

## **THE PARADOX OF LEISURE: A PANEL DISCUSSION**

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Leisure researchers and practitioners often espouse the inherent value of leisure experience. Leisure experience is seen to have benefits to the individual, to social groups, and to society. However, the thesis posed by this panel discussion is that the value of leisure is a social construction and thus is created by humans, changes over time and is open to interpretation. One of the ways in which meaning is created is through the polarization of viewpoints. For example, leisure is inherently good for people as compared to leisure places people at risk. This panel discussion will examine the paradox of leisure in the context of gambling, the paradox of leisure in the process of recovering from adversity, the paradox of leisure for youth, and the paradox of touristic leisure.

### **The Paradox of Leisure for Gambling**

Are gambling and “gaming” considered to be recreation and leisure experiences? Or is there an addictive nature to gambling and gaming that would place these activities “at risk” and in need of special legislation to control and deliver these leisure services? Gaming and gambling pose a particular paradox for leisure in the understanding of the historical-cultural emergence of these experiences as legally sanctioned and socially supported, especially at a time when support for other forms of recreation and leisure activities and services may be in decline.

This paper will serve to identify gambling as one of the more relevant economic and social measures of adult leisure behaviour in Canada. By reviewing the literature on the historical and cultural developments in horse-racing, bingo, lotteries, casino, and inter-net wagering, such related societal values as excellence, productivity, patronage, specialization, entertainment, individualism, thrill-seeking, social control, social policy, and independence will be explored.

In the gaming literature “fortunists” are described as individuals who more frequently participate in gambling games of chance. Participants are significantly more likely to be individuals who are vulnerable in society such as older populations, women, lower socioeconomic status, and with highly accessible gambling venues. By contrast, “potents” are individuals who would more frequently participate in gambling games of skill. These participants are significantly more likely to be individuals who are younger in age, male, of high socioeconomic status, and with difficulty accessing gambling venues.

This paper will suggest that there has been a shift in societal values toward a “fortunist” society that might support and enhance gambling as adult leisure at the expense of other recreation and leisure experiences and services. Additionally, suggestions for the recovery of more “potent” forms of leisure will also be advanced.

### **The Paradox of Leisure in Recovering from Adversity**

Adversity comes in many forms in today’s society – disability, illness, bereavement, fear, violence, abuse, poverty, war, etc. Adverse circumstances are those events that “represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual,

and that represent significant challenges to individuals' ways of understanding the world and their place in it" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). Thus, adversity challenges peoples' basic belief systems and requires them to develop novel strategies for coping.

Interestingly, leisure is seen to be both a casualty of adversity as well as an important aspect of the recovery process. When adverse life events occur, leisure is often low on the list of priorities; people who experience adversity are concerned with basic coping and survival. They want to manage their emotions, they want to solve the problem, they want to understand how this could have happened to them, and they want to understand how this experience fits into their life story. There is little interest or energy for leisure.

However, the most recent literature related to coping with adversity suggests that involvement in leisure is an extremely important part of the process of recovery and post-traumatic growth. Involvement in leisure provides a respite from the stress and worry associated with change. It allows people to think about something other than the traumatic experience and their response to the adversity. Leisure experience, with its associated positive affect, is extremely important in generating hope for recovery. Social leisure experiences provide a context in which to share personal experience with adversity, a necessity for adaptation and growth. Finally, leisure involvement also facilitates the development of a revised life story as many of our important personal narratives are situated in a social leisure context. Thus, the paradox of leisure, in this case, lies in the inherent lack of value for leisure early in the experience, and the potent value of leisure for the process of recovery.

### **The Paradox of Leisure for Youth**

Leisure involvement for youth creates tremendous opportunities for growth while at the same time creating significant potential for risk and rebellion. Moreover, given the social value of structured leisure experiences for youth, the impact of other-defined, other-created leisure experiences for youth must be called into question. The paradox of leisure for youth is based on the meaning and benefits of those experiences for the individuals involved, whether defined and created by the youth themselves or by adults.

Leisure involvement is seen as a positive means of growth and development for youth. Programs for youth designed to teach cooperation, social skills and strategies for working with others are seen as a foundation for children to become members of the community. However, these experiences are often defined by adults, occur in spaces created by adults, and have adult-valued meanings. While superficially seen as beneficial and developmental for youth, the question must be asked – to what extent do the youth themselves see these experiences as developmental and beneficial? Are resilient youth created by experiences that are other-defined? Are leisure experiences that are other-defined truly leisure experiences for those involved?

Perhaps one response to adult-defined leisure is involvement in high-risk, detrimental leisure experiences. Youth use these types of activities to define themselves, to differentiate themselves from the adults in their lives, and to create their own leisure contexts and experiences. While not valued by most members of society, these types of leisure experiences may, in fact, have greater developmental value to the youth than the traditional, structured experiences planned by caring adults. The paradox here is how do

leisure services professionals allow youth to create their own spaces and experiences while maintaining the need for safety, positive development, and socialization.

### **The Paradox of Touristic Leisure**

Tourism is fundamentally an expression of leisure (Mieczkowski, 1981). This assertion implies that tourism holds the promise of delivering the benefits that leisure enshrines. For this reason tourism, like leisure, has always been justified as a right and need of all. Providing this “right to leisure” for the transient masses has proved to be a lucrative venture for enterprises, as they incrementally create the ‘demand’ for holidaymaking today more than ever before.

Krippendorf (1987) observes that although leisure seekers are on the move in hordes, they are scarcely gratified with their experience. This is so because the industry has seized control of our leisure and directs people even in their leisure pursuits (Franklin & Crang, 2001). Moreover, as leisure mobility intensifies, leisure landscapes become increasingly annexed to, and confiscated by, the ever expanding tourism system that imposes its dictates on people’s leisure and recreation. Hence, instead of delivering people through tourism, it seems as though the commercial provisioning of leisure has not merely captivated the values of the present generation, but also victimized their leisurescapes.

Presently, the tourism industry is projected to grow at an exponential rate. This growth rate implies an equally accelerated growth in revenues. Such a growth rate can be realized only if enterprises continue to seek out new pastures, in terms of markets and destinations. In this frenzied ‘search and consume’ syndrome, the tourism system breeds and sustains itself. The question here is: what needs to be sustained? If tourism carries the seeds of its own destruction, then it must also carry seeds of its perpetuation. Also, if leisure has been phased out by the modern tourism system, then it is leisure that needs to be appropriately juxtapositioned within the system for its sustenance (Broadhurst, 2001).

Sustainable tourism has been engaging the attention of tourism scholars in recent times. In overly simple terms, the concept refers to practicing tourism with responsibility and accountability. It calls upon all concerned partakers; namely, tourists, governments, communities and businesses, to perform their obligations towards people and habitats. This does not require these stakeholders to dispossess themselves in anyway. On the contrary, it is expected that all participants have an opportunity to work toward the common goal of sustaining leisure and leisurescapes for all the values they hold for humankind.

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