

Walking and hiking as a way of life

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Abstract

Exercise usually takes place in leisure time. The benefits, mental and physical, of exercise are well documented, yet, many choose to remain inactive. There is a need for more research concerning those who continue to exercise. The purpose of this study was to understand more about the experience of those who are hiking and walking on Medvednica Mountain Nature Park near Zagreb, Croatia. To this end we interviewed 122 hikers and walkers on-site. We asked general questions about the walking experience on Medvednica. The findings center around three main experiences: 1. Nature and outdoors, 2. Benefits – Mental and Physical, 3. Interaction with others, and the self. These people have found a simple way to negate the impact of living in modern society. This research suggests that civic organizations should promote walking as a way of life.

Keywords: Walking, Hiking, Leisure, Nature, Qualitative Research, Croatia.

Learning about life on the Mountain: Walking and hiking as a way of life

Introduction

There is an interest in wellness across the globe. People want to know how to improve personal health. Many are interested in simple exercises that can last a lifetime. Modern life is fraught with time constraints, people demands, and busy careers that compromise and interfere with the needs of the body.

To this end, the purpose of this study is to understand more about the walking experience of those who are hiking and walking on Medvednica Mountain near Zagreb, Croatia. This is an important study because these people have chosen to utilize their leisure time to improve their health in a natural and simple way. We interviewed 122 people who were actually hiking and walking on the mountain. This on-site research provides a needed voice in recreation and leisure research, because during our investigation we could not find other on-site interviews with walkers or hikers. Also, this is the first qualitative study of exercise that has taken place with participants from Croatia.

This research brings together several dynamics - leisure and recreation, walking or hiking, being with others, as well as geography. The mountain is within the city limits of the city of Zagreb and easily accessible to a population of one million people. Walking is the number one choice of exercise for many people, and one of the simplest and most natural forms of recreation and exercise. The dynamic of being with others during walking or hiking adds a significant social aspect to their leisure time. According to one local professor of sports:

There are many hiking clubs and organizations that organize activities such as on Sunday or Saturday or weekend trips. In addition they may sponsor some mass activities as World Hiking Day or Sports for All or Day of Sport. Some parameter could be that 8 to 10 % of the population participate in some organized and controlled recreational activities. Participants are from all social classes. (Personal communication, Prof. Vesna Babic, October 2007).

Wesch, Milne, Burke, and Hall (2006) state “The physical and psychological benefits of physical activity are substantial and have been well documented, yet 57% of Canadians aged 18 and older, one third of the American population age 50 and over, and 66% of adults in the UK over 65 are considered insufficiently active for optimal health benefits” (p. 197). Because of this, there is a need to learn more about the experience of people who exercise as a way of life. The purpose of this study is to find people who are exercising in this way and learn more about their experience.

Literature Review

This literature review covers a variety of articles concerning walking and hiking. Much of the literature seems to focus on physical benefits of walking (Albright & Thompson, 2006; Fisher & Li, 2004; Kato et al, 2005; Larkin, 1999; Neis, & Partridge, 2006; Pagano, Barkhoff, Heiby & Schlicht, 2006; Stanish, Temple, & Frey, 2006; Ward, 2006; Williams & Stream, 2006). Notably lacking were specific articles with on-site interviews of hikers or walkers in outdoor settings. In addition most of the literature was based around walking; there was not substantive research on hiking. The literature review has the following themes: 1. Suggestions about walking – places to go, how to walk, and types of clothes, 2. Barriers to hiking/walking, 3. Being outdoors in the nature, and 4. The

internal and emotional dynamics of walking and hiking. Missing in the literature is research on specific countries and mountain areas.

Suggestions for Walking and Hiking

Although many authors discuss the overall positive benefits of walking, likewise many writers such as Warburton, Nicol, & Breden (2006) suggest that people should consider that walking not only promotes health, but also is a preventative for poor health. There are multiple sources of information with various suggestions about walking. This ranges from research on how robots walk (Alexander, 2005) to specific places for walking (Jermanok, 2006) to posture when walking.

Going beyond typical vacations, Jermanok (2006) wants the walker to understand the number of calories that may be burned during walking. He suggests that walking two miles per hour will burn approximately 170 calories, and three miles per hour will burn 238 calories. Warburton et al. (2006) suggest that the potential walker should not be discouraged because of the amount of time required for walking, such as the recommended 30 – 60 minutes per day. If the individual can walk briskly in 10 minute segments this can also count toward ones overall workout.

