

Overlooking the Importance of Countryside Recreation - Just Who is to

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We have grossly underestimated the contribution that leisure, recreation and tourism can make to our health, our well being, our development and our environment, for years. Who is to blame? This state of affairs could be a natural consequence of the protestant work ethic bequeathed to us. Under this scenario, leisure is still seen as a frivolous use of time. Perhaps we could attribute some of the blame to Adam Smith, and his *Wealth of Nations*, that encouraged us to divide our labour and specialise? Of course, many would argue that his work provided for just that, or at least the wealth of some nations. In the same year that his work was published (1776), a group of people set up the constitution for the United States, and included within it the inalienable right of individuals to happiness.

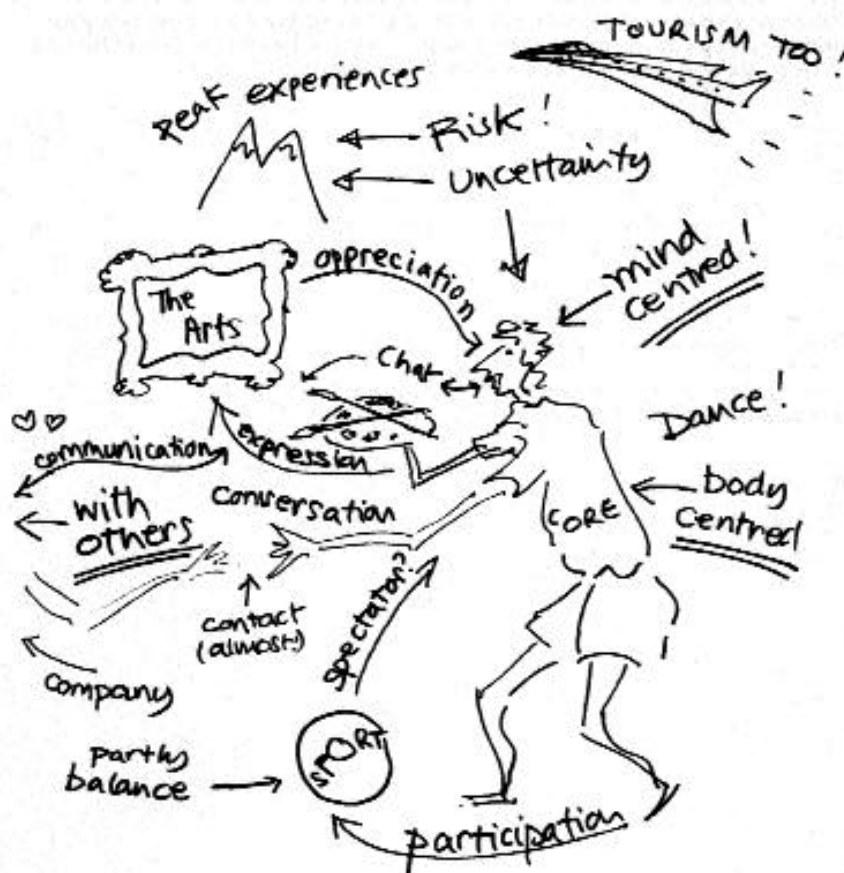
We are the prisoners of our past. Although we may not be able to escape entirely, we can at least throw off the shackles of the blame culture. The arrow of time points (all too clearly) in one direction only. Although we can always reinterpret or rewrite our past, if we want to bring about change we can only look forward. In management circles in the UK, programmes have been set up to counter the seemingly magnetic attraction of working longer and longer hours. These programmes seek to ensure a balanced approach, a balance between the needs of the organisation for effective working, and the needs of the individual for effective living, for the needs of home, family and friends.

