Parks and families: Addressing management facilitators and constraints to outdoor recreation participation

Abstract

Families face real challenges to engaging in active forms of leisure. Apart from issues of time and money, other barriers often prevent families from engaging in leisure activities outside their homes. One particular form of active leisure that has been shown to provide benefits for family life is outdoor recreation. However, outdoor recreation activities may pose further challenges for family engagement as they often require specific skills and knowledge for safe participation. The purpose of this paper is to examine how management of outdoor recreation spaces, such as national parks or regional parks, contribute to general family outdoor recreation participation. This research presents findings from interviews with 22 families and ten outdoor park managers from the New Zealand cities of Wellington and Dunedin. The findings indicate that family-oriented marketing practices and information strategies could improve participation when lack of finances, time and energy prevent family recreation activities.

Introduction

Family leisure has long been noted as a significant part of family life which contributes to family cohesiveness and well-being (Agate et al., 2007; Dodd, 2009; Orthner et al., 1994; Orthner and Mancini, 1990; Zabriskie, 2001). However, families, particularly those with young children, face significant challenges to engaging in active forms of leisure where all family members take part together (Agate et al., 2011; Bittman, 2002; Hultsman, 1993;

Jackson, 2005; Witt and Goodale, 1981). Apart from issues of time and money frequently mentioned in the leisure constraints literature (White, 2008), other barriers, such as access, information and appropriate infrastructure, often prevent families from engaging in leisure activities outside their homes (Agate et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2001). One particular form of active leisure shown to provide benefits for family life is outdoor recreation (Huff et al., 2003; Wells et al., 2004; Zabriskie, 2001). However, outdoor recreation activities may pose further challenges for family engagement as they often require specific skills and knowledge for safe participation.

To date, little research has been conducted investigating the ways in which families recreate together in outdoor environments. An exception to this rule is family camps, particularly therapy camps, commercially organised camps and outdoor adventure programmes for families (Agate and Covey, 2007; Bandoroff and Scherer, 1994). Few studies, however, have gone outside these formally constituted spaces of nature-based leisure, where facilitators and organisers tailor the leisure and recreation experience to achieve certain goals.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this less-explored area of family leisure by looking at how management of outdoor recreation spaces, such as national and regional parks, influences family outdoor recreation participation. We argue that it is important to understand how recreation management approaches may facilitate or hinder family participation in outdoor recreation. Although there is a large body of literature that discusses park management strategies, little research exists dealing with family use of national parks and other protected natural areas, and how management may impact family participation in outdoor recreation. This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study in which 22 families and ten park managers from two major urban centres in New Zealand were

interviewed with the aim of identifying the strategies that facilitate family participation in outdoor recreation in regional and national parks and other outdoor settings.

Family leisure, constraints and outdoor recreation

Leisure constraints theory, emerging more formally from the work of Crawford and Godbey (1987), has identified three main categories of constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal constraints relate to personal leisure preferences and the psychological characteristics of individuals that lead to these preferences (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression). Interpersonal constraints are a product of social interactions and relationships that interfere or affect an individual's preference for leisure activities (e.g. the influence of family and friends) whereas structural constraints are "intervening factors between leisure preference and participation" (Crawford and Godbey, 1987: 124) and emerge after an individual's leisure preference is formed but before participation itself (e.g. season, time availability) (Agate, 2010). These categories have significantly contributed to our current understanding of why people participate or do not participate in leisure activities as well as of how people overcome barriers to successfully engage in leisure pursuits. However, most research using leisure constraints theory to inform their understanding of leisure participation has focused on the individual and not on group participation (Agate, 2010). Family groups, therefore, have not yet received significant attention from scholars discussing constraints to leisure.

The limited research in this field has shown that families encounter constraints to leisure and outdoor recreation owing to life cycle stages, parenting arrangements, lack of spare time, and financial and accessibility reasons (Agate et al., 2011; Claxton and Perry-Jenkins 2008; Freeman and Zabriskie, 2002; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2002; Shaw and Dawson, 2001). Cultural reasons also may influence participation or non-participation in

specific activities or at specific settings, especially when the natural environment and unstructured activities are involved (Shaull and Gramann, 1998). Women, more specifically, have been found to reduce their leisure participation when they become mothers, particularly in individual leisure pursuits (Brown et al., 2001; Crawford et al., 1991; Little, 2002). Family leisure, on the other hand, becomes a central focus for mothers with home-residing children (Shaw and Dawson, 2001), although the engagement with family leisure activities may not always be regarded as pleasurable and relaxing (Shaw, 1992; Trussell and Shaw, 2007). In fact, several studies have indicated that family leisure can become another burden for mothers, who often organise and administer activities that are not entirely of their own choice (Bialeschki and Michener, 1994). Family camps and outdoor adventure programmes have been reported as successful in relieving this burden, as they often require that responsibilities be shared between family members as part of their aim to achieve family cohesiveness and enhanced communication through outdoor recreation (Wells et al., 2004).

