

The Role of Leisure in Arts Administration

Abstract

Most people who attend arts events (e.g., concerts, festivals, performances, exhibitions) or patronize arts facilities (e.g., galleries, museums, libraries) are seeking a leisure experience. Of use to arts administrators, whose job is, in part, to market the arts they have been hired to manage, is knowledge about this experience, particularly knowledge about its nature and its distribution in the population of actual and potential members of the publics of the various arts. This paper explores both questions, examining how arts consumption is differently realized in three types of leisure: serious, casual, and project-based. The diversity of these publics poses several challenges for arts administrators, among them finding balance in what they offer along the lines of fine and popular art and avant-garde and traditional art.

Key words: arts administration, serious leisure, casual leisure, project-based leisure, volunteers

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Serious Leisure

Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). It is often contrasted with "casual" or "unserious" leisure, which is considerably less substantial and offers no career of the sort just described. Casual leisure is immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it (Stebbins, 1997, p. 18).

Serious leisure is pursued as three types: amateurism, hobbyist activities, and career volunteering. Amateurs are found in art, science, sport, and entertainment, where they are inevitably linked in one way or another with professional counterparts who coalesce, along with the public whom the two groups share, into a three-way system of relations and relationships known as the "P-A-P system." The professionals are identified and defined according to theory developed in the social scientific study of the professions, a substantially more exact procedure than the ones relying on the simplistic and not infrequently commercially-shaped commonsense images of these workers. In other words, when studying amateurs and professionals descriptive definitions turn out to be too superficial, such as observing that the activity in question results in a livelihood for the second but not the first or that the second works full-time at it whereas the first pursues it part-time. Rather, we learn much more by noting that, for example, the two are locked in and therefore defined, in most instances, by the P-A-P system, a complex arrangement set out elsewhere in greater detail (see Stebbins, 1979, 1992, chap. 2).

Hobbyists lack the professional alter ego of amateurs, though they sometimes have commercial equivalents and often have small publics who take an interest in what they do. Hobbyists are classified according to five categories: collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants (in noncompetitive, rule-based, pursuits such as fishing and barbershop singing), players of sports and games (in competitive, rule-based activities with no professional counterparts like long-distance running and competitive swimming) and the enthusiasts of the liberal arts hobbies. The rules guiding rule-based pursuits are, for the most part, either subcultural (informal) or regulatory (formal). Thus seasoned hikers in the Rocky Mountains know they should, for example, stay on established trails, pack out all garbage, be prepared for changes in weather, and make noise to scare off bears. The liberal arts hobbyists are

enamored of the systematic acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Many of them accomplish this by reading voraciously in a field of art, sport, cuisine, language, culture, history, science, philosophy, politics, or literature (Stebbins, 1994). But some of them go beyond this to expand their knowledge still further through cultural travel and visits to arts events and facilities.

Volunteering is uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay done for the benefit of both other people and the volunteer. The domain of serious leisure, or career, volunteering is narrower than that of casual volunteering (discussed later), even if the former does cover considerable ground. The author's (Stebbins, 1998, pp. 74-80) taxonomy consists of sixteen types of organizational volunteering, including volunteer service in education and the arts. Still, the definition of serious leisure restricts attention everywhere to volunteering in which the participant can find a career, in which there is more or less continuous and substantial helping. Therefore, one-time donations of money, organs, services, and the like are more accurately classified as voluntary action of another sort, as are instances of casual volunteering, which include ushering, stuffing envelopes, and handing out programs as an aid to commercial, professional, or serious leisure undertakings (Stebbins, 1996a).

Serious leisure is further defined by six distinguishing qualities (Stebbins, 1992, pp. 6-8), qualities found among amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers alike. One is the occasional need to *persevere*, such as in learning how to be an effective museum guide. Yet, it is clear that positive feelings about the activity come, to some extent, from sticking with it through thick and thin, from conquering adversity. A second quality is, as already indicated, that of finding a *career* in the endeavor, shaped as it is by its own special contingencies, turning points and stages of achievement or involvement. Because of the widespread tendency to see the idea of career as applying only to occupations, note that, in this definition, the term is much more broadly used, following Goffman's (1961, pp. 127-128) elaboration of the concept of "moral career." Broadly conceived of, careers are available in all substantial, complicated roles, including especially those in work, leisure, deviance, politics, religion, and interpersonal relationships.

