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The future of leisure studies in six landscapes

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What is the future of leisure studies? The answer is as undefined as the field's past. Leisure studies have always lacked a true, unified governing body (e.g. no general assembly) that has established defined parameters, principles, key concepts, and a set of values that provide an ethic to and for activity. However, in happenstance, the field has produced a large volume of various forms of both popular and academic content, and most importantly the six represented professional associations of this discussion (World Leisure Organization, The Academy of Leisure Sciences, Leisure Studies Association, Canadian Association for Leisure Studies, Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies, and China-International Leisure Research Association). While 'what is the future of leisure studies?' is not unequivocally answered, the presented discussion identifies potential next steps for the establishment of topical panels, a series of special issues, and stand-alone symposia.

Keywords: Leisure research; leisure pedagogy; visioning; organizational reflection

Quel est l'avenir des études sur les loisirs? La réponse est aussi indéfinie que le passé du domaine. Les études sur les loisirs ont toujours manqué d'un véritable organe directeur unifié (par exemple, aucune assemblée générale) qui aurait établi des paramètres définis, des principes, des concepts clés et un ensemble de valeurs qui fourniraient une éthique à l'activité et pour l'activité. Cependant, par hasard, le domaine a produit un large et divers éventail de contenus académique et grand public et, surtout, les six associations professionnelles représentées dans le cadre de la présente discussion (World Leisure Organization, The Academy of Leisure Sciences, Leisure Studies Association, Canadian Association for Leisure Studies, Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies et China-International Leisure Research Association). Bien que la réponse à la question « quel est l'avenir des études sur les loisirs? » ne soit pas sans équivoque, la discussion présentée identifie les prochaines étapes potentielles pour la mise en place de groupes thématiques, d'une série de numéros spéciaux et de symposiums autonomes.

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Mots clés : recherche en loisir; pédagogie des loisirs; vision; réflexion sur l'organisation

Representatives from six landscapes and six professional leisure associations gathered in May of 2023, during the Canadian Congress on Leisure Research in Ottawa, Ontario, in order to have a discussion on the current state and future of the field of leisure studies. Specifically, scholars representing the World Leisure Organization, The Academy of Leisure Sciences, the Leisure Studies Association, the Canadian Association for Leisure Studies, the Australia and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies, and the China-International Leisure Research Association met to reflect on the future of leisure studies. To shape the conversation, the following three fundamental realms of reflection were posed:

- (1) Reflect on contemporary challenges facing their organization as well as the study of leisure more broadly.
- (2) Share their knowledge and experience in regard to where leisure and students of leisure should be putting their energy in order to secure a bright future for the field and leisure as a human right.
- (3) Explore how cross-disciplinary connections, as well as connections with the leisure industry, can be enhanced from the leisure studies field for a mutually beneficial exchange in the face of the current challenges, such as the closure of departments and/or programs; restrictions in speech on diversity, equity, and inclusion; world wars; world economic calamities; and migrant crises.

Based on commentary and discussion at conferences from 2019 to the present, these leisure association representatives have posed questions about the local and global relevance of leisure as a subject of study. Additionally, their discussions have generated some degree of traction, with joint Zoom meetings and journal special issue collaborations. Reflected here, in this paper, are the results of the first 'formal' gathering of these representatives and efforts to publicly engage the leisure studies community about these issues. While there have been examples of past individual scholarly questioning and reflections on the state of the field (Stebbins, 2011), the aim here is to engender a collective discussion about the future of leisure studies.

Leisure has been a construct, concept, tool, service, and experience as well as an area of study for decades. It has also been the subject of leisure-related degrees, including programs oriented toward professionals and those from a range of other non-leisure-specific disciplines and fields. As a result, the field has produced a great deal of knowledge through books, chapters, journals, articles, studies, commentaries, rebuttals, conferences, symposia, keynotes, presentations, workshops, radio shows, TV interviews, webinars, podcasts, curricula, courses, practicums, capstones, theses, dissertations, and most importantly through the activities of its various professional associations. These developments, taken up around the globe, have been the product of efforts that have been both disjointed and broad and have included regional activities undertaken with varying degrees of coherence and community. Indeed, leisure studies have always lacked a true (i.e., global, unified) governing body that has defined parameters and established principles, key concepts, and a set of values that can provide an ethos that broadly shapes our scholarship and activities (e.g., we have no general assembly). While the field of leisure has produced a remarkable body

of thought that should not be diminished, it is time for a critical conversation of the state of the field and where it could go.

What is the future of leisure studies? This is different than asking what is the future of leisure, as in the experience of leisure, the offering of recreation, and the provision of a range of things we associate as leisure. Indeed, the question of what is the future of leisure studies is as uncertain and undefined as the field's past. When did the field actually begin? Was it the moment that the first college degree program was created or when the first class was offered? Who knows? We have never collectively agreed upon that moment. Was it the moment the first book that used leisure in its title was published or when the first thorough discussion of the concept was undertaken with serious thought? Was it the first provision of a service, program, or activity under the guise of the concept of leisure? Again, who knows? Not only would these answers be difficult to attain, but it would be nearly impossible to ensure we have taken into account all that was happening in all other parts of the world.

