Trends Affecting the Parks, Recreation and Culture Sector in Canada and British Columbia

Note: This section is excerpted from a 2007 report by Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants Ltd. which was commissioned by the BCRPA as part of the sectoral strategic planning process. It provides information on current quality of life trends and the implications they pose for BC. This is an updated Appendix B for The Way Forward.

1. Demographic Trends

1.1 A Profile of Shifting British Columbia Demographics

The population of BC in the 2006 Census was 4,113,487 and is expected to grow to 4,873,300 by 2016. With the undercount estimate of 3.1% used by Statistics Canada, the actual population was closer to 4,241,000. The growth rate between 2001 and 2006 was 5.3%, which increased from 4.9% between 1996 and 2001. Most of that growth resulted from strong migration from other provinces and countries. Population growth was accompanied by strong economic and job growth during this period
BC's population is aging with the median age rising by approximately 2.1 years every 5 years. The proportion of age 65+ older adults will increase from 13.6% in 2001 to approximately 24.1% in 2031, while the proportion of children age 0-14 will decrease from 18.1 to 13.1% over that same period.

1.2 Population Cohorts and Shifts in BC and Canada

Population shifts are not consistent over all age cohorts and are especially affected by the huge Baby Boom cohort which will be aged 44-63 in 2010. The Baby Boom accounts for 1/3 of the Canadian population and are influencing leisure demands and trends as they age. The generational population shifts have gone from Boom to Bust, then to Echo, and now back to a second Bust with the smaller cohort of children aged 11 years and under.

1.3 Growing Gap between Haves and Have-Nots

While poverty rates have declined slightly over the last decade, the gap between haves and have-nots has widened, with a strong correlation between age and relative wealth. Young families are now twice as likely to live in poverty as those over 65, but poverty is present in all generations, especially for lone parent families and individuals living on their own.

1.4 Increasing Diversity

BC's population is becoming increasingly diverse, especially in urban areas as migration from other countries grows. The proportion of visible minorities grew from 17.9% in 1996 to 21.6% in 2001, and then to 24.8% in 2006 for 2006. Of the 27.5% of BC residents who are foreign born, approximately 50% are from Asia, 35% from Europe and the other 15% from other regions of the world.

1.4 Leadership Shifts and Gaps

The field is seeing an increasing number of early Baby Boomers retire. This creates opportunities for other individuals to advance and demonstrate their abilities. There is a concern, however, with the availability of practitioners at the entry-level in a number of job settings.

Implications of Demographic Trends

- The high levels of population growth in many communities will place increased pressure on the demand for services and facilities, as well as the provision of adequate new open spaces to accommodate growth.
- Individual communities vary widely in their demographic profiles. Communities need to be aware of their own patterns through data available through BC Stats and Statistics Canada.
- The Baby Boom generation will continue to be active and place a high demand on services. Their preferences, however, will shift to less strenuous physical activities as they age and to cultural activities.
- More elementary schools will close as the number of children decreases, leading to a potential loss of community access to school facilities and open spaces. There will also likely be declines in swim lessons, sport participation levels, and other children's programs as the fertility rate remains low.
- Accessibility and affordability for young families will need to be a priority. Fee policies will need to be re-examined, especially high discounts for seniors who can easily afford services. Recreation opportunities for children living in poverty needs to be a higher priority.
- Most Canadians view parks as part of the "commons". There is an expectation that they will continue to have free access to parks and trails for individual use. The significant public reaction to parking charges in Provincial Parks is an indicator of these expectations. Care needs to be taken in introducing new fees that impact use and access.
- As the cultural diversity of communities increase, the development of policies, programs and services, and marketing approaches will need to reflect this diversity and reach out to different ethno-cultural groups.
- Many ethno-cultural groups place a premium on large gatherings, (as do many organizations), for gatherings and special events. The provision of large group areas with adequate shelter and washrooms should be considered within parks systems.
- The recruitment of young people into the field and its post-secondary education programs will be a priority. Young practitioners will also need mentoring and professional development opportunities as they enter the field.

2. Behavioural Trends

2.1 Toward Informal and Individual Activities

There is a clear shift toward more informal and individualized activities. The favourite activities for both adults and youth fall into this category. People are choosing activities that can be done at personally convenient times and places.

2.2 Changing Preferences and Expectations

There is a shift to the activities that have an experiential nature and offer challenges and other forms of learning. In the tourism area, cultural learning and ecotourism will continue to grow. There will be high expectations for the quality of programs and facilities. Baby Boomers will shift to less strenuous physical activities and to culture and the outdoors.

2.3 Time Segmentation

As many people feel increasingly rushed, there will be a growing trend to more condensed periods of leisure activity. This will further emphasize the trend to more individualized activity at times convenient to the individual.

