

18. National Leisure Participation and Time-use Surveys: A Future

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Introduction

The contributors to this book were asked to provide information in relation to their respective countries on: 1. national leisure participation and time-use surveys which have been conducted; 2. overall patterns of leisure participation and leisure time-use arising from the surveys including, where possible, trends over time; 3. inequalities in patterns of participation in relation to such factors as gender, age and socioeconomic status; and 4. the effects of globalization on leisure behaviour, including use of the Internet. In this final chapter these four areas are reviewed in turn, in relation to cross-national comparison and the prospect of future surveys.

The surveys

The contributions to this book reveal a wide range of experience in the conduct of national leisure participation and time-use surveys among the 15 countries represented. Table 18.1 presents information on the latest surveys reported for each of the 15 countries. It shows that 14 out of the 15 have conducted leisure participation surveys and 10 have conducted time-use surveys.

In some cases, notably in the German and Polish contributions, reference is made to leisure *expenditure*, drawing on data from general household expenditure surveys. Most economically advanced countries conduct household expenditure surveys on a regular basis and a future edition of this book may well draw on such sources more extensively. The following comments may be made on the information presented in the table.

TABLE 18.1 ABOUT HERE

Year of survey

It is too much to expect international agreement on common years for national leisure participation and time-use surveys, but this is arguably not of vital importance, since the social and economic situation which shapes leisure participation is not the same in all countries in any one year. What is more important is that surveys should be carried out periodically on a comparable basis within countries, so that trends may be established and studied.

Time-series

In some countries a series of surveys has been established over a number of years, which enables trends to be established. However, in some of these cases there remain problems of comparability between surveys and in a number of cases only two surveys are available, which is not a strong basis for the establishment of trends. The overall picture, in terms of trends, is

mixed. Certainly up to the 1980s, leisure time appeared to be increasing, at least for some groups in the community, but there is evidence to suggest that it has declined in the 1990s. There is no clear trend in leisure participation: some activities increase in popularity while others go into decline. As discussed in Chapter 1, most of the surveys are sponsored by government agencies in order to monitor the effects of government policies: in particular governments would hope to find increasing levels of participation in those types of activity, such as the arts and sport, which they promote. It is clear that, to date, the surveys have not been fully effective in providing data for assessing the effectiveness of such policies. Much more research, with better data, is required to address the question of trends in participation.

Some ** have conducted a number of comparable surveys over time, to establish time-series. In some countries resources exist to conduct surveys annually, but in research terms this is unnecessary, since annual fluctuations are not necessarily a guide to long-term change. Surveys conducted every 4-5 years provide for measurable social changes between surveys and allow a time-series of data to be built up over a reasonable time.

Activity emphasis

The range of activities to be included in the survey presents no problem in the case of time-use surveys because they cover all activities which people engage in during the course of a day. Challenges arise, however, at the coding stage in clearly identifying and distinguishing leisure from other activities - for example whether to classify travel to a leisure venue as part of the activity or part of the separate activity of 'travel', or whether to count certain meals as leisure or 'personal maintenance'.

In the case of participation surveys problems of inclusion and exclusion arise from the beginning. Generally such surveys are conducted or sponsored by government departments, or by national statistical agencies with government departments as the main 'clients'. Few governments have single departments with responsibilities across the whole of leisure; typically a myriad of departments - of sport, the arts, the environment, heritage, youth affairs - is involved. Even when a 'whole of government' approach is adopted and the scope of a survey ostensibly encompasses the whole of leisure, the extent of government areas of responsibility may still limit the definition of leisure, often excluding, for example, commercial or home-based activities. In a number of countries, for example, Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand, the scope of the survey is restricted as a result of the dominance of the interests of single departments, such as a Ministry of Sport. In other cases, fragmentation occurs as different departments wish to 'do their own thing' in regard to surveys, resulting in a number of surveys covering different aspects of leisure, which may or may not be comparable and therefore able to be aggregated to produce a comprehensive picture of leisure. Even if such surveys can be aggregated, they may fail to include data on some aspects of leisure which fall outside the purview of *any* government department.

