

The leisure society: myths and misconceptions: 1960-1979

A.J. Veal

University of Technology, Sydney

Abstract

Recent discussion in the *World Leisure Journal* has raised the issue of the place of the 'leisure society thesis' in the development of leisure studies. Some have argued that the thesis was a key, but misconceived, 'project' of the early phase of leisure studies which has done lasting damage to the leisure studies brand. Others argue that the thesis was a passing preoccupation which has long since been superseded and is no longer of relevance. In this paper, it is noted that recollections of the leisure studies thesis in its heyday of the 1960s and '70s are often unspecific and at times ill-informed. The paper is not a defence or critique of the leisure society thesis but an attempt to establish a more accurate history through discussion of five myths: 1. that portrayals of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s invariably involved visions of the future; 2. that there was a consensus within the leisure studies community concerning a future leisure society; 3. that the thesis was a significant feature of the early leisure studies literature; 4. that definitions of the leisure society were based on predictions of falling working hours; and 5. that leisure society proponents themselves predicted reductions in working hours.

Introduction

In a recent edition of the *World Leisure Journal*, Cara Aitchison (2010) took issue with Chris Rojek's (2010a) portrayal of the 'leisure society thesis' as a major feature, possibly *the* major feature, of the early development of the field of leisure studies. She argued that, by the mid-1980s, the leisure society idea¹ had been 'largely revised, refuted and replaced' by other significant themes and related paradigms from within sociology and from other disciplinary traditions, notably physical education/human movement and geography. In his response to Aitchison's comments, Rojek stood his ground, stating:

My reasons for looking again at the leisure society thesis are not nostalgic but analytical, particularly with the issue of the institutionalised study of leisure today in university settings. To put it bluntly, nothing before or since has been as successful in capturing the public imagination. For students of leisure, the results of the gradual submergence of the thesis in public life have been serious. The discipline has suffered a relative decline. ... leisure studies is left with an identity crisis of major proportions: it is embarrassed about where it has come from (the promise of a shorter working week, early retirement, and well-funded activities for all), and it has not generated a new idea, one big enough to put leisure back on the agenda of public debate and make student enrolments in the subject expand. (Rojek, 2010b, p. 277)

Rojek is not alone in attributing such a pivotal role to the leisure society thesis. Peter Bramham (2006, 2008) depicts it as the major 'project' of leisure studies during the 1970s, with three other projects characterising the following three decades. It is quite common in the contemporary leisure studies research literature for the leisure society idea to be referred to as the only, or the typical, defining feature of the field in its early period, but one which was at best short-lived and at worst deeply flawed. Examples of such recollections include: Green, Hebron and Woodward (1990, p. 3); Roberts (2000, p. 4); Shaw (2006, p. 257); Coalter (2007, p. 9); Waring (2008, p. 296); and Carrington (2008, p. 36). Similar references also appear in textbooks, for example: Kelly and Godbey (1992, p. 492); Wolsey and Brown (2001, p. 64); Bull, Hoose and Weed (2003, p. 282); Tribe (2005, p. 71); Best (2010, p. 231); and Page and Connell (2010, p. 20).²

Table 1 presents a listing of the leisure society literature from 1960 to 1979. The table includes relatively substantial contributions, excluding passing references of a secondary nature.³ Information is included on the country and discipline of the author, the type of publication (book, journal etc.) the terminology used, details of any cross-references to other sources on the leisure society thesis, and a comment, typically quoting a key phrase from the source. It can be seen that, of the 18 sources listed, just over half are leisure studies specialists and the majority of the authors (10) are from the USA, with six from the UK and just one each from France and Canada. All except three are books, two are book chapters and just two are journal articles subject to the peer review process. Of the latter only one is from a leisure studies journal, the first specialist journal, the *Journal of Leisure Research* having been published for the first time in 1969. The sources are divided into three groups: those who held that the leisure society had already arrived (4); those who anticipated a future leisure society (7); and those who questioned the leisure society thesis (7). One author, Roberts, appears in two of the groups, for reasons explained below.

INSERT Table 1

Analysis of this body of literature is used to address a five myths which have arisen in recollections and discussions of the leisure society concept: 1. that portrayals of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s invariably involved visions of the future; 2. that there was a consensus within the leisure studies community concerning a future leisure society; 3. that the thesis was a significant feature of the early leisure studies literature; 4. that definitions of the leisure society were based on predictions of falling working hours; and 5. that leisure society proponents themselves predicted reductions in working hours. The paper is not a critique or defence of the leisure society thesis: it has a very limited aim, to provide a fuller and more accurate account of 'who said what' than is typically found in contemporary recollections of the 1960s and '70s literature. While this period is seen as the heyday of the leisure society thesis, the post-1980 literature, from both proponents and critics and from leisure studies and other traditions, is more substantial, but to do this justice would require another paper. Furthermore, the leisure society idea did not emerge in the 1960s from a vacuum; it arose against a background of lively debate in the inter-war years on work, automation, unemployment and the 'new leisure', and post-war discussion of mass leisure, work centrality and post-industrialism. These debates have been extensively documented elsewhere (see Hunnicutt, 1980; Cross, 1989; Larrabee and Meyersohn, 1958; Smigel, 1963; Kumar, 1978; Granter, 2008).

Myth 1. Portrayals of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s all involved visions of the future

If the leisure society thesis is based on a future vision that did not come to fruition, then it can be criticised for lacking a valid model of social and economic change or, in the light of unforeseen events, such as oil price crises, recession and the advent of globalisation, it may simply be seen as irrelevant, given the changed conditions. However, not all conceptions of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s were about the future. The first group of four sources in Table 1, Kaplan, Miller and Robinson, Sessoms and Roberts argued that the leisure society had already arrived.

Max Kaplan (1960, p. 3) opens *Leisure in America* with a declaration that America could be said to be 'in an age of leisure' because 'we have as much time during the day away from work as we have in work'. This appears to have been based on discussion, later in the book, of US data on a full-time male worker pattern, involving a week-day with eight hours of paid work and eight waking hours away from paid work. The eight hours away from paid work would not have been wholly devoted to leisure activity, but perhaps if weekends and holidays had been taken into

account the proposition that there was more leisure time than paid work time – for men – would have been supported. Kaplan also refers, in a single paragraph, to a variety of social and economic changes recently experienced in America, which appear to be offered as additional evidence of the existence of a leisure society, including reduced working hours, changed family life, increased 'rootlessness', a decline in the importance of traditional 'sources of control, such as the church and elders of the community', the growth of visual media, ageing of the population and modification of ideas about class. However, the connections between these changes and the leisure society idea are not explicitly addressed.

