

Capitalism, fascism, communism, social democracy and the study of leisure: Comments prompted by Ken Roberts' 'Still speaking to ourselves'

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Introduction

In a recent article in this journal Ken Roberts (2021) analysed the development of Western leisure studies over three historical periods: 1900-1939; 1945-1989; and the post-1990, post-communism, period including the present and the immediate future. His ambitious thesis is that the study of leisure in the first two of these periods was influenced by the global tensions created by their 'binary international political contexts', between democracy and fascism in the first and capitalism and communism in the second. In both these contexts leisure was, Roberts observes, a 'high profile public issue', with leisure-related academic contributions to public debate attuned to these political contexts and, furthermore, commanding wide public audiences. By contrast, in the post-communist era, leisure research and commentary has not been attuned to any one dominant political context but has faced 'multiple modernities' and, furthermore, has failed to attract attention outside of leisure studies circles.

In terms of scope and ambition, Roberts' paper is without doubt a *tour de force*, which builds on earlier observations from a decade ago (Roberts, 2010). However, a number of his claims are challengeable. First, while there can be no doubt that, to varying extents, the identified historical 'binary international political contexts' existed, convincing evidence to show any significant effects of these contexts on the study of leisure is scarce, and what does exist is ambivalent. Second, it can be argued that the extent to which academic research and commentary on leisure attract attention outside of leisure studies circles tends to depend primarily on factors other than the international political environment. In addition to discussing the three periods, Roberts also offers some thoughts on the developing future 'wilderness'. In this paper, these thoughts are not commented on since to do so would require another whole paper. The focus is on the accounts of the three historical periods. These are examined in turn below considering, first, the relationship between the relevant binary international political context and the study of leisure and, second, the public prominence of writing on leisure at the time. The question of prominence can be viewed in relation to academic audiences outside of leisure studies and to the general public. While the two may be inter-related, the discussion here concentrates on the latter.

1900-1939

Roberts argues that the period 1900-1939 was characterised by the democracy versus fascism binary international political context. However, while Mussolini came to power in Italy in the early 1920s, the other two European fascist régimes, Franco in Spain and Hitler in Germany, did not gain power until the 1930s. While fascists were active during the 1920s, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the first half of the period was characterised by a democracy versus fascism binary significant enough to have an effect on leisure research. The following comments are therefore focussed on the 1930s.

Leisure commentary and the democracy v fascism binary

Roberts provides only one example to illustrate the relationship between a ‘democracy vs fascism binary’ and the study of leisure in the 1930s. This was a contest between democrats and fascists to ‘seize the agenda’ in a series of international conferences on leisure time and recreation. The series began in the USA in 1932, and was later taken over and hosted by the Axis powers in 1936, 1938 and 1940, the last being cancelled due to war. Roberts cites a paper by Tano (2010), based on German and Japanese language sources, which states that the 1936 congress ‘became the focal point of the international recreational movement’ (p.1). Such a movement would typically be a practice-based phenomenon as would the international congresses themselves, given their early origins with the International Labour Office (concerned with working hours) and links with the Olympic Games. The extent of academic involvement is unclear. There is evidence to suggest that proceedings for the 1936 congress were published in English, which might have indicated whether leisure scholars contributed and what views they expressed, but neither Roberts nor Tano refers to this source.¹ Therefore, while the conferences may have demonstrated the existence of the ‘binary international political context’ of the 1930s, their influence on the study of leisure in this period is not established.

The setting of international congresses is very specific, with international differences to the fore. Roberts implies that the democracy/fascism binary had a wider impact including, presumably, commentary on leisure in the domestic environment, but he does not provide details. In noting the growth of interest in the leisure of the working class in inter-war Britain, reference is made to the scholarly work of leisure historian Robert Snape (2018; Snape and Pussard, 2013), but not in relation to the political binary theme. Furthermore, fascism is not mentioned in the two sources cited.

Just how, then, might one expect the existence of the impact of the binary to be evidenced in the leisure-related literature? Presumably, it would be in the form of arguments or factually-based demonstrations that the way of life in a democratic society, particularly its leisure features, is superior to the likely way of life under a fascist régime. This superiority could be in regard to material conditions, freedoms enjoyed and/or moral values. An implication would be that fascism could be a threat to the democratic way of life and its values.

My own recent review of some 25 authors’ views on leisure time and working hours during the period 1918-1939, revealed no preoccupation with fascism (Veal, 2019, pp.76-94), although, admittedly, I was not looking for it. Western commentators were interested in widespread declines in working hours and the growth of leisure time and its consequences, arising from technological change and industrial bargaining and, to some extent, the issues raised by the very high levels of unemployment during the Great Depression. These events were generally viewed as an economic phenomenon with social impacts, typically parochially confined to Britain or the USA/Canada, and generally with no reference to the democracy/fascism political context.

Some examples of relevant sources are discussed below. These were not selected on the basis of a systematic review, but offer evidence of leisure-related commentary which, while noting the existence of fascist régimes, generally expressed attitudes which were far from confrontational.

