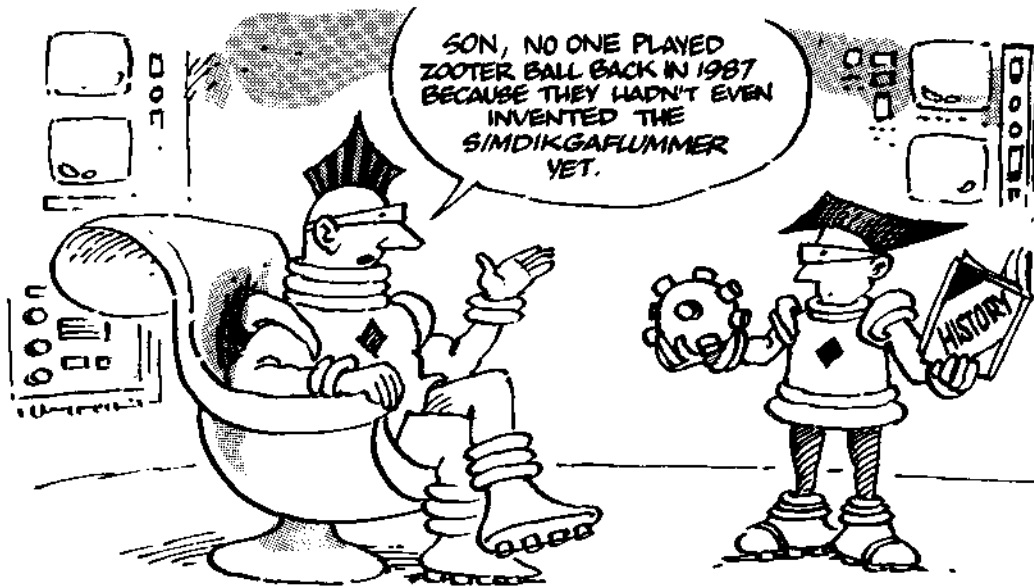


A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 20

RECREATION TRENDS The recreation and parks field is in an era of constant change. It faces new challenges as we move toward the 21st century. This bulletin (the 20th in this series) looks at trends and some future directions for leisure and recreation services.



Alberta
RECREATION AND PARKS
Recreation Development Division



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INTRODUCTION

Dramatic changes are taking place in our environment. Many are occurring at a rapid rate. These changes will affect the role of recreation and the direction of municipal recreation services. What are some of these influences? What are their implications for recreation planning and programming?

All types of planning require thinking about the future. Awareness of trends provides agencies with a better understanding of challenges they will face. This allows agencies to play an active role in determining their future directions.

Surveys such as the 1981 and 1984 *Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation* are one source of information about trends in recreation. It is important, however, to look at recreation trends in relation to major changes in society. There are many types of trends which can influence the direction of recreation services. These include socio-demographic, environmental, economic, technological, and social trends. Futurists are studying these topics and trying to predict the effects they will have on the direction of our society.

Some of the recreation and leisure trends in Alberta are summarized in the first section of this bulletin. The next section looks at some future directions for society, and general predictions for the recreation field. Several of the planning and programming implications which emerge from these predictions are presented in the final section.

Highlights which are discussed in this bulletin are:

Activities with higher participation rates in 1984 than in 1979 are walking, swimming, bicycling, jogging, baseball, golf, racquetball, and badminton.

Some recent trends in Alberta include greater interest in heritage resources, increased spending on sporting goods, and more demand for personal development activities.

In the future, recreation agencies will need to deal with new activities, new institutions, and new concepts in recreation services.

* *References are identified by numbers on the last page of the bulletin.*



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CURRENT RECREATION PATTERNS

An understanding of current patterns provides a starting point for thinking about the future. There are many indicators of trends in the recreation field. It is not possible to provide a complete review of trends in this bulletin. However, the following discussion identifies sources of information about recreation trends and summarizes some key findings.

