

**THE WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION: PROMOTING SOCIAL,
CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

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**ORGANIZAÇÃO MUNDIAL DE LAZER: PROMOÇÃO SOCIAL,
CULTURAL E TRANSFORMAÇÃO ECONOMICA**

RESUMO: Para muitos, o lazer é o aspecto central da vida, influenciando o bem-estar social, cultural e econômico dos indivíduos, comunidades e nações em todo o mundo. Lazer é transformação, promovendo oportunidades para o indivíduo interagir com o meio ambiente sempre em transformação. Como forma de alterar a qualidade de vida e bem-estar, o lazer proporciona muitos benefícios. Fundada em 1952, a Organização Mundial do Lazer dedica-se a descobrir e criar condições que através do lazer, ajudam indivíduos, comunidades e nações a otimizar a sua qualidade de vida e bem-estar. Conjuntamente com as Nações Unidas a Organização Mundial do Lazer promove muitos benefícios, programas e serviços valiosos para os seus membros que são apresentados e desenvolvidos neste artigo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lazer. Transformação. Organização Mundial do Lazer.

ABSTRACT: For many, leisure is a central life focus, influencing the social, cultural and economic well being of individuals, communities and nations world-wide. Leisure is transformational, providing opportunities for individuals to address and respond to our ever changing environment. As a major way of impacting quality of life and well being, leisure provides many benefits. Founded in 1952, the World Leisure Organization is dedicated to discovering and fostering conditions through leisure that help individuals, communities and nations optimize a higher quality of life and well being. Linked to the United Nations, World Leisure provides many valuable benefits and programs and services for its membership and are presented and reviewed in this article.

KEYWORDS: Leisure. Transformation. World Leisure Organization.

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INTRODUCTION

As one of life's major forces, leisure contributes significantly to the improvement of quality of life and the well being. It is through leisure that growth, renewal, reflection and an exploration of the self, as well as many other benefits, is possible. This is not only the case for individuals but for communities and nations as well. Leisure contributes to and supports the need for quality life experiences offered in sustainable environmental settings. Leisure is especially powerful in building the human experience within civil global society, contributing to cross cultural communication and understanding.

Leisure promotes, facilitates and enables transformation. Leisure holds infinite possibilities for change. As an expression of individual interest, often reflecting broader social and cultural values, leisure provides individuals, communities and nations with enlarged opportunities to choose desirable life pursuits. Leisure can serve as a well spring for the generation of new creative perspectives for living one's life. As such, leisure is an optimal medium of transformation. Leisure provides opportunities for individuals to discover, explore and create new ideas in response to the need for transformation.

Interestingly, as leisure provides opportunities for individuals to learn and grow, it also provides the opportunity to engage in familiar experiences that provide stability in an environment of continuous change. Thus, leisure serves as not only a way of optimizing opportunities to promote transformation, it also provides the opportunity for individuals to find the solace that comes from the need to surround or immerse oneself in an environment that promotes familiarity. Maintaining a connection with ones cultural and historic heritage is a way of stabilizing one in the sea of change.

There is mounting evidence that leisure contributes to the quality of life by contributing to the social, cultural and economic-environmental development of individuals, communities and nations. In 2006, the *Hangzhou Communiqué – Leisure and the Quality of Life: Impacts on Leisure upon Social, Economic and Cultural Development* sponsored by the World Leisure Organization, suggests that “[...] success in implementing leisure planning and policy, from a local to the global level, will ultimately depend on an enhanced understanding of the implications of leisure for cultural as well as individual life, and for the social/global inequality and opportunity” (JACKSON, 2006, p.

4). This landmark document identified the following impacts of leisure:

- Leisure is a significant aspect of cultural life in all societies throughout the world and is related to cultural creation, development and preservation
- Cultural identity is formed in part within the leisure context and contributes to the formulation of valued lifestyles
- Leisure may be the most important of life for realizing relaxation, happiness and self fulfillment
- Leisure contains possibilities for quality of individual health, well being, and human development across the life span regardless of physical or mental ability or objective status
- Leisure provides opportunities for family development, relationship building and community bonding
- Leisure promotes social benefits such as shared experiences, intimacy and emotional closeness, and cooperation and collaboration
- Leisure goods and services account for 20-25% of all consumer expenditures and are rapidly increasing
- Leisure contributes to environmental quality, enjoyment of natural areas as a significant contributor of quality of life (p 11-16)

It is evident that leisure is a major factor contributing to the social, cultural and economic well being of individuals, communities and nations. Further, leisure's positive contributions to maintaining the ecosystem through various conservation and preservation practices has provided a philosophical underpinning for the modern environmental movement. The social reconstruction of societal institutions with a focus on leisure-oriented themes is increasingly evident throughout the world. As individuals seek a higher quality of life and greater well being, it is through the reengineering and reinvention of various government, non government and business policies and practices that are leading to an increased consciousness of focusing on leisure and its related concerns such as the "greening of the environment," "promotion and protection of human dignity," and the "rise of spiritual/experiential living."

