

# Information sharing in serious leisure as a source of Ibasho and Tanoshimi: A narrative from bonsai growers in Australia

**Yazdan Mansourian, PhD**

School of Information and Communication Studies, Charles Sturt University, Australia  
ymansourian@csu.edu.au

## **Keywords**

Information Sharing, Serious Leisure, Bonsai Hobby, Ibasho, Tanoshimi, Communities of Interest, Australian Bonsai Community

## **STRUCTURED ABSTRACT**

---

### **Aim of the contribution**

This paper presents selective findings from an ongoing project exploring information activities of bonsai growers in Australia. Bonsai growing is a traditional Japanese art and a popular hobby worldwide. It is a Japanese version of the original Chinese art called “penjing” or “penzai” that merges aesthetic principles, horticultural techniques, and mindfulness (Zhao, 2012). Bonsai is the art of planting, shaping, and preserving trees in shallow containers to represent an ideal form of nature (Warren, 2014). Bonsai is a trendy hobby globally, and the volume of information about different aspects of it is massive and available in several formats (e.g. books, magazines, websites, YouTube videos, social media, podcasts). Therefore, bonsai is a productive ground to explore from the human information behaviour perspective. Moreover, bonsai is an example of serious leisure because it requires passion, perseverance and learning specific skills. It also brings personal and social benefits and can turn into a career. As a result, it has the requirements of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982).

The project aims to discover how bonsai hobbyists seek, evaluate, organise, share, create and curate information related to their hobby. This paper focuses on information sharing, which is a major area of interest within the human information scholarship. However, most studies in this field have focused on work-related, health or educational contexts, and fewer studies have investigated hobbies like bonsai. Research shows that information sharing is an inherently social phenomenon and can occur in many ways in

various contexts (Pilerot, 2012). People have diverse motivations for information sharing. For example, they may share information to create new connections with others or foster the existing social bonds (Tinto and Ruthven, 2016). However, it is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by several contextual, cultural, and emotional elements (Heinström et al., 2021). Research also indicates that people have a habit of exchanging information when there is a uniting factor (Pilerot, 2012). For instance, when they have a common interest like a hobby or work in a shared workplace (Heinström et al., 2021). Furthermore, people within a profession (Hanell, 2017) or with similar social status (Kim et al., 2015) are more likely to share information within their groups.

### **Value of the contribution**

This paper provides new insights into information sharing patterns in a unique hobby. The literature review suggests that very little research has been done on the bonsai art in the information behaviour scholarship. Therefore, our knowledge about their information behaviour is still minimal. Gaining new insights about their information practice will enhance our knowledge of information behaviour in other similar hobbies. Thus, this paper contributes to research on information behaviour by demonstrating how bonsai growers share information within their communities.

Also, the paper is based on everyday life information behaviour (Savolainen, 1995) and the leisure domain (e.g. Hartel, 2010; Bronstein & Lidor, 2021) rather than the workplace or educational settings, which used to be the dominant trend in information behaviour research. What makes information behaviour in leisure activities special is the authenticity and diversity of leisure-related information activities and their relevance to everyday life. Thus, it is important to explore leisure to understand information behaviour in the bigger picture. Nonetheless, the findings contribute to the previously established understanding of information sharing behaviour based on vocational and educational domains by comparing the similarities and differences between these different contexts. Additionally, the paper introduces two concepts borrowed from the leisure studies scholarship. The concepts can provide new conceptual frameworks for future information behaviour studies. The first concept is "*Ibasho*", and the second one is "*Tanoshimi*".

*Ibasho* is a fascinating term in Japanese culture which encapsulate several concepts. It means a sense of comfort and emotional safety that a person feels in a specific context. It generates personal identity, social ties, and group affiliation. This term refers to a place where people feel they belong, and others accept them as they are (Bamba and Haight, 2006; Kiyota et al., 2015; Tokunaga et al., 2022). *Ibasho* is a unique concept in Japanese

culture, and the closest term in English is “niche” (Ozawa, 2005; Herleman et al., 2008). It includes three aspects: place, relationship, and time. Therefore, it refers to a physical or digital place where one can feel safe, has decent relationships with others, and has a perspective for future engagement (Tanaka, 2021).

