

Unpacking the impact of social relationships on the leisure mobility of Millennials

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Millennials, the generation born between the early 1980s and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010), have a profound economic influence because of the sheer size of their generational cohort (Cai & Stoyanov, 2016). Their desire for diversity and harmonious relationships (Graybill, 2014; Rainer & Rainer, 2011; Winograd & Hais, 2014) and work/life balance (Winograd & Hais, 2014) underscores the value they place on leisure and their preferences for experiences over material possessions (Twenge et al., 2010; Winograd & Hais, 2014). Relationships also motivate and drive this generation, as they view the world as a much smaller place, where friendship stays strong across any geographical borders due to technology and the ease of travel (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). Despite this open attitude towards travelling, car ownership is less attractive to Millennials due to technology, high costs of obtaining a driver's license, and environmental concerns (Sivak & Schoettle, 2013). Instead, Millennials prefer efficient transportation options (Barton, 2012; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Given the size of the Millennial cohort, these preferences are shaping urban living, particularly in small and mid-sized cities in North America (Morckel & Rybarczyk, 2015). However, car-oriented city designs pose a challenge to Millennials' non-automobile lifestyle (Speck, 2012). So while many eschew cars, they remain somewhat reliant on them, particularly for access to leisure.

While leisure participation ensures social equity and strengthens social capital (Montgomery, 2013; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), it should not be decoupled from leisure travel analysis (Ettema & Schwanen, 2012; Preston & Rajé, 2007), for urban mobility plays a role in identity formation and sense of belonging by facilitating social encounters (Skelton, 2013). As Gough (2008, p. 244) explained, “[young people’s] mobility in and between spaces of the home, the neighbourhood, and their wider environment, changes, which is an important part of achieving independence, competence and maturity and sustaining social relations with their peers”. Despite the connection between leisure and mobility, there is a lack of research on Millennials and how they navigate mobility constraints in the urban environments in which the majority of them live (Ettema & Schwanen, 2012). This chapter addresses this gap

by examining Millennial leisure mobility in the City of Nanaimo. More specifically, it explores the role transportation, via car and its alternatives, plays in accessing leisure opportunities for Millennials living in Nanaimo. To gain deeper insight into the perceived role of transportation in their leisure lives, the objectives for this study were to: (1) explore the latent demand of leisure (activities that were desired, but unfulfilled); (2) investigate whether transportation was identified as a constraint to these activities; (3) determine how Millennials negotiated constraints to their mobility; and (4) understand whether social relationships played a role in constraint negotiation.

Methods

The study on which this chapter is based included participants between the ages of 20 and 32 years who resided in the City of Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, for a minimum of six months. Study participants, who included professionals and students at Vancouver Island University (VIU), were identified using a two-pronged purposeful sampling approach combined with snowball sampling. To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, a convergent parallel mixed methods approach was implemented using an online survey, a Facebook group discussion, and a traditional focus group.

Located on Vancouver Island, Nanaimo is known for its green and lush nature and lower cost of living compared to its neighbouring cities of Victoria and Vancouver. Its diverse population of 90,504 (Regional District of Nanaimo, 2017) owes partly to VIU, which boasts a student population of 16,000, over 1,900 of which come from more than 80 countries. Nanaimo, like many growing urban centres, faces the problem of urban sprawl, which is the development of low-density neighbourhoods designed to be accessible by car (De Vos & Witlox, 2013). In addition, its proportion of people approaching retirement is larger than the proportion of labour market entries (Nanaimo Economic Development, 2016). Given the importance of Millennials as a driving force for development, mid-sized cities like Nanaimo need to understand their needs and interests to attract and retain them.

