



Leisure through Community Engagement using the Lens of Symbolic Interactionism and Evolutionary Theories

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ABSTRACT – Social wellbeing is known to accrue from leisure activity and is particularly beneficial in enhancing quality of life in the community. Leisure is a core factor of having quality life. Community members today experience numerous stresses most of the time that they may lack time for leisure. With the so many things occupying the mind such as financial, social problems and the like, the time for reflection has been forgotten. It is the purpose of the paper to determine the existing activities for community engagement towards leisure and its correlation to wellbeing. Furthermore, it seeks to look at the changes of the outlook of the members involved using the lens of the evolutionary theory. Local community days and festivals are the focus of the study by means of participant observation and actor-oriented perspectives. A qualitative paradigm is followed in the study. In-depth interviews are done to community members representing the youth, the local government unit, and other active stakeholders of barangay Tuntungin, Los Baños, Laguna. Oftentimes, the overindulgence in sensual pleasures and materialistic preoccupations takes a person away from a leisured experience which is essential for enhancing the quality of life. It is equally true that leisure and our leisure dreams are deeply related.

Keywords: confidence, construction of meaning, satisfaction, social wellbeing, stress

INTRODUCTION

Social wellbeing can be seen through the level of interaction one has with the other members of the community. It is affected by the kind of relationship one person can have with the rest of the family, neighbors and the community. Social wellbeing is known to accrue from leisure activity and is particularly beneficial in enhancing quality of life among immediate neighbors in the community specifically in relation to mental health (Elliot et al. 2014). Leisure is considered important for health and well-being. It is the core factor of having quality life because it is the essence of social life to enhance social capital in order to attain its potential in the society (Forcinia et al. 2013).

While community members today are undergoing numerous demands most of the time, leisure is taken for granted. Sometimes, one's concept of leisure is affected by media, technology and essence of time. With the so many things occupying the mind especially how to survive economically, the time for reflection has been forgotten. Involving in a leisure activity has an impact on the overall satisfaction of the community dwellers. Trainor et al. (2010) discussed that individuals who are psychologically healthy tend to be involved in structured leisure activities. Engaging in leisure enhances satisfaction of living in a community. The identity of belonging to the place can be further helped by engaging in community activities.

To cite this paper: Buot, M., Custodio, R.R. and Mantillas, C. 2014. Leisure through Community Engagement using the Lens of Symbolic Interactionism and Evolutionary Theories. *Journal of Nature Studies*. 13 (2): 56-67

Two theoretical perspectives helped in the understanding of social wellbeing in the light of leisure in the community. Symbolic Interactionism (SI) theory will be used to decipher the different meanings to symbols due to past interaction of each individual (Blumer 1969). On the other hand, evolutionary theories depict an assumption that societies gradually change from simple system into a complex one (Lewis & Steinmo 2006). Theorists predict to have a positive change but not all planned progress were covered.

The current study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What is a quality life?; 2) What is the concept of leisure?; 3) How helpful are the existing leisure activities by the Local Government Unit (LGU) to the communities?; 4) How do leisure constructs fare with the parents and/or grandparents?; 5) What other goals do you want to see materialize in your community?

The paper hopes to explore social wellbeing in relation to leisure constructs. Specifically, it would like to identify the different symbols of wellbeing as perceived by the stakeholders; determine the various constructs of leisure; determine the desires and hopes of each stakeholders in order to enhance social wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative paradigm was followed in the study in order to obtain first-person account to understand the social meanings from them. Interviews according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) would be the best method if we want to know how individuals thought of their world and the meanings of their lives. Interviews with selected community members of barangay Tuntungin, Los Baños, Laguna were done. Selection was through purposive sampling. Consent was asked before the scheduled interviews were done. In-depth interview was used to elicit the stories from individuals on how they understand their community and their own lives. To initiate the narratives, guide questions were asked to ten (10) key informants. Most of the time, probing questions were used as follow-up in order to clarify meanings. All interviews were tape recorded for ease in getting back to the narratives. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the informants.