During the conference, the panel conversation was recorded, and as such it forms the basis for this paper. The conversation ranged from a discussion of broad, contextual concerns (i.e., capitalism, institutional relevance), operational factors (i.e., influence of funding bodies, frequency of gatherings), and the exploration of alternatives (i.e., thematic annual gatherings, radical revisions of knowledge). While 'what is the future of leisure studies?' was not unequivocally answered, the discussion did bear fruit in regard to identifying potential next steps for building a global view of leisure studies – such as establishing ongoing conference panels, a series of special issues, and stand-alone symposia or colloquia. We, as a field, can gain much from the praxis of making these ideas happen while being informed by some aspects of organizational theory on collective action (individual and/or regional assessments that can inform greater cooperation), goal setting (organizational success is dependent on clear, specific, and measurable goals), and even polyphony (multiple, diverse voices that move organizations to go beyond their initial intent). It is important to note that these are the panelists' personal views, albeit based on years of experience in the field and past or present leadership of the aforementioned organizations. We, as panelists and authors, present them here with the intention of provoking a broader reflection upon, and conversation about, the very future of our field.¹

We, as panelists and authors, first acknowledged that the very term 'leisure' no longer serves as the arena of instruction for various academic institutions, nor as a distinct area of study for various scholars working therein (Fletcher *et al.*, 2016; Parr & Schmalz, 2019). Leisure is still understood based upon older, core tenets that have been established in the Western world (free time, recreation activity, and state of mind; see Mgonja, 2020). But there is no denying that the fundamental concept of leisure does serve as a philosophical coalescer of the ever-segmenting study and instruction related to parks, recreation, tourism, sport, recreation therapy, outdoor recreation, adventure education, experience design, etc.

What is the past of leisure studies?

The joint reflection of members of these six associations works as a polyphony, an 'individual melody' formed by different parts of a desired whole. The desired whole is the field of leisure. The six associations in conversation with each other reflect parts of a desired whole in lieu of a formal unified body and/or field of leisure. This whole exists,

despite the growing subfield splintering that coincides with the reduction of institutional support for conference travel, which has created the perception of a fracturing of the field. Nonetheless, a field still exists even if it is faint. For instance, the development and maintenance of field-specific journals: *World Leisure Journal* in 1958 (originally published as *World Leisure & Recreation* from 1958 to 1999); *Journal of Leisure Research* since 1969; *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal* and *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure* since 1978; *Leisure Studies* since 1982; *Schole: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education* in 1987; *Leisure/Loisir* in 1999 (originally published as *Recreation Review* in 1970, *Recreation Research Review* in 1977, and then as the *Journal of Applied Recreation Research* in 1990); and *Annals of Leisure Research* in 1998. Together, these all highlight a clear presence of 'leisure' as a body of knowledge. Indeed, these outlets provide the most viable foundation for understanding from where our field has come and where it might be heading (Harmon *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, we can point to the development and maintenance of regular gatherings: the annual Leisure Studies Association and The Academy of Leisure Sciences conferences; the biennial World Leisure Organization Congress and Australian and New Zealand for Leisure Studies conferences; the Triennial Canadian Congress for Leisure Research; and the quadrennial RC-13 Sociology of Leisure section, which is held within the International Sociological Association World Congress. Add to these other conferences, symposia, and meetings of the Academy of Leisure Sciences Africa or the International Recreation and Sport Management Congress in Turkey. These events, although exhibiting occasional signs of fluctuating attendance, show no signs of ending.

Taken together, these journals and events have long worked to construct the spaces where what the study of leisure could look like and was most possible was imagined. Importantly, they eventually evoked a particular kind of opportunity in imagining, one that can first deconstruct the field and then reconstruct it with the consideration of voices and traditions that were initially excluded (Henhawk *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, with our journals marking 40+ years of productivity and academic gatherings engendering more than 40 years of dialogue, we (as a field) ought to be encouraged (Johnson *et al.*, 2018). This encouragement is especially true if one considers that, in some cases, we (as a field) have accomplished what we had been calling for, including, for instance, more internationalization – via lines of communication, publication of authors, and reach of publications (Williams, 1997).

To be clear, the whole of the field of leisure has so many different parts that it may seem like a shared goal, and shared understanding of leisure is difficult to attain. Yet those different parts have resulted in similar lines of questioning, particularly about the state and relevance of the field of leisure (see, for example, Shaw, 2000); a polyphony of concern and of opportunity, perhaps (Andersen, 2003; Mair, 2006).

Further, if we (as a field) think of these separate associations and/or groups as parts of an unofficial organization that represents the entire international field, then we may have a polyphonic organization. Each of these journals and events may emphasize one perspective over another (philosophy vs. professionalization), embrace one theme over another (criticism vs. optimism), and embrace a particular type of presentation over another (15-minute presentations vs. one hour); they draw from either similar texts (an unofficial canon) or similar concepts (flow, serious leisure, theory of planned behavior, etc.). Nonetheless, the very tensions inherent in choosing one perspective, theme, and presentation over another has opened the doorway to polyphony and not a monophony as these differences represent the multiplicity in codes (of conduct, value, theory). The

desire to respond to society's hopes, desires, and issues requires vastly different efforts, but the intention to respond has brought us all to the same point. These similarities mean that 'all roads' ultimately get to similar conclusions. Furthermore, it is important to understand that polyphony is not uniformity or even unity; there is not one function or one functional system, but there can be one aim or one intent or one focus. As such, our aim with this paper is not to situate the field as a polyphonic organization in so far as it is a mode of operation for 'optimization.' No, instead, the aim here is to highlight the ways members of these disparate associations have ultimately all wondered about the same thing: the future of the field.

