

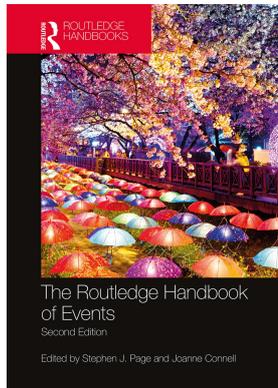
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Public events, personal leisure?

Diane O'Sullivan

Introduction

Any attempt to understand the role of leisure in society must be prepared for a 'moveable feast'. As society shifts and alters so leisure demand, provision and consumption inevitably change in response. However, it is at least conceivable that this traffic is not all one way and that changing leisure, in its turn, has the capacity to change society. For this reason, if no other, the relationships between society and public leisure events are worthy of consideration. Discussions about leisure often begin with its role and meaning in peoples' lives (where we live, what we do, our tastes, who we choose to spend time with) and the way in which it influences, and is influenced by, society. Sociologists use the concept of *lifestyles* to explain 'self-concept' (Decrop 2006: 11), that is, how we explain to ourselves and to others, who we are. The growing consumption of leisure events such as sporting, cultural, visual arts, music festivals, and heritage events have resonance with contemporary tourists being described as accumulators of 'social and cultural capital' (Shaw and Williams 2004: 132). Given the relatively well-developed literature around the phenomenon of leisure (Page and Connell 2010) it is certainly possible that leisure studies has something useful to contribute to explaining the motivations, experiences and behaviours of event attendees (Getz 2007; Jackson 2005; Li and Petrick 2006) but there may be a further question to be explored: does leisure theory have something to contribute to event effectiveness and event evaluation?

A significant and stubborn difficult issue around public sector event provision has been the measurement of anticipated benefits. Initially, considerable attention was given to establishing the economic benefits of individual events (Tyrrell and Johnston 2001; Crompton and McKay 1994; Long and Perdue 1990; Getz 1989) though there was little agreement that such approaches were reliable, cost effective, accurate or comparable (Bowdin *et al.* 2011; Jones 2008; Craig 2006; Jura Consultants *et al.* 2001; Dwyer *et al.* 2000). More recently there have been attempts to capture frequently lauded social and environmental benefits from events (Arts Council 2007) such as the 'the triple bottom line' (a term coined by John Elkington in 1994 to mean that business should consider 'people, planet and profit') and other developments, such as social capital and social entrepreneurship have an important role to play (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2008). However, a report for the Scottish Cultural Commission (Ruiz 2004) claimed that despite the almost universal

Table 3.1 Societal benefits of leisure

<i>Societal benefits of leisure</i>	<i>Societal benefits of events</i>
Fitness and health – physical/mental	Events that keep people physically active and mentally engaged
Social	Positive engagement with society, needs not being met in other areas of life
Community	Self-esteem and esteem of others
Self-actualisation	Personal growth through serious leisure, commitment and involvement
Environmental	Engagement with global/local issues of concern

Source: After Getz (2007)

agreement for the need for a better system of evaluation, the complexity and nuances of the task mean that it remains, at best, problematic.

Despite the challenge of measuring outputs contemporary cities have recently been described as demonstrating a 'desire for eventfulness' and as moving towards a state of 'festivalisation', with texts promising to reveal how to 'develop and manage an eventful city' in order to optimise contributions to 'economic and social prosperity' (Richards and Palmer 2010: 2), as illustrated in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 15. However, evaluating public event outcomes is now widely recognised as a complex task fraught with multiple potential pitfalls, any of which could either singly, or in combination, undermine a reliable understanding of what objectives have been set or achieved (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2009). Consequently, with the measurement of public event outcomes so notoriously challenging, there is a danger that public policy decision-making related to events might be less *evidence-based*, more *wishful thinking*. This chapter has two key purposes. First, it seeks to explore some of the benefits of leisure with particular reference to public sector leisure events. Second, it considers whether leisure theory might have something to offer the understanding of what outcomes public sector leisure events can reasonably be expected to deliver and consequently, how these might be more effectively assessed and understood. Much of the debate in this chapter is framed around the interconnections between the societal benefits of leisure and events (Table 3.1) and how these can be promoted through a public policy agenda, a feature that we return to in Chapter 30 in relation to ageing and the positive benefits of events.

Understanding leisure in a social context

Much of the contemporary Western thinking on leisure stems from an understanding of leisure as it occurred in the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. Continuing this historical perspective, changes in leisure activity through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution are generally covered to provide the context for contemporary ideas (see Torkildsen 2005; Haywood *et al.* 1995). At first, attempts to define leisure at the conceptual level, of which there are many, tended to address the role of play (Ellis 1973) and its contribution to human development (physical and mental) and then to explore leisure in relation to time (free time), activity (freely chosen) and state of mind (the motive of the participant) (Bull *et al.* 2003).