Careers in serious leisure commonly rest on a third quality: significant personal *effort* based on specially acquired *knowledge, training, or skill*, and, indeed, all three at times. Examples in the arts include such characteristics as showmanship, scientific knowledge, and long experience in a role. Fourth, eight *durable benefits*, or broad outcomes, of serious leisure have so far been identified, mostly from research on amateurs. They are self-development, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity (e.g., a painting, scientific paper, piece of furniture). A further benefit -- self-gratification, or the combination of superficial enjoyment and deep fulfillment -- is also one of the main benefits of casual leisure, to the extent that the enjoyment part dominates.

A fifth quality of serious leisure is the *unique ethos* that grows up around each instance of it, a central component of which is a special social world where

participants can pursue their free-time interests. Unruh (1980, p. 277) developed the following definition:

A social world must be seen as a unit of social organization which is diffuse and amorphous in character. Generally larger than groups or organizations, social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership lists, or spatial territory. . . . A social world must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants. Characteristically, a social world lacks a powerful centralized authority structure and is delimited by . . . effective communication and not territory nor formal group membership.

In another paper Unruh (1979) added that the typical social world is characterized by voluntary identification, by a freedom to enter into and depart from it. Moreover, because it is so diffuse, ordinary members are only partly involved in the full range of its activities. After all, a social world may be local, regional, multiregional, national, even international. Third, people in complex societies such as Canada and the United States are often members of several social worlds. Finally, social worlds are held together, to an important degree, by semiformal, or mediated, communication. They are rarely heavily bureaucratized yet, owing to their diffuseness, they are rarely characterized by intense face-to-face interaction. Rather, communication is typically mediated by newsletters, posted notices, telephone messages, mass mailings, Internet communications, radio and television announcements, and similar means, with the strong possibility that, in the future, the Internet could become the most popular of these.

The sixth quality revolves around the preceding five: participants in serious leisure tend to *identify* strongly with their chosen pursuits. In contrast, casual leisure, although hardly humiliating or despicable, is nonetheless too fleeting, mundane, and commonplace for most people to find a distinctive identity there.

In addition, research on serious leisure has led to the discovery of a distinctive set of rewards for each activity examined (Stebbins, 2001a, p. 13). In these studies the participant's leisure fulfillment has been found to stem from a constellation of particular rewards gained from the activity, be it boxing, ice climbing, or giving dance lessons to the elderly. Furthermore, the rewards are not only satisfying in themselves, but also satisfying as counterweights to the costs encountered in the activity. That is, every serious leisure activity contains its own combination of tensions, dislikes and disappointments, which each participant must confront in some way. For instance, an amateur football player may not always like attending daily practices, being bested occasionally by more junior players when there, and being required to sit on the sidelines from time to time while others get experience at his position. Yet he may still regard this activity as highly fulfilling - as (serious) leisure - because it also offers certain powerful rewards.

Put more precisely, then, the drive to find fulfillment in serious leisure is the drive to experience the rewards of a given leisure activity, such that its costs are seen by the participant as more or less insignificant by comparison. This is at once the

meaning of the activity for the participant and his or her motivation for engaging in it. It is this motivational sense of the concept of reward that distinguishes it from the idea of durable benefit set out earlier, an idea that emphasizes outcomes rather than antecedent conditions. Nonetheless, the two ideas constitute two sides of the same social psychological coin.

The rewards of a serious leisure pursuit are the more or less routine values that attract and hold its enthusiasts. Every serious leisure career both frames and is framed by the continuous search for these rewards, a search that takes months, and in many sports, years before the participant consistently finds deep fulfillment in his or her amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer role. The ten rewards presented below emerged in the course of various exploratory studies of amateurs, hobbyists, and career volunteers (for summary of these studies, see Stebbins, 2001c). As the following list shows, the rewards of serious leisure are predominantly personal.