May and Petgen’s *Leisure and its Uses* (1928), published prior to the takeover of fascism in Germany and Spain, but during the period of its control in Italy, was an American study of leisure developments in European countries. The section devoted to Germany noted, without comment, the existence of mass, often nationalistic, youth organisations (which were later to be absorbed into the Nazi-controlled Hitler Youth). The same process had already taken place in Italy, about which the authors offered the following comments:

The movement in Italy which for the purposes of the present report at once claims our attention is the “Dopolavaro”.² From the point of view of the American investigator, it is probably most expedient to regard this movement as an important experiment, on a national scale, in the matter of leisure provision for workers. To regard the movement as an experiment is not to imply any judgement as to its value or duration; it is merely to see it as an integral part and expression of Fascism, which, to the foreign observer, is itself an experiment, in the sense that the Russian Soviet Government is an experiment. In other words, one feels that the ultimate fate of the Dopolavaro movement is intimately bound up with the ultimate fate of Fascism. (May & Petgen, 1928, p.246)

This is ambivalent in regard to the both fascist and, seemingly, communist ‘experiments’. No impression is given that they posed a threat to America or its democratic values.

A similarly relaxed attitude can be found in the pioneering American textbook, *Leisure and Recreation*, by Neumeyer and Neumeyer (1936), which was published after the Nazis had come to power in Germany. A chapter on ‘Recreation movements in other lands’, included a descriptive history of the German Youth Movement which concluded with this observation:

Since Hitler has become “Der Führer”, the different youth organisations have gradually been dissolved and have been merged into “Hitler jugend”. Even the Catholic youth organizations, which were guaranteed independence in the concordat, are joining the Hitler youth. This united youth movement possesses a new note in that the young people are living the National Socialist Creed among themselves and are supporting the Nazi program. (Neumeyer and Neumeyer, 1936, p.277)

While this is expressed in an ominous tone, the consequences are not discussed any further. It is possible that a textbook was not seen as a suitable place to enter into partisan political debate in America.

A similar stance was adopted in a substantial 1937 report of an American review of leisure provision in inter-war Europe, conducted by an academic for an apparently professional readership (Weir, 1937). In the discussion of the fascist and communist states the report contrasted their mass, party-controlled organisations with the pluralist pattern in the democracies, but suggested that people’s enjoyment of leisure in the two systems was similar (pp.11-13). The German ‘Strength through Joy’ movement and the Hitler Youth, and the Italian Dopolavaro were described in some detail but without any political comment.

It is recognised that the above specific examples all emanate from the America. The lack of confrontational attitudes may reflect the political isolationist temperament of the USA at this time. This was to change from 1941, following the Pearl Harbour attack and the USA’s entry into World War II and its subsequent adoption of a peacetime international leadership role.

In contrast to this academic commentary, examples can be found of practitioner statements which make clear pro-democracy and anti-fascist statements in the leisure context. An American example is Eduard C. Lindeman’s (1939) essay, *Leisure – a national issue: Planning for the leisure of a democratic people*, which was addressed to the American social work community. Lindeman was a professor of social philosophy in the New York School of Social Work, but had recently spent four years seconded to the Recreation Division of the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal federal agency which provided funds for recreation projects during the Great Depression. On the basis of this experience he sought to make a case for a national plan for recreation involving 12 federal agencies. However, given the traditional American suspicion of ‘big government’, he was at pains to stress that the planning he had in mind was *democratic* and *pragmatic* in nature, involving consultation with states and civil organisations

and building on existing cultural traditions. This, he asserted, was in contrast to ‘communism and fascism’, which were ‘creedal concepts’ which did not belong to ‘the same category with democracy’ (p.36).

In regard to Britain, Snape (2015, pp.54, 67), in a paper not cited by Roberts, refers to examples of British social reformers of the 1930s who promoted suitable leisure activities as a component of ‘social citizenship’ and as a ‘bulwark against fascism’.³ Also noting this phenomenon, Olechnowicz (2005, p.37) observed that, as ‘the threat of totalitarianism became more pervasive in the later 1930s’, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in England claimed that recreation programmes based on ‘voluntary organization or free association’ could act as democracy’s defence against the ‘totalitarian or omnipotent state’. These practitioner-based cases clearly reference the possible threat of fascism, but it is not clear whether they were isolated examples or a reflection of widespread concerns. Furthermore, the extent to which they reflected academic commentary is not conveyed.

Prominence of leisure research/writing

Roberts posits that the domestic and international political binaries ‘amplified’ the voices of leisure scholars but he does not offer supporting evidence. He refers to economist John Maynard Keynes’ famous essay on future ‘possibilities for our grandchildren’ (1931/1972).⁴ However, this commentary was not prompted by the rise of fascism but by the beginnings of the high levels of unemployment of the Great Depression. Currell (2005, p.3) points out that there was a considerable interest in the growth of leisure in the popular media in America in the 1930s and Hunnicutt’s (1988) extensive citation of sources further demonstrates this point. However, these sources do not suggest a significant international political dimension to the contemporary commentary.

Conclusion: 1900-1939

Concentrating on the 1930s, it is concluded that the democracy/fascism binary had little impact on academic commentary on leisure during the period and, where the existence of the binary was recognised, attitudes towards fascist regimes were not typically confrontational. In contrast, there was some evidence to suggest concerns around the threat of fascism existed among planners and practitioners. As for the prominence of leisure-related literature, evidence for any international political influence is scarce.

