

The Institutionalization of Leisure: Cultural Interpenetration

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INTRODUCTION

The paper assumes and argues that leisure, as a socio/cultural phenomenon in white, anglo-saxon, protestant North American society in general and in Canada in particular, is becoming increasingly institutionalized (Goldman, 1977; Kelly, 1986; Lenskyi, 1988; Mullett, 1988; Olson, 1984; Stormann, 1989; Whittles, 1989). However, the argument has relevance also to the West European scene and to those areas of the globe influenced or becoming influenced by a western institutionalized culture [e.g. through cultural tourism (Butler, 1989)]. Basic to the argument are the assumptions:

1. that leisure and culture are inseparable;
2. that institutions seek to influence cultures which are expressive and irrational rather than being technical and rational;
3. that a culture becomes increasingly institutionalized as it assumes the rational/technical values of institutions; and
4. that both institutions and cultures seek self-survival.

The discussion develops through an examination of the hegemonic exchange between institutional values and socio/cultural values expressed through leisure particularly as these relate to differing perspectives on the nature of (1) *linear* (rational) and (2) *natural* (expressive) time and creative action as being instrumental or expressive. Institutional culture and leisure as a cultural expression are thus examined and related.

Strategies for institutional control over an organization's cultural environment are then presented to form the substance of potential empirical examinations in the context of ecomuseums. The discussion concludes, following the (Mazurek, 1989) argument that significant ontological, epistemological, and praxiological questions for leisure studies can be raised.

DISCUSSION

Four main themes seem to dominate much of the informed commentary, and research in such seemingly diverse areas as socio/geriatric medicine (Restak, 1988), cultural tourism (Butler, 1980), substance abuse (Neulinger, 1974), bird-watching (Devlin, 1977), and others. These themes are as follows and are exemplified by an institutional expression:

1. Leisure as compensation (the amusement industry) (Postman, 1985);
2. Leisure as professional activity and responsibility (leisure education institutes);
3. Leisure as routine (industrial recreation and life-long learning programmes) (Goldman, 1977); and
4. Leisure as consumption (leisure commodities industries) (Kelly, 1986).

In each of the above examples there is a conflict of values, beliefs and their symbolic expressions between institutional and non-institutional cultural values [e.g. between the professional and the amateur (Stebbins, 1979)].

Clarke and Critcher (1985, p. 228) have suggested that this is a hegemonic conflict in that "Hegemony identifies cultural conflict as a process which does not just happen at the level of political ideologies, but also involves the patterns of everyday thinking and habits of mind -- precisely those aspects of social ideologies which we take for granted because they are so 'obvious'". Indeed, they continue, "... leisure is itself central to the struggle for hegemony".

Culture is considered as the integrated set of values, beliefs, traditions, and customs and their symbolic expression which defines a society or a social group. This set is given both structural and functional representation which frequently take on a symbolic function. Crucial to the identity and realization of a culture are the ways in which freedom is expressed through creative activities and in which time is defined. And, as (Hall, 1984) has argued, this identification and realization occurs at the *technical*, conscious level of words, technologies and tools, and other visible symbols, at the personal, *private* level of screamed-off discourse and intimacy, and at the *primary* "out-of-awareness level of feelings and meditations".

When leisure is considered as a cultural phenomenon (Peiper, 1963), creative freedom, a sense of "flow", and an ignorance of machine-defined time seem to be essential to its comprehension. Its function seems to be expressive and to arise from itself.¹ Kelly (1987) has identified eight metaphors by which leisure has been examined. His identification of leisure as "immediate expression", as "existential action", and as the process of "development" bears a strong resemblance to Hall's description of the *primary* level of culture. Similarly, Hall's *private* level accounts for much of Kelly's metaphors of "social identity" and "interaction" as does the technical level for "institutions" and "politics". Kelly's eighth metaphor, "humanistic/cultural", accounts for the previous seven as well as Hall's three cultural levels.

When institutional culture is considered, "time" becomes a crucial element (Thompson, 1967a). Indeed, a linear or mechanical view of time is essential to the understanding and achievement of rational organized efficiency. "Creativity and "freedom" become understood as values and beliefs associated with the conformities of:

1. categories (distinctions between employees);
2. structures (hierarchies of control);
3. procedures (rules and regulations); and
4. personnel (specializations and training) (Scott, 1987, pp. 194-198).

These organizational practices (which become institutionalized as values and beliefs) differentiate, in their expression as actions and symbols, between *mutual benefit* organizations (e.g. churches and professional associations in which the members benefit), *business concerns* (e.g. fitness centres and theatres from which the owners benefit), *commonwealth organizations* (e.g. schools, hospitals and prisons from which the society as a whole benefits), and *service organizations* (e.g. nursing homes and social welfare and parks and recreation agencies which benefit those who receive the services) (Blau, 1962).

¹ **The weaknesses and strength of reifying leisure are acknowledged in the same way they are acknowledged when one "rattomorphizes man and anthropomorphizes rats" (Bertalanffy, 1967).**

If leisure is considered as a major cultural expression of the society which surrounds and exchanges with an institution then, to the degree that an institution's culture dominates or is allowed to dominate the social culture, leisure will be similarly affected. This relationship has been termed "cultural interpenetration" (Jepperson, 1989). Such institutional interpenetration with its emphasis on culturally condoned rationality and technological expediency displaces communal, kinship-base and traditional forms of community association (the structural expression of culture) (Zucker, 1983, pp. 1-47). To both protect and enhance its norms of rationality (Thompson, 1967b) has suggested, in prepositional form, that institutions use a variety of strategies; namely:

1. developing alternative control strategies;
2. seeking prestige and support;
3. gaining more relative power over competitors;
4. contracting;
5. coopting;
6. coalescing; and
7. expanding spheres of influence.

CONCLUSION

The postulated hegemonic conflict, the mutually interdependent cultural interpenetrations affecting and conditioning socio/cultural leisure and the strategies used through appeals to economic growth and diversity, cultural assimilation, and increased material standards of living can be observed, to give one example, in recent ecomuseum developments in both urban and rural areas in Canada. The examination of institutionalized and non-institutionalized ecomuseums when compared and contrasted with institutionalized and non-institutionalized cultural villages/historic enclaves which have not been defined as ecomuseums (Heron, 1989) exemplifies the praxiological dimensions of this discussion. The ontological problem is addressed through considering the nature of culture, at all its levels, as expression in leisure. The epistemological problem can not be avoided when the institutionalized nature of leisure in contemporary society is explored and when the influence of the rational/legal/technical culture of institutions upon our leisure is acknowledged.

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