A common theme of the work of sociologists on leisure has been the comparisons to be drawn with its relationship to work and then, expanding that relationship further, to cover leisure/work and politics; leisure/work and class; leisure/work and gender; and, leisure/work and economics

(Roberts 2006; Critcher 2006; Haworth and Veal 2004; Critcher *et al.* 1995; Haywood *et al.* 1995). The 1960s saw the field of urban studies raising early concerns over a perceived decline in a sense of community and a move towards individualism (Mumford 1961) which could be evidenced by changes in structures for leisure. Social psychology has a long history of interest in leisure, seeking to understand 'why people need social relationships and how these are expressed in terms of leisure behaviour, attitudes and activities' (Page and Connell 2010: 154). The work of Argyle (1996) offers an overview of leisure as a form of social integration which provides positive opportunities for social advantage, identity and improved self-esteem and governments commonly seek strategies to support society by addressing social exclusion (and, more positively, promoting social inclusion) via the removal of barriers to leisure participation for disadvantaged social groups (Page and Connell 2010: 154). Such concerns may also be evidenced by increased interest in the notion of social capital, which deals with the reciprocal relationships to be gained by individuals working together, via the activities that occur in leisure time, to achieve shared objectives (Putnam 1993). Leisure's link to social capital has been investigated in a variety of ways (Warde *et al.* 2005) and events are no exception. For example, O'Sullivan *et al.* (2008) considered the role of festivals and events in rural areas of Wales, concluding that they make a significant contribution to local communities by providing opportunities for supporting and encouraging social capital and entrepreneurship, often filling a vacuum caused by a lack of support from local authorities.

As the nature and structure of society shift so too does the nature and structure of leisure. A traditional focus of leisure was, arguably, within the home, centred originally listening to the radio, and reading; later the watching of television, computer games and accessing the internet (see Kynaston 2007: 295 for an analysis of post-war leisure and the evolution of these trends). However, Roberts (1999: 41) argues that in the second half of the twentieth century leisure outside the home has also flourished as evidenced by the growth of tourism, involvement in sport and physical activity, and other recreational activities, such as those offered by the entertainment sector including visits to public houses and high-technology cinemas, although more recent trends have demonstrated the younger generation focus on technology and in-home leisure. Though it may at first seem counterfactual, events can and do, fall into both home-based and out-of-home typologies of leisure.

One of the key contemporary aspects of events as leisure is the notion of events as 'experience' and of successful events being built upon 'predictably satisfying experiences' (Mannell and Kleiber 1997: 11), a theme we will pick up again in Chapters 13, 20 and 21. The idea of controlling and replicating such experiences absorbs an increasing amount of time and effort for those involved in the design and management of 'live' events (Berridge 2006). This concept stems from a focus on the customer experience as a natural extension of the provision and marketing of products and services, where the engagement of and with customers is achieved in a 'personal, memorable way' (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 3). In their seminal text *The Experience Economy*, Pine and Gilmore offer advice on how to create positive experiences and, though their experiences focus mainly on retail exchanges, the concepts are frequently discussed by advisors on event management (Shone and Parry 2010; Bowdin *et al.* 2011; Getz 2007: 173). The concept proposes a theatrical approach covering the experience theme (including scripting a story); surprise (staging the unexpected); the production team (the sum of roles required to produce and event); and, finally a process of 'transformation' which positively changes the individual (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 165). The 'wow factor' where live event attendees are 'dazzled' (Citrine 1995) has become increasingly sought after but increasingly difficult to achieve in a 'safe and guaranteed' experience (Getz 2007). However, planned events are not always designed solely for the spatially 'live' audience.

Events created primarily to be packaged and broadcast via television and the World Wide Web have the potential to reach a truly global audience and are now commonplace. The broadcasting

of live events, such as the Olympic Games and Ryder Cup, like the actual events themselves, are said to offer intangible benefits such as community pride, cultural renewal, increased tourist interest and investment in the host community or destination (Getz 2007). Traditional home-based leisure pursuits, particularly listening to the radio or watching television, were viewed as passive forms of leisure but increasingly live broadcasts transcend that description. Work undertaken by Lincoln (2005) on youth culture and music suggest that music, both live and recorded, is one of the ways in which young people develop 'socially, politically and culturally', determining their 'attitudes, appearance and friendships' (cited in Page and Connell 2010: 104). In 2018 Prince Harry, son of the Prince of Wales, married American actress Megan Markle with live local community celebrations around the world supported by an estimated 18 million TV views in the UK, around 29 million TV views in the USA and hundreds of millions more globally (BBC News UK 2018). Such celebratory events offer an opportunity for home-based and out-of-home leisure; individual and community leisure; personal and public leisure; local and visitor leisure; and live and broadcast leisure. This royal wedding event (not held on a weekday necessitating a public holiday but rather scheduled at a weekend) demonstrates how leisure and events are inextricably linked in both theory and practice.

Understanding leisure in a public policy context

Early thinking on post-industrial societies centred around American academics who, in the 1960s, argued that advances in technology, productivity and economic growth would lead to social structures and lifestyles dominated by leisure (Critchler and Bramham 2004: 34). Meanwhile, in the UK, increased public spending on leisure and the arts culminated in the creation of large departments for leisure in local authorities, supported by huge increases in spending under the banner of 'community welfare' (Veal 1993). However, by the economic crisis of 1976, which necessitated the government approaching the International Monetary Fund for a loan, public spending on leisure began to be 'targeted' in order to achieve specific economic, social and public order goals (Veal 1993). In this way public sector support for leisure moved from a policy of 'leisure for all' to a policy of targeting 'hard to reach groups' (including women, the poor) and geographical areas (such as the inner cities).

During the Margaret Thatcher governments of the 1980s spending on leisure was increasingly squeezed forcing provision to become more *market facing* (for example, by the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering for local public leisure provision) and *economically justified* in terms of outcomes produced (Bull *et al.* 2003). However, by 1990 a newly elected party leader took a different view of leisure and in creating a new Department of National Heritage, John Major's government sought a return to the view that culture (sport, tourism, the arts, heritage and broadcasting) offered benefits for society as a whole, rather than just as a tool for dealing with isolated problems. By the late 1990s the New Labour government inherited leisure policies which they were ideologically able to retain, many of which were made possible by the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994. Despite the original intention that the Lottery should provide additional funding, over and above that which previously existed, that goal was 'all but abandoned' with more of the original funding being directed at social policies (Bull *et al.* 2003).

