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Serious academic studies of leisure first appeared in the period after the First World War, when national elites in European countries felt the threat of growing socialist movements and began to regulate the maximum number of working hours. Workers suddenly found themselves with more time away from work, leisure time. In 1919, the 48 hour work week was introduced in Sweden; in 1957 it was reduced to 45 hours, and in 1970 the 40 hour week was established in law. Early leisure research was engaged in detailed surveys of how the workers spent their newfound free time. After World War II leisure studies became more of an independent research topic, with its own experts, codifications and definitions, courses, journals and debates. One feature of the development of leisure time during the postwar decades was the democratization of culture, which influenced leisure studies that was otherwise rich with the focus on the relationship between work and leisure. In the following years, leisure studies developed pretty much in line with the general academic research, often based on sociological theory and methodology. By the mid-1990s leisure research had reached a crossroad, where one direction followed the traditional recreation research path, while the other primarily focused consumption and cultural studies. One who lived through the past 25 years as leisure researcher, and experienced the crisis of leisure studies, is Chris Rojek, whose latest book, *The Labor of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time* (Sage), has a principally theoretical approach to leisure, which he argues should be considered the school of life. Halvdan Haugbakken has read Rojek's book. He has some critical comments, but overall, he has become wiser by reading.

Rojek on Leisure: New Insights and Familiar Stuff

Halvdan Haugbakken

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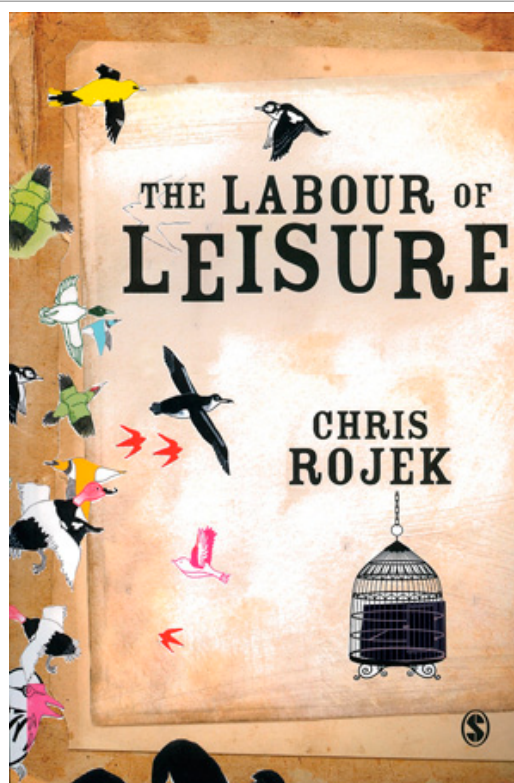
*Chris Rojek***The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time**

208 pages, pb.

London: Sage Publications 2010

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The Labour of Leisure is Chris Rojek's sixth book on the subject of leisure, a topic that he has written extensively on over the past two decades. Rojek is currently professor in sociology and culture at Brunel University in the UK. Celebrity culture, the sociology of leisure and tourism, popular music and the sociology of culture are his main research interests, and *Labour of Leisure* is his latest contribution to this research field. I must stress that *Labour of Leisure* is not the dissemination of results from an EU-funded, multi-disciplinary research project, based on independent data collection processes and analysis. Instead it is that other kind of academic book, a rigidly theoretical text, and much more, a type of philosophical and sociological outline that moves between different perspectives, topics and approaches within the well-ploughed field of leisure studies. In other words, when browsing through the first pages, you depart,



and soon after, realise that you are holding, and being held by, a genuinely academic text.

Rojek's opening chapter starts off interestingly. He seriously corrects our traditional conceptions on leisure, especially the way we connect it with freedom. He states that he intends to apply social and cultural theory on various leisure forms and practices, especially the notions of freedom, choice and self-determination, which he, together with his students, have found to be too opaque. Over the last centuries, however, leisure has been fused with the concept of freedom, which Rojek argues is almost a false belief: "It has buried so deeply into the Western cortex that it has colonised our world-view, supplying us with the whole vocabulary, *mentalité*, and set of discriminations which define leisure". The growth in leisure has meant that the West see it is a separate sphere for relaxation and escape from reality, but in addition, an space where freedom can be attained. But, asks Rojek, freedom from whom, and what? His opening point is that it is rarely connected to an absolute state of voluntarism, but is conditional and very much a question of individual beliefs. Many see leisure as the reward for work; it is a key component in what now is called work-life balance, but is seldom a representation of absolute freedom.

Historically, leisure and leisure practices and activities are subject to various forms of regulations, which can either grow from the grass root level and up between individuals, or are forced upon us by larger state or corporative authorities. But it is more complex; the condition of freedom depends upon a number of aspects, but first and foremost, on

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competent actors and credible citizens of the society in question. Rojek argues, that in order to get this to work, one needs disciplined behaviour, which again is respected and valued by individuals and society at large. Competence requires knowledge on norms and values. Someone is set to monitor human feelings and actions to assess their impact upon others, and discernment to evaluate social situations. In other words, leisure is often sanctioned and subject to a degree of control, especially by the so-called "interventionist state", meaning that absolute freedom within leisure is not a reachable goal. When confronted with such a backdrop, the academic community needs new analytical tools in their study of leisure. Rojek then reintroduces the concepts "emotional intelligence" and "emotional labour". He argues that these are key concepts for studying leisure forms and practices.


The following chapters then quickly develop into a rigid discussion and a professional outline of what is the current status on the concept leisure, and what contemporary leisure studies was, has developed into, and currently is. This historical outline begins with the formation of the leisure society thesis, which originated in mid 1960s and mid 1970s, following what was a restructuring of the Western economy where leisure as a social phenomenon became a more and more dominant aspect of the modern life. Rojek is highly critical and reflective in his approach. He provides the reader with the earliest analytical framework employed in leisure studies to current approaches. He analyses the traditional framework and various perspectives, point out their importance and contribution, but also emphasise their analytical weaknesses and strengths. Finally, he also suggests which perspectives should currently be employed in the study of leisure.

If I am to point out two interesting chapters, it has to be the one on the state and the one on the role of greedy corporations. These two chapters stand apart from rest. Rojek's case on the role of the corporation as an imperative part of the leisure industry, correctly underscores the two-faced, and very often denied superficiality, being on the one hand the facilitator of health problems and environmental destruction, and on the other their misplaced philanthropy for a better world.

My final interpretation of Rojek's work is that I find Rojek's work very interesting and it has provided me with new insights and thoughts. But the strength of *Labour of Leisure* lies in its totality, where it serves as a theoretical backdrop for understanding larger social and societal processes. Rojek's work is truly sociological in its heart, as it takes on big issues. *Labour of Leisure* is however, theoretically strong. But there are some loose ends, which need more tightening. I question the use of data combined with theory. This, sometimes, appears randomised and blindly safeguarded. In addition, the text's main argument about leisure's connection with freedom, and the introduced distinction between "emotional intelligence" and "emotional labour", appear vague and can be difficult to understand.

I read *Labour of Leisure* as an academic appeal for the importance and value of leisure studies. Leisure is too important to be ignored. But the dominant perspectives of the field must change and respond to the changes of the society that they claim to study. This becomes a hallmark for what *Labour of Leisure* is; a synthesised academic text that offers new insight to those not familiar with leisure studies, but familiar stuff in new wrapping for those well versed in the field of leisure studies.

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