1945-1989: democracy vs communism binary and leisure studies

The opening paragraph of the section of Roberts’ paper on the 1945-89 period notes that the Cold War was a cultural/political ‘struggle for hearts and minds’ in place of what might otherwise have been a nuclear war. The question arises as to how this environment affected the academic discussion of leisure which emerged in the post-war era. Roberts moves straight from outlining the capitalism/communism binary context to a discussion of the leisure society concept, giving the impression that this was the defining feature of the vision designed to win the ‘struggle for hearts and minds’ in the West. Below, therefore, this theme is discussed first, followed by an examination of leisure studies more generally.

The leisure society

While it can be argued that the leisure society attracted some public attention in the 1960s/1970s period, it is also arguable that it was far from being the key agenda item even within the emerging field of leisure studies (see Aitchison, 2010; Veal, 2019, pp.279-280). Roberts presents a brief summary of selected proponents and critics of the leisure society phenomenon and concludes that the Cold War context ‘acted as an echo chamber which made their work

politically relevant and won wider audiences'. However, he does not provide any explicit illustration of this echo chamber at work. My own review of the leisure studies literature of the period (Veal, 2011, 2019), does not detect any explicit concern with the Cold War or the capitalism/communism binary among the various discussants.

Apart from the simple criterion of a superior level GDP, which Roberts acknowledges, it can be argued that the more prominent feature of the Western vision of the future was not the possibility of a *leisure* society but the emergence of a *post-industrial* society. While the two features are sometimes portrayed as being connected, notably by Rojek (1985, p.101), this was not generally the case (Veal, 2019, pp.110-124). The most prominent feature of the post-industrial society was, after all, not a reduction in work time but a shift of work into the services sector, and that is what has happened.

Leisure studies texts and recognition of the capitalism/communism binary

To what extent was the international capitalism/communism political binary of the post-war era reflected in the emerging leisure studies literature more generally? Roberts does not discuss examples beyond the leisure society. As with the inter-war period, some examples of relevant literature discussed below are not the result of a systematic review, but are examples of material typical of the time.

In the English-speaking world, American writings on leisure led the way. Often they indicated little or no concern with the international political environmental context of leisure, as was the case with the 1958 volume *Mass Leisure* (Larrabee and Meyersohn, 1958), which contained over 40 previously published articles, none of which addressed this dimension. While there were exceptions to this pattern, awareness of the democracy/communism binary did not necessarily result in an unambiguous defence of capitalism. Examples are discussed below in chronological order of publication.

Nash, in *Philosophy of Recreation and Leisure* (1953/1960), declared that there existed a 'world struggle between ideas', with 'great giants representing the East and West ... facing each other, each defending its concept of social organization', the USA was devoted to freedom based on democratic laws 'dedicated to the dignity of the individual' and the recreational movement should 'make its contribution to these democratic ideals' (p.208). However, while democracy was defended, there was an implied criticism of capitalism since it promoted a 'materialist philosophy of life' (p.209), which it was the role of the recreation movement to counter by the promotion of participation in worthwhile leisure activity.

Ambivalence can also be found in Brightbill and Meyer's *Recreation: Text and Readings* (1953). Meyer was a professor in the University of Illinois and also chair of the Recreation Committee of the United Nations International Labor Office, so he had a particular awareness of the international context. The final chapter of the book was concerned with 'Special recreation problems', one of which was 'national emergencies'. The national emergency facing the USA in 1953 was seen as not a 'general war' but 'numerous potential dangers confronting the nation' and 'a war limited in its area of operation' (p.476). These threats, the authors stated, placed an onus on the USA Department of Defence to provide recreational outlets, linked with civilian recreational programs, as part of its responsibility to 'boost the morale of the young men and women' in the armed forces (totalling some three million in the 1950s). This modest proposal was presented as being of 'tremendous importance to our national defence and our way of life' (p.478).

While an awareness of the political dimension was apparent in Max Kaplan's (1960) seminal text, *Leisure in America*, he appears as an apologist for the Soviet régime rather than a critic. In a section on 'Leisure as social control' in a chapter on 'Leisure and the state' (pp.144-146), he

referred initially to the Roman 'bread and circuses' concept of controlling the masses. However, the ensuing discussion was mostly devoted to describing, and defending, the Soviet Union's support for sport and the arts and workers' subsidised vacations. This was presented as 'an illustration of direct governmental interest in leisure for general purposes of control but in a positive way that uses the device of winning loyalty through a significant benefit to the person' (p.145). Kaplan observed that, while critics of the Soviet Union emphasized the 'propagandist or ulterior purposes of the state as it "captures" the worker', welfare programs in American industry were criticised by 'labor unions on much the same grounds' (p.146).