*Tanoshimi* is another culturally unique concept in Japan, which means enjoyment, fun or hobby. *Tanoshimi* refers to joyful experiences that people look forward to experiencing in a context and anticipate a positive outcome. Leisure studies show *tanoshimi* serves as both emotional and problem-focused coping strategies. It helps people find meaning to explore new purposes in life. Besides, it can be a source of normality and continuity to experience personal transformation (Kono & Shinew, 2015; Kono, 2018). Research also reveals that feeling *Tanoshimi* in leisure activities is rewarding as it creates mindful experiences, positive short-term goals, and novelty (Kono & Nagata, 2021).

### **Research outline and findings**

This study is exploratory and interpretative in nature. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach and employed phenomenology to explore the bonsai growers' lived experiences and how they interact with various sources of information as part of their practice. The researcher interviewed a sample of bonsai growers across Australia via Zoom platform or telephone and asked them to narrate their experiences. The findings indicate that engagement in this hobby requires passion, dedication, and constant learning. As a result, bonsai growers need so much information to pursue their passion. They need specific knowledge to nourish and preserve their trees and keep them in good shape and health. Their primary source of this knowledge is other fellow bonsai growers with more experience. Therefore, most of the participants were members of their local bonsai club. Engagement in bonsai hobby helps them create communities of interest in the form of bonsai clubs, associations, workshops, and exhibitions.

As a result of this collaborative culture, there are 57 Bonsai clubs and societies in Australia, and most of them are a member of the Association of Australian Bonsai Clubs (AABC). The Bonsai Society of Australia is one of the first bonsai societies in this country, founded in August 1965 (Bonsai Society of Australia, 2022). Moreover, there is the National Bonsai & Penjing Collection of Australia (NBPCA) in Canberra (The National Arboretum Canberra, 2022). Bonsai clubs organise workshops, tours, contests, and exhibitions, and these events provide productive platforms for information sharing.

The findings show these clubs are like a source of *Ibasho* for bonsai enthusiasts as they enjoy attending the events and freely share bonsai related information with like-minded

people. They share information within their groups about different tools and techniques of bonsai care, such as watering, fertilising, repotting, pruning, wiring, trimming, and grafting. Furthermore, their information practice is mainly joyful, and they typically look forward to finding new information and sharing it with their peers. As a result of long-term interaction with bonsai-related information, they create sophisticated methods to interact with the sources in this context beyond conventional information activities.

Information professionals can use the findings of this study to gain a deeper understanding of hobbyists' information behaviour and serve them more effectively across the GLAM sector (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums). Moreover, information professionals can seek advice from experienced bonsai growers to identify the most helpful and up-to-date information resources for bonsai growers.

This collaboration will be beneficial for user engagement and enhancement of the quality of print and digital collections in information agencies such as public libraries. Besides, research shows that traditionally public library programs are more focused on casual than project-based or serious leisure (VanScoy et al., 2020). At the same time, people involved in serious leisure need more information because learning new skills is an indispensable part of serious leisure, and learning requires access to information. Therefore, public libraries should consider this group in their future programs and events.

## **Conclusion**

Bonsai hobbyists are actively engaged in learning new skills to pursue their interests. Because of that, they interact with various information sources through various information activities, such as information seeking, searching, organizing, sharing, and exchanging. Besides, they create a massive volume of information about their hobby and publish it via multiple channels such as books, magazines, and social media. Furthermore, they develop exclusive information sharing techniques to stay in contact with their peers and exchange tips and techniques via social contexts such as bonsai clubs, bonsai societies, exhibitions, and workshops. Finally, as they are passionate about their hobby, they actively search for information and share it within their groups, and these information activities are mainly joyful and rewarding. Moreover, concepts from leisure studies discourse, such as *Ibasho* and *Tanoshimi*, are helpful conceptual frameworks to explore and understand the lived experiences of bonsai growers as an example of a serious leisure practice.