Personal rewards

1. Personal enrichment (cherished experiences)
2. Self-actualization (developing skills, abilities, knowledge)
3. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed)
4. Self-image (known to others as a particular kind of serious leisure participant)
5. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep fulfillment)
6. Re-creation (regeneration) of oneself through serious leisure after a day's work
7. Financial return (from a serious leisure activity)

Social Rewards

8. Social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants, with clients as a volunteer, participating in the social world of the activity)
9. Group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project; senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic)
10. Contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in making the contribution)

In the various studies on amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers, these rewards, depending on the activity, were often given different weightings by the interviewees to reflect their importance relative to each other. Nonetheless, some common ground exists, for the studies on the arts, for example, do show that, in terms of their personal importance, most serious leisure participants rank self-enrichment and self-gratification as number one and number two. Moreover, to find either reward, participants must have acquired sufficient levels of relevant skill, knowledge, and experience (e.g., Stebbins, 1979, 1996b). In other words, self-actualization, which was often ranked third in importance, is also highly rewarding in serious leisure.

Serious Leisure and Arts Administration

Amateurs and hobbyists in any given art constitute a small, but important, part of the public the arts administrator is trying to reach. That is, most people who attend an arts event or patronize an arts facility – i.e., the public of the art in question -- are not themselves serious participants in it. They are not, for example, amateur painters or musicians or hobbyist quilters or coin collectors. Still, for the administrator, these amateurs and hobbyists are special. They do know the art intimately. Through this knowledge and experience, they may have some useful ideas on how to present it. Furthermore, if they like what they see or hear, they are in a position, because of their deep involvement in the social world of the art, to spread the word about a particular concert, exposition, collection, and the like. They may also be counted on to argue publicly and politically for the importance of the art in question and financially for its continued community and governmental support. And they themselves may be, or may become, significant donors.

Liberal arts hobbyists, as part of the art public, occupy a unique place there: they are *buffs*. They must be distinguished from their casual leisure counterparts: the *fans*. Buffs have, consistent with their serious leisure classification, considerable knowledge of and experience with their specialized interest in the art being presented. Fans, by contrast, consume the art for the enjoyment and pleasure this can deliver; it is at bottom a hedonic activity requiring little or no background skill, knowledge, or experience.

Arts volunteers, as such, are not members of the public of a particular art, but are, rather, unpaid helpers who assist in presenting the art to its public. Among the career volunteer roles in the arts are those of guide (often in a museum), receptionist, and member of the board of directors of an arts facility. Moreover, serious leisure arts volunteers may also be amateurs or hobbyists in the same art and, in that capacity, also members of its public. Such people have thus a dual serious leisure involvement in their art.

A powerful motive underlying the pursuit of all serious leisure is the search for deep self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment is either the act or the process of developing to the full one's capacity, more particularly, developing one's gifts and character. Pursuing a fulfilling activity leads to such fulfillment. Since arts administrators hold considerable responsibility for setting the core tasks and working conditions of their volunteers, they also control the level of fulfillment the latter can receive in this role. I have identified for "devotee" work and serious leisure six criteria that must be met, if people in pursuit of such activity are to find self-fulfillment there and a desire to continue doing it (Stebbins, 2004, pp. 8-9).

1. The valued core activity must be profound; to perform it acceptably requires substantial skill, knowledge, or experience or a combination of these.
2. The core activity must offer significant variety.
3. The core must also offer significant opportunity for creative or innovative work, as a valued expression of individual personality.
4. Participants must have reasonable control over the amount and disposition of time put into the core activity, such that they can prevent it from becoming a burden.

5. The participant must have both an aptitude and a taste for the activity in question.
6. Participants must work in a physical and social milieu that encourages them to pursue often and without significant constraint the core activity.

Solving the various problems that emerge from trying to recruit and retain volunteers rests substantially on meeting these criteria.

