



# Outdoor Recreation and Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Iain Cowie - Rural Development Institute, Brandon University



## Purpose

This Masters Thesis project explores the role of green spaces as critical infrastructure for facilitating outdoor recreational opportunities which allowed for the maintenance of individual well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This poster presentation will outline the linkages between the core concepts of the study, highlight the methods and key findings, and offer insights and policy recommendations.



The study was based in Brandon and the surrounding area in Southwestern Manitoba situated nearby the Brandon Hills Wildlife Management Area (below)



## Methods

The study included an in-depth literature review used to explore the impacts of Covid-19 and its related public health measures on people's mental health and well-being. Core concepts such as well-being, outdoor recreation, and "friluftsliv" were also explored as well as operationally defined for the purpose of the study.

The literature review was followed by the distribution and analysis of a survey of 80 participants in Brandon and the surrounding area of Southwestern Manitoba assessing their outdoor recreational activities before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Literature Review

### Core Concepts:

#### Well-being:

A definition for well-being, for the purpose of this project, was drawn from a conception at the individual scale proposed by Dodge et al. (2012) as: "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (Dodge et al., 2012, pg. 230). This is illustrated using an analogy to a seesaw in which well-being is situated between personal resources (stocks) on one end, and challenges (flows) on the other.



#### Outdoor Recreation:

Outdoor recreation can be defined simply as "activities that people undertake out of doors in places where they can access nature or green areas, mainly as part of their daily or weekend routines" (Bell et al., 2007, p. 7). There is considerable evidence for the link between outdoor recreation and its benefits in terms of maintaining physical and mental health as well as overall well-being, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Friluftsliv:

Friluftsliv is a Norwegian philosophy that is closely related to outdoor recreation. This concept can be roughly translated and defined as "open-air living" and it is deeply engrained in Scandinavian heritage and even national policies (Smith, 2020; Hansen et al., 2020, p.2).

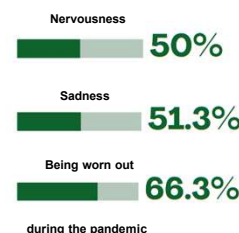
## Survey

In Spring of 2021, an online survey was distributed to 80 participants in Southwestern Manitoba. Survey questions were based around:

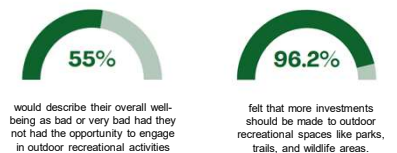
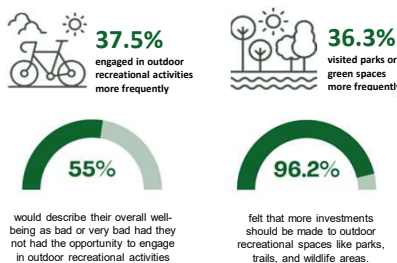
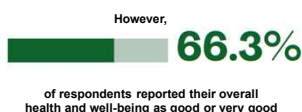
- Perceptions of the impacts of Covid-19 on participants' subjective sense of well-being before and during the pandemic.
- Participants' involvement in outdoor recreational activities. This considered type, frequency, duration, and estimated number of visits to parks and green spaces.
- Views concerning the role of outdoor recreation relative to participants' self-reported sense of well-being.

## Key Survey Results

Respondents reported increased feelings of



during the pandemic



## Hearing from the Respondents

Outdoor recreation spaces have become more important during covid. These spaces are some people's only form of outing during the pandemic.

I have come to appreciate the value of the outdoors. Not just for me and my family, but I have seen the happiness of others on the trails. I hope this continues post covid.

At times outdoor recreation activities and places were the only way we interacted with family and friends. It was also our only source of entertainment, and we hope to continue this. It was so important to our physical and mental health!

It feels more important to me now because it's so easily accessible and it's a way to escape the stress of the pandemic.

It has contributed greatly to my mental health to be outside, and doing something active before and during the pandemic to help get me through, especially while everything was locked down.

These spaces are critical to mental, physical health as well as general well-being. The mental health aspect of outdoor recreation proved very meaningful.

## Insights and Recommendations

- The results of this study highlight the role that outdoor recreational activities that align with the philosophy of friluftsliv played during the pandemic in helping individuals maintain high levels of perceived well-being.
- Parks and green spaces served as critical infrastructure during the pandemic and can continue providing a valuable resource for individuals to draw on in the aftermath of the pandemic as well as for future societal shocks and challenges.



The conception of well-being used for this study can be applied to outdoor recreation, green space exposure, friluftsliv as well as the challenges that people experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Qualitative and quantitative data overwhelmingly shows that supported further investments toward parks and other outdoor recreational spaces.
- It is recommended that investment be made toward access and maintenance of parks and green spaces

## Key References

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## Contact



Iain Cowie

