
Look at Leisure #37: Regional Recreation Patterns

The findings of the series of Recreation Surveys undertaken over the past 15 years show that there are variations in recreation patterns across Alberta. This bulletin discusses these patterns, how they have varied over the study period, and their implications for community recreation services in Alberta.

Introduction

The 1981 - 1996 Recreation Surveys obtained information from large numbers of Alberta households. Because of these numbers it is possible to divide the province into regions and look at the recreation behaviors of each region. This analysis gives practitioners an understanding of the recreation interests of their regional residents, and how these compare to other regions in the province.

Five provincial regions were defined during the conduct of the 1988 survey. The data for all years have been reanalysed according to these regions, to yield a consistent spatial basis. The regions defined were: South, Central, North, Calgary area and Edmonton area. The results reported in this bulletin are based on the following numbers of surveys returned from respondents in each region.

Survey Year		Region				
		South	Cal.	Central	Edm.	North
1981	N	217	754	156	947	211
	%	9	33	7	41	9
1984	N	504	1232	1002	901	202
	%	13	32	26	23	5
1988	N	523	1217	393	1269	560
	%	13	32	10	32	14
1992	N	509	1994	359	1937	417
	%	10	38	7	37	8
1996	N	343	1656	209	1131	131
	%	10	48	6	33	4

Favorite Activities

Leisure and recreation serve an important role in the lives of most people. People participate in activities to satisfy various needs, and receive personal benefits from their participation. Some of the general benefits associated with leisure are good mental health and personal growth. Leisure enhances life by providing a means of self-expression, choice, control, and a change from routine. In addition to these general benefits, there are many specific benefits (such as learning new skills) which people can enjoy. Understanding of the needs that are met through leisure and recreation enables one to design programs that satisfy the needs of consumers, and to market these programs effectively.

Over the last 15 years the favorite activities of Albertans have remained relatively constant. In each study respondents were asked to name their favorite activity. For the purposes of this analysis their responses were grouped into ten activity groupings. The trends in these over the study period are shown in Figures 1 - 3.

As can be seen from these data, exercise-oriented activities are far more popular than their closest rival, team sports, and this gap is widening as time passes. The popularity of golf and non-mechanized outdoor activities is increasing, while that of creative-cultural activities is remaining constant. All the other groupings exhibit decreasing popularity.

Participation in Activities

In all the surveys, respondents were asked to indicate, from a list of about 65 activities, those in which household members had participated during the previous year. Our studies have shown that the most important reasons for participation in recreation activities are pleasure, relaxation, physical health or exercise, doing something different from work, and enjoyment of nature. Reasons such as competing,

