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A Study of Fiscal Trends on Leisure Service Delivery in Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies from FY96 to FY00

by Nathan A. Schaumleffel, Deborah A. Smith, Irma O'Dell, and Daniel G. Yoder[1]

Small towns regularly suffer from insufficient public services to meet health, social service, and recreational needs. This is due to the fact that local resources and outside funding are sparse or perceived to be sparse by practitioners (Bhaerman 1994). Economies in small towns and rural areas are often depressed and frequently are dependent on one industry (e.g., coal mining or prison administration), which means public agencies have a relatively low and precarious tax base (Davenport and Davenport 1995). Presumably, a small tax base and lagging economy have limited small Illinois communities in their efforts to provide recreation and leisure opportunities. To combat the lack of recreation opportunities in small towns, public recreation agencies are attempting to identify ways to deliver affordable, year-round leisure services (Long and Kieselbach 1987).

Only four studies have been conducted on the effects of fiscal trends on public leisure service delivery. The findings of these studies are important because they have shaped the general assumptions within our field about fiscal conditions in public recreation agencies. Klar and Rodman (1984) examined the budgetary and administrative impacts of tax-limiting legislation on municipal recreation and park departments in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In 1986, Gitelson and Sessoms studied the effects of federal cutbacks on local park and recreation systems in North Carolina. Weissinger and Murphy (1993) studied the effects of fiscal conditions in small-town public recreation departments in Western and Midwestern states. Lastly, a study by Gladwell and Sellers (1997) assessed the fiscal status and financial trends in public park and recreation agencies in medium-sized communities of the southeastern United States. Noticeably, fiscal trends in small towns in the Midwest have not been studied in over a decade. Thus, fiscal trends in small towns are presumably an understudied area within the park and recreation administration literature. Yardley, MacDonald, and Clarke (1990) stated that for the last twenty years, practitioners and scholars in the field of park and recreation have debated fiscal conditions in public recreation agencies. A review of the literature uncovered a large number of articles that purport or acknowledge the following general assumptions: (1) public recreation agencies (PRAs) have experienced annual budget decreases, (2) fiscal resources continue to be very limited, and (3) PRAs take disproportionate cutbacks compared to "essential services" such as police and fire departments (Cockrell and Wellman 1985; Deppe 1986; Fletcher, Kaiser, and Groger 1992; Gitleson and Sessoms 1986; Gladwell and Sellers 1997; Goodale 1985; Klar and Rodman 1984; McCarville and Crompton 1988; McDonald, Noe, and Hammitt 1987; McLean and Johnson 1997; Nilson 1987; Simmons 1995; Weissinger and Murphy 1993; Whyte 1992; Yardley et al. 1990); however, these assumptions have been called into question in the last two decades (Deppe 1986; Gitelson and Sessoms 1986; Gladwell and Sellers 1997; McCarville and Crompton 1988; Weissinger and Murphy 1993). Furthermore, even though studies have successfully challenged the three general assumptions, more research needs to be conducted to continue to ascertain fiscal trends in PRAs. A thorough understanding of the fiscal status and trends in the public setting is invaluable to administrators' decisions regarding short- and long-term planning. This is especially important given that many practitioners claim that budget cuts or tight budgets are affecting and constraining the success of their leisure service delivery (Whyte 1992).

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[1] The authors are, respectively, Doctoral Student, Department of Leisure Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Assistant Professor, Department of Health Education and Recreation, Southern Illinois University Carbondale; Associate Professor, Department of Health Education and Recreation, Southern Illinois University Carbondale; and Professor, Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Administration, Western Illinois University.

This study compared the raw budgetary data from five fiscal years of an essential service (police) with that of the park and recreation agency from the same municipality. No previous study has undertaken a comparison of "essential" and "non-essential" services.

Past research on fiscal trends in public recreation agencies have studied a variety of community sizes. Weissinger and Murphy's (1993) study targeted small-town fiscal trends, but only explored the trends of park and recreation agencies. Moreover, the population range in Weissinger and Murphy's (1993) study was 5,000 to 25,000. The current study examines the fiscal trends associated with leisure service delivery in small-town public recreation agencies (2,500 to 10,000) in Illinois from FY96 to FY00.

