

Leisure Research Symposium Paper

Leisure Research for Social Impact

Troy D. Glover

University of Waterloo

Abstract

Leisure researchers work within a contested landscape for evaluating the quality and significance of their work, thereby necessitating the need to do both rigorous and socially relevant research. The 2014 Butler Lecture tackled the issue of research relevance by advancing three connected pathways to social impact: knowledge mobilization, encouraging critical reflection, and advancing social innovation. In so doing, it positioned leisure research—both its process and benefits—as a vehicle for meaningful engagement between researchers and users; it advocated for research as the conceptual, intellectual, and evidential bases for introspection, which enables researchers to insert themselves and their values into pluralistic (or complex, multilateral) dialogues; and promoted research as a crucial contributor to the change process. Accordingly, recommendations were made to encourage greater social impact, including continuing to reimagine leisure studies and its role in helping society understand, confront, and address complex social challenges.

Keywords: *benefits of research; scholarship of engagement; social practice of research; high-impact research*

Troy D. Glover is a professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. The author extends his sincerest gratitude to Bill Stewart, Diana Parry, Bryan Grimwood, Sebastian Filep, Tianyu Ying, Tara Duncan, Jim Sibthorp, Ed Gomez, and Ingrid Schneider for their comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this manuscript. He also expresses his deepest appreciation to Ed Gomez and NRPA for giving him the honor of delivering the 2014 George Butler Lecture. In addition, the author acknowledges the financial support he received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which funded two of the research projects profiled in this paper. Finally, he thanks the University of Otago for awarding him a William Evans Visiting Fellowship and hosting his sabbatical leave during which he began drafting his remarks. Please send correspondence to troy.glover@uwaterloo.ca

"To be willing to risk ourselves, to be relevant to our times, takes courage."

—Maria Allison (1995, p. 122)

Perhaps more than ever, leisure researchers work within a contested landscape for evaluating the quality and relevance of their research. Peer review continues to drive topical and funding decisions, the perceived merit of submissions for publication, and employment and promotion within institutions. Impact factor introduces a new tension around the selection of outlets for published work. And external rankings of programs rely exclusively on publication counts of faculty (see Jackson, 2004; Walker & Fenton, 2011). Meanwhile, external calls for public accountability demand that we contribute toward the advancement of society, practice, and policy. In short, we can no longer, if we ever did, disengage from pressing social matters. We must do rigorous, socially relevant research.

Leisure studies occupies a seemingly precarious position within this landscape. Its apparent preoccupation with advancing "leisure theory" has led some to criticize what they see as its growing disengagement from the practitioner community, the very community it was established to serve. As our field expands its scope, we stretch our academic field beyond its traditional user base. Within the academy, moreover, questions persist about our contribution to knowledge generation, given how infrequently our work is ostensibly cited outside of our literature¹ (Samdahl & Kelly, 1999; Shaw, 2000). Are we talking only to ourselves? Does leisure research really matter?

With this long-standing question in mind, this paper revisits and reframes the issue of research relevance, the subject of a spirited panel discussion 20 years ago at the 1994 Leisure Research Symposium (see Allison, 1995; Pedlar, 1995; Sylvester, 1995; Weissinger, 1995). Focusing specifically on efforts to reach beyond our academic circles, I focus our attention on the need to mobilize our work beyond academic audiences to enhance its relevance. Drawing on my own research, I explore three connected pathways to enhance the social impact of research: (1) knowledge mobilization, (2) the encouragement of critical reflection, and (3) the advancement of social innovation. After acknowledging the challenges of practicing a more engaged form of scholarship, I conclude by advocating for a social impact agenda in leisure studies.

The Social Practice of Research Relevance

Have you ever considered how nonacademic audiences would respond if confronted by the titles of our journal articles? Consider a few of the titles of articles I have published over the years and how lay audiences would possibly react to them. "At once liberating and exclusionary: A Lefebvorean Analysis of Gilda's Club of Toronto" (see Glover, Parry, & Mulcahy, 2013). Lefebvorean? Few people can pronounce Lefebvorean correctly, never mind associate it with the Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre. How about this title? "Toward a critical examination of social capital within leisure contexts: From production and maintenance to distribution" (see Glover, 2006). Well, first, it helps to know what social capital is. Second, even if you understand what it means, what does it have to do with production, maintenance, and distribution? I'm sure my father would rather poke his eye out with a blunt object than have to spend an hour of his life reading it. Even a title like "The 'community' center and the social construction of citizenship" (see Glover, 2004a) talks past certain audiences. Social construction? More like eve of destruction, as in, having to read this article would destroy me, if I were forced to do so. Now, to be fair,

¹This claim warrants an updated investigation, given the widespread accessibility of journals online and through powerful search engines, such as Google Scholar, which exposes our work to expanded audiences.

these articles were clearly written for an academic audience. Understandably, lay people do not possess the background knowledge, cultural codes, and genre awareness necessary for complete understanding. To most of you, these titles may make sense and may even sound interesting enough to read. But to folks outside of our scholarly circles, these projects and their intended objectives sound esoteric and even irrelevant to their day-to-day lives.