Many people are motivated to walk because of weight control. Fogelholm (2005) & Eating Disorder Review (2004) suggest that 30 minutes of walking per day or even 200 minutes of walking per week is not enough to lose weight. Rather the walker should increase to 250 – 300 minutes of walking per week in order to lose weight. Also, similar to Warburton et al. (2006) they suggest the benefits of walking can accrue if there is a minimum of ten minutes of brisk walking. For example, forty minutes of walking can take place in four segments of ten minutes each. Lastly, Rudner (1996) suggests the

walker should have comfortable shoes, Kirk(1998) states that walking outdoors may be more enjoyable than being in doors, and Nawaz, Wilkinson, Walker, Pockley, & Wood (2000) emphasize that upper body strength can also help to improve walking.

Barriers to Participation in Leisure Activity

Because of the potential of recreation and leisure, such as walking, to positively impact ones life, it is important to consider barriers that may limit this experience. The research in this review state barriers as no walking trails, fear of walking alone, and conflict with others.

Powell, Slater, Chaloupka, and Harper's (2006) research showed the lack of convenient places for recreation in lower income neighborhoods as a barrier. Similarly, Williams and Streat (2006) discuss how barriers to exercise and recreation are often unnoticed even though a lack of physical activity has become an overlooked public health problem. Vong's (2005) research in Macao, China showed the importance of access to leisure and its role in the community. Although it has been shown there is a positive link between leisure satisfaction and quality of life, this research showed there is also a need for communities to plan for and provide for leisure opportunities.

Coble, Selin, and Erickson (2003) emphasize that more women hike than play golf, basketball, softball, or tennis, and many express a fear in hiking alone. This fear can diminish the individual's leisure experience by limiting autonomy, personal choice, and concentration or flow. Their research stated five main fears in hiking alone: being hurt by another hiker, having injury, being lost, encountering wild animals or dogs, and a theft of car or things left in the car. The research indicated that learning to handle these fears will allow for solitude and silence during the leisure time.

Adding to this is Glotfelty's (1996) writings that encourage women to be alone in the wilderness. The author encourages women to enjoy beautiful scenery, to get back in touch with real nature, and to enjoy being free from stresses of city life. And the author suggests that women should consider how wilderness may help to provide emotional outlets that family, job, or home can not.

Conflict and its potential can be a barrier for many. Carothers, Vaske, and Donnelly (2001) recommend zoning users of facilities with a potential for conflict, such as mountain bikers and hikers. This zoning through education will help to separate these two different types of users in areas where they will not come into contact with each other. Another often discussed barrier is that of feeling overcrowded in certain places of recreation and leisure. Kyle, Graefe, Manning, and Bacon (2004) found the barrier of crowding is more an internal state and is often compensated for by adapting.

Lastly, Wesch et al.'s (2006) research showed how a lack of self-efficacy can be a barrier to exercise especially with older adults. This insightful study indicated that older adults with strong self-efficacy were effective in terms of carrying out exercise, as well as scheduling exercise.

Being Outside and in Nature

From taking walks and playing in the outdoors to serious lectures, Evans (1933) has been encouraging educators to take advantage of the learning potential in the outdoors. Researchers are discussing and investigating this positive and natural influence of being outside and in a natural setting during classes (Palmberg & Kuru, 2000).

Research has previously shown that wilderness has a restorative quality that outdoor physical exercise has a positive impact, and the individual usually enjoys the

challenge of living in the outdoors (Caulkins, White, & Russell, 2006). Also they discuss how social interaction in an outdoor setting is of a different quality, usually productive and helpful. Of special consideration is that there is often quiet, solitude, time alone, as well as a beautiful and natural setting while being outdoors.

Similarly, Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) investigated how wilderness therapy intervention effects change in problem behavior of adolescent clients. Findings indicate that physical exercise and hiking, primitive wilderness living, peer feedback facilitated by group counseling sessions, and the therapeutic relationship established with wilderness guides and therapists were key change agents for adolescents. For example, the participants (young teenagers) discussed how other campers come together for help, and that being alone in nature for reflection was an important aspect of this process. “By meeting in a wilderness wearing hiking boots, sitting under a tarp, and eating nuts and raisins, the counselor is perceived as more approachable and the therapeutic relationship is altered” (p. 435).

