Leisure in the Network Society: From pseudo-events to hyperfestivity?

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Introduction

Albert Einstein once remarked that 'The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.' In the contemporary network society, however, this system seems to have stopped working. We are constantly bombarded by events; natural disasters on our TV screens, news streams on the Internet, alerts on our mobile phones, events we feel compelled to attend, events we have to arrange, rights of passage to be passed through. The regular rhythms of events in traditional societies and the ordered series of events in industrial society seem to have given way to a chaotic cacophony of events, which we might characterise as 'hypereventfulness' or 'hyperfestivity'. Every place, every organisation and every community seems compelled to organise events, whether as a tool for social cohesion, a means of generating economic impact or boosting an external image.

This brief review considers why events have become so important in contemporary society and how events and other leisure phenomena are shaped by the network society. This analysis is placed against a background of developments in research in the leisure field, and considers how we might best organise our research efforts to study the changing nature of leisure in contemporary society.

A brief history of pseudo-events

The American historian Daniel Boorstin was the first to comment on the gathering avalanche of events that seems to have overtaken modern society. Boorstin illustrated the development of what he called ´pseudo-events´ through an analysis of leisure, particularly the rise of the media and tourism. He took the example of a hotel that wishes to increase its business. The hotel hires a public relations consultant, whose advice is that the hotel creates an event – a celebration of the hotel's thirtieth anniversary.

> *Once the celebration has been held, the celebration itself becomes evidence that the hotel really is a distinguished institution. The occasion actually gives the hotel the prestige to which it is pretending (Boorstin, 1962:xx).*

According to Boorstin, such pseudo-events are distinguished from 'real' events by:

- A lack of sponteaneity – they are purposefully planned
- An orientation towards the media – the purpose of a pseudo event is to be reported
- Their ambiguous relation to the underlying reality of the situation. Whether it is 'real' or not is less important than its newsworthiness and ability to gain favorable attention.
- Their inclination to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The result of the proliferation of pseudo-events, according to Boorstin was 'the programming of our experiences', with 'no peaks and valleys, no surprises.' Somewhat ironically, Boorstin himself became something of an event organiser when he was appointed as Librarian of Congress in 1975, as he 'installed picnic tables and benches out front, established a center to encourage reading and arranged midday concerts and multimedia events for all' (McFadden, 2004).

Boorstin's book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America* was written in 1961, and was one of the inspirations for Beaurillard's (1985) analysis of 'hyperreality' almost a quarter of a century later. Boorstin's work seems to identify the emergence of postmodernity before it became labeled as such: the replacement of the 'real' by the sign or image, the replacement of the 'hero' (sic) living through real events by the 'celebrity' living through the pseudo-events created by the media. Interestingly, Boorstin's book is now a classic in the field of leisure, because his prime example of pseudo-events related to the rise of tourism. He discussed the way in which the serious business of 'travel' (derived originally from the French *travail*, or work) had been replaced by tourism, in which real adventure is replaced by relaxing pseudo-events:

> *The traveler was active; he (sic) went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes 'sight-seeing' (p. 85).*

Although Boorstin's view of modern leisure and tourism experiences as being essentially shallow and meaningless was later challenged in Dean MacCannell's (1976) seminal work *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*, at least some of the conceptual mud that Boorstin slung in the direction of modern consumption has stuck. The image of the consumer as the willing dupe of modern capitalism is reflected in a host of later studies, notably Ritzer's (1993) conception of McDonaldization and Gary Cross's (2000) survey of American consumerism.

Cross (2000: 2) argued that consumerism won out against all other 'isms' and ideologies in the 20th century because:

> *..it concretely expressed the cardinal political ideals of the century – liberty and democracy – and with relatively little self-destructive behavior or personal humiliation. Consumer goods allowed Americans to escape from their old, relatively secure but closed communities and enter the expressive individualism of a dynamic 'mass' society.*

This dynamic mass society has been made possible through the breakdown of a range of structuring elements of industrial society, such as the family, religion, and traditional patterns of work and leisure. These changes have led to widespread disembedding of individuals and social groups and the development of a form of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) in which more flexible bases of interaction and relation are prevalent, most notably information technology and new forms of media. This is what Castells (2009) refers to as the 'network society'.

The widespread dislocation and fracturing of modern life occasioned by such changes has arguably produced need for new forms of social interaction, new types of social identification and a realignment between individuals, their identities and the places they live in. In many cases this has caused people to seek new forms of meaning in the past, which is often viewed as a more stable, more certain and more tangible reality than the hyperreality of postmodern life. In Boorstin´s terms, pseudo-events based on the past are safer than those created around contemporary culture, because they defuse contemporary politics by infusing sanitized nostalgia.

In leisure, the resort to history was encapsulated in the growth of the 'heritage industry', which the British cultural historian Robert Hewison (1987) saw as being symptomatic of a country in decline. Nostalgia for lost empires, a hankering for times past and old certainties characterised post-modern Britain, and heritage was seized upon by Thatcher's Conservative Government in the 1980s as a justification for promoting traditional values and a particular view of history. This had a direct impact on leisure policy, as responsibility for culture and tourism passed to a newly-created Department of National Heritage. The cult of heritage in the UK was firmly seated in a conservative rejection of modern culture and multicultural visions of society, but it also reflected the emerging view of leisure as an industry which could at least partly replace the jobs decimated by the decline of manufacturing.

The problem, as the opening sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* (1953), made clear, is that; 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'. This refrain was later borrowed by the American geographer David Lowenthal, whose magnum opus *The Past is a Foreign Country* made it clear that the many attractions of the past included the fact that we feel at home there – the past is where we come from. The problem is that dwelling on the past does not put bread on the table. We need a system for bringing the past into the present, and making it a utilisable resource for future development.

History has therefore been transformed into a commodity called heritage. The symbolic capital of the past is utilised to add value to a wide range of phenomena, from tourist attractions to sporting competitions to architecture. The attempts to use our past for present gain has often given rise to over-zealous preservation of the past as well as incon-

gruous new ‘heritage’ developments. The mock Victorian kitsch in a contemporary shopping centre, a Medieval theme park in the middle of a modern housing development, or the growth of ‘ostalgie’ for Communist architecture in former East Block countries are all good examples of this.

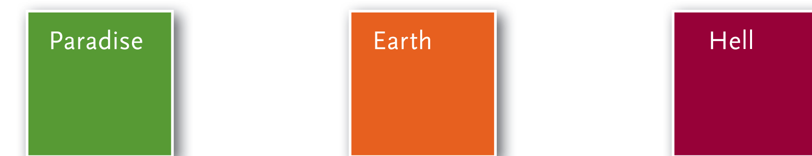
UNESCO (1998) noted that such philosophies of cultural heritage preservation were producing a ‘shift from a zeal for great architectural masterworks towards the appreciation of a historic sense of place and from the monumental to the vernacular’. This may have increased the comfort zone of those actually living in the ‘space of places’ in the network society (Castells, 1996), but it has recently produced a reaction in the blunt futurism of architects such as Frank Gehry, Zara Hadid and Jean Nouvel. The exaltation of intangible heritage by UNESCO and the rise of ‘creativity’ as a new stimulus for urban development (Richards and Wilson, 2007) may also be seen as part of this contemporary rejection of heritage by the cosmopolitan class anchored in the ‘space of flows’.

The creative turn has caused many to think about the use of the past in new ways. In particular, the past is now increasingly being viewed as a source of creative ideas that can be employed to develop contemporary production and consumption. Nowhere is this clearer than here in Brabant, where the development of the celebrations surrounding the 500th anniversary of the painter Hieronymus Bosch in 2016 represent a huge collective effort to utilise the creative capital of the past to develop activities and events which are relevant to the present. Bosch is not seen as a historical figure so much as a source of inspiration and ideas to be used by modern creators to engage with universal themes and to give local citizens new reasons to engage with each other and with their own culture and creativity. The programme for the Bosch 500 celebrations has so far included a gastronomic competition between different neighbourhoods, an artistic parade on the Binnen Dieze river and the Bosch Young Talent Show, linking all the ‘Bosch Cities’ that contain paintings by Bosch. The fact that Den Bosch is the only member of the network which does not have works by Bosch means that the city has to be even more creative in its use of symbolic capital linked to the painter.

