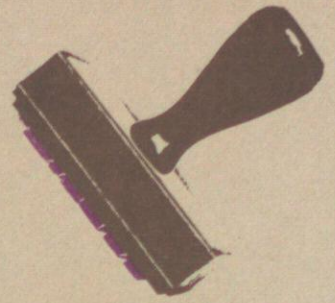




# BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

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COMMENT



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## REPORT ON LEISURE TIME PATTERNS OF APARTMENT DWELLERS IN THE CITY OF LONDON

### INTRODUCTION

As the modern North American city gains control of its task of providing services to *property* - sewers, roads, water - it turns its energies to supplying services to *people*. These human services have grown to include health, welfare and recreation. At one time seen as "extras", or beyond the scope of municipal governments, services in these areas are now accepted as essential to the quality of life in the urban setting.

In an effort to meet these emerging needs more effectively, provincial and federal governments have conducted major studies. These, however, have focused primarily on outdoor recreation patterns as related to the use of the provincial and federal park system. Few have dealt with the leisure patterns of the urban population and even fewer with recreation related to high-rise living.

This study focused on the leisure patterns of people in high-rise apartments, in the City of London, Ontario and utilized university students to work on the project. The study is the result of the combined efforts of members of the City of London's Planning Department and Faculty and students of the Universities of Waterloo and Western Ontario, with the BMR providing an analysis of results.

### OBJECTIVES OF REPORT

The project was designed -

- (1) To provide a basis for sound planning of recreation facilities, parks, open space, and programs.



- (2) To illustrate the recreational needs of people living in high-rise developments.
- (3) To provide some basic guidelines for developers in designing buildings and surrounding areas.
- (4) To provide the Public Utilities Commission with guidelines for planning programs.<sup>1</sup>

The Bureau has synthesized the report and presents its highlights, along with the Bureau's recommendations and assessment. A full document will be published in the summer of 1975 through the cooperation of the City of London Planning Department.

#### THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In the summer of 1974, the students conducted in-person interviews with high-rise residents in the City of London. A random sample of 2% of the total apartment population was surveyed. The interviewee was either the household head or a person 16 years of age or over. 31% of the respondents were from low rental buildings, 36% from medium rental, and 33% from high rental. The sample consisted of 900 apartment units, with the apartment buildings being selected on the basis of clusters. These clusters included several variables, including the height of the building, the rental rate, and the presence or absence of recreational facilities.

London's four geographic districts were used for this study - the Central Business District, Central London District, the Inner City and Suburbs. Of the population interviewed, 4% came from the Central Business District, 12% from the Central London District, 25% from the Inner City and 59% from the Suburbs, where there is the greatest concentration of apartments, particularly medium and high rental.

The findings of this study are an *indication* of the leisure time patterns of high-rise dwellers. The recommendations represent our guidelines for the City of London's planners and are not conclusive.

#### THE NATURE OF LEISURE PATTERNS

##### Popular Activities

Respondents were asked to list a maximum of 10 winter activities and 10 summer activities that they had done recently. These lists

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1. The Public Utilities Commission in the City of London is responsible for electricity, parks, recreation, and water.



are the ten most frequently mentioned summer and winter activities and the percentage of respondents engaged in them.<sup>1</sup>

<u>SUMMER</u> <u>MOST POPULAR ACTIVITIES</u>		<u>WINTER</u> <u>MOST POPULAR ACTIVITIES</u>	
1. Television	(55%)	1. Television	(75%)
2. Reading	(52%)	2. Reading	(54%)
3. Swimming	(42%)	3. Radio	(26%)
4. Radio	(29%)	4. Skating	(19%)
5. Walking	(20%)	5. Sewing	(19%)
6. Travel & Tennis (ea.	19%)	6. Movies	(18%)
7. Sewing	(17%)	7. Arts & Crafts	(17%)
8. Records	(16%)	8. Records	(17%)
9. Movies	(15%)	9. Cards	(16%)
10. Golf	(14%)	10. Walking	(15%)

*Of all the activities mentioned, 50% were carried out within the apartment. Popular at-home activities were T.V., listening to the radio and records, and reading. 35% of the activities occurred in the city. Of these, 5% were within walking distance. For the other activities, people biked, drove or used a bus. Buses, however, were the least frequently used means because respondents indicated the service was not reliable. They were used less than 2% of the time.*

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE AMOUNT OF RECREATION ACTIVITY

In order to determine those factors which seem to influence the number of recreation activities performed, respondents were asked whether they had added or dropped activities upon moving to the apartment, and if so, why?