Past efforts to assess the future of the field have focused on or highlighted several different concerns and opportunities. One of the earliest discussions of the future appeared in the third issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research* in 1976. Possibly bright-eyed and optimistic, yet homogenous (North American, male, white, etc.) respondents conveyed common interests in conceptual history, the sociology of leisure, and an emphasis on sport (Crandall & Lewko, 1976). In 1985, professionalization seemed to become a vital consideration for both the future of students pursuing degrees in various programs and for research and instruction (Godbey, 1985). One oppositional voice even proposed that leisure studies instruction was simply not viable for the college level (undergraduate education) and is far more suitable for a graduate-level education (Burdge, 1985).

Discussions in the 1970s and 1980s on these questions may have served the burgeoning field as good forms of intellectual debate, but these conversations, whether they evolved into debates or not, may have been signs of intellectual and organizational stagnation and complacency (Pronovost, 1997; Veal, 2002). These signs were in line with the results of a 1990 survey of leisure researchers who noted that priority must be given to leisure theory development, alternative research methods (e.g., qualitative research), stronger adherence to social science disciplines (sociology, psychology, etc.), and an attentiveness to broader social trends in research (Burton & Jackson, 1990). Nearly 30 years later, it has been argued that there still need to be stronger linkages and relationships with foundational disciplines that inform research, practice, and policy (Auger et al., 2020). Earlier concerns and cautions of a pending split within the broader field of leisure studies, a need for professionalization with an emphasis on management, and the restrictive exclusion of what leisure even is, impacted the direction of where and/or how the field grew; thus, those concerns and cautions were left unheeded (Smith, 1985). Nonetheless, the list of dominant themes of study, discussion, and inquiry still remain in the commonly conceived categories of management, programing, and service delivery, and this is evident when looking at *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure* and the defunct *Journal of Leisurability*, since the 1970s (see Karlis et al., 2018).

The very fact that some journals and organizations include either 'science' or 'studies' alongside leisure in their name reflects a moment in time when that tension took on a concrete manifestation. This led to further (professional) specialization that impacted the 'science' of exploration and inquiry (Godbey, 2000). The science and studies 'split' encompassed a geographic aspect, with studies (and a sociological approach) veering to United Kingdom-aligned education and research, and the science and psychological inclination housed within United States-aligned education and research (Coalter, 1997). More profoundly, the questions 'is leisure studies something that is best studied by social science?' or 'is leisure studies even a social science?' have

only occasionally been posed in the body of literature (e.g., as the focus of an article by Lynch, 1997). But even with these two very different pathways (science and studies), early polyphony was evident, despite perception of a 'crisis' regarding the end of the field for both. It should be noted that the domination of English-speaking education and research production excluded many places of the Global South and/or forced such alignments to emerge.

Further, much of what we (as a field) think as a reflective exercise regarding the field of leisure studies has been dominated by social science thinking, and very seldom have the humanities entered this space (Heintzman, 2018). The argument was made that if leisure scholars wanted to accommodate the broadening of the field (typically based on two end points of a continuum leisure studies and/or sciences and leisure professionalization), we needed to anticipate future distancing, but perhaps that also presented an opportunity which should be embraced (Henderson, 2011). In fact, if we read articles published in *Journal of Leisure Research* and *Leisure Sciences* around the year 2010, the outlook on the future of leisure studies was dominated by a sense of crisis. But that sense of crisis may have missed a key question: is a collective identity more important than being relevant to a society (Henderson, 2010)? Some noted, albeit more than 30 years ago (Pronovost & D'Amours, 1990), that to have such existential concerns was too soon for an emerging field of study. Nonetheless, is it worth asking: As a field of scholars, are we still in development as a legitimate field?

The debate about the legitimacy of our field, often assessed in terms of practitioner-determined relevance, the use of new modes of communication, and the establishment of a field as an area of study with degree programs (D'Amours, 1997), is no longer new. Legitimacy cannot be based on merely existing, nor should we rest on the reality that just because we exist, we will always exist. This relevancy may also hinge on whether we see leisure as being an unmitigated good or an instrument for social control (Chick, 1997). Perhaps it was and is best to think of the field as more of an intellectual assemblage rather than something that required any measure of organizational coherence (Silk *et al.*, 2017). And while others may call for collaboration as a solution to future research development (Schmalz *et al.*, 2019) or to create broader networks for the field of study of leisure (Tower *et al.*, 2018), even this may not present the best solution to future field and organizational development.

Considering the pull of the United States (North America) and United Kingdom (Europe), in terms of leisure's 'origins' (as a concept, since we cannot truly determine when the field began) in the 1800s, leisure was born out of a concern for the social good and the necessity for social control depending upon which nation-state you were writing about or studying in (Mommaas, 1997). This geographical and intellectual divide could also be seen through a focus on the macro-level (United Kingdom) and micro-level (United States) approaches to research (Shaw, 1997). But even the very understanding of what leisure is comes from the dominance of the Global North, either as hubs of academic development (degrees, fellowships) and scholarly production (journals, books) or as thought leaders (theories and concepts of leisure) that serve to reify old colonial positions (Mgonja, 2020; Mowatt, 2021; Rodriguez, 2023)

An historical and geographic lens also allows us to see three major observations that have emerged within leisure studies: 1) four scenarios of the work–leisure relationship in society: conservatism, reactionism, reformism, and revolutionism (Parker, 1997); 2) four unfortunate (and distasteful) characteristics of leisure studies: a) conflated generalities of sport and culture; b) an ignorance in regard to understanding the vagueness of leisure

amongst the public, which c) prevents leisure from being a meaningful rallying point for producers of knowledge and those who consume that knowledge; and d) the salience of the (Protestant) work ethic (Stebbins, 1997); and 3) four traditions of criticality counter to traditional leisure: a) critical leisure studies; b) new leisure; c) post-leisure studies; and d) anti-leisure (Mowatt, 2021).

