

In-depth Examination of Constraints on the Use of Urban Parks for Physical Activity in Latino Neighborhoods

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Introduction and Background

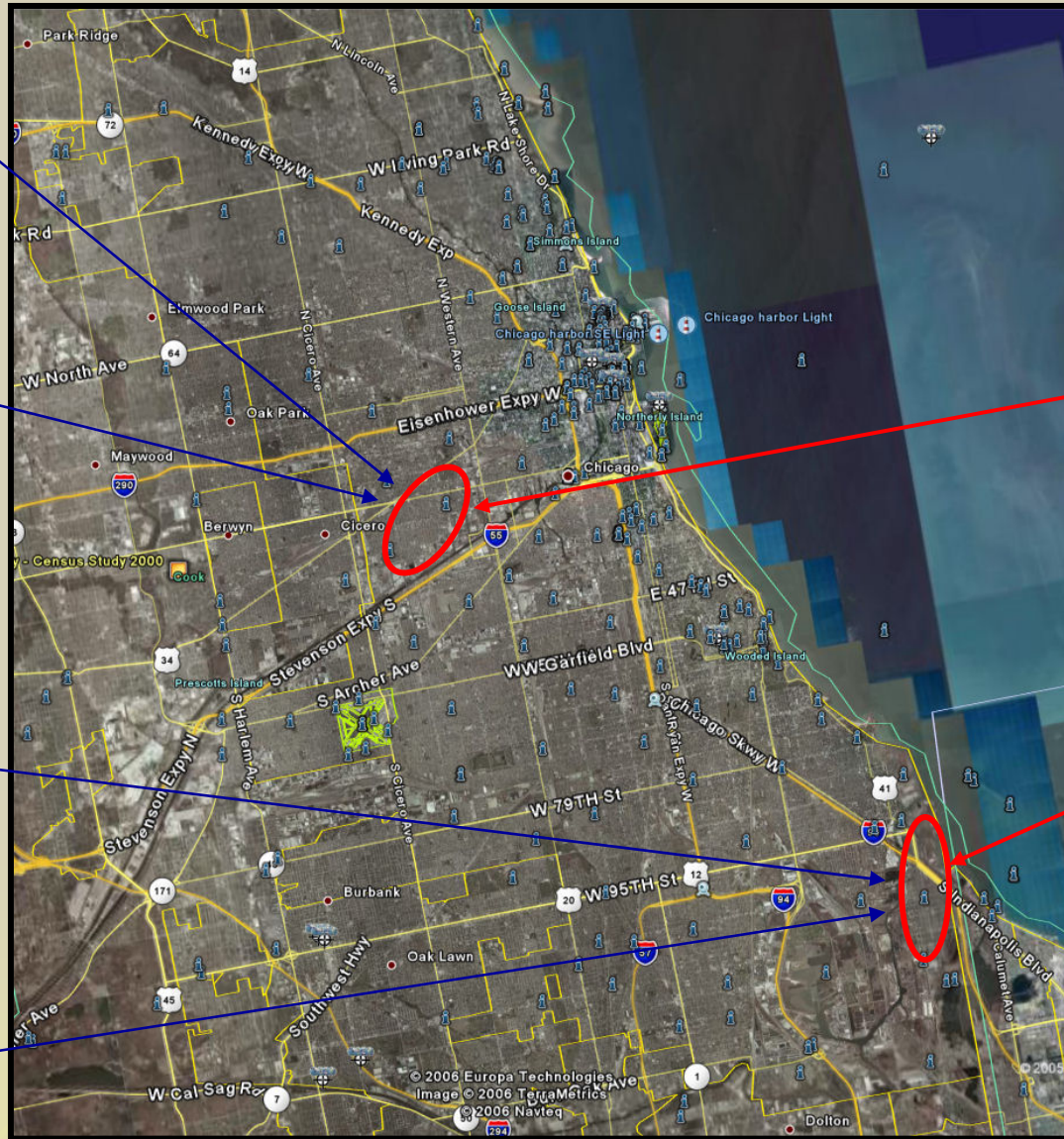
- Promotion of LTPA is especially important for Latinos, who constitute the fastest growing and one of the least active groups in the U.S.
- Due to their low cost, urban parks have a high potential to provide significant LTPA opportunities in minority neighborhoods.
- Current use of parks for LTPA, however, is often constrained by a number of factors that need to be examined before policy recommendations aimed at reducing such constraints can be formulated.

Objectives of the Study

- Part of a **larger project** on environmental preferences and the use of natural environments for recreation in Latino neighborhoods.
- **Objectives of this part of the study:**
 - To provide an in-depth examination of factors that constrain Latinos' use of urban parks for LTPA.

These factors were related to the *characteristics of the parks themselves* and the *characteristics of the communities* in which they were located.

Little Village



South Lawndale (Little Village)

East Side

East Side

Methods

- **Two focus groups** with first generation Latino immigrants and **two focus groups** with Latinos born in the U.S.
- **Timeline** – June – September, 2007
- **Gender** – 13 men and 13 women (26 participants total)
- **Language of focus groups** – English in f.g. with Latinos born in the U.S. and Spanish in f.g. with immigrants.
- **Snowball and stratified sampling**
- **Length of focus groups** – 1.5 – 2.5 hours.
- **Locations of focus groups** – private homes and a restaurant.