Although they constitute only a minority of the public of any given art, the serious leisure amateurs, hobbyists, and liberal arts buffs contribute disproportionately to its survival and development. For this reason they, along with major donors, are worthy of occasional special treatment given, if possible, at little or no charge. Examples include exclusive invitations to workshops, receptions, special openings, pre-event seminars, and meet-the-artist gatherings.

Casual Leisure

I have so far been able to identify seven types of casual leisure (defined earlier). They are play (including dabbling), relaxation (e.g., sitting, napping, strolling), passive entertainment (e.g., TV, books, recorded music), active entertainment (e.g., games of chance, party games), sociable conversation, sensory stimulation (e.g., sex, eating, drinking, sight seeing), and casual volunteering. Casual leisure is considerably less substantial and offers no career of the sort described earlier for its counterpart, serious leisure.

This brief review of the types of casual leisure reveals that they share at least one central property: all are hedonic. More precisely, all produce as a main reward for those participating in them a significant level of pure pleasure, or enjoyment. In broad, colloquial language, casual leisure could serve as the scientific term for the practice of doing what comes naturally. Yet, paradoxically, this leisure is by no means wholly frivolous, for there are some clear benefits in pursuing it. Moreover, unlike the evanescent hedonic property of casual leisure itself, its benefits are enduring, a property that makes them worthy of extended analysis in their own right.

Benefits of Casual Leisure

I have so far been able to identify five benefits, or outcomes, of casual leisure (Stebbins, 2001b). But since this is a preliminary list - my first attempt at making one - it is certainly possible that future research and theorizing could add to it. All five can accrue from consuming one of the arts.

A lasting benefit of casual leisure is the creativity and discovery it sometimes engenders. Serendipity, “the quintessential form of informal experimentation, accidental discovery, and spontaneous invention” (Stebbins, 2001a, pp. 3-4), usually underlies these two processes, suggesting that serendipity and casual leisure are at times closely aligned. In casual leisure, as elsewhere in life, serendipity can lead to highly varied results, including a new understanding of almost anything in the world of art gained from attending an arts event or patronizing an arts facility. Who knows how many casual observers of the displays in a museum of modern home decoration come away with a new idea or two, serendipitously found, for decorating their own

home. Such creativity or discovery is unintended, however, and is therefore accidental. Moreover, it is not ordinarily the result of a problem-solving orientation of people taking part in casual leisure, since at least most of the time they have little interest in trying to solve problems while engaging in such activity. Usually problems for which solutions must be found emerge at work, at home, or during serious leisure.

Another benefit springs from what has recently come to be known as *edutainment*. Nahrstedt (2000) holds that this benefit of casual leisure comes with participating in such mass entertainment as watching films and television programs, listening to popular music, and reading popular books and articles. Theme parks and museums are also considered sources of edutainment. While consuming media or frequenting places of this sort, these participants inadvertently learn something of substance about the social and physical world in which they live. They are, in a word, entertained and educated in the same breath.

Third, casual leisure affords regeneration, or re-creation, possibly even more so than its counterpart, serious leisure, since the latter can sometimes be intense. Of course, many a leisure researcher has observed that leisure in general affords relaxation or entertainment, if not both, and that these constitute two of its principal benefits. What is new, then, in the observation just made is that it distinguishes between casual and serious leisure, and more importantly, that it emphasizes the enduring effects of relaxation and entertainment when they help enhance overall equanimity, most notably in the interstices between periods of intense activity. Still, strange as it may seem, this blanket recognition of the importance of relaxation has not, according to Kleiber (2000), led to significant concern with it in research and practice in leisure studies. The potential for relaxation offered by week-day noon-hour concerts and theatre productions should be noted.

A fourth benefit that can flow from participation in casual leisure originates in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. One of its types, the sociable conversation, is particularly fecund in this regard, but other types, when shared, as sometimes happens during sensory stimulation and passive and active entertainment, can also have the same effect. The interpersonal relationships in question are many and varied and encompass those that form between friends, spouses, and members of families.

