Taking Leisure Seriously: Information Realities in Leisure Time

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Abstract
This panel presents the information realities that exist within leisure time. It introduces a conceptual model of leisure, called serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982), that affirms the role of information in enabling leisure experience. Our panel offers a theoretical perspective and case studies of a meaningful area of everyday life that has not been a subject of much information research. The specific goals are threefold:

1.) To present state of the art theorizing and research underway into the information seeking and use that occurs in the everyday life realm of leisure
2.) To introduce serious leisure, a concept that serves as a unifying umbrella and theoretical frame for such work, and
3.) To showcase fruitful international collaboration underway between leisure science and information studies

Background
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 (Argyle, 1996, p. 1; Robinson and Godbey, 1997; Stebbins, 2001, pp. 147-149).
To varying degrees all forms of leisure involve information seeking and use (ISU). Enthusiasts take steps to discover what leisure opportunities are available, and to know where, when, and how to participate. The notion of ISU in leisure is proposed in theory and confirmed in empirical research. Savolainen identifies pleasantries, interests, and hobbies as factors in a "way of life" sustained through information seeking (1995, p. 262-265). Information institutions such as the library and Internet are resources for leisure materials, information, and experiences. Surveys report that 87% of library visits are for entertainment (Vavrek, 2001); and the internet is most often a resource for hobbies or fun (Pew, 2005).

While leisure involves ISU through outlets like libraries and the Internet, the matter has not been systematically investigated by information researchers. Little is known about the acquisition and use of information in leisure. Instead, 95% of the 3,000 ISU studies since 1966 have focused on scholarly or professional environments (Harris & Dewdney, 1994, p. 9). Since such work settings differ in nature from leisure, it is a mistake to consider extant theories and insights about ISU to pertain to leisure contexts, or be useful in guiding leisure information provision.

In response to the relative neglect of leisure as a research subject, and in some cases out of sheer curiosity, scholars of ISU are beginning to explore information phenomena in free time. A landmark study of pleasure reading (Ross, 1999) came to the unexpected conclusion that pleasure readers find information without seeking, confirming that leisure contains unique information phenomena. Subsequently, there have been inquiries into ISU in sex (Spink, Ozmuslu, & Lorence, 2004), the paranormal (Kari, 2001), genealogy (Yakel, 2005), outdoor recreation (Ernest, Level, Culbertson, n.d.) and gourmet cooking (Hartel, 2003). It is premature to attempt a synthesis of this work, since there is great methodological diversity.

Several researchers of leisure ISU have come to consensus that serious leisure is an ideal approach for studying ISU in leisure. Serious leisure is a grounded descriptive framework that maps the landscape of leisure and points to its most information-intensive forms. Serious leisure operationalizes central leisure concepts, and explicates many psychological and social characteristics of leisure. As an umbrella, serious leisure sharpens and systematizes research, so that leisure realms can be compared and ultimately generalized.

Panelists and Presentations
The panel features the originator of serious leisure, Robert A. Stebbins, and four information scholars conducting research on information phenomena therein. The group comes from three disciplines (sociology, information studies, communications), four continents, and has new and seasoned scholars. Three different serious leisure settings serve as case studies: genealogy, hiking, and coin collecting. The five presentation titles and abstracts are below in order of appearance.

**Introduction: Locating Leisure in Information Seeking and Use Research**
Jenna Hartel, organizer and moderator, Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

To contextualize the idea of studying serious leisure for its ISU, I will address: 1.) The history of ISU research, explaining its favoritism for scholarly and professional subjects, 2.) The recent emergence of the everyday life information seeking (ELIS) specialty, 3.) Seminal works on leisure and the problem of their methodological diversity, and 4.) The solution available in the serious leisure framework. Later, I will conclude the panel session with remarks about the value, challenges, and potentials of this research area, and then facilitate a discussion period.
Leisure and Information Science: Bridging the Gap
Robert A. Stebbins, Department of Sociology, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The serious leisure framework, which has been under development since 1973, is my name for the theoretic framework that synthesizes three main forms of leisure, known as serious leisure, casual leisure, and project-based leisure. So far as I can tell at present, all leisure (at least in Western society) can be classified according to one of the three forms. The three forms are briefly defined as follows. Each has several types and subtypes.