And, again, Caulkins, White, & Russell’s (2006) research showed the effectiveness of wilderness therapy may be due to time for reflection while being alone in the wilderness. There is also a perceived competence and a feeling of accomplishment, when the individual can perform certain activities outdoors. Participants in their research discussed an increased awareness, awareness of surrounding, self, and others as well as the feeling of timelessness.

The Internal and Emotional Dynamics of Walking and Hiking

Solnit (2001) expands on the dynamics of walking in this insightful book
Wanderlust: A history of walking:

Walking...is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart...Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. (p. 5)

Adding to this, Wylie (2005) has described walking in a variety of ways - a sequence of incidents and experiences, influenced by personal subjectivity and space, with sensations from anxiety to immensity. He also writes about encounters with others, the weather, visual exhilaration, and even examples of epiphany when walking. He emphasizes that walking can vary from precise pacing to ruminative leisure reflection and even include disruptive and anarchical gestures. But, mainly he emphasizes that walking is an interaction of self, others, and nature.

Important for this research, Wylie (2005) adds that solitary walking allows for one to undergo various experiences that otherwise are distracted by talking and interacting with others. He states: "Walkers ...very often find themselves in...a close visual, tactile, and sonorous relations with the earth, the ground, mud, stinging vegetation" (p. 239) and that "walking is not thoughtless" (p. 240). He continues these ideas by explaining that with no one to talk with, the solitary walker can become absorbed in various mental excursions such as memory, nature, and the sublime.

Walking and hiking is more than merely taking steps. This ancient moving of the body through nature also allows for the mind to interact with its environment and become loyal to certain areas (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004). The psychological dynamics of walking are stressed by Morris, (2006) who emphasizes that walking can be a powerful experience because it is slower than normal life and allows for freedom of

thought. Similarly, Markwell, Stevenson, and Rowe's (2004) research emphasizes how walking through historical areas can raise peoples awareness of their culture and surroundings.

The concept of walking and talking is the idea of shared experiences as discussed by Kyle and Chick (2004). They write about the importance of shared experience with friends and family during leisure time. This complexity is described in more detail by Anderson (2004), and talking and walking or narrating (Adaval and Wyer, 1998) can be an opportunity for expressing ones frustrations, or the 'letting off steam.' The walker gets a break from the monotony and modern stress of life. One can reconnect with the surrounding natural environment, get away from ones own personal site, and re-experience connection to a wider landscape. "Talking while walking also is a time to reminisce and be reminded of these events or to prompt other life course memories associated with the individual's relationship with place." (p. 258).

Methodology

This research was a basic qualitative design, which "seek[s] to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p.11). The purpose of this research was to learn more about the walking experience of those who hike and walk on the Medvednica Mountain Nature Park. To this end there were three guiding questions: Tell us about your hiking/walking experience, What do you enjoy about hiking/walking today at Medvednica, and Is there anything else you want to add about your walking/hiking experience at Medvednica? The interview guide is in the Appendix.

Perhaps Medvednica Nature Park can be best described by quoting the official brochure – found on their web site: [www.pp-medvednica.hr].

Medvednica Nature Park is in close proximity to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. Due to its numerous landscape trails, mountain huts, historical monuments, and recreational area, the central part of this wooded mountain gives an impression of a spacious city park. By walking down the educational trails, you can learn about some of almost one thousand recorded plant varieties, listen to the song of around a hundred bird types, and come across numerous insects and animals...The walk through the forest restores natural balance to life, and each moment spent in the Medvednica Nature Park enriches your existence. Welcome!

Because of the lack of research with on-site walking, we interviewed participants as they are actually walking or hiking on Medvednica Mountain Park. We trained five volunteers to assist with interviews, yet most were conducted by the two authors. In addition we met with these volunteers to answer any questions. The volunteers interviewed 20, and we conducted the rest, for a total of 122 interviews. Adding to this study, both authors are experienced hikers and walkers. One of the authors is a native of the Zagreb area, and has experience hiking, running, and walking on this mountain throughout her life. We started the interviews in November of 2006 and concluded in February of 2007.