## References

- Bamba, S. and Haight, W.L. (2006). Helping maltreated children to find their Ibasho: Japanese perspectives on supporting the well-being of children in state care, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20(5), 405-427.
- Bronstein, J., & Lidor, D. (2021). Motivations for music information seeking as serious leisure in a virtual community: Exploring a Eurovision fan club. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 73(2), 271-287.
- Bonsai Society of Australia. (2022, April). *About the Bonsai Society of Australia*. Retrieved April 22, 2022 from: <https://bonsai.asn.au/about-bsa/>
- Hanell, F. (2017). Teacher trainees' information sharing activities and identity positioning on Facebook, *Journal of Documentation*, 73(2), 244-262. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-06-2016-0085>
- Hartel, J. (2010). Managing documents at home for serious leisure: A case study of the hobby of gourmet cooking. *Journal of Documentation*, 66(6), 847-874.
- Heinström, J., Ahmad, F., Huvila, I. and Ek, S. (2021). Sense of coherence as influencing information sharing at the workplace, *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 73(2), 201-220. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-03-2020-0077>
- Herleman, H. A.; Britt, T. W.; and Hashima, P. Y. (2008). Ibasho and the adjustment, satisfaction, and well-being of expatriate spouses, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(3), 282-299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.01.004>
- Kim, J., Lee, C. and Elias, T. (2015). Factors affecting information sharing in social networking sites amongst university students: Application of the knowledge-sharing model to social networking sites, *Online Information Review*, 39(3), 290-309. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-01-2015-0022>
- Kiyota, E.; Tanaka, Y.; Arnold, M. and Aldrich, D. (2015). Elders leading the way to resilience, *SSRN Electronic Journal*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2575382>
- Kono, S. & Shiness, K. J. (2015). Roles of leisure in the post-disaster psychological recovery after the great east Japan earthquake and tsunami, *Leisure Sciences*, 37(1), 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2014.935836>
- Kono, S. (2018). Constraining, negotiating, and facilitating leisure after disaster: a case of the great east Japan earthquake and tsunami. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 1(2), 171-195. <https://doi-org/10.1007/s41978-018-0011-0>
- Kono, S., & Nagata, S. (2021). Understanding leisure's impacts on sources of life worth living: A multi-domain approach. *Leisure Studies*, 40, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2021.2006278>
- National Arboretum Canberra. (2022, April). The National Bonsai and Penjing Collection of Australia. Retrieved April 22, 2022 from: <https://www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au/living-collections/national-bonsai-and-penjing-collection-of-australia>
- Ozawa, K. (2005). *Ibasho Gram for Understanding of Identity in Adolescence*. The Academic Reports, the Faculty of Engineering, Tokyo Polytechnic University, 28(2), 49-56. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/>
- Pilerot, O. (2012). LIS research on information sharing activities - people, places, or information, *Journal of Documentation*, 68(4), 559-581. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220411211239110>

- Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of “way of life”. *Library & Information Science Research*, 17(3), 259–294.
- Stebbins, R.A. (1982), Serious leisure: A conceptual statement, *Pacific Sociological Review*, 25(2), 251-72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1388726>
- Tanaka, H. (2021). Development of the ibasho concept in Japanese education and youth work: Ibasho as a place of refuge and empowerment for excluded people. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 15, 3-15. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324199.pdf>
- Tinto, F., & Ruthven, I. (2016). Sharing “happy” information. *Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology*, 67(10), 2329–2343. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23581>
- Tokunaga, T., Machado Da Silva, I. and Fu, M. (2022). Participatory action research with immigrant Youth in Tokyo: Possibilities and Challenges of Ibasho Creation Project. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 46(1), 40-51. <https://doi-org/10.1111/napa.12173>
- VanScoy, A., Thomson, L., & Hartel, J. (2020). Applying theory in practice: The serious leisure perspective and public library programming. *Library and Information Science*, 42(3), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2020.101034>
- Warren, P. (2014), *Bonsai: Techniques, Styles, Display Ideas*, Dorling Kindersley, New York.
- Zhao, Q. (2012). *Penjing, the Chinese Art of Bonsai: A Pictorial Exploration of Its History, Aesthetics, Styles and Preservation*, Better Link Press, New York.

### Citation

Mansourian, Y. (2022). Information sharing in serious leisure as a source of Ibasho and Tanoshimi: A narrative from bonsai growers in Australia. *Trends in Information Science – The ASIS&ST European Chapter Research Series*. 07-19 June 2022. Virtual conference.