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Chapter

Introductory Chapter: Outdoor Recreation - Physiological and Psychological Effects on Health

Hilde Dorthea Grindvik Nielsen

1. Introduction

The interest for creating this book started with a desire to communicate how valuable it is for a healthy live to be physically active outdoor in the nature or in parks. Outdoor recreation activities are adapted for pleasure, exercise, challenge, friendship, and a natural opening to become a part of the nature or be a user of public parks. Everyone can participate in outdoor recreation activities; it is not necessary to be a sports athlete to participate.

Outdoor recreation can be defined as any leisure time activity which is being conducted outdoor in which individuals engage themselves [1]. The wide range of activities are divided into two classifications: resource-based and user-oriented recreation [1]. The resource-based recreation is known to be performed in natural settings, while user-oriented recreation can be presented anywhere such as in parks [1].

Traditional examples of outdoor activities are camping, canoeing, caving, climbing, cycling, fishing, hiking, horse riding, hunting, mountaineering, kayaking, rafting, rock running, sailing, skiing, sky diving, and surfing. But outdoor recreation is in continuous development and now also includes activities as canyoning, coasteering, fastpacking, and plogging, to mention some.

People have been fishing and hunting since the start of human history. Today, some of the activities which were earlier executed for surviving are executed as a hobby or leisure activity, especially in the part of the world in which everything is industrialized and modernized. In these wealthy parts of the world, outdoor recreation is something people do in weekends or on holiday leaves. It is well documented in the literature that outdoor recreation activities, among several other factors, are important for a healthy life [2, 3].

Urban planning is a process for managing the physical development of cities. Even small towns are built according to a plan that defines the layout and location of city streets, squares, quarters, downtown areas, business districts, green areas, and residential areas. Central park in New York (USA), the Promenade des Anglais in Nice (France) and Hyde park in London (UK) are famous examples. It is a challenge to allocate available space in the cities for recreational areas, a demanding task for the city planners. Efficient utilization of limited areas is not easy in already over-crowded cities.

There are many health benefits with executing outdoor recreation activities. If you are lucky and live in a country/area in which the level of air pollution is low you get fresh air; moreover, it gives you a break from your ordinary daily life. Outdoor recreation strengthens the physical and mental health and increases the quality of life [2, 3]. A study from year 2000 shows that 90 percent of the respondents who

said they participate in regular outdoor recreation were more satisfied with their overall lives compared to the 60 percent who reported non-outdoor activities [4].

In countries where mountains and forests are easily accessible and not crowded with inhabitants and buildings, *e.g.* Norway, outdoor recreation has had a significant growth during the Covid-19 pandemic. Luckily, Norway, with its 5 million inhabitants, has large areas for executing outdoor recreation. The increasing interest for outdoor recreation activities does not, of course, involve everyone. In fact, those who are already physically active has a lower threshold to start with outdoor recreation activities in addition to the "ordinary" physical activities. Still, the interest for outdoor recreation has reached more people than before.

The climate problem can be considered the largest challenge for humanity as of today. Weather forecasts can in many places regularly deliver detailed information on levels of ozone, air pollutants, pollen, and ultraviolet radiation (UVR) exposure, along with warnings when too high or too low temperatures levels may become dangerous to health. This will in the future influence our behavior for outdoor recreation/outdoor physical activity [5] even more than today. More rainy days, too hot weather or too much ice and snow will limit people's habits for being physical active outdoor. Good planning and right facilitation of the outdoor activities are essential for a good and memorable outdoor experience and for the continued interest for such activities in the general population.

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