2.4 Volunteerism

There is a significant drop-off in volunteerism that is affecting sport and recreation. Retiring Baby Boomers may be a future source, but will need to be approached directly. Episodic or short-term volunteering has seen greater success than requests for longer-term commitments.

2.5 Wellness and Chronic Disease

There is a growing awareness of the health benefits of physical activity and healthy eating. The proportion of Canadian adults who are active has increased significantly over time, although activity levels continue to drop with age. Physical activity has been clearly recognized as a major factor in chronic disease prevention and management. However, increasing activity levels could also increase injury. Injury prevention during activity is also an issue.

2.6 Children and Youth Inactivity

Child and youth inactivity is considered to be a major problem as obesity rates have tripled over a 15 year period. The amount of "screen" time (i.e. video games and television) has increased as children pursue less active forms of activity. Chronic disease levels have increased in children and youth, creating concerns for long-term health impacts.

2.7 Growing Leisure Activities

Leisure activity areas that have grown include walking and cycling, home landscaping and gardening, cultural activities, outdoor activities and environmental learning, cultural learning and ecotourism, and physical activity as rehabilitation. Demands by parents for children's physical activity programs will grow.

Implications of Behavioral Trends

- There will be greater demands on drop-in opportunities in recreation and cultural facilities, and scheduling should ensure that these are available throughout the day.
- The development of greenways, bikeways and pathway systems is a key priority for community open spaces systems. These systems contribute to personal and

environmental health.

- More experiential programs will be in high demand. These include outdoor adventure programs, cultural learning and participation, and more intensive learning opportunities.
- Where feasible, more programs should be offered in compressed timeframes – a one or two day workshop instead of on a weekly basis for a longer timeframe.
- Conversely, many people enjoy the constancy and social aspects of ongoing programs. Especially for older adults, social elements should be included as part of the post-activity period.
- Volunteer recruitment and development programs will need to be revived, with retired Boomers and young people as two key targets. Volunteer experiences may need to be packaged into shorter timeframes around community projects.
- Programs aimed at rehabilitation and wellness can be offered through partnerships with the health sector. Programs offered in community, rather than clinical settings, are more likely to lead to ongoing healthy lifestyle behaviour. Aquatic and fitness elements can be included in facility design.
- Youth inactivity and obesity are considered by many to be at the epidemic level. Schools play a key role but often have diminished capacity. Partnership approaches by schools, Parks and Recreation Departments, community sport, and parents will be required to address the issue.
- There will be an increasing demand for recreation staff to work with their park counterparts to plan and provide programs that address the growing interest in gardening, plant selection, pruning and home landscaping.

3. Organizational and Workplace Trends

3.1 The Benefits Movement

The Benefits Movement has helped the fields become more outcomes focused and to broaden its mandate beyond traditional services. Another shift is from simply using the benefits in advocacy and marketing to using the benefits approach in programming and planning.

3.2 Accountability

Political decision makers and boards are increasingly demanding that the field measure and demonstrate their impacts. This often means demonstrating the field's contribution to overall organizational and community goals.

3.3 Partnering

Partnering has been extended beyond traditional to newer partners in health, justice, education, community and social services, and the corporate sector. Internal municipal partnerships with planning, engineering and the police are also growing as the field plays a more integral role in community design and public safety.

3.4 Alternative Delivery Systems

There are growing examples of alternative delivery systems including contracting out of certain services and cooperative agreements with the not-for-profit and corporate sectors. Some arrangements have worked, while others have been problematic.

3.5 Expanding Service Demands

The parks and recreation field is increasingly being recognized as a vital element in affecting community health and addressing social issues. This places additional pressures on the field and often calls for a new set of skills, as practitioners work in integrated teams with other sectors.

3.6 Technology

The field has become increasingly sophisticated in the use of technology. Some elements include registration systems, bar-coded facility entry, user tracking systems, enhanced communications, and parks mapping and work tracking.

3.7 Broad Workplace Shifts

As more people are self-employed, have more flexible work schedules, or work part-time, there will be increased demands on day-time use of facilities and parks. There will be increasing use of teams and traditional and rigid job descriptions are becoming obsolete.

Implications of Organizational and Workplace Trends

- Departments will need to become more skilled at integrating the benefits and outcomes into both operational and strategic planning.
- The analysis of trends and their impacts should be integrated into organizational strategic planning processes to ensure they are considered in identifying strategies and priority setting.
- The development of a clear set of performance measures for the field will be required so that outcomes can be measured and communicated. The field needs to ensure that these measurements are relevant and are not simply output measures that are imposed by others.
- As the field partners with other sectors, it will need to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of mandates as a starting point in the development of partnership approaches. This includes internal partnerships at the municipal level.
- Partnering with other sectors in the provision of services will require a clear set of expectations and written agreements. The development of an overall set of partnership guidelines can support this.
- Working with other sectors will create the need for developing greater skills in community development, team building and social inclusion.
- Mechanisms will be required to allow those in the field to share information about technological advances and opportunities.
- As job schedules become more flexible and people retire, there will be increased demands for day-time use – especially informal drop-in use.