Locale of the study

Barangay Putho-Tuntungin is one of the barangays of Los Baños, Laguna (Figure 1). The total land area of the barangay is 781 hectares. It has a population of 9,454 with 1,865 households. There are six (6) puroks in the barangay, with ten (10) homeowner's associations and nine (9) active People's Organizations. The barangay houses one barangay high school, an extension of the Los Baños National High School, and one public elementary school. There are also two big private schools within the barangay.



Figure 1. The study site (Barangay Putho-Tutungin) from the Philippine map. (www.worldatlas.com / SOBA 2014)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Satisfaction in the stage of life one is in can be attributed to many factors. Satisfaction is not only due to income or to getting all the material possessions but more with the values one has attached to the possession. Relationship with other people in the community has a big impact to the overall wellbeing (Elliot et al. 2014) as well as one's trust to the functional institution of the community. This paper focused on the social wellbeing as intensified by doing leisure activities together in the barangay.

1. Symbolisms of Wellbeing

Symbolic interactionism has three propositions (Blumer 1969). First, human beings react toward things based on the meaning they attribute to it. There is no standard meaning and all meanings are assigned. The assignment of meanings came about because of social interaction. This brings us to the second proposition that the meanings people attribute to things arise out of social interaction. Meanings are learned. The third proposition stated that the meanings people attribute to things are handled through an interpretive process used by person in specific situation. To some quality of life means having all the luxuries because of present need or to some, quality of life refers only to being satisfied with what is available at the present.

The narratives of the informants showed two themes: assurance of livelihood for family's future and protection from criminality and natural diseases.

Assurance of livelihood for contentment and job security. Several categories came out of the narratives by the informants: easy ways to find work; ability to provide for the family and the dependent parents; to find livelihood. The informants were young people who were looking for an assurance that they would get a job if their time comes to provide for their own. The parent informants, both a mother and a father shared also their view of having the means of livelihood in order to provide. They said:

*“Para sa akin po, yun pong kapag namumuhay
po kami sa isang komunidad po may
mapagkukunan ng trabaho o mapagkitaan doon.
Para po makasigurado doon ng kalagayan noong
pamilya namin, na hindi magugutom or
magkakasakit doon sa komunidad na yon ”*

(As for me, living in a community means getting a job or earning money there. I have to be assured of the condition of our family that we would not get hungry and get sick in the community.)

*“Nagtrabaho ka...nag enjoy ka sa trabaho.
Nakakaya mo lahat ng responsibilities sa trabaho,
na sa pag uwi mo sa bahay, di mo na dala yong
isipin ng trabaho. Kasama din po syempre ang
pagprovide ng need ng mga anak mo ng pamilya
mo. Kahit may trabaho ka may oras ka na ilabas
sila. May oras ka na turuan sila, libangin sila.
Masaya sa pamilya, walang problema sa asawa
at anak. May oras ka din sa sarili.”*

(One has a job... finds enjoyment in the work one is doing. Be able to tackle all job responsibilities and to leave those pressures at the workplace. Of course, to provide for the immediate family is also a must. Even when you have a job, you have time to go outside with them. You have time to teach them, to play or mingle with them. There is happiness in the family, no marital problem. There is time for yourself.)

*“Pera? I need it. Para ma-raise ang mga bata.
Para lang makasurvive. But I do not want
excessive money. Money being the root of all
evil. Aside from money? Kontento.
Simplicity. Ayoko mga anak ko maging
mayabang kase may pera sila...simple lang.
marangal. Honest living. Not living in
excess...”*

(Money? I need it in order to raise my children. In order to survive. But I do not want excessive money. Money being the root of all evil. Aside from money? Contentment. Simplicity. I do not want my children to be haughty because of money...simple life, but with dignity Honest living. Not living in excess...)