This creative use of the past to stimulate current activity and interaction is also evident in a trend that Robert Palmer and myself (Richards and Palmer, 2010) have identified as the rise of the ‘Eventful City’. In addition to the many celebrations linked to contemporary culture, cities are also continually mining the past for excuses to celebrate: anniversaries of famous peoples’ births and deaths, famous moments in the history of the city, even creating events to celebrate past events. ‘Special events’ have been with us for a long time (Richards, 1992), but now it seems that they have become an essential part of the cultural DNA of cities and regions worldwide. Contemporary societies increasingly seem to be flooded with events, designed to meet a range of different needs, varying from economic development to stimulating creativity to supporting social cohesion. The result is a feeling of ‘festivalisation’ or ‘hyperfestivity’ in certain cities, to the extent that Einstein´s vision of time as a separator of events seems to have collapsed.

The rise of eventfulness is clear to see in Brabant, just as it is in many other regions. Alongside the extensive programme being developed for Hieronymus Bosch in Den Bosch, the five major cities in the region, including Tilburg, Eindhoven, Helmond and Breda together with Den Bosch are bidding for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC). The idea is to use the event as a catalyst for binding these cities together into a new network city called BrabantStad.

The possibility of this prestigious event being organised by a non-existent city is a fascinating prospect, and a challenge that requires far more creativity, collaboration and coordination than normally required by the ECOC. Not surprisingly, therefore the development of BrabantStad Culturele Hoofdstad is one of the areas in which we are planning to do research in the future, as I will outline later. However, the developments in Brabant provide inspiration for this analysis in more ways than one. BrabantStad is the home of Heronymous Bosch, the fantasy-rich depicter of heaven, hell and earthly delights. One of the devices that Bosch and his contemporaries were fond of in their representations of such universal themes was the tryptic; panel paintings with three sections. In paintings such as *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and *The Haywain*, Bosch was able to create triadic images combining:



or in temporal terms, perhaps

Borrowing heavily from Bosch, from the tryptic-based programme of Hieronymus Bosch 500 and also from my colleague Ronald Leenes (2010), I would like to present my vision for the development of Leisure Studies in Tilburg in terms of this triad, looking at where leisure studies has been, where it is now and where we want to go in the future. In doing so, I will try and review some of the major research issues in leisure studies as a whole, before trying to illustrate how these are related to contemporary developments in the network society, and the future research challenges that these raise for our Department and other scholars of leisure.

The routes from the roots of leisure research (Paradise Lost?)

Leisure studies has undertaken a long journey from the original seeds sown by Veblen (1899) in his study of the leisure of the wealthy classes. In Veblen's time, leisure as we understand it today was the preserve of the rich, who underlined their status through visible leisure consumption while leisure for the masses revolved around an escape from the drudgery of work or simply functioned as a period of recuperation for work. In the past this system was underpinned by enormous differences in education, wealth and access to the political system. Even though many of these differences have been reduced by the democratisation of western society, many scholars argue that Veblen's ideas about conspicuous consumption are still relevant today (e.g. Hillman, 2009).

This is perhaps surprising, given the fact that Veblen was describing a society in which there was a 'leisured class' supported by a working class that effectively had little or no leisure. The quantitative changes in leisure production and consumption since Veblen's time have been enormous, largely thanks to the rapid strides in productivity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the prospect they held out of vast amounts of leisure time being available to all – the paradise of the 'leisure society' (Veal, 2009).

The 20th century indeed saw a marked increase in the struggle for time between labour and capital. Shorter working weeks and increased holiday time became central demands of organised labour, and legislation on the working week and annual holidays became common in most developed countries. For example, in the Netherlands the average working week fell from 48 hours a week after the First World War to 39 hours a week in 1993. Annual leave also grew markedly, increasing from 8 days per year in 1910 to 31 days by 1980, and 40 days by 1990 (Richards, 1996).

As early as 1930 John Maynard Keynes predicted in his essay on *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren* that rising productivity would result in a large increase in leisure during the following hundred years. And, he speculated that the central problem for humanity in the future would be using its abundant leisure time in a meaningful way.

> *Thus for the first time since his creation man (sic) will be faced with his real, his permanent problem-how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well.*

This vision was further developed by futurologists in the post-war period, with the emergence of 'mass leisure' (Larrabee and Meyersohn, 1958) and the prospect of people in the developed world enjoying a 40,000 hour working lifetime, or an average of a four hour working day (Fourastié, 1966). This prediction was a little optimistic, but by the mid 1980s, the average working life in northern Europe had already fallen to about 60,000 hours. Not surprisingly then, much early effort in the field of leisure studies went into planning for the day when we would all have so much free time on our hands that we wouldn't know what to do with it. Veal (2009:86) remarks that 'it was widely accepted among leisure scholars in the post-World War II period – through to the 1980s – that reductions in working hours would continue into the future.'

It also seems that most ordinary people were also looking forward to the arrival of the leisure society. Research in the United States indicated that in 1975, 36% agreed with the statement: 'Leisure time is the important thing — and the purpose of work is to make it possible to have the leisure time to enjoy life and pursue one's interests.' In 2000, 43% of people agreed with that statement (Bowman, 2001). In the UK, for the period 1975-2000 Warde et al. (2005) could argue: 'with the exception of unpaid work, the theory that we are moving towards a more leisured society whereby people spend more time in voluntary and pleasurable activities and less on obligatory activities receives some support.'

No wonder Schor (1998:7) was able to exclaim that 'the coming of the leisure society has been an article of faith for decades, widely held among social scientists, politicians and publics'.

Of course we have not reached this utopian position. The Leisure Society steadfastly refuses to arrive, even in the wealthiest countries. Juliet Schor's (1993) research indicated that leisure time actually began to decline in the 1960s, and by the 1980s this trend was also being noted on this side of the Atlantic (Gurshuny, 1992, Gratton, 1995, de Haan et al., 2003). These early signs of increasing work hours turned into a torrent of research on work-related stress and burn-out (Swanson, 1992; Westman and Eden, 1997; Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004). There are now signs that the growth of the network society and the need to stay in touch not just with colleagues and work, but also friends and social contacts, has contributed to increased stress. A 2005 report indicated that 52% of Britain's employees claimed to have experienced one or more symptoms of over-work or burnout in the previous six months, and almost half thought the situation had worsened in the last five years (Hudson, 2005). The growth of 'anytime, anywhere' technology (email, PDAs, mobile phones, voicemail and Blackberries) was cited as a cause of increased stress by over 60% of respondents. Interestingly, the same study showed that levels of burnout were highest in the leisure and tourism industry.

Another study by the UK Institute of Leadership and Management (2010) revealed that 40% of managers do not return to the office feeling more relaxed, with 90% worried they will return to a deluge of emails. As a result, 80% frequently respond to emails on their Blackberries or Smartphones, almost half take phone calls and one in ten even go into the office. Penny de Valk, chief executive of the ILM, said:

> *Gone are the days when people cut off contact with work for a fortnight over the summer and made a complete break. While technology means that it is easier than ever to work remotely, it also makes it extremely hard to switch off. Uncertain economic times also mean that many UK employers are keeping one eye on their job at all times, when what they really need is time away from the office to rest and re-energise.*

The integration and fragmentation of work and leisure facilitated by the network society increases levels of stress even for the most privileged in society. Borrowing Linder's (1970) paraphrasing of Veblen, Tibor Scitovsky (1976:163) noted that:

> *..in our society of The Harried Leisure Class, whose high hourly earnings make their time so precious that they cannot afford the time it takes to enjoy life and are forced to eat their meals on the run, cut short the foreplay in lovemaking, attend abbreviated religious services, buy books to glance at, not to read, and have no time to look at the beauty spots of the world to which their conferences take them.*

The shift towards the 'Harried Leisure Class' became increasingly visible in the 1990s as people in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the developed world saw their hard-won leisure time steadily being eroded. A frantic search for explanations of this unexpected delay on the road to paradise centred around structural changes in the nature of modern society – the increasing role of women in the workplace, stratification through differential access to different forms of capital, etc. There was also a search for economic explanations. Juliet Schor, author of the *Overworked American* (1993) came to Tilburg with the message that instead of translating productivity gains into more leisure time, the Americans were simply increasing their consumption, leading eventually to the phenomenon of the *Overspent American* (1999). This also seemed to be the case in the Netherlands and other European countries. The leisure time of Dutch adults fell from 49 hours a week in 1985 to less than 45 hours in 2006 (SCP, 2006), and in Finland Raijas (2005) notes that leisure expenditure increased faster than leisure time, leading to more money intensive leisure practices, particularly in the area of new communications technology.

