

Personal Decisions in the Public Square

Beyond Problem Solving into a Positive Sociology

Robert A. Stebbins

This work looks into how, why, and when people pursue things in life that they desire, those that make their existence attractive and worth living. Robert A. Stebbins calls this "Positive Sociology," the study of what people do to organize their lives such that they become substantially rewarding, satisfying, and fulfilling. Western society has many challenges: crime, drug addiction, urban pollution, daily stress, domestic violence, and overpopulation. Significant levels of success in avoiding these problems brings a noticeable measure of tranquility, but it does not necessarily generate a positive life.

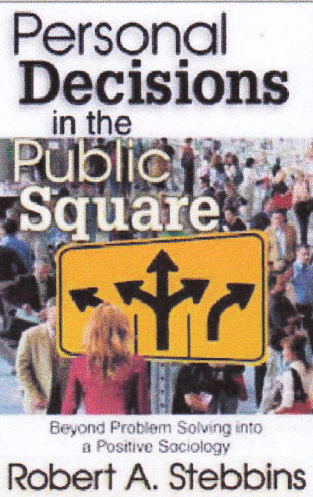
Personal Decisions in the Public Square draws upon, in large part, the sociology of leisure, a "happy science." Among the basic concepts in the sociology of leisure are activity and human agency. The centrality of positive activity is one of its hallmarks and separates it from other social science specialties. Stebbins's positive sociology centers on conceptual roots found in the "serious leisure" perspective. This theoretical framework synthesizes three main forms of leisure (serious, casual, and project-based) while showing their distinctive features, similarities, and interrelationships. Positive sociology also considers two other domains of life: work and non-work obligations.

This new approach focuses on the pursuit of "that which makes life worth living." Stebbins explores goals that are important to all people, such as negotiating the right work/family or obligation/leisure balance and the tricky relationship between money and happiness. Research scientists or the general public may find the ideas presented in this volume help them better understand and negotiate situations, by showing how to approach them in a positive way rather than as "problems" that need to be solved.



Robert A. Stebbins is faculty professor in the department of sociology at the University of Calgary. Among his many books are *Serious Leisure: A Perspective for Our Time*; *Leisure and Consumption: Common Ground, Separate Worlds*; and *Serious Leisure and Nature: Sustainable Consumption in the Outdoors*. In addition,

his work has appeared in both *Leisure Studies* and *Pacific Sociological Review*.



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- Sociology
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"[A] great summary of research and concepts in leisure and an excellent starting point for a theoretical debate about "positiveness" in the personal and public sphere. Well written and very accessible, even for readers not familiar with sociology. Highly recommended."

—G. K. Hearn, *Choice*

"Stebbins elects to focus not on social problems, but on how people construct meaningful, happy, and fulfilled lives. . . . Aside from sociologists of leisure, scholars interested in collective action might take note of Stebbins' approach."

—*Contemporary Sociology*

"The book should be essential reading for students of leisure. It offers a leading edge for researchers who may wish to explore the attractive side of leisure."

—Francis Lobo,
World Leisure Journal