Sociology of leisure

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abstract This article reviews the topics that have been investigated, the research methods that have been employed, the main theoretical perspectives, agreed conclusions and issues that remain unresolved since this sub-discipline was formed in the 1960s. We see that solid advances in knowledge have been accomplished through research into the relationships between uses of leisure and occupations, gender roles and life course stages. Meanwhile, grand claims about the role of leisure in society have yet to be developed into testable theories about the roles of particular kinds of leisure under specified circumstances. Also, it is only recently that the sociology of leisure has been forced to entertain the possibility that the western version may not be the sole form of modern leisure.

keywords age ◆ gender ◆ leisure ◆ life course ◆ social class ◆ time ◆ unemployment ◆ well-being ◆ work

Foundations

History and status within sociology

The sociology of leisure was created as a sub-discipline in the 1960s, indicated by the formation of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee 13 (RC13) in 1970. Sociologists had studied leisure previously (see in particular De Grazia, 1962; Lundberg et al., 1934; Veblen, 1970 [1899]), but usually as an offshoot in studies of workers in particular occupations, or in family and neighbourhood research. It was only with the birth of RC13 that it became possible for sociologists worldwide to identify collectively as sharing a professional interest in leisure. From these beginnings, right through to the present day, this sub-discipline has encountered difficulties in defining its boundaries and claiming possession of its field. There are several reasons for this.

Leisure studies

At the same time, in the 1960s, when the sociology of leisure was being institutionalized, universities across North America were creating a subject called 'leisure studies'. Initially the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were preparing students for careers in, and faculty were conducting investigations relevant to, parks and other public recreation services, but the curricula, and the research interests of staff, spanned the whole of leisure. From the 1970s onwards, leisure studies departments and courses spread throughout universities in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, and then, albeit far less densely, throughout the rest of Europe, Asia and Latin America. A consequence is that everywhere in the world, sociologists who study leisure have been as likely, probably more likely, to be based in leisure studies rather than squarely in sociology departments, and within leisure studies the boundaries between sociological and other contributions have never been clear.

The sociology of leisure's submersion in leisure studies has been deepened by the sub-discipline (of sociology) and leisure studies (the field) sharing common specialist research tools. These are time budget and leisure participation surveys, sometimes complemented by data on household and individual incomes and expenditures. These sources sketch the 'big picture' against which more focused enquiries explore particular leisure activities, and the uses of leisure, the motivations, constraints faced and gratifications gained by different sections of the public.

Sociologists have never been able to impose their own preferred methods of classifying the basic leisure data that they work with. Leisure is routinely broken down into common sense categories, which broadly coincide with how the leisure industries are organized (media, sport, tourism, hospitality, heritage, gambling, etc.). Sociologists have proposed interesting alternative classifications. One is according to whether leisure is spent as a consumer (of commercial goods and services), as a citizen (using public sector goods and services), as a member (of a voluntary association), or privately. Despite the post-1990s debate about an alleged decline in civil society and social capital (see Putnam, 2000), there have been no representative sample surveys in any country which measure the proportions of leisure time that are accounted for in these alternative ways, and the differences between sociodemographic groups.

Another sociological classification distinguishes 'serious' from 'casual' leisure, and also recognizes a mid-type of project-based leisure (Stebbins, 1992, 2001, 2005). These concepts have inspired a series of studies of particular forms of serious leisure, but again, we still do not know in any country what proportion of leisure is 'serious', or whether this kind of leisure is concentrated within specific sociodemographic groups. A sociology of leisure with stronger claims on its field would very likely have been more successful in promoting its own classifications. This is important. Basic data about how leisure is used are the foundation from which theories are built, and against which theories are tested. If the basic data are inadequate, the entire enterprise is compromised.

Challenges from within sociology

Within its own discipline the sociology of leisure has always faced rival claims on its field. Initially the main challenge was from cultural studies, especially the genre that examined popular cultures. Media sociology has always positioned itself outside the sociology of leisure, and likewise the sociology of the arts. Youth researchers have been more likely to investigate youth *cultures* than youth *leisure.*

A strong challenge during the last 30 years has been from the sociology of consumption. This challenge has arisen in a context, in the world's richer countries, where leisure spending has been growing strongly, much more strongly than the growth of leisure time, and commerce has spread into areas of leisure where provision was once mainly by the state or voluntary sector. In Europe in the 1970s over 80 percent of TV was by public service broadcasters whereas today over 80 percent is commercial (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Top sport has been wrenched from its voluntary sector roots and has become primarily a business, an entertainment spec-

tacle. Major arts and sports events are now competed for by countries and cities that seek to become hosts primarily for commercial benefits (see Roche, 2000).

Fragmentation within

In some respects, the sociology of leisure has fallen victim to its own success in reaching a size where it has been possible for specialists in sport and tourism to organize their own conferences, form scholarly associations and launch their own journals, Fragmentation affects all disciplines, but leisure is especially prone. Students, teachers and researchers are far more likely to be enthusiastic, even passionate, about a particular art form or sport than about leisure in general. Moreover, 'leisure industries' is not their own term. Providers organize themselves into tourism, TV, publishing, computer games, etc. They are more likely to recruit graduates from specialist courses, and look to specialists when commissioning research, than to departments of leisure studies (or sociology).