Today, we seem to working more than ever, and soon people across the developed world will be retiring later to ease the cost burden of aging populations, as a result significantly increasing the number of hours in a working life.

What happened to the leisure society? Some of the work of the Leisure Studies Department in Tilburg was devoted to finding an answer to this question. Analyses of participation highlighted the growth of new leisure activities, patterns of consumption and routines (van der Poel, 1997) the commercialisation of leisure (Mommaas, 2000a) and hyperactive lifestyles (Beckers, 2004). These studies indicated a growing fragmentation and diversity of leisure consumption, catered to by an increasingly commercialised leisure industry given room to operate by a retreating central state.

The fragmentation of leisure consumption has been confirmed by recent studies in the UK, where Warde et al. (2005:15) note that:

> *If a leisure society were emerging we would expect to find increased participation rates for leisure activities. This is not the case. Cooking, eating out, gardening, playing sport and hobbies are the only activities to show an increased participation rate of the survey sample. All other activities witness a decline, in some cases very marked.*
>
> *....leisure activities are becoming more specialised because those who participate in the same activity in 2000 do so for longer than did people in 1975. We also see, very importantly, greater exclusivity in leisure activities because participation rates for most activities have diminished.*

So one conclusion from looking at the UK data might be that the leisure society has not emerged because leisure has become individualised, not socialised. Leisure consumption also became more money intensive rather than time intensive, so the decrease in leisure time availability was actually paired with more leisure consumption, not less. The tendency for people to take productivity gains in the form of consumption rather than leisure time shifted our attention to the obvious conclusion: there must be increasing amounts of money in the upcoming leisure industries. Hans Mommaas (2000b) and others conducted extensive explorations of the contours of the emerging leisure industries in the Netherlands, which led to estimates of a total leisure economy of 28 billion by 2002 (Mommaas, 2006). This spending was partly stimulated by the fact that people were increasingly consuming events and experiences further away from their home environments, adding to the cost of leisure experiences in terms of money, time and environmental costs (Bartels, 2006).

Along with the rise of the leisure, tourism and culture industries, therefore the production of events and experiences also became a recognisable industry, whose economic power became increasingly visible. So much so that the OECD (2008) recently took an interest in 'global events' and the European Commission (2007) undertook a study of the economic benefits of cultural and sporting events. Closer to home, before the 2010 World Cup, it was estimated that a Dutch win in this one event alone would be worth 700 million to the national economy (and such was the confidence in a Dutch victory that nobody bothered to calculate what second place might be worth).

The increasingly pervasive nature of leisure production and consumption changed the symbolic value of these phenomena as well. The Dutch term 'vrije tijd', which translates into English as 'free time' became increasingly translated into the English term 'leisure', signifying a qualitative change from leisure as rest and recuperation from work into a source of work itself. Free time is difficult to manage, but leisure has certainly become conspicuous as an element of the network economy.

The explosion of leisure consumption and production meant that static categories were often not sufficient to capture the nuances in different types of leisure activities or the tendency for consumers to mix and sample different leisure forms. Attention turned from the classic types of leisure consumer (the sports player, the culture buff, the tourist) to the cultural omnivore, who was apparently capable of consuming just about any type of leisure, anytime, anywhere (van Eijck, 2001). The new scenarios of omnivorous consumption were to be found in city centres and purpose-built leisure complexes, where consumers could glide effortlessly from a frivolous afternoon at a themed leisure attraction to fun shopping to a serious night at the opera. The problem for social scientists was that the new omnivorous leisure consumer was extremely hard to pin down – consumption seems to occur everywhere, all the time and refuses to stick to conceptual pigeonholes.

This is perhaps only a problem if we continue to be wedded to traditional categories of activities and participation by individual consumers. As Warde (2005:146) notes, if we analyse practices rather than consumption:

> *The concept of 'the consumer', a figure who has bewitched political and social scientists as well as economists, evaporates. Instead the key focal points become the organization of the practice and the moments of consumption enjoined. Persons confront moments of consumption neither as sovereign choosers nor as dupes.*

Attention has gradually turned to the practices involved in leisure, and in particular the types of practices which are regularly repeated, giving structure to social phenomena.

Bargeman and van der Poel (2007) traced the rather sad pilgrimages of Dutch tourists, some of whom had been visiting the same holiday location for 25 years. Apart from insanity, or a total lack of imagination, it was very difficult to explain the meaning of such behaviour, particularly against a background of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) in which novelty, speed, change and the dissolving of social bonds which seem to be the order of the day.

But arguably practices are formed through regular performance. As Reckwitz (2002) explains, a practice:

> *... is a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements.*

This concentration on interconnectedness suggests that a practice approach might be suitable for dealing with the new complexities of the network society. The concept of practices also sees social fields as being structured by the routines of social practices. This in turn implies the temporality of structure, and underlines the fact that structures are reliant on the routinised behavior of actors for their maintenance, encompassing the structure-actor duality outlined by Giddens (1984), long a mainstay of the Tilburg School of leisure studies (Corijn, 1998) .

An approach to leisure studies based on practices apparently offers a number of advantages, including collapsing the previous distinctions between structure and agency and producer and consumer which have become relatively unhelpful in a de-differentiated leisure sphere. However, practice theory, as essentially a constellation of approaches to the social:

> *has not offered a theoretical 'system' which could compete in complexity with Parsons's homo sociologicus, Luhmann's constructivist theory of social systems, Habermas's theory of communicative action or the theories of cognitive psychology (Reckwitz, 2002:257).*

Although practice theory does not offer grand theoretical systems, one might also ask if these are what we need. Schatzki (1996) has postulated that because the 'total field of practices' forms a dense tangle of human practices that is globally linked, there is a need to narrow down the field of practice enquiry. This indeed seems to be the approach taken by many practice researchers. Interestingly enough, many of these practice studies focus on leisure, including activities as diverse as digital photography, Nordic walking, floorball, DIY, cooking, eating out and fitness (Pantzar and Shove, 2005; Warde, 2005).

The key reason for focusing on leisure practices is that participants can exercise choice in terms of which practices to engage in, therefore offering the possibility of examining the dynamics of engagement and generation of individual and collective benefits. One of the problems of this isolated focus, however, is that leisure practices are often taken out of a broader social context. In this case it is easy, as Pantzar and Shove (2005: 5) suggest, to see leisure as less than serious:

> *Leisure, as a form of practice, is characterized and constructed as 'fun' by those involved. Having fun is not some abstract experience – it requires the active configuration of material stuff, images, services and competencies.*

Seen as a complex of practices, leisure is actually far more than a series of non-constrained activities or 'fun stuff'. It involves the complex interaction of actors, institutions and organisations, resources, knowledge, competences and skills. The network society makes this interaction even more complex, since it tends to delocalise, virtualise and simultaneously individualise and collectivise leisure experiences.

Mondeo Man and Mini Madness

The practice of driving has long been a mainstay of practice researchers (and a favoured example of Actor-Network theorists). Driving clearly involves the coordination of actors and objects with skill and competence. The car as an object can also be a very effective signifier of difference, with different makes of car still being clearly attached to specific lifestyles (encapsulated by Tony Blair's appeal to 'Mondeo Man' in the 1997 UK General Election). However, driving has also become a leisure activity that is attached more to skills, competence and knowledge than to income and status. For the 'car fanatic' what is important is to show off their car to other people who know about cars and 'connect with like-minded car nuts.' (McDonald, 2006). In order to do so, they will gladly surf the Internet, join a social networking site, or travel to far-flung corners of the globe to admire each other's cars and encyclopedic knowledge of them. For example, the Pomona Swap Meet & Car Show in California attracts over 4000 vehicles and their owners every year, as well as 20,000 spectators who come to view the cars or buy or swap car parts. The activity of driving therefore becomes not just the preserve of the 'networked individual' (Castells, 2009), but also a reason for organising co-presence in order to ritually confirm the importance of a shared focus of attention, while at the same time establishing position in the group through differential levels of skill and knowledge.