To operationalize leisure activities for this study, we adopted Munafò's (2015) classification of activities for leisure travel and slightly adjusted it to fit a Canadian context. The classification includes three different categories: (1) compactophile, which includes activities best enjoyed in an urban environment, such as dining, social gatherings, and cultural activities; (2) naturophile, which includes activities in nature, such as outdoor activities (both sportive and non-sportive), excursions, and hiking; and (3) other, which includes activities that either cannot be classified or are both compactophile and naturophile activities. To determine the type of leisure amenities available in the city and its surroundings, we listed locations for leisure in Nanaimo, including the downtown core, malls, VIU, home, natural spaces inside and outside

1 of Nanaimo, and other towns or cities on the island. Modes of transportation
2 used to access leisure opportunities were chosen based on the diversity of
3 possible locations and distances within and around Nanaimo. These
4 included: driving (alone); driving (with others, i.e. carpool); taxi; bus/coach;
5 walking; biking; ferry; and seaplane.

6 To collect quantitative and qualitative data, an online survey was designed
7 that listed structured (ordinal questions and Likert response scales) and
8 unstructured questions (open-ended questions). A Facebook group was
9 created and opened for two weeks for the virtual discussion on the topic of
10 accessing leisure in Nanaimo using the same survey open-ended questions.
11 A question was posted each week, to which group members answered and
12 commented on others' answers. The first question encouraged participants
13 to identify two leisure activities: one in which they frequently participated,
14 and one in which they desired to participate more often. Participants were
15 then asked to discuss the reason(s) why they did not participate in the latter
16 more often. The second question prompted the participants to share
17 their thoughts and opinions on the role of transportation in accessing
18 leisure opportunities in Nanaimo. After the Facebook group discussion
19 was closed, the focus group took place on VIU's campus using these two
20 questions.

21 Taylor & Francis 22 Findings 23

24 There were 195 valid responses from the online survey, 16 participants in the
25 Facebook group discussion, and 9 participants in the focus group. Over half
26 of the survey participants were female and between the ages of 20 to 24. The
27 majority were educated, and many were full-time students. Only 18% of the
28 respondents were born and raised in Nanaimo. Almost 80% of the respondents
29 had lived in another Canadian city before Nanaimo. In term of mobility,
30 the majority of respondents had a driver's licence (84%) and access to a car
31 (74%). Over half of them also had access to a bicycle (56%), and close to
32 90% lived close to a bus stop. Table 4.1 provides a summary overview of the
33 demographic backgrounds of the respondents.

34 All told, leisure access was found to play a critical role in place attachment
35 and relocation choices insofar as more than half of the respondents (64%)
36 agreed that being able to access leisure places influenced where they decided
37 to live. Within Nanaimo, transportation was found to present a constraint
38 to leisure for many individuals and many negotiated these constraints using
39 their social networks.

40 41 The role of car and its alternatives 42

43 In the survey, Likert-scale questions were designed to identify the role that
44 transportation had in accessing leisure. The two statements "I can easily

Table 4.1 Summary Table of Millennial Respondents Overview

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	116	68
Male	50	29
Transgender Female	1	1
Gender Variant/Non-conforming	4	2
<u>Age</u>		
20 to 24	87	51
25 to 29	60	35
30 to 32	25	15
<u>Educational Qualification Obtained</u>		
High school graduate, diploma or equivalent	64	37
Trade/Technical/Vocational training	15	9
Associate degree	13	8
Bachelor's degree	63	36
Master's degree	16	9
Professional degree	2	1
<u>Current Employment Status</u>		
Employed full-time (more than 20 hours per week)	41	24
Employed part-time (20 or less hours per week)	22	13
Participating in an internship or practicum placement	5	3
Full-time student, working	37	21
Full-time student, not working	46	27
Part-time student	7	4
Not employed, looking for work	7	4
Not employed, NOT looking for work	8	5
<u>Living Time in Nanaimo</u>		
6 months – less than 1 year	28	16
1 – 3 years	65	38
More than 3 years	49	28
My whole life	31	18
<i>Total Valid Responses N = 173</i>		

reach the places where I participate in leisure activities in Nanaimo” and “I can easily reach the locations of any leisure activities outside of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island” contradicted the statement “Transportation is a barrier to accessing my leisure”. However, opinion about ease of leisure travel within and outside of the city did not reflect that contradiction. Figure 4.1 illustrates the results.

