

The Future of Leisure Studies

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The creation of knowledge within universities suffers from both over specialization and parallel lines of inquiry and information dissemination, which never touch. Not only do the two intellectual cultures of science and the liberal arts rarely touch, but legions of researchers work in isolation, studying issues within their own narrow paradigms and publishing outlets. Within universities, academic departments command the loyalty of faculty. Few professors know much about what's going on in other departments.

Within the "social sciences" there is an increasing tendency for research to be divorced from other "science." Thus, our genetic heritage is largely ignored. Some social scientists studying courtship or marriage, for example, examine "compatibility" and other psycho social variables but ignore critical biological factors. Since biology operates on the principle that difference is better, it may surprise such social scientists that women appear to be attracted to the scent of men, through their sweat, who have different genes from their own. (Blum, 1997). When biological aspects are occasionally considered, nature is often considered to be fixed or unchanging. Thus, discussions of a "sustainable society" often rest on the false assumption that nature is unchanging, when, in reality, the universe churns toward its own ends in ways which deny most assumptions about what is "natural" in nature.

The social sciences also often lack concern about historical understanding and perspective. Many kinds of behavior which recur cyclically in human history are therefore sometimes misunderstood as new and unique. Youth gangs, binge drinking, bicycling, oppressed minorities, disrespect among youth, intolerance among older people—none are new. Most families were and are dysfunctional by the definitions of social scientists. Commitment was generally not stable where individuals had choice about the matter (Coontz, 1992).

A further limitation in acquiring knowledge is an increasing tendency for "politically correct" thinking to limit the questions which can be asked; let alone examined. Thus, real differences between males and females or among ethnic groups are ignored. "Mainstreaming" is uncritically accepted as good and desirable. The notion that finding pleasure makes for both a good and a healthy life is suspect. Behind such denial is a misunderstanding of the interplay of the genes and culture. Ironically, politically correct thinking reduces diversity of thought, a diversity which it claims to think is good

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in the composition of a culture and would inevitably accompany such diverse cultures. It produces a kind of Puritanism which currently characterizes much research in the social sciences.

Part of this Puritanism, which seeks to deny real differences among ethnic groups, age groups, genders, races, and other divisions of society, is actually a sort of pessimism about human ability to change. The Japanese, for example, raised the average IQ of school age children dramatically over a period of a few decades (Jones, 1993). This was obviously not the result of genetic change. Thus, the good news is that, while human groups differ with regard to intelligence, such differences are not immutable but rather capable of being changed by human endeavor. Such good news is largely lost on those who seek to deny difference among human groups in the name of political correctness.

Leisure Studies

Within this milieu, leisure studies and recreation and park management continue to emerge with great uncertainty. The intellectual content for these related but very different subjects of study evolved from at least two different and often conflicting perspectives. The first, which came from the various movements to reform and rationalize recreation during periods of industrialization and urbanization, was almost never interested in recreation or leisure *per se*. Rather, interest was in the ability of recreation and leisure activity to improve the health, education, social adjustment and life chances of poor people, children, the elderly, "handicapped," and others who had few resources to help them replace the recreation patterns of peasant life. These movements also sought to re-make the peasant mentality; improving their character and making them more malleable in their roles as industrial workers. Recreation and leisure, among such movements, was not generally examined intellectually but rather morally or strategically.

Leisure studies emerged from a different set of traditions. First and foremost, it was concerned with the social problem of use of free time in industrial societies, where the portion of life devoted to work was being constantly reduced. Leisure studies was grounded first in sociology; studies of everyday life, time use, suburbanization, and, primarily, of work. The first sociologists of leisure initially focused on industrial work. As industrial sociologists began following workers home, (primarily males), and to see what the rest of life was like, the sociology of leisure was born—by accident.

Leisure studies continues to suffer from the disjuncture between the restricted and pragmatic concerns of the reformers and practitioners of recreation and parks and the broader, but often unfocused, concerns about the social phenomenon of leisure within modern societies. Rabel Burdge (1985) wrote about this many years ago, arguing that recreation and parks and leisure studies could not be successfully merged into a single curriculum or discipline since recreation and parks, as an occupation or profession, is not

interested in leisure but rather in the management of selected forms of leisure activity, such as outdoor recreation and sport.

In spite of this, leisure studies is beginning to evolve in positive ways. As leisure and recreation are recognized as being important by numerous organizations whose interests are as varied as retired persons, youth, health, economic development and the natural environment, research is finally being undertaken which considers leisure in its totality with regard to a social or environmental problem or issue. So, too, are market sector organizations increasingly interested in leisure studies. Companies involved with resorts, theme parks, sport and exercise, entertainment and related enterprises are genuinely interested in leisure studies, when it provides answers about leisure behavior which can be turned into profit.