Gender roles and expectations through the process of socialization depend on cultural context (Zelezny et al. 2000). In our society, there is still a strong expectation for children to help later in their lives towards their parents and other members of the family who would be in need. Even the qualitative text showed to this effect. To be a provider has always been embedded in our social norms (Zein-Elabdin 1996). People learn the meanings of things through face to face interaction with other people or with the real situation one is confronted with. The youth looking for assurance of a better future perhaps, was very strong in the emotion of the narratives. The current situations they are in have given them other meanings relevant to where they are now. The parents always want to instill real values in their children in order to be assured of a productive individual later in the community.

Assurance for protection from criminality and sickness. In a small barangay, very adjacent to a government university, the feeling of security was very high. Citizens' awareness to the reality of lack of security in the community came upon them because of news about rape cases in the vicinity and petty crimes such as thievery.

The second theme that came about was protection from criminality and diseases which was a result of recent security issues or lack thereof. Several categories came out from the narratives like: safety for the family, comfort for the family, respect for all, contentment and simple life. The informants mentioned that:

“Sa akin naman po, more on security. Parang buhay na ano lang...mapayapa lang. Walang nababalitaan na krimen, katulad ng nababalitaan nating mga rape dito. Mas gusto ko yong, peace lang.”

(For me, more on security. Just like a life that is...peaceful..., no news about criminal acts just like what we have heard in the news like rape cases. I would rather have peace.)

“Yong sa akin po ay simple lang. May respect sa isat-isa sa bahay lalo na sa community. Mas importante i-respeto natin ang kapwa natin parang mas maayos yong buhay, tsaka yong masaya lang. Yong hindi iniisip yong mga negative...”

(Mine is very simple. Respect for each other in the home especially in the community. It is more important that we respect our neighbors so we can have a better life, a happy life. We don't have to think of the negative.)

“...ay yong tipong paggigising ko sa umaga, paglabas ko sa kwarto makikita ko po na buo ang pamilya ko na malusog sila, hindi sila nagkakasakit. Sapat po yong makakain namin.”

(When I wake up in the morning, when I come out of my bedroom, I will see that my family is complete and they are healthy, they don't get sick. That we have enough food to eat.)

“...kase po yong krimen sa balita...sana yong buong family ay safe. Sa araw araw wala kang ibang nababalitaan sa kababayan mo, may nangyayari na masama, wala ka na ding tiwala sa kapaligaran.”

(...with the crime that is always the content of the news...hopefully my family would be spared. Every day you could not hear anything new, there are bad things that are happening, you begin to lose trust in your own surrounding.)

The young informants were very vocal in their aspiration for a safer community as their basis for wellbeing. The social environment to them became shaky and the longing for protection for themselves and their family was very evident in their narratives. Young as themselves at present gave them the impression of being a constant prey to criminality. While on the other hand, the more mature informants, like the member of the barangay council had other priorities in mind. Welfare for the elderly and the women's needs continuously put her into action. This would bring us back to SI theory

highlighting the emotions to social life. The youths were more apprehensive of their security because they did not have the power yet, financially or physically, to protect themselves either from man or nature. The council member had the inherent power because of the title that she has. Even the school teacher and the businesswoman have their own power in the community therefore the emotions that they had expressed were different. The different stakeholders had different symbols of wellbeing as they perceived it in their individual lives.

2. Construction of Leisure

How one attributes value to an object depends on how one sees the object. Leisure has multiple meanings. Norms, values and status affect the acceptance or rejection of these meanings. To some, leisure could mean freedom, or an engagement for social and personal functions, or an activity to be done for the sake of doing it, or in extreme, the activities that one should not have been doing. What could this “object” mean to my informants?

Construction of leisure created two themes: interest that leads to knowledge accumulation and interest that leads to enjoyment. The narratives revealed that the object meant to them as an interest worthy to be pursued.