271 of the respondents did fewer activities on moving to a new apartment - the reasons included:

- 36% no facilities/no space
- 20% no opportunity
- 12% transportation problems
- 6% less interest
- 18% change in personal status
- 8% other

upon moving to a new apartment, 295 of those interviewed did more activities - the reasons included:

- 36% increased facilities
- 22% increased opportunity (time, availability of activity, money)
- 7% better transportation (easier access to public/private transportation)
- 25% increased interest
- 7% a change in personal status (e.g. married, separated, divorced, new job, etc.)
- 3% other

1. Compare these results with the Ontario Recreation Survey: Tourism and Outdoor Planning Study, May-October/73, Progress Report # 2 (September 1974). Respondents to this survey listed those activities in which they had participated in the past 12 months. The priorities were somewhat similar to those in the London study.

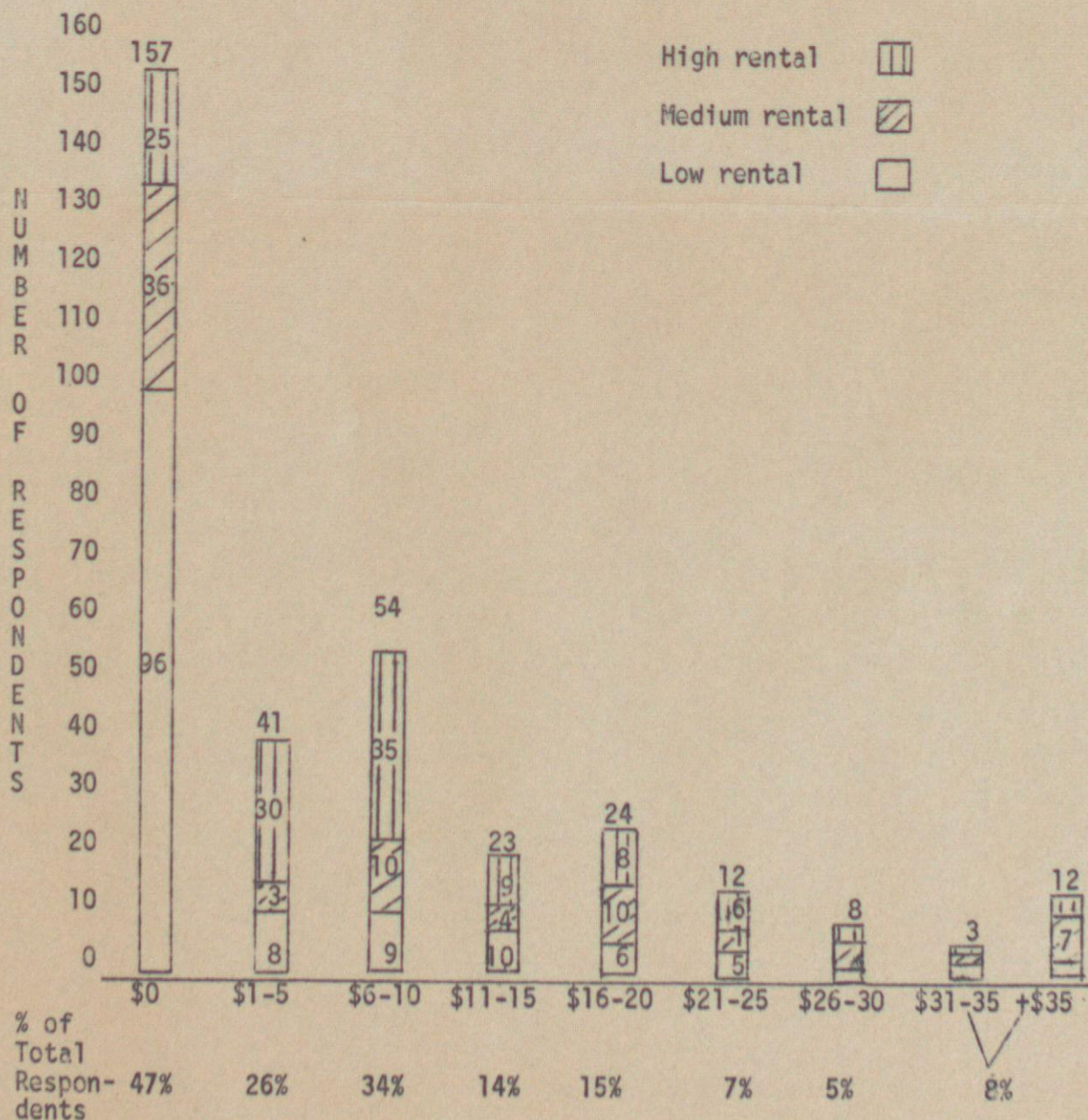


It appears that the leisure patterns of high-rise residents are most influenced by the availability/lack of facilities and space, opportunity (time, availability of the activity, money) and interest. A prime component of "opportunity" was time.

