

Leisure management: All about the 'what' and the 'who'

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## Introduction

The catalyst for the production of *World Leisure Journal's (WLJ) Leisure Management Special Issue* came out of the Leisure Management Commission's conversations at the 2014 WLO Congress in Mobile Alabama. There were about six colleagues who shared ideas and updated each other about the leisure management issues that we wanted / needed to address through the activities of the LM Commission. It was clear to us at the time that there was scope to include more about leisure management in future WLO Congress programs and to contribute more to *WLJ's* content. The task of producing the LM Special Edition was embraced by Jo An and John to help provide a focus for the LM Commission and to address a perceived gap in some of the scholarly leisure literature.

The call for papers for the LM Special Edition was released in late 2015 so it is particularly rewarding to see the outcome of that initiative with five articles from around the world that address issues about leisure management. Tower and Zimmermann (2016) set the context for the special edition by inviting submissions about scholarly and empirical contributions, systematic reviews and reports that would further the understanding of how leisure management improves communities' quality of life. Our analysis identified limited publications in scholarly leisure journals that focused on leisure management and there was even less focus on community / non-profit and government services (except parks) where much of the community leisure programs are delivered. There was a need to provide more insights about community leisure programmes, services and facilities to assist in service provision (Tower & Zimmermann, 2016). Leisure management is about delivering the services that meet the leisure needs of individuals and communities. If leisure managers do their jobs effectively, then the communities around the globe will have better opportunities to increase their quality of life. This LM Special Edition delivers articles that explain how leisure managers are addressing communities' leisure needs.

The 'What' and 'Who' of Leisure Management

Leisure management is about the delivery of leisure services by understanding the phenomenon of leisure, how to organise a department and facilities (Nash, 1938), leadership, organisation, finance (Edginton, 1997), community planning, accountability, partnerships, diversity (Edginton, Hudson, Lankford & Larson, 2015), control, quality and performance (Taylor, 2011). The five articles in this *WLJ* edition all deal with aspects of these leisure management principles. Our analysis of these articles has identified two themes that underpin leisure management. Leisure managers need to have in-depth understanding of 'what' needs to be delivered and 'who' it is delivered for.

The 'what' of leisure management is about a thorough understanding of key concepts such as leisure, play, sport, recreation, tourism, and events. It is not our intention to review the explanations of these key concepts but simply to remind colleagues that this understanding is fundamental in order to place leisure management into context. The other aspect of the 'what' of leisure management is to understand how organisations function and manipulate their resources to deliver programs, services and facilities. As our industry has matured we have adopted more sophisticated concepts about planning, organising, leading, financing and measuring outcomes of leisure services. The articles in this edition provide insights about these matters.

A characteristic that leisure services share with a range of community services is the desire to achieve more than just an efficient and effective service. Leisure services often exist to help make the world a better place for diverse segments of the community. The impact of public management and the accountability of public funds increases the demand for leisure managers to deliver quality of life outcomes for many disadvantaged sectors of the community. The focus on diverse community groups provides another key element of leisure management, i.e., who is the service for?

The 'who' of leisure management is about understanding the leisure service consumers and stakeholders. Wearing, Schweinsburg and Tower's (2016) Tree Model of Marketing Delivery have the consumers and stakeholders as the trunk of the tree because without a thorough understanding 'who' the service is for, there is limited capacity to deliver successful services. One of the key branches of their marketing tree is the understanding of the market

segments and deciding on target markets. The better leisure managers understand who their programmes, services and facilities are for, the more likely they will be able to achieve their goals. Again, the articles in the LM Special Edition make important contributions to understand who is a stakeholder in the delivery of leisure services and whose quality of life is going to be improved/impacted by their involvement in the leisure programme, service or facility.

### The Articles

Each of the five articles in this issue provide useful insights about what needs to be delivered and who will benefit from the leisure service delivery.

