

WLN NEWS

ISSUE 63

**2025 WORLD LEISURE EXPO,
WLO CONGRESS REGISTRATION AND
AWARDS PROGRAM NOW OPEN!**



April 2025

Editorial

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news here!

Dear members, dear colleagues,

Welcome to the April 2025 issue of WL News!

This month, we open our newsletter with exciting plans for the 2025 World Leisure Expo & 27th Hangzhou West Lake International Expo taking place in July in Hangzhou, China. We announce the inspirational keynote speakers who have been confirmed for the 2025 World Leisure Congress and remind you take advantage of our early bird registration rates (hint: you have until May 20th). You'll also read about an inspiring encounter between WLO and the Basque Country Association for UNESCO, as well as the success of World Leisure Day 2025.

In news from our wider network, you'll be invited to submit abstracts for the upcoming ANZALS 2025 Conference to be held in December in Sydney, Australia, and you'll read about an exciting event in Guadalajara, Mexico.

We have several exciting Opportunities to mention this month: the WL Awards remain open for applications – you'll read an inspiring quote from a previous winner and find a recap of the opportunities on offer. We reiterate our call for new institutions to apply to join our growing network of World Leisure Centers of Excellence, and we are still accepting bids to host for the World Leisure Congress 2030 – don't miss these exciting chances to boost your institution's profile!

In our Publications section, you'll discover that an entire issue of the *WL Journal* remains open for free access, and last but not least, in our Encounter section, we close with a fascinating interview with Anthony Iracki, CPRP, Professional Development Manager, PlayCore and Vice Chair, Grandville, MI Park and Recreation Board.

Please enjoy this exciting issue! We'll be taking a break next month, but will be back with our next newsletter at the end of June!

Yours truly

Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere

WLO Chief Operating Officer





The 2025 World Leisure Expo & 27th Hangzhou West Lake International Expo: A city at the forefront of leisure

The 2025 World Leisure Expo & 27th Hangzhou West Lake International Expo is nearly upon us!

This premier biennial event will be held from **July 10-12, 2025** in the city of Hangzhou, China at the [Hangzhou Grand Convention and Exhibition Center](#), bringing together industry leaders, innovators, and professionals to explore the latest trends shaping the future of leisure.

Co-hosted by the World Leisure Organization and Hangzhou Municipal People's Government, and organized by Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the expo will feature an exciting opening ceremony, a fascinating thematic

exhibition, and a variety of other major activities.

Invitees include leaders and foreign dignitaries as well Ms. Joanne Schroeder, Chair of the World Leisure Organization, and Dr. Cristina Ortega, WLO's Chief Operating Officer.

The Expo's thematic exhibition coincides with the 10th anniversary of the establishment of China's Comprehensive Cross-Border e-Commerce Pilot Zone. Planned exhibition areas include:

- Global cross-border e-commerce ecosystems
- Cooperative cross-border international imports
- Scientific and technological innovation
- Leisure and quality of life

Exhibit categories include: general merchandise, outdoor goods, sports and fitness, gifts and creativity, beauty and personal care, home appliances, apparel, leather goods, jewelry, pet products, international foods, baby toys, motor vehicle accessories, electronics, hardware, home gardening, lighting, software services, and more.

Other major Expo events include prestigious lectures on cross-border e-commerce platforms, exciting new product launches, global e-commerce procurement fairs, and e-business talent fairs.

Hangzhou: The Leisure Capital of Asia

Hangzhou is not just a city of beauty and history—it's a global leader in leisure and innovation. Hangzhou effortlessly combines its rich cultural heritage with cutting-edge modernity, making it a key destination for the leisure industry. With world-renowned sites like [West Lake](#), a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the [Liangzhu Archaeological Site](#), Hangzhou has long been a destination of global significance.

Beyond its historical landmarks, Hangzhou has become a global leader in hosting major events, including the 2023 Asian Games and the 2016 G20 Summit. This year, the future of leisure will be explored at the 2025 World Leisure Expo & 27th Hangzhou West Lake International Expo in a city that masterfully combines tradition and modern progress.

