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Key Concepts in
Leisure Studies

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For Maggie and Andy

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introduction

Selecting key concepts obviously involves making choices about what to include and how to structure the discussion. The choices in each case are likely to be controversial, and this is to be expected. Leisure studies is not a subject with agreed or fixed boundaries, but one which focuses on different topics and different concepts at different times. These topics and concepts overlap with others discussed in physical education, tourism and sport. In its broader conceptions, 'leisure' also includes activities that are analysed by media studies and the social sciences, history and economics. Indeed, according to recent commentaries, the experience of leisure and its pleasures can be detected in most human activities, including activities which go on at work. I tend to favour this broadest of definitions myself, so that studying leisure involves studying a very broad range of activities indeed; in this book, we examine activities which include eating, visiting heritage sites, playing electronic games, consuming pornography, and getting bodies tattooed or pierced. It follows that one of the challenges of studying topics like this is that sometimes a detached stance is required, one that does not involve making immediate value judgements of support or condemnation.

On a more technical level, there have been occasional discussions among academics about where the boundaries of leisure studies should lie. At one stage, for example, there was a suggestion that the subject should be virtually replaced by the characteristic arguments and topics developed in cultural studies. Some people think that a strict boundary should be maintained between leisure studies and tourism, or between leisure studies and media studies, while others would suggest the opposite. To some extent, these academic disputes reflect opinions and policies outside the academy as well. Government policy can almost force a focus on particular kinds of activities which they define and fund as 'leisure', most spectacularly in the debates in the 1980s about how we were moving towards a 'leisure society', which preferred certain kinds of socially functional leisure in order to compensate for the decline of traditional patterns of work. There is also the argument that leisure studies is a 'teaching object', to borrow a debate from cultural studies. This means that the topics of leisure studies are shaped more by the internal requirements of universities and their courses than by any

conceptual framework: the subject has expanded to include the more popular commercial and casual leisure activities in order to attract students and meet new vocational needs, for example. Organizational politics can also play a part as different academic departments compete for resources; leisure can be included under broader headings (the UK Government currently includes it in an academic unit with hospitality studies, sports, outdoor education and tourism), or can go it alone.

I have attempted to pursue fairly open boundaries with neighbouring social science disciplines, especially with sociology, media studies, cultural studies and sports studies. This may involve risk, in that specialist debates in those areas may be glossed or omitted. I have not focused so clearly on relevant debates about leisure that might be found in psychology, economics or management. It is beyond my expertise and scope to venture very far into these areas, and there are much better specialist books and journals. Those wanting to explore those areas more deeply might well wish to begin with the special editions of the journal *Leisure Studies*. Volume 18, No. 2 (1999) introduces some recent perspectives in economics, while Volume 17, No. 2 (1998) discusses leisure, commerce and policy.

I suspect that some readers might think of a 'key concept' as involving a fairly simple definition of a technical term. I do offer introductory definitions, but then move on to consider debates and arguments. Leisure studies does not have relatively stable concepts in the sense that mathematics does, and there is always going to be dispute and argument. However, such activity can look like an unnecessary academic game to the beginner. There are some definite benefits in suggesting different avenues and approaches to topics, though, and for considering concepts as guides for research rather than as fixed labels. The field is an expanding one, for example, and it may be necessary to consider various perceptions of emergent forms of leisure. It is often thought that policy implications follow best from simple definitions and concepts, but premature policy, based on incomplete understanding, can be ineffective or counter-productive.

Finally, I have some suggestions about how student readers specifically might want to use this book. An interactive style of learning is generally held to be more effective, even as far as books are concerned. I do not think that this means we should take 'interaction' too literally, and proceed immediately to 'in-text questions' or suggested exercises, since interaction can often involve 'inner dialogues' initiated by all sort of elements in texts, not just the ones designed to do so. However, it is important that this book offers a variety of routes to understanding. To

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take an obvious example, although the content is organized in terms of 'concepts', a number of substantive studies are included as well. Discussing more concrete studies and current controversies can be a useful teaching strategy, and some students prefer to work from actual studies back towards concepts or theoretical frameworks. Readers of this book should use the section outlines as a guide to content as well, therefore, or else they might not realize that, for example, the entry on adding value contains specific discussions of selling Nike trainers, that the entry on ecstasy considers dance and clubbing as well as drugs, the entry on effects analysis examines electronic games, and that on semiotics includes analysis of James Bond movies.

Finally, I am conscious that some experienced leisure studies students may well find these key concepts unusual in a particular sense. The material could appear to be less obviously practical or vocational, for example, although it could be argued that it is extremely relevant vocationally to understand the pleasures that commercial leisure can offer, or how tastes develop. Nevertheless, in order to help come to grips with this slightly unusual material, I have discussed some possible teaching and learning strategies in the section on using the book.

