This paper presents definitions of leisure in Australian society, discusses various forms of leisure and its importance to the individual, community and nation. Recent observed changes to the nature of leisure are presented. It appears as though a shift from individual consumption to collective production of leisure is occurring; for example, "jogging all the way to choir".

Introduction

"Singing together (like bowling together) does not require shared ideology or shared social or ethnic provenance." (Putnam, 2000:411)

This paper presents some highlights of research into leisure and culture industries, focusing on emerging themes and major changes in how we use our free time. Understanding of changes in leisure activity is important for social policy, including understanding of infrastructure requirements at all levels of government. The paper focuses on Australian data. Leisure is directly associated with culture and individual and community well being. Leisure is inextricably linked with the culture of a community. Culture and leisure highlight our individual and social need for identity, creativity, and a sense of history, appreciation of the aesthetic, spirituality and our ability to play (ABS, 2001). There has been concern about the nature of leisure in our communities and the effect that may have on our culture. A popular example of that concern is presented by Putnam’s (2000) ‘Bowling Alone, the Collapse and Revival of American Community’. There is evidence of a significant change from individual to community-based activities (Aria & Pedlar, 2003:185). The paper commences with definitions and measures of leisure and free time then moves to discussion of the main issues in the academic literature and work being undertaken in Australia. The findings and implications for researchers and policy makers conclude the paper. Key topics include the change from individual to community-based leisure, work as the new leisure and the impact of technology on our free time. This paper is of relevance to academics and practitioners involved in include human movement, and the arts, sport and entertainment sectors, commercial and not for profit, in Australian society.

There is a diversity of opinion on the definition of leisure (Greenwood Parr & Lashua, 2004). This paper deals more with the issues surrounding leisure than the preciseness of the definition. What is known is that the nature of leisure is changing. For the purpose of this paper the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) is used.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines free time by seeing it as a residual factor; i.e. as the amount of time left in the day after time spent on:

- Necessary time – sleeping, eating, personal care;
- Contracted time – paid work and formal education;
- Committed time – family and household responsibilities, and unpaid voluntary work.
The ABS regards that time as being available for people to:

"... recover from the pressure of work and other commitments, to bond with their family and community members, to pursue their interests and to reflect on their life direction and meaning." (ABS, 2001:270)

Kaplan (1960: 22-25) proposed a definition that is built on positive terminology rather than the absence of work and commitments as proposed by the ABS(2001). Kaplan set out seven elements of leisure as follows:

1. an antithesis to "work" as an economic function;
2. a pleasant expectation and recollection
3. a minimum of involuntary social-role obligations
4. a psychological perception of freedom;
5. a close relation to values of the culture;
6. an inclusion of an entire range from inconsequence and insignificance to weightiness and importance; and
7. often, but not necessarily, an activity characterized by the element of play.

The Kaplan (1960) definition is more contingent and less deterministic and allows for the definition of leisure by those taking part.

Time and Leisure

The amount of time spent at leisure varies between gender and time of the week. ABS surveys in 1999 showed that the average free time for Australian is over 4 hours and 44 minutes on weekdays and 6 hours and 37 minutes on weekends. Men have more free time on weekends, due to women's greater share of domestic and childcare duties. People aged 15-24 years had more free time than most adults. People aged 25-54 had the least free time due to work, partner and family commitments. People over 55 had the most free time due to fewer work or family commitments. Australians spend more time watching TV than any other activity, though the most recent statistics do not reference the Internet or on line activities (ABS, 1999).

Understanding Leisure

Culture and leisure activities are linked to nonmaterial needs. The affirmation of social values, healthy behaviours and positive identity are important factors for individual well being. The activities can be:

- Family and home-based
- Sport and team-based
- Social and Community-based.

An individual may participate in immediate family and household activities; in sports and creative activities; or attending celebrations with friends and extended family.

Individuals can also participate in leisure as part of the wider community. For example, by supporting protection of heritage institutions, encouraging businesses to sponsor groups and by actively participating in community groups such as hobby, choirs and theatre groups (Roberts, 1999; Stebbins, 1992).
Technology, Globalisation and Leisure

The changes in technology, particularly the Internet and its computer-mediated communication have provided different but not well-understood changes in leisure. It is not yet known how the Internet will change our leisure habits, though there is some discussion that the Internet is not likely to have as much of an impact on our leisure as the development of television (Roberts, 1999). Other interactions between technology, globalisation and leisure occur when technology is used as an enabler of social connectedness such as when young women use the Internet to engage in craft clubs such as Stitch’nBitch’, which uses the Internet for communication and facilitation. Stitch’nBitch groups are sophisticated users of the Internet, however they meet locally in third places such as pubs and hotels.