Interest that Leads to Knowledge Accumulation. Different categories surfaced in the narratives like leisure involved a purpose, passion and goal. It is also a hobby. The informants stated that:

“My idea about leisure.. ginagawa po siya in excess of time...naglibang...pero natuto din. May kabuluhan, may purpose. Sports minded kase ako...basketball, swimming. I used to teach swimming while we were in Aklan. Varsity ng swimming, sumasama ako sa paggawa ng workshop. Natuto ako. Purpose ko...first of all, exercise for my body, same time nag eenjoy ako. Yong skills ko doon, matransfer ko sa mga anak ko, ibang tao, mga students ko din. Yong libangan...nakakatulong sa pag improve ng relationship.”

(My idea about leisure...these are activities done in excess of time...to have fun...and at the same time to learn. There is value, there is purpose. I am sports-minded...basketball, swimming. I used to teach swimming while we were in Aklan. Swimming varsity team, I joined during workshops. I learned. My purpose was first of all, exercise for my body and at the same time, enjoyment. The skills I have learned there could be transferred to my kids and to other people, my students. The fun experience helped me enhance my relationship with other people.)

“Isang bagay na gustong gusto mong gawin. May passion po doon. Habang ginagawa mo yon masaya ka lang. Alam mong may benefit while ginagawa.”

(It is one thing that you really want to do. There is passion. While you're doing it, you are happy. You know that you will have benefit by doing it.)

*“...para lang po may magagawa gagawin ko un
leisure. Hindi po naman dahil wala akong
ginagawa pero yong isang bagay na ginagawa ko
at naging hobby ko na... may patutunguhan.”*

(...Just so I have something to do with my time, I will do leisure activities. It is not because I have nothing to do but the thing that I am doing becomes my hobby... there is a sense of purpose.)

To some informants, the knowledge they learned out of the hobby helped them value more the leisure activity they engaged in. It had a dual purpose to them, learning a skill and having fun. A father who had passion for sports learning the skills more because he loved to do it, gave him a chance to perfect the skills thereby making himself an effective coach, teacher and father. Even the youth realized the need to learn skills through LGU's livelihood program that will help them later in finding real livelihood. One young member of the community pointed out to the workshops offered by the barangay regarding cottage industry specifically making of bracelets or necklaces. To them, it was a way of passing the time but challenging at the same time because they learned new techniques.

Interest that Leads to Enjoyment. The categories of bonding, relaxing, and interesting emerged in the texts of the informants. Bonding with the family members and other stakeholders in the barangay was always referred to. Take for example the sports festival organized by the LGU every summer had been identified by the young informants as the event where they can relax after the culmination of school days. This was also the event they considered as a venue to bond together as a family and as a community. If the youth with their families were waiting for the events to unfold, the LGU planned and organized for it.

One of the council members, Ms. Dorie shared:

*“Mapagkalibangan...for example yong mga
elderly, naisip ko mabigyan sila ng libangan
pwede sa ballroom. Mga youth ay nagkaroon ng
youth week. Leisure ng mga bata...nag-gawa kami
ng activities para sila ay abala palagi. Para sila
maging busy sa magandang gawain.”*

(To have something fun to do with your time...for example, the elderly, I think, we could give them something to do for their time like ballroom dancing. For the youth, we organized the youth week so that they had activities to make them busy all the time. So that they can be busy for a good work.)

When asked whether everybody in the community was considered to be a participant, she mentioned:

*“Open to all youth. Kahit hindi sila nag aaral.
May taskforce kami. Sila yong naghahanap ng
mga participants.”*

(Open to all youth. Even if they are out of school. We have a taskforce. Their duty is to search for participants.)

Niel, a young boy who was very active in the anti-drug campaign and a member in the Youth for Christ narrated that:

*“Ang libangan ay involved po lahat ng family
members kase po sa libangan mas maganda
kasama ang pamilya mo, yong bonding ng bawat
isa mas stronger po. Yong tipong kung may
conflict, o problema, sama sama pong harapin.”*

(Leisure means all family members are involved because there is more happiness when you are with your family, the relationship becomes stronger. The type when there is conflict or problems, the family can face or solve it together.)

