

WORLD LEISURE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY, CANADA

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ABSTRACT: The World Leisure Center of Excellence in Sustainable Leisure Management brings together established and emerging scholars from around the globe to share innovative ideas, engage in dialogue and collaborate in research and teaching (WORLD LEISURE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, 2012). Bridging the World Leisure Organization (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016) and the host campus of Vancouver Island University, the Centre emerges as the leading source for information, research (<http://www.viu.ca/slm/WorldLeisureCentreofExcellence.asp>) and collaboration surrounding sustainable and innovative leisure best practices. Through shared learning experiences on regional, national, and international levels, the Centre will foster inquiry and distribute knowledge with an established network of community, scholars and professionals. This article will present the path of the Center, as well as background and context to provide a better understanding of the WLCE's objectives and commitments for the future. It also includes examples of the events and activities developed by the Center that show its ongoing effort to continue working in knowledge exchange, fostering sustainable practices within the leisure context and future projects.

Keywords: World Leisure Centre of Excellence. Sustainability. Leisure. Scholars. Research. Knowledge and Community.

CENTRO ACADÊMICO DE EXCELÊNCIA EM LAZER DA VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY, CANADÁ

RESUMO: O Centro Acadêmico de Excelência em Lazer da Vancouver Island University, no Canadá, é temático ao estudo da gestão sustentável do lazer. É fundado sob a perspectiva de compartilhamento de ideias inovativas trazendo a colaboração de pesquisadores de todo o mundo engajados no diálogo e colaboração em pesquisa e ensino (WORLD LEISURE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, 2012). Em ligação com os preceitos da Organização Mundial de Lazer (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016) e da universidade-sede no campus da Vancouver Island University, tal Centro emerge como uma força líder em termos de informação, pesquisa e colaboração a respeito de práticas sustentáveis e inovativas (<http://www.viu.ca/slm/WorldLeisureCentreofExcellence.asp>). Por meio de experiências de aprendizado em níveis regional, nacional e internacional, o Centro fomenta a discussão e a propagação de conhecimento com uma rede estabelecida em comunidades, meio acadêmico e na atuação profissional. Este ensaio apresentará algumas características deste Centro, bem

como sua estrutura e conjuntura para fornecer um melhor entendimento dos objetivos e dos compromissos dos Centros Acadêmicos de Excelência em Lazer. Também inclui exemplos de eventos e atividades desenvolvidas pelo Centro que identificam um esforço contínuo no intercâmbio do conhecimento, fomentando práticas sustentáveis inseridas no contexto do lazer na perspectiva de projetos futuros.

Palavras-chave: Centro Acadêmico de Excelência em Lazer. Sustentabilidade. Lazer. Pesquisa científica. Conhecimento. Comunidade.

CENTRO ACADÉMICO DE EXCELENCIA EN OCIO DE LA VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY, CANADA

RESUMEN: El Centro Académico de Excelencia en la Gestión Sustentable del Ocio reúne investigadores de todas partes del mundo para compartir ideas innovadoras, involucrarse en el diálogo y colaborar en la investigación y la enseñanza (SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY REPORT, 2012). Vinculado a la Organización Mundial del Ocio (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016) y al campus de la Vancouver Island University, dicho centro emerge como la principal fuente de información, investigación (<http://www.viu.ca/slm/WorldLeisureCentreofExcellence.asp>) y colaboración, que rodea las mejores prácticas de ocio sustentables e innovadoras. Por medio del intercambio de experiencias de aprendizaje a nivel regional, nacional e internacional, el Centro fomentará la investigación y propagación del conocimiento mediante una red conformada por la comunidad, investigadores y profesionales. Este artículo presentará la trayectoria del Centro, así como su coyuntura y contexto, para ofrecer una mejor comprensión sobre los objetivos y compromisos a futuro del Centro. También incluye ejemplos de eventos y actividades desarrolladas por el Centro que denotan su esfuerzo continuo para seguir trabajando en el intercambio de conocimiento, y el fomento de prácticas sustentables en el contexto del ocio en la perspectiva de proyectos futuros.

