

A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks

No. 11

A LOOK AT LEISURE PATTERNS IN 1981

This is the eleventh bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks that looks at the leisure behaviour and attitudes of Albertans. It is the last bulletin in the series which describes the results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. This issue presents some of the major patterns and relationships found in the last ten bulletins of A Look at Leisure.



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INTRODUCTION

The 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation was conducted in February 1981 and was sent to over 4,700 randomly selected Albertans. A total of 2,425 individuals responded which represented slightly more than a fifty percent response rate. The purpose of the survey was to obtain province-wide information on recreation participation and the attitudes of Albertans towards leisure. The intent of the A Look at Leisure series was to provide insight to recreation practitioners about provincial leisure patterns and to increase awareness of issues concerning recreation delivery systems.

In this bulletin some of the major findings of the last ten bulletins are reviewed. In the first section, patterns of recreation participation are examined. In the second section, some of the important factors that affect leisure participation are discussed. The third section describes the attitudes of Albertans towards various leisure issues. Participation trends in various social settings, and the use of recreation programs and services provided by different types of organizations are reviewed in the fourth section. The fifth section provides profiles of respondents based on their similar socio-demographic characteristics as well as their recreation behaviour and attitudes. The final section suggests a few overall implications of the findings for practitioners.

PATTERNS IN RECREATION PARTICIPATION

In the first few bulletins of A Look at Leisure various aspects of actual and desired recreation participation were examined. Respondents were asked questions about their actual participation in recreation activities, their favorite activities, and activities they would like to start participating in. When the results were compared in these bulletins, a few major trends became evident.

Albertans appear to be interested in many types of recreation activities (Table 1 and 2). This indicates a demand for a variety of recreation opportunities. It may also indicate that individuals themselves have a variety of recreation interests.

TABLE 1 TOP TEN ACTIVITIES

Rank	(Rank -order)		
	Most Participated	Most Favored	Most Desired
1	Visiting Friends	Camping	Racquetball /Handball
2	Watching T.V.	Golf	Tennis
3	Radio Listening	Downhill Skiing	Swimming
4	Dining Out	Fishing	Downhill Skiing
5	Pleasure Driving	Hockey	Cross Country Skiing
6	Board Games	Pleasure Walks	Golf
7	Pleasure Walks	Reading	Curling
8	Reading	Swimming	Bowling
9	Picnicking	Racquetball /Handball	Calisthenics
10	Attending Movies	Curling	Hockey

The study also examined favorite and desired recreation activities of Albertans. A significant finding was that the recreation activities which people often take part in are not necessarily their favorites. Neither are they the ones that people would most like to start - given the opportunity. It would appear that peoples' attitudes toward recreation participation are not always translated into everyday behaviour. The findings indicated that people are most likely to participate in passive and social recreation activities, whereas their "most favorite" and "most desired" activities are the more active sport, exercise, or outdoor recreation pursuits.

The findings on recreation participation (Bulletin No. 2) showed that most people participate in passive or social recreation activities (Table 1). Most of these activities either allow for social interaction within friendship and family groups or provide high levels of personal entertainment through various media (e.g., T.V., radio, books). These recreation activities can be done by oneself on the spur of the moment, or with family or friends in the home environment or neighborhood. People tend to participate in these types of activities to fulfill needs for relaxation, social interaction, and to increase knowledge.

In contrast, when questioned about their favorite activities (Bulletin No. 3), respondents indicated a number of exercise-oriented, sport and outdoor activities as their favorites (Tables 1 and 2). Typically, these activities do not occur in the home, but require organized facilities and services as well as the scheduling of larger amounts of time to participate. People undertaking these activities usually need equipment, some level of skill, and other people to participate with. The needs satisfied by these types of pursuits include physical health, challenge, and relaxation.

Respondents were also asked whether there was a recreational activity that they don't take part in now, but would like to start regularly (Bulletin No. 5). Approximately one half of the respondents answered 'yes' to this question. When asked to name the activity they would most like to start, the majority of these respondents showed interest in forms of recreation requiring physical activity, as well as those associated with the outdoors (Tables 1 and 2).