In the midst of this complexity the route taken towards analytical clarity by many practice scholars is to emphasise the everyday, routine nature of practices. In this way, discrete practices are also made visible through their performance, with each repetition serving to thicken the contours and increase the definition of a practice and its social embeddedness.

A good example of this is provided by Desiree Verbeek's (2009) research on sustainable travel. She shows that even though awareness of environmental problems of flying is rising, people continue to engage in environmentally unsustainable travel practices because such practices have become inseparable from our everyday lives. This phenomenon also helps to explain the delayed arrival of the leisure society. We are unable to resist the siren call of certain practices, even if it costs us money, as Schor (1999) found, or destroys the environment, as Verbeek (2009) suggests, or if it undermines the fabric of the family, as Peters (2000) suggests. So what is it that makes these practices apparently irresistible? Why do people see these practices as 'fun' or necessity? What is needed, it appears, is some kind of explanation of why people engage in particular practices in particular ways in particular situations. Perhaps what we need to understand is no longer just how specific leisure practices are produced by organisations, or consumed by consumers, but in fact how practices themselves are organised, and what induces particular individuals to become participants in those practices.

The network society revealed by the ash cloud

The eruption of the Icelandic volcano on March 20th 2010 led to the evacuation of local villages and initial fears that glacial melting might cause flooding. The enmeshing of this remote corner of Iceland into global networks was first noted in the crashing of a web cam operating in the area due to the number of people trying to view it.

Eyjafjallajokull (AYA-feeyapla-yurkul) — dormant for nearly 200 years — forced at least 500 people to evacuate their homes. Keflavik international airport, Reykjavik airport and Akureyri airport were all closed due to the possibility of ash getting into engines of the planes.

A second eruption a couple of weeks later forced more evacuations and created an ash cloud that floated towards Europe. As a result, airports in Northern Europe were closed for days, stranding thousands of travellers in all parts of the globe. Airlines were losing €250 million a day, and as a result began to exert enormous pressure on national and supranational bodies to re-open European airspace. The total cost to Europe alone is estimated to have been €2.5 billion.

Apart from the enormous economic damage, the incident instantly made visible the complex mesh of tourism practices in modern society. Leisure, work and family interconnections were suddenly laid bare on the evening news through interviews with stranded passengers, highlighting the complex web of globalised practices far more efficiently than decades of scientific research. Even though there were no planes taking off from airports in Northern Europe, thousands still turned up for their flights, because as the erstwhile travellers tended to say – 'you never know. What if our plane takes off without us?' What indeed? Although the consequences for most of the non-travelling public were limited to having to do without fresh starfruit from Kenya, the overall impression was that the ritual practices of travel needed to be re-established as soon as possible in order to ensure the normal functioning of society.

One of the functions of the ash cloud was to make it evident that it was not only important where you were – what was important was movement, the process of travel itself. This has become an essential lubricant of the network society, because it brings people together and allows moments of co-presence in fragmented societies. We no longer live only in local communities: our family, friends and colleagues are spread across the world, and in order to be together we need to travel. This holds true even though the technology of the computer and the Internet makes it perfectly possible to talk to and see each other

from different sides of the globe. There is no substitute for being there, in a particular place, at a particular time.

This implies that as well as analysing and understanding the networks which pervade modern society and how these link actors and organisations together, we also need to understand how individual actors are recruited to such practices. Understanding the motivations for travel is all very well, and there are thousands of quantitative research studies which attempt to do just that. But is it really essential to know if somebody is taking a particular journey because they need rest, or excitement or escape, or a mix of all three? Surely the real question is why these people are travelling at all. What is it about the modern network society that makes rituals of travel (or sport, or museum visiting, or any other leisure practice) necessary for people?

Although the work of Castells (1996, 2009) provides a good basis for approaching the development of the network society as a whole, but his macro-approach does not help to explain recruitment into networks or practices. One of the potential pathways towards analysing this issue has been provided by the work of Randall Collins (2004) on 'Interaction Ritual Chains' (IRC), or a 'theory of individuals' motivation based on where they are located at any moment in time in the aggregate of (Interaction Ritual) chains that makes up their market of possible social relationships' (xiv).

Collins argues that Interaction Ritual Chains can help to explain individual motivation, since they cause people to seek the 'Emotional Energy' (EE) that is generated by participation in IRCs. Emotional Energy seeking is

> *'the master motive across all institutional arenas; and thus it is the IRs that generate differing levels of EE in economic life that set the motivation to work at a level of intensity ranging from enthusiastically to slackly; to engage in entrepreneurship or shy away from it; to join a wave of investment or to pull one's money and one's emotional attention away from financial markets' (xv).*

It is interesting to speculate whether the seemingly old-fashioned anthropological concept of 'ritual' might offer some guidance in analysing the workings of the contemporary network society. In fact, ritual has been an important element of research in leisure for some time. In the case of tourism, the habit of travelling to other places has long been likened to a ritual, for example in the form of pilgrimage (Cohen, 1979; Turner and Turner, 1969). The idea of tourism as some kind of ritual has echoes with MacCannell's analysis of the leisure class, and ritual behavior has been analysed in a variety of leisure activities, including golf (McGinnis et al., 2009); backpacking (Richards and Wilson, 2004); cultural tourism (Dodd and van Hemel, 1999); American Football (Axelrod, 2001); drinking tea (Jolliffe and Aslam, 2009) and coffee (Morris, 2005); disco (Vitali, 2000); gastronomy (Hjalager and Richards, 2002); festivals (Richards, 2004); theatre (Harrison et al., 2003) and museums (Bouquet and Porto, 2005).

Wittel's (2001) analysis of 'network sociality' provides similar examples of social rituals which generate 'fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations' which create ephemeral but intense encounters. Network sociality makes networking itself into a practice, which has also spawned its own eventfulness. The phenomenon of First Tuesday business networking meetings is an example of these new forms of sociality, which interestingly involve a high degree of integration between work and leisure.

In spite of our apparent (post)modernity, it seems that we are surrounded by ritual. In fact one of the observations that Collins makes about rituals is that we often only notice them when they are not performed properly, or fail to work. The pilgrimage to the sun or to the snow clad mountains or seething city centres has become so much part of modern life that we only notice it when we suffer the adverse effects of tourism directly, or else when it is suddenly absent. The Icelandic volcano recently exposed the fragility of global networks linking millions of people in ritual journeys of self-fulfillment, self-gratification or social duty or pleasure.

Having outlined some of the roots of leisure research, it is time to move from the pilgrimages of the past to focus on the issues of the present. In the following section I will examine some of the evidence from current leisure research that can provide some explanations of the relationships between leisure practice and the network society.

The art of leisure (Earthly Delights)

The problems posed by the increasing stream of events in the network society are highlighted by the dilemma posed for Canadian architectural critic Sanford Kwinter in October 1997. Like many of his colleagues he could have been in the Basque Country, attending the opening of the Guggenheim Bilbao. However, as is often the case nowadays, he had another invitation to consider: the fiftieth anniversary reenactment of the first supersonic flight by Chuck Yeager in the Mojave Desert. He decided on the desert:

> *We came because we believe in shock waves, we believe them to be part of the music of modernity, not something to watch a ribbon be cut from, but something to feel with our diaphragms, eardrums, genitals and the soles of our feet. We wanted to be in the desert badlands that day with nothing but the sun, the baked dirt, the pneumatic tremors, and the unbroken horizon (Kwinter, 2010: 89).*

The Bilbao Guggenheim had become an event, even before the ribbon was cut. As Gehry's titanium titanic rose out of the ground it became a place of pilgrimage for architects, art critics and leisure scholars. But for Kwinter, the building was an empty shell. He referred to it as an example of 'pseudo innovation' in architecture, echoing Boorstin's complaint about (post)modern shallowness. The real event was in the Mojave Desert, because: 'Out there somewhere we knew was the zero-degree and the future, and that Bilbao was the past.' (Pratt, 2008). There was, however, a certain irony in Kwinter's decision. Arguably, by following Boorstin's prescription to attend a 'real' event dedicated to a real American hero he was actually looking back to events of the past. The Mojave Desert celebrations also had many of the trappings of a Boorstin-style pseudo event, including the issue of a US Postage stamp, the unveiling of a statue of Yeager and the re-naming of the main road to Edwards Airbase as 'Yeager Boulevard'. Kwinter could not possibly have guessed that the first phase of the supersonic future was about to be abruptly terminated less than three years later with the crash of Air France Concorde Flight 4590 near Paris.

