

Recreation and Leisure in Modern Society

Richard Kraus

Sixth Edition



RECREATION AND LEISURE IN MODERN SOCIETY

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Temple University, Professor Emeritus



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PREFACE

Recreation and Leisure in Modern Society is the sixth edition of a text that has been used by hundreds of college and university departments of recreation, parks, and leisure studies throughout the United States and Canada. As before, it is designed for use in courses dealing with the history and philosophy of recreation and leisure on the world scene and, more specifically, with the role of organized leisure services today in North American communities.

The book has been heavily revised to reflect societal changes that have occurred in recent years and the challenges that face leisure-service managers in the twenty-first century. While it has been cut back in terms of the number of chapters and pages, it continues to provide in-depth analysis of the basic concepts of recreation and leisure, the motivations and values of participants, and trends in the overall field of organized community services.

Throughout the text, several important themes are emphasized, including the following:

- Dramatic shifts in population makeup, including the balance of different age groups, restructured family patterns, and great ethnic and racial diversification in many communities

- The impact of sophisticated information technologies on the national economy and business world and on the varied uses of leisure

Linked to these trends, the burgeoning prosperity of the early 2000s has been accompanied by a “winner-take-all” psychology that has left the United States, in particular, with a growing gap between the rich and the poor. In the recreation field itself, there has been a strong drive toward an entrepreneurial, marketing-based approach to the delivery of leisure services, which has undercut the traditional human-service orientation of this field.

As a consequence, such trends as the commodification and privatization of organized recreation programs threaten to create a society in which many disadvantaged individuals have sharply limited leisure opportunities. On the positive side, innovative partnership approaches among agencies and the application of benefits-based management approaches offer a hopeful vision of the future.

Throughout this book, instead of the past approach to characterizing organized leisure services as the almost exclusive domain of public recreation and park agencies, 10 different types of organizations—ranging from nonprofit community organizations or armed forces recreation to sports management and travel and tourism sponsors—are discussed in detail.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Numerous public, private, nonprofit, commercial, and other organizations have contributed material to the text in the form of annual reports, program brochures, and planning studies. Beyond research in such scholarly or professional journals as *Parks and Recreation*, *Recreation Canada*, the *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Leisure Studies*, or the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, many contemporary events and social trends were gathered from major newspapers, newsmagazines, and wire services.

In addition to these sources, the author wishes to acknowledge the important contribution made by a number of leading recreation and leisure-studies educators whose writings—both in textbooks and in scholarly articles—influenced his thinking. While it is not possible to name all of these individuals, they include the following: Lawrence Allen, Maria Allison, John Crompton, Dan Dustin, Geoffrey Godbey, Tom Goodall, Karla Henderson, Debra Jordan, John Kelly, Leo McAvoy, James Murphy, Ruth Russell, Wayne Stormann, and Charles Sylvester.

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CHAPTER 1

RECREATION AND LEISURE: *The Current Scene*



Parks, recreation, and the leisure services in the twenty-first century continue to experience enormous changes as a result of development in lifestyles, technology, economics, governmental philosophy, and almost every aspect of human endeavor.

These changes present both challenges and opportunities to those citizens and professionals concerned with improving the quality of life for all people through creative, meaningful, leisure opportunities. Professionals in this dynamic field are constantly trying to find new ways to meet the needs, desires, and the potential of our society.¹



INTRODUCTION

Many individuals regard recreation simply as a source of casual fun or pleasure and think of leisure solely as the free time that provides the opportunity to relax and shed work-related responsibilities. However, as this book will show, recreation, parks, and leisure services have become an important part of government operations and a vital program element of many huge nonprofit, commercial, private-membership, therapeutic, and other types of agencies. Today, recreation constitutes a major force in our national and local economies and is responsible for millions of jobs in such varied fields as travel and tourism, popular entertainment and the arts, health and fitness programs, hobbies, and participatory and spectator sports.

Beyond its value as a form of sociability, play also provides major personal benefits in terms of meeting physical, emotional, and other important health-related needs of participants. In a broad sense, the leisure life of a nation reflects its fundamental values and character. The very games and sports, entertainment media, and group affiliations that people enjoy in their leisure help to shape the character and well-being of families, communities, and society at large.

For these reasons, it is the purpose of this text to present a comprehensive picture of the role of recreation and leisure in modern society, including (1) the field's conceptual base; (2) the varied leisure pursuits people engage in; (3) their social and psychological implications; (4) both positive and negative outcomes of play; (5) the network of community organizations that provide recreational programs and related social services; and (6) the development of recreation as a rich, diversified field of professional practice.

