

Russell, R.V. (1996). *Pastimes: The context of contemporary leisure*. Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark.

Reviewed by

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Biographical Information

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Russell's Pastimes: The Context of Contemporary Leisure takes a refreshing look at the concept of leisure. The layout of the book is creative, and includes some unique chapters which are typically not covered in an introductory leisure textbook. The book contains an appropriate level of detail, informing the reader without being overwhelming. Russell has included some helpful learning features. For example, each chapter begins with a "preview" in which key questions are presented. Russell then responds to the questions based on the information covered in the chapter, which serves to prepare the reader for the upcoming chapter. Case studies are also included in each chapter, accompanied by questions for discussion. Two unique aspects of the book are the biographies and "research" sections. The biographies include background information on such people as Aristotle, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Jean Piaget, and John Muir. The research sections take a topic area related to the particular chapter and describes the research that has been conducted in the area. The reader is sometimes given a question or task related to the research findings. The topics range from compulsive running to Nicodemus, Kansas, becoming a unit of the National Park Service. The combination of these learning tools gives the reader an enjoyable and diverse reading experience.

The first four chapters lay the foundation for the book. Russell refers to this first section as "Leisure as a condition of being human-personal context." In this section she suggests that leisure helps shape who we are as human beings. I found Chapter 1 to be particularly interesting given the focus on the humanities and ancient history. Russell takes the view that "leisure is part of the humanities" and considers the humanities as a way to "interpret the meaning of leisure in life." She examines leisure as it relates to literature, art, and music. This is followed by a brief review of leisure in our history. Russell begins this section with reference to Africa as "the birthplace of the human race" and continues to discuss the major historical periods. The chapter ends by examining today's meaning of leisure. She categories leisure definitions into the standard introductory leisure textbook classifications of free time, activity, and attitude. Chapter 2 then "goes beyond leisure's definition" to focus on the "variety of ways leisure is felt." Although

this chapter presents the common ideas associated with the definitions of leisure, Russell compliments this information with interesting connections to humor, rituals, and spirituality.

Chapter 3 is titled “explanations and speculations” and here Russell examines the questions, “What influences our pastime choices?” Her response to this question is that there are multiple explanations because leisure behavior is “complex and dynamic.” She explores the work of Wilensky, Dumazedier, Kelly, Driver, Neulinger, Csikszentmihalyi, and Mannell in an effort to explain the meaning, conditions, and function of leisure. Prior to discussing their work, however, she provides the reader with a brief explanation of theory and theory building. The final chapter in this section (Chapter 4) examines leisure and human development. Russell takes a life span development approach as she addresses questions regarding the continuities and changes across the life span as they relate to leisure. She examines how cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development are connected to leisure and by doing so, she demonstrates that leisure is part of our entire life.

Part two of the book examines “Leisure as a cultural mirror-societal context.” This is one of the more unique sections of the book. In Chapter 5 Russell asks, “What is leisure’s cultural significance?” and then responds by stating that “leisure is so much a part of the patterns of life that it can describe how cultures are both similar and different.” Russell begins by considering the earliest cultures, Paleolithic peoples, and makes the case that these people may have been the “original affluent society.” She goes on to examine leisure in “technological” cultures, such as Japan, Germany, and the United States and in “developing” countries, such as Poland, Malaysia, and Costa Rica.

Chapter 6 examines popular culture, looking specifically at television, the “hub of popular culture,” films, and printed media (i.e., newspapers, magazines, books). This format is similar to what Kelly (1996) uses in his introductory book *Leisure*. After Russell explores the most prevalent forms of popular culture in modern Western societies, she discusses the “thread that weaves these popular cultures together: the roles of entertainment and amusement in modern society.” As an example, she reflects back on the role of amusement parks in our society, and includes a biography on Walt Disney.