Like many architects, Kwinter may have disliked the Guggenheim because he was more concerned with form than function and more with structure than context. But one could also see the new museum in a different light. The opening of the Bilbao Guggenheim in was arguably an important turning point in the study of leisure and the relationship between art, architecture, culture and local development. Before the Guggenheim, Bilbao was a run-down northern Spanish port-city with a filthy river and declining industry. The new museum put Bilbao on the map, with international tourists suddenly flocking to see Gehry's futuristic colossus and urban leaders across the globe scrambling to emulate the 'Guggenheim effect'.

Much of the argument about the Bilbao Guggenhiem has subsequently revolved around the costs and benefits of this beacon of contemporary culture. There was little doubt that the streams of tourists brought much needed income to the city, but did this actually weigh up against the considerable costs? Was it of benefit to local people, or only the international elite? This continues to be a subject of debate, especially as the initial shock effect seems to have worn off, and the visitor returns continue to diminish (Plaza, 2000).

What was missing from the debate (and Kwinter's critique), however, was the fact that Bilbao was a marker of a significant qualitative change in the way in which art was being consumed. The Guggenheim made clear what the Pompidou Centre had already hinted at: that art museums did not need to worry about content in the same way as they had in the past. Curators used to focus on assembling artworks to tell a meaningful story to people who appreciated art. But the modern harried leisure consumer no longer has time to contemplate art and think about its meaning. Increasingly museum visitors are skimming the artworks on their way to the café or the museum shop. The legendary marketing campaign launched by the Tate Museum in London had already heralded this change in 1988 by calling itself 'an ace café with quite a nice museum attached'. People were no longer using museums as location for the serious development of cultural capital, they were seeing them as an extension of socialised leisure.

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon lies in the new forms of capital being generated in the network society. While economic capital and cultural capital can be developed by individuals in a social network, the development of networks and their generation of ephemeral, yet intense, sociality, has placed more emphasis on the development of 'relational goods', which are accumulated through social contacts made through different networks. The more central the position of individuals in the network, and the more different networks they belong to, the greater the amount of relational goods they can acquire.

Relational goods are ....

> *goods which cannot be produced, consumed, or acquired by a single individual, because they depend on the interaction with others and are enjoyed only if shared with others (Bruni and Stanca, 2008:509).*

Bruni and Stanca argue that relational goods are generated by socially enjoyed leisure. Relational goods cannot be consumed alone and enjoyment therefore depends on the presence of others. Collective leisure has become more important as a relational sphere, because people have fewer opportunities for traditional forms of contact, partly because of growing individualisation in society as a whole, and also through the individualisa-

tion of leisure, for example through the growing time spent watching TV or surfing the Internet. Bechetti et al. (2010:7) also argue that the nature and quality of relatedness is important for well-being and happiness:

> *A second explanation for the opposite signs of the correlation of happiness with solo and social leisure-time hinges on the fact that relational goods, by definition, are not an option freely available at the individual level. An individual's time use choices may be contingent on the time use choices of others, because the utility derived from leisure time (relational goods) often benefits from (requires) the presence of companionable others. ... The message we draw from our analysis is instead that cooperation between individuals, for instance in coordinating their leisure, is also essential for welfare.*

This points to one of the potential flaws in Schor's (1993, 1999) arguments about the decline of leisure time. Schor only really considered the expansion in consumption of private goods, and did not consider relational goods, as these are generally related to non-economic practices. Schor's basic argument was that people have to work more in order to feed their consumption of private goods, driven by status considerations. However, relational goods can be obtained without necessarily increasing income. This suggests that if we focused on relational goods rather than private goods, we might be happier with our leisure. In the case of relational goods, however, a different limiting factor suggests itself - the increasing problems of coordinating busy personal agendas in order to engage in significant moments of co-presence.

For private goods, the lack of time for consumption drives up the relative cost of goods consumed. In the case of relational goods, the ephemerality of co-presence opportunities means that the intensity and value of relational moments is heightened as other, private consumption moments become more prevalent in our use of leisure time:

> *If television viewing is so damaging to relational activities and, as a consequence, to individual happiness, why do people choose to watch so much TV? In our view, part of the answer lies in the fact that relational activities are constrained by immediate costs in terms of time and effort, the necessity of other people to participate, and the need to engage intensively for long periods. (Bruni and Stanca, 2005: 8).*

The rising value of co-presence and the increased difficultly of synchronising certain practices may help to explain some recent results of leisure research. For example, research has consistently failed to uncover a strong quantitative link between leisure time and happiness, or income and happiness. In fact, those activities which now take up the bulk of our leisure time, such as watching television, generate the lowest levels of leisure satisfaction. Higher levels of satisfaction and happiness are usually produced by activities

which require intense concentration, skill, challenge and often the presence of others (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Diverse leisure activities, also related to stronger and diverse social networks, increase feelings of satisfaction and engagement.

Arguably, the amount of time or money invested in leisure is no longer so important to our happiness as the quality of relationships that our relational time investment can forge. This would certainly make sense in terms of Collins's argument that people invest time and money in IRCs in order to generate a return in 'emotional energy' (Collins, 2004), which depends heavily on the presence of others.

It is also interesting that this development seems to be taking place at the same time that individualisation is increasing. It could be that the 'networked individuals' identified by Castells (2009) are able to use technology to organise virtual co-presence. However, it seems more likely that the increased virtual communication afforded by the network society has not had the effect of replacing physical co-presence, but rather has strengthened the need for it. We meet online, but feel the need to confirm our virtual experience through real-world encounters. We also need our real world experiences in order to have something interesting to say online.

The problem remains, however, that the time for physical co-presence, particularly where ritual encounters of the type described by Collins, is fairly limited. Therefore the network society has given rise to a series of visible ritual practices aimed at overcoming the co-presence problem in order to generate relational goods, while at the same time maintaining ample opportunities for distinction through conspicuous meaning.

The range of such practices is very large indeed, and is supported by a growing events industry as well as growing eventfulness in more traditional spheres of leisure. Take for example the growing importance of:

- Art museums
- Watching football in the pub or in public space
- European (and other) Capitals of Culture
- Eurovision Song Contest
- Festival marketplaces and cultural clusters
- Eating out
- Nightclubs
- Mega discos
- Live concerts
- Festivals

- Networking events
- Stag and hen parties

The example of the art museum is perhaps one of the most interesting for our purposes, because it concerns the transformation of a practice associated by Bourdieu (1984) with elite culture into a form of cultural sport for the masses. This transformation ironically began in Paris, with the construction of the Pompidou Centre, the first ludic art museum with no serious collection. The device was rapidly employed in other cities, as the opening of the Tate Modern, the Bilbao Guggenheim and countless other contemporary art museums underlines.

The Tate Modern in London has perhaps become the archetypal example of the genre, if for no other reason than its sheer size. Housed in the largest brick building in Europe (a former power station), it attracts over 5 million visitors a year, and is due to add a 21,000 square metres extension onto the existing 31,000 square metres to cope with the demand. The reason for this success is obvious to those who visit. The Tate Modern is not so much an art museum as a relational space. Children run (or roll) down the ramp into the turbine hall, to be greeted by a giant sun, or a theme park-like installation of slides, while their parents drink coffee in the Members' Room or browse the shop. The quiet contemplation of art that Bourdieu and his contemporaries would have valued has been replaced by what the contemporary French art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) has termed 'relational aesthetics'. In his view, it is not the art object itself that matters, but the interaction with it. The Tate Modern, and other cultural institutions have become relational spaces where people develop their own meaning through their relationship with art and each other.

As Vickery (2007:77) discusses, the way in which people relate to culture-led regeneration projects such as the Tate Modern is key, because this determines if relational capital is actually being developed for the wider community, or if the 'audience' is simply being used to add symbolic capital to the physical space. In the ideal case:

> *Collective participation can perform an act of symbolic integration of a diverse social and political constituency, such as social minorities usually absent or excluded from social or cultural institutions.*

This is certainly true of grass roots cultural production and creativity, such as the Festes de Gràcia in Barcelona, where local residents make their own creative landscapes from recycled materials, attracting around 2 million visits to the neighbourhood every year (Crespi Vallbona and Richards, 2007). One of the important spaces in the Festes includes the 'gypsy plaza', where this often marginalised group becomes the focus of collective attention in a transcultural ritual of music and dance.