Brightbill presented a contrasting view, with a more unequivocal appraisal of the democracy/communism binary, in *The Challenge of Leisure* (1960). In a chapter on 'Leisure as freedom', reflecting the awareness of the political binary shown in the earlier Meyer and Brightbill volume, he stated: 'At this period of history when opposing ideologies, backed by weapons which can annihilate all civilization, compete for the minds and hearts of men we may be more sensitive to, if not more skilful in, preserving our freedoms' (p.105). He then discussed the individual's exercise of freedom of choice of leisure activity, with the existence of a general state of freedom in American society taken as given. The conditions which ensured this state were considered further in relation to the concept of democracy. In addition to 'equal opportunity, tolerance, understanding and majority rule' democracy also meant freedom; free choice was 'at the heart of both leisure and democracy'. Democracy freed the individual's 'political thinking and action' while leisure freed the soul (p.109). Brightbill then declared:

One of the barriers to the establishment of public recreation services with tax funds has been the fear that such action might lead to government regimenting our lives and taking away the precious freedoms of leisure. Such apprehension is not without some justification. This has happened in totalitarian countries with the leaders focusing primarily on youth and bending recreation toward the ends of the state. (Brightbill, 1960, p.109-110)

He was, however, confident that this attack on freedoms would not take place in the democratic environment of the USA. This is as far as his discussion of possible threats to freedom went.

The descriptive/ambivalent stance reappears in Kraus's (1971) classic textbook, *Recreation and Leisure in Modern Society*. A chapter devoted to 'Recreation on the international scene' (pp. 211-234) included a section on the Soviet Union which was largely descriptive. While noting the degree of political control in various activities, it was also quite positive in regard to levels of provision of cultural, sporting and outdoor facilities. However, this chapter was omitted from subsequent editions of the text (e.g., Kraus, 1998).

The first specialist leisure studies journal, the *Journal of Leisure Research*, was launched in the USA in 1969. Its content was initially quite parochially North-America orientated. An exception was a brief 'impressionistic account' of leisure in the Soviet Union by Hendricks (1973), based on a conference and holiday trip. However, apart from a mention of Russian citizens' desire for more consumer goods, the report was entirely positive, with praise for Soviet sporting facilities, parks, book stores, holiday resorts and low working hours.

In general, then, it can be said that Roberts' thesis is only partially borne out by the American examples discussed above. While they show an awareness of the international political binary and see it as relevant to the leisure context, even if discussions are brief, the Soviet Union's approach to leisure is seen to have a number of positive features. Only in Brightbill (1960) is an unequivocal defence of capitalism/democracy against ~~fascism~~ **totalitarianism** presented.

Turning to Europe, Dumazedier's *Toward a Society of Leisure* (1962/1967) was, ~~as noted above,~~ a general sociology of leisure in France, despite its title. At first glance, the book looks promising in regard to Roberts' thesis since the index contains eight references to the Soviet

Union. These references are, however, generally descriptive and comparative, concerned largely with differences in cultural consumption patterns and provision for sport between the Soviet Union and Western countries. One reference nevertheless noted that the Soviet Union had created 'a vast system of leisure institutions for the masses'; all observers agreed that it had been 'the most successful of all countries in organizing mass sports'; and it had considerable 'cultural achievement ... on behalf of the masses' (p.241). The question was, however, raised as to whether, once the Soviet citizens' standard of living approached that of the Americans, they would accept the centrally planned approach to leisure. Discussing the more flexible conditions in other East European countries, where he had 'participated in investigations', Dumazedier concluded:

To sum up, all countries, whether capitalist or socialist, are faced with major problems arising from the growth of leisure. One side employs a development policy for the masses that is too narrowly authoritarian; the other suffers from an absence of any policy at all, which commits a commercially based anarchy of entertainment to flourish² (Dumazedier, 1962/1967, p.242).

Thus, reflecting Nash's (1953/1960) stance, criticism was aimed at both sides of the binary. This reflects a key proposition of Dumazedier's overall thesis, that 'the cultural development of our mass society is enveloped in incoherence and impotence'. However, far from a communist threat, French culture was under attack from the heart of capitalism: free time was becoming dominated by the 'malignant aspects of leisure à l'américaine' (p.240). To counter this, he called for the appointment of a national cultural council to work towards the creation of a 'civilization of leisure' (p.248).

Roberts' own early books on leisure appeared in this period. The first made a passing reference to the difference between communist and Western societies, noting that:

in communist societies the importance of leisure as a sphere of life in which values of a wider social and political significance can be expressed and communicated to the public is openly recognised. Forms of art and recreation that could be socially or politically subversive are deliberately suppressed ... In western societies, with the political élites being publicly committed to the concept of freedom, such overt recognition of the importance of controlling people's leisure lives is not found. (Roberts, 1970, p. 84).