Palabras-clave: Centro de Excelencia Mundial de Ocio. Sustentabilidad. Investigación científica. Conocimiento y Comunidad.

History and context

As of September 15th, 2009, a partnership was created between the World Leisure Organizations (WLO) and Vancouver Island University (VIU). This partnership was created in order to establish a World Leisure Centre of Excellence (WORLD LEISURE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE - WLCE). The Centre that was created has a focus on sustainability and innovation in leisure. The WLO definition identifies a Centre of Excellence (COE) as an international post-graduate program with research and service elements and the agreement stated visiting scholars as an integral part of the COE program.

One of the VIU WLCE's primary focuses was the delivery of the Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management (MA in SLM). On September 15th, 2009 VIU and the WLO signed an agreement to establish the VIU WLCE. In this agreement both parties agreed to provisions of the VIU WLCE.

1) The VIU WLCE would advance, promote and exchange leisure concepts, best practices and other related topics in an internationally focused program of teaching, research and service that would bring together researchers, scholars, professionals and students.

2) The MA in SLM would provide the following program objectives: to engage leaders with interest in innovative approaches, to create collaborative, student focused learning experiences and to integrate and build upon the commitment and capabilities of VIU Faculty, visiting scholars, and the BC Regional Innovations Chair in Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development

3) VIU would appoint a faculty member to the position of Chair of the WLCE with responsibilities to direct and supervise the WLCE; provide oversight and direction to the MA in SLM; represent the WLCE to the WLO; teach and advise graduate students; and establish and implement recruitment plans for scholarships, assistantships and funds for student and international research.

The World Leisure Centre of Excellence Program was designed to incorporate post-graduate education with complementary research and service with an international focus (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016). Currently, one of the WLCE's main goals is bringing together researchers, scholars, professionals and students in order to advance, promote, and exchange leisure concepts, best practices and other topics.

There are currently four designated WLO Centres of Excellence that work in collaboration with various projects: Arizona State University (USA), Vancouver Island University (Canada), NHTV Breda University (Netherlands) and Deusto University (Spain). Each centre has a unique focus and educational theme with a delivery of graduate and PhD programs.

The center and scholarly activity

There are two core themes of the Centre that frame the deliverable functions of service, education and research.

1. Sustainability: Questioning the relationship between leisure and sustainability, determining the level of sustainability of the leisure industry and inviting and monitoring new models and approaches to enhance sustainability.

2. Innovation: Rethinking the systems and structures that have evolved across the globe, creating a culture of innovation where new ideas emerge and flourish, and measuring the impact of innovation on sustainability efforts.

The work of the Center objectives includes:

1. Creation of a network of scholars from academic, government, non government and community to form a community of practice that engages in dialogue on sustainability and innovation in leisure.

2. Collaborative scholarship on sustainability and innovation in leisure including research projects, learn abroad opportunities, and interactive media.

3. Delivery of a Masters degree in Sustainable Leisure Management at Vancouver Island University where emerging scholars learn about the core thematic areas of the Center while engaging in dialogue with partners within the network (WORLD LEISURE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, 2013).

World Leisure Organization

The WLO is a world-wide, non-governmental association of persons and organizations dedicated to discovering and fostering the conditions best permitting leisure to serve as a force for human growth, development and well-being. The three action areas of the WLO are to foster inquiry, engage in informed advocacy and knowledge sharing (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016).

The WLO has six strategic areas shaping their goals and planning. As a WLO centre, the VIU WLCE is able to align itself with four of the six strategic areas through its three centre tiers of education, research and service. These four strategic areas are; Enhancing Research and Scholarships; Advocating for Leisure; Expanding Educational Opportunities and Learning Venues; and Strengthening Partnerships and Collaborative Relationships.