In general terms, research on barriers to participation in outdoor recreation constantly refers to lack of time and money as the two major barriers to be overcome by people who are willing to, but are not currently participating, as well as by those who are already taking part, but who nonetheless identify time and money as major issues (Little, 2002; Outley and Floyd, 2002; Shores et al., 2007; White, 2008). Recently, researchers have also raised competition with screen-based leisure as a major hurdle to be overcome if outdoor recreation participation is to increase (Pergams and Zaradic, 2006).

There is a substantial body of literature focusing on general visitors' experiences and constraints associated with national park settings in New Zealand and abroad. However, families have received limited attention in these studies. An important finding from a New Zealand-based literature review of visitors to public conservation lands reported that families have been viewed as being under-represented amongst visitors to national parks (Booth,

1989). Nevertheless, the outdoors is regarded as part of the New Zealand identity (Ross, 2008) and is a popular recreation space for New Zealand families owing to relatively good access to coastal areas and national parks (Devlin and Booth, 1998). This popularity notwithstanding, families' perspectives do not appear to be well represented in research findings relating to New Zealand outdoor recreation.

Within the broader New Zealand outdoor recreation context there is limited in-depth qualitative or quantitative research examining families' group experiences of outdoor recreation (Booth et al., 2010). Exceptions include Simmons' (1980) and Devlin's (1976) studies which noted that families were active as visitors participating in summer holiday programmes provided by staff within national park settings. Bagnall (1998) explored how parenting impacted the recreational pursuits of parents of pre-schoolers but did not focus on family experiences. These early, unpublished studies found that such participation was often linked to a family's life cycle stage, confirming international research in this field.

Findings from recent quantitative research conducted via user surveys in a newly established New Zealand conservation park included that taking one's family into the outdoors was a major motivation for visitors (Carr et al., 2006). In a similar study at a different conservation park, Lovelock et al. (2007) found that 'friends and family' were a main source of information about the park, indicating the importance of sharing knowledge in continuing outdoor traditions amongst family members.

In a study of metropolitan park use in Australia, McDonald and Price (2009: 31-32) found that 'the most popular request was to have more parks providing quality activities for children, up to and inclusive of teenage years'. Although not all participants had children, there was a common feeling that such activities and facilities would encourage wider participation, with individuals stating that they would take visiting friends and relatives to parks were these activities available. The study concluded that park awareness needs to be

heightened if park use is to increase and that interpersonal facilitators are pivotal in raising awareness of available opportunities in leisure and recreation.

Hornig (2005), whilst providing a more general framework for addressing family needs in urban park settings, emphasised a few criteria that will likely increase family participation in outdoor recreation: careful site selection, safety, comfort, simplicity, interest for all ages and attention-grabbing. Although Hornig's focus was on urban parks, his suggestions highlight structural elements that can influence intra and interpersonal factors to facilitate family participation in outdoor recreation.

The literature, whilst sparse regarding research on families' recreation and outdoor leisure activities, nevertheless highlights the importance of providing facilities and promoting parks to families as it is likely that this strategy will not only attract this group, but also potentially attract others through increased awareness of leisure opportunities available in parks and the benefits to be derived from them. By recognising the different factors that may constrain family participation, park managers will be able to attract not only family groups to parks but also the wider public.

Methods

Design

A qualitative research approach, using an interpretative methodology, was chosen for this study in order to provide a general glimpse into the complexities of family life and outdoor recreation (Willis, 2007). This approach recognizes the richness of experience that each family brings to our knowledge of family leisure and recreation. It acknowledges not only the uniqueness of each experience, but also the potential for them to reflect broader social and cultural issues.

The inclusion of a whole-family approach was another step taken to ensure that the experiences of the group were clearly presented. Although still marginal in family studies, this is not a new method in family interviewing (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 1999). It is, however, more common in general family studies to interview members individually in order to provide more freedom for the disclosure of sensitive issues. Due to the nature of the project, the individual approach was not considered essential, as we did not regard our topic of investigation as prone to involving issues of a sensitive nature. On the contrary, as the study aimed to gain a better understanding of interactional data or shared meanings, the family unit was considered to be the most appropriate informant (Åstedt-Kurki et al., 2001). The assumption was that by interviewing all family members collectively we would be able to capture the meaning of outdoor recreation to the family as a unit that shares a group life.

According to Handel (1997: 346), 'a family constructs its life from the multiple perspectives of its members, and an adequate understanding requires that those perspectives be obtained from their multiple sources.' Also, the presence of children provided the opportunity for family members who usually have less input into different aspects of family functioning to have a say or, at least, to become aware of motives and expectations for family participation in outdoor recreation. Children's involvement also enabled them to participate in the research process and communicate their preferences for and experiences of outdoor activities – a research approach advocated by Jamison and Gilbert (2000) and Schänzel (2010). Children frequently prompted discussions through their words or actions about characteristics of trips, most enjoyable experiences, and major hurdles to be overcome by families. Therefore, the presence of the whole family (where possible) was extremely valuable to our better understanding of the dynamics involved in family life when engaging in outdoor recreation activities.

