State of Play: Information Phenomena in a Leisure Context

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Abstract
This panel presents current information behaviour research in the context of leisure. It continues a tradition of locating work within the theoretical framework of leisure, the Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP). Five years has passed since the last public discussion of this topic at an ASIS&T Annual Meeting and in the intervening time much progress has been made in understanding leisure information phenomena. Our goals are to stimulate interest in leisure as a setting for information behaviour scholarship; provide a status report on the topic; and introduce new ideas associated with digital gaming, fun, and happiness. The panel includes four concise presentations from leading researchers currently focused on different leisure contexts. We assume that some members of the audience will have research underway into leisure information phenomena and they will be invited to share their experience, as well; a lively discussion will develop in the presence of experts and newcomers to this topic.

Keywords
Information behaviour, information retrieval, leisure, serious leisure, casual leisure, digital games

Leisure as a Context for Information Behaviour
A meaningful area of life is leisure. For many people, leisure is a source of joy, happiness, and physical health (Argyle, 1996, p. 6). In communities leisure creates a sense of fraternity and vitality, it is "...the space of friendship, of much parenting and nurture, of community interaction and of the family itself" (Kelly, 1983, p. 23). More so than any point in history, leisure is a significant component of everyday life.
To varying degrees all forms of leisure involve information behaviour. Enthusiasts take steps to discover what leisure opportunities are available, and to know where, when, and how to participate. While leisure clearly involves information phenomena, the matter has not been systematically or thoroughly investigated by information researchers. Most theories and concepts of information behaviour have been based upon research into work and professional scenarios. Since such work settings differ in nature from leisure, it is a mistake to apply extant theories and insights about information behaviour to leisure contexts or leisure information provision.

In response to the relative neglect of leisure as a research subject, scholars of information behaviour have started in the past decade to focus on leisure as a special context. When doings so, many have utilized a theoretical framework of leisure, the serious leisure perspective (SLP) (Stebbins, 1982). The SLP describes major forms of leisure and their social, social-psychological, and psychological features. The SLP divides leisure into three main forms: casual leisure, serious pursuits, and project-based leisure. Casual leisure is engaged in hedonistically for its significant level of pure enjoyment (Stebbins, 1997). Project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2005) entails short-term, moderately complicated, creative undertakings. Serious pursuits (Stebbins, 2012a) include serious leisure: an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.

Hartel (2003) introduced the SLP into information science as a means to conduct systematic research into leisure information behaviour, and to focus information science on pleasurable and profound experiences (Kari & Hartel, 2007). The first public conversation occurred at the panel “Taking Leisure Seriously: Information Realities in Leisure Time” (Hartel, 2006) during the 2006 ASIS&T annual meeting. Thereafter, interest in leisure grew among information researchers and a Library Trends special issue on serious leisure (Fulton & Vondracek, 2009) showcased studies of pleasure reading (Ross, 2009), backpacking (Chang, 2009), genealogy (Fulton, 2009), and numismatics (Case, 2009). Other noteworthy happenings include a second ASIS&T conference panel on leisure (Hartel & Kari, 2009), a JASIS&T article on rubber duck collecting (Lee & Trace, 2009); the first chapter on leisure in an information science encyclopedia (Hartel, 2010); and a research program into casual leisure information behaviour (Wilson & Elsweiler, 2010; Elsweiler, Wilson, & Kirkegaard-Lunn, 2013) among other groundbreaking studies.

The findings from this emerging body of research are hard to summarize in a short space except to say they are important. Leisure information phenomena differ markedly from conceptions of information behaviour as tasks or problems; tend to defy the principle of least effort; and feature distinct temporal patterns. Whereas research in the past decade has largely consisted of narrow case studies into specific leisure activities, the work now underway engages larger swaths of leisure and is centered upon new concepts, such as gaming, fun, and happiness. Overall, our panel aims to stimulate interest in leisure as a
setting for information behaviour scholarship; provide a status report on the topic; and introduce new ideas.

Participants and Their Presentations
Each of the four panelists will present for 6-8 minutes. Presentations will be timed to keep the entire session on schedule.

Jenna Hartel (moderator): “Leisure as a Context for Information Phenomena”
My presentation will explicate leisure as a context by surveying recent theoretic developments in the SLP, namely: project-based leisure and its subforms (Stebbins, 2005); serious pursuits (Stebbins, 2012); and devotee work (Stebbins, 2004). I will highlight the idea of core activity (Stebbins, 2012), which brings all leisure activities into sharper focus. What is more, in a critical spirit, I will address the recent challenge to the SLP from Shen and Yarnal (2011), who argue that leisure activity is better represented along a continuum. These new concepts and alternative views have considerable implications for information behaviour research.

