LEISURE PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION IN TWO EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

ABSTRACT. This paper compares participation in leisure activities in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and Thionville, France. Factors associated with participation in different types of leisure activities, including health, status, household structure, attitudes towards leisure, and perceptions about leisure facilities are examined for the two communities. The study also compares the contribution of participation in different activities to satisfaction in the two countries. Data are based on a questionnaire distributed to a random sample of 95 elderly individuals living in Luxembourg's urban areas and 100 in Thionville. In general, differences in factors associated with participation are greater between the two countries than among different activities within each country. The study concludes that elderly individuals derive different meaning from participation in leisure activities in Thionville and Luxembourg.

Key Words: Leisure, satisfaction, Luxembourg, France

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines factors associated with participation in leisure activities in two European communities and the contribution of leisure participation to life satisfaction. Questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected households with an elderly individual in Thionville, France, and the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. Three questions are addressed here:

1. What leisure activities are done by the elderly in each community?
2. How do personal characteristics and attitudes towards leisure affect participation in different types of activities in the two countries?
3. For which leisure activities is participation associated with satisfaction?

ISSUES

Participation in Leisure Activities

Elderly individuals participate in a wide range of leisure activities and for the most part make selections similar to the population as a whole (DeGrazia 1961). Studies that accurately pinpoint the amount of time spent on different daily activities are difficult to undertake, but there is a consensus that the most popular leisure activities for all age groups are watching television, listening to the radio, reading books and/or journals and visiting friends and/or family (McAvoy 1979; Riley & Foner 1968).
A second category consists of leisure activities that are relatively widespread but are less commonly and frequently done than the first group; these include participation in gardening, hobbies, voluntary associations, and travel. Other leisure activities are done by relatively few people and less frequently.

Factors Associated with Participation

While analysts are relatively clear about the types of leisure activities done by the elderly population, they do not agree on why individuals participate in particular activities and on what meaning different people derive from different activities. Three personal characteristics appear to be associated with leisure participation. First is being in good enough health to participate (Bultena & Oyler 1971). Second, elderly individuals need enough money to engage in the activity without embarrassment. Social class has been shown to influence the choice of activities, as well as the frequency of participation (Havighurst 1973; Havighurst & Feigenbaum 1968). Third, elderly individuals need family or friends with whom to do the activity or at least who will encourage participation. Elderly individuals who live with spouse or other family or who have a cohort of retired friends are most likely to find the companionship and reinforcement for leisure participation (Thompson & Steib 1961).

Other analysts claim that while personal characteristics may help in developing a profile of leisure participants, they do not help much in understanding leisure behavior (Kelly 1980; Smith 1983). Instead, leisure behavior of older people is considered a function of past experience and attitudes towards leisure: individuals who participated as a child and were encouraged by their parents are more likely to participate at an older age (Schreyer, Lime & Williams 1984; Sofranko & Nolan 1972; Spreitzer & Snyder 1983).

Participation in some types of leisure activities may be encouraged or hindered primarily by characteristics of leisure facilities rather than by users (Stover & Garbin 1982). Relatively high participation levels may be found among elderly people living near greater opportunities, such as those offered in a university or retirement community (Bultena & Wood 1970; Morgan & Godbey 1978). Participation may be hindered by perception that recreation sites are too dirty, dangerous, crowded, and hard to reach (Atchley 1984; Lawton 1978; Smith 1983; Toseland & Rasch 1978).

Participation and Satisfaction

A number of studies have shown that participation in leisure activities contributes significantly to life satisfaction, high morale, and adjustment to