Data Collection Procedures

In-depth interviews were conducted with families and with park managers as a means to compare, contrast and explore the perspectives of users and providers. Interviews with 22 families from two major urban settings in New Zealand (Wellington and Dunedin) were conducted in order to provide the perspective of families within their specific social, political and cultural contexts (Tables 1 and 2). These locations were chosen for reasons of research cost efficiency and because both urban areas have a variety of nature-based settings nearby, including sub-alpine, bush, parks, rivers, lakes and coastal/marine settings.

Seven face-to-face interview sessions were conducted in the two study sites with a total of ten park managers (Table 3) from local, regional and national parks, in order to analyse public initiatives that intend to encourage active engagement of families in public natural areas. In this paper we focus on the aspects of the interview programme that relate to the relationship between government practice and family outdoor recreation participation.

Recruitment of participants involved numerous stages. Families were invited to participate in the research through poster adverts in such places as public libraries, supermarkets, public pools, churches, sporting clubs, primary and secondary schools, and at universities. An advertisement was placed in a local community newspaper in each city. Invitations also were sent out via several email networks (e.g. Māori and Pacific Island Centre networks, the New Zealand Alpine Club). Flyers were distributed with school newsletters in one school in Dunedin and two schools in the Wellington region. Finally, a snowballing technique was used to recruit participants, as families who agreed to participate suggested other families via 'word of mouth' recommendations.

Table 1: Dunedin Families Interviewed

Identifier	Household Members	Ages	Ethnicity	Level of Education
D1	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 39/39 Children: 7/3	Father: Samoan/Pākehā Mother: Chinese	Father: Trade Certificate Mother: Tertiary
D2	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 47/46 Children: 16/14	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D3	Father, Mother, 2 children and grandmother	Parents: 54/52 Children: 18/14 Grandmother: unknown	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D4	Divorced Mother, Partner and 1 child from first relationship	Caregivers: 32/36 Child: 12	Mother: Māori Partner: Pākehā	Mother: Tertiary Partner: Secondary
D5	Father, Mother, 4 children (2 adopted)	Parents: unknown Children: two adopted teenagers and two primary school children	Father: Samoan Mother: Samoan	Father: unknown Mother: unknown
D6	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 49/49 Children: 16/13	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D7	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 45/47 Children: 18/14	Father: Pākehā Mother: Māori	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D8	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: unknown Children: 5/3	Father: Māori Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D9	Father, Mother and 1 child	Parents: 35/32 Children: 2	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D10	Father, Mother, 4 children and one niece	Parents: unknown Children: 18/13/10/3/21	Father: Samoan Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D11	Father, Mother and 3 children	Parents: 30s/40s Children: unknown	Father: Samoan Mother: Samoan	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D12	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 45/50 Children: 13/11	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
D13	Father, Mother, 2 children and grandmother	Parents: 43/37 Children: 6/4 Grandmother: unknown	Father: Māori Mother: Pākehā immigrant	Father: Tertiary Mother: Trade certificate

Table 2: Wellington Families Interviewed

Identifier	Household Members	Ages	Ethnicity	Level of Education
W1	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: unknown Children: 3/1	Father: Cook Islander Mother: Māori	Father: unknown Mother: Tertiary
W2	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 46/39 Children: 3/1	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā Children: Pākehā	Father: Trade certificate Mother: Trade certificate
W3	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 46/36 Children: 5/3	Father: Māori Mother: Pākehā	Father: Secondary Mother: Tertiary
W4	Father, Mother and 2 children	Parents: 48/45 Children: 12/6	Mother: Pākehā/Māori Partner: Pākehā	Mother: Tertiary Partner: Tertiary
W5	Father, Mother, 2 children and grandmother	Parents: 20s Children: preschoolers Grandmother: 50s	Father: Pacific Island Mother: Māori	Mother: University Student Father: Secondary
W6	Divorced Mother, re-married, with 2 children from previous marriage and one from current	Caregivers: 55/61 Children: 21/19/12	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
W7	Father, Mother and 4 children	Parents: unknown Children: unknown	Father: Pākehā/Māori Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
W8	Father, Mother and 3 children	Parents: 41/41 Children: 8/6/3	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Tertiary Mother: Tertiary
W9	Divorced Father, re-married with 2 children from previous marriage and one from current	Parents: 40/28 Children: 12/8/1	Father: Pākehā Mother: Pākehā	Father: Secondary Mother: Tertiary

Table 3: Government Representatives Interviewed

Organisation	Participants	Identifier
Department of Conservation Otago Conservancy	Recreation Planner	DOC 1
Department of Conservation Wellington Hawke's Bay Conservancy	Technical Support Officer, Recreation	DOC 2
Department of Conservation National Office	Recreation Manager	DOC 3
	Visitor Information and Visitor Centres	DOC 4
	Manager, Research & Development	DOC 5
Dunedin City Council	Community and Recreation Services Manager	DCC 1
Wellington City Council	Manager, Community Engagement & Reserves, Parks and Gardens	WCC1
	Senior Park Manager	WCC2
	Recreation Planner	WCC3
Greater Wellington Regional Council	Manager, Marketing & Design, Water Supply, Park & Forests	WRC 1