Interestingly, in the late 1990s, the Conservative opposition party in Canada engaged in a similar exercise to embarrass the ruling Liberal Party. In parliament, they read out the titles of grants awarded to academics by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Taxpayers who financed these grants were appalled by what they heard and viewed the appropriation of SSHRC funds as a misuse of public monies. In response, SSHRC was forced to overhaul its application process, requiring applicants to speak explicitly to the overall social relevance of their research and outline their plan to mobilize their research with nonacademic audiences. This kind of public reaction to academic work is all too common in this current era of austerity. Increasingly, external calls for public accountability and value for money demand that those of us who work in publicly funded institutions and who rely on public monies to fund our research focus our attention on the social relevance of our work. We have no choice but to respond.

But what is research relevance? From my perspective, relevance is best understood as a social practice of ongoing scholarly activities aimed intentionally to generate useful research. How we conduct our work, why we do it, how we share it, and how others decipher it, adopt it, and use our ideas in their own research or professional or personal practices shape the knowledge we generate. Further, existing social needs, the collective values of our scholarly community, the reward structure of at our academic institutions, the priorities of external granting agencies, media attention, and the publishing business all propagate different and sometimes competing definitions of relevance that shape the practice and meaning of our research. Understood in this way, conducting relevant research is not simply a matter of publishing what we think are interesting findings; it involves a more dynamic social and political process.

Making our research relevant starts with our own value judgments about its merit (Stewart, Parry & Glover, 2008). In the current moment, for example, an increasing number of leisure researchers dedicate themselves to advancing social justice, a laudable goal that embodies an explicit conformity and commitment to values aimed at enabling individuals, irrespective of their social identities, to thrive within a just society (Floyd, 2014; Henderson, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Parry, 2014; Parry, Johnson & Stewart, 2013; Schmalz & Mowatt, 2014; Stewart, 2014). Whether aspiring to forward this or other meaningful goals, relevant scholarship concerns itself with helping individuals, communities, and groups make sense of their position in the world and the nature of the challenges that confront them. The knowledge we generate may have academic value in its own right, but necessarily contains social value that exists beyond the academy.

To convey this social value, leisure researchers must work actively to synthesize, translate, and mobilize their research outside the academy, for research cannot become “more relevant” through sheer force of will” (Staeheli & Mitchell, 2005, p. 360). Research, which many people mistake for data alone, does not necessarily create value itself; researchers create value. This ought to be no surprise to us, given that leisure studies evolved out of a civic-minded view of the potential of our academic field to shape society for the public good (Dustin & Goodale, 1999). Accordingly, most of us recognize we have a civic duty to mobilize knowledge as a civilizing and progressive force. Ultimately, we risk engaging with practitioners and the public to improve the relevance of our scholarship through the interchange involved.

While we may aim for research relevance, eventual users of our research judge its value in relation to their own needs. Thus, according to Nicolai and Seidl (2010), research *becomes* (1) conceptually relevant when it influences understandings of current issues and challenges, (2) instrumentally relevant when it influences a course of action, or (3) legitimately relevant when it legitimizes or enforces a chosen course of action.

My own imperfect work, which focuses broadly on the role of leisure in building social capital, community, and place, attempts to be relevant in these three ways, albeit with varying degrees of success, through vastly different projects and initiatives. Much of my work focuses on exposing social inequities in leisure service provision or social engagement to create awareness about exclusive practices or policies that privilege certain groups over others (see Glover, 2004b, 2007; Graham & Glover, 2014; Mulcahy, Parry & Glover, 2010). This work, which I will expand on shortly, intends to be conceptually relevant by influencing and challenging conventional understandings of current issues.

At the same time, another complementary line of inquiry on which I collaborate with my good friend and colleague Bill Stewart from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign is aimed at developing community-based planning processes that facilitate meaningful discourse on public values (see Glover, Stewart, & Gladdys, 2008; Stewart, Glover, & Barkley, 2013). My work in this area engages community members directly in dialogue to envision their aspirations for the future of their community. Practitioners/planners/policy makers are included in this process deliberately to enhance its instrumental relevance and shape decisions. Admittedly, influencing decision making is not a foregone conclusion, but the research—its process and outputs—have the potential to contribute to the practical knowledge necessary for informed decision making.