The sociology of leisure has needed, and needs perpetually, to demonstrate that there is value-added by scanning the entire field of leisure. It needs to show that inserting an intermediate level of analysis is preferable to leaping straight from data on sport or tourism to theories about society at large. It also needs to show that leisure is a concept with strengths that complement those of consumption and culture, and that sociologists, against leisure scholars from other disciplines, have something extra, something distinctively sociological and valuable, that they can contribute. Here we need to demonstrate the value of our broader knowledge about the main social divisions – by occupations and social class, gender and age – and of our theories about social systems, social structure and social change.

Evidence

Work and leisure

This was the sociology of leisure's original main research issue. It became so simultaneously in three different ways. First, *modern* leisure was treated as a product of the modernization of work. Second, a long-term growth of leisure was seen as an outcome of the shrinkage of work time. Third, uses of leisure offered additional evidence (if any more was needed, given what other areas of sociological research had already unearthed) of the 'long arm of the job'.

Modern work, modern leisure: Most sociologists have treated *modern* leisure as a historical

outcome – a product of the broader division of labour associated with modernization – rather than a sociocultural universal. There is continuing debate about whether a leisure concept can be usefully applied to the free time, amusements and pastimes of pre-modern times, and whether these societies had a different kind of leisure (as argued, for example, by Veal and Lynch, 1996). One view is that modern leisure is actually a debased version of the purer leisure enjoyed in ancient Greece, albeit just by a minority of free men (see De Grazia, 1962). However, there is agreement that modern leisure is different.

During the industrial revolution paid work was substantially relocated into offices, mines and factories. In industry employees worked at set times, fixed by the clock, under work-specific authority and often amid work-specific relationships with colleagues. Modernized industrial work was organized rationally – to minimize unit costs and to maximize output per unit of resources invested. Customary ways were swept aside, if necessary. Work was certainly not organized so as to maximize job satisfaction. Thus work became a part of life, and leisure, while not the whole of non-work time, was located within it, and in modern societies it is during this leisure time, their own time, that people enjoy relative freedom to determine their own activities, and to do things for the pure enjoyment.

Work time and leisure time: The pioneers of the sociology of leisure in the 1960s were inspired, above all else, by the historical growth of leisure time. They knew that standards of living were rising; they were writing during the first decades of so-called mass affluence. They knew that the benefits of economic growth were being taken partly in the form of higher real earnings and levels of consumer spending, but they were more impressed by the extent to which working time had been rolled back. Since the industrial revolution the length of a normal work-day had been reduced from 12, to 10, then to eight hours. The weekend had expanded from one, to one-and-a-half, then two full days. Annual holiday entitlement had grown. The normal working life had been trimmed at both ends. Thus in the 1960s Joffre Dumazedier (1967) was able to proclaim a great historical inversion – the typical worker was spending more time at leisure than at work. There appeared to be no reason why these trends should not continue. The four-day work-week was confidently forecast. A time was envisaged when all workers would be able to take sabbaticals. People would enjoy 'the time of their lives' (Best, 1978) and humanity would enter a 'new Eden' (Neulinger, 1990).

Most sociologists were cautious (see Veal, 2011). Harold Wilenski (1963) noted that most of the extra free time created since the early decades of industrialism had enlarged the size of groups outside the paid workforce (mainly the young and the retired), that the decline in hours of paid work had affected only manual employees, and that their gains had achieved no more than winning back the free time that was lost during industrialization. Staffan Linder (1970), an economist, noted that leisure time was increasing more slowly than consumer spending power, and forecast the growth of a 'harried leisure class' whose main problem would be 'finding the time'. Geoff Godbey (1975) claimed that in the USA it was not leisure, but a condition that he described as 'anti-leisure' that was growing – basically time-pressured, compulsive activity and consumption. These warning voices have proved remarkably prescient. Since the 1970s the 'society of leisure' has ceased to be even a major reference point in the sociology leisure (Veal, 2012).

The terms of the work time/leisure time issue changed abruptly in 1991. We can date this precisely because the catalyst was the publication of Juliette Schor's book, *The Overworked American*. Schor, an economist, claimed that in America working time was lengthening, that Americans were working too long for their own good, pressured by greedy employers and the 'addictive power of consumption'. Schor's book ignited a search for other countries where working time was lengthening (see Zuzanek et al., 1998). Up to now there is no country where a general lengthening of work time has been confirmed (as opposed to alleged). In the USA, Schor's claim has not been corroborated by time budget evidence (see Robinson and Godbey, 1999). However, by the end of the 1990s there was agreement that the earlier shortening of work schedules had ended, probably in the 1970s. Although there are 'time pioneers' (see Horning et al., 1995) who have deliberately opted to downshift to enjoy slower and more frugal lifestyles, up to now these pioneers have not been trend-setters. Rather, work–life balance has become an issue all over the world. Up until the 1980s, balancing work and the rest of life was treated as a problem confined to women who had to cope with the double shift (paid jobs followed by housework), and shift workers who were unable to synchronize with the routines of other family members, and whose normal sleep and eating patterns were disrupted. By the end of the 1990s, work–life *imbalance,* presumed to be due to overwork, had become a problem that was believed to afflict entire workforces.