Participation rates for activities are one measure of recreation trends. Changes in participation patterns of Albertans were discussed in *A Lookat Leisure* No.13 (Participation Patterns). Comparisons of results of the 1981 and 1984 *Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation* showed that:

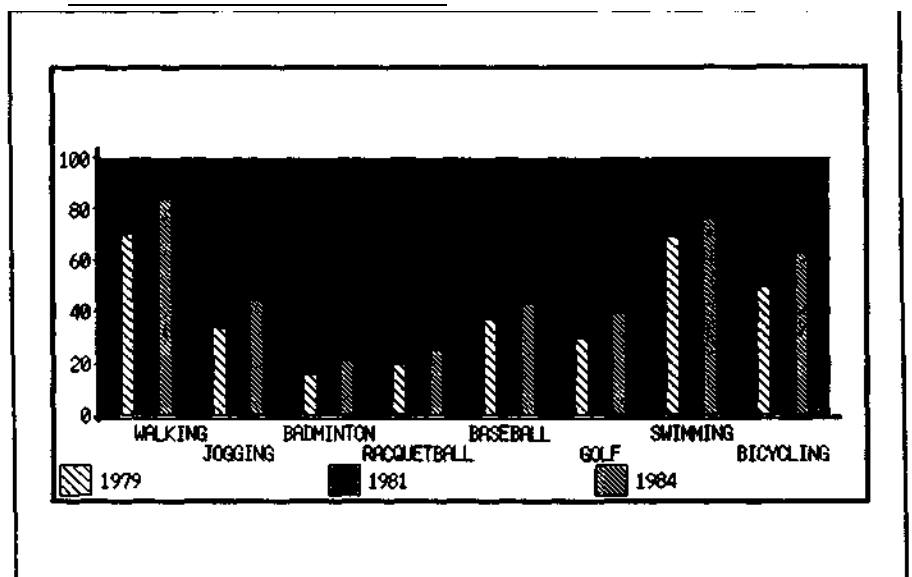
Activities with the highest rates of household participation were the same in 1981 and 1984. Social and entertainment activities were ranked highest overall.

There was an increase from 1981 to 1984 in the percentage of households participating in organized clubs, video and electronic games, gardening, and ice hockey.

There was a decrease in the percentage of households participating in social dancing, bowling, roller skating, reading, and camping.

The 1981 and 1984 participation rates were also compared with findings from the 1979 *Public Opinion Survey on Outdoor Recreation*. Figure 1 shows eight activities which increased in participation levels from 1979 to 1984. Other activities showing smaller increases in household participation were downhill skiing, soccer, and picnicking. Participation was stable for tennis, fishing, ice skating, backpacking, and cross-country skiing during this time period.

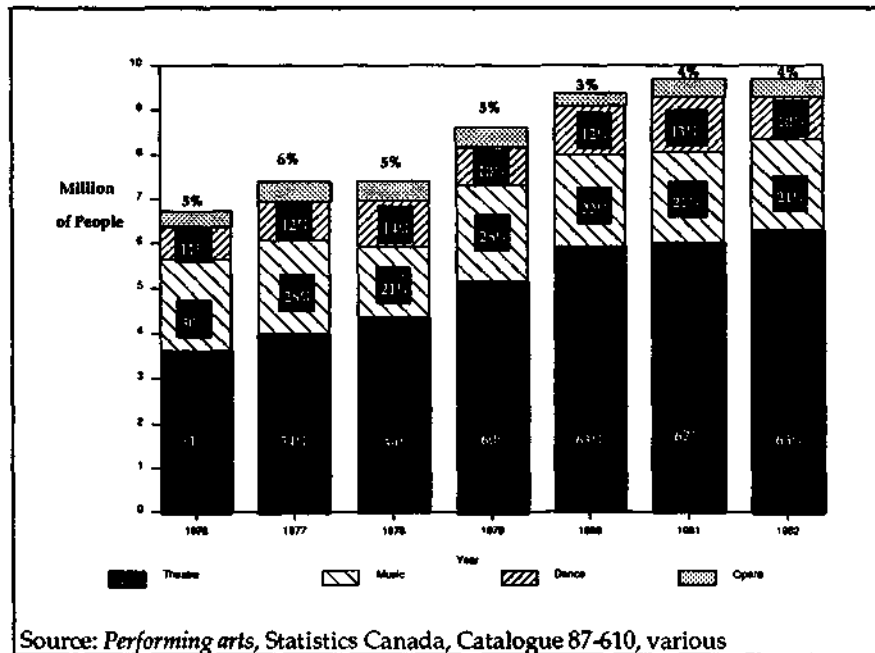
Figure 1 *Activities With Higher Levels of Participation in 1984 Than 1979*



Visit and attendance figures provide another source of information about trends. For example, Parks Canada data show that visits to National Parks in Alberta have declined since 1981. However, visits to National Historic Parks have more than doubled. Statistics from Alberta Culture also support a trend of increased interest in heritage resources.

