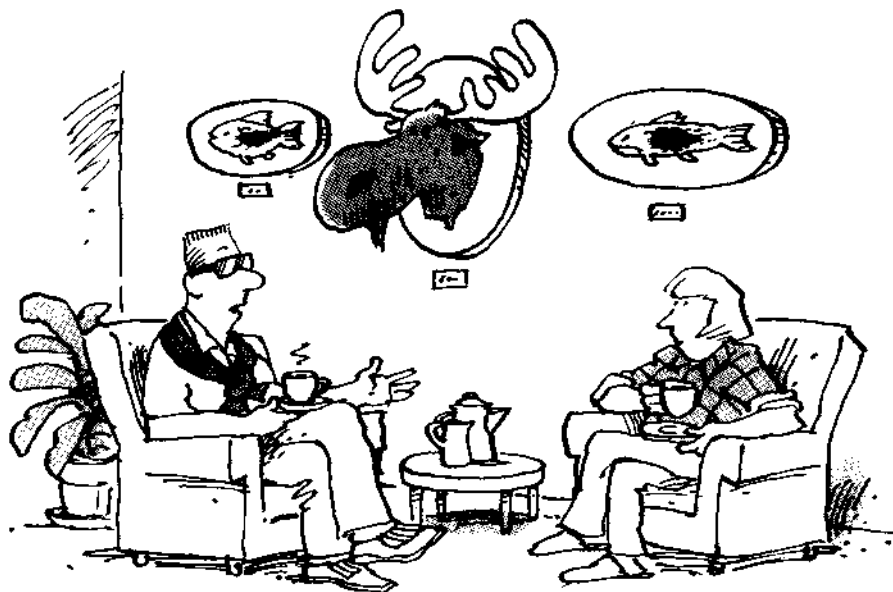


A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 19

COMMUNITY TYPE VARIATIONS IN RECREATION PATTERNS

This bulletin examines recreation patterns according to place of residence. Comparisons are made for respondents living in larger urban centres, smaller urban centres, rural non-farm, and rural farm settings. Data are presented from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, which was conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks, and from other studies which have looked at rural-urban differences in recreation behaviour.



"YOU MEAN, OUT HERE IN THE COUNTRY YOU CAN GO HUNTING OR FISHING WITHOUT HAVING TO BOOK A TIME AT THE REC CENTER?"

Alberta
RECREATION AND PARKS
Recreation Development Division



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INTRODUCTION

Previous bulletins in the "A Look at Leisure" series have examined recreation patterns for the province as a whole, and regional variations for Edmonton, Calgary, and South, Central, and Northern Alberta (see Bulletin No. 16). A comparison of recreation behaviour patterns for rural and urban residents, and for residents of various community sizes also provides some interesting findings for the provision of recreation services in different community settings.

One section of the bulletin compares household participation rates for urban residents and farm residents. The remainder of the bulletin compares recreation patterns for residents of four types of communities, defined as follows:

- Larger urban centres - Includes greater Edmonton, greater Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray.
- Smaller urban centres - Centres with populations greater than 3000, but less than 20,000 residents.
- Rural non-farm - Town and villages with less than 3000 residents.
- Rural farm - Farm or acreage residents.

The survey sample was divided into these four groups. Comparisons were then made on a number of variables such as socio-economic characteristics, activity patterns, reasons for participating in recreation activities and obstacles to participation.

Highlights of the findings which are discussed in the report include the following:

- Compared to urban centres, rural areas had a greater percentage of respondents over 45 years of age, and a higher percentage of families with children.
- A higher percentage of rural households participated in land-based outdoor activities such as hunting and snowmobiling, while more urban households took part in facility-based activities such as racquet sports.
- Facility and cost factors were important obstacles to participation for urban residents, while family and work commitments were particularly important for rural farm residents.
- Volunteer participation rates were lowest in large urban centres.