Due to the self-selection nature of the recruitment method most families were active participants in outdoor recreation. A few families presented lapsed patterns of engagement, with current family life cycle stage or circumstances posing difficulties for participation. Some families with little to no participation in outdoor recreation provided insights into their leisure motivations and the alternative activities they pursued. Overall, the majority of participating families were relatively active in engaging with outdoor recreation pursuits and were diverse in the types of activities pursued, level of engagement in outdoor recreation, family life cycle stage and cultural background. This offered valuable insights into the main barriers to family participation in outdoor recreation and the potential strategies that encourage engagement.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 50 and 70 minutes. Park managers were asked questions focused on the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities for families, constraints for family participation, strategies for reducing constraints, and development of family-friendly facilities and/or programmes. The family interview programme was broader, focusing on families' experiences of the outdoors, particularly the activities pursued, common places for family outdoor recreation, frequency of engagement, patterns of participation pre- and post-children, changes of activities through the different life cycle stages, perceived benefits, main barriers to participation and cultural matters influencing their choice of outdoor recreation pursuits. Participants were also encouraged to raise other issues they considered relevant, as well as to extensively discuss what they considered pertinent to the stated aims of this research. Interviews followed an exploratory structure accommodating participants' willingness and ability to respond to questions. The previously determined questions acted as prompts for the interviewers and were adapted to the specific context and participants' readiness to respond and engage (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Study Cases

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is the main provider of outdoor experiences for residents and visitors to New Zealand, managing a large network of campsites, huts (cabins), walking tracks, picnic areas and access infrastructure. Recreational enjoyment of New Zealand's natural heritage is part of their mission and management of recreation is focused on identifying priorities. In their Statement of Intent, DOC states that 'neither the Department nor the public want all recreational opportunities provided in all locations. Instead, a range of opportunities targeting a range of people will be provided' (DOC, 2004: 15). DOC, via its national office, develops national priorities, policies and systems to be

implemented at the local level. The country is then divided into eleven regions, each with its own conservancy office and various area offices that manage conservation and recreation within a particular geographic area.

Dunedin is the fourth largest city in New Zealand and the second largest on the South Island, with a population of 123,000 inhabitants. Dunedin and its environs are extremely well-served with natural landscapes and recreational opportunities, with most of the region's publicly accessible natural areas currently managed by DOC or the Dunedin City Council (DCC). The role of local authorities, primarily regional and city councils, are significant in the provision of facilities at settings such as parks and gardens. In Dunedin, the DCC manages over 100 outdoor parks or recreation settings, including the Town Belt (a green belt of over 200 hectares that surrounds the centre of the city) and the beaches along the northern and southern coastlines that provide opportunities for recreation in the outdoors.

Wellington is the second largest city in New Zealand, located on the North Island. With a population of over 197,000 inhabitants it is considerably larger than Dunedin. Moreover, Wellington region encompasses several cities and districts and is home to almost 500,000 people. It is the capital of the country and hosts the national government offices. It possesses, therefore, a different political environment to Dunedin's, which certainly contributes to the differences found between the park management strategies taken by the city and regional councils. The Wellington Regional Council (WRC) manages several regional parks, forests and recreation areas. The Wellington City Council (WCC) plays a smaller role in the context of outdoor recreation in Wellington due to the significantly smaller area of natural landscape under their management. Together with DOC, the two organisations are responsible for promoting and managing all public outdoor recreation spaces in the city and wider Wellington region.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was inductive and data-led. Two researchers read all transcripts several times for keywords, phrases and rich quotations. Notes taken during interviews were also cross-referenced whilst reading transcripts to account for the context of the interviews (especially when several family members were contributing or when children were playing over conversations, resulting in 'messy' transcripts). Themes that emerged during the interviews were identified and subsequently clustered and compared. Analysis of the interview data, following the above procedure, used the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). After main themes had been identified, rich quotes highlighted and relevant points annotated, researchers compared findings with each others' results to develop and prioritise themes, and identify commonalities.

Data Trustworthiness and Credibility

In order to ensure data analysis led to trustworthy, credible and valid results, all material gathered was read and analysed by at least two researchers, independently, and then cross-referenced to identify common themes and topics that emerged from the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In addition, multiple data sources and perspectives, coming from family groups with diverse cultural and social backgrounds, living in different regions of the country, as well as from several park managers and from all the supporting documents raised throughout the study (e.g. management plans, brochures and photographs) provided a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being investigated.