The World Leisure Organization

The World Leisure Organization has established itself as a world wide non governmental voluntary association "[...] dedicated to discovering and fostering those conditions which permit leisure to serve as a force to optimize collective and individual well being (2007, p. 2). Established in 1952 initially as the International Recreation Association, the organization changed its name to the World Leisure and Recreation Association in 1967, and adopted the short form of World Leisure in 1999. In 2007, the name of the organization was changed officially to the World Leisure Organization, Inc. The organization is focuses its efforts on various advocacy, research and educational initiatives including: 1) promoting leisure as integral to social, cultural and economic development; 2) supporting the right of all people to good quality leisure experiences; 3) recognizing that many have special requirements related to disability, age, gender, social

status, poverty, domicile and education; and 4) recognizing leisure in its broadest context including play, recreation, the arts and culture, sport, festivals and celebrations, health and fitness, and travel and tourism. These ends are achieved through four basic program objectives: 1) providing a forum for the analysis and critique of knowledge and practice; 2) encouraging research and inquiry; 3) disseminating knowledge and information; and 4) acting to raise the quality of leisure experiences for all by encouraging greater opportunities and access to leisure, with improvements to services, facilities, management and programs.

World Leisure is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of up to 20 individuals. These individuals represent various regions of the world including Brazil, where Dr. Ricardo Uvinha, University of Sao Paulo, was recently selected to serve as a member of this group. Members of the World Leisure Board of Directors are elected to three-year terms and may be reappointed for one additional term. Their primary responsibility is to advance the work of the organization. World Leisure's Executive Committee works as the steering body of the organization and includes the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer of the Board of Directors, the Secretary General and others

World Leisure is managed by the Secretary General. The Secretary General is the Chief Executive Officer of the organization and is responsible for the overall management and administration of the affairs of the organization in accordance with World Leisure's Constitution and By-laws. In addition to speaking on behalf of the organization, maintaining financial control, developing and implementing programs and services, the Secretary General also manages the work of the World Leisure Secretariat. The World Leisure Secretariat is responsible for coordinating several functions including:

1) membership services; 2) communications; 3) inter-organizational Relations; 4) support to the Board of Directors and Commissions; 5) distribution of *World Leisure's Members Bulletin*; 6) congress and conference coordination; 7) web site development and upkeep; and 8) maintenance of archives and records. Many of these activities are handled by World Leisure's Program Assistant, Kimberly Heffernan-Moss.

World Leisure Benefits

World Leisure offers numerous benefits to individuals and its affiliate organizations. As is the case with similar type membership organizations, not only does World Leisure provide numerous opportunities for individuals to advance their own professional knowledge and skill set, but participation in the efforts of the organization result in contributing to the development of the leisure movement world wide. Some of the more specific benefits of belonging to World Leisure include:

Networking. Your membership in World Leisure provides you access to professionals, colleagues and lay citizens on a worldwide basis.

Advocate for Leisure. Advance and promote on a worldwide basis the ideals of the profession through your involvement in World Leisure.

Educational Opportunities. World Leisure provides a host of educational opportunities including participation in congresses, conferences, forums, expositions, workshops and institutes.

Electronic Communications. World Leisure provides for its members electronic access to its *World Leisure Journal*, *World Leisure News and Jobs*, *World Leisure Members Bulletin*, and other important items.

Research and Fact Finding. World Leisure promotes research and fact finding fostering research projects and inquiry.

Participation in World Leisure Commissions. Join others in common interest areas focused on advancing specific aspects of leisure through research, education and advocacy.

World Leisure Programs. Support and participate in programs such as the *World Leisure International Centre of Excellence (WICE)*, *World Leisure International Scholarship Program (WISP)* or our *World Leisure Professional Services (WPS)*.

Partner with Collaborating Agencies. World Leisure holds consultative status with The United Nations as well as other organizations including the World Tourism Organization, the International Council of Sports Science and Physical Education, American Leisure Academy, the Conference of French Speaking Ministers of Youth and Sport (CONFESJES) and numerous others.

Awards and Recognition. The prestigious World Leisure Innovative Prize recognizes excellence achieved by leisure organizations throughout the world.

