

Results of The Value of Recreation

The recreation program consisted of four interrelated projects. The objectives and results of each project are summarized below.

The first project aimed to derive the (economic) value of recreational destinations. Based on data from the Continuous Leisure Survey people's daily leisure choices were modelled using state-of-the-art econometric methods. The resulting models provide insights into the characteristics of recreational destinations that add value to trips and, as such, are able to attract people. A remarkable finding of the research is that the presence of cultural heritage, expressed in the number of monuments, positively influences the attractiveness of both (inner-city) urban areas and extra-urban areas. Hence, preserving cultural heritage is not only wise from a historical viewpoint, but also from a recreative-economic one. Another interesting finding is that the value of outdoor areas is positively affected by the landscape diversity. This means that the recreational value of areas with one (or several) dominant landscapes can easily be increased by adding a less dominant landscape type. For example, the Green Heart is quite monotonous, consisting predominantly of agricultural land and water. As such, it is amongst the least valued landscapes across the country. Its value to tourists could easily be increased, however, by adding elements of a less dominant landscape type.

One of the main objectives of the second project was to assess which kinds of people perform which types of recreational activities. Such knowledge is valuable to predict the effects of future demographic trends, such as the ageing of the population or the rise of single-person households. An unexpected but relevant finding of the research is that young and middle-aged singles are more likely to go out and participate in cultural activities than young and middle-aged couples, even if these couples do not have children. Given the expected rise in single-person households the demand for urban recreational activities will therefore likely increase in the future. As expected, older people mostly preferred outdoor recreation (e.g. a walk in the park). However, the research also showed that among older people who are single a strong preference existed towards fun shopping and going out. This means that, with the ageing of the population, the recreation market has to prepare itself for a (large) group of older singles who will be recreationally active.

The third project aimed to predict the effects of large travel costs increases on people's vacation choice. Such knowledge is valuable to predict the effects of pricing policies (e.g. a carbon tax). The research showed that if the travel costs increase people will likely choose destinations closer to home. Compared to other aspects of the vacation choice, like the duration, accommodation and travel mode, the destination was not found to be a decisive factor. This means that the utility loss associated with choosing a destination closer to home is limited and can, for example, easily be compensated by a longer vacation period.

The final project aimed to integrate the results of the first three projects and translate their implications to the policy practice. One overarching and important implication of the program is that a widening gap may be expected between the demand and the supply for outdoor recreation, especially in the Randstad. Due to current demographic trends increases in the demand may be expected. At the same time, the supply of green areas is (potentially) under pressure, as it is unknown if and to what extent municipalities (who are now responsible for spatial policy) will preserve existing green areas. Since people are generally unwilling to travel large distances to reach recreational destinations, this gap may lead to a large latent demand for recreation.