The World Leisure Expo finds its ideal home in Hangzhou, a city that leads the way in both the leisure industry and the global event scene, ready to inspire and redefine the future of leisure.



worldleisure.nl.com

World Leisure Congress keynote speakers announced!

We are delighted to confirm four inspiring leaders in sustainable tourism, destinations, and events as keynote speakers for [WLC 2025](#):

- **Prof. Kathleen Andereck**, Professor of Sustainable Tourism, School of Community Resources and Development, Arizona State University
- **Dr. Jane Ali-Knight**, Professor in Festival and Event Management, The Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland
- **Ms. Yvonne Nassar**, Chair of the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC), Netherlands
- **Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Alexander Klippel**, Professor of Immersive Experiences and Sustainable Transitions Science Advisor WANDER – XR Experience Lab, Cultural Geography Research Group (GEO), Wageningen University & Research, Netherlands

Don't miss the chance to meet and learn from these inspirational leaders at this year's World Leisure Congress. You can [read more about this year's speakers here!](#)

Register now to secure your spot! Early bird rates and exclusive discounts are available until May 20th.



UN ETXEA and WLO: Collaborating in the name of leisure

UN ETXEA – the Basque Country Association for UNESCO – is a non-profit association set up in 1991 with the aim of promoting the principles and programs of UNESCO within Basque society. The organization's aim is to generate individual and collective attitudes that foster UNESCO's human rights values and enable Basque society to participate effectively in the global challenges of sustainable development.

On April 15th, our two organizations had a productive meeting to discuss ways to advance the human right to leisure and explore the crucial role of leisure in promoting sustainable development and human wellbeing.

WLO is excited about the collaborations that lie ahead, and we look forward to continuing the dialogue and transforming today's ideas into impactful, forward-thinking projects.

Our heartfelt thanks to the team at UN ETXEA for the warm welcome. Mila esker!



Another successful World Leisure Day in the books!

World Leisure Day was April 16th, and it was a truly global experience!

The countless of inspiring WLD events that took place across several continents and both hemispheres included workshops, community gatherings, outdoor activities, academic forums, and creative initiatives, all celebrating the power of leisure to improve lives and showcasing how leisure connects people, promotes well-being, and builds stronger, more inclusive communities.

The fifth annual celebration of World Leisure Day was an enormous success. Year on year, the event has gained momentum. Thank you to all the individuals and organizations who made this day meaningful in every corner of the world.

Make sure to mark your calendars for next year!

Network



2025 Western Sydney University's WLCE's Visiting Scholar Program

This Program provides a unique opportunity for researchers from around the world to collaborate on cutting-edge leisure research with colleagues in our Centre. The program encourages knowledge exchange, fosters international partnerships, and supports the development of innovative solutions to local and global challenges. Visiting Scholars will be expected to engage with both their collaborator(s) in the Centre and engage in broad research activities with academics within the Centre and the School of Health Sciences, who is hosting the program.

If you or any of your colleagues are interested in coming to Western Sydney University on this scheme, please contact me in the first instance and we can discuss the program in more detail, including potential collaborators within our Centre of Excellence and projects that would fit the guidelines of the program.

Please note that there are two main programs on offer:

Option 1: This is a competitive pathway and is open to esteemed international scholars. The international scholar and Western collaborator/s would apply for up to AU\$ 10,000 in funding to support the Scholar's travel and expenses while in Australia (e.g., flights, accommodation, living expenses). Applications close 23rd May, 2025.

Option 2: This is a self-funded pathway. The scholar would have permission from their University/Organization to travel and spend time in our WLCE. Applications can be received any time from now until Friday 26th September, 2025. Applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

We look forward to welcoming outstanding researchers from across the globe to our World Leisure Centre of Excellence. For more information connect with Dr. Arianne Reis (a.reis@westernsydney.edu.au)



ANZALS 2025 now accepting abstracts!

You are invited to submit your abstracts for presentation at the upcoming [ANZALS 2025](#) Conference, to be held from Tuesday, 2 December to Thursday, 4 December at the [University of Technology Sydney](#) in Australia. There is also an HDR [Research] Student Workshop to be held on the afternoon of Monday, 1 December.

