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World Leisure: Enhancing the Human Condition ISSN:  
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## Abstract

Living in the 21st Century has created a new context for the organization of individual, community and national life wherein increasingly greater fulfillment through the provision of leisure services and amenities is sought. Without question, leisure is increasingly valued and central in the lifestyle of individuals. Today, people seek to live in hospitable settings that are alive with social, cultural and leisure opportunities, as well as ones that are ascetically pleasing and environmentally sustainable. Thus, it is evident that leisure is a major force in influencing the lives of individuals, communities and nations as they seek meaningful, relevant and satisfying life experiences.

## Introduction

Leisure provides the means for individuals, communities and even nations to transform their quality of life and well being. As Edginton and Chen (2008, p. vii) wrote, “. . . leisure holds infinite possibilities for change. . . [and] . . . is an optimal medium for transformation.” As these authors have suggested, “. . . experiencing leisure is transformation in and of itself. Individuals change as they experience leisure” (ibid). Leisure can and does contribute in many ways to assisting individuals in enhancing the condition of their daily living. It is through leisure that one finds balance in their lives, as well as a temporal space and time for reflection, renewal and a rekindling of the human spirit.

The moral and philosophical foundation for our human rights is expressed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This important social construct establishes a standard for all people throughout the world and defines the basic rights for all members of the human family. The most significant statement relevant to leisure is framed in Article 24 suggesting that each individual has “the right to rest and leisure including reasonable limitation of work hours and periodic holidays with pay” (1948). In addition, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights encourages individuals in Article 27 “. . . to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” (1948). A number of other U.N. documents also support the rights of individuals to leisure, especially those pertaining to children and women. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child states “. . . the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (1989). In addition, the U.N. Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Article 13 indicates “. . . the right to participate in recreational activities sports and all aspects of cultural life” in an equitable fashion among men and women” (1979). The U.N. Principles for Older Persons Clause 16 notes that women “. . . should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society” (1999).

## The World Leisure Organization

The World Leisure Organization (WLO) is a major international professional membership organization which serves to promote and advance concerns related to leisure. Established as “. . . a world wide, non governmental voluntary organization, World Leisure is dedicated to discovering and fostering those conditions which permit leisure to serve as a force to optimize collective and individual well being” (2007). WLO was founded in 1952 and was known as the International Recreation Association. In 1973, the organization changed its name to the World Leisure and Recreation Association and in 2007 to its present title. Through its advocacy, research and educational programs and services, the organization seeks to promote leisure as being integral to social, cultural and economic development (ibid).

The goals of WLO are outlined in its strategic plan titled *A World Fit For Living: World Leisure for People 2004-2008* (2003). During this time, WLO has committed its efforts to achieving results in four priority areas as follows: 1) heightening the awareness of leisure benefits; 2) improving policy and legislation; 3) strengthening leadership; and 4) expanding international cooperation (ibid, p. 7). WLO has worked over the span of the aforementioned strategic plan to achieve results in each of these areas. For example, to heighten the awareness of leisure benefits, a World Leisure EXPO was staged and the organization has worked hard to strengthen its interactions with the United Nations and UNESCO. One way that WLO has worked to improve policy and legislation, the organization sponsored a World Leisure High Level Forum held in Guangzhou, The Peoples Republic of China in 2006, focused on raising awareness of the importance of leisure amongst top policy makers in that country. Madam Wu Yi, Vice Premier of China, spoke to a select group of policy makers inside of The Peoples Republic of China along with the Chairman of the World Leisure Board of Directors, Dr. Derek Casey. We also have developed an extensive data base to disperse information on a world wide basis regarding leisure policies and best professional practices. WLO is working to strengthen leadership by developing new opportunities for educational institutions to affiliate with the organization. This past year, a request for proposal was offered to colleges and universities around the world to establish new World Leisure Centers of Excellence featuring post graduate educational programs. International cooperation has been facilitated by the establishment of a number of affiliation agreements and the staging of a World Leisure Summit focused on leisure and community development that will take place in Quebec City, Canada at the 10th World Leisure Congress.

Recently, WLO has worked to establish a new strategic planning initiative. This activity has helped to produce a new strategic planning document entitled *Leisure: Enhancing the Human Condition – Priorities & Strategies 2009 – 2014* (2008). Building on the previous activity, this strategic planning initiative emphasized an overarching theme primarily focused on the United National Millennium Development Goals (MDG). WLO is now focusing its capacity and efforts to establish goals, priorities and action programs to guide and strengthen the organization and its efforts at enhancing collective and individual well being. Over the next several years, WLO will focus on improving, enhancing and informing professional practice by emphasizing leisure and its relationship to the concept of identity, the process of transformation and the ways in which it enhances the human condition.

## World Leisure's Organizational Framework

WLO is governed by a 20-member international board of directors. Annually, WLO seeks nominations for or from individuals who are interested in serving as members of this important governing body. The primary role of the members of the World Leisure Board of Directors is to set policy and direction for the organization including approval of program design to accomplish its mission. Individuals are elected to a three-year appointment and may be renewed for an additional three-year period of time. WLO's Board of Directors includes individuals from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, Mauritius, New Zealand, The People's Republic of China, South Korea, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

There are various administrative positions, both paid and voluntary, that are

responsible for carrying out the work of the organization. The Secretary General is the Chief Executive Officer of the organization and is responsible for the overall management and administration of the affairs of the organization in accordance with WLO's Constitution and By-laws. The Secretary General is supported by Program Associate and a large number of Program Managers focused in the areas of educational services, marketing and promotions, commissions, chapters and affiliates, event management, international scholarship program, publications and representatives to the United Nations and UNESCO. In addition, each of the commissions operated by WLO is headed by a group leader who is responsible for planning, organizing and implementing programs and services offered by these groups.