All of the interviews took place on-site in various locations on the mountain called Medvednica Mountain Nature Park. We would ask a walker or hiker if they would be interested in helping to give us their opinion. We approached anyone who was an adult. After hearing similar responses, we determined we reached data saturation after

approximately 100 interviews. The participants often discussed the benefits of walking and positive aspects of being in natural surroundings. The interviewers carefully wrote down the responses to the questions on the questionnaire during the interview, later they transferred their information to a more permanent record. After each interview, the researchers would make additional notes concerning the discussion. The interview lasted as long as the walker or hiker was willing to talk. We felt tape recordings did not fit in with the natural environment and would disrupt the leisure experience of the walker. The interviews were eventually translated to English for analysis by both authors.

Our interviews were an informal conversational interview (Patton, 1990). This natural flow from the immediate surroundings permits an informal interview that takes advantage of the context of the moment. This also allows for observation as well as flexibility so the interviewer can adapt the interview to the individual. A blend of an interview guide and informal conversational interview was incorporated. Similar to the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1992) we intensely listened during the interview and wrote comments. "Treat every word as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject's way of viewing the world." (p. 98). Also, we tried to create an environment where the person feels at ease. Both researchers read through the findings several times, came up with their own results, and then collated on the final findings.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand more about the experiences of hikers and walkers on Medvednica Mountain. The findings center around three main experiences including being in nature and outdoors, mental and physical benefits, and interacting with others and the self [See Table 1.] It should be noted that the interviews

were translated from Croatian into English. The language was left in the original translation as much as possible to reflect authenticity and the voice of the participant. [Insert Table 1. here] The numbers on this table represent how often the participants referred to this particular experience.

1. Experience of Walking and Hiking in Nature

Participants discussed the experience of being in nature and the outdoors while walking. This centered around an appreciation for the “forest, trees, and woods,” the experience of breathing fresh/clean air, and the quiet. Also mentioned were the colors of nature, the various aspects of the mountain, sounds in nature, and searching for and picking mushrooms. One walker emphasized: “For me walking is connection with earth – that is something divine.” One mother stated while pushing her baby: “Not sure why it has this impact – but there is something about the nature, the wood, peace, quiet, it is green. The people I meet here, there is just a different energy here on the mountain.” Another woman brought together the aspect of hiking and being outdoors: “For me hiking is health, well-being, hiking fuels my life, forest is life for me.”

Adding to the experience of being outdoors, one walker stated: “I am here because the air is better. I love the forest; it is green in the summer. And the nature is really nice here.” Another similarly stated: “I like to come here because this is a beautiful place, I enjoy the hills it is not just flat. It is always beautiful, the trees, the flowers. And it is always different throughout the seasons.” One more hiker said: “Everything that is negative is just going out. By the walking, by the quiet. You make an effort, and you have the fresh air.”

The hikers seemed to really enjoy the quiet, the beauty of the trees, the hills, valleys, and the air. Concerning quiet, other words that were used were “silence, tranquil, and peaceful.” Another walker expressed: “Here is better air, breathing is better quality, and it is good relaxation. For me it is escape from city, enjoying in nature and I never smoke when I’m here.” One made the connection between nature and relaxation: “Nature relaxes me, makes me feel better, we always have some good tempo of walking. It is important for us, and I think it is the best way of relaxation. Hiking gives me better vitality, condition for life, and for living. Nothing can’t make any problem for me, everything is easier.”

2. The Experience of Mental and Physical Benefits

The main experience discussed by the participants concerned mental and physical benefits. They were convinced that this walking and hiking was “good for me,” others said “I feel great,” “it gives me energy,” “I am ready for work,” and “my mood is better.” This personal mental benefit is described by one walker: “...I feel good when I am here. I can feel it when I have been here.” Another walker said: “...We feel good physically and psychologically, I sleep well and healthy; it is pleasure, it is chance to see my friends and be with them, for me is very important knowledge that I do something for myself.” The walkers and hikers often mentioned stress relief, relaxation, positive experience, and a sense of escape.