These factors may not only influence the recreation patterns of high-rise dwellers but also those of people across the Province. The Ontario Recreation Survey had similar findings.

The study also measured whether respondents would be willing to pay for apartment facilities and for open space. Those interviewed were asked: "If you could get your ideal of open space and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, how much money would you be prepared to pay for it per month, above the rent you are now paying?". The results are recorded below:

AMOUNT WILLING TO PAY ABOVE MONTHLY RENTAL





Several respondents said they would prefer a membership fee to an increase in rents.

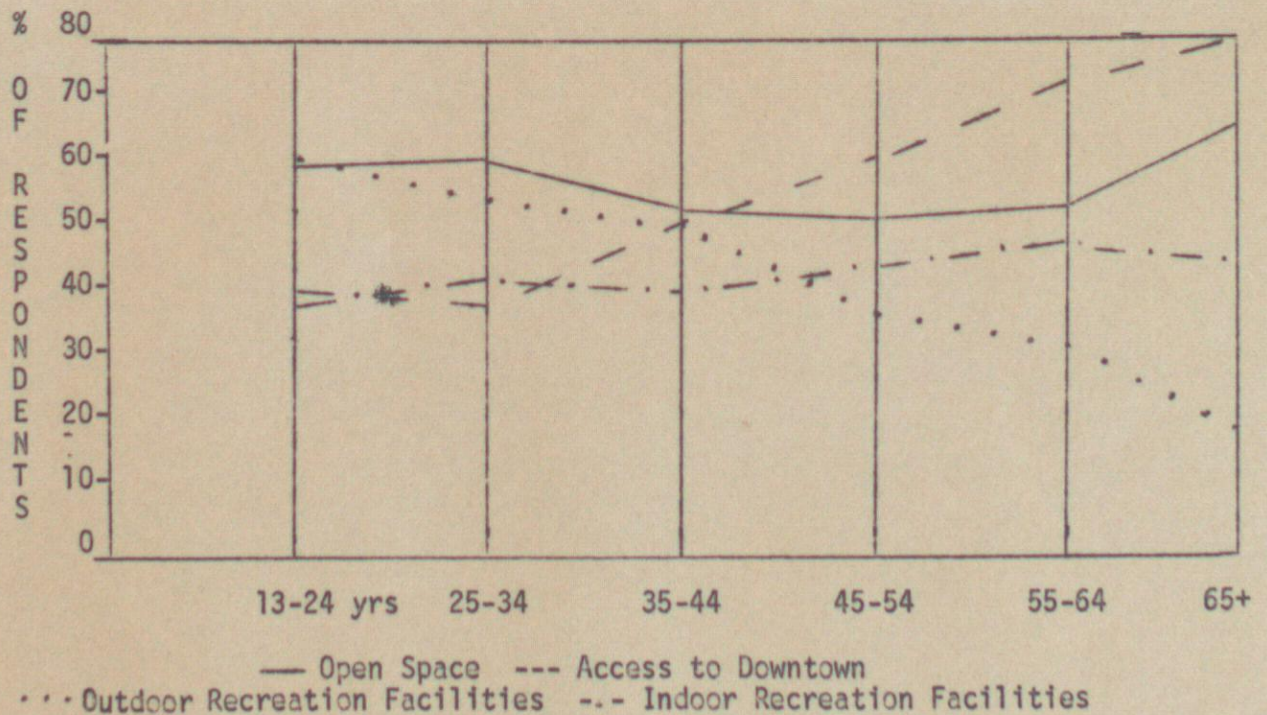
"Willingness to pay" seems to be related to "ability to pay". Although the study did not analyze this factor specifically, it is apparent from the chart that 60% of those who were *unwilling* to pay for recreational facilities, also were in low rental buildings. (The majority of these were also on low incomes.)

