Leisure and Culture

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

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Leisure and Culture Domain – Summary and Highlights

Participation in leisure and culture activities, whether arts, culture, or recreation, contributes to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and societies. The myriad of activities and opportunities that we pursue and enjoy today all contribute to our overall life satisfaction and quality of life. They help to fully define our lives, the meaning we derive from them, and ultimately our wellbeing. This is true for all age groups and both genders.

Participation in leisure and culture throughout one’s lifetime promotes higher levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing into later life. There is also emerging evidence that leisure and culture can play an even greater role in improving the quality of life for marginalized groups, such as lower income groups, children and older adults living with disabilities, and minority populations.

The wide array of activities, experiences, settings, and stakeholders involved in arts, culture, and recreation are a reflection of the importance of this domain to Canadians. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing’s Leisure and Culture category tracks changes in the amount of time and money that Canadians spend on these kinds of activities within two theme areas:

- **Leisure and recreation** – formal and informal, active and passive, including as examples cycling, hockey, fishing, reading for pleasure, playing games, and spending time with family and friends.

- **Arts and culture** – both popular and high culture, including performing arts such as music, dance, and live theatre, visual arts such as painting, drawing and sculpture, media arts such as radio and television, and facilities such as art galleries, museums, and heritage sites.

More specifically, the Leisure and Culture Domain tracks eight indicators:
The Leisure and Culture Model

Trends

- Canadians are spending less time on social leisure activities.

- Volunteering for culture and recreation organizations has dropped, especially among those 25 to 34 years of age.

- The number of performances and attendance at performing arts have dropped.

- Participation in physical activities has leveled off.

- Visits to National Parks and National Historic Sites dropped significantly after September 11 and are not expected to rise to levels seen in the 1990s for some time, if at all.

- Household spending on culture and recreation is increasing.
Report Highlights

The following are the key highlights of the report:

**We are Spending Less Time on Social Leisure Activities**

- The average portion of total time that Canadians spent on the previous day on social leisure activities dropped from 15% in 1998 to 12% in 2005. Participation in arts and culture activities remained comparatively stable at less than 5%.

- Women spent a greater percentage of time than men on both social leisure and arts and culture activities, but the drop in social leisure activities from 1998-2005 was greatest among women, from 18% to 14%.

- Adults 65 years and older spent the highest proportion of time on both social leisure and arts and culture activities, in part because they had more free time.

**Percentage of Time Spent in Social Leisure and in Arts and Culture Activities on the Previous Day (1992 to 2005)**

![Graph showing percentage of time spent in social leisure and arts/culture activities from 1992 to 2005](image)

**Arts Performances and Attendance have Dropped**

- The number of performances by various theatre, opera, musical and other performing arts companies dropped from 45,000 to under 38,000 and attendance from 15 million to 13 million (2001-2006).

- Average attendance went down steadily from 2001 to 2004, but showed a marked increase in 2006.

**Average Attendance at all Performing Arts Performances (2001 to 2006)**

![Graph showing average attendance at performing arts performances from 2001 to 2006.](Image)

*Source: Survey of Service Industries: Performing Arts (2001 to 2006)*
We Volunteer Less for Culture and Recreation Organizations

- Despite the fact that overall volunteering in Canada has increased, the percentage of volunteering time given specifically to culture and recreation organizations dropped dramatically from 32% to 22% (1997-2004).

- The number of hours that Canadians reported volunteering in the previous year for culture and recreation organizations dropped from 46 to 42.

- The drop was greatest among those 25 to 34 years of age, with the average number of hours falling from 55 hours in 1997 to less than half of that in 2004.

- Men reported a significantly greater number of hours and a much greater percentage of their volunteering time given to culture and recreation organizations than did women, though the numbers for both groups dropped.

Mean Hours Volunteering in the Past Year for Culture and Recreation Organizations by Age Group (1997 to 2004)

Our Participation in Physical Activities has Levelled off

- Overall participation in physical activity rose steadily from about 21 to 26 times per month (1994-2003), but was still at the same level in 2005. Physical activities measured included walking, bicycling, exercising, various sports, gardening and social dancing.

- Men reported two more episodes of physical activity per month, but the pattern of growth and levelling off was the same for both genders.

- Older adults participated in physical activity at much lower levels than all other age groups. As the population ages, overall levels of physical activity among Canadians might begin to decline.

