

The 1960s: A Pivotal Decade for Recreation Research

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For the most part prior to *Of Time, Work and Leisure* (DeGrazia, 1962) recreation was defined as an activity which took place during one's leisure (free time). Proponents cited its value as an enriching life experience motivated from the pleasures derived from the experience itself. DeGrazia's definitions of leisure, recreation and work changed that. Leisure transcended time, becoming an experience with enriching and satisfying potential. Recreation was relegated to the status of diversionary activity. This view had immediate impact. For academics there was a new set of concepts to explore, a new arena in which to play, and for many leisure appeared more esoteric and multi-dimensional than did recreation. Recreation and its technical side, the provision of activities and programs, could be left to those who practiced its art; leisure would be the basis upon which theories of behavior and motivation, constraints and desires would be built.

To understand this shift in perspective and interests one needs to put in context what was happening in the field of parks and recreation and its research efforts, for this was the Sixties, a turbulent decade with many social and professional changes. Before 1960 most research efforts in recreation and leisure had been of an inventory nature. The National Recreation Association had periodically conducted status surveys of park and recreation agencies, providing organizations and practitioners with a mass of data related to park and playground acreage, personnel and fiscal patterns, and program dimensions. Some sociological studies had been conducted exploring patterns of recreation and leisure behaviors according to age, gender, income and other demographic variables. Congress established the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, charging it with the responsibility to assess America's outdoor recreation interests and needs and determining the requisite resources required to accommodate those behaviors. The Commission completed its national recreation household survey in 1963, reporting to Congress its findings in some twenty seven volumes. As a result of this unique research undertaking (the only national recreation research study in the United States ever done by a governmental agency) Congress created the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. One of its mandates was to continue to monitor our nation's outdoor recreation behaviors, develop an outdoor recreation plan, and periodically update its planning process.

Change was everywhere in the mid-sixties. Federal legislation was enacted assuring all people, regardless of race, equal access to public places, including parks and recreation areas. The first wave of baby boomers were

in college, demanding that they be involved in formulating policies and procedures relating to their education. The park and recreation profession was developing standards for the accrediting of its academic programs and was trying to bring together its various major professional organizations into one body. The effort succeeded in 1966 with the creation of the National Recreation and Park Association. Two years later, the profession had its first research journal, the *Journal of Leisure Research*. Although published by NRPA, its editorial board was composed largely of non-recreation and park educators. Most were trained either as social psychologists, sociologists, or in one of the natural resource specialties. With little notice a division was occurring within the recreation education and research community between those who identified with parks and recreation, believing they were striving to improve a profession, and those who saw themselves as members of a discipline; leisure studies (Burdge, 1983). The latter group of scholars from divergent backgrounds were coming together to study the singularity of leisure, whereas the former were more concerned with the issues of professional practice, professional preparation and profession development.

Partially in response to an insatiable demand by the public for recreation experiences and partially in response to a national manpower study which suggested parks and recreation as a growth industry, scores of universities and colleges began offering a park and recreation major. Whereas less than one hundred universities had reported having a baccalaureate degree program in parks and recreation in 1960, by 1970 that number had doubled (Stein, 1971). The growth of these programs had far outstripped the ability of the profession to provide faculty trained in parks and recreation. Consequently, many universities turned to those with degrees in related areas who had an expressed interest in leisure studies to teach their recreation majors. Most of these faculty were more comfortable teaching about leisure, leisure behaviors and motives than they were programming, areas and facilities and recreation administration and their scholarship reflected that. Since their professional careers would depend largely upon their scholarship, they would write for the research journals and, in time, assume control of the profession's research journals and their editorial policies. Their view of research and scholarship would dominate. Studies related to practice would rarely be published and few dissertation advisors would recommend to their students to pursue such lines of investigation.