But the sense of crisis may still be less a matter of relevance of the field, and instead may be more about the field's uncritical acceptance of the historical and social conditions that produced it (Rowe, 2002). The crisis, then, is that we do not see the crisis in society, and that in turn, creates a 'crisis' in the field borne out of that insulation from the outside world.

In the case of *Schole*, the field's sole journal emphasizing pedagogy, only one article presented a caution that the nostalgia of the past could both obstruct our divining of the future of the field while also convoluting an archive of the past (Talmage et al., 2017). Particularly within degree programs, rarely have the larger external forces in society dictated the curriculum, and rarely have we worked with any academic and student affairs data (enrollment patterns, degree interest, degree choice, and subject matter interest beyond our own student majors) in our call for reworking the field. Systematic elimination of courses on leisure theory, leisure history, and leisure philosophy, or the elimination of the requirement to take these courses to complete a degree in undergraduate and graduate degree programs, are obvious ways of manufacturing the later crisis of a lack of relevance (Parr & Schmalz, 2019). So much of the early discussion of the future of the field of leisure studies, ca. 1980s and the 1990s, hinged upon the need to redirect degree programs, yet was promulgated and implemented without any in-depth analysis in any peer-reviewed publication. Not as a statement of slander against our professional and/or practitioner colleagues, but we have largely assumed they have the primacy in understanding and directing a future of leisure, once again, without any evidence (Parr & Lashua, 2004).

If we look deeply enough, we may even find flaws in the learning components of our programs as they may have been based on an overestimation of the disposition or internal attributions of a person or sampling of people that then underestimates the environmental factors that may explain and modify behavior (according to Dieser, 2012). Even within the very first volume and first issue of the second oldest journal of the field, *Journal of Leisure Research*, there was an argument against the perception of asking far too many surface-level questions in any a given study (Meyersohn, 1969). Knowing the mechanics of service delivery does not produce the knowledge of what service should be or ought to be, and what service to deliver. Working in a city does not mean you are servicing a society, at least not for any just, positive growth for all people.

Having laid out what we think are the main concerns and considerations shaping the past and even the present of leisure studies, we now turn to the future. It is here that we rely more directly on the particular contexts and perspectives of the leisure associations' representative panelists and authors.

What is the future of leisure studies?

Regardless of the realities faced by those working in the academic world(s) of leisure (e.g., degree and program cancellations and departmental closures), leisure studies as a field is clearly not dying, at least not as a field of study or as an area of inquiry for various disciplines (Carr, 2022). Do we see our calling as leisure, either as a researcher

studying it or as one who is engaged in its pursuit (Henderson, 2018)? Calls to hold to 'old' lines of questioning and 'old' methods of inquiry should not be replaced in favor of newer lines and forms of inquiry (e.g., cultural studies, media studies, sociology of sport; Roberts, 1997). Indeed, these moves from the old to the new would go against the most fundamental lesson in research – that the research problem ought to determine the best or most appropriate method (Henderson, 2011; Silk *et al.*, 2017). Asking the question, 'what is the future of leisure studies?' should be less an appraisal of the field of leisure studies and more a plan of action. A plan of action for ourselves as the body of people who are here before the students or community members enter the room and who remain in that same room long after they have left; the academics that are the professors, thought leaders, lecturers, readers, teachers, and researchers.

The authors of this paper are leisure scholars who (collectively) have decades of research and teaching experience, and we have each led (or are leading) the main organizations shaping our field. What follows is a brief description of the organizations (in alphabetical order) we represent as well as our thoughts, as panelists and representatives of these associations, about the future of the field.

Australia and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS)

The Australia and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS) was formed in 1991 at the World Leisure Congress in Sydney by a group of 46 delegates from across a number of Australian and New Zealand tertiary institutions. Since that time, the key purpose of ANZALS has been to enable scholarly debate and dissemination of knowledge in the study of leisure; to promote the publication of scholarly leisure studies work; to facilitate and promote networking amongst ANZALS members as well as other interested organizations, including similar kindred organizations, government bodies, and/or organizations as well as not-for-profit and for-profit industry groups; and to encourage high standards of leisure studies within tertiary education.

Since 1993, ANZALS has hosted an in-person biennial conference (except in 2021 owing to the Covid-19 global pandemic), attracting delegates from across the two nations as well as from Asia and South-East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North and South America. From 1993 to 1998, ANZALS published a biennial refereed Research Series edited by Tony Veal and Betty Weiler. In 1998 the peer-reviewed journal *Annals of Leisure Research* was launched, under the co-editorship of Rob Lynch, Clare Simpson, and Bob Gidlow, with an international Editorial Advisory Board. The journal began as single-issue volumes until 2003 when it was published quarterly, and since 2019 five issues a year. In 2023, over 96,000 articles were downloaded or viewed from the publisher's online website.