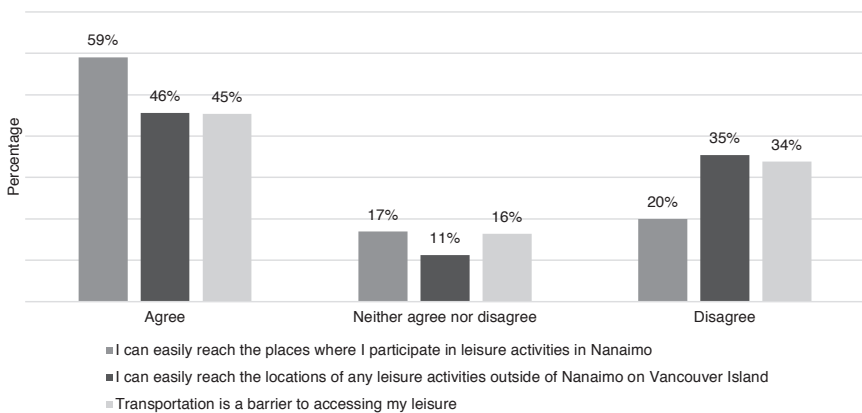


Figure 4.1 Millennials' opinions on the three different statements regarding the role of transportation in accessing leisure activities based on the percentage of respondents.

To better understand this contradiction, a cumulative odds ordinal logistic regression with proportional odds was run to determine the effect of having access to a car, a bike, and living close to a bus stop (within a 10-minute walk). The results showed that Millennials with access to a car were about 7.627 times more likely to consider accessing leisure in Nanaimo very easily than those who did not have access to a car. With a car, Millennials were also 21.926 times more likely to indicate they could access leisure places outside of the city than those who were without one. Those without a car were almost twice more likely to consider transportation as a barrier to accessing their leisure than those who had access to one.

These statistical findings showed that having access to a car was a determining factor to whether or not transportation was perceived as a barrier to accessing leisure opportunities. Having access to a bike and living close to a bus stop also made it less likely that transportation was a leisure constraint, but it was of minor importance compared to having access to a car. The qualitative results from the Facebook discussion and focus group supported these findings, with Millennials often citing the buses' limited routes, infrequent schedules, and lack of punctuality as well as the city's lack of reliable biking infrastructure as barriers to accessing leisure, particularly for naturophile activities. For instance, one Facebook participant wrote: "to get to Pipers Lagoon park from Westwood lake it takes about 1:25 hrs via public transit and if you want go to [Jack Point near Duke Point] there is no public transit going there so u have to have a car or take a taxi!!!!". This shared frustration, together with the mutual desire to access nature more often for leisure, created social relationships that helped some Millennials overcome the barrier caused by transportation.

Millennials, leisure constraint negotiation, and social relationships

Both quantitative and qualitative data showed that Millennials participated in compactophile activities ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.368$) almost as often as naturophile activities ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.440$). Both sets of data also showed that Millennials in Nanaimo shared a mutual desire for leisure, which is the ability to participate much more often in naturophile activities. Only 30% of survey respondents wished to participate in compactophile activities as opposed to 70% who wished for more naturophile activities. This desire was observed also by their peers and acquaintances as one Facebook group participant wrote:

I'm actually mind blown sometime when I talk with students at VIU realizing a lot of them who are not from Nanaimo have rarely had the opportunity to see Victoria or even Tofino! Unless you have your own way to travel (which has to be a vehicle), it is very limiting. Alternate options are just so few that I feel so many people don't have the opportunity to take in the island!

The theme of leisure constraint negotiation strongly emerged during the discussions, particularly during the focus group. A few Millennials did not negotiate and therefore gave up on pursuing their favourite leisure activities altogether. Those who sought solutions eventually established an interdependent relationship with two distinctive roles: Drivers and Riders.

The Drivers were Millennials who had access to a car, primarily through car ownership. Most of them moved to Nanaimo from a different place without a car. After a while using other transportation options, they resorted to purchasing their own vehicles. Such a purchase was intended to improve their access to work and/or school as the current bus system did not serve work schedules efficiently: "Many people who use bus systems don't work a 9–5 Monday to Friday job, having limited evening and weekend routes severely hampers people who work evenings/early mornings." By owning a vehicle, the Drivers were also more likely to access leisure places.