It was significant also that all members of the research team were active outdoor recreationists who frequently explore the New Zealand outdoors with their families. Their personal stories and experiences were significant when conversing with research participants as well as when analysing the data collected, as it was possible to understand the context of

the participants' experiences, helping to establish a relationship of knowledge sharing and co-construction, an approach that forms the basis of the epistemological groundings of this project (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Results

Interviews with families and park managers from different government agencies provided important insights into family recreation experiences. There were noticeable differences between government agencies, regions and levels of government in terms of the extent to which family recreation demand is perceived and addressed. Below we present the main findings dividing them into sections according to the government agencies and locations investigated.

Department of Conservation

Interviews with DOC staff, both at national and at conservancy level (Wellington and Dunedin), reinforced statements found in their official documents (e.g. visitor strategies and Statement of Intent). These documents classify different visitors into categories based on motivation to visit parks, and range from short stop travellers and day visitors to remoteness and thrill seekers. This classification assumes that different individuals or group of individuals will have a different motivation and set of skills to participate in outdoor recreation and therefore 'families' should not be addressed as a particular group of focus. As one DOC staff explained:

> *Because, to me, just because someone's a family, doesn't mean that they only fit as*
> *day visitor, I mean families who are wanting to get out there are wanting more*
> *backcountry comforts, some have got older kids and kids who have been building up*
> *experience, they're backcountry adventurers, they actually can still be family units. So*

from that perspective, we don't see that's a family track, we base it on people's experience and skills and the kind of things they are looking for, and families, different families might want a slightly different thing. (DOC 1)

In addition, based on DOC staff interviews, a review of relevant documents and brochures, and also the family interviews, it seems that although there is a local community relations officer (or team) in each of the conservancies responsible for communicating DOC's programmes to the community, there is not a general, national strategy for promoting to and communicating with particular groups of the community, such as families or ethnic groups apart from Māori. Public participation in decision-making processes regarding the conservation estate is legislated via legislation such as the Conservation Act 1987; however, there is no children's or youths' voice on conservation boards and rarely are children and youths consulted. Usually it is up to individual managers or staff to be proactive and establish strategies that will better promote engagement with outdoor recreation on public conservation land, as this quote from a DOC staff member highlights:

[…] each conservancy is different and so there might be fantastic things happening in [one conservancy] and maybe not so much happening in the next conservancy. It's largely people dependent and also the management structure and so perhaps there is a conservator who is in charge of that conservancy has got young kids, then there might be more of a focus. (DOC 4)

In terms of identifying activities that are 'family-friendly', camping was considered by all managers as one of the most important family outdoor recreation activities; this reflects the focus of family recreation literature on family camping (Agate and Covey, 2007; Burch Jr., 2009; Freeman and Zabriskie, 2002). According to DOC staff, brochures specifically

focused on camping were developed as an outcome of DOC research into constraints to participation in camping, and these brochures have proven extremely popular. Their success, as we see it, is based on providing clear and useful information and, in particular, because they are, in all aspects (from images used to detailed information provided), inviting for families.

The interviews also revealed that DOC staff are aware that information quality and availability is still an issue for participation, particularly for families, due to their inherent characteristics. Despite information being obtainable on DOC's website, one of the interviewed staff said that 'at the moment it is really hard work.' Family interviews corroborated this finding, as several family members complained about the quality of the information provided, particularly in light of the inherent risks of the New Zealand outdoors: 'Just the level of information as well, like a lot of people wouldn't know how to handle a map like that' (D2 Father). Word of mouth, therefore, becomes an important means of information gathering, which, although extremely powerful (McDonald and Price, 2009), can be limited if your social network is not vast or if you are new to the area:

> *We find out about areas by word of mouth though and then we would research that*
> *area, we would go and find a map to the area 'cos someone said when we were here it*
> *was really great and they would probably have found out about it by someone else as*
> *well.* (D2 Son)

Another constraint associated with family participation identified by DOC, and corroborated by the literature (Bittman, 2002; Shaw and Henderson, 2005; Shores et al., 2007), is a lack of time. Unfortunately, this issue cannot be easily overcome by park management strategies, although some research has indicated that parks, particularly metropolitan parks, can be viewed and accordingly promoted as an easy and quick alternative

for leisure engagement for those who lack time (McDonald and Price, 2009). However, other common constraints, such as lack of awareness, level of facilities provided and access can be addressed through management strategies. In New Zealand, DOC has eased financial constraints through adopting a fees policy that dramatically reduces hut fees for under-18 children, in some instances exempting them from payment. Several families interviewed commented on this policy change and applauded DOC's initiative:

> *One thing I would say about DOC is that I think cost is an issue as well and it's really good that they have just made it free for kids in huts. Too late for us.* (D3 Mother)

It seems therefore that DOC staff, particularly at the national office, are aware of the main constraints faced by families wanting to engage in outdoor recreation, but are engaging infrequently with families in the local communities to identify ways of overcoming some of these barriers and increase family participation in the outdoors. Although some strategies have been put into place, such as the fee exemption for under 18s, in general terms DOC does not have in place a national strategy aimed at encouraging outdoor recreation participation for families as a unit. It is useful to consider the implications at a local level and thus the specific Dunedin and Wellington contexts will now be discussed.