The ability to consistently host an international biennial conference as well as create and grow an internationally recognized peer-reviewed journal over a 30-year period could be viewed as fulfilling a number of ANZALS key purposes, particularly in relation to enabling scholarly debate, disseminating knowledge, and facilitating networking opportunities. However, a number of other key purposes have been less successful, these being in relation to networking with other interested organizations as well as supporting leisure studies as a field within the Australian and New Zealand university sector.

In 2015 the then ANZALS Board in collaboration with the conference organizing team undertook an exploratory research project with members and conference delegates

to “document the state of leisure studies in Australia and New Zealand, and to identify steps that can be taken by a range of leisure studies’ stakeholders to address critical issues influencing the field, and to promote leisure curriculum and research” (Tower et al., 2018, p. 3). Feedback from participants clearly articulated leisure studies had become a diverse and disparate field within academia, which inhibited the ability for leisure scholars to be identifiable with the tertiary sector (and beyond) as well as the ability to develop core leisure studies curriculum. While there were no formal recommendations developed from the study, consensus amongst participants indicated the need for ANZALS to continue to develop and maintain collaborative networks with a variety of stakeholders, both within and outside the tertiary sector.

Since 2017, the ANZALS Board has consistently sought opportunities to develop formalized collaborations through the use of Memorandums of Understandings. Whilst a number of these have been signed between ANZALS and other kindred organizations, they have rarely resulted in any notable outcomes beyond recognition of each other on websites and promotion of upcoming events and conferences on social media. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, ANZALS was involved and supported a number of international leisure studies webinars, but owing to global time differences, many of these opportunities were not conducive to Australian and New Zealand leisure studies scholars. However, the ANZALS Board has remained committed to maintaining and strengthening collaborations amongst kindred organizations by exploring and trying alternative networking initiatives.

We could be pessimistic and claim ‘leisure studies is dead!’ and it is not what it was, a singular field of academic study, with its own collective faculty, students, and subjects, which is true. Across the past 30 years ANZALS has seen and been affected by the disaggregation of leisure studies as a separate academic field, the corporatization and bureaucratization of the tertiary sector as well as impacted by a global pandemic; however, it remains as relevant today as it was when it was first formed in 1991. ANZALS, as a flagship organization for leisure studies in the Australia and New Zealand region, has proven not only to be resilient to change but also willing to explore new opportunities to reach out, to learn from its own experiences as well as from others. The future of leisure studies, as it has always been, is in the hands of those scholars who are inspired and committed to the field. The challenge becomes (and again as it has always been) finding and supporting the next generation of leisure scholars from across a vast range of academic fields. To do this we must work collectively, support each other as a global network, celebrate our successes (however big or small), encourage new and diverse perspectives in relation to leisure studies, and move beyond traditional knowledge dissemination techniques (such as conferences and journals) to utilize social media platforms in inventive and creative means. Leisure studies are not dead. . . the possibilities of what they could be in a new era merely lie across the knowledge base of the international academy and as of yet have not been congealed into a formalized set of standards, body of work, or other structure. It requires us all, individually as well as collectively, to reach into those academic spaces to bring it into the light.

Canadian Association for Leisure Studies (CALs)

CALS describes itself as an organization of Canadian and international scholars and practitioners “who share an interest in recreation and leisure research and the delivery of leisure services (CALs, n.d.). The organization was envisioned and then

'officially' created in 1981 during the Third Canadian Congress on Leisure Research (CCLR) in Edmonton, Alberta (the first CCLR was held in 1975 in Quebec City). For many years, the primary purpose of CALS was to convene each triennial CCLR event, but over time, it acquired responsibility for the peer-reviewed journal *Leisure/Loisir* and became much more active in terms of supporting its members through grants and scholarships, building relationships with existing leisure and allied social science associations, and advocating for the study and practice of leisure broadly defined. While not clearly defined as of yet, CALS has always had a kind of informal mandate to serve any and all scholars and practitioners working in areas such as parks, tourism, therapeutic recreation, as well as municipal recreation and even organized sport. Evidence of this commitment can be found in the broad range of topics covered in both the journal and the Congresses over the years.

If one were to scan the various journal issues and conference programs over the last 40 years, it would be clear that CALS has tried to provide Canadian venues for tackling some of the most pressing debates of our times – from the role of theory, to methodological revolutions and innovations, to an ever-growing body of deeply critical leisure scholarship. More recently, leisure journal cross-collaborations, such as the upcoming special double issue of *Leisure Sciences* and *Leisure/Loisir* on the fraying and (re)building of society, reflect a growing recognition of the importance of combining efforts to situate leisure scholarship within the broader context of contemporary social challenges. It should also be made clear that, while dominated by English and, albeit to a lesser extent, French language publications and presentations, CALS has been embraced by many international scholars, particularly Americans. This has led to the formation of deep and lasting bonds between a variety of scholars and organizations, particularly but not exclusively, with TALS, LSA, and ANZALS, which can be seen through the listing of CCLR panelists and co-presenters. Perhaps surprisingly, the first efforts to create a Memorandum of Understanding between these organizations began in the mid-2010s.