Another discovery during this renewed interest in hours of work and work–life balance has been that

today's working classes put in fewer hours than managers and professional-grade staff. Various explanations have been suggested for the longer hours of higher-grade employees: presenteeism through fear of redundancy or loss of promotion opportunities; busyness as a new badge of honour; and work as the new leisure (see Gershuny, 2005; Lewis, 2003).

However, we also know that sections of the population differ in their ability to resolve potential time pressure problems. Wealthy individuals and households can buy time by paying for services such as home and car maintenance. Some sections of the workforce enjoy considerable time sovereignty (the ability to decide exactly when to work), and also place sovereignty (deciding where to work). Manual employees tend to be disadvantaged on both counts. Their employers usually decide when they can (or must) work, and working usually involves being present at the workplace. Managers and professional-grade staff are more likely to be able to work at home, and at times that are most convenient for them (see Broek et al, 2002; Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). Hence the occupational groups that work the longest hours have the highest participation rates in virtually all forms of out-of-home leisure. They save time mainly by watching less television (Roberts, 2007).

The long arm of the job: This phrase underlines the extent to which people's jobs control not only their lives at work but also what they do in their 'own' time. From the very beginnings of leisure research it has been noted repeatedly that the middle classes 'do more', the main exception today being television viewing. There are numerous reasons. These do not include the middle classes enjoying more leisure time. The reasons do include childhood socialization in middle-class households and extended education, but these influences occur in the context of the middle classes being able to afford to do more. This has always been among leisure research's starkest and most consistent findings.

However, in the 1950s and 1960s rather more attention was paid to how particular occupations tended to foster distinctive uses of leisure. This was observed among deep-sea trawlermen (Tunstall, 1962), coalminers (Dennis et al., 1956), assembly line workers (Friedmann, 1961) and so-called organization men (Whyte, 1957). Spillover and compensatory work–leisure relationships were distinguished. Stanley Parker (1971) relabelled and expanded these concepts into an extension, neutrality and opposition typology of work–leisure relationships, arguing that extension was most likely when people found their jobs interesting, when they identified with their work roles, and with work colleagues also. In contrast, opposition was likely when people found their jobs disagreeable and celebrated the end of a shift by doing things that were enjoyed largely because they were different.

Despite the clarity of the case studies, it was always difficult to identify these work–leisure relationships in large-scale survey research. It is likely that occupations with characteristic and distinctive uses of leisure have always been exceptional. The examples offered were invariably male-dominated occupations, and were typically in towns where there was one dominant industry, and where work and neighbourhood relationships were mutually reinforcing. Economic change (de-industrialization), residential mobility, the motor car and television have been dissolving these social formations. Thus the middle classes simply doing more has become the outstanding and starkest example of the long arm of the job.

In the mid-1990s, initially in North America, researchers 'discovered' that the middle classes (managers and professional-grade employees) were typically leisure omnivores, characterized by the wide variety of their leisure tastes and activities (Erikson, 1996; Peterson and Kern, 1996). Subsequently, middle-class omnivores have been spotted all over the world (see, for example, Sintas and Alvarez, 2002). The middle classes not only dine out more frequently than the working classes but do so in a wider variety of catering establishments (Warde et al., 1999). The middle classes now produce most rock and pop as well as classical musicians. One explanation of this phenomenon is the scale of upward social mobility into expanding middle-class occupations (see Van Eijck, 1999). The original statements of the omnivore thesis alleged that middle-class omnivorousness represented a change: the middle classes had ceased to be distinctively highbrow. However, there are so far unanswered questions.

First, highbrow tastes have never been common throughout all sections of the middle classes, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) noted. So is middle-class omnivorousness really a new phenomenon? Second, we need to distinguish between individual and collective omnivorousness. Researchers continue to identify different and very distinctive middle-class lifestyle groups (see Savage et al., 1992; Wynne, 1998). Third, are these middle-class lifestyle differences, which have been noted by 'class' as well as by leisure researchers (see Burrows and Gane, 2006; Veal, 1993; Vester, 2005), weakening the sociopolitical unity of the middle classes? Or, as the original statements of the omnivore thesis claimed, are these differences, and an awareness of and an ability to discuss a wide variety of tastes and topics, a source of middle-class unity and distinction, separating those

concerned culturally from a working class whose leisure tastes are more uniform and wholly lowbrow, and whose leisure time is dominated by television?