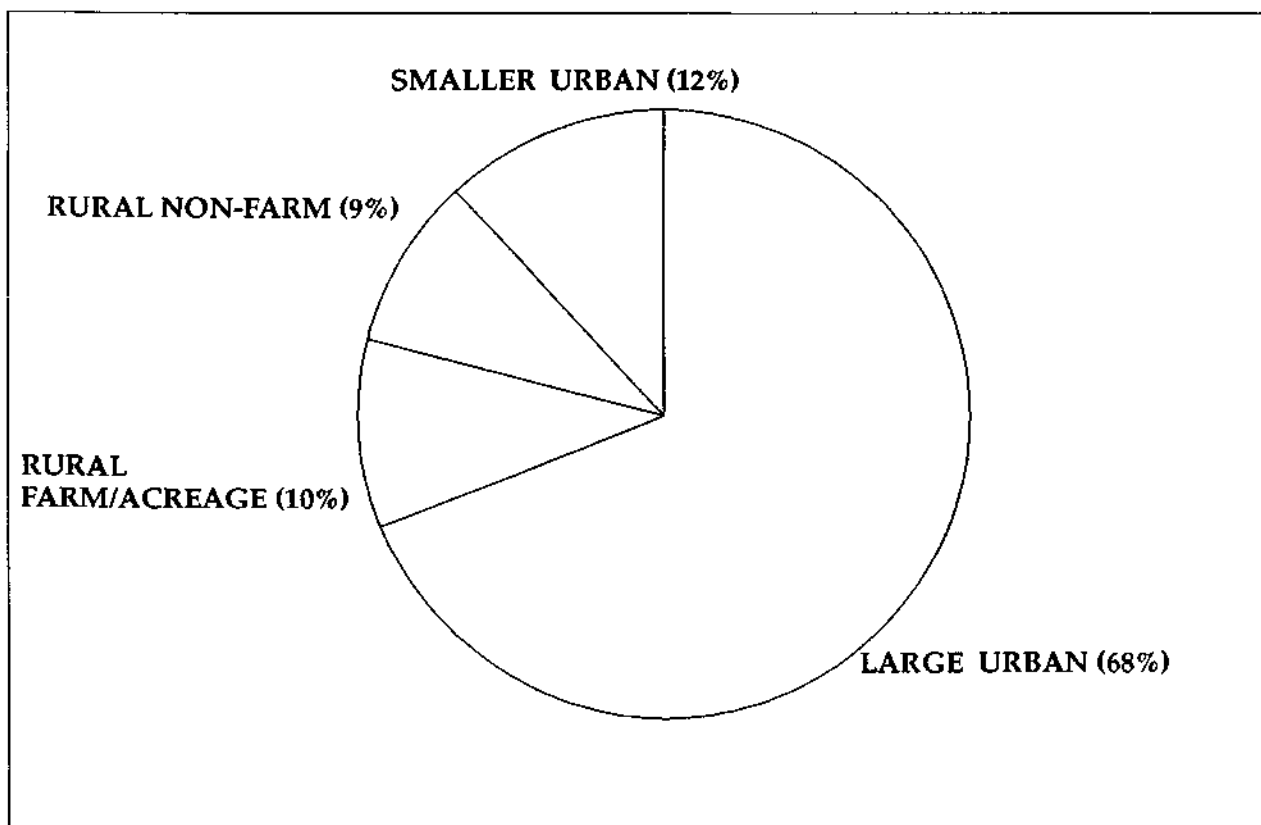
**SAMPL
CHARACTERISTICS**

Approximately 10% of the survey sample consisted of rural farm or acreage residents, while the remaining 90% of respondents lived in all types of non-farm settings (i.e., cities, towns, and villages). The distribution of respondents in each of the four categories is shown in Figure 1.

Residents of large urban centres are slightly over-represented in the survey, while rural non-farm residents are slightly under-represented.

Rural-urban and community size differences in recreation patterns reflect, in part, differences in socio-demographic characteristics of the residents (Hendee, 1969; McPherson and Curtis, 1986). For example, community participation patterns will vary with the age profile of community members.

Figure 1
Distribution of Respondents



The first step in the survey analysis was to look at the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents living in each of the location types. This provides information about recreation markets and is useful in understanding some of the study results. The socio-demographic findings are summarized in Table 1.



Table 1
Characteristics of Respondents from
Various Community Types

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Age | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Urban populations tend to be younger than rural populations. <input type="checkbox"/> The farm category had the smallest percentage of respondents under 34 years of age, and the highest proportion between 45 and 64 years. <input type="checkbox"/> Rural non-farm settings had the highest percentage of respondents over 64 years of age. |
| Type of Household | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The percentage of households with children was highest in rural communities. <input type="checkbox"/> The highest percentage of single persons was in large urban centres (21% compared to 6% in farm settings). |
| Education and Income | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Level of education increased with the size of the community. <input type="checkbox"/> There were no marked differences in income levels across location types. |
| Length of Time in Alberta | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 92% of farm/acreage residents had lived in Alberta for more than 10 years, compared to 75% of respondents from large urban centres. |

HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION

Rural-urban differences in household participation rates were found for about 40% of the activities studied in the survey. There were no differences in the percentages of participating households for most of the casual home activities such as playing cards, reading, and crafts, or for activities such as watching sports and taking educational courses. Rural residents, however, were more likely to join organized groups or clubs.