WLCE activities and events

WLCE programs are organized as an international post-graduate program with research and service elements supporting the effort. Such centers provide a unique opportunity for graduate students from throughout the world and leisure educators, researchers and professionals to come together at one venue to participate in and/or contribute to the offering of an English-based graduate program.

Themes of these programs can relate to enhancing global awareness, increasing environmental sensitivity, sustainability and innovation, community development and promoting quality of life issues through leisure and certainly provide for its students a greater awareness of living in a globalized society. Following are numerous events and activities that the VIU Centre of Excellence has engaged in and developed since its inception.

Field School in Mobile, Alabama, USA

An inaugural Field School was delivered in Mobile, Alabama, USA, September 2014. The initial concept of the field school came through discussions within the WLCE to

find ways to connect the centres and create opportunities for students through international and global learning.

The theme of this first Field School was: "Creating a Livable City through Leisure: A Global Perspective". Mobile aimed to transform the inner city into a more livable and vibrant area. Leisure was seen as an important element in this transformation. Some leisure spaces were better able in bringing human activity and interaction than others. The first challenge presented was to provide a context for bringing people together to make those spaces more sociable. This required leisure spaces to function as 'third spaces': places of social interaction. 'Classic' third spaces were public parks and squares, coffee houses, cafés or bars, or, potentially, the main street (SOJA, 1996). But for these places to actually function as central urban meeting spaces, it was necessary to make them able to coordinate human co-presence and stimulate meaningful social experiences (HICKMAN, 2013). Since leisure is essential to build a sense of community, having the adequate infrastructures for individuals to interact will ultimately lead to improve their quality of life in general (EDGINTON, 2012).

The experience of this Field School included a case study analysis of a current situation in the host community, online platform/component, required readings, participation in the congress, attendance at WLCE master classes, presentation at the congress, involvement in experiential learning, participatory research and completion of a final report determined by each sending University (WORLD LEISURE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, 2014).

2016 Field School in Durban, South Africa

The second Field School will take place in Durban, South Africa from June 24th to July 1st, 2016. Some of the topics that will be addressed during the field school include promoting outdoor spaces suited for leisure/recreational activities, participation in a local project to develop a plan for these spaces in order to attract local people and/or tourists to visit and actively enjoy and experience during leisure time, including a variety of target groups with different age groups, diversity and cultural backgrounds, considering sustainability as a main ecological and social focus to achieve social cohesion in the area.

Supported by the WLO and determined by the Committee members, the naming of this experience is the Douglas Ribeiro da Silva Field School. The reason behind this decision was to offer a tribute to one of the Brazilian students who participated in the last WLO Congress in Alabama. Unfortunately, Douglas passed away during the Congress in 2014. In spite of all adversities in his life, he chose education and knowledge as the path to be followed in order to change society, to empower and emancipate people. His life was an inspirational example on how to overcome difficulties and discrimination with knowledge. Therefore, his story represents the message that the WLO wants to send out to emergent, young global changers and leaders around the world.

The 2016 World Leisure Congress will be hosted by the Leisure and Recreation Association of South Africa (LARASA) with Durban as the host city. The theme of the WLO Congress is Challenges, Choices and Consequences within a leisure management context. It will highlight the importance of an integrated approach using leisure services to improve the human condition, transforming spaces and boosting the economy (LARASA, 2016).

Visiting Scholar Program

The Visiting Scholars Program is an integral component of two initiatives at Vancouver Island University (VIU): the MA Degree in Sustainable Leisure Management, and the World Leisure Centre of Excellence. Accordingly, the Visiting Scholar Program is designed to bring local and international leaders to VIU to engage with students, faculty, and the Vancouver Island region. The purpose of this engagement is to enrich the student experience, to share research and professional experiences, and to explore possibilities for future collaborations such as research projects, student and faculty exchanges and study tours. The faculty in the Department of Recreation and Tourism at VIU is one of the largest leisure related programs in Canada, and includes two funded Research Chairs. The Visiting Scholar program is an enhancement to the already active department in research, international activity, and community projects.