Figure 1

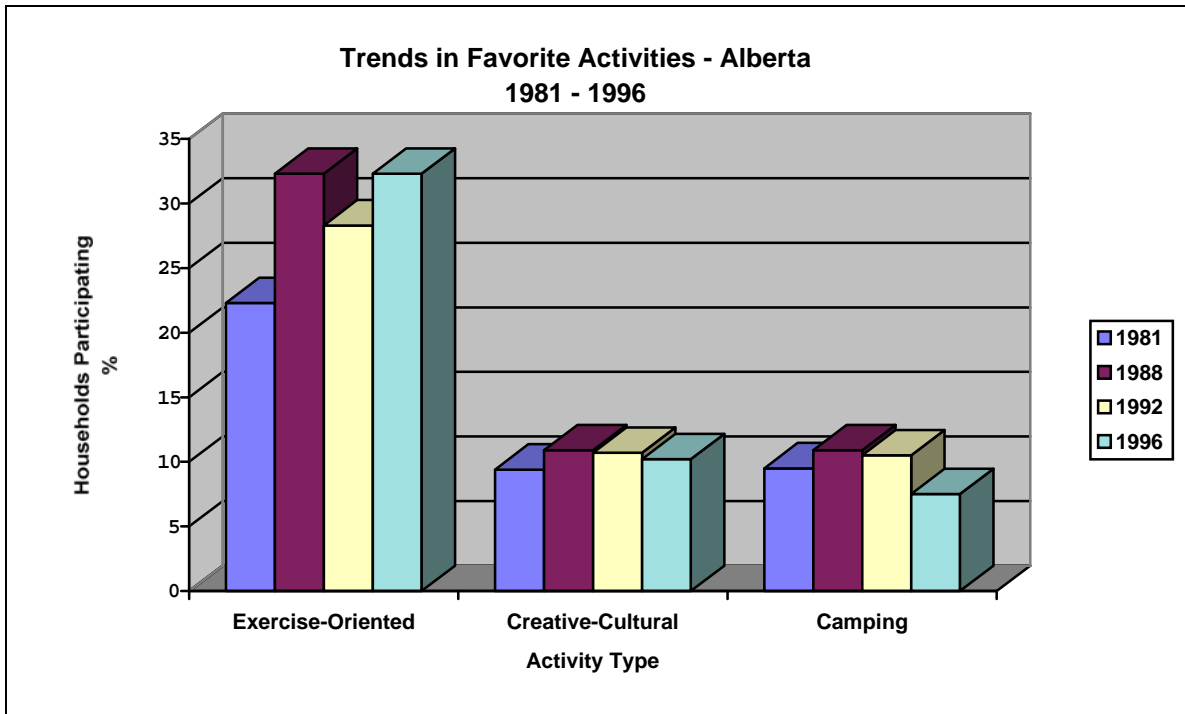


Figure 2

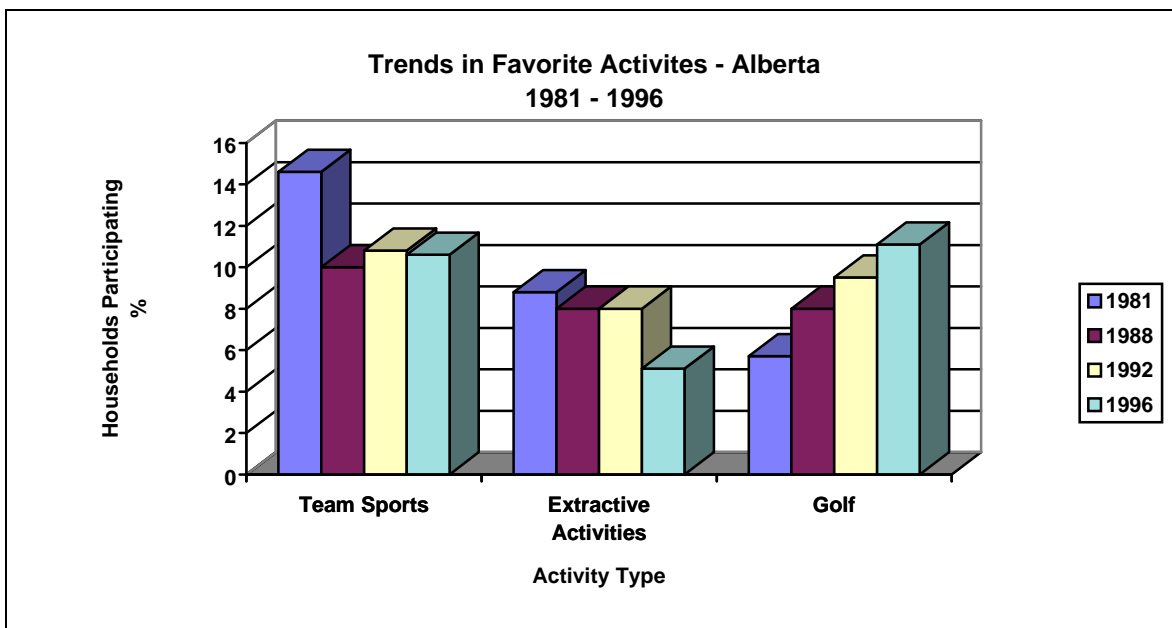
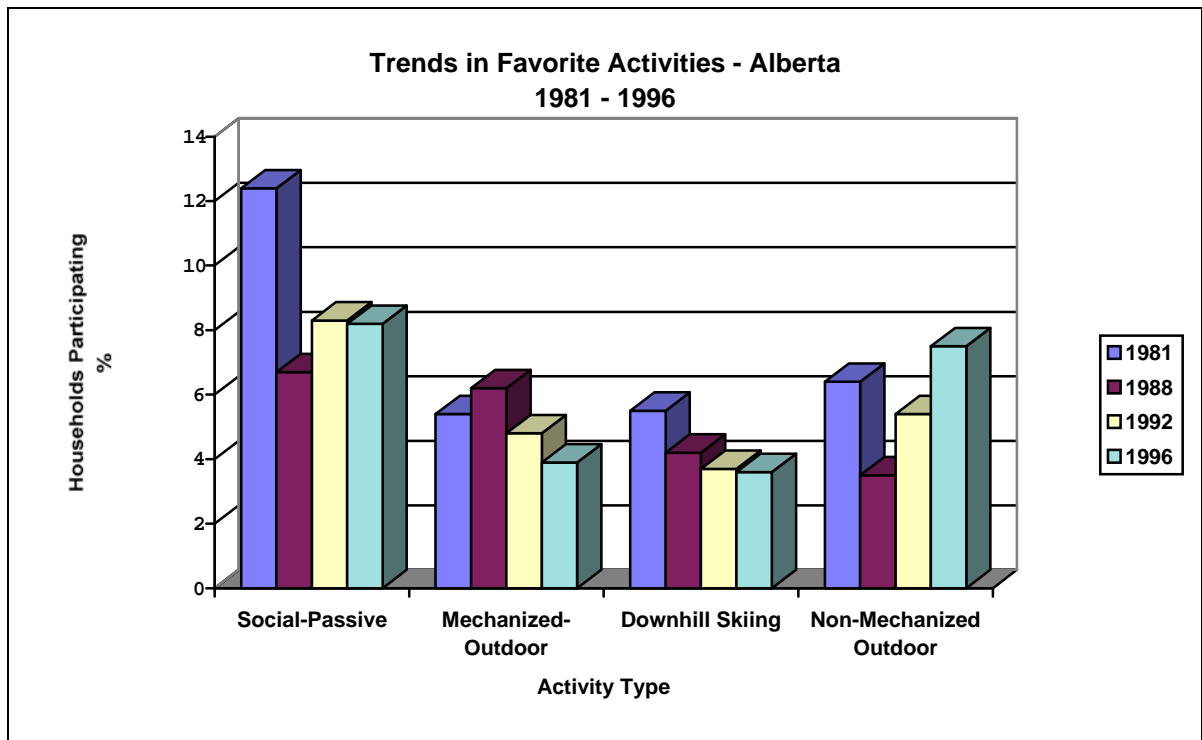


Figure 3



showing accomplishments to others, and being away from the family rank relatively low in importance. It is evident that our recreation choices are constrained by factors such as time and money.

Figures 4 - 8 show the regional differences in the household participation rates of the ten top activities for the five survey periods. It is noteworthy that although in most cases the rates for an activity were approximately equal across the province, the rates did vary over the study period.

In addition to regional differences in participation, one might expect to find variations which were related to the size of the respondent's community. The 1981 - 1988 surveys contained data on whether the household was urban or rural, but this distinction is not available for the 1992 and 1996 data sets. *A Look at Leisure* No. 19, however, reported that there were no differences in participation rates for most of the casual home activities or for activities such as watching sports. Rural residents were, however, more likely to join organized groups or clubs. Rural residents were more likely to take part in outdoor activities such as snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, motor biking, softball and gardening. Urban residents, on the other hand, had higher participation rates in the facility-oriented activities such as racquet sports, hiking and movies.

