RECREATION PROGRAMMING

Designing, Staging, and Managing the Delivery of Leisure Experiences

J. Robert Rossman
Barbara Elwood Schlatter

EIGHTH EDITION
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The eighth edition of Recreation Programming: Designing, Staging, and Managing the Delivery of Leisure Experiences is dedicated to John R. (Jack) Kelly, a pioneer in investigating sociological dimensions of leisure. When Jack accepted appointment at the University of Illinois in 1975, he was one of the first sociologists to do so in a department of leisure studies. He was closely watched by fellow sociologists. His work led them into studying the many social dimensions of leisure as a legitimate and important social science endeavor. He was a lecturer on leisure sociology for Barb and Bob’s major professor. His work in symbolic interaction and his referring Bob to symbolic interactionist Norman Denzin for additional study provided the academic foundation for this book.

Jack has authored many books on the sociology of leisure. He is an international authority on the sociology of leisure, and his works are read and cited by sociologists around the world. After many years of retirement, he still contributes as a Sagamore-Venture author.
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Preface

The first edition of this book was published almost three decades ago. When it was first released, it included many innovative concepts, and a few risk takers adopted it. Since then, the book has been adopted for use at over 100 universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Taiwan, and other countries.

The profession and its knowledge base have continued advancing. We have incorporated into this eighth edition the implications of the latest research in leisure behavior, as well as the latest professional practices. It is gratifying that much of the research completed during the past three decades has continued confirming the theoretical base of this book. Leisure is a phased, sequential experience resulting from interaction. How an experience is produced determines the quality of an individual’s leisure experience. Staging leisure experiences through designed programs is a complex undertaking. There is a continuing need for well-educated programmers who can design, stage, and evaluate excellent leisure experiences and services.

Leisure remains a desired human experience. There is no doubt in our minds that people will continue to demand leisure experiences and services. Who supplies them will shift to suppliers who are able to deliver the types and formats of experiences and services desired. Thus, programming will continue to be an important, primary function in all leisure service agencies.
We are grateful to the many colleagues and students who have shared their thoughts about how to improve the book and programming. We welcome their contributions and any you may add. We want to thank the following colleagues who have given us feedback useful in developing the eighth edition of this book:

Larry Allen, Clemson University  
Mat Duerden, Brigham Young University  
Brent Beggs, Illinois State University  
James Busser, University of Nevada–Las Vegas  
Gary Ellis, Texas A&M University  
Amy Hurd, Illinois State University  
Jean Keller, University of North Texas  
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Marta Moorman, University of Nebraska at Kearney  
Michael A. Mulvaney, Illinois State University  
Rob Stiefvater, Jr., North Carolina Central University

Students from the University of North Texas, Southern Illinois University, Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Florida, Indiana University, the University of Nevada–Las Vegas, Texas A&M University, and Illinois State University have provided valuable feedback about the book as it has developed over the past 30 years. Practitioners and agency directors from around the country were generous in providing us with photographs of excellent programs. We received more photographs than we could use. The agencies providing photographs and, in most cases, the photographers, are cited with each photograph.

We also want to acknowledge the help provided by the staff at Sagamore-Venture. Joe Bannon, Sr., publisher at Sagamore-Venture, has provided ongoing support for the book for over three decades and was instrumental in encouraging development of the original volume. Peter Bannon, Susan Davis, Marissa Willison, and Amy Dagit at Sagamore-Venture have made significant contributions to producing this edition. We are grateful to all of them for their dedicated, professional work on this book.
About the Authors

J. Robert Rossman, PhD, has been designing and staging leisure experiences for over 50 years as a practitioner, scholar, and consultant. His early career responsibilities included many of the typical part-time jobs in this field including serving as an arts and crafts instructor, life guard, swimming instructor, camp counselor, and pool manager. Upon graduation with a BS in public park and recreation administration “with distinction” from Indiana University in 1968, he accepted appointment as a National Recreation and Park Association intern in Oak Park, Illinois. From this position he was appointed as the assistant director of Recreation for the Village of Oak Park, Illinois, where he was responsible for the operation of seven recreation centers and numerous community special events.

His formal education was completed with an MS in park and recreation administration (1975) and PhD (1981) in leisure studies from the University of Illinois. Throughout his career, he has pursued studying programming. His work has provided new techniques and methods for programming. His academic mentors included Ted Deppe, Janet MacLean, Joe Bannon, Allen Sapora, and Jack Kelly. Professional mentors included Sandy Little, Bob Toalson, and Jim Talley. His more recent colleagues and coauthors have included Gary Ellis, Barbara Elwood Schlatter, and Mat Duerden.

This text is the eighth edition of Recreation Programming: Designing and Staging Leisure Experiences, which has been in publication for over 30 years. It is estimated that over 80,000 recreation and park professionals have read the text while completing university curricula. Additionally, many use it as a desk reference for their day-to-day work. It has become a classic book in the field.

Dr. Rossman has spoken and made presentations around the world about the unique programming ideas presented in this book. During his academic career, he taught undergraduate and graduate classes at five universities including the University of Illinois; the University of North Texas; the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Illinois State University; and Texas A & M University. He also taught short courses at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand, and at Beijing Sport University in Beijing, China. At Illinois State University, he holds the titles of professor and dean emeritus.

He remains active as an author, scholar, and consultant about designing and staging leisure experiences and managing experience-producing organizations. The two universities he attended have recognized his accomplishments. The Department of Leisure Studies at the University of Illinois has presented him the Charles K. Brightbill Award. Indiana University has given him the Legend Award and the W. W. Patty Distinguished Alumni Award. During graduate school, he earned membership into Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society. He was elected a Fellow in the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, which has designated him a Legend for outstanding contributions to the field. His peers elected him a Fellow in the Academy of Leisure Sciences and have designated him a Distinguished Colleague. He lives in Phoenix, Arizona, where he enjoys swimming, golf, singing in his church choir, travel, and his grandchildren.
Barbara Elwood Schlatter, PhD, began her career designing outdoor recreation experiences for adolescents with learning disabilities in rural Vermont. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, she facilitated after-school sport programs and organized community events in Jalapa, Guatemala.