Tony Bennett and his colleagues' (2009) study of *Culture, Class, Distinction* in Britain has made important contributions to all these issues. These researchers gathered evidence comparable to that used by Pierre Bourdieu in his study of *Distinction* (1984), which used data on cultural consumption in France in the 1960s and earlier. Bennett and his colleagues gathered data from a large British sample on tastes and consumption of music, films, television programmes, visual art, eating and sport/body culture. They thereby identified a culturally omnivorous middle class that was distinct and distinguished by its confident familiarity across diverse cultural fields. This was contrasted with a culturally disengaged lower class whose cultural consumption (nearly all via the mass media) tended to be necessary (to escape from the daily grind), what happened to be available and could be enjoyed.

Unemployment: There was a flurry of studies into the leisure of the unemployed in the 1980s, when mass unemployment returned to the western world after what are now recalled as the '30 glorious years' – the post-Second World War decades of full employment and steady economic growth. The initial questions posed about the leisure of the unemployed were soon answered. What are the effects on leisure of unemployment? We learnt quickly that the unemployed tend to 'do less' for a variety of reasons – financial, loss of work-based social relationships and loss of status (reluctance to expose spoiled identities to the public gaze). Does participation in leisure activities help to maintain the well-being and morale of the unemployed? Yes, when levels of leisure activity are maintained (which is exceptional), but even then not at the levels of well-being that are normal within the employed population (see Glyptis, 1989; Havitz et al., 2004). The research effort (though not unemployment itself) subsided when these main questions were answered, though there are continuous efforts (often monitored, leading to some evidence of 'positive outcomes') to use leisure provisions to prevent or remedy social exclusion (see also below).

There is much to gain from setting unemployment (and its leisure implications) in the broader context of class relationships. The unemployed (long-term and recurrent) are really just extreme cases of the working class at leisure being disengaged and doing less. Also, in consumer societies the unemployed, to an even greater extent than the low-paid, suffer a double stigma. They are unwanted as producers and they are flawed consumers –

unwanted in society's main 'cathedrals' of consumption (Bauman, 1998).

Leisure work: Higher levels of leisure spending and leisure activity have led to the expansion of the leisure industries, which have become a main, if not *the* main, source of new jobs in countries all over the world.

The leisure industries include some of the so-called creative industries, whose main asset is intellectual property rights (for example, computer software, musical and other kinds of 'texts'). Some leisure industries have glamour roles (sports and screen stars). Employees can be attracted into mundane jobs by their proximity to glamour, but overall the leisure industries contain many mundane occupations. Many of the jobs are seasonal (especially in tourism), part-time, and involve being on duty at unsocial hours (jobs in the night-time economy, for example). The jobs score low on both time and place sovereignty. Employees are often required to perform aesthetic labour (see Warhurst and Nickson, 2007), where the appearance and personality of the employee are part of the service rendered to customers.

The growth of leisure has not led to leisurely lives for all. Rather, it has created divided societies. On the one hand, there are those who work long hours, in well-paid occupations, and who are the big omnivorous leisure consumers and spenders. On the other hand, there are those who work in low-paid precarious occupations (many in the leisure industries), and whose own leisure is subject to severe time and money constraints (see Seabrook, 1988).

Gender and leisure

During the 1980s this replaced work as the leading issue in the sociology of leisure. Second-wave feminism forced gender up the research agenda. Feminists' initial complaints were that leisure research had neglected gender in general and women's leisure in particular. These criticisms were immediately accepted, and it is now 20 years since it was possible to complain that gender or women's leisure were neglected. The original questions raised about leisure and gender have now been answered, and new issues have taken their place.

Women and patriarchy: An initial claim was that in leisure women were the disadvantaged sex due to a combination of time and money constraints, and heavier sociocultural regulation than experienced by men (see Deem, 1986; Green et al., 1990; Henderson et al., 1989). Research evidence has generally endorsed these claims, albeit with some important qualifications.

Women's leisure time disadvantages arise from

the double-shift, with housework and childcare remaining primarily women's work. Time budgets show that men are doing more housework than in the past, but that women still do far more than men. Time budgets consistently show that women with paid jobs have less leisure time than their male partners. When all men and women are included, the same time budgets consistently show that overall the sexes have more or less equal amounts of leisure time: the reduced leisure of women with paid jobs is counterbalanced by the expanded leisure time of non-employed women. That said, the evidence shows that overall women's leisure is more fragmented (they are less likely than men to enjoy long, unbroken periods of leisure), and less of women's leisure time is spent in adult-only situations (see Bittman and Wajcman, 1999). According to Chatzitheochari and Arber (2012), women are the more likely to experience time poverty not so much through having less than because their leisure time is more likely to be fragmented and contaminated by non-leisure activities.

As regards money, it is accepted that women have been and are still disadvantaged. Men are more likely to be in employment, earning their own money. Women in employment generally earn less than men. Household income is not always shared out equally between males and females. Women are less likely than men to be able to separate their 'own' from household funds (Pahl, 1990). As the main earners in most households, men appear the more likely to feel that they have the right to spend on their own pleasures, and also to take (without necessarily negotiating) the time to do so (see Barrell et al., 1989).