By the 1990s the notion of the *creative industries* had replaced the earlier focus on culture with its, potentially negative, connotations of cultural consumption and increasing consumerism (Page and Connell 2010: 350). It is argued that a move from tangible elements of culture (e.g. buildings, museums and monuments) to the intangible elements (image, identity and lifestyle) indicates a shift to a symbolic economy (Richards and Wilson 2007). This shift

culminated in a strategy for the creative industries designed to make the UK a focus for the sector across the world (DCMS 2008). Despite the economic recession of 2008 which negatively impacted the UK economy for (at least) the following five years, the most recent figures available from Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) claim that It is estimated that in 2015 the Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution of DCMS sectors (creative industries, cultural sector, digital sector, gambling, sport, telecoms and tourism) to the UK was £221bn, or 13.3 per cent of UK GVA. The GVA of DCMS sectors has grown at a faster rate than the economy as a whole, increasing by 3.6 per cent since 2014 (£213bn), and 24.8 per cent since 2010 (£177bn). This compares to increases of 2.3 per cent and 17.4 per cent respectively for the UK economy as a whole (DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2015). Currently, the future of the UK economy outside the European Union following BREXIT is uncertain (Tisdall 2018): given its fragmentation and lack of cohesive political identity (Bull *et al.* 2003) the future for public sector leisure is perhaps even more so.

Why are events significant for the public sector?

Perhaps the place to start with this question is to ask why governments get involved in anything at all, a theme we will return to in Chapter 14 on the political analysis of events. Firstly, where involvement is a function of governance, they have no choice. Examples here would include education, public health, and national security. However, there are areas of activity where government involvement is not mandatory and where choices may be made. In these cases governments' particular political ideologies come into play, but in general terms, their involvement in supporting events tends to be driven by the concept of the 'public good'. Getz (2007: 330) suggests that the benefits of public events might include:

- contributions to social equity with regard to, for example, leisure access or health
- redressing market failures or inadequacies, such as, stimulating business and encouraging enterprise and job creation
- generating income via profits to be made from public events
- intangible benefits, such as, contributions to culture including for non-users, and
- sustaining and protecting public resources, including the physical environment.

Other writers highlight the benefit of public leisure events as being their role in national and local economic development strategies (e.g. Bowdin *et al.* 2011; Whitford 2004; Hall and Ruser 2004; Harcup 2000; Hughes 1999). Observers of contemporary city development highlight the value of events to the restructuring of 'post-industrial cities' such as Glasgow, Manchester and Dublin (Miles and Miles 2004) and to the 'entrepreneurial city' (Judd 1999; Hannigan 1998) where development partnerships between the public and private sectors becomes the dominant development model. Additional claims for the value of public events include their contribution to 'creative cities' (Landry 2000) which focus on attracting businesses and people who fit into Richard Florida's (2002) definition of the 'creative class' and where cultural capital is used to attract 'innovative businesses and services' (Zukin 2004: 13). This is extended even further to the notion of the 'intercultural city' which is said to be able to utilise complex internal cultural resources, demonstrated by diverse cultural events and festivals (Wood *et al.* 2006), to adapt to changing external circumstances and so 'extend their competence base' (Lambooy cited in Richards and Palmer 2005). Consequently, public sector involvement in leisure events has become one way in which places seek to attract visitors, labour, businesses and investment capital.

Understanding public leisure events

It has been suggested that the study of events might usefully receive contributions from at least fourteen foundation disciplines and eleven closely linked professional fields (Getz 2007). Before 2000 much of the writing and research on events was scattered through wider fields of study, notably tourism, leisure, marketing and hospitality, business and economics (Bowdin *et al.* 2011). Academics and practitioners in Australia set a new agenda in 2000 at the first international event management research conference and since that time specific event research, journals and programmes of education have proliferated around the globe (Getz 2007). Discussions arising from such events conferences in Australia led to the claim that academics and practitioners were not communicating very well (Harris and Jago 2000) and it was as recently as 2006 that an Event Management Body of Knowledge EMBOK (www.embok.com) was published. Establishing how and when a field of study is 'born' is contentious but it is said to have occurred when it becomes generally accepted that practitioners need an understanding of the variety of theoretical foundations and research methodologies that underpin their professional activities (Tribe 2006). Arguments against disciplinary status for fields of study such as events suggest that by their very nature they are too complex and that such a move would limit further development. The longer established field of study around tourism is still said to lack the cohesion required to claim the status (Tribe 2006, 2004; Echtner and Jamal 1997: 875).

Though the relationship between events and public policy has received relatively limited analysis (Hall and Rusher 2004; Gratton and Henry 2001) events' role in local and regional development strategies suggest they are practically thought to be of considerable significance (Whitford 2004; Pugh and Wood 2004; Hinch and Higham 2004; Roche 2000) and lack of analysis in no way indicates a lack of event activity. Public sector involvement in events at the regional level has become more visible with the creation of dedicated events departments or events units. Visit Britain, the British tourist authority, created eventBritain (www.visitbritain.com/en/campaigns/eventbritain) which claims to offer an extensive range of benefits to help achieve its core objective of working with UK industry partners to support bids for major business, cultural and sporting events. EventScotland has a similar objective (www.eventscotland.org) with a budget of around £5 million and the Welsh Assembly Government developed its own Major Events Unit in 2009. In one of the few texts yet to emerge which attempts to deal with events as a concept, Getz (2007: 329–349) argues that events offer government a potential for economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits on the condition that they are planned and managed effectively.

