEISURE
Environmental Benefits

1. Maintenance of physical facilities
2. Stewardship and preservation of options
3. Husbandry and improved relationships with the natural world
4. Understanding of human dependency on the natural world
5. Environmental ethic
6. Public involvement in environmental issues
7. Environmental protection
   a. Ecosystem sustainability
   b. Species diversity
   c. Maintenance of natural scientific laboratories
   d. Preservation of particular natural sites and areas
   e. Preservation of cultural, heritage, and historic sites and areas

Source: B.L. Driver & D.H. Bruns. (1999). 'Concepts and uses of the benefits approach to leisure'. In E.L. Jackson & T.L. Burton. (Eds.). *Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty-first century*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc., 349-369.

One question that has been raised recently is whether or not the list by Driver and Bruns is sufficiently inclusive. Are there, perhaps, other categories of benefits from leisure and recreation that have not been included in their exhaustive compilation? What about, for example, policy, planning, and governance benefits? Is it possible that benefits to do with policy formulation, planning strategies, and governance can be derived from leisure and recreation activity? Driver and Bruns have limited the benefits on their lists to those benefits that can be derived directly from engagement in leisure and recreation activity. But are there others that can be obtained indirectly from the process of recreation and parks provision? This is a worthy research question in itself.

A Beginning Agenda

It was suggested earlier that the elaboration of an applied recreation research agenda must emanate from the members of the ARRNA, and that this will occur over time through the activities of the network. It is worth noting, however, that a recent survey of the members of the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (the proposed core members of the ARRNA) addressed the topic of research needs and priorities indirectly (Burton, 2001). Respondents to the survey were given ' … a list of planning and policy concerns relevant to the organization and delivery of municipal recreation and parks services … ' and asked to indicate how important it is ' … that ARPA begin to address these concerns in the next five years'. Responses were given along the following scale: *very important – of some importance – not very important*.

Results based on the proportions indicating that a topic was *very important* show the following priorities for the respondents:

- How to carry out consistent and practical economic impact assessments for recreation, sport, and culture (55.3% of responses);
- Developing practical ways of using benefits assessments in municipal recreation and parks (48.7%);
- Developing methods of empowering community groups as partners in recreation and parks provision (44.7%);
- Understanding long-term pressures on the voluntary sector and implications for recreation and parks services (42.1%);
- How to conduct integrated strategic planning for recreation, sport, arts, parks, and playgrounds (38.2%); and
- Developing ways of carrying out recreation and parks services performance evaluations (34.2%).

Other topics had fewer than one-quarter of the respondents rating them as *very important*.

Several of these priorities imply a beginning research agenda. At the head of this would be the desire for development of a practical way of assessing the benefits of

community recreation and parks services, since this would be valuable not only to assessing services themselves but also to setting priorities for applied research. Indeed, this is merely the first of several topics that call for *the development of methods or means for assessing outcomes from community recreation and parks services*:

- ways of conducting consistent and practical economic impact assessments for recreation, sport, and culture;
- methods of empowering community groups as partners in community recreation and parks;
- ways of carrying out integrated strategic planning for recreation, sport, arts, parks, and playgrounds; and
- ways of carrying out recreation and parks services performance evaluations.

It would appear from this that practitioners readily accept the need for a variety of measures of their activities: benefits obtained, economic impacts generated, community partnerships created, and more. What they are seeking is a series of *templates* that will help them to determine these for their own particular services, programs, and facilities.

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