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## Table of Contents

- 162** *Editorial* Grant Cushman and Bob Gidlow  
*Guest Contribution & Commentaries*
- 164** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? IF SO, DOES THIS MATTER? Ken Roberts
- 177** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? INTEGRATING LEISURE STUDIES WORLDWIDE: A VIEW FROM HONG KONG, Atara Sivan
- 181** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? OTHER "MUSICS," OTHER INSIGHTS: A VIEW FROM LISBON, PORTUGAL, José Machado Pais
- 185** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? IT TAKES MORE THAN OPTIMISM: A VIEW FROM ATHENS, GEORGIA, USA, Diane M. Samdahl
- 191** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? A VIEW FROM SAO PAULO, BRAZIL, Ricardo Ricci Uvinha
- 196** IS LEISURE STUDIES "ETHNOCENTRIC"? A VIEW FROM TAICHUNG, TAIWAN, Chieh-Lu Li
- Research papers*
- 200** WHO VISITS THE U.S. NATIONAL PARKS? AN ANALYSIS OF PARK VISITORS AND VISITATION: 1990-2008, Michael A. Schuett, Lena Le, Steven J. Hollenhorst
- 211** WOMEN'S LEISURE AND LEISURE SATISFACTION IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN CHINA, Bob Lee, Aihua Zhang
- 222** VOLUNTEERING AT THE STOCK CAMP: NEGOTIATING SOCIAL POSITIONS, Anne Campbell
- News and notices*
- 232** 2010 ChunCheon World Leisure Congress Honors and Awards, Christopher R. Edginton, Ian Cooper
- 234** 2010 Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship Award Winners, Christopher R. Edginton
- 236** Notice of Special Postgraduate Issue of WLJ

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# Is leisure studies “ethnocentric?” Other “musics,” other insights: A view from Lisbon, Portugal

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Looking at the issue of ethnocentricity in the field of leisure studies, Ken Roberts accepts that the cultural forms of leisure are diverse, whilst recognising a degree of “intellectual colonisation” by the Anglophone world, leading to the adoption, outside this world, of a “Western gaze.” We might go so far as to speak of *hegemony* in a sense not far removed from that of the Gramscian tradition, whereby the “dominated” will accept being taken as represented insofar as they will feel rewarded, at least partially, for their loss of power (Cabral, 2007, p.234). I have doubts about the analogy, despite the undeniable reward represented by participation in prestigious academic events and the possibility of publication in illustrious reviews with an international readership. The obligation of such rewards is to make use of the hegemonic language – which, it must be admitted, has the advantage of permitting communication between people who would otherwise not understand each other. So English has acquired the status of the *lingua franca*.

But the question of hegemony is much more complex. The hegemony asserts itself above all in the paradigms which dominate the production of scientific knowledge. Scientific practices correspond in general to systems of conventions that prefer stable forms of identification, supported by paradigms which are robust and capable of being reproduced and shared by scholars. Indeed, the classic definition of “paradigm,” provided by Kuhn (1975), corresponds to a system of propositions which, by

virtue of guiding the researches of a given set of members of a scholarly community, form the object of “collective beliefs.” Along these lines, scientific theory presents itself as a *scientific habitus* where concepts are frequently treated as intellectual *totems* (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 136). Any science has its own particular ethos (Merton, 1992), complete with rules expressed in the form of prescriptions, prohibitions, preferences, and permissions.

But to what extent might some of these rules have turned into dogmas of an ethnocentric nature? Apparently, the question is all the more relevant when we consider that the emergence of leisure studies appears to correspond to the institution of a desirable field of “normal” knowledge (in the Kuhnian sense of “normal science”). Ken Roberts’ article has the merit of offering an interesting discussion of whether this field of knowledge might be open, despite its alleged ethnocentricity, to listening to “other musics.” I agree with Roberts. The important thing is not to be deaf to the reality around us.<sup>1</sup> Only ears that listen can hope to think (Schafer, 1992). Listening is a way of scrutinising reality.