It has been suggested that, in the UK, the public sector is responsible for much of the existing event activity and that local authorities have 'substantial and varied events programmes' (Pugh and Wood 2004). Research undertaken in Wales in 2006/7 revealed that, at a conservative estimate, all twenty-two local authorities were involved with events in some way and that the vast majority were targeted mainly at local audiences and 'staged primarily for socio-cultural reasons linked to basic social-capital building activity' (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2009: 26).

In summary, it is clear that while Leisure Studies is generally viewed as a more established discipline, though one with its own challenges of identity and profile (Fletcher *et al.* 2017), the much younger study of 'events' is still limited by a focus on managing practice rather than developing theory and exploring meaning. While public sector involvement in leisure provision in the UK is well recorded and comparatively well understood, understanding of events is less easy to disentangle from involvement with tourism, sport and the arts more generally.



Figure 3.1 Understanding the potential for benefit from leisure

Leisure benefits and public sector events

It has been suggested that there are (at least) five benefits of leisure which might have significance for events and that these are fitness and health, social benefit, community benefit, self-actualisation and environmental benefit (Getz 2007). Here these benefits are used as a framework for exploring ways in which public sector events might be linked to notions of leisure. However, it should be remembered that, in practice, such factors are not easily separated and remain complex and inter-related as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

To avoid the temptation to view benefits as compartmentalised it may be more appropriate to view them as a continuum moving from the personal, to the individual, to the community, to society and finally, at the broadest level, to the physical environment which supports all human activity. What follows is an attempt to consider how our understanding of leisure might usefully contribute to an improved understanding of public sector event activity.

Public sector leisure and the potential for self-actualisation

The need for self-actualisation is said to be the pinnacle of a human *hierarchy of needs* (as conceived by Abraham Maslow in 1954) and despite its critics (see, for example, Cooper *et al.* 2008) the concept is still frequently quoted in attempts to understand the role of leisure in peoples' lives. Maslow theorises that once the physiological needs of life are satisfied (hunger, rest, thirst, shelter) human beings move along a hierarchy of needs to include safety and security, belonging and love, esteem and finally, at the pinnacle of the triangle, self-actualisation or personal self-fulfilment. In a similar vein, a key concept in understanding the role of leisure in modern life may be the notion of 'serious leisure', which is defined as:

the serious pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience.

(Stebbins 2004: 200)

Serious leisure, as contrasted with casual leisure, is characterised as an 'immediately intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it' (Stebbins 2004: 201).

Serious leisure, a concept developed initially by Robert Stebbins (developed further by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) and, for events, Mackellar (2013)), was originally defined as amateurism, hobbyist activities and career volunteering. The amateur pursuit of activities in art, sport, science and entertainment are contrasted to professional pursuit, defined by employment for financial reward. Hobbyists are not simply non-professionals and can be collectors, makers, followers of non-competitive rule based pursuits (such as mountain climbing) or sports and games in competitive activities where there is no professional equivalent (such as hockey) and can be enthusiasts of liberal arts hobbies pursuing knowledge for its own sake (such as

literature) (Stebbins 2004). Volunteering is defined as 'voluntary individual or group action oriented toward helping oneself or others or both' (Stebbins 2004: 201). Stebbins offers a taxonomy of sixteen forms of organisational volunteering and coins the term 'career volunteering' (in education, science, civic life, religion, politics, economic development, safety and the physical environment) where there is 'continuous and substantial helping' rather than single donations or acts (Stebbins 2004: 202).

Serious leisure is said to be further defined by seven personal and three social rewards:

Personal:

- 1 Personal enrichment – cherished experiences
- 2 Self-actualisation – development of skills, abilities, knowledge
- 3 Self-expression – expressing skills, abilities and knowledge developed
- 4 Self-image – identification as a participant
- 5 Self-gratification – superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction
- 6 Recreation – leisure after a day's work
- 7 Financial return – from a serious leisure activity

Social:

- 8 Social attraction – engagement with others in a social world
- 9 Group achievement – a sense of helping, being needed, altruism
- 10 Contribution to the group – helping, being needed, altruism

Stebbins (2004: 204)

Despite academic challenge to the theoretical development of the original concept (see Veal 2016) it does appear that finding satisfaction from serious leisure is likely to provide a mix of personal rewards and social rewards which are satisfying in themselves but far outweigh the inevitable tensions and disappointments to be encountered along the way.

In the past much was made of the value of social capital and the third sector activity (voluntary, not-for-profit) with parties of different political persuasions both claiming them for their own ideologies (The Economist 2005). In 2010 a newly elected government led by Conservative David Cameron launched the concept of the 'Big Society' which promoted a power shift from politicians to people in an attempt to tap into and release latent social energy (Norman 2010). This was to be achieved by, among other things, a volunteering programme for 16-year-olds; public service delivery by social enterprises; charities and voluntary groups; and, the launch of a Big Society Day to encourage more people to take part in social action (www.theconservatives.com).