Information about performing arts attendance by Canadians is shown in Figure 2. A recent report (5) states that audience growth in North America has begun to level off in the 1980's. New markets will need to be developed if growth is to continue in the future.

Figure 2
Attendance at Performing Arts Presentations, by Discipline, 1972-1982



Education and personal self-development will become a lifetime activity in the future. Edmonton Public Schools Continuing Education reports a recent increase in demand for personal development and do-it-yourself courses. Enrolment in non-credit courses at Alberta's colleges and universities increased by 43.3% from 1978-79 to 1982-83 (1). Participation in these types of courses has been stable since the peak 1982-83 period.

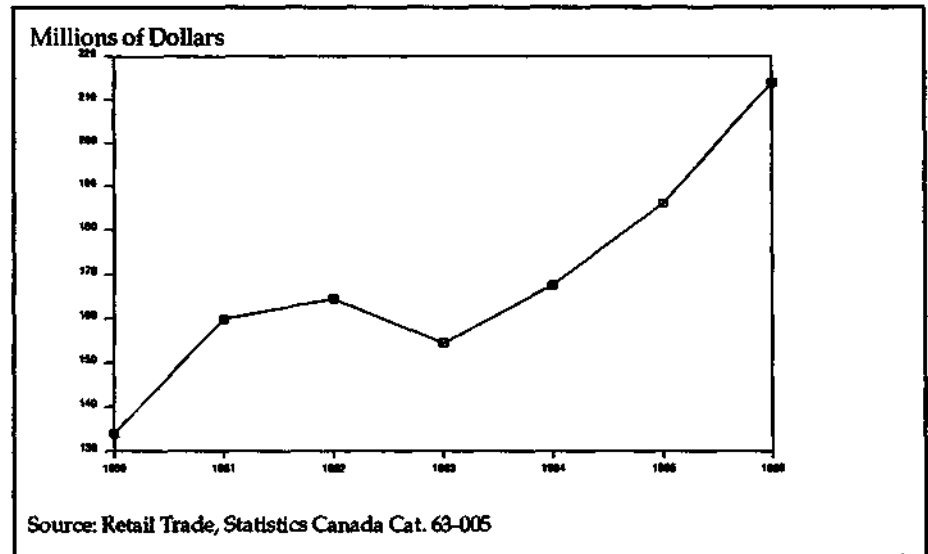
Economic information provides another measure of recreation trends. Statistics Canada data for Alberta (10) show that:



- The personal disposable income per capita in Alberta is higher than for Canada as a whole. However, it has been gradually dropping since 1983, and is now about 3% above the Canadian level
- Sales of sporting goods and accessories in Alberta dropped in 1983. There has been a strong recovery in the last three years (see Figures).

Figures

Sales of Sporting Goods and Accessories 1980-1986



- Between 1976 and 1982, many households bought bicycles, tents, and cross-country skis. Recent data suggest that ownership of this type of equipment has begun to level off (11).

At the community level, agencies interested in trends should try to keep consistent records of participation and attendance from year to year. Reviewing these records may provide some useful insights into local recreation patterns. General information about trends happening *in* other parts of Canada and the world is often available from news and professional magazines.

TRENDS IN SOCIETY Many of the future trends in society will influence leisure and recreation services. There are several major trends which Alberta Recreation and Parks feels may influence the parks and recreation system. These are discussed in the draft Alberta Recreation and Parks Policy Statement (1). Some key points are summarized in Table 1.



