How Friends of Discovery Park Can Increase Environmental Awareness and Enhance Visitor Satisfaction

Annemarie Ayton*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington
Site Supervisor: Garrett Esperum, Friends of Discovery Park
Faculty Advisor: Himanshu Grover, Depart of Urban Planning, University of Washington

BACKGROUND

- The purpose of visitor centers throughout parks across the United States, is to inform tourists of the historical background and environmental significance of the land being dedicated to public use (see figure 1). The benefits of having an effective visitor center are increased environmental, social, and economic support throughout the community in addition to providing tourists with a valuable visiting experience.
- But, the content of visitor centers is critical to achieving these goals.
- Therefore, there is a need to evaluate how to increase environmental awareness and improve visitor satisfaction.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What attributes of visitor centers can increase awareness of environmental issues as well as enhance visitor satisfaction?

INTERNISHIP/METHODS

- I completed my internship with Friends of Discovery Park (FODP)
- The purpose of the project was to evaluate and determine how the existing displays and materials could be updated to better serve the Seattle community.
- I conducted a survey for community feedback and created a brochure for FODP to distribute on site and virtually.
- A literature review and an annotated bibliography helped to provide evidence to support my researchable question.

RESULTS

- High functioning visitor center can promote preservation and help to maintain the many habitats and wildlife that thrive at the park.
- The results from my survey (Figure 2) show that:
  - 65.5% of visitors would like more community events and activities
  - 58.6% of visitors would like more interactive or hands-on displays
  - 44.8% of visitors would like more educational materials and information
  - 6.9% of visitors believe the visitor center does not need improvement

IMPLICATIONS/SIGNIFICANCE

- Discovery Park offers people in Seattle with a much-needed reprieve from an otherwise crowded and busy city.
- Without the dedication of organizations like FODP, we would not have access to well-maintained and ecologically sound parks in our city that are imperative to a healthy environment.

What Are the Next Steps?

- Further evaluation of visitor centers is necessary to determine their advocacy in conveying critical information.
- Conduct a cost benefit analysis and find creative ways to increase funding to support projects and park restoration.
- Consider expanding programs at the visitor center that both empower the community but also facilitate outdoor experiences.

CONCLUSION

- By conducting a community survey, a literature review, and an annotated bibliography, this project attempted to better facilitate Friends of Discovery Park’s concerns regarding environmental awareness and visitor experience.

Features of Effective Visitor Centers

- Experiential technologies
- Well maintained infrastructure
- Available facilities
- Informational resources
  - Brochures
  - Maps
  - Information desk

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