

CHAPTER ONE: ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS

Current use, problems and opportunities

Sophie Spalding

"The Park should be, as in fact it is, the one great People's Park of Los Angeles. It should not only be made easy for the people to get to the Park, but at first they must be taught to want to go there.... Once the people learn to go there to feel its intimate association with their own lives, there will be no difficulty about securing large appropriations for its development and care...."

Report of the Municipal Art Commission
Charles Mulford Robinson, 1907

ENDNOTES

1. Although Whyte's subjects were city streets and plazas, his discoveries are pertinent to any study of people using public spaces.
2. Except when specifically referred to, these general findings do not include users located within the Grace E. Simons Lodge or Old Lodge Picnic Ground areas. Neither do they include commuters who shortcut through the Park or those who use it only to enter Dodger Stadium. On weekdays in particular, if commuters alone were included under the definition of "Park user" they would constitute the vast majority.
3. See Appendix Tables One through Five for actual weekday visitor counts conducted during April-May, 1990.
4. Approximately 95 percent of weekend visitors to the picnic/recreation areas were in groups (three or more people). The average recorded weekend group size was between eleven and twelve people.
5. Tables One through Seven are based on data collected during interviews in the Park's low-lying picnic/ recreation areas including: the Recreation Center grounds; Solano Canyon picnic grounds, ball field and tennis courts; Chavez Ravine picnic grounds, children's playground and not including the Grace E. Simons and Old Lodge areas. (See shaded area on Map One) In total, eighty interviews were conducted between the hours of 12:30pm and 2pm on Saturday, May 12th and 2pm-4pm on Sunday May 20th, 1990.
6. It should also be noted that there is a homeless population living in the park's higher and more secluded areas. Evidence of this population can be seen in homeless men picking up recyclable trash or sleeping in the park during the day.
7. Surveyed weekend users were congregated in the low-lying picnic and recreation areas, which provide a certain safety in numbers. The great majority of survey respondents return to the same area each time they visit the Park. Few had ventured into the Park's more remote areas. Indeed, many were surprised to hear of their existence.
8. Foley, Jack, "Leisure Rights" Policies for Los Angeles Urban Impact Parks", a paper presented to the People for Parks "Kick-off" Conference, February 4, 1989.
9. In light of this approach it seems ironic that Elysian Park's biggest money-maker, i.e., Grace E. Simons Lodge, was financed under terms which stipulate that revenues generated not be reinvested in the Park.
10. Foley, op cit. Foley and others also point out that another source of funding for parks--Quimby fees--further exacerbate this inequality. State mandated in 1974, Quimby fees are based on a percentage of land value and paid by developers when filing to build housing. Each city establishes its own spending rules and in the case of Los Angeles, the City Council decided this money should be spent within a mile and a half of where it is generated (also, within the same Council District). Not surprisingly, areas such as the West side and the West Valley, where land is expensive and much residential building has taken place in the sixteen years have much to show for Quimby (e.g., Westwood Recreation Center) while inner city areas have experienced few benefits.

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9. Cuales son las partes del parque que usted utiliza?

1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___ 11 ___

10. Usted piensa que el parque se mantiene limpio y en buen estado? Si no, por que no?

11. Usted piensa que hay seguridad en este parque? Por que no?

12. Que es lo que a usted mas le gusta del parque?

13. Como se puede mejorar el parque? _____

14. Cual es su pais de origen(nacionalidad)? _____

15. En que comunidad vive? _____

16. Cual es su zona postal? _____

Esto concluye nuestro estudio. Que pase muy buenos dias/buenas tardes. Adios.

ayudaran a mejorar este parque para que la comunidad lo siga disfrutando.

Sex: M F (circle one)

Area: 1 2 3 4 (circle one)

User activity:

1. Que tipo de transporte utilizo hoy para llegar al parque?

carro bus y caminando

caminando bicicleta

de otro modo (cual?) _____

2. Cuanto tiempo le tardo llegar aqui? _____

3. Esta usted en el parque.....

solo/sola con familia * cuantos vinieron _____

con amigo/amiga con un grupo * y cuantos son _____

4. Ha estado usted en este parque antes? si no

**Si contesto si, continue con #5, si contesto no, continue con #10

5. Como llega usted normalmente al parque?

carro bus y caminando

caminando bicicleta

de otro modo (cual?) _____

6. Normalmente cuanto tiempo le toma para llegar al parque desde su casa? _____

7. Frecuenta usted mucho este parque?

mas de una vez a la semana una vez a la semana

una vez al mes o mas menos de una vez al mes

8. Usted utiliza los servicios de este parque....

sola/solo con su familia * y cuantos son _____

con amigo/amiga con un grupo * y cuantos son _____

9. Which parts of the park do you usually use?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

10. Do you think the park is clean and well maintained? If no, why? _____

11. Do you think the park is safe? If no, why? _____

12. What do you like most about the park? _____

13. What improvements would you like to see in the Park? _____

14. What is your ethnic group/nationality? -----

15. What neighborhood do you live in? _____

16. What is your zip code? _____

Muy buenas tardes señor/es/a, mi nombre es ...y soy un/a estudiante de la universidad de Los Angeles y estamos haciendo un estudio sobre este parque. Nos incluir su opinion en este estudio para saber que es lo que opina el publico. Las siguientes preguntas le toman unos cuantos minutos. Sus opiniones son muy valiosas y nos

Sex: (circle one) M F

Area: 1 2 3 4

User activity: _____

1. How did you get to the park today? (circle one)
car bus and walking
walking bicycle
other (please specify) _____
2. About how long did it take you to get here? -----
3. Are you in the park: (circle one)
alone with family * how many____
with a friend with a group * how many____
4. Have you ever been to the park before? (circle one)
yes no

**If yes, continue with #5. If no, skip to question 10

5. How do you usually travel to the park? (circle one)
car bus and walking
walking bicycle
Other (please specify) _____
6. How long does it usually take you to get from your house to the park? _____
7. How often do you use the park? (circle one)
more than once a week once a week
Once a month or more less than once a month
8. Do you usually use the park:
alone with family * how many____
with a friend with a group * how many____

