Access to green areas and the frequency of visits – a case study in Helsinki

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Background

- Close-to-home recreation related to health and wellbeing impacts are in focus because most people do not get enough exercise while doing daily routines such as going to work or school
  - → sedentary lifestyle
  - → obesity and other health problems, increasingly among children and young people
  - increasing health care expenses for society
Literature

- **Active living, active lifestyle**
  - Leisure Sciences 27, 2005: Henderson and Bialeschki, Gobster
  - Godbey et al 2005 (Am J Preventive Medicine)

- **Healthy places and environment & physical activity**

- **Nature and health & wellbeing; restorative environments**
  - Stigdotter & Grahn 2005, Korpela 2001, etc.

- **Access and supply of recreational opportunities**
  - Hörsten and Fredman 2000, DeVries & Zoest 2005
Study questions and setting

Relationship between recreation demand and supply
  ▪ How accessibility to green environment influence on participation in outdoor recreation
    ▪ Does the amount of green areas in the residential areas have any effect on the number of close-to-home visits?

▪ Case of Helsinki
  ▪ Capital and largest city in Finland
  ▪ 0,6 mill. inhabitants in Helsinki
Helsinki in Pictures
Helsinki Parks and Forests
Helsinki Parks and Forests

- In the Centre of town:
  - 320 ha of parks and 310 ha of urban forest
- In suburban areas:
  - 730 ha of parks and 4200 ha of urban forests
- 3500 ha of recreational areas outside city boundaries
Outdoor Map of Centre of Helsinki
Outdoor Map of Northern Helsinki
Data and Methods

- Population data N = 368, people living in Helsinki
- LVVI-data of Finnish population; sample 12 000

- Telephone interview and mail questionnaire

Variables

- Demand: Close-to-home recreation means in day-use distance from home:
  - Participation rate
  - Number of close-to-home recreation occasions
  - Distance to recreation site
  - Duration of last visit
Supply variables of recreational opportunities

- distance to park, km
- percentage of green areas
- forest area, % land area
- parks, % land area
- indoor sport and swimming facilities, number of units
- sport fields and playgrounds, number of units
- cafeterias and restaurants, number of units
Amount of green environment in Helsinki
Results 1

- Participation in close-to-home recreation
  - 96 % participate in outdoor recreation
  - Half of people visit outdoor daily or every second day
  - 5 % suburbanise and 10 % of centre did not participate during last four weeks

- Frequency of occasions/visits
  - In suburbs 169 visits, in Centre 137 visits (160 in average in whole)
Most favourite outdoor activities
Results 2:

- Accessibility

  - Distance to recreation site during the last close-to-home recreation occasion among Helsinki dwellers
    - less than 100 m for 66 %
    - 0.1-2 km for 14 %
    - More than 2 km 20 %

  - 75 % of destinations were in municipality recreation site
  - Distance to closest recreation site from home was 0.6 km in average
    - Skiing site 1.5 km
    - Swimming site 3 km
    - Hiking site 8 km
    - Picking berries and mushrooms 12 km
### Results 3: model of frequencies

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Results 4: Expected frequencies related to supply factors

- Green area 60%, distance 0 km: Frequency of participation/week
- Green area 60%, distance 0.5 km: Frequency of participation/week
- Green area 30%, distance 1 km: Frequency of participation/week
- Green area 25%, distance 2 km: Frequency of participation/week
Summary and Conclusions

- Good amount of green areas and easy access (short distance) increase the number of visits
- Differences in participation rates and frequencies were significant between dwellers in the Centre and in suburbs.
- Frequency in close-to-home recreation and physical activity matters concerning the active living and healthy lifestyles!
- The more green environment, the better opportunities for healthy life
Thank you!