Finally, I have engaged in the odd research project to assist organizations in collecting information directly relevant to their operations and legitimacy. Recently, I, along with my University of Waterloo colleagues Steven Mock and Roger Mannell, worked with the Canadian Camping Association to provide empirical evidence that children benefit from traditional summer camp experiences (see Glover et al., 2011; Glover et al., 2013). The quantitative project, which reported significant camper growth in areas such as independence, self-confidence, and emotional intelligence provides legitimacy to the summer camp industry in Canada, an industry that belongs to an increasingly crowded marketplace of summer programming. As demonstrated in these examples, instrumental and legitimate relevance underscore the direct and obvious uses of research, whereas conceptual relevance remains more indirect and subtle, albeit equally important.

I am not alone in mobilizing my research to influence understandings of current issues, to impact decision making or to legitimize best practices. Many of our colleagues engage actively in the good work of trying to make their research relevant and devote considerable time and energy toward doing so. I am thinking of scholars such as Corey Johnson (et al., 2014) and his documentary film work with transgender, queer, and questioning youth; Brett Lashua (2006) and his work with “the Beat of Boyle Street,” an innovative research project that engaged First Nations youth through hip hop; Simone Fullagar (2008) and her work on leisure as a site of identity transformation for women dealing with depression; Sherry Dupuis (et al., 2012) and her research team’s authentic partnership approach to working with people living with dementia; Myron Floyd (et al., 2009) and his work in environmental justice by examining the contribution of parks and recreation amenities to physical activity in low income communities of color; and John Crompton (2008) and his practitioner-focused research on repositioning the professional

field of parks and recreation to alleviate social problems. By committing themselves to what Boyer (1996) referred to as the “scholarship of engagement,” these and other leisure researchers do more than just address matters relevant to contemporary society; they engage directly with stakeholders to move knowledge to action.

Beyond Knowledge Generation

But isn’t knowledge generation our core responsibility as researchers? Quite importantly, our research generates new understandings and raises awareness among our academic peers and field of inquiry. We cite relevant literature, use, improve or revise existing ideas, subject our work to peer review, publish our findings, and add to our body of knowledge. These are expectations we necessarily fulfill as scholars.

I have certainly strived to contribute actively to this conventional model of scholarship, having spent much of my career trying to understand social capital and how leisure contributes to it (see Glover, 2004b, in press; Glover & Parry, 2008). Its theoretical development inspires me professionally and stimulates my intellectual curiosity. I would like to think the knowledge we generate through publication reaches beyond our narrow productivity goals.

Indeed, we “stand on the shoulders of giants” by building on research of the past to develop future intellectual pursuits. Thus, we owe much to scholars like Karla Henderson, Sue Shaw, Deb Bialeschki, Chris Rojek, Roger Mannell, Ed Jackson, John Crompton, Jack Kelly, Geoff Godbey, Dan Dustin, Tom Goodale, and George Butler, among many others who paved the way for us with their seminal contributions to our field. My own interest in social capital emerged after reading John Hemingway’s (1999) work when I was a doctoral student. My research—to this day—builds on his seminal article, which itself grew from Robert Putnam’s (1995) work. I owe much to him and to my mentors, including Mark Havitz, Tim Burton, Trevor Slack, and Bill Stewart, whose guidance and modeling as academics and scholars influenced my career in so many positive ways. Any successful career and its relevant line of inquiry builds on the solid foundation of those who came before us.

Moreover, we generate knowledge together as a critical mass of scholars. To be sure, “Bodies of consistent evidence are more powerful and effective over time than single studies, even though the latter will sometimes generate quite a bit of short-term attention” (Levin, 2008, p. 7). Our collective impact, in other words, has the greatest capacity to make a difference. More than just the generation of knowledge, then, we engage in a collective process to move that knowledge forward.

One way we do so is through our teaching. As instructors, we pass along the knowledge we generate from our research by educating our students. We expose students to ideas that animate and challenge their thinking, thereby making them critical consumers of information and reflexive practitioners. Outside of the classroom, assignments, theses, and even meaningful service learning experiences stimulate critical thinking skills, complex decision making, and creative exploration by encouraging independent reading and the exploration of our literature. Research training, moreover, teaches students to build on a body of literature, demanding that they familiarize themselves with its direction, limitations, and potential, and push it forward in their own way. Given the role of teaching and training in exposing students to our literature, it’s unfair to claim that what goes on in the pages of the *Journal of Leisure Research* stays in the pages of the *Journal of Leisure Research*, for our colleagues and students use our research, learn from it, and build upon it.