World Leisure's Moral and Philosophical Foundations and Linkage to The United Nations

World Leisure has linked itself morally and philosophically to the purposes and principles reflected in the founding of The United Nations (UN). Encouraging friendly relations among nations, the UN solicits their cooperation in addressing international problems of social, cultural, economic or of a humanitarian character (1948). Likewise, The UN draws upon the work of nongovernmental organizations in support of its efforts world wide. World Leisure holds consultative status with the UN and has been an active participating member for nearly its entire existence as an organization. World Leisure's focus on promoting quality of life through leisure is supported by a number of declarations, principles and covenants offered by the UN. Such statements provide the World Leisure Organization with support for its vision, mission, goals and priorities.

Central to the efforts of the World Leisure Organization is Article 24 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights stating that “[...] *Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay* (1948)”. In addition, Article 27 offers the following: “[...] *Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in*

scientific advancement and its benefits (ibid)". The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child affirms that "[...] *Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the art (1989)*". And, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that "[...] *Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular,*" especially "[...] *the right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life (1979)*". Last, the affirmation of the rights of older persons is found in Clause 16 of UN Principles noting that "[...] *Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural and recreational resources of society (1999)*".

The World Leisure Organization has affirmed its support for the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Project. The MDG project provides a global agenda which is time bound with measurable targets. The eight (8) elements of the MDG Project are aimed at enhancing the human condition by "combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environment degradation and discrimination against women (2000, p. 1)". All of these can be addressed in concert with the work of the World Leisure Organization in "discovering and fostering those conditions which permit leisure to serve as a force to optimize collective and individual wellbeing." Leisure, as a vibrant and significant means of social, cultural and economic development, can contribute significantly in the achievement of these goals.

Several World Leisure programs related to the UN have been initiated. First is the establishment of a World Leisure UN Commission. The work of this group has focused on several activities including: 1) creation of the World Leisure Global Civil Society Internship Program; 2) establishment of the UN Delegate Assembly consisting of representatives from the 192 UN Member Nations; and 3) expansion of the United Nations Commission by adding six (6) Commissioners, each serving staggered three-year terms. The current World Leisure UN Representative serves as head of the World Leisure Commission and has been appointed for a 5-year term. The World Leisure UN Commission is actively seeking affiliations with other UN affiliations and bodies. Representatives from World Leisure are active at the UN Annual NGO Conference held in New York City, USA. The next meeting of the World Leisure UN Commission open to the general membership is planned for the 2008 World Leisure Congress scheduled for Quebec City, Canada. Individuals interested in contributing to the work of the World Leisure UN Commission are invited to contact: Gerald S. Fain, World Leisure UN Representative, Professor School of Education, Boston University

617-353-3295, fain@bu.edu <<mailto:fain@bu.edu>>.

World Leisure Programs and Services

The World Leisure Organization operates a wide array of programs and services available to its membership and to other interested individuals and parties. In order to implement World Leisure's programs and services, a number of Program Managers have been appointed to support various activities. The duties and responsibilities of World Leisure Program Managers include: 1) providing leadership in the form of guidance and motivation to a designated program area; 2) maintaining ongoing communications; 3)

initiating new programs and services based on need; 4) monitoring program performance; 5) providing liaison with the World Leisure Secretariat; 6) developing an annual action plan, and 7) reporting progress to the Secretary General, and World Leisure Board of Directors. Current World Leisure Program Managers include: Dr. Steve Albrechtsen (World Leisure Commissions); Dr. Ernie Olson (World Leisure Chapters & Affiliates); Dr. Roger Coles (World Leisure Educational Services); World Leisure Event Management (vacant); Dr. Stephen Anderson (World Leisure International Scholarship Program); Dr. Kenneth Roberts (Editor-In-Chief, *World Leisure Journal*); and Dr. Bohdan Jung (Managing Editor, *World Leisure Journal* and UNESCO Representative). Some of World Leisure's the most visible and viable programs include:

World Leisure Congresses and Regional Conferences. World Leisure conducts world congresses and conferences [...] an international event comprised of a multidimensional program and related activities such as trade shows, exhibitions, professional tours, workshops, etc. Forthcoming World Leisure Congresses are scheduled in 2010 in Chuncheon City, Korea; and in 2012 in Poland or Italy.

World Leisure Exhibitions and Trade Shows. World Leisure's first EXPO was held in conjunction with the 2006 World Leisure Congress. This exhibition brought together a series of exhibition, special events, conferences, trade shows, festivals and training programs with the purpose of examining and demonstrating leisure's potential for enhancing quality of life. World Leisure Exhibitions and Trade Shows are often scheduled in conjunction with World Leisure Congresses and World Leisure Conferences.

World Leisure Summits and Forums. Specialized events that bring focus to a topical area; for example, in 1998 a *World Leisure Summit* was convened in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and produced a *Declaration on Leisure and Globalization*. Similarly, a *World Leisure Summit* was convened in 2006 for proclaiming a global declaration of leisure as integral to social, cultural and economic development. A *World Leisure High-level Forum* was organized as a part of the opening ceremonies for the 2006 World Leisure EXPO. A *World Leisure Summit* was held in 2008 in Quebec City, Canada, focused on the topic of leisure and community development.