These findings indicate some general patterns. Many Albertans seem to be concerned about health and fitness and wish to participate in sport and exercise activities providing some physical

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exertion and challenge. They are also interested in outdoor activities which provide relaxation and pleasant natural surroundings (e.g., camping and fishing) and those that provide physical activity (e.g., downhill and cross country

skiing). The findings, however, also show that even though they prefer to do or start these activities, people most often participate in passive or social activities in or around the home.

One possible explanation for this tendency is that the results reflect "socially desirable" responses; that is, people feel that they should be involved in more active recreation, and therefore report them as favorite or desired. Thus the actual behaviour (i.e., watching T.V.) may be more representative of preferred activities than the data suggests.

On the other hand, this pattern may also indicate gaps between what people do and what they would most like to do. One of the challenges facing recreation practitioners is finding how to narrow this gap so people will participate more in those activities they prefer doing.

FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION

The first step in narrowing this gap is understanding some of the positive and negative influences that affect participation. The study found some of these influences to be: motivation and satisfaction factors, barriers to participation, and socio-demographic variables.

Research suggests people participate in recreation activities because they have certain reasons (or motives) for participating and feel that the activities will satisfy these needs. Bulletin No. 3 looked at some of the reasons why people participate in favorite activities as well as the needs satisfied by these activities.

TABLE 2 FAVORITE AND DESIRED ACTIVITY CATEGORIES*

(Rank-order)

Rank	Most Favorite	Rank	Most Desired
1	Exercise-Oriented	1	Exercise-Oriented
2	Team Sports	2	Racquetball/Handball
3	Camping	3	Outdoor Recreation (non-mechanized)
4	Hunting/Fishing	4	Team Sports
5	Passive Indoor	5	Outdoor Recreation (mechanized or resource-based)
6	Outdoor Recreation (mechanized)	6	Tennis
7	Creative/Cultural	7	Downhill Skiing
8	Golf	8	Creative-Cultural, Social and Passive
9	Social	9	Golf
10	Downhill Skiing		
11	Outdoor Recreation (non-mechanized)		

* The categories of recreation activities are not identical between favorite and desired activities. For an explanation of the changes, see Appendix A at the end of the bulletin.

Various combinations of reasons (motives), needs, and socio-economic factors were found to influence the choice of certain types of recreation activities. A profile for each type of activity could therefore be developed in terms of the above factors. Table 3 shows examples of profiles for exercise - oriented activities and camping.

TABLE 3 PROFILES - FAVORITE ACTIVITY CATEGORIES

(Two Examples)

A. Exercise-Oriented Activities

Reasons: health, exercise Needs Satisfied: staying healthy, physical challenge, relaxation

Socio-Demographic Variables: preference declines with age; increases with education; more frequent among females, single parent families, and households with unrelated adults.

B. Camping

Reasons: pleasure, pleasant surroundings, relaxation, being with family, alternative to work.

Needs Satisfied: relaxation, pleasing places, increase in knowledge.

Socio-Demographic Variables: preference equal among sexes; declines with education; more frequent in intermediate age and income groups, and among couples, especially those with children.

These findings have some implications for recreation practitioners. The results suggest there are motivational and socio-demographic factors that affect preferences for recreation activities. At the community level, one way of obtaining this type of information is by conducting needs assessment surveys. These studies can assist practitioners in understanding and predicting demand for recreation activities and programs in their own communities.

The results indicated that on a provincial level, profiles for activities can be developed in terms of reasons, needs satisfied, and socio-demographic factors. Recreation practitioners may want to look at the recreation activities offered by their own agencies in a similar manner. In this way they can learn more about the types of participants, their motives for participation and whether their needs are being adequately satisfied by the recreation activities offered.

Barriers were also found to be important factors affecting recreation participation (Bulletin No. 5). Whereas motives and satisfactions tend to positively influence people to recreate, barriers act as obstacles which prevent participation. Certain obstacles were most often considered barriers to participation. These were: work commitments, overcrowding of facilities or areas, lack of others to participate with, lack of a close opportunity and family commitments. Although these were the most important barriers on a province-wide basis, practitioners may find other types of barriers that affect people in their own communities.