Critics claimed that this (now abandoned) policy narrative was simply a way to achieve the Right-Wing ideal of reducing the size of the state 'by the back door' but regardless of ideology, its implications for the public sector and the third sector inspired much media, political and academic debate at the time. However, a lack of understanding of leisure time use in peoples' lives and an absence of consideration of the concept of leisure in policy documents may have contributed to its failure (Such 2013). Fenwick and Gibbon (2017:129) argue that due to the complexity of contemporary public policy provision in an era beyond modernism, the Big Society 'had its moment', but that was all it could be.

Nevertheless, The Localism Act 2012 reflected a broader policy of reducing the central state and transferring power to local voluntary groups (King 2014) and, despite negative connotations of 'austerity localism', more positive ideas of 'progressive localism' in public sector

leisure (for example, in transferring the assets of libraries and sport centres to local control) are still being debated (Findlay-King *et al.* 2017: 158). Consequently, despite long-standing and repeated challenges around leisure policy (see Roberts 2006), potentially explained by a decline in the prominence of leisure studies in social sciences (see, for example, Fletcher *et al.* 2017), it must surely be possible that public sector leisure could offer a contribution to positive notions of society.

Without ignoring the challenges outlined above I would argue that public sector events designed to encourage volunteering or community engagement might use the literature on career volunteering as *serious leisure* to inform local approaches and measure effectiveness. Such events might be designed to focus primarily on the personal advantages to be gained which far outnumber the social ones. They might usefully highlight the fun and satisfaction to be gained, the sense of involvement and belonging, the recreational benefit and respect to be gained from one's community. Volunteering traditionally implies selflessness and service but the literature on volunteering as *serious leisure* suggests that benefits are overwhelmingly personal rather than social. Involvement in career volunteering as characterised by Stebbins' notion of serious leisure suggest a focus on the *personal* benefits to be gained might be a useful way of getting over the problem of volunteering being negatively perceived as no more than low-cost labour subsidising publicly funded service provision.

Public sector leisure and individual benefit

Social scientists tend to disagree about whether the amount of working time has declined or increased since the 1980s (Zuzanek 2004). The traditional view on work and leisure time suggested that by the 1980s leisure time would overtake the time spent on work, however, by the 1990s a 'vicious work-and-spend' cycle was said to have resulted in '*time squeeze*' for both men and women (Schor 1991: 1). Though this view is contested (Gershuny 2000: 74; Robinson and Godbey 1997) there remains support for research reporting that people feel 'always rushed' (Robinson 1993) or that they 'never have enough time' (Bond *et al.* 1998) or that they perceive themselves to have 'less time than they did five years ago' (Zuzanek and Smale 1997). While this may be a psychological response to the general 'speeding up of modern life' (Robinson and Godbey 1997: 25) the fact remains that contemporary Western-style societies report feeling 'time crunched'. Despite the controversy over the interpretation of the research, statistical data is available to support the claim that paid and unpaid workloads appear to have increased hours worked and that there is, to a lesser extent, a 'speeding up' of non-work activities such as voluntary work or social leisure. Nevertheless, it appears that it is time spent on personal needs and continuing education, rather than leisure, have been reduced to accommodate the change (Zuzanek 2004:125).

It has been claimed that if good health behaviour (good nutrition, exercise, non-smoking and moderate alcohol intake) were widely practised, average life expectancy would rise by seven years but that if all types of cancer were eliminated the gain would be only two years (Ornstein and Erlich 1989). With much of what is controllable in individual's lifestyle being leisure related why is it that so few of us engage in active leisure or only do so reactively (for example, in response to a heart attack) despite the benefits of physical activity being widely promoted? One theory is that home entertainment provides 'the path of least resistance' saving us money, time and effort. A second is that trends in modern living (concerns for family togetherness and stress caused by work, commuting and financial pressures), combine to push us towards the passive and reactive lifestyle (Iso-Ahola and Mannell 2004).

So what motivates us to engage in leisure? Iso-Ahola and St Clair (2000) argue for three factors:

- 1 that we can be biologically predisposed and socialised into leisure
- 2 that knowledge and values/attitudes can play a part
- 3 that constraints and facilitators affecting our ability to engage with leisure combine to determine our motivation.

Further, it is argued that engagement in physically active leisure has to be self-determined and intrinsically rewarding, and that engagement of this nature is characterised by fun, enjoyment, excitement and enthusiasm (Iso-Ahola and Mannell 2004).

A scan of any UK local authority's event activity is likely to reveal involvement in events which seek to encourage physical activity and to raise awareness of the role of exercise in health, such as heart health, mental health and healthy eating. Yet engagement levels remain lamentably low and even where successful only temporarily so. Perhaps this explains why for over twenty years estimates consistently suggest that 50 per cent of people are likely to leave an exercise programme within six months of starting it (Iso-Ahola 1999). So, does an understanding of leisure theory offer anything which might improve the effectiveness of public sector leisure events which seek to encourage individual health and fitness?

A selective tour of the literature suggests that public sector events could usefully emphasise the following aspects of an individual's engagement with active leisure programmes:

- 1 Value for money – relative to home entertainment options
- 2 Time investment – relative to the busy 'time squeezed' lifestyle
- 3 Effort – easy to access and physically achievable
- 4 Family togetherness – activities that can be enjoyed by family groups
- 5 De-stressing – a sense of personal autonomy and friendship
- 6 Intrinsic rewards – fun, enjoyment, excitement, enthusiasm.

While not *all* programmes might be able to offer *all* these benefits to *all* individuals *all* of the time, if the purpose of an event is to encourage engagement in physical activity, perceptions of these factors as barriers to engagement is likely to work against that goal. It is possible that public sector events created to encourage physical activity could be made more effective by successfully addressing these issues in the minds of the target audience.

