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Max Weber and leisure

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Introduction

At first sight, including the work of Weber in a handbook on leisure theory seems rather odd as his work is mainly concerned with the domains of religion and work. Unsurprisingly, the term ‘leisure’ is never mentioned in his 1400+ page magnus opus *Economy and Society*. Yet, his work in both domains has greatly influenced leisure studies. Below we will discuss: 1) the Protestant Ethic and the absence of leisure, focusing on the relationship between religion and consumption, 2) bureaucracy and rationalization of leisure, discussing McDonaldization and re-enchantment, and 3) social inequality and leisure: class, status, party, discussing how status – vis-à-vis class –matters for lifestyle studies. Each section consists of a discussion of Weber’s theories on the topic, followed a description of how his ideas have affected recent leisure studies. Finally, we will provide some suggestions for further research in the conclusion.

The Protestant Ethic and the absence of leisure

Weber's foundations

In his masterpiece *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as well as in other works on the sociology of religion, Weber examines the "inner relationship between certain expressions of the old Protestant spirit and modern capitalistic culture" (*Protestant Ethic*, p. 11). These certain expressions refer to the ascetic rationalism of Calvinism, which differed from the mysticism of many other world religions in several ways (Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1995, p. 205). First, those who accepted the Calvinist doctrine believed in predestination, i.e., that God – and God alone – decided who would be saved and who would be damned. As such, Calvinists were anxious to know whether they were among the chosen ones. Second, as they could not get any certainty about their fate, they inevitably felt a great inner loneliness and isolation. Third, although one could not influence God's decision – his ways were considered incomprehensible and his motives unsearchable, people began to look for signs that they were among the elect. People wanted to be convinced that they deserved good fortune (*Social Psychology*, p. 271). Besides faith, intense worldly activity helped to win certainty of his state of grace and alleviate doubts (*Economy and Society*, p. 547). Fourth, all believers were considered instruments of God who were expected to live rational ascetic lives and master this world through work in a worldly vocation (*Religious Rejections*, p. 325). The devout should therefore not fall for irrational sensual pleasures, superstitions or things of the flesh. As such, "the path to salvation was turned away from a contemplative 'flight from the world' and towards an active ascetic 'work in this world'" (*Social Psychology*, p. 290).

According to Weber, such worldly asceticism was one of the factors that fostered the rise of the spirit of capitalism (*Social Psychology*, p. 268). This capitalistic culture contains several key

elements (Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1995, p. 203). First, work is valued as an end in itself – a duty, instead of means to an end. "The valuation of the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume" was unquestionably new, according to Weber (*Protestant Ethic*, p. 40). As such, considering one's profession a 'calling' is a key characteristic of the ethic of capitalistic culture (p. 19). Second, wealth and profit are evidence of economic as well as personal virtue, i.e. a certification of grace. "If success supervenes upon such acquisitive activity, it is regarded as a manifestation of god's blessing upon the labor of the pious man and of god's pleasure with his economic pattern of life" (*Economy and Society*, p. 543). Third, everyday life should be methodically organized by reason. Calvinists took systemization of ethical conduct quite literally by entering or tabulating their sins, temptations, and progress in religious account-books (*Protestant Ethic*, p. 76). Fourth, future satisfaction is more important than immediate happiness. As such, the enjoyments of wealth is forbidden to the ascetic and profit should be reinvested in the honor of God.

When such capitalistic culture is (still) strongly coupled to Calvinism, there is hardly any place for leisure as every worldly activity should be performed in God's glory. First, if labor is a divine calling, and considering the short span of human life to confirm one's election by showing personal virtue, "loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation (*Protestant Ethic*, p. 105). Second, enjoying non-rational activities (art and erotic life) that do not have a clear religious value were considered suspect, as deifications of the creaturely. As long as the creative artist experiences his work as resulting either from a calling, the relationship between art and the religious ethic remains harmonious (*Religious Rejections*, p. 341). However, as art aims to provide "salvation from the routines of everyday life", it begins to compete with the redemptory function of religion and the relationship becomes more problematic, even blasphemous (p. 342).

Third, indulging in immediate material wealth was morally abject. "The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life". (*Protestant Ethic*, pp. 105). Thus, leisure in general was regarded a competitor to the kingdom of God (*Social Psychology*, pp. 291).

