ISSN:2230-9926

International Journal of Development Research

SJIF Scientific Journal Impact Factor 2015: 4.25



Volume: 05

Issue: 12

2015

www.journalijdr.com

International Journal of Development Research
ISSN: 2230-9926

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International Journal of Development Research

ISSN: 2230-9926

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International Journal of
DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

IJDR

ISSN: 2230-9926

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 5, Issue, 12, pp. 6398-6400, December, 2015

Full Length Research Article

UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING LEISURE ACTIVITIES: THE CASES OF ISTANBUL AND DENTON

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 02nd September, 2015
Received in revised form
19th October, 2015
Accepted 12th November, 2015
Published online 30th December, 2015

Key Words:
Leisure,
Development,
Participation,
Aging and Culture.

ABSTRACT

The sociology of leisure has always drawn the attention of the academicians. In particular, the discussion on the leisure activities of the older adults has moved to the front burner in the developmental sciences such as applied gerontology in the recent years. That's because the later years are relatively seen as free time for the individual despite the body constraints due to aging. However, the planning and management of leisure time are extremely considered by the aged regarding their cultural habits. That is why this article sets a background for a critical review of debates on leisure activities in Eastern world with Darulaceze Skilled Nursing Home Facility in Istanbul and in Western world with the Seniors in Motion example in Denton. Both examples are going to give an idea about the role cultural backgrounds and daily life habits on the development of leisure activities strategies to see how the participation of older adults in leisure activities becomes an indicator of quality aging or successful aging.

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INTRODUCTION

Leisure has become a hot debate among scholars in the recent years. It is obvious that mostly psychologists focused in this field, but with development of recreational activities and sport management it has become a main focus of sports peoples. Also, there is a big increase in leisure tourism. This creates a big interest for some economic organization to deal with this time. It is interesting to note that leisure activities are not beyond the scope of "aging enterprise" as well. Now, it seems that it will become one of the hot debates among gerontologists, too. In this evaluation, I will try to understand leisure and evaluate how it was perceived differently by giving the Seniors in Motion example in Denton and the *Darulaceze* Skilled Nursing Home Facility example from Istanbul.

Leisure: Theoretical Background

According to Kleiber, Walker and Mannell (2001) leisure is a period of time to distress and to enjoy yourself, the recreational activities performed for our own sake, free time available to all promotes personal fulfillment and self enrichment, a part of our holistic lifestyle. As understood from this definition the scope of leisure is very wide. In particular, lifestyle gains a great importance here.

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As it is well known, humankind has always sought for some formulas for his or her health and happiness. As a result, most people reached a point that their lifestyles determine their health and happiness. For this reason, as Kleiber, Walker and Mannell (2001) states, newer department of health promotion, gerontology, consumer sciences, and family studies was emerged to provide answer to particular lifestyle issues and educate citizens to work in human service field related to these issues. What makes leisure different from work is a critical question. Leisure is a specific type of activity. For example, the watching a movie is a leisure activity, but one should assign time for this activity free from obligation. That is why for a movie maker the watching of a movie is not a leisure activity. Conversely, it is a part of his or her work. Also, a leisure activity should be meaningful and bring enjoyment to person who participated in. For instance, a vacation with her several children can be a sort of work for a mother. Thus, although vacation is a leisure activity, some elements such as child responsibility can turn it into domestic work.

It is hard to say leisure is always pleasant. Instead, it mostly makes a person feel pleased and to have fun. As it is well known, in social sciences it is hard to make generalization. The concept of always change the picture completely. Although leisure has a pleasant aspect, it is not scientific to argue that it is always pleasant. That is because external factors are also in play. Unfortunately, some external factors

are not always welcoming you in your leisure activities. That is why I would venture to argue that being pleasant is not a biological trait of human being. It has a social aspect as well. Therefore, it is not empirical to say leisure is always pleasant. Instead, one can argue that a leisure activity is supposed to make a person please and have a fun, enjoyment, excitement, relaxation, awe, belonging, etc. As seen, a behavior should have three characteristics to be considered as leisure. First of all, for a behavior to be leisure we need an activity. As stated above watching of movie is a leisure activity because you take action. Secondly, there should be an allotted time. In other words, one should arrange a time which is free from any obligations. Finally, it should include a satisfying experience. You should have enjoyment and feel an escape from stress of the work, for example.