Norman Miller and Duane Robinson (1963, p. v) state: 'The twentieth century finds man turning more and more to his increasing free time to fulfill himself. It is during leisure time and through play and recreation that increasing numbers of people find the means for creative self-expression. The effect of this movement has made the present day a leisure age for new masses of people'. No elaboration of this statement is offered. Douglas Sessoms (1972, p. 312) offers a similarly brief assertion that the 'age of leisure' could be said to have arrived because advances in technology had already 'freed many from the drudgery of routine work'.

Of the four authors in this group, Kenneth Roberts provides the fullest exposition:

... the information we have at our disposal does suggest that, along with other modern societies, Britain has become a society of leisure in that activities in which people elect to participate during their free time play a significant part in the development of their sense of self-identity, and leisure thereby is accorded the power to reciprocate the influence that other institutions have upon it. ... The influence that leisure exerts upon people's lives and upon other institutions is specific to advanced industrial societies, which is why it is justifiable to call them societies of leisure. (Roberts, 1970, pp. 101-02)

It is notable that this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative definition, an issue we return to later in the paper.

If the leisure society was already deemed to have arrived in the 1960s or '70s, where does this leave contemporary criticism of the concept? Clearly, these authors cannot be criticised on the basis of having failed to anticipate future events: their description of Western countries as leisure societies stands or falls on their assessment of conditions existing in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is not proposed to resolve this issue here, but just to note that this view of the leisure society was not acknowledged, let alone challenged, by critics at the time and has not been challenged since.

A curious footnote to this phenomenon is provided by Joffre Dumazedier, the most well-known figure associated with the leisure society thesis. His book, *Toward a Society of Leisure* (Dumazedier, 1967), was published in English in 1967, but had originally been published in French in 1962 under the title *Vers Une Civilization du Loisir?* (Dumazedier, 1962). The deletion of the question mark from the title of the English version clearly removes the tentative stance of the original, and was, it seems, done without Dumazedier's approval. Jiri Zuzanek (2003) has pointed out that Dumazedier was 'the first one to emphasize that the French title of ... *Toward a Society of Leisure*, ended with a question mark'. The other difference between the titles of the two editions was the substitution of 'society' for 'civilization'. And yet within the book Dumazedier uses only the word 'civilization'. Since any difference which might exist between 'society' and 'civilization' is not discussed in the book, the reader of the English edition would naturally assume that the two terms are probably interchangeable. However, many years later Dumazedier offered a surprising clarification, when he stated: 'The leisure civilization has still to be created.

We live in a leisure society, but one that is still far away from the awareness which might create a balance in social time more attuned to the development of both the individual and society' (Dumazedier, 1989, p. 149). Thus, for Dumazedier, a leisure *society*, which already existed in Western countries in 1989, was different from a leisure *civilisation*, which might be achieved in the future. He offered no detailed explanation but, since he did not speak of particular changes in the more than 25 years between the first publication of his book and this statement, it could reasonably be assumed that the remark applied to the 1960s as well as the 1980s. This raises the question, in regard to the English edition of his book, as to how we could be moving *toward* a society of leisure if we were already living in one. This distinction between the 'society' and the 'civilization' of leisure also raises the question of definitions and this is discussed under Myth 3 below.

Myth 2. In the 1960s and '70s there was a consensus within the leisure studies community concerning the prospect of a future leisure society

It should be noted that the number of proponents of a *future* leisure society was relatively small. Six are identified in Table 1, of whom only two were leisure studies specialists: Dumazedier – and John Neulinger.⁴ Thus, including the four already discussed, six leisure studies specialists were proponents of the leisure society thesis. Of the five proponents who were not leisure studies specialists, two were theologians (Lee, Dahl), and the others were a scientist (Gabor), futurologists (Kahn and Wiener) and an education specialist (Strom). It is notable that only one of the ten refers to others on the list in regard to the leisure society thesis: Dumazedier (1971, pp. 193-94) refers to Kahn and Wiener's (1967) work as 'too linear and too optimistic'.

Seven authors who were critical of the leisure society thesis are identified in Table 1, of whom five were leisure specialists. Sebastian De Grazia (1962, p. 86) based his critique on a claim that reductions in paid working hours over earlier decades had been whittled away by increases in time devoted to travel to work and personal and domestic 'maintenance' activities, of the sort later identified by Linder (1970). Zuzanek (1974) contrasted the leisure society thesis (with reference to Dumazedier and Kahn) with 'harried leisure class' thesis (Linder, 1971), concluding that neither was convincing and that 'the future of work/leisure should not be analysed solely in a linear, quantitative way, but in terms of 'an economically and culturally patterned *leisure or life style*' (Zuzanek, 1974, p. 304). Stanley Parker (1976) argued that the extent of reductions in working hours and the significance of leisure in people's lives had been exaggerated. Uniquely, he directed criticism at named proponents, Roberts and Dumazedier. Augustine Basini (1975, p. 102) described the leisure society as an 'unproven assumption', declaring that 'euphoria regarding an imminent society of leisure is premature' and that working hours in Britain at the time were not falling, a point of view shared by the other non-leisure studies critic, Krishan Kumar (1978, p. 83), who consequently described the leisure society as 'an ever-receding goal'.

Thomas Kando's (1975, 1980) critique of the leisure society thesis is arguably the most thorough published to date. He replicated and updated De Grazia's time-use trend analysis in two editions of his book, coming to similar conclusions. He nevertheless concluded that the material economic conditions existed for moving towards a leisure society in America, but that the innate nature of the American capitalist system and its associated materialist and work-orientated culture prevented it from happening. He concluded: 'It may be that a civilization capable of creating the conditions necessary for true leisure, an affluent material base, has no use for leisure itself; and conversely, a culture whose ideology is supportive of leisure may not be able to erect leisure's material foundation' (Kando, 1975, p. 100).

