

Leisure Reflections

Robert A. Stebbins



Professor Robert A. Stebbins pioneered the ideas of "serious leisure," "casual leisure," and "optimal leisure lifestyle" and has spent 30 years studying all three. He is currently Faculty Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary. Author of 26 books and monographs in several areas of social science, his most important works bearing on these three ideas include: *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); *After Work: The Search for an Optimal Leisure Lifestyle* (Detselig, 1998); *The Urban Francophone Volunteer: Searching for Personal Meaning and Community Growth in a Linguistic Minority* (University of Washington, Canadian Studies Centre, 1998); and *New Directions in the Theory and Research of Serious Leisure* (Edwin Mellen, 2001). He is presently conducting a study of leisure activities: *Rocky Mountain hobbyists in kayaking, snowboarding, and mountain climbing* (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada), and working on a grant proposal for research on grassroots associations in the lives of their amateur, hobbyist, and volunteer members and participants. Stebbins is currently awaiting release of a book in the latter area entitled *The Organizational Basis of Leisure Participation: A Motivational Exploration* (Venture, 2002). He was elected Fellow of the Academy of Leisure Sciences in 1996 and, in 1999, elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada; and has been a member of LSA since 1995.

Stebbins's main leisure interests lie in amateur music, where he is a jazz and classical double bassist, and in various outdoor hobbyist pursuits, notably cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking and mountain scrambling (hiking to mountain tops). He is also an active volunteer in the Calgary French community, primarily as President of the Société d'accueil francophone (an organization that helps French-speaking immigrants settle in Calgary). And, to be sure, casual leisure counts as well. For Stebbins it consists mainly of evening conversations with friends and family and dining out in Calgary's restaurants.

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CAREER AND LIFE COURSE: LEISURE AS PROCESS

Career is not a concept widely used in leisure studies. Moreover, I am probably responsible for most of the relatively few appearances it has made in the literature, as seen, for example, in my discussions of 'career volunteers' and 'leisure career' (e.g., Stebbins, 1996b, passim; 2003, pp. 878-880). In fact I have found the idea indispensable, especially in its expression as leisure career. As for life course it is an idea I have used much less, a broader concept than career that, as with career, stresses the process and fluidity of leisure. Nonetheless, life course has somewhat broader currency in leisure studies than leisure career. The object of this edition of 'Leisure Reflections' is to describe for leisure studies the utility of both ideas. That is, both can guide important research as well as provide powerful explanations of certain kinds of data.

Turning first to career, it is necessary to banish the idea that it refers only to work roles, which is erroneous, even while it may help explain why career is so seldom used in leisure studies. Instead, following symbolic interactionist thought, a career is possible in any substantial and enduring role, as found in work, deviance, friendship, and leisure. A leisure career is the typical course, or passage, of a type of amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer that carries the person into and through a leisure role and possibly into and through a work role. Serious leisure participants, be they hobbyists, amateurs, or volunteers, find a career there acquiring relevant skills and knowledge, and accumulating relevant experience. In collective endeavours this may also lead to some hierarchical advancement, as in being appointed principal cellist in an amateur orchestra or voted captain of a sports team.

The essence of any career, whether in work, leisure, or another substantial role, lies in temporal continuity of the activities associated with it. Moreover, we are accustomed to thinking of this continuity as one of accumulating rewards and prestige, as progress along these lines from some starting point, even though continuity may also include career retrogression. In the worlds of sport and entertainment, for instance,

athletes and artists may reach performance peaks early on, after which prestige and rewards diminish as the limelight shifts to younger, sometimes more capable practitioners. Serious leisure careers have been empirically examined in several studies conducted by me (for a list see Stebbins, 1992, pp. xiii-xiv; 2001, p. vii) and in research conducted by Baldwin and Norris (1999).

Career continuity in leisure may occur predominantly within, between, or outside organizations. Careers in organizations such as a community orchestra or hobbyist association only rarely involve the challenge of the 'bureaucratic crawl', to use the imagery of C. Wright Mills. In other words, little or no hierarchy exists for them to climb. Nevertheless, the amateur or hobbyist still gains a profound sense of continuity, and hence of career, from more or less steady development as a skilled, experienced, and knowledgeable participant in a particular form of serious leisure and from deepening self-fulfilment that accompanies this kind of personal growth. Some volunteer careers are intraorganisational as well.