Two government employees shared the same feeling, one summarized it this way:

“...any activity na ginawa mo para ang vacant time ay masaya, relax ka, for fun and nalilibang ka. Yong bakanteng oras na spend ng maayos. Sa akin po kase, ang leisure talaga ay..kung nasa trabaho man ito yong pakikwentuhan mo sa mga kasamahan mo, anything under the sun.”

(...any activity that you do in your vacant time which is fun, relaxing and you become so interested in it. It is a well spent free time. In my case, leisure while at work, is socialization with your colleagues, sharing stories about anything under the sun.)

Leisure for the informants involved a lot of building trust and confidence that would lead to cohesion and openness (Arai & Pedlar 2003). It is always the challenge of every community to provide a space for civic engagement to flourish and at the same time fulfil the personal longing of each individual.

At the current year, the LGU had added new activities like the Halloween costume party for everybody. Most of the attendees were the young people whom Ms. Dorie considered as priority to be engaged in, in order for them not to indulge in illegal activities. She believed further that once the young people were busy doing things for the community then the temptations to do other things would be lessened.

3. Longings of the Past and Desires of the Present

Majority of the informants were second generation migrants of the barangay. Their grandparents or parents were coming from the other islands of the Philippines. Only two had their original roots in Laguna. Asking about leisure of their grandparents or parents from their own perspectives at current time can make us understand the longings of the past. The past was also a good source of data to see how the changes took place in the concept of leisure. Evolutionary theory offers a clear and empirically tested explanation how human preferences have evolved (Coser 1977). The current structure of preferences is the product of both evolutionary adaptations to previous environmental contexts and how individual was influenced through time. Environment plays more of a direct influence.

The families of Kath and Nel are coming from the Bicol Region of the country, talked about the traditional dances and games being used during past times of their folks. Some of the informants talked about simple games their parents told them about. Most of the times, the activities in the past were used as the basis of comparison with the current trend of using technology to aid the present generation in having fun. The past leisure was more into plurality of membership while the present becomes individualistic. For a father, leisure was supposed to enhance relationship but with technology, the opposite might come and he mentioned:

“Ang relationship hindi na ganoon ka tibay. The youth has been distracted by technology. Naabuse ng mga bata. Ang oras nila ang nacompromise kase some students opted for the technology. Kase ang time with the kids magstudy minsan na give up na.”

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(The relationship is not that strong anymore. The youth has been distracted with technology. The youth is abusing it. Students have compromised their time with technology. They have given up their time to study.)

Monchito used the analogy of the disposable watch to explain the relationship that had eroded due to abuse in using technology. His father was a skilled watch-repairman.

Two themes surfaced from the narratives: Leisure activities for financial wellness and Leisure activities for social wellness

Leisure Activities for Financial Wellness. The youth especially have seen the need for more activities that engage the community and at the same time improve the leverage for more income opportunities. Neil commented:

“yon nga po...yong ibang activities...yong para sa parents, bigyan po sila ng workshop po.kung ano mang gusto nilang negosyo para kikita sila.”

(...that’s it, other activities for the parents, they need to have a workshop to become entrepreneurs and earn.)
In addition to Neil’s, Jane shared that:

“un napapansin ko po sa barangay...hindi naman lahat ng tao dito ay may kaya po, sana po may programa tayo na lahat ng pamilya may representative. Bawat pamilya meron isa na dadalo sa programa. Para po mag survey kung ano mga hobby nila or leisure na makakatulong sa kanila para po magkaroon ng trabaho. Parang pong naglilibang ang sarili nila pero at the same time kumikita pa sila.”