Roberts appears among the ranks of the critics as well as the proponents because he changed his

position. He made his first negative remarks in a 1975 paper (Roberts, 1975), but his clearest statement, contradicting his 1970 statement discussed above (although not referring to it), was presented in 1978:

The growth of leisure is affecting the quality of life, but leisure is not becoming the whole of it. Talk of a leisure civilisation or a society of leisure is misconceived. ... leisure has not become and is not becoming synonymous with or the basis of modern life in general. ... there are limits to how widely the influence of leisure is spreading throughout the social structure. Work and politics are two areas of life where its impact is slight and, while this remains so, talk of a society of leisure is ill-advised. (Roberts, 1978, pp. 146-8)

This suggests that Roberts had changed his assessment of the empirical conditions in Britain rather than the logic of his original statement. It implies that if, for example, the impact of leisure on work and/or politics were to increase, the conditions for a leisure society might again be realised. On the other hand, if Britain had changed, from leisure society to non-leisure society, in 15 years, this should surely have been a matter for comment.

Following his 1960 statement, Kaplan apparently never wrote about the leisure society again, even when writing about the future of leisure (Kaplan, 1968) and Sessoms wrote only one other paper on the topic (Sessoms, 1974), so it is possible that they also came to realise that they had been mistaken.

Given that there were known proponents and critics of the leisure society thesis, one would expect to find that the topic was the subject of debate within the leisure studies community. But, with the exception of the contributions of Parker and Zuzanek, the critics do not refer to the leisure society proponents by name, or to the specifics of their work. And the proponents do not refer to the critics. Even Kando (1975, 1980), who offers the most substantial discussion of the topic, does not refer to named proponents. And Neulinger (1981), while making frequent references to Dumazedier when he is discussing leisure definitions and theory, makes no such reference when he is discussing the leisure society. So there was no apparent direct debate between proponents and critics. Nevertheless, given that the two groups existed with opposing views, it is difficult to conclude that there was a consensus among members of the leisure studies community regarding the leisure society.

This brief compilation of the relevant literature may help to counter some of the inaccuracies which appear from time to time in some of the recollections of the leisure society concept in the current literature. Thus, for example, Aitchison (2010) indicates, and Bramham (2006) implies, that Roberts supported the leisure society thesis in *Contemporary Society and the Growth of Leisure* (Roberts, 1978), whereas that is the volume in which he *rejected* it. Bramham (2006), Waring (2008) and Best (2010, p. 231) associate Stanley Parker with the leisure society but, in *The Future of Work and Leisure*, to which they refer, Parker does not mention the leisure society and is quite sceptical about claims of falling working hours (Parker, 1971, p. 11) and, as we have seen, in later publications he made clear that he rejected the thesis (Parker, 1975, p. 33; 1976, p. 147). A number of commentators associate post-industrial theorist Daniel Bell with the leisure society thesis (Rojek, 2005, p. 3; Waring, 2008; Best, 2010; p. 231), but Bell's (1973, p. 475) view of the future did not involve a leisure society and was very far from the optimism typically associated with the leisure society (see Granter, 2008, pp. 918-19). Some have associated Thorstein Veblen with the evolution of leisure society idea (Rojek, 1995, p. 80-81; Ravenscroft and Gilchrist, 2009) but, while Veblen (1899/1970, p. 68-70) envisaged the masses seeking to emulate the conspicuous *consumption* of the leisure class, he did not envisage them emulating its conspicuous *leisure*.

Myth 3. The leisure society was a significant feature of the leisure studies literature of the 1960s and '70s

This section raises questions as to the significance of the leisure society thesis in leisure studies on the basis of evidence on the *absence* of the leisure society thesis from key parts of the leisure studies literature.

Arguably, the first major post-World War II publication on leisure was the 1958 edited volume, *Mass Leisure* (Larrabee and Meyersohn, 1958). None of the 42 papers was specifically about a future leisure society but about life in 1950s America. Even the papers in the last section on 'The Future of Leisure' did not address the issue.

The British equivalent, *Leisure and Society in Britain* (Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973), did not include a paper on the leisure society. The only reference to the topic that can be found in the book is an unreferenced passing mention in the editors' introduction, which states: 'only when changes have occurred in the ownership and control of economic resources will a society of leisure be possible. Until then leisure simply reflects and perpetuates inequality' (Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973, p. 11).

The initial issue of the first refereed journal in the field, the *Journal of Leisure Research*, contained a bibliography of over 200 items on the sociology of leisure, 1945-65, divided into 11 sections, none of which was concerned with the leisure society, or even the future (Meyersohn, 1969). Only one reference included the term 'leisure society' in its title – a paper by Denney (1959) which, despite bearing the title, 'The leisure society: do we use leisure or does leisure use us?', does not actually discuss the leisure society. Of over 300 articles in *Journal of Leisure Research* up to 1979, only one contains the term 'leisure society', or similar, in its title – the paper by Zuzanek (1974) which, as noted above, was critical of the leisure society thesis rather than supportive. A review of Dumazedier's *Toward a Society of Leisure* in the first volume of the journal (Clawson, 1969) does not mention the leisure society concept but concentrates on Dumazedier's general sociology of leisure.

In Britain, the only mention of the leisure society in the proceedings of the 1973 symposium at which the Leisure Studies Association (LSA) was conceived was the paper by Basini (1975) which, as noted above, was critical of the concept. The LSA was established in 1975 and in the proceedings of its first conference, the only mention of the leisure society is the paper by Roberts (1975), also mentioned above, in which he first rejects the leisure society concept. The LSA held another eight conferences by the end of 1979, none of them concerned with the leisure society⁵. Even the 1976 conference on 'Forecasting Leisure Futures' did not include a paper on the topic (Haworth and Parker, 1976). The LSA journal, *Leisure Studies*, did not begin publication until 1982.

Therefore, in major leisure studies publication outlets in the 1960s and '70s, containing many hundreds of papers, we find just five mentions of the thesis which is now widely believed to have been so important at this time. These comprised: an unreferenced passing mention in an editors' introduction (Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973, p. 11); a reference in a bibliography (Meyersohn, 1969) to a paper which includes 'leisure society' in its title but does not actually discuss the topic (Denney (1959)); and three papers which rejected the thesis (Zuzanek, 1974; Basini, 1975; Roberts, 1975).

In spite of Rojek's views on the significant, if flawed, role of the leisure society in the development of leisure studies, his own four-volume edited compendium of almost 100 pre-

published papers on leisure (Rojek, 2010c) does not include a paper on the leisure society, although in his introduction (Rojek, 2010d) he outlines his critique of it.

