

The concept and definition of leisure



The word leisure is normally attributed to an individual's free time and what they choose to do during that time. Every individual at some stage in their life will participate in some form of leisure, whether it be shopping, travelling, playing sport or just relaxing. Participation must be by choice in order to be considered leisure. Throughout this essay I am going to identify and explain the different types of leisure and why individuals participate with reference to relevant academic literature.

Leisure as a concept is not new, throughout history there has always been examples of leisure. If you think back to the time of ancient Rome, people enjoyed watching and in some cases taking part in the activities held within the Coliseum. Furthermore as you move through history the examples continue; Jousting and banquets in the middle ages, all the way up to what we define as leisure activities today, shopping, participating in sport etc (Pearson, 2008). What's important to point out is the change in perception of what leisure actually is now, compared to what it was before. During the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain went through a massive economic change. Otherwise known as the industrial revolution, this period changed what we would define leisure as today (Bull et al, 2003). For so many people, their nature of work changed drastically, both in terms of what they did and where. This change enabled social class to be born, and with it increased wealth. This new found wealth enabled new technologies which in turn would allow new forms of leisure (2003).

Trying to define leisure is often difficult; this is due to the many different forms leisure can take. Bull, Hoose and Weed, (2003) propose four approaches to define leisure. These are leisure as time, leisure as an activity,

quality of leisure and personal attitude (p32). Most people work long stressful hours during the day, leisure time is often dictated by the time we are left with after working and earning money. However necessities such as sleeping, eating and personal hygiene all eat into what we define as 'leisure time'. Under the leisure as time approach, work and leisure can be perceived as being in opposition, with one (usually work) limiting the other (p33). When it comes to activity based approaches, as the name suggests, this approach sees leisure as engaging in activities that one would do in their free time, such as shopping, playing recreational sport etc. The quality of leisure and personal attitude go hand in hand with the previous approaches. If the participant is having fun their quality of leisure is improved, the opposite can be said if their attitude is negative. It's important when looking at why people participate in leisure, that these 4 approaches are taken into account.

As mentioned above, leisure and work are often seen to be in opposition with each other; however that is not always the case. More and more businesses are seeing the benefits leisure can have on staff productivity and happiness. This year alone an estimated £1. 67 billion was spent on leisure activities for staff at work (Groom, 2010). That equates to 20% of all spending on expenses last year. This view is reinforced by companies partnering with leisure based businesses such as activity day planners and health clubs to offer staff a range of benefits and discounts in order to increase their leisure quality. In addition to investing in leisure for staff, businesses as a whole take part in "leisure" also. Sponsorship for leisure events was estimated to be around \$45. 2 billion last year (IEG Global Sponsorship Expenditure Reports, Cited in 'Sponsormap', 2009).

The main concept to explore when asking why people participate in leisure is what motivates them to do so. Under ideal circumstances, the benefits from participating in leisure are numerous. As it covers such a broad range of activities, leisure allows an individual to do what they want. Linda Nazareth (Cited in Alboher, 2008) provides an example of a woman who works a stressful 6 day week. By incorporating a small amount of leisure into her routine, she felt happier at work, and felt her interactions with others outside work also greatly improved. Further to this studies show that physical based leisure, such as exercise or recreational sport have a positive effect on ones wellbeing. This is due to a combination of psychological factors as well as raised endorphin levels (“ The Reality of the Runners High”, 2008).

However, an individual’s leisure can often be impacted by numerous external factors such as age, race, income and gender. William R. Burch, Jr. (2009) highlights how social class (income) has an effect on what activities an individual can take part in. Activities such as going sailing, although not exclusive to upper class, is more likely to be available to than someone who is lower class. In addition an individual’s gender can also affect their free time. Roberts (2010) cites a recent international survey that shows men have half an hour more leisure time every day than women. In addition, geography also plays a key role. In the same study, figures showed that the half an hour advantage men have over women in the UK, compared to 38 minutes in the US, 33 in France, 50 in Belgium, 22 in Germany and 80 in Italy.

Person’s surroundings similarly can limit their participation in leisure. One could argue someone who is retired will have the most leisure time out of all

socio economic groups. This however is not always the case. Just as before, location has a major role on leisure, not just internationally but also locally. As Bull et al (2003) describes behavioral norms and expectations of what someone who is retired is able to do, can in fact limit what it is available to them. Further to this, social expectation can encourage social isolation and disengagement. All of these things contribute to having a negative effect on an individual's participation. Government funding can also have an effect. If the facilities aren't available, what an individual may want to do as activity based leisure may not be possible. In addition if pricing of facilities is too high, what an individual has access to will be limited. On the flip side, if funding is there the quality of leisure available to individuals is greatly improved and in general so is participation. This highlights how; at least in terms of activity based leisure, opportunities can sometimes be better for some more than others.

As shown, although leisure is subjective, external factors often have a role to play in the choices an individual makes. When answering why people participate in leisure, the answer is obvious. As William H. Davies said " What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?" (Cited in, Khurana 2009). Life is too short to have nothing but worry. People participate in leisure to escape from the hectic lives they have to live. Although many extrinsic factors can have an effect on leisure, there is no denying the benefits of even a little a day.