

# Quality-of-Life Community Indicators for Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

# Social Indicators Research Series

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## Volume 43

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Megha Budruk · Rhonda Phillips  
Editors

# Quality-of-Life Community Indicators for Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

 Springer

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*“When we all do better, we all do better.”*

– Paul Wellstone

*For my parents Shripal and Aruna*

*- Megha Budruk*

*To my colleagues, for their support and  
inspiration*

*- Rhonda Phillips*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Rhonda Phillips and Megha Budruk

### Background

Within leisure research, approaches to measuring quality of life (QOL) have often focused on place-centered indicators such as the frequency of leisure facility usage. Lloyd and Auld (2002) propose that person-centered criteria such as satisfaction with leisure experiences or attributes of leisure need to be included as well in order to offer a more comprehensive view. An underlying assumption of place-centered indicators seems to be for “policy outcomes that increasing the number of facilities and services will automatically enhance people’s QOL” (p. 43). In contrast, Lloyd and Auld’s research found that person-centered measures are the best predictors of quality of life. This supports other findings that leisure participation improves personal quality of life in a variety of ways (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993). This includes “holidaytaking” or vacationing and its uplifting effects (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004) or increases in recreational/physical activity and improved well-being (Wendel-Vos, Schuit, Tijhuis, & Kromhout, 2004). These are just a few of numerous studies that show these positive benefits. So, we know that leisure is a vital component of quality of life.

Leisure and quality of life is a complex and fascinating domain of study and one that deserves much attention. An interesting point to consider is how the parks, recreation, and tourism field can inform ongoing research and inquiry into a person-centered perspective of quality of life and community development. As Crouch and Ritchie (1999, p. 189) point out, much of “tourism development entails community development. . . . If handled appropriately, tourism can become an important engine for achieving broader social goals.”

The latter part of the quote, “achieving broader social goals,” represents a shift in perspectives of what tourism and parks and recreational aspects of communities really mean and how these are valued. This desire for achieving broader goals is

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evident in more recent studies where indexes are constructed to gauge impacts that cover a wide range of community well-being considerations. For example, Urtasun and Gutiérrez's (2006) study of numerous Spanish provinces included such indicator indexes as health and health services, cultural and leisure opportunities, coexistence and participation, and citizen security in addition to more typical social, economic, and environmental indicators. Similarly, Roberts and Tribe's (2008) work in sustainable tourism indicators point out the importance of constructing indicators and indexes to address residents' and tourists' concerns and areas of conflict. These areas include resident access to recreational and tourist areas, promotion and protection of indigenous cultures, and ownership patterns of venues.

Community indicators represent one such way to bridge these areas of quality of life and broader social goals, especially when used to address areas of concern that are important to residents, visitors, and organizations – the stakeholders of our communities. Indicators as well as standards have long been used for management decision making in the leisure sciences. We see particularly strong evidence of their use within natural resource management, where environmental and social indicators are relied upon in maintaining resource and visitor experience integrity.

Since the passage of the USA's National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, community participation in governmental decision-making processes has received increased awareness and legal mandate. Community indicators provide one avenue for community voices to be integrated in the planning and management of common resources. Within the tourism management domain, more community indicator frameworks are being developed and used from the local and regional to national and multinational levels. Our area of interest is at this intersection – where quality-of-life domains and community indicators can be used for management of parks, recreation, and tourism concerns. It is not just about indicators or measurement of quality of life; however, it is about how these are integrated into “systems” that influence management processes and outcomes for the overall well-being of communities. Simply having indicators is not enough, it is their use and integration into larger decision-making and policy processes that subsequently influences personal and overall community quality of life.

