
Book Review

Reviewed by Maximiliano E. Korstanje

E-mail: maxikorstanje@fibertel.com.ar

**Horizontes Latinoamericanos del Ocio.
(Horizontes latino-americanos do lazer)
by: Christianne L. Gomes and Rodrigo Elizalde
Published 2012
by Editora UFMG,
Av. Antônio Carlos, 6627 – Pampulha, 31270-901 –
Belo Horizonte – MG, Brazil 343pp
ISBN: 978-857041940-8**

Christianne L. Gomes and Rodrigo Elizalde present a valuable book, which explores critically how the boundaries of leisure work in our daily life. Latin American countries keep a great dependency from other developed countries accepting passively a whole of north-coined paradigms. To what an extent the economy subordination replicates the north-south hegemony is one of the aspects this impressive book focuses on. To understand the pervasive role of leisure, sometimes legitimating the status quo but under other contexts, engendering a radical social change, authors provide with an all encompassed research that exerts considerable criticism on the existent Anglo studies of leisure. First and foremost, leisure is a political process enrooted to the imperial interests. Most certainly, the theory centre-periphery not only needs to be re-visited but also enriched by other conceptual studies. What is the role played by leisure in the so called process of emancipation, today Latin American countries are facing?

This bilingual work is an effort encouraged by the Master in Leisure, Recreation and Free Time of diverse Latin American universities and educational establishments. Attempting to integrate a wide-range personal experiences and moments, Gomes and Elizalde argue that any process of decolonisation wakes up silenced voices, views that has been subordinated to central paradigms. The five chapters that form this book are written in Spanish and Portuguese; this represents a clear improvement in the dialogue between Brazil and the rest of South America. Some interesting doubts are arisen respecting on how this knowledge has been constructed over the last years. What has been produced in North America along with leisure studies? Around what objects this knowledge is based on? And how do these discourses circulate to peripheral countries? Based on a critical approach matured after years of research that encourages a substantial transformation, Gomes and Elizalde give not only an refresh diagnosis but also focus on the needs of transformation, emancipation and social change.

Readers will find in this book that the introductory chapters re-visit the concept of what does Latin American mean. Although there is no ethimological agreement about the origin of the term, some specialists suggest the term was used after the French invasion to Mexico. Emperor Napoleon III, whose ends were to expand their authority over the USA,

coined this neologism to develop sympathy for his cause. At some extent, Napoleon's empire vindicated a supposed Roman legacy for all countries which official language comes from Latin. This ideological point of view was criticised by some other scholars who argued that local writers employed the term before French invasion. Whatever the case may be, the term connotes a clear division between two USA, Anglo and Latin America. Since the words are constructed according to wider political processes, since the Second World War, being Latin American referred to questions of underdevelopment. The USA built its hegemony by a combination of diverse ideological instrument, leisure and consumption. Latin America results from the interests of diverse empires that labelled what in fact is heterogeneous. Throughout this excellent research, Gomes and Elizalde convincingly explain that the US way of life constitutes an mediated merchandise produced and sold by Hollywood for exporting to the world. The adoption of these patterns conform a technique in order for the US cultural values not to be refused, when this happens, the periphery experiences a needs to belong. Nonetheless, recreation is only a superfluous manifestation of leisure. The latter corresponds with a ground needs proper of human beings. Following this thesis, the book focuses on the following two significant points:

- a In Latin America, scholars adopted a biased definition of leisure, sometimes linked to recreation. Besides, in many other cases, leisure is widely accepted only under the bourgeois logic, as a form of revitalisation inherently to labour.
- b Leisure may stimulate citizens to valorise their institutions and strengthen the social bonds.

Given the discussion, it is important to see how the existent fragility in the leisure-related studies depends on the conceptual pervasiveness imposed by industrial countries. This confusion compromises not only the advance of the scientific understanding of leisure in Latin America but poses serious barriers for the scientification of leisure in view of the next years. Nowadays, the nets, educational establishments and agents play a pivotal role in creating new paradigms that help a further reading of leisure, whose goals should be aimed at developing more sustainable strategies and policies for local actors. What seems to still important to debate here, is that the old archetype of leisure has been copied taking the Roman and Greek civilisation as the only examples. These construes were later projected to the industrial societies as there would be a continuum between Ancient Greece and modern capitalism. Meanwhile, many other forms of leisure not only have been forgotten but also remain in the shadows. On third chapter, it is necessary to rethink the leisure in view of Latin American contextualisation, including new perspectives and theories. Surely, too much has been written and said respecting to leisure, because of time and space, it almost impossible to synthesise the current conceptual framework of leisure in one book. If we pay attention to the historiography of leisure, two important schools surface. Both developed its own forms of defining the problem and innovated in their own methodologies and meanings:

- a the school of recreation
- b the school of leisure.

The sense of recreation, born in the USA, emphasised on the pedagogic nature of creative activities with the end of revitalising the frustrations of industrial life. Conducive to

business goals, the theory of recreation was based on the creation of playgrounds. These sites, later, paved the ways for the creation of squares, and other diverting spaces. The importance of recreation was encouraged by governments not only as a form of entertainment, but as an instrument of education, indoctrination. The philosophy of recreation was aimed at improving the citizen quality of life. Conceived as a technique of intervention to prevent social pathologies, recreation in US was framed and guided by professionals linked to education, psychology and social psychology. Rather, the school of leisure had its epicentre in Europe (France to be exact) retrieving a more ancient sense of the word. Unlike the US paradigm, Europeans developed a much richer theoretical conceptualisation of leisure, enrooted in Greece and Rome.

In order for unearthing new forms of leisure, two fundamental questions articulate the fourth chapter, is the leisure inextricably intertwined to work? Should we continue with the old industrial paradigm of leisure? In the next decades, scholars would seek discovering how leisure impacts in social life. The reduction of working hours that has been characterised the advent of postmodernism has been resulted in much time to spend in different ways. However, in view of the facts, a new type of oppressed leisure is being alienating modern citizens to the extent to close their ontology before others. It is noteworthy to transcend the boundaries of alienation and self-conformation to see the dangers the problem of consumerism created for the planet. In doing so, the humankind should formulate an alternative programme for educating by means of leisure. What way does leisure facilitate an emancipatory education in?

These and other disturbing points are masterfully examined by Gomes and Elizalde to stimulate the discussion towards a more sustainable society. Leisure would play a pivotal role in the next years changing the mind of people and transforming consumers in citizens (these questions are addressed in last chapter). In other terms, authors remind not only how important leisure is for society, but the needs to make for leisure-related investigation a more than temporary fashion. Social sciences, as Elias and Dunning (1992) put it, should devote considerable attention and endeavours in addressing leisure. This work exhibits not only an insightful investigation but also a serious efforts to bring a new leisure-related theory to be applied in Spanish speaking countries.

References

- Elias, N. and Dunning, E. (1992) *Quest for Excitement. Sports and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, FCE, Mexico.