Russell devotes Chapter 7 to the topic of “taboo recreation.” This topic, which is extremely relevant to our field, has received attention in other introductory texts. In this chapter Russell presents the “negative outcomes” that can be associated with leisure. She defines taboo recreation as “those pastimes that are typically forbidden by law, custom, or belief” and that are “delinquent activities that bring pleasure or escape to the participant.” Russell’s examples of taboo recreation include substance abuse, gambling, vandalism, and harmful sex. She uses the concepts of anomie and differential association in an attempt to explain such activities. The final chapter in this section is titled “Of time and work” and in it Russell takes an interesting look at the interrelationships between work, time, and leisure. She examines the different types of time (i.e., cyclical time, mechanical time, biological time, cultural time) as well as how time relates to leisure.

Russell concludes the chapter by examining leisure's relation to work, including a discussion on workaholism.

The final section of the book is described as "Leisure as a social instrument-systems context." Russell states that "in the final section of this book, we turn our attention to the more functional side of leisure: leisure's ability to be useful as a tool." The first chapter in this section (Chapter 9), is titled "Using leisure for social good." In it, Russell points out that although "leisure is not a panacea for social and individual difficulties, it does make a vital contribution to contemporary problem solving." The utilitarian role of leisure in the United States from the colonial period to the present is examined. I found Russell's depiction of leisure for the slaves particularly interesting. She points out that while American folklore has told of cheerful slaves dancing to banjo music, in reality they experienced very little leisure. Slaves allowed roughly one-fourth of southern white people to lead a life of leisure. She compares this period to the Greek period, another time in history when a slave class supported a leisure class. She goes on to describe the Industrial Revolution and the "birth of organized leisure systems." In this section Russell provides biographies on Jane Addams, Ellen Starr, and Joseph Lee. She ends this chapter by describing the beginning of the leisure profession, including a discussion on professional education and leisure occupations.

Leisure's relationship to the economy is described in Chapter 10, "Paying for it all." In this chapter Russell explores the relationships between leisure and economic development, capitalism, and consumerism. Further, she compares the power of leisure to "positively affect economic health through employment, taxes, and property values" and compares this to leisure's negative economic impact from "the cost of accidents and a negative balance of payments." In her discussion on leisure and capitalism, she provides the reader with a case study of the Mall of America, a quintessential example of consumer behavior in America.

In Chapter 11, Russell makes two major points about leisure and equity. First, she states that there is not yet equity in leisure, and second, that leisure has the potential of being a great equalizer. Russell examines a number of groups "whose circumstances make them invisible from service providers." For example, women's leisure is examined and a link is made between feminism and leisure, both of which are based on qualities of choice and freedom. A summary of the constraints research is provided to show that women are often unable to take full advantage of the potential for leisure in their lives. Leisure opportunities for people with disabilities are also discussed, along with the concepts of mainstreaming and normalization. Additionally, Russell states that "leisure can be a tool for distinguishing ethnic groups" and can be a "tool for empowering people of all ethnicities." In addition to women, people with disabilities, and ethnic groups, Russell examines leisure for "invisible people," people living with particular situations that have left them neglected by customary leisure services. She includes the homeless, the unemployed, migrant workers, latchkey children, and AIDS/DIV victims in this category.

In Russell's final chapter she asks "Why are leisure resources important?" Her response is that having access to pastimes is imperative to the health and vitality of individuals, as well as societies. She then proceeds to relate this to the concept of "cultural capital," a competence in a society's dominant culture. Russell states that leisure experiences help people gain this competence. Russell identifies the leisure sources of cultural capital and classifies them according to type of experience. Her classification includes sports and games, cultural arts, outdoor recreation, travel and tourism, hobbies, and social recreation. A brief description of the opportunities available within each of these categories is provided. Russell also provides a second classification system, based on sponsorship. She describes the purpose, services, and funding sources for commercial, private, and public agencies.

In summary, *Pastimes: The context of contemporary leisure* addresses the major topic areas included in most introductory textbooks, but does so in a creative manner. Moreover, Russell addresses many subjects that have been neglected by other authors. I enjoyed the design of the book and the organization of the major sections. The themes that are developed within the sections are original and engaging. Russell does not make any assumptions regarding the reader's knowledge of leisure, which makes this text an extremely useful learning tool for an introductory leisure studies course.