The interest of the *leisure* researcher is in a comprehensive approach to leisure - if this interest is to be served it is necessary to get the message across to government departments and/or statistical agencies that all forms of leisure activity compete for people's time and money: it is only possible to understand one aspect of leisure if the complete picture is available.

When the scope of 'leisure' is agreed, there remains the challenge of listing and coding individual activities. When data are gathered by means of face-to-face interviews or

respondent-completion questionnaires substantial lists of activities can be presented to respondents, who can then tick those in which they have participated. The written list has the advantage of acting as a memory prompt, but a long list can be daunting, especially for less literate respondents. In the case of telephone interviews, an open question about 'activities you do in your free time' must be used but, without a visual prompt, this can result in under-reporting of some activities. In both cases a shorter prompting method may be used, referring to activity groupings - such as 'home-based', 'sport' and 'arts and entertainment'.

Table 18.2 lists almost 200 activities which occur in at least one of the participation surveys represented in this book. No one activity is common to all participation surveys reported, although television watching and going to the movies come close. In many cases comparability is confounded by the tendency of survey designers to group certain activities together. Examples include opera and concert-going, reading of various types, indoor and outdoor sporting activities and various water-based activities. Groupings of activities may lead to inaccuracies in responses due to the 'inflationary' reporting of participation, where respondents feel that they 'must have' engaged in one or more of a group of activities (e.g. 'performing arts'), even if they cannot recall specific instances. One lesson for the future is for the designers of surveys not to group activities together, but to retain as much detail as possible, to facilitate comparison across surveys.

INSERT TABLE 18.2 ABOUT HERE

Future comparative research on leisure participation will depend in part on achieving, as far as possible, an agreed common list of activity codes for analysing participation data. Such an agreement is partially in existence for time-budget surveys - for example in the Harmonised European Time Use (HETUS) activity coding list (Aliaga and Winqvist 2003). However, typical time-use coding lists are inadequate for leisure participation surveys because they tend to include only 50-60 separate codes for leisure activities; thus, for example, sports and exercise activities tend to be grouped into just three or four groups.

Sample size

Sample sizes of the surveys referred to in the book vary enormously, from 1000 to 50,000. To a large extent this is a function of the size and political structure of the country, with large samples often called for in countries with federal systems which require results at state or provincial level. But, regardless of the size of the population, small samples are a constraint on analysis of activities which have low participation rates - for example, most individual sports. Thus, with a sample of 1000, a participation rate of 1% is subject to a confidence interval of plus or minus 0.6, that is, the participation rate is estimated to be somewhere between 0.4% and 1.6%. Such a margin makes it very difficult to compare participation rates, both between activities and for the same activity over time. Further, the small overall sample size results in small sub-samples of individual minority-activity participants, making further analysis of the characteristics of participants in such activities difficult. Survey costs are, of course, a limiting factor, exacerbated by the fact that the relationship between sample size and confidence interval is quadratic - that is, to reduce the confidence interval by half requires a four-fold increase in sample size. Arguably, it would be advisable to conduct surveys infrequently with large samples sizes rather than frequently with small sample sizes.

Age-range

The 'age threshold' of the samples covered by the surveys varies substantially from country to country, with minimum ages ranging from 6 years to 20 years. In some surveys, therefore, the bulk of teenagers are excluded, and only one includes children under 12 years old. This is highly significant for leisure time as a whole and for certain areas of leisure, such as active sport, popular music and computer and electronic games, where young people are generally very active. Thus even small differences in the age-range covered could make comparisons between surveys from different countries invalid. Of course, it would be technically feasible to produce results for all surveys for the highest age cut-off, which is 18+ for one of the Australian surveys. But this would require special tabulations to be produced by the various survey agencies.

Very few surveys have included an upper age-limit and, with the aging of Western populations, it would seem increasingly unwise to do so.

In some countries, special surveys have been conducted of children's leisure activities. However, if very young age-groups are to be covered, then it is generally necessary to rely on parents' reporting of children's activities, this may introduce inaccuracies for older children, who may have behaviour patterns without parental influence or knowledge.

If international comparability is to be achieved in future then a common threshold age for surveying and reporting and some common methods for assessing 'under-age' participation will need to be adopted. Given the emerging consensus on the participation reference period discussed below, the varying age-ranges of survey samples remains the most significant barrier to cross-national comparison of leisure participation patterns.