In regard to the future of leisure studies, CALS (as an organization) is very well positioned to tackle complex yet essential issues shaping not just our field but social life more broadly, which is clear in the themes and tracks that it selects for annual meetings and conferences. As an organization, CALS membership is over 200 and the Board of Directors is the most diverse (in terms of career stage, field of study, demographics, etc.) it has ever been, and it has actively developed plans and programs which support members through scholarships, conference funding, and other collaborative initiatives. These are all essential ingredients for keeping CALS (and the study of leisure and recreation in Canada) healthy and relevant.

From my perspective, issues facing CALS and our field hinge on the need for advocacy and capacity building in regard to challenging the profit-oriented, individualist-focused foundations of contemporary society. This foundation has led humanity to the edge of a cliff (e.g., the loneliness epidemic, polarization, dwindling social trust, environmental collapse and the climate emergency, colonization, racism, violence). CALS and its affiliated scholars and practitioners need to be supported as they collaborate to challenge and change society for the better. The future of leisure studies lies in engaging these issues head-on.

China-International Leisure Research Association (CILRA)

CILRA was started as the China-North America Leisure Studies Network by a group of leisure researchers from Beijing International Studies University (China), the University of Illinois (USA), the University of South Alabama (USA), and the University of Alberta (Canada) in 2013. In the same year, the first conference was hosted by and held at the Beijing International Studies University (BISU). Since then, CILRA began laying the groundwork for the development of the China-North America Leisure Studies Network. The Network held its second conference in Tianjin, China in October 2015. Soon, it became apparent that interest in the Network spanned well beyond China and North America and included scholars from many places around the world. In this regard, the China-North America Leisure Studies Network was renamed the China-International Leisure Research Association in 2015. The third conference of CILRA, held in Hangzhou, attracted a large number of participants from all over the world in 2016. In collaboration with the University of Illinois, the CILRA 2020 Conference was held in conjunction with The Academy of Leisure Sciences Conference (TALS 2020), on the campus of the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Both CILRA 2020 and TALS 2020 were held when COVID-19 had just started. Although several participants from China were refused entry to the USA by US border control, the two conferences were successfully completed via online and in-person participation.

With rapid economic development and urbanization in China, recreation and leisure became critical elements in Chinese people's daily life. Research on leisure behavior among the approximately 1.4 billion Chinese population contributes to broadening the scope of leisure research, testing the existing leisure theories, and enhancing the development of leisure studies in a global context. Therefore, the mission of CILRA is to foster research on issues critical to leisure in China and to promote research collaborations among leisure scholars from China and abroad. The specific goals of the association are to: (1) initiate a dialog between Chinese and international scholars on critical leisure issues in China and the world; (2) develop joint research projects on these critical leisure issues; (3) seek funding to support such research; (4) develop and foster professional exchanges at the institutional level; and (5) develop student exchanges between universities participating in the association.

The most notable work by CILRA is a 2015 publication titled "Identifying Critical Leisure Issues in China: A Mixed Methods Study" (Stodolska *et al.*, 2015). The study was conducted during a workshop organized in October 2013 by BISU. Data were obtained from 28 Chinese leading leisure scholars using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, specifically followed by a group discussion of the survey responses. As a result, a total of nine issues and/or topics were identified by the Chinese experts including time use, leisure and happiness and/or life satisfaction, public policy and planning, family leisure, needs and motivations, technological change, leisure space and resources, leisure education, and leisure and traditional culture. This list reflects the needs of improvement in the quality of life from a leisure perspective. In addition, the CILRA 2020 Conference produced a special issue on *Leisure and China in the Global Context* that was published in the *Journal of Leisure Research* (Stodolska *et al.*, 2021). This special issue is very meaningful and instrumental because it presents new research on leisure in China and among Chinese populations abroad to correct some misconceptions about Chinese leisure which are prevalent in the West.

During COVID, China was viewed as a country that had the strictest COVID-19 policy to limit social distancing, shut down all leisure facilities, impose self-quarantining, and so on. After COVID regulations were lifted in December 2022, China has been working hard to bring leisure services back and attract foreign visitors. However, China realizes that the road is still very long, but international collaboration is needed to get the country back on the world stage.

Leisure Studies Association (LSA)

The Leisure Studies Association was founded in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1975 by an independent body of planners, researchers, policymakers, administrators, and practitioners, in part to provide a space wherein academics and practitioners could engage in discussions on a wide variety of leisure studies topics. This was shortly followed by the establishment of the association's journal, *Leisure Studies*, in 1982. The LSA has historically been and still is primarily UK based and thus is subject to the shifting research and education foci that impact directly on UK academia. However, more recently there has been a renewed drive within the organization on the internationalization of our membership, in part as a direct response to the shrinking of leisure-related fields, both in terms of academic programming and staff numbers, throughout the UK. This shifting of the research and education foci has been driven in large part by government policy that is not only antithetical to leisure education in the form of higher education degree programs but also is often openly hostile toward certain degrees that fall under the umbrella of leisure. For the LSA, then, an increased international presence is not only desirable but also, in many ways, an existential need. Fortunately, we have had increasing success at expanding beyond the UK, with around a third of our membership now coming from outside of the UK. However, and going hand in hand with a drive for a greater international scope, the leisure field as a whole, particularly within the scope of our academic organizations, would benefit substantially from increased collaboration, which would help to respond to some of the arbitrary geographic silos that have evolved in the field. Furthermore, it would allow for potentially greater impact on policy and decision-making, albeit while also acknowledging the existing issues around the policy impact of academic research.