Back to the Future at Tate Modern

One of the Turbine Hall installations at the Tate Modern in 2009 was Robert Morris' Bodymotionspacesthings, a series of huge props including beams, weights, platforms, rollers, tunnels and ramps built from materials such as plywood, stone, steel plate, and rope. This was actually a re-creation of Tate Gallery's first fully interactive exhibition which took place in 1971. The original exhibition was actually too successful in its innovative call for people to physically interact with an art work. It was closed just four days after opening, due to the unexpected and over enthusiastic response of the audience.

'Men started picking up some of the exhibits - weights suspended on chains - and swinging them around their heads. First aiders were occupied picking splinters out of the rear ends of the miniskirted young women hurt on wooden slides. 'The trouble is they went bloody mad," the Daily Telegraph quoted a guard as saying of the visitors as he surveyed the battered remains of the installation. The Guardian said at the time: "The participation seems likely to wreck the exhibits and do the participants a mischief"' (Higgins, 2009).

The mass organization of interactive co-presence by the Tate is nothing new. But today the arts audience has a proper theme park to enjoy.

Just as art is becoming a fully-fledged leisure activity, so the media is also becoming a source of collective co-presence. One example is the way that major football tournaments have become televisual spectacles, not only in people's living rooms, but in public space as well. For the 2010 World Cup FIFA had official Fan Fest venues in nine South African cities as well as six other cities around the world. The Fan Fest venues attracted 400,000 for the opening day of the competition:

> *Asked if the experience ranks a close second to attending the match in person, she replies without hesitation. 'This is better than going to the match! The stadiums are beautiful but everyone's sitting down - the atmosphere is nothing like this.'*

Of course, the official FIFA Fan Zones could only accommodate a small fraction of the global audience, so other outlets had to be found for World Cup mania. Inflatable screens were used to bring the event to isolated communities in Kenya, while in the Netherlands fans could opt for a performance by Guus Meeuwis in the Philips Stadion in Eindhoven. Television audiences for the world cup were enormous, but in relative terms the live spec-

tacle provided by the homecoming of the Dutch team from South Africa was even more impressive. The world's media was astonished by the fact that second place was enough to attract a reported audience of 700,000 in Amsterdam, compared with only 200,000 for winner Spain in Madrid. In fact, the mobilising force in Amsterdam was the event itself, the fact of 'being there' with so many others to welcome home a team stoked up with a heady mix of alcohol and house music.

Similar shifts can be seen in the transformation of the Eurovision Song Contest into a giant social event seen not only in living rooms across Europe, but which also increasingly spills out into bars and public spaces. Eurovision in 2010 included simultaneous dance performances in different cities, also linked with webcams and live TV feed from different places in Europe. Not only were the song performances judged, but also the way in which the host nation staged the event. The organisation of co-presence in such a creative way was hailed by the UK commentators; 'Well done Norway, really simple idea.' Norway has come a long way from 'nul point', not so much because of their musical ability, as their understanding of ritual.

Another contemporary ritual which has become more important in recent years is the European Capital of Culture (ECOC), which now also has a local relevance with the city of Tilburg and four other cities in Brabant bidding to host the ECOC together as BrabantStad. One of the most important reasons for wanting to do this is of course the drawing power of the event. Studies of previous events have indicated that the average ECOC increases its number of visits by around 12% during the event, and more successful events often have an even more dramatic effect. So Liverpool, ECOC in 2008, was able to generate more than 9 million additional visits, 33% of whom were first time visitors to the city (Garcia et al., 2010). The fact that so many people visited Liverpool in 2008 highlights another feature of the ECOC ritual – the tendency to organise the event in locations not considered to be classic 'cultural capitals' (van der Ark and Richards, 2006), thereby contributing to the growing club of 'comeback cities' (van Boom and Mommaas, 2009).

The importance of physical co-presence in the success of the ECOC is underlined by the role of large-scale events in generating visits. The major festivals and celebrations held in public space (including the opening and closing ceremonies) can account for over 50% of total attendance (Lille 2004, 2005). Our research in cities such as Rotterdam, Porto and Sibiu shows that 'atmosphere' was consistently the most important visit motivation for ECOC participants (Richards, et al, 2002). Interestingly, the same research also revealed that a minority of visitors had travelled specifically for the ECOC programme or events – it seems that simply 'being there' was an important enough motivation in itself for many.

Of course, the heady combination of large crowds seeking physical co-presence in cities which are unused to welcoming such numbers of culture lovers also leads to problems. The organizers of Lille 2004 were so overwhelmed by the success of the opening party in 2004 that they considered cancelling it, but in the end let it go ahead for fear of even worse consequences. Unfortunately 2010 has seen the near miss in Lille turn to gruesome reality with the death of 21 revelers at the Love Parade in Duisburg. Although the Love Parade has decided to wind itself up after this tragedy, interestingly the organisers of the ECOC in the Ruhr were quick to disassociate themselves from the disaster, perhaps fearful of any tarnishing of the ECOC brand. The party went on, because as the organisers said: 'We have the responsibility towards the people of the Ruhr area to continue our program with just the same level of inspirational and worthy cultural events as before - and always with the consciousness of the Duisburg tragedy' (Palmer et al., 2010).

Not only is there a seemingly endless demand for rituals of co-presence, but cities and regions never seem to tire of producing more. This can be seen in the increasingly fierce competition to stage the European Capital of Culture (ECOC), which in spite of the variety of host cities and themes contains a remarkable set of routine practices from one year to the next (Richards and Palmer, 2010). These routines include:

- Highly choreographed opening and closing ceremonies
- A programme split into recognisable themes and seasons
- Large scale festivals and displays in public spaces
- Arguments over control of the event between different stakeholders
- Regular changes in artistic director as a result of these arguments
- Narratives of 'success', even in the face of objective (and abject) failure.

In spite of the fact that each city has a great deal of freedom in organising the ECOC, there is a great deal of routine behavior which tends to structure the event. The routines and rituals of the ECOC are promulgated by networks of cities, of universities and researchers and policy makers. Cities jostle for position in this field, nestling up to the 'successful' cities and their leaders, and avoiding the less successful. Those who are involved in organising these events often go on to hold key positions in the host city or elsewhere in the international cultural scene. Through the concentrated learning processes that the cities and the cultural actors undergo during the ECOC, an enormous amount of cultural, symbolic and relational capital is produced and distributed, and these 'soft' effects of the ECOC are far more significant in the long term than the economic impacts claimed for the ECOC year itself. Would Glasgow or Lille have been able to shrug off the stigma of being dirty, dilapidated industrial cities as easily without the ECOC?

It seems that the ECOC has become a ritual to be followed not just by participants, but also the by the cities themselves. As with other practices, the contours of the ECOC practices have become more visible from the outside, in the host cities themselves many of the elements of the ECOC are taken for granted, often to the detriment of the event and its legacy. As Mary Miller, Director of Stavanger 2008 recently complained, the ECOC has often been more about 'Bono and Tall Ships' with too many fireworks, and not enough attention to creating meaningful co-presence. But the reason for this is clear: organising events is one thing, organising meaningful events is a different art altogether.

The same applies to researching leisure. The explosion of events and other leisure practices has generated a lot of research on content, and rather less on context and meaning. As Boorstin's trickle of pseudo-events has been replaced by the contemporary avalanche of hyperfestivity, so the volume of leisure studies research has also increased. The question might be whether we have advanced our understanding very much further in the face of growing complexity in the contemporary network society. Hopefully it has become clear that my response to such problems is always to look for the interconnections between actors and things. Events have a useful habit of making such connections clearer, so perhaps an increase in eventfulness is not such a bad thing after all.

Developing a research programme for Leisure Studies (Paradise regained?)

Leisure is a research field drenched with complexity. Because leisure can effectively include any activity undertaken in 'free time', the scope of research is almost endless. In addition, the increasing de-differentiation of consumption and production, work and play, and the growing tendency for consumers to engage in omnivorous and changeable leisure behaviour, mean that previous assumptions about links between particular social groups and particular leisure patterns are increasingly brought into question.
The dynamic and rapidly changing field of leisure studies also leads me to reflect on my previous research career as a geomorphologist. In studying sea level change, one pretty soon realises that any measurement is complicated enormously by the fact that not only does the level of the sea change, but that the land is also moving, thanks to plate tectonics (as recent earthquakes in Haiti, China and New Zealand make clear). Finding a fixed point to measure the movement of sea level is a virtual impossibility – but if we can develop tools to establish the relative positions of land and sea at different points in time and space, then eventually we can piece together what happened (Richards and Vita-Finzi, 1982).