In Roberts' (1978) later influential book, *Contemporary Society and the Growth of Leisure*, political considerations were to the fore. He stated that the 'descriptive conclusions' of the book applied to Western, not communist, societies, adding:

Indeed, one of the book's arguments is that leisure is different in societies that retain market economies, private property and multi-party political systems. ... Do we want governments to marshal the resources that leisure unleashes, to promote and educate the public to appreciate approved pastimes, and maybe to produce Olympic champions? In the socialist [i.e., communist] world governments purport to know how people should spend their leisure and pursue policies accordingly. Appeals for similar guidance from above are not unheard in Western countries. ... Do we want to appoint armies of recreation professionals to organise sport, arts, tourism and other uses of leisure? ... Or do we want to leave consumers with money in their pockets to play the market and organise their own voluntary associations? (Roberts, 1978, p.10)

The distinction here was clearly between the exercise of freedom of choice under pluralism/capitalism and unacceptable restrictions on freedom under socialism/communism. While Roberts claimed that his book did not aim to 'make up readers' minds' (p.11), it came very close to attempting this as it progressed. In the central part of the book, the immediate focus was not

alternative real world political régimes but alternative theories about the place of leisure in contemporary Western societies. Two such theories concern us here, *class domination theory* and the *pluralist scenario*, because they correspond approximately to communism and capitalism/democracy respectively. Roberts concluded: ‘The model of society that best enables us to understand contemporary leisure is a pluralist model – the unofficial ideology of Western society’ (p.86). Again, he emphasised the concept of freedom:

‘Freedom from’ is a condition of leisure. But there is also a positive side to the coin that involves individuals exploiting their ‘freedom to’ and leads logically to socio-cultural pluralism, meaning societies in which various taste publics are able to fashion life-styles reflecting their different interests and circumstances. (Roberts, 1978, p.86).

‘Class domination theory’ was seen as inadequate in addressing leisure behaviour in Western societies because its proponents had to ‘resort to highly convoluted explanations’ of leisure behaviour (p.86). In a later discussion of the dominance of work in people’s lives in an economy driven by efficiency and profit, Roberts returned to the question of alternative régimes, stating:

Of course, the market could be replaced. Capitalism might be superseded by socialism throughout the Western world, and the market replaced by a command economy. In themselves, however, these changes carry no guarantee of improvements to the quality of working life. Socialist [i.e., communist] regimes can free industry from market pressures, institute workers’ control, and allow production to be organised in whatever ways the producers found congenial. We know, however, that socialist regimes do not always use their power to this effect (Roberts, 1978, p.142).

Not surprisingly, Roberts’ own statements from the leisure studies literature are the clearest exposition of the thesis he puts forward in his 2021 article. In these statements, in highlighting the significance of *freedom*, he identifies arguably the key criterion used in general/political discourse to evaluate democracy/capitalism and fascist/communist/totalitarian régimes (Wilson, 1988).

The concept of freedom also provides a link to a major feature of leisure studies from the 1980s onwards, namely the neo-Marxist, critical and feminist analyses which were variations on what Roberts referred to as ‘class domination theory’. However, in this theoretical approach, rather than focussing on the lack of freedom under communist régimes, or the defence of liberal-democratic freedoms, the thesis was advanced that the latter were illusory. Individuals in liberal democracies were *not* free but were manipulated by market forces and controlled by the interests of industrial capital. To place this approach within the Roberts political framework, the binary context assumed comprised: *neo-liberal capitalism* versus *transformed or emancipated society*. While the details of the latter tend not to be spelled out, there are examples which offer advice to the political left on how to work towards it (e.g., Clarke and Critcher, 1985, pp. 234-240; Gorz, 1989, pp. 219-242).

A number of expositions of this approach appeared in the 1980s. For Canadian Ed Andrew (1981, pp.182–183), the principles of the ‘iron cage’ of ‘Taylorized production’, which controlled the workplace under capitalism, extended into leisure, so that leisure was no more free than work. Rojek (1985, p.181) declared that, in capitalist society: ‘Leisure relations are not relations of freedom’ but ‘relations of **power**’. **Clarke** and Critcher (1985, p.95) argued that, in capitalist Britain, ‘the identification of leisure with freedom, choice and satisfied needs is ...misleading’. They critiqued the typical claims made for capitalism in regard to leisure and freedom, as follows::

The ability of consumer-orientated capitalism to deliver the leisure goods is used as its political validation. Its effectiveness is contrasted with the economic stagnation of the

Easter bloc and the ‘backwardness’ of the Third World. ... the market [has] become the major institution and ideology of leisure. Far from being the antithesis of freedom, it has been represented as its realisation. Broader questions of freedom and control have been narrowed around the right to consumer choice. (Clarke & Critcher, 1985, pp.232-233)

Feminist leisure research which emerged at this time was similarly not concerned with international political environments, but with limitations on women’s access to leisure time and constraints on their freedom to engage in leisure activity, which were ‘part of the power, ideology and social structures of patriarchal relations between men and women’ (Deem, 1986, p.132). This perspective was advanced as part of either a neo-Marxist thesis or a reformist agenda.

This suggests two views of the political binary of this era. Roberts’ view becomes *pluralist capitalism* versus *communism*, while the critical view becomes *neo-liberal capitalism* versus *an emancipated society*. This, however, was just the beginning: neo-Marxist/critical/feminist approaches to leisure studies continued in the post-1990 era as discussed in the post-communist era section below.

Prominence of leisure research/writing: 1945-1989

To what extent did leisure scholars during this period attract wider attention, from mass media or the general public? In the absence of readily available statistics on book sales, we are dependent on anecdote and impressionistic awareness of citations.