Review of Literature

Within our field, general assumptions about negative fiscal trends in public recreation agencies have been shaped over the last thirty years by historical legislation and public policy. For example, Deppe (1986) documented that in the mid-1970s, the longest period of economic growth in the history of our country came to an end and caused local governments to experience difficult fiscal conditions. McCarville and Crompton (1988) stated that social and economic trends were pointing toward inescapable dispossession of tax subsistence through the 1970s. Deppe (1986) noted that "a number of 'unique' events were occurring that created an awareness that local government was facing a financial dilemma" (44), notably, the 1974-1976 recession, the 1975 bankruptcy of New York City, California's Proposition 13 in 1978, and Massachusetts' Proposition 2.5 in 1980. A few states passed tax-limiting legislation during the 1970s, such as New Jersey in 1976 and Rhode Island in 1977, but the "'tax-revolt movement' did not receive significant national attention until Proposition 13 was passed by two-thirds of California voters in 1978" (Gladwell and Sellers 1997, 2). The tax revolt was a movement in which citizens lobbied for legislation that limited the amount of taxes that local and state governments could assess and collect. Thirty-six states had implemented tax-limiting legislation or had begun to reduce one or more local and/or state taxes by 1979 (Leonard 1986). The introduction of "Reaganomics" in the early 1980s was thought to be more damaging to local recreation agencies' budgets than the snowballing, tax-limiting legislation (Gladwell and Sellers 1997). McCarville and Crompton (1988) indicated that "financial cutbacks and restraints became part of the prevailing conditions under which most parks and recreation administrators operated and thus became part of the field's conventional wisdom" (47).

In 1987, Cordell, Cordell, Hope, and English found that small-town public recreation departments spent more money per capita than larger, urban park and recreation departments; however, this finding can be misleading once it is put in a realistic small-town context. Cordell et al. capture the substantive interpretation of this finding:

> It appears that the proportionate contributions to recreation budgets were consistent across community sizes, but the marginal cost of providing additional recreation services or facilities apparently is higher in the smallest communities. This higher cost has probably hampered service expansion. (39)

These scholars acknowledge that small towns have a higher per capita staff-to-resident ratio than large metropolitan agencies; however, the overall staff size is still inadequate to accomplish the work and fulfill the mission of the organization such as writing grants, building collaborations with other organizations, and seeking sponsorships or donations.

Whyte (1992) identified three key fiscal trends effecting leisure service delivery. The first anticipated fiscal trend in the 1990s was generally declining park and recreation budgets, resulting in downsized agencies and a search for additional revenue. The second trend was that public recreation agencies would have increased competition for existing tax resources. In the municipal setting, Whyte predicted that tax dollars would be reserved for public services perceived to be essential. Lastly, Whyte forecasted that debt service would cause public agencies to have fewer operating funds.

Gladwell and Sellers (1997) presented sufficient evidence to confirm that reductions in appropriations for public sector recreation agencies have not been as ubiquitous as formerly implied. Furthermore, they claim that "local parks and recreation departments may be fiscally healthier than conventional wisdom has assumed" (3). Indeed, in small-town recreation departments, Weissinger and Murphy (1993) found that budget reductions were not as abundant and extensive as they predicted. They commented that they were "somewhat surprised to learn that most of the departments reporting budget reductions also said that other departments in the municipality took an equal-sized cut" (69). Moreover, Gladwell and Sellers (1997) found that "per capita spending for local parks and recreation and the ratio of local expenditures for park and recreation to total general expenditures by local governments increased between FY89-90 and FY94-95" (10) for medium-sized communities. Amazingly, Gladwell and Sellers noted, this increase in per capita spending is in stark contrast to the 1970s' tax-revolt and the 1980s' Reaganomics. Gitelson and Sessoms (1986), Gladwell and Sellers (1997), and Weissinger and Murphy (1993) corroborate that the crumbling of public recreation services is a myth; fiscal trends have been more positive than originally thought. The literature review generated the following research questions:

- Between FY96 and FY00, did small-town public recreation agencies' budgets increase, decrease, or freeze in Illinois?
- How did fiscal trends effect leisure service delivery in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies?
- Were fiscal trends in small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois consistent with the general assumptions?

