

TOWARD A THEORY OF PARTNERSHIP AS CONTEXT FOR A THEORY OF LEISURE

Kim S. Uhlik, Ph.D.
Department of Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism
San Jose State University
One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192-0211
kuhlik@casa.sjsu.edu

Abstract.—The field of leisure studies has been developing a body of theory since the late 1960s, but construction of an overarching, unified theory of leisure remains an elusive goal (Bedini and Wu, 1994; Brown, Dyer, & Whatey, 1973; Burdge, 1983; Edginton, Hudson, & Lankford, 2001; Henderson, 1994; Henderson, Presley & Bialeschki, 2004; Hendricks & Burdge, 1972; Jackson, 2004; Jordan & Rowland, 1999; Samdahl & Kelly, 1999; Uhlik, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Thirteen years ago, La Page (1994) presciently observed, “Although rarely recognized as such, [the] guiding principle [of partnerships] is what makes us unique as a profession” (p. 32). What La Page realized was that, irrespective of legal considerations, each partnership represents a potentially transformative “social contract.” Given that the attributes of any particular partnership are smaller-scale imitations of the surrounding society’s characteristics, a theory of partnership as a social contract serves as the crucial context from which a theory of leisure can be derived.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: INDIVIDUALS, SOCIETY, AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The fundamental premise that leisure is individually defined—if not also experienced and expressed—has traditionally produced theories of leisure that focus on particular aspects or attributes of leisure, rather than on explaining the comprehensive whole (see Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, & Edginton, 2004, for examples). Nevertheless, the classical concept of leisure—the

freedom of educated persons to intelligently choose to invest their resources toward living meaningful lives—carried sufficient philosophical import to warrant inclusion among the three essential individual “rights” specifically listed in American colonies’ 1776 Declaration of Independence: “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

In this sense, both the Declaration and the U.S. Constitution are a kind of social contract between citizens and their government that is specific to a democratic republic: individuals have the freedom to choose with whom to associate, and to act on their own behalf to reach their full human potential. The conception of leisure as a form of social contract—and of partnership as the essence of that relationship—allows a theory of partnership to support a theory of leisure. Just as leisure is individually defined, societies emerge from individuals’ decisions to associate with one another according to some commonality, with that commonality then serving as the basis for distinctive social contracts. However, because any two or more societies may emerge from widely divergent beliefs (political, religious, philosophical, etc.) the social contract that recognizes the right to leisure is not expressed in all societies in identical ways, if expressed at all.

In Uhlik (2006a), a theory of relationships based on self-predisposition to “others” was proposed:

Among various *schema* (Stangor & Schaller, 1996) for describing the organization of human relationships may be proposed an arrangement from most general to specific: from society, to civilization, to culture, and then to the realms of culture. The premise is that, fundamentally, society results from the association of individuals on the basis of their *preconception* of the “other,” and if that “other” is viewed in a societal context of favorable predisposition, then the subsequent

affiliation will be reciprocal. Conversely, an “other” *prejudged* as suspicious or threatening will produce an unequal relationship based on domination (or, perhaps, elimination) of the “other.” (pp. 4-5)

Further, Figure 1 (from Uhlik, 2006a) suggests that societies then can be classified along a continuum ranging from predation, through cooperation, and finally to partnership according to their members’ collective predispositions. A predominance of exploitive relationships—“partnerships” in name only—is an indicator of a predatory society; the authoritarian iron rule dictates that one preemptively must do unto others *before* they do unto you. Leisure in a predatory society would be a means to an end whereby individuals are prejudged as rivals in a competition producing winners and losers. Conversely, a partnership society wherein the other is welcomed, valued, and encouraged, embraces the Platinum Rule: do unto others as *they* would do unto themselves. Through the social contract nurturing partnership, leisure becomes both a means *and* an end: the journey of discovery taken together and the destination celebrated as a collective challenge met.