### PRIORITIES

Recreational activities are carried out in a variety of settings. To assess the respondents' preference, each was asked to rate the following in order of priority:

1. Open Space
2. Access to Downtown
3. Outdoor Recreation Facilities
4. Indoor Recreation Facilities

The priorities were also related to the age of the respondents, as shown in the following graph:





Outdoor recreation facilities were understandably less important as age increased. Their importance diminished from 60% in the 13-24 year bracket to 15% in the oldest age group.<sup>1</sup>

#### SUMMARY

The major type of activities enjoyed by high-rise dwellers were: watching TV, reading, swimming, listening to the radio.

The *number* of activities increased as facilities, time, the activities themselves, and money were available. One's degree of interest was also a major variable.

If City planners and developers wish to meet the latent needs of recreation, easy access to facilities and activities appear to be the best approach. However, increased facilities are costly. In the London survey, 52% of the respondents were willing to pay something above the monthly rental for such services. 48% were unwilling to pay more and of these, two-thirds were in low rental buildings and a majority on low incomes.

If facilities within apartments are increased, and rents are also increased from a low rental to a medium rental status, such apartments would be less available to those currently in low rental buildings (and on low income). Apartments with increased facilities and increased rents might meet the recreation needs of medium and high rental apartment dwellers. They would probably not meet the recreation needs of low rental dwellers and in the London survey, most low rental apartments had no recreation facilities.

Across the City, respondents expressed a desire for open space with trees, lawns, and landscaping. Benches, barbecue areas and picnic tables, and kiddie tot lots were also desired in this space. Respondents' activities in open space areas included walking, jogging, bicycling, concerts, and music.

Access to downtown (the Central Business District) was most important to those 65 years and older. It was desirable, generally, as an opportunity for walking and entertainment; going to the theatre, movies, concerts and clubs.

Outdoor recreation facilities were important to those primarily between the ages of 13-24 years. One can assume that these would be equally important to younger people as well. Recreational activities included: swimming, exercise (physical fitness), ice skating, skiing, tennis, golfing, tobogganing, picnicking and gardening.

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1. The Ontario Recreation Survey had similar findings. According to the government's study the number of activities in which Ontarians participate decreases as age increases.



Indoor recreation facilities were important to all ages. These included: TV, reading, records, radio, swimming, exercise, sewing, arts and crafts, movies, cards, etc.

#### THE ACTUAL USE OF PARKS, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

In contrast to the recreation activities evident across the City and by district, respondents frequently were unaware of programs available through the Public Utilities Commission and made equally little use of its parks and arenas. 77% of those interviewed had never attended a program. 78% used at least one park run by the Commission, 45% used at least two parks, 16% used three, 5% at least four. The parks least visited lacked variety in recreational facilities.<sup>1</sup>

This data may only indicate that city parks are not solely for active use, and that they fulfill a vital function in making up the *recreational environment* of the city - its feeling of haste or calm, of space and air, its smells, sights, and systems. Park usage is not always a sound indicator of a park's value.<sup>2</sup>

53% of those interviewed used at least one public or private pool, 13% used at least two pools, 3% used three pools. Generally, however, all the P.U.C. pools were used minimally by respondents. However, 330 respondents (37%) used a pool located within their apartment. Apartment pools seem to be most popular with apartment dwellers.

