

## A Long Journey to Somewhere: JLR at 40

**Peter A. Witt**

Professor and Bradberry Recreation and Youth Development Chair  
Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences  
Texas A&M University

In 1969 I was just finishing up my PhD at the University of Illinois. Publishing was on my mind as I needed to begin the march towards tenure. I had been working with Dr. Doyle Bishop on an article and he mentioned a new journal called the *Journal of Leisure Research* where we might try to publish our work. As a psychologist, Doyle was skeptical about “wasting” our work in a new journal with no standing in the academic community. But, we decided that the only way this new journal would survive, let alone thrive, is if people took a chance and submitted their work for review and otherwise supported the journal. The manuscript was submitted and published in volume 2, number 1, 1970. Thus began my association with JLR. And luckily the journal not only survived, but has become the premier international journal for publishing work related to leisure. Over the past 40 years the journal has helped solidify the positive stature of both leisure research and leisure researchers. In many ways the success of JLR laid the foundation that has allowed other recreation and leisure journals to be both created and successful.

What has been most impressive over the years has been the overall quality of articles published in the journal. Under the tutelage of a number of editors and wise and dedicated associate editors and reviewers the journal has been able to attract quality manuscripts and has perhaps even supplied the motivation for researchers to undertake higher quality research. The journal has also successfully become a touchstone for the changing methodologies and topics pursued in our field. It is hard to imagine now that there was once considerable controversy concerning the value and appropriateness of quantitative versus qualitative methodologies and concerns that review panels had a quantitative bias, therefore providing a roadblock to the publication of quality articles that used qualitative methodologies. As the editor of JLR during a six year period at the front end of these concerns (1990-95), I can vividly remember being referred to as a “quant” guy, and when qualitative articles did appear in the journal being congratulated on my daring and willingness to take chances in seeing them published. So much has changed. The journal has provided a home for articles where the key issue is the appropriateness of the methodologies employed rather than the assumption that quantitative approaches are superior.

The journal has also had to survive periods of misunderstandings between academics and the leadership of NPRA. There was a period in the 1970s where it became necessary for the academic community to lobby NRPA to maintain the journal as an essential membership service. Reason prevailed, JLR survived and is now recognized as an asset to a national professional organization professing to advance the case for the importance of recreation and leisure and the services and facilities that promote

citizen participation. The only reason for mentioning this point is the need for us to be constantly on guard against the independence of the journal content from NRPA control, but at the same time remembering that the journal is sponsored by a professional organization and reports to the NRPA Trustees Research Committee (not just the Society of Park and Recreation Educators).

Having been an avid reader of JLR and been involved in its nurturance during its first 40 years, I do have several concerns about the journal for the future. The first concern is the need for authors to maintain a balance between works that they chose to submit to JLR and efforts to publish in other respected journals, especially those without recreation, leisure or tourism in their titles. Many of the articles published in JLR deal with critical issues of theory that would be of interest to people from other academic fields. By these comments I am not trying to diminish the stature of JLR, but to increase the general placement of academic work related to leisure, which I believe will improve the stature of all leisure related publications. Put another way, is there too much of a premium placed on JLR publications in the tenure and promotion process, and in some cases do we underestimate the possibility of our work being publishable elsewhere?

A second concern is the need to continue to attract manuscripts from academics from other disciplines which too often do not see JLR as a viable placement for their work. This concern has been overcome to some extent in recent years, but the stature of the journal will only be enhanced through a wider group of published authors. Special issues with carefully crafted and widely distributed calls for papers may help increase works by others outside our immediate field.

Third, there is the need to find a way to work with authors from countries when their first language is not English and who perhaps use methodologies that might not pass muster with a North American review panel. Means need to be found to help authors who are not native English speakers to put their manuscripts in formats where a major review issue is not their command of the language.

Fourth, we must pay careful attention to whether the work in JLR is actually being read and cited both within our field and beyond (Samdahl & Kelly, 1999; this article is cited 19 times, only two of which are outside of JLR or Leisure Sciences). Many JLR publications are rarely cited or are only cited within our field. On the other hand, there are articles that are cited regularly (citations greater than 30, to pick an arbitrary number by anyone doing research on a related topic. For example, only a couple of my own articles have been widely cited within the leisure field, and more importantly within articles beyond our journals. Thus, work judged as having sufficient quality through the review process may not actually either spur additional work or be seen as relevant to emerging areas of interest. On the other hand, even with today's sophisticated search engines, work from our field may not command the prominence we would like it to have.

Even with the above concerns, it is clear that JLR has achieved pre-eminence. The world-wide subscription base speaks to JLR's stature as an international journal. It is clear that under the careful guidance of the journal leadership that young faculty members do not need to worry about the journal's survival or ranking.

Finally, I note that JLR has a new cover design this year. Bravo! I remember that when I was editor the associate editors urged me to recommend changing the cover

of the journal. I had some professional mock ups made (how easy this would have been with today's available computer software!) and went to the Trustees Research Committee for their approval. Having presented the rationale and the prospective covers to the committee, Dr. Betty Van der Smissen, chair of the committee, paused then told us about how she had created the original design of the cover and was quite happy with the way it looked. I politely thanked Betty and withdrew my suggestion ... not the first or last person to wilt under Betty's presence. The more important lesson from this discussion was that Betty and others, who had helped create and foster JLR were still invested in insuring the continued viability and success of the journal. Their example is what the editor, associate editors, reviewers and authors still must pursue today. Luckily a number of people have and continue to serve as JLR gatekeepers and advocates. I look forward to watching the journal to continue to thrive in the future, and even contributing the occasional article.

### Reference

- Samdahl, D.M.; Kelly, J. J. (1999). Speaking to ourselves: Citation analysis of Journal of Leisure Research and Leisure Sciences. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31(2): 171-180.