Dunedin City Council

Dunedin interview respondents indicated that there were few government-organised and promoted outdoor recreation events and activities that take advantage of the city's natural environment. The interviews showed a strong focus, where families were concerned, on playground maintenance, indoor facilities and the Botanic Garden. Although these are indeed popular places for family recreation, there was an apparent lack of initiatives in the form of events and programmes to stimulate family participation in outdoor recreation.

The provision of outdoor opportunities, however, through facilities is broad: well maintained walking tracks, mountain biking tracks, parks and reserves with picnic tables and barbeques, and open sports grounds. It appeared, from interviews with management, that DCC focuses on providing the facilities and choices for people to enjoy the city's environment, rather than combining facilities with the active promotion of activities and events to encourage people into the outdoors.

Responses from families to interview questions reflected the lack of active promotion of the outdoors by government organisations in Dunedin. Families reported a longing for programmes of activities planned and promoted by a government agency, be it DOC or DCC, that provide the necessary trigger for them to be 'out and about':

I remember when I was a kid I was probably about [my daughter]'s age ... they used to do trips in the holidays to all the different outdoorsy places around Dunedin. So one weekend they would be going down to the Pyramids and the next week they might go to Sandfly Bay and the next week they might be over in the Taieri or somewhere and we used to do a lot of those as a family group as well. (D4 Mother)

These programmes are not in place anymore although several families indicated they would certainly be interested in participating were these programmes available:

I think if they did that, it would catch on again, like it did then. And I think you might have had to pay like $8 or something just to cover petrol and they would take you to the places and you would all walk and they would tell you about the history. (D4 Partner)

An example of a less event-oriented promotion and more facility-focused initiative is the 2010 DCC's Autumn Holiday Guide. There, families and individuals could find a list of

providers and facilities, with some indoor activities taking place in DCC-managed venues, but no outdoor recreation promotion or events/courses/workshops taking place in any of the public outdoor recreation areas of the city. According to DCC's website, they 'no longer administer a specific fund for sport and recreation projects, [but they] are more than happy to offer advice if you are seeking funding in this area.' (DCC, 2010: n/p). The initiative needs to come from the population and DCC provides guidance when necessary. The lack of active encouragement coming from DCC may translate into lower levels of participation from the population, a question we did not aim to answer in this research, but one that is certainly worth pursuing in future studies.

Wellington

The Wellington Regional Council (WRC) produces and freely distributes throughout the region individual brochures for all parks under their management, including regional parks, forests and recreation areas. These brochures provide information about use of the parks, including maps, access, main features, activities, tracks, safety and history. Many brochures contain family-relevant information and images that invite family participation.

The document guiding the WRC approach to outdoor recreation is the Parks Network Strategy, which states as one of their main objectives: '[to] provide a range of outdoor recreation opportunities within the network that cater for varying age, ability and experience' (WRC, 2009: 3). In order to achieve this objective, the WRC provides accessible, useful information that transmits a sense of safety to encourage broad participation, including families:

> *In the brochures, in particular, [we identify activities or areas that are more suitable*
> *for families], where you would say that there are places here that are suitable for*
> *picnics, camping, group activities, easy walks, easy bike rides and that type of thing.*

[...] So, it's really up to the individual because you know that family circumstances vary markedly but we know for example that they will need things like toilets, they will need, probably picnic tables and reasonable vehicle access. And reasonably easy recreational opportunities in close proximity to all those things. That's the sort of stuff that is going to make it attractive to families. And you also need a perception of safety and so people don't get lost and they want to make sure the kids don't fall over a cliff or something like that. So all that sort of stuff is going to enhance the opportunity for family recreation. (WRC 1)

It is interesting to note in the comment above the inclusion of risk perception as something of importance to family participation. The WRC was the only agency who acknowledged this issue in planning strategies, although DOC manages a significantly larger area of parks in the country. Research in the field of constraints to outdoor recreation participation has found that perceived risk can be a major barrier to participation (Green et al., 2009). For families, particularly those with young children, this can be a further obstacle to overcome and can therefore be the defining factor between participation and non-participation. It is therefore surprising that risk perception was not found in the planning discussions of other managing agencies.

Another important initiative from the WRC is the organisation and promotion of the summer programme. The programme has been running since 2000 and offers more than 60 activities throughout summer to encourage the population to use and have fun in the outdoors. The main aim of the programme is to introduce people to the regional parks:

[the summer programme] is geared up to encourage a wide range of people, so we have got things like, there was a park open day here and this is an event called "Keep

the Kiwi" which is basically focused on getting families with small children out and going for a short walk and that type of thing. (WRC 1)

The popularity of the summer programme was reinforced in our interviews with families in Wellington. In particular they found that there was a range of activities that suited different members of the family, but that were possible also to be engaged in by several members together – an opportunity that has been constantly referred to both in the literature and in our interviews as conducive for family cohesiveness and well-being (Lee et al., 2008):

We [son and dad] did a fly fishing morning at Otaki, fly fishing instruction that they got the local fly fishing club to run. It was very good. (W7 Father)

The success of the event, which is advertised through the delivery of pamphlets to every household in the region, reinforces the appeal of the outdoors to the general population, even in a highly urbanised region of the country.