Historian Gary Cross (1993), in examining the making of consumer culture within North American society, concluded that the market sector has largely won, not only in derailing the real possibility of a society where work was a small part of every day life, but also in shaping the meaning, use and consequences of leisure behavior. The historic battle between the various rational recreation movements and the market sector has been largely decided—for now. For leisure studies, *this situation re-defines what must be studied and understood*. Social psychology has risen to the fore. What individuals perceive is critical and what they want is a priori the basis for action.

In some ways, however, social psychology is of limited value to both the study of leisure and to recreation and park management; limited by producing ahistorical interpretations of human behavior, by ignoring the genetic, and by sometimes evolving into a solipsism which asserts that what people believe and want is all that need be known.

The United States, which has carried individualism, materialism and corporate capitalism to historic extremes, contains less than five percent of the population of the world. The cultures which are producing nineteen of twenty of the new people in the world are significantly more homogeneous. As the world is re-populated by those in numerous Asian and Latino countries, demography becomes a more important analytic tool to understand recreation and leisure. Both understanding and planning must be done in the aggregate in a world in which population is both greatly expanding and urbanizing. The characteristics of the population of humans and the distribution of those characteristics in time and space becomes more important. Attention to individual perception and wants is a luxury which the emergent world population will allow for less and less. Protection of groups of humans will receive more attention while the wants of individuals will receive less attention.

The wants of individual humans will also be balanced against the needs of the rest of the living world. Nature, as it happens, doesn't care much about the individual. As environmental problems such as global warming make clear that individuals cannot do what they want simply because it is meaningful at an individual level, limitations to wants will be established.

People will be less able to assert their individual wills in terms of consumption, use of "nature," and desire to travel when it harms groups of humans and the rest of the living world.

While leisure studies has largely adopted social psychology as the paradigm of choice to gather knowledge, numerous other paradigms will be needed. The study of leisure within the emerging world will need to be truly interdisciplinary with broader understandings of the environment, the human body, history, and demography. At the academic level, this means hiring more faculty whose background is not in recreation and park management, providing a rigorous minor area of study for Ph.D. students in Leisure Studies, and more familiarity with what is going on elsewhere within the university and within other centers of knowledge. Ironically, the drive for stand alone professionalism and identity, a concept which is now largely obsolete, continues to be a hindrance in making the above changes. Neither leisure studies nor recreation and park management has become a discipline in most senses of the word. Rather, both are subjects of study which sometimes intersect, at their best drawing from knowledge and techniques in a myriad of other subjects of study and disciplines.

Over specialization of the academic content of both subject areas has been harmful. Initially, the issue of identity was most salient to those in academic life whose interests corresponded to recreation and parks or to leisure studies. This led to separate journals, degrees, credential and labeling. Today, however, curricula dealing with recreation and park management and/or leisure studies have gone too far in producing separation from other areas of study—too many journals, too many conferences, too many studies which are largely divorced from the rest of intellectual life (and community life). Changing this will be difficult. Journals such as this one are now largely managed, edited and circulated only to those in leisure studies. The authors of articles are largely from leisure studies or recreation and park management. Much the same can be said about the other refereed journals in the field.

Over specialization has led to basic gaps in knowledge. Most students in environmental education options are taught precious little about the environment. Most students in therapeutic recreation know little about the human body. Most students of park management know little about plant life.

Accompanying a needed re-emphasis of interdisciplinary research, appointments of new faculty, and academic involvement must be *debate*. Both leisure studies and recreation and park management suffer from an almost total lack of debate. More use must be made of Hegel's dialectic "involving the theory that reality develops through the conflict of opposites, that is, that every action produces a reaction and then an integration or synthesis." (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969, p. 111). The dialectic approach, which may be traced to ancient Greek philosophers, is almost totally absent in the academic milieu of leisure studies or recreation and park management.

There are signs, however, that the problems mentioned above are beginning to be recognized. The intellectual orthodoxy that led to standard

curricula and curriculum accreditation at a national level is beginning to come apart. National accreditation of curricula may not exist in ten years, not only because it is less relevant in a decentralizing society but also because it is modeled after a kind of stand alone professionalism that is rapidly dying in medicine, law and elsewhere. The standard of scholarship is beginning to improve, but only beginning, from mindless number crunching to thoughtful inquiry which crosses numerous academic boundaries.

Such change, however, must come about rather quickly. Universities are in the midst of a revolution. New models of learning are emerging with historic rapidity. Efforts to gain academic respectability within the old establishment, an obsession with those in leisure studies and recreation and park management, simply ensures that they become obsolete. Entrepreneurial effort, partnerships, interdisciplinary involvement, real diversity (as opposed to the politically correct type) making demands on the system, negotiating, promoting, explaining, and—above all—not apologizing for the subject matter studied; all are essential for recreation and park management and leisure studies to survive and prosper. This can be done if those in the field decide to take risks, confront change, expose the content of the curricula to scrutiny, forget stand alone professionalism as a relevant model, and, above all, lead rather than blindly follow.

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