Barb earned her bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees from SUNY Cortland, Springfield College, and the University of Illinois, respectively. Her career in higher education spanning 30 years includes academic appointments at SUNY Cortland, Chicago State University, and Illinois State University, where she is professor and assistant director in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation. Her teaching specializations include advanced experience facilitation, recreation programming, special events and tourism, and outdoor recreation. Her scholarly work is published in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration; Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport; Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance;* and *LARNet: The Cyber Journal of Applied Leisure and Recreation Research.*

She was the keynote speaker at the third ASEAN Conference on Physical Education, Health, and Sport in Nakhonpathom, Thailand, and has delivered conference presentations in Guatemala, South Korea, China, Brazil, Sweden, Netherlands, Costa Rica, Poland, and Argentina on topics of recreation program planning practices. Barb was a visiting professor at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2009 and 2016, teaching classes in leisure management and outdoor leadership.

Barb served as president of the Academy of Leisure Sciences and holds memberships in the World Leisure Organization and the National Recreation and Park Association. She is an elected Fellow in the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration.

Barb enjoys traveling, bicycling, playing the banjo and guitar, and spending time with family and friends.
An urban music festival planner reviews a comprehensive security program for an upcoming public park concert venue as one of many staging tasks. A visitor center worker in Wisconsin manages the Explorium where travelers see a 7,000-pound replica of a woolly mammoth being hunted by a Paleo hunter. A park ranger runs a sense tour as part of a plant education program for memory care patients and persons with partial sight. Visitor experiences focus on plant fragrances and other sensory inputs.

A recreation specialist plans paddleboarding and archery lessons to injured service members and veterans at the San Diego Park and Recreation Department. At the Playa Hermosa Ecolodge in Nicaragua, guests see and learn about the endangered olive ridley turtles that inhabit the area. Ecotourism businesses in the Dominican Republic deliver canopy tours, cave tubing trips, and much more to cruise ship travelers. University recreation management students organize an adventure bike race in which co-ed teams of four encounter mystery challenges along the Katy Trail in Missouri, the longest rail trail in the United States.

A park guide facilitates a First Day Hike in a Georgia state park to families ringing in the New Year by taking a hike in the middle of winter. A special event planner works with college alumni to organize an elaborate reunion weekend that includes a fundraiser golf tournament, a luncheon boat cruise, and a bike adventure along a local greenway.

A therapeutic recreation specialist runs a Wounded Warrior program for service members who served in Middle Eastern conflicts and are severely disabled. The specialist creates individual program plans that allow the clients to resume their favorite pastimes such as skiing, tennis, or bicycling with modifications.

Recreation professionals design, stage, implement, and evaluate myriad recreation programs at commercial, public, and quasi-public agencies across the country. At a Sandals retirement community, a lifestyle director hires local health and wellness experts to provide Tai Chi classes and administer wellness assessments to residents. A children’s discovery museum worker plans hands-on attractions featuring life-size, roaring dinosaur skeletons and simulated fossil digs. Program directors
at a residential camp in Vermont design challenging and adventurous programs for the campers.

Designing, staging, and evaluating recreation and leisure services is programming. Programming is a major responsibility in all leisure service organizations. The National Recreation and Park Association in their 2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review documents that programming is the number two responsibility reported by public park and recreation agencies, closely following operating and maintaining park sites, their number one responsibility. They stated, “Programming is the key outreach method that drives usage of park and recreation facilities and, when associated with registration fees, also happens to be the largest non-tax revenue source for most agencies” (NRPA, 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, many commercial recreation operations and not-for-profit organizations exist solely to provide specific recreation programs, a golf course, for example. Programming is a central concern of managers in all leisure service agencies and is usually an identified part of the mission of a leisure service agency.

**Programming: The Focus of the Profession**

Designing and staging recreation and leisure services is the major function of the leisure service profession. Leisure experiences are the basic units of service that the leisure service profession provides. Although there is great interest in providing experiences across the economy these days, producing leisure experiences is one of the most difficult for agencies to deliver because leisure is a complex interactional form. Engaged leisure experience is the conduit through which other desirable outcomes can be accomplished. It is not beyond fun and games in the sense of bypassing them, but through the contexts and interactions of fun and games. The context of leisure interaction facilitates access to leisure experiences, and this unique experience facilitates the accomplishment of additional desirable outcomes.

Professional practice is based on the recreation and leisure discipline, which seeks to understand the antecedents to leisure, the phenomenology of experiencing leisure, and the results of participating in leisure. Nagel (2018) reported, “Nothing increases park use and physical activity as much as programming—providing supervised activities to help people make active use of available space” (p. 62). Programming is the reason the profession and leisure service organizations exist. Programmers, better than any other professional group, should understand the phenomena of leisure, how humans engage in and experience leisure, the results of this experience, and how to facilitate an individual’s experience of leisure. Our professional responsibility is to manipulate environments to facilitate leisure experiences for patrons. Tillman (1973) characterized the centrality of programming to the profession when he declared, “Crown program. Long live the king!” (p. ix).

Over the past 30 years, programmers’ responsibilities have expanded greatly. They include operating special events, many of which today are called experiential marketing; contracting for services with external vendors; developing programs services from a marketing approach; organizing leagues and tournaments; developing
socially purposeful programs; and others. Additional developments include the in-
fusion of computer technology into the management of program services, the need
to provide inclusive services that address social justice concerns, and the need to
manage program operations to reduce risk. Today, programmers use an increas-
ingly complex set of delivery formats and techniques.

Numerous techniques are available for developing successful programs, in-
cluding strategic planning, brainstorming, needs analysis, community surveys,
evaluation, systems analysis, and marketing. All of these techniques can certainly
be used in developing successful programs. But none address leisure program de-
velopment directly, comprehensively, and uniquely. They are all only piecemeal
techniques that fail to provide the comprehensive insights into programming for
developing successful programs.

One of the difficulties in writing a programming book is drawing the bound-
aries around the various functions needed in managing leisure services and leisure
service agencies. The delivery of good leisure services requires that all management
functions be performed properly, including leadership, supervision, programming,
and management of services, agencies, and facilities. In preparing this text, we have
tried to restrict its content to the essential elements of programming and the usual
responsibilities of a programmer, although there is indeed some unavoidable over-
lap into other functions.

