CONCEPTS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF LEISURE: STRUCTURING KNOWLEDGE

CONCEITOS E COMPREENSÕES DO LAZER: ESTRUTURANDO O CONHECIMENTO

CONCEPTOS Y COMPRENSIONES DEL OCIO: ESTRUCTURANDO EL CONOCIMIENTO

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a contemporary concept of leisure by integrating established and emerging theoretical perspectives. Through evolutionary concept analysis (Rodgers, 1989) and a integrative review of 223 Web of Science articles, leisure is framed as a phenomenon characterized by three interdependent elements: activity, temporal context, and subjective experience. The definition differentiates leisure from both its consequences (e.g., rest, personal development, social integration) and from work activities - even when pleasurable - thereby challenging reductionist views that conflate leisure with free time, specific activities, or universally positive experiences. By accounting for individual and sociocultural contextual influences, this framework provides conceptual clarity while advancing a pluralistic approach to theorizing leisure. Ultimately, it aims to promote inclusivity and inform equitable leisure policies and practices.

Keywords: Leisure. Concept. Phenomenon. Subjective Experience. Public Policies.

RESUMO

Este estudo propõe um conceito contemporâneo de lazer ao integrar perspectivas teóricas consolidadas e emergentes. Por meio da análise evolutiva de conceitos (Rodgers, 1989) e de uma revisão integrativa de 223 artigos da Web of Science, o lazer é enquadrado como um fenômeno caracterizado por três elementos interdependentes: atividade, contexto

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temporal e experiência subjetiva. A definição diferencia o lazer tanto de suas consequências (por exemplo, descanso, desenvolvimento pessoal, integração social) quanto das atividades laborais – mesmo quando prazerosas –, desafiando assim visões reducionistas que o confundem com tempo livre, atividades específicas ou experiências universalmente positivas. Ao considerar influências individuais e socioculturais, esse referencial oferece clareza conceitual e avança uma abordagem pluralista para a teorização do lazer. Em última análise, busca promover inclusão e orientar políticas e práticas de lazer mais equitativas.

Palavras-chave: Lazer. Conceito. Fenômeno. Experiência Subjetiva. Políticas Públicas.

RESUMEN
Este estudio propone un concepto contemporáneo de ocio al integrar perspectivas teóricas consolidadas y emergentes. Mediante el análisis evolutivo de conceptos (Rodgers, 1989) y una revisión integrativa de 223 artículos de Web of Science, el ocio se enmarca como un fenómeno caracterizado por tres elementos interdependientes: actividad, contexto temporal y experiencia subjetiva. La definición diferencia el ocio tanto de sus consecuencias (por ejemplo, descanso, desarrollo personal, integración social) como de las actividades laborales – incluso cuando son placenteras –, desafiando así visiones reduccionistas que lo confunden con tiempo libre, actividades específicas o experiencias universalmente positivas. Al considerar influencias individuales y socioculturales, este marco ofrece claridad conceptual y promueve un enfoque pluralista para la teorización del ocio. En última instancia, busca fomentar la inclusión y orientar políticas y prácticas de ocio más equitativas.

Palabras clave: Ocio. Concepto. Fenómeno. Experiencia Subjetiva. Políticas Públicas.

1 INTRODUCTION

As noted by Purrington and Hickerson (2013), there is no consensus regarding the concept of leisure or its implications. According to Yeh and Chick (2024, p.480), "leisure carries so many implications and shades of meanings that it defies definition." Several authors argue that the concept of leisure is complex and has evolved over time (Lee et al., 2024), resulting in different, often complementary, perspectives.

This variety of interpretations highlights the need for a concept that synthesizes the understandings developed throughout leisure studies while incorporating new perspectives and insights that reflect the dynamic and diverse experiences of modern life. In this regard, the evolutionary concept analysis approach proposed by Rodgers (1989) offers a theoretical foundation that recognizes concepts as social and historical constructions in constant transformation. It understands them as dynamic, open to multiple forms of expression and diverse cultural and social realities, thus promoting recognition of diversity and respect for difference.

In the case of leisure, this perspective is particularly relevant, as it is a field in permanent evolution, influenced by changes in gender roles, technological advances, flexibilization of working hours, and the growing appreciation of minority rights.

The conceptual diversity in leisure studies is evident in the distinct theoretical approaches that inform the understanding of the phenomenon. Dumazedier (2008, p.34) offers a classical definition that emphasizes freedom and non-obligation, characterizing leisure as "a set of occupations to which the individual may freely devote himself [...] after freeing himself from professional, family, and social obligations," explicitly excluding work from this category. In contrast, Stebbins (2012, p.4) broadens this view by defining leisure as "uncoerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both)," allowing for the possibility that work-related activities may be considered leisure when they generate pleasure and personal fulfillment. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), meanwhile, emphasizes the psychological dimension, describing the subjective experience of flow—a state of complete immersion and satisfaction in activities that balance challenge and skill.

These conceptual divergences are not just theoretical nuances, they carry significant practical consequences, from the formulation of public leisure policies to the understanding of social rights and the organization of social time. This underscores the importance of conceptual clarity for the advancement of knowledge and the field itself.