**TABLE SEVEN
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: SUNDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: May 20, 1990
Time: 1pm-2pm
Weather: Hazy sunshine

Activities	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	57	34 SM
picnic	981	large family grps.
hanging out	93	teens & families
courting	24	
viewing	10	
reading	2	
sleeping	5	2 homeless
backgammon	12	elderly Armenians
Active		
walking	14	SF/SM/duos
jogging	11	SF/SM/duos
catch	13	children/adults
basketball	25	teens & children
work on car	2	
soccer	11	picnic area
softball	15	children & adults
children's playground	40	packed family
kite flying	4	
Commercial		
selling fruit/ coconut	4	
selling candy/ ice cream	1	
Total	1,324	

Note: 40-45% of observed users were male. More than nine out of ten (90.02%) were located within official picnic and recreation areas. Several hundred people attending an Armenian festival at the Old Lodge Picnic Ground were not included in the above figures.

**TABLE SIX
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: SATURDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: April 21, 1990
 Time: 3pm - 4pm
 Weather: sunny and warm although cloud and drizzle were forecasted

Activity	#	Comment
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Passive

sitting in car	40	5 couples, 30 SM
picnic	243	mostly large family grps
hanging out	20	teens/young men near cars
courting on grass	10	
viewing	9	
bird watching	1	
fraternity picnic (Old Lodge)	100	

Active

walking	25	SF/SM/twos and threes
jogging	26	SF/SM/twos and threes
catch	30	mostly fathers with kids
basketball	3	
tennis	6	
soccer	20	in picnic area
volley ball	16	
bicycle riding	1	
children's playground	25	

Commercial

musicians	4	
selling ice cream	2	

Total	581	
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Note: Approx. 40% of observed users were male. Over 75% were located within official picnic and recreation areas.

Several hundred people attending wedding reception/"Boda" at G.E.S Lodge are not included in the above figures.

**TABLE FIVE
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: FRIDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: April 20, 1990
 Time: 11am - 12am
 Weather: cloudy, damp

Activity	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	32	2 couples, 28 SM
picnic		20 mostly couples
hanging out	10	teenagers with cars
courting on grass	6	
sleeping (homeless)	1	
Active		
walking	5	two solo, one trio
jogging	7	1 SF
catch	8	1 teenager/6 children
basketball	6	teenagers
tennis	2	
maintenance/ gardening	10	R&P
Total	103	

Note: 77.67% of observed users were male. Approximately 60 percent were located within official picnic and recreation areas.

**TABLE FOUR
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: THURSDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: April 26, 1990
 Time: 4.30-5.30pm
 Weather: Sunny, warm with breeze

Activity	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	15	2 couples/11 SM
picnic	5	family
hanging out	16	teenagers with cars
courting on grass	4	
sleeping	1	homeless
Active		
walking	5	3 SF
walking dog	3	1 SF
jogging	12	
catch		
adults & children	13	
basketball	15	teenagers
soccer	16	picnic area
tennis	2	
softball	14	
working on car	3	
maintenance/ gardening	4	
bike riding	1	
Commercial		
selling ice cream	1	
Total	120	

Note: 69.2% of observed users were male. Exactly two thirds were located within official picnic and recreation areas.

**TABLE THREE
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: May 16, 1990
Time: 2-3pm
Weather: Hazy, mild

Activity	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	26	22 SM
picnic	14	2 couples/2 families
hanging out	15	teenagers/young men
courting on grass	14	
Active		
walking	16	SF/SM/couples
walking dog	4	SF/SM
jogging	40	LAPD trainees
catch	4	family
basketball	12	teens/children
soccer	8	picnic area
tennis	4	both courts
cruising	6	teenage couples
working on car maintenance/ gardening	3 8	teenagers R&P
skipping rope	1	elderly male
Total	175	

Note: 73.1% of observed users were male. More than 65 percent (65.71%) were located within official picnic and recreation areas

TABLE TWO
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Date: May 8, 1990
 Time: 2pm - 2:30pm
 Weather: Cloudy, temperatures in 60s

Activity	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	14	2 couples/10 S.M.
picnic	9	1 solo/1 couple/2 family w/baby
hanging out	5	teenagers with car
courting on grass	6	
viewing	2	adult male w/toddler
reading	1	elderly male
Active		
walking	2	middle-aged couple
walking dog	2	2 S.M.
softball	20	junior high students
cruising	4	teenage couples
working on car	2	young male
maintenance/ gardening	10	R&P
Total	77	

Note: 62.3 percent of observed users were male. Slightly less than 60 percent (59.7%) were located within official picnic and recreation areas.

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL SURVEY TABLES

**TABLE ONE
USER ACTIVITY COUNT: MONDAY AFTERNOON**

Date: May 21, 1990
 Time: 1pm - 2pm
 Weather: Sunny with high clouds, temperatures in high 60s

Activity	#	Comments
Passive		
sitting in car	17	1 couple/15 SM
picnic	6	3 couples
hanging out	10	teenagers with cars
courting on grass	4	teenagers
viewing	3	with cameras
sleeping	2	homeless
Active		
walking	2	SF
walking dog	1	SM
jogging	4	LAPD trainees?
basketball	3	teenagers
cruising	4	teenagers
maintenance/ gardening	10	R&P
picking up aluminum	1	homeless
Total	67	

Note: 79 percent of observed users were male. Just over half (53%) were located within official picnic and recreation areas.

USER ACTIVITY CHARTS: Abbreviations

SM Single Male
 SF Single female
 R&P Department of Recreation and Parks

Friday. In fact many surveyed adults found a question as to whether they visit the Park on weekdays somewhat amusing! Underuse is harmful of this resource. Rather than letting large parts of Elysian Park lie virtually idle, especially on weekdays, a set of programs and amenities, targeting an array of user groups, must be developed. The presence of a large regular user constituency in the Park could go a long way towards insuring against further intrusions.