Barriers were also found to vary with the type of recreation activity and with the socio-economic characteristics of the respondent. In addition, combinations of barriers, rather than individual barriers alone, serve to restrict participation in any given type of activity or among any relatively similar group of people.

Some barriers (eg., work commitments and overcrowding) were consistently an obstacle to participation in most activities. Certain barriers, however, were also found to be more associated with some activities than others. For example, racquet sports, exercise-oriented activities and team sports were more affected by lack of opportunity and lack of partners, whereas economic barriers such as equipment costs and admission fees were more likely to affect downhill skiing and golf.

The findings also showed that barriers varied according to certain demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population. For example, single parent families felt the effects of most barriers quite severely, whereas couples without children perceived little impact from them.

These findings suggest there are a number of factors that practitioners must look for when examining barriers to participation in their own communities. Knowledge of barriers which affect specific programs, facilities, or client groups may make it easier to plan ways of eliminating perceived obstacles to participation.

LEISURE ATTITUDES
AND ISSUES

The study looked at Albertans attitudes toward leisure and a number of issues of importance to the recreation and sport community. One of the most significant findings was that almost all respondents had positive attitudes towards leisure and its personal benefits (Bulletin No. 8).

Respondents were also asked about their attitudes toward a number of issues related to sports, employee recreation, family recreation opportunities and the community use of schools (Bulletin No. 6).

Two of these issues generated strong reactions from respondents. A majority (89%) of respondents agreed with using schools for public recreation purposes after school hours. Over three quarters (78%) also felt it was important or somewhat important that Alberta amateur athletes win medals in national and international competition.

Opinions on the other issues - competition in children's sports, employee recreation, and opportunities for family participation - were not as clear cut. Attitudes tended to vary on these issues and in no case was a particular view held by more than fifty-five percent of the respondents. In these cases, about half (49%) of the respondents felt there was too much emphasis on competition in children's sports, that employers should provide recreation activities for their employees (55%), and there were enough opportunities for families to participate in recreation activities (53%). The effects of the GET UP ALBERTA campaign were also mixed. There was an almost even split between those who had and those who had not seen, heard or read about the GET UP ALBERTA fitness promotion campaign.

These latter responses indicate that there are differences in opinions among Albertans on these issues. Recreation practitioners wishing to find out how their own communities feel about these issues should consider conducting local opinion surveys.

Respondents were asked for their opinions on five attitude statements about voluntarism. They were also asked if they had worked as volunteers in the last twelve months.

A majority of people (91.4%) felt that volunteers serve an important role in the community and that they have a chance to learn new things when they volunteer (89.7%). Although fewer in number, many respondents (66.5%) also believed that volunteers were given meaningful tasks. The agreement with these three statements indicates that Albertans recognize the positive benefits of volunteering to both the individual and society.

In contrast, most respondents (60.9%) believed that the number of people willing to volunteer is decreasing. This may imply that volunteer organizations are having difficulty recruiting new volunteers or retaining existing ones.

Most non-volunteers agreed that personal sacrifices make it difficult to participate as a volunteer. Studies have shown that many people refuse to become involved as volunteers or have stopped volunteering due to time constraints associated with other commitments such as job, school or family. Most volunteers disagreed that personal sacrifices make volunteering difficult which suggests they have found ways of balancing their volunteer roles with other commitments in their lives.

In order to encourage new volunteers and retain existing ones, practitioners should consider methods to effectively manage volunteers. Volunteer tasks should provide opportunities for personal growth and job satisfaction. Volunteers should feel they have worthwhile and responsible roles. An important consideration is to match the skills, interests and available time of the volunteer to the right job in the organization. Further, volunteers require clear feedback and encouragement for the tasks they undertake.

It is equally important that organizations do not over load volunteers with too many tasks or responsibilities that may impinge on other time commitments. Volunteer "burnout" and "dropout" are frequent consequences of many volunteer programs that overwork their volunteers.