To program, programmers must understand programming concepts, the theory
of how recreation and leisure program services are developed, and how leisure is ex-
erienced. More explicit, theory-based information about programming has begun
to appear in journals. The programmer’s knowledge base must enable him or her to
operate on two levels. First, the programmer is a manager and must be able to de-
sign, stage, and evaluate leisure services within a specific agency context. Second,
the programmer must do this in a manner that facilitates the occurrence of leisure
experiences at the behavioral level—that is, for individuals within interactions in
social occasions.

This text includes information and techniques based on current knowledge
about experiencing leisure and the current professional techniques and practices
you need to learn and master to design, manage, stage, and evaluate leisure ex-
eriences in any organization including government, commercial, and not-for-profit
agencies. Recreation Programming: Designing and Staging Leisure Experiences, eighth
dition, teaches the programmer to design and stage program services by learning
the theory and techniques of recreation programming including (1) basic leisure
theory that explains how leisure is experienced; (2) the generic structure of situated
activity systems in which social interaction produces leisure experiences; (3) how
programs are designed; and (4) procedures and techniques that programmers use to
manage, stage, and evaluate recreation programs in a variety of agencies. Providing
meaningful leisure experiences is important to individuals, society, and our pro-
fession. We hope this book will provide you the ability to deliver excellent services
to your participants and give you a sufficient educational background to continue
being an accomplished programmer throughout your career.
References


Bibliography of Books on Programming


Recreation programming, designing and staging experiences that people enjoy and that provide them a good life, is personally and professionally rewarding. The pursuit of happiness afforded from participating in leisure is not a trivial matter; it is of such importance that it is mentioned as one of three human rights in the U.S. Declaration of Independence—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In his book *Authentic Happiness*, Positive Psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman discusses the power of participating in experiences that create positive emotions and allow us to use our positive traits to pursue accomplishments that ultimately provide the happiness of meaning and purpose. In this pursuit, some individuals adopt shortcuts to positive feelings. But to experience the happiness of true gratification and have lasting, sustainable memories, we need to believe that we are entitled to our positive feelings because they resulted from our own accomplishments. Designing and staging leisure experiences that provide these outcomes is recreation programming.

This book is predicated on the notion that individuals desire to participate in leisure and that there is a body of knowledge and practice that programmers can learn that enables them to facilitate leisure experiences. In designing and staging interactive encounters, the programmer directs and facilitates participants’ engagements so they result in a leisure experience. Additionally, staging leisure experiences requires a unique production paradigm wherein the programmer must engage the participant in co-creating the experience. Programmers also need to understand how experience-producing organizations manage the development and delivery of experiences and services.

Part I develops a foundation for successful programming. Chapter 1 explains basic concepts of programming and operational definitions of leisure behaviors. Chapter 2 discusses social science theory that explains leisure behavior. This is one of the more difficult chapters in the book, but understanding its content is necessary as it will guide the professional programmer’s development and management actions throughout the Program Development Cycle. The material in Chapter 3 flows from the discussion in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the generic structure of situated activity systems, in which leisure experiences occur, and how the programmer manipulates them. Chapter 4 discusses leisure service products and how
they may be packaged for distribution and sale. Chapter 5 explains a method for collaboratively developing the organization’s strategic programming mission. At the end of this section, there is a two-page diagram of the Program Development Cycle. Margin notes next to the diagram briefly explain the cycle. A more complete explanation can be found at https://www.sagamorepub.com/products/recreation-programming-8th-ed; however, each of the remaining chapters in the book explains and elaborates on the steps in the cycle and provides technical information about how to accomplish them.

Chapter 1: Basic Programming Concepts

Chapter 2: How Individuals Experience Leisure

Chapter 3: Six Key Elements of a Situated Activity System

Chapter 4: Developing Leisure Products in the Experience Economy

Chapter 5: Collaborating in Developing an Organization’s Strategy
1 Basic Programming Concepts

KEY TERMS
Program, Programming, Program Development, Leisure, Recreation, Games, Play, Sport, Tourism, Event
The ultimate goal of programming is to stage leisure experiences for program participants. Accomplishing this requires that the programmer learn the concepts that tie together leisure experiences, program definitions, the act of programming, and the management activities that an agency must implement to stage successful programs.

Programming Concepts Defined

Program

A program is a designed opportunity for leisure experience to occur. Program is an elastic concept that describes a variety of operations, including activities, events, or services conducted by leisure service organizations. The term program can refer to a single activity, such as a bike ride, or a class meeting over several weeks. It can refer to a collection of activities, such as the cultural arts classes operated by an organization. It can refer to a single event, such as a softball skill workshop or a weeklong festival. It can refer to the services an agency offers, such as a drop-in auto hobby shop or a desk selling discount tickets to area events. It can also refer to the total set of operations an agency offers, including all of its activities, events, and services. Any of these may be called a program.

This definition is broad and is intended to include more than typical programs organized with a face-to-face leader. The key point is the notion of intentional design in which the programmer conceptualizes a leisure experience and intervenes in some way to stage it for the participants. In some instances, this intervention may be minimal, but in others, it may be near total. The intervention may be through face-to-face leadership, a designed physical environment, or the regulation of leisure behavior through the development and enforcement of policies. Design always involves intentional intervention, regardless of its type or magnitude.

Two assumptions in this definition need further explanation. First, the notion of design assumes that we know how leisure is construed and experienced by individuals (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) and that we can stage experiences to facilitate its occurrence. Second, it assumes that we know the attributes of the leisure experience. What outcomes must result for individuals to label some experiences as leisure but not others? The ability to program requires a thorough knowledge of the process of experiencing leisure, how to design and stage these experiences, and the outcomes that define the experience. This knowledge will be introduced in the appropriate sections throughout the book.