Myth 4. Definitions of the leisure society were based on predictions of falling working hours and increased leisure time

There is a remarkable paucity of precise definitions of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s literature. One feature of available definitions is that they are not all quantitative: that is, they are not predicated on anticipated reductions in working hours. Three leisure society proponents offer qualitative definitions. Sessoms (1972, p. 312) can be dealt with summarily since his brief definitional statement refers to the single criterion of relief from 'the drudgery of routine work', although he does not explain precisely what is meant by 'routine work'.

Roberts's 1970 statement, quoted above, indicates that a leisure society is one in which leisure is a significant source of people's sense of self-identity and exercises a reciprocal influence on other institutions in society. Although Roberts does not explicitly refer to the idea of quantitative and qualitative definitions of the leisure society, in the same book in which he makes his qualitative statement, he indicates that he rejects a quantitative definition. Thus, he states, there are two views on the future of work and leisure: one a 'leisure age' in which 'it has been suggested that work may well come to be treated as spare-time activity' (Roberts, 1970, p. 20) and another in which working hours will continue at their present level as workers seek to maximise material consumption. Roberts rejects both these 'extreme predictions' and expresses his own view that 'leisure will continue to expand, but slowly and undramatically' (Roberts, 1970, p. 22), presumably, therefore, not meriting the label 'leisure age', or at least not for a long time.

We have noted that Roberts first expressed negative sentiments regarding the society of leisure in a 1975 paper on 'The society of leisure: myths and reality'. Here he first rejects another type of quantitative definition of leisure, in stating that increasing levels of participation in various activities – notably sport, countryside recreation, tourism and cultural activities – cannot be equated with 'the emergence of a 'society of leisure'' (Roberts, 1975, p. 5). The main thrust of the paper is to warn against simplistic extrapolation of past trends and to argue for the pursuit of deeper understanding of motivations for, and the social context of, leisure behaviour. However, in doing so, he seems to take the notion of progress towards a leisure society as a given. For example, he states: 'To the extent that we are moving towards a society of leisure, this must mean that the options are somewhat wider than the voices of those lobbying on behalf of already institutionalised forms of recreation might indicate' (Roberts, 1975, p. 5). And: 'It is extravagant ... to infer that we are entering a society of leisure in which the quality of life will depend, above all else, upon provision for out-of-home recreation. Our society of leisure, if it deserves the title, remains solidly anchored around home, family and television' (Roberts, 1975, p. 8). However, he then appears to move away from this position when he asks:

Are we verging on a golden age of leisure or threatened by a wilderness of boredom? Before taking such questions too seriously we should remind ourselves that social science is not really in the prediction business. Social science may clarify past and present trends, and may thereby actually influence the future, but it is simply impossible to write history in advance. (Roberts, 1975, p. 13)

Thus he rejects, in effect, the possibility of predicting a future society of leisure, or anything else. In passing, he offers a further defining feature of an age/society of leisure: that it would not be expected to be boring. He also follows Dumazedier, as noted below, in adding the adjective 'golden', a descriptor not used by any of the leisure society proponents.

However, although he does not say so, Roberts's rejection of quantitative definitions of the leisure society and of predictions of an imminent leisure society does not necessarily rule out his earlier qualitative statement on the criteria for the existence of a leisure society. As we have seen, in 1978 he reversed this earlier position and rejected the proposition that contemporary Western societies were already societies of leisure, but in doing so he used similar criteria to argue that the leisure society had not materialised. This leaves open the possibility that the criteria might be met at some time in the future. Thus his qualitative definition still stands.

As the major figure in the field, Dumazedier's views are clearly of key significance. In *Toward a Society of Leisure*, it is difficult to pin him down as regards definitions, or even the precise nature of his version of the leisure society thesis. Much of the book is, after all, a straight sociology of leisure as experienced in France: it could quite appropriately have been entitled *Leisure and Society in France*. This is consistent with his remarks in a later publication (Dumazedier, 1974, p. 211-12) which indicated that he had included 'leisure society' in the title as a device to attract the attention of fellow sociologists and alert them to the significance of leisure, but that he had failed in this aim. The main focus of his analysis was not some speculative future but the past and present. His view was that leisure was already the 'very central element in the *life*-culture of millions upon millions of workers' (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 3-4). Western society, with its morality, work ethic and materialist culture, was failing to address the challenges this presented. A society which successfully rose to this challenge would be a 'civilization of leisure'. He states that the 'central question of a leisure civilization' is:

How can a civilization in which leisure has become a right for everyone and is tending little by little to become a fact for the mass of the people, help each individual, whatever his birth, wealth or education, to achieve an optimum *balance* freely chosen from among the needs for repose, for entertainment, and for participation in social and cultural life? (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 242)

Addressing these matters called for democratization of education and for cultural democratization. In contrast, he states, 'the cultural development of our mass society is enveloped in incoherence and impotence' (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 243).

The leisure society/leisure civilization issue highlighted by the translation of Dumazedier's work into English, as discussed earlier, is clearly definitional and two comments in the book and two from later publications shed light on it:

Essayists and poets have been misled by the spectacle into thinking that leisure plays an even more autonomous and preponderant role in daily life than it does. Denis de Rougemont, for one, has described our 'era of leisure' as a new Golden Age which will witness the magical vanishing of all social problems. (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 4)⁶

There are those who believe that the complex and ambiguous state of leisure today is on the threshold of a profound transformation. Thanks to the discovery of new sources of energy and to the spread of automation, the time spent at work should be reduced fairly rapidly for everyone. A new situation would then arise, in which old social problems would disappear. The poets will win out over the sociologists: we shall leave the era of work to enter into the 'era of leisure'. (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 33)

The predictions of physicists such as Kahn or of economists need to be based on projective and comparative research of all the social sciences working together. Many factors, not only

technological and economic, but also social and cultural are involved. To a sociologist, such anticipations as those of Kahn seem too linear and also too optimistic. (Dumazedier, 1971, p. 193-94)

It must be emphasised that the extension of leisure certainly depends on technical progress, but it does not depend on that alone. The hailing of the 'era of leisure' as an automatic consequence of automation is a new form of what Friedmann calls 'technical utopianism'. Leisure results both from the possibilities offered by technical progress and from the conscious or unconscious socioeconomic choices of the nation and of the classes and social groups of which the nation is composed. ... Technical progress merely fixes the limits within which social choices can be made. (Dumazedier and Latouche, 1977, p. 127)