One view is that leisure studies achieved a ‘break through’ to wider audiences with the idea of the leisure society. Rojek (1985, p.101), for example, claimed that the leisure society was a ‘central article of faith in ... post-industrial theory’ and persisted with this view in later commentary (see Veal, 2019, pp.110-124, 222). In view of Dumazedier’s claim that *Toward a Society of Leisure* sold 80,000 copies, in three language versions (reported in Samuel, 1993, p.11), it can be concluded that this concept did break out beyond leisure studies scholars and even to the communications media and the public. However, despite its title, the book was, as noted above, a general introduction to the sociology of leisure in France and included very little discussion of the leisure society idea as such. In fact, Dumazedier (1974, pp.211-212) indicated that he chose the title as a ploy to draw the attention of fellow sociologists to the significance of leisure, but doubted that he had succeeded. In fact, 20 years after the publication of his book, he observed that the concept of the ‘leisure civilization’ had been so badly misunderstood that he expressed a desire to ‘bury it’ (Dumazedier, 1984, author’s translation). One possible reason why, having attracted early attention, the leisure society idea did not appear to have ‘staying power’ was that, apart from Western economic growth being disrupted by economic crises, it was not a soundly based or carefully researched proposition (Veal 2019, p.286). Furthermore, despite the mythology in leisure studies lore, it did not have many serious champions.

Roberts indicates that his own first two books attracted media attention. In the case of the first one (Roberts, 1970+) it might arguably have been because it was the first book **to be** published on the topic in the UK. It contained a whole chapter on the leisure society, so one might speculate what attention it might have attracted if, like Dumazedier, he had included ‘leisure society’ in the title!

Juliet Schor’s (1991) *The Overworked American*, published in 1991 but dealing with the post-war period up to the 1980s, ‘briefly made the non-fiction best-seller list’ (Kniesner, 1993). However, at the time she was writing the book, Schor was an economist and not a member of the leisure studies community, although she was identified as such for a period following the book’s publication. Arguably, the leisure society remained the attention-grabbing factor, since Schor’s book essentially challenged the idea of increasing leisure time.

One common feature of the popular books mentioned, which may appear trivial, is that they used footnotes or endnotes rather than the intrusive author-date referencing system common in contemporary academic books.

Conclusion: 1945-89

To sum up in regard to the 1945-89 period: as with the 1930s, Roberts' thesis regarding the influence of the international political binary on writing/research on leisure, is hard to sustain on the basis of the evidence examined. While some practitioners appeared to conform to the thesis, seeing leisure provision in democracies as playing a part in countering totalitarian threats, few leisure academics did so, the most notable exception being Roberts himself. Authors in the mainstream of leisure studies who identified the political binary were either ambivalent about it or concentrated less on the merits of democratic/capitalist system than on its internal faults (e.g. Dumazedier, Brightbill). Arguably, the more notable feature was the emergence of neo-Marxist, critical and feminist leisure theorists, who, rather than contrasting the lack of freedoms of communist systems with the claimed freedoms of liberal democracies, argued that the latter *lacked* freedom. For them, the relevant binary was not capitalism versus communism but neo-liberal capitalism versus emancipated society. Regarding the prominence of leisure studies, the proposition that it benefited from the 'echo' of the democracy versus communism binary is also, therefore, unsupported.

Post-communism (1990-present)

The political/economic environment

Roberts' initial discussion of change in the post-communist era is entirely Europe-orientated. The experiences of the post-1990 period in Asia, for example, in China, Vietnam or India, or the Americas, which were very different to that of Europe, are not discussed. A fully inclusive global analysis would, of course, be a very ambitious undertaking, although Roberts' later thoughts on the future 'wilderness' does attempt to cover Asia.

Roberts' discussion of general conditions in the West in the post-communist era posits that loss of the capitalism versus communism binary has been responsible for the various changes in working conditions in the West, but he does not explain any causal links. The discussion is indeed quite truncated. The collapse of the Soviet system resulting in eastern/central European countries joining the EU and permitting worker access to Western European labour markets, certainly had a significant impact on those labour markets. But, arguably, an at least equally significant impact arose from the existence of the Asian cheap industrial labour force and capabilities which facilitated the 'off-shoring' of Western jobs, in manufacturing in particular. This began in the 1960s with Japan and the 'Asian tiger' economies and was ramped up significantly by the rise of China in the 1990s, following the Deng Xiaoping reforms. This hastened the shift to 'post-industrial' economies in the West, which had been in train since the 1960s (see Veal, 2019, Ch.6). While real wages in the West in recent decades have not grown at the same rate as in previous periods, the availability of cheap imports of manufactured products contributed to the sustaining of material living standards, while technical evolution and innovation (e.g. audio-visual electronics, the internet and mobile devices) have been transformational in a number of leisure sectors. But what of leisure studies in this period?

Leisure studies and the paradox of leisure

While Roberts offers a view on the state of work/leisure in this post-communist era, he does not seek to describe the state of leisure studies. However, this should be considered because it is relevant to his overall theoretical approach. The critical leisure theorists' 'project' of attacking Western capitalism, particularly in regard to its claimed leisure-related freedoms, continued into

the 1990s and persists to this day, as does the lack of comparative discussion of levels of freedom in non-liberal-democratic states.