For real success in this area, we need to re-evaluate the concepts of 'leisure', 'recreation' and 'tourism'. How do these words become so devalued? The 'leisure' industry is in many minds equated to the selling of alcohol and gaming or gambling. In the eyes of some, these may be honourable pursuits and taking part (in moderation) undoubtedly enjoyable,

but this is certainly a long way from leisure in ancient times. The word 'school' is derived from the Greek for leisure. Then, leisure was seen as a higher state of mind. Contrast this with the escape or sense of oblivion provided by alcohol and gambling. Of course it is too easy to overlook the great role that alcohol has had in society, providing a lubricant in social gatherings. Gambling too has an honourable side to its past, and encapsulates elements of risk taking which we cherish amongst entrepreneurs, and amongst white knuckle sports, but seemingly treat differently when enjoyed by people at leisure. 'Recreation' too has suffered as a word, devalued from time to time, and yet maybe there is a great richness in meanings, locally held. Rarely, is the full extent of activities in which people engage, encapsulated. Related terms, such as 'hobbies' and 'pastimes' provide no indication of the importance of such activities for the people who choose to live in these worlds. 'Tourism' has probably suffered most, having become synonymous with 'mass' tourism. The term 'tourist' has a rich (if socially exclusive) heritage derived, as it is, from the Grand Tour indulged in by gentlemen (more usually than ladies), and aristocrats of Europe, visiting cities and taking in culture. The modern day equivalent is possibly the 'gap year', enjoyed by some between school and further education. (Whatever happened to the sabbatical!)

Most of us would be happier to be described as visitors, rather than tourists. Other people are tourists. Few of us would describe ourselves as explorers, and yet surely much of our tourism is founded on discovery of the new; new people, new activities, new cultures, and new landscapes. Surely, tourism is nothing to be ashamed of, unless it is bad tourism that exploits the natural environment, and only takes from the host community, or worse still

(Source: Broadhurst, *Managing Environments for Leisure and Recreation*, with the kind permission of Routledge)



Different kinds of recreation

from future generations. We should not fool ourselves though. It is salutary to recall that one return transatlantic ticket on a flight is responsible for as much carbon output as an average year's motoring in Britain. On the other hand the freedom of personal mobility is something that we hold most dear. We have to keep this freedom balanced by obligations to society, in just the same way that participation in leisure has to be balanced with the other needs of families and friends.

Each of us is a manager of environments for leisure and recreation. What, you might ask, is there to manage? We distribute activity through time and space, we select or alter the physical environment, and in the same way we change, or select the social environment. What makes leisure and recreation stand out as really special is the freedom they give,

the freedom of choice: of activity, association, freedom to go where you like, when you like, with whom you like, doing what you like, at whatever time you like and for however long you choose. This freedom is balanced by a sense of obligation towards friends and family, and to the communities of neighbourhood or interest. It is all about choice, for more (or for less) physical activity, for more (or for less) mental activity, and more (or less) social activity, for example. We exercise such choice as citizens and consumers, and as managers, whether as parent, teacher, employer, or friend.

Could a new responsible approach to leisure and recreation be part of the antidote to globalisation. In managing the settings and activities, can we take care to consider the impacts that people have in the past ignored? Can we adopt an environmental

management approach? Rather than merely adopting the systematic approach, or mantra, the book urges us to adopt a systemic approach, so that in our every move we consider the longer term and incremental, as well as the direct effects, on the bio-physical and socio-economic environments, on the land and its people. Needless to say the effects in the past, upon which most attention has been focused, have tended to be the negative effects. The positive effects have been ignored or undervalued. Now at last, with initiatives such as the Benefits based approach (see Benefits network) and the focus on Life -Work balance, we may be on the verge of raising the profile for leisure and recreation, for all the right reasons. In doing so we need to use the widest definitions, and to celebrate diversity. We need to remember the value of providing space and time for simple social pleasures such as conversation, and laughter, as well as the more physical and cerebral. Most of all we must avoid erecting needless barriers. To begin the process, we can start with ourselves, and award ourselves more leisure and recreation. Lighten up, for all our sakes!

If we want to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from leisure, recreation and tourism, we could do worse than to encourage everyone to practice a role as manager of settings for leisure and recreation; of physical and social settings, large and small, and of every conceivable kind. Each of us has a fantastic role to play, with consequences which could change the world for the better. That is surely something well worth taking the blame for.

Richard Broadhurst is the Policy Officer for the Forestry Commission's National Office for Scotland, but this article represents the views of the author, not the organisation. Before taking up his current post, he enjoyed 25 years (and three days) working in different areas of leisure and recreation. He still occasionally lectures on the subject. His views are amplified in 'Managing Environments for Leisure and Recreation', which is published by Routledge in their Environmental Management series, and the paperback is available for £19.99. This book grew out a series of lectures given to fourth year recreation students at Edinburgh University.. Richard can be contacted by e-mail at: Richard.broadhurst@forestry.gov.uk