Dumazedier was a sociologist, not a poet; he did not believe in the simplistic views of the future peddled by poets, physicists and economists, with which he associated the term 'era of leisure'. It is possible that the 'era of leisure' is the same as the leisure *society* to which he referred in his 1989 paper, with translation from the French causing the inconsistency. It is a society in which technology and market forces have produced more leisure time and high levels of consumption – 'leisure à l'américaine' (Dumazedier, 1967, p. 40), but it is not one in which conscious 'social choices' have been made about the place of leisure in society: that is, it is not a *civilization* of leisure. Thus, achievement of the civilization of leisure was not an inevitability but a political project. This stance was also adopted by Neulinger, who spoke of the necessity of 'understanding and overcoming the forces that will be directed against the establishment of a worldwide leisure society' (Neulinger, 1981, p. 216), and who later published a sort of philosophical manifesto for a leisure society (Neulinger, 1990) and became chair of the Society for the Reduction of Human Labor.⁷

Clearly, the definitions of Roberts, Sessoms and Dumazedier are qualitative. Although they must depend in part on the availability of a certain amount of leisure time, they are not determined by this criterion. However, while each of the three authors offers his own opinion, that the conditions for a leisure society have or have not been met, they do not offer guidance on how these qualitative conditions should be assessed, so the question of whether a leisure society exists in any given situation remains a personal view of the author.

Three other proponents offer definitions of the leisure society which are quantitative. While Kaplan's definition, noted above, seems to involve a number of qualitative changes in American life as background, the main criterion is that the amount of leisure time exceeds the amount of work time, a situation which, he argued, had already been achieved in the 1950s. Neulinger, despite his considerable commitment to the leisure society thesis, does not offer a formal definition but, on the basis of the observation that tourism expenditure was the second ranking item of retail expenditure in the United States in 1972, he states: 'On the surface, such evidence seems to indicate that we have not only reached a point where a 'leisure society' is just around the corner, but that we have already turned that corner' (Neulinger, 1981, p. 147). In subsequent discussions, however, he reverts to the assumption that the leisure society lies in the future. Futurologists Kahn and Wiener (1967) (the same Herman Kahn whose work Dumazedier criticised) were unique in specifying a particular number of working hours in their future 'leisure-oriented society' scenario. They noted that the average working year for full-time American employees stood at 2000 in the 1960s and that in the post-World War II period, the rate of decline in working hours had slowed compared with pre-war rates, suggesting a working year of 1700-1900 hours by the year 2000. But, without providing any justification, they then assumed a 'renewed tendency' for the faster rate of decline to resume in future, so they adopted 1100 hours a year for their year 2000 leisure-orientated scenario (Kahn and Wiener, 1967, p. 125). Despite the

lack of a sound basis for the figure, and the fact that it was in any case a 'scenario' rather than a firm prediction, the figure was reported as a prediction in at least two textbooks (Kraus, 1971, p. 463; Carlson *et al.*, 1979, p. 25). Kahn and Wiener were unique among the leisure society proponents in two other ways: first, they provided a speculative account of how the increase in leisure time might affect the leisure behaviour patterns of the various classes in American society. Second, they not only used a specific target date and working hours figure, but it was also one of their own devising. This leads to Myth 5.

Myth 5: Leisure society proponents themselves predicted reductions in working hours

The uniqueness of Kahn and Wiener, in using a specific date and a specific working hours figure of their own devising, highlights the fact that, although falling working hours formed the backdrop to the leisure society thesis, specific predictions were not typically produced or referred to by future leisure society proponents. Published predictions were, however, available during the period, as Table 2 indicates. Of the eleven predictions listed, only Kahn and Wiener's appeared in association with a leisure society prognostication. While Kaplan is listed as a source in Table 2 and was also a leisure society proponent, his prediction did not appear in the same book as his leisure society statement, but in a later publication, and in a footnote (Kaplan, 1975, p. 4n). Conversely, it is notable that none of the other leisure society proponents listed in Table 1 made explicit references to any of the predictions in Table 2.

INSERT: Table 2

In a number of cases, the basis of the working hours prediction is not explained. In most cases, 'author's projection' indicates that past trends in working hours, dating from as far back as the nineteenth century, were translated into a rate of decline per decade and this became the assumed future rate of change used to produce the future projection, as shown in column six of the table. The average assumed reduction in weekly working hours per decade was 3.7, with a median of about three. Most of the projections relate to the year 2000, for which the average predicted work-week was 29.3 hours, although it would undoubtedly be lower if the Jensen and Nanus and Adelman figures (for 1995 and 1980 respectively) were to be projected to 2000. The median is about 30. With the advantage of hindsight, we now know that this figure was too low. Typically, the misjudgement is attributed to the impact on Western economies of unforeseen events, such as the 1970s oil price crises and the rise of globalisation, particularly the competition offered by low-wage developing economies (Rojek, 2010a, p. 21; Bramham, 2006, 2008). The fact that working hours did not continue to fall was, in due course, drawn to the attention of the leisure studies community by the work of Hunnicutt (1980) and Schor (1991). It should be noted, however, that the experience in Europe was somewhat different from the USA (Schor, 2006) and it is argued by Robinson and Godbey (2004) that when time-use rather than labour survey data, are used, even in the USA, paid work time was continuing to fall up to the 1990s. However, what leisure society proponents of the 1960s and '70s failed to observe was that the working hours projections of the time were generally flawed, in their own terms, from the moment they were published.

Figure 1 reproduces a diagram based on US Bureau of Labor Statistics data and published in 1958 (Zeisel, 1958). It provides data on average weekly working hours for the period 1850 to 1940 in decades, and then annual figures for the period 1941 to 1956. The different horizontal scale of the two halves of the diagram exaggerates the difference in the slopes of the two lines, but it can clearly be seen that the rate of decrease in working hours slowed after World War II. The rate of decline in weekly working hours was 2.9 per decade between 1850 and 1940 and 4.5 per decade between 1900 and 1940. But between 1941 and 1956 the rate was just 2 hours per decade, and if we omit the exceptional war-time years, the rate between 1946 and 1956 was just

1.5 hours, and from 1950 to 1956 there was no change at all. Thus, it would have been very misleading to use the pre-war, per-decade rate of decline, or a straight line between some pre-war year and a post-war year, as the basis for projecting the trend to the end of the twentieth century. But that is precisely what most of the forecasters listed in Table 2 did. Over the three and a half decades to the end of the century, the period over which the predictions of weekly working hours were typically made, the difference between the *assumed* rate of decline of three hours per decade and the *actual* rate of 1.5 hours per decade resulted in predictions that were 5.25 hours a week too high.