Methods

Sample. The researchers attempted to identify the entire population of Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies by using three methods. Using a membership list provided by the Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA) and the 1990 U.S. Census (Illinois Department of Energy and Natural Resources 1994), 38 park and recreation agencies were identified. In addition, the researchers contacted all Illinois' small towns via phone to confirm whether or not the municipalities had a public recreation agency or if a park district served the area. This process yielded 90 members for the population. Finally, 79 Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies were identified from the *2000-2001 IAPD/IPRA Membership Directory and Buyer's Guide* (IAPD/IPRA 2000). These three processes yielded a total of 207 communities. Directors, park board presidents, or knowledgeable individuals from each of the communities received a survey. Thirty completed the questionnaire for a response rate of 14.49 percent. The high rate of nonresponse was partly expected due to the extremely high level of time and effort required for the completion of the survey.

Furthermore, many small towns simply did not have the requested budgetary information available. For example, many agencies have neither staff nor a central office for storage. Past records may have been misplaced in the process of moving between commissioners through the years. Many agencies discarded the budget after an audit was completed, only maintaining documentation of what was spent. In many cases, staff was not available to complete the instrument and locate the annual budgets from FY95 to FY00. Some potential participants felt the questionnaire was too intrusive even though budgets for government agencies are public information available to everyone. While the low response rate reduces the confidence in extrapolating to the population of 207 Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies, the study nonetheless can serve as a point of departure for further research in the area of fiscal trends in small-town public recreation agencies.

Procedure. Weissinger and Murphy's (1993) Small Town Recreation Survey, and Gladwell and Sellers' (1997) Financing Public Parks and Recreation Services questionnaire were the basis for the Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey. This survey had two parts: (1) a subject instrument and (2) a researcher instrument.

The subject instrument inquired about the agencies' organizational structure, population served, years respondent worked for the agency and served in current position, respondent's job title, the number of full-time and part-time staff, and annual budget appropriations. Also, data were gathered from an open-ended question about the effects of budget increases, decreases, and freezes on the respondent's agency's leisure service delivery. The researcher instrument was used to standardize the responding agencies' budgets because each agency has a different budgeting format.

Results

Sample Characteristics. Eleven of the responding agencies are Illinois' small-town public park districts (36.7%), and the remainder (19) are divisions of Illinois municipal governments (63.3%). The 19 agencies that are municipal government divisions have an assortment of organizational structures for delivering public leisure services. Eight have a park and recreation department, five have a park committee/board, three have a park department, and three have a public works department.

The average population among the responding small towns was 5,345, while the median population was 4,536. The smallest community had a population of 2,514, and the largest was 10,000. The average number of years for respondents to work for an agency was 12.4 years, while respondents have served in their current position for an average of 10.5 years. This indicates that those completing the instrument had been in their leadership positions with the agency during the entire time frame under study.

Analysis of Fiscal Trends. The fiscal trends of small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois were analyzed by gathering data on four indicators of positive fiscal trends. Indicators of positive (or healthy) fiscal trends are increases in (1) total operating budgets, (2) per capita spending, (3) ratio of spending for park and recreation to general local expenditures (police departments), and (4) employment levels of both full- and part-time staff (Gladwell and Sellers 1997). The results are presented by indicator type and three posed research questions. The third research question is based collectively on the positive or negative trends for all four indicators. Lastly, qualitative data gathered from an open-ended question on the subject instrument will be presented to address the second research inquiry.

Annual Total Operating Budget Increases. A positive fiscal trend is evidenced by increases in an organization's total operating budget. To address this general assumption that public recreation agencies have endured annual budget decreases and that these agencies are strapped for funding, the authors examined whether small-town public recreation agencies' budgets increased, decreased, or remained frozen in Illinois from FY96 to FY00.

Table 1 illustrates that from FY96 to FY00, Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies had a mean annual budget appropriation of $373,393.34. Table 1 also shows that Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies had a mean annual budget increase of 7.2 percent. **Table 2** illustrates the mean budget appropriation for each revenue source for Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies from FY96 to FY00. Table 2 summarizes, on average, how much of a small-town public recreation agency's budget was generated from each specific revenue source. Table 2 also illustrates that property tax was the primary revenue source for small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois, although user fees and charges are nearly equaled in percentage of the annual total operating budget. Even more interesting, among the respondents, not a single agency generated revenue from general obligation or revenue bonds.