The activities showing the greatest rural-urban variations in participation are shown in Figure 2. Some of the rural-urban differences which appear in this figure reflect "opportunity" factors. On the one hand, outdoor activities such as hunting and snowmobiling require large areas of non-urban land, which are more accessible to rural



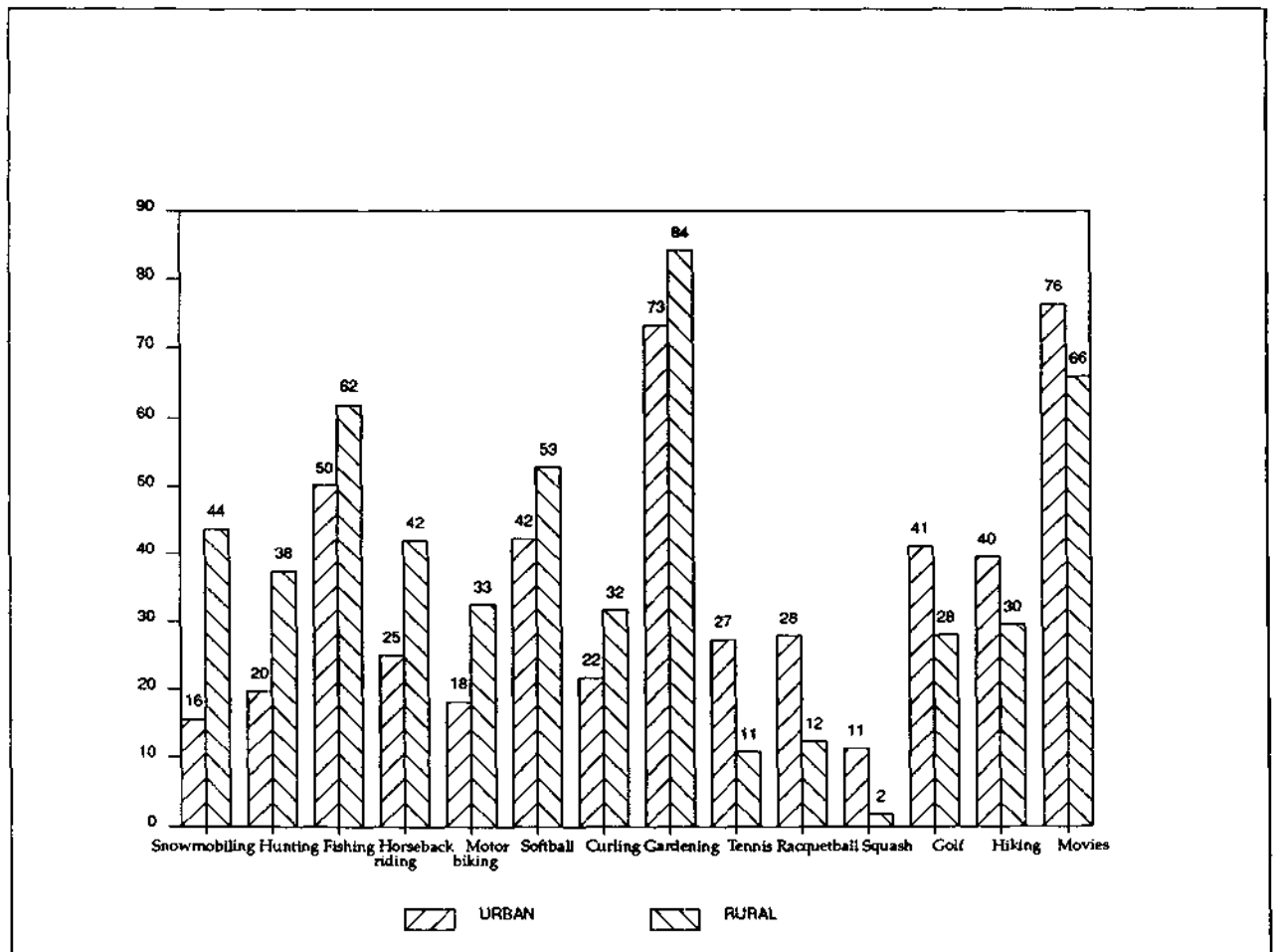
residents. On the other hand, urban areas, with a larger population and more public funds, have more facilities and organized programs (McPherson and Curtis, 1986).