2.0 PARTNERSHIP DEFINED, AND REDEFINED

The original definition of “partnership” as “a contract of two or more competent persons to place their money, efforts, labor and skill, or some or all of them, in lawful commerce or business, and to divide the profit and bear the loss in certain proportions” (White,

1909) has been extended in leisure studies to include *a dynamic arrangement between two or more parties, based upon the beneficial satisfying of specifically identified, mutual needs* (Uhlik, 1995; James, 1999; Uhlik, 2005). The contrast is between *partnerships* as simply exchange arrangements emphasizing material profit, and *Partnership* as a shared effort intended to produce benefits and satisfaction as much intangible and intrinsic as tangible and extrinsic.

In light of the discussion, above, a third definition may be introduced: “Partnership” within the context of a theory of partnership is *a transforming relationship oriented toward the mutual achieving of meaningful goals*. This conception captures both the idealism implicit in the term’s common (non-economic) use and the social contract’s “freedoms” suggested by mutuality and transformation. But transformation is predicated on thoughtful action, which in turn requires meaningful awareness.

Abraham Maslow (1943) is said to have stated, “What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself”; this transformative process serves as the basis for Figure 2. Within this framework, Maslow’s first four stages are subsumed under the heading *self-awareness*. As one migrates from the first stage to the fourth, information is collected to form a knowledge base that, when compiled, informs the self about its needs and wants; strengths and weaknesses; and values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Integrated through reflection, these characteristics describe the individual’s true self at that moment.

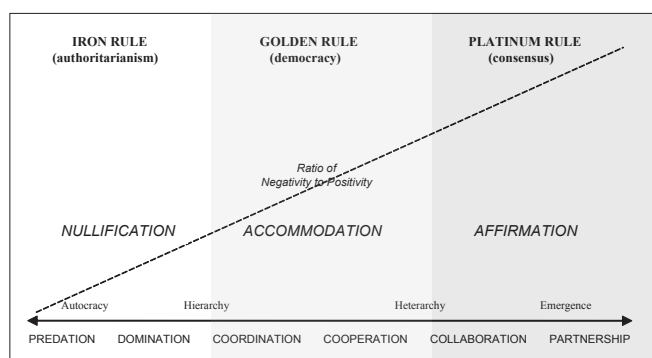


Figure 1.—The partnership continuum depicting overarching philosophy, partner affect, and ratio of negativity to positivity (from Uhlik, 2006a).

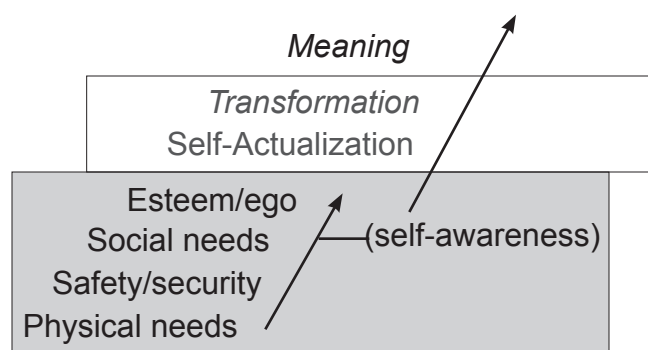


Figure 2.—The process of achieving a meaningful life in relation to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs.

As Maslow indicated, an individual who becomes self-aware also feels the obligation to act on that awareness; at the same time, leisure requires the freedom to act. Herein, then, self-actualization becomes a precursor to the additional two stages shown in Figure 2: transformation, and meaning (which also may be perceived as satisfaction or fulfillment). Assuming one has been enabled by self-awareness to take authentic initiative during self-actualization, then experiencing both the process (journey) and outcome (destination) of one's actions is transformational for the self and the other, a mutuality achieved whether one is participating in or providing for the opportunity.

Transformation may occur in isolation, but a theory of partnership aligned with the social contract concept purports that purposeful transformation is accomplished through leisure's nurturing of self-awareness and self-actualization, and results in the creation of the meaningful life envisioned by the architects of classical democracy and of our own (Mechikoff & Estes, 2006). Further, the very existence of this form of leisure is a direct consequence of its being embedded in the type of society whose individual members create and maintain the social contract.

3.0 "MAPPING" A THEORY OF PARTNERSHIP IN RELATION TO SOCIETY AND LEISURE STUDIES

Figure 3 incorporates five essential elements delimiting the parameters of a theory of partnership as an intermediary or facilitator between leisure studies and the larger society. In this sense, partnership is the social contract linking the two. Despite its visual complexity, mapping the entire "landscape" may reveal the theoretical applicability of partnership to leisure.

Underlying the structure, each of the four like-sized overlapping circles encompasses one of the typical disciplines often comprising leisure studies: hospitality, tourism, travel, and commercial recreation; parks and recreation; therapeutic recreation; and

sports management. In the outer four corners of the figure are the ever-present *external* aspects (realms) that influence those disciplines: culture, law, politics, business, and education. These realms act as conduits through which the power of societal type is transmitted—for example, valuing uniqueness over ubiquity, inclusion over restriction, collectivism over individualism, equity over profit, and pragmatism over idealism.

Listed in a box located within each disciplinary circle are *internal* aspects that influence partnership: relationships, resources, networks, and organizations. These are the aforementioned smaller yet important theoretical perspectives that inform, but are subsumed under a theory of partnership.

Overlain on the disciplines and their internal influences are three concentric zones representing levels at which partnership exists, and where research can occur (Henderson, 1994; Henderson, Presley & Bialeschki, 2004). Partnerships themselves (as instruments or tools), and published descriptions of those partnerships in action (e.g. case studies), occupy Figure 3's central area. This is where the hoped-for individual transformations take place. Activity facilitators and their supervisors "partner" with those whom they serve with the expectation that working together enhances the probability that mutually beneficial goals will be achieved.

In the middle ring are models of partnership (e.g. Selin & Chavez, 1994; Uhlik, 1995), wherein procedures to insure transformation are designed and enumerated. It is here that managers and educators distill essential instructions from research and experience, filtered through leisure philosophy (the "pursuit of happiness"), that are then provided to their field staffs to guide actual practice.

A theory of partnership (e.g. Uhlik, 2006a; Uhlik, 2007) is located in the outermost ring, occupying the transitional space between the internal and external aspects and influences—between individual leisure and society—enabling their social contract. In total, Figure 3 employs a theory of partnership to integrate

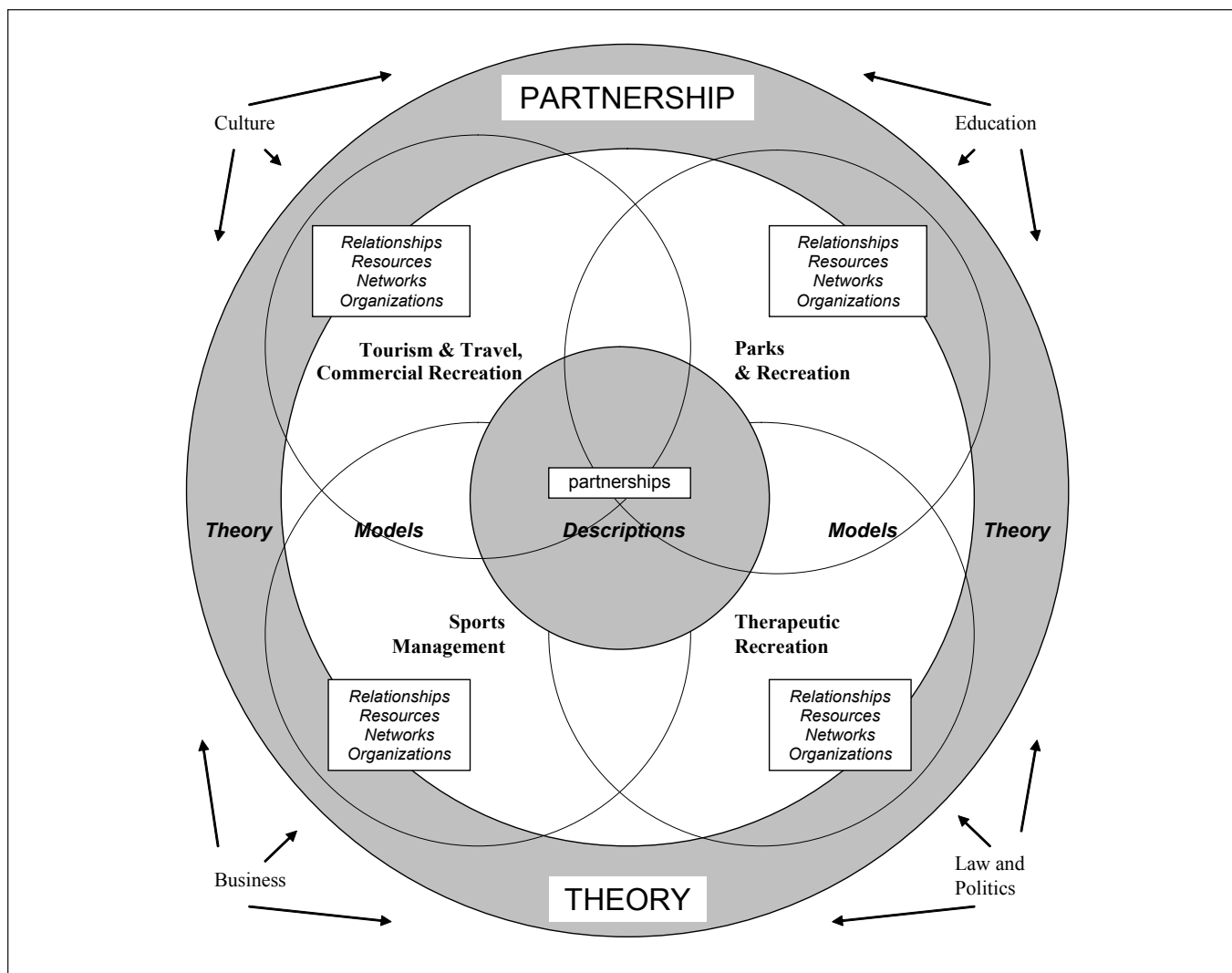


Figure 3.—The scope and potential of partnership research, extending between “partnerships” as a tool and “partnership” theory.

society and leisure into a holistic system supporting that social contract.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Not every interaction is a partnership, but at a theoretical level every interaction is a relationship—momentary or prolonged, superficial or intense—affected by the reciprocal influence between societal type and the self and “other”. Although the larger American society embraces competition and may even tend toward dominance, the society formed more recently by leisure adherents exhibits a contrasting ethic. As LaPage (1994) argued, leisure embraces partnership as a fundamental value in the same way

that life and liberty are valued. People engaging in leisure activities have chosen to associate on the basis of a predisposition favoring each “other” as a potential partner rather than as a competitive rival. Thus, leisure service providers enter into a social contract—a partnership—with those they serve and with whom they work to provide opportunities for transformation.

It’s not so much that leisure professionals employ partnerships as tools to accomplish goals; this is the stereotypical view derived from unconnected case studies (Mowan & Kerstetter, 2004; Vaske & Donnelly, 1994). In Figure 1, this condition is represented by the *coordination* or *cooperation* arrangements reflective of partnership’s seminal,

functional definition. More significant is the discovery, implicit perhaps, that the goal of service to others offers a higher benefit: the possibility of transformation through self-aware, directed action, resulting in the creation of meaningful lives. This elevates the relationship as displayed in Figure 1 from simply an arrangement to a *collaboration* or *partnership*.

The practical implications are immediate and potentially far-reaching. First, leisure can unite its diverse, individually defined manifestations under the long-sought-after theoretical foundation, and refine its unique contribution to the well-being of every individual. Philosophically, the explicit link to leisure as a fundamental right of all Americans provides a firm platform on which to advocate for extensive programming—especially that which is targeted to underserved individuals and groups—along with the proper level of funding and support. Third, the concept of partnership answers the call(s) for grounding partnership research in theory (Mowan & Kerstetter, 2004; Vaske & Donnelly, 1994), and opens to research the many areas of leisure which have not previously been recognized as legitimate topics (Uhlik, 2006a).

Finally, and perhaps most widely applicable, the practical development of partnerships may be informed by the notion that not every “partner” subscribes to the higher goal of transformation; some partners actually seek only coordination of efforts to solve immediate problems and other “partners” actually intend to exploit their fellows in the name of partnership. By explicitly recognizing individuals’ varying motivations for forming partnerships, compatible goals and expectations can be established to insure that the relationship, or “arrangement,” operates at a level congruent with those preconceptions.

By focusing on the primacy of *individual relationships* and the subsequent association of individuals into societies sharing particular perceptions toward others, a context for a theory of leisure may be established. The essence of partnership is the quality of the individual partners’ relationship, just as the basis of society is each individual member’s predisposition

toward the “other,” which defines the range and types of potential relationships between them. A theory of partnership suggests that the type of relationships fostered by leisure professionals and organizations underwrites a theory of leisure: the social contract enabling—through transformation—an individual’s freedom to create a meaningful life.

5.0 CITATIONS

- Bedini, L.A., & Wu, Y. (1994). **A methodological review of research in Therapeutic Recreation Journal from 1986 to 1990.** *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 28(Second Quarter), 87-98.
- Brown, P.J., Dyer, A., & Whaley, R.S. (1973). **Recreation research – so what?** *Journal of Leisure Research*, 5(1), 16-24.
- Burdge, R.J. (1983). **Making leisure and recreation research a scholarly topic: Views of a journal editor, 1972-1982.** *Leisure Sciences*, 6(1), 99-126.
- Edginton, C.R., Hudson, S.D., Dieser, R.B., & Edginton, S.R. (2004). **Leisure programming: A service-centered and benefits approach** (4th Ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Henderson, K.A. (1994). **Theory application and development in recreation, parks, and leisure research.** *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 12(1), 51-64.
- Henderson, K.A., Presley, J., & Bialeschki, M.D. (2004). **Theory in recreation and leisure: Reflections from the editors.** *Leisure Sciences*, 26(4), 411-425.
- Hendricks, J., & Burdge, R.J. (1972). **The nature of leisure research – A reflection and comment.** *Journal of Leisure Research*, 4(3), 215-217.
- Jackson, E.L. (2004). **Individual and institutional concentration of leisure research in North America.** *Leisure Sciences*, 26, 323-348.

- James, K. (1999). **Understanding successful partnerships and collaborations.** Parks & Recreation, 34(5), 38-46.
- Jordan, D.J., & Roland, M. (1999). **An examination of differences between academics and practitioners in frequency of reading research and attitudes toward research.** Journal of Leisure Research, 31(2), 166-170.
- LaPage, W.F. (1994). **Partnerships for parks: A handbook for building and guiding park partnerships.** Tallahassee: National Association of State Park Directors.
- Maslow A.H. (1943). **A theory of human motivation.** Psychological Review, 50, 370-396.
- Mechikoff, R.E.S., & Estes, S. (2006). **A history and philosophy of sport and physical education: From ancient civilizations to the modern world** (4th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Mowan, A. & Kerstetter, D. (2004). Call for papers. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration.
- Samdahl, D.M., & Kelly, J.J. (1999). **Speaking only to ourselves? Citation analysis of journal of leisure research and leisure sciences.** Journal of Leisure Research, 31(2), 171-180.
- Selin, S., & Chavez, D. (1994). **Characteristics of successful tourism partnerships: A multiple case study design.** Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 12(2), 51-61.
- Stangor, C. & Schaller, M. (1996). **Stereotypes as individual and collective representations.** In C.N. Macrae, S. Stangor, & M. Hewstone, (Eds.). Stereotypes and stereotyping. New York: The Guilford Press, 3-38.
- Uhlik, K.S. (1995). **Partnership, step by step: A practical model of partnership formation.** Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 13(4), 14-25.
- Uhlik, K.S. (2006a). **The “nature” of leadership philosophy in outdoor and adventure education: Partnership or predation.** Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning, 6(2), 135-142.
- Uhlik, K.S. (2006b). **Disconnecting learning and practice: Research behavior among leisure partnership authors.** Unpublished manuscript.
- Uhlik, K.S. (2007). **The ghettoization of partnership research in leisure studies.** Leisure Sciences, 29(3), 309-314.
- Vaske, J.J., & Donnelly, M.P. (1994). Call for papers. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 12(4), ix.
- White, W.R. (1909). **Law of partnership.** New York: Pace & Pace.