

## LEISURE – ITS PHILOSOPHY AND EVOLUTION

choose what to do. Aristotle, in Book 2 of the *Politics* in describing the need for 'freedom from the necessity of labour', is concerned as much about freedom for, as about freedom from. It is how we use time that matters. We need to be relatively free from those external compulsive forces so as to be able to act – i.e. it is a 'freedom to', rather than a 'freedom from' idea. And the motivation for those acts is intrinsic – i.e. not being motivated by some external force or pursuing some external reward. In life-enhancing terms, leisure appears to be the process of gaining freedom and finding meaning through self-understanding and self-improvement, it is a self-directed process. Idealistic, yes. But without ideals and goals we have a shallow philosophy of life, and leisure.

G.Torkildsen (2001),  
Leisure and Recreation  
Mgt, E&FNSpon.

### 4.4 Leisure – a social problem?

So vast are the reaches of 'leisure' today that it appears to bestride the Western world like a colossus. At one extreme it is seen as a gigantic movement for great good; enhancing the quality of life for the mass of people, and at the other extreme it is seen as a major twentieth century problem, with people incapable of coping with leisure and where, for some, time hangs heavy or is consumed in greed and destruction. Clearly, leisure can lead to a personally fulfilling life and carry social benefits. But is it also a social problem? Industrial societies have created leisure as we know it today. Godbey [36] refers to the creation of 'leisure potential'. The increased potential for leisure, however, has also created factors that have negated the meaning of leisure in our society. They include: limitless materialism, increasing societal complexity and change, increasing demands of labour and carry-over of 'work values' into leisure. Thus, while our potential for leisure has increased, we are nowhere near the society of leisure about which so much has been written. What has increased, according to Godbey [37], is 'anti-leisure' – i.e. activity which is undertaken compulsively, as a means to an end, from a perception of necessity, with a high degree of externally imposed constraints, with considerable anxiety, time-consciousness, minimum personal autonomy and which avoids self-actualization: 'In regard to romance, the practice of taking a mistress has largely died out because it is too time consuming. It has been replaced by the "one nighter".'

In the same vein, Linder, a Swedish economist, in *The Harried Leisure Class* [38] believes that sexual promiscuity today is primarily due to the desire to speed up the courtship process and achieve what intimacy can be achieved in a very short period of time! He believes that life has become so demanding in time that consumption eliminates, for all practical purposes, the time necessary for leisure. This consumption production creates a 'leisure deficit'. Industrial society has set its face towards increasing economic growth by all possible means. Hence one of the problems is viewing time as a commodity. Research by the German sociologist Scheusch [39] illustrated that many people during a large part of the day do more than one thing at one time. The term 'time deepening' was coined to describe a person's ability to do several things simultaneously, and so crowd a greater number of activities into the same twenty-four hours.

Time experts in the United States found that if we did all the things that are expected of us, it would take at least thirty-six hours in a twenty-four-hour day. In

business and at home we now spend money to save time. Goodale and Godbey believe that these changes have been so drastic that the notion of leisure among many today is almost in direct opposition to its ancient meanings. As de Grazia observed, humans rejected the tyranny of man, while submitting to the tyranny of the clock! Just as time spent in work became more carefully regulated, so too did leisure time. Leisure itself was slotted between periods of work, whose values washed over into it continuously.

Picture how we spend much of our 'leisure' time. Fast-food stops on the motorway encourage us to hurry. We park as close as possible to save walking and taking up time. We order in quick-coded language 'Big Mac'. We eat our meal in a few minutes or order American style 'to go', so we can eat and drive at the same time. Then we drive and speak on the telephone at the same time, saving valuable seconds! Fast foods will get us on our way faster. Why? If we rush through life, will we be more or less happy? Can happiness be tied to consumer goods? One wonders how much of our 'workaholic' lifestyle, harried leisure and pursuit to purchase happiness is in fact an escape from freedom. With freedom, you have to make difficult choices. Perhaps we are looking for an 'unfreedom', a pretend freedom?

