

Leisure Time

Leisure time is time that individuals have to voluntarily engage in pleasurable activities when they are free from the demands of work or other responsibilities. It is commonly deemed as necessary for basic survival, and has increasingly been referred to as a domain of the “good life” (Smale et al. 2010). Suggested metrics of this domain are the amount of time spent on specific leisure activities, types of activities, frequency of participation, and expenditures on leisure activities. Measures of work hours and continuous sleep time can be used as surrogate measures indicating the amount of time available for leisure activities. Enjoyable activities may also act as “restorers” that facilitate the individual’s recovery from stress as the result of positive social interactions or relaxation that lead to increased positive emotions (Pressman et al 2009).

Participation in leisure time activities has been positively linked to both physical and mental health measures (Williams and Patterson 2008, Krueger et al. 2009). Leisure time also provides for psychological detachment from work which in turn promotes well-being and productivity (Sonnentag et al. 2010). Leisure time activities also provide opportunities for social interactions through group participation (e.g., clubs, sports, religious organizations) and expand the size of social networks, enhancing social cohesion. Higher income has been positively associated with increased leisure time as it relates to more disposable income; however, in the U.S. the cost of the loss of leisure time due to increased work hours has continued to rise since the 1950s (Talberth et al. 2007).

Relationship to Ecosystem Services:

Specific activities individuals engage in can be linked to access and exposure to nature and greenspace. According to Korpela and Kinnunen (2010), time spent in interaction with nature is significantly correlated to both life satisfaction and relaxation, contributors to our subjective well-being and health. Among a variety of leisure time activities evaluated, exercise, spending free time outdoors and interacting with nature were the most effective activities for recovery from work stress (Korpela and Kinnunen 2010). These activities are closely tied to recreational opportunities and aesthetics, biodiversity, usable water (swimmable, fishable), and clean air. The U.S. downward trend in the amount free time afforded to individuals places increased value on the amount of time available outside work. The potential impact of outdoor activities and interactions with nature on our well-being exemplifies the contribution of ecosystem goods and services that support these leisure activities.



Courtesy of U.S. EPA