INSERT Figure 1

But this egregious error was compounded by a failure to take account of the changing composition of the labour force, which came in two main forms.

First there was the number of women and, in the USA, of college students joining the workforce in the post-war period. These two groups included a significant proportion of part-time workers so their increasing numbers reduced the overall average working hours figure. This was already apparent in the 1960s. Thus, Moore and Hedges (1971) showed that between 1955 and 1960 average weekly working hours for all employees (including the additional women and students) fell by 1.1 but for full-time workers alone (which excluded most of the additional female and student workers) the fall was just 0.2 hours. Between 1960 and 1965, working hours were steady for all employees, but *increased* by 0.4 hours for full-timers. Extending analysis to the period 1948-1975, Owen (1976) observed that overall average working hours showed a decline of just under two hours a week, but for full-time non-student men only, the reduction was just 0.2 hours. This analysis is not the wisdom of hindsight, it is based on analysis undertaken in the 1970s.

The second structural change was the continuing changes in the *industrial* structure of the labour force in the post-war period, with manufacturing and agriculture shedding labour, in relative terms, and public and private sector service employment increasing. However, particularly before the advent of digital information technology, services had less scope for increasing productivity, so could not contribute to the trend which had been made possible by the mechanisation of agriculture and the automation of manufacturing and which had enabled increased production and incomes to be accompanied by falling working hours for the first half of the century. Even without foreseeing the effects of globalization, Burck (1970/72) noted that, in the period 1948 to 1968, manufacturing, agriculture and mining employment in the United States had fallen from 47 per cent of the labour force to 36 per cent, and was predicted to fall to 30 per cent by 1980. In the same period, service employment had grown from 53 per cent to 64 per cent of the workforce and was predicted to grow to 70 per cent by 1980. He concluded: 'The leisure society is a myth because more and more man-hours will be needed to provide ever-expanding services' (Burck, 1970/72, p. 343). There would be limited opportunities for reducing working hours because there would be a slowing in the rate of growth in labour productivity, a feature of the emerging post-industrial (that is, service-based) society which was recognised by Daniel Bell (1973, p. 463). The United States was the first economy to enter this service-based, 'post-industrial' stage, followed closely by Britain. While other factors may have been at work, Kando (1980, p. 95) notes that these two countries had the lowest rates of productivity growth of nine developed economies in the period 1960 to 1976.

A further factor which counteracts the above, but is not reflected in the working hours data, which are derived from surveys asking people about their work pattern in the week prior to interview, is changes in holiday entitlements. When this is taken into account and averaged over the year, Owen's (1976) figure quoted above, of a 0.2 hour reduction for men between 1948 and

1975 increases to 0.7 hours. But this is still only 15 minutes per decade.

Thus we find that a common prediction of a working week of 30 hours or less by the year 2000 was based on erroneous data analysis and interpretation. While De Grazia's (1974, p. 96) critique of the figures on rising leisure time was based on other factors, his comment was apt: 'The past from which these figures were launched was not studied carefully enough. They are based on bad history'. This was despite the fact that the relevant data were being gathered and made publicly available by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And it was before the effects of the oil crises and globalization were being felt. The analysis does not suggest that working hours would not fall at all, but that any decline would be much slower than the predictions presented in Table 2.

The first oil price crisis occurred in 1973 and did, of course, have an effect on economic growth around the world. However, Figure 2 indicates that, while 1974 saw a sharp decline in the real rate of growth in gross domestic product per person employed in the UK and USA, it had bounced back again by 1976, albeit to a point about one per cent below pre-crisis levels. Furthermore, Owen's (1976) figures for the USA show no disruption of the pattern of slowly falling working hours of employed males between 1972 and 1975. Similarly Gallie's (2000) data on British male manual workers shows no interruption in the slow downward trend up to 1975, but it stalled in 1980. However, pursuing these trends into the 1980s and beyond is outside the scope of this paper.

INSERT Figure 2

Summary and conclusions

The paper began with the disagreement between Cara Aitchison and Chris Rojek regarding the significance of the leisure society thesis in the early development of leisure studies. In addition, it was observed that identifying the leisure society thesis as a, if not *the*, key characteristic of leisure studies in the 1960s and '70s is quite common in contemporary leisure studies literature, but the recollections of the nature and literature sources of the thesis were often inaccurate. These matters were discussed using the framework provided by five myths about the leisure society which can be detected in the leisure studies literature.

Regarding the significance of the thesis in the development of leisure studies, the evidence presented in the discussion of Myths 2 and 3 suggests that this has indeed been exaggerated. As an academic project, the leisure society thesis was curiously lacking in robust debate and was curiously absent from much of the mainstream leisure studies literature of the period. The relevant literature is lacking in definitional precision and is marked by inconsistencies and contradictions. This finding supports Bramham's (2008, p. 9) contention that 'Leisure Studies has rarely had the confidence to voice its own independent detached vision of 'the leisure society' or make a strong case for the intrinsic value of leisure scholarship and research'.

Regarding the inaccuracies in the contemporary recollections of the thesis: the discussion of Myth 1, that portrayals of the leisure society in the 1960s and '70s all involved visions of the future, established that, in fact, some proponents of the leisure society believed that it had already arrived. Thus, if their position is to be critiqued, it requires discussion of their views of conditions in the 1960s and '70s, rather than of their visions of the future. Discussion of Myth 4 indicated that not all definitions of the leisure society were based on quantitative predictions regarding working hours: some were qualitative, concerned with the cultural significance of leisure in people's lives. The definitional statements from the 1960s and '70s of Roberts and Dumazedier quoted in the paper are remarkably similar to more recent statements about the role of leisure in contemporary postmodern culture. For example, Tony Blackshaw has stated:

It is my contention that in the liquid modern world we live in, which is founded first and foremost on freedom, leisure moves steadily into its position as the principal driving force underpinning the human goal of satisfying our hunger for meaning and our thirst for giving our lives a purpose. This is the job leisure was always cut out for ... But ... it had to wait a long time, until the last few decades of the twentieth century to be precise, to secure this function, which has hitherto been occupied by work. (Blackshaw, 2020, p. 120)

It is, nevertheless true, as discussion of Myth 4 shows, that most of the definitions of the leisure society were explicitly or implicitly quantitative, involving continuing reductions in paid working hours. However, the discussion of Myth 5 shows two main things, first that most leisure society proponents did not themselves present specific predictions of reductions in working hours or refer to the published predictions which existed in the literature. Second, while it is well-known, with the advantage of hindsight, that the typical prediction of an average full-time paid work-week of 30 hours by the year 2000 proved to be inaccurate, the predictions were exaggerations in their own terms because they relied on pre-World War II trends and failed to take account of changes in the composition of the workforce which were well underway in the 1960s and '70s.