The Frenchman de Toqueville [40], writing about American culture a century ago, but whose words ring true still, described the lack of leisure philosophy: 'Leisure, for us, is like jam for Alice in Wonderland to put on your bread. You shall have jam on your bread tomorrow, but tomorrow never comes. It is always today.'

Activities which take time, thought and care – family life, listening to the problems of others, visiting the sick – are often swept aside with the demands of more pressing things to get done by deadlines. But some, having lived through life in the fast lane amid the rat race, are turning back to simpler values where stewardship of the environment, the enjoyment of what nature, families and friends have to offer, become appealing.

Futurists and economists, however, tell a different story for the mass of people: 'Time starvation' and 'hurry sickness' were to become the hallmark of the 1990s, according to the Henley Centre [41], which predicted that some consumers would have money but no time to spend it. The prediction of time starvation was partly true and could well apply in the years ahead. The harried consumer will increasingly be looking for new ways to cope with the conflicting demands of work, love and family. While time for leisure can be used to enrich the lives of many people, for others it may be a curse upon them. For example, it can be a time for loneliness. For some, it is an opportunity for vandalism, warring factions and gangs looking for excitement and trouble. The extraordinary lengths taken by governments and the football fraternity to head off trouble erupting at the World Cup in France in 1998, were an indictment of the way in which we have failed to meet the social needs of some young people whose choice of leisure activity is gang warfare.

In some cases, leisure has taken on the mantle of business and work. The inability to relax, even for a moment, is a common complaint and evidence of neurotic disturbance; even leisure time is taken at a workrate pace. Some find it hard to take holidays, and suffer from after-work irritability and the 'Sunday neurosis'. Most suicides occur during weekends and vacations. The attraction of 'moonlighting' or the second job is not just the money. It indicates the relative

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importance given to work compared with leisure. Up to eight million Americans need psychiatric assistance every year, 125,000 are treated in hospital for depression and 50,000 commit suicide.

Time viewed as a commodity, rather than expanding life, can make our lives shorter. One is reminded of the passage from Ecclesiastes. To everything there is a season, a natural pattern: 'A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.' Hence many writers view leisure as a social problem. Cutten [42] saw aspects of the problem in restlessness and the need for excitement, the inability to be alone, lack of self-discipline, boredom, fatigue and lack of play experience. The heart of the leisure threat according to those who see it as such is its unwise use; an aspect of the problem is mass availability. Two aspects of leisure – mass leisure and popular culture – illustrate divergent opinions.

### 4.5 Mass leisure

The twentieth century has brought time for leisure not only for the few, but also for the many. Leaders of the world governments in the last years of the twentieth century have to ask the same question posed by Aristotle: with what activity is man and woman to occupy his or her time for leisure? To Aristotle, people must be capable of handling leisure: 'The provision of an external opportunity for leisure is not enough; it can only be fruitful if the man himself is capable of leisure, and can, as we say, occupy his leisure or work his leisure (as the Greeks say).'

De Grazia believes that even today there are many who are incapable of leisure: anyone can have free time, not everyone can have leisure. Others take a very different viewpoint. The emergence of mass leisure has reduced, if not eliminated, many of the previous social and class differences in leisure behaviour. Roberts [43] considers that leisure is now the great equalizer. He indicates that there are typical leisure-time occupations of people of all classes. Others, however, see the picture in another perspective. Despite the increases in time, affluence, travel and mass consumerism, there are differences between the classes, particularly at both poles of the social spectrum.

Kraus [44] believes that inequalities in leisure remain deep in modern society, particularly in the spheres of recreation, cultural taste and social contacts. Zuzanek [45] reported on a study of urban family expenditures in Canada. Respondents from the lowest family income quintile were spending five times less money on recreation than respondents from the highest quintile. Yet in view of those who advocate a 'holistic' approach to leisure, emphasizing self-development and fulfilment through freely chosen meaningful activities, leisure participation will be particularly valuable for those people in society who are less advantaged.

#### 4.5.1 Popular culture

Within the framework of mass leisure has emerged the concept of 'popular culture'. It is important because it continually reaffirms common cultural values and identity of people in that culture. It also appears to embody or express the social and