VARIED VIEWS OF RECREATION AND LEISURE

For some, recreation means the network of public agencies that provide such facilities as parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, sports fields, and community centers in thousands of cities, towns, counties, or park districts today. They may view these facilities as an outlet for the young or a means of achieving family togetherness or pursuing interesting hobbies, sports, or social activities.

For others, recreation may be found in a senior center or golden age club, a sheltered workshop for mentally retarded individuals, or a treatment center for physical rehabilitation.

Environmentalists may be chiefly concerned about the impact of outdoor forms of play on our natural surroundings—the forests, mountains, rivers, and lakes that are the national heritage of Americans and Canadians.

Without question, recreation and leisure *are* all of these things. They represent a potentially rewarding and important form of human experience and constitute a major aspect of economic development and government responsibility today. It is important to recognize that this is not a new development. Recreation and leisure are concepts that have fascinated humankind since the golden age of ancient Athens. Varied forms of play have been condemned and suppressed in some societies and highly valued and encouraged in others.

Today, for the first time, there is almost universal acceptance of the value of recreation and leisure. As a consequence, government at every level in the United States and Canada has accepted responsibility for providing or assisting leisure opportunities through extensive recreation and park systems. For example, Searle and Brayley have reported that leisure expenditures by the federal government in Canada almost tripled during the 1980s and that annual recreation expenditures by Canadian families rose by 40 percent during a recent five-year period.²

Diversity in Participation

Often we tend to think of recreation primarily as participation in sports and games or in social activities and to ignore other forms of play. However, recreation actually includes an extremely broad range of leisure pursuits, including travel and tourism, cultural entertainment or participation in the arts, hobbies, membership in social clubs or interest groups, nature-related activities such as camping or hunting and fishing, attendance at parties or other special events, or fitness activities.

Recreation may be enjoyed along with thousands of other participants or spectators or may be an intensely solitary experience. It may be highly strenuous and physi-

cally demanding or may be primarily a cerebral activity. It may represent a lifetime of interest and involvement or may consist of a single, isolated experience.

Motivations for Recreational Participation

In addition to the varied forms that recreation may take, it also meets a wide range of individual needs and interests. While later chapters in this text will describe play motivations and outcomes in fuller detail, they can be summarized as follows.

Many participants take part in recreation as a form of relaxation and release from work pressures or other tensions. Often they may be passive spectators of entertainment provided by television, movies, or other forms of electronic amusement. However, other significant play motivations are based on the need to express creativity, vent hidden talents, or pursue excellence in varied forms of personal expression.

For some participants, active, competitive recreation may offer a channel for releasing hostility and aggression or for struggling against others or the environment in adventurous, high-risk pursuits. Others enjoy recreation that is highly social and provides the opportunity for making new friends or cooperating with others in group settings.

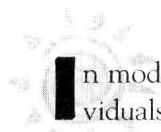
Many individuals take part in leisure activities that involve community service or that permit them to provide leadership in fraternal or religious organizations. Still others take part in activities that promote health and physical fitness as a primary goal. A steadily growing number of participants enjoy participation in the expanding world of computer-based entertainment and communication—including CD-ROMs, interactive video games, and the Internet. Others are deeply involved in forms of so-called elite culture, such as music, drama, dance, literature, and the fine arts. Exploring new environments through travel and tourism or seeking self-discovery or personality enrichment through continuing education or religious activity represent other important leisure drives.

SOCIAL FACTORS PROMOTING THE RECREATION AND PARK MOVEMENT

The social factors that helped bring about the growth of recreation and leisure programs and services in the United States and Canada stemmed from a variety of causes. Some of these involved changes in the economic structure of society or in dramatically shifting gender values and family relationships. Others were rooted in the kinds of social expectations that emerged as we moved from an essentially rural, agrarian society—where government played a limited role—to a complex industrial, urban culture where government assumed increasingly broad functions.

Twelve of these important social trends are described briefly in the following section of this chapter and in fuller detail in later sections.

1. Increase in Discretionary Time A key development underlying the growth of the recreation movement and our national preoccupation with leisure has been the growth of free or discretionary time in the twentieth century.



In modern, post-industrial society, nonwork time has grown markedly for many individuals. Thanks to advanced mechanical equipment and automated processes in factories, agriculture, and the service fields, productive capacity increased dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. In effect, the workweek has been cut in half since the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

In addition, more holidays and longer vacations are now taken for granted by most American and Canadian employees. With improved Social Security benefits and pension plans, as well as medical advances leading to a longer life, many employees today are assured 15 or more years of full-time leisure after retiring from work.