Toward Social Impact

In short, I think there is still a great deal of merit in publishing manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals, but I believe we also have a duty to serve, not just through our committee work or service responsibilities, but more importantly through our research. More than active scholars, we must be *engaged* scholars. To engage, we must interact directly with potential users of our research. To my mind, if we want our research to have an impact, we must recognize the cycle involved in moving knowledge to impact. Here, I propose the following model of knowledge to social impact (see Figure 1). Though admittedly a simplistic depiction, it underscores the point that knowledge generation alone is insufficient in our aim for impact. As I have discussed, the interchange between stakeholders and leisure researchers drives the focus of our research, shapes our values, and gives us the direction we need to remain relevant. As Levin (2008, p. 8) wrote, “The relationship between knowledge and use runs in both directions; practice affects research just as research affects practice.” Generating knowledge remains crucial to this process, too, for knowledge is the currency we contribute to the world to make it better. From there, however, we need to *mobilize* knowledge by actively seeking out appropriate audiences, synthesizing bodies of literature and translating our findings for productive use. In mobilizing knowledge, I argue we ought to aim to encourage critical reflection. I use the term *encourage* deliberately; clearly, we cannot force our stakeholders to reflect critically, but we can package our research in a way that opens their minds to our findings and recommendations. Reflection is key to advancing social innovation, what I think of as a necessary step toward making a social impact. This cycle is iterative and repetitive and can start at any point. But it continues indefinitely and is taken up not just by ourselves, but by our colleagues and our field. The key for me is for us to begin paying closer attention to how we can mobilize knowledge, how we can better encourage critical reflection, and how we can advance social innovation. Drawing on examples from my own work, I move next to describing ways that I have both succeeded and failed to make a social impact with my research in these three ways.

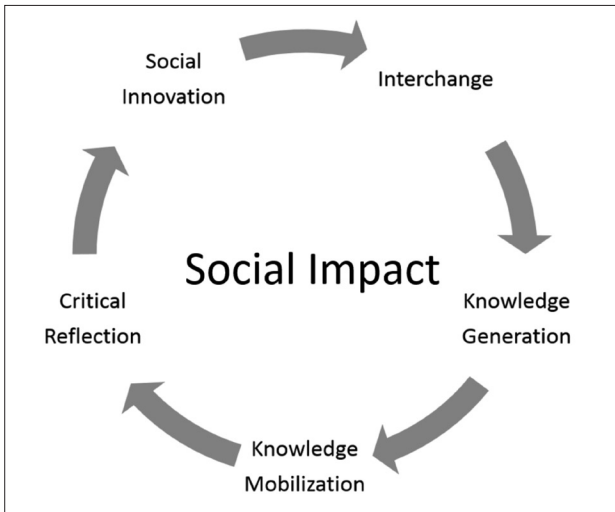


Figure 1. From Knowledge to Social Impact

Knowledge Mobilization

Let me begin with knowledge mobilization. Less about the transfer of findings into a specific context and more to do with how our research—both its process and outcomes—can be used as a vehicle for public discourse, engagement, and deliberation (Ellwood, Thorpe, & Coleman, 2013), knowledge mobilization treats users as co-producers, collaborators, and thoughtful interpreters of knowledge, as well as sources of ideas and inspiration (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Accordingly, knowledge mobilization underscores an active model of interaction between researchers and users—before, during, and/or after the research is conducted—to emphasize joint actions in the definition, creation, authentication, and use of research (Bannister & Hardill, 2013).

Bill Stewart and I incorporate this approach in our collaborative work (see Glover et al., 2008; Stewart et al., 2013). As it tends to be practiced, planning often frames decision making as an effort by professionals to address deficiencies *in* community, as opposed to problems that can and should be addressed *by* community. Our aim is to encourage a community-based model of planning sensitive to the very citizens for whom plans are made. Accordingly, we use participatory techniques, such as *photo elicitation*, to encourage participants to narrate their own values, land ethics, and place meanings. As part of the research process, we invite participants to take part in social learning circles that engage participants in a meaningful dialogue with others. The circles enable professionals in attendance to respond to feedback and explain how concerns raised contribute to future planning. This sort of engagement allows us to get at the participants' reactions to planned landscape change and how, if at all, they impact on participants' sense of place. Moreover, it equips participants with civic skills to participate in future public processes. When all is said and done, these projects provide insight into planning processes and give professionals tangible ideas for moving forward with planned changes. In other words, knowledge mobilization facilitates the creation of value for a community through a meaningful process of co-production or collaboration.

This research offers only one modest example of strategies used to engage participants in knowledge mobilization. Others include alternative forms of dissemination, such as blog posts, theatrical performances, infographics, and documentary films. It can take the shape of educational interventions, collaborations between researchers and users, and facilitation (Bannister & O'Sullivan, 2013). Depending on the intent of the research endeavor, these strategies can be woven into the research process itself. Clearly, the research process is one area in which we can often make the most change (Parry, 2014).

Whatever the approach, to legitimately claim to be knowledge mobilization, researchers must engage actively in practices that generate and enhance the conditions that facilitate access and utilization of research with the intent to enrich individual, organizational, community or societal outcomes. Thus, I would argue that publishing a manuscript in a peer reviewed journal, presenting results at an academic symposium or in the classroom, or writing a report to summarize findings do not constitute effective knowledge mobilization strategies. Though these efforts are means of sharing knowledge, they fail to mobilize it effectively for use and therefore do not fit my criteria for high impact research. By transcending our campuses and engaging actively with stakeholders, knowledge mobilization, as I have described it, grounds us in the social realities that drive our research and increases the potential of our research to have a greater social impact.