SOCIAL SETTINGS
AND RECREATION
ORGANIZATIONS

The study examined the various social groups or settings in which Albertans recreated and determined the importance of these settings to respondents (Bulletin No. 9). Most respondents (90%) tended to participate in recreation activities with their family or with friends and also found these groups to be important social settings for their recreation. Although many respondents indicated that they participated in recreation activities by themselves, considerably fewer (25%) found participating alone to be an important social setting. This may suggest that even though people may be participating in recreation activities alone, they might prefer to recreate with others (i.e., family or friends).

One important implication of these findings is that practitioners should consider directing recreation opportunities to specific social groups such as family and friends. Recreation programs and facilities can be oriented to encourage group participation and social interaction. Practitioners might also take a more active role in providing social opportunities for those who participate in recreation activities alone, but who would prefer to be interacting with others.

The findings also suggested people are likely to find certain social settings to be more important for their recreation at different stages of their lives. Younger single adults tend to prefer to be with friends or fellow workers whereas middle aged couples with children find the family an important setting for recreation.

Practitioners should take into account the various stages of the family life cycle when developing programs. When carrying out needs assessment surveys of communities, practitioners should look at the needs of the social group in addition to the needs of individuals.

The study also examined the degree to which respondents relied on various social groups and agencies to organize their recreation. The majority of respondents depended primarily on themselves or their social circles of family or friends to arrange recreation activities. Fewer people depended on formal agencies and clubs to

organize their activities. Of those who did, reliance was greatest on municipal parks and recreation agencies.

The study also looked at the degree of use respondents made of the recreation programs and services provided by various organizations (Bulletin No. 10). Almost 90% of the respondents used the recreation services of municipal park and recreation agencies, followed by commercial facilities, service and community groups, exhibition and agricultural boards, and schools, universities and colleges. The findings also suggest that the recreation programs and services of most organizations are used on an occasional basis rather than often.

These findings on social settings and recreation organizations suggest a few patterns. It is likely that much recreation is informally arranged and takes place with family, friends or by oneself in or around the home environment. Individuals and social groups are less likely to use the more structured programs and services offered by organizations, although this tendency varies with type of activity. Individuals tend to depend on themselves or their immediate social circles (family and friends) to organize their recreation activities whether these activities are structured or unstructured. In this way, the agency may organize the program, but the individual or social group makes active decisions as to whether they will utilize the services or not.

The results also showed that different types of organizations tend to attract different types of clientele or market segments to their recreation programs and services. Recreation practitioners should consider obtaining information about the market segments attracted to their own programs and services. This information can provide feedback to an organization as to whether it is meeting its objectives in serving certain sectors of the public. It can also aid in attracting additional client groups to an agency.

RESPONDENT PROFILES

The 1981 survey obtained a variety of information about Albertans' recreation behaviour and their attitudes toward leisure participation. It also obtained data on respondent's socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. One of the main goals of the study was to see if there were any relationships between these two sets of findings. This would allow for a number of respondent profiles to be developed which could be useful in determining recreation patterns in the larger Alberta population.

A few fairly clear profiles emerged from the survey results. These profiles were particularly related to the family life cycle of individuals, which included the variables of age and the presence of children in the household.

One of the main subgroups of respondents found in the study were young, single adults (under 34 years of age). These people preferred more physically active pursuits, such as exercise-oriented activities and team sports. They were more likely to participate in recreation by themselves or within social circles composed of either friends or fellow workers. Young adults were more severely affected by a lack of partners, lack of transportation and lack of knowledge of recreation opportunities. In spite of this, they use the recreation programs and services of a number of organizations, particularly those centering around school or work, and commercial and municipal recreation services. Young adults indicated positive attitudes toward leisure. They found such items as social entertainment, sports and creative arts, a challenging job, and living close to recreational facilities as being important to their quality of life.

