

Keynotes

Les themes principaux

Where Has All the Leisure Gone? The Distribution and Redistribution of Leisure

Susan M. Shaw, Division of Leisure Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 3J5

INTRODUCTION: TIME AS A RESOURCE

One of the problems facing many people in today's society is that of time availability. High demands on time because of responsibilities and obligations, and high levels of time stress, lead inevitably to a lack of time and space for leisure. Leisure may not be the same phenomenon as free time, but the lack of free time and the presence of time stress are certainly barriers, both objectively and psychologically, to leisure. Moreover, the availability of time and leisure are also associated with, and contribute to, the overall quality of life.

It can be argued, then, that time is an important and significant resource in people's lives. Nevertheless, there has been relatively little attention directed towards time availability either in leisure studies or in other fields. In comparison with other resources such as wealth, power, education, or social status, we have very little knowledge and understanding of changing patterns of time allocation and time distribution. In this paper, the availability of time will be looked at from two perspectives. First, survey and census data will be presented to provide evidence of the decline in free time among Canadians. Second, attention will be directed towards the unequal distribution of leisure time and social structural and lifestyle factors which constrain leisure.

Explanations for these patterns of time distribution, and possible solutions aimed at the redistribution of time, will also be discussed.

THE DECLINE OF FREE TIME

It is not uncommon to hear anecdotal evidence about the decline in free time and the increase in time stress. Lack of time is a frequent complaint among people from many walks of life, and stress-related health disorders appear to have gained considerable prominence and attention in recent years. In addition, the most common barrier to leisure, as reported in number of studies of leisure participation is lack of time, and a recent study by the Conference Board of Canada reported that two-thirds of employees in Canada face increasing stress as they attempt to cope with work and family responsibilities.

There are few longitudinal studies of changes in time availability, but the 1971 time budget study carried out in Halifax Nova Scotia (n = 2,141) found that 30% of the respondents reported high levels of time stress and 63% said that they never or almost never had free time. Evidence of some increase in time stress, even since 1971, comes from a follow-up panel study

conducted in 1981 (n = 453) which reported an increase of 2% in the high stress level category.

Consideration of this evidence of time stress in modern society is, perhaps, particularly noteworthy given the common predictions of the 60s and 70s of the coming "leisure age". These predictions about the future leisure society were, in large part, based on evidence of a decline in the average length of the work week. In Canada, for example, the average work week declined from 55 hours in 1926 to 38 hours in 1988.

However, there have been some problems with the interpretation and application of work week statistics. One problem is that they do not take the subjective experience of time into account. Apart from this problem, though, there has been a tendency to treat these data too simplistically by ignoring other employment-related trends such as the increased employment of women, increased part-time work, and a decrease in agricultural occupations. When these trends are taken into account, the decline in the average work week of full-time employees since 1926 is shown to be relatively small, and the average hours of work per person has actually increased from 22 hours in 1951 to 26 hours in 1988. Moreover, when the family or married couple is considered as the unit of analysis, it is evident that the weekly work load of the "average family" has increased substantially since the 1950s -- from 37.8 hours in 1951 to 53.6 hours in 1986.

When other changes in obligations and demands are also considered, the finding that free time has declined rather than increased remains unchanged. For example, although there has been some decrease in the time women spend in household labour, this does not offset the increase in paid employment time. In addition, there has been a substantial increase in participation in post-secondary education since the 1950s, both among young and mature adults, which has exacerbated the decrease in time availability.

While data on work, housework, and education participation do not directly reflect the availability of perceived leisure or leisure experiences, they do give some indication of the increased constraints on people's leisure options. Other social trends over the last half century are more difficult to measure and to document, but suggest additional reasons why subjective time stress may have increased. These include the increased competitiveness that has developed under advanced capitalism leading to rising work demands and expectations in some occupations, and the increased rate of societal change and information flow with advancing technology. In addition, the decline in real income for many workers, continued high rates of unemployment and job insecurity also lead to increased job stress.

THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF TIME AND LEISURE

The situation today is not just one of lack of time, but also one in which the time that is available is unevenly distributed. Time availability is affected by a number of factors, including family obligations as well as work obligations. Gender is also a significant factor since women continue to do the bulk of the household labour whether they are employed or not. It is hardly surprising, then, that time budget findings show that time stress is particularly evident among employed women with children (47% high stress category, n = 2141).

