

Recent immigrants' recreation experiences of outdoor nature-based settings in New Zealand

AUTHORS: Brent Lovelock, Kirsten Lovelock, Carla Jellum & Anna Thompson

ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the very limited body of research that addresses recreational behaviours of migrants and ethnic minorities in New Zealand – with a focus on nature-based recreation. The study comprised a questionnaire that compared recreational perceptions and behaviours of migrants with New Zealand born citizens. Follow up in-depth interviews with migrants were undertaken to elucidate patterns observed in the survey data. Further interviews were undertaken with recreation professionals planning and/or providing resources and activities in natural areas. The geographical focus for all aspects of the study was Auckland and Wellington because of the spatial concentrations of migrants there. The survey data (N=433) revealed statistically significant differences based on migrant status, ethnicity and country of birth for a range of recreation-related variables. The key differences, based upon migrant status include: frequency of participation (migrants have higher percentages in both the low and high frequency of participation categories); recreation group size (larger groups for migrants); and recreation group composition (migrants mix outside their own ethnic group more). Significant differences were found by migrant status for all constraints to participation: cost of equipment, cost of transport, not having people to recreate with, distance from recreation areas, lack of knowledge of recreation areas, and lack of experience were all significant constraints to migrant recreation.

Migrants and New Zealand born respondents rated the significant features of natural areas (for recreation) quite similarly, however, statistical differences were noted by ethnicity and country of birth. More Chinese and 'other' ethnicities rated the presence of recreational facilities (e.g. huts, tracks, toilets, picnic areas) as being important than did Europeans or New Zealand Europeans. Chinese respondents rated water amenities as not being important. For the Chinese-born, and those from 'other' countries, the proximity of recreation areas to home was an important feature. Migrants and New Zealand born respondents had similar views on the personal benefits of nature-based recreation. Migrants, however, placed more value on this as a means of spending time with their families, and also socialising and creating contacts. Those of 'other' ethnicity placed high value on natural areas as places for children to recreate. Childhood use of natural areas was lower for migrants than non-migrants, and lower for Chinese respondents. New Zealand born respondents, however, tended to abandon more outdoor recreation activities than did migrants. Of the migrants, about 20% indicated that they had abandoned nature-based recreational activities since coming to New Zealand. However, just under half of the migrants in the study had participated in new activities since arriving here, tramping being the most common new activity. While few participants overall belonged to outdoor clubs/organisations (around 8%), fewer migrants than non-migrants belonged to an environmental organisation. There were no differences between the environmental attitudes of migrants and non-migrants.

The interviews with migrants reveal that those most likely to engage in outdoor nature based recreation in our regional and national parks are those that have had similar experiences in their countries of origin and where understandings of what constitutes the wild, the natural and the naturally beautiful (aesthetic) have been shaped by similar philosophical traditions. For those whose socialization has ensured little experience of these sites, who have very different philosophical traditions which shape very different perceptions of the natural, the wild and the beautiful, engaging with regional and national parks in New Zealand is unfamiliar and considerably more challenging. There have always been diverse opinions, perceptions, experiences and values ascribed to outdoor nature based recreation and the venues within which this form of recreation takes place. New migrants merely highlight how different these factors can be. Not all New Zealanders share the same perspectives on the value of wilderness in regional or national parks, understanding different perspectives will enable managers to communicate more effectively with our pluralistic society. The interviews with recreation professionals demonstrate strong recognition and support for enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities for migrant communities: for the migrants themselves in terms of personal and social outcomes; for integration goals and the host society; and for conservation of the natural resource base. However, participants emphasised that the communication and operational needs of the above are resource intensive in a recreation-provider environment that is already resource-challenged. Other key points to emerge were the need to find out from migrants *how* best to communicate recreation opportunities, and also the need to be creative in providing low-cost entry opportunities for migrants as key catalysts for ongoing engagement in outdoor recreation. But importantly, we need to know if we can sustainably cope with any increased (and diversified) demand from migrant recreation use - both in terms of the sustainability of the *overall* visitor experience *and* natural resource sustainability.