A comparison of the mean total operating budgets (.981; p>.05) from year to year was conducted to determine if the annual budget increases were significant. A 7.2 percent annual average budget increase indicates more positive fiscal conditions than originally thought. Furthermore, the large number of agencies that had three or more years with budget increases reinforces the necessity for additional research. Of the thirty agencies examined, thirteen (43.3%) had increases four of the five years studied. Eleven (36.7%) had five increases. While no community had fewer than two increases, two (6.7%) did have two, and four (13.3%) had three.

Table 1. Mean Total Operating Budget and Percent Increase from FY96 to FY00 for Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies

FY	*Budget*	*% Increase*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Range*
1995	294,635.03		0	3,075,525.00	3,075,526.00
1996	341,497.13	13.7	0	3,226,650.00	3,226,651.00
1997	348,232.46	1.9	5,500.00	3,338,000.00	3,332,501.00
1998	367,683.98	5.3	16,000.00	3,537,600.00	3,521,601.00
1999	378,736.01	2.9	16,000.00	3,699,500.00	3,683,501.00
2000	430,817.11	12.1	50,000.00	4,098,300.00	4,048,301.00
Grand Mean	373,393.34	7.2			
Grand Range			0	4,098,300.00	4,098,301.00
n=30					

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

Table 2. Mean Budget Appropriation for Each Revenue Source for Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies from FY96 to FY00

Revenue Sources	*Mean*	*Percent*
Tax: Property	233,775.24	21.0
User fees and charges	217,800.96	19.6
General Fund Reserve	125,000.00	11.2
General Fund	119,570.51	10.7
Park exaction	92,938.41	8.4
Grants	79,184.56	7.1
Cash on hand	75,561.97	6.8
Parking	62,247.25	5.6
Tax: Sales	31,300.00	2.8
Donations/Gifts	21,342.93	1.9
Intergovernmental Revenue (Personal Property Replacement Tax, Museum Fund Reimbursement)	14,525.28	1.3
Tax: Special/Excise	12,921.20	1.2
Concessions	11,322.89	1.0
Interest	7,427.62	.7
Miscellaneous	4,763.57	.4
Farm rental	3,687.50	.3
Bond Issue: General Obligation	0	0.0
Bond Issue: Revenue	0	0.0
Tax: Income	0	0.0
n=30		

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

This indicator of fiscal trends suggests that trends are positive; it contradicts the general assumption that budgets have decreased and that public recreation agencies are suffering disproportionately for funding.

Per Capita Spending. The second indicator of positive fiscal trends, increases in per capita spending, was tested by using descriptive statistics to illustrate the level of spending per capita in each Illinois' small-town public recreation agency. **Table 3** illustrates, on average, that Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies spent $69.85 per capita from FY96 to FY00. **Table 4** provides supplemental information to Table 3 by way of offering additional descriptive statistics to illustrate per capita spending for public leisure services for FY96 to FY00. The evidence provided by these descriptive statistics confirms that per capita spending has been positive.

Ratio of Spending for Parks and Recreation to General Local Expenditures (Police Departments). The third indicator of positive fiscal trends was increases in the ratio of spending for park and recreation to general local expenditures. The data also address the assumption that recreation departments take disproportionate budget decreases compared to "essential services"—in this case, police departments.

Table 3. Mean Per Capita Spending for Public Leisure Services for FY96 to FY00 by Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies

		Mean		
FY	*Budget*	*Population*	*Per Capita Spending*	*% Increase*
1995	294,635.03	5,345.57	55.12	
1996	341,497.13	5,345.57	63.88	13.7
1997	348,232.46	5,345.57	65.14	1.9
1998	367,683.98	5,345.57	68.78	5.3
1999	378,736.01	5,345.57	70.85	2.9
2000	430,817.11	5,345.57	80.59	12.1
Grand Mean	373,393.34	5,345.57	69.85	7.2
n=30				