Leisure is not a set of identifiable activities, events, or services. If that were the case, we could simply give you the list below and move on to how to organize each of them.
The attributes that make them leisure experiences are not inherent in the activities, events, or services that are usually called leisure. Rather, leisure is construed by how a participant processes his or her experiences of a program and interprets what has occurred (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Kelly, 1987; Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998). Modern programming is more than simply searching for the most popular activity that can be offered. Programmers must understand that leisure is a state of mind most likely experienced when participants enter freely chosen programs that enable them to achieve realistic personal goals by consciously directing interaction in a social occasion. Samdahl (1988) said, “Leisure can be viewed as a distinctive pattern of perceiving and relating to ongoing interaction. That is to say, leisure is a particular definition of a situation” (p. 29).

Discussing delivering the leisure experience, Kelly (2013) observed, “Delivery of the possibility of a leisure experience is a process, not a product” (p. 109). He continues discussing the process, saying, “The focus, however, is on the receivers who also are active in the process. The leisure experience is never just receptive, passive. It is an involving process in which the players are all acting in one way or another” (p. 109). Thus, a program provides an opportunity for leisure to occur but cannot ensure that it does, since this ultimately depends on how a participant interprets his or her experience of participating and directs his or her own interactions in the encounter.

**Programming**

*Programming is designing, staging, and delivering leisure opportunities by intervening in social interaction, that is, by manipulating and creating environments in a manner that maximizes the probability that those who enter them will have the leisure experiences they seek. Individuals achieve satisfaction from a leisure experience depending on how they guide and interpret their participation in the leisure occasion. Because the programmer understands what patrons must experience to construe an experience as leisure and understands how this experience is produced through social interaction, a program that facilitates (i.e., increases) the probability of a leisure experience occurring can be designed and staged. These are key notions. The practice of all professions, including leisure service provision, is predicated on information developed through the scientific method and then applied to practical problems.

Designing social interactions that will facilitate the leisure experience must be based on knowledge about experiencing leisure and how it is produced in social occasions. Kelly (1999) suggested that all definitions of leisure presuppose that it occurs in an action context: “Something happens in directing attention, processing information, defining meaning, and producing the experience” (p. 136). He added, “The distinctive element of leisure action is that it is focused on the experience rather than external outcomes. It is engaged in primarily for the experience of the action” (p. 136). The programmer is responsible for designing programs with participation processes that will facilitate participants’ opportunities to engage in actions that will
result in a leisure experience. Thus, how a program is staged is more important for facilitating a leisure experience than the specific activity itself.

Furthermore, programmers must understand that leisure is a multiphase experience (Stewart, 1999) and begin by planning to engage the participant through the three phases of human experience—anticipation, participation, and reflection (Busser, 1993; Little, 1993). New standards for experiential engagement, introduced with the emergence of *The Experience Economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), suggest that programs should be staged—a theatrical metaphor indicating the comprehensiveness of the details and sensibilities that the programmer must deal with if the participant is to achieve the intended experience. Good programming, then, is designed intervention that is staged based on knowledge about social interaction and the social psychology of experiencing leisure. The Framed Experience Model of programming, discussed in Chapter 10, provides the reader with a technique for designing programs based on these theories and concepts.

**Program Development**

Program development is the overall management process in which the programmer designs, stages, manages, and delivers program services within the context of a specific agency. It includes understanding and developing an agency’s mission, assessing needs, developing a strategy for their delivery, designing programs, staffing them, staging them, delivering them, and evaluating them so that the programmer can document the benefits that have been provided, as well as determine their future. All programs are delivered by some type of organization. Therefore, the programmer must learn to manage program services successfully within an organizational context. Successful program development results in programs that meet the needs of the agency, patrons, and community. Programming is one key function in program development. The overall process of program development is diagrammed in the Program Development Cycle (at the end of Chapter 5). Now complete Exercise 1.1.

**Definitions of Related Concepts**

Concepts we use influence how we act. The linguistic labels attached to various forms of human behavior shape our attitudes and actions. The lack of precise definitions in the recreation and leisure field is often a cause of concern to new students. This book offers concepts necessary for understanding and accomplishing programming: leisure, play, recreation, games, sport, tourism, and events. Each concept refers to a different type of leisure experience; therefore, each must be programmed somewhat differently. This section discusses the concepts in relationship to each other to help clarify their meanings.

Kelly (1983) contended that leisure is central to today’s society. He stated that leisure is “crucial life space for the expression and development of selfhood, for the working out of identities that are important to the individual. [It is] . . . central to the maintenance of the society itself as a social space for the development of
intimacy” (p. 23). Driver, Brown, and Peterson (1991) took the position that multiple behaviors or experiences (Stewart, 1999) are included under the concept of leisure. Leisure, then, is the broadest concept (Neulinger, 1981), encompassing play, recreation, games, sport, tourism, and events, each of which can be viewed as a form of leisure that can be distinguished by more specific defining characteristics.

**Leisure**

Leisure has been defined in several ways. Murphy (1974) identified six types: classical leisure, leisure as discretionary time, leisure as a function of social class, leisure as form of activity, anti-utilitarian leisure, and a holistic concept of leisure. Neulinger (1974) suggested that all definitions of leisure are either quantitative or qualitative and concluded that leisure is a state of mind characterized primarily by perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation. Often, the discipline training of the individual defining leisure will influence the definition. Thus, definitions have been provided by economists, sociologists, psychologists, and social psychologists.

The perspective used throughout this book is that leisure is a social experience constructed through interaction in social occasions (Iso-Ahola, 1999; Samdahl, 1988). Iso-Ahola (1980) emphasized this point by stating that “leisure studies is a human service field in which social interaction is the main ingredient” (p. 7). Samdahl (1992) found that over 50% of the occasions labeled as leisure by those involved included some type of social interaction. Hamilton-Smith (1991) also assumed leisure is best understood as a social construct that can be defined in a variety of ways, including leisure as time, leisure as action, leisure as action within time and space, and leisure as experience.

Leisure is an experience most likely to occur during freely chosen interactions characterized by a high degree of personal engagement that is motivated by the intrinsic satisfaction that is expected to result. After a first reading, this definition may seem relatively simple, but it incorporates three complex concepts: freedom, intrinsic satisfaction, and engagement.