Sociocultural regulation refers to how it has been considered improper (more so for women than for men) to consume alcohol fulsomely and become intoxicated, to play strenuous, aggressive, competitive sports, to go alone to cinemas and other leisure places, and to enjoy leisure in mixed-sex company when not accompanied by one's sexual partner. However, researchers have noted that times are changing. In western countries the differences between men's and women's uses of leisure have narrowed. Rates of sport participation have converged, women have been closing the gender gap in alcohol consumption, and groups of women now enjoy girls' nights out in the same places as are frequented by groups of men (see Sweeting and West, 2003). The trend is towards genderless leisure (Robinson and Godbey, 1999).

Cross-cutting the debate about the extent to which the leisure of one sex has been and remains disadvantaged, there have been claims that women's leisure is qualitatively different to men's leisure. It has been claimed that mainstream leisure research has proceeded unwittingly with a masculine concept of leisure, and that, as a result, women's leisure has been misrepresented. The main gender differences are said to be, first, that men associate leisure with particular times (when they are not at work) thus making time budgets appropriate for quantifying their leisure, whereas women tend to identify leisure with particular kinds of experience, activities and being with particular people. Second, it is alleged that men tend to appraise their leisure quantitatively (how much time they have and how much they do in this time), whereas women's appraisals are in terms of the quality of their experiences (see Gregory, 1982; Lenskyj, 1988). Hence the alleged need to develop a feminine concept of leisure and to adopt feminist research methods (see Wearing, 1998).

Men and masculinity: Men's studies requires masculinity, just like femininity, to be treated as a problematic social construct, following which we recognize that there can be different versions of masculinity (maybe specific to social classes or ethnic groups), and that some men may find their masculine scripts just as constraining as femininity is for some women.

As yet there are no signs of men collectively rejecting all forms of masculinity. Rather, we now have abundant evidence of men using leisure to retain conventional masculine identities in inhospitable historical contexts. De-industrialization has destroyed swathes of jobs that required toughness and endurance. Women's greater independence has deprived males of the traditional breadwinner role. One male response has been to use leisure to maintain conventional masculine identities. Sports events followed by nights out with the lads become occasions for celebrating conventional masculinity (see Blackshaw, 2003).

Sexualities: Most leisure sites are places where sexual roles and identities are celebrated and enacted. Anyone who enters a mainstream leisure facility is likely to be treated as a sexualized subject, and to feel able to treat others similarly.

Sociology's interest has been, first, in the use of leisure spaces to develop and enjoy sexual partnerships, and second, in how the operation of heteronormativity marginalizes people with other sexual identities – gays and lesbians, bisexuals and presumably paedophiles also. Breaching hetero-normativity still invites ridicule or worse in many sports clubs and, indeed, is risky in most leisure places (see Wellard, 2002). A response in sociology has been the development of queer studies, in this case viewing leisure sites from the perspectives of non-heteros (see Cauldwell, 2006). A response in the wider western societies has been for gays, lesbians and bisexuals to

create their own leisure spaces – bars, villages, sport clubs, etc. (see Skeggs, 1999).

The life course
This is another field where accomplished research has posed a new set of questions.

Leisure and age: Sociological work on leisure and life course really began with the Rapoports' pioneering study in London in the 1970s (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1975). These investigators observed how the family life-cycle created different preoccupations and interests at successive life stages, which interacted with employment careers to produce characteristic uses of leisure. Shortly afterwards, in the USA, Estes and Wilenski (1978) identified the 'life-cycle squeeze'. This refers to the squeeze on adults' time and money when they embark on new household and family formation. Family life events are still the main junctures when leisure patterns unfreeze and are reconstituted (Gershuny, 2003).

Evidence from time budget and leisure participation surveys in all parts of the world has confirmed repeatedly that youth and young adulthood are the life stages when people have the most time and money for leisure spending and activities, and therefore when participation rates peak in most forms of out-of-home leisure. This is typically followed by the squeeze, and leisure becomes family-centred, home-centred and TV-dominated.

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in leisure in later life; a response to increased longevity, the super-sized baby boomer cohorts approaching and now entering later life, and evidence (see also below) that leisure activities are especially beneficial for the well-being of older people since satisfiers connected with work and family roles are less likely to operate.

Leisure biographies: Some of the most thought-provoking research findings have been from studies that have traced individuals' leisure biographies, sometimes with retrospective data (there can be recall problems) and sometimes with panel methods. These studies have revealed powerful long-term continuities in leisure interests and activities. People who play sport in late-adulthood, and those who hold office in voluntary associations during this life stage, were typically playing these same roles (though not necessarily in the same sports or associations) when they were young adults (McGuire et al., 1987; Mihalik et al., 1989; Roberts et al., 1991; Scott and Willits, 1989). Childhood and youth are the prime life stages when individuals form leisure tastes and interests and acquire basic skills. They may lapse, in which case they are less likely to resume than are

those who have been continuously active to remain active. Leisure interests may remain among the most reliable and stable threads in life courses during which so many other things (including family relationships and occupational careers) change unpredictably. Paul Hodkinson (2011) has described how ageing Goths are able to share a collective subcultural life course journey from youth onwards.