This year's conference will feature a diverse range of topics, each focusing on critical and emerging topics in our field.

The conference welcomes abstract submissions that align with the following themes:

Navigating new frontiers in education:

Exploring the innovative approaches, methodologies, and practices that are shaping the future of education

Digital horizons: Exploring technology, wellness, ethics, and community engagement: Investigating the intersection of technology with wellness, ethical considerations, and community involvement

Shadows and light: Exploring dark leisure, well-being, and transformative experiences: Delving into the complexities of dark leisure activities and their impact on well-being and personal transformation

Everyday escapes: Navigating leisure in daily life: Examining how individuals incorporate leisure into their daily routines and the implications for quality of life

Diversity, equity, and inclusion: Bridging gaps, building communities: Addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and exploring strategies for fostering inclusive communities

Other: Submissions on other relevant topics that do not fall within the above themes are also welcome

Abstract Submission Guidelines:

1. Abstracts should be 250-300 words (use Microsoft Word).
2. Include title, author name(s), affiliation(s), contact details, and keywords.
3. Submit your abstract via email by July 15, 2025 to anzals@uts.edu.au

All submissions will undergo a peer review process, and notification will be sent to the submitting author.

[ANZALS](#) looks forward to your contributions and to welcoming you to a stimulating and enriching conference.

Details about conference registration and program outline coming soon!



Dr. Antonio Bramante, WLO Board member, visits University of Guadalajara (Mexico) for World Physical Activity Day celebrations

At the invitation of the University of Guadalajara, Mexico, a series of activities were carried out in connection with the celebration of World Physical Activity Day (April 6), spanning the period from March 31 to April 6.

On the academic front, these activities included a restricted workshop with graduate students, a second workshop for a broader audience conducted jointly with Professor Oscar Incarbone (Argentina), and a public forum on physical activity from the perspective of leisure. The forum was attended by approximately 500 participants and featured contributions from five invited speakers.

Throughout these events, information about the World Leisure Organization is shared with attendees, encouraging membership and raising awareness about the organization's mission and initiatives. These outreach efforts serve to enhance WLO's visibility and foster opportunities for future collaborative projects.

In the non-academic segment, participation included the launch of an innovative community initiative titled the "Physical Activity Cube" — a repurposed container equipped to support physical activity in underserved areas. Additional involvement included a mass dance-based physical activity event at the university, as well as a large public activation in a central city square on April 6. This event, led by a world boxing champion, engaged over one hundred participants in boxing-inspired movements, reflecting the sport's national popularity.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that every Sunday, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., for over two decades, 31 kilometers of city avenues are closed to vehicular traffic, creating space for over 100,000 people to walk, run, or cycle—offering an exemplary urban leisure experience.

Research

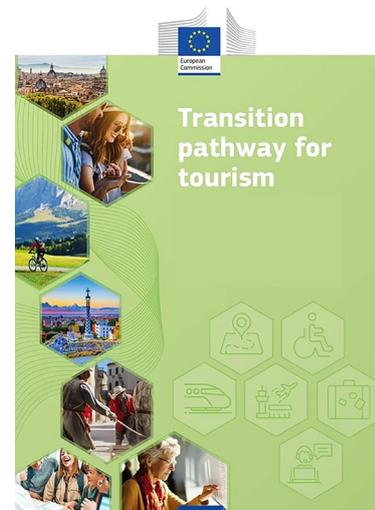


Accessibility, visitations and uses in Bahli Urban Park, Algeria: the 15-minute city post-pandemic perspective by Samira Khettab, Meriem Naimi-Ait Aoudia & Hadjer Djedi (from *World Leisure Journal*)

During the pandemic, green spaces were vital for well-being, yet research on visitation changes across different pandemic phases is limited. This study examines the accessibility, use, and visitation patterns of Bahli Urban Park in Blida, Algeria, using a combination of in-situ observations and semi-structured interviews.

Results indicate that visitation was affected by factors like mobility restrictions, fear of contamination, stress relief needs, and weather conditions.