Finally, labor-saving devices in and around the home, such as automatic heating units, snowblowers and lawnmowers, microwave ovens, and frozen foods, have simplified life's demands considerably.

Surprisingly, in the mid- and late 1980s, a number of surveys showed that this trend had been reversed and that there actually had been an increase in workweek hours for many individuals. However, other research has challenged these findings. As Chapter 4 shows, the increase in work hours appears to have been selective, with certain groups in the population (such as affluent professionals or business managers) working longer hours, but with other individuals continuing to have relatively short workweeks. When other factors are taken into account, such as the increase in holidays, vacations, and early retirement and the needs of special population groups like the disabled or underemployed, it is apparent that leisure continues to present a vast opportunity to great numbers of Americans and Canadians today.

2. National Affluence A second critical factor stemmed from the dramatic growth of the gross national product (GNP) and personal income in the United States and Canada.

Throughout the twentieth century, household income continued to rise steadily in both nations, with the total amount spent on varied forms of recreation increasing from decade to decade. In the late 1990s, annual expenditures on recreation in the United States rose to over \$400 billion (see Table 1.1). When one recognizes that the Commerce Department's figures do not include hundreds of billions of dollars spent on travel and tourism, gambling, liquor, and less easily measured forms of amusement or the operational expenses of thousands of public, nonprofit and private leisure-service agencies, it is apparent that total leisure spending is substantially higher than the amounts shown in the table. Some authorities have estimated that annual recreation expenditures in the United States now are a trillion dollars.³

For a period of time, chiefly in the 1980s and early 1990s, the national economies of both the United States and Canada experienced a pronounced slump—with growing unemployment rates and enforced cutbacks in government spending that many referred to as an “era of austerity.” However, a dramatic economic recovery in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century returned government agencies on all levels to

TABLE 1.1

ANNUAL PERSONAL SPENDING ON RECREATION: 1985-1996

Type of Product or Service	1985	1990	1996
Total Recreation Expenditures (Billions of Dollars)	116.3	281.6	431.1
Percent of Total Personal Consumption	6.6	7.3	8.3
Books and maps	6.5	16.5	23.2
Magazines, newspapers, and sheet music	12.0	21.5	26.5
Nondurable toys and sport supplies	14.6	31.6	45.4
Wheel goods, sports, and photographic equipment	15.6	29.8	42.0
Video and audio products, computer equipment, and musical instruments	19.9	53.8	89.7
Radio and television repair	2.5	4.2	5.1
Flowers, seeds, and potted plants	4.7	11.1	14.9
Admissions to specified spectator amusements	6.7	15.1	22.1
Motion picture theaters	2.6	5.2	6.3
Legitimate theater and opera and entertainments of nonprofit institutions	1.8	5.6	9.3
Spectator sports	2.3	4.4	6.4
Clubs and fraternal organizations except insurance	3.1	8.9	13.0
Commercial participant amusements	9.1	23.0	46.2
Parimutuel net receipts	2.3	3.4	3.5
Other [includes lottery receipts, pets, cable TV, film processing, sports camps, video rentals, etc.]	19.4	62.7	99.6

Sources: *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999). See this source for a fuller explanation of product and service categories.

impressive budget surpluses and expanded service capability and led to consumer confidence and increased spending on recreation. One commentator writes:

Go ahead, it's safe to say it: *We've never had it so good.* We've got an \$8 trillion economy that's cranking out three million new jobs a year, an economy so strong that a lot of us are gorging ourselves on its fruits.

. . . [W]e can be honest with ourselves and recognize that on the eve of a new millennium we are living in an age of unparalleled economic prosperity and material comfort, in the most affluent civilization that this long-suffering planet has ever known.⁴

Growing Gap between Rich and Poor At the same time that millions of newly rich families are enjoying what one economist has described as "luxury fever," there is strong evidence that the middle and lower socioeconomic classes have been left behind. A 2000 report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute found that

. . . the incomes of the poor and middle class have declined or stagnated while the incomes of the highest-income families continued to grow. Since the late 1980s, in

two-thirds of the states, the income gap between the richest and poorest families grew. . . . [T]he average income of the poorest fifth of families nationwide actually fell by almost \$900 after adjusting for inflation.⁵

As a result, economists have concluded that the United States is the most economically stratified of nations. While a growing class of millionaires is able to enjoy a host of expensive forms of recreation, those in the nation's urban ghettos and rural slums lack even minimal resources for needed recreation—a contrast that has been described as “recreation apartheid.”