World Leisure Special Events. A variety of special events are offered by World Leisure; for example, the *Leisure Lifestyles and Constraints Project* involved a cross-cultural comparative study focused on this topic and the *World Leisure Consensus Project* brings together scholars to examine the impact of leisure on human development and well-being. A forthcoming World Leisure special event is the 2010 *World Leisure Games* scheduled for Chuncheon City, Korea.

World Leisure Educational and Training Programs. World Leisure is strongly committed to strengthening the leadership of the profession by providing educational and training programs. *World Leisure's Centre of Excellence (WICE)*, established in 1992 at the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands, provides graduate-level education in the area of leisure, tourism, and the environment. The *Asian-Pacific Centre for the Study of Leisure (ACPL)* at Zhejiang University was established as an open, nonprofit academic research and training organization in 2004.

World Leisure Commissions. This program reflects the organization's ongoing program activities and provides a context and medium for persons of like interest to act

collectively at the world level. Areas of special interest: access and inclusion, children and youth, education, management, leisure in later life, law and policy, research, tourism and the environment, volunteerism, women and gender, as well as an emerging one on health promotion and disease prevention.

World Leisure Innovation Prize. The *World Leisure Innovation Prize* acknowledges the efforts of communities throughout the world at promoting sustainable social and environmental communities through leisure. Winners of the first World Leisure Innovation Prize included: City of Christchurch, New Zealand; Emmanuel Foundation, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; City of Townsville, Queensland, Australia; and Zhejiang Province, The Peoples Republic of China.

World Leisure Journal. The *World Leisure Journal* is the organization's major publication disseminating hard evidence including basic and applied research. The journal seeks papers on leisure, recreation, and related issues from individuals worldwide. Peer reviewed and published on a quarterly basis, the journal includes articles which are theoretical, applied, and/or of professional interest.

World Leisure International Scholarship Program. The *World Leisure International Scholarship Program (WLISP)* was formerly known as the Thomas and Ruth Rivers Scholarship in honor of the founding director general and his wife. The intent of the scholarship program is to provide students with access to an important World Leisure event and provide them with a broader perspective of trends, issues, strategies, and ideas advancing leisure worldwide.

World Leisure's United Nations Partnership. World Leisure's most prized partnership is its recognition as a consultative body with the Economic and Social Council of the

United Nations. This recognition provides World Leisure with a platform to support the work of the United Nations by reflecting its goals in the organization's programs and services. In particular, World Leisure has sought recognition from UNESCO for several of its programs including the *World Leisure Consensus Project* and the *2006 World Leisure Summit*. World Leisure has initiated a major undertaking to strengthen our relationship with the United Nations. As mentioned, efforts are underway to create a worldwide network of World Leisure representative in all 192 member countries of the organization.

World Leisure Chapters. Established in 2001, the *World Leisure Chapter* program enables individuals and groups to associate with the organization and promote its goals locally. The structure of a *World Leisure Chapter* will vary depending upon local conditions; however it must include a written statement detailing the chapter's terms of reference including its purpose, membership, officers, elections, and meetings. The first *World Leisure Chapter* was established in Taipei, Taiwan, and held its inaugural meeting in 2006.

World Leisure Affiliates. World Leisure seeks affiliate collaborative relationships with other organizations throughout the world. An affiliate can be thought of as a preexisting educational institution, government, or non-government organization wishing to associate with World Leisure. Affiliate organizations work to permute greater cooperation and collaboration with World Leisure.

SUMMARY

Leisure is a powerful social, cultural and economic force, influencing individuals, communities and nations world wide. The impact of leisure is felt in the sphere of our

daily lives and increasingly is linked to enhancing quality of life and well being. The character of many leisure experiences is such that it is transformational in nature. Leisure can assist individuals in their life journey to cope with the challenges that come with living in an ever changing world. Whether leisure provides opportunities, space and time for individuals to gain new knowledge, skills and values or to assist them by centering their lives in familiar predictable activities, the leisure experience is important in assisting individuals, communities and nations coping with inevitable that comes with living in a rapidly changing environment.

The World Leisure Organization is dedicated to assisting individuals, professionals, educators, government officials and others in understanding the phenomenal of leisure and its impact on society. Framed as a membership organization, World Leisure provides a forum for advocacy, information and knowledge exchange, networking and other benefits. The opportunity to promote the benefits of leisure by improving policy and legislation, strengthening leadership and expanding international cooperation are all major elements of the World Leisure effort. As a non profit, non governmental organization, World Leisure seeks to improve the quality of life and well being of individuals throughout the lifespan.

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