Introducing Leisure and Recreation
It’s All About Play

Leisure is the mother of philosophy.
Thomas Hobbes, British philosopher, Leviathan, 1651

Canada is an industrialized society in which most of us distinguish our work from our non-work time and our leisure from our non-leisure time.

This chapter begins by discussing why we should study leisure and recreation in Canada. It then introduces the leisure and recreation service industry. The chapter subsequently presents directions of leisure and recreation research in Canada, followed by an introduction to leisure and recreation in Canadian society. Finally, we discuss the relationship between leisure, recreation, and what it means to be a Canadian.

Learning Objectives
■ To examine why we should study leisure and recreation in Canadian society
■ To describe the benefits of leisure and recreation
■ To examine the academic discipline of leisure studies
■ To introduce leisure and recreation research in Canada
■ To explore the perceptions of Canadians toward leisure and recreation
■ To review the relationship between leisure, recreation, and Canadian identity

Key Concepts
■ Public goods
■ The Elora Prescription
■ Leisure studies
■ Technology transfer
■ Participatory action research (PAR)
■ Canadian Index of Wellbeing

Why Study Leisure and Recreation?
Leisure and recreation play a significant role in the development of individuals and in the sustainability of healthy communities. It is important for individuals, groups of individuals, and society as a whole. Over twenty years ago, Recreation Canada published an article compiled by Susan Markham that consisted of contributions from five retired recreation professionals: Roy Ellis, Lloyd Minshall, Bob Secord, Cor Westland, and Ray Wittenburg (1992). Each contributor noted that the leisure and recreation industry involves community development, engages volunteers, advances the needs and capacities of the entire human organism, and has unlimited potential.

A 2016 joint initiative by the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association reports that the well-being of individuals, their communities, and their natural and built environments continues to rely on devoting time to studying and understanding the role of leisure and recreation in our lives. As Concordia University professor Steven Henle states, leisure merits exploration, as it is “the one area of our lives where most people are able to make choices … it has an enormous positive impact in terms of increased socialization and enjoyment of life, reduction in sedentary lifestyles, and exposure to other cultures“ (Curran, 2008: A6).

The reasons to study leisure and recreation in Canada include the following:
■ To understand ourselves, other individuals, and the society we live in
■ To address our own leisure and recreation needs and those of others
■ To improve our quality of life and the quality of life of our community
■ To help us adjust to life stages and the life cycle
■ To assist in program planning and development, and to make a contribution to the leisure and recreation service industry and to society as a whole
■ To learn to value leisure and recreation and the role they play for the functioning of society
■ To become more aware of the role leisure and recreation play, and can play, in shaping Canadian identity

Perhaps one of the main reasons we should study leisure, however, is because it is recognized as a means to build a positive self-identity. Morden and Delamere (2005: 419) note that “leisure is an integral context of development, with particular importance for the development of a positive identity.” Leisure is an avenue to help us feel positive about ourselves, and the study of leisure helps us recognize not only how but also why it plays such a key role in shaping positive self-identity.