## World Leisure Programs and Services

WLO operates a wide array of programs and services available to its membership and to other interested individuals and parties. Although these programs and services are primarily designed for the membership of the organization, all who are interested in the activities of WLO are strongly encouraged to seek opportunities for involvement. Some of WLO's programs and services include:

### World Leisure Congresses

World Leisure Biennial Congresses is to bring together the membership of the organization for the purpose of gaining new information and insights as well as to provide opportunities for presentations, discussions and conversation regarding timely concepts, ideas, issues or concerns. The 10th World Leisure Congress will be held in Quebec City, Canada in October 2008 and the 11th World Leisure Congress will be hosted by Chuncheon City, Korea.

### World Leisure Regional or Specialists Conferences

Such events, which are geographically limited to one or two regions, provide opportunities to focus on specialized topics of regionalized interest. For example, in 2005, a World Leisure Regional Conference focused on "Leisure and Young Immigrants" was held in Malmo, Sweden.

### World Leisure Exhibitions and Trade Shows

Often coupled with World Leisure Congresses, Exhibitions and Trade Shows provide opportunities for participating individuals to view innovative products and services and/or bring greater attention to leisure. In 2006, WLO staged its 1st World Leisure EXPO in Hangzhou, The People's Republic of China.

### World Leisure Summits and Forums

Such activities are designed to promote greater interest in a specific concept, idea, issue and/or concern among policy makers, professionals and to the general public and often result in the creation and distribution of policy statements in the form of statement of principles, declarations, covenants, charters, conventions or other major pronouncements or publications. The Sao Paulo Declaration on Leisure and Globalization and WLO's Charter for Leisure are two examples.

### World Leisure Educational and Training Programs

WLO operates a wide variety of educational programs such as our international post graduate program at the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands. In addition, WLO sponsors the Asian Pacific Center for the Study of Leisure at Zhejiang University in The Peoples Republic of China.

### World Leisure Commissions

Commissions are specialized bodies working to promote leisure concerns in

specific areas including access and inclusion, children and youth, education, management, leisure in later life, law and policy, research, tourism and the environment, volunteerism and women and gender.

### World Leisure Innovation Prize

The World Leisure Innovation Prize was established in 2006 and “. . . seeks to recognize organizations that have implemented creative solutions that foster local, national or international leisure opportunities for the benefit and development of individuals and communities” (2008). The award seeks to identify “. . . use of leisure as a creative solution to enhancing collectively the social, cultural, environmental, and economic quality of life in an area” (ibid). Currently, the award is sponsored by the Beijing Tonghe Times Tourism Research and Planning Institute.

### World Leisure Journal

The World Leisure Journal is published on a quarterly basis and includes both basic and applied research. A refereed publication, World Leisure Journal provides a means of hard evidence to inform WLO’s advocacy role.

### World Leisure International Scholarship Program

This program is designed to support students to attend and participate in World Leisure Congresses. Successful applicants are provided with an opportunity to participate in the Congress and gain a broader perspective of international leisure trends, issues, philosophies and problems.

### World Leisure’s United Nations Partnership

WLO’s most prized partnership is the consultative status we are granted through the United Nations. WLO is developing several programs in support of the UN’s initiatives including a student internship program. We are engaged with the UN primarily through the Department of Public Information and their Non-governmental Organizational Conference (NGO/DPI).

### World Leisure Chapters

The WLO Chapters program was established in 2001 to enable groups to associate with the organization and promote its goals on a local basis. The first WLO Chapter was established in Taipei, Taiwan. There are many benefits to this program including networking, unifying various segments of the leisure industry, aligning with the moral framework of the UN and creating opportunities to influence the world’s leisure movement.

### World Leisure Affiliates

WLO works to aggressively link its activities with other aligned organizations. For example, WLO holds affiliate status with the World Tourism Organization, the International Council of Sports Science and Physical Education, Australia and New Zealand Association of Leisure Studies, and the American Leisure Academy.

Such programs and services provide numerous benefits to the WLO membership. In fact, there are many benefits to joining the World Leisure Organization including opportunities to network, to advocate and to be provided with relevant educational opportunities, communications and information.

## Concluding Comments

WLO provides a framework and platform to assist individuals, communities and nations with their desire to increase the quality of life throughout the world. It is evident that leisure holds great promise for improving well being and fulfilling the dream of creating meaningful, relevant and satisfying life

experiences. WLO's vision and mission provides optimal opportunities which support the rights of all people to quality and accessible leisure experiences. Working with all sectors – government, non government and commercial – WLO seeks to assist in helping individuals, communities and nations to understand the benefits of leisure, acquire appropriate knowledge and skills required for full participation, remove the barriers or constraints to leisure and promote a cooperative spirit so that all may work together to advance quality of life concerns.

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