Kleiber, Walker and Mannell (2001) give four characteristics of serious leisure, including identification, unique ethos, enduring benefits and specialization. First of all, in identification, a person should identify himself or herself a particular leisure activity. Otherwise, it wouldn`t be serious leisure activity. Secondly, there should be unique ethos (community). That is, a social world should be shared with somebody else or fellow participants. Thirdly, some enduring benefits are gotten from participation. For example, a person gets an enhanced self-esteem by his participation. Finally, there should be specialization or high involvement. If there is not a high participation in a leisure activity, there is no way to say it is a serious leisure activity. In my evaluation, I would like to focus on the concept of flow giving a big idea about deep involvement as seen in the last point. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) flow is the experience of deep involvement which a person frequently look for in their various activities. In other words, it is a state of mind or state of experiences that a person feels when he or she participated in what he or she is doing. In Csikszentmihalyi (1990) view, one should have a clear goal in his or her mind in flow. Also, while doing an activity he or she should have a chance of getting an immediate feedback. Concentration or focus is another important trait of flow. One should have a huge concentration while doing a leisure activity, especially physical activities. Finally, people face challenges everywhere. Therefore, a person should be aware of challenges in the flow.

It is important to note that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) uses the metaphor of river in his conception of flow. Therefore, many big companies, such as Microsoft and Green Cargo learned to stay alive in the global capital fluctuations associated to a river by employing the concept of flow in their works. However, people should have a big interest and enjoyment in the flow experience. It is interest and enjoyment makes it leisure. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) differentiates enjoyment from pleasure. Whereas pleasure is the good feelings satisfying homeostatic needs such as hunger, sex and bodily comfort, enjoyment refers to the good feelings of people experience when they go through homeostasis.

Theory: Self-Determination Theory and Theory of Planned Action

Deci and Ryan (1985) developed a theory of self-determination (SDT) to understand the logic behind the leisure motivation. According to SDT, there are two types of leisure motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the natural derive, whereas extrinsic motivation comes from the external sources. In other words, in SDT, intrinsic motivation is a sort of innate push coming from our biological being, whereas external motivation is based on external factors such as money or award. However, despite these two motives humankind has still a locus of control to manipulate or determine his or her behaviors. Locus of control is a state in which a person believes he or she can control the ways in which he or she behaves. To me, sense of autonomy is a good example of internal locus of control. That is because we love our autonomy and we all believe that we can determine our autonomy zone even though it is somewhat an illusion-not to mention even illusion has also a real consequences. Although control over environment seems to be an area of internal locus of control, it is an external locus of control because our adaptation to it is sometimes out of our control.

In Arzen (1991) theory of planned action or behavior, it is believed that a behavior doesn`t come into being without any intention or perception. This means that our all behaviors are determined by our personality make-up and environmental factors. For this reason, planned behaviors are not spontaneous. Conversely, they are organized by individuals by in the state of experiencing their own personal characters and environmental factors.

To understand what SDT wanted to explain one should look the definition of three innate needs by this theory. They are competence, relatedness and autonomy. First of all, competence refers to being effective in coping with environment where he or she can express himself or herself. As a matter of fact every person has an innate need of manifesting himself or herself. Secondly, relatedness is an innate need of humankind. It is important in leisure because it makes person take part in leisure activities and be in contact with other people. Since leisure is a social activity, relatedness is vital for any leisure activities. Finally, people like their freedoms and want to be independent. For example, any interventions create a reaction if they are not a strong humane logic behind them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are several research tools or methods for defining, observing, and measuring or evaluating leisure. First of all, observation is important in leisure studies. Since experimental approaches are hard to be applied in leisure studies, observation research approach is a good tool to acquire data although there is a high risk of subjectivity due to involvement of human factor. Secondly, self-reports are interesting tools. As it is well known, they are methods of receiving information on diary basis from deep thoughts of people whom a researcher is working on. Interview is another method of learning leisure activity by involving in the real situation and having a chance of going deeper in unclear questions, for example. Finally, survey is a common method in studying leisure broadly. You need to sample a population randomly, for example, and measure or evaluate results to represent this particular population.