District (LAUSD) currently runs school trips to the Ballona Wetlands, for example. Why not include the Park on the list of school outings which provide one of the few opportunities for contact with nature for many inner city school children? Ultimately Elysian Park would make an excellent site for a magnet school of natural sciences. (Also see Chapter Four on possible reuse of Police Academy site as a Nature Center.)

3. An immediate priority for Recreation and Parks should be to **rebuild and open vandal-proof public toilets and provide of such other basic amenities as water fountains**. The absence of such fundamental facilities is extremely off-putting to many people.

4. As detailed in Chapter Two, a far sighted goal for the Park would be to **establish an Urban Ranger Program such as that of Central Park**. The Park and its users gain through such a program by way of increased policing and maintenance, the provision of guided tours, etc. Although a majority of surveyed picnic/recreation area users report feeling safe in the Park (at least during the daytime) there are large and remote areas of the Park which, as Chapter Two relates, seldom see a ranger. As a result, it is impossible for Park staff to keep up with problems of dumping, vandalism, etc. Local youth could be recruited from nearby recreation centers (e.g., Downey, Echo Park, and Alpine). As reported, many teenagers already "hang out" at the Park and expressed an affinity with it during interviews. An Urban Ranger program would steer this sense of territory in a positive direction and benefit surrounding communities by providing youth employment.

5. Of course generating the funding for any such a program would be difficult. Until the late 1970s Recreation and Parks could supplement its staff with CETA employees. This source no longer exists. Elysian Park needs a "guardian angel" organization such as New York's Central Park Conservancy, which has been able to raise millions of dollars in large donations from corporate and wealthy donors. However, the status afforded to Elysian Park by Angelenos is nowhere near that of Central Park in the eyes of New Yorkers. Perhaps the Dodger Group, which has prospered greatly during its stay in Los Angeles could be convinced to sponsor a certain number of young rangers. After all, the Park does provide the Dodgers with a beautiful setting for their stadium and the Dodgers' activities do subject the Park to a substantial degree of wear-and-tear and general inconvenience through traffic and illegal parking by fans.

6. Increased use of the Park by the Chinatown community must be encourage. It is probably no accident that people from Echo Park and Elysian Heights, who have quickest and easiest access to the Park's main user areas, make most use of them. The initial question, therefore, would be how to improve links from Chinatown to current user areas (perhaps in coordination with Alpine Recreation Center). In the long term, this would involve new user areas on the Park's south side. This fits well with City Hall's current professed interest in proposals to create a greenbelt along the Los Angeles River corridor through downtown. (Also see discussion of A Plan for Central City North in Chapter Seven.)

CONCLUSION

Just as the survey results are conceived of as preliminary, so too are the above suggestions, which are meant less as a set of firm conclusions and more as a starting point for the discussion over how to serve both current and potential users of Elysian Park. This study makes clear the Park's necessity. In particular, the impact of the massive influx of new immigrants into central and eastern areas of Los Angeles over the past decade creates an urgent need for public open space which functions not only as a place to engage in recreational activities but also as a venue for family and other social gatherings. However, the majority of current users (as family groups led by working parents) cannot be expected to visit the Park on Monday through

Nichols, 1989) Elysian Park was originally included in the program. However, while its maintenance division still receives Urban Impact funding, the extra recreation allowance was discontinued.

Underfunding not only results in few recreational programs and facilities. It also takes its toll on general Park maintenance. Most of the Park's restrooms are closed due to vandalism. Rows of unisex "port-a-potties" in their stead are unappealing and unsuitable particularly for families spending the day in the Park with small children. Water fountains are absent throughout much of the Park. As noted above, the attitude of most surveyed individuals was remarkably uncomplaining. However, two near unanimous requests were for decent toilet facilities and water fountains.

Park use is further hampered by access problems and poor advertising. Although this subject is dealt with in detail in Chapter Two, it must be noted here that the absence of public transportation running through Elysian Park is a serious drawback for an urban public park of this size. Critics and advisors have been calling for some form of public transit linking the Park to the city for quite some time. (Mulford Robinson, 1907, Elysian Park Master Plan, 1971). Heavily travelled bus routes, such as the Number One-Sunset, run near to the Park's southern and western boundaries. However, few visitors take the bus since getting into the Park's user areas from the bus stop involves a steep hike uphill.¹¹ This prohibits families with small children, carrying picnics, strollers, sports equipment, etc. It also cuts off access to older unaccompanied children, who might, for example, use the Park after school hours for team sports during the bright summer evenings. In particular, lack of public transit through the Park contributes greatly to the isolation of the Recreation Center.¹²

In terms of advertising, Chapter Two recounts how little the City does to promote Elysian Park, despite its great historical significance, beauty and proximity to downtown Los Angeles. This results in a situation where for many, the Park is merely a driveway into Dodger Stadium. Indeed, Dodger fans are (often unknowingly) one of the Park's biggest user groups. Although some do stop to enjoy the Park before or after the game, others simply use it as a free parking lot. Thus, on weekends when a game is played, it becomes difficult for legitimate Park visitors to find parking throughout the Chavez Ravine-Solano Canyon areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The degree of underuse described above amounts to an enormous waste of such a beautiful piece of open green space in the heart of a congested and smog-filled inner city. The following suggestions offer environmentally sensitive ways in which to increase the range of hours, days and seasons in which the Park's amenities are used without clashing with current uses:

1. A relatively simple and inexpensive proposal would be to encourage regular use of the Park by downtown public employees (and other workers). Given the Park's proximity to the Los Angeles Civic Center, during daylight savings time, shuttle buses could ferry employees the short distance to the Park for after-work use of the ball fields by employee teams (for practice/league games etc). Picnic/barbecue facilities could also be marketed for lunchtime employee picnics.
2. Weekday use could also increase if the city were to build a relationship between the Park and local schools, e.g., Solano Street and Cathedral High (perhaps through Parent-Teacher Associations?). School classes could use the Park for hiking, picnics and sports activities. On a more ambitious level, the Park could serve as an "outdoor classroom" in which to study sciences such as geology, biology, botany, horticulture, etc. The Los Angeles Unified School

PEOPLE AND FACILITIES

The greatest number of people who come to the park do so because of the isolated nature of the two principal valleys and will set up for large group gatherings in these spots for picnicking, with the open lawn space for informal and impromptu lawn games such as touch football, softball, badminton, croquet, quoits, and other casual family games. Present facilities are inadequate and antiquated for maximum park use and each area will be examined as to need for park furniture. Large areas, such as the major picnic spots in Chavez Ravine, Solano Canyon or the Bishop fill area, will be furnished with shelters, tables, barbecue units, sinks and restrooms and play areas - all designed with a rustic appearance for overall harmony.