Such an expanded and socially sensitive understanding directly contributes to the formulation of more effective public policies that consider the specificities of diverse social groups and work toward equitable access to leisure. Therefore, conceptual analysis not only enriches the theoretical field but also offers the possibility for leisure to become increasingly accessible, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of a constantly changing society.

Thus, this work aims to present a concept of leisure that encompasses what is already consolidated in the field across different authors, bringing forth relevant discussions for an updated understanding of the phenomenon. It seeks to consider different experiences, practices, and values related to leisure, forming a pluralistic concept that is sensitive to the diverse ways of being and living of human beings. This promotes a more inclusive and enriching understanding of leisure in contemporary times. By integrating multiple perspectives and acknowledging the inherent complexity of the topic, this proposal aims to contribute to the debate among researchers, professionals, and public policy makers with a more comprehensive and contemporary conceptual framework, valuing leisure as a right, a form of cultural expression, and an instrument for personal and social well-being.

2 METHOD

The method used in this study follows the principles of the evolutionary concept analysis proposed by Rodgers (1989). According to Gunawan et al. (2023), this approach is particularly suitable for investigating dynamic and socially constructed concepts, as it enables tracking their evolution and contextual variations over time. Given its fluid and multifaceted nature, leisure is considered one such concept.

Evolutionary concept analysis does not follow a rigid linear structure; rather, it is a flexible and iterative process that allows the researcher to move between stages as required by the investigation. The method comprises seven stages, which guided the construction of this work: (1) Identify and name the concept of interest; (2) identify substitute terms and relevant uses of the concept; (3) identify and select an appropriate field (sample) for data collection (4) identify the attributes of the concept; (5) identify references, antecedents, and consequences of the concept, where possible; (6) identify related concepts e (7) identify a model case for the concept (Rodgers, 1989).

In the first stage, identifying and naming the concept of interest, the term "leisure" was selected. This choice was essential for guiding subsequent phases, ensuring focus and coherence in the investigation.

In the second stage, identifying substitute terms and relevant uses of the concept, resources such as Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Thesaurus, and the Sketch Engine platform were consulted. This stage aimed to identify synonyms, linguistic variations, and the use of the term in different contexts.

In the third stage, identifying and selecting an appropriate field for data collection, the analytical corpus was defined as scientific articles published in the Web of Science between 2016 and 2025. These articles were filtered based on the presence of the term "leisure" in the title and "concept" in the abstract. The broad search sought to encompass diverse conceptualizations of the term, with the only exclusion criterion being lack of relation to the theme of leisure.

In the fourth stage, identifying the attributes of the concept, essential attributes of leisure were extracted from the selected articles and analyzed to form the foundation of the proposed concept.

In the fifth stage, identifying references, antecedents, and consequences of the concept, authors cited in the selected articles were critically analyzed to determine whether their aspects should be incorporated into the proposed conceptualization.

In the sixth stage, identifying related concepts, brief explanations were presented concerning activity, time, moment, experience, and the individual's free and spontaneous will.

In the seventh and final stage, identifying a model case for the concept, examples were discussed to demonstrate its practical application in different contexts. This phase was developed throughout the writing of the paper.

The application of this methodology enabled a deep, critical, and contextualized analysis of the concept of leisure, respecting its complexity and transformative potential. As a result, the study aimed not only to describe the current state of the concept in the literature but also to propose a more inclusive formulation—one that is sensitive to human diversity and relevant to contemporary challenges.

3 RESULTS

The results will be presented in each session, addressing distinct stages of Rodgers' methodology, yet emphasizing their interconnection, a reflection of the methodology's inherent flexibility and iterative nature.

3.1 IDENTIFYING AND NAMING THE CONCEPT OF INTEREST

Following Rodgers' (1989) stages, the study begins with identifying the concept of interest: the term "leisure."

3.2 IDENTIFYING SUBSTITUTE TERMS AND RELEVANT USES OF THE CONCEPT

To facilitate comprehension, the two stages will be presented separately.

3.2.1 Substitute Terms

To identify substitute terms for "leisure," three procedures were carried out. The first involved a search in the MeSH; the second, in the ERIC Thesaurus; and the third, in the Sketch Engine Thesaurus, using the corpus formed by the articles selected in the literature review of this study and the corpus offered by the platform with online content.

When the term "Leisure" was searched in MeSH, it returned "Leisure Activities," defined as "voluntary use of free time for activities outside the daily routine." The entry terms included: "Activities, Leisure," "Activity, Leisure," "Leisure Activity," "Leisure," and "Leisures." Previously indexed terms were "Hobbies" (1966–1969) and "Recreation" (1966–1969), defined respectively as "leisure activities engaged in for pleasure" and "activity engaged in for pleasure."

In the ERIC Thesaurus—used as a descriptor in education and human sciences—the term "leisure," when searched with synonyms and deprecated terms included, yielded related entries such as "leisure counseling," "leisure education," "leisure time," "recreation," "holidays," "recreational activities," "vacations," "work ethic," and "leisure time reading."

It is evident that although several terms relate to "leisure," such as "holidays," "recreation," "hobbies," and "vacations," each functions only as a partial substitute, limited to specific uses and failing to encompass the full complexity and multifaceted nature of leisure.

The term "hobbies" refers to ongoing, structured leisure activities requiring active and specialized engagement, thus excluding occasional or unstructured practices and those not linked to personal identity.