As would be expected, urban participation is higher for facility-based activities such as racquet sports. The exception to this pattern is hiking, which was reported by more urban households than rural.

OTHER MEASURES OF PARTICIPATION

The survey also looked at the outdoor and sports activities in which *respondents* participated most frequently in the previous year. For this analysis, the survey sample was divided into four groups, based on community size. Table 2 lists the activities which showed the greatest variations among the community types, and indicates the percentages of respondents reporting frequent participation in each of these activities.

Figure 2
Rural-Urban Differences in Household Participation Rates



Some of these findings for respondent participation show a similar picture to that reported for household participation rates. Activities which were more "urban", decreasing in importance for smaller communities, were bicycling, racquetball, swimming, and weightlifting. Activities which were more "rural", increasing in importance for smaller communities, were curling, hunting, and snowmobiling.

As would be expected, horseback riding was particularly important for farm residents; fishing was less frequently reported by residents of large urban centres. Residents of small urban centres and rural non-farm communities were more likely than residents of other areas to report camping as a frequent activity. Participation in golf was lowest for farm residents, but uniformly higher across other types of communities.

Overall, participation in outdoor and sports activities appears to be most similar for residents of smaller urban and rural non-farm communities. Many of the activities listed in Table 2 show this pattern. In addition to these activities, the two types of communities also had similar participation levels for hiking, ice skating, bowling, picnicking, and tennis.

Table 2
Respondents' Most Frequent Outdoor and Sports Activities

| Activity | Larger | | Smaller | |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|----------|------|
| | Urban | Urban | Non-Farm | Farm |
| | % | % | % | % |
| Bicycling | 19 | 19 | 15 | 12 |
| Curling | 6 | 11 | 12 | 16 |
| Downhill skiing | 10 | 4 | 5 | 8 |
| Fishing | 15 | 24 | 23 | 23 |
| Golf | 20 | 20 | 17 | 9 |
| Horseback riding | 3 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| Hunting | 6 | 12 | 17 | 16 |
| Ice skating | 10 | 4 | 7 | 6 |
| Overnight camping | 17 | 24 | 24 | 18 |
| Racquetball | 7 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Snowmobiling | 1 | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| Swimming | 24 | 21 | 17 | 18 |
| Walking | 34 | 33 | 28 | 35 |
| Weightlifting/ body building | 7 | 4 | 5 | 2 |

The survey also looked at activities started and ceased in the previous year. There appeared to be a slight gain in participation in smaller urban centres and rural non-farm locations, since more



respondents started a new activity than ceased an activity. The opposite occurred for farm residents, where more respondents ceased an activity than started an activity.

The types of new activities which were started varied somewhat with the type of community. Creative, cultural, social, and passive activities were more popular for rural residents, while residents of large urban centres were more likely to start exercise-oriented activities. Team sports were a popular new activity for respondents living in small urban centres.

Rural-urban and community type differences in recreation activity patterns have also been found in other studies. In a Canada Fitness Survey Report, McPherson and Curtis (1986) found that Canadian urban residents were more active than rural residents in physical activities such as running, exercises, and sports. This picture was true for all age groups, except those 30 to 39 years of age, and 60 to 69 years of age. An Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation study (1983) reported that more adults in large and small urban centres were more active than were those in rural areas.

McPherson and Curtis (1986) outlined several reasons why community type differences in active recreation participation might occur. In addition to "opportunity" (described above), they identified occupation as a factor. "In rural areas, a larger percentage of the labour force is likely to be engaged in physically demanding occupations, and may be less likely to perceive the need for leisure-time physical activity" (p. 21).

The population of rural communities is generally older than that of larger communities. This contributes to lower rural participation levels, since older people tend to participate less frequently in active physical pursuits (McPherson and Curtis, 1986).

On the other hand, Romsa and Blenman (1987) looked closely at participation in a range of activities commonly enjoyed by retirees (such as hobbies, going for drives, visiting). They found that "older residents residing in more rural municipalities do tend to be somewhat more active and pursue some more physically demanding activities" than do urban residents.

REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION AND OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION

Respondents living in each of the types of communities did show some differences in their reasons for participating in recreation activities (Table 3), and in their reasons for ceasing participation (Table 4).