**Freedom.** Freedom has been a central defining element of leisure since man first contemplated the meaning of leisure. Modern research has confirmed the primacy
of freedom (Iso-Ahola, 1999). Freedom from something and freedom to have or do something have been primary themes of leisure definitions (Sylvester, 1987). In our society, the social obligations of work, family, friends, civic duties, and so forth can obscure the meaning of “freely chosen” or “free choice,” or at least make it more difficult to sort them out. Some leisure occasions are determined by the degree to which they free individuals from social role constraints (Samdahl, 1988). In discussing decisions to purchase leisure experiences, Kelly (2013) reminded us repeatedly, “No one has to do it” (p. 3 and elsewhere). The “freedom from” notion, then, occurs in situations in which an individual is freed from social role constraints to explore and accomplish something.

The other operant condition is freedom to have “a sense of opportunity and possibility” (Kleiber, 1999, p. 3). The notion of freely choosing something can only be determined from the perspective of the individual making the choice. Thus, the notion of freedom is a matter of individual perception (Neulinger, 1981). The evidence suggests that individuals must believe they could have chosen not to do an activity, before it meets the test of being freely chosen (Kelly, 1982). As Patterson et al. (1998) explained, “Situated freedom is the idea that there is a structure in the environment that sets boundaries on what can be perceived or experienced, but that within those boundaries recreationists are free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and variable ways” (pp. 425–426).

Programmers should remember that leisure must be freely chosen from the perspective of the individual making the choice. Additionally, individuals must perceive that they have options and choices in a program in order to explore, move forward in their personal stream of experience, and “become something new” by participating in a novel experience, that is, one that is experienced in this way for the first time. Freedom experienced in this manner creates a unique condition for an optimal self-actualizing experience to occur (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991).

Thus, freedom plays a functional role in construing the leisure experience. Although optimal experiences may occur in other spheres of life, they are more likely to do so when the conditions of freedom just explained occur. Overprogramming, by providing too much structure to an occasion, will leave the participant few or no choices. This may destroy the very experience that the programmer is trying to facilitate. Entertaining, rather than engaging participants, is a good example of overprogramming to the point that participants have no choice. It is an error frequently made by individuals who stage events but have no understanding of leisure behavior. Although it keeps the programmer in control of the event, it does not allow participants the freedom needed to experience leisure.

**Intrinsic satisfaction.** Intrinsic satisfaction is the second major dimension of leisure. Psychologists have used several terms to describe participating in this experience, including *autotelic activities*, *arousal-seeking behavior*, and *optimal experience*. “The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself,” wrote Csikszentmihalyi (1991, p. 67); it is intrinsically satisfying. The behavior associated
with pursuing intrinsically satisfying activities has also been called “arousal-seeking behavior,” based on the need of maintaining optimal arousal. Ellis (1973) proposed this theory, and it assumes that people are not normally quiescent; rather, they seek and act to increase stimulation.

Intrinsically satisfying activities provide satisfaction through the interactive engagement, and that satisfaction provides sufficient motivation for the individual to continue participating. Thus, no external reward is necessary. The feedback received from such participation indicates that what is occurring is congruent with an individual’s goals, thereby strengthening and validating the self (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). This affords a freedom from concern with oneself that frees an individual to focus psychic energy more intensely on the demands of the current interactive engagement. These engagements demand and consume an individual’s complete focused attention. The motivation to participate in interaction to seek this experience is powerful and real (Neulinger, 1981).

Programmers should understand how this occurs. Unfortunately, intrinsic satisfaction is not wholly contained within activities. In fact, people similarly describe their optimal experiences in different activities, and their descriptions are consistent across sociological and cultural variables (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Iso-Ahola, 1999). Thus, it is not a matter of prescribing a list of intrinsically satisfying activities and expecting individuals to find intrinsic satisfaction in them.

Intrinsic satisfaction is a personally interpreted perception of a situation. This perception is constructed through interaction in a social occasion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Samdahl, 1988; Shaw, 1985; Unger, 1984). Individuals’ past experiences and current expectations help them determine whether an engagement is intrinsically satisfying. What arouses an individual today is part of a stream of interactions between the individual’s natural abilities and previous experiences. Participants will conclude that they were intrinsically motivated when programs provide opportunities for developing competence, self-expression, self-development, or self-realization (Mannell, 1999). Different individuals find different activities intrinsically satisfying because of factors such as their own skill levels in an activity, their level of socialization into it, and the previous opportunities and experiences they have had with it. Although these factors initially influence their likelihood of participating, their interpretation of the interactions in an activity on a given day will determine whether it is a leisure experience for them.

Thus, how an activity is staged and how an individual interprets his or her participation in it are more important than the activity type (e.g., softball, oil painting, gardening) in determining whether an individual will have a leisure experience. Programmers need to devote more attention to how activities are staged rather than continually searching for the perfect activity that will provide a leisure experience.

Engagement. Finally, experiencing an event requires, at a minimum, that an individual engage in and interpret it. Leisure occurs in an action context. As Kelly
(1999) wrote, “Something happens in directing attention, processing information, defining meaning, and producing results” (p. 136). Experiencing is more than a passive state of mind; it denotes processing and ordering information in one’s consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Kelly, 1990). That is, an individual must engage in it. Kahneman (2011) discussed System 1 and System 2 thinking. The first he termed slow thinking and the second fast thinking. Engagement as discussed here relates to System 2 thinking, when an individual “allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it . . . (Kahneman, 2011, p. 21). People choose leisure experiences because they demand their attention and engagement in a challenging and pleasurable way.

Many who are entering the experience economy and producing events and other kinds of programs repeatedly confuse entertainment with engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). They design events to entertain rather than engage. Leisure is more likely to occur when individuals play an active role in organizing and self-directing outcome; that is, they have the opportunity for positive affect (Kleiber, Caldwell, & Shaw, 1992; Kleiber, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1986). Ajzen and Driver (1992) reported that “perceived behavioral control” improved their ability to predict leisure behavior, again verifying the importance of having control over outcomes of the leisure experience.

People experience leisure by active engagement in and interaction with various combinations of elements in an environment; they thereby have the perception that they are directing the outcome of the event and are thus the cause of an act. This engagement can be as simple as reading a book and interpreting its meaning. In this case, the reader self-directs the interpretation. It can also include participating in a lively social discussion with friends or family. Participating in rule-bound games and sports also provides a significant number of opportunities for self-directed social interaction and self-directed outcomes. When these types of engagement result in experiences that are enjoyable, fun, or pleasurable, the event is more likely to be construed as leisure (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Thus, leisure experiences are self-directed and interpreted in a specific way.