Similarly, "holidays" and "vacations" cannot be regarded as synonyms, as they denote formal periods of labor or academic interruption, with defined temporal boundaries, and do not inherently include experiential or activity-based components. This limitation overlooks the subjective nature of leisure and may even involve social or domestic obligations that contradict its essence.

Regarding "recreation," the term typically refers to organized leisure activities conducted by professionals, characterized by deliberate structure and purpose. Although recreation represents an important facet of leisure practices, it cannot be used synonymously, as it excludes spontaneous or individually undertaken activities.

Results from the Sketch Engine platform, using the academic corpus, associated 169 words with the term "leisure." The ten most frequent were: activity, time, experience, work, life, study, research, practice, participation, and space. While none of these can be considered synonyms, the first three—activity, time, and experience—clearly reinforce the elements prioritized in this article's conceptualization.

The thesaurus results from Sketch Engine using the "English Web 2021 (enTenTen21)" corpus suggested recreation, convenience, hospitality, relaxation, and tourism as the top five synonyms for leisure. None of these terms, however, serve as true synonyms. Convenience pertains more to ease and practicality in routine situations, diverging from the notions of free time and pleasure integral to leisure. Hospitality involves social or commercial reception and service, being more related to industry than to subjective leisure experiences. Relaxation, while potentially part of leisure, is confined to states of rest or detachment, overlooking leisure activities that require effort or active engagement. Tourism, though frequently associated with leisure, does not encompass it fully, as leisure also occurs in everyday, non-itinerating contexts.

3.2.2 Relevant Uses of the Concept

Analyzing the relevant uses of the term *leisure* requires consideration of four fundamental dimensions: its occurrence in official government documents, its use in academic contexts, its media representation, and its meaning in everyday life. These domains provide complementary perspectives and enable critical analyses for a better understanding of the concept, although the scope of this study does not allow for a deep methodological exploration of all of them—an endeavor that should be pursued in future research.

In the realm of official documents, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) stands out as a pivotal reference—both for its international reach and its influence on national legislation. Article 24 establishes leisure as an inalienable right, stating: "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." Although it does not explicitly define the concept, the UDHR distinguishes leisure from rest and links it to social well-being.

In the academic sphere, the literature review reveals specific forms of leisure that may be regarded as typologies, marked by terms such as: *serious leisure*, *deviant leisure*, *extended leisure*, *activist leisure*, *casual leisure*, *polluted leisure*, *family leisure*, *educational leisure*, *sustainable leisure*, *intergenerational leisure*, *mass leisure*, *contemplative leisure*, *digital leisure*, and *urban leisure*. While still emerging in scholarly debate, these appropriations are particularly significant as analytical categories for understanding contemporary leisure practices. Moreover, during the article search in the Web of Science (WOS), the platform suggested related keywords such as *serious leisure*, *digital leisure*, *family leisure*, *leisure education*, *leisure constraints*, *leisure time*, *free time*, *leisure activity*, and *leisure activities*—some of which overlap with those identified above.

To investigate representations of leisure in media and everyday usage, the tool Sketch Engine was employed, specifically the Word Sketch function using the "English Web 2021 (enTenTen21)" corpus. Lexical analysis of the term *leisure* revealed five main associations: *time*, *good*, *something*, *activity*, and *hard work*. These frequent occurrences suggest that, in part, popular understanding aligns with academic views by connecting leisure to temporal ("time"), qualitative ("good"), and practical ("activity") dimensions.

However, a deeper contextual analysis of the excerpts where these terms appeared uncovered a significant discursive duality. On one hand, there is a discourse that positively values leisure, presenting it as a source of individual and collective benefits. On the other, a capitalist-oriented discourse emerged, associating excessive leisure with unproductivity—suggesting that only hard work leads to material success and personal achievement. This contradiction highlights the ideological tensions embedded in contemporary social representations of leisure.

3.3 IDENTIFYING AND SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE FIELD FOR DATA COLLECTION

To conduct the literature review, the Web of Science (WOS) database was selected, recognized for its multidisciplinary scope and rigorous indexing of high-impact journals. The search strategy focused on articles published between 2016 and 2025, containing the term *leisure* in the title and *concept* in the abstract, across English, Portuguese, and Spanish languages. The full search link is available here: https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/7f7c8a32-a63f-4b10-9a24-10ce1227ad8f-016adff46f/relevance/1.

The search returned 282 articles: 261 in English, 11 in Portuguese, and 10 in Spanish. Of these, one article was duplicated and 56 were excluded due to restricted access requiring payment—unavailable through institutional access and not provided freely by the authors. No article was excluded during the qualitative analysis, as all addressed leisure as a central research topic. Thus, the remaining 225 articles were included in the analysis, aiming to map the breadth of the concept of leisure across academic and geographic contexts. This approach aligns with Rodgers' (1989) methodological framework, which emphasizes the importance of capturing the diversity of a concept's definitions and applications to understand its evolution.