Building on Weber

Probably the most important and celebrated publication on leisure and consumption taking much of its inspiration from Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is Colin Campbell's (1987) *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. In this book, Campbell wonders how it is possible that the Puritanically inclined English middle classes shifted to an ethic of consumerism in the eighteenth century. Campbell (1987, p. 12) aims for an update and extension of Weber's arguments: "Thus, the basis of an ethical code which served to justify consumption is described largely by a process of distinguishing it from that "Protestant ethic" described by Weber. Despite these differences, the underlying structure of the argument advanced mirrors that of Weber's, stressing the central role of a cultural 'ethic' in enabling the introduction of a 'modern' form of economic action, demonstrating both their 'congruence' and their psychological and cultural connections". Indeed, if we consider Weber's thesis as "an account of the development of a distinctive 'motivational complex'" (Campbell, 2006, p. 210), the parallels Campbell is pointing at are obvious. The middle class did not seek pleasure in material consumption or physical sensations, but rather in emotions to be tickled by the imagination and daydreaming. The novel, probably the romantic consumer good par excellence, was not loved as a commodity to be owned, but as an object of self-illusionary engagement, or modern autonomous imaginative hedonism (Campbell, 1987, p. 78). Thus, other than traditional hedonism, which seeks

gratification in the object itself, Campbell's modern hedonism finds pleasure in a degree of control over the meanings of objects. Moreover, "the modern hedonist possessed the very special power to conjure up stimuli in the absence of any externally generated sensations. This control is achieved through the power of imagination, and provides infinitely greater possibilities for the maximization of pleasurable experiences than was available under traditional, realistic hedonism to even the most powerful of potentates. This derives not merely from the fact that there are virtually no restrictions upon the faculty if imagination, but also from the fact that it is completely within the hedonist's own control. It is this highly rationalized form of self-illusory hedonism which characterized modern pleasure-seeking" (ibid., p. 76).

But how can this modern hedonism be derived from the Protestant ethic? Campbell notes that the Puritans were no total strangers to the concept of pleasure. 'Rational' recreation was permitted and pleasure, including the enjoyment of sexuality, was alright as long as it was not an end in itself but "accompanied acts demanded by God or supported by reason" (ibid., p. 102). Campbell goes on to argue that Weber, trying to unravel Protestantism's impact on economic production, did not pay much attention to strands of Protestant thought that were more relevant for understanding its relation to consumption. Thus, Calvinism was not only very rational and ascetic, but its teachings also had the abovementioned profound emotional effects of loneliness, self-doubt and fear as a result of predestination. Interestingly, as Calvinism went into decline, signs of godliness were increasingly sought in character traits, the experience of saving grace, and emotional states that had a special spiritual significance, not just in conduct or material success. Valuing the possession and manifestation of feelings in Calvinism, together with the attenuation of belief and a growing faith in the natural goodness of man, ultimately led to sentimentalism, allowing one to derive pleasure or bitter-sweet melancholy from religious meditations. Thus, Campbell (1987: 142) arrives at the notion of sensibility as an ideal of character in the eighteenth

century that "clearly embraces a readiness to indulge emotions for the pleasures which they can supply".

Sentimentalism, stemming from Calvinism, then, is a precursor to romanticism. With its emphasis on creativity and personal, divine genius, this shift "resulted in two closely connected forms of religious faith: a pan-psychic mysticism, or pantheism, with regard to nature at large, combined with a purely personal drama of salvation and redemption to be acted out within the confines of the self", turning romanticism into "a theory of art extrapolated into a philosophy of life" (p. 182). And now pleasure became not just something acceptable, but in fact something dignified, the "defining attribute of all life" (p. 191) demonstrating one was not too alienated from nature. Hence, with creativity being a central characteristic of the divine, imagination became a highly appreciated quality allowing one to ponder the true and perfect world and experience pleasure in doing so. Experiencing such pleasure came to indicate one's search for a more perfect world and was therefore valued positively (unless it was pleasure derived from immediate sensation). As such, Campbell's brilliant application of Weber's work demonstrates how Weber's thought is still relevant for explaining today's insatiable consumer on his ongoing quest for pleasure and why some forms of pleasure seem more in line with 'good taste' than others.

A limited number of studies into the relation between leisure and religion is more loosely based on Weber and markedly less ambitious in this respect. Katz-Gerro and Jaeger (2012) find that religiosity (frequency of church attendance), rather than religion per se, is positively related with cultural consumption. Moreover, the impact of religiosity is comparable to that of well-known determinants of cultural lifestyles such as education, income and age (see also Katz-Gerro, Raz & Yaish, 2009). Van Eijck (2012) found less strong direct effects of religion once socioeconomic and demographic characteristics were controlled for. Especially social value orientations, which were closely related with religious identification, turned out to be relevant for explaining cultural

