

## COMMUNICATIONS

### *The State of Leisure Research<sup>1</sup>*

As my term as editor comes to a close, I take this opportunity to reflect upon the state of leisure research, this journal and the problems and pressures peculiar to this area of investigation. I also would like to point out some of the conflicts among individuals and institutions engaged in leisure research.

As I expand on each of these points, I will be reflecting the biases of a sociologist from a traditional survey research background and from an academic setting that is housed in land grant colleges. However, my entire career has been devoted to leisure and recreation research and to the dissemination of my findings to other academics and practitioners in leisure organizations.

#### *The Development of The Journal of Leisure Research*

During 1966 and 1967, a group of interested researchers from universities, the government and other professional organizations in Washington, D.C., conceived the idea and put together under the sponsorship of the National Recreation and Park Association the first volume of the *Journal of*

*Leisure Research*. Early subscriptions were almost entirely supported as a portion of the membership package of NRPA. Manuscripts were solicited at the beginning, but were more likely to be submitted by the end of the first year. In 1970, the journal moved to Texas A&M University in the Department of Recreation and Parks, under the editorship of C. S. Van Doren. It remained there until 1971, when it came to the Department of Sociology at the University of Kentucky.

The average number of manuscripts submitted during the first three years was about 50 per year. That figure has now grown to an average of 120 per year and will probably increase. At the same time, the number of pages available to print these articles has remained the same. The circulation is now over 11,000 per issue with an increasing percentage of the subscriptions coming from individuals and organizations outside NRPA.

#### *My Role and Philosophy Regarding the Development of The Journal of Leisure Research*

My goal as editor was to develop

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the *Journal of Leisure Research* as the most authoritative and scholarly social science publication in the area of leisure and recreation. The improvement in quality was a result of more submitted papers and rising support within the academic community, coupled with the lack of competition and alternative outlets for articles on this topic. Being most familiar with sociology journals, and remembering that most past contributors to this publication were sociologists, I attempted to pattern the journal after the format of sociology journals. As models, I chose *Rural Sociology* and *Social Forces*. My initial thought was that everything published must be empirical and be based on adequately conceptualized hypotheses derived from a careful review of the literature. My hope was for accumulation. I had also wanted to avoid ponderous statistical presentations and narrow treatises which might interest only a small number of persons. In other words, I hoped to develop a general journal.

I also hoped to make the review process fair, in that we would not only tell an author what was wrong with the paper, but what could be done to improve it. In this way, we hoped to encourage and help young researchers and at the same time build a solid audience of contributors and reviewers. To help pursue these goals we have assembled a strong group of associate editors. These persons, who qualify due to a demonstrated capability as researchers, actually conduct the reviews and make detailed recommendations regarding the disposition of submitted papers.

In addition to the above procedural and policy goals, we have made many format changes and included new features with the hope of improving the readability of the periodical. I am

particularly happy with the improved quality of the book review section, to whom the credit belongs entirely to Joe Hendricks.

Although my original orientation was empirical, I now see the need for more theoretical articles, particularly if they are short and suggest new research directions. Another hope was to report research which dealt with leisure behavior in all settings. Unfortunately we have not attracted more papers on urban leisure or urban leisure environments.

I have experienced difficulties with certain papers, particularly reports of evaluation research on recreation programs. I support such publications, but do not feel they belong in the *Journal of Leisure Research*. I hope that the new Society of Park and Recreation Educators' (SPRE) publication will serve as an outlet for articles on administering recreation programs and educational matters within park and recreation departments. I have also rejected papers that were not generalizable, for I feel that a "general" journal must report research that has some applicability beyond the setting of the data.

#### **The Educational and Research Institutions Which Support and Consume Research on Leisure and Recreation**

I soon learned that being editor of an interdisciplinary journal required political as well as academic expertise. Because leisure and recreation tend to be defined as problems, the research on these areas is interdisciplinary, and as such requires a variety of perspectives and methodologies. When you bring together different research perspectives in the same department conflict is bound to occur. First I will explore institutional conflict; in the next section I will discuss the diffi-

culties in various research approaches to the study of leisure.