There is also a need for small picnic areas which could accommodate ten to twenty-five people and which will have the same furniture as the large areas. These spaces will be near parking for restroom convenience and efficient maintenance.

There will be rewards for people who are willing to hike in a ways to find more remote and idyllic spots for small groups of five to ten people. Furniture here will be rustic and durable, such as you would find in the National park picnic areas, fixed in place but without stoves, sinks or restrooms.



PICNIC IN CHAVEZ RAVINE

by DWP and IBM employees for volleyball practice but otherwise remains closed most of the time. The Center's grounds contain a basketball court and a shaded wading pool. The basketball court is used daily for pick up games but the wading pool is permanently dry. The children's playground is about the size one would expect to find in any small neighborhood park. The Park also contains only two tennis courts and three ball fields.

As alluded to above, there are no soccer fields in Elysian Park. This, despite Recreation and Parks' Assistant General Manager for Inner City Areas, Sheldon Jensen's assertion of an "overwhelming, burgeoning demand for soccer facilities in the inner city". Jensen made this remark to David Johnston in his 1989 Los Angeles Times article entitled "The Soccer Gap". According to Johnston, soccer is viewed as an "alien sport" by Recreation and Parks management, who continue to direct most of their sports budget towards traditional North American games such as softball, baseball, basketball and American football:

The city maintains only one designated soccer field in the inner city when hundreds of thousands of children and adults regard soccer as their primary sport.

Seven soccer fields are currently under construction at Griffith Park. Elysian Park maintenance staff say the Bishop Canyon Landfill area is "being considered" as a possible soccer field. However, the Department of Recreation and Parks prefers to develop this area for multipurpose use, for example, soccer during the week and passive uses such as viewing and kite-flying on weekends.

Like other inner city parks, Elysian Park lacks recreational programming because it has spent the past decade struggling to recover from the fallout from Proposition 13. According to Elysian Park management, last year's budget reached pre-1978 levels for the first time. However, the 1990-1991 proposed Bradley "austerity" budget threatens to reverse this improving trend. Proposition 13 had a devastating effect on the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, which went from 4,000 to 2,000 employees practically overnight and, as the budget continued to dwindle, closed two dozen recreation centers, slashed programs and reduced park hours across the City. Worse still, parks in poorer neighborhoods suffered disproportionately for two reasons. First of all, the department responded to the tax cuts by dividing its remaining funds between parks on a per acre rather than a need, or per capita basis. (Yorkin, 1989) Then, to make up for their losses, individual park managements were encouraged by their Department to "go into business" by charging user-fees for facilities and services:

Armed with marketing and user-fee approaches, Los Angeles parks recycled revenue and "bought back" part-time recreation specialists who are a crucial element in the delivery of leisure services.⁸

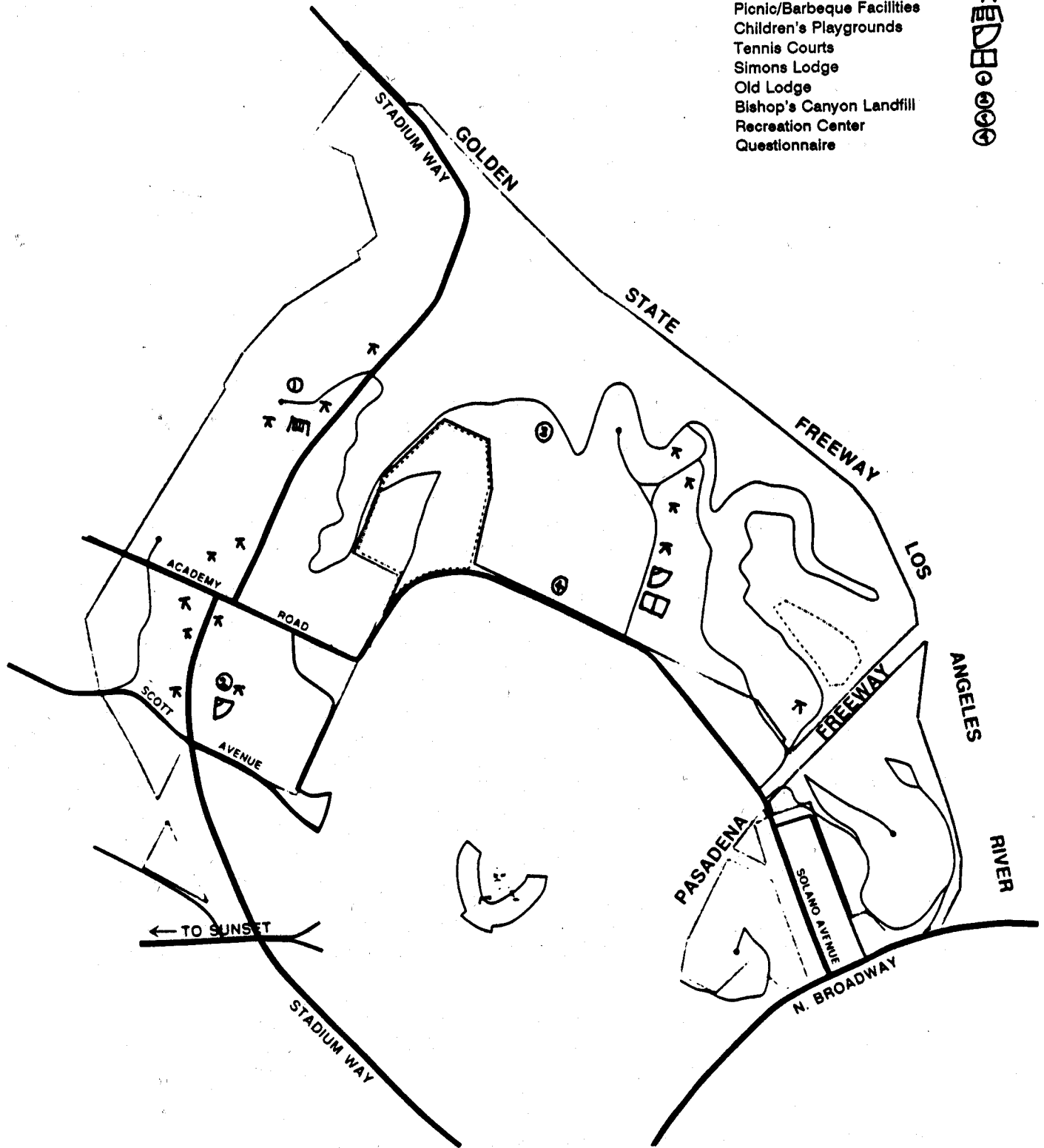
Many parks in affluent and middle class communities actually flourished under such free market conditions, expanding their hours and adding new services such as day care and cultural programs. Fees were reasonable because demand was high, direct costs were met and profits were used to buy additional staff. Not surprisingly, inner city parks fared less well.⁹