## **What Is So Special About Community Indicators?**

A bit of context for community indicators is merited. What makes community indicators any different from other measures? Their specialness lies in the ability to help build an integrative approach – considering impacts in not only economic terms, but also the social and environmental dimensions. It is the ability to build a system or framework on valid indicators that conveys its real usefulness. These systems can then be used to aid decision making and set priorities within organizations and communities. Further, a community indicator's system reflects collective values and this is a powerful feature. If the process of identifying and implementing indicators is open and inclusive, i.e., if citizen and stakeholder participation are

embedded in the process, then the system will reflect collective values. Typically, decisions made on the basis of collective values receive more widespread support since collective values imply that goals or targets are more widely agreed upon. Finally, indicators' systems or frameworks represent a more comprehensive evaluation tool. Since these systems can be integrated into community development planning for an overall community or region's planning, it makes evaluation easier.

It is this ability of community indicators to be integrated as a system for gauging impacts across a full spectrum of considerations mentioned above that makes it beneficial to explore using them. Further, indicators incorporate both frameworks of performance and process outcomes, which serve to facilitate evaluation. When properly integrated into planning and development, they hold the potential to go beyond just issuing annual summary reports, to being utilized in the decision-making process. Widespread support or recognition of the role of parks, recreation, and tourism within a larger community and regional comprehensive planning context can be very beneficial for all.

### *A Closer Look at Indicators*

Just what is a community "indicator"? Basically, community indicators are bits of information that when combined provide a picture of what is happening in a local, regional, or national system (Phillips & Pittman, 2009, p. 285). They provide insight into the direction of a community: improving or declining, forward or backward, increasing or decreasing. For example, the number of new tourism-related jobs created might inform a community about the economic impacts of tourism development in their community. Combining indicators provides a measuring system or framework as mentioned previously to provide clear and honest information about past trends, current realities, and future direction, in order to aid decision making. Community indicators can also be thought of as a "report card" of community well-being, or a bottom line, similar to a balance sheet snapshot of a company. It is important to note that these systems generate much data and it is the analysis of these data that can be used in the decision-making and policy/program improvement process. There are four common frameworks used for developing and implementing community indicator systems in the USA. Each has relevance for parks, recreation, and tourism management and often a combination of the approaches is used to fully address needs and desires:

- 1 quality of life,
- 2 performance evaluation,
- 3 healthy communities, and
- 4 sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

A brief look at each of these illustrates the types of applications for community indicators.

## **Quality of Life**

Quality of life is reflective of the values that exist in a community. Indicators therefore could be used to promote a particular set of values by making clear that residents' quality of life is of vital importance. The advantage of this type of system is that if agreement can be reached, the system can be strong motivator for all types of community outcomes, not the least of which is evaluating progress toward common goals. The disadvantage is that measuring quality of life is a political process because what defines "good life" can vastly differ among individuals, groups, and institutions. See the subsequent discussion of quality of life for additional insights.

## **Performance Evaluation**

This type is mostly managed by state or local governments and organizations as a way to indicate the outcomes achieved by their activities. It is very beneficial as an evaluative technique because it provides regular (usually annual or semi-annual) reports on progress and outcomes. It is typically part of the annual budgeting process so that adjustments can be made for priority areas. Performance evaluation is used often in parks, recreation, and tourism management, particularly when gauging impacts of programs.

## **Healthy Communities**

This approach is gaining popularity as it attempts to cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for community health and well-being. It focuses on indicators that reflect health such as elder care, pre-natal and early childhood care, and youth – groups that often do not show on typical economic indicators concerned with working adults. It also prioritizes education and other human development facets of communities, including social concerns. These projects often redefine traditional measures of healthy conditions and typically build upon the World Health Organization's Healthy Cities program. This type of approach holds much relevance for parks and recreation management and can be seen in some applications that tie health policies with healthy living resources represented in parks and recreational resources.

