

Passionate reading as a Serious Leisure



Reading does not have to be a serious leisure for everyone. However, for some people it has the potential to become a lifelong practice and form a central role in their life. It provides a great opportunity for libraries in general, and public libraries in particular, to promote the practice of reading in society more efficiently. Initiating and running various reading programs such as reading events, book clubs, or writers talks are among a long list of ideas that can serve this purpose. YAZDAN MANSOURIAN explains.

People have diverse motivations for reading and they do it in various forms and levels. There is a really broad scale ranging from shallow and infrequent reading to deep and continuous practice. Moreover, reading can serve a wide range of needs. Some people may read on their leisure time just to enjoy the pleasure of reading and enjoy escapism and release from life stresses. Nonetheless, for committed readers the functionality of reading is broader than these common themes. For example, they not only enjoy reading, but also evaluate what they read and reflect on what they learn through it. Furthermore, they normally share their

reflections with friends and colleagues via social media or other grounds such as book clubs. Also, reading for them is much more than a temporary distraction from here and now or an escape from the dullness of daily routine. For dedicated readers it is an opportunity to embracing emancipation, authenticity and liberty. They read to develop a meaningful experience and transform their life. At the same time, they enjoy intellectual and aesthetic pleasures of understanding and achieving new levels of insight and awareness. This is the time that reading has the potential to become a serious leisure.

Serious leisure (SL) is a sociological term initially coined by Robert Stebbins in 1982 and it includes a wide range of hobbies and activities which are sufficiently substantial and adequately challenging. SL participants often engage in different kinds of collecting (eg antiques, book collecting); making (eg origami, quilling); tinkering (eg car restoration, repairing); performing (eg dancing, cycling); competitive hobbies (eg speed cubing, chess); outdoor hobbies (eg hiking, rock climbing); observing (eg whale watching, amateur astronomy); or learning (eg liberal arts, genealogy).



Reading as a SL means a deep devotion to reading over a long period of time. This means that passionate readers know a lot about their favourite topics and actively seek, save and share information on these topics. They know well-known writers and enthusiastically follow current trends and issues in the book market. They regularly visit bookshops and public libraries and attend book events such as author talks in public libraries.

When reading becomes a SL practice for someone, it also becomes a central part of life for them. Reading can entail a systematic and long term seeking of knowledge about various topics and provides the reader with a profound and pleasurable experience. These concepts are the main features of any SL. Reading as a SL is a lifestyle in which reading is the core activity. For engaged readers reading is an exciting and enjoyable action with significant and meaningful purposes.

Regarding the key role of information acquisition, reading as a SL is quite similar to a liberal arts hobby where hobbyists usually focus on one or two specific topics (eg astronomy, music) but in the case of reading for SL, the main fascination is the consumption of a topic and the reader may follow a wide variety of subjects. The issues might be similar in

terms of context however, the reader continues reading about various themes and follow their interests enthusiastically. After a while, because of a long-term interaction with relevant information, they will learn to evaluate the values of resources and critically assess the contents. Gradually, a network of topics, authors and publishers will be formed in their minds and they will make links between topics and generate new ideas. This is a kind of lifelong learning journey with the centrality of reading as SL.

Reading as a SL includes various forms such as reading for pleasure and recreational purpose but it also moves beyond these. In terms of frequency, SL readers will habitually read almost every day and develop a sort of reading identity. Finally, there is convincing evidence in reading studies that reading can transform a person's life and it seems devoted readers have more chances to achieve this goal. 🌟

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