Encouraging Critical Reflection

Research can also provide the conceptual, intellectual, and evidential bases for critical reflection, a second and complementary pathway to greater social impact. By critical reflection, I mean more than inviting introspection; I mean challenging the status quo. By interrogating

policies, practices, and privileges, exposing misuses of power and injustices, and challenging decision-making and (in)action, our research identifies problems that warrant attention and opens up new ways of seeing things. We envision ways in which life should be lived and identify the roles, practices or policies that potentially move society closer to them (Stewart et al., 2008). Encouraging critical reflection means using our strengths as researchers to insert ourselves and our values into public dialogues, not necessarily to please audiences, but to challenge them to think and act differently.

I see this task as one of my main ambitions as an academic. One of the more interesting studies in which I have been involved focused on *First String*, a grassroots baseball league founded by three African American couples in Champaign, IL to engage children who lived in their predominately African American neighborhood (see Glover, 2007; Glover & Bates, 2006). The league was meant to overcome the constraints neighborhood children faced through the policies of Little League Baseball (LLB). Chief among the founders' concerns was LLB's policy to redistribute players throughout the city in which they played, thereby intentionally ignoring neighborhood affiliation as a factor in the allocation of players. Though intended to distribute talent fairly across the city, this policy had unfortunate consequences for the African American children who lived in the founders' neighborhood insofar as the children had no reliable transportation to get to the games played across town. It meant, more often than not, the children were unable to enroll in LLB, and for those who did, they were often the only African American players on their teams, which posed its own problems in terms of social identity and exposure to role models who looked like them. Lack of resources prevented black parents, whose children participated in league play, from attending games. So, while any request to change power imbalances by allowing black children to field an all-black team was met with apprehension because of concerns about segregation, integration constituted an indirect defense of the status quo, which privileged white players, coaches, and parents. In short, the policies of little league gave a false sense of addressing racial tensions, while maintaining systemic social advantages.

In exposing these elements of inequity, my intent was to encourage reflection on the policies of LLB and how they constrain participation among a vulnerable population. Social impact means understanding how the system we wish to influence operates and to make changes that alter the system itself. Critical reflection encourages reexamination, renewed understanding, and fresh insights on how to take action. But here is where I think I went wrong. Though the participants in this study felt empowered by my interest in their good work, I failed to connect with individuals or organizations that could have benefited from this critical analysis and used it to change their practices and policies. Had I connected with LLB or park districts, I would have a better chance mobilizing this knowledge for social impact. Research that encourages critical reflection ought to invite double-loop learning by moving beyond identifying a problem (single loop learning) to questioning the assumptions, policies, practices, values, and system dynamics that led to the problem in the first place (Patton, 2011). While we cannot promise to solve problems outright, we can cultivate greater understanding and encourage the reflection necessary to influence meaningful change. We just need to reach the right people to do so.

The Advancement of Social Innovation

As a complement to reflection, and a further way to mobilize knowledge, leisure research has the potential to inspire social innovation, a third pathway to social impact. It does so by reframing problems and assisting in crafting potential solutions, thereby enabling us to move creative policies and practices forward and advance hope (Parry, 2003). Social innovation refers to "any initiatives, products, processes, or programs that change basic routines, resources

and authority flows, or beliefs of any social system” (Moore & Westley, 2011, p. 2). As much of our research shows, leisure itself can serve in this capacity. In mobilizing knowledge for social innovation, we can help others recognize the need for change and strategic intent, reframing knowledge to make it comprehensible, accessible, and engaging for others, and sharing ideas with relevant audiences and across scales.

Here, I think of my recent work collecting narratives from African immigrants about their settlement experiences in the community in which I live. My intent was to inform the development of everyday conditions that create a more welcoming community for newcomer youth. To this end, I spent considerable time working with the then-President of the African Canadian Association of Waterloo Region (ACAWR), Edwin Laryea, to develop thoughtful and effective procedures to engage participants.

In our deliberations, Edwin and I acknowledged the project needed to provide some tangible benefit to the community under investigation, so we jointly designed a leadership program to build capacity among youth in the local African Canadian community. The program capitalized on Edwin’s expertise as a language specialist and personal communication coach, my research assistant Debjani Henderson’s organizational skills, and my background in youth programming. Moreover, the decision allowed us to embed our research objectives into a user-friendly format. As participants in the program, youth engaged in fun, experiential activities—using maps, video footage, audio files, photographs, and drama—designed to encourage a critical telling of their settlement experiences.