In addition, the WRC uses information from their annual surveys to understand their market and receive feedback about the services that are being provided:

We do have quite a few Pacific Island families who we know are very focused on family and very focused on the church and so, we have noticed, they particularly prefer parks, like Queen Elizabeth Park, which has wide open spaces, that are good for group picnics and that type of thing. Not particularly oriented towards a lot of walking ... they sort of regard parks as a setting for their social activities, so they can strengthen their ties within their community and so that is a particular trait of Pacific communities. (WRC 1)

The Wellington City Council (WCC), although playing a smaller role in the context of outdoor recreation provision in Wellington, encourages several half-day and full-day activities in the waterfront, reserves, Town Belt and Botanic Garden through their 'Feeling Great' programme. A monthly brochure is distributed throughout the city with activities such as events, walks, festivals and sports. Also, the WCC has a selection of widely distributed brochures showing different walks and tracks.

Family interviews in Wellington indicated that the community greatly appreciates these efforts coming from both the WRC and the WCC: 'I mean, the regional park programme in Wellington region is brilliant. If you want to take part in something, the vehicle is there.' [W2 Father]. Summer programmes, recurrent and one-off year-round activities can serve as stimuli for families who are not experienced enough to feel they can go into the outdoors without 'supervision', as well as for families who lack the local knowledge, resources or a social network to motivate their participation in outdoor recreation pursuits.

Discussion

DOC, not only the national level government provider of outdoor recreation opportunities but also an organisation with regional and local offices, does not place emphasis on family units, or any specific group, when managing their outdoor recreation areas and opportunities. From the interviews with DOC staff, it became clear that DOC is concerned with the identification of potential and appropriate recreation activities in their management areas to provide 'the facilities and services required to enable visitors to participate in these activities' (DOC, 1996: 19). This approach takes into consideration distinct groups of visitors, but these are classified according to their motivation, or their relationship with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes (Clark and Stankey, 1979): 1) short stop travellers, 2) day visitors, 3) overnighters, 4) backcountry comfort

seekers, 5) backcountry adventurers, 6) remoteness seekers, and 7) thrill seekers (DOC, 1996). By maintaining their focus on these categories of visitors, DOC seems to be assuming that the multiple roles and styles of family units encountered in today's societies makes it impossible to categorise 'families' as one particular type of visitor. This approach seems to work well as a management tool, but falls short when it comes to the promotion of outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities for families, with all their different characteristics but also commonalities.

However, there is also a clear understanding among staff that families do have certain 'qualities' that are unique to them. Isolated attempts have been made to overcome some barriers to family participation but no concentrated effort has taken place to tailor activities, spaces, places or opportunities for families, or to target families in advertising or educational campaigns. Interviews with families frequently praised any effort from DOC to facilitate family participation in outdoor recreation, which supports the argument that strategies tailored to this group are not only welcomed but seem to be effective in attracting participants to outdoor recreation.

International research in the field of park visitation has indicated that use of parks is likely to increase where not only park awareness is high, but also where awareness of what parks have to offer to individuals and groups is increased (Griffin and Archer, 2006). Therefore, the issue of expectations and assumptions needs to be addressed more emphatically since, as the family leisure literature suggests (Freeman and Zabriskie, 2002), there are indeed characteristics common to most families that need to be taken into consideration if park managers are to encourage more people to enjoy the outdoors. What findings emerging from DOC and families interviews suggest is that managing opportunities using ROS is adequate but that this needs to be combined with strategies of promotion that target particular groups within society – in this case families.

Partially as a response to the limitations of this strategy focused on ROS, DOC has recently developed the 'Destination Management Framework', which focuses on increasing the participation of people in recreation. DOC articulates the benefits of such a framework specifically noting that 'people will improve their health and wellbeing, spend quality time with family and friends, learn about their heritage, and strengthen their "sense of place"' (DOC, 2011: n.p.). This latest agenda supported by DOC demonstrates a renewed focus on identifying recreation opportunities on the conservation estate, even though the visitor categories are still relevant for the management of parks and other areas open to visitation. This approach specifically identifies spending 'quality time with family and friends' under a range of benefits of recreation participation, and therefore has the potential to provide a national strategy that will consider the significance of families in outdoor recreation promotion.

The WRC and WCC, working together using a similar strategy of management to each other, seem to have embraced a more targeted approach. Together they provide not only opportunities for a vast array of people through the provision of facilities and appropriate spaces, but also are able to select specific targets to attract to their parks, through effective and group-specific communication (e.g. the WCC is currently providing application software with marked tracks available in the city and surrounds, which can increase interest to generation Y groups). They offer also programmes and activities that focus on different groups, such as the summer programme. Programmes like this provide the encouragement and trigger necessary for different groups of society to engage with the environment. Not only are families an important target, but also different ethnic groups (Chavez, 2001; Fullagar and Harrington, 2009; Rehman, 2002; Shaull and Gramann, 1998).

