

A STUDY OF BARRIERS TO
RECREATION PARTICIPATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



RECREATION AND PARKS

A STUDY OF BARRIERS TO RECREATION PARTICIPATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Analysis of Data from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation

Prepared By

E.L. Jackson and V.W. Blakely Prepared For

Alberta Recreation and Parks
Recreation Development Division

Planning Support Branch

May, 1983



Appropriate Use of Documents. Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). Please note that this document is copyrighted and CREDIT MUST BE PROVIDED to the originator of the document when you quote from it. You must not sell document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>

Acknowledgements

The Executive Summary and Background Report were prepared by Dr. E. L. Jackson and Ms. V. W. Blakely, with the assistance of B. L. Neri (research assistant).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
A. INTRODUCTION	1
B. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	2
C. MAIN FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	4
1. Desired Activities and Barriers	4
2. Respondents Desiring and Respondents Not Desiring a New Activity	7
3. Activity-Specific Barriers	9
4. Regional Variations	10
5. Socio-economic Differences in Desired Activities and Barriers.....	10
D. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	18
E. STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS	19
Acknowledgements	20

A. INTRODUCTION

This Executive Summary presents a condensed description of the literature review, the main findings and recommendations from the analysis of data concerning recreational activities in which Albertans would like to participate but do not, the barriers to such participation, and socio-economic, demographic, and locational influences on these factors. The data are derived from the Public Opinion Survey on Recreation, 1981, which was mailed to a sample of 4700 Albertans, from which a response rate of 51.6% was achieved. Recommendations are based both on the specific results and on the broader implications of what is known about barriers to recreation participation.

The analysis sought to answer the following questions:

- o in what activities would Albertans like to participate but currently do not?
- o what is the relative strength and importance of barriers to participation?
- o in what respect do Albertans who desire new recreational activities differ from those who do not?
- o how do the effects of barriers vary between types of recreational activity?
- o to what extent do desired activities and perceived barriers vary spatially across the Province of Alberta?
- o in what ways do desired activities and perceived barriers vary between respondents defined according to socio-economic variables?

B. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature was divided into three sections:

- (i) A general introduction to variations in recreation preference and participation patterns;
- (ii) Factors associated with non-participation in recreation; and,
- (iii) An overview of findings that deal specifically with barriers to participation in recreation.

There is a large body of research which has examined variations in recreation preferences and participation, especially in relation to socio-economic variables, and which may indicate the presence of barriers. For example, the commonly-reported decline in outdoor recreation participation with advancing age may suggest declining physical ability among other factors, while low rates of participation among the poor may be indicative of severe economic barriers. Such research, however, merely indicates that obstacles may exist, and that their effects are perceived differentially among different segments of the public; it fails to show what indeed the barriers are, and how they vary between social groups and between various types of recreational activity. A thorough review of this class of literature was therefore not attempted; moreover, it has been summarized extensively elsewhere (for example, see Jackson, 1980; Kelly, 1980; Unkel, 1981; White, 1975; Zuzanek, 1978).

The literature review therefore addressed the interconnected topics of non-participation, reasons for non-participation, and barriers to participation and enjoyment. For example, Romsa and Hoffman (1980) examined differences in perceived barriers between upper and lower strata and between relatively active and inactive recreation groups; Witt and Goodale (1981) studied barriers to enjoyment (not participation) as a function of family stage; Boothby et al. (1981) reported on a variety of respondent's attributes related to ceasing participation in sports; and Francken and Van Raaij (1981) examined the socio-economic antecedents of relationships between barriers and leisure satisfaction.