Table 1
Major Trends in Society

Socio-Demographic

- Alberta's population will continue to age, with a growing proportion of people falling into older age categories. The population profile for 1986 and projections for the year 2001 are shown in Figure 4.
 - The structure of society will continue to change. There will be a relative increase in the numbers of seniors, young singles, single parent families, working women, the poor, and distinct ethnic groups.
-

Economic:

- The future of the Alberta economy will remain difficult to predict. It will be tied to world economic events, but will continue to diversify into areas such as high-tech industry and tourism.
 - Governmental concern over expenditures and decreased revenues will continue.
-

Technological:

- Computerized technology and the importance of communications will move us into an information society.
 - There will be major advances in health and transportation technology.
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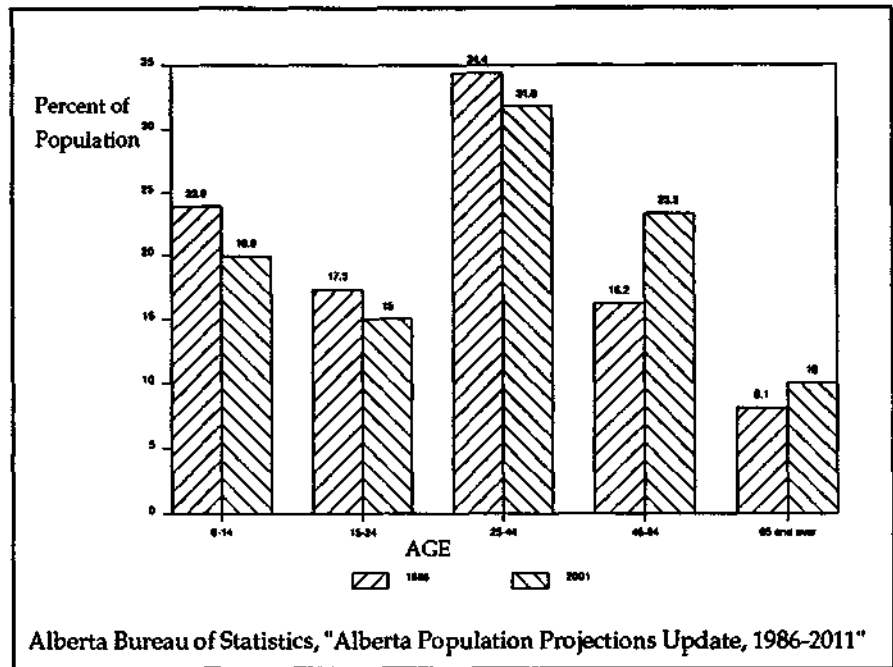
Environmental:

- There will be renewed concern about protecting the world's resources. There will be a rise in the Conserver society.
 - There will be continued loss of natural environments.
 - The demand for high quality recreation experiences in natural environments will increase.
-

Social:

- Personal values will continue to change. Self-help, self-reliance, individual choice and responsibility will be emphasized.
 - There will be increased levels of societal stress. Problems will include alienation, alcohol and drug abuse, rapidly changing human values, and "future phobia" among young people.
 - People will have more choices for their lifestyles. Education will be a life-long process.
 - Community and local initiatives will be emphasized.
-

Figure 4
Alberta Population Projections



An increase in free time is predicted for the future. This will be due to longer holidays, technological advances in the work environment, shorter careers, and underemployment/unemployment.

The trend toward longer holidays is occurring in the 1980's. The Conference Board of Canada (4) reports that the average number of weeks of vacation has increased from 2.9 in 1965 to 4.3 in 1985.

However, there has been little change since the mid-sixties in the average number of weekly hours worked. In fact, there has been an increase in the numbers of Canadians working more than 40 hours a week. The report concluded that a substantial reduction in worktime is not very likely in the short term.

It is possible that the distribution of free time may change with shift work and flex time. To reduce pressure on facilities in the future, weekends and even official holidays may be flexible and distributed throughout the week. (11)

The Conference Board found that about 30% of Alberta employees would prefer to work fewer hours. Of those interested in worktime reductions, 84% said they wanted more time for leisure and recreation.



THE FUTURE OF LEISURE AND RECREATION

What do futurists say about the role of leisure and recreation as we move into the 21st century? Leisure and recreation will become an increasingly important aspect of society. Work and the positive use of leisure will become equally important as people search for meaningful activity beyond the work environment (2). The boundaries between work, learning, and play will be blurred (4).

The provision of leisure services will become more essential. Ruben Nelson (8) notes that recreation is not a major part of life in industrial cultures. Recreation deals with discretionary time and discretionary budget. He feels that the changes taking place will provide parks and recreation with the opportunity to become an essential part of society.

Concern about quality of life, physical health, and human development will become even more important in the future. "Recreation will move beyond a narrow focus on activities, buildings, and parks toward a mission of improving the quality of life and environment." (6, p.140). Social agencies will use recreation as a tool to deal with social problems.