The first institutional conflict occurs between professionals and scientists. In this example the professionals are recreation educators and the scientists are the leisure researchers. Educators teach students solutions to situations that they supposedly will face in the real world. What is taught may be "conventional wisdom" or the results of one's experience as in the practicum. Research to professionals tends to be the reporting of a workable solution to a localized problem. On the other hand, research to the scientist means the discovery of basic truths which in this case deal with leisure behavior. The solution in a scientific sense is found by experimenting, testing or analysis. The problem is that scientists and professionals do not share the same definition of research. As such they apply different criteria in deciding what should go in a publication such as the *Journal of Leisure Research*.

Another conflict I have experienced is the relationship of departments of parks and recreation to persons in colleges of physical education with health and physical education backgrounds. The most successful departments of parks and recreation have been housed within colleges that are resource oriented as opposed to those that produce educators. A funding relationship with the cooperative extension service and the agricultural experiment station is helpful.

The problem is that the end product of the department of parks and recreation has very different career demands than someone who graduates in other parts of colleges of physical education. The parks and recreation graduate needs courses in management, sociology, engineering, horticulture, design and layout,

planning and turf management, among others. What they are less likely to need is training in teaching methods and curriculum development.

At the college level the conflict between park and recreation people and physical educators may be due to the differences in approaching research. Physical educators tend to be more physiologically oriented with research on motor skills being frequently reported, while recreation people stress training in the social sciences as well as management and economics. These approaches are going to produce conflict in such areas as course content, the proper selection and application of statistics and research methods and, of course, the question as to what is good research come time for promotion or divvying educational rewards.

A third problem relates to a philosophical issue. In fact, emphasis on a philosophical position may be one of the reasons that leisure and recreation are not viewed as being legitimate for research or that the findings, once they are presented, are accepted only as representing a value position. Most people are drawn to this field out of an interest in leisure and recreation as an activity or out of concern that people are misusing leisure or that leisure is a real social problem. As such, implicitly they have accepted a value (or philosophical position) that leisure, and the wise use of it, is good. Conversely, not doing leisure or wasting leisure is bad. One has only to search the textbooks in this field or to look at the pages of *Parks and Recreation* to see evidence of these philosophical commitments to leisure as a basis for presenting factual information.

However, unlike many other researchers we do state our value positions prior to beginning research. While some persons do study the

philosophical issue of what is good and bad leisure, others study the degree to which the general population views certain leisure activities as good or as bad. We also study the degree to which certain value issues regarding leisure are diffused throughout the population and how participation in work, free time and other institutions influence an individual's perception of leisure and behavior in leisure places. Finally, I am prepared to accept the value position that as the number of "leisure pockets" in our life increases, some serious research will be required on how to fill them.

As I have repeatedly emphasized, the study of leisure faces an additional conflict due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. It is no news that academic people and the research community in general build disciplinary fences around any topic. Neat disciplines mean easy to approach, but often useless research. It means scholarly journals to fill with reified knowledge. Only persons who wish to avoid promotions would consider doing research on such interdisciplinary topics as pollution, natural resource development, the energy crisis, let alone leisure and recreation. All universities and colleges have a department of sociology, but only a few of these institutions have departments variously known as recreology, recreation and parks, parks and recreation and park and recreation resources.

It is my firm belief that the solution to problems and the wide application of scientific knowledge is best fostered in an arena of conflict. In addition, I believe that the solution to the stagnation of the traditional disciplines at least at the university level lies in the application of skills and knowledge to interdisciplinary problem areas.

### Conflicts in Research and Science That Are Inherent in This Topic

I have experienced on occasion tremendous dissonance on deciding what should go in and what should be kept out of the journal. The conflict of boundaries is as old as science, for it involves the basic nature of science and its methods.

Let me quote from a letter by former Associate Editor Mike Ellis on what should be in the *Journal of Leisure Research* and how leisure should be studied. I have received his permission to use this quote which is in response to my letter rejecting his manuscript for publication.

Running through the debate there seems to be a dangerous thread, which is woven, I think, from misconceptions of the processes of science and what a scientific journal is about.