A precise comparison of the barriers in these papers was not possible

since items were not replicated and methods of data collection differed. Nonetheless, some strong similarities were apparent. Romsa and Hoffman (1980) examined four sets of reasons for non-participation, these being lack of interest, time, facilities, and funds. Witt and Goodale (1981) utilized 18 specific reasons for non-participation which included time, skills, money, and opportunity, as well as other "items . . . thought to be key motivational, decision-making, or attitudinal barriers to leisure enjoyment" (pp. 32-33). Francken and Van Raaij (1981) broadly distinguished between two sets of barriers, namely "external" (e.g., circumstances, lack of time and money, geographical distance, and lack of facilities), and "internal" (e.g., personal capacities, abilities, knowledge, and interests). Lastly, Boothby et al. (1981) identified 43 specific reasons for ceasing sports activity, which they classified into six main groups, these being loss of interest, lack of facilities, lack of fitness and physical disability, leaving a youth organization, moving away from the area, and no time to spare. Regardless of the precise nature of the variables under investigation, at least five sets of factors were fairly commonly reported in these studies - interest, time, money, facilities and opportunities, skills and abilities.

Non-participants may be sub-divided into two distinct groups, namely those who, for lack of interest, do not wish to participate, and those who wish to participate but for whom a barrier or combination of barriers temporarily or permanently restricts their participation. This distinction is useful for applied purposes, since it would be a waste of time and resources to try and generate enthusiasm among the uninterested (Boothby et al. 1981; Francken and Van Raaij, 1981). Instead, it would be more productive to address the second group of non-participants by concentrating on relaxing the efforts of obstacles. The present study focused on this group, by asking survey respondents if there was an activity in which they would like to participate but did not at the time of the survey; these respondents (presumably the uninterested) who did not specify such an activity were excluded from the analysis.

C. MAIN FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Desired Activities and Barriers

- o 1240 respondents (51.1% of the sample) identified a recreational activity in which they would like to participate, but did not;
- o 69 activities were listed, which were classified into nine activity groups plus an "other" group;
- o In rank-order, the desired types of activity were: (1) exercise-oriented activities excluding racquetball/handball and tennis (listed by 23.5% of the 1240 respondents desiring a new activity); (2) racquetball/handball (13.7%); (3) self-propelled and/or non-mechanized outdoor recreational activities (12.3%); (4) team sports (10.1%); (5) resource-based activities (hunting, fishing, camping, and mechanized outdoor recreational activities) (9.1%); (6) tennis (8.4%); (7) downhill skiing (7.4%); (8) creative-cultural, social and passive indoor leisure activities (6.5%); (9) golf (6.0%); (10) other (2.9%).
- o The rank-order of barriers to participation was (1) work commitments (checked as "sometimes" or "often a problem" by 71.3% of respondents desiring a new activity); (2) overcrowding of facilities or arenas (64.4%); (3) lack of partners (58.1%); (4) lack of a close opportunity (57.5%); (5) family commitments (55%); (6) price of recreational equipment (53.2%); (7) admission fees and user charges (45.3%); (8) unawareness of where to participate in the activity (43.1%); (9) unawareness of where to learn the activity (31.8%); (10) shyness (29.4%); (11) price of gasoline (26.7%); (12) not having physical abilities (21.1%); (13) lack of transportation (17.6%); (14) not having artistic or creative abilities (16.8%); (15) being physically unable to participate (11.2%).

(i)Activities

Implications

Overall, people appear to desire participation in recreation activities, but a majority do not participate because of one or more barriers. The three most desired types of activity were 'exercise-oriented activities'; racquetball/handball; and 'self propelled and/or non-mechanized outdoor recreation activities'.

The literature would support these general findings, in whole or in part, with regard to the three most desired types of activity. However, a balanced and varied approach to activity provision must be maintained.

Planners, policy developers and managers must become aware of new focuses and trends in order to supply relevant and adequate opportunities for comprehensive service, and be prepared to discard obsolete programs.

In view of present economic conditions there is reason to believe that low-cost or no-cost activities will become increasingly popular. Equipment costs and proximity of activity to the user must also be considered.

As it was indicated that individuals have an increasing concern for their personal health and lifestyle, service providers must consider the provision of leisure education programs.