The three-day program we developed ended with a community forum hosted by the youth. At the forum, the youth participants shared what they learned with invited attendees, including members of the African Canadian Association, school officials, youth workers, and immigration services. The forum fostered dialogue among attendees and encouraged the sharing of knowledge. Though only a small change, the forum encouraged the African Canadian Association to start up a youth wing of its organization. Combine this tangible result with the leadership skills participants developed, which built future capacity in the local African Canadian community, and the benefits of the project add to the project’s potential to advance social innovation.

Research for social innovation requires a willingness to experiment with socially creative strategies like those included in my example or others focused on the translation of findings (Parry & Johnson, 2007). In the research I described, innovation began as part of a social process that allowed ideas to move freely and quickly among stakeholders, combining them in the kind of *bricolage* necessary to forward innovation. Clearly, I learned much from my collaborations with Edwin. In addition, direct participant engagement “. . . provided a method of both observing and explaining how change took place or what limited its success: This leaving the way clear for further attempts at change to build cumulatively on the earlier experience” (Arthur, 2013, p. 339). The project gave the youth a forum to not only identify challenges, but offer solutions to improve the experiences of other newcomers. This and other research approaches not touched upon, including documenting, communicating, and evaluating social innovations, encourage necessary triple-loop learning—that is, continual reflection on the assumptions and values that motivate the learning process and influence its outcomes (Yuthas, Dillard, & Rogers, 2004). In short, high impact research is an important starting point in the social innovation process.

A Social Impact Agenda for Leisure Studies: Challenges and Opportunities

I believe we are in the midst of a discernible shift toward a more engaged approach to scholarship that, while still focusing on knowledge generation as the core function of leisure

research, concerns itself with the active promotion and dissemination of knowledge, relevance, and value to a range of audiences. If we wish to enlarge our academic footprint beyond our scholarly circles, we must engage actively in high impact research practices. Leaving the process to knowledge generation alone will not do. The route to social impact certainly involves knowledge generation, but it necessarily requires knowledge mobilization, which can lead to critical reflection and eventually social innovation (see Figure 1). By engaging in this cycle, we work actively toward mobilizing knowledge for greater social impact.

For me, the three pathways I described necessarily inject a level of engagement in the research process, increasing the potential to improve stakeholders' desire and capacity to use the knowledge generated. As Levin (2008, p. 8) noted, "Simply telling people about evidence and urging them to change what they do is clearly ineffective." The active and direct involvement of stakeholders in our research improves the quality and influence of our work.

Frustratingly, our professional reward system struggles to value our efforts to mobilize our research for social impact. We need to address the lack of credit afforded to knowledge mobilization. Though admirable, the pathways described above struggle to fit neatly with our conventional aspirations and professional rewards. Though we give credence to "quality" and "importance" as measures of our research contributions, their evaluation remains subjective (Hicks & Crouch, 1990). Society demands more from us. We demand more from our own research. Accordingly, leisure studies ought to champion a social impact agenda and take active steps to embrace the increasing blurring of research, teaching and service.

That social impact is challenging to measure should not be lost on us, however. In practice, impact can be complex and contingent, thereby making it unclear what should be attributed to research or to other inputs. Far from a simple question of cause and effect, the impact of most research only becomes apparent in the distant future (SSHRC, 2009). By its very nature and complexity, social impact cannot be known *a priori*. As a result, our articulation of our research impact is often "more postulated than demonstrated" (Bornmann, 2013, p. 219).

These challenges should not dissuade us from advancing a social impact agenda, though. Instead, we can begin by asking ourselves *who* benefits from our research? And *how* does society benefit from it? These questions offer a constructive starting point when planning our research projects. We should design our research with careful consideration of how everything done, from beginning to end, will affect use. "Use" concerns how real people in the real world apply research findings and experience the research process. Who is the research for? What are they going to do with it? These questions invite us to consider how our research questions or design can better serve those affected by the topic (Thomas, 2013).

In addition, we need to be reasonable about our appraisal of our impact over the course of our careers. Small victories—like those associated with changes we see in our research participants after they participate in our projects (see Parry, 2014)—represent starting points for even bigger successes. Knowledge mobilization, the encouragement of critical reflection, and the advancement of social innovation can be forwarded in various ways, perhaps together, most often separately, over the life course of our careers. They don't have to happen all at once. In this sense, the criteria by which we judge our work ". . . is less about the relevance of a specific research project and more about the relevance of researchers themselves during a lifetime's scholarship" (Ellwood et al., 2013, p. 198).

Finally, we need to value our collective contribution to social impact through our leisure scholarship. Debates about relevance unnecessarily pit methods and theories against one another. Approaching relevance through these lenses implies certain theoretical or methodological

approaches are more conducive to relevant research than others. However, we must understand relevance in a way that side-steps the division between theory and practice and that unnecessarily positions certain research approaches as less relevant than others. The pluralism and proliferation of epistemological, methodological, and analytical approaches in our field only serve to strengthen our body of knowledge and its potential for impact. We must embrace this growing diversity of scholarship, for it helps us all accomplish our collective aims to achieve a sense of social impact.