3.4 IDENTIFYING THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CONCEPT

To fulfill the fourth stage of Rodgers' (1989) methodology, identifying the attributes of the concept, a detailed analysis was conducted on selected excerpts from the literature review that helped define leisure. Priority was given to passages in which authors directly described leisure, even briefly, or explored its key features, dimensions, and properties. Seminal authors cited within argumentative sections were also considered, as their perspectives contributed to the development of the articles. Therefore, their original works were consulted to support the structure of this study—particularly relevant given that much of the scholarly production on leisure is found in books, not only in journal articles. Another work taken into consideration was that of Veal (1992), in which the author extracts from the literature several concepts of leisure from 29 different sources and authors between the years 1934 and 1990.

Although Auger et al. (2020, p. 229) argue that "attempting to define the notion of leisure is, in itself, a perilous adventure because of the historical evolution of this term and its fundamentally social and contextual character," results show that leisure is a polysemic and multidimensional concept, whose core attributes maintain relative stability over time and across different theoretical traditions, even as cultural nuances emerge.

As noted by Yeh and Chick (2024, p. 480), "Leisure and recreation researchers have acknowledged at least three general approaches in viewing leisure: (1) leisure as free or discretionary time, (2) leisure as a particular type of activity, and (3) leisure as a condition or a state of being." This tripartite framework is also considered by Getz and Page (2016), who synthesize leisure's multidimensionality as "an activity, free time, a meaningful and satisfying experience, or a combination of these" (as cited in Lehto et al., p. 411). Similarly, Kono et al.

(2025, p. 391) highlight these aspects: "different aspects of leisure (i.e., free time, activities, and subjective experiences)."

Leisure as free time appears as the most widespread notion—for instance, in Veal's definition (as cited in Lee et al., 2024, p. 1), it is "free or spare time away from the demands of work and duty." While leisure is not equated directly with free time, the association is reinforced by Davidovitch and Soen (p. 494), who describe leisure as "a function of free time." It is essential to note that free time encompasses more than just relief from work—it includes other personal obligations as well (Bhandari, 2023).

However, while free time is commonly cited in definitions of leisure, this conceptual proposal treats it as a necessary condition—not a synonym. Free time may be used in ways that do not involve leisure, such as addictive behaviors or inertia, a topic explored in detail in section 3.8.

Leisure as an activity constitutes the second key dimension. According to Cho (2021), it is "an activity carried out during free time and driven by intrinsic motivation that results in pleasure." Stebbins (2012, p. 4) likewise defines leisure as "un-coerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both)." This view is echoed by Williams (2020, p. 207), who emphasizes consensus that leisure involves activity "freely chosen (noncoerced) and primarily intrinsically motivated.".

Leisure as experience is emphasized by Hänninen et al. (2025, p. 66), who write: "leisure is, above all, determined by motivation and thereby meanings attached to the notion of time and activity." This aligns with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *flow*, describing leisure as a state in which a balance of challenge and skill leads to deeply satisfying experiences. Csikszentmihalyi critiques passive leisure practices (e.g., automatically watching TV) for often failing to generate *flow* or lasting fulfillment.

Even when leisure is conceptualized using only one of the classical dimensions—free time, activity, or subjective experience, it is rarely isolated. The reviewed definitions show these aspects are frequently interconnected, revealing the structural complexity of the concept.

This is exemplified in the definition proposed by Dumazedier (1967), a foundational figure in leisure studies, who viewed leisure as a freely chosen activity distinct from work, family, and social obligations. He outlined three essential functions: relaxation (physical and

mental recovery), entertainment (escape from daily pressures), and personal development (spontaneous social participation and creative expression) (Dumazedier, 1967).

In the psychology of leisure, Neulinger (1974) developed a theory centered on the individual's subjective experience, defining leisure through two core criteria: perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation, forming a psychological state of leisure. Neulinger (1981) also examined how factors such as age, gender, religion, and socioeconomic status shape the way leisure is experienced, pointing to diverse attitudes on the topic.

Iso-Ahola (1979) empirically validated key elements of leisure using models by Kelly and Neulinger. He confirmed leisure hinges on three dimensions: perceived freedom (the most influential), intrinsic motivation, and detachment from work. Notably, for women, activities with minimal connection to work were more consistently associated with leisure— even when there was no freedom of choice.

Adding to the interplay among leisure, work, time, and experience, Pieper (1998) conceptualized leisure as a cultural dimension with intrinsic human value, representing a contemplative and celebratory attitude that contrasts with the utilitarian logic of modern life.

An important aspect introduced later in this study is discussed by Mowatt (2023, p. 43), who states: "While the experience of leisure is individualistic, the impact and implications have never been." This tension between individual and collective dimensions is further reflected in Elias and Dunning's conception (2008, p. 88), describing leisure as "an enclave within the 'spare-time spectrum' wherein people can choose 'socially permitted self-centeredness in a non-leisure world'" (as cited in Thurston & Bloyce, 2020, p. 1618). This perspective was incorporated into this article's conceptual proposal and will be further explored.

The definition by Godbey (1985, p. 9, as cited in Veal, 1992, p. 4) is the one that best integrates the factors highlighted so far. According to the author, "Leisure is living in relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one's culture and physical environment so as to be able to act from internally compelling love in ways which are personally pleasing, intuitively worthwhile, and provide a basis for faith."

The phrase "living in relative freedom" suggests temporal availability, although it does not specify time as an empirical category. The action is present in "act from internally compelling love," though this also does not specify activity as an empirical category. The personal meaning and the pursuit of pleasure are strongly emphasized in "personally pleasing" and "intuitively worthwhile."

