



# Leisure Reflections [65] by Robert A. Stebbins

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'How to Identify the Professional Counterpart of an Amateur Activity'

By Robert A. Stebbins, University of Calgary

In Stebbins (1992) I identified the professional counterpart of the amateur-professional duality as an essential link. Although some of these professionals may be sociological professionals (as described in Stebbins 1992), many economic professionals are in fields where professionalization is in the sociological sense only beginning. Note here that enactment of the core activity by the professionals in a particular field, to influence amateurs there, must be sufficiently visible to those amateurs. If the amateurs, in general, have no idea of the prowess of their professional counterparts, the latter become irrelevant as role models, and the leisure side of the activity remains at a hobbyist level (e.g., the pros are too rare or too obscure). This limitation is unique to the economic conception of professional. Consequently, I have redefined "professional" in economic rather than sociological terms (Stebbins 2007/2015, pp. 6-7). These terms relate better to amateurs and hobbyists, namely, as people who are dependent on the income from an activity that other people pursue with little or no remuneration as leisure. The income on which the professional depends may be this person's only source of money (i.e., full-time professional) or it may be one of two or more sources of money (i.e., part-time professional).

In other words, this sociological conception centers on *liberal* professionals, the ones who serve as models for like-minded amateurs and, for some of the latter, the ones whom they aspire to become for their livelihood. The liberal professions are, according to the European Union's Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC): "those practiced on the basis of relevant professional qualifications in a personal, responsible and professionally independent capacity by those providing intellectual and conceptual services in the interest of the client and the public" (Berkvens 2009). The liberal professionals exercise a calling; theirs is a vocation. Their clients are served by physicians, lawyers, architects, teachers, consultants, and the like, while their publics are served by, for example, musicians, actors,

writers, painters, small businesses and skilled trades and crafts.

### **The Visibility of Economic Professionals**

For hobbyist activities not yet graced with a flourishing (liberal) professional wing, there are degrees of evolution toward such a state in many of the nature challenge (NCA) variety. For instance, some competitive NCAs offer cash prizes to first-place winners and sponsorships (e.g., snowboarding, darts, bass fishing (Yoder, 1997), hunting, surfing, and running. Meanwhile, other hobbyists serve as guides for fishing, hiking, rafting (Carnicelli, 2010), caving, and the like. In these NCAs there are governmental regulations and seasonal variations that limit the number of months a guide may work each year.

Such remuneration amounts to part-time professional work. What do they win? Usually it is a purse, trophy (no money), free equipment or clothing related to their hobby, exposure as a pro (in magazines, TV, films), or sustenance. Among the hobbies discussed in the SLP literature (e.g., Stebbins, 2013), a full-time pursuit is now possible only in the world of darts players. Consequently, they should now be treated of as amateurs (in sports). Some professional hunters work in the private sector or for government agencies and manage species that are considered overabundant,<sup>[1][2]</sup> others are self-employed and make a living by selling hides and meat,<sup>[3]</sup> while still others guide clients on big-game hunts (see <https://work.chron.com/become-professional-hunter-16736.html>). The self-employed hunter appears everywhere to be an increasingly rare worker, even as a part-time pro. As for the professional surfers who win major championships, they are paid a lucrative prize by the WSL (World Surf League), organizer of these events. The participants tour during the year by heading to the best beaches known for good surfing conditions, which often vary over the typical year.

In the past I have listed trapping as an exploitative NCA (e.g., Stebbins, 2013), and as such lacks a professional counterpart. This was not always the case, however, and today the picture is still in flux:

Originally employed for protection against wild creatures — perhaps the series of pits in front of a cave dwelling — or to provide supply of meat and fur wraps, it is necessary to point out that trapping is still part of the daily life of people in the underdeveloped areas of the world. (p.13),

[https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/253345/goldeneaglesports\\_com\\_new\\_sequence=1](https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/253345/goldeneaglesports_com_new_sequence=1))

Nonetheless, trapping mammals for their fur appears in other parts of the world to be losing its appeal as a livelihood at any level of remuneration (p. 17, website above).

Be that as it may, there exist economic professionals who have no significant background as amateurs or hobbyists but still make a living.<sup>[1]</sup> One such occupation is that of the modern state/provincial/national politician (Stebbins 2017). These politicians are not liberal professionals as described above, the ones who serve as models for like-minded amateurs and, for some of the latter, the ones whom they aspire to become.

Max Weber (1946) set out in his essay on politics as a vocation (first delivered as a lecture in 1920), that high-level politicians are guided by one of two ethics.

One is the “ethic of responsibility,” or the desire to work politically for the good of the community. This implies the presence of substantial altruism, where among the serious leisure volunteers who express it, self-interest is a secondary motive. In support of the argument that the modern democratic politician is more and more unlikely to be an amateur is the fact that this person’s career line leading to this role tends not to originate in an academic field. In other words, politics is not a practical application of a field like political science, though some politicians may have an educational background there, in economics or social work, or somewhat more probably, in management, law, or even medicine. Even in the last three on this list, their applied components are not directed toward developing the skills politicians need to do their job. In fact, formal training to be a politician is rare, a lack that led Arjen Berkvens (2009) to develop a unique, 144-page political skills manual.

How do professional politicians fit in this picture, focussing here only those whose political activities are full-time or close to it and who are sufficiently remunerated to find in them a living, whether passable or substantial? First, the modern Western politician seems to be driven very often by Weber’s other ethic, namely, the “ethic of conviction.” Fired by this mentality, its proponents strive to preserve their moral purity, though with little or no regard for the broader consequences of this approach. That is, their beliefs and related actions as they impinge, sometimes negatively, on the well-being of significant parts of the larger society. Politicians acting this way are not altruistic, nor are they serving society as liberal professionals profess to do. Put otherwise, theirs — the first — is no altruistic calling, rather it is dominantly an interest-based pursuit, a drive to work for one’s own narrow concerns and those of one’s special group. That democratic politician of the ethics-of-conviction type lacks altruism (except for one’s special group), sufficient to attest that such enthusiasts are not volunteers (Stebbins, 2019). As critical, volunteering is unremunerated activity, whereas high-level politics is not. Nonetheless, some political volunteers (e.g., those serving in political parties, as candidates for office, in governmental functions) might develop enough of a taste for the political career to aspire to one of their own.

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## **Conclusions**

From this discussion it can be concluded that each NCA studied must also be explored for its distinctive drift toward economic professional work for some

of its participants.

- What evidence is there for such activity?
- Are there organizations and events that facilitate it?
- What is the common level of livelihood in this NCA?
- What are its facilitators (Raymore 2002) and constraints (Scott & Jackson 1999).
- Are these pros evident in the social world of the NCA?
- What is the typical career to professional status from that of amateur or hobbyist?

Most of the NCAs discussed have been, at minimum, scientifically professional existence can be realized there. Bass fishing in the United States has been found to deliver a sort of payment in kind for a select number of contest champions. But, for the rest, we need careful exploratory research to answer these questions.

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### **Endnote**

1 Stebbins (2022) contains an extensive discussion of the hobbyist and amateur activities that can become career paths leading to devotee work, or work that is, in essence, remunerated serious leisure.

### **Forthcoming:**

Leisure Reflections No. 66, July 2024: 'Counteracting Ignorance: The Liberal Arts Hobbies as Cure'