Conclusion

The social sciences—in which I include leisure studies—matter because they help society understand, confront, and address complex social challenges. To move further along in this direction, we must continue to forge connections that help us focus on problems rather than remaining rooted within our individual disciplinary boundaries. In my view, the pathways I discussed today necessarily position our research in ways that enhance its ability to contribute to collective efforts to improve quality of life and overall well-being. Leisure research must continue to endeavor to make an impact on society, practice, and policy. Leisure studies will continue to matter only because of its ongoing courage to be relevant.

References

- Allison, M. T. (1995). The question of relevance: Introductory comments. *Leisure Sciences*, 17(2), 121–124.
- Arthur, L. (2013). Participatory action research and implications. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, & A. Hamdouch (Eds.), *The international handbook on social innovation: Collective action, social learning, and transdisciplinary research* (pp. 332–342). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.
- Bannister, J., & Hardill, I. (2013). Knowledge Mobilisation and the Social Sciences: Dancing with new partners in an age of austerity. *Contemporary Social Science*, 8(3), 167–175.
- Bannister, J., & O'Sullivan, A. (2013). Knowledge mobilisation and the civic academy: The nature of evidence, the roles of narrative and the potential of contribution analysis. *Contemporary Social Science*, 8(3), 249–262.
- Bornmann, L. (2013). What is societal impact of research and how can it be assessed? A literature survey. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 64(2), 217–233.
- Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 18–33.
- Crompton, J. L. (2008). Empirical evidence of the contributions of leisure services to alleviating social problems: A key to repositioning the leisure services field. *World Leisure Journal*, 50(4), 243–258.
- Dupuis, S. L., Whyte, C., Carson, J., Genoe, R., Meshino, L., & Sadler, L. (2012). Just dance with me: an authentic partnership approach to understanding leisure in the dementia context. *World Leisure Journal*, 54(3), 240–254.
- Dustin, D. L., & Goodale, T. L. (1999). Reflections on recreation, park, and leisure studies. In E. L. Jackson, & T. L. Burton (Eds.), *Leisure studies: Prospects for the 21st century* (pp. 477–486). State College, PA: Venture.

- Ellwood, P., Thorpe, R., & Coleman, C. (2013). A model for knowledge mobilisation and implications for the education of social researchers. *Contemporary Social Science*, 8(3), 191–206.
- Floyd, M. F. (2014). Social justice as an integrating force for leisure research. *Leisure Sciences*, 36(4), 379–387.
- Floyd, M. F., Taylor, W. C., & Whitt-Glover, M. (2009). Measurement of park and recreation environments that support physical activity in low-income communities of color: Highlights of challenges and recommendations. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 36(4), S156–S160.
- Fullagar, S. (2008). Leisure practices as counter-depressants: Emotion-work and emotion-play within women's recovery from depression. *Leisure Sciences*, 30(1), 35–52.
- Glover, T. D. (2004). The 'community' center and the social construction of citizenship. *Leisure Sciences*, 26(1), 63–83.
- Glover, T. D. (2004b). Social capital in the lived experiences of community gardeners. *Leisure Sciences*, 26(2), 1–20.
- Glover, T. D. (2006). Toward a critical examination of social capital within leisure contexts: From production and maintenance to distribution. *Leisure/Loisir: Journal of the Canadian Association for Leisure Studies*, 30(2), 357–367.
- Glover, T. D. (2007). Ugly on the diamonds: An examination of white privilege in youth baseball. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(2), 195–208.
- Glover, T. D. (in press). Leveraging leisure-based community networks to access social capital. In G. Walker, D. Scott, & M. Stoldoska (Eds.), *Leisure matters: The state and future of leisure studies*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Glover, T. D., & Bates, N. R. (2006). Recapturing a sense of neighbourhood since lost: Nostalgia and the formation of First String, a Community Team Inc. *Leisure Studies*, 25(3), 329–351.
- Glover, T. D., Chapeskie, A., Mock, S. E., Mannell, R. C., & Feldberg, H. (2011). *The Canadian Summer Camp Research Project: Examining the outcomes of the Canadian summer camp experience*. Canadian Camping Association/Association des camps du Canada.
- Glover, T. D., Graham, T., Mock, S., Mannell, R. C., Carruthers, A., & Chapeskie, A. (2013). *Canadian Summer Camp Research Project, Phase 3: Parent perception of changes in children after returning home from camp*. Canadian Camping Association/Association des camps du Canada.
- Glover, T. D., & Parry, D. C. (2008). Friendships developed subsequent to a stressful life event: Links with leisure, social capital, and health. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 40(2), 208–230.
- Glover, T. D., Parry, D. C., & Mulcahy, C. M. (2013). At once liberating and exclusionary? A Lefebvrian analysis of Gilda's Club of Toronto. *Leisure Studies*, 32(5)467–486.
- Glover, T. D., Stewart, W. P., & Gladdys, K. (2008). Social ethics of landscape change: Toward community-based land-use planning. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(3), 384–401.
- Graham, T., & Glover, T. D. (2014). On the fence: Dog parks in the (un)leashing of community and social capital. *Leisure Sciences*, 36(3), 217–234.
- Hemingway, J. L. (1999). Leisure, social capital, and democratic citizenship. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31, 150–165.
- Henderson, K. A. (2014). The Imperative of leisure justice research. *Leisure Sciences*, 36(4), 340–348.
- Hicks, D., & Crouch, D. (1990). Can bibliometrics measure up? *Physics World*, 3(9), 27–28.
- Jackson, E. L. (2004). Individual and institutional concentration of leisure research in North America. *Leisure Sciences*, 26(4), 323–348.