These theorists began to refer to the basis of this project as the ‘paradox of leisure’. For example: for Coalter (1989, p.xiv) leisure was a paradox because it was ‘Janus-like, containing elements of both freedom and constraint’; Rojek (1995, pp.191-192) referred to the ‘sheer paradox of leisure’ as ‘a luminous goal in our culture’ associated with ‘freedom, choice and life-satisfaction’, but which becomes ‘one more problem in an existence already surrounded with problems’; and Spracklen (2009, pp.11-19) opened his book with a chapter with the title: ‘The paradox of leisure’. Others stated the paradox without using the term. For example, Hemingway (1995) used the expression ‘ruptures between principle and practice’ in Western society, exemplified by ‘claims of enabling freedom in leisure and particular forms of leisure that in fact restrict freedom or channel it into a narrow range of practices’ (p.28), while Blackshaw (2010, p.15) referred to structuralist critics who argued that ‘although it would appear that we have freedom to choose our leisure, modern society actually denies us real choice’, offering instead, the ‘illusion of free choice’ or ‘false consciousness’. The critique continues to be focussed on Western capitalism, with an international dimension recognised in the form of the process of globalisation. This is merely seen as enhancing capitalism’s scope to clamp down on freedom.

Roberts is cited as the one leisure theorist who rejects the paradox proposition: ‘for Roberts there is no paradox ... the notion of the rational actor, free of constraint, making free choice, is fundamental’ (Spracklen, 2009, p.18). In fact, as we have seen, Roberts uses the term *relative* freedom, which makes a difference. The pluralist argument is not that liberal democracies offer absolute freedom but that they generally offer more freedom than most alternatives. The tendency is for the critical theorists to see Roberts’ version of pluralism as representative. In fact, his version, as set out in, for example, Roberts (1978, pp.84-89; 2006, p.x, 205-207), is conservative, particularly as it plays out in terms of public policy (Roberts, 1978, pp. 155-159; 2016, pp. 85-90). This has implications for Roberts’ political binaries concept, as discussed below.

The focus of the critical leisure theoretical project can itself be seen as a paradox, of leisure studies. This is that, while Roberts’ thesis is that leisure studies is shaped by the political binary, between liberal democracies, associated with individual freedoms, and communist and authoritarian régimes, associated with lack of freedom, the key mission of critical leisure theorists has been to demonstrate the very opposite of this claim, at least of its first part.

There is yet another paradox in this situation – the *paradox of leisure politics*. This is that, while the analysis of the lack of freedom in leisure under capitalism generally is a critical/left project, albeit one which has not generally resonated with the wider community, right-wing libertarian movements have attracted popular, and populist, followings with leisure-related concerns. These include such matters as defence of ‘second amendment’ gun laws in the USA and opposition to current COVID-19 pandemic-related curbs, such as mandated mask wearing and lockdowns and ‘vaccination passport’ access to cafes, pubs, cinemas and gyms.

Whither the political binaries?

The political binary within which critical theorists operate remains as in the 1945-1989 era, as discussed above, namely: neo-liberal capitalism versus a transformed or emancipated society. However, Roberts’ capitalism versus communism binary is now in disarray because of the perceived absence of a viable communist model. It is the consequences of this that Roberts discusses in the final section of his paper but which is not pursued here.

However, there is a third possible model. At the end of the 1945-1989 period, I was searching for a way to express this in offering support for Roberts’ pluralist approach in the form of a

suggested theoretical framework for leisure studies based on the Weberian concepts of status and lifestyle (Veal, 1989a). This was ignored by Roberts and roundly condemned by neo-Marxist and feminist commentators alike (Crichter, 1989; Scraton and Talbot, 1989), although I sought to defend my stance (Veal, 1989b) and have subsequently updated it (Veal, 2013). In what can be seen as a follow-up to this initiative, I have more recently argued that an alternative to both the Roberts conservative pluralist standpoint and to that of the critical theorists is *social democracy* (Veal, 1998). This accepts capitalism but with a strong role for government and democratic structures to counter the economic inequalities of capitalism and **to make public** provision to overcome the limitations of the market system. Rather than binary, the schema which encompasses the political range of leisure studies is then three-pronged: *neo-liberal capitalist society* versus *social democratic society* versus *transformed society*. It should be noted that, while the transformed or emancipated society remains an idealised vision, social democratic societies do exist, notably in Scandinavia (Scott, 2014) and, from time-to-time, in European and other democracies.

The post-communist era and the profile of leisure research/writing

Roberts does not re-visit the issue of the profile of leisure studies in the post-communist era, although others in the field have expressed concerns or offered observations on the matter (e.g., Kelly, 2000; Witt, 2000). Two points can nevertheless be made, regarding topic and medium/style. It can be argued that the wider society will be interested in academic writing if recognisable current social or economic issues or topics are addressed directly. Thus Dumazedier and Roberts himself addressed work/leisure issues at a time when they were still a relatively new issue in the post-war era, and Schor sought to overturn widely accepted 'common knowledge' on changing working hours. Regarding medium and style: the question arises: can leisure studies scholars expect to attract attention beyond the field in the twenty-first century if they publish only in traditional leisure studies outlets in the academic style?