4. Infrastructure Trends

4.1 Aging Infrastructure

A large proportion of BC's recreation and parks infrastructure is aging. Many older facilities are deteriorating more rapidly than necessary because of a lack of preventative maintenance programs. The costs of renovating or replacing these aging facilities are significant.

4.2 Infrastructure Programs

Many provincial infrastructure capital programs were discontinued in the mid to late 90's, with the funding redirected to health. The Canada/BC Infrastructure Program needs adjustments to provide greater support for community facilities. It is likely that new provincial programs for recreation, sport and trails programs will be needed.

4.3 Facility Shifts

A clear shift from stand alone to multi-use facilities has occurred and will continue. This also includes a shift from separate youth and seniors' centres; these are now more commonly integrated into multi-generational facilities.

4.4 Expanded Facility Roles

There is a trend to including more partners in facilities including public health, libraries, and community services. Community facilities are also contributing more to tourism and economic development, and as focal points for community events.

Implications of Infrastructure Trends

- A careful analysis of the major systems of aging facilities will need to be carried out and a repair/retrofit plan developed. As systems such as roofs age, deterioration accelerates with time, so repairs that are put off generally become more serious and costly.
- Facilities of any age require a life cycle management plan to review the condition, and repair and replace systems within reasonable timeframes.
- Fossil fuel costs will continue to increase and systems to reduce consumption need to be considered based on payback. These include roof solar panels, heat recovery systems and motion sensitive lighting. Buildings should be planned with appropriate LEED principles and supplementary energy sources such as solar and geothermal. Water use needs to be reduced in shower, toilet, pool, and grounds/landscaping applications.
- Advocacy efforts at the provincial level need to continue to influence the criteria within the Canada/BC Infrastructure programs and agreements. The UBCM plays a major role in influencing these programs. In addition, advocacy for separate BC infrastructure programs for recreation, sport and trial programs should be a priority.
- Active transportation systems are a major contributor to individual and community health. Ideally, walkway and bikeway connections should be made to indoor facilities. At a minimum, adequate bicycle parking and storage should be provided.

- Care should be taken before developing stand-alone senior centres because of changing expectations of the coming generation of older adults. Seniors' oriented spaces should be grouped with other adult program spaces and include social elements.
- Stand-alone youth facilities have proven to be less effective in most settings than the inclusion of youth elements in multi-generational facilities. Again, these spaces should be grouped with gymnasiums and other active areas. The most successful youth parks have enough elements that they attract a range of youth groups and interests. These elements may include a skateboard facility, sport courts and social gathering spaces.
- Partnering with other sectors in recreational facilities requires careful planning and clear agreements. The most successful ones are those that involve program partnerships rather than simply being a landlord-tenant relationship.

5. Environmental Trends

5.1 A Growing Sense of Stewardship

The health of the environment remains high on the agenda of British Columbians. These concerns extend to water and air quality as well as the preservation of natural areas.

5.2 Environmental Activism and Activation

There are high public expectations that Parks and Recreation Departments will demonstrate high levels of stewardship and environmental sensitivity in their operations and planning. There is also a growing willingness of citizens to participate in projects to protect or restore sensitive environmental areas.

5.3 Interest in the Environment

There is a growing interest in learning about the natural environment. Outdoor experiences are growing in popularity, but tend to be done within shorter timeframes and closer to home.

5.4 Climate Change

While there is no agreement about the causes, there is an understanding that global warming and other climate changes are occurring. One clear result is the increase in the number of significant storms and other weather related conditions such as droughts and floods.

Implications of Environmental Trends

- The stewardship of natural environments requires sound and sensitive management practices; many communities have developed natural areas and urban forest management plans, and integrated pest management plans.
- The conservation and wise use of water needs to infused into park operations, including automated irrigation systems and drought tolerant, native plant selection.
- With the growing incidents of severe storms, municipalities will need to create

contingency plans including tree debris removal.

- There is increased interest and opportunities to engage local citizens and groups in environmental stewardship activities such as stream and riparian zone restoration and the removal of invasive species.

- With a heightened interest in nature and the environment, regional and local authorities may consider interpretive programs, signage, and environmental education and information programs.

- Environmental education should include an understanding of how the individual can impact on and support environmental health. This includes using active and public transportation, household watering and chemical use, and other practices.