In fact parks in working-poor communities throughout the city fell into rapid decline. While all parks lost staff as a result of a period of scarcity, parks in low income communities were unable to "buy back" staff...(leading to a)...two park system, (or)..."recreation apartheid" separated by income, race and ethnic origin.¹⁰ In 1987, responding to a public outcry over "recreation apartheid", Mayor Tom Bradley's office instituted the Urban Impact program, targeting 66 inner city parks for increased recreation and maintenance funding. (Neuschatz &

LEGEND

- Picnic/Barbeque Facilities
- Children's Playgrounds
- Tennis Courts
- Simons Lodge
- Old Lodge
- Bishop's Canyon Landfill
- Recreation Center
- Questionnaire

KEDB0000



ELYSIAN PARK: Recreational Facilities

Two out of every ten surveyed weekend users visit the Park at least once a week and almost every one of these come from nearby low-income communities. (See Tables Five and Six). Seventy percent of those surveyed use the Park more than once a month. A majority of these regular users also live in working-poor communities. The most heavily represented neighborhood area is Echo Park/Elysian Heights, in which three-quarters of visitors who use the Park once a week or more and almost half of those who use the Park once a month or more live. (Sees Table Six and Seven) However, people also travel regularly from many communities east of the Los Angeles River as well as from the heart of the inner city (Downtown/MacArthur Park/Mid Wilshire), Hollywood and some surprisingly far-off communities, such as Thousand Oaks in the San Fernando Valley and San Dimas, in the eastern San Gabriel Valley.

EXPLANATIONS FOR UNDERUSE

During the early 1970s, a debate arose among leisure and recreation planners as to the future need for neighborhood parks. Increasing non-use of such public spaces, it was argued, was primarily the result of the country's growing affluence in the period since World War II. With more and more people entering the ranks of the middle-class, Americans were abandoning neighborhood parks as a leisure outlet in favor of their own back yards, second homes, or private clubs. As people no longer used parks for legitimate purposes, drug dealing and other anti-social activities moved in to fill the vacuum and people's perception of urban parks became increasingly negative, thus completing the vicious circle. (Gold, 1972)

Increased access for middle-class Americans to alternative leisure outlets may be a small part of the explanation for Elysian Park's problem of underuse. However, neither the pleasures of second homes nor the lure of private clubs provide a plausible primary explanation for such a predominantly low-income user constituency.