Reference period

The major factor preventing comparison between surveys is the activity 'reference period' chosen - that is the time period to which reported participation relates. At one extreme is the one or two days of the time-diary survey. In participation the period ranges from as little as a week (used, for example, in early Australian surveys) to a year. Clearly the range of activities which an individual engages in during the course of a year is much greater than is possible in a single week or month. The longer the reference period used, therefore, the higher the reported participation rates and the larger the sub-samples of participants in activities. The one-year reference period is gradually becoming the norm internationally - some three quarters of the surveys listed in Table 18.1 use this period.

The one-year reference period has the advantage of covering all seasons of the year in one question, but it can be argued that the scope for error in recalling activities over such a long time period is great. It might be speculated that errors could be made in both directions - under-reporting and over-reporting - and these might cancel each other out, but whether or not this happens is not known. Experiments conducted over 20 years ago by Chase and Godbey (1983) and Chase and Harada (1984) suggested that significant over-reporting was more likely than under-reporting, particularly in activities which are socially approved and which people engage in regularly, but for which they tend to forget the irregular, but possibly frequent, occasions when they missed their 'weekly game'.

A further defect of the one-year reference period lies in the inclusion of infrequent participants together with frequent participants. For example, the person who has been swimming on just

one occasion during the previous year, perhaps for just a few minutes while on holiday, is counted as a participant in swimming, together with the person who swims twice a week throughout the year. For some activities - for example visiting a zoo - participating just once or twice a year might be a typical attendance pattern. For others - notably sporting activities - regular participation is common, and the desired pattern from the point of view of public policy, so distinguishing between regular and infrequent participants is important. In these cases, the 'headline' figure of total participants is misleading.

To some extent, the problem of the infrequent participant can be overcome by including an additional question on frequency of participation. Typically, rather than being an accurate estimate this will be indicative only - for example a person who claims to engage in an activity 'once a week' may not actually do so 52 times a year, due to the normal interruptions to routine, such as sickness and holidays. This makes it possible to deal realistically with individual activities, but since the definition of 'infrequent participant' varies from activity to activity, compilation of an aggregate 'headline' figure for participation in groups of activities, for example sports or the arts, becomes complicated. It is notable that Canadian data on sports participation refers to 'regular' participants only (Table 3.11). Data on frequency of participation are also important for policy or marketing purposes, since increasing frequency of participation can be as important in some situations as increasing the number of participants.

In recent years there has been some attempt to collect data relating to both a shorter and a longer time period in the same survey, and to compare the results. It can be seen in Tables 7.8 and 7.10 in the Great Britain chapter in this book that for most activities there is a dramatic difference in the one-year and the four-week participation rate. In Canada the 1988 survey was based on a one-year and subsequent surveys on a three-month period - it can be seen in Table 3.6 that the impact varies from activity to activity. How much of the differential is due to real differences in the participation rates for the two periods and how much is due to exaggeration of the one-year participation rate due to inaccuracy of recall is not known. There is, however, a strong incentive to use longer reference periods - particularly the one-year option - to save on costs. Surveys with shorter reference periods require larger samples to capture minimal samples of participants in minority activities and must be conducted at different time of the year to capture seasonal variation, both features tending to increase the costs of conducting surveys.

Despite its drawbacks, therefore, the one-year reference period is emerging as the international norm for participation surveys.

Inequality

While absolute levels of participation cannot be compared cross-nationally, some of the patterns of relationships between participation and key socioeconomic and demographic variables can be compared in an informal way. In most of the contributed chapters the relationships between participation and a number of traditional social variables, including gender, age and socioeconomic status, are examined. These are complex phenomena and their relationships with leisure are the subject of numerous research approaches. The survey data presented in this book represent just one such contribution to the mosaic of data, theory and interpretation available.

In relation to gender, the picture presented is very mixed. Time-budget data indicate that

women generally have less leisure time than men, particularly women in the paid work force. As regards participation patterns, women tend to be less active in sport and more active in arts and cultural activities, the differences being more marked in some countries than in others. The finding that women also tend to be more active in home-based activities could be interpreted as a result of choice but can also be seen as a reflection of lack of freedom of choice, since women's leisure choices are often confined to the home because of child care and domestic responsibilities as well as other economic and cultural constraints.