As noted in the introduction to the paper, discussion of the leisure society idea did not end in 1979. Apart from recollections, accurate or otherwise, the period has been marked by continuing debate on the future of work and leisure (for example, Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1994; Beck, 2000; Cross, 1989; Jenkins and Sherman, 1978, 1981; Rifkin, 1995; Sherman, 1986), critiques of the leisure society thesis (eg. Clarke and Critcher, 1985: pp. 1-5; Rojek, 1985, 2010a, 2010b; Seabrook, 1988) and new contributions to the thesis (eg. Corijn, 1987, Molitor, 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Stebbins, 1999). But to do justice to this on-going discussion would require another paper.

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Table 1. The leisure society literature: 1960-1979

Date	Authors	D*	Country	P**	Term used***	Leisure soc. sources§	Comment
Leisure society already here							
1960	Kaplan	L	USA	B	Age of leisure	None	'We are in an age of leisure'.
1963	Miller/Robinson	L	USA	B	Leisure age	None	'.. the present day [is] a leisure age for new masses of people'.
1970	Roberts	L	UK	B	Leisure society	None	'Britain has become a society of leisure'.
1972	Sessoms	L	USA	BC	Age of leisure	None	'We are entering the <i>Age of Leisure</i> '.
Leisure society anticipated							
1962/67	Dumazedier	L	France	B	Civilization of leisure	Kahn and Wiener	Realisation of a 'civilisation of leisure' will depend on conscious social decisions. (Leisure <i>society</i> may exist already - see Dumazedier, 1989).
1964	Gabor	Sc	UK	B	Age of leisure	None	Society is facing an age of leisure within one generation.
1964	Lee	T	USA	B	Leisure society/ era	'Chorus of voices'	'A chorus of voices proclaims we are headed toward' a leisure society.
1967	Kahn & Wiener	F	USA	B	Leisure-oriented soc.	None	The leisure-orientated society = a 2000 scenario with 1100 working hrs pa.
1972	Dahl	T	USA	B	Leisure-oriented soc.	None	Ten 'major trends toward' a leisure society.
1974/81	Neulinger	L	USA	B	Leisure society	None	To achieve the desired goal of a leisure society will require effort, education.
1975	Strom	E	USA	J	Leisure society	'Some futurists'	'We must prepare tomorrow's adults for life in the leisure society'. '
Leisure society thesis questioned							
1962	De Grazia	L	USA	B	Age of leisure	'Many persons'	Many believe we face a new age of leisure, but in fact, net leisure time is not increasing.
1974	Zuzanek	L	Canada	LJ	Leisure society	Dumazedier, Kahn	Work/leisure futures should be analysed in terms of 'an economically and culturally patterned <i>leisure</i> or <i>life style</i> '.
1976	Parker	L	UK	B	Leisure society	Roberts, Dumazedier	Reduced working hours exaggerated; leisure society predictions are 'not taken seriously, neither should they be'.
1975	Basini	E	UK	BC	Age of leisure	Unnamed recreation, planning, education sources	'Euphoria regarding an imminent society of leisure is premature'. Working hours are not falling.
1975	Kando	L	USA	B	Leisure society	None	Conditions exist for leisure society, but US culture and capitalism resistant/inimical.
1975/78	Roberts	L	UK	B	Leisure civilisation/ society	None	'Talk of a leisure civilisation or a society of leisure is misconceived'.
1978	Kumar	S	UK	B	Leisure society		Working hours did not fall in post-World War II period.

* Discipline/specialism: L leisure specialist (known to have other publications on leisure), E educationist, F Futurist, T theologian, S sociologist/social scientist, Sc: scientist.

** B book; BC book chapter, J: journal; LJ leisure journal. *** 'Leisure society' includes 'Society of leisure' § Whether or not writer references other sources on the leisure society

Table 2. Working hours: predictions, 1960-79

<i>Author</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>D.*</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Assumed future rate of change, hrs/decade</i>	<i>Working time predicted, hrs/per week</i>	<i>Target date</i>	<i>Leisure society link?</i>
Holman	USA	1961	St	Author's projection	4.4	28	2000	No
Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Comm. (ORRRC)	USA	1962	St	Bureau of Labor Statistics	1.9	31	2000	No
Resources for the Future†	USA	1963	N	Not stated	1.0	37	2000	No
Douglas & Crawford	USA	1964	L	Not stated	2.5	31	2000	No
Dower	UK	1965	L	Not stated	3.4	30	2000	No
Fourastié	France	1965	L	Author's prediction	3.3	30	1995	No
Kahn & Wiener **	USA	1967	F	Authors' scenario	4.5	21	2000	Yes
National Planning Assn†	USA	1967	P	Not stated	2.7	31	2000	No
Jensen	USA	1970	L	Not stated	2.7?	32	Readers' lifetime	No
Kaplan	USA	1975	L	Author's estimate	6.8	20	2000	No
Nanus & Adelman	USA	1976	PS	US Dept. of Labor Delphi analysis	7.5	32	1980	No
Mean					3.7	29.3		

* Discipline/specialism: F: futurist; L: leisure specialist; N: not known; P: planner; PS: public servant; St: statistician. ** scenario ; ? assumed figure in the absence of information from source; † Source: Ewald (1972).

