

“We actually care and we want to make the parks better”: A qualitative study of youth experiences and perceptions after conducting park audits



Active Living Research

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Background

- Parks are promising resources for facilitating youth physical activity (Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005)
- Design and quality of community parks impact the extent to which they are safe and inviting spaces
- Facilities, amenities, and quality of parks can vary dramatically within and across communities

(Kamel, Ford, & Kaczynski, 2014; Vaughan et al., 2013)

- Creating healthy community environments is recognized as a vital strategy in addressing youth obesity and related public health challenges (Sallis et al., 2006)



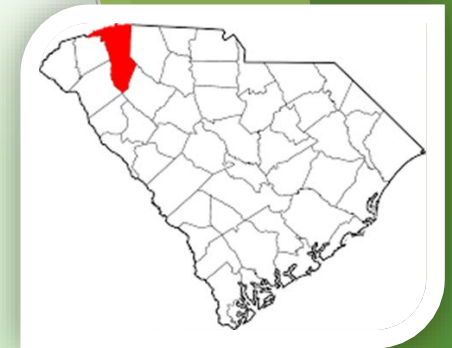
Focus on Youth

- Youth can be especially valuable resources:
 - innovative ideas
 - energy
 - impact of their voices on decision makers
(Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005; Ribisl et al., 2004)
- However, in spite of their potential contributions, youth and adolescents are often overlooked or under-represented within efforts to promote public health
(Millstein & Sallis, 2011; Valaitis, 2002)



Broader Project

- To engage youth in becoming advocates for healthy community design through innovative technology in Greenville County, SC



- An electronic app version of the Community Park Audit Tool (eCPAT) was developed (Besenyi et al., under review)
- Included the use of focus groups to explore not only the technical usability of the tool, but intrapersonal aspects as well

Broader Project

- 150 youth ages 11-18 were recruited based upon existing participation in youth groups and programs
- Three groups designated by an audit tool format (paper CPAT, eCPAT, Both)
- 2-hour training workshops
- Two park audits using assigned audit tool format
- Total of 47 parks
- Google Nexus 10 tablets



Purpose

- Explore youths' experiences and perceptions about future community engagement as a result of participating in a community-based data collection project using paper and mobile technology park environmental audit tools



Methodology

- Subsample of youth were recruited to participate in retrospective focus groups
- **Nine focus groups** : 3 per audit format
 - 51 total participants
 - 28 White, 12 African American, 11 other
 - Mean age: 13.4 years
 - 18 Male, 33 Female
- **Focus groups explored:**
 - Experiences participating in the project
 - Changes as a result of participating in the project
 - Suggested uses for the park audit data collected

Data Analysis

- All focus groups were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed in NVivo10 using a grounded theory approach

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2012)

- Using the constant comparative method, three coders developed and refined the codes through an iterative process of reviewing the transcripts and emerging themes

(Patton, 2002)

- Cross-verification of the three independent coders provided assurance of validity and reliability of the themes

Results

- Experiences participating in the project
 - Four emergent themes
- Changes as a result of participating in the project
 - Four emergent themes
- Suggested uses for the park audit data collected
 - Three emergent themes



Results: Experiences Participating in the Project

New Experience (+)

Fun (+)

Uncomfortable/Unsafe(-)

Travel Issues (-)



Results & Discussion:

Experiences Participating in the Project

New Experience

Fun

Uncomfortable/Unsafe

Travel Issues

“I thought it was very unique. I've never done anything like that before.”



Results & Discussion:

Experiences Participating in the Project

New Experience

Fun

Uncomfortable/Unsafe

Travel Issues

- Appeared in 8 out of the 9 focus groups

“if there were more projects like this, I definitely want to do them because they’re really easy and actually fun....”

- Psychological engagement (paying attention, demonstrating interest in the activities) is related to significant increases in leader-rated social competence and in effectance motivation (Mahoney, Parente, Lord; 2007)

Results & Discussion:

Experiences Participating in the Project

New Experience

Fun

Uncomfortable/Unsafe

Travel Issues

“... the surrounding area wasn't very kid friendly. So, I didn't feel very comfortable in that park.”