Well-being is still another benefit that can flow from engaging in casual leisure. Speaking only for the realm of leisure, the greatest sense of well-being is achieved when a person develops an *optimal leisure lifestyle*. Such a lifestyle is “the deeply fulfilling pursuit during free time of one or more substantial, absorbing forms of serious leisure, complemented by a judicious amount of casual leisure” (Stebbins, 2000a). People find optimal leisure lifestyles by partaking of leisure activities that individually and in combination realize human potential and enhance quality of life and well-being.

Turning now to casual leisure and arts administration, note that the public seeking a casual leisure experience generally approaches the arts as relatively passive consumers of them. Still, as in serious leisure, volunteers serving in casual leisure roles are special. In that role they are hardly passive consumers, but rather active helpers. Here, vis-à-vis arts administration, they perform a variety of useful functions, ranging from

taking and selling tickets, handing out programs, and giving directions to ushering, serving drinks (when paid bartenders are not used), and stuffing envelopes. If properly designed and managed these activities can be enjoyable, a responsibility that falls to the arts administrator.

The discussion to this point about serious and casual leisure and arts administration is summarized in figure 1.

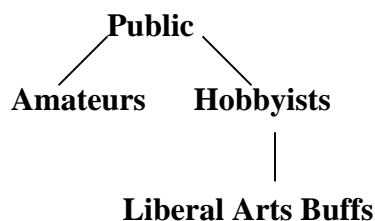
Project-Based Leisure

The following, a working definition, is useful for exploration and tentative delimitation of the field. Project-based leisure is a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time (Stebbins, 2005). It requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge, but for all that is neither serious leisure nor intended to develop into such. The adjective “occasional” describes, widely spaced, undertakings for such regular occasions as religious festivals, someone’s birthday, or a national holiday. The adjective “creative” stresses that the undertaking results in something new or different, showing imagination and perhaps routine skill or knowledge. Though most projects would appear to be continuously pursued until completed, it is conceivable that some might be interrupted for several weeks, months, even years (e.g., a stone wall in the back garden that gets finished only after its builder recovers from an operation on his strained back).

Moreover, it appears that, in some instances, project-based leisure springs from a sense of obligation to undertake it. If so, it is nonetheless, as leisure, uncoerced activity, in the sense that the obligation is in fact ‘agreeable’ – the project

Figure 1 Serious and Casual Leisure and Arts Administration

SERIOUS LEISURE



Reward: deep fulfillment

Volunteers

examples:

- board member
- guide
- receptionist

deep fulfillment

CASUAL LEISURE

Public-Consumers

- sensory stimulation
- passive entertainment
- active entertainment
- relaxation
- sociable conversation
- play

Volunteers

examples:

- take/sell tickets
- hand out programs
- give directions
- usher
- serve drinks
- stuff envelopes

Reward: enjoyment

enjoyment

creator in executing the project anticipates finding fulfillment, obligated to do so or not (for further discussion of this point, see Stebbins, 2000b). And worth exploring in future research, given that some obligations can be pleasant and attractive, is the nature and extent of leisure-like projects carried out within the context of paid employment. Furthermore, this discussion jibes with the additional criterion that the project, to qualify as project-based leisure, must be *seen by the project creator* as fundamentally uncoerced, fulfilling activity. Finally, note that project-based leisure cannot, by definition, refer to projects executed as part of a person's serious leisure, such as mounting a star night as an amateur astronomer or a model train display as a collector.

Motivationally speaking, project-based leisure may be attractive in substantial part because it does not demand long-term commitment, as serious leisure does. Even occasional projects carry with them the sense that the undertaking in question can be terminated at will. Thus project-based leisure is not a central life interest (Dubin, 1992). Rather it is viewed by its creator as fulfilling (as distinguished from enjoyable and hedonic) activity that can be experienced comparatively quickly, though certainly not as quickly as casual leisure.