Enjoyment of nature was especially important for farm residents as a reason for participation; physical health or exercise was of less importance to this group than to those living in other loca-



tions. Residents of both smaller urban and rural non-farm settings indicated that meeting new friends was important. Other aspects of the data suggested that excitement and keeping busy were also important to these residents.

Other reasons for participating, such as creativity, relaxation, learning and using skills and talents, and competing did not differ in importance for people living in the various types of communities.

Table 3
Reasons for Starting New Activities:
Percent of Respondents Reporting Reasons to be Important

| Reasons | Larger Urban % | Smaller Urban % | Rural Non-Farm % | Rural Farm % |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Enjoy nature | 45 | 50 | 52 | 57 |
| Physical health, exercise | 74 | 76 | 72 | 59 |
| Meet new friends | 36 | 44 | 46 | 36 |
| To be away from family | 5 | 4 | 12 | 7 |
| Contribute to community | 14 | 23 | 27 | 26 |

There were also some differences in the reasons for ceasing participation reported by respondents from the four community types (Table 4). Residents of large and small urban centres both placed importance on facility and cost factors. Lack of opportunity to participate near home was more of a problem for respondents living in smaller communities than for those in large urban centres. Other aspects of the data also suggested that residents of smaller urban and rural non-farm locations had difficulty knowing where to participate.

Family and work commitments were especially important reasons for ceasing participation for farm/acreage residents. The importance of family commitments is linked closely with the high percentage of farm households in the survey sample which consisted of families with children.

In a study of the family and community activities of rural non-farm families with children, Bollman *et al* (1975), found that it was families with preschool children who tended not to participate in events outside the home. Participation in community activities increased, however, as the children became older.



Table 4
Reasons for Ceasing Participation: Percent of Respondents Reporting Reasons to be Important

| Reasons | Larger Urban % | Smaller Urban % | Rural Non-Farm % | Rural Farm % |
|---|----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Family commitments | 35 | 44 | 39 | 49 |
| Work commitments | 43 | 36 | 35 | 54 |
| Admission fees, costs | 25 | 23 | 16 | 15 |
| Facilities overcrowded | 27 | 25 | 14 | 16 |
| No opportunity to participate near home | 20 | 27 | 30 | 26 |

McPherson and Curtis (1986) also found that urban residents identified the cost factor as a barrier to increased participation in physical activities. Concerns of rural residents included distance to facilities, and the need for better facilities.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

In our survey, residents of smaller communities showed the greatest volunteer involvement. The percentages of respondents who were volunteers in each type of community are shown in Figure 3.

When the 1984 survey findings were compared with those from the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, it was found that rural volunteer participation declined slightly from 1981 to 1984.

A higher percentage of rural volunteers was identified in a study of farm life in Alberta conducted by Keating and Doherty (1985). In their study, 75.4% of men and 72% of women had volunteer roles. The most common types of volunteer activities were church, agricultural, and service related.