Average Monthly Frequency of Participation in Physical Activity Overall and by Gender (1994 to 2005)

Source: National Population Health Survey (1994 to 1999) and Canadian Community Health Survey (2000 to 2005)
Visits to National Parks and Historic Sites are far below Pre-9/11 Levels

- Annual visits to National Parks and National Historic Sites of Canada increased steadily throughout the 1990s, but dropped significantly immediately after 9/11 and are still far below pre-9/11 levels. The most recent year for which data are available (2008-2009) showed a further 6% drop. Other contributing factors included the outbreaks of SARS, West Nile virus, and mad cow disease.

- The total number of National Parks and Historic Sites increased from 117 to 127 (1994-2007), but the average number of visitors matched the drop in annual visits.

- The number of visitors is not expected to rise to levels seen in the 1990s for some time, if at all. Recovery to previous levels would require a huge upswing which is not likely to happen given a variety of factors including the introduction of fees and charges and greater restrictions when visiting Parks and Sites.

Visitation to National Parks and National Historic Sites (1994 to 2009)

Source: Parks Canada (1994 to 2009)
We’re Taking Slightly Longer Vacations

- The total number of nights Canadians spent away from home was relatively stable in the 1990s. It was generally higher from 2000 to 2007 although the average number of nights away per trip declined until 2003, but has rebounded since 2004. This suggests that while the total number of trips taken by Canadians vary, the trips on average are increasingly longer.

- When women vacationed they spent more nights away than men.

- Adults 65 years and over – most of whom are in retirement – spent significantly more nights away on average than other age groups.

Total Number of Nights Away on Vacation (1996 to 2007)

Source: Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (1996 to 2007)
We’re Spending More on Culture and Recreation

- Total annual household expenditures on culture and recreation, even when adjusted for inflation, rose by 20% from $10,000 in 1997 to $12,000 in 2006.

- Regardless of whether household income has gone up or down over the years, the percentage of that income spent on culture and recreation has stayed relatively steady at slightly over 21%.

- Mid-aged adults from 35 to 49 years reported spending significantly more on culture and recreation than any other age groups. This may be because they were the ones most likely to have children in the household.

- Adults 65 years of age and older reported spending significantly less on culture and recreation despite having more free time for such activities. This was largely due to their having less disposable income than other age groups.

Mean Total Household Expenditures on all Aspects of Culture and Recreation by Age Group (1997 to 2006)
Conclusion

Leisure and culture make significant contributions to the wellbeing of Canadians and their communities. They also help shape our national identity and sense of who we are as a people. Thus, the overall decline in the engagement of Canadians in such activities is of considerable concern.

The significant drop in leisure activity among women is noteworthy. It may well reflect their increased feeling of time crunch reported upon in the previous section. While there is some comfort in knowing that participation in physical activity has not gone down in recent years for either gender, given the challenge of an aging population and increased chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity has been called everything from “a ticking time bomb” to “the greatest health challenge facing our generation”, it would be more comforting to see an increase – and a substantial one – in physical activity.

Equally worrying is that over the past several years, public agencies and non-profit, voluntary organizations responsible for the provision of leisure and culture programs, services, facilities, and other opportunities have seen an ongoing shift away from core funding. Indeed, since 1990, community per capita expenditures on recreation and culture have not kept pace with inflation or population increases. This decline in basic operational support represents a serious threat to the ongoing missions of these agencies and organizations, which are mainly responsible for the infrastructure supporting leisure and culture in Canadian communities. It represents a loss of potential to improve the wellbeing of Canadians.

These trends bode poorly for the wellbeing of individuals, community, and society. Should they continue, the benefits associated with having leisure and culture as key components in the lifestyles of Canadians and in our communities will simply not be realized. We must strengthen our capacity to provide meaningful venues and opportunities for leisure and culture.
Based in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network is an independent, non-partisan group of national and international leaders, researchers, organizations, and grassroots Canadians. Its mission is to report on quality of life at the national level and promote a dialogue on how to improve it through evidence-based policies that are responsive to the needs and values of Canadians.

The Network’s signature product is the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). The CIW measures Canada’s quality of life and tracks progress in eight interconnected categories. It allows us, as Canadians, to see if we are better off or worse off than we used to be — and why. It helps identify what we need to change to achieve a better outcome and to leave the world a better place for the generations that follow.

The Honourable Roy J. Romanow, Chair  
The Honourable Monique Bégin, Deputy Chair