Still, many amateurs and volunteers as well as some hobbyists have careers that bridge two or more organizations. For them, career continuity stems from their growing reputations as skilled, knowledgeable practitioners and, based on this image, from finding increasingly better leisure opportunities available through various outlets (as in different teams, orchestras, organizations, tournaments, and exhibitions as well as in different journals, conferences, contests, and shows). Meanwhile, still other amateurs and hobbyists, who pursue noncollective lines of leisure (e.g., tennis, painting, clowning, golf, entertainment magic), are free of even this marginal affiliation with an organisation. The extraorganisational career of informal volunteers, the forever willing, sometimes highly skilled and knowledgeable helpers of friends, relatives, and neighbours, is of this third type.

Serious leisure participants who stick with their activities eventually pass through four, possibly five career stages: beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. But the boundaries separating these stages are imprecise, for as the condition of continuity implies, participants pass largely imperceptibly from one to the next. The beginning lasts as long as necessary for interest in the activity to take root. Development begins when the interest has taken root and its pursuit becomes more or less routine and systematic. Serious leisure participants advance to the establishment stage, once the requirement of learning the basics of their activity is behind them. During the maintenance stage, the leisure career is in full bloom; here participants are now able

to enjoy to the utmost pursuit of it, the uncertainties of getting established now behind them, for the most part. By no means every serious leisure participant faces decline, but those who do, experience it because of deteriorating mental or physical skills. A more detailed description of the career framework and its five stages is available elsewhere (Stebbins, 1992:chap. 5; on hobbies see Stebbins, 1996a).

Unlike career, linked as it is to particular roles, life course is much broader, covering multiple roles as they evolve, interweave, and are assumed or abandoned across the lifetime of a person (Bush and Simmons, 1981, pp. 155-157). Furthermore, life course, when viewed sociologically, centres on age-graded roles and generational effects. Thus it has a historical dimension as well as links to social structure based on the statuses associated with each role.

Life course is also broader than the related idea of family life cycle, in that the latter is limited to family matters. Additionally, family life cycle, although chronological as career and life course are, is not, however, essentially processual. Process is a continuous series of actions, events, and changes, and in the social sciences, includes the assumption that these actions and the like emerge from, or are influenced by, each other in seamless fashion. Moreover, this influence can have past (retrospective), present (immediate), and future (prospective) components. Life cycle, on the other hand, deals with historically arrayed, discrete slices of time, often called phases, and within each, events and actions are typically treated of as static. The classic study of leisure and family life cycle is that of the Rapoport (1975). In short, life course offers a distinctive perspective on social process and leisure.

Why process is important

The most obvious answer to this question is that human social life is, in significant part, processual, and a complete scientific explanation of that life must therefore include this aspect of it. More subtly, however, is the fact that careers and life course, as processes, are important because they constitute strong motivational forces. For instance, both success and failure in a career often motivate people to try to build on the first to achieve still more success and to do what they must to avoid more of the second. Concerning life course people often seem to want, for example, to harmonize personal interests and role obligations. Thus Wearing and Fullagar (1996) concluded from their studies of Australian women that, today, some of them are modifying traditional family roles to put themselves in a position to pursue roles not traditionally open to females.

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Moreover, both career and life course, by dint of their emergent qualities, encourage people to take stock of what has happened in a particular career or in one's life up to the point of stock-taking. The 'life review' (Butler, 1963), said to be common among the elderly, exemplifies stock-taking of the life course variety. It involves returning to past experiences and unresolved conflicts to make new interpretations of both, the aim being to reintegrate them into life as it has since unfolded. Successful reintegration can bring new significance and meaning to the life course of the subject and prepare this person for death. Likewise, careers in particular roles seem to encourage at various points in time both retrospective and prospective reviews of how they have gone and how they will or could go in the future. Strategizing on what to do with reference to one's career in the present or the future is part of this stock-taking.