Millennials with this leisure mobility style did not only negotiate their own leisure/transportation constraint, but also that of their friends – the Riders. The study's findings revealed that many of their frequent leisure activities, both compactophile and naturophile, were highly socially oriented, that is, they either had to be done in groups (e.g. soccer) or were often done in the company of friends. This need created an interdependent relationship between the Drivers and the Riders when both groups attempted to negotiate their leisure/transportation constraints. Most Drivers used to live without a vehicle prior to their car ownership, which helped them empathize with their peers who did not have such access and automatically assumed their roles as

1 “the driver” when it came to planning leisure together. Sometimes, however,
2 some Drivers preferred to enjoy their car-granted freedom alone, but not
3 without some guilt:

4
5 I’m not as much as I don’t wanna be really nice and everything, there is a
6 certain time but ... you have only one hour yes, then ... because you have
7 your own time going so ... as much as I want to do with some friends and
8 everything, I’d rather ... don’t say to anyone I just go and do it.
9

10 Most of the time, participants did not mind picking up their friends for a
11 shared leisure activity. As one Driver put it:

12
13 If we wanna do something, I won’t just going to do it by myself maybe?
14 I’ll automatically think of bringing them along because it just becomes
15 habit. I don’t think I necessarily like “I should help them!” but this is
16 what we do. If we’re gonna do something it’s like automatically that I’m
17 gonna drive, which like I got used to because I know what it’s like to not
18 have a car and I don’t really ... mind I guess.
19

20 Besides the freedom to participate in their chosen leisure activities, there were
21 also constraints that came with a car. The most prominent one being the high
22 cost of owning a vehicle. Even though “you definitely pay for freedom”, the
23 costs associated with a car, such as gas, insurance, and travelling on the ferry
24 with a car besides the initial cost of purchasing a vehicle, were still considered
25 disadvantageous by the Drivers. Cars were very beneficial to access leisure
26 in Nanaimo, especially naturophile activities. However, for compactophile
27 activities, it might become costly due to the parking fee around downtown
28 and at the university. Furthermore, not all Drivers enjoyed being behind the
29 wheel all the time.

30 Despite such disadvantages, some Drivers were already “used to the con-
31 venience and the freedom that ... giving that up now would be really hard”.
32 Interestingly, many other Drivers shared that if the public transit system was
33 improved, they would consider reducing their car use and would not even
34 “mind selling [their] car[s]”. One Driver commented on Facebook:

35
36 It will significantly reduce my personal vehicle use. And if travelling by
37 bus is cheaper without sacrificing convenience, I will utilize this service
38 more. Plus I’ll have extra money to spend on things I love doing! Like
39 [Wildplay] or attending events at the port theatre ... or ice cream at
40 the waterfront.
41

42 For the Riders, the optimal solution to transportation constraint was “friends
43 with a car that [could] drop [them] to places that [they] wanna go”. Most
44 members of this group identified in the study were international students.

The majority of Riders' most frequent leisure activities were compactophile, and all of them wished that they could discover nature through leisure in Nanaimo and on the island more often.

There was a sense of guilt among the Riders when asking their Driver friends for a ride. One Rider said: "I feel guilty and I don't wanna keep ... asking the same people, 'Hey can you help me out?'". Because of this guilt, all Riders were greatly aware of their dependent role when carpooling. This awareness automatically created a mentality in this group which eventually changed their leisure behaviours – that is, their leisure choices depended on the Drivers as one Rider described: "My leisure life actually ... centres around other people's." The Riders volunteered to shift their leisure habits as long as they could access leisure. This behaviour was identified as a new constraint by the Riders themselves.