3. Commodification of Leisure This contrast is heightened by what has been termed the “commodification” of leisure. Increasingly, varied forms of play today are developed in complex, expensive forms by profit-seeking businesses. More and more, giant conglomerates like Time Warner, Disney, and Viacom have taken over control of huge corporations that run music, television, and movie businesses; and own sports stadiums and professional teams, cruise ships and theme parks, and other leisure operations.

Many elaborate new facilities offering varied forms of recreation are being developed as part of this trend toward commodification. In cities throughout the United States and Canada, huge public fitness centers that include pools, aerobics and dance rooms, and facilities for family play and a host of other activities are being built—often with charges for membership that cost several hundred dollars a year. Many other recreation centers or programs operated by public recreation and park agencies today require the payment of substantial fees that exclude the poor.

4. Population Trends Another factor that has been responsible for increasing participation in recreation and leisure in the United States and Canada has been the steady growth of the populations in both countries.



Population in the United States, estimated to be about 250 million persons in 1990, reached over 281 million by the turn of the twenty-first century—with striking growth in the number of young and elderly age groups. In Canada, the population stood at 27 million in 1990 and grew to 30.5 million by the end of the decade. Clearly, the growing numbers of potential participants encouraged the development of new recreation facilities and programs to meet their leisure needs on every age level.

Another marked influence on leisure programs has been the dramatic diversification, in racial and ethnic terms, that has taken place, particularly in the United States. As a result of growing waves of immigration from Asian, Latin American, and other third world regions, often with markedly higher birthrates, the nation's identity as a primarily white society based heavily on northern European and English traditions is rapidly shifting.

As later chapters will show, the emphasis in popular culture, sports, and other leisure-related areas reflects these population changes, with African-Americans, Hispanics, and, to a lesser degree, Asian-Americans playing a far more visible role.

Both in public recreation and park agencies and in major youth-serving organizations like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YMCA and YWCA, recreation programming and staffing practices today reflect a strong multicultural emphasis. In Canada, both public and nonprofit recreation and park organizations have made programming to reflect the traditions and customs of minority populations—with Indian and Inuit (Eskimo) groups in particular a high priority.

5. Where People Live: Urbanization and Suburbanization A key factor in the early development of the recreation movement was the growth of North America's industrial cities. As millions of immigrants came from impoverished European nations or migrated from rural regions to cities in search of better job opportunities, they tended to huddle together in crowded slum tenements. Without the natural opportunities for outdoor recreation that the countryside provided, it became obvious that leisure posed an increasingly serious problem for a heavily urbanized society.

Thanks to this dramatic growth of the cities, the recreation movement got under way in the United States and Canada. It took the form of playgrounds for children, sports fields for youths and adults, networks of parks throughout our cities, and the establishment of settlement houses, community centers, and other social-service and religious organizations to meet public leisure needs. In addition, throughout both countries, civic-minded individuals joined together to establish symphony orchestras, opera companies, art and natural history museums, and libraries.

Following World War II, there was a widespread move by millions of middle-class families away from the central cities to the suburban areas that surrounded them. The satellite communities they formed quickly established recreation and park systems—often with extensive facilities and programs. Recreation was part of the “good life” that the suburbs offered to many American and Canadian families who moved to them, and they paid taxes to support these services willingly.

More recently, recreation and park development has been seen as a key factor in promoting the revival of many larger cities, as wealthy citizens have moved into newly rehabilitated or developed residential areas (the process has become known as gentrification). Rundown waterfront or factory areas have been transformed into attractive sites for shopping, sightseeing, cultural activities, and entertainment. Recreation has been stressed as critical to making cities more livable, attracting tourists, and retaining middle-class and wealthy residents. In numerous other communities, public recreation and park departments have constructed new water-play parks, tennis complexes, creative arts centers, marinas, and other recreational facilities.

At the same time, there has been a pronounced shift of millions of residents from the older cities of Northern and Midwestern states to such sunbelt states as Florida, Arizona, or Southern California. Millions of older men and women have retired to communities in these states, and many others have moved to them to find jobs in their flourishing economies.

Within each of these population shifts, recreation and leisure play an important role. Many individuals and families place high value on the recreational and cultural opportunities that are available in communities that they are considering moving to, and large corporations regard this factor as an important element with respect to staff recruitment and retention.