## **Sustainability**

"Community indicator systems" can provide the mechanism for monitoring progress toward balanced – "sustainable" – development because community indicators provide information for considering the impacts of development in not only economic terms but also social and environmental dimensions. The concept

of sustainable development first emerged in the Bellagio Principles that include such characteristics as broad citizen participation, ongoing assessment, essential elements, and a guiding vision. Indicators are consistent with these principles. Indicators are just one means – but potentially a particularly effective means – of measuring progress toward sustainable development in a manner consistent with these principles. Indicators also offer the opportunity to go beyond standard indicators, such as gross domestic product, to fully assess well-being. The difficulty with the approach is being able to fully integrate indicator use into overall community planning so that sustainability can be a reality instead of rhetoric.

As mentioned, all of these approaches hold relevance for parks, recreation, and tourism management. Elements of each can be seen in many current approaches, and their applicability continues as the need to incorporate comprehensive community indicator systems expands.

### *Quality of Life Considerations*

Because it is a special domain, we have to look further into quality of life concepts and issues. First, despite the different approaches used for identifying, designing, and implementing community indicator systems, all share the common value of improving the quality of living of people and places (Wong, 2006). Because QOL is “embedded” within indicators, it is important to consider its dimensions. There are numerous approaches to defining quality of life. It is not an easy task to identify and define it, much less measure it. It is an inherently political process because it involves competing ideologies that define what constitutes a “good life” in different ways (Phillips, 2003). Often, the utilitarianism model is used to evaluate indicators (seen in rankings, for example, myriad annual “best places to live” studies). This model holds that individuals maximize their quality of life based on available resources and their individual desires and is driven by economic theory (Diener & Suh, 1997). However, there are limitations to its use as a guide for indicator development – for example there are concerns about its ability to be linked to actions and policies. Just because a community has a vibrant cultural or arts district does not necessarily mean citizens will be able to make use of it and thus positively impact their quality of life (Phillips, 2003).

Parkins et al. describe two other major approaches to defining and measuring quality of life, based on seminal work by Ed Diener and Eunhook Suh. The first is a normative approach based on commonly held beliefs or ideals within society and is most closely associated with the social indicators research tradition (Parkins, Stedman, & Varghese, 2001). Second, analysis is taken from the national or community level to the experience of the individual. It represents a union of social indicators research on objective human measures with a subjective approach of quality of life research (Parkins et al., 2001, p. 45). These approaches still lack the explicit reference to the issue of long-term balance; many suggest that sustainability is the bridging concept that will bring together human and ecological well-being together (Michalos, 1997; Parkins et al., 2001).

Another consideration is the need to look at “community” level quality of life, and this is more difficult. Is it simply a compilation of individuals’ ratings? Therefore, we have to look at another distinguishing feature of quality of life: QOL measured through different units or levels of analysis and QOL measured through subjective versus objective indicators (Sirgy, Rahtz, Muris, & Underwood, 1998, p. 281). There is long-standing controversy over the latter, particularly with subjective indicators being used in several studies of community level indicators. Early on, Shin (1980 in Sirgy et al., 1998, p. 284) concluded that quality of life at the community level has two dimensions, the first is the level of citizen satisfaction related with various community resources and the second is the distribution of this satisfaction across the citizenry.

As seen in this brief discussion, measuring quality of life is not without its challenges, and issues of level and type of analysis are key. Despite the challenges, measuring quality of life is vital as it is especially reflective of the domains of parks, recreation, and tourism.

## **Bringing It Altogether: Quality of Life and Indicators**

One way to bring together the diverse array of considerations in quality of life and community indicators is via strong planning. As mentioned, the ability to integrate indicator systems for parks, recreation, and tourism management into overall community, regional or national level planning is paramount to long-term success. And long-term success is all about sustainability and achieving balance. Since the early 1990s, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) has promoted the development and application of sustainability indicators for tourism destination communities, at the local to national levels. Their efforts have focused on the importance of incorporating indicators into planning processes and decision making. They explain as follows:

Sustainable development of tourism requires a sound planning process, as well as continuous management of the key elements that support tourism and its destinations (e.g., maintenance of assets, involvement of the community, involvement of tourism in the planning process for the destination). Indicators are an intrinsic component of the planning process (World Tourism Organization, 2004, p. 14).