In addition, the author highlights external compulsions in "external compulsive forces of one's culture and physical environment." While he adds this external coercion—perhaps referring to work and other social obligations, and referring to time once more—internal coercion is not addressed.

In conclusion, although Purrington and Hickerson (2013) point to the lack of consensus in the field (as cited in Yeh & Chick, 2024) contemporary research not only validates the three traditional dimensions of leisure—time, activity, and experience—but also adds layers of complexity by framing it as a social phenomenon of personal fulfillment with societal impact and influence.

3.5 IDENTIFYING REFERENCES, ANTECEDENTS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONCEPT

3.5.1 Identification of references

The identification of the most frequently cited references in the field of study was conducted using all articles retrieved from the Web of Science database. The search criteria included the term *"leisure"* in the title and the word *"concept"* in the abstract, across publications in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, considering articles published between 2016 and 2025. A total of 282 articles were analyzed with no exclusions, as the data was not dependent on paywalled content.

Search results were exported from the Web of Science platform in plain text format. The file was then opened in VOSviewer (version 16.20.00) using the following settings: "create a map based on bibliographic data", "read data from a bibliographic database," type of analysis: co-citation; unit of analysis: cited authors. Data processing resulted in a network comprising 10,059 authors, with the most cited listed in the table below:

Table 1

Position	Author	Number of times it is cited
1	Stebbins, Robert Alan	176
3	Rojek, Chris	53
2	Veal, Anthony James	43
4	Iwasaki, Yoshitaka	42
5	Shaw, Susan Margaret	39

Stebbins (2020) stands out as the founding theorist of the *Serious Leisure* P*erspective*, distinguishing between serious leisure, casual leisure, and project-based leisure. Through his perspective, Stebbins (2020) provided a robust theoretical framework for comprehensively understanding leisure as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by social and subjective realities. His framework has been widely adopted across disciplines, making him an essential reference in contemporary leisure studies.

Anthony James Veal advocates a dynamic vision of leisure, analyzing it as a social right (Veal, 2015), an economic phenomenon (Veal, 2006), and a historical construct (Veal, 2019). His work also examines the balance between work and personal life (Veal, 2020).

Chris Rojek, meanwhile, explores the contradictions of leisure under capitalism. According to Rojek (2010, 2014), leisure in capitalist societies, while seemingly a space of freedom, is constrained by its instrumentalization and the logic of consumption, functioning as a mechanism for reproducing existing social structures and limiting its emancipatory potential.

Yoshitaka Iwasaki is recognized for his research on leisure as a tool for coping, psychosocial well-being, and social inclusion, particularly among marginalized groups. His studies demonstrate how leisure activities promote joyful living among individuals with mental illnesses (Iwasaki et al., 2015). Additionally, Iwasaki (2007, 2016) highlights leisure's role in constructing existential meaning through identity formation, social bonds, and spiritual development. He also investigates at-risk youth, even when leisure is not the explicit focus (Iwasaki, 2015; Iwasaki et al., 2014).

Susan Shaw, drawing on Giddens' notion of agency—understood not as absolute freedom but as the socially constituted capacity to act, through which individuals reproduce and transform structures in their everyday practices—adopts a feminist perspective to examine minority groups, particularly women. Within this framework, she conceives of leisure as a space of resistance to gender norms through human agency (Shaw, 2006). Shaw (2000) critiques the lack of social impact in leisure research, famously asking: "If our research is relevant, why is nobody listening?" (p. 147). Her studies highlight contradictions, such as how families use leisure to teach values while reproducing gender inequalities (Henderson & Shaw, 2006; Shaw & Dawson, 2010). Her work spans topics from ethics of care (Shaw, 2010) to structural barriers (Shaw & Henderson, 2005), revealing leisure as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by historical and social forces (Shaw, 1985).

The significant gap between Stebbins' 176 citations and the 53 attributed to the second most-cited author underscores the depth and systematic approach of Stebbins' conceptualization. His taxonomy articulates multiple dimensions of leisure in contemporary society with a holistic vision that transcends context-specific analyses and serves a wide range of scholarly domains.

Although this reference analysis identified leading contemporary authors in leisure studies, some fundamental theorists cited earlier during the discussion of conceptual attributes did not appear among the most cited. This gap reinforces the relevance of the present study, as many articles reviewed lacked a clear conceptualization of leisure—often assuming an implicit consensus on its meaning. Additionally, it highlights the interdependence of all stages of Rodgers' (1989) methodology in building a comprehensive concept of leisure.

3.5.2 Consequences of the Concept

The evolution of the concept of leisure reveals that its essence may not have changed radically, but rather incorporated new ideas that have significantly broadened the interpretation of the phenomenon. From the initial formulations to contemporary approaches, there is a noticeable continuity in the understanding of leisure as activity, time, or experience distinct from daily obligations. What has changed are the layers of analysis added to this foundation, allowing leisure to be understood simultaneously as a social right, a space for identity construction, and a field of political dispute. This conceptual expansion did not distort the original core, but enriched its interpretation by incorporating critical and contextual dimensions previously neglected.

