Speaking a Common Language in Leisure: Towards a Comprehensive Leisure Taxonomy

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INTRODUCTION

Classification efforts in leisure are not new. In fact, classification efforts are pervasive in the leisure literature. However, at the present time, there is no common linkage between the various types of classifications. This paper attempts to provide a rudimentary model for a comprehensive taxonomy to provide a common linkage between leisure classification efforts and to provide a common "language" for leisure professionals.

Lacking such a comprehensive taxonomy leisure researchers are limited in their attempt to build theories explaining leisure phenomena:

> Theory building is predicated upon the ability to classify phenomena. This process of classifying phenomena has been very evident in the study of leisure behaviour... The utility of existing systems for advancing the theoretical understanding of leisure behaviour, however, is limited due to lack of coordinated research efforts and integration of research findings. Very little attempt has been made to summarize or compare results across studies (Allen and Buchanan, 1982, p. 307).

More recently, Williams and Knopf (1988), in the context of presenting results on work concerning perceived similarities among outdoor recreation activities, expressed the following critique on classifications:

> Classification of leisure activities has been and currently remains an essential part of leisure research... Classification is fundamental to advancing leisure science because science itself is predicated on the grouping of unique events or objects into similarity classes to arrive at laws of higher generality ... Unfortunately, the results of classifying leisure

> behaviour have been as diverse as the activities being classified (Williams and Knopf, 1988, pp. 153-154).

This paper, in essence, is a classification of classification efforts in leisure. The classification is based on an initial review of the leisure literature. The preliminary classification of that literature is presented herein as a first step towards the creation of a viable comprehensive taxonomy of leisure.

METHODS

There are no set guidelines for the construction of a taxonomy in a field. In essence, each field is free to create, or not create, its own organizational structure. The model used in this study is drawn from the biological sciences which uses a hierarchical taxonomic structure. Such a structure depends on defining items using a gradually narrowing set of criteria until only one single item remains.

This hierarchical approach was chosen because it allows the use of already completed classification to provide some of the discriminating criteria necessary to a taxonomy. The broad levels chosen reflect the large body of work already available under those headings. It is a central assumption of this paper that new classification work will be necessary to fill in gaps exposed by the larger taxonomic structure. It is a further assumption that the proposed taxonomic model will serve as simply a starting point for the creation of a final model. Consequently, adjustments, reordering, and even replacement are assumed as a logical outcome of presenting this model.

CRITERIA FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LEISURE TAXONOMIC MODEL

In constructing a comprehensive leisure taxonomic model, it was necessary to establish the criteria used to establish the model, the assumptions made, and the laws that governed the use of the model. A brief description of each is presented below:

1. The model should be simple, yet comprehensive enough to be used by leisure practitioners and leisure researchers alike.

2. The model should be dynamic to allow for changes, additions, and reconstructions.

3. The model should be adaptable to other cultures and languages.

4. The model should be regulated by a central international committee similar to the ones used in the biological sciences.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Leisure is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately described by a single dimension description.

2. Each leisure phenomenon can be described by a unique set of characteristics.

3. A combination of observable and non-observable characteristics best describes leisure phenomena.

LAWS GOVERNING A COMPREHENSIVE LEISURE TAXONOMIC MODEL

1. It is not possible to directly observe *all* characteristics that make a leisure phenomenon unique, but as a general law, observable characteristics should receive preference over non-observable traits in describing leisure phenomena.

2. The preferred description for each leisure phenomenon is the one that requires the shortest sequence of characteristics to uniquely identify the leisure phenomenon.

3. Past and present leisure research should be used whenever possible to provide unique descriptions for each leisure phenomenon.

RESULTS

Comprehensive Leisure Taxonomic Model

Keeping within the rules described above, the broadest classification of the taxonomic model should deal with the most easily *observable* characteristics. Consequently, the first division of leisure is the leisure activity type. Each unique activity at this level would be assigned a number that would appear to the right of the Roman Numeral I. Subclassifications of the activity would appear as a number to the right of the larger classification of the activity (for presentation sake, the Subclassifications are presented with no argument for their inclusion except for illustration purposes).

> Example: Fly fishing could be classified as 1.1.3 with the I representing that this is the activity level description, the 1 representing the broad activity of fishing and the 3 representing the specific activity of fly fishing. The Arabic numbers would be systematically assigned as necessary to uniquely identify the leisure phenomenon in question. Each Arabic numeral would have a unique position that it held and would work in a manner similar to keying out a specific biological species.

The next level of the hierarchy would deal directly with the physical setting. This level parallels the ROS conceptualization by Driver and Brown (1978), although it expands the concept to *all* physical environments including those constructed by people. The divisions of this level would characterize the physical setting.

> Example: Fly fishing could be further defined by I.1.3.II.3.4. The Roman Numeral one represents the description given above. Roman Numeral two represents the physical setting with 3 representing river fishing and 4 representing undisturbed conditions.

Level III of the model would represent the social setting. This also roughly parallels the ROS conceptualization of Driver and Brown (1978), but it allows the expansion of the number and types of social settings included. The initial division within this level could be between groups of one and groups of more than one. Further divisions would further characterize the social setting with some variables now being only indirectly observable.

> Example: Picnicking could be defined as I.1.3.II.3.4.III.2.1. The Roman Numerals one and represent the activity and physical setting described above. The Roman Numeral three represents the social setting with the 2 representing a group of more than one, the 1 representing an immediate family group.

Level IV would represent the psychological nature of the leisure experience. Although psychological experiences can vary greatly from activity to activity, the experience is anchored in *some* activity and allows for a richness of description for every single leisure activity (with the full complexity of studying leisure readily apparent). The first division could be based on previous research such as that done by Tinsley and Johnson (1984) which used need

satisfying characteristics to differentiate between the need satisfying characteristics of many recreation activities. Further divisions would further characterize the psychological nature of the activity with all variables now being only indirectly observable.

> Example: Hiking could be identified as I.1.3.II.3.4.III.2.1.IV.2.3. The Roman Numerals one, two and three represent the activity, physical and social settings described above. The Roman Numeral four represents the psychological setting with 2 representing, in this case, self-actualization and 3 representing a search for solitude as the motivational factor.

Levels of the taxonomic model after Level IV would be reserved for advances in leisure research and techniques. Intermediate levels to the ones described above could be inserted if future work warranted such a change.

DISCUSSION

The key aspect of making the model manageable is to provide the shortest list of characteristics that uniquely identifies the leisure phenomenon. This means that while numerous leisure characteristics have been described, only the few that make up the minimum critical number to uniquely identify the chosen leisure phenomenon would be used at any one time.

The model is immediately useful in research as it provides a systematic manner of describing all leisure phenomena. The model also lends itself to relatively simple translation across languages and cultures as the taxonomic symbol for each leisure phenomenon would remain constant while the description could be in any language of convenience.

Implementation of a Leisure Taxonomy

To make a comprehensive leisure taxonomy a viable tool requires that an agreed upon model serve as the standard. It is suggested that an international committee, similar to those used in the biological sciences, be created to make an initial decision as to what model shall be used as a standard in the field. This committee, after deciding what approach to take, would then be the final judge as to necessary changes, modifications, and/or replacement.

In summary, a comprehensive leisure taxonomy would provide organizational structure to a diverse and complicated field. This study has proposed a

rudimentary comprehensive leisure taxonomic model. It is suggested that the implementation of such a model will require cooperation at the international level in leisure. Over time it is hoped that debate and discussion of this issue will lead to an internationally accepted comprehensive leisure taxonomy.

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