Overall, then, to experience leisure, an individual must freely choose to engage an environment and perceive that this engagement provides intrinsic satisfaction that rewards and sustains the engagement. Intrinsic satisfaction partly results from experiences that provide opportunities for positive affect, that is, effortful mental activity (Kahneman, 2011, p. 21) that results in self-directing the outcome of the engagement. Experiencing leisure is something that individuals do, not something programmers do to individuals. Neulinger (1981) insisted that leisure is not a noun, but a verb that implies action, process, and experience. Leisure is something to be consciously processed and experienced, not something that is acquired and possessed. It occurs in a social context with form and structure; that is, it is situated action (Kelly, 1999). In designing and staging a program, the programmer provides selected elements of a situation and thereby specifies form and structure for the leisure occasion. The programmer is responsible for staging the proper form and structure to situate an activity system that facilitates a leisure experience. The notions
The programmer is responsible for staging the proper form and structure to situate an activity system that facilitates a leisure experience.

of a situated activity system and a participant’s co-production of experience will be developed further in subsequent chapters.

Games

Games are leisure experiences with formal rules that define the interactional content, attempt to equalize the players, and define the role that skill and chance will play in determining the outcome. Formal rules create an unknown or problematic outcome, the resolution of which can only be achieved through playing the game. This applies to table games, athletic contests, and other gaming situations.

Games are rule bounded, and the rules delineate the arena of focused reality that will be addressed during the gaming occasion (Goffman, 1961). Games are popular leisure experiences because the rules of a well-constructed game create an area of focus with a high probability for a leisure experience. To create this focus, rules must clearly define the gaming encounter and the role that skill and chance will play in determining the outcome.

Game rules must define the focus of the contest and what is being contested. A game winner should have exhibited more of the particular skill being contested in the game than other participants have. In some games, the rules minimize the role of chance and maximize the effect of skill on the gaming outcome.

On the other hand, chance is solely responsible for the outcome of some games. For example, the winner of Chutes and Ladders, a popular children’s game, is determined entirely by chance. Thus, parents often play the game with young children who are not able to play a game of strategy or skill. In a game whose outcome is determined entirely by chance, the players are immediately made equal—each is equally dependent on chance to win the gaming encounter.

Some games require a mixture of skill and chance. This mixture is characteristic of many table games that must sustain interest among players with unequal levels of skill. Trivial Pursuit is a good example. No matter how many questions are answered, a lucky roll of the die is still necessary for a player to land in the final winning position. A more highly skilled player can answer many more questions than other players and still lose the game because of unlucky rolls of the die.

The element of chance in a game is usually settled with the toss of a coin, the roll of the die, or the use of some type of manual or electronic spinning device. More complex contests may begin with a coin toss or some other mechanism for determining the order of play or an initial position. In football, for example, the winner of a coin toss may choose which end of the field to defend, or to receive or kick the ball to start the game. Depending on weather conditions, this choice can affect the outcome of the game. Nonetheless, it is a matter of chance, unrelated to any of the skills that football is supposed to test. Chance, then, as a major determinant of the gaming outcome is often used in making unequal players equal or determining initial advantage totally unrelated to any game skill.
Game rules define the skills that will be contested and the role that skill and chance will play in determining the outcome. Leisure service professionals must understand the function of rules in games, because much game programming involves modifying rules or facilities so that those with insufficient skills or fewer skills can participate on a more equal basis.

Recreation

Recreation is leisure engaged in for the attainment of personal and social benefits. Recreation has always been characterized as socially purposeful and moral; that is, it incorporates a rightness and a wrongness. Hutchison (1951) stated, “Recreation is a worthwhile, socially accepted leisure experience that provides immediate and inherent satisfaction to the individual who voluntarily participates . . .” (p. 2). Jensen (1979) commented on the inherent morality of recreation, stating, “In order to qualify as recreation, an activity must do something desirable to a participant” (p. 8). Recreation is considered to have a specific moral purpose in society.

Recreation has always been viewed as restoration from the toil of work. De Grazia (1964) assumed this view, writing, “Recreation is activity that rests men from work, often by giving them a change (distraction, diversion), and restores (re-creates) them for work” (p. 233). Thus, he credited recreation with having social significance by functionally relating it to work. With this view, recreation is instrumental to work because it enables individuals to recuperate and restore themselves to accomplish more work. These concepts were introduced at a time when work involved hard labor as humans forged materials into useful products with economic value. Most work today requires much less fatiguing labor and thus our need for recreation as recuperation from work is less apparent.

But recreation is good not only for individuals—it is also good for society. Recreation has been used as a diversion from government repression, war, economic depression, congested urban conditions, and so forth. It is beneficial to society when people are engaged in socially purposeful activities in their free time as opposed to drinking, gambling, taking drugs, and other personally and socially degenerative engagements. Recreation always has morality associated with it, and there are good and bad forms of recreation. For example, drug use is considered morally degenerative. Therefore, to a recreation professional, the notion of “recreational drug use” is not possible.

Moreover, organizations that provide recreation services are viewed as social institutions that espouse the positive aspects inherent in the recreation activities they offer. Specific moral ends or purposes are usually attributed to providers such as municipal recreation agencies, churches, the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, the armed services, and other similar organizations. More recently, recreation programs that combat exposure to adverse social conditions and the general lack of positive opportunities have been developed for at-risk youth. And the notion that recreation has a role to play in achieving social justice through ensuring the equitable distribution
of opportunities for recreation and leisure has become an important moral end for the profession to accomplish.

Thus, recreation is a specific form of leisure behavior that is characterized as having a pervasive morality. It is an institutionalized form of leisure that the programmer can manipulate to accomplish socially desirable goals and objectives that are often defined by the sponsoring agency. It is the form of leisure behavior that programmers most often try to facilitate. In developing recreation programs, the programmer is often expected to go beyond providing a leisure experience and to intervene to accomplish a socially purposeful goal. In these instances, recreation is a conduit to socially purposeful outcomes beyond a leisure experience. Recreation’s usefulness as a unique conduit to socially purposeful ends, compared to education, religion, and other conduits, should not be overlooked or undersold. Chapter 11 presents specific techniques for accomplishing socially purposeful intentional design.