Suitable Visiting Scholar candidates are scholars with research and teaching expertise in leisure, sustainability, innovation, behavior change, community development, knowledge mobilization, strategic planning, and related areas. Scholars may be either, or both, practitioners or academics who are actively engaged in the study or application of sustainable practices in leisure management. Visiting scholars participate in the delivery of one of these courses, with ten hours of required teaching as well as the delivery of a public presentation.

VIU will fund up to \$4000 CDN for travel and living expenses for four visiting scholars per year. To date we have had well over 30 Visiting Scholars and numerous Scholars in Residence participating in our innovative teaching model.

Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management

The MA program in Sustainable Leisure Management (MA SLM) at VIU prepares emerging leaders to create innovative approaches for providing recreation and tourism opportunities in ways that respect and enhance communities, natural settings, and local economies. It is a 16-20 month degree which included face to face courses and experiential field trips.

The academic schedule for the MA SLM program commences each year in September, with courses organized mainly in four week modules. Courses include Leisure and Sustainability: Principles and Paradigms; Case Studies in Sustainability and Innovation; Influencing Change Towards Sustainability; and two courses in research called Knowledge Mobilization. Students write and deliver a thesis supported by a committee and an external reviewer for the defense.

Innovation Infusion Series

The Innovation Infusion Series was created to complement the Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management, provided by VIU's Centre of Excellence. Throughout the year, a mix of visiting scholars and guests are welcome to speak about their practices or research related to sustainability, leisure and innovation. Presentations are open to the general public, practitioners and students and are delivered free of charge. The delivery has been in presentation or workshop format and the purpose is to spark discussion with the audience about the topic and around the WLCE themes. Some of the topics have included; Reforming Leisure in China, Dr. Geoffrey Godbey; International Volunteer Tourism, Dr. Stephen Wearing; The Cruise Industry and Sustainable Development in European Cities, Dr. John McCarthy; Dog Friendly Tourism, Dr. Neil Carr; and Commercial Gentrification, Olaf Ernst.

The team

The people behind the Center are scholars, faculty members and students from different backgrounds, enhancing the essence of a culturally diverse institution. The managing and administration of the Center falls under Joanne Schroeder, Director of Partnerships and Community Engagement and Dr. Nicole Vaugeois, Director of Advancement and Strategic Initiatives from the Department of Recreation and Tourism.

Graduates and undergrad students fill work opportunity positions within the Centre every year. There are three current positions which facilitate a variety of tasks and initiatives and additional on-going small contracts are filled for short term projects. The permanent positions are filled by the Communications Assistant, working on promotions for the centre with blogs and other social media as a means of public engagement. As well as working alongside faculty members for the annual report writing and strategic development for continuous growth of the Centre.

Secondly, the Event Coordinator whose responsibilities include coordinating the calendar of events for Innovation Infusion Series and a reading circle event. Finally, the WLCE Ambassadors is involved in preparing planning itineraries and activities for the visiting scholars that are hosted at VIU and encouraging more engagement by students and other scholars at VIU with the WLCE.

The student's perspective plays an essential role in the Center by bringing fresh ideas from different backgrounds and enhancing the diversity and the knowledge building that is one of the aims of the Centre.

Experiential learning in sustainability and innovation

Experiential education and learning is a critical component of the MA in Sustainable Leisure Management. Each cohort of students is involved in field experiences throughout the Vancouver Island region and Greater Vancouver. The purpose is to learn how organizations, businesses and government agencies are addressing sustainability challenges through innovative thinking and action.

Complex social issues are addressed, collaborative efforts between multiple stakeholders are observed and explored, and students interact with a range of individuals. Learning occurs in a variety of venues ranging from farms, to parks, trails, open spaces and public forums to name a few.

