5 - CONCEPTIONS OF LEISURE: A HISTORICAL APPROACH ON SOCIETIES

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Introduction

Leisure has been the focus of countless studies on contemporary society. This is due mostly to the strong correlation among leisure activities and quality of life and the social development of individuals. Although it is impossible to precisely foresee the starting point of concerning about leisure activities, it is known that those have accompanied man ever since the beginning of humankind.

Although leisure has been the focus of studies in different areas, it should be studied from the precept that man is a biophysicosocial being, and his biological, psychological and sociological characteristics cannot be dissociated. An investigation concerning leisure can reveal several characteristics that show the social and cultural context of a society.

Eventually leisure is conceived as a synonym of free time, nevertheless, such proposition is not true. Leisure activities are practiced during free time, but free time is not completely fulfilled with activities characterized as leisure (ELIAS; DUNNING, 1992).

The present paper has as objective to carry out an analogy among different leisure conceptions, in the most varied epochs and in different societies, aiming at a better comprehension of leisure studies in contemporary society.

Concepts of leisure

According to Elias and Dunning (1992), leisure is defined as an activity freely practiced with no wages involved, and which brings a pleasant and delightful sensation to the one who practices it. Following Elias and Dunning's distinction of leisure and free time, to better specify, it is possible to mention leisure as “culture, comprehended in its broader sense, experienced or practiced in the available time” (MARCELINO in REIS; SOARES, 2006, p.02).

Based on this statement, it is perceptible that a leisure activity is any activity that provides pleasure in a free time away from work. On this sense, Dumazedier (in Reis and Soares, 2006, p.02) states that leisure can be defined as:

[...] a group of occupations to which an individual may surrender freely, either to rest, have fun, recreation, entertainment or, yet, to develop information or disinterested formation, his voluntary social participation or free creative capacity, after being dismissed or released from professional, familiar or social duties.

The denomination “leisure” has been used for very long already, and along the centuries, it has presented distinct conceptions, varying not only according to time, but indeed from society to society, being characterized in each situation with its respective particularities. Such particularities, with proper changes, are adjusted and provide the conception of leisure in the nowadays society.

The full meaning of leisure is not limited to only using free time, but it is also related to the achievement of human being aspirations. In this sense, it is possible to state that:

Leisure practices are not only rituals of pauses before returning to practical life or work, but yet they should exist with roots that plunge in historical-anthropological deepness, which refers to human being in his nature, keeping knowledge production, discussion and systematizing as a central axle […]. In fact, our social context, impregnated by violence, exclusion, unemployment and prejudices, has put aside all and every possibility of experiencing leisure practices in its fullness (FRANÇA; CAVALCANTI, 2002, p.06).

In a synthesis to this idea, it is perceptible that only “having leisure available to enjoy will not improve quality of life, unless the person knows how to use it effectively; leisure is not something that one learn how to do automatically” (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI in FRANÇA; CAVALCANTI, 2002, p.06).

Almeida and Gutierrez (2005) understand leisure as a way to relief tensions occasioned by contemporary life style, seeing it as an essential and enabling factor to live in society.

Another aspect strongly correlated with leisure activities is the sports practice. Frequented in clubs or proper environments for such activities, leisure practice under physical education and sports field, can be seen as:

[...] possibilities of moments to fully express body, which should collaborate in the development of human potentialities, exactly for its diversity and transcendence, should be manifestations that reinforce complexity and the human dimension that attends, practice and live such moment (FRANÇA; CAVALCANTI, 2002, p.05).

Despite the concepts of leisure are a great number, it is perceptible that the authors manifest unanimity that leisure activities should be practiced during free time, and that they provide some feeling of achievement and pleasure to the individual who practices it.

Leisure in societies

The habit of experiencing leisure suffers considerable changes from time to time, from society to society. According to Gonçalo (2002), the search for leisure is present in societies in every stage of development. However, the feeling occasioned by leisure is limited by restrictions imposed by civilization.

It should be understood that the search for leisure in distinct societies is characterized by limiting factors imposed by society itself, which explains the different forms of practicing it.