Evaluating Leisure Participation and Constraints

Many factors define both participation in leisure activities and constraints for leisure activities. Personality type, cultural/ethnic background, gender and age are some of them. As it is well known, socialization can also occurs through leisure. In particular, for children it plays a great role. Parents use leisure to socialize their children. That is because leisure activity, especially sport contributes their abilities to share goals. Without a doubt, an extrinsic reward influences their participation. As a result, their competitiveness, autonomy and relatedness were reinforced by a leisure activity.

The same thing is also case for the aged. Although the main theme of some physical leisure activities is about health and well-being, one can't disregard the socialization aspect of a leisure activity. We had a visit to Seniors in Motion in Denton and had interview with Jean Seward. The main thing drew my attention was the socialization aspect of older adults participation in physical exercises. Without a doubt, there are many places to go exercise, but they prefer this place to socialize with each other. As stated above, the concept relatedness gains importance here as well. It doesn't matter which age group you are in, but you always need somebody to relate. This is because human being is social being. It is interesting to note that there is a high participation of people in leisure activity in the developed countries, whereas there is a low participation in developing countries. For example, as opposed to Seniors in Motion there is an extremely low participation of older adults in leisure activities in *Darulaceze* Skilled Nursing Home Facility exercise room. For this reason, we need to examine what are constrains that evade people from the participation in leisure activities. Gomez (2006) developed the ethnicity and public recreation participation model (EPRP) to understand factors that affect the leisure participation. These factors are mainly are:

- Socioeconomic status
- Subcultural identity
- Perceived discrimination
- Acculturation
- Perceived benefits of recreation

First of all, In Turkey, for example, not only vacation but also physical exercise is seen as a distinguished activity for upper class. In particular, people from upper class participated in leisure activities related to economic sectors. Although needy people have simple ways of leisure, they cannot enter in the field of upper class. Without a doubt, socioeconomic status is not only a lone constrains, but their subcultural identity also affects their participation. For example, there is not specialized physical exercise center for subcultures in Istanbul. That is because the concept of physical exercise is a new concept for them. They have some simple leisure activities such as picnic and poker in the café house of their associations only. According to Scott, Lee, Lee and Kim (2006) Negro children ride bikes more than other people instead of involving in other leisure activities. It is interesting to note that they argue that oriental children don't participate in leisure activities a lot due to their language learning or barriers. As seen, subcultural identity can create constraints in every country. Perceived discrimination is another constraint. Some people feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the presence of "the other." It is interesting to note that both upper class and lower class can perceive each other as "the other." In other words, both classes are not quite comfortable to participate in the same leisure activity.

However, through acculturation some changes can occurs, but acculturation is still a constraint as well. Without a doubt, acculturation refers to a change a person goes through as a result of contacting with other cultural group. Although it is still a constraint for participation, a possible change in perceived benefit can increase participation in a leisure activity, but this requires a great effort to change perception of people about a leisure activity. In particular, for migrant subcultures in Istanbul it is quite hard to make them perceive physical exercise is helpful for their health and well-being. That is because they were raised in a culture in which physical exercises were not promoted.

Conclusion

From the point stated above one may safely make a conclusion that the factors affecting leisure participation are not only the aforementioned ones. There are many other factor affecting and delaying leisure participation. Kleiber, Walker and Mannell (2001) enlist intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints to show how it is hard to increase leisure participation. A person personal type and gender can also create some constraints. For instance, if one has an open to a new experience personal type, he will more likely to participate in a leisure activity. On the other hand, if one has e neurotic personality, he or she will be aggressive and thereby will participate in activity including anger. Gender is also a factor representing the participation in a leisure activity. For example, it is believed that women have limited opportunities in participating in a leisure activity as opposed to men. My own experiences from the U.S. and Turkey showed me that not only gender also age create a barrier for a leisure activity. The bottom line is that although older adults have more time for leisure, their health problems and weakness in body have changed the structure of their leisure activities. Therefore, they prefer passive leisure activities instead of active physical leisure activities anymore.

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