Interpersonal interaction appears critical to the provision of quality activities; there must be consideration of both mental and physical health.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers undertake various types of needs surveys to determine actual desired activities.
- o That recreation service providers develop a mechanism to identify obsolete programs so that they may be removed from the service repertoire.
- o That recreation service providers be proactive with respect to the acquisition of current information and anticipate future trends in the provision of relevant and adequate opportunities for participation.

- o That providers undertake constant examination of the overall recreation service to ensure a balanced and varied approach to service provision in the sense of both experiences and individual versus interpersonal participation.

(ii) Barriers

Implications

There appear to be two main types of barriers that were identified. The first focussed upon the individual, the second upon the service provider.

Recreation service providers have possibly become preoccupied with the 'things' (facilities, equipment) aspect of service delivery and have lost touch with the interpersonal components of participation.

There is a need to better understand services from the interpersonal aspect to ensure personal satisfaction for the individual, which is becoming increasingly important to clients. Possible avenues that might be explored to achieve this include re-examination of what the server role entails; a thorough understanding of that role by the recreation provider; and a re-commitment of the policy developer, the planner and the manager to undertake concerted efforts to make personal contact with clients as individuals.

In light of Canada's new Constitution and in particular, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms contained within this document (The Canadian Constitution, 1981), the public servant will have to become concerned not only with the jurisdiction of service provision but also the content of that service.

If recreation service providers wish to provide appropriate, meaningful service, such avenues as the administration of needs surveys via personal contact with specific groups will allow the interface with clients that is desirable.

It is also necessary for providers to fully understand all facets of each barrier and develop services that attempt, as comprehensively as possible, to overcome barriers for all clients.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers undertake studies that will identify possible barriers to recreation participation within their authority.
- o That these studies be approached from the point of view of identifying barriers that are unique to the service provider and those that are unique to the client groups of that particular service authority.
- o That recreation service providers review the orientation of their service provision with respect to the emphasis placed upon facilities versus programs. Personal satisfaction of the individual must be ensured through programs and efforts to increase interpersonal interaction and reduce alienation toward the provider by the client.
- o That recreation service providers familiarize themselves with the role of the service provider in relation to client rights to recreation services.

2. Respondents Desiring and Respondents Not Desiring a New Activity

- o there was an increasing lack of interest in a new activity with advancing age and with increasing length of residence in Alberta;
- o there was an increasing desire for a new activity with increasing levels of education and income;
- o the lowest levels of desire for a new activity were expressed by respondents aged 45 and over, those who had not completed high school, those with an annual family income of less than \$10,000, and those resident in Alberta for ten years or more;
- o the greatest interest in a new activity was expressed by respondents aged up to 34, relative newcomers to the Province, university-educated respondents, and those with an annual family income exceeding \$10,000.

Implications

The recreation service delivery system must examine, its offerings to

determine if there is appropriate and adequate provision for the aging population. Simultaneously it is necessary to provide more adequate service for the very young so that participation in recreation will start at a young age and continue throughout life.

The service provider must consider the dynamic nature of lifestyle through the various stages of the life-cycle. It must be questioned whether one strata of the population (namely the middle class) is receiving the majority of the recreation service.

The overall consideration is that socio-economic/demographic information is very important to understanding the needs and desires of individuals and that it is imperative for recreation service providers to be aware of demographic information with regard to the populations that they are serving. It is also necessary to look at future socio-economic/demographic trends for future planning and service.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers develop and update socio-economic/demographic profiles with regard to their client groups for both present consideration and future planning of services.
- o That recreation service providers determine the socio-economic/demographic characteristics of those client groups who are actually being served by their programs.
- o That the general population profile and the actual population profile of the clients receiving services be compared to determine populations that have not been receiving adequate services.
- o That populations that show particular non-involvement, or a lesser degree of involvement than other, populations, be considered for in-depth study to attempt to determine if there are specific barriers to participation for these groups.

