

What is leisure?

Key concepts

The main concepts covered in the chapter are:

- The nature of leisure
- Leisure time
- Leisure organisations in the public and private sector
- The management of leisure organisation.

Introduction

This chapter considers the concept of leisure in relation to individuals, organisations and society as a whole. It looks at:

- the nature of leisure in 2004 against the historical backdrop of leisure development;
- the concept of leisure time as a sociological phenomenon;
- different types of leisure activities, and the organisations that provide leisure products and services in the public and private sector;
- the importance of management theory in leisure organisations.

There has been a considerable degree of overlap and disagreement between the different aspects of leisure provision. Leisure organisations include these in tourism and hospitality sectors as well as the more traditional providers in the arts, sports and recreation sectors. Similarly, there is an increased level of blurring of what constitutes a leisure organisation through the eyes of the consumer. The retailer that provides shopping and eating experiences for the consumer, for example, can be just as important to them as the cinema, public house or football ground. It is true that leisure

has become a much more holistic experience that incorporates a myriad of organisations providing a vast range of leisure experiences.

This chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the concept of leisure and is followed by three chapters that explore the international market, the international leisure consumer and the international business environment in some more depth. Before we do this, however, let us think of the concept of leisure and define what it means in the broadest sense.

The nature of leisure

Leisure is a term that has been used to encompass a whole series of experiences that people can undertake in their free time. To sociologists, however, leisure encompasses a state of mind that an individual finds herself or himself in at a particular time. We shall now explore these ideas in more depth with reference to key academic authors to illustrate the point made.

The concept of leisure permeates a wide range of responses and it could be argued that it is a sense of time, rather than a sector at all. The management and marketing of leisure experiences has had a profound effect on the lives of people in history and in the early stages of the new millennium. Leisure is also big business and has spawned economic growth in countries where societies had depended more on production industries rather than service industries.

But, before we consider the business of leisure we should consider the theoretical framework of leisure as it has been developed by commentators in the twentieth century on the basis of the long historical development of the concept from ancient times.

A useful framework is explored by Torkildsen (2001) in his wide-ranging book entitled *Leisure and Recreation Management*. He suggests that his analysis of the literature on leisure reveals five discernible but overlapping approaches which are useful to consider here. The five overlapping approaches to leisure are summarised in Figure 2.1. It can be seen from Figure 2.1 that leisure has been viewed very differently by different authors and that it can range from a sample activity to an all-encompassing state of mind

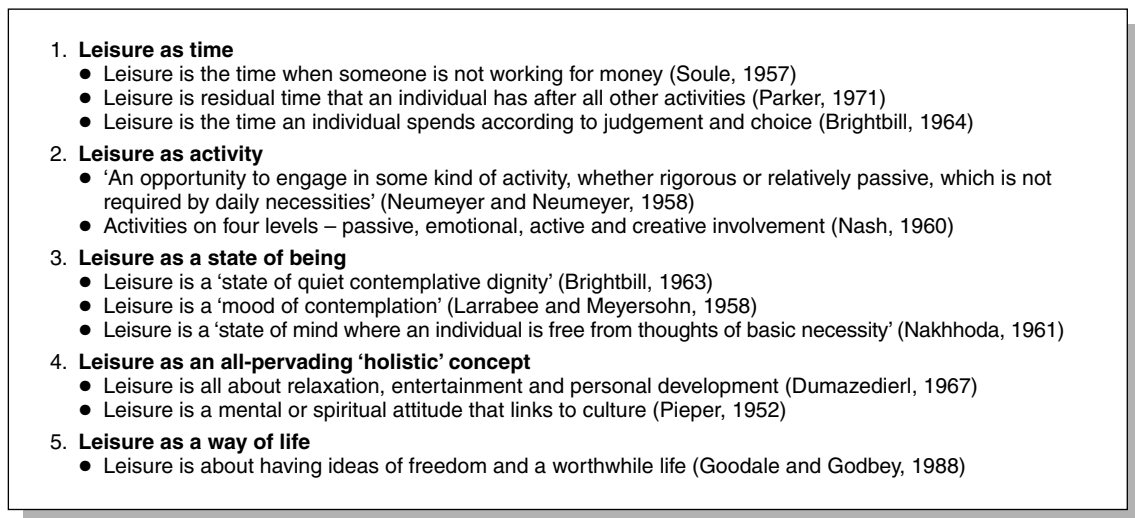


Figure 2.1 Five approaches to the concept of leisure (*Source: After Torkildsen, 2001*)

that brings relief from work and other unpleasant life experiences. The leisure sector, however, serves the needs of the consumer who wants to spend his time consuming leisure experiences, so it is worthwhile to spend a little more time considering leisure as a concept of time which we will do in the next section.