This mental benefit was also described as “filling up my batteries.” One person stated: “It is an exercise for me. I enjoy good conversation and fresh air. I can fill up my batteries. I can throw out the boring when I am here. I just see how simple everything is when you look at nature. I look at what is around. I have a good walking shoe.” Adding

to this another said: “I keep doing that (walking) because it makes me feel good, I fuel my battery for the rest of the next week, I’m happy here because the people and their activities and habits are so normal, food is normal – domestic (homemade)...here is everything normal, health for environment.”

Some of the participants described their experiences as relief, specifically stress relief. “I love to be here today with my wife in the nature (very affectionate). This helps to relieve stress. I am not in the city environment, my cell phone is off.” Likewise another hiker stated: “We like to come here for fun, for sports, and to go with people. When you come here you feel calm, your mind is relaxed from nature. You have an escape from town.”

Another explained in more detail:

I like being in the nature, it is peaceful. This helps me to get out of the city and away from all the noise that is in the city. This can help me to deal with stress. I come here with friends, and we talk. We have fun. We hike to the top and then back down. I like being here; it is near the city. So, it is so convenient.

Stress relief may be related to relaxation; one walker emphasized how this helps him to relax: “I am coming here to relax and to get in good condition. I know if I am doing this I will have better physical condition. And also I will have a better psychology.” Another one emphasized: “This is a great place to relax. There is fresh air. I have been on Medvednica all of my life. I am born nearby...so for me to come here is also a remembering of my youth. I have a special feeling; I know every trail and every place.” One continued his dialogue: “I like being in the nature, it is peaceful. This helps

me to get out of the city and away from all the noise that is in the city. This can help me to deal with stress.”

There were several hikers who emphasized that hiking on Medvednica was something similar to psychology. Listen to this hiker: “I use this hiking instead of a psychiatrist. It is good for the mind and for the physical. In one way I am tired when I finish, yet full of energy. I am full of energy, it is filling me.” And a busy young mother pushing a newborn: “I come three times a week. (She is very happy, excited, energetic, smiling.) I used to go running before I had baby. Now I come here walking with baby in carriage three times. This is like a balance between the physical and the spiritual. This is psychotherapy.”

Participants also describe their experience on Medvednica Mountain as a physical benefit. They elaborate concerning walking, hiking, sweating, and many describe this activity as recreation. For example one walker stated: “I am here 2 – 3 times a week, and every time in the week I am here walking. I feel sick if I don’t walk or sweat.” Another person discussed exercise as well as other experiences:

It is an exercise for me. I enjoy good conversation and fresh air. I can fill up my batteries. I can throw out the boring when I am here. I just see how simple everything is when you look at nature. I look at what is around.

One hiker stated: “For me hiking means health and conditioning. I enjoy in walking. I wasn’t visit doctor since 1991.”

Similar to exercise, many participants discuss an experience of health renewal. One woman stated: “I know this is healthy, especially for bones, against osteoporosis. When I am doing this I am younger, because I can go. This helps me to be in good

condition for work.” One man said: “For me hiking is health, physical and physiological relaxation, joy, during hiking I forget all problems.” Two ladies walking together and carrying umbrellas shared the following: “This is a need for us to come here. We want to breathe. We feel healthy and happy when we are here. We are calm because we are doing this walking up Medvednica.” And adding to this one hiker stated: “Hiking is healthy, convenient, useful for soul, eyes, body.” Others mentioned the economics of hiking on Medvednica: “Hiking experience for us it is walking, it is everything you like, pleasure, it is the cheapest way out, and I enjoy the company I am with.”

3. Interacting With Others and the Self

Many discussed the interaction and connection that is made with others during hiking and walking. This includes those they are hiking with, usually friends or family, and may involve singing, eating, and drinking. However, the dominant part of this is simply being with someone and walking together in the nature – walking and talking. This idea of “walking and talking” was expressed in various ways. One hiker stated: “I love it! I feel better the whole week when I have been hiking here. I have better health and I have a better mood. I am here every Saturday about 10 am. When I am hiking I am talking with my friend about everything, politics, family.” Another walker stated: “I like to walk and to talk. We talk about business, about the nature.” One man with his young son in a child’s carrier explained: “I am here every weekend. This is a stress relief from a stressful week. And I am trying to learn my son to get with the nature.” Despite the loud crying from his son, the father was singing and talking with him. A young businessman explained more about this walking and talking:

This is a group of us that meets at 8:30 in parking lot every Saturday when we hike up here. This is something we can do with nature, something that promotes a peace. And it has a lot of different tracks (trails), and it is not boring, everything is a new experience. Food is very good in this hut. We talk and we discuss about our week. We talk about problems, and it is very help for us to do this. I have been coming here to Medvednica on regular basis for last two years.