[READ MORE...](#)



Transition Pathway for Tourism: A Collaborative roadmap for a greener, smarter, and more resilient sector

The Transition Pathway for Tourism, launched by the European Commission in February 2022, provides a roadmap to support the tourism sector's green and digital transformation. With tourism making up about 10% of the EU's GDP, the initiative promotes sustainability and long-term resilience. So far, over 140 organizations from 23 countries have submitted 260+ pledges on topics like sustainable mobility, digital innovation, and inclusive tourism. The European Commission actively encourages more stakeholders—both public and private—to join the initiative by submitting their commitments through the EU Tourism Platform.

[READ MORE...](#)

Policy



Mondiacult 2025: Shaping global cultural policy for sustainable future

MONDIACULT 2025 is UNESCO's flagship World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, scheduled to take place from **29 September to 1 October 2025** at the Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona (CCIB), Spain. Hosted by the Government of Spain, the conference aims to shape the global cultural agenda and advocate for the recognition of culture as a standalone goal in the post-2030 United Nations development framework.

The conference will focus on six key themes:

1. Cultural rights: Ensuring equitable access to culture and safeguarding the rights of all individuals to participate in cultural life.
2. Digital technologies in the culture sector: Exploring the impact of digital transformation on cultural expressions, heritage preservation, and the creative industries.

3. Culture and education: Integrating cultural education into curricula to foster creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding.
4. Economy of culture: Recognizing culture's contribution to economic development, job creation, and innovation.
5. Culture and climate action: Addressing the role of culture in promoting environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change.
6. Culture, heritage, and crisis: Understanding how cultural heritage can be protected and leveraged in times of crisis, including conflicts and natural disasters.

In addition to the main themes, MONDIACULT 2025 will emphasize two critical focus areas:

Culture for peace: Highlighting culture's role in conflict prevention, reconciliation, and the promotion of peaceful societies.

Artificial intelligence and culture: Examining the ethical implications of AI on cultural creation, dissemination, and preservation.

[READ MORE...](#)



Vienna wins 2025 Access City Award for leading the way in accessibility for persons with disabilities by European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

The city of Vienna has been named the winner of the [2025 Access City Award](#) by the [European Commission](#), recognizing its longstanding commitment to inclusive urban development.

Through its “Inclusive Vienna 2030” strategy, the city has implemented innovative policies that promote accessibility in public spaces, transportation, and services — making it a leading example in accessibility policy across Europe.

[READ MORE...](#)

Industry



UN Tourism and CAF Launch Indigenous Tourism Challenge for Latin America and the Caribbean (from *UN Tourism*)

UN Tourism and CAF- (Development Bank for Latin America and the Caribbean) have launched the Indigenous Tourism Challenge for Latin America and the Caribbean to promote sustainable development and cultural diversity. The initiative aims to support innovative tourism projects that highlight Indigenous cultures, foster economic empowerment, preserve traditions, and encourage community-driven tourism experiences. Projects focusing on economic autonomy, cultural preservation, gastronomy, and community innovation are encouraged.

Finalists will receive mentoring, global network access, and international visibility, with the winning project awarded USD 10,000 in investment.

[READ MORE...](#)



International Netball Festival reduces teen depression, anxiety & cyberbullying (from *Australasian Leisure Management* magazine)

The International Netball Festival, held annually in Samoa, New Zealand, Fiji and Australia's Gold Coast, offers young people a unique opportunity to connect, stay active and improve their mental health.

Founded by Jane Rushton—who overcame a near-fatal car crash and now works as a speaker and coach—the festival uses netball as a tool to combat youth depression, anxiety and social isolation.

[READ MORE...](#)

Member Quote

Experiencing the WLO Awards: Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship



"Participating in the World Leisure Congress in New Zealand as a TRISS Scholarship recipient was a turning point in my personal, professional, and academic journey. Sharing the outcomes of my dissertation in an international setting not only enhanced the visibility of my research but also provided meaningful feedback that strengthened my work. Engaging with leisure scholars and professionals from around the world offered an incredible opportunity to exchange experiences, learn new concepts, and build lasting connections. It was truly an inspiring and transformative experience."