The surveys generally indicate that the range of leisure activities engaged in declines with age. For a few activities, such as television watching, some arts activities and specific sports, such as golf and bowls, participation rates are higher among the older age-groups than among the young, but in general the reverse is the case. Time-budget data present a different picture, with retired people, inevitably, having comparatively large amounts of leisure time available. It is widely accepted that an active leisure life can enhance health and the quality of life generally for older people: the picture of *declining* levels of participation with age may therefore be viewed with concern from the point of view of public policy. It could of course be the case that older people choose to engage in fewer activities, but more intensively. But an alternative perspective is that people who drop leisure activities in middle age, due to family and work commitments, often fail to adopt new activities to replace them when leisure time increases with retirement: the result is an increase in time spent on passive 'time fillers', such as watching television, rather than on potentially more rewarding engagement in an activity of choice (Carpenter, 1992: Dodd, 1994).

As regards socio-economic status, based on occupation and education, the general picture emerging from the surveys is that there are marked differences in patterns of leisure participation across the socio-economic spectrum. The economically and educationally advantaged groups in the community generally have higher levels of participation in all activity groups, even though they tend not to have more leisure time. The exception is France, where manual workers have higher participation rates in sport. As with the aged, it is possible that the less advantaged groups adopt a more intensive involvement with fewer activities, but it is also possible that a reduced leisure 'repertoire' results in a lower quality of life. Again the public policy dimension is relevant: it seems clear that the groups who benefit most from government programmes and subsidies in the arts, sport and outdoor recreation are often the economically privileged groups in society. After several decades of implementing modern public leisure policies, the universal rights to leisure, as discussed at the beginning of this book, are some way from being realized in practice.

Use of the Internet

The use of the Internet as a leisure activity has yet to be fully explored in the leisure research literature. Its effects might be anticipated as being no more than an extension, or intensification, of the effects which television has had on society over the last 40 years: a decline in out-of-home commercial leisure activity with associated consequences for social life, an increase in the prevalence of sedentary lifestyles and associated health implications, and an increase in passive absorption of advertising and commercialised popular culture. The last of these is the most controversial and, indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that television-watching is in practice far from passive (Critchler, 1992). While use of the Internet involves a cathode-ray or similar screen, it is arguably less intellectually passive than watching

television or videos, but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that its added attraction, has increased the amount of time which young people in particular spend engaged in physically passive activities.

Data on Internet use are not presented for all countries represented in the book, and not all data are up-to-date, but drawing on post-2000 data only, the following gives a flavour of the findings:

- in Australia the proportion of households with Internet access grew from 16% in 1998 to 46% in 2002 and 57% of males and 51% of females aged 18 and over had used the Internet in the last year;
- in Britain, in early 2003, 54% of the population had used the Internet in the previous three months, including 78% of those aged under 25;
- in the Netherlands, a quarter of the population had been using the Internet during their free time in October 2000, spending, on average, two hours on the activity in the previous week.

Typically, data on Internet use are derived from special surveys and it is notable that the reference periods used are even more mixed than for general leisure participation surveys, making comparisons difficult. It is clear that numerous indicators of the extent of Internet use exist, including the proportion of households with home-computers with Internet access, the amount of time spent using the Internet, and distinctions between use for work, household or leisure purposes.

Problems and issues

The major and continuing problems for national leisure participation surveys might be summarized as the 'three cs': continuity, comparability and comprehensiveness.

Continuity refers to the need to conduct surveys on a regular and frequent basis - every 4-5 years at least. As discussed above, in most cases annual surveys, while perhaps useful at the beginning of a survey programme to establish the stability or instability of the data, would seem, in the long term, to be a waste of resources, since most changes in collective behaviour take place over a longer time-period and short-term fluctuations in participation and time-use patterns are just 'noise' in the data.

Comparability refers to the need to ensure that surveys *within* countries are comparable, but also to consider ways in which comparability *between* countries might be achieved in future.

Comprehensiveness is a reference to the need to cover all aspects of leisure and to include as many activities as possible. However, as Zuzanek suggests (Chapter 3), the long-term accumulation of comparable, standardized data sets is hampered by changes of personnel in key government agencies and the desire of new personnel to make their mark on the process by making changes - which result in loss of comparability.