The main consequences of this cumulative evolution manifest at three levels: individual, social, and political. On the individual level, the incorporation of the experiential perspective has transformed the understanding of how leisure contributes to human development. Socially, critiques of the commodification of leisure and analyses of gender have revealed how leisure practices reproduce or challenge power structures. Politically, the conception of leisure as a universal right has supported demands for more inclusive public policies, demonstrating that the conceptual expansion has had tangible impacts on the organization of contemporary societies.

This trajectory shows that the strength of the concept of leisure lies precisely in its capacity to absorb new interpretations without losing its essence. Recent contributions have

not invalidated classical formulations, but have re-signified them in light of new social contexts.

3.6 IDENTIFYING CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE CONCEPT OF INTEREST

To better understand the concept of leisure, it is necessary to comprehend the terms used in its conceptualization, such as work, subsistence, time, pleasure, freedom, coercion, and obligation.

Work can be understood as an activity aimed at production that enables sustenance (Kelly, 2009). Time is understood, in its common popular usage, as something with measurable duration in which actions unfold. Pleasure can be interpreted as a subjective sensation of satisfaction or well-being, a feeling favorable to the individual. Freedom may be defined as the absence of restrictions, coercion, and internal pressures that inhibit the individual's will to decide and perform activities, or that compel one to decide and perform activities that do not arise spontaneously. Coercion is seen as external pressure that limits autonomous choices. Space is characterized by its physical or social context where activities occur. Finally, obligation should be understood as a commitment that demands fulfillment, regardless of individual will.

3.7 IDENTIFYING A PROTOTYPE CASE OF THE CONCEPT

As for the final stage, identifying a prototype case of the concept, it was considered throughout the writing of the article and appears at specific points to explain the conceptualization. However, it is essential that the academic community, researchers, and scholars of leisure conduct critiques, analyses, and discussions of this study, as well as present new examples that deepen the proposed conceptualization. Only then can the concept of leisure presented in this article be legitimized.

3.8 THE CONCEPT OF LEISURE

With the aim of broadening the understanding and capacity for intervention regarding the phenomenon, contributing to the development of scientific studies, implementation of public and private projects, creation of legislation, and other related aspects involving the topic of leisure, this work, while considering post-industrial capitalist societies, proposes the following concept of leisure:

A phenomenon that simultaneously depends on activity, temporal context, and subjective experience. It occurs during the occupation of an individual's discretionary time in search of pleasure, according to their free and spontaneous will, with this "discretionary time" characterized by the voluntary interruption or temporary suspension of professional, social, or subsistence obligations; and their "free and spontaneous will" defined by the absence of coercion or pressure, whether external or internalized.

A significant detail regarding this conceptual formulation is that it distinguishes the concept of leisure from its consequences and the impact of this phenomenon on society. This distinction is important and aims to avoid confusion, seeking a clearer and more precise approach for research on the topic. Therefore, statements asserting that leisure experiences contribute to personal growth, provide rest, support workforce recovery, assist in community building, or serve minority group resistance are avoided, as these are effects of leisure and not constitutive elements of its concept. Furthermore, this study rejects the equivalence between leisure and free time, leisure and activity, and leisure and experience—concepts established in the classical tripartite definition of the term. It is asserted that leisure simultaneously depends on these structures but is not equivalent to them, since equivalence leads to reduction.

Often, to simplify communication—as is the case in this article—researchers refer to activities or moments as leisure, yet these are activities or moments *of* leisure. Such communication should be interpreted by scholars and professionals in the field based on the concept, understanding that leisure is a complex phenomenon that simultaneously depends on these structures (activity, temporal context, and subjective experience), but is not reducible to any of them individually, as explained below.

The mere existence of free time does not constitute leisure, as this time may be occupied with various other activities serving purposes beyond the pursuit of pleasure, such as those fitting inertia or behavioral addiction.

Inertia is expressed when the individual occupies their free time in a passive and non-intentional manner. Classic examples include lying down without a specific goal, mindlessly scrolling through social media without genuine interest, or watching television programs without attention, merely as background noise. These behaviors indicate a time occupation that does not stem from conscious choice or the pursuit of satisfaction, but rather an absence of active engagement with the available time.

Behavioral addiction represents another form of non-leisure occupation of free time. In this case, activities such as compulsive video gaming, impulsive eating, or obsessively checking digital messages may offer momentary distraction but do not constitute leisure. The core characteristic of these behaviors is the automatic repetition motivated more by compulsion than by free choice or the pursuit of authentic pleasure. This distinction is crucial because it reveals how free time may be "filled" without necessarily becoming leisure, and thus the equivalence of free or available time to leisure is mistaken. While leisure presupposes agency, intentionality, and the pursuit of satisfaction, these other forms of occupying free time are marked precisely by the absence of these essential elements.

Nor is leisure merely an activity. Going to the gym, for example, is an activity that may be considered work, social obligation, health maintenance, or leisure depending on the temporal context and pressures to which the individual is subjected. It may be work if it is part of an athlete's training; or a social obligation if connected to pressure for maintaining an image or accompanying a partner; working out may also be classified as subsistence (health maintenance), particularly for an elderly individual following medical advice; or it may be considered leisure if the prerequisites are met.