Bringing aspects of these two points together, we may contrast Roberts' **1970** book with his more recent 2006 volume. Roberts (197**0**) used the unobtrusive footnote referencing style and the concluding chapter addressed the question: 'Is leisure a social problem?'. Thus, it could be seen as being addressed, at least in part, to a non-leisure-studies audience. In Roberts (2006), on the other hand, he used the obtrusive author-date referencing style and the final chapter, while it had an ostensibly socially relevant title, 'The Transformation of Leisure?', actually presented a somewhat arcane discussion of the definition of leisure (as experience or residual time) and concluded with a discussion of 'The future of leisure research'. It was clearly addressed to leisure studies academics.

My own, not necessarily exemplary, experience can be brought into the discussion here. The choice of title of my recent book, *Whatever happened to the leisure society?* (2019), is an indication that I originally intended to seek a wider, and possibly more popular, audience. In the proposal to the publishers I suggested using endnotes rather than author-date referencing but, by force of habit, I resorted to use of the latter. Furthermore, while the final chapter has an ostensibly popular title, 'The struggle for time: what next?', it ended up being addressed to leisure studies researchers rather than the broader community. By contrast, I have recently published three articles in the Australian edition of the on-line publication *The Conversation*, which is a university-sponsored platform that publishes short (1000-word) articles specifically designed to communicate academic research findings to the general public. The articles were on the topic of the length of the working week (Veal, 1918, 2020, 2021). To date, they have attracted 123,000, 134,000 and 417,000 reads respectively and have given rise to a total of about 20 media interviews. It seems that there may be a wider audience for the output of leisure scholars if the topic and the medium used are suitable. This does not restore the 1970s; after all, the 2020s era is a very different world. However, it demonstrates that writing which taps into

public concerns can attract public attention. As Shaw (2007, p.61) expressed it, the lack of recognition of leisure studies outside the field may be related to ‘the fact that leisure scholars have failed to adequately explain the significance of leisure research in ways that resonate with and relate to other dominant life concerns’.

The above *Conversation* experience raises the issue of communications media generally. Books have traditionally been the way in which leisure studies academics have reached audiences outside of academe: few have been successful. Even fewer academics have been able to communicate in a significant way via radio and television. New internet-based and social media have, of course, democratised mass media communication. The leisure studies community, while connected to these media, via organisations such as WLO, ANZALS and LSA, has to date not realised ~~its~~ **their** full potential in terms of communication with a wider public.

Conclusion

Ken Roberts’ primary thesis in his 2021 article, concerning the influence of ‘binary international political contexts’ on leisure-related commentary and research in the 1930s and post-World War II periods, is challenged in this paper.

It is concluded that, during the 1930s, the *democracy versus fascism* binary had little impact on academic commentary on leisure although concerns about the threat of fascism existed among planners and practitioners. In the 1945-89 period, the initial decades saw a similar pattern, with evidence of some practitioner concerns with communism, but with variable academic attitudes. Authors in the mainstream of leisure studies were either ambivalent about the *capitalism versus communism* political binary or concentrated less on the merits of democratic/capitalist system than on its internal faults. The most explicit exposition of the binary in the 1970s was that of Roberts himself. The more notable feature from the 1980s onwards was, however, the emergence of neo-Marxist, critical and feminist leisure theory questioning the claimed freedoms of liberal democratic capitalism. Here, the relevant binary was not *capitalism versus communism* but *neo-liberal capitalism versus transformed society*. The post-1990 era saw the decline of the USSR-led communist bloc and hence the disappearance of the *capitalist versus communist* binary. In Roberts’ 2021 paper he offers perspectives on its replacement by ‘multiple modernities’. This proposition was not pursued in the current paper, rather, it is noted that the critical approach to the study of leisure continued and strengthened, with the issue of freedom, or lack of it, under capitalism being identified as the *paradox of leisure*. It is argued, however, that a neglected political framework, social democracy, offers a three-pronged political/theoretical framework for the study of leisure, comprising *neo-liberal capitalist society* versus *social democratic society* versus *transformed society*.

Roberts’ secondary thesis, that leisure-related research/commentary which reflects the binary international political context of the time attracts attention from outside of the narrow circle of academic leisure studies, is also challenged in this paper. It is argued that the prominence of leisure studies in the wider community is concerned not with relationships with international political binaries but with the relevance of the topic to people’s lives and, more recently, the nature of the communication media used.

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¹ Roberts appears to refer to the same leaflet that I have a copy of (*World Congress, Leisure Time and Recreation*, 1936), which promotes the 1936 conference proceedings. However, I have been unable to locate a copy of the proceedings themselves and neither Roberts or Tano appear to cite them. The pamphlet indicates that the proceedings included a 'Foreword' by Reichminister Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler's Deputy and Patron of the Congress. Hess, now deceased, was the longest-serving prisoner found guilty of crimes against peace at the post-war Nuremberg trials.

² 'Dopolavoro', which means 'after work', was a movement for adults and youth.

³ Snape's source is Beaven and Griffiths (2008, p.216), whose source in turn is Olechnowicz's (2000, p.16) historical reference to the views of one 1930s reformist local politician in north west England.

⁴ He could also have mentioned Bertrand Russell's (1935) essay on the 4-hour work day.