Furthermore, it can usually be pursued at times convenient for the participant. It follows that project-based leisure is nicely suited to people who, out of proclivity or extensive non-leisure obligations or both, reject serious leisure and, yet, who also have no appetite for a steady diet of casual leisure. Among the candidates for project-based leisure are people with heavy workloads; homemakers, mothers, and fathers with extensive domestic responsibilities; unemployed individuals who, though looking for work, still have time at the moment for (I suspect, mostly one-shot) project-based leisure; and avid serious leisure enthusiasts who want a temporary change in their leisure lifestyle. Retired people, who do have time for plenty of leisure, may at times, find project-based leisure attractive as a way of adding variety to their leisure lifestyle. Beyond these special categories of participant, project-based leisure offers a form of substantial leisure to all adults, adolescents, and even children looking for something interesting and exciting to do in free time that is neither casual nor serious leisure.

The project-based leisure of greatest interest to arts administrators is, by and large, the one-shot variety and involves volunteers. Organizers of arts festivals and certain expositions in museums have need for a number of one-time, project-based volunteers. Although, it was noted that this form of leisure is distinct from serious leisure, both forms offer the same list of motivating rewards (Stebbins, 2005). Furthermore project-based leisure requires considerable planning, effort as well as, at times, skill or knowledge and for this reason, its participants expect a fulfilling experience. As with serious leisure, it is largely up to the arts administrator to ensure this quality.

Conclusions

Although having publics composed of seekers of both serious and casual leisure may be appreciated by the arts administrator for their diversity, however disproportionate the two groups, this diversity also poses a number of challenges. One challenge is finding the best balance of offerings and commentary about them, such that large segments of both groups are routinely attracted to the event or the facility. For instance, hobbyist collectors may want extensive written material on the collectibles displayed, whereas casual consumers are usually happy simply to look at them and not to read much about them.

Then there is the challenge, found in some of the arts, of achieving a balance of offerings representing both their fine art and popular-commercial sides. The commercial facet is more popular and consequently draws a significantly larger number of casual leisure consumers compared with the fine arts facet, which amateurs, hobbyists, and liberal arts buffs like, even while it lacks mass appeal. For instance professional symphony orchestras in North America know very well that they can bring in considerably more income with a couple of concerts of Strauss waltzes or Broadway shows tunes than they can with the same number of concerts devoted exclusively to the works of, say, 19th century classical composers. And, on the theatrical stage, Gilbert and Sullivan will sell to the general public much better than Ibsen or Brecht.

A related challenge is standard offerings versus those that are avant-garde, epitomized in the symphony world by concerts made up largely, if not exclusively, of the works of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms vis-à-vis those made up of works by Boulez, Berio, and Stockhausen. Certainly, an exhibition of 20th century experimental painters will attract fewer patrons than one featuring one or two of the old masters. This challenge does not pit casual and serious leisure participant against one another, however, but points to differences in taste within the fine art wing of music. Preferences for traditional compared with modern jazz turn on similar orientations in its public.

Fourth, is the challenge of satisfying tastes concerning the level of formality of the arts event. Today, a wide range of dress is evident at a wide variety of arts events and arts facilities. So-called “black-tie” affairs are now mostly limited to grand openings, and many of these, depending on the art in question, are much less formal than they used to be. But some consumers are still uncomfortable in the august atmosphere of the typical concert hall or art museum, so that getting their interest may well require finding different, more informal venues. Meeting this challenge has pushed some orchestras and theater companies, for example, to perform on occasion in city parks and high school gymnasias. Nevertheless, I have yet to see fine art paintings exhibited in a shopping mall, perhaps because, compared with the municipal art museum, informality in this art is

already achieved to some extent in the local small galleries. This challenge has more to do with social class than with preferences for casual or serious leisure.

Leisure, these pages show, is for many reasons, an important consideration for arts administrators. Good administration in this sphere increases exposure of the art and enhances the financial status of the artists displayed. Administrators are therefore key to success in many arts occupations. Yet, they have this effect, in significant part, because they understand the leisure interests of their serious and casual leisure patrons and volunteers and because they imaginatively apply this knowledge to organizing presentations of the arts in their charge.

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