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There are no fixed ways to teach or to learn, despite the emergence of enthusiasms for different approaches from time to time. There has been a great deal of research on teaching and learning, including some highly influential work on approaches to study (see Entwistle, 2003; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Morgan, 1993). This work suggests that students should avoid what used to be called a 'surface approach', which involves putting in a lot of hard work to remember the immediate details such as names, facts and dates, specific quotes and specific examples. This can be desperately inefficient and also heartbreaking on encountering some academic work which is packed with detail of this kind. It does not even generate the kind of learning that is most likely to be effective in terms of gaining high grades, since most university assessment is based on quite different requirements, for example, that students should understand the basic principles of an argument, be able to provide a few relevant examples, put arguments in their own words, make criticisms of arguments, and forge connections between arguments that they may have encountered in different texts. I have encountered spectacular examples of students who have not realized this and who have had a very unhappy and unrewarding time at college as a result, including a student who evidently believed that it was necessary to remember 'all the dates' (which turned out to be the dates in brackets used to reference books and journals). Since just the opening paragraphs of books commonly contain many of these, I began to see why this student had suffered so much!

It is useful to practise summarizing the main principles of an argument, and beginners very often find they first need to learn what these principles might be. The 'key concepts' format of this book offers a chance to practise on relatively small sections of text. Thus one thing that students might want to do is to attempt to summarize each 'concept', focusing on the main points, identifying the main debates, illustrating the points with a few key examples, and learning to read and make notes selectively. The activity of making notes itself might be important, judging by the work offered on writing skills (Learning Development and Continuing Education Unit, 2003). Writing is itself positive and creative, and it involves skills that students will be using a lot, so it makes obvious sense to encourage people to interact with academic arguments by writing

about them. Useful suggestions produced by this Unit include taking full advantage of the flexibility offered by writing, for example, giving each paragraph a sub-heading, producing an abstract, writing a question for each section, identifying keywords, re-writing a section in a more popular style, organizing critical thought by writing a question for oneself to answer such as 'I understand this argument, but . . .', and so on. Focusing on 'key concepts' should help students not to be distracted by so much else that goes on in more conventional chapters, including establishing one's reputation and engaging in the occasional scholastic display for the benefit of other scholars.

The concepts on display here are arranged in alphabetical order, and this is a strategy which misses chances to structure them deliberately for teaching purposes. A more rational order might involve placing concepts in a hierarchy, with the most abstract and general ones at the top and the more specific and limited ones at the bottom. A common teaching strategy would then begin with the more specific ones and move on to the more abstract ones. Other common ways to offer concepts in sequences involve pairing those which are in some sense opposed to each other, so that a debate can be pursued.

It is useful to remind students that they can impose their own order, according to their own preferences, including these sequences or clusters if necessary. It might be useful, for example, to consider 'postmodernism' as a concept at a higher level of generality than concepts such as 'hyperreality', and note that it is also used in more specific discussions of topics such as 'heritage', or 'Disneyfication'. This offers readers the opportunity to impose their own sequences and choose the best way to read about these concepts. You might want to read the more specific discussions first and then come to the more abstract one with a knowledge of typical 'applications', or start with the general concept and work back to see how it is 'applied', or even oscillate between the two. To take another example, concepts such as 'gender', 'race' and 'social class' can be grasped separately and then grouped together under a more general concept 'social inequality' or 'social difference' – here, the reader supplies the more general concept, which is an excellent way to interact with the text.

If my suggestions about the skills required to do well in academic assessment are correct, readers might also consider organizing their work accordingly, and try to structure debates around concepts. Which is the more important social division, for example, among the three we mentioned in the preceding paragraph? How would a general approach like postmodernism or gramscianism enable us to see how 'race', class and

gender and their effects on leisure are related? What are the differences between postmodernism and gramscianism in this respect? On another tack, the entry on figurationalism uses examples such as sport and food to demonstrate its approach – are there any other areas where it might usefully be applied? Are the functionalists right to think that their approach can illuminate all the other examples – how would they attempt to grasp the work on 'the gaze', and how resistant are the problems identified in the entry on leisure policy? To take yet another sequence, I have discussed some examples of the semiotics of tourist brochures and mainstream movies, but what of the semiotics of the sports ceremony? Is it possible to take a theme such as gender, and track it through a number of other discussions, or to examine different types of methodology used and developed in different entries? The great strength of the alphabetical list is in enabling many strategies and sequences like this, and I merely hint at some possibilities in suggesting connections with other entries as we go along.

The relationships between the concepts can also be depicted pictorially, as a concept map (students might have come across more specific examples of diagrams used like this in 'mind mapping' study skills sessions). You take a cluster of concepts and try to map the relations between them, perhaps in terms of generality and specificity, or by asking which ones differ radically from each other and why. I became involved with a project to develop concept maps as a curriculum design tool while working at the Open University, and noted the superiority of the technique as against the far more common practice of setting objectives or learning outcomes for teaching sequences or books. To summarize the debate in the form of a homely analogy, the latter offer a set of signposts to help students navigate the terrain, while the former provide much more information in the form of a map. I would be very interested to see if and how readers construct their own concept maps with this book.

Finally, I have also provided some additional material on my personal website (Harris, 2003). I have long been interested in taking advantage of the facilities offered by electronic teaching, and considering what sort of electronic documents might be best developed. I have provided 'reading guides' – reviews of various books and articles I have read over the years – and I have some examples associated specifically with this book (see http://www.arasite.org/keyconc.html). I can add more as I keep reading and you can read them there in the future. These, together with some suggestions for further reading in this text itself, indicate ways to develop critical interactions with the literature more widely.

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how to use this book