Barnes, Lauckner and Hutchinson's article about recreation and health for people with chronic conditions provides many lessons about the 'what' and 'who' of leisure service delivery. One of the key aspects of their article relates to the capacity of leisure and health partnerships to be a key element of serving the needs of people with chronic health conditions. The collaboration which is researched and described in the article incorporated a wide range range of recreation and health providers with participants experiencing chronic conditions. The purpose was to develop and design programs and services that would help meet the needs of the participants as well introduce more effective service delivery via shared information and resources. The outcomes of this research underscore the need for partnerships – we just can't do it alone!

Pavelka's explanation of ongoing issues related to amenity migration provides particularly useful insights about the planning process when a community is changing due to an influx of 'amenity migrants'. Ironically, it would appear that the very features which draw these migrants may in fact suffer negative impacts due to the influx of part time residents. Pavelka's article reports on a longitudinal study of sorts. He investigated a particular Canadian community at three different points in time and illustrates how developments created primarily due to 'amenity migrants' changed the nature of the community. The conclusions illustrate the need to be not only aware of the 'who' but also the 'what' so that leisure services remain relevant in changing communities.

Understanding the importance of community connection helps leisure managers to focus on the elements of the community that may be best served by specific types of programs. Legg, Newland and Tanner's article focuses on adult recreational tennis players in one community and identified that the most important aspect of this program was the sense of community experienced by participants. By tying into literature related to sense of community and sense of community in sport, this research provides another way to look at the benefits of community sport programs. It also serves as a reminder that sometimes, the sport or activity we plan is only a means to achieving a much greater end.

Iversen explains the impacts of public policy management principles on the focus of sport facility managers. In particular, he examines which users and user groups facility managers focus on when developing programs and services in relation to how they receive funding to operate. The subtle differences between an activity-based management model and a budget-based management model have impacts on who is the focus of program development and what types of programs and services may be developed. Both of the management models have strengths and weaknesses, so a manager will need to be fully aware of the outcomes they desire in terms of the 'what' as well as the 'who' and choose the model that is more likely to assist them in reaching their target. The results of this research highlight once again that we must be intentional when planning.

Finally, Anderson provides a conceptual framework for designing and implementing programs for one of the largest user groups which we serve – namely youth. She argues that using tools from the world of psychology will provide a better understanding of the range of youth needs which will assist managers to better deliver youth programs. Incorporating a specific understanding of individual youth needs, especially youth with specific needs, via the five-factor model of personality will help leisure managers to develop and deliver more effective leisure services.

The objective of the LM Special Issue was to raise the profile of leisure management, especially in the community and government sectors. It was rewarding to receive a range of expressions of interest from 13 authors, with eleven that fit well with this Special Issue. Ultimately, eight articles were submitted and five accepted giving us an overall acceptance

rate of less than 40%. The contribution of these articles will assist leisure managers to provide better programmes, services and facilities and to understand approaches that will help them to understand the needs of the diverse communities they intend to serve.

This Special Issue is just another step in the range of initiatives from WLO in the leisure management space. The evolving LM Special Interest Group is addressing a range of new initiatives that will help leisure managers to address local issues on a global scale. We are also optimistic that the leisure management stream will have a substantial programme in future WLO Congresses.

As the guest co-editors of the LM Special Issue, we also want to share some reflections of this task. We recognise that we have learned a lot from doing this job and will be much better in this role if and when we do something similar in the future. We want to express our gratitude to all the referees who donated their skills and time to provide comments to the articles under review. Being a referee for a journal article is a thankless task and it was rewarding to see the effort and expertise that referees provided to the anonymous author/s. Although some articles were not included in this special issue, we are hopeful that authors will take the feedback and resubmit their work in future editions of *WLJ* or other leisure journals. Our colleagues in the leisure industry have so much useful information to share. We are delighted that our efforts as guest editors provided the opportunity for some of our colleagues to share their research and insights to improve the management of leisure services.

Finally, we want to thank Atara and Eugene in the *WLJ* editor office. We were rookies in the editing of a journal so we were dependent on their capacity to guide us in the process. Atara and Eugene were patient, supportive and friendly in how we worked as a team to produce this edition of *WLJ*. Now that we are done, we can reflect that it was a pleasure to be able to make this contribution to leisure scholarship through our efforts as guest editors with *WLJ*.

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