Leisure time

We have seen in Figure 2.1 that leisure can be seen as a concept of time. The idea that people have to spend time away from the time they spend providing themselves with the bare necessities of life and equipping themselves with the necessary resources for basic living is a powerful theme in the literature. Torkildsen (2001) also suggested that pleasure forms the central focus of the overlapping ideas of play, recreation and leisure.

We have an inbuilt desire to play. We seek recreational experiences, and we also have the need for leisure experiences that all give us feelings of pleasure. The question arises, however, how each individual decides to spend her or his leisure time given the huge range of opportunities that are on offer in the twenty-first century. We explore myriad opportunities that are open to an individual in their choice of leisure experience in Figure 2.2.

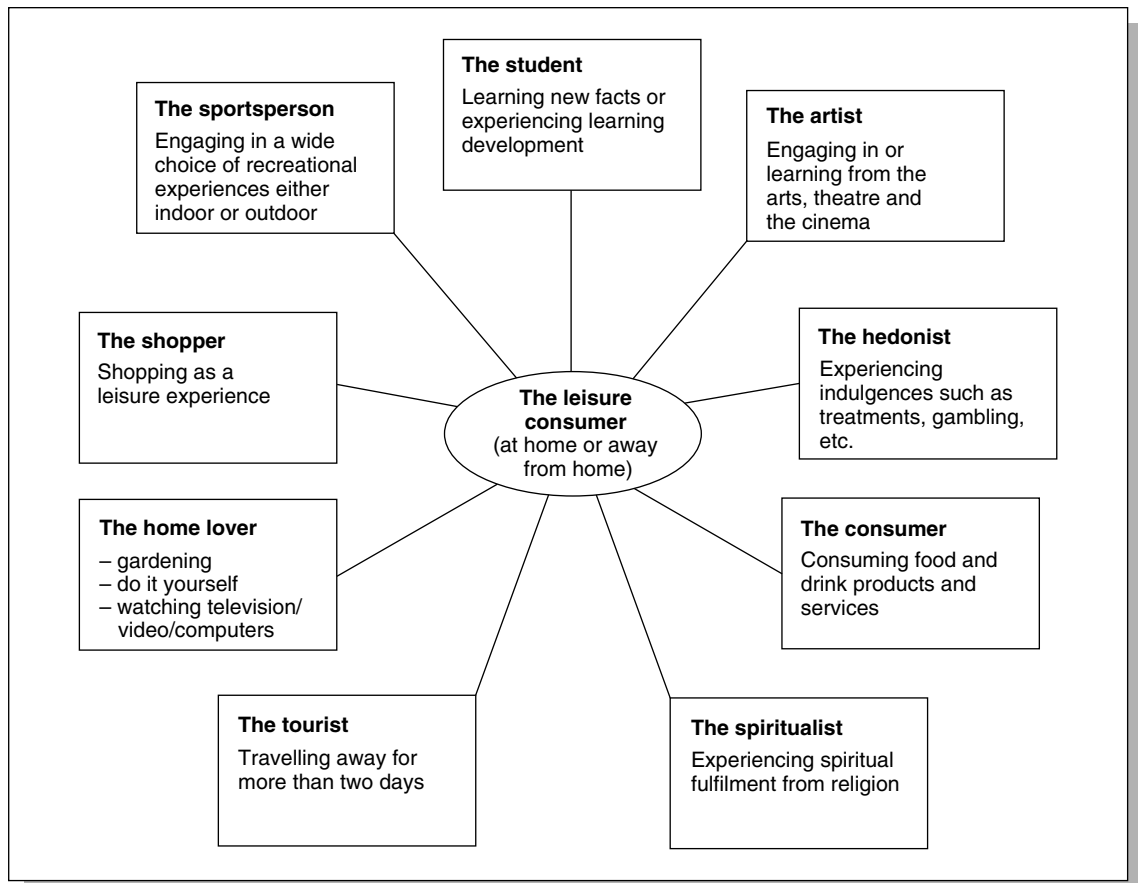


Figure 2.2 The choice of leisure experiences open to an individual

It can be seen from this figure that an individual can choose to spend their time engaging in a series of different experiences during their leisure time to gain different outcomes. Many of these states of mind do overlap – for example, it is possible for an individual to be a tourist, a hedonist and a consumer – during their holiday time spent in Las Vegas for example, when they will be away from home, staying and consuming in a hotel, and partaking of gambling opportunities while they are there. It can be seen from the analysis that leisure is not a simple concept and that an individual is often engaged in a series of leisure experiences to reach a particular psychological state.

The common theme in leisure seems to be that whatever the chosen activity the individual should derive a positive mental state as a result of leisure activities akin to the positive experiences gained by play in childhood.

It seems that leisure is a psychological state of mind derived from a range of different activities that are chosen by individuals from a vast array of opportunities. So, what are the different organisations that provide this vast array of leisure opportunities to us as consumers?

Leisure organisations in the public and private sector

We have already seen that individuals have a huge array of opportunities that are open to them to gain a positive psychological state as a result of leisure activity. It is now important that we start to categorise these leisure organisations into different categories so that we can carry out a more detailed analysis of these later on in the book. Figure 2.3 explores some of the categories of organisations that offer individual leisure consumers different types of leisure experiences.

It can be seen from Figure 2.3 that we are suggesting that there are different categories of organisations involved in leisure provision according to the type of leisure experience that they offer the consumer. These organisations can also be found in the *private*, *public* or *voluntary* sectors according to their constitution and membership.

The leisure industry is therefore composed of a number of overlapping organisations that provide leisure opportunities either in the home or out of the home, either in the regional, national or international context. The leisure industry consists of organisations that provide products and services which are used during people's leisure time (holidays, cinemas, theatres, amusement parks, etc.). The definition of the leisure sector is so broad that it encompasses a myriad of different activities and organisations that might, on the face of it, have little or nothing in common. For example, one could argue that leisure encompasses rock climbing and playing bridge, gambling and church-going.

Three important sectors of leisure are *recreation*, *hospitality* and *tourism*, which will now be considered in a little more depth.

Recreation

Individuals spend time both in the home and out of the home in recreational and play activities. There has been a growth in the number of recreational activities that people can engage in at home as more free time has become available to them, and the emphasis on the home as a desirable and attractive place has grown. Activities such as home entertainment and gardening have grown. The growth of home entertainment systems based on the Internet or other technologies has fuelled the growth of computer games, Internet searching and home-video viewing. Television has even become interactive in the age of digital technology.

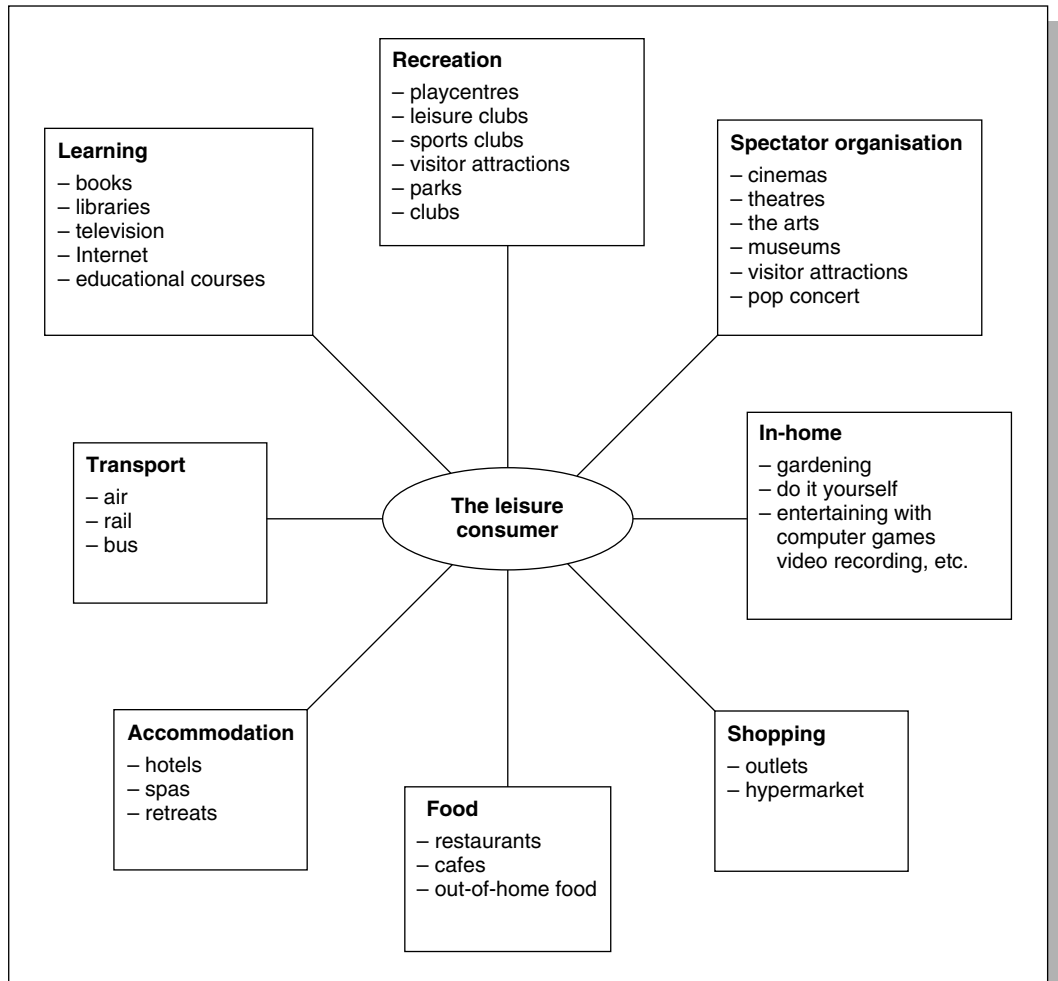


Figure 2.3 Different types of leisure organisations arranged by category

Individuals have also put an increasing emphasis on out-of-home recreation whether they are in the home or away from the home. There has been a growth of private leisure centres, for example, where people can engage in sports and beauty therapies. The growth in adventure tourism has fuelled the development of recreation and sport as being a central focus for a growing number of holiday experiences.

People do not simply sit around on the beach on holiday any more, but increasingly engage in a wide range of recreational and sporting activities. This interest in recreation and sport has also been fuelled by the increasing emphasis of individuals on their health, well being and weight control, a movement which continues to grow in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The provision of out-of-home leisure relies heavily on two very important sectors of the total leisure sector, *tourism* and *hospitality*.

Tourism

Definitions of tourism tend to have several components. In general, tourism is defined as a short-term movement of people to places some distance from their normal place of residence to indulge in pleasurable experiences and activities.

This sounds simple, but it is not. For example, it does not encompass the lucrative field of business tourism where the main purpose of the trip is for work rather than play. Most commentators say that tourism is an activity serviced by a number of other industries such as hospitality and transport. If there is a tourism industry specifically, it is probably made up of the tour operation and retail travel sectors, which did not exist at all until the rise of the modern mass package tourism.

Hospitality

This involves looking after guests well. This is an 'Americanised' term but it is becoming increasingly used in Europe in place of traditional phrases such as hotel and catering or *hôtellerie*. This is perhaps because it has a qualitative dimension, in other words, looking after guests *well* which makes it attractive in an era when quality management is a fashionable concept. The sector also involves all the organisations that are involved in providing services for guests (hotels, inns, restaurants and other recreational activities). This means that hospitality is mainly concerned with the provision of places to sleep and food and drink. Not all hospitality consumers are tourists, therefore, as some will be people going to their local bar for a drink or restaurant for a meal.

The link between different leisure providers is therefore evident from the discussion about the three overlapping sectors above. Leisure is a concept of time, whereas tourism is an activity and hospitality is concerned with the provision of services. For some commentators, tourism and hospitality are merely subsets of leisure. However, this does not take account of the tourist activity and hospitality services which are related to business travel. Others argue that all three are separate, yet there are clearly great areas of overlap between them.

Ultimately it does not matter if we cannot easily see how they interrelate as long as we recognise that they do. However, it would be wrong for us to end this brief discussion without highlighting the problems which this ongoing debate causes for marketing in the field. These include:

- a lack of clarity and problem of duplication and gaps in marketing data;
- the absence in most countries of a single professional body with one voice in all areas of leisure which reduces the potential influence on decision-makers;
- ongoing debates in all three areas by education institutions that perhaps deflect some energy that might otherwise be spent on further improving the quality of education and training for marketing practitioners across the sector.

The blurring of the distinction between organisations in the leisure sector

It is now time to turn our attention to the second question, namely to what extent the overlap between leisure organisations is growing, and the distinctions between them becoming more blurred. Some have said this is a result of postmodernism, but whatever the reason it does appear to be a real phenomenon. Furthermore, it is a phenomenon which appears to be affecting both the demand side and the supply side in leisure.