Methods

- **Ages of participants** – early 20's to late 60's.
- **Occupations of participants** - construction, hotels, factories, nursing homes, babysitting, teacher's assistant, chiropractor's assistant, customer service, students, car mechanic, unemployed people.
- **Ethnic background of participants** – all Mexican-American.
- Focus groups tape recorded and video recorded.
- **Analysis** – Constant comparative method.
- Participants paid \$25 for involvement in focus groups.

Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

➤ **Safety**

Jesus - There is a thing with gangs and parks. For example the only park we have is Piotrowski. The gangs have it really controlled. The gangs gain hold of the parks. Then, it doesn't really matter if you have a park and you don't have security in it. No one would want to go to the park. *[LV, immigrants interview, 8 years in the U.S.]*



Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

➤ **Poor maintenance of parks**

- Jogging trails full of potholes
- Trash
- Lack of water fountains
- Unsanitary restrooms

Elsa – [About Piotrowski Park] It is disgusting! When it rains it is always flooded around the path around the park. There are these big holes that they just filled up with big rocks and part of the track around the park. There is broken glass all around. The bathrooms in the field house are one of the most disgusting things. The water runs in the bathroom. You can't see yourself in the mirrors because they are so dirty and so scratched up. *[LV, born in the U.S., 20 years old, undergraduate student]*

Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

➤ **Facility problems**

- Lack of facilities
- Poor maintenance of facilities
- Improper use of facilities
- Dilapidated playground equipment



Elsa – Inside the field it's pretty gross. The tennis courts are messed up. There is gravel. The pool is just crowded, dirty. The playground is falling apart. It's rusty. *[LV, born in the U.S., 20 years old, undergraduate student]*

Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

➤ **Crowding, insufficient size**

Roxana – There is just too many people there. It's just too overcrowded to begin with. It's just not a very comfortable place to go and be outside. *[L.V., born in the U.S., 25 years old, teacher's assistant]*

Gloria – Piotrowski Park is very small for all the people that live there. A lot of times we pass driving through there and it's always full. There is need for more, bigger parks. *[LV, immigrants interview, 50 years old, unemployed, 18 years in the U.S.]*

Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

- **Insufficient staffing; lack of Spanish-language information** about programs.

Carla – I think the communication exists, but a lot of the times there isn't a lot of information out there in Spanish... they don't really make a big effort at communicating that in a native language. You have a class in the park, let's say gymnastics. They never put out that information in Spanish. It would always be flyers in English, so the community doesn't find out that we have that. *[East Side, born in the U.S., 27 years old, customer service for an airline company]*



Findings

Characteristics of the Parks

➤ **Racial tensions - Different racial background of park users.**

Elsa – There is just engrained racism between Hispanic people and Black people; Hispanic people often wouldn't go to the park because that park is the Black people's park. You are starting to see Black people in Piotrowski Park, but you wouldn't see that often because that is the *Hispanic park*. [LV, born in the U.S., 20 years old, student]

Erik - I think what happened is that there are the Latino gangs and the Black gangs. The Latino gangs are giving us a bad image and the Black people won't feel safe with us and say "hey is this another gang banger that is going to start things with us?" And when they come over here we think the same thing too. You don't know who that is, where is he coming from? does he have a gun? does he not? [LV, born in the U.S., 20 years old, car mechanic].

Findings

Characteristics of the Neighborhoods

➤ **Neighborhood safety**

Esther - Where I live there is Farragut [High School] and there is a field there. There are no trees but you can run. Yet it is very dangerous because sometimes you are running and then you hear gun shots and you have to run back inside your house [LV, immigrants interview, 40 years old, substitute teacher, ~ 20 years in the U.S.]

Erik - Oh, it gets dangerous, sometimes when you are walking back.. They [the gangbangers from the area] don't know you so they will start saying stuff. They treat you really badly... [people who] live around the park and sometimes in the parks. You know, mishaps happen. [LV, born in the U.S., 20 years old, car mechanic].

Findings

Characteristics of the Neighborhoods

➤ **Traffic problems**

- Lack of cross-walks
- Cars driving too fast in the vicinity of parks (lack of speed-bumps)

Lizet - I would like to see speed bumps in the avenue because there was already one death. I have been hit by a car two times already. The cars, at times they pass by the park really fast. It is an area where there are a lot of little children and there's not a single speed bump. The cars...they don't let you cross and then another car passes from the other side. *[East Side, immigrants interview, 3 years in the U.S.; mid thirties; maid]*



Discussion & Conclusions

- Findings support earlier quantitative research and provide an increased depth of understanding needed to propose policy and management recommendations for increasing the use of urban parks in minority neighborhoods for LTPA.
- A significant part of the LTPA literature argues that inadequate provision of parks in minority communities is an important obstacle that needs to be addressed (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Gobster, 2002, 2005).

The results of this study suggest that, although access is often an issue, various safety and maintenance issues in the existing parks also need to be overcome.

Discussion & Conclusions

➤ **Limitations of the study**

- One-sided view of issues affecting park use and community dynamics.
- Limitations inherent to interpretive approach – lack of generalizability of findings etc.

➤ **Suggestions for future research**

- Case studies of successful parks in urban areas that serve ethnic groups.
- 360° approach – obtain information from park staff, community leaders, police, and other stakeholders.