Public sector leisure and community benefit

The concept of community in leisure studies has changed markedly in recent years. It has moved from traditional sociological approaches (breaking it down to the sum of its parts – geography, interests, common union, whilst at the same time accepting that it is more than these) to a contemporary view of community as something much less tangible (Blackshaw and Crawford 2009). It is argued that community has overwhelmingly positive connotations and is viewed as 'warm and friendly' (Bauman 2001: 1) but also that it is (over) used 'indiscriminately' and 'emptily' (Hobsbawm 1995: 428).

In considering the link between community and leisure, it has been suggested that the concept of *community practice* is viewed as an alternative to, and a critique of, traditional approaches to public sector policy and service provision (Butcher 1994). Butcher lists a variety of occupations

and services that have sought to apply the community practice approach, including community care, community education, community development, community business, community radio and community leisure (Butcher 1994: 3). He also notes the critical perspective which suggests that community is used as a “spray-on word”, deployed to lend legitimacy and positive feelings to a variety of otherwise very diverse and maybe, in the end, not particularly new and innovative practices and approaches’ (1994: 4).

Community practice then may be defined an approach to public sector service delivery which:

- views service users and the public as co-participants in the determining what should be provided and how
- takes a collective approach to problems and decision making
- recognises the value of indigenous community resources in the promotion and delivery of services designed to meet community needs
- is aware of cultural diversity with regard to community needs, taking a cultural sensitive and responsive approach to service delivery
- is committed to prioritising the needs of disadvantaged people and groups.

Butcher (1994: 5)

Despite criticism of the concept, community practice in public service delivery, including community leisure, has been promoted since the early 1990s. The move towards this type of public service delivery can be evidenced, not least, by the proliferation of community development projects in the local government arena and, more recently, by the growth in programmes designed to educate for effective community facilitation. Of course, the notion of community practice approaches requires a community willing and able to be involved, and this resonates with the notions of the engaged individual and career volunteering (Stebbins 2004). The potential benefits of ‘progressive localism’ discussed earlier (Findlay-King *et al.* 2017) depend on the availability of a society willing and able to rise to the challenges and responsibilities on offer, though this is by no means guaranteed (see Such 2013). And also perhaps, on individuals able to see the personal benefits to be gained, as opposed to viewing involvement as purely selfless public service.

In the framework developed from Getz (2007) at the start of this chapter it was suggested that public leisure events might provide community benefit, and, in this section, the notion of community practice has been introduced. It is relatively easy to see how community-based events would be generally positive for their community. Indeed, work undertaken on events across the principality of Wales has suggested that of over 1,000 events with public sector involvement, support is justified primarily for socio-cultural reasons, community development and social-capital building outcomes (O’Sullivan *et al.* 2009). But can community leisure practice offer public sector events any practical lessons?

It does appear that public sector events which seek to benefit their community might usefully focus upon issues such as:

- communities of interest and disadvantaged groups
- involving service users in determining what should be done and devolve responsibility to them where possible
- attempting to engender a sense of belonging and community spirit
- linking events with other service provision such as, education and training for socially excluded young people or hard to reach ethnic groups

- considering methods of service delivery by taking
 - o a facilitating and enabling management style
 - o a partnership focus
 - o user-led approaches
 - o capacity building for community groups
 - o viewing the community as a resource.

If you are thinking that these approaches sound familiar with regard to public sector event delivery, one should not be surprised. There is some evidence to support the claim that these approaches are already happening within arts, sport, recreation and leisure events supported by the public sector. Indeed, it may be one of the factors contributing to the growth in interest in event management and provision generally (Getz and Page 2016). However, this chapter suggests that what the leisure literature might still have a contribution to make to support a change in the way in which such events are evaluated. If the value of events were understood and discussed from the perspective of their contribution to community practice (as described above), and evaluated on the same basis, this might help to address the seemingly intractable problems currently surrounding approaches to event evaluation discussed earlier (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2009).

Public sector leisure and social benefit

The study of groups of people and how they are organised has contributed much to the contemporary understanding of leisure and the field of leisure studies. While it is not possible, or desirable, to explore all social science contributions to leisure here, it has long been claimed that there is no 'defined tradition of leisure theory' and that leisure remains largely 'under-theorised' (Haywood *et al.* 1995). Reasons put forward for this omission are that other social institutions, such as, work, politics, and family, have taken precedence and that leisure is often studied in relation to work these 'big' social issues raising fundamental and important questions about the relevance of the leisure discipline (Evans 2014; Rojek 1995) and that leisure, conceptualised as 'free-time', is a relatively recent construction and rarely has a clear history of its own (Rojek 1995). It may also be the case that conceptualising and even classifying leisure is a particularly diverse and complex task, making theory development 'problematic' (Haywood *et al.* 1995).

In broad terms there have been two key approaches in understanding leisure in the context of society (for an overview see Page and Connell 2010; Roberts 2006). The view preferred by the 'leisure studies' tradition focuses upon the individual's freedom to choose, to control their own actions and express themselves in a huge variety of freely chosen leisure forms, where supporting football and playing football are equally valid. The second approach takes a structuralist perspective which views leisure as a function of society, with society conceptualised as a system made up of institutions (family, work, politics and culture) that combine to maintain social order. This approach can be sub-divided into a view of the social order as a broad consensus, where structures of society help integrate individuals into acceptable types of behaviours, and one of conflict, where structures are controlling, with dominant and subordinate groups playing out power struggles. Here the Marxist view sees capitalism as dominant over the interest of the majority of people (the working classes or the proletariat), while feminist writers have viewed social structures as designed to benefit white, middle-class males. Critical theorists, led by the Frankfurt School of sociologists, take the view that freedom in leisure as an illusion, with human needs suppressed and leisure commodified for the promotion of false needs and desires which

combine to support and maintain capitalism. We will return to these critical perspectives on events in Chapters 27 to 33.