An issue for promoters of national surveys is to consider the respective roles of time-budget and questionnaire survey methodology. Zuzanek points out that time-budget studies are good at dealing with everyday activities, such as television watching and other home-based or

frequently engaged-in activities, but are less effective in gathering information on activities which, while they may be key indicators of lifestyle, may not take up a great deal of time on a day-to-day basis - for example theatre going or visiting art galleries. The researcher is in fact faced with a spectrum of approaches related to the reference period used, ranging from 1 or 2 days - effectively a time budget - via a week or a month to twelve months. Beyond 12 months lies the 'personal leisure history' or biographical method, which also has a role to play in leisure research (Hedges, 1986; Smith, 1994). Finding the right balance between these approaches and the advantages and disadvantages they offer, is a challenge for survey researchers around the world.

The development of cross-national comparative research

The task of the current project was to review the status quo and to bring together information on the availability of data and insights into leisure behaviour and leisure trends from a number of countries. In compiling the first edition of the book, it quickly became clear that the variety of survey vehicles used made comparisons of the results between countries virtually impossible. In the concluding chapter we discussed the merits and possibilities of cross-national research in this area and looked forward to further developments. We, somewhat naively, had a tentative belief that the growing level of activity in conducting national leisure participation and time-use surveys across the world and increasing ease of communication between researchers in different countries, both directly and via conferences, journal, books such as this, would, by now, have improved the level of comparability. Almost a decade later it is clear that this has not happened. While some efforts are being made to increase international liaison in the area of time-use surveys (Pentland et al., 1999; Aliaga and Winqvist, 2003), this has not been the case in leisure participation surveys. Clearly a concerted effort is needed, perhaps under the aegis of an international organisation such as UNESCO, if this is to happen.

Looking to the future

Our discussion in the concluding chapter of the first edition of the book stands as a statement of out thinking on the possible future of cross-national research in this field. For the moment it seems appropriate to make a more succinct statement. The evidence of this book indicates that a wealth of information and insight into patterns of leisure behaviour in contemporary society is being developed at considerable collective cost by a wide range of researchers, in universities and government agencies around the world. But the value of this effort is substantially diminished by the lack of international collaboration in design, analysis and dissemination, resulting in an inability to compare results across more than a handful of countries. More cooperation and collaboration would greatly enhance the value of this work in future. The challenge remains for academic and government researchers to find ways and means to take the necessary steps to achieve this end.

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Table 18.1. National survey characteristics

Country	<i>Leisure participation surveys</i>						<i>Time-use surveys</i>				
	<i>Date of latest survey</i>	<i>Time series#</i>	<i>Activity emphasis</i>	<i>Sample size, '000s</i>	<i>Age-range of sample</i>	<i>Reference period</i>	<i>Date of latest survey</i>	<i>Time series#</i>	<i>Sample size, '000s</i>	<i>Age-range of sample</i>	
Australia	2001	5	Sport	13	15+	Year	1997	1	9	15+	
	2002	3	Cultural	15	18+	Year					
Canada	1992	2	Leisure	12	12+	Year	1998-99	3	11	15+	
	2000	5	Sport	12	12+	3 mths					
Finland	1991	2	Leisure	4	10+	Year	1999-00	2	5	10+	
France	1997	3	Leisure	3	0-70	Year?	1997-98	4	16	15+	
	2000	1	Sport	6							
Germany**	1991	-	Leisure	3	14+	Often	-		-	-	
Great Britain	1996	7	Sport	16	16+	4 weeks	2000-01	4	10	8+	
Hong Kong	1993/4	-	Leisure	3	6+	Month	-		-	-	
Israel	-		-	-	-	-	1990	1	1	20+	
Japan	2003	6	Leisure	3	15+	Year	-		-	-	
Netherlands	1999	5	Leisure	?	15+?	Year?	2000	5	2	12+	
New Zealand	1998-99	1	Sport	4	5+	Year	1998-99	-	9	12+	
Poland	1998-99	-	Leisure	4	15+	Year	1996	3	2	?	
Russia	*	*	*	*	*	*	1990	*	47	?	
Spain	2000	1	Culture	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	
United States	2000	7	Outdoor rec.	50	16+	Year	1995	3	7	18-64	
	2002	3	Sport	17	18+	Year					