Reflecting on subjective experience reveals scenarios that contradict its direct equivalence to leisure. It is desirable to feel pleasure when fulfilling obligations, just as it is possible to feel no pleasure in a leisure situation. Working with a well-integrated team that delivers results, seeing students overcome difficulties, or being a cook who finds joy in others savoring their food are all pleasurable scenarios within the realm of work, though they are still work activities. Frustration during leisure is also possible—such as attending a concert with poorly balanced sound or fulfilling the dream of visiting a specific country only to find that the weather prevents various excursions. These are just a few examples that demonstrate the impossibility of equating leisure with subjective experience in an isolated and simplistic manner.

Understanding these differences is key in reflecting on why public policies and social interventions should consider not only the availability of time, but also the conditions that allow time to be used satisfactorily for leisure.

Breaking down the terms used in the concept, "phenomenon" broadens the understanding of leisure by positioning it as an integral part of culture and society. It is not treated solely as a subjective occurrence but is made explicit in its dialectical interaction with

culture, society, economy, and the individual. The use of this term in the conceptualization strengthens critical approaches by offering a theoretical basis that allows leisure to be examined in its entirety— as a socially situated practice, shaped by cultural, economic, and political dimensions.

The term "activity" refers to the concrete actions performed by the individual—these actions are tangible and observable, representing the materialization of leisure in daily life. Included in this category are activities such as "doing nothing" or contemplative leisure practices like watching the sunset. This term is useful for leisure studies that aim to categorize the various possibilities of leisure and improve or expand the provision of leisure opportunities.

The term "temporal context" refers to the deliberate use of chronological time (measurable and objective) by the individual, always considered in relation to social structures and practices. It serves researchers who seek to empirically study diverse leisure activities, as well as those examining the balance of time distribution between work and personal life.

The term "subjective experience" emphasizes the individual's personal perception of leisure, thereby creating space for research related to leisure quality, satisfaction with the activity, and individual agency.

The expression "free and spontaneous will" is closely tied to the "absence of coercion or pressure, whether external or internalized." From this analysis, five conclusions stand out: (1) for leisure to be considered, the individual must not face punishment or sanctions for refusing to participate; otherwise, it constitutes a disguised obligation. (2) The freedom to choose whether or not to participate in leisure requires awareness and reflection on personal motivations, avoiding actions driven by inertia or lack of understanding of one's own preferences. (3) The subject's autonomy is not absolute—it is bounded by cultural factors, the availability of leisure options, and the accessible resources for creating new possibilities, aligning with the concept of "individual agency" (Bhandari, 2023).

Considering external and internal pressure: (4) External pressures manifest in multiple forms: when others influence participation in activities against the individual's will (e.g., friends urging one to attend unwanted events); when deep-rooted social expectations exist (such as the obligation to attend family gatherings); or when institutional structures create expectations, whose frustration can diminish an individual's image (such as not having a

hobby). Another relevant example occurs in the corporate environment, where happy hours may become disguised social obligations.

(5) Internal pressures, in turn, arise from various psychological mechanisms: fear of social exclusion; internalization of cultural norms (such as the belief that certain activities are "more appropriate"); anxiety over missing opportunities (FOMO — Fear of Missing Out); or self-coercion driven by productivity standards that hinder true disconnection. These pressures may prevent individuals from engaging in leisure or may lead to performative leisure behaviors, lacking genuine interest or satisfaction.

The concept defended in this article emphasizes the "voluntary interruption or temporary suspension of professional, familial, social, or subsistence obligations." 'Voluntary interruption' is understood as the active and conscious decision by the individual to pause their obligations, evidencing their free will. "Temporary suspension" refers to periods in which the context naturally releases the individual from demands, such as vacation or the act of dropping children off at school. While the former highlights personal agency, the latter recognizes that social structures also create opportunities for leisure.

Referring to obligation in the context of leisure is problematic, as the line distinguishing what is considered an obligation or not is highly subjective and varies according to individual and cultural circumstances. Hence, joint work between participants and researchers is needed to frame the study of leisure within the context in which it is being explored or applied. Emphasis should also be placed on recognizing differences among individuals—men, women, children, Black people, white people, Indigenous peoples, the wealthy, the poor, and other distinctions—since only through this consideration will expectations of social roles be addressed and leisure truly understood.

It is important to note that discretionary time involves not being occupied with subsistence tasks. Therefore, even an unemployed person can experience leisure—contrary to certain older texts. Another important detail lies in the analysis of subsistence activities that may become leisure depending on the practitioner's perspective. For instance, eating is a biological necessity, yet dining with friends may be perceived as leisure. It is the transformation of biological needs (such as eating) into socially meaningful practices (such as a shared dinner with friends) that, when interpreted by the practitioner, allows the activity to be classified as leisure.

It is undeniable that leisure should be treated as an intrinsically personal experience. Only the individual can determine whether they are engaged in an activity of their own free

and spontaneous will, without any form of external pressure or internalized coercion. This perspective reinforces the notion that leisure is, above all, a state of mind, as argued by Mannell and Kleiber (1997) and Pieper (1998, p. 50), as seen in the quote: *"Leisure, then, as a condition of the soul (and we must firmly keep to this assumption, since leisure is not necessarily present in all the external things like breaks, time off, weekend, vacation, (...)"*. As highlighted by Kelly (2019), the essence of leisure lies in subjectivity, not activity. A dinner, for example, may be a leisure experience for someone who freely chose to attend, but merely a social obligation for someone attending out of duty.