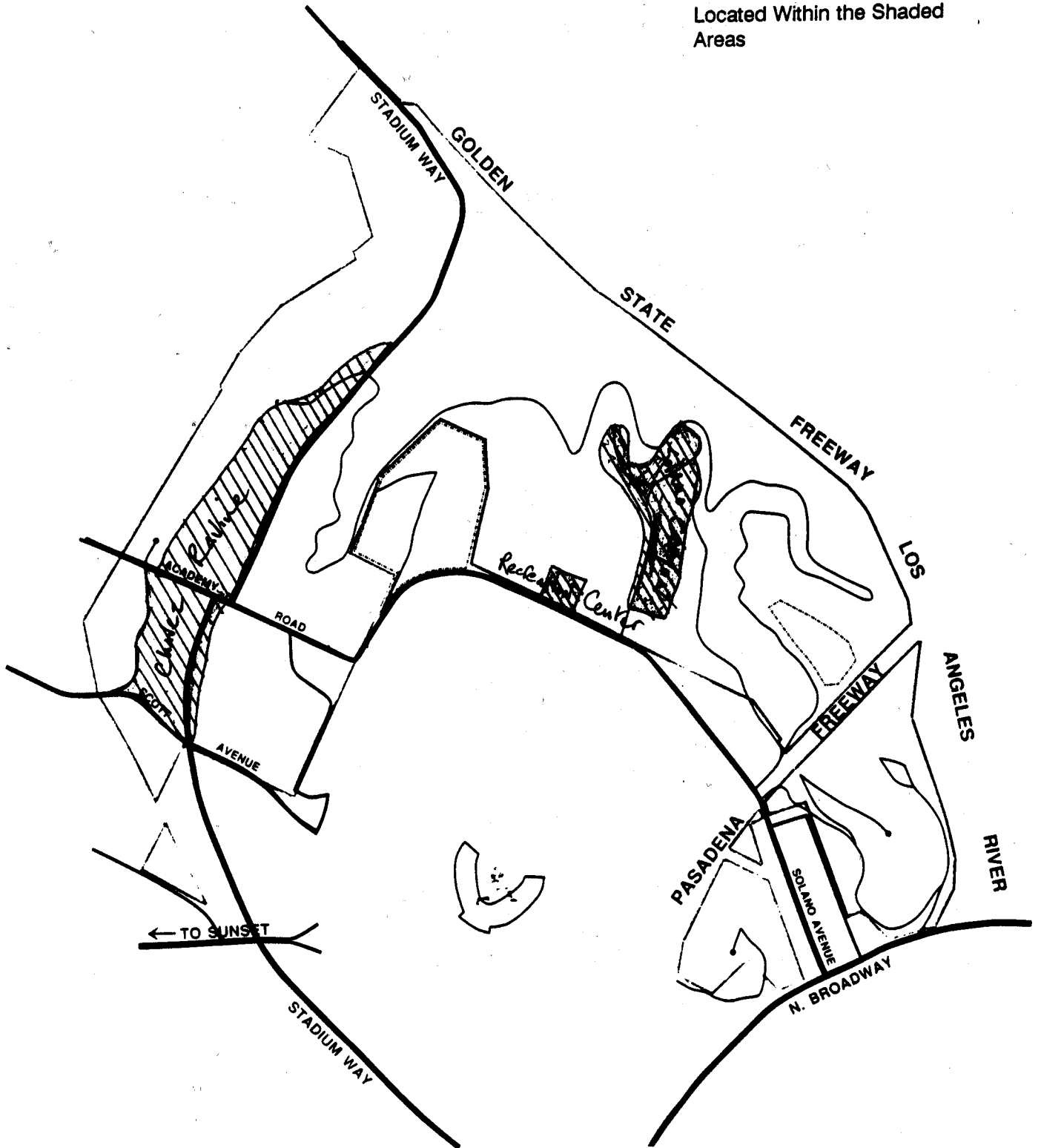
Further underscoring the necessity for the Park is the high percentage of immigrants among weekend picnic area users. Table Two reveals 84.2 percent of surveyed weekend visitors were born outside of the United States and many have lived in the United States for less than five years. As such, many Park users may not have qualified for amnesty under the 1984 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Lack of legal status probably plays some part in explaining the generally undemanding attitude of interviewees. Working to support a family in such precarious straits cannot encourage any organized lobbying for public sector provision of recreational (and other) needs. Neither are privately-provided recreational facilities an option for minimum or near minimum wage workers and their children. Yet living in overcrowded apartments and neighborhoods, these residents express a great need for green space in which to play, relax and get together for family and other social gatherings.

Recent arrivals to the United States may also feel less of the above mentioned antipathy towards public parks. The large majority of surveyed users who reported feeling safe in Elysian Park during the daytime and the frequent reference to the Park's sense of peace and tranquility, for example, suggest a more benign impression of parks.⁷

If the need for Elysian Park is undeniable, how then can its underuse be explained or interpreted? Most immediately, sparse recreational/sports facilities and a lack of facility and activity programming severely constrict Park use. (See Map Two for Park Facilities) According to Department of Recreation and Parks sources, Elysian Park currently offers not a single recreation program. The Elysian Park Recreation Center is rented out twice a week

LEGEND

61% of Weekday Users and
75% of Weekend Users are
Located Within the Shaded
Areas



ELYSIAN PARK: Where Visitors Go In the Park

TABLE SIX
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Where those who visit once a week or more live

Neighborhood	%
Echo Park/Elysian Heights	74.7
North/east Hollywood	13.2
Downtown/Mid-Wilshire/ MacArthur Park	5.7
Glendale	1.3
East LA	3.8
South Pasadena	1.3
Total	100.0

TABLE SEVEN
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Where those who visit once a month or more live

Neighborhood	%
Echo Park/Elysian Heights	46.2
North/East Hollywood	4.7
Downtown/Mid-Wilshire/ MacArthur Park	8.1
Glassell Park	5.6
Glendale	3.1
Eagle Rock	3.7
Lincoln Heights	6.1
Highland Park	4.6
South Central	1.4
Brooklyn Heights	2.0
Montebello	1.1
El Sereno	1.1
Long Beach	2.4
Inglewood	6.0
San Dimas	2.5
Thousand Oaks	1.4
Total	100.0

TABLE FOUR
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Where they live

Neighborhood	%
Echo Park/Elysian Heights	39.3
North/East Hollywood	7.1
Downtown/Mid-Wilshire/MacArthur Park	11.2
Glassell Park	7.7
Glendale	3.8
Eagle Rock	3.6
Huntington Park	3.8
East LA/Boyle Heights & Brooklyn Heights	3.9
Lincoln Heights	3.8
Highland Park	3.2
Chinatown	1.5
South Central	3.0
South Pasadena	0.8
Ramona Gardens/El Sereno/Montebello	1.9
Inglewood	0.3
Long Beach	1.2
San Dimas	1.2
Thousand Oaks	0.5
Van Nuys	1.3
Fontana	0.4
Total	100.0

TABLE FIVE
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: How often they visit the Park

Frequency	%
once a week or more	20.2
once a month or more	49.9
less than once a month	13.4
First Visit	16.5
Total	100.00

Picnickers use Park-provided barbecues and picnic tables as well as the grassy slopes on the edge of these areas. Parents watch as children play in the playground area and people of all ages engage in informal lawn games. Catch and volleyball are popular although we also observed a range of activities including three-legged races and sack races. For the less athletically inclined, passive forms of recreation include sitting/lying or strolling on the grass around the picnic tables and barbecues.

Larger gatherings tend to be highly animated social affairs. Among smaller, nuclear family groups it is not uncommon to see one or other parent, dozing on the grass while the children play nearby.

Also on weekends, softball teams use the Solano Canyon/Chavez Ravine fields and groups of young men, teenagers and children play pick-up games of basketball at the Recreation Center. Soccer players use the flat, grassy picnic grounds (which are not official) marked for soccer use, arriving in increasing numbers as evening falls and picnickers depart.