**Play**

Play is leisure with the childlike characteristics of spontaneity, self-expression, and the creation of a nonserious realm of meaning. As a specific form of leisure, play has these further defining characteristics.

Play incorporates a dualism that distinguishes it from the real world. Play involves a lack of seriousness in which interaction is free flowing, as it progresses from place to place and takes on new forms as focus, needs, and demands shift (Denzin, 1975). It is an expansive interactional form that is not guided by conventional rules of interaction; thus, it is not a game. Hunnicutt (1986) suggested, “Play may well be one of those things that we do to understand other things and to create a truth” (p. 10).

Play is the most spontaneous form of leisure behavior, and its occurrence depends on the consent and conscious participation of the players. Lynch (1980) showed that players recognize and signal each other when interactions shift into a play mode, thereby suspending the normal rules of interaction. The inconsequential nature of play establishes a sense of self and reality that the player cannot otherwise attain in daily life. To “play with” an object, person, or an idea is to experience the meaning of the object, person, or idea in a fundamentally new way. Because of this, play is one of the most difficult forms of leisure to program.

**Sport**

Sport is leisure that involves institutionalized competitive physical activity. It can be thought of as a game whose rules require physical competition. Many programmers are employed in organizing sport competitions and managing sport venues.

In defining sport, one is faced with the question of professional athletes, that is, is their participation leisure? Although they are highly visible and well known to the wider population, few individuals are employed as athletes. Not completely resolving this issue does not influence a large number of individuals. Nevertheless,
most sport scholars include professional athletes in the rubric of sport participation. For our purposes, we will assume that whether someone is paid or unpaid, it is the experience the athlete has while participating that determines whether an event, including participation in sport, is leisure.

Three key concepts define sport: physical exertion, rules, and competition of physical skills. Most academics who have studied sport agree that it includes only activities that require physical exertion. They do not include activities such as card playing, playing chess, and other similar activities under the rubric of sport. In our sedentary world, the need to expend physical energy is a unique attribute that separates sport from everyday life.

Rules are a second attribute that define the sporting event and regulate participation: “The essence of sport lies in its patterned and regulated form. Through the social process of institutionalization—the formalizing and standardizing of activities—sport is regulated” (Leonard, 1998, p. 13). In addition to the rules for competitions, sport as an institution is also regulated by league rules. The modification and enforcement of rules often becomes the focus of sport, attracting as much attention from the sport media and fans as the competitions do. Owners of professional teams spend many hours contemplating rule changes. Consider the use of instant replay in professional sports in recent years, which has expanded as technology has advanced. Football, baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer use instant replay to varying degrees.

Most sports are games with rules that function like the game rules previously discussed, except that all sport games involve physical exertion and are contests of physical skills. Rules affect the character of a game, including the strategies participants use to compete and the skills they may need to participate. Rules often differ for collegiate versus professional competitions or national versus international competitions. Programming sporting competitions inevitably involves the programmer in rule discussions, as teams will try to manipulate rules to assure themselves of a competitive advantage on the playing field.

The final attribute of sport is that it involves a competition of physical skills. The rules of each sport require participants to possess and showcase specific physical skills (e.g., eye–hand coordination [table tennis], flexibility [gymnastics], strength [weight lifting], endurance [marathon running]). The most popular sports, such as basketball, football, baseball, and hockey, require athletes to possess multiple physical skills in various combinations to succeed. Often, programmers will help develop rule modifications to accommodate participation in sport of individuals who possess less physical skill than needed to compete successfully in open competitions.

A significant amount of association with sport in the United States involves individuals watching others participate in sport (i.e., being a sports fan, now called the fan experience). This type of involvement does not, of course, provide the benefits or challenges of participating in sport. In general, it is not part of a programmer’s daily
tasks, except for contending with sport fans who attend sporting events organized by the programmer and planning occasional trips to sporting events.

Additionally, a recreation programmer may spend much of his or her time organizing participation in youth sports. In many cases, the programmer will be working with adult groups who organize and operate youth sports. Currently, the focus of programmers in operating youth sports has been on improving the skills of adults coaching youth and dealing with the behavior of parents who attend youth sport games. The National Alliance for Youth Sport’s sole purpose is to improve youth sport experiences for children (https://www.nays.org). They currently have over 3,000 participating organizations. To this end, they offer assistance for dealing with bullying in youth sports, background checks of adult organizers and coaches, concussions, and other current issues in operating youth sports.

Tourism

Touring is a rapidly expanding form of leisure in which individuals travel for opportunities to experience leisure. Additional defining dimensions that characterize touring are restoration, change of pace, and individual purposes. Touring for leisure is distinguished from travel for business or commercial purposes. A tourist is defined as someone who travels at least 50 miles from home and stays at least 1 night for the purpose of recreation or leisure. Touring is ripe with opportunities for leisure, as leisure experiences can result from the travel itself and from engagements during travel.

An enduring feature of tourism is its use as an escape from and renewal for work. Many people still pursue the annual vacation to restore themselves for work. A 2-week annual vacation is often the norm for beginning employees. In North America, the number of days of annual vacation often increases with job seniority, sometimes reaching 4 or 5 weeks per year for employees with longevity in a position. In other countries, annual vacation days from work frequently exceed those provided in North America. In many cases, these days are used as an opportunity to travel and get away from home and work. Leisure experiences that will refresh and restore one for work are pursued.