Leisure in Rural and Regional Australia

There has been very little work on the nature of leisure in rural and regional Australia. It can be assumed that options are limited, with the local town and community determining options. The Internet is a vital source of communication and social connection for rural and remote communities in Australia.

Governments, Leisure and Culture

All levels of Government influence the frequency and type of leisure activities through allocation of resources for community venues and facilities. Additionally they have a role as custodians of national and cultural heritage. The extent and type of government participation in leisure is debated from a variety of economic and philosophic perspectives.

The Business of Leisure and Culture

The sporting industry is seen as being a major component of the leisure industry. There are many other forms of leisure that, at this time, are not well understood, nor do we know much about the size of the industry. In 2000, the ABS estimated that 2.5 million people were involved in some form of paid or unpaid work in the leisure and cultural industries. The ABS estimates that there are 272,000 people employed in small businesses in the Leisure and Culture Industries. This statistic does not include the formation of online businesses (i.e. in arts and crafts) that has been developed in recent years (ABS, 1997). There has been a significant reduction in the number of fitness clubs opening, with a focus being on the ‘best of the breed’ (Fallon, 2003).

Work As The New Leisure

There is increasing attention to issues of work-life balance, yet at the same time there is a blurring of the boundaries between work and personal life. There is some evidence that paid work is beginning to dominate people’s lives (Lewis, 2003:343). The research notes that many prefer to work and that technology is allowing them to work in different times and spaces both in the home, the office and a third place. This change can bring many benefits to people but also diminish their personal life and leisure. Many individuals appear to be deliberately choosing to work long hours, as it is engaging and affirming of professional identity. What is not known is whether this choice is an informed one or whether the people do not see other options to long hours engaged in paid work.
Jogging All The Way To Choir

There is evidence of a macro level social change where the individual focus in leisure is being overtaken by the need for community connection. For the last few decades of the twentieth century, leisure was a solitary pursuit of consumption, where people would jog alone, go to the gym alone and consume their leisure as a solitary range of services such as provided in the health and beauty industries. This appears to be changing with more young people participating in community groups such as choirs and craft groups. This change is welcomed as the return to community and social cohesion, trust, mutuality and openness (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). This trend, if it continues, will have a significant impact on social policy needs and the business of leisure and culture.

A Research Agenda

Research into Leisure and Culture is of necessity complex and multidisciplinary. The field requires an understanding of the “interplay between social, personal and environmental factors and the need to develop new theories and methods of research” (Haworth, 2003:317). At this point it is under researched and with a diversity of definitions and some contradictory findings. In particular there is a need to better understand changes in leisure and culture that are occurring as a result of the major changes in technology, particularly the development of the computer-mediated communication (Lawrence, 2003:301). The work being undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics is providing a conceptual framework that can assist in research into leisure and culture.

We can understand leisure at an individual, family, team or community activity. At this point there is some interest in the balance between individual and community leisure with indications of a macro level social trend towards more community-based activities such as choirs and craft groups. Technology is an enabler of social connectedness, whilst at the same time can be seen as alienating, this paradox needs to be better understood.

Areas of particular interest to government, industry and academia are the macro level changes as they will be a driver of changes to social policy and infrastructure. An appreciation of the changes in the production and consumption of leisure in Australia will allow for appropriate and timely service delivery by government and industry. Further research is of particular relevance to local government. This sector needs to understand the changes in order to ensure that appropriate facilities are available; for example it may be that it is not the time to be thinking about demolishing the old scout halls.

Leisure in Australia is under researched and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has taken the lead to define the term as the residual time left after necessary, contracted and committed time has been spent and that leisure allows people to recover from work and be with their families and communities. People are able to engage in activities that interest them and indeed leisure provides time to think and reflect on all manner of topics. The primary leisure activity measured in time is watching TV; though statistics on time spent on the Internet are not yet available. Leisure can be an activity of individual consumption such as gym memberships. Leisure can be a community social or cause related activity such as belonging to conservation and heritage groups. Technology has a major role to play in contemporary leisure, as it is an enabler of community connections for local or global participation in activities. The role of technology in the leisure patterns of rural and regional communities is not well understood. The opportunity to research major social change as it occurs is rare and critical incident studies will provide insights into the nature of the changes occurring. The call for research is based on the knowledge that macro level social change needs to be understood by the government, industry and community sectors. Only by understanding the changes occurring is it possible to provide the appropriate infrastructure and support. An investment in research into leisure in Australia will require a multidisciplinary approach that provides accurate measures and policy input for all levels of government.
References