preferences for classical and modern art styles. This finding aligns with DiMaggio's (1996) study on museum visitors whom he found to be less often Protestants, less often believing the Bible to be the literal word of God and less likely to claim that religion is important for the good life than non-visitors. In fact, these studies confirm that effects of religion are largely mediated by the values and convictions that come with certain religions. For example, Van Eijck (2012) found that a preference for modern or abstract visual arts is negatively related with being religious as well as with indicators of traditionalism such as communitarianism and social disorientation. Weber alluded to this very animosity between art and religion, which he attributed to the rise of the intellectualist perspective that values aesthetic criteria over ethical ones when judging works of art: "The rejection of responsibility for ethical judgment and the fear of appearing bound by tradition, which come to the fore in intellectualist periods, shift judgments whose intention was originally ethical into an aesthetic key" (*Economy and Society*, p. 608). The findings suggest that, indeed, religious people find it more difficult to put their moral criteria aside and make room for the more playful attitude that is required for an aesthetic enjoyment of images, irrespective of their moral connotations. Thus, the 'distinctive motivational complex' offered by religion is highly relevant for contemporary leisure studies and, as Campbell has demonstrated, can lead us into unexpected directions.

Bureaucracy and the rationalization of leisure

Weber's foundations

In his sociology of religion, Weber contrasted capitalistic with traditionalist culture and rational ascetic Calvinism with mysticism. Similarly, in his work on social stratification, he distinguishes three ideal types of domination or authority: charismatic, traditional and rational legal (*Economy and Society*, pp. 212-301). First, charismatic authority rests "on devotion to the exceptional

sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (p. 215). Charismatic leadership is solely based on the belief in the 'divine powers' of an individual. While the administrative apparatus initially consists of faithful disciples, over a longer period of time charismatic authority faces the problem of routinization, i.e. receding to traditional or rational-legal authority. Second, traditional authority is based "on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them" (p. 215). Third, legal-rational authority rests "on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (p. 215). Here, legitimacy is defined by having followed the 'right' procedure, for example through voting, and leadership based on position, irrespective of the charisma of the individual fulfilling that position. Weber labelled the administrative apparatus of the rational-legal system a bureaucracy.

A bureaucracy contains the following elements (pp. 956-959). First, employment is based on knowledge and experience, often formalized in qualifications. Second, its operations are governed by general and calculable rules in the form of written documents (laws or administrative regulations) applicable to all. These rules are "more or less stable, more or less exhaustive and can be learned" (p. 958) and are supposed to prevent arbitrariness. Third, there is a formal hierarchy with a clearly established system of super- and subordination. Fourth, all bureaucrats have a fixed number of specialized tasks, which fulfill a functional yet impersonal function. Fifth, there is segregation of official activities from the sphere of the private life. According to Weber, "the fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and material and personal

costs" (p. 973). Yet, a process of bureaucratization has also removed the magical from many forms of social interaction, which Weber labelled disenchantment.

Building on Weber

Weber's work in rationalization and bureaucratization has been used in leisure studies to study the leisure industries. Building on the work of Weber, George Ritzer has shown the extensiveness of rationalization in what he has labelled McDonaldization, i.e. "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (1996, p. 1). He distinguishes between five "alluring" dimensions.

First, the fast-food model offers *efficiency*, or at least an attempt to find and use the optimum means to a given end. In practice, this entails three things: streamlining a variety of process (e.g. assembly-line production of the product, drive-troughs), simplifying goods and services (e.g. offering limited menu options), and using the customer to perform tasks that employees used to do (e.g., salad bar; Ritzer, 1996, pp. 36-58). An example of the latter is how Amazon.com not only has the consumers do all the work in placing the order, but also serve as unpaid reviewers (Ritzer 1999, pp. 79-80). Online consumers even 'do the research' for these organizations by providing them data.

Second, McDonaldization emphasized calculability of process and product, i.e. a focus on quantity rather than quality of products (e.g., coffee sizes at Starbucks), efforts to create the illusion of quantity (e.g., use of an abundance of ice in drinks) and to reduce production and service processes to numbers (e.g., pizza-delivery time; Ritzer, 1996, pp. 59-78). Leisure businesses often also operate under the moniker '50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong'. Consider, for example, the importance of TV ratings and box office openings in defining a successful (good?) movie.

Third, predictability is achieved through a replication of settings (e.g. using the same interior for restaurants all over the world), the use of scripts to control what employees say (e.g., by welcoming customers in a standard manner), the routinization of employee behavior (e.g., by using training programs) and the offering of uniform products (Ritzer, 1996, pp. 79-99). This echoes Horkheimer and Adorno who wrote in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* : “In a film, the outcome can invariably be predicted at the start – who will be rewarded, punished, forgotten – and in light music the prepared ear can always guess the continuation after the first bars of a hit song and is gratified when it actually occurs.” (1997, p. 98-99). In contemporary culture industries, predictability is as seen as a strategy to handle risk uncertainty, explaining for example the popularity of sequels and movies based on successful books.