(I have observed that not all of the residents in the barangay have financial capacity, hopefully there would be a program that all families have a representative. There would be a survey to know the hobby or leisure activities that might help them get a job. The people must enjoy doing it while at the same time getting an income out of it.)

The LGU was always at a lookout for livelihood programs, too. Ms. Dorie declared when asked regarding plans of her committee that:

“Madami pa...sana ang priority ang pangkabuhayan. Kung sa libangan...yong pa din ang pinag isipan.”

(We have several plans...the priority is for livelihood. When it comes to leisure...we are still planning for it.)

Leisure Activities for Social Wellness. The different sectors in the barangay had seen the need to enjoin the entire barangay in order to help create an enabling social environment and if possible help improve the physical environment. Nancy, a very strong young leader remarked that:

“Ah...para mabuild up pa po ang waste reduction program, hindi lang mga kabataan, kung di mga parents at iba pang professional, hindi lang kabataan, hindi lang kami ang aware, kung di kasama po mga magulang.”

(Ah...to enhance waste reduction program, not only the youth but also the parents, other professionals as well. The awareness about the program should not only be with the young people, but for all.)
Another informant said that:

“Yong yoga or aerobics, pwede po i-promote para po sa mga elderly. Iba po kase yon dito sa barangay, para yong mga elderly ay hindi nila maiisip na napabayaan sila”

(Yoga or aerobics can be promoted for the elderly. That is considered differently in the barangay, and the elderly will not think the community does not care for them.)

In connection with the plans for elderly, the barangay councillor added that:

“Walang libangan ang mga elderly. Maganda yong may mental laro ang mga elderly. Dama, scrabble, chess...sana po magagawa.”

(There is no structured leisure activity for the elderly. It would be good for them to have mental games. Like dama, scrabble, chess....hope we could do it.)

Mental alertness of the senior citizens in the barangay was also a concern. Giving them a structured activity is beneficial since the cognitive function could be helped (Iwasa et al. 2012). Sustainability of the LGU plans and the active participation of the community residents could assure total wellness (Guillen-Royo 2010). Continuously creating spaces for the entire barangay to pitch in positive leisure activities is always a vision to be accomplished. Creating a strong barangay bond through leisure activities is a worthwhile community engagement.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

Symbolisms of wellbeing differed according to the priorities of each informants as they value each object similarly or differently. The narratives of the informants explored on two themes: assurance of livelihood for family's future and protection from criminality and natural diseases. The youth looking for assurance of a better future perhaps while the parents always wanting to have real values instilled in their children in order to be assured of productive individual later in the community.

Leisure has multiple of meanings. Construction of leisure created two themes: interest that leads to knowledge and interest that leads to enjoyment. The narratives revealed that the object meant to them as an interest worthy to be pursued. Leisure for the informants involved a lot of building trust and confidence that would lead to cohesion and openness.

The past was also a good source of data to see how the changes took place in the concept of leisure. Evolutionary theory offers a clear and empirically tested explanation how human preferences have evolved. Social wellbeing would be greatly enriched through engagement in beneficial leisure activities. Cooperation between the stakeholders of the barangay should be continuously envisioned and hopefully incorporate the dreams of the youth and the families. Strongly engaging the families will proportionately enhance the wellbeing of the younger members and will therefore lead to a strong community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would always be grateful to the barangay Putho-Tuntingin, Los Baños, Philippines in accommodating the concepts of the study and allowed the authors to be a participant-observer in their activities. The staff of the office of the Barangay Chairman were very kind in lending us all the documents we needed. Ms. Joeyce B. Abunda in helping us connect with the young leaders of the community. Most especially to our informants who had shared with us their valuable time.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

The first author conceptualized theoretical framework, identified key informants and undertook the writing up. The second and the third authors helped in the discussion of the theories, and suggested important points in the choice of the key informants.

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JOURNAL OF NATURE STUDIES
(formerly Nature's Bulletin)
ISSN: 1655-3179