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*Outdoor Recreation Patterns  
among Immigrants from the FSU*

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## Summary

The last decade has seen a significant increase in the use of open spaces for recreation purposes. Studies recently conducted in Israel investigated various aspects of the demand for outdoor recreation, examining the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of consumers. However, these cross-sections do not capture the full complexity of the demand for outdoor recreation, since they do not give sufficient weight to cultural traditions and habits which depend, to the great extent, on the consumers' country of origin. Israel is characterized by great ethnic diversity, and each sector in the population has its own preferences in terms of outdoor leisure activities.

Immigrants from the FSU constitute a large market segment of the visitors to nature and recreation sites in Israel, and they exhibit various patterns of recreational preferences. Surveys recently conducted in Israel regarding the domestic tourism activity of various immigrant groups (Degani and Degani, 1998; Berman Institute, 1996) provide some information, but we still do not have sufficient details about the extent, character and structure of the demand for outdoor recreation among sub-sectors of different immigrant populations. We also lack information regarding the factors which influence the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of demand for outdoor recreation among immigrants from the FSU.

**The purpose of this study** is to characterize and analyze the outdoor recreation patterns of immigrants from the FSU (the effective demand), and also to identify and characterize the latent demand, i.e., the desire to engage in recreational activities.

From the subject population of the study, which constituted of immigrants from the FSU who came to Israel in the large immigration wave of the 1990s, we extracted two samples that reflect the structure and nature of the effective and latent demand. The analysis was conducted by means of two surveys, of different types. The first was a field survey conducted in April and May 2000 among visitors to JNF parks (Kiryat Ata, Aminadav, Gilo and Lahav Forest); the second was a phone survey conducted in November-December 2000 among immigrants living in the metropolitan areas of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beersheva. Since 2000, we have not conducted a repeat survey among the same population, but other

surveys that were recently conducted in JNF parks and forests by the same researchers suggest that the findings of the study are still valid.

## **Main findings**

The study reveals that immigrants from the FSU have considerable interest in outdoor recreation, which is reflected in the extensive demand — both effective and latent. Immigrants from the FSU visit nature and recreation sites even more frequently than native Israelis. In other words, this population constitutes a significant segment of the market for outdoor recreation. In addition, this population also exhibits considerable latent demand for outdoor recreation, thus suggesting even greater potential as a consumer of this type of activity.

### **1. The immigrant's familiarity with recreation sites in Israel**

The surveys revealed that most visitors were not familiar with the names of the sites they visited (mostly parks and woods). Their main source of information is word-of-mouth, though most of them are interested in receiving pertinent information in the Russian language through the mail or the media.

### **2. Outdoor recreation habits of the study population**

The times of year which are traditionally utilized by native Israelis for outdoor recreation (such as the intermediate days of Pesach) are not always utilized by the immigrants and do not constitute a major factor in their recreational behavior patterns.

In terms of their specific motivations, the immigrants give more weight to the factor of “seeking solitude in nature,” either alone or with family and friends, compared with the other visitors to the parks and forests.

As for effective and latent demand, the findings reveal considerable use of forests and parks (outside the city) for picnicking. The respondents also display an interest in outdoor art events, in active vacation activities and in visiting nature reserves. In other words, demand for these activities is not fully supplied.

### **3. Outdoor recreation habits of various sub-segments of the study population**

Identifying the motivation for visiting nature and recreation sites, and correlating this motivation with the demographic, social and cultural characteristics of the immigrants, is likely to be an essential component in the *physical planning* of the sites. For example, it emerges that immigrants from the Caucasus and the Central Asia ascribe considerable importance to the social incentive of the visit and display less interest in the natural features of the parks or woods. Older and more educated visitors exhibit more interest in nature and in visiting new recreational sites in Israel

### **4. Outdoor recreational patterns: spatial cross-section**

Our survey of immigrants living in Israel's four metropolitan areas revealed the following pattern in terms of number of visits to nature and recreation sites: the number of visits decreases as we descend from the north to the south. Immigrants living in Haifa made the largest number of visits, while those who live in Beersheva made the smallest number. Moreover, immigrants from Beersheva differed from the rest of the study population in other ways as well: This sub-group contained a smaller percentage of individuals who visit nature and recreation sites, and displayed the lowest frequency of visits in comparison to frequency of visits in the country of origin. A high percentage of respondents among the immigrants from Beersheva stated that the nature and recreation sites in the south are crowded and poorly maintained.

The low frequency of visits made by immigrants from Beersheva is partly due to the desert environment, to which the immigrants are unaccustomed. However, outdoor activities in the desert are a specialized form of recreation that is favored by limited population segments — individuals who do not necessarily live in Beersheva. Since our study focused on recreational patterns and perceptions of visitors to JNF **parks and forests**, it is interesting to note that from this viewpoint the immigrants from Beersheva do not differ significantly from other residents of the south. This is reflected in the findings of other surveys conducted by the same researchers in JNF forests in the south (especially in Lahav Forest). These surveys were conducted as part of a different study, which examined the quality of outdoor recreation services in the region. The findings of the present study can therefore

help to promote outdoor recreation for all the population of the south, which currently has limited options in this sphere.

## Main policy recommendations

1. Our findings revealed that there are insufficient sources of pertinent information for immigrants regarding nature sites, opportunities and outdoor recreation activities in Israel. We therefore **recommend** to address the issue of marketing: conduct more intensive advertising of hikes in the Russian media; distribute leaflets in Russian through the mail and in public areas frequented by Russian-speaking immigrants (e.g. “Russian” shops, community centers, clubs and *ulpanim*). In addition, we **recommend** providing leaflets in Russian at site entrances.
2. Since immigrants ascribe importance to “communing with nature,” we **recommend** taking appropriate steps in planning the parks, e.g., effective use of the natural features of the landscape, a wider array of hiking trails inside the woods and parks, etc.
3. In light of our findings regarding latent demand for outdoor recreation among immigrants, we **recommend** that efforts be made towards planning and producing art events in parks and woods (concerts, exhibitions, art workshops, etc.), and in developing and maintaining the natural spaces and landscapes in the JNF parks.
4. In light of the findings regarding the recreation habits of various sub-segments, we **recommend** giving attention to the functional division of the sites and to planning different elements in each site (parking areas, trails, attractions, playgrounds, sports fields, etc). Plans must consider the demographic-cultural profile of the visitors in order to satisfy the requirements and expectations of each population segment.
5. In light of our findings regarding the habits of a cross-section of the immigrants, we **recommend** developing recreation sites in the south: broaden the range of

available activities (attractions, sports activities, horse-riding trails, etc.), offer educational activities (e.g., involving visitors in anti-desertification activities), diversify the vegetation of the woods and parks and invest in planning and design, with attention to the specific climate conditions of the region.

By adapting JNF woods and forests to the recreation requirements of the various segments within the immigrant population, we can attract more visitors from this population as well as increase the attractiveness of the sites to nature-lovers in the general population, and broaden the range of recreation activities offered in JNF sites.

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