Fourth, McDonaldization emphasizes control by replacing humans with non-human technology (Ritzer, 1996, pp. 101-120). One example could be the replacement of gatekeepers (e.g., reviewers) – those providing tips to cultural consumers on related tastes, by algorithms. Another is the use of devices allowing people to scan the prices of the products they buy in the supermarket by themselves so they will not have to wait in line at the cash register.

Fifth, the irrationality of rationality refers to the negative effects of rationalization, to rational systems as unreasonable, dehumanizing systems, and moreover a dominating systems (Ritzer, 1996, pp. 121-142).

However, as Weber noted, the price that McDonaldization pays is that of disenchantment, in the realms of both work and leisure. This might lead to a growing resistance to the rationalized business side of leisure facilities as cathedrals of consumption, critiquing its quality, absence of the unpredictable, and lack of autonomy (Ritzer,1999). As such, some theorists have suggested the possibility of re-enchantment, particularly within the postmodern tradition (Ritzer 1999, pp. 75-77). First, the contemporary rationalized world could be seen as both enchanting as well as

disenchanting, for example places like Las Vegas. Second, consumers are ever more demanding and this affects competing leisure organizations. For example, as contemporary museum visitors want their visit to be more of an experience, they push museums to new, more 'enchanting' presentation styles. The famous concept of the 'experience economy' itself (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) is largely about re-enchantment. Third, but on a related note, postmodern theory calls for an abandonment of the focus on the agentic actor, and instead emphasizes the setting in which consumption occurs.

Social inequality and leisure: class, status, party

Weber's foundations

The study of social inequality owes to Weber the notion that social stratification is not merely a matter of class, but rather a multidimensional phenomenon. For starters, Weber refine the notion of class by distinguishing between three types of classes. Property classes are largely determined by differences in their properties and spending power, commercial classes by the marketability of goods and services they own or provide, and social classes are groupings within which social mobility is "easy and typical" (*Economy and Society*, pp. 302-3-5). But more importantly, Weber added status group and party as alternative sources of power. Parties are mostly relevant as units of political power, as their actions are always directed toward a set goal and they involve association in order to achieve political control. Our focus, as in most studies on social inequality in leisure and lifestyles, will be on Weber's fruitful distinction between classes and status groups. This distinction is by far the most relevant for leisure studies.

While all three types of classes can be defined in terms of their members' position in the system of production based on ownership, entrepreneurial and/or other skills, or shared working experiences, status groups can have different origins. Status (*ständige Lage*) is a claim to social

esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges founded on 1) style of life, 2) formal education, or 3) hereditary or occupational prestige. Status may rest on class position, but money, property or entrepreneurial positions will never be the sole determinants of status. Nor will the lack thereof foreclose status attainment. Inversely, status may influence class position but will not be identical to it. The status order, for Weber (p. 927), reflects "the way in which social honor is distributed in a community between typical groups participation in this distribution". Honor and power are linked in multiple ways, but must be distinguished due to the different yet partly overlapping sources of power and honor. Thus, Weber explains that "other determinants of reciprocal relations" than hose determined by the power of property (class) are at play and that "status groups hinder the strict carrying through of the sheer market principle" (p. 930).

For Weber, status honor "normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property" (p. 932). He argues that "status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle" (p. 932). This implies certain restrictions on social intercourse and the use of fashion items or other consumer goods which might be considered as a claim to qualify as a member of a certain status group. Status groups can be quite inaccessible for non-members. Especially when membership is limited to people with a specific ethnicity, they can become closed castes. Such a process turns what might initially be mere diversity into a vertical social system of super- and subordination. However, each status group believes in their own specific honor and a dignity which, depending on their relative position, lies either in this world or, for the less fortunate, in "a future lying beyond the present, whether it is of this life or on another" (p. 934).

According to Weber, "classes are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life" (p. 937). This makes their relation

inevitable as “the possibility of a style of life expected for members of a status group is usually conditioned economically” (p. 935). In addition, “material monopolies provide the most effective motives for the exclusiveness of a status group: although, in themselves, they are rarely sufficient, almost always they come into play to some extent” (p. 935). It is crucial that status groups are based on consumption patterns, or styles of life, in order to grasp Weber’s importance for the study of leisure. Leisure itself in fact becomes an indicator of status honor and shared leisure interests and consumption patterns are potentially powerful sources of honor, prestige, and the power that comes with that.