Age, cohort and generation: Current and earlier cohorts of older people were children at a time when opportunities to form leisure interests and to practise the activities were far fewer than today. So the low rates of leisure participation in current older age groups may not be a straightforward age effect but could be a cohort effect, due to the poverty of childhood leisure socialization years ago.

The baby boomer cohorts who are now approaching or entering retirement are the first cohorts to have grown up in post-scarcity societies. The Woopies (well-off older people), who remain highly leisure active, are a minority within current cohorts but will become more numerous if the baby boomers turn out to be a change generation who remain willing to take on debt and, if necessary, to spend capital that is tied up in their dwellings, in order to sustain active leisure for as long as they are physically able.

Since the 1970s, many young adults have failed to establish themselves in stable occupational careers by their mid and even late twenties. Simultaneously, more have been progressing through higher education, and students are a sociodemographic group in which rates of leisure interest, taste and skill formation are exceptionally high. Since the 1990s children and young people have grown up using the full range of digital technologies which became, and may remain for ever, crucial to their socializsation and identity experiences (Lehdonvirta and Rasanen, 2011). The long-term leisure implications of these trends – the cohort and possibly generation effects – remain to be explored.

Leisure and well-being
In leisure studies (rather than just the sociology of leisure) the leading theories in recent years have been about whether, and if so how, leisure can improve personal well-being. So we now know how leisure can be a source of 'optimal experience', what Csikzentmihalyi (1990) calls 'flow'. We know about the special satisfactions that arise from serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992). We also know that all uses of leisure raise levels of self-reported life satisfaction provided the leisure is active (takes people out of their homes), social rather than solitary, and structured so that the behaviour can become routine,

making personal motivation on each occasion unnecessary. These same uses of leisure also improve physical health, but here physically active leisure is especially beneficial (see Isao-Ahola and Mannell, 2004). The life satisfaction benefits appear to arise from what psychologists call 'basic categories of experience': doing something rather than nothing, interacting with other people and achieving a goal, especially if this requires collective effort.

Leisure and status attainment

Sociologists have also been interested in the role of leisure, if any, in lifetime status attainment. There are never-ending leisure projects to save youth judged to be at risk, excluded or impeded by multiple disadvantages. Although many of these projects are monitored and can usually produce enough signs of positive outcomes to secure continued funding, the social science verdict is that the evidence remains inconclusive (see Coalter, 2007; Collins and Kay, 2003). However, evidence from longitudinal research in the UK shows that, in recent decades, teenage involvement in *some* leisure activities has been associated with statistically significant positive labour market and social outcomes at age 30 (Feinstein et al., 2006; Robson, 2003). Involvement in the arts, sport, church and community organizations, though not youth clubs, appears to have been beneficial, but the processes that are responsible remain unclear. They could be via the acquisition of human, social or cultural capital. Whether it will be worthwhile to try to identify the crucial process or processes is debatable since the role of leisure in status attainment is minor compared with family origins and achievements in education.

The societal role of leisure

Parsonian functionalism gave leisure a latency role – allowing pent-up emotions and other otherwise suppressed drives in personality systems to be expressed (Parsons, 1951). The Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry claimed that its role was to pacify a potentially rebellious working class (see Bottomore, 1984). More recent neo-Marxist critiques of the consumer society deploy a similar argument about consumer culture's soothing balm (Baudrillard, 1998). Karl Spracklen's (2011) application of Habermas's categories treats leisure as a site of tension between instrumental and communicative rationalities.

Joffre Dumazedier (1967, 1974), the first president of RC13, had different ideas. As leisure grew in scale it was expected to play a stronger role in society. Specifically, Dumazedier treated leisure as a source of values (choosing and doing things for the intrinsic satisfaction) that he expected to invade other domains like workplaces and families. However, since the 1970s the 'society of leisure has virtually disappeared even as a reference point in the sociology of leisure (Veal, 2012). When the thesis resurfaces, this is most likely solely to be subjected to another ritual demolition (as in Rojek, 2009). Theories about the senses in which leisure is now playing a larger and stronger role in society have been reformulated with 'identity' as central concept. Postmodern conditions are said to have weakened modern structures and their associated roles (occupational and gender roles, for example), whereas people are able to use consumer roles to tell themselves and others who they are.

It is always difficult to supply convincing evidence when historical change is postulated since there is rarely suitable benchmark data from times past. Rigorous attempts to measure changes in values and sources of identity in Britain and Australia have concluded that the continuities are far more impressive (Majima and Savage, 2007; Phillips and Western, 2005). However, it is likely than any societal role will always depend on the type of leisure and the other roles of the actors or consumers. Leisure may play a strong role in identity stabilization during a certain life stage such as youth, then recede in importance.

Big theory has become a weak spot in the sociology of leisure. Rather than acting as the source, the sub-discipline draws on work in economics about the growing proportions of jobs, trade and spending that leisure accounts for; from politics about the impact of consumer boycotts and buycotts; from leisure studies about leisure's contributions to wellbeing; and from the rest of sociology, in particular in recent times, theories about an emergent ICT-facilitated network society. Promising areas for the sociology of leisure to develop theories are in the interfaces such as that observed by Aall et al (2011). Leisure accounts for a growing proportion of all consumption. Leisure consumption is more energy intensive than consumption in general. This is unsustainable. Yet advanced economies are becoming more and more dependent on rising levels of spending on leisure goods and services to deliver economic growth.