Leonardo C. Soares,
University of São Paulo
2023 TRISS Scholarship
Winner





Publications

In continued celebration of World Leisure Day 2025, *WL Journal's* April issue remains open for free access!

Here are just a few of the exciting articles available in this issue:

[Saudi youth views on hosting western music festivals: problematic performances and positive perceptions:](#) This exploratory study distills the views of Saudis aged 18-30 on hosting Western music festivals as part of the "Saudi Seasons" tourism strategy.

[Recreational awareness prevents digital game addiction associated with social exclusion in adolescents:](#) This study seeks to shed light on the preventative impact of recreational awareness on digital game addiction linked to social exclusion within the context of the physical, psychological, and social origins of digital game addiction.

[The impending disruption of digital nomadism: opportunities, challenges, and research agenda:](#) This research maps the landscape of digital nomadism research (DNR), elucidating key topics, themes, challenges, opportunities, and socio-economic, environmental, cultural, and demographic impacts.

[Innovating for retention: strategies for enhancing customer retention in theme parks:](#) Customer retention holds strategic importance

in securing a vital competitive edge for theme park businesses. This study examines the role of different types of motivated consumer innovativeness (Hedonic, Functional, Social, and Cognitive) on memorable experiences and their effect on customer retention.

[Experiences of older adults' leisure-time physical activity in aquatic and leisure facilities:](#) For older adults, being physically active is positively associated with various health benefits. This study explores the experiences of older adults using aquatic and leisure facilities to better understand how this setting might be more effectively utilized to support older adult leisure-time physical activity.

[Does leisure time improve your job and life satisfaction? The mediating effect of work-life conflict and the moderating effects of organizational support:](#) Based on the conservation of resource theory, this study aimed to investigate the mediating effects of work-life conflict between leisure time and satisfaction, and the moderating effects of organizational support.

Opportunities



WORLD LEISURE
CENTERS OF
EXCELLENCE
OPEN REQUEST
FOR PROPOSALS

- [Zhejiang University \(China\)](#)
- [Hungarian University of Sports Science \(Hungary\)](#)
- [Breda University of Applied Sciences \(Netherlands\)](#)
- [University of Otago \(New Zealand\)](#)
- [Texas State University \(USA\)](#)

WLO is especially interested in the establishment of new WLCEs in geographic areas without current representation. However, all proposals will receive consideration by the WLO Board of Directors.

Notices of Intent to respond to this request for proposals are due before **July 5, 2025**.

[Read more...](#)

Join our rapidly expanding network of World Leisure Centers of Excellence!

Applications are still open to establish your institution as a [World Leisure Center of Excellence \(WLCE\)](#)!

The global WLCE network is rapidly becoming a recognized and highly relevant institutional honor.

Our prestigious cohort currently includes:

- [Western Sydney University \(Australia\)](#)
- [University of Sao Paulo \(Brazil\)](#)
- [Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières \(Canada\)](#)
- [Vancouver Island University \(Canada\)](#)



Open call to host the World Leisure Congress 2030!

WLO invites expressions of interest from communities, cities, or institutions interested in hosting the **World Leisure Congress in 2030!** If your community is passionate about leisure and eager to be part of a global conversation, this is your opportunity to get involved and make a lasting impact.

To ensure a strong local foundation for the event's success, we encourage proposals developed in collaboration with professional associations, government agencies, and academic institutions.

Learn more about the World Leisure Congress Open Call [here](#).



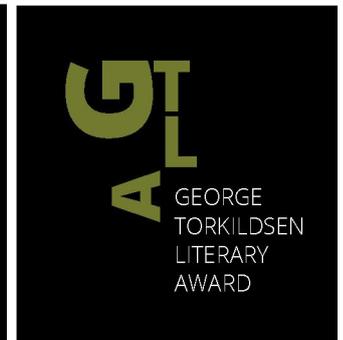
THOMAS & RUTH
RIVERS INTERNATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP



HILLEL RUSKIN
MEMