

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste

Perspectives

Leisure studies education: Historical trends and pedagogical futures in the United Kingdom and beyond



Karl Spracklen

Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Curriculum
Events
Leisure
Leisure studies
Management

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to stimulate debate about the decline of leisure studies and the rise of courses and subject fields defined by sport, events, tourism management. It is argued that although this decline has happened, there are two possible futures for a re-purposed leisure studies that would ensure its survival.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

My work-place Leeds Metropolitan University (UK) has a global reputation for leisure studies. It was one of the first universities in the United Kingdom to start an undergraduate leisure studies course back in the 1980s, and it has had world-class leisure studies scholarly activity since then. Historically, people like Sheila Scraton, Peter Bramham and Jonathan Long were active in the Leisure Studies Association and the journal *Leisure Studies*. More recently, Beccy Watson has stepped up to the Managing Editor role at *Leisure Studies*, while others have played key roles on the Executive Committee of the Leisure Studies Association. I myself was Chair of the Leisure Studies Association from 2009 until 2013. We still have the Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, arguably the strongest research institute in the university, with dozens of people submitted to the United Kingdom Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Research Excellence Framework. In my building I am surrounded with experts in the sociology of sport, gender studies, tourist studies, mobilities, sports development, cultural geographies, cultural tourism, history of sport, sports marketing, sports management, diasporic studies, critical 'race' studies and disability studies. In the building next door there are specialists in sports coaching, physical education, physical activity and health, and various sports sciences. There are even a few of us who define ourselves strictly as leisure studies scholars – for example, my own professorial title is Professor of Leisure Studies.

On the surface, then, Leeds Metropolitan University seems to have retained this strong reputation for leisure studies. But dig a little bit deeper and you will find that things have changed. There might be a research Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, but there is no School or Faculty with the word leisure in the title. We have a School of Sport and a School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality. These two Schools sit with the School of Education and Childhood in the Carnegie Faculty. Within the School of Sport there is an academic group that carries the title Leisure, Sport and Entertainment, but academic groups are managerial entities that have little impact on how students and the outside world sees us. Both the School of Sport and the School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality might be argued to be doing leisure studies. But suggesting to senior management that they merge the two Schools into a School of Leisure (Studies) will result in a nervous

E-mail address: K.Spracklen@leedsmet.ac.uk

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2014.03.002>

1473-8376/© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

smile and a shake of the head. Each of these Schools has a strong brand that it wants to project to the outside world (we are thrusting and dynamic and open for business), and leisure is seen as something old-fashioned. The School of Sport, as I have said, does still have leisure scholars and leisure taught content (modules, an M.A. in Leisure, Sport and Culture; Ph.D. students), but as of September 2013, with the removal of the B.A. (Hons.) Sport, Leisure and Culture from the School of Sport's portfolio, it no longer has an undergraduate course with leisure in its title.

In this review article, I want to explore the rise and fall of leisure studies in higher education in the United Kingdom. I will contrast what has happened in the United Kingdom with other countries around the world and suggest that there is a clear cycle of subject fields such as sports studies, active recreation, events management and tourism studies breaking away from leisure studies and squeezing leisure studies from the curriculum. This observation about the decline of leisure studies has been made by many others (see Aitchison, 2000; Bramham, 2006; Rojek, 2010; Spracklen, 2009), and there is in the work of some of these particular scholars a strong pessimism about the future of leisure studies. Given the brief history of the rise and fall of leisure studies here at Leeds Metropolitan University with which I started this article, one might think I aligned myself with the pessimism. But in the final section of this article, I will map out possibilities and opportunities for leisure studies – domestically and globally – as a vibrant subject field with a new pedagogical and research focus, and suggest that there are two pedagogical futures for leisure studies in the undergraduate curriculum: challenging students to think critically within otherwise narrowly focussed 'professional' courses; and becoming the new cultural studies.

2. Historical trends

In an interview in the journal *Leisure Studies* (Andrews, 2006), Alan Tomlinson, Professor of Leisure Studies at the University of Brighton and a key figure in the growth of the subject field in the 1980s, suggested there were three important strands to the evolution of leisure studies. The first strand was associated with sociologists who became interested in the status of leisure in modern society in the 1960s and 1970s. These were people such as Eric Dunning, who was interested in the development of modern sport through the lens of Norbert Elias' figurationalism; and Ken Roberts (1978) and Stanley Parker (1971), who were interested in the ways leisure and work were defined and delineated. The second strand was associated with academics that came to be interested in leisure after receiving narrowly-focussed training in Physical Education. The third strand, according to Tomlinson, came from the policy arena (Andrews, 2006, p. 259):

The other kind of contributor to leisure studies in the very early days... came from among people who had gone into the more practical area – variants of recreation management or policy. So in the early to mid-1970s there were some very important planning and policy and management contributors to the formation of the field of leisure studies: some in the private sector, some in the public sector – that was another extremely important route, but of course they were not establishing what you might call an institutional curriculum-based strength for the academic subject area. Some certainly established areas or pockets of excellence for a while, as did Tony Travis in Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham. Tony Veal came through there and Judy White came through the unit, which was research-based, with some Masters type courses. Groups in Edinburgh University and North London Polytechnic were also important pioneers in the field.

From the beginning, then, the subject field of leisure studies combined critical social science research about what people did in their non-work lives with more practical content around leisure management and leisure policy. Sports and active recreation ran through both the critical sociological debates about leisure and the practical debates about how to improve people's leisure lives. The foundation of the Leisure Studies Association in 1975 and the creation of the journal *Leisure Studies* in 1982 established leisure studies as an exciting multi-disciplinary subject field, focussed on increasing knowledge about the function of leisure and sport in everyday lives, while helping policy-makers to make leisure central to their planning. In the United Kingdom, local authorities took on the role of providing leisure opportunities for people, building leisure centres and delivering programmes of leisure and sport. Leisure studies attracted support in education and in the 1980s leisure studies undergraduate degree courses started to appear.

These first leisure studies degrees had very similar content. Running through these courses were those three strands Tomlinson mentioned, distilled into taught content: a critical sociology, a policy and management core, and practical elements associated with sports and active recreation that came from Physical Education. Along with these there were some engagements with other social sciences and humanities such as economics and philosophy, and a sport-studies focus at many colleges that rolled leisure studies and sport science together. Similar courses emerged in other parts of the world, in particular North America, parts of Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. These were mainly called leisure studies degrees, though some were badged as sport studies or recreation studies. Crucially, these first leisure studies degrees were often the only form of leisure study possible in each higher education institution that offered them – they were not competing with sports studies, tourism studies, leisure management, sports development and so on.

The success of these undergraduate courses rested partly on their links with policy-makers and graduate careers in the leisure industry. But they also owed their success to catching a *zeitgeist* of fashionable interest in the problem of leisure in post-industrial societies. Students wanted to learn about how leisure could be used to make sense of community and belonging, or how leisure could be used to favour some groups over others. For many students, however, the popularity of leisure studies was associated with their interest in sports, or other forms of physical activity. In the 1980s, leisure studies

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7420252>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7420252>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)