The perspective of leisure as freedom and leisure as control, are presented as polarised, but much of the writing on society, and the role of leisure within it, are not necessarily constrained simply in this way. Instead, thinking on leisure and society may be more fully understood by reference to the complex sociological traditions from which it has emerged, including feminist analysis, cultural studies and postmodernism. So, what might the thinking on society and leisure offer the thinking on public sector events?

Academic studies of the role of public sector events as leisure in society can be undertaken from a variety of perspectives, such as economics, financial management, marketing and geography to name but a few. However, as discussed earlier, work on events has been disparate and until recently, significantly under-represented. Within sociology a variety of perspectives might be taken to public sector events and undertaking research from specific sociological perspectives may facilitate a way through the complexity of the subject matter. Below is a list of suggested titles for research on public sector leisure events undertaken from an individual action or specific sociological perspective:

- Community arts events: opportunity for individual self-expression?
- Examining the role of the Olympic Games in maintaining societal cohesion within the host nation.
- Public sector leisure events as ‘bread and circuses’: A Marxist analysis.
- Community-led events: more leisure for men, more work for women?
- Public sector events and economic development: evidencing the commodification of leisure and the debasement of culture?

With leisure long viewed as under-theorised in comparison to issues such as work, politics and culture (Haywood *et al.* 1995), and events relatively recently beginning to emerge as a field of study in its own right (Getz 2007), the complexity of the academic leisure context still appears to daunt researchers. However, there is a view that this complexity must be celebrated and incorporated into approaches which examine both the individual leisure experience and the structures within which it operates (Fletcher *et al.* 2017). It is possible that closer sociological analysis of public sector events as leisure will inform the understanding of the purposes and outcomes they seek to achieve and consequently, ways in which they can more effectively be evaluated.

Public sector leisure and the environmental benefit

The concern about human impact on the environment is often discussed from two opposing perspectives. In the *anthropocentric* view the human race is dominant and nature is harnessed for human gain, while the *ecocentric* view argues that the quality of the natural environment is more important than the human race. While international concern over the direction of human development can be traced to the 1960s, it was in 1984 that the United Nations appointed a World Commission on Environment and Development. From this work the now famous document *Our Common Future* (1987) (often referred to as *The Brundtland Report* after its lead author) was produced. The report contained what has become the most widely quoted definition of sustainable development as ‘development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. From the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 the *Agenda 21* international blueprint for development was produced and

182 heads of state agreed to implement its principals. Although Agenda 21 did not mention leisure specifically, regional and local governments in the UK attempted to apply its principles across their operational and development activity.

Concern about the ways in which leisure exploits the environment centre around pollution (ground, water, air, noise) and more broadly, the degradation and resource depletion mass leisure can cause (Blackshaw and Crawford 2009). Leisure travel and tourism have been a key focus of concern and one response has been to encourage environmentally conscientious travellers to make 'off-setting' payments equal to the carbon emitted by their trip (see, for example www.myclimate.org). However, lack of consensus on principles, definitions and the measurement of damage caused by human activity mean that despite attempts to assess environmental impacts, to establish maximum capacities for development and to put limits on how much development is acceptable, progress is often criticised as slow and inadequate.

Sociological notions of consumption and consumerism are also relevant in relation to the physical environment. It is argued that during the 1950s spending became increasingly central in peoples' lives throughout the Western world (Cross 1993) and that, over time, more and more goods and services are produced and purchased by more and more people. Rising standards of living for many create governments elected on promises of maintaining, or improving, society's ability to purchase non-essential, often leisure-based, goods including electronic equipment and holidays, leading to a 'self-sealing circle' (Roberts 1999: 170). As all types of experiences (including events) become commoditised or available to buy, so the more people aspire to increased spending power with which to buy more consumables. Sociologists have linked this to notions of identity and lifestyle and suggest that it is driven by a media culture of marketing, promotion and leisure shopping experiences (Cashmore 1994). It is here that the leisure literature has been focused and though much of the work has concentrated on public sector leisure with an anti-commercial bias (Taylor 1992), the future dominance of consumerism is not uncontested (Cross 1993) nor without its defenders. Commercial leisure provision has expanded leisure choice and been a liberating force for many people. A positive view of the expansion of commercialised leisure points to the rise in the skilled consumer who is active rather than passive in structuring their leisure choices and engaged in a 'pick and mix' approach to leisure lifestyles (Gratton 1992). Much of the concern around the direction of human development has been its impact on the physical, socio-cultural and economic environments of a world driven by consumption and consumerism. Products and services draw upon fragile and ultimately finite resources and it is in this that leisure, largely viewed as a non-essential or as a 'created need', comes under fire. So how do organisations square the unlimited leisure demand circle and its potential for degradation across the planet?