In ancient times, the Roman and Greek people would base their leisure activities in competitions and games. The nobler classes would behave as viewers of competitions between fighters or gladiators that would battle till death. Nowadays, some features of that culture still remains, even if in terms of a less devastating version, such as cockfighting and bullfighting (STURION; CABRAL, 2007).

It should be emphasized that, in the mentioned period, leisure was part of only the privileged minority of society that would have high acquisitive power. This situation is maintained for centuries, until a remarkable fact starts a revolution, not only technological, but also cultural.

During the industrial revolution period, the long and exhausting work journeys forced workers to claim for better work

conditions, exposing this way the need for practicing activities with leisure character (PILATTI, 2007).

In Brazil the observation that human needed to practice leisure activities occurred during the period when Getúlio Vargas was President. However, broader accessibility to those activities was concretized only in the governing of Juscelino Kubitschek. High and medium classes would occupy their free time with theater plays, musical presentations and sport clubs, whereas the worker class would search for entertainment through sports practice in public spaces, circus and festive commemorations. This way, leisure starts to be part of the workers' and medium class' quotidian (ALMEIDA, 2005).

Despite leisure covering had expanded, such fact did not mean the unification of the several social classes for leisure activities. On the contrary, high classes would refuse to frequent the environments dominated by the worker class.

During the governing periods of Getúlio Vargas, the State would promote leisure public activities. However, in Juscelino Kubitschek's governing, the private sector starts to invest in leisure options, such as cinema, theater and radio, occupying a space previously conceded by the government. This way, it is even more evidenced the separation between the medium and worker class, including in the activities of leisure (ALMEIDA, 2005).

This way, there is the perspective that the substitution of human hand labor by machines would provide the workers more free time to practice leisure activities. However, such proposition turned out to be mistaken.

In modern society, leisure presents itself as an option to break routine, where man “searches eagerly to transform the result of his hard work into something that may bring him pleasant compensations” (STURION; CABRAL, 2007, p.01).

Leisure in the current context

The increasingly search for leisure activities propitiated large investments from private initiative in the entertainment sector, which created the opportunity for the emerging of a new sector, the leisure industry. The leisure industry incorporated through the conception that the ludicrous element did not represent only a banality or a spare time, but a direct relation with the cultural, ethics and social feelings (FRANÇA; CAVALCANTI, 2002).

By observing the importance of leisure activities in the man's context, conceived as a biophysicosocial being, this new modality of service rendering arose as a promising one, beginning to be exploited as a new need for human being, or maybe an ancient need though recently discovered.

Though the search for leisure in current society has been behaving as increasingly and steady in the last decades, the available leisure to the individuals is not consonant with the time-space and financial conditions from the majority of society, turning leisure into an deluxe aspect, a select activity (PIUCCO, 2005).

According to Giancomello and Reis (2006, p.01), people, most of the times influenced by the media power, view leisure as one more product to be consumed, purchased by capital power. This perspective makes clear that leisure will become a consuming good purchased to satisfy human being needs, however not accessible to every social class.

It is yet possible to state that the need for financial investments in activities of leisure character may mischaracterize the real sense of leisure, once such fact separate the latter from its conception as a relevant social factor in human life, most of the times being reduced to a mere merchandise (GIANCOMELLO; REIS, 2006, p.01).

The idea that leisure activity practice is only a matter of option is equivocate in several aspects: urban spaces more and more make difficult the practice of such activities, the huge space of time used in the long work journey, added to the time used to go and come from work and, finally, the precarious financial conditions, constitute impediments to the practice of activities with such purpose.

Reinforcing this idea and making a parallel with the problem of income distribution and, consequently, the differences between social classes, it is plausible to state that:

The growing of leisure is far away from being equal in the several layers of society. The classes with a lower acquisitive power, as much in developed as in underdeveloped countries, are restricted by the inexistence or insufficiency of a recreative or collective cultural equipment, lack of financial resources and difficulties work related. In those social classes, leisure needs may determine high levels of dissatisfaction (STURION; CABRAL, 2007, p.01).

Within this context, it is perceptible that only a small parcel of population presents conditions to enjoy leisure activities, once the accessibility to those are linked to the availableness of an appropriated place, available time and consonant financial condition.