The WTO further describes how a community can respond with a planning process, whether or not they have current plans in place. It is an excellent illustration of how to integrate community indicators into planning. Here is an excerpt of this valuable information for incorporating indicators into tourism planning:

- Where no plan currently exists
  - The procedure by which indicators are developed is analogous to the first step in plan development. Both involve the identification of the key assets and key values associated with the destination. Both normally involve the assessment of the actual problems, current or potential impacts, or risks associated with

development, as well as documentation of the major current or expected trend or events which may affect these.

- An indicators study can be the catalyst for development of a formal plan or planning process, beginning with identification of potential issues (pollution, loss of access, impacts of development in other sectors). Response will require some form of plan or management procedure.
  - An indicators exercise can help identify key element that must be included in plans, such as the resource base for the industry or risks to assets or product
  - Performance indicators can be defined relative to the specific goals and target of the plan; each specific development project can integrate performance indicators in order to measure the success of management actions in the implementation phase. This information will serve to decide whether corrective actions are needed and also can provide a tool for continuous monitoring.
  - Indicators defined to analyze actual environmental and socio-economic conditions at the initial phase of the planning process can become performance indicators in the implementation phase. For example, indicators determining the actual state of seawater quality at beaches or actual levels of community income from tourism will serve later on to measure achievement relative to these goals.
- When a plan already exists
    - An indicators study can assist in evaluation of current regional or tourism plans to determine where all of the key risks to sustainable development of tourism are covered
    - The indicators identification exercise can be applied to already defined problems, issues, and objectives to improve the provision of accurate data and information where needed
    - Where no monitoring system or performance measures are included in an existing plan, the indicators development process can assist in identifying and clarifying key area where performance measures are needed
    - Indicators discussion can often stimulate greater precision in redefining goals and targets

(Source: World Tourism Organization, Madrid: WTO, 2004, pp. 14–15).

In summary, it is not an easy task to bring together all the dimensions of the elements addressed in this book: quality of life, sustainability, community indicators in the context of parks, recreation, and tourism management. For example, quality of life can be difficult to measure yet we must try for it as this aspect is highly valued and influences both the individual and the overall community or region. We know implicitly that it has major implications for parks, recreation, and tourism management. At the same time, community indicators can reflect quality of life and often explicitly represent it. Sustainability underlies all – having desirable quality of life as well as excellent management practices and outcomes of parks, recreation, and tourism results in communities, regions, and nations that are balanced for the

long term. Indicator systems represent a tool to help capture the goals and targets for an area that are reflective of collective values and as such can be of great benefit.

## Structure of This Book

Exploring all these concepts and bringing them together has been an enlightening process that we hope will spur innovative applications in the leisure sciences. Drawing from a variety of disciplines and perspectives such as parks, recreation, tourism, planning, and community development, we are pleased to present the contributions of 18 authors in 11 chapters. This first chapter provides an overview of quality of life and community indicators and sets the context for exploring them in the domains of the leisure sciences – parks and recreation and tourism. In [Chapter 2](#), Robert Manning provides a review of indicators and standards in parks and outdoor recreation from the perspective of the environmental management field. His discussion of social norms and norm “intensity” has particular relevance for weighting the importance of potential indicators strengths.

Next we turn our attention in [Chapter 3](#) to a philosophical exploration of the meanings of leisure and their relationship to quality-of-life satisfaction. Ariel Rodriguez presents a framework of leisure’s three major meanings: leisure as free time, leisure as an activity, and leisure as an experience. Relating it to quality of life satisfaction underscores the importance of tackling the tough issue of measurement so that leisure can be included more broadly in indicator studies. As he points out, leisure has been a “slippery” concept throughout the quality of life and subjective well-being literature.