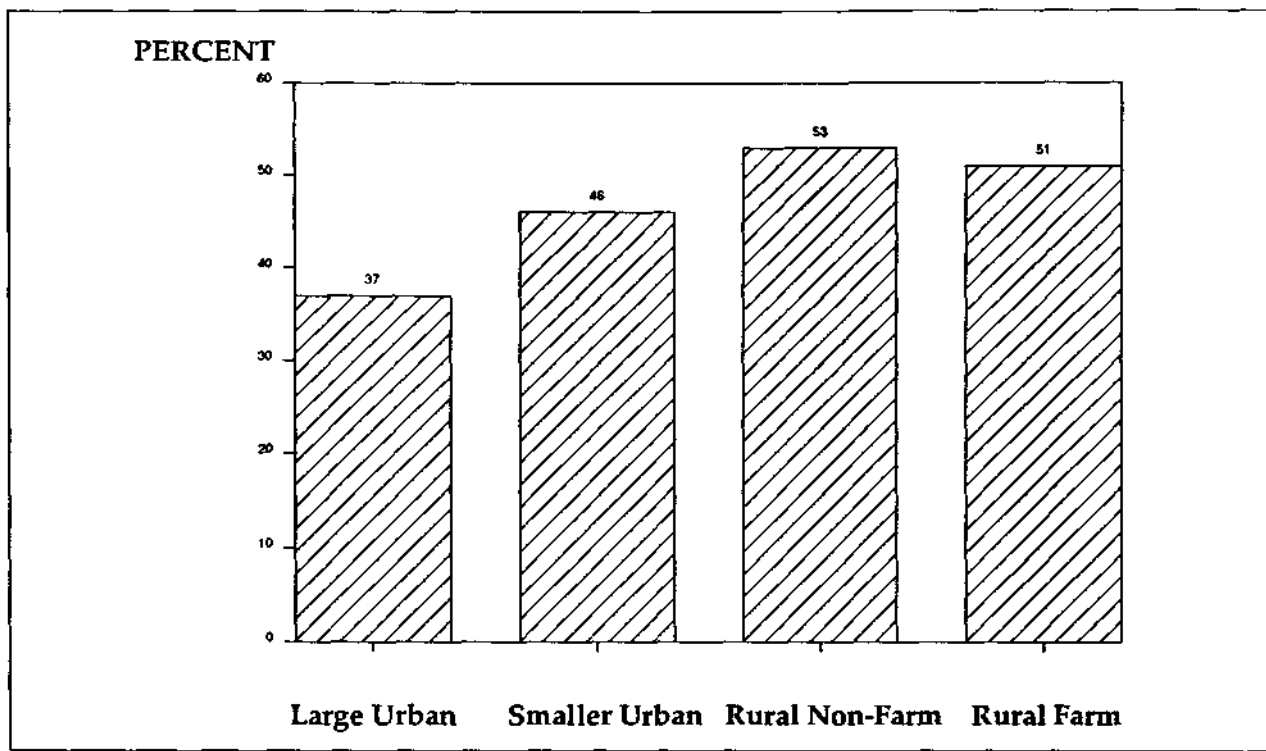
IMPLICATIONS

What implications do the study findings have for agencies involved in recreation service provision? Although many recreation behaviours are similar for residents of all types of communities, the study has pointed out some differences which might be considered in recreation programming.

Participation in many recreation activities varies according to community size and rural-urban location. This is partly due to differences in the socio-demographic profiles of the residents, especially for life-cycle factors such as age and family type. Lifestyles and interests also vary for residents in different settings. It is important for agencies to recognize the unique qualities and interests of different types of communities when providing recreation services.



Figure 3
Percentage of Respondents in each Type of Location who were Volunteers



Provincial agencies and associations must make decisions about the distribution of resources. What communities will be most likely to benefit from programs? How should programs be adjusted to meet the needs of specific types of communities? Information about the location of recreation markets, and their characteristics, is an important basis for making such decisions.

Programming at the local level should also meet the needs of specific target markets. For example, rural communities generally have a higher proportion of older people, and also a higher percentage of families with children. Large urban centres have a higher proportion of young, single people. Are these target groups receiving adequate attention in current programming?

How can programs and services be designed to meet the needs of these target groups? Neighbourhoods within a community may also differ in their population profiles, requiring different programming approaches.

It would be useful for agencies to identify communities with similar characteristics (such as size and age profiles). Provincial sports and recreation associations could design similar types of programs for communities having similar interests and profiles. It



might also be helpful for communities to share marketing and programming ideas with other communities having the same type of clients?

Community differences in participation patterns are also related to the opportunities which are available. If there are no racquetball courts in a community, for example, the participation rate for racquetball will be low. It is useful for recreation practitioners to know present participation levels for activities (i.e., expressed demand). But it is also important to look at "latent demand", which is a desire for participation in activities which is not being met

Some types of communities may show very little demand for certain activities. Before developing new facilities or programs, it is important to find out the level of demand. Public input through meetings and surveys are two methods of determining community recreation needs.

Residents of various types of communities show some differences in their reasons for participating in recreation activities. Do your programs recognize the unique needs of your residents? How do different groups of residents vary in their needs?

Family commitments are an Important reason why farm families discontinue recreation activities. How can you make it easier for families with children to participate in community activities? Overcrowding and admission costs are two concerns in urban centres. What can be done to reduce the effects of these barriers to participation?

The study findings are a useful starting point for practitioners and agencies interested in adapting programs to meet the needs of specific target markets. The rural-urban distribution of Alberta's population has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. As the population distribution continues to shift toward urbanization, recreation practitioners will need to monitor the structure of their communities, and examine the implications of any changes for their recreation programming and planning.

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FUTURE ISSUES

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

INFORMATION

If you require more information, or would like to change your mailing address, please contact:

Janet Fletcher
Recreation Planner
Recreation Development Division
Alberta Recreation and Parks
Standard Life Building
10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3N4
Phone: (403) 427-4685



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