

## Enhancing the Accessibility and Visibility of Leisure Research

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The articles by Jordan and Roland and by Samdahl and Kelly encourage us, as leisure researchers, to step back and examine the relevance of our research and the role of journals and periodicals in disseminating this research.

The main conclusion arising from the Jordan and Roland paper is that very few practitioners and academic researchers read research journals. This certainly appears to be true for practitioners, but the majority of academic researchers did report reading the *Journal of Leisure Research (JLR)* or *Leisure Sciences (LS)* at least sometimes (see Jordan and Roland: Table 1). Jordan and Roland found fairly strong agreement from both practitioners and academic researchers that published articles should have some applicability to the practice of the profession and that all research articles should include a section about implications for practice. Very few respondents felt that research articles are easily understood or applied by practitioners.

Should these findings cause *JLR* to reassess its approach to the dissemination of leisure and recreation research? As with any type of publication, journals need to identify an appropriate niche in which to meet the needs of a defined readership. *JLR* has traditionally functioned as a theory-based scholarly publication meeting prescribed academic standards. This represents a valid and valuable niche in the spectrum of leisure and recreation publications, and is complementary to the roles of other journals and periodicals that locate themselves at various points along the theoretical—applied dimension, some with specific mandates to bridge the gap between empirical research and practical application.

There are also alternative forums in which published research from academic journals may be disseminated to recreation practitioners. The fact that practitioners may not read journals such as *JLR* does not mean, as Jordan and Roland suggest, “the existence of a non-influential body of research literature”. Publications or features are often designed specifically to convey relevant research findings to practitioners. Examples of these include the Research Update section of *Parks and Recreation* and the Look at Leisure bulletin of Alberta Recreation and Parks. Furthermore, educational seminars and presentations for a practitioner audience often draw on empirical find-

ings, providing contextual and trend information that may ultimately be more beneficial to practitioners than conclusions from discrete published articles.

Nevertheless, the findings of Jordan and Roland should focus our attention on the continuing need for dialogue between practitioners and academic researchers to ensure that practitioners are aware of significant developments in the leisure literature and that researchers are making some attempt to address key concerns of practitioners. Although there is a role for theoretically-based journals, there are opportunities for these journals to provide more practitioner-friendly features such as review articles that summarize key findings and trends in specific topic areas and address their implications for practice.

Samdahl and Kelly, in their analysis of publication citations, have provided a valuable overview of the broad field of leisure and recreation research and have raised some challenging issues with regard to the cross-fertilization of leisure research with other relevant bodies of literature. They report that articles in *JLR* and *LS* represent less than ten percent of the currently published leisure and recreation research. This information, which may surprise many *JLR* readers, should serve as a significant motivator to leisure researchers to increase their familiarity with a broader base of social science literature. Samdahl and Kelly's findings should also encourage researchers to familiarize themselves with current research material when drawing on "outside" sources. Citations in *JLR* and *LS* were often more than ten years old, a finding that raises concerns that leisure research may be lagging behind contemporary developments in social science theory.

There is potential for both leisure researchers and leisure journals to work toward increasing contemporary linkages with a broader literature base. As noted by Samdahl and Kelly, researchers' access to leisure and recreation citations has improved with relatively comprehensive electronic databases such as Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism Abstracts and Current Contents listings. Researchers are also recognizing the benefits of multi-disciplinary collaborative projects that provide exposure to contemporary work and trends in associated disciplines.

Research journals could assist in this process by providing researchers with resource material and in modifying the peer-review process. As an information source, many journals now list the indexes in which their articles are cited. Occasional research notes on new electronic tools could be published to alert researchers to the availability of relevant databases and Internet sources. The review process itself could evaluate more explicitly the timeliness of references and, where relevant, could increase access to reviewers outside of the leisure field who could provide critical perspectives from contemporary research developments in associated fields.

Samdahl and Kelly's finding that there is not a consistent body of citations within the key leisure journals would appear to be of less concern. Given the multi-dimensional nature of the leisure field and the broad range of topics that may be published in any given year, this situation is not sur-

prising. It would seem, on the other hand, that a tighter body of citations would be symptomatic of even more insularity within the leisure journals.

Enhancing the accessibility and visibility of *JLR* and *LS* in external settings would appear to be a greater challenge than ensuring current citations in these journals. Greater use of review articles, as suggested above, might also serve to increase the accessibility of these journals to external readers by providing contemporary overviews of timely topics in the leisure field.

Both the Jordan and Roland and Samdahl and Kelly articles highlight considerations that researchers should use to evaluate their contributions to the leisure field. Although the findings might suggest the need for major changes in the publication of leisure research, many of these concerns could be reasonably addressed by incremental changes that increase the breadth and timeliness of cited material in *JLR* and *LS* and enhance the accessibility of these journals for "outside" researchers and practitioners.