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Leisure, Sports & Society

Karl Sprau



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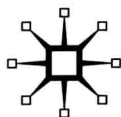
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## LEISURE, SPORTS & SOCIETY

*Also by Karl Spracklen*

CONSTRUCTING LEISURE

THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LEISURE

HEAVY METAL FUNDAMENTALISMS (*co-edited with Rosey Hill*)

SPORT AND CHALLENGES TO RACISM (*co-edited with Jonathan Long*)

*For my Mum and Dad*

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KARL SPRACKLEN

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# Introduction: What is Sociology of Leisure?

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Consider, for a moment, the Super Bowl. It is a huge sports event involving full-time professional athletes who play for franchised clubs in America's National Football League. It is watched by millions of fans on television, some of whom organize parties, barbecues and drinking around the watching. Companies pay millions of dollars to advertise to these fans. Young fans watching might want to be professional footballers when they grow up. There will be some Americans betting huge amounts of money on the outcome of the game. There will be plenty of Americans who do not like American Football, who will use the Super Bowl as an excuse to go walking, or to read a book, or to play a sport of their own, or to surf the internet. For most people around the world, the Super Bowl is an irrelevance, or a side-story in their newspapers, or something to be actively ignored because of its association with America. For some people outside America, the Super Bowl will be watched live, late at night or early in the morning, precisely because of its association with America. Sports are a huge part of society. They play an important role in many people's lives. But for most of us, sport is just one part of our wider leisure lives, one part of the way we make sense of our relationship with society. Think about your own attitude towards American Football and the Super Bowl. What you think is your natural taste on the matter is, in fact, a product of your upbringing, your education and the social structures around you.

We can begin to understand this example by thinking about the sociology of leisure and the relationship between leisure, sports and society. Leisure is a useful term that encompasses a range of activities: the things we do, and the things that interest us, when we have the choice and freedom to entertain ourselves. This, of course, is a simple definition of leisure, and one that

will be discussed and questioned in more detail throughout the book. But for the purposes of this introduction it will suit. Whenever this book mentions the sociology of leisure, you can take it to mean the sociology of leisure, sports, tourism, events, festivals, popular culture, hospitality, the internet and beyond. This introduction is the most important chapter of the whole book, so well done for starting here. For the rest of this chapter, I will be setting out the justification for the book, the rationale for its shape, and the book's relation to my research programme on leisure. There will be a discussion of the value of leisure studies, and sociology of leisure – as well as some definition of what the latter is. The introduction will also explain how the book works: the self-contained nature of the material in the chapters, along with the progressive argument that will be perceived if the book is read from cover to cover. The introduction will explain how the boxed examples and the end material of each chapter can be used.

This textbook meets the needs of courses on leisure studies and all other related courses (sport studies, tourism studies and so on through to entertainment management), as well as sociologists and sociology students interested in, or learning about, leisure. The aim of this book is to provide a critical sociology of leisure textbook that can be used by students and lecturers in leisure studies, sport studies, tourism studies and other leisure and sports courses with sociology content. It is also a crucial textbook for students and lecturers coming to leisure and sports from sociology and cultural studies. It will combine information, exposition and critical analysis, using ideas and research from leisure studies alongside ideas and research from sociology. In other words, the textbook, in linking leisure studies and sociology, will provide a unique and distinctive synthesis of the two: a critical sociology of leisure that is as much about the former as it is about the latter. For students without a sociological background, each chapter will begin with some necessary definitions of key concepts – and there is also a glossary at the end of the book where the main concepts are briefly defined. Students with a sociology background may skip these sections and move on to the main content of the relevant chapter.

The term 'leisure' is used in this textbook in two ways. First, leisure embraces all kinds of activities undertaken exercising some freedom of choice during the time we are not having to do the things that keep us alive: leisure encompasses sport and tourism, as well as other activities associated with culture, popular culture, entertainment and the everyday and informal. Second, I use leisure as a kind of shorthand for the parts of the whole

### When sport met leisure

'Leisure Studies' is the academic discipline that brings a range of social science perspectives to understanding the importance of leisure in modern society. Leisure studies scholars are interested in questions about politics, philosophy, psychology, history, economics and sociology. The discipline allows academics and students to learn what leisure means, how people make choices about their leisure activities, how leisure and sports are funded, how leisure changes, why some leisure activities are regulated, and how leisure is related to fashions and taste. The sociology of leisure is that part of leisure studies which asks questions about the relationship between individuals, social groups, society and leisure. It is interested in asking questions about how much of leisure is freely chosen, and how much is a product of social structures and situations. So in my own research, I have investigated how being a player and fan of a particular sport (rugby league) or popular music (extreme metal) is an expression of social identity.

Courses with titles such as 'Leisure Studies' appeared in the 1980s, and for a while these courses were the places to go for students who wanted to learn and study the social sciences of leisure and sport. Since then, of course, sport studies have split away from leisure studies, along with tourism studies, into specialized disciplines, often with a strong vocational edge (Rojek, 2010). This has led leisure studies scholars to question the relevance of their own discipline (Bramham, 2006), and the student marketplace has led many universities to drop leisure studies in favour of sport-related courses, or recreation courses, or to subsume leisure into sport. Where leisure studies have survived as undergraduate courses they have become something else: either linked with another academic discipline, or re-branded as critical social sciences of leisure, losing some of the multidisciplinary nature of 1980s Leisure Studies.