In looking at the current distribution of time, there are better measures available than work week or time stress. Measuring time experienced as leisure, for example, takes individual subjectivity into account. Also, since experiences reported as leisure are closely associated with perceived free choice, pleasure, and intrinsic motivation, this measure of connotative leisure is consistent with leisure theory.

Two studies carried out in Halifax, Nova Scotia (1981-1982 and 1986-1987), which incorporated measures of experienced leisure as well as time diary data, can provide further insight into the unequal distribution of time. The first study was based on interviews with 60 married couples, while the second used a sample of males and females selected using random telephone numbers (n=108). From the second study, it was evident that employment status did affect the availability of leisure time, with employed people having the least leisure and retired people

the most leisure. However, housewives and students had only slightly more leisure than the employed, indicating the constraints of household labour and educational participation as well. This study also showed "lifestyle" (i.e. marital and family status and living arrangements) to be a factor, and that in most lifestyle categories, women had less leisure than men.

Since the couple study had a matched sample of women and men, this actually provides a better gender comparison. The data from this study show that both work obligations (employment status and length of work week for those employed) and family obligations (based on the number and ages of children in the family) affect the availability of leisure, and that they affect men's and women's leisure differentially. Specifically, men's leisure is primarily constrained by the extent of their paid work obligations. Women have less leisure, overall, than men, and the main constraints on their leisure are family obligations and their husbands' (rather than their own) work obligations.

The methodology used in these two studies has the advantage of not only providing a reliable time measure, but also of tapping into people's everyday lived experiences and taking their perceptions of leisure experiences into account. It also has its limitations, though, because it does not record factors such as a sense of responsibility, or thinking, planning, and organizing, nor does it consider emotional work such as care and concern for others. If these factors could be adequately measured as well, they might help to further explain why certain types of occupation, including running a household, tend to be associated with time stress.

TOWARDS THE REDISTRIBUTION OF TIME

The general decline in time availability and the extreme levels of time stress faced by some, are significant issues that need to be addressed. Instead of moving towards a leisure society, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction. One cause may be a changing value system which may be increasingly production-oriented or achievement-oriented. However, it is unwise to consider changing values without also considering the underlying structural causes.

Women's work roles have changed dramatically over the last half century as the majority of women have moved into the formal labour force. Other social structures, though, have failed to accommodate this change. Family structure and women have taken on a greater and greater proportion of that workload. In addition, an issue which has received less recognition is that work structures have failed to adapt as well. We have a labour market system which is still based on the patriarchal assumption that the worker is male, is free to dedicate a large part of his life to the demands of work, that child care is not an issue, that someone other than the worker is responsible for the family and household, and even that the worker is free to travel or move if required by the job. These outdated work and family structures, coupled with increasing work competitiveness, higher expectations and job insecurity, are probably the major causes of decreased time availability and increased time stress. This leads to the conclusion, then, that basic structural change is needed rather than, or in addition to, attitudinal change. Structural changes that bring about greater gender equality and that recognize women's (and hopefully men's) changing roles are needed both within the family and within the labour market.

The lack of time and the unequal distribution of time are both issues that should be of concern to leisure researchers, since they clearly constrain leisure and affect overall life quality. The notion of leisure disadvantage is also one that deserves more attention. Time stress is not the only factor which constrains leisure. For some groups, such as the unemployed, the disabled, and the very poor, problems of stigma, psychological distress, lack of financial resources, and excess of time, are much more salient and should not be ignored. However, time stress is a form of disadvantage that is common in today's society. In many ways, the leisure studies field, with its emphasis on life quality and its concern for subjective as well as objective experiences, is in a unique position to understand and to work towards solutions to this problem.

PROCEEDINGS
Sixth Canadian Congress on Leisure Research
May 9-12, 1990

COMPTE RENDU DU
Sixième Congrès Canadien de Recherches en Loisir
Le 9-12 mai, 1990

University of Waterloo

***Leisure Challenges:
Bringing People, Resources and
Policy into Play***

***Les défis des loisirs:
agencer les personnes,
les ressources, et les décisions***

Editor/Le rédacteur: Bryan J. A. Smale

©Ontario Research Council on Leisure 1990
©Conseil Ontarien de Recherche en Loisir 1990

Copyright © 1990 Ontario Research Council on Leisure/Conseil Ontarien de
Recherche en Loisir

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used
in any form without written permission of the editor or ORCOL.

Printed and bound at Graphic Services
University of Waterloo



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only).
Please note that this document is copyrighted and CREDIT MUST BE PROVIDED to the originator
of the document when you quote from it. You must not sell the document or make a profit from
reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside
of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the
database by the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>