

Reflections from the Garden A Commentary on "Worlds Apart: Thoughts on a Canadian Association of Leisure Studies"

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Nineteen years ago, in the weeks after the Third Canadian Congress on Leisure Research at which the Canadian Association for Leisure Studies was formed, Steve Smith wrote in *Recreation Research Review* about the choices that Canadian leisure researchers had in creating an environment for themselves. He suggested that the muse of leisure studies could create several possible environments for leisure researchers: a desert, a jungle, or a garden. His preferred environment was a garden which would produce "bountiful crops year after year," be "open to new ways, new ideas, new individuals," and where "the soil nurtures and is, in return, protected and strengthened." He also cautioned that the gardens "require weeding and selective pruning," and that the soil must be "tended and protected," and the new plants must be protected. So . . . how is the CALS garden doing—is it growing, or is it withering?

One of the main functions of CALS is the awarding of the triennial Canadian Congress of Leisure Research. There have now been nine triennial Canadian Congresses and the tenth will be held in 2002. The last one, in 1999 in Wolfville, attracted 117 registrants from six countries and featured 73 research and discussion papers, eight So-

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cratic lunches and eight round table sessions. The registration at other recent CCLR's was: 150 at CCLR6 (1990 in Waterloo), 125 at CCLR7 (1993 in Winnipeg), and 159 at CCLR8 (1996 in Ottawa). It would appear that the garden is producing modest crops—with the quality rather than the quantity of the bounty being the key to the garden's output. CCLR9, even though it was held in a more remote part of the garden, was viewed as a success by most of the participants. The Congresses provide not just a place to view the crop of ideas from established and new scholars, but also provide an atmosphere that nurtures growth. The recent *Evaluation of the NRPA Leisure Research Symposium* by Diane Samdahl noted that many respondents criticized the overwhelming environment of NRPA. They "made reference to smaller conferences such as the Canadian Conference on Leisure Research that is small enough to promote on-going interaction between conference members" (p. 16). The various Congresses also have developed partnerships with the three Canadian Journals, *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure*, *Journal of Leisurability*, and *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*. These partnerships have led to the publication of Congress presentations in both regular and special "Congress" issues of the journals—undoubtedly widening the audience for the scholarly efforts of CALS members.

One of the characteristics of the garden as envisioned by Steve Smith is that it would be a place "open to new ways, new ideas, new individuals." How well are we doing at attracting new individuals to CALS? Forty percent of the respondents to the CCLR9 evaluation survey indicated that this was their first Congress, and another 20% indicated that it was their second Congress. This would indicate that we are attracting new individuals—but are we retaining the veterans? Only 10% of the respondents are long-time veterans of the Congresses—one respondent indicated that he had attended all nine Congresses, and five had attended six or seven or eight Congresses. CALS tends to be a rather fluid organization whose membership is drawn from the registrants on the Congresses; thus, the membership changes both in composition and in numbers. The garden has not been pruned, but it may have lost some former members to attrition. Is CALS no longer relevant to them?

Communication is one of the key functions of CALS. CALS maintains an electronic mail discussion list for the purpose of exchanging information of interest to leisure and recreation scholars and practitioners. Hopefully, this exchange helps to nurture the garden.

The CALS garden has developed some partnerships with other members of the research community. It has become a member of the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council. It is anticipated that this action will strengthen the place of leisure studies within the Canadian research community—in the words of Smith, after much “tedious preparation, years of work and careful minding” it could now be time for CALS to play a higher profile within HSSFC and also within the granting structure of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Discussions have begun to consider becoming affiliated with the World Leisure and Recreation Association. Information links have been developed with the Leisure Studies Association.

The new journal *Leisure/Loisir* marks the latest CALS venture in partnership with the Ontario Research Council on Leisure. *Leisure/Loisir* follows in the fine tradition of the *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, *Recreation Research Review*, and *Recreation Review*. I look forward to seeing this part of the garden grow and flourish.

References

- Smith, S.J. (1981). Worlds apart: Thoughts on a Canadian association of leisure studies. *Recreation Research Review*, 8(4), 10-11.
- The complete history of CALS by Tim Burton is available at the CALS website: www.eas.ualberta.ca/elj/cals/calshist.htm