It will be necessary to continue with some traditional programmes. Agencies will also need to respond to the changing interests and needs of clients. There will be more of an emphasis on the adult-oriented society.

Demand for services will increase but there will be less money available. Clients will have less disposable income. Recreation agencies faced with these challenges will need to stress efficiency. They will have to find alternative ways of providing services. This may include greater use of volunteers, and cooperative programmes for sharing facilities and equipment (6).

Seymour Gold (6) identifies three major areas of change which recreation agencies will face:

- New Activities - Most of the new activities cannot be predicted. Some will combine traditional activities with computer technology, e.g. Electronic indoor golf.
- New Institutions - Parks and recreation departments will be combined with other social or environmental services. Arts, culture, and education will be coordinated as "life enrichment".
- New Concepts - Agencies will need to think about recreation in new ways. E.g. Self-programmed recreation; new forms of risk recreation; converting obsolete buildings to recreation spaces; creative integration of programmes into non-traditional facilities.



What are some specific implications for the future of recreation programming and planning? Several examples are provided in Table 2. These examples have been selected to show how future changes will affect many aspects of leisure and recreation. The Recreation Canada article by Ken Balmer (4) would be of interest to readers wishing a more complete listing of trends.

Table 2
Implications for Programming and Planning

General:

- Home will increasingly become the centre of activity, including leisure. Computers will enable people to pursue careers and education at home.
- Continuing education will occupy much of adult leisure time.
- Recreation administration and education will be geared toward a goal of lifetime participation.

Administration:

- There will be increasing demand for high quality recreation programmes and facilities.
- There will be demand for more public input into programmes and decisions.
- The role of the private sector in recreation will increase.
- Fee increases may be needed to offset slow growth in the tax base.
- Facility improvement will be necessary to permit increased levels of use and more energy efficiency.
- Tax breaks will be provided for companies that incorporate recreation areas in their workplace.
- There will be new potential for the volunteer movement.
- There will be growing interest in the barter system, in which volunteer time is exchanged for access to facilities and programmes.

Programming:

- Greater flexibility in facility and program scheduling will be needed since more adults will be available at various times of the day.
- Physical recreation opportunities will be needed for the adult population involved in sedentary work.
- The needs of older segments of society will require more attention.



- Computer systems will be used for learning (e.g. How-to videos). There will be potential for home computer systems to be used as a tool for leisure education.
- There may be more need for organized social activities for people who work at home and are isolated from social contacts.
- Creative and cultural opportunities will be in demand. There will be a growing interest in crafts and do-it-yourself activities.
- There will be an emphasis on less consumptive and/or less expensive forms of recreation (e.g., cross-country instead of downhill skiing).

Parks and Environment:

- Large portions of wilderness areas will be shut off to protect wildlife and the environment.
 - The mobility of outdoor recreationists will continue to increase.
 - Urban parks will shift away from places of relaxation to places of exercise and fitness.
-

Sources: (3) (4) (6)

PLANNING

How can recreation agencies plan for the future in a time of constant change and uncertainty? A good understanding of present trends in the community provides a basis. Thinking about future trends requires a balance between the use of data and intuition.

Ken Balmer (3) has outlined a process by which communities may look at trends and plan for the future. The four steps in this process are:

1. Study the trends and scenarios described by futurists.
2. Determine which of the trends appear to be happening in your community. Identify any additional local trends.
3. Brainstorm the implications of these trends. Determine which are important and need to be addressed in planning decisions. Set some general strategies or directions.
4. Review the trends and their planning implications annually.

During this process, it is also important to consider the views of community members. What do people want to see in their community? What type of community do they want to have in the future?



There are many questions which will face recreation agencies planning for the future. How will the structure of the community change? What are future employment patterns in the community? Which recreation markets will be expanding and which will have less emphasis? How will recreation services be coordinated with other social services?

The recreation field is facing a time of change. There is a great deal of uncertainty about what these changes will or should be. Many trends cannot be predicted. However, by sharing ideas about the future, organizations will be better prepared to adapt to a changing world, and to influence their future directions.

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FUTURE ISSUES

The next issue of *A Look at Leisure* will focus on women in recreation.

INFORMATION

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