We need to rethink how we “include the excluded”: An analysis of exclusionary themes in the 2015 Framework to Recreation in Canada.

Overview

This study employed critical discourse analysis to analyze how the problem of exclusion & the solution of inclusion have been discursively produced within the Canadian Parks & Recreation Association’s text “A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing.”

Themes of Exclusion Revealed

1. Situating power within dominant social groups
   - In the Framework, inclusion strategies are typically employed by (and tend to employ) members of dominant social groups. This positions public spaces as belonging to the dominant groups, with a goal to benevolently include “Others” without truly acknowledging their ownership of recreation culture as well.

2. Using the traits of “Othered” groups to mobilize fear
   - The Framework mobilizes economic fears related to physical inactivity and obesity, which are then tied to ‘inactive target populations’ for which policies, strategies, and programmes are required. This produces clear ideas about who should be characterized as an economic risk to our national health systems.

3. Promoting self-regulation to achieve a normative ideal
   - The Framework encourages ‘at-risk’ individuals to assume responsibility for their health by binding themselves to particular norms. It defines inactivity, obesity, & illness as instances of personal and moral failure regardless of how these outcomes result from structural failures towards the marginalized groups they most impact.

Recommendation for recreation policymakers:

In order to shape recreation into a truly inclusive space in Canada, we invite leaders in recreational practice to re-frame inclusion not as something we do to ‘the vulnerable’ but as something we do to ourselves.