As the rural/urban analysis could not be done, an analysis based on community size was conducted. Table 1 shows the data resulting from a three-way

grouping of communities, using the same ten activities. A review of the data shows that visiting a museum, being a spectator, doing crafts, camping, and gardening have declined in participation, while walking for pleasure, playing video games and golf have increased.

Trends

The findings from the five Recreation Surveys were compared to provide information about trends in the 80's and 90's. Highlights from this comparison include the following:

- There was a slight decline in the proportion of respondents indicating a desire for starting an activity, from 1981 (51.1%) to 1996 (40.6%).
- Over the last 15 years the favorite activities of Albertans have remained relatively constant.
- The trends in these over the study period show that exercise-oriented activities have increased in popularity, as have golf and non-mechanized outdoor recreation activities. Creative-cultural activities have remained at about the same level of popularity, as have social-passive activities since 1984. Camping, mechanized outdoor activities and downhill skiing have all declined in popularity over the time period studied.

It should be noted that the results related to the respondent's "Favorite Activity" refer to the

Figure 4

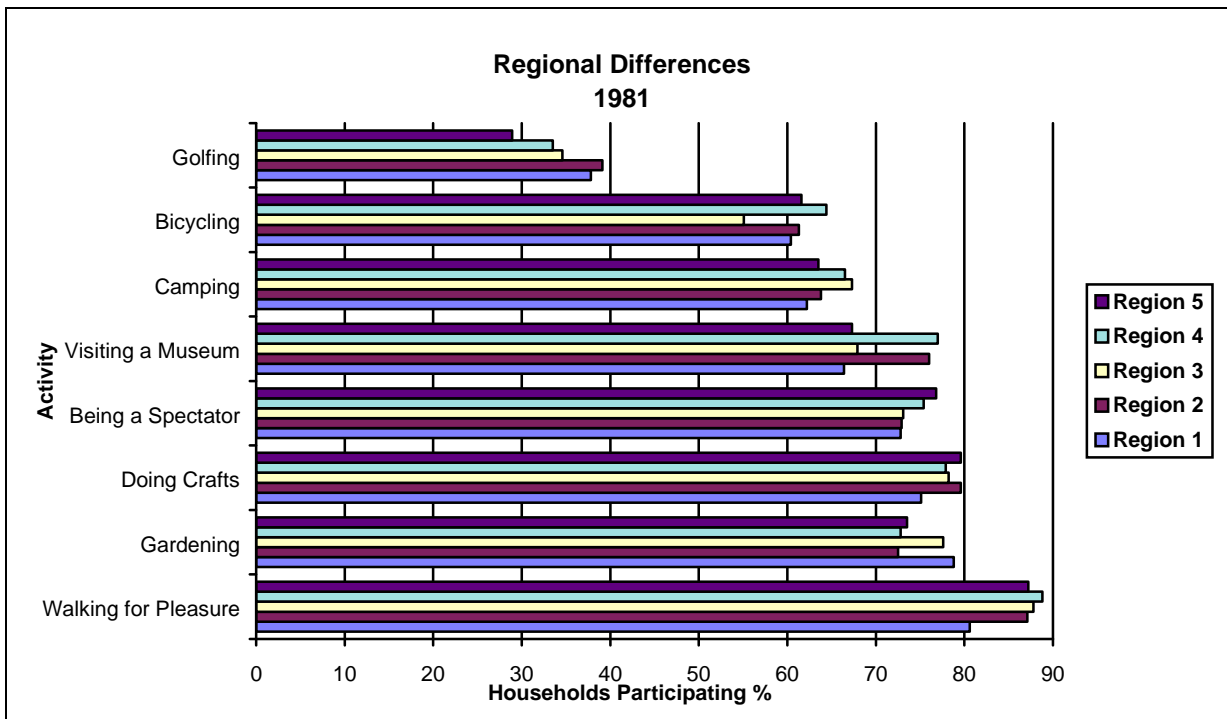


Figure 5

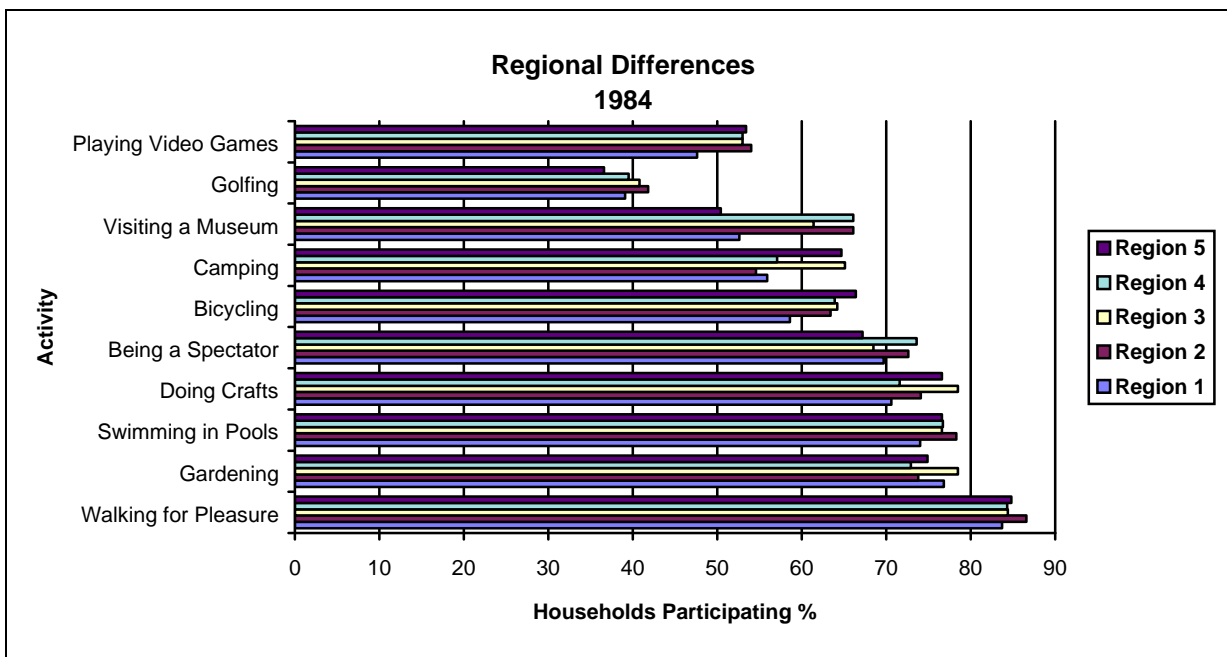


Figure 6

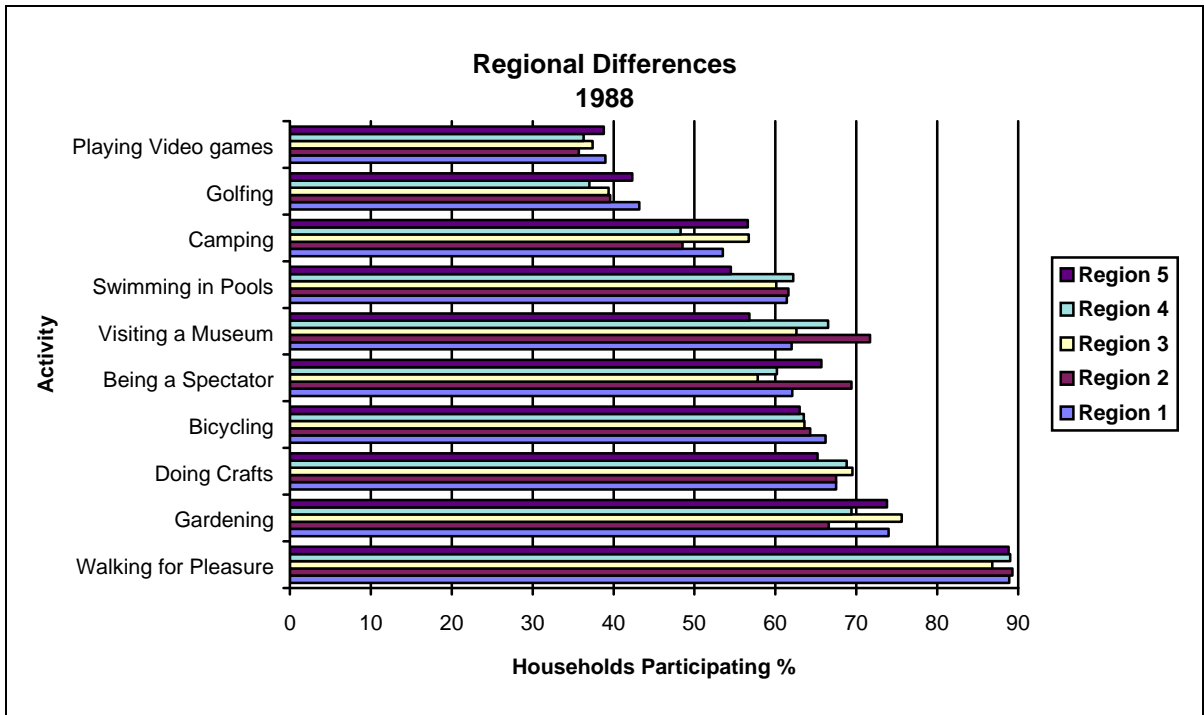


Figure 7

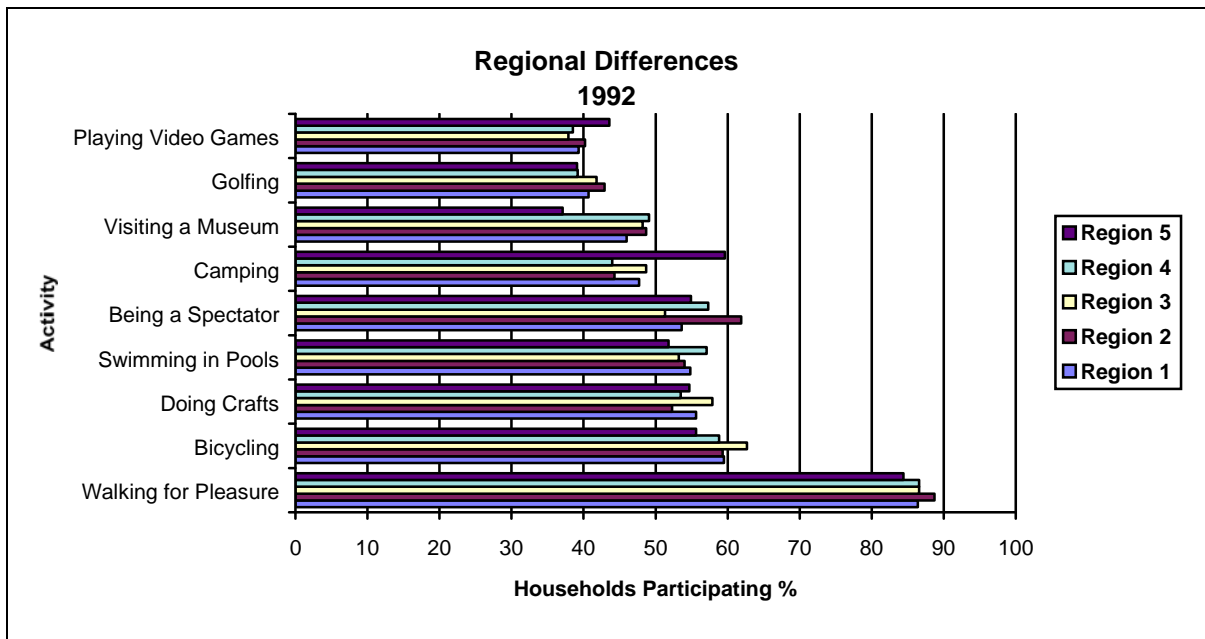