A number of examples can be used to illustrate this point:

The resort complexes such as Club Méditerranée and Center Parcs offer both hospitality services and leisure facilities on the same site, under the ownership of one organisation. Furthermore, they offer this mixture to a market which largely consists of tourists, in other words, people who have travelled away from home and are spending at least one night away from their normal place of residence.

Theme parks are increasingly offering on-site accommodation units to encourage visitors to spend more time, and thus more money, on site. A good example of this is the Futuroscope theme park in Western France which now has several hotels, of different grades, within the boundaries of the park.

The trend amongst hotels in most European countries is to build in-house leisure facilities for their guests such as gymnasia and swimming pools. This is seen as necessary to attract two very different groups of clients, namely leisure visitors on weekends and business customers on weekdays.

- Leisure shopping is being developed as a tourist activity. Shopping is now used as a way of motivating trips to destinations as diverse as Liverpool in the UK, with its Albert Dock complex, the craft centres of rural Norway and the gold shops of Dubai.
- Sophisticated catering operations are being developed at visitor attractions to boost income. These can range from fast-food outlets to themed restaurants. Interestingly, many of these current developments in Europe are mirroring earlier ones in North America.

At the same time, we are also perhaps seeing a reduction in the gap that has traditionally been seen between the leisure and pleasure, and the business sectors of leisure. For example, theme parks like Chessington World of Adventures are increasingly offering their facilities for corporate hospitality. Likewise the existence of leisure facilities such as golf courses are being used more and more by destinations to attract business conferences, for instance. We are also seeing some changes within the industrial structure of tourism, leisure and hospitality that are blurring the distinctions between the three sectors. For example, some tour operators are buying shares in, or taking full control of, hotels and hotel groups. A good example of this is the partial ownership of the leading Greek hotel chain, Grecotel by the German tour operator TUI. Likewise, there are the hotel chains like Stakis in the UK which own and operate casinos, and tour operators and hotel chains offering holidays based on leisure pursuits such as white-water rafting, bicycling, painting and gastronomy.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that these examples of interrelationships between different leisure organisations are a recent phenomenon. For instance, in the early days of tourism, railway companies and airlines were major owners of hotels.

Nevertheless, the scale of the link within the sector is perhaps unprecedented and the sophistication of the links has not been seen before. This reflects the fact that leisure organisations are all relatively recent developments as 'major industries' and that they are still growing and developing at a very rapid rate. The blurring of the distinction between the three sectors is a truly global phenomenon, although there are national differences in its precise nature. Perhaps, the clearest and most highly developed form of integration between the three is, ironically, an American import, the resort complex concept.

The management of leisure organisations

We have already seen that leisure experiences are about participation in certain activities with the aim of bringing positive health and psychological benefits. Participation in leisure experience has grown over recent years but it has become important that these

experiences are not just open to the most wealthy individuals in society, if positive benefits are to permeate the whole population.

The provision and management of leisure organisations is therefore crucial, so that correct choices of leisure organisations are made to match consumer demand in the first place. The effective and efficient management of the leisure organisation is also crucial so that both the consumer and the organisation can prosper in the long term to bring positive benefit to all. One of the key aspects of this management activity in the twenty-first century is the development of an effective marketing function so that the correct services can be provided and its benefits can be communicated to prospective consumers. This is vital in the private sector where profitability is a central force. It is equally important in the public sector where the organisation is trying to attract certain market segments to partake in their leisure activities. It is now important for us to focus on the international dimension of leisure in more depth before we consider the marketing function for leisure organisations.

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that there are varying views on what is leisure. At the simplest level, leisure refers to the way in which people spend their time when they are not at work.

Sociologists believe that leisure involves an individual reaching a particular psychological state, and it is much more about a holistic experience. Many different types of organisations are involved in the provision of leisure services and the management of these forms an important contribution for economic development.

Discussion points and essay questions

1. Critically evaluate the view that leisure is a concept of time.
2. Discuss the different ways that a person can gain the relaxation, entertainment and personal development that are all part of the leisure experience.
3. Evaluate the role that the public sector has in the provision of leisure services in a region or country of your choice.

Exercise

Choose one leisure organisation from the public, private or voluntary sector. Critically analyse the products and services that the organisation offers. Try to identify who you think the customers are, for the products and services on offer.

Discuss the benefits that you think these customers derive from the products and services provided by your chosen organisation.