Several studies have noted the diverse meanings different cultures place on the natural environment and how that guides their ways of engaging with parks and outdoor recreation

(Carr and Williams, 1993; Johnson et al., 1998; Sasidharan, 2002; Walker et al., 2001).WRC staff recognize the cultural distinctiveness of Pacific Island communities and indicate an awareness that a different approach to attracting this group to parks needs to be taken. Such a response aligns well with the argument that, although there is incredible diversity within such groups, including family groups, there are binding similarities that need to be taken into account when promoting participation in outdoor recreation.

In contrast, the DCC is currently using an outmoded approach to park and recreation management, focusing on the provision of facilities while disregarding the need to provide users/visitors with an attractive experience (Crompton, 2008). A revised approach may be more likely to foster ongoing engagement with parks and sites. After completion of the study, an Outdoor Recreation Forum to address these issues was formed in Dunedin. This forum coincides with the DCC employing a recreation adviser and launching a 'Getting Dunedin Active' programme. At this stage, however, it is not clear if there will be a focus on promoting activities for families in particular or if the approach will continue to be on the provision of facilities and opportunities.

In general, the results from our study indicate that there is still an overall lack of structured effort to promote outdoor activities for families, with the emphasis on the provision of facilities and resources and less on promoting those to particular segments of society. This approach, still based on an activity or custodial focus paradigm (Crompton, 2008), is showing signs of weariness, and some agencies seem to have now superseded it. The WRC is a good exemplar in our study of this shift in management paradigm, showing a clear awareness of the necessity of tailoring information to reach certain audiences that go beyond the individual level and reach the wider community. Their focus on creating strategies to attract different and varied audiences within the community acknowledges the heterogeneity of groups but also the commonalities among each of them. This study's

participating families indicated that such a strategy is welcome and, in fact, can be very effective in encouraging people, particularly those less inclined, to participate in family outdoor recreation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine outdoor recreation participation from the perspective of the family, and place this in the context of how management initiatives can hinder or foster participation in outdoor recreation spaces in New Zealand. Whilst the research consisted of interviews with families and park managers from two major cities in the country the findings provide insights into family experiences and management initiatives that corroborate international studies on family leisure constraints. Collectively, these studies suggest that a lack of spare time, financial reasons and accessibility to leisure spaces are major barriers to family leisure participation (Freeman and Zabriskie, 2002; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2002; Shaw and Dawson, 2001). Our findings also reinforce the position that participation in outdoor recreation needs to be fostered and actively promoted if we are to increase participation, in a time where screen-based leisure is a major source of leisure for children and youths (Pergams and Zaradic, 2006).

Another important finding of this study supported by previous research in the field of park management (Henderson et al., 2001) is that public park and recreation departments can, through their management practices, actively contribute to increasing (family) participation in outdoor recreation. It is important that outdoor recreation planners and managers become aware of the importance of the role families play in fostering future outdoor recreation participation by allocating resources to promote the planning and implementation of activities for families in natural areas. While researchers such as Hornig (2005) have identified essential 'structural elements' for family participation in park-based recreation (e.g. site,

safety, comfort, simplicity, interest, attention) our findings suggest that while some of these elements may be important, the identification of opportunities to participate is paramount. We strongly support the call of McDonald and Price (2009) for the enhancement of park awareness, and in particular, note that park managers need to employ mechanisms that are likely to reach and appeal to the family target segment.

To date 'opportunity' has been operationalised by conventional visitor management frameworks such ROS. Park management strategies based on user motivation (e.g. through ROS) have been accepted as standard practice in most national parks and protected natural areas around the world. However, this study suggests that such approaches may be too broad-brush to cater to the needs of groups such as families. Greater consideration needs to be given to different groups, including families, that share common constraints to participation in outdoor recreation, as a singular focus on motivation may conceal barriers that will prevent engagement altogether.

This paper contributes to the field of family leisure, particularly family outdoor recreation participation, by identifying the nexus between family recreation constraints and management actions of public sector organisations – some of which are specifically mandated with facilitating greater participation in recreation on their lands. The study demonstrates that management strategies that actively engage with particular segments of society can have a positive impact on recreation participation in parks and other public outdoor areas including national parks. Such an outcome may bring other social benefits, such as increased awareness of our natural environment by the younger generations which may contribute to advocacy for conservation and environmental protection in years to come.

Recommendations for future management of outdoor recreation for families include that there be collaborative effort between relevant government agencies and local authorities in the planning and provision of outdoor recreation pursuits at local, regional and national

levels. This includes aspects such as pooling resources (including funding and staff expertise) and, from the families' perspective, scrutinising the production of printed and electronic information to ensure there is consistency with information provided by respective providers. In conclusion, such management initiatives are a means for increasing the meaningful participation of diverse family groups in positive outdoor recreation experiences.

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