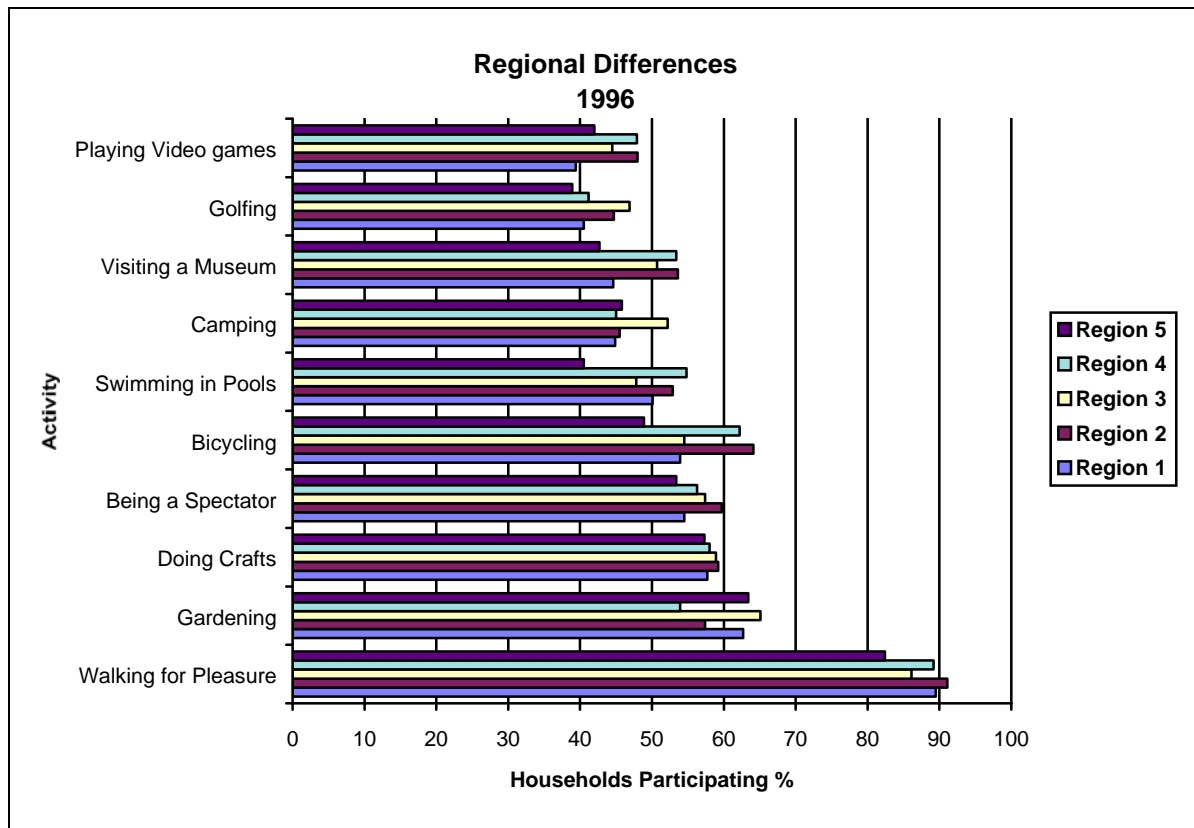


Figure 8



respondent's activities alone, and in this analysis do not reflect frequency of participation.

Both age and gender were important influences on the type of activity desired.

Regional differences in the household participation rates of the ten top activities for the five survey periods are remarkably small. Only in the case of visiting museums was the variation in excess of 10%. On the other hand, there was considerable variation when the data were considered over time.