Although the P.U.C. has an active advertising campaign, those whom this campaign reaches are obviously not high-rise apartment dwellers. (At least not those interviewed.)

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The following recommendations and guidelines are those of the Bureau of Municipal Research, based on our study of the London survey and our reflections generally on the subject. They do not necessarily represent the views of the City of London Planning Department.

##### RECOMMENDATION #1 - OPEN SPACE

In all four geographic districts, open space was a major priority. Within that open space, people would walk, jog, bicycle, and enjoy the landscape. Benches and kiddie tot lots were chosen as desirable options within this area.

1. Springbank Park is one of London's most frequently used. It has the famous Storybook Gardens, a zoo and provides opportunity for canoeing or boating.
2. Satherthwaite (1970, p. 105)



The City of London has already made concerted efforts to preserve open space within the city, for example, its open space system around the Thames River.<sup>1</sup> To enhance this recreational environment an expanded system might be designed in those areas where open space appears to be less, as in the Central Business and Central London Districts.

In these districts, both public and private land could be made more attractive with trees and benches, allowing pedestrians to easily walk through the downtown core or to sit and watch people go by. Store and office owners could be encouraged through tax incentives and planning by-laws to provide these amenities. If networks of sidewalks were so designed, the feeling of open space, already present in London, would be increased in the downtown area amidst office buildings and stores.

#### RECOMMENDATION #2 - PROGRAMS

Few of those interviewed knew about or attended the Public Utilities Commission recreation programs. We suggest the Commission test ways of designing programs with the assistance of apartment dwellers.<sup>2</sup> It may be that apartment dwellers prefer to have programs/equipment available within the building. Arts and crafts, for example, might be initiated by the Commission in these areas. Residents themselves might be responsible for the project's continuation.

#### RECOMMENDATION #3 - PARKS

High rise residents seem to use the parks provided by the Commission minimally, yet there is an expressed appreciation of open space.

Parks or play areas do not have to be elaborate or permanent. In some cases, a small vacant lot could be temporarily leased and designed as a "vest pocket" park, safely protected from traffic.

Another alternative would be to use some form of tax incentive, encouraging owners of vacant city lots to maintain these as parks or some limited form of recreation facility until the land is developed. A Public Utilities Fund could cover possible child injuries.<sup>3</sup>

In areas where larger space is required, a road might be blocked off - it can then become a playground. (Children seem to enjoy the street more than the protected playground. Blocking off

1. "Upper Thames Conservation Authority, London Valley Lands Study", Project Planning Associates Ltd. (January, 1975)
2. A similar program operated during the summer of 1974. Possibly a year round program would be more suitable.
3. Silverstone, S., "Land Recycling for Open Space: More from Less", Plan Canada 1974, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp.33-34. Another alternative would be to provide blanket multi-peril insurance for all recreational areas used by the public.



a street for playing may turn a problem into a solution).<sup>1</sup> The Public Utilities Commission may wish to examine alternative playgrounds now being designed in larger cities.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4 - GARDENING

Gardening was important to 13% of the respondents. Interest in this pastime was shown by respondents from all age groups. It is possible too that this interest will increase as food costs rise.

We recommend that the needs of the different geographic districts be further tested to see if gardening plots are desirable in each district. Depending on the desires of the people in each district, plots might be rented out to individual families or shared communally by the neighbourhood. Both approaches are currently being tested in other cities.<sup>2</sup>

#### RECOMMENDATION #5 - POOLS AND LIBRARIES

Generally, it appears that recreational activities for apartment dwellers increase as facilities are available *within* the complex. However, increased facilities usually mean increased rents, placing such apartments beyond the reach of those low rental dwellers who have few facilities. We recommend the Public Utilities Commission test out the possibility of working with developers to design pool and recreation facilities to meet required specifications; that joint funding of construction and operation be investigated so that apartments with recreation facilities be within reach of middle and low income residents. Ideally the recreational complex should be designed with the input from neighbourhood groups as well (those who would also use the facilities).

