INDUSTRY INNOVATION

5 BENEFITS OF SERIOUS LEISURE FOR A **PUBLIC LIBRARY**

A way of enriching the quality of public library services and programs is to engage with serious leisure (SL) groups in your community. Libraries already do this in many ways, consciously or unconsciously, by providing services such as group meeting rooms, and/or establishing group activities, such as knitting groups or book clubs. SL groups mark out the library as a special social hub, which brings a group of people together to enjoy themselves, share their thoughts on their hobbies and learn new knowledge and skills. They visit the library to pursue their hobbies and this is a valuable asset for the library as it adds to its atmosphere in a positive way. Again, this provides yet another way to improve the quality of the library's culture and relationship with its community.

There are lots of SL groups that are or might be in your public libraries such as stamp collectors, amateur photographers, genealogists, sportspeople, birdwatchers, and travellers. There are around 230 categories listed in the Wikipedia entry under 'hobbies' and about 150 under 'list of collectables'. What SL practitioners have in their life is a unique passion and invest much of their non-working time, over a long period, and is often referred to as their 'leisure career' because of the dedication of the participant. Robert Stebbins, Canadian sociologist, coined 'serious leisure' as a term in 1982 to describe these activities and since then many scholars have explored its personal and social benefits in improving people's life and overall wellbeing.

Public libraries are an ideal place to promote SL for several reasons. First, in almost all kinds of SL pursuits there are multiple information rich activities. Participants will actively search, collect, organise, share and produce information. So, a public library is a perfect source of authoritative information usually having good collections of print and electronic resources to meet their clients' interests. Secondly, public libraries are terrific social hubs and can provide people with the facilities to promote SL pursuits. Thirdly, library staff provide expert knowledge on the information resources for SL activities. Finally, public libraries promoting SL activities, creates at least the following five benefits.

1. SERIOUS LEISURE CREATES SOCIAL TIES AND INCREASES SOCIAL INCLUSION

Public libraries are social hubs that facilitate social inclusion. A safe and welcoming place where people can get together, share ideas and find new friends. One of the main benefits of supporting SL activities is enhancing social interaction inside and outside of the library, which increases a sense of belonging. When people feel the public library belongs to them, they engage with it more actively. SL also reduces the cultural distance between participants and reinforces the library's positive role in the community.

2. SERIOUS LEISURE MAKES THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT MORE ENGAGING AND INVITING

SL makes our library more colourful and attractive through supporting different types of interesting activities to the wider community. These new activities and events can inspire people to look for new directions in their life. As a result, library clients who are not familiar with the diversity of activities (promoted by the library) might become interested to learn more about these novel areas and pursue new and fascinating pathways.

3. SERIOUS LEISURE CREATES COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST AND INFORMATION GROUNDS

When SL people get together and share their ideas and views in a temporary social setting, they create an information ground which can stimulate interest and collecting on a topic to support their SL pursuits. These information grounds are important for libraries to notice because they can give new directions to the library services to better support user needs.

4. SERIOUS LEISURE BUILDS NOVEL IDENTITIES AND NEW LIFE STYLES

SL participants can create self-actualisation, feelings of accomplishment, pleasure and strong identification with the culture of the SL group. People who are involved in SL usually have very specific information requirements, plus varying knowledge and skills about their topic. This develops over time as they become information literate in their SL pursuit. As a result, they will build up their lifestyle around a core activity which helps them to escape from the hum-drum of everyday life and brings about a renewed sense of joy and freedom. Those new life styles will create new information needs focused on the pursuit and from that a likely demand for new services and library collections.

5. SERIOUS LEISURE ENRICHES THE LIBRARY COLLECTION AND LIBRARY EVENTS

Supporting SL can give new directions to collection development, library events and programs. After a while, it has an impact on the library collection as libraries then collect relevant resources about several specific SL topics this in turn enriches the quality of the collection. Moreover, libraries can organise various events related to SL activities like inviting authors who have published books on SL topics, running workshops, launching exhibitions, and so on.

Public libraries support SL participants/groups and benefit in the many positive outcomes that would flow from such an initiative. It requires proactive engagement and planning with SL groups and consideration about how the public library can best support the individuals in their SL pursuits. Thankfully, there are many kinds of SL pursuits and the possibilities of innovation in this area is enormous. In general, we believe SL can be a source of inspiration and creativity in libraries and there are many great opportunities to use this concept to promote social inclusion as well as developing awareness of the important community role of the public library.

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