

Leisure Policy in the 1990s

Geoff Godbey, Department of Recreation and Parks, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802

INTRODUCTION

The world is in an unprecedented process of change, and the exponential rate of such change in every aspect of our lives will reshape the meaning and use of leisure in every nation on earth, as well as the extent and objectives of leisure policy. As the mutual interdependence of every living and non-living thing increases, it is almost folly to attempt a taxonomy of change. The universe has become a small pond which ripples from the tossing of each and every pebble. We cannot see most ripples: "...instead of experiencing the world as it is, people experience only about one trillionth of outside events, a small world indeed" (Ornstein and Ehrlich, 1989, p. 73). Nevertheless, perhaps we can see a few more ripples if we arbitrarily categorize changes as environmental, economic, and social, and start with some premises which have implications for leisure and leisure policy. In doing so, a few exemplary bits of data will be presented as illustrations.

ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

The greatest causes of the unprecedented ecological change which has occurred since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution is the cancerous growth of the human population and faulty human perception. While it took 1,700 years after the birth of Christ for the world's population to double, it has doubled three times since then in increasingly shorter durations. The 5.1 billion people in the world will double again in a little over 40 years at present rates of growth. Today, the "biomass" (collective weight) of human beings is 300 million tons, which is probably greater than any other animal. Most of the explosive population increase is now attributable to poverty and the low status of women, so lowering the birth rates will have to deal directly with these issues (UNESCO, 1988).

While the huge population increase will result in continuous environmental calamities, it is the developed nations, such as Canada and the United States, which do the real environmental harm. The negative ecological consequences of the birth of a North American is about one hundred times that of, for instance, an Indian, Chinese, or Bolivian. North Americans, who constitute six percent of the world's population, own 135 million of the 350 million automobiles in the world. If the Chinese owned automobiles at the rate we do, the polar ice caps would melt. While North American culture is increasingly serving as a model for much of the world, thanks to increased telecommunications, tourism, the emergent world economy, and widespread use of computers, the model is entirely inappropriate.

Our own farming practices cannot be sustained even one more century. A third of North American topsoil, which has taken a millennia to produce, is gone. "The basis of human proliferation is not our own seed but the seed of grasses. Corn, wheat, and rice produce plenty of seed, big bluestem and switchgrass precious little. Quadrupeds can live on the stems and leaves of prairie grasses, and bipeds can live on the quadrupeds, but that arrangement leaves bipeds perched on a high, narrow ledge of the trophic pyramid. We are now too plentiful to fit" (Eisenberg, 1989, p. 62).

Similar dismal pictures may be drawn with regard to global warming, our unbelievably ignorant use of water and chemicals, and a host of environmental problems. The greenhouse effect, for instance, which is largely attributable to the development of coal, oil, and natural gas as cheap energy sources for the masses (particularly in North America) may result in the earth warming three to nine degrees Fahrenheit in sixty years, more than it has in the last 15,000 years, with disastrous results, such as an exponential increase in melanoma and the loss of many coastal cities. It may even be argued that AIDS represents an environmental warning.

Premise One: The rapidly deteriorating quality of the natural environment will bring about a decrease in our material standard of living, increased use of both aversive and non-aversive conditioning by government and private enterprise to slow this process of deterioration, and the economic and social value of the natural world increasing exponentially in relation to the human-made world.

ECONOMIC CHANGE

Changes in the environment and in the economy are directly parallel. In both cases, we have, in effect, stopped living off our interest and are now spending our capital. Simply put, those in most industrial societies, particularly North America, are living far above their economic means. At the federal government level, both the United States and Canada, in an era of peace and prosperity, are running deficits of approximately 20 percent of their respective budgets. The United States' deficits are actually more, since some budget expenditures have been taken offline, such as the bailout of the savings and loans industry, and monies collected for future Social Security payments have been transferred to general revenues. In Canada, the federal deficits have accumulated in an era of prosperity in which Canadians spent almost nothing on military. North Americans' personal rates of savings are the lowest of those in industrial nations.

To these economic problems must be added a plethora of new costs which will be increasingly evident in the next few decades. Such costs include the need to replace much of the urban infrastructure (from sewer systems to bridges) in many North American cities, the exponentially increasing bill for treatment of AIDS victims, the huge increase in health care bills as the 35 percent of the population which makes up the Baby Boom Generation moves toward old age, the massive re-education of those who can no longer function in a complex society, the clean-up toxic waste, water, and air, and the increasing cost of drugs and drug-related crime.

Premise Two: A fundamental reordering of economic practices will be necessary. Such a reordering will partially curtail individual economic freedom to help bring about collective economic solvency. Consumption of material goods will be more heavily taxed; saving more rewarded. The environmental costs of consumption will be increasingly built in to purchase prices of goods and services. Taxes will increase and governmental spending will be more parsimonious and more closely monitored.

SOCIAL CHANGE

The characteristics and conditions of the North American population are changing as rapidly as the economy and the natural environment. Such changes are interrelated and multi-faceted. The 35 percent of the population sometimes called the "Baby Boom Generation" is now between the ages of 44 and 26. The percentage of elderly in our society is increasing rapidly, as in every industrial society. Our population lives in increasingly smaller numbers within households, defers marriage longer, divorces more frequently, and lives alone more frequently compared to a generation ago.

Economically, the percentage of the population in the middle-class has declined during the last decade. The Rich have gotten richer and the Poor have gotten poorer. Children have emerged as the poorest segment of our society as well as less physically fit, emotionally stable, or educationally prepared to assume positions of leadership in the emergent world economy. Almost one in two children will live in a one-parent household.

The progression of women into the labour force, not just for sporadic employment, massive immigration of Hispanics and Orientals, the emerging "two-tier" labour force and the huge increase in homeless people of all ages are transforming our society in fundamental ways.

Premise Three: Our society is rapidly becoming more vulnerable, more diverse in terms of economic and educational resources, and in lifestyle, and less capable of sustaining

our former ways of life. All of our major social institutions will have to undergo major restructuring to accommodate these changes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEISURE POLICY

All the previous changes suggest that leisure policy will be reformulated in fundamental ways. Some of these ways would seem to be as follows:

1. Leisure policy will be guided more by responses to need for environmental, social, and economic reform than simply a demand driven service of government. An ideological agenda will be developed which is reflected in policy stressing the immediacy of need for pragmatic reform concerning the destruction of natural resources for short term profit, a more frank condemnation of narcissism and open-ended economic greed, the relatedness of leisure experience to a myriad of social and environmental problems, and the limitation of individual rights when the exercise of such rights flies in the face of communal well-being, the sustainability of our culture, and our economic solvency.
2. Leisure services will experience big policy battles as a result of the quickly emerging two tier society of have and have nots. Policy within given agencies will have to have multiple objectives. On the one hand, seeking to serve the "haves", for whom quality of experience, aesthetics, convenience, safety, high levels of specialization in a leisure activity, and so on, are important and, on the other hand, participating in a reform agenda which is concerned with individual responsibility to maintain one's own health, the relatedness of work skills and leisure skills, the ecological necessity for preserving the environment in a more natural state, creation of less consumptive models of living and leisure use, the re-education of children who are not equipped to function in a changed world, and people who have no homes or future.

To a great extent, leisure policy will reflect a "Robin Hood" strategy in our two tier society, using funds generated from high income participants to provide services for low income ones. Issues of equity will become less important as income disparities increase and there is greater recognition of the economic benefit to all society of improving the health, education, and life chances of the "have nots".

3. Leisure services will function in less isolation from other services of government. Many government services will increasingly recognize a leisure component in what they do. Leisure services will be, to some extent, decentralized throughout government, and policy will be established or made more explicit with regard to leisure for a myriad of government agencies including those concerned with public transportation, natural resource management, public housing, education, economic development, crime, health, sewage, special populations, planning, and other functions. The idea that leisure is the concern of only one agency of government will become obsolete.
4. Leisure policy will increasingly be concerned with *prevention*. As a concept, "prevention's" importance will grow dramatically as we realize that it makes economic, moral, and physiological sense to

place our efforts more in preventing many situations we define as problems before they occur, rather than attempting to remedy them after they have become visible. In regard to health, for instance, a logic will be recognized as follows.

The rise of the medical profession has had comparatively little effect on longevity or health quality. Epidemiological studies find little or no effect (in the range of five to ten percent) of expanded health care and massive spending increases on health. "Of the factors that determine the state of our health, more than 80 percent, probably much more, derive from our environment: our relations with friends and enemies, our status in society, the quality of our education, and our thoughts about ourselves" (Ornstein and Ehrlich, 1989, p. 1233). If health care is a relatively minor component in our health, neither do the types of behaviours we undertake as a kind of aversive conditioning to improve our health. Almost no one who goes on a diet has lost weight at the end of six months. People who do prescribed exercise routines quit after a short period of time. It is only when the individual has voluntarily and pleasurably undertaken an activity with a positive (or negative) health consequence that it is likely to become part of his or her style of life. This rather simple but hitherto elusive line of reasoning will be increasingly recognized and leisure policy will be increasingly framed in health-related terms.

5. At the macro level, leisure policy in North America will be increasingly cognizant of the fact that our culture's use of leisure is serving as a model for for much of the rest of the world. Television, film, mass tourism, computers, and the internationalization of business allow less "developed" nations to see what we do during leisure and to be attracted to our highly consumptive lifestyle with its appealing emphasis upon immediate gratification, individual fulfilment, and consumption of an ever-increasing array of goods and services. As our understanding of the environmental consequences of other nations attempting to follow our lead (North Americans consume 40 to 60 percent of the world's illegal drugs, consume a diet which the world's agricultural base could only provide for two billion people, and so on) our own leisure policies and other policies will increasingly reflect movement toward a sustainable environment and society, based upon the recognition that our self-interest dictates reshaping our use of leisure and our ways of life. It may be, however, that developed nations will try to use "cultural barter" instead. "In exchange for the developing countries' agreement not to copy the most consumptive forms of leisure practised in the West, they would be provided with various types of widely-conceived cultural assistance, such as free access to satellite television, to music and video tapes, various forms of cultural exchanges, assistance in preservation of cultural and historical heritage, free technological transfers and/or joint production of consumer durables serving leisure needs, with emphasis on collective, rather than individual forms of 'consuming' leisure" (Godbey and Jung, 1989, p. 22). In either eventuality, the federal, state, and provincial policies which are developed in regard to leisure will show a markedly greater awareness of their impact upon the rest of the world.

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Editor/Le rédacteur: Bryan J. A. Smale

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