Furthermore, the Riders also lacked flexibility in their leisure schedules. One Rider explained: "If we want to go somewhere, we have to manage according to the friends' timing if they're available like if they're driving us." Some Riders' leisure constraint shifted from "transportation" to "difficulty planning with friends". When asked if the Riders would consider purchasing a car given that cars and their associated costs were reduced significantly, some Riders did not hesitate to say yes. There were others who had a different viewpoint. Similar to the Drivers, they would prefer public transit to private motorized vehicles if buses were more efficient. One Rider shared: "Even VIU has too many cars. As a prominent university on the West Coast and on Vancouver Island, we should promote a more [environmentally] friendly mode of transportation."

Both of these leisure mobility styles took form during the leisure/transportation negotiation process. The Drivers overcame the transportation constraint with a high monetary cost, particularly because most of them were still full-time university students. The Riders did so with less freedom and flexibility regarding where, when, and what they could do for leisure.

Discussion

While investigating the role of transportation in leisure access, not only was transportation identified as a structural constraint to leisure, but the theme of leisure constraint negotiation also emerged with the identification of two roles within a mutual relationship: Drivers and Riders. This finding confirmed Ettema and Schwanen (2012)'s strong emphasis on the important role that social influence and social networks played in leisure travel research within urban areas. In this case study, not only were social relationships reasons to participate in or part of a leisure activity, but they played an important role in leisure/transportation constraint negotiation.

Such relationship revealed the central role of friendship in the social capital of Millennials in Nanaimo. Social capital is defined as "all networks and social

1 connections that individuals accumulate throughout their lifetime, through
2 sharing of common values such as social trust and reciprocity” (Porskamp,
3 Ergler, Pilot, Sushama, & Mandic, 2019, p. 2). The drawing on friendship
4 to facilitate leisure activities between the Drivers and Riders illustrates the
5 importance of social capital in levels of mobility, which then results in leisure
6 participation or the lack thereof (Nettle & Dunbar, 1997; Porskamp et al.,
7 2019). Without the Drivers, Riders would have been challenged to participate
8 in leisure activities that were not accessible without a vehicle. And without
9 the Riders, some of the Drivers’ leisure activities may not have occurred due
10 to lack of co-participants. Every Driver and Rider depends on their friend-
11 ship with each other to acquire that last piece of the puzzle necessary for a
12 leisure activity to take place, be it a car or friendly company. Whether or
13 not this relationship is sustainable in the long run, however, remains to be
14 observed.

15 On the one hand, if Drivers keep feeling obliged to provide their Rider
16 friends rides despite the activities being enjoyable enough on their own, it
17 cannot be considered a fair exchange. Furthermore, car immobility based
18 on friendship may even reinforce a kind of immobility within social class as
19 Drivers may prefer to go out for leisure with others who can drive: “[Car]
20 drivers share with their ... friends and so cushion them from a world of ‘oth-
21 ers’ using public transport or walking” (Skelton, 2013, p. 478). By contrast,
22 improved public transit and walking/cycling infrastructure may weaken this
23 relationship and reduce the social opportunities offered by sharing a car with
24 friends toward a mutual leisure destination.

25 However, if transportation is not a constraint, it is possible that Millennials
26 could still connect with the community regardless of their vehicle ownership
27 status. Data in this study show that Millennials of different cultural, socio-
28 economic, and educational backgrounds desired to access nature in Nanaimo
29 and on the island more often for leisure. An improved public transportation
30 system may help bring this community together in leisure places.

31 32 **Conclusion** 33

34 Millennials are an important economic driver in urban environments.
35 Mobility is recognized as an important element in relocation decisions for
36 Millennials who are interested in navigating to and from various sites to pur-
37 sue leisure pursuits. Leisure and mobility are social activities that can gener-
38 ate a sense of belonging to communities and people. This study identified
39 the interdependent nature of Millennial relationships to access leisure expe-
40 riences in a mid-sized city in Canada. While we have understood that trans-
41 portation systems pose constraints to leisure, this study suggests that social
42 relationships provide individuals with a mechanism to negotiate these con-
43 straints. Future research should expand upon these insights to understand
44 the influence of transportation on community connectedness and the role

of social relationships in navigating to and from leisure experiences in urban environments.

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