Although their user population remains relatively sparse, the Park's higher grounds--the fire roads and viewing points, Carob Grove near the Reservoir, Bishops Canyon Landfill, etc.--also receive more visitors on weekends.⁶ Higher ground users tend to be more solitary, including joggers and walkers (male and female), viewers, kite-flyers, and bird watchers. There is a strong, predominantly male "auto contingent", who either cruise, sit in parked cars, stand around beside their cars or sometimes even work on their cars (the rule seems to be to wash the car elsewhere and then to drive it to a quiet spot in the Park for waxing and polishing!). Teenagers, who comprise about fifty percent of this "auto contingent", make up a sizeable Park user group. Most of the couples in the Park are teenagers. Groups of teenage boys and girls also visit the Park throughout the week. Apart from car-related activities, teenagers play some sports such as soccer and basketball but tend most simply to "hang out".

Attitudes Towards the Park

Significantly, almost three-quarters of surveyed weekend users responded to a "what do you like best about the Park?" question by simply mentioning the need to escape the noise and crowding of the city, to find space, tranquility or some aspect of nature (trees coming in a strong first at 32.5 percent of surveyed users!). Another twenty percent said the Park gives their children room to run and play. New Latino immigrants, in particular, displayed a remarkably undemanding and uncomplaining attitude in response to survey questions asking for criticisms, comments and suggestions regarding the Park.

Survey respondents exhibited a general sense of security in the Park with less than ten percent (8.7%) reporting feeling unsafe in the Park during daylight hours. Seventy one percent said they felt completely safe. Another 13.8 percent responded that they felt safe during the daytime (remaining 6.2% "don't knows"). Of those who felt the Park is not completely safe, one referred to the danger of children getting run over by food vendors' trucks. One had a friend who was robbed in the Park, one was unnerved by the heavy police presence (although the LAPD do not patrol the Park) and the sounds of the Police Academy's firing range and two recalled a drive-by shooting in 1986.

Where Elysian Park Visitors Live

Elysian Park is surrounded by some of the city's poorest and most overcrowded neighborhoods. The weekend survey determined that the great majority of users live in these predominantly working-poor areas (See Table Four).

TABLE ONE⁵
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Racial/Ethnic Breakdown

	%
Latino	88.5
Asian	4.0
Anglo	2.7
African-American	1.8
Middle Eastern	3.0

Total	100.0

TABLE TWO
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Where they were born

	%
Latin America*	78.9
Asia	3.7
Middle East**	1.6
United States	15.8

Total	100.0

*31 percent of Latino immigrant Park users are from El Salvador and Guatemala. The remainder, apart from two Peruvians and one Belizian, originated from Mexico,

**The large number of Middle Eastern visitors is skewed by an Armenian Boy Scout fund raiser at the Old Lodge Picnic Ground on Sunday May 20th. Only one interviewed Armenian family had visited the Park previously.

TABLE THREE
ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: Group Size Distribution

Group Size	# of grps	# of people	% pop
1 person	5	5	.6
2 people	9	18	2.3
3-5 people	14	61	7.8
6-9 people	21	166	21.2
10-15 people	16	200	25.5
16-20 people	6	113	14.4
21-30 people	4	55	7.2
31-50 people	5	165	21.0

Total	80	783	100.0

Weekend Visitors

As demonstrated by the Saturday and Sunday counts, Elysian Park comes to life on weekends with an average recorded weekend use almost nine times greater than that of weekdays. More precisely, parts of the Park come to life with a pronounced concentration of weekend users--approximately seventy-five percent--located within Solano Canyon and Chavez Ravine. These areas contain the bulk of the park's facilities--picnic grounds, Arboretum, children's playground, Recreation Center with Basketball court, ball fields, tennis courts, Old Lodge Picnic Grounds and Grace E. Simons Lodge. They are also close to the major thoroughfares (Academy Road and Stadium Ways) and have adjacent parking.

Throughout the week, but especially on weekends, the Park's user population is predominantly Latino and immigrant. Indeed, almost 70 percent (68.8%) of interviews with Park visitors were conducted in Spanish. (See Tables One and Two) Most activities revolve around picnicking in family groups. Those nuclear families observed using the Park were larger than the typical United States family with one or two children. Family gatherings in Elysian Park include three or more generations of extended family and up to fifty people turn out to celebrate special family occasions.⁴ Celebrations involving Mexican holidays, Quinceaneras, baptisms, and Catholic First Communion and Confirmations are common as are children's birthday parties, Mother's Day, etc. This use of the Park for family get-togethers, rather than a family member's home or a commercial venue such as a restaurant, is telling. Several of those surveyed explained that there is not room enough in their apartment to gather as a family and the cost of going to a restaurant would be prohibitive.

ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: COMBINED ACTIVITY COUNTS*

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Avg w/d	Avg w/e
Active									
walking	2	2	16	5	5	25	14	6.0	19.5
walking dog	1	2	4	3	0	0	0	2.0	0
jogging	4	0	40	12	7	26	11	12.6	18.5
playing catch	0	0	4	13	8	30	13	5.0	21.5
basketball	3	0	12	5	6	3	25	5.2	14.0
softball	0	20	0	14	0	0	15	6.8	7.5
soccer	0	0	8	16	0	20	11	4.8	15.5
tennis	0	0	4	2	2	6	0	1.6	3.0
volleyball	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	8.0
cruising	4	4	6	0	0	0	0	2.8	0
working on car	0	2	3	3	0	0	2	1.6	1.0
gardening/maint.	10	10	8	4	10	0	0	8.4	0
recycling	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0
skipping rope	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.2	0
bicycling	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.2	0.5
playground	0	0	0	0	0	25	40	0	32.5
kite flying	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2.0
Commercial									
musicians	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	2.0
snacks	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	0.2	3.5
Passive and Active									
Total	67	77	175	120	107	581	1,326	109.2	953.5

On average, 61 percent of observed weekday users and 75 percent of observed weekend users were located within official picnic and recreation areas (shaded are on Map One). The recorded weekday population was 72.3 percent male. By contrast, between 40 and 45 percent of recorded weekend users were male.

* Complete user activity charts for each individual period of observation--including dates, times, weather reports and detailed comment--in Appendices One through Seven.