However, this does not mean leisure occurs in isolation. It can be shared and shaped by social, cultural, and structural factors, and is thus also understood as a collective phenomenon. Therefore, individual leisure experiences do not exclude the presence of another participant or the relationship to the social context, which can both shape and be shaped by such experiences.

In this sense, the term "leisure opportunities" becomes more appropriate to highlight the phenomenon of leisure that does not take place within the individual, but rather reflects social practices, governmental responsibilities, and private sector investments in creating spaces, infrastructure, and public policies that facilitate access to leisure. While leisure itself pertains to the individual's subjective experience, leisure opportunities involve the material and social conditions that make such experiences possible.

Regarding the pursuit of pleasure, it is observed that it is not always achieved in leisure activities—such as reading a book whose ending proves disappointing or traveling to a beach on a rainy day. However, it is emphasized that the defining criterion lies in the initial intention to seek pleasure, not in its actual attainment. Therefore, even when the result does not generate satisfaction, the activity is still characterized as leisure.

4 DISCUSSION

The proposed conceptualization offers a useful framework for investigations into leisure. By incorporating the dimensions of activity and time (tangible and categorizable), experience (subjective and qualitative), and phenomenon (sociocultural and dialectical), the concept enables multifaceted analyses, adapting both to empirical studies requiring operationalization into measurable variables and to critical approaches that explore leisure as a space for social reproduction or transformation. Additionally, the concept avoids reducing

leisure to a mere tool serving other ends, thereby distancing it from utilitarian or functionalist logics.

This article did not aim to analyze or restructure specific leisure sub-concepts that highlight nuances and particularities, such as "serious leisure," "deviant leisure," "family leisure," "extended leisure," "activism leisure," "casual leisure," "polluted leisure," "educational leisure," "sustainable leisure," "intergenerational leisure," "mass leisure," "contemplative leisure," "digital leisure," and "urban leisure." However, it is argued that these terms deserve emphasis and attention from researchers due to their relevance to the field.

Understanding that leisure involves the pursuit of pleasure—and that pleasure is not always found in the activity itself—opens space for a new perspective in leisure research: that of "frustrated leisure." This perspective may contribute to the development of individual autonomy and to improvements in how leisure opportunities are offered.

It is necessary to approach leisure from ethical and legal perspectives, particularly as a fundamental social right, especially when considering the existence of deviant leisure. Leisure practices must be continuously analyzed with the aim of promoting both the common good and individual rights. As such, some practices may be decriminalized, while others may become criminalized—a process already witnessed in certain countries, such as the banning of smoking in enclosed public spaces and the legalization of recreational cannabis use—and which may repeat itself across other social practices.

Another relevant point lies in the fact that leisure is verified from the individual's standpoint, which should not hinder or limit efforts to offer leisure activities—on the contrary, this should amplify the effort to understand people's needs and desires, thereby opening the field of leisure in the right direction regarding the provision of leisure activities and moments. That way, all different individuals may choose what truly characterizes leisure for themselves.

The critique of the prioritization of obligations over leisure within the concept proposed by this article is valid. However, this hierarchy arises from cultural and economic values that prioritize productivity over well-being. In capitalist societies influenced by the logic of the Industrial Revolution, leisure is often considered secondary—a reward for fulfilling obligations. Although some individuals now challenge this logic by seeking balance between work and leisure, denying this hierarchy today is to ignore the structures underpinning the current economic and social system.

The concept proposed by this article does not consider activities involving familial or social obligations as leisure, which contradicts broader approaches to the topic.

Nevertheless, this does not mean individuals cannot feel pleasure in activities they feel obligated to perform. It is possible—and even desirable—to seek pleasure in helping children with homework, on family outings, at work, or even during bathing, since leisure should not be the sole source of pleasure in one's life.

The manner in which a person performs these obligatory activities may be decisive in whether they are pleasurable or not: a hot bath, for instance, may bring more pleasure than a cold one on a chilly day, yet it is not automatically characterized as leisure unless the individual, aware of the definition of leisure, identifies it as such and the bath does not represent maintenance of health. A bath at a spa, for example, may more easily be classified as a leisure activity than a bath taken at home. As mentioned earlier, it is the social meaning—as interpreted by the individual—that defines an activity as leisure.

This work acknowledges that the multifaceted nature of leisure manifests itself distinctly across different fields of knowledge. While it seeks a comprehensive conceptualization, its analysis is primarily circumscribed to contemporary Western perspectives, which privilege dimensions such as economy, pleasure, and personal development, without fully encompassing existing cultural variations. This delimitation highlights the importance of future investigations capable of articulating these multiple dimensions of the leisure phenomenon in different sociocultural contexts, rethinking contemporary leisure from holistic perspectives that value active, inclusive, and meaningful practices, integrating technology, education, culture, health, and sustainability.

It is worth noting that Rodgers' approach does not propose a definitive concept (Rodgers, 1989), which is why it is expected that researchers and interested individuals will follow and deepen the debate, contributing collaboratively to the advancement of leisure conceptualization and of the terms that underscore its various aspects—thus expanding knowledge in the field.

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