- Johnson, C. W. (2014). "All you need is love": Considerations for a social justice inquiry in leisure studies. *Leisure Sciences*, 36(4), 388–399.
- Johnson, C. W., Singh, A. A., & Gonzalez, M. (2014). "It's complicated": Collective memories of transgender, queer, and questioning youth in high school. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(3), 419–434.
- Lashua, B. D. (2006). "Just another native?" Soundscapes, chorasters, and borderlands in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, 6(3), 391–410.
- Levin, B. (2008, May). Thinking about knowledge mobilization. In *An invitational symposium sponsored by the Canadian Council on Learning and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (pp. 15–18). Ottawa: SSHRC.
- Moore, M. L., & Westley, F. (2011). Surmountable chasms: Networks and social innovation for resilient systems. *Ecology & Society*, 16(1).
- Nicolai, A., & Seidl, D. (2010). That's relevant! Different forms of practical relevance in management science. *Organization Studies*, 31(9-10), 1257–1285.
- Parry, D. C. (2003). Towards a 'politics of hope': Advocating a sixth phase of feminist leisure research. *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure*, 26(1), 49–67.
- Parry, D. C. (2014). My transformative desires: Enacting feminist social justice leisure research, *Leisure Sciences*, 36(4), 1–16.
- Parry, D. C., & Johnson, C. W. (2007). Contextualizing leisure research to encompass complexity in lived leisure experience: The need for creative analytic practice. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(2), 119–130.
- Parry, D. C., Johnson, C. W., & Stewart, W. (2013). Leisure research for social justice: A response to Henderson. *Leisure Sciences*, 35(1), 81–87.
- Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pedlar, A. (1995). Relevance and action research in leisure. *Leisure Sciences*, 17(2), 133–140.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65–78.
- Samdahl, D. M., & Kelly, J. J. (1999). Speaking only to ourselves? Citation analysis of *Journal of Leisure Research and Leisure Sciences*. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31(2), 171–180.
- Schmalz, D. L., & Mowatt, R. A. (2014). The unsettling nature of prejudice: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 46(3), 245.
- Shaw, S. M. (2000). If our research is relevant, why is nobody listening? *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32(1), 147–151.
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). (2009). SSHRC's knowledge mobilization strategy, 2009–2011. Ottawa, ON: SSHRC.
- Staeheli, L. A., & Mitchell, D. (2005). The complex politics of relevance in geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95(2), 357–372.
- Stewart, W. (2014). Leisure Research to Enhance Social Justice. *Leisure Sciences*, 36(4), 325–339.
- Stewart, W. P., Glover, T. D., & Barkley, J. R. (2013). Sharing stories of place to foster social learning. In *Place-Based Conservation* (pp. 137–150). Springer Netherlands.
- Stewart, W. P., Parry, D. C., & Glover, T. D. (2008). Writing leisure: Values and ideologies of research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 40(3), 360–384.
- Sylvester, C. (1995). Relevance and rationality in leisure studies: A plea for good reason. *Leisure Sciences*, 17(2), 125–131.
- Thomas, R. (2013). Research and scholarship with impact: a British perspective. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 5(3), 277–282.

- Van de Ven, A. H., & Johnson, P. E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(4), 802–821.
- Walker, G. J., & Fenton, L. (2011). Institutional concentration of leisure research: A follow-up to and extension of Jackson (2004). *Journal of Leisure Research*, 43(4), 475–490.
- Weissinger, E. (1995). Judging the relevance of deductive inquiry: The central role of theory. *Leisure Sciences*, 17(2), 141–145.
- Yuthas, K., Dillard, J., & Rogers, R. (2004). Beyond agency and structure: Triple-loop learning. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51(2): 229–243.