This is as true of leisure roles as it is of non-leisure roles. Still, this observation is probably most valid for serious leisure roles, where over the long-term, there are skills and knowledge to develop and apply and experience to accumulate and profit from. The life review in old age could certainly include interpretation of the good and the bad experienced in former serious leisure roles.

Third, for leisure studies specialists interested in narrative research, both career and life course offer useful frameworks for organizing data gathered during interviews inquiring into people's leisure lives. As above, narratives about leisure would seem to be most commonly gathered from enthusiasts who have spent years in a serious leisure activity, who would, it is presumed, have much to recount about their career there and about how that leisure role has meshed with other major roles they have played. Manning's (1999) work on high-risk narratives, which concentrated on hobbyist adventure in nature (sea, jungles, mountains, etc.), exemplifies this approach. And Fullagar and Owler (1998), in a narrative study of people with mild intellectual disability, were, in effect, looking at life

course considerations with reference to their pursuit of leisure in group settings that was more substantial than the 'boring' leisure of entertainment television. Fourth, focus on careers and life course includes the links people have through their various leisure roles to associated statuses and community social structure. For instance, a man serving (role) as a member of the board of directors of a local arts council (status) also has an identifiable place in his community. It is likewise for a woman coaching (role) an amateur sport team (coach as status). Both participants, in pursuing their leisure careers in these roles, simultaneously find a respectable and recognizable place in the larger community, which I have argued elsewhere (Stebbins, 2002, pp. 34-35) is a motivational reward of its own. Life course considerations could enter the picture here through such long-term role interconnections as the volunteer policies of the individual's employer (work role link) and the demands made on that person by family (family role link).

Social dynamics (e.g., process, change) and social statics (e.g., system, structure, organisation) have, since their inception, served as two main poles of theory and research in the social sciences. I am in no position say whether leisure studies favours one pole, but I do believe that more effort could be fruitfully devoted to the dynamics of career and life course, to bring out the fluidity leisure and its plastic intersection of other aspects of life.

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News from ILAM

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Welcome to the fifth instalment of News from ILAM.

As the academic year draws to a close, colleagues may be interested to hear of ILAM's Best Dissertation Award, launched this year. This is open to any higher education institution offering degrees in the field of leisure management and carries a prize for the winner of £100 cash plus one year's free membership. It also offers the winner the opportunity to present his or her findings at the Education and Training Conference in November. Institutions wishing to participate should enter what they consider to be their best student dissertation. The deadline for submission is 30th September 2004. Further details can be obtained from ILAM's Professional Department: www.ilam.co.uk or 01494 874800.

An advance date for your diaries: a one day conference organised by ILAM in association with Manchester Metropolitan University and the LTSN on Thursday 4th November 2004. The theme of the conference is "From PDP to CPD: Personal Development Planning to Continuing Professional Development". The conference will explore a number of themes that focus on personal and career development within the leisure industry, including the transition from PDP to CDP, the ways in which leisure management graduates can plan their career and the concept of the leisure professional. Further details will be available in due course.

More and more leisure management courses are being accredited by ILAM. If you are interested in having your course accredited, contact the Professional Development Department (www.ilam.co.uk or 01494 874800).

Readers of this column will have followed with interest its on-going account of progress towards the emergence of a single professional body for leisure. Unfortunately negotiations have closed following the withdrawal of the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM) from further unification discussions. David Evans, Chair of the ILAM Council, regretted this decision, commenting "From ILAM's perspective, the ending of these discussions is a disappointment. ILAM believes that the interests of the profession would be served most effectively by one professional body to resolve the problems of duplication, fragmentation and a lack of a strong, unified voice for the leisure and recreation management sector." ILAM is continuing to engage with other organisations in the interests of collaborative working. Its working relationship with the National Association for Sports Development continues and the two organisations are currently investigating ways of progressing a number of joint initiatives.

Finally, ILAM's 2004 **Parks, Places and Countryside Seminars**, the theme of which is "Raising Standards", will take place in partnership with the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral on 20-22 September. The event will include presentations by the Civic Trust, Green Flag Award and CABI and also the presentation of the 2004 ILAM Open Space Management Award. Further details from ILAM at **01491 874854**.