Drawing in a community planning perspective, Jeremy Nemeth and Stephan Schmidt present an indicator framework for urban public space management in [Chapter 4](#). Creating a comprehensive index that uses 20 indicators in four broad categories, the authors demonstrate how it can be used to help manage publicly accessible spaces in our urban environments. An important feature of the index is that it can also serve to engage local communities and help facilitate public participation in the management process. In [Chapter 5](#), Bill Field explores how to reconcile visitors’ expectations with quality of life dimensions. His exploration is in the context of quality of life indicators for multi-use trail planning in an integrated resource management process. Using British Columbia’s heritage trails as the test case, surveys based on expectancy theory are found to be a tool for measuring leisure quality of life values.

Beginning with [Chapter 6](#), we turn our attention to the tourism domain. Kathleen Andreck and Gyan Nyaupane have developed a tourism quality-of-life instrument providing a comprehensive method of measuring residents’ perceptions of tourism’s impact on quality of life. The authors’ identification of challenges and strengths in a variety of contexts is compelling and the subsequent analysis using exploratory factor analysis yields much insight. The instrument is a highly beneficial contribution to continuing efforts to integrate community indicators into tourism planning and allows for the inclusion of perceptions of life satisfaction which is the conceptual

goal of quality of life studies. This chapter is followed by a classic reading with a reprint of HwanSuk Choi and Ercan Turk's "Sustainability Indicators for Managing Community-Based Tourism" in [Chapter 7](#). This chapter helped foster the discussion of sustainability in the tourism context, by identifying 125 indicators via a panel of experts. The indicators are in the areas of political, social, ecological, economic, technological, and cultural dimensions. It brings to light the importance of indicators for community tourism development.

[Chapter 8](#) by Sam Cole and Victoria Razak addresses the question of how far can tourism development proceed before the way of life enjoyed by residents is threatened by over development. Using the Caribbean Island of Aruba, the authors develop a framework to provide a structure for discussion of tourism-related sustainability issues. A very valuable aspect of this framework is its inclusion of carrying capacity indicators and serves as the baseline for discussing other economic, social, and demographic concerns.

A tourism-focused quality-of-life index for Budapest is the focus of Lazlo Puczko, Melanie Smith, and Roland Manyai's contribution in [Chapter 9](#). The Budapest model introduces an approach to quality of life studies in the tourism context, bringing together five domains: attitudes toward traveling, motivations of the visitor, qualities of the trip, characteristics of the destination, and impacts of tourism. A comprehensive discussion of tourism and quality of life precedes the testing and discussion of the survey instruments for developing the model.

In [Chapter 10](#), a case of a southwestern USA mining town, Mammoth, Arizona, Donna Myers, Megha Budruk, and Kathleen Andereck design a destination-level tourism indicator system focused on sustainability. The research was conducted from the perspectives of residents and business owners in the town. The indicators thus provide a voice for stakeholders in tourism development, reiterating the notion that indicators must be reflective of collective values of those they serve.

This volume concludes with [Chapter 11](#), *The Trials and Tribulations of Implementing Indicator Models for Sustainable Tourism Management: Observations from Ireland*. Kevin Griffin, Maeve Morrissey, and Sheila Flanagan of the Dublin Institute of Technology outline the development of indicator model for sustainable management of tourism. The chapter includes a discussion on its design, testing, and implementation and how communities have been involved in these processes. The indicator model is quite comprehensive and represents an innovative application of community indicators and tourism planning and management, incorporating aspects of heritage, infrastructure, and enterprise.

A range of applications are evident in this collection of chapters from technical-led initiatives to identify identifying indicators (e.g., [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#)) to participatory/community-led initiatives (e.g., [Chapters 8](#) and [10](#)). These chapters illustrate how different situations warrant different approaches toward indicator applications. It is our sincere desire that you will find this volume useful to bring together quality-of-life considerations and community indicators in your own applications for inspired parks, recreation, and tourism management research and practice.