More specifically, there are multiple barriers to enacting macro-level change, not only at the international but also at the national level, particularly as there is a propensity for policymakers to engage with those academics whose work supports their preconceived understanding of the leisure field. However, there are also notable issues driven by traditional academic hierarchies built on the premise of accumulated academic capital and professional standing. For example, within the LSA, the executive committee has a sizable number of individuals who are relatively early in their career, which means that although they may have some academic capital within their own sub-areas, they are unlikely to have enough to make policy makers or even senior academics, in some cases, stand up and take notice. Therefore, in order for leisure scholars and their students to have an impact on the world around them, the best way forward, at least based on the experience of the LSA, is to focus on small-scale local projects that are driven by bottom-up thinking with an emphasis on community-based collaboration and co-creation. It is, in my opinion, the only way to protect leisure rights under late-stage capitalism as the concept of leisure as a human right is in direct opposition to the current focus on profit over people.

In relation to cross-disciplinarity, the fragmented ways in which scholars often work in the UK or other parts of Europe, for example, often restricts the ability to undertake research that breaches or outright ignores traditional disciplinary boundaries. Academia, in many places, is still highly siloed, with each discipline throwing up walls to guard 'their' area, which has bled into more umbrella fields like leisure studies. More specifically, there is a tendency to create barriers and delineate what is and isn't leisure research, which can be alienating for individuals who potentially could enhance and advance existing leisure research by providing new perspectives. The LSA has adopted a very open approach to leisure research with a firm stance that anyone who feels that they are a leisure researcher has a space in our community, regardless of discipline or method. This reflects my own personal anti-disciplinary stance in regard to not just leisure research but academia as a whole. I am a firm believer that the separation of knowledge is inherently limiting and that we as scholars should be tearing down existing walls instead of putting new ones up.

The Academy of Leisure Sciences (TALS)

While the Academy of Leisure Sciences was founded in 1980 with a stated central purpose as the intellectual advancement of leisure sciences, it remained a rather small and select group. A recognized group of outstanding scholars were elected as Fellows by their peers and formed the Academy. The Academy established annual meetings and activities, such as the Leisure Research Symposium (LRS), which was held within the National Recreation and Park Association annual congress. The LRS was the sole exchange of ideas on leisure within the United States that advanced any degree of intellectual understanding of leisure, as well as promoting the production of research that studied leisure (recreation, recreational therapy, parks and recreation, outdoor recreation, adventure education, tourism, and sport). While it is significant that the original 30 Fellows have grown to a more membership-driven organization and/or association of over 150 individuals (TALS, n.d.), it is also significant that there is a depth to this history that bears study, discussion, and scrutiny. The aim of this brief section is to highlight the foci of the inclusive-minded Fellows and members that began in 1991 with the Society of Parks and Recreation Educators Teaching Institute held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and the 2017 proto-Research Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, as they worked to think more broadly, more critically.

While there has been much to justify the decades-long prioritization of everything other than leisure (theory, philosophy, history, etc.), the subfield study and growing emphasis on sport, tourism, recreation, events, and even parks illustrated a significant fracturing of the field of leisure. Indeed, without leisure, what brings us into the room together? Youth? No. Community? No. Economic development? No. Those very sub-fields have fractured. Consider, for example, outdoor recreation, which has been broken up by conferences and gatherings around adventure education, outdoor leadership, along with regional meetings that have grown (SEER – Symposium on Experiential Education Research and NERR – The National Environment and Recreation Research Symposium, among others).

The loss of a leisure philosophy that could bind us results in an unclear future. This loss is not just present in the conference foci but also in the loss in courses at the undergraduate and graduate level. All told, this results in future loss, as new researchers graduate from programs with even more of a distance to what once bonded and brought

so many into the same room. Yet, each leisure-related journal reflects a selective viewpoint of past arguments and regional agreements that resulted in further fracturing as well as a current confusion regarding the philosophical underpinning of leisure by newer academicians, as people will present and publish exclusively through those fractured outlets.

Another factor that we must be honest about is the industry and grant foci of our teaching and research. Abandoning leisure as a justified course of action when making a case for the so-called future financial boon from privatized (e.g., Disney, Hilton) and philanthropic (e.g., Robert Wood Johnson) funding, federal grants (e.g., NIH, NSF), and perceived social respect (public health, experience, hospitality) has never panned out – at least in a sustained way. The focus on the perceived financial rewards from these privatized, philanthropically funded, and perceived socially respectable outlets was never fully realized for the greater field. The absence of thinking deeply and critically (position and power) about what is provided in leisure service delivery has produced empty understandings of recreation programming without thinking about the populations that must be served (or at least forcing ourselves and our students to think about other populations than the wealthy). While a leisure focus does not inherently produce social responsibility, the histories of leisure can point people to at least consider it as a need. But the lack of socio-political relevance (i.e., human rights, homelessness, critiques of capitalism, and problematizing histories) has even adversely affected the depth and scale of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. We are still 'discovering' cases of discrimination and social inequity.