The recreation patterns of middle aged couples (age 35 to 44) with children revolve around the family. Because of their commitments to family as well as work, many feel they are not always able to participate in activities they desire. Things organized and done with the family, however, are very important to the quality of life of these couples and are likely to contribute to their positive outlook on leisure. While also enjoying exercise-oriented activities, they also like to participate in family oriented activities such as camping. In pursuing their

recreation activities, they tend to rely quite heavily on services and programs offered by municipal park and recreation departments and service or community groups. These people tend to be the "volunteer workhorses" of the community, perhaps because their families use service or community organizations so extensively for their recreation.

Single parents felt more affected by barriers than most other groups in the study. They tend to rely on various agencies to organize their recreation such as municipal recreation departments and service or community groups. They also use the programs and services offered by schools and churches. Even though they are likely to participate in recreation alone, they enjoy social activities and have a high preference for exercise-oriented activities.

Older individuals (age 65 and over) were also plagued by a large number of barriers. In particular, lack of physical and artistic ability were perceived as obstacles to recreation participation. Perhaps as a result, older people look more to passive and social recreation activities to satisfy their needs, even though exercise-oriented activities were still considered favorites by many. Older people were less likely to have positive attitudes toward leisure; this may be a reflection of their limited access to recreation opportunities. In comparison to other groups, they were also less likely to be volunteers. Church groups were important to these individuals, serving both as a social group for recreation and as a provider of recreation services.

Another sector of the population highly affected by all types of barriers include those individuals with low incomes and education (i.e., incomes less than \$10,000 and less than high school education). Perhaps as a result of these barriers, these persons were less likely to use recreational services and programs offered by most agencies. Instead, they relied more heavily on social service organizations such as churches and Preventive Social Services Boards for their recreation.

These profiles indicate that certain segments of the population tend to exhibit similar types of behavior and attitudes toward recreation and leisure. Although these general profiles exist at a provincial level, they may or may not be characteristic of populations in particular communities within the province. Awareness of the characteristics of the different segments of population within a community may assist recreation practitioners concerned with satisfying the diverse needs of their recreation clientele.

CONCLUSION

In the last ten bulletins, several consistent tendencies concerning recreation participation and the attitudes of Albertans emerged. In addition, however, it was also apparent that Albertans exhibit a wide variety of recreation behaviour and opinions and that these varied according to many factors (i.e., needs, barriers, socio-demographic variables, etc.) The major implication arising from this study is that recreation practitioners should know and understand their own communities in the context of major provincial patterns as well as the various factors that affect participation at the local level.

Needs assessment surveys and other types of studies serve as important ways of understanding the recreation preferences of local populations. Information from these studies can provide a basis for developing recreation programs and services, market strategies and leisure counselling programs. Both marketing and leisure counselling involve techniques which attempt to match a person's recreation needs with available recreation opportunities.

If the goal of recreation delivery systems is to provide quality service to the public, it is important to know the characteristics of the public - their needs, attitudes and activity preferences. This information can then be translated into effective programs that meet the requirements of the community.

APPENDIX A

With reference to Table 2, in order to allow for particular statistical analyses of the data, the categories of recreation activities were amended between favorite and desired activities. The following changes were made to the favorite activity categories to obtain the desired activity categories:

1. Creative-cultural, social and passive activities are combined into one group.
2. Racquetball/handball and tennis are deleted from exercise-oriented activities and are recognized as distinct activities.
3. Camping, mechanized outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing are combined into one group.

INFORMATION

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We will soon be publishing the full report A Study of the Social Setting in Recreation by Dr. Kenneth Fairbairn. This report will be provided to major libraries and universities in Alberta. We will also publish the Executive Summary of the report, which will be available upon request to those who wish to obtain more detailed information than was provided in the ninth A Look at Leisure bulletin. Those who desire further depth are advised to refer to the full report.

We will also be publishing a report entitled 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation - Summary of Final Results. This document provides a summary of the frequency results of each question in the survey, along with a short description and explanation of how the results were ranked in the table. This report will be provided to major libraries and universities in Alberta.

FUTURE

This is the last bulletin in the series which describes the results of 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. We are presently considering a proposal to continue the series with the purpose of describing the results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation which was conducted during November and December of 1984.