Building on Weber

With regard to the relevance of consumption for social inequality, the work of Pierre Bourdieu has been most influential, especially his major work *Distinction* (1984). In this book, Bourdieu leans heavily on Weber. Consumption patterns, or lifestyles, are (re)produced through differential access to economic, cultural, and social capital embodied in habitus. By introducing the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital, Bourdieu acknowledged, too, that social inequality entails not just economic or class differences. It is based on other sources of honor, especially cultural capital as indicated by manners and taste. Bourdieu does not, however, follow Weber in trying to clearly demarcate classes from status groups. He rather treats status as the symbolic aspect of class structure, arguing that class positions are not defined by economic resources alone. Instead of assuming objective class boundaries based on economic structures, Bourdieu focuses on “the structured formation or self-production of class collectivities through struggles that simultaneously involve relationships between and within classes and determine the actual demarcation of their frontiers. Bourdieu replaces the concept of class structure with that of social space, understood as

the multidimensional distribution of socially effective forms of power (or capital, be it economic, cultural or social) underlying social positions" (Wacquant, 1991, p. 52).

More recent scholarly work has shown a growing interest in distinguishing between class and status in studies of cultural lifestyles or leisure activities. According to Chan and Goldthorpe (2010), a main weakness of research into the relation between social stratification and leisure consumption results from inadequacies in the operationalization of the former which typically fails to apply Weber's distinction between class and status. Referring to Weber, they argue that classes are not real sociocultural groupings; yet, class has been the main way to operationalize social inequality. The status order seems however more relevant for understanding cultural consumption as it is more explicitly linked to social honor. Status is expressed in differential association with others and "lifestyles that are seen as appropriate to different status levels. Status affiliations are thus more likely than class affiliations to be 'real' in the sense of ones that are recognised by and meaningful to the social actors involved" (p. 12). Lamenting the "loss of Weberian refinement" (p. 12), they demonstrate that since the 1950s, class and status have not been properly distinguished but used interchangeably by scholars from both the US and Europe, assuming, like Bourdieu, that class and status are necessarily closely and universally connected. The international survey research project launched by Chan and Goldthorpe re-establishes Weber's distinction. It demonstrates that, indeed, cultural consumption is stratified more by social status, which was measured using information on the occupations of significant others, than by social class (Chan, 2010; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007).

Finally, we can also see the growing interest in taking the status group concept seriously in attempts to link lifestyles to the composition of people's social networks (Mark, 1998; Lizardo, 2006). Using relational data is increasingly called for in order to understand leisure patterns in their social context. DellaPosta, Shi and Macy (2015, pp. 1502) argue as follows: "Unlike the members

of the underlying population, the respondents in a national random sample are atomized individuals, unaccompanied by friends and family. In the absence of relational data, there is no way to measure the effects of sorting and influence in the clustering of opinions. Investigators are then left with only one analytical option: to assign all the explanatory power to other individual attributes". This calls for more research that pays explicit attention to shared interpretations, concrete interactions and group identification when explaining leisure and taste patterns. Thus, explanations of cultural taste patterns, e.g. omnivorism, are increasingly cast in terms of underlying shared values (Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008, Ollivier 2008), (changing) symbolic boundaries (Holt, 1997; Friedman & Kuipers, 2013; Jarness, 2015) and people's engagement in multiple status groups with which they all partly identify (Lahire 2011) and interact (Collins, 2004; Ridgeway, 2013).

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the relevance of the insights of Max Weber for leisure theory. First, we discussed the Protestant Ethic and the absence of leisure, focusing on the relationship between religion and consumption. Second, we took at closer look at Weber's ideas on the bureaucracy and the rationalization of leisure, and how these ideas were used to discuss McDonaldization and re-enchantment. Third, we included a section on social inequality and leisure, discussing how status – vis-à-vis class –matters for lifestyle studies. While we demonstrated that each approach has led to fruitful new research, we would like to end this contribution by suggesting some avenues for future research. First, despite a trend towards secularization in most Western countries, religion remains important and in many parts of the world its impact is increasing, especially if we look at Islam. More research could examine how religion affects leisure consumption across the globe, particularly with a context of societal integration, and how particular religious values are translated

into leisure restrictions or opportunities. Second, how does re-enchantment work with online leisure consumption? To what extent do online enchantment rituals and meaning-making processes differ between online and offline cultural practices? Finally, the growing interest in the class-status distinction opens up the field of inequality and leisure to questions of shifting hierarchies of honor and prestige. Which leisure activities are considered more or less legitimate and how do non-class indicators such as gender, age and ethnicity affect the honor associated with specific leisure practices?

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