A similar problem exists in leisure research, since the old certainties about actors and structures, about production and consumption, about state and market, have ceased to exist. In a field in which all the research objects seem to be moving very rapidly, what strategies can be adopted to analyse the dynamics of contemporary leisure? The starting point that the Leisure Studies Department in Tilburg has decided to adopt is to analyse leisure practices and their consequences in the network society. By studying the repeated patterns of behaviour that give meaning to everyday life we can attempt to trace emerging social structures, exemplified among other things by the 'Interaction Ritual Chains' identified by Collins (2004).

As Warde (2005) has suggested, the practice turn in the social sciences has a number of important implications for research. The themes that require attention include:

Contextuality

Every practice requires participants to avail themselves of the necessary resources, competence, understanding and commitment to the practice in order to derive benefits from it and to ensure the survival of the practice. Because participants are connected by networks which supply these elements, we should perhaps pay less attention to individual choices and more to the collective development of practices. The perspective of 'disciplined participation' outlined by Warde fits very well with the kinds of 'constrained freedom' that characterise the leisure field.

Benefits

Attention to practices reveals the internal and extrinsic rewards from conduct. The involvement of individuals in different practices conveys not just information about external rewards (as suggested in Bourdieu's concept of distinction) but also internal rewards. It may be difficult for everybody to become an opera buff, but by developing skills and competences in other, smaller, more specialised fields, individuals can still gain the recognition they need through the growing multiplicity of practices.

The individual as intersection of practices

New research questions develop around the prevalence of difference types of practices, the range of practices that different individuals engage in, and how these practices are combined and affect each other. The question of commitment to practices also becomes vital, as this begins to explain how 'careers' within individual practices develop and end, and how people develop an understanding of their own role within those practices.
These emerging themes suggest that a new way of approaching leisure research is required, which moves away from the previous concentration on individual choice or socio-economic positions.

Leisure practices imply dialectic relationships between actor and structure, between producer and consumer and between state and market. Studying such practices therefore requires us to adopt a holistic, multidisciplinary approach which can resolve some of the former oppositions between these categories. The network society also impels us to pay more attention to connections; not just links between consumers and producers, but also links between the practices engaged in by different individuals. The membership of different networks will tend to influence the practices engaged in by their members, and those practices will in turn shape the network. As Castells (2009) argues, we also need to analyse the power relationships within the networks – who are the gatekeepers, the 'switchers', and how do they influence the development of leisure practices? Following Collins (2004), we also need to identify the emerging leisure rituals of the network society, and to analyse how and why certain rituals are initiated, maintained and discarded.

Unfortunately, the new contours of the network society do little to simplify the task at hand for leisure scholars; on the contrary, they make life even more complicated. This is why, in my view, we need to adopt a more coherent and focused approach to our research programme. In developing research on leisure in the network society, we need a number of new elements:

- A new focus
- New partners
- New tools

A new focus

In the network society the traditional role of leisure as a period of rest and recuperation from labour is subsumed by new roles for leisure as a space for creativity, production, social interaction and the generation of meaning. The focus on leisure practice therefore becomes a means of examining the emergence, development and decline of new social phenomena, and the role that leisure can play in the developmental and relational spheres of life.

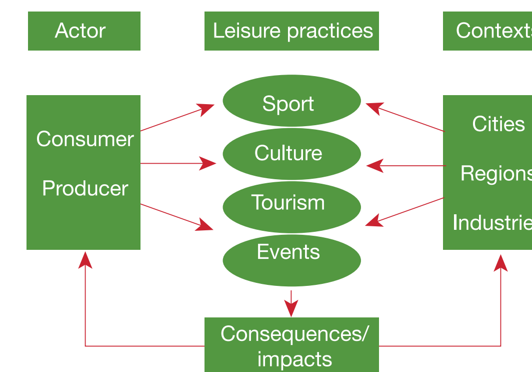


Figure 1: Towards a practice approach to leisure

Warde (2005: 146) notes, 'the effect of production on consumption is mediated through the nexus of practices'. He argues that with a practice perspective 'the analytic focus shifts from the insatiable wants of the human animal to the instituted conventions of collective culture, from personal expression to social competence, from mildly constrained choice to disciplined participation'. From this perspective, the concept of 'the consumer' arguably evaporates. Instead, attention shifts to the ways in which particular practices are created and sustained by the coordination of individual trajectories in the network society. This means that our previous reliance on categories such as 'consumer' and 'producer' or 'demand' and 'supply' are problematised. Instead, our new research programme will focus on the processes of leisure in three interrelated areas:

Dynamics of leisure practices

Individuals combine practices into a narrative of self, and who therefore make decisions about which practices to adhere to, to support or to abandon. Such choices are not entirely unconstrained, since there is a degree of path dependency in the selection of practices. Examining why people choose to take up practices or are recruited by others to specific practices is an important area of research. Even more so because leisure practices have become one of the most important areas in which attempts are made to address issues of community and social cohesion (Toepoel, 2010).

As discretionary use of time and other resources, leisure practices 'are under particular pressure to attract and retain attention' (Pantzar and Shove, 2005:215). The Interaction Rituals of leisure therefore have to provide the experiences and benefits that participants desire and need. In the context of practices, we can also ask why individuals pursue particular routes to fulfilling their needs and desires. As Collins (2004) suggests, recruitment and commitment to practices are important, and analysing these means putting practice

at the centre of our analysis and considering the context in which activities develop and are reproduced. The research questions here include:

- what it means to do these things
- how enthusiasms develop and flourish
- the demands that practices make of those who follow them
- specific mechanisms of attraction and defection
- the relation between individual practitioners and the unfolding entity – the practice – they sustain (Pantzar and Shove, 2005).

By linking practice theory and IRC, it might be possible to tackle these issues. Can we, for example, relate the participation in specific practices to the amount of 'emotional energy' it produces for its adherents? Are levels of emotional energy greater for 'serious' as opposed to 'casual' participants? Do emotional energy levels change at different stages of a practice 'career'? What are the outcomes of emotional energy generation, for example in terms of social cohesion?

Leisure organisations in the network society

Organisations are arguably undergoing significant change in the network society, both in terms of internal and external processes and structures. Internally, changes in organisation culture are taking place to create new linkages which can speed innovation as a response to environmental change. There are also challenges of inter-organisational collaboration as organisations vie for position at key nodes within networks. Leisure organisations themselves are also becoming more temporary and virtual, and some 'time-based organisations' are themselves becoming events rather than solid structures. Such shifts are also calling into question traditional concepts of the value chain in leisure, which is increasingly becoming a 'value network'

The value network increasingly co-opts the consumer into the development and production of new leisure experiences. At this intersection of 'what people do when they do leisure and .... the activities of organisations that see themselves as being in the leisure business' (Pantzar and Shove, 2005: 4-5). A number of key questions can be asked about the way in which leisure is produced as a co-creation between leisure organisations or 'producers' and 'consumers'. How are new forms of leisure practice innovated? What is the relative role of producer and consumer?

In this new nexus of consumption and production, the skills and competences of not just participants, but also producers becomes important. As organisations engage in the development of new value networks, they need to reorganise themselves to engage in different ways with a range of stakeholders. They also need to deploy a new range of resources to compete effectively, such as the knowledge and competences of consumers or the diversity of staff within the organisation.

Events can also act as a catalyst for organisations in the leisure sector. Sedita's (2008) analysis of the performing arts in the Veneto region of Italy underlines how organisational and personal networks can be mobilised and integrated through staging events. Richards and Palmer (2010) have also emphasised that events such as the ECOC are a means of building the 'orgware' or organisational capacity of cities.