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

Table 4. Range for Per Capita Spending for Public Leisure Services for FY96 to FY00 by Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies

FY	*Mean Per Capita Spending*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Range*
1995	55.12	0	410.07	411.07
1996	63.88	0	430.22	431.22
1997	65.14	1.22	445.07	444.85
1998	68.78	3.55	471.68	469.13
1999	70.85	3.55	493.27	490.72
2000	80.59	7.02	546.44	540.42
Grand Mean	69.85			
Grand Range		0	546.44	547.44
n=30				

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

Data were collected and analyzed for all of the participating small towns that had a police department. The mean budget amounts of each agency that has a park and recreation department and their corresponding police department were calculated. Then, the overall percentage budget change was calculated from fiscal year to fiscal year to illustrate the trends in park and recreation and police departments. **Table 5** shows that park and recreation departments had a total operating budget mean of $175,180.07 and an annual budget increase of 10.5 percent since FY96. Police departments had a total operating budget mean of $712,722.70 and an annual budget increase of 6.1 percent. These findings illustrate not only that public park and recreation agencies did not take a disproportionate budget decrease from FY96 to FY00, but that park and recreation agencies actually had a 4.4 percent higher average budget increase than police departments from FY96 to FY00. These findings illustrate that small-town park and recreation departments have not taken disproportionate budget decreases compared to "essential services." These findings suggest that the three general assumptions need to be revisited and researched further. Also, the evidence shows that park and recreation spending has been proportionately higher when compared to other public services, thus lending support to the notion that fiscal trends are more positive than originally thought.

Table 5. Mean Total Operating Budget and Percent Increase for FY96 to FY00 for Parks and Recreation Departments and Police Departments

	Parks and Recreation Departments		*Police Departments*	
FY	*Budget*	*% Increase*	*Budget*	*% Increase*
1995	118,701.88		594,192.82	
1996	151,956.24	21.9	611,916.90	2.9
1997	168,643.41	9.9	649,572.65	5.8
1998	172,918.29	2.5	719,986.88	9.8
1999	170,365.24	-1.5	766,788.65	6.1
2000	212,017.18	19.6	815,598.41	6.0
Grand Mean	175,180.07	10.5	712,772.70	6.1
n=17				

Note: The number of agencies is equal to 17, due to 19 of the 30 respondents representing an agency that is a division or department of municipal government. Two of the 19 municipalities did not have their own police department, thus lowering the number of agencies to 17 for Table 5.

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

Employment Levels of Full-Time and Part-Time Staff. The fourth indicator of positive fiscal trends was increases in employment levels of both full- and part-time staff. From FY96 to FY00, an average of 2.64 people were employed full-time in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies and 31.87 were employed part-time. **Table 6** illustrates that the number of full- and part-time staff increased every fiscal year studied.

Table 6. Mean Full-Time and Part-Time Employees for Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agencies

FY	*Mean Full-Time Employees*	*Mean Part-Time Employees*
1996	2.40	29.67
1997	2.50	30.60
1998	2.56	31.80
1999	2.77	33.13
2000	2.97	34.17
Grand Mean	2.64	31.87
Median	2.00	11.00
n=30		

Source: Illinois' Small-Town Public Recreation Agency Survey (2001).

Increases in employees for all five fiscal years supports the notion that fiscal conditions have been positive in small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois.

The evidence suggests if fiscal trends in small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois are similar to the evidence portrayed on the four indicators, then fiscal trends in these agencies are inconsistent with the three generally accepted assumptions of widespread budget decreases, limited resource availability, and disproportionate cutbacks.

Using responses from an open-ended question on the subject instrument that inquired about the effects of fiscal trends in the respondent's agency, data were grouped into two categories: (1) budget decreases effects and (2) budget increases effects. Budget decreases, according to the respondents, affect leisure service delivery in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies in a variety of ways. One respondent associated budget decreases with a decline in the quality of park infrastructure: "We have been most effected by not changing a breakeven price for activities which has caused a decline in the park infrastructure." Another respondent mentioned that budget decreases have caused the agency to seek grants from county and state agencies. In contrast, another person said, "Budget increases have assisted agencies in providing additional services and employee benefits to the public and to Park District employees."