But how should we reach these other musics? And how should we interpret them? In his *Dictionnaire de Musique* (1767), Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that music is the art of organising sounds to please the ear. But

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<sup>1</sup> James (1988) and Schütz (1964) defined reality as a universe of stimuli which draws our attention.

whose ear? Judging by the Eurocentric vision of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is easy enough to guess. We might accept that the first ears to be pleased should be the composer's. But how can we explain cultural tastes? This is a huge challenge faced equally by ethnomusicology and by leisure studies. In order to investigate the "truth of music" (Mukuna, 2008), ethnomusicologists are committed to discovering what might exist beyond sound. In the equation to be solved, music is the known element; the unknown, the variable to be discovered, is part of the experience of life. Similarly, in leisure studies, the equation to be solved should involve deciphering the unknown that allows us to understand why leisure in one culture is the way it is. We find ourselves here in a debate very dear to anthropologists, concerning the distinctions of "insider/outsider," or "emic/etic" (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Ken Roberts nods quite clearly in this direction when he writes that "what is taken to be objective is simply intersubjectively agreed." Of course, each culture can conceive of leisure on its own terms. But much could be gained if leisure studies could perfect the theoretical and conceptual tools which would enable us to understand, through a sort of "collective hermeneutics" (Molitor, 1990, pp. 19-35), particular cultural phenomena in their proper contexts (Pais, 2009).

What has been discovered in the field of ethnomusicology is a variety of musical traditions and different scales. We could say the same of leisure. If, like music, leisure is a cultural artefact, this means that it reflects variables of context which permit us to understand why the leisure in a given culture is the way it is. I would here like to propose a question for debate: Could leisure be considered not only as the reflection of a culture, but also as a force for cultural influence? The relationship between (social) reality and (cultural) reflection is not one of mere mechanical correspondence, and "cultural reflection" also has the chance to intervene on the reconstruction of "social reality." In other words, this gives rise to *reflexivity*, the capacity to intervene in reality, modifying the representations that reflect reality. What we need to do is to consider the mirror relationship between "mimetic reflex" and "transforming

reflexivity" (Calvo, 2001, pp. 136-8). What I'm proposing here is that leisure be acknowledged as a factor of social change – which poses a fresh challenge: the need to look at social reality from a methodological perspective that confers on leisure a new theoretical centrality.

This hypothesis suggested itself to me when I was invited by the Council of Europe to write a report on the situation of young people in Romania (Pais, 2000). On my visits to a country with which I was unfamiliar, my notebook became my most reliable confidant. I would note down everything, especially the small discoveries made by chance (Becker, 1994, pp. 183-194), which Merton (1968, p. 157) has called "serendipitous findings." The spontaneous exercise of curiosity leads us to formulate puzzles which intrigue us and thereby helps us to overcome the ethnocentricity of people observing a reality alien to them. In this instance I then found that these enigmas were small signs or clues to much more complex realities.

At a meeting in Romania with a group of young people from a rural background (Sarata), one of them professed his great consumer's dream: "to have a mobile phone." Almost all expressed extreme discontent at the isolation in which they lived. They would have liked internet access and more television channels, as the local station provided just a single channel. In a habitat of pre-modernity, the young people laid claim to symbols and values of modernity. On the journey back from Sarata to Cluj, the countryside offered constant contrast. From time to time we were surprised by groups of old peasants sitting by their front doors, waving energetically, their smiles advertising their friendly disposition and missing teeth. They were probably more used to seeing donkeys and carts passing by. Then we would turn a corner and see young peasants working the land, in shorts and t-shirts. And round the next corner an unexpected sight: two young peasant girls digging away and showing off not only their strength but also their looks – they were dressed in bikinis! They were a breath of *post-modernity* in an environment dominated by *pre-modernity*.

In the small towns, I was surprised to see young people climbing on the rooftops in swim-

ming costumes, to get a tan. Even in rural milieux, I noticed that young people worked on stylising their appearance (wearing urban fashions) and deplored the lack of discotheques where they could have fun – not traditional forms of diversion, but “fun” as modelled by urban, globalised culture. The lack of participation on the part of Romanian young people in the formal structures of youth organisations was counterbalanced by alternative juvenile sociabilities, of a performative nature. During another visit to Bucharest, I was struck by the crowds of young people on roller skates and skateboards in the city’s spacious gardens and avenues. I discovered that there was a central meeting point for *rollers* in the city: Herastru Park. This *performativity of skating* is transposed onto other stages. For example, many of the roller skaters are keen snooker players. In both cases, we are dealing with dexterity in the art of “rolling.” These young people need only a “smooth space” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 487) to show off their skills. Most likely, this opening – which emerges in the field of leisure – is what they actually need, in order to set their wider life plans rolling.