Leisure and comparative sociology

The comparative sociology of leisure remains in a prolonged infancy. The earliest and the many recent comparative studies simply draw together accounts of leisure in their countries by country-based authors, writing to a common template (Cushman et al., 2005; Szalai, 1972). European sociologists (see Gronow and Souherton, 2011; Lopez, 2011; MacInnes, 2006) have been able to analyse

harmonized data sets which show that, in Europe, leisure spending expands as countries' economies grow, but beyond this there are country specifics, some probably due to geography and others reflecting national histories and cultures, which defy explanation in terms of a limited number of predictors.

Since the 1960s, the sociology of leisure has been developed mainly by western scholars, and those based in other parts of the world have been more likely to adopt than to challenge western sociology's definitions and classifications of leisure activities. However, leisure is now being studied by sociologists in all parts of the world: in Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and especially in the Asian countries that are becoming major global economic centres (see Dodd and Sharma, 2012; Donner, 2011; Rolandsen, 2011). It is noteworthy that some cultural specificities of western leisure are currently being highlighted by scholars from, or writing about leisure in India, Japan and China. However, the research of these scholars also notes important convergences, especially the consumerist character of leisure in all the emerging market economies (see Erwei Dong and Jouyeon Yi-Kook, 2011; Pysnakova and Miles, 2010).

Assessment, prospects, future directions

The sociology of leisure was established as a collective enterprise at a time when major new technologies of the early and mid-20th century had already changed, or had already begun to change, people's lives in first world countries – radio, movies, recorded music, television, the motor car and air travel. The relevant changes were occurring at a time when paid work schedules were contracting, and when disposable incomes (not required for essentials) were growing. This was the context in which sociology was debating the affluent society and the possible embourgeoisement of the proletariat. The wider field of leisure studies relied heavily on sociology for theories to make sense of how people were using their increased free time and spending power. As explained earlier, the emergent sociology of leisure was able to draw on occupational sociology's insights about the 'long arm of the job', and information about people's daily lives as reported in studies of families and neighbourhood communities. During subsequent decades, sociology continued to inject theories into leisure studies – symbolic interactionist perspectives, Marxism, feminism and debates about the likely character of an emergent post-industrial age.

The present-day sociology of leisure has far less to say about the future than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s. This is despite the arrival of another generation of new technologies – the information and communication technologies – that have delivered multi-channel television, personal computers, mobile phones-plus and the internet. It is also despite confident predictions of climate change that will be only ameliorated by changes in how we produce and consume, and knowledge that the planetary resources on which current first world lifestyles depend will one day be exhausted. Sociology in general, not just the sociology of leisure, has become cautious. Today we know that the basic new technologies that gave us radio, movies, motor and air transport had all been invented before or soon after the end of the 19th century, yet at that time few could envisage how these technologies would be used 50 years later. Also, we know that many future forecasts made in the mid-20th century have been confounded. One point on which we feel confident is the frailty of our ability to predict. Grappling with the present seems sufficient challenge.

Just as in the 1960s, the sociology of leisure needs to draw on broader sociological theories about changes in 21st-century societies. For example:

• The kinds of work–life balance and imbalances experienced by different sociodemographic groups in different countries.
• The implications for patterns of stratification of changes in the distribution and types of economic, social and cultural assets.
• The long-term implications of past and current changes in leisure socialization during childhood, youth and young adulthood.
• The consequences for leisure behaviour and social identities of the growth of commercial consumer industries and the spread of the associated consumer cultures.
• The implications of governments looking increasingly towards the leisure industries to promote economic growth, or to prevent stagnation or degeneration.

It is likely that some of the most exciting, paradigm shattering sociological work on leisure will forthwith be conducted outside the first world countries where the sub-discipline was born. As explained above, the sociology of leisure is now taught and researched in all parts of the world. Are new technologies and the global market economy strengthening the cultural imperialism of the old west? Or are 21st-century developments enabling traditional cultures to be re-invigorated and asserted? Are the new industrial countries, and the new market economies of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, still catching up, or

are late-development effects propelling these countries ahead in certain respects? Leisure is a site where issues of much wider interest within and beyond sociology can be explored.

Annotated further reading

Bennett T, Savage M, Silva E, Warde A, Gayo-Cal M and Wright D (2009), *Culture, Class, Distinction.* London: Routledge.
A 21st-century response to Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction (1984). Tony Bennett and his colleagues have conducted one of the largest ever studies of leisure in terms of the size of its sample which is representative of the population of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the range of tastes and types of consumption covered. The data are analysed using Bourdieu's concept of 'field' in which actors, their tastes and practices acquire significance from the rest of the field. The authors analyse differences by social class, gender and age, and discover some interesting links with political proclivities.