3. Activity-Specific Barriers

The most important barriers corresponding to each type of activity were as follows:

- o exercise-oriented activities: work commitments, overcrowding, lack of opportunity, lack of partners;
- o racquetball/handball: work commitments, overcrowding, lack of opportunity, lack of partners, admission fees and user charges;
- o self-propelled activities: equipment costs, work commitments, lack of opportunity, lack of partners, family commitments;
- o team sports: work commitments, overcrowding, lack of opportunity, lack of partners, unawareness of where to participate;
- o resource-based activities: price of gasoline, equipment costs, work commitments, overcrowding, lack of opportunity, lack of partners;
- o tennis: work commitments, overcrowding, lack of opportunity, Lack of partners, shyness;
- o downhill skiing: work commitments, equipment costs, fees and charges, price of gasoline, overcrowding, lack of transport, not having physical abilities, family commitments;
- o creative-cultural, social, and passive activities: work commitments, lack of opportunity, unawareness of where to participate, unawareness of where to learn the activity, lack of artistic or creative ability, equipment costs.
- o golf: work commitments, overcrowding, equipment costs, family commitments, fees and charges.

Implications

Although the literature did provide some indication as to barriers that surround certain activities, it was not exhaustive or conclusive. It did, however, give some indication to the service provider of the obstacles that would have to be considered in undertaking the provision of particular activities.

The provider must be willing to examine and change where needed, those approaches which have been traditional and stereotyped in the provision of recreation services.

Recommendations

- o That, once barriers to recreation participation are determined,

in-depth analysis occur in order to fully understand all the facets of barriers as well as the many different ways that individuals view barriers.

- o That recreation service providers determine what particular barriers might be prevalent in relation to the provision of certain activities, based on the clientele of that authority.

4. Regional Variations

- o No substantial or important regional differences were discerned, either in desired activities or the effects of barriers to participation.

Implications

Although for this study, this particular topic did not result in data which were statistically significant, it should not be dismissed totally. There is some indication in the literature that region could have some bearing particularly with respect to supply considerations.

Recommendation

- o That recreation service providers be cognizant of possible regional variations in desired activities and barriers in relation to supply.

5. Socio-economic Differences in Desired Activities and Barriers

- o respondents aged 24 or less most desired exercise-oriented activities, racquetball/handball, team sports and self-propelled activities, and were more inhibited than others from participating by lack of opportunity, partners and transportation, and unawareness of where to learn the activity;
- o respondents aged 25 to 34 most desired exercise-oriented activities, racquetball/handball, self-propelled activities, and team sports, and were more inhibited by family commitments and lack of partners;

- o respondents aged 35 to 44 most desired exercise-oriented, self-propelled and resource-based activities, and racquetball/handball, and were more inhibited by family and work commitments;
- o respondents aged 45 to 64 most desired exercise-oriented activities, golf, self-propelled, creative-cultural, social and passive activities, and were more inhibited by physical and artistic ability;
- o respondents aged 65 or over most desired exercise-oriented activities, golf, and creative-cultural, social, passive and resource-based activities, and were inhibited by a large number of barriers including physical and artistic ability, being physically unable, lack of partners and transportation, price of gasoline, and unawareness of where to learn or participate in the desired activity;
- o both males and females ranked exercise-oriented activities as the most desired. Men preferred golf and resource-based activities more than women, whereas women preferred tennis and creative-cultural, social, passive and self-propelled activities more than men;
- o the only barrier felt more severely by males than by females was work commitments; all other barriers for which there was a statistically significant difference were felt more severely by females than by males;
- o there were no substantial or significant differences in desired activities between sub-groups of the sample defined on the basis of their education, income, type of household, size of household, or length of residence in Alberta;
- o the least educated group and respondents with an annual family income of \$10,000 or less felt all barriers for which there were statistically significant differences more severely than other respondents, and there were recognizable declines in the effects of barriers as levels of education and income increased;
- o couples without children were the least affected by all barriers than any other type-of-household groups, and the only barrier felt

more severely by couples with children than by others was family commitments; o the most disadvantaged type-of-household group was composed of respondents from single-parent families, who felt almost all barriers for which there were statistically significant differences more severely than other groups; o there were no substantial differences in perceived barriers according to respondents' size of household; o the only meaningful difference in perceived barriers by length of residence was unawareness of where to participate in the desired activity among relative newcomers to the Province.

