



Sport Participation in Canada

Chapter 15

15.0 Possible Factors Influencing Sport Participation

Reasons for the decrease in participation include:

- an aging population;
- economic pressures;
- limited leisure time; and
- a wide range of other leisure activities vying for our attention.

Various social and economic factors offer useful contextual information to help explain the decrease in sport participation by Canadians from 1992 to 1998.

Explanations may lie on a number of fronts including an aging population, economic pressures, increasing cost of sport equipment, registration and membership fees, limited leisure time and the wide range of leisure activities vying for our attention.

15.1 Aging Population

Canada's population is aging. The baby boom is making a significant impact on the age distribution and structure of the general population. Current population projections point to the fact that the number of seniors living in Canada will increase notably over the next 20 years. This demographic change will likely have important consequences for the sport sector. As our society ages, with 'baby boomers' entering their fifties and sixties, the current levels of sport participation will likely see further decreases.

The rate of sport participation will undoubtedly change as demographic factors reshape the composition of its participants. Indeed, upcoming demographic changes will create both opportunities and challenges for sport enterprises.

15.2 Women living longer

The latest life expectancy figures for Canadian women show that in 1996 women lived 5.7 years longer than Canadian men (81.4 and 75.7 years respectively). Female life expectancy has consistently been higher than that of males throughout all provinces (with the exception of the territories). While a series of projections prepared by Statistics Canada provide three scenarios on total population distributions by age and gender, there is no question that the number of seniors, particularly women, living in Canada will increase notably over the next 20 years. These changes to the age composition of Canadians will result in an older, female-dominated senior population which may prove to further dampen sport participation rates.

15.3 Free Time at a premium

According to the General Social Survey, *Overview of the Time Use of Canadians in 1998*, free time¹ is at a premium. Personal time has become one of the most valuable commodities people have today. In fact, the amount of free time enjoyed by Canadians has not increased since 1986. Canadians reported an average of 5.7 hours of free time per day in 1986 and 5.8 hours per day in 1998. Since most sport activities take place during our leisure time, its absence is significant to participation levels.

15.4 Economics

Sport and recreational expenditures, as a proportion of total spending, have steadily declined over the past decade. According to the Survey of Household Spending (formerly FAMEX), Canadians decreased their spending on sport and recreation by 9 percent between 1986 and 1996. On average, spending on sporting goods and services in 1996 represented approximately 2 percent of our household budgets.

Personal disposable income has been growing only moderately, as income taxes continue to take a large share of our household income.² People have fewer disposable dollars to spend and, the dollars we do have tend to be allocated carefully. Furthermore, there is enormous competition for our shrinking discretionary dollar.

15.5 Competing leisure activities

Today's consumer has the ability to choose from a myriad of leisure activities including films, television, various hobbies and sport. There is increasing competition among a wide array of services and activities for both our time and our dollar. The demand for sport is becoming increasingly fragmented as more recreational options are available to us. At the same time, we are making our choices more carefully among these options as the amount of leisure time we enjoy is limited.

¹ Free time or leisure time comprises the residual of the 24-hour day, time that is not allocated to either paid work, unpaid work, or personal care.

² Survey of Household Spending, 1997.

Information technology in the home is the newest domain poised to have a major impact on Canadians. Advancements in technology have rapidly moved computers into our homes in the form of video games, home computers and Internet access. In 1997, 36% of Canadian households had a computer, more than triple the proportion in 1986 (10.3), and more than one out of every 3 home computers is being used to access the Internet.³ Our leisure time is spent differently today than ever before, with fewer people participating in sports and hobbies. People, especially young people, are spending more of their leisure time surfing the net.

15.6 Conclusion

Given the pace of technological advancements, the aging of our population, limited free time, variable economic conditions and changing consumer preferences, it is difficult to predict future patterns of sport participation. Each of these factors play their part in influencing how we spend our discretionary time, effort and dollars. As we move into the next century, further shifts in sport participation will inevitably occur as large numbers of baby boomers move closer to retirement.

On the other hand, one may foresee an increased demand for sporting goods and services fostered by such factors as increased education levels and higher incomes, coupled with a larger proportion of two-income families (two incomes does not necessarily mean more disposable income). These socio-economic factors may in fact translate into increases in sport participation. The challenge ahead lies in being able to understand and anticipate some of these changes, and then to target those sport activities and services which the new emerging conditions will demand.

³ Household facilities and equipment, Cat. 64-202-XPB