Another hiker emphasized how talking can change with different hikers: “When we are here we are discussing politics and discuss all this, and we come with some solutions. Sometimes my wife comes, and that changes everything about how we talk and what we do.” And lastly, “When we are walking we are talking about our lives.”

Other aspects of interacting with others include people they meet or pass during hiking, as well as going to various mountain huts, especially for well known local food. Several people mention going with groups and singing and drinking together. Some discuss how much it adds to have their dog with them.

Very similar to interacting with others, yet somewhat different, is the interaction and connection the walker and hiker has within himself/herself. This is a personal, internal experience within the individual as he/she interacts with that which is around them especially nature and people. For example, some participants discussed thinking, clearing their mind, looking and watching the nature, something spiritual such as praying, and reliving past memories of walking with friends and family. Many participants discussed how during this hike on Medvednica they would forget themselves, or their concerns, or problems. One hiker said: “For me hiking is health, physical and physiological relaxation, joy, during hiking I forget all problems.” Going to another level

another walker stated: “I heal my depression here. It makes me internal pleasure and balance.”

Explaining this internal chemistry one walker stated: “When I do hiking I’ve got more energy, I feel better, easier do other things, easier solve problems. Hiking means to me realising of stress, health, physiological and physical well being.” This personal healing taking place on Medvednica is also explained by another walker: “After a really exhausting week, then on Saturday morning I am throwing out all this bad layers in my head and replacing it with fresh thoughts.” This concept of throwing out the bad and replacing it with something new has been repeated in these interviews. Although initially coming for exercise, these walkers realized that during this process of walking in nature, they are also involved in an internal psychological and mental healing. Similar to this, another said: “I can think about all my life and all the things in my life.” Another hiker remembered: “When you are here you leave behind yourself, all of your worries, and just everything.” Adding to this another hiker said: “during hiking I forget all problems.”

Discussion and Implications

The modern world seems to separate the individual from natural ways to exercise such as walking or an agrarian lifestyle (Kirk, 1998; Rudner, 1996). Sensing that leisure time is compromised in our busy life, some are looking for simple ways to participate in exercise or activities that can promote health (Jermanok, 2006). And, adding to this, there is a lack of exercise in most Western countries (Wesch et al., 2006). In today’s society people spend long hours sitting while at work, during transportation, and in school or various meetings. Complicating our remaining leisure time, Murphy (2003) discusses that free time is not necessarily a positive choice; one may choose their leisure time for

indulgent, wasteful, and even dangerous activities. This research has found walking and hiking as a natural, simple, and healthy choice for the problems of modern life. Also, hiking on an elevation such as hills or mountains adds to the intensity of this exercise and promotes more benefits (Jermanok).

As previously discussed, the physical and mental benefits of walking are well documented (Fisher & Li, 2004; Larkin, 1999; Neis & Partridge, 2006; Stanish, Temple, & Frey, 2006; Ward, 2006). Similarly, this research has confirmed these mental and physical benefits of walking and hiking. Among those discussed in interviews were weight control, stronger bones, higher quality of life, and better circulatory system. Close to the benefits that Williams and Streat (2006) describe, these participants emphasize mental benefits – especially less stress, less worry, and positive mental energy as a result of walking in nature.

Complimenting this research, Roberson (2003) also saw the positive influence of nature on older adult learning by setting an atmosphere of quiet, beauty, and natural surroundings. Likewise, Argyle (1996), Caldwell, Smith, & Weissinger (1992), and Caltabiano (1994) discuss the positive influence of active outdoor pursuits. Our participants, similar to ideas of Leopold (1970), found the activity of walking in natural surroundings to have a physical and mental impact. The participants in this study were continually discussing how much they enjoyed hiking and walking in undisturbed nature also reflecting ideas of Evans (1933), Caulking, White, and Russell (2006), and Palmberg and Kurer (2000). Perhaps this is a modern example of Russell and Phillips-Miller's (2002) discussion of wilderness therapy; these participants discussed “walking and talking” as if they were involved in their own personal self-help therapy.