Sport is just one part of leisure, a phenomenon of modernity that has much in common with that other phenomenon of modernity, popular music (Spracklen, 2009). Nonetheless, it is sport that gets students excited about leisure. Most of our students are both sports fans and sports participants, who identify with the sports they watch and play. Most of us as academics come to leisure through the same route. I took up a PhD bursary and became a sociologist of leisure when I realized I could combine my passion for watching a sport with my love of learning. A cursory glance through the back issues of the journal *Leisure Studies* will demonstrate that the majority of leisure research is essentially sport research, where sport is used as a site of theorizing and debating the meaning and purpose of leisure. This of course is a real strength of leisure studies, as sport is so dominant in the modern leisure industry. But it is also a weakness, as leisure debates become stifled by theoretical frameworks and assumptions that owe more to the spin of sports pedagogy than they do to critical thinking.

Sport and Recreation Studies is an offshoot of Leisure Studies; There is a set of shared intellectual interests and practical concerns. Like leisure studies scholars, sport and recreation academics are interested in what motivates people to take part in sport, what barriers certain groups face when they try to take part in sport, what sport offers to people in terms of their sense of belonging and identity, how sport can build various

forms of social and cultural capital, and how sport can contribute to well-being (the list, of course, could continue, but I have covered sufficient ground to make the point). The only superficial difference between us is that leisure studies scholars will often replace the word sport with leisure. But there is another more intellectual difference. Some leisure studies scholars would question whether sport, with its limited history and its connection to the history outlined in the rest of this chapter, could ever be anything but a way of keeping people under control (Bramham, 2006). Sport and Recreation Development or Management presupposes that sport has some positive value, and although sport and recreation academics will be critical of much of the apparatus of Sport Development (for example, the focus on elite athletes and pathways, or competition, or the dominance of male sports, or the absence of sustainable engagements with minority ethnic communities) there will be a consensus that sport itself is good for us.

Many leisure studies scholars do in fact think sport has some good to it, coming themselves from sport backgrounds as supporters or participants. But even the pro-sport among us recognize that sport is a product of a specific time and a specific place, and its meaning is constantly contested and challenged. Sport's status as a leisure good cannot be taken for granted. Sport, then, is a sub-set of leisure – an important part of leisure, but not the whole of leisure.

leisure sphere that are not specifically sport, tourism or culture – to make you realize how big leisure is, beyond the realm of sports. This textbook is thus distinctive in the way it uses worked examples from research across the leisure spectrum: from leisure and sport to tourism and culture (defined here as popular/mass culture associated with music, fandom, the internet and entertainment). No other textbook in this field attempts to provide such a wide range of research examples. All of these examples are related to different issues within the framework of sociology of leisure.

The book's chapters are designed to be read separately, though they contain a progressive argument that ends with the final chapter. Together with boxed research examples, and the sectional structure of each chapter, this provides students with easy access to the topics they need to think about, with exercises at the end of each chapter supporting learning. This arrangement allows students and other readers to gain a cumulative knowledge of the sociology of leisure and its importance. The argument is that leisure is – potentially – something that allows us to be fully human in a dehumanizing world. In Part I (Understanding Leisure) I make the argument by first looking at the history and philosophy of leisure, to identify the importance of modernity in shaping leisure. There are three further chapters on the meaning of leisure: leisure and modernity; leisure and



work; and leisure and function. Part II (Leisure Sociologies) explores the purpose of leisure through chapters on structure, inequality, identity, community and subcultures. Part III (Leisure Trends) develops the argument that leisure is becoming increasingly instrumental, with chapters on globalization, commodification, postmodernity, postmodern leisure, liquid leisure and intentionality, dark leisure and the future of leisure. Finally Part IV (The Meaning and Purpose of Leisure) serves as a conclusion and a discussion of my own work applying Habermas to thinking about leisure.

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Each of the book's eighteen chapters introduces a new theme in the sociology of leisure, relating it to wider debates in sociology and focusing on specific problems and issues in leisure, sport, tourism and culture. The boxed examples in each chapter are designed for teachers to use in classes alongside the readings identified, so that students can be guided to read the original research and think critically about its meaning. The examples can also be used by students in small study groups or in their own independent study to help them understand the original research and place it within the wider context of leisure, sports and society.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the sociology of leisure by discussing leisure through different historical periods, and showing that questions about the philosophy of leisure (its meaning and purpose) are central to any attempt to understand leisure through history. History and philosophy, the chapter suggests, are essential guides for any sociological journey.

Chapter 2 introduces and explores the concept of modernity. Through arguments from social theory about the nature of modernity, and sociological arguments about the uniqueness of modernity, readers will be introduced to debates in leisure studies about whether the shift to modernity in Western society changed the nature, meaning and purpose of leisure.

The debates in Chapter 3 originate from the sociology of work. Understanding and discussing the concept of work will enable readers to contrast work with leisure, drawing on leisure studies theorists who define leisure as something that is 'not-work', something that is done or chosen voluntarily, of one's own free will. I then provide some criticisms of this idea of leisure as a simple expression of agency.

Chapter 4 examines two theoretical trends relating to function. The first is the development of classic functionalism, central to much empirical sociology