Blackshaw T (2003) *Leisure Life: Myth, Masculinity and Modernity.* London: Routledge.
One of the few books from men's studies that focuses upon men's leisure. It describes, with detailed ethnographic evidence, how working-class males in a de-industrialized city were using leisure to maintain traditional masculine identities.

Dumazedier J (1967) *Towards a Society of Leisure*. New York: Free Press.
The foundation text by the founding father of the sociology of leisure. This book charted the historical growth of leisure time, identified values associated with leisure, and envisaged these values becoming increasingly powerful in a not-too-distant society of leisure.

Green E, Hebron S, and Woodward D (1990) *Women's Leisure, What Leisure?* London: Macmillan.
The publication, which was one among many contemporaries claiming that women at leisure were disadvantaged, was distinguished by marshalling impressive quantitative and qualitative evidence from research in Sheffield, UK.

Parker S (1971) *The Future of Work and Leisure*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.
This book presented the results of the author's own research among social workers and bank clerks, set this evidence alongside findings from other research, and developed an influential typology of work–leisure relationships: extension, opposition and neutrality.

Peterson RA, Kern RM (1996) Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review* 61: 900–7.
The paper that discovered the middle-class leisure omnivore, and explained how omnivores' diverse tastes could simultaneously divide and unite the middle classes.

Rapoport R, Rapoport RN (1975) *Leisure and the Family Life-Cycle*. London: Routledge.
The first study that related leisure to the family life-cycle rather than simply to age. The authors' own research in London revealed how different life-cycle stages, interacting with employment careers, bred characteristic interests and preoccupations, and hence leisure behaviour.

Robinson JP, Godbey G (1999) *Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time*, 2nd edn. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
The ways in which Americans use their time have not surprised many sociologists, but this book soon became, and has remained, an essential source. The book charted changes and continuities in how Americans use time from time budget research conducted in different years since the 1960s. The book identified a trend towards genderless leisure. It rejected claims that Americans were working longer than in the past, or exceptionally long hours by global yardsticks.

Schor JB (1991) *The Overworked American*. New York: Basic Books.
A landmark book, whose central claim was that working time was lengthening in the USA. This claim was subsequently disputed, but Schor's book propelled work–life balance and overwork into issues that were soon being debated and investigated all over the world.

Scott D, Willits FK (1989) Adolescent and adult leisure patterns: A 37 year follow-up study. *Leisure Sciences* 11: 323–35.
A seminal paper which reported impressive individual-level continuities in uses of leisure among a US sample who were followed up after being initially investigated 37 years previously.

Stebbins RA (1992) *Amateurs, Professionals and Serious Leisure*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.
This is the book that successfully launched 'serious leisure' as an analytic concept. It illustrates serious leisure from the author's own studies of a variety of volunteers, hobbyists and amateurs – people who were taking their leisure just as seriously as, and sometimes achieving equally high standards to, professionals in their fields.

Veal AJ (2011) The leisure society I: myths and misconceptions. *World Leisure Journal* 53: 206–27.

Veal AJ (2012) The leisure society II: the era of critique, 1980-2011. *World Leisure Journal* 54: 99–140.
Two landmark papers that trace the origins and history of debates about a forthcoming leisure society.

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résumé   Ce texte présente un bilan des objets de recherche, des méthodes employées, des principales perspectives théoriques, des conclusions qui ont pu en être tirées et des questions qui demeurent irrésolues depuis la formation de la sous-discipline dans les années 1960. Des avancées considérables ont été faites à partir de recherches portant sur les liens entre les usages des loisirs et la profession, les rôles des genres ou les périodes de la vie. Cependant, des affirmations importantes quant au rôle des loisirs dans la société n'ont pas encore donné cours à des théories vérifiables à propos du rôle particulier de certains types de loisir dans des circonstances spécifiques. Aussi, ce n'est que récemment que la sociologie du loisir a été forcé de considérer la possibilité que la version occidentale ne constitue pas nécessairement la seule forme de loisir moderne.

mots-clés   âge ◆ bien-être ◆ chômage ◆ classe sociale ◆ cours de la vie ◆ genre ◆ loisirs ◆ temps ◆ travail

resumen   Este artículo revisa los temas que han sido investigados, los métodos de investigación que han sido empleados, las principales perspectivas teóricas, las conclusiones concordadas y los temas aún no resueltos desde que se formó esta sub-disciplina en los años sesenta. Vemos que los avances continuos en el conocimiento han sido realizados por la investigación de las relaciones entre los usos del ocio y las ocupaciones, los roles del género y las etapas del curso de la vida. Entre tanto, las reclamaciones sobre el rol del ocio en la sociedad todavía tienen que ser desarrolladas en teorías comprobables sobre los roles de las diferentes formas del ocio bajo circunstancias específicas. También, solo reciéntemente la sociología del ocio ha sido obligada a considerar la posibilidad de que la versión occidental no necesariamente es la única forma del ocio moderno.

palabras clave   bienestar ◆ clase social ◆ curso de la vida ◆ desempleo ◆ edad ◆ género ◆ ocio ◆ tiempo ◆ trabajo