1. There is evidence that traditional playgrounds are not exciting enough for children. Actions of swinging, sliding, running are fragmented into separate activities on a swing, slide, track. In more recently designed playgrounds, these activities are integrated. Children climb logs and timbers, leap into piles of sand - in a more natural setting. Friedberg, M.P. and Berkeley, E.P., Play and Interplay, The MacMillan Co., Collier-MacMillan Ltd. (Toronto, 1970).
2. Rental garden plots are presently available in Etobicoke and East York. 90% of the East York users are apartment dwellers; 60% of Etobicoke users are home owners. In both cases citizens rent plots from \$5 to \$15 for specific time periods. (The Toronto Star, February 21, 1975) In Manhattan, New York, garden plots are growing on lots where there was once rubble. These are city-owned lots for future development, leased to neighbourhoods on a month-to-month basis at \$1/month. The park-gardens are sponsored by the Parks Council of New York and are run by neighbourhood groups (New York Times, August 19, 1973, p. 29).



Since reading was one of the top favourite activities both in winter and summer, we also recommend that the Public Utilities Commission and Library Board investigate the possibility of kiosks or small centres for magazines/paperback books in apartment complexes. The library does not have to be elaborate and could be run by apartment residents.

In our discussion with the Director of the library, it was evident that mobile book services and library services to shut-ins provide needed human contact for those receiving the service. However, time taken to meet the needs of shut-ins could be a strain on the present staff. The Public Utilities Commission and Library Board might investigate using volunteer youth groups/ religious organizations for such services.

#### RECOMMENDATION #6 - GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPERS AND PLANNERS

Although no senior citizen homes were included in the survey, the needs of senior citizens are evident from the survey.

When designing apartments for senior citizens (65+), outdoor recreational facilities are *not* a priority. However, a community room, library and arts and crafts facilities, service stores (beauty salons, variety stores) should be designed *within* the building. Landscaping - trees, lawns - benches, and a gardening area should be included in the open space surrounding the building.

For apartments designed for younger couples and singles ages 17 to 34, pool, tennis courts, barbecue pits and picnic tables, and a child's play area with recreation equipment are important facilities. Day care facilities are essential to young families.

For all ages, cable TV is a desired option and should be included in apartment design.

Area residents should be involved, where possible, in determining the design of park space. However, leadership should probably be given by planners who have investigated the new forms of park design.

#### CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data and subsequent recommendations are somewhat limited. Only *one* indicator of leisure activities - the *number* of activities - was analyzed. The analysis did not cover intensity of activities. For instance, although a respondent might play tennis fewer times than she walks or reads, tennis may be the sport most important to her. Further analysis is required to determine intensity of activity. This information is available in the data collected through the interviews.



Although the study covered recent recreational activities, it did not deal directly with what people *would do* if facilities were available. Study planners felt that such a test of public opinion often produces erroneous data.

This decision, however, points to a major difficulty in studies of this type. The pattern of leisure activities which emerges is based on present trends. Recommendations are then geared to this. But in the Ontario Recreation Survey, it was found that as certain activities were readily available, the number of those who participated in these increased. For example, people in Northwestern Ontario participated more in camping, canoeing, snowmobiling, than those in Southern Ontario where possibilities for these activities are less. It appears that as facilities/activities are available, people use/participate in them. Suggestions based primarily on present usage do not usually account for this.

Through the present analysis of the data, we do know that respondents dropped or added activities due to the availability of facilities. To determine whether the respondent, in fact, used the apartment facilities requires a further analysis of the data. If this can be shown, the findings and recommendations regarding apartment facilities would stand on firmer ground.

A further study could also be made of the type and intensity of activities of respondents in buildings *with* recreational facilities and those *without* facilities. The influence of available recreational facilities on leisure time patterns can then be further determined.

Also, those interviewed represent only 2% of the entire apartment population in London. It might be helpful to test the priorities and options listed according to districts with other apartment dwellers in the area.

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