Interaction with others and within the individual during walking was a repeated theme in this research. Solnit (2001) describes what many hikers were telling us: “Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together....” (p. 5) This interaction of the self with the landscape was a common theme with many walkers and also described by Wylie (2005). Similar to the ideas of Anderson (2005) our participants described how much they enjoyed looking at the nature, interacting with companions (Kyle & Chick, 2004), and thinking about the past week.

We expected to find many people who were walking or hiking on the mountain of Medvenivca. However we were surprised at the number of people who discussed the role of nature in this leisure experience. In addition we were surprised at the number of walkers we saw regardless of weather, especially in rain.

The implications for this work are that walking as a way of life should be promoted as policy among local governments and various civic institutions. More research in the area of walking around the world, as well as Nordic walking would add to this research. There is a need for communities around the world to promote walking and hiking by providing pathways within local communities as well as education concerning wellness (Vong, 2004). Similarly, Larkin (1999) and Pagano et al.’s (2006) discussion on a convenient place for walking and hiking was also an important concern for these hikers. Many of the participants live within a radius of five kilometers of Medvednica Mountain.

This research has shown that walking should be promoted as a way life. The implications of this are widespread and can affect every home, business, and community. For example, walking paths should be made available for everyone, and walking for a

minimum of 30 minutes a day should be encouraged in various ways. Similar to ideas of Vong (2005), crowded cities have a responsibility to provide access for opportunities of leisure, such as walking trails and biking paths.

As a result of this research, we have two conclusions. There are specific benefits, mental and physical for walking on a daily basis. Second, if the person can walk outside in a natural setting this will add to the exercise by bringing the individual close to the natural world. Lastly, one limitation of this study may be the cultural differences among the researchers as well as translations that occurred during this process. For example, in translating the data from Croatian language to English language some of the original meaning may be lost. Also complicating this is that our interviews required participants to stop their leisure experience and to become involved in a question and answer session. There were many people who avoided us; and for some it was obvious we were becoming a constraint to their walking experience.

We close with a quote by a 72 year old hiker who has walked Medvednica 1,131 times:

I'm a member of hiking club Matica, I start hiking 1978....I hike for health, it relax me, I don't like cars I walk always I'm passionate walker. I walk alone or with friend. During the hiking I thinking or talking, or I enjoy in peace...I've got training shoes for walking...Now it become my needs and habit, life style, I went 1131 times at Medvednica.

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Appendix

Medvednica Questionnaire

This research is in cooperation between Dr. Donald N. Roberson, Jr. (Cooperative Studies) and Dr. Vesna Babic (Kinesiology Fakulty). The purpose of this study is to learn more about the attitude of those who are walking/hiking on Medvednica.

Permission: YES I agree to be a part of your investigation _____
(signature)

Location on Medvednica: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Age & Gender: _____

*Note that the * questions are the main questions of the research. Make sure you ask these each time, and if you need more direction you can ask the others.

*Tell me about your hiking experience on Medvednica.

*What is this like for you? /What do you get out of this?

*Can you describe for me your typical experience of hiking on Medvednica?

How often do you go to Medvednica/per month or week?

At what time do you usually begin your hike?

And what time do you finish?

With whom do you usually go?

Is your tour walking up, walking down or both?

What do you typically do during this hike?

What other sport or recreation activities are you involved with?

What helps you to enjoy hiking to Medvednica?

Type of shoe?

Clothing?

How did you begin hiking?

Why do you keep coming back to Medvednica?

*Anything else you would like to say about hiking on Medvednica?

Interviewers Comments.

Table 1. Experiences of Medvednica Hikers

There are five main findings. Each finding has the three top experiences under that category also listed. The number refers to how many participants discussed this experience.

Nature and Being Outdoors 65	
Fresh Air	22
Quiet	15
Woods	16
Mental Benefits 88	
Good for me	36
Stress Relief	31
Relaxing	37
Physical Benefits 84	
Exercise	40
Health	30
Recreation	10
Interacting with Others 52	
Family	27
Friends	44
Others/Huts	14
Interaction with self 31	
Thinking	23
Looking/Watching	12
Memories	23