When the data were inspected on the basis of community size, using the same ten activities over the 15 year study period, it was shown that visiting a museum, being a spectator, doing crafts, camping, and gardening declined in participation, while walking for pleasure, playing video games and golf have increased.

Implications

The Alberta Recreation Surveys provide information about several aspects of recreation. The study of these data is important since agencies should have a good understanding of both the users and non-users of their services.

In order to meet the recreation needs of the community, it is necessary to identify the types of activities that people desire. The study has shown

that swimming and golf are two activities which have a great deal of interest at the present time. Do you see an increasing demand for these activities in your community?

To attract people to facilities and programs, it is important to know why people are not using these services at present. The Alberta Recreation Surveys have identified some of the regional variation in participation and favorite activities that agencies may be able to address. Some of these differences are due to regional differences in recreation facilities and other factors related to the opportunity to recreate, others are undoubtedly the result of regional differences in preferences.

Studies of non-participation in recreation help agencies to understand the factors which may limit participation in their programs. These types of studies also help to identify groups in the community that encounter obstacles to participation. With such information, agencies providing recreation services may be able to modify their programs and information distribution to reduce the effects of barriers, and ensure that recreation opportunities are available for all segments of the community.

Table 1 - Participation Rates by Community Size Group

Communities Larger than 500,000						
	81	84	88	92	96	Change
Walking For Pleasure	88.7	85.6	89.6	88.1	90.5	1.8
Bicycling	*	63.2	63.0	58.2	63.6	.4
Being A Spectator	73.4	*	66.8	59.4	58.2	-14.8
Doing Crafts	77.5	72.7	66.6	51.7	57.7	-19.8
Gardening	69.3	71.1	64.9	*	54.8	-14.2
Visiting A Museum	77.8	67.9	70.6	49.2	53.8	-24.0
Swimming In Pools	*	*	61.5	54.7	53.0	-8.5
Playing Video Games	43.4	52.9	35.2	38.1	48.0	4.6
Camping	64.3	53.8	46.3	42.5	44.8	-19.5
Golf	35.0	41.1	37.7	40.1	42.4	7.4

Communities 6,000 - 65,000						
	81	84	88	92	96	Change
Walking For Pleasure	84.1	85.0	90.7	89.1	89.6	5.5
Doing Crafts	75.8	73.8	66.7	56.5	60.2	-15.6
Gardening	78.3	74.1	73.1	*	59.0	-19.3
Bicycling	*	64.5	70.9	64.0	58.6	-5.9
Being A Spectator	74.4	*	62.6	57.3	57.5	-16.5
Swimming In Pools	*	*	62.8	58.1	55.4	-7.4
Visiting A Museum	75.1	59.8	65.5	47.9	51.5	-23.6
Camping	65.7	61.7	51.7	49.3	47.9	-17.8
Golf	40.1	42.8	43.6	47.9	47.2	7.1
Playing Video Games	48.0	51.6	37.4	43.4	44.6	-3.4

Communities Smaller than 6,000						
	81	84	88	92	96	Change
Walking For Pleasure	86.0	83.7	87.4	84.6	87.2	1.2
Gardening	79.8	79.7	75.4	*	67.8	-11.2
Doing Crafts	80.5	74.6	69.6	57.1	62.0	-18.5
Bicycling	*	62.5	62.7	58.5	55.1	-7.4
Being A Spectator	75.8	*	61.1	56.0	53.9	-21.1
Camping	65.8	61.3	55.9	50.0	50.2	-15.6
Swimming In Pools	*	*	58.6	54.1	49.3	-9.3
Visiting A Museum	67.2	55.5	60.2	43.6	46.1	-21.1
Playing Video Games	43.0	52.6	38.4	41.5	45.2	2.2
Golf	33.9	36.4	40.3	39.3	43.6	9.7

* Data not available for this variable in this time period.

For More Information

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