(i) Age

Implications

The results lend support to the importance of family life-cycle with respect to barriers to recreation participation. The recreation service provider must be cognizant that the family and its welfare are of high priority to the age group twenty-five to approximately forty-five.

The age group of forty-five years and over indicated abilities and physical inability as barriers. The literature again supports these findings but also indicates that there may be an over reaction and possible myth as to the frailty of the older person.

For the service provider it is important to know the age breakdown of those individuals partaking of programs on a continual basis. With this information, the provider can start to determine if the services are comprehensive in the sense of serving all age groups and also start to deal with specific needs of the various ages. It would also be very important to obtain age profiles of the service area to determine if one age group is over represented and to relate this to the provision of services. There may be a need for more programs for one age grouping should this be so.

Recommendations

o That recreation service providers review services in relation to

the age of clients served to determine if there are age gaps, o If age gaps are found, they should be reviewed in relation to possible barriers to participation as perceived by these individuals.

(ii) Sex

Implications

There appears to have been a change recently with regard to male/female participation and barriers which affect that participation. An indication was given that the females might differ in some of the activities selected, but have the same satisfaction as the male. Perhaps as the female becomes more involved in her own lifestyle, her participation will not differ from the male. Also, work commitments of the female might become a more significant barrier when careers are considered.

It is important, therefore, to be aware of the individual and his or her needs and not project that what is provided for males is what females will necessarily require to meet their needs. Likewise, it is important for males to be free to determine their program needs on an individual basis and not to be placed in stereotyped activities prescribed for males.

It might be possible to target market programs to further involve females. However, there is the caveat that target marketing aimed at a specific group should not jeopardize the principle of provision of services to meet the needs of the individual.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers examine their service provision and determine if there is adequate opportunity for participation of both sexes.
- o If discrepancies in opportunity exist, they should be reviewed in relation to possible barriers to participation as perceived by these individuals.

(iii) Education

Implications

Once again, the literature is consistent with the findings of this study and gives some further evidence as to the importance of education in understanding barriers to recreation participation. It is important that recreation service providers determine whether or not their services are accommodating the range of education levels and that barriers, or facets of those barriers which exclude potential participants on the basis of education, be streamlined out.

When services are advertised to the public, they must be presented in such a way that all educational levels can understand their possible benefits.

Advertising of services must attempt to educate the public and expose individuals to new experiences from which they may gain satisfaction.

There is some indication that leisure education might have a contribution to make with regard to reducing the disparities in recreation participation based on education level. The potential for effective leisure education programs is great if they can be placed within the recognized education system at levels where attendance is compulsory.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers examine their services to determine if they are merely serving the more highly educated members of the population,
- o If discrepancies in opportunity exist, they should be reviewed in relation to possible barriers to participation as perceived by members of the lower education groups.

(iv) Income

Implications

It is indicated in the study results and the review of literature that higher income groups feel fewer barriers to recreation participation.

It would seem that the service provider has to become aware of the recreation needs of lower income groups in relation to the barriers they are experiencing, such as cost, skill, and logistics (Levy, 1977). Providers also must determine the income strata of the clientele actually being served by present service.

The marketing and the promotion of programs must also be examined.

Those involved in the development of policy regarding fees and charges must avoid the creation of a welfare class of lower income citizens.