Biography: Dr. Hartel's academic career is organized around the question: What is the nature of information in the pleasures of life? She investigates this matter through the concatenated study of serious leisure realms. She introduced the SLP to information science (2003, 2005), generated the first detailed description of information phenomena in a making and tinkering hobby (Hartel, 2007), and manages The Serious Leisure Perspective website. Jenna takes an interdisciplinary approach and is involved in sociology and leisure studies, especially through collaboration with Dr. Robert A. Stebbins. Her goals are to generate basic knowledge about information in the pleasures of life; challenge existing ideas that have largely emerged from academic problem scenarios; establish positive models of organic, flourishing information environments; enliven classrooms with upbeat topics; and enrich the information experience for leisure enthusiasts.

Christopher J. Young: “Information/Leisure/SLP and Digital Games”
A new, exciting, and complex research area exists at the crossroads of information/leisure/SLP and digital games. The field of game studies has generated original theoretical frameworks about games and gaming experience as a form of play (Grimes & Feenberg, 2009; Huizinga, 1950[1938]; Juul, 2005; Mortensen, 2009; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Spariosu, 1989; Suits, 1978; Taylor, 2006). However, digital gaming has yet to be located within the SLP. Within the SLP, digital gaming may take the form of casual, serious, or project-based leisure, each with distinct motivations, benefits, and social context. This approach would generate a rich new understanding of gaming cultures and also place digital games in relation to other types of leisure. Modding, hacking, and creating digital games are possible information behaviours within gaming cultures that have yet to be explored as forms of serious leisure. My presentation will address the existing
disconnects in the research about information/leisure/SLP and digital games and propose an intelligent and original way forward. As gaming becomes an increasingly popular form of leisure, all social sciences would benefit from an integration or reconciliation of these associated concepts and domains.

**Biography:** Chris J. Young is a doctoral student at University of Toronto’s Faculty of Information, Knowledge Media Design Institute, and Semaphore Lab. His research interests include games and play cultures, information seeking and use practices, and cultural industries and labour. For his doctoral thesis, Chris will be conducting a yearlong ethnography of the information seeking and use practices of hobbyist and amateur “indie devs” in Toronto’s “indie game scene”.

**Max L. Wilson: “Searching, Because It Is Fun”**
Traditional views of information seeking typically revolve around an information need, and if we don’t know what that is, or how to describe it, then searchers engage in broader exploratory behaviours. This brief talk will present the view of what is missing in these notions, when we are searching for fun. Not trying to find fun, but because mindlessly searching online, like surfing the web, is a pastime that many people enjoy, sometimes for many hours. I will present findings from some of our recent work and introduce elements of our casual-leisure information behaviour model.

**Biography:** Dr. Wilson is an assistant professor in Human-Computer Interaction and Information Seeking at the University of Nottingham. Max publishes widely in the space between HCI, Information Retrieval, and Information Science, at venues from ACM SIGCHI to *JASIS&T*, including a book on Search User Interface Design with Morgan Claypool, and an award winning book chapter on Understanding Casual-Leisure Information Behaviour. As well as serving on the IP&M Editorial Board, and on several conference committees (e.g. CHI 2010-2014, IIiX2010-14), Max has organised several workshops, including the EuroHCIR series, and the Searching4Fun workshop at ECIR2012 and IIiX2014.

**Ian Ruthven: “The Importance of Small Things”**
Information science has tended to prioritize the permanent over the ephemeral, the formal over the informal and the serious over the trivial. However much of our information behaviour take the form of evanescent activities that, while appearing insignificant individually, are important to relationship formation, mood management and to portraying a sense of self to the outside world. In this presentation I will share findings on why small information acts are important and meaningful, particularly focusing on the sharing and receiving of happy information.

**Biography:** Dr. Ruthven is Professor of Information Seeking and Retrieval at the University of Strathclyde. Ian works on the interface between information seeking and retrieval; studying the relationship between the human experience of interacting with information and the design of systems that provide access to information. A recurrent
theme arising from these studies is the creative, and often unexpected, ways in which we use technology for important – but not serious – leisure and the significance of such information activities in making sense of our everyday lives.

**Audience Participation**
Our panel will be marked by an extremely collegial and interactive environment. Presentations will be kept short in order to allow ample time for questions and discussion with the audience. We assume that some members of the audience will have research underway into leisure information phenomena and they will be invited to share their experience; a lively discussion will develop in the presence of experts and newcomers to this topic.

**References**