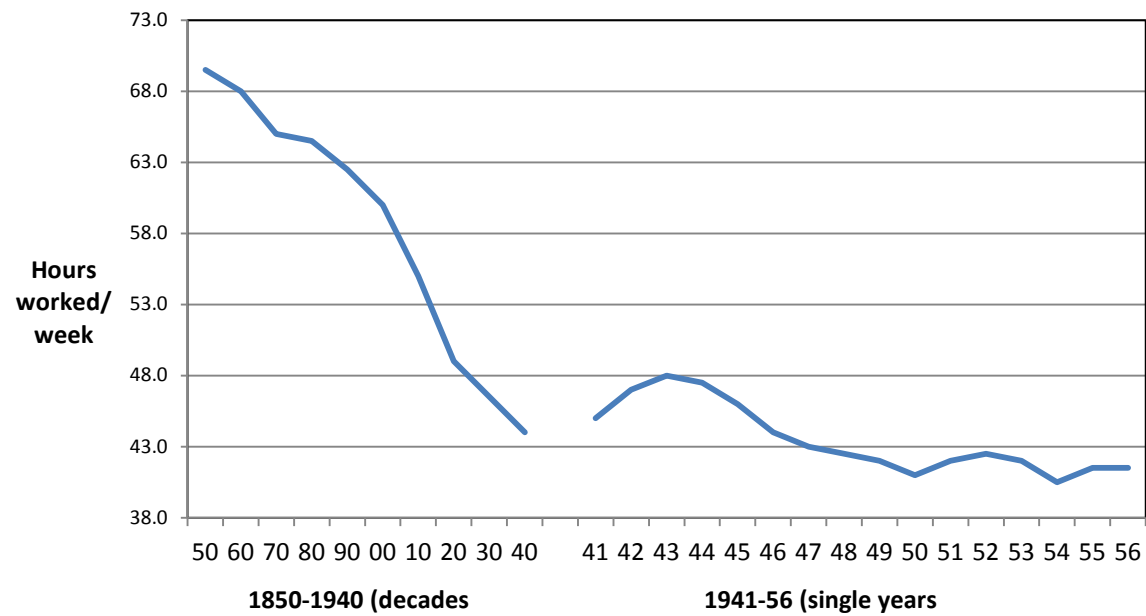


Figure 1. Working hours, USA, 1850-1940 and 1941-56

Source: Zeisel (1958)

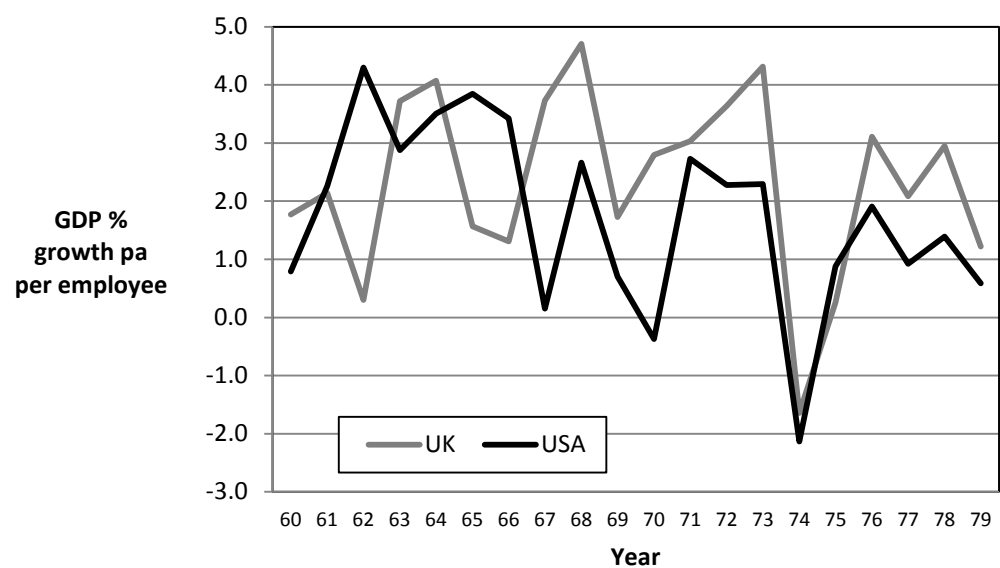


Figure 2. Trends in growth of gross domestic product, per employee, UK and USA, 1960-1979

Source: Conference Board/Groningen Growth & Dev. Centre, Total Economy Database (www.gdc.net)

Notes

- ¹ The most vocal contemporary critic, Chris Rojek, uses the term 'leisure society thesis', although few of the leisure society proponents develop their ideas to the level of a testable thesis. Others have used the term 'leisure society project', which can be seen as similarly inflated. The terms 'idea', 'notion', 'proposition' or 'concept' are arguably more appropriate for many of the treatments in the literature. All these terms are therefore used at various points in this paper.
- ² A number of alternative terms are used in the literature but, unless indicated by authors, the following are deemed to be interchangeable: leisure society; leisured society; society of leisure; leisure-orientated society; era of leisure; civilisation of leisure; age of leisure; free-time society.
- ³ In a number of articles the term 'leisure society' is used in the title but then not discussed in the text (Denney, 1959; Bates, 1971; Stainbrook, 1972). Some refer to the fact that the leisure society is being discussed/predicted by others but provide no references (Darwin, 1956; Martin, 1967; Knapp, 1989; Obermeyer, 1971; Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973; Jubenville, 1976), or provide references which are inaccurate or untraceable (Bendiner, 1957; Brightbill, 1960; Bosserman, 1971).
- ⁴ Neulinger's initial statement on the leisure society appeared in 1974 (Neulinger, 1974) but was developed more fully in Neulinger (1981). Although the latter falls outside the 1960-79 framework of this paper, it is included because it seems to be intellectually part of the 1960s/70s tradition.
- ⁵ Details can be found on the LSA website at: www.leisure-studies-association.info/LSAWEB/Publications.html
- ⁶ **Error! Main Document Only.** Dumazedier's comment refers to Denis de Rougemont's (1957b) paper 'L'Ere des loisirs commence' (The era of leisure begins). The paper is an extract from de Rougemont's (1957a) book *L'Aventure Occidentale de L'Homme* (*The Western Adventure of Man*) (1957). The term 'Golden Age' of leisure is not used; the term 'era of leisure' is used in the title of the article, but not at all in the body of the text, or in the book from which the extract is taken. Neither does he speak of **Error! Main Document Only.** the magical vanishing of all social problems'.
- ⁷ The Society for the Reduction of Human Labor no longer appears very active and seems to have been subsumed under the Shorter Work Time Group (www.swt.org).