Leisure education may also have a role in influencing the leisure lifestyle of lower income groups as well as creating an awareness of the range of recreation opportunities.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers examine if their services adequately accommodate all income strata. This could be accomplished by determining the economic situation of the population of the community in relation to those actually utilizing recreation services.
- o If discrepancies exist, then the providers should determine what barriers, or portions thereof, are restricting recreation participation.
- o That recreation service providers review fees and charges policies and other policies that influence restriction by income. There must then be a move to make these policies compatible with the provision of services for all people.

(v) Type of Household

Implications

There appears to be a need for better understanding of the family life-cycle and its importance in influencing barriers to recreation participation. The service provider should examine barriers in relation to not only the traditional view of the family, but what is happening presently and what is projected for the future with regard to the family

and its composition. It would seem that providers must be aware of the changes in family composition and respond accordingly with appropriate opportunities.

Service providers must create a more positive and accepting setting for the non-traditional groupings which occur, and the term household must be considered from the true sense of household and not family.

To this end, the definitions of family, household, etc. used on such documents as user fees and charges policies should be considered very carefully.

Recommendations

- o That recreation service providers understand the relationships between type of household and the effect of barriers with respect to recreation participation.
- o That recreation service providers review barriers in relation to the non-traditional view of the family in order to identify gaps in service provision for such populations as singles, single parent families, and so on. (vi) Size of Household

Implications

Although there was no statistically significant relationship between this variable and barriers to recreation participation, the review of literature does suggest the possible importance of this factor.

Service providers should be cognizant of trends with regard to the size of household of the clients they serve. This particular factor has some potential to affect participation as well as barriers to participation.

Recommendation

- o That recreation service providers should be cognizant that size of household has the potential to influence barriers connected with participation.

(vii) Length of Residence in Alberta

Implications

The barrier of most importance to relative newcomers to the Province was that of not knowing where to participate. Thus, this barrier becomes very important in terms of an individual feeling of alienation and its inter-relationship with barriers such as 'it is difficult to find others to participate with' and 'shyness'. There is potential for more rapid involvement of newcomers to the province, which can also be enhanced by target marketing to this segment of the population.

In addition, the potential of assimilating newcomers to Alberta more quickly than they are at present may possibly alleviate some of the social problems experienced by this province.

There also has to be an attempt made to find new market potentials. The recreation service provider should attempt to assess how many new users are brought into programmes compared to the number of regular users.

Recommendation

- o That recreation service providers identify newcomers to the Province of Alberta in order that they might be made aware of what services are provided and with whom they might participate.

D. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- o It is recommended that recreation service providers seriously consider the undertaking of leisure education programs in conjunction with: school authorities, especially those working with the younger, compulsory school-aged population; employers, in particular those dealing with the issues of pre-retirement and those offering leisure lifestyle counselling; and service providers working in the area of rehabilitation. These are but a few of the population groups that could be addressed in the initial stages of leisure education programs.

- o It is recommended that the recreation service provider acquire the necessary marketing skills and understanding of marketing concepts through extension programs, universities, colleges, business schools, etc. In addition, there should be the acquisition of further knowledge of the human service system of recreation by the provider in order to apply these marketing theories and techniques most effectively to reduce the barriers to recreation participation, while keeping in mind the fulfillment of the individual and his/her positive functioning within society. Leisure education could be the focus of a comprehensive marketing program which could combine the fulfillment of individual needs through recreation while simultaneously making the service provider a viable and relevant entity as a partner in this process.

E. STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

- o A follow-up study should be conducted based on a more comprehensive range of questions and response categories, defined with a clearer articulation of the essential concepts than in the present study;
- o future studies should have a sufficiently large sample size to permit a multi-variate analysis of the data;
- o the focus of interest should be broadened to include barriers to recreational enjoyment; and,
- o in-depth interviews with representatives of disadvantaged groups should be conducted.



Appropriate Use of Documents. Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). Please note that this document is copyrighted and CREDIT MUST BE PROVIDED to the originator of the document when you quote from it. You must not sell document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>