** Information from first edition of the book. * Data in chapter drawn from a variety of sources. # No. of previous, comparable surveys conducted

Table 18.2. Activities covered in leisure participation surveys in this book

Arts/Cultural Activities	Bird watching	Exercise, keep fit
Art films/cine-clubs	Camping	Fencing
Art gallery/art museum	Kite-flying	Fishing/hunting
Arts crafts	National park	Fishing
Arts (paint, sculpt)	Parks	Football (see also soccer etc)
Ballet	Picnic/barbecue	Gateball/croquet
Circus	Picnic/hike/nature walk	Golf
Classical music concert	Walk in country/bushwalking/hiking	Gymnastics
Flower arranging		Handball
Historic site visit	Social/informal recreation	Hiking/backpacking
Jazz concert	Amusement parks etc.	Hockey
Library visit	Auctions	Hockey/lacrosse: outdoor
Movies	Bingo	Hockey/lacrosse: indoor
Museum/historic site visit	Church/religious activities	Horse-riding
Museums, galleries	Club/assoc. member	Ice-skating
Music recital/opera	Club visit (licensed/night)	Informal sport
Opera or ballet	Community/voluntary work	Jet skiing
Opera	Conversation	Jogging/running
Other live performances	Dancing, discotheque	Judo
Outdoor concert/play	Dining out	Lawn bowls
Painting, sculpturing, pottery	Driving for pleasure	Martial arts
Performing arts	Electronic/computer games	Netball
Photography	Excursions	Netball: outdoors
Playing musical instrument	Exhibitions	Netball: indoors
Playing music	Fair or festival	Orienteering
Pop concerts	Gambling	Pinball, pool, shuffleboard
Theatre	General interest courses	Playground games
Theatre/concert	Going out/evening	Pool/snooker/billiards
Making videos	Hobbies	Rink sports Roller-skating
Writing	Horse races/trots/dog races	Rugby
	Karaoke	Rugby Union
Home-based activities	Motor sport	Rugby League
Car repairs	Nightclub, disco	Sailing
Cards, board games	Outings	Sailing/canoeing/boating
Chess, checkers	Pachinko	Self-defence
Collecting (stamps, coins)	Pub/cafe/tea house visit	Shooting/hunting
Computer/video games	Sauna/massage	Skateboarding
Crafts/ads	Shopping for pleasure	Skating
Do-it-yourself	Social activities	Skating/skiing
Entertaining at home	Special interest courses	Skiing
Gardening for pleasure	Sport spectator	Soccer (see also football)
Gourmet cooking	Tea ceremony	Soccer: outdoor
Household skills	Travelling overseas	Soccer: indoor
Indoor games	Visit/be with friends/relatives	Softball
Listening to music	Visitor centre	Sport (at least one)
Listening to radio	Walking dog	Squash
Listening to records/tapes	Walking	Strength sports (weights, box)
Model-making	Working for a church group	Surfing/lifesaving
Outdoor games		Swim in own/friends' pool
Playing with pets	Sport/physical recreation	Swimming
Playing with children	Aerobics	Swimming: outdoor
Reading magazines	Archery/shooting	Swimming: indoor
Reading books	Athletics	Swimming: in pool
Reading newspapers	Australian Rules Football	Swimming: non-pool
Reading newspapers/magazines	Badminton	Table tennis
Reading	Ball games	Team sports
Relax, do nothing	Baseball/softball	Ten-pin bowling

Sewing, knitting, etc.	Basketball	Tennis, racquet sports
Spend time at home/with family	Bowls/bowling	Tennis
Study	Boxing/wrestling	Touch football
Talk on telephone (15 mins +)	Climbing	Volleyball
Watch TV	Cricket	Water-skiing
Woodwork, carpentry	Cricket: outdoor	Water sport: excl sailing
Outdoor recreation	Cricket: indoor	Water activities: non-power
Backpacking	Curling	Weightlifting/bodybuilding
Beach	Cycling	Windsurfing
	Darts	Yoga
	Diving	