Indeed, in contrast with older generations, it is young people who are most likely to embrace the values of post-modernity – including those of leisure. This is the sense in which we can debate new forms of cultural integration by young people, following in the wake of Mannheim (1990), for whom the acceleration of social transformation must necessarily be associated with new opportunities for access to culture on the part of an increasingly well-educated younger generation. Ken Roberts has drawn attention to this important correlation, frequently referring to it in his vast scientific output which, not by chance, has oscillated between the sociology of leisure and that of youth. However, Roberts points out that “it does not necessarily follow ... that uses of leisure will develop in similar ways in all parts of the world.” Indeed, cultural globalisation has not resulted in unavoidable uniformity. The promiscuity between “local” and “global” poses the question of the “frontier” and of “cultural confrontations.” The question that remains open is to what extent the growing proliferation of *intercultural flows*

(migratory, economic, media, etc.) will or will not result in ways of perceiving and communicating which will most likely complicate the demarcation of inter-cultural frontiers. Even in the case of youth cultures, many manifestations appear to be *epidemiological* (Sperber, 1985) – in other words, they affect, simultaneously, a large number of young people in the same region, but their causes are not merely *local*.

The symbols of the “Western way of life” are not necessarily accepted without question. I could point to the example of Coca-Cola. In Brazil, in São Luís do Maranhão, there was a soft drink (*guaraná*) known by the name of “Jesus.” Loyalty to Jesus was so firmly rooted that Coca-Cola had never managed to get a foothold in the market. The multinational was not to be deterred and bought out Jesus, wound up the production of guaraná and expected Coca-Cola to take its place. The strategy misfired. The locals resisted globalisation, until Coca-Cola decided to produce Jesus, putting it back on the market. The city of Maranhão rejoiced in posters proclaiming “Jesus has come again!”

The “local” can also hijack the “global.” I could give the example of *manguebit*, a musical and cultural movement which took shape in the *mangues* (mudflats) of the city of Recife, Brazil. The inhabitants of these wetlands eke out a poor living from catching crabs. The young people of the community created a new musical genre called *mangue*, an expression of a local culture, blending *batuques* and rap. For their symbol, the young people chose the crab (the idea of one step back to take two steps forward is suggestive) and also an aerial, fostering the illusion that they could broadcast their music around the world. So as a local culture, *mangue* aspired to the condition of a global culture, transforming itself into *manguebit* (the media helping with the addition of “beat”). This is yet another example of creative leisure associated with social change.

Recent socio-cultural currents have attached growing importance to leisure in its multiple cultural expressions. Indeed, the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity* [Law 26.305/2007] points to the existence of an increasingly colourful cultural weave which has proved a chal-

lenge to cultural policies. How should cultural diversity be promoted or managed? To what extent might cultural policies committed to the inviolability of cultural diversity perversely contribute to atrophying cultural exchanges? Should cultural policies be geared to conserving tradition or fostering innovation?

The issue of *cultural democratisation* remains near the top of the public policy agenda, in view of continued social inequalities in access to culture. Cultural policies have concentrated their efforts on building up the supply of culture, especially through museums and classical music. But is cultural provision in itself a guarantee of democratised access to cultural goods? Is cultural development a challenge to be tackled by the State or by civil society? What are the possible effects of a centralising policy thrust, albeit mitigated by the decentralising pressures exerted by regional affirmation, as may be observed in Mediterranean Europe, in particular in Spain and Italy? What are the impacts of contrasting policies – centralising and decentralising – and also those of policies delegated to independent foundations or bodies which operate at an arm’s length basis, as in Scandinavian countries? Insofar as audiences for the arts are not conjured up out of nowhere (they are created!), what is the role of education for leisure in shaping or raising the awareness of these audiences?

I will conclude by giving my full backing to Ken Roberts’ call “for a quantum leap in comparative studies,” properly anchored in a sound theoretical foundation. A new paradigm could serve as our guide: that of *interculturality* which, as argued by Canclini (2004), points to a process of “contrasting” and “intertwining,” when different groups establish reciprocal relations and exchanges. Leonardo da Vinci had a method for obtaining the best possible definition in the colours he used on his canvases, which was to place them adjacent to their opposites: white next to black, yellow next to blue, green next to red. In a way, this is the road we can follow – the *method of contrasts* – when we select cases in different shades, anchored in specific analytical contexts. This will allow us to explore different categories, analytical dimensions, and conditions through which the properties of the concept of leisure may vary.

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