In the capitalist production system, human being is conceived exclusively as a production agent, excluding his personal characteristics, such as feelings, desires and needs. Such facts occasioned, and continue to proportionate, a deep social transformation in society life style (ALMEIDA; GUTIERREZ, 2005).

Nowadays, leisure can be perceived as a form to enjoy time free from labor activities, to compensate stress and preoccupations originated from work environment, in a way that such activities may proportionate a sensation of pleasure and well being.

Final considerations

Based on the present study, it is possible to state that leisure has a role of major importance in the cultural transformation process, and that the conception of leisure is concretized as each society improve it and insert it in its citizens' life. This perspective shows that human behavior has a strong correlation with leisure activities, and that the manifestations of leisure in human being represent an important factor of study to understand him as an integrant member of society.

Though the need of experiencing leisure practices are the same, the accessibility to leisure is still away from becoming homogeneous among the different social classes. The lowermost available free time is converted in work, aiming at attending other needs. And, due to social problems, those who do not have access to leisure, denominate this as a synonym of rest. The authentic leisure activities are left on a second plan.

Since the industrial revolution until the current days, it is notable that there was a considerable increasing of free time for workers. Nevertheless, only part of this time is effectively converted in leisure activities.

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CONCEPTIONS OF LEISURE: A HISTORICAL APPROACH ON SOCIETIES

ABSTRACT

The search for leisure activities is present since humankind was born, and such activities are distinct according to the culture of each society. The present paper analyzes different approaches of leisure, bringing it under the light of several researchers and portraying it in several societies and epochs, comparing it with different social classes, and also approaching leisure in contemporary context, in an analogy with previous epochs. It is concluded that leisure is accessible to only part of population and, despite the reduction of working hours and technological advances, only a small part of the free time is fulfilled with activities characterized as leisure.

KEYWORDS: leisure, free time, society**.**

CONCEPTIONS DU LOISIR: UNE APPROCHE HISTORIQUE À PROPOS DES SOCIÉTÉS

RESUME

La recherche d´activités de loisir remonte à la nuit des temps de l´humanité et ces activités varient suivant la culture de chaque peuple. Cet article présente différentes conceptions du loisir suivant la société, l´époque, la classe sociale. Nous confrontons divers points de vue de chercheurs. Nous traitons aussi du loisir dans le contexte contemporain tout en faisant une analogie historique. Nous en concluons que le loisir est accessible seulement à une petite partie de la population, et malgré la réduction de la journée de travail et des progrés technologiques, seulement une partie du temps libre est consacrée à des activités de loisir.

MOTS-CLES: loisir, temps libre, société.

CONCEPCIONES DEL OCIO: UN ABORDAJE HISTÓRICO ACERCA DE LAS SOCIEDADES

RESUMEN

La búsqueda por actividades de ocio está presente desde el surgimiento de la humanidad, y estas actividades varian conforme la cultura de cada pueblo. El presente artículo realiza diferentes abordajes del ocio, exponiendo lo mismo en la visión de varios pesquisadores, y retractándolo en varias sociedades y épocas, afrontándolo con las diferentes clases sociales, y abordando también el ocio en el contexto contemporáneo, en una analogía con las épocas anteriores. Se concluye que el ocio es accesible apenas a una parcela de la población, y que a pesar de la reducción de la jornada de trabajo y de los avances tecnológicos, apenas parte del tiempo libre es convertido en actividades con carácter de ocio.

PALABRAS-LLAVE: ocio, tiempo libre, sociedad.

CONCEPÇÕES DO LAZER: UMA ABORDAGEM HISTÓRICA ACERCA DAS SOCIEDADES

RESUMO

A busca por atividades de lazer está presente desde o surgimento da humanidade, e tais atividades variam conforme a cultura de cada povo. O presente artigo realiza diferentes abordagens do lazer, expondo o mesmo sob a ótica de vários pesquisadores, e retratando-o em várias sociedades e épocas, confrontando-o com as diferentes classes sociais, e abordando também o lazer no contexto contemporâneo, em uma analogia com as épocas anteriores. Conclui-se que o lazer é acessível apenas a uma parcela da população, e que apesar da redução da jornada de trabalho e dos avanços tecnológicos, apenas parte do tempo livre é preenchido com atividades com caráter de lazer.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: lazer, tempo livre, sociedade.