ELYSIAN PARK VISITORS: COMBINED ACTIVITY COUNTS*

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Avg w/d	Avg w/e
Passive									
sitting in car	17	14	26	15	32	40	57	20.8	48.5
picnicking	6	9	14	5	20	343	981	10.8	662.0
hanging out	10	5	15	16	10	20	93	11.2	56.5
courting	4	6	14	4	6	10	24	6.8	17.0
viewing	3	2	0	0	0	9	10	1.0	9.5
sleeping	2	0	0	1	1	0	5	0.8	2.5
reading	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0.2	1.0
bird watching	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.5
playing backgammon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6.0

regarding the Park) this passive user analysis was supplemented by a more formal survey of visitors via questionnaire-guided interviewing in both English and Spanish. This part of the study was conducted on Saturday May 12, 1990 and Sunday May 20, 1990 between the hours of twelve and three in the afternoon. Although activity/user counts were conducted throughout all areas of the Park accessible by car, again, time and labor constraints restricted interviews to these two weekend days and to the low-lying picnic and recreation areas in Chavez Ravine and Solano Canyon which receive most of the Park's visitors.(See Map One) Finally, interviews with Recreation and Parks maintenance and recreation officials provided information as to Departmental procedures and programming concerning Elysian Park as well as access to statistics on users of reservable facilities (i.e., the Grace E. Simons Lodge and Old Lodge Picnic Grounds).

SURVEY FINDINGS²

Weekday Visitors

User activity counts reveal a striking gap between the number of weekday and weekend visitors, with average recorded weekend use between eight and nine times greater of that from Monday through Friday. On weekdays the Park could be described as chronically underused, with as few as sixty-seven users recorded during one observation period. These counts also point to a predominantly male mid-week population, while the reverse is true on weekends.³

Few children or families come to the Park during the week with most visitors either using the Park alone or with one other person. The children's playground is deserted and the picnic grounds and sports facilities are little used. The Old Lodge Picnic Ground mirrors this general use pattern. Capable of holding up to several hundred people, it is booked solidly for months in advance on weekends but generally empty on weekdays. Both private parties and public organizations such as the Boy Scouts use this area for picnics, fund raisers, etc. The Grace E. Simons Lodge is constantly booked for weddings, Quinceaneras, etc., on weekends. However, this facility is also used more on weekdays as a venue for events such as Los Angeles Unified School District board meetings. While the Old Lodge area rents for \$100 for four hours, the Simons Lodge, surrounded by landscaped gardens replete with fountain and pond, is the biggest generator of funds within the Park, renting for \$900 per six hours. Unfortunately, the fees from the latter are not recycled into the Park. Twenty five percent of the revenue is used for upkeep of the Simons Lodge area and the remainder goes into the City's General Fund.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on visitors to Elysian Park and is based on a Park user study conducted during the months of April and May, 1990. The study's fundamental premise is that a "park-poor" city like Los Angeles, whose fifteen thousand acres of park land amount to approximately half what a city of its size should have (by national standards), must cultivate and protect all of its public parks as vital resources for city residents. In the case of Elysian Park, this preservation argument holds especially true: As Los Angeles' largest downtown park, surrounded by densely-packed, working-poor communities, the Park serves as an essential neighborhood park as well as providing access to open green space to residents throughout the crowded inner city and beyond.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the research methods used to gather information on Elysian Park users. It then turns to a description of Park visitors; where they come from, when and why they visit the Park. This exercise serves two purposes: first, it identifies current users and use patterns; second, by highlighting the conspicuous absence of visitors throughout most of the Park and for much of the week, it also raises the equally important issue of nonusers. Underuse is not only wasteful of this valuable public resource, low visitor numbers also pose a very real threat to the Park's future. Even a cursory glance at Chapter Four on expansion plans for the Los Angeles Police Academy, or Chapter Six's account of current and historic encroachments onto Park land, reveals the degree to which the Park has been and continues to be imposed on, short-changed and damaged by non-park interests. A strong and active user constituency with a sense of belonging and investment in the Park would be its best advocate and watchdog against further intrusions. Towards this end, the final part of this chapter briefly outlines a set of proposals to cultivate use (both through increased visits by current users and the targeting of new user groups) in a manner which minimizes both conflict with existing legitimate uses and disturbance of sensitive natural landscape.

Research Methods

From the outset, the preliminary nature of this study must be stressed. Limited time and few resources made a complete investigation of each Park area and all user groups impossible. However, the findings outlined below provide a solid starting point from which to begin to understand the needs of Park users--current and future, actual and potential. The bulk of the research was conducted using a set of methods--including on-site observation, user counts and activity mapping--known collectively as "post occupancy user analysis". Valuable information and insight into these techniques were gained from user surveys conducted by the Central Park Conservancy in New York as well as the work of that city's "Project for Public Spaces" organization (Madden & Love, 1982) and William H Whyte's (1980, 1986) pioneering studies of user behavior and dynamics.¹

User analysis grows out of the point of view that direct observation is the most effective way to understand how public space is used or not used by people. Park managers and planners can employ such methods in making design/management decisions either discouraging or encouraging certain uses. In this case, user analysis was utilized less as a means to discover specific design or policy flaws (although many were revealed during periods of observation) and more as a way of gaining a broad understanding of visitors and use patterns in Elysian Park. While all current and potential user needs should not--cannot--be extrapolated from the behavior of the Park's current population, these methods do provide many insights.

To obtain biographical detail on current users (and to hear their comments and opinions

TABLES

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2. Elysian Park Visitors: Where they were born
3. Elysian Park Visitors: Group Size Distribution
4. Elysian Park Visitors: Where they live
5. Elysian Park Visitors: How often they visit the Park
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11. Our visitor survey revealed a total of one user who took the bus to reach the Park (his car had broken down).
12. The Center lost its "natural constituency" when the Chavez Ravine neighborhood was "cleared" and Dodger Stadium was built. It is also cut off to the southeast by the Golden State and Pasadena freeways. According to Director of Recreation and Parks, James Hadaway, it is "being considered" for reuse as a special recreation center for the mentally/physically challenged.