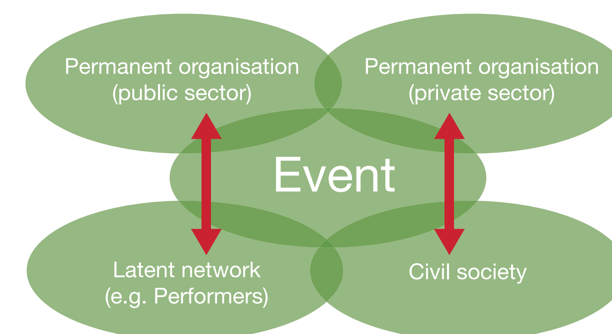


Figure 2: Events as network catalysts. (Sedita, 2008)

Leisure interventions

Growing inter-urban and regional competition in the network society is forcing policy-makers to re-think their intervention strategies. Policy frameworks are made more flexible by incorporating private and voluntary sector actors into urban and regional 'regimes'. Re-found attention for space is reflected in the development of leisure and cultural clusters and new formulations of territorial partnerships. The colonisation of space is mirrored by the colonisation of time, with event-based (re)-development strategies and the temporal extension of consumption opportunities (e.g. shop opening hours, Internet shopping, etc). The overall effect of these changes has been increasing attention for the development of flexible interaction ritual chains linking a series of different actors across different 'scapes' in order to concentrate and control flows of people, symbols and resources.

In many cases what policy-makers are concerned with are the outputs of interventions. Traditional impact studies tend to focus on a limited range of outputs, and also tend to treat projects or 'events' in an isolated fashion, disregarding context and value networks. Although Collins' model of Interaction Ritual Chains provides one possible means of ana-

lysing projects and events in leisure, his model focuses to a large extent on the inputs, or resources needed to maintain rituals. The only 'output' he considers is the emotional energy that individuals gain from their participation. Our review of the effects of events suggests we need to consider a wider range of outcomes, including the generation of relational capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital and economic capital.

New partners In order to undertake research in the network society, there is also a need for new research partners. Just as network organisations are busy incorporating consumers into their knowledge systems in order to get closer to leisure practices, so we as researchers need to get closer to producers, consumers and policy makers in order to better understand the new connections between them.

Not only do we need to be able to chart connections, but as Castells points out, we also need to follow the flows of power and meaning within networks. These flows can help to identify the nodes of power, and the 'switchers' within networks, who are probably also the actors closest to the heart of the Interaction Ritual Chains described by Collins.

With our small research team, this is a difficult task, but by building connections with other organisations in the leisure field, we can try and analyse the form, function and meaning of key leisure practices.

As an important first step in building such links, we are working together with NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, and Wageningen University and Research Centre to create the Centre for Leisure and Tourism (CeLToR), a network whose mission is:

> *To co-create and apply knowledge for the sustainable and innovative development of tourism and leisure, contributing to improving the quality of life. (www.celtor.eu)*

CeLToR creates a critical mass of leading researchers in the leisure field, albe to address both pure and applied research questions. The new Centre will work with a range of key partners from the commercial and public sectors to define a knowledge agenda for the sector. The focus for the research will also be provided by the development of a number of 'Academic Workspaces' designed to bring together researchers and practitioners to concentrate on topical issues.

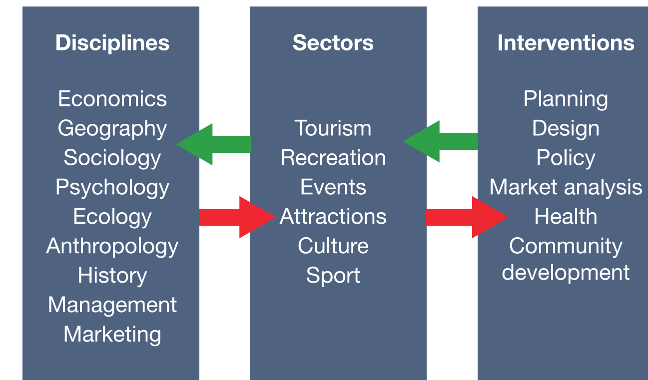


Figure 3: CeLToR research fields

One area in which an Academic Workspace is being planned is around the theme of BrabantStad Culturele Hoofdstad (BCH). We will be working with a range of partners in the new network city to develop research programmes which will not only monitor the outcomes of the cultural programme, but also the wider organisational processes involved. In this way we can actively contribute to the design and implementation of the programme as it unfolds. It is hoped that this research will strengthen the knowledge infrastructure around culture and creativity in the region, and provide a focus for such research at European level. The Events research group of CeLToR will also play an important role in researching and monitoring cultural and other events in the region and beyond.

Another Academic Workspace is being developed with the Efteling in the field of storytelling. Not only is the Efteling a textbook example of storytelling and 'imagineering' but it is a particularly poignant example in the field of leisure practice, since visiting the Efteling has become a ritual for the Dutch – something that has to be repeated at least three times in your life, as child, parent and grandparent. The success of the Efteling is largely thanks to the power of its narrative, the role of storytelling. Even more than Disney, the Efteling has managed to develop a coherent storyline that has turned a leisure attraction into a site a ritual pilgrimage. Understanding the Efteling and its relationship with its visitors can tell us a lot about the dynamics of the network society and the motivations and behaviour of its members.

The international dimension of the research programme will also be supported by our continuing involvement with the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), which Tilburg helped to found almost 20 years ago. ATLAS itself is a good example of how knowledge creation can function in the network society, with more than 300 member research institutions spread across the globe. Tilburg will take a more active role in ATLAS

research in future, particularly through the formation of an international Events Special Interest Group to link with the events research group in CeLToR.

Although leisure researchers are thinly spread around the world, and they therefore have a tendency to develop international collaboration in order to achieve critical mass, we should not forget that collaboration closer to home is also important. Because leisure is a multidisciplinary field we have the opportunity to work with colleagues in the Social Science Faculty in Tilburg on research methods in leisure, the sociology of leisure, the psychology of leisure or leisure organisations and networks. Some work has already begun in this area, but there is potential for much more collaboration in the future.

New tools

A rigorous and coherent approach to leisure practices also requires new research approaches. The Leisure Studies Department has already pioneered the use of sequence alignment methodology to measure routines in decision making (Bargeman and van der Poel, 2005), and is working with the Research Methods Department to apply latent class analysis in the tourism field (van der Ark and Richards 2006).

In both cases, one of the important themes has been the development of a longitudinal dimension to the analysis of practice. Because practices are structured through repetitive behavior of actors, there is a need for a temporal dimension to the research. This is an important reason why the Leisure Studies Department is developing a Leisure Panel with the help of other CeLToR partners, which will provide opportunities for repeated measurement of leisure behaviour and attitudes among consumers in the Netherlands. Hopefully, by monitoring the participation of people in different networks and ritual chains we can describe in far more detail the effects of transforming leisure practices in Dutch society.

To these largely quantitative approaches we will also endeavour to develop a significant qualitative research programme, designed to capture more information about the meaning and significance of leisure practices. This shift is already evident in the research being developed with the Efteling, and in the cultural tourism research being undertaken with international partners (Richards and Munsters, 2010).

Conclusion

The development of the network society has linked people together virtually, but rather than replacing face-to-face contact, it seems to have heightened the need for physical co-presence. We need to be with others to participate in the Interaction Ritual Chains, and these need to have a collective focus of attention which can give meaning to our activities. The result seems to be more, rather than less mass participation in leisure events of all kinds.

Although Boorstin long ago predicted the rise of pseudo-events, one could argue that the current trend towards hyperfestivity is not just a product of PR campaigns or overblown instrumentalism. It is just as much a result of a real individual and social need to build the social fabric and to generate shared, meaningful experiences. The problem with Boorstin's analysis, as Whitfield (1991) pointed out, is that he was very good at identifying the 'unreal' in modern society, but was at a loss to define what was actually 'real' or 'meaningful'.

Although it is easy to be critical of the contemporary leisure landscape, there are still plenty of signs that people are capable of using the spaces and places around them to create meaning and shape fulfilling moments of co-presence. The real problem starts when you want to channel that energy to achieve concrete social, cultural and economic goals. As Boorstin pointed out, pseudo-events are lacking in spontaneity and content, which suggests that 'real' event should be spontaneous and creative. The problem is, how do you plan for spontaneity?

In fact, planned spontaneity is already happening in the network society. Trendwatching.com has identified the tendency to make 'spontaneous decisions to go somewhere or do something' as one of the main impacts of networked individualism. If this trend continues, then planners and policy makers will also have to become more spontaneous, or risk being left behind by the creative leisure makers of today.

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