While this seems quite critical, publication outlets and presentation venues create the strongest hope for the future by creating infrastructure for the future. Rewriting and revising old textbooks; socially conscious themes for conferences, conference sections, symposia, and workshops; and the call for special issues of journals and special topic calls for book chapters create avenues for not returning to the blind embrace of 'leisure is good' and 'benefits [of recreation] are endless.' As well, overcoming geography and embracing internationalism via travel to meetings and communication can also eliminate the need to be dependent on any one of our associations (while also strengthening our interconnections, as long as we work within this frame). Through adopting aspects from fields that are partially related to leisure studies, like geography (American Association of Geographers [AAG] and its special interest groups – i.e., Feminist Geographers, Socialist Geographers, Black Geographers, Urban Geographers; there is also a Recreation, Sport and Tourism group) and like Urban Affairs (that split from AAG, and serves all people that are interested and working within urban studies, city planning, urban sociology, urban political economy, more focused on-the-ground organizers, and more ethical industries and city officials), there is much we could learn, appropriate, adopt, and integrate. But the potential creation of a completely separate critical leisure studies field, which is free of institutional limitation, free of degree, and free of field specificity, may be the very future we need.

World Leisure Organization (WLO)

Leisure has been loosely described as an umbrella concept that encompasses play, recreation, arts and culture, sport, festivals and celebrations, health and fitness, travel and tourism, and education. The World Leisure Organization (WLO), formed in 1952, is also somewhat of an umbrella organization that works to provide space for its members

to collaborate, advocate, and educate citizens, students, and decision-makers worldwide. The WLO publishes the *World Leisure Journal* (WLJ) and manages Special (Research) Interest Groups and World Leisure Centers of Excellence at seven universities. Its consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council is another aspect that makes WLO unique (World Leisure Organization, 2023a).

Before the pandemic, the WLO was evolving, building a global network of leisure-focused Centers of Excellence, Expos, Congresses, and scholarly opportunities. The Secretariat moved from the United States to Spain in 2016, changing its management and governance structure. In 2017, the World Leisure Special Interest Groups (11 topic areas) became more inclusive and member driven, and the World Leisure Communities of Excellence program was launched. The 2018 World Leisure Congress in Sao Paulo, Brazil, launched the Global Leisure Studies Debates, a platform for leisure scholars and executives to discuss relevant leisure issues critically. During the pandemic, this evolved into the Global Leisure Debates, engaging representatives from the scholarly leisure associations (World Leisure Organization, 2023b).

At the heart of the WLO is the foundational belief that leisure is a human right; however, it is also recognized that access to and participation in leisure is not universally available or inherently inclusive. Addressing these challenges has become more difficult as governments are increasingly occupied with post-pandemic austerity, the rise of ultra-conservatism, and the spreading of global conflict. Thus, the education of future leisure scholars and service providers must address the socio-economic and socio-political forces that limit access to leisure.

As we move into a future likely to be defined by challenges resulting from climate change, global conflict, increased human migration, biodiversity loss, and worsening health outcomes, leisure and the scholarship of leisure will become increasingly important. Within the leisure academy, it is understood that leisure provides a space where common ground can be found and lead to personal and collective transformation. However, decision-makers and community leaders are not always quick to understand nor support the essential role of leisure services within society. In response, the WLO is committed to using its programs and platforms to promote the value and role of leisure in building social cohesion and open, inclusive, and pluralistic societies.

A commonality between the leisure associations is the commitment to sharing scholarship on diverse leisure-related topics. The WLJ has been published since the late 1950s, and like many leisure journals, Western perspectives and experiences were privileged. Rodríguez (2023) highlighted the consequences of such a privilege, which has resulted in intellectual colonialism within leisure studies in the Global South. Thus, the discussions at the 2023 World Leisure Congress in Aotearoa, New Zealand, which suggested that the WLJ move toward publishing different types of scholarship and accepting submissions and publishing in more than English, mark a potential change in this situation. Opening the leisure academy to diverse world views and global perspectives on leisure can only improve our understanding of leisure and its role in the human experience worldwide.

Conclusion

This paper began with what is likely an impossible task: to come to terms with the history of leisure studies so as to begin to think about its future. Of course, we all realize that *this* known and recorded history presents a rather unsatisfying and very partial and/or particular

story, and (too) much is missing. Nonetheless, we aimed to reflect on the ways leisure students have talked to themselves and each other about what the field is, so that we could begin to understand what it could and should be. This discussion is only the beginning of a series of similar conversations over the span of several regional conferences. Ideas were expressed publicly, to attendees and to each other (as reflected here in the recapturing of the points that were made). Future conversation will need to lead to the interrogation of these ideas by attendees and each other. We ended with a presentation of a set of views about leisure studies that tried to situate this story within a wider frame by looking at it through the eyes of scholars involved with a few of its more well-known and influential organizations. A telling of the social history of leisure will nearly always be bounded up in apolitical and atheoretical takes of what came before (in thinking about Cross, 1990), especially if we are thinking of or studying the forces of capital, consumption, accumulation, modernity, and post-modernity that produce it (Rojek, 1995). What is even the society that we are referring to, wanting to influence or aid, or to change? Is there a leisured society (Veal, 2011, 2012)? And if so, how was it produced? Who works it and who enjoys the spoils of it? But again, what is leisure is not the question; the question is, what is the future of leisure studies? We believe you get the point; the question of what is the past of leisure studies is likely an unanswerable question. So, again, what then, is the future of leisure studies?

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Note

1. The denotation of “We” will stand in for the authors of this manuscript unless otherwise noted.

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