One of the characteristics of a profession is its development through research and practice of a unique body of knowledge. Where would medicine be today if its journals did not report on techniques of treatment, studies which demonstrated the value of one modality or drug over another? Such studies often lack reference to concepts or theories; rather, they emphasize consequence. To illustrate, there was a recent study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* entitled "Mosquitoes and Mosquito Repellents: A Clinician's Guide" (Fradin, 1998). The author wrote "This paper is intended to provide the clinician with the detail and scientific information needed to advise patients who seek safe and effective ways of preventing mosquito bites." Would

such an article have been published in our research journals, even though knowledge of the importance of mosquito repellents would be most beneficial to those who organize and conduct outdoor recreation activities? There are a host of problems which need to be addressed, issues of a practical nature such as how to successfully pass a bond issue, or what is the most effective means of serving a select population. There is also a great need for inventory studies, studies which enhance the expertise of park and recreation practitioners. Unfortunately, few of these studies will be undertaken by recreation and park educators unless there is some assurance that the results will be published in the profession's refereed journals. Consequently, parks and recreation finds itself research deficient when it comes to the development of a body of practice tested through research.

Given this history and the dynamics of the 1960s, it is easy to understand the divisions and fragmentation which have accompanied our growth. Those who identify with parks and recreation long for the same recognition for their research as is accorded the leisure study scientists. They often find their closest allies to be those in travel and tourism where inventory studies and surveys are accorded equal standing with the more conceptual pieces. They are grateful to the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* for its inclusive policies. The profession's efforts in accreditation and certification have also strengthened their academic position and when parks and recreation is viewed as a field of practice, few university administrators question the validity of its applied research interests. One has to wonder what might have happened had the *Journal of Leisure Research* been entitled the *Journal of Research for Parks, Recreation and Leisure Studies*.

The study of park and recreation techniques and methods of operation are as essential to the field as are the studies of leisure, leisure behaviors and leisure interests. The recognition of the centrality of the park and recreation mission requires that more attention be given to the issues of practice. Leisure studies has prospered because of its interdisciplinary quality. But leisure studies is not parks and recreation. The park and recreation profession may be doing itself a disservice by continuing to use "leisure services" when it really means the practice of parks and recreation. Both leisure studies and parks and recreation would be strengthened by the recognition that the two are interrelated but distinctly different entities, that each requires a scholarly base grounded in research which adds to its knowledge. For parks and recreation that is the knowledge of practice, whereas for leisure studies that is the knowledge of behavior.

There are two additional issues which need to be addressed by the recreation, park and leisure studies researchers. The first relates to diversity. In our attempt to better understand our under served and diverse populations, we may have fallen into the trap of studying those populations as exclusive entities, with unique behaviors and needs, without first determining if those behaviors and feelings are really different from other populations. Granted, there is much to be learned by studying a single group in depth, but in our haste to discover the attributes of diversity we must not forget that those

attributes are meaningful only when contrasted or compared to others. Normative studies are needed.

Secondly, there exists and has existed a void in park and recreation and leisure research related to public policy and the politics of parks and recreation. For some unexplained reason those trained in political science have not found this to be an area of interest. Likewise, there have been few historical studies, particularly of the more recent past and the effects of various social trends on professional practice.

When one looks at the twentieth century four decades seem to have played instrumental roles in the development of parks and recreation. The initial decade brought organized recreation into being through the playground movement. It was then that the Playground Association of America was established and cited by President Theodore Roosevelt as one of the more significant events in America's history of child welfare concerns (Knapp and Hartsoe, 1979). The second critical decade was the 1930s in which the federal government through its various programs of public works added to recreation's resource base, as well as underwriting its first national curriculum conference, the wellspring from which the development of programs of professional preparation in parks and recreation sprung (Sessoms, 1993). The 1980s heightened our interest in the private sector and entrepreneurship. It affected the financial structure of many public park and recreation agencies, making partnerships and cooperative agreements common. But it was the 1960s which set into motion the dynamics which have created our present research situation. It was then that our university system embraced parks, recreation and leisure studies as an academic field, leisure more than recreation became our conceptual base, we created our research journals, saw a division among our scholars and embarked upon our current agenda of research with its biases. We are who we are and where we are because of those events.

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