One respondent from an agency that has had small budget increases mentioned, "Budget increases have only maintained current programs, not added new services. An aging [pool] facility causing rapidly rising upkeep [and] repair costs and the cost of employee labor have been the foremost reasons for budget increases." Additionally, a respondent said, "Budget increases have mostly been COLA (cost of living adjustments) type increases which more or less maintained status quo."

In some small towns, public recreation agencies experienced larger increases. This allowed them to make capital improvements. One person stated, "This year we will complete a $1.8 million dollar re-development on our 11.4 acre park." Another respondent noted that positive fiscal trends have allowed their agency to buy parkland. Moreover, two agencies used budget increases to increase facilities, add landscaping, and repair facilities that were neglected for several years. In the area of recreation programming, some reported that their communities have been able to offer numerous new creative programs and purchase top quality supplies. Many of the small towns' budget increases are a result of revenue-producing facilities, increased user fees, and increases in property taxes. Furthermore, some small towns operated with tight budgets causing administrators "to find ways to keep programming going even though the money is not available." Finally, many small-town public recreation agencies have such a limited budget that matching grants were unattainable because the agency does not have the funds available to match the grant amount.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with Weissinger and Murphy (1993) and Gladwell and Sellers (1997). Among the responding agencies, fiscal trends in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies are more positive than the three general assumptions would suggest. The findings of this study suggest Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00.

Annual Total Operating Budget Increases. Increases in total operating budgets came to 7.2 percent, on average, from FY96 to FY00. Furthermore, 80 percent of the responding agencies enjoyed budget increases four or five of the five fiscal years. These findings are inconsistent with much of the literature that indicates public recreation agencies encountered budget cuts (Cockrell and Wellman 1985; Fletcher et al. 1992; Goodale 1985; Klar and Rodman 1984; McDonald et al. 1987; McLean and Johnson 1997; Nilson 1987; Simmons 1995; Weissinger and Murphy 1993; Whyte 1992; Yardley et al. 1990).

The findings of this study are consistent with those that contradict the general assumptions about fiscal trends (Deppe 1986; Gitelson and Sessoms 1986; Gladwell and Sellers 1997; McCarville and Crompton 1988; Weissinger and Murphy 1993). The annual budget increases allude to the fact that Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00.

It is important to note that the three general assumptions were developed over the course of several studies from the 1980s to the early 1990s. Only one article has addressed the general assumptions of fiscal trends in the last five years (Gladwell and Sellers 1997). The lack of research in the area of fiscal trends in public recreation agencies and the findings of this study may support a shift in the general assumptions about fiscal trends in public recreation agencies.

Part of the budget increases in public recreation agencies from FY96 to FY00 may be a result of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, commonly referred to as the Federal Crime Bill (Bennett 1994). The Federal Crime Bill included $9.2 billion dollars for crime prevention programs. This included $40 million for collaborations administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for programs such as midnight basketball, self-esteem classes, arts and crafts, dance classes, physical training programs, and conflict resolution training. The annual budget increases may also be a result of reduced competition from the private and nonprofit sector in Illinois' small towns. It is possible that the size of the towns are so small that residents cannot financially support or patronize a profit-oriented leisure business or donate to a nonprofit organization and pay property taxes to the public sector. It also appears that the annual budget increases may be partially due to an increase in the amount of available grant money from the State of Illinois and the federal government. For example, the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant is a permanently funded grant program through the State of Illinois, which has funded numerous projects and contributed to leisure service delivery throughout the state (Murphy 2001). Moreover, the booming national economy through the middle and late 1990s may have caused more personal discretionary spending and an increase in home and automobile purchasing, which allowed public recreation agencies to experience annual budget increases by receiving more property and sales taxes.

Large single-year budget increases support the notion that agencies cycled maintenance projects and capital development in the parks to improve and repair infrastructure and expand park acreage. Although the number of available grants have increased, many small-town public recreation agencies may not have the cash on hand to help fund a capital project. Lacking such cash may have caused small-town public recreation agencies to be unsuccessful at securing multiple-year matching grants that would have given the agency significant budget increases from FY96 to FY00.