Firstly, science is concerned with explaining phenomena. Its end point is theory that seems to explain existing data and predict events. Theories are confirmed in the heat of public test. A crucial element of science, then, is its public verifiability, which requires mechanisms for recording past science, so that interested future scientists have a base from which to work. The usual procedure is to 'publish' the fruits of science on archival or scholarly journals. From this stems our concern for the journal. It should be a repository for the scientific thinking that has taken place. It doesn't have to be popular. It doesn't have to be read by non-scientists. It is the permanent archival record of leisure research.

Next point. The nature of what is a useful contribution must be carefully assessed. You'll remember that Copernicus was hassled because his theories of our galaxy were not popular. There is a danger that only fashionable material is published, or only that work which hews to a viewpoint is accepted (see *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*). There is a danger that we narrow down our concerns till we are accepting only stuff that is agreeable.

Science is not in the business of being agreeable—in fact, the opposite.

*The Journal of Leisure Research* should be concerned with becoming the vehicle by which research on the leisure behavior of man is recorded, to allow a science of leisure to progress. It must be concerned with making public tests of theories and data those tests generate. We must resist watering the journal down just to make it palatable. To do that would be to eviscerate the *Journal of Leisure Research* and leave us without our archive.

The science of leisure to me encompasses any of a variety of methodologies that have as their prime purpose explaining the leisure behavior of man by asserting and testing the interactions between the setting (the environment, the park, play-group, etc.), the actor (the humans, individual or group) and the ensuing behavior (the choice, response, etc.). I see our journal as the medium whereby the biological, social or psychological analysis of leisure are published.

The boundaries are difficult to draw. I'd prefer to proceed by having a defined focus. We are engaged in publishing work that contributes to our understanding of man at leisure or man at play. Science is in the business of identifying, isolating, observing the effects of variables. These variables and their interactions are then dealt with by inducing theory.

With very little quarrel, I find myself agreeing with Professor Ellis. His conception of the role of science is well thought out and brilliantly presented. Not leaving an editor to catch his breath, the next day I received a letter from an associate editor who is a leader from another discipline represented by the journal. He also has some thoughts on what should be the direction of the research in leisure and recreation, and consequently what should be published in the journal.

We must be concerned and have an awareness and understanding of the broad social problems which relate to leisure-recreation behavior. Research on this topic

(here meaning leisure) should relate to the management and managerial situation that face persons in recreation resource based agencies and organizations. While the information gained must be obtained through the scientific method, it must have application and be relevant to a field situation. If scientifically produced information cannot be applied, then it is not an appropriate problem for leisure scientists. Therefore, the type of articles that are published in the *Journal of Leisure Research* must have social value through application to the problems of the practitioner and the resource manager.

While these two positions both agree on the scientific method and therefore are researched based, they disagree on the boundaries of material that should be published in the journal. Here the dilemma lies. I am constantly bombarded with requests to make the journal relevant. At the same time I know the journal will through time become useless if only practical concerns are published.

#### **The National Recreation and Park Association as Sponsor of *The Journal of Leisure Research***

It has been suggested that the ownership of the *Journal of Leisure Research* might best be housed within a university department or some other scholarly or professional organization. I personally would oppose any arrangement other than the present one for some of the following reasons.

First, if the journal were to become the property of a particular organization it would lose its interdisciplinary flavor and thus the breadth of focus which must of necessity be brought to bear on a problem topic. Secondly, the use of editors and associate editors on a rotating basis (each person is limited to a three-year term) allows for the introduction of new ideas into the presentation and content of the

editors allows the inclusion of persons who are up-to-date in their field and at the moment are active in leisure and recreation research. Finally, although not really a research organization, NRPA is the only organization of leisure professionals that has attempted to provide a place for both academics and practitioners in its organization. Because it is a problem and not a discipline, the study of leisure cannot be confined to one organization or professional group. The more diffused the ownership of a journal, the less likely is the editor to receive pressure to publish material of questionable scientific utility.

### Conclusion

Despite my apprehension over the many problems associated with the

journal, I think it has a bright future. A journal that creates conflict of a scholarly nature will thrive and develop. The study of leisure is approaching the threshold of real accomplishment, both on a national and international basis. We naturally hope that the *Journal of Leisure Research* will publish the best work that comes from this effort.

I suppose the results of our work have received the supreme compliment when a librarian told me that of the hundreds of journals in her library, the *Journal of Leisure Research* was the most difficult to keep.

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