Increasingly, organisations have developed strategies, policies and initiatives to demonstrate their commitment to the principle of sustainable development and the event sector is no exception. Despite their long history the number of newly created festivals and events has grown significantly since the 1960s (Picard and Robinson 2006), but it is relatively recently that a standard for sustainable events has been attempted. British Standard 8091 Specification for a Sustainability Management System for Events is a management standard designed to help organisations in the events industry to improve the sustainability of their business. Launched in November 2007 and revised in 2009 there are three significant differences between BS 8901 and many other guides that exist for the events industry. Firstly, rather than relying on a 'checklist' BS 8901 prescribes the management system elements that an organisation has to have in place in order to enable it to improve the sustainability of its operations. Secondly, BS 8901 does not apply to specific events, rather to the management system that an organisation uses, so it is the organisation that

is certified and not the event. Thirdly, BS 8901 is about sustainability not just the physical environment but about strategies which seek to ensure long term business success, to drive social prosperity and progress, and to reduce environmental degradation (SEC.com).

One of the potential benefits of a development strategy based on events is that their temporary nature facilitates permanent impacts on the physical environment being limited. Efforts to minimise or balance impacts on the physical environment are common in local government as many of the issues, for example, waste management, are controlled by departments increasingly familiar with their own environmental agendas. However, for larger events the legacy of permanent physical regeneration may be a desirable key outcome. One objective of the London Olympic Games (LOG) 2012 was to physically transform an area of East London in the vicinity of Stratford. The LOG 2012 website claimed that sustainability was embedded in the bid for the Games and committed the team to:

- use venues already existing in the UK where possible;
- only make permanent structures that will have a long-term use; and, to
- build only temporary structures for everything else.

The Games sought to encourage people to make immediate behavioural changes with regard to their impact on the environment but also to educate them toward sustainability for life (www.london2012.com). The stated objectives listed above were relatively easy to review at the end of the event. It was simple enough to know whether structures were temporary or permanent. However, what was less measurable was the willingness to deal with consequences of non-compliance.

The plethora of post-2012 academic literature provides much discussion on whether the London Games could be considered sustainable and whether promises of sustainable games can ever be relied upon remains highly contentious. Geeraert and Gauthier (2018) argue that the International Olympic Committee, despite its planned 2020 reforms, will never be able to achieve environmental sustainability objectives until they incentivise environmental compliance and introduce credible sanctions into the Host City Contract arrangements.

One direct output associated with London 2012 is its facilitation of the International Standards Organisation ISO20121 – Sustainable Events. This guidance and management system takes a ‘triple bottom line’ (after John Elkington 1994) approach to sustainability attempting to balance people, profit, planet. In recognising the potential for events to have a negative impact on resources, society and the environment the organisation claims that ‘with ISO 20121 you can make your event sustainable, no matter its type or size’ (www.iso.org). Practitioners have not extensively embraced this three-level optional standard, arguably due to its benefits frequently perceived to be outweighed by the cost of certification, however, with increased social concern for the environment event industry bodies may yet require mandatory compliance as a future condition of membership (Conference and Meetings World 2015).

How does it all add up?

This chapter began by examining the thinking around the role of leisure in peoples’ lives and suggesting that the relatively well-developed literature on leisure might have something to contribute to the emergent understanding of where events might fit within this mix. After setting out a context for reasons why, and how, events have been employed by the public sector in the UK, the benefits of leisure more generally were linked to the potential for benefit from public sector leisure events. Potential benefits of leisure were conveniently grouped under five headings (self-actualisation, individual benefit, community benefit, social benefit, and environmental

benefit) providing a framework for study. The issues were then explored in turn and, in each case, the difficulty of measuring the outcomes of events was considered.

- Public sector events could offer an opportunity for *serious leisure* and volunteerism but would need to acknowledge that it is personal self-fulfilment which truly engages people in the long term. At the personal level research suggests that many of us *feel time crunched and always rushed*. These issues would need to be considered.
- The health of individuals is an area where public sector interventions are common and there are many public sector events which seek to encourage, for example, good nutrition and exercise. Such events might usefully consider the leisure literature findings on barriers to such engagement and aim to address these to improve outcomes and their evaluation.
- While community is a difficult concept to pin down the leisure literature has provided some useful ideas about engaging communities at the local level and these have been widely applied by the public sector in the area of arts, sport and recreation. What has thus far been less successful is a willingness to accept that objectives, such as target group engagement, involving service users in decision making and engendering a sense of belonging, are valid criteria in measuring programme success.
- Sociologists have conflicting views about understanding society from a variety of perspectives, including Marxism, critical theory and feminism. Others argue that the study of leisure should focus upon individual freedom to choose and human self-expression. This controversy serves to offer a variety of ways in which public sector leisure events could be researched with the potential for new insights for practice and evaluation to emerge.
- While the environment can be viewed from an anthropocentric or an ecocentric standpoint, notions of societies becoming defined by their ability (or lack of ability) to consume ever increasing amounts of products and services are now well established. Organisations are frequently seeking ways of persuading increasingly eco-sensitive customers/end users that their activity really is *sustainable*. A UK standard and an international standard have been established for event management making the achievement of these objectives within event activity, to some degree, assessable. What remains to be better understood are the motivations for voluntary take-up by the events industry sectors and the sanctions if standards are breached.

In summary, it would appear that public sector leisure events do have the potential to contribute to a broad spectrum of objectives including self-actualisation, to benefit the individual, community and society and even to play a positive role in environmental protection if managed and assessed appropriately. Nevertheless, as with most deceptively simple sounding aims these objectives will be challenging to achieve and in increasingly turbulent economic, socio-political and environmental climates, even more so.

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