The field work is developed with a very clear experiential model, applied as a continual spiral of learning. The process involves preparation notes for the field thus understanding the context of where they are going; creation of field notes while in the field; reflection of summary of notes after returning, and writing with new knowledge.

Students are required to identify sustainability issues they learned in the field; propose what stakeholders were doing to address or not address the issues and research innovations from around the globe that could be applied to the sustainability issues observed.

Solution Series Innovation Labs

As complex, social issues continue to grow in our communities, both locally and globally, the leisure services industry is challenged to not only think outside of the box, but get outside of the box! These are the questions that the Solutions Series Innovation Labs probed and challenged. Solution Series Innovation Labs is an initiative piloted in 2014, under the WLCE where students and practitioners participated together in four separate workshops providing concrete experiences with active involvement tasks. In this initiative, the VIU Department of Recreation and Tourism students successfully explored how they could use innovation lab techniques to address key community issues as identified by leisure professionals.

Changing the Conversation was the theme of these workshops which engaged well over 120 participants. Practitioners participated from the private, public and not for profit sectors as well as educators and both graduate and undergraduate students. The four labs addressed; Leisure Access in Aquatics; A Framework for Recreation 2015;

Tourism Product Development & Recreation Opportunities and finally, Tourism and Recreation Professionals, Where Have They All Gone?

Case studies: innovative leisure practices

Case studies are a valuable way for researchers and practitioners to synthesize and share knowledge with external audiences in a way that allows others to reflect, discuss and learn from approaches taken in other contexts. While ample case studies can be found in areas such as management, sustainability, and community development, there are far fewer cases available in leisure. At a time when new approaches and models are being piloted and learned from in various contexts around the world, the leisure community is missing out on an opportunity to document and learn from these innovations taking place.

After the success of the 2015 volume of case studies, The World Leisure Centre of Excellence at Vancouver Island University is accepting case study proposals for inclusion in the 2016 volume of Innovative Leisure Practices. The intent of the volume is to provide a forum for the exchange of innovative practices in leisure. Innovative practices are defined as any unique, modern or promising approaches, strategies or techniques that have been used to address current issues, opportunities or trends in leisure. These can be practices conducted at a societal, community, or organizational level in either the field of practice or in leisure research.

The first of two intended audiences for these case studies include the faculty and students in leisure related academic programs who can benefit from having current examples of how researchers and practitioners are approaching common issues, opportunities and trends. The second audience will be practitioners who will benefit from having a platform to either share their own innovative practices or gain insight from new research or other practitioner contexts.

The aim of the case studies is to share examples where research and practice connect in innovative ways to offer solutions for common issues and opportunities in leisure. The volume will be shared widely via the network of World Leisure Centres' Excellence as a free, downloadable resource for faculty, students and practitioners. To view the 2015 volume of case studies visit <http://www.worldleisureviu.org/>

Future for other WLO Centres of Excellence

The WLO has a desire to see growth in the number of Centres of Excellence so that their mission and vision might be expanded globally. The main benefits for students include international exchange programs, BSc, MSc, access to internships and training opportunities in other institutions, PhD and possible research stays and finally, joint thesis supervision from other centres.

The benefit for post doc researchers include; research stays, access to high impact journals, access to highly competitive programs and identification of consortium partners for competitive projects proposals, post-doc positions, access to scientific congresses, collaboration with non-academic agencies, entities or companies interested in following the project development and its final results and finally access to data bases with competitive research calls, funding programs, and research scholarships. (WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION, 2016)

The VIU WLCE Future

To date, the Centre has successfully met the goals of prior strategic plans with very limited resources. Now that the Centre is established, well known, and networked internationally, it is ready to set sights on larger and more complex activities to expand the reach and impact of the work. To that end, the Centre will be engaging in a 3-5 year strategic planning workshop in the spring of 2016 to strengthen partnerships and collaborative relationships and set priorities for the way forward. It is anticipated that the input from faculty, stakeholders and emerging leaders will direct the initiatives and focus to move the WLCE into another stage of Excellence.

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