Parks that are not maintained and/or attract vagrants could contribute to people's perceptions of safety within the park, which likely impacts their use (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, & Cohen; 2005)

Results & Discussion:

Experiences Participating in the Project

New Experience

Fun

Uncomfortable/Unsafe

Travel Issues

“really hard to find”

“kind of hard sometimes
to fit into your schedule”

Results & Discussion:

Changes as a Result of Participation

Increased
Awareness (+)

Motivation for
Further Action (+)

Increased PA (+)

No Change



Results & Discussion:

Changes as a Result of Participation

Increased Awareness

Motivation for Further Action

Increased PA

No Change

“It definitely changed the way I look at a park... the app made me look a little bit deeper into the park, and see some of the things that were actually wrong”

Mismatch between perceived and objectively-assessed environments
(Ball et. al; 2008)

Results & Discussion:

Changes as a Result of Participation

Increased Awareness

Motivation for Further Action

Increased PA

No Change

“I know how important parks are to the community and that's why I would want to do it again ... you want to go to a nice park, not really a bad condition park.”

Forming a personal connection to a program's activities “may be a central mechanism in the change process through which youth become motivated and engaged.” (Dawes, Larson; 2011).

Results & Discussion:

Changes as a Result of Participation

Increased Awareness

Motivation for Further Action

Increased PA

No Change

“...very good way to get exercise ... have to walk all around the park to see everything ... good way to get people out of the house ... going to parks, walking around.”

Exercise facilities, including parks, that are conveniently located have been found to be associated with vigorous physical activity in a number of studies, among both adults and children (Sallis et. al;1997)

Results & Discussion:

Changes as a Result of Participation

Increased
Awareness

Motivation for
Further Action

Increased PA

No Change

- Some youth indicated that they perceived *No Change* due to their participation

Results: Use of Information Collected from Tool

Communicate
Improvement
Needs

Generating Park
Information for the
Community

Getting the
Community
Involved



Results: Use of Information Collected from Tool

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“Taking several pictures of [the graffiti]... if somehow this app could be communicated to someone who could actually have the authority to go in and remove it and improve it.”

“playgrounds renovations may have the potential to increase the number of children utilizing the playground outside of school hours” (Colabianchi; 2009)

Results: Use of Information Collected from Tool

Communicate
Improvement
Needs

Generating Park
Information for the
Community

Getting the
Community
Involved

“If you had a website and a map, you could pull up like information about the parks. That'd be cool... you could like click on it and it would pull up accurate information, like up to date about the park....everything that was on the survey.”

Results: Use of Information Collected from Tool

Communicate
Improvement
Needs

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Information for the
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Getting the
Community
Involved

“you could put up signs..
do a bake sale ... tell people in
your school about it ...
raise money at school and
they could help to make a
different community project.
Just get people involved.”

to engage youth in critical reflection on
interpersonal and sociopolitical processes
there is a “need for increasing youths’
understanding of community, institutional,
and bureaucratic structures; **participating in
assessment of community resources; and
reflecting on challenging events in order to
form subsequent actions**” (Jennings et al., 2006)

Conclusion

We learned about youths':

- ▶ Experiences completing park audits
- ▶ Changes as a result of participation
- ▶ Desired utilization of the information collected



Why is this important?

- Limited park audit tools have been developed or used extensively with youth
- Limited qualitative research with perspectives of youth engaged in such projects



- Aid in understanding youth attitudes and preferences in order to advance youth empowerment

Implications – Research & Practice

- Positive youth interest and potential to be engaged in healthy community PSE projects



- Illustrations of youths' ability to become more aware of their environment, and envision avenues of communication and action

Implications – Research & Practice



- Knowledge and awareness of community parks and recreation resources which has the potential to lead to increased utilization of these resources by youth

- Mobile technology is a viable mechanism for civically engaging youth



Contact

For more information on the paper CPAT or eCPAT app:

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