But tourism encompasses more than simply restoring individuals for work. Retirees who no longer work are a growing segment of the tourism industry. For them, touring provides a change of pace from the routine of their lives: a chance to visit new and exotic places. Thus, travel to places, with schedules and activities that are different from a routine pattern of work or routine imposed by continual interaction with the same individuals, places, and events, is pursued through traveling and becoming a tourist. Since becoming a tourist requires an individual to be away from home, touring will likely result in a change of the individual’s daily pace. With a change of pace as a benchmark for defining a touring experience, touring can provide this change through a variety of engagements including rest, relaxation, culture, sport, escape, adventure, and many others.
A final dimension of uniqueness in tourism is the diversity of individual purposes for touring. This diversity has resulted in emerging niche tours that include sport tourism, ecotourism, gambling tours, medical tourism, and many other specialized touring groups and tours. Some purposes include specialized destinations such as golf courses, gardens, or wineries. Some utilize specialized forms of transportation such as cruises, bus tours, trekking, or a new possibility, space touring. Unique associations are the basis for some tour cohorts. For example, tours organized for university alumni, members of specific religious denominations, or members of a civic organization. Many other market segments form the basis for organizing touring groups or themed organized tours.

Programmers work in the tourism industry as tour organizers for the hotel industry, transportation businesses, attraction venues, or tour companies that package tours. Ironically, the attractions that are the reason for travel are often the least expensive part of a trip. The majority of tourism dollars are spent on transportation, housing, and food—not admission to the recreation attractions that are the primary reason for traveling to a specific locale. Because the total cost of travel, lodging, and food are likely to far exceed the total cost of admissions to recreation amenities or venues, the price of admission to a recreation amenity or venue is relatively inelastic and is one of the lower costs incurred during trips.

Events

Events, along with tourism, have become specialized programming categories with increasing demand. Some recreation professionals, including wedding planners, event managers, corporate event managers, and others, are dedicated to designing and operating events. In many leisure service organizations, events are one of several types of program formats operated during the year.

One difficulty in defining events for this book is that they cross boundaries. That is, not all events are leisure. There are religious events, commercial events, education events, and so on. Berridge (2007) pointed out that practitioners and academics continue to struggle, without complete success, to develop a suitable definition of events that all will accept. However, some unique characteristics that most agree on will enable us to provide a working definition that separates events from other programming forms.

Events are infrequently experienced by participants. While many other types of programming discussed occur routinely and regularly, events by definition are made special partly because they occur seldom and are thus not experienced repeatedly in the short term. Although the timing of some events is regular (e.g., Christmas, New Year’s, Veterans Day), they still occur infrequently and provide diversion from habitual routine. Similarly, a trip to an amusement park is done infrequently by participants, but operating the amusement park is a daily routine for employees. Thus, attending the amusement park is an event for participants.

Events often require an agency to shift from its normal program delivery format to create an unusual event for itself and its participants. Additionally, the staging of events usually requires significant agency resources. Agencies and participants often
Agencies and participants often look forward to an event because it provides a different programming format.

look forward to an event because it provides a different programming format. For example, a sports management organization that normally operates competitions including leagues and tournaments may need to design and stage an annual awards banquet. This is an unusual programming format for the organization, one that is outside of its normal programming practices. Additionally, this is not the usual program format experienced by the organization’s regular participants.

Similarly, arts organizations often have a gala opening night for an opera, symphony, or other performance series. Opening night celebrates the beginning of the season, and opening night occurs only once a year. Staging a pre- or post-event celebration with hors d’oeuvres, drinks, and other amenities creates a different programming format for opening night compared to other performance nights.

Finally, events often provide experiences beyond a participant’s normal range of choices and beyond the routine of ordinary life, by providing opportunities for ritual, celebration, or festivity. Although some forms of leisure are experienced alone, these leisure forms are almost always a shared experience. The bonding with others and the shared values that result from these experiences are important parts of participant interaction and the memories that result. Often, events provide opportunities for symbolic behavior that reveals the values and mores of a given culture or group. For example, an awards banquet is usually a celebration of excellence wherein specific individuals are given awards for superior performance. The event symbolically recognizes the values of the group. Although individuals are lauded for their accomplishments, these individuals also symbolize the notion that excellence is venerated by the group who has gathered to celebrate excellence. For an interesting account of the contributions of rituals, celebrations, and festivals, see deLisle (2014).

Events are a unique form of leisure participation defined by their infrequent occurrence, their different format of participation, and the change of pace they provide from routine activities.

**Programming Implications**

Leisure is considered the most general and encompassing concept, while recreation, play, games, sport, tourism, and events are viewed as specific forms of leisure. Figure 1.1 (page 18) illustrates the central defining concepts of each leisure form and its relationship to others. The boundaries of each form overlap, illustrating the nebulous character of each form of leisure. For example, game rules are often structured to allow players to play in a spontaneous, free-flowing, and creative manner. Nonetheless, when game players serendipitously discover a new move or game strategy that gives them an advantage, the programmer can modify rules to quash it or accommodate it within the rule structure of the game.
When recreation activities are programmed, they are often made to appear as much like leisure as possible; perceptions of free choice and intrinsically rewarding activities are included in the program. However, the programmatic goals of the agency sponsoring and operating a program may foster an activity structure that does not permit ongoing freedom of choice in the activity. The use of prescriptive programming methods such as intentionally designed outcome-based programming can lead to highly structured programs that impose the agency’s desired outcome on participants. Programmers need to realize the central concepts of each of these forms of leisure and should design and operate programs that are least obstructive to a participant’s desired experiences. Programmers often face a situation in which the best programmatic manipulation is simply to “stay out of the way” (Kelly, 2013, p. 109) to avoid destroying the experience desired. In this case, the programmer must understand the experience and make sure that the design or operation of a program does not have built-in blocks to the leisure experience desired by the participant or intended by the agency. Now complete Exercise 1.2.

Figure 1.1. Relationships Among Central Definitions of Leisure, Recreation, Play, Games, Sport, Tourism, and Events
Programming is the central focus of the leisure service profession and a primary mission of leisure service organizations. Programmers stage opportunities for leisure to occur. Leisure is a primary social space in modern society for exercising free choice and the development of self. Leisure occurs through interactions in social occasions that are characterized by perceived freedom, intrinsic satisfaction, and opportunities for exercising positive affect. Recreation, games, play, sport, tourism, and events are specific forms of leisure with additional defining concepts.

References


Exercise 1.2.

Programming Leisure Experiences

In class, discuss the differences among programming sport, play, games, recreation, tourism, and events.

• How do the differences among these six forms of leisure demand different programming approaches?

• Which of these six forms of leisure is the most difficult to program?

• Why?