- **Serious leisure**: the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.
- **Casual leisure**: an immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable core activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy it.
- **Project-based leisure**: a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time. It requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge, but for all that is neither serious leisure nor intended to develop into such.

Serious leisure is the most complex of these three, which suggests that it offers the richest lode for LIS researchers to mine. Its complex social organization and core activities generate a huge need for communication of information among participants in particular leisure activities. Nevertheless, certain types of casual and project-based leisure can also be fruitfully analyzed for the distinctive ways in which they generate and disseminate information. In short the serious leisure perspective offers a framework for systematically exploring people’s use and dissemination of information in their free-time.

Quid Pro Quo: Information Sharing in Leisure Activities
Crystal Fulton, University College Dublin School of Information and Library Studies, Ireland

Amateur genealogy may be characterized as serious leisure, that is an amateur or voluntary activity in which the hobby forms a central life interest, with participants actively acquiring and expressing special skills, knowledge and experience (Stebbins, 1982). The information world of the amateur genealogist involves an intricate network of information, which the participant must navigate to follow an individual trail of ancestry. As a result, information seeking and exchange are key features of genealogy. In particular, information sharing supports information seeking in this hobby.

Clarke (1973) refers to information sharing as information that is exchanged within a social group, whereas information seeking involves intentional exploration for information outside one’s circle. Rioux (2005) offers a framework for information acquiring-and-sharing (IA&S), identifying a highly social and pleasant information behavior in which individuals store and recall the information needs of others, associate the acquired information with an individual, and share this information.
The importance of information in genealogy means that information sharing among participants is not only a social, enjoyable activity, but also a serious activity, in which the actual exchange of information is emphasized, as well as the quality of the information shared. Community members may be categorized by members according to perceived usefulness and helpfulness of the information they share and selected for further interactions based on this categorization. In addition, information sharing may extend beyond one’s immediate social, familial, or genealogical circles to the broader genealogical community and other areas of one’s life.

This paper examines the information sharing behavior of amateur genealogists as a means of connecting with each other, in which the standard for acceptable information sharing is equivalent exchange of information deemed appropriate by individual participants.

**Information Acquiring in Leisure Activities – Backpackers’ Search for Tourist Information**
Shan-Ju Chang, Department of Library and Information Science, National Taiwan University, Taiwan

This presentation considers backpacking as “way of life” in the context of everyday life information seeking (Savolainen, 1995) and focuses on the search for tourist information by backpackers. Backpackers need to search for information before, during, and even after traveling, in order to make their trip worthy in terms of their money and time. For backpackers, creating a traveling plan involves many tasks such as deciding where to go, how to get there, what are interesting to sightsee, what should not miss, what are the social landscape and safety conditions etc. They have to make decisions based on information they collected and yet they are also flexible and may change the courses along the way.

Exploring the needs for information and information acquiring strategies of 30 subjects who had experience in backpacking from an in-depth interview with each, our research on backpackers shows that their information search can be conceptualized as a three-stage information search process. In each stage, depending on the type of task, backpackers use various information resources, such as tour guides, maps, fliers, websites, discussion bulletin board etc. for different purposes. Depending on the characteristics of the source of information, one is relied on more than the other in different stage of traveling and for different task and purpose.

**'Are they fake?' Discourse About Coin Collecting and Trust**
Donald O. Case, College of Communications and Information Studies, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, USA.

The collecting of things for pleasure is an almost universal human experience. Psychological studies tell us that it is deeply connected to the development of the self and of relations with the world and other people. A naturalistic study of numismatists explores the notion of trust in transactions as played out in both face-to-face (F2F) and electronic (e.g., eBay) marketplaces. The investigation asks several questions, among them: What role does collecting play in the self-image of numismatists? What are the motivations of coin-collectors; e.g., is mainly for leisure, or is it pursued for profit or investment? Is this type of collecting a form of “consumption,” as some scholars claim? Where do coin collectors get their information, and how do they evaluate it? How do...
theories of social capital and trust apply to transactions among collectors, especially online purchases from strangers? Thus far I am finding that motivations vary widely, and that "trust" is an important component in both F2F and online sales. The increased ease of global transactions and electronic markets, and an increasing volume of counterfeit coins, are among the recent challenges to this community of collectors. Numismatists have responded to "fakes" and their sellers with actions and attitudes that preserve both the meaningfulness of their hobby and their own "face" in light of accomplished and attempted swindles.

References