Per Capita Spending. Per capita spending of leisure services is an indicator of positive fiscal trends. The annual mean increase in per capita spending was consistent with the findings of Gladwell and Sellers (1997). On average, Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies spent $69.85 per capita from FY96 to FY00. The minimum amount of money spent per capita was $0.00, while the maximum amount of money spent per capita was $546.44. The wide range may mean that some of the respondents' agencies are actually "affluent small-town suburbs" that are geographically located in a major metropolitan area. Depending on a future definition of small towns, the range of per capita spending in this study may be much smaller if the sample of small towns is taken from counties that do not include large metropolitan areas and suburbs. This limitation could be a result of the narrow definition for *rural* and *urban* provided by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Ratio of Spending for Parks and Recreation to General Local Expenditures (Police Departments). The third indicator, increases in the ratio of spending for park and recreation to general local expenditures (police departments), found that leisure services did not take disproportionate budget decreases from FY96 to FY00. In fact, leisure services actually had a 4.4 percent higher average budget increase than police departments from FY96 to FY00. These findings contradict the general assumption, which postulates that public park and recreation departments take a disproportionate budget decrease compared to other departments in the municipal governments (Gladwell and Sellers 1997; Whyte 1992). Although Weissinger and Murphy (1993) concentrated on public recreation departments that experienced budget cuts, it is interesting to note that their findings showed that leisure services and other municipal departments took equal budget reductions. The increases in the ratio of budget dollars for park and recreation departments to municipal police departments indicate Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00.

Employment Levels of Full-Time and Part-Time Staff. The fourth indicator, increases in employment levels of both full- and part-time staff, corresponds to the increase in the annual total operating budgets. The findings of this study are inconsistent with Klar and Rodman's (1984) findings that many communities lost full- and part-time employees. While small-town public recreation agencies have more staff per capita than larger municipal departments, their smaller total staff size makes it difficult for the agency to fulfill its mission and to complete all of the components of leisure service delivery (Cordell et al. 1987). Having more staff at an agency may allow the agency to apply for more of the available grants. The annual mean employee increases suggest that Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00.

Conclusions

The intent of this study was similar to Weissinger and Murphy's (1993) study, "to present an empirical picture of the recent fiscal trends of small-town public recreation agencies" (62); however, a goal of this study was to focus on small towns in one Midwestern state. Furthermore, this study strived to compare actual budgetary data, not budget estimates, of two departments—park and recreation and police—from the same municipalities. Based on the evidence provided, using Gladwell and Sellers' (1997) definition of positive fiscal trends, small-town public recreation agencies in Illinois appear to have experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00. Fiscal trends in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies are more positive than the general assumptions would predict. In light of this, some other variables must be affecting the delivery of leisure services such as the training and education of the practitioners. It is typical for small-town public recreation agencies to be administered by local citizens who may or may not have any professional training or higher education.

Results suggested that fiscal trends have affected leisure service delivery in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies in several ways. Positive fiscal trends affected leisure service delivery by allowing agencies to offer better benefits and higher salaries to employees, maintain current programs and services, improve parks, and increase programming. The findings of the study may induce practitioners to reassess their leisure service delivery methods to look beyond perceived negative fiscal trends as a constraint to providing quality leisure services in the public sector. Furthermore, because negative fiscal trends appear to not have been a primary factor affecting public leisure service delivery in Illinois' small towns, this study may encourage researchers and practitioners to identify other factors that may be affecting the quality of public leisure service delivery in small-town public recreation agencies.

The findings of this study, that Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies have experienced positive fiscal trends from FY96 to FY00, contradict the general assumptions and call for additional research. The following recommendations for future research are made based on the results of this study. Some valuable studies include the following: to determine if agencies are receiving adequate funding each fiscal year to fulfill the agencies' missions, to determine the effects of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Federal Crime Bill) on fiscal trends, to assess if positive fiscal trends in Illinois' small-town public recreation agencies are used to increase programs and services or if the annual budget increases are only enough to maintain current programs and services, and to execute similar studies in other states and geographic locations.

It will be interesting to watch how this decade will unfold as economic trends are perceived to become unhealthy once again. Researchers should continue similar studies to document fiscal trends and conditions as economic conditions presumably shift and change.

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