

The importance of leisure in ensuring quality of life

While exploring the issue of Land Use and its linkages with the concept of Quality of Life, it was established that quality of life is a rather intangible idea that broadly covers most aspects of human wellbeing and can be rather personal and hard to generalize. Observations made whilst conducting fieldwork identified a seeming lack of obvious entertainment or leisure venues in the area of focus (Nob Hill and Chinatown, San Francisco). Thus, in a bid to better understand the connection between leisure and quality of life, as well as explore ways in which they are affected by land use, the essay will first attempt to define leisure before going into more detail about the various ways quality of life can be defined and comprehended. It will then move on to examine the effect that various leisure activities can have on an individual's quality of life and finally look at some means by which types of land use can influence opportunities to conduct leisure activities and hence have an impact on quality of life.

Leisure as defined by Voss (1967) from an economic point of view refers to "a period of time referred to as discretionary time" and is completely up to someone how he or she intends to make use of it that has nothing to do with fulfilling a "economic, legal, moral or social compulsion or obligation". As such, leisure activities would be activities that one engages in out of his or her own free will for reasons that are perhaps purely personal and more often than not for enjoyment and self-satisfaction as people are not supposed to be obliged in any sense to be taking part in any activities that are categorized as leisure.

Compared to leisure, quality of life would be a more complicated concept to grasp as it tends to be multifaceted and dependent on the individual. In fact, Felce and Perry (1995) claimed that there are as many definitions of quality of life as there are people, highlighting the personal nature of quality of life. They go on to try and break quality of life down into five areas, namely, physical wellbeing, social wellbeing, material wellbeing, development and activity and emotional wellbeing. Felce and Perry (1995) also accounted for the individualistic nature of quality of life by separating each category into objective and subjective (personal satisfaction) perception as well as including a personal ranking of the importance of each category. Of which all three are subjected to external influences. While this is a comprehensive attempt at defining quality of life, measuring it is also an equally if not more complex matter. Multiple attempts have varied greatly depending on the target sample size, the context and the parameters of each study (Smith et al, 2004). However, despite the problems associated with defining and measuring quality of life, academics have not given up trying to fine-tune the process and in doing so, come to realize that leisure is quite an important factor in contributing to happiness and hence related to quality of life (Shin and Johnson, 1978).

Research conducted by the World Health Organization further supported the relationship established by Shin and Johnson (1978), and go further to claim that leisure activities do play a key role in sustaining quality of life (The WHOQOL Group, 1998 in Iwasaki, 2007). Leisure activities come in many forms and can range from solitary activities such as walking and watching TV programs to social and community activities like spending time with family members or catching up with friends at a local tea house (Iwasaki, 2007). Unsurprisingly, as with quality of life, the definition of leisure activities also differs

considerably as Iwasaki (2007) illustrates in his paper on leisure in various cultural and social contexts. Research on the elderly (the elderly was observed to be the dominant age group during the fieldwork visit to San Francisco's Chinatown) and their leisure needs usually focused on maintaining their independence and mobility, preference for social activities with neighbors or family members who live nearby (Gabriel and Bowling, 2004) as well as a love for walking and easy access to spaces for social activities (McAvoy, 1979). Since leisure activities can mean any kind of activity as long as a person spends free time taking part in it for enjoyment and out of free will, Leung and Lee (2005) raised the idea of classifying leisure as either place-centered or people-centered. This distinction then enable the discussion to introduce land use and its ability to influence the type of leisure activities available in a given area and as a result, have an effect on quality of life of the people in the area, especially the elderly and the young, who are typically less mobile.

Land use is intimately related to quality of life as it determines how space is utilized and for what purposes, be it for residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, recreational or infrastructural. In built up cities that are increasingly finding themselves constrained by space limits, ever-increasing demands on land make it much harder to ensure that land use distribution amongst the various purposes is maximized for quality of life of residents in the city. This is especially so for people who have fewer resources at their disposal to ensure that their needs and opinions are sufficiently accounted for. Place-based leisure activities, which are usually social activities that involve groups of people, need to have the facilities or space to be conducted. For example, mass Taichi sessions are a form of leisure physical activity enjoyed in Asian cultures (Iwasaki, 2007) and they are usually held in public spaces such as squares, parks or gardens. Karaoke lounges, cafes and community centers are also conducive places where leisure social interactions take place as these spaces allow people to gather together for planned communal activities.

Transport infrastructure also plays a key role in ferrying people to and from their leisure activities outside of their residences. Elderly people have shown to prize their independence of movement in studies and enjoy walking as well as easy access to spaces for engagement in social activities (McAvoy, 1979). But without convenient walking paths or easily accessible public spaces or transport routes, elderly folk might be deprived of such activities merely because they are unable to commute to areas where leisure activities are held at or simply cannot enjoy getting around without the help of others. Moreover, proper planning and transition time is often needed when land use changes or when new developments are built to ensure that the elderly have time to familiarize themselves and feel safe enough to venture out. Meyer (2008), in his comparison of Hutongs and high-rise apartments, raises the example of the struggle elderly Beijing residents face when moving from one place to the other as Hutongs are torn down to make way for new developments.

In conclusion, leisure serves as a key bridge between land use and quality of life as land use can influence the quality of life of residents in the area by enabling or curtailing their ability or opportunity to engage in leisure activities and as a result enhance or diminish their quality of life. With this in mind, perhaps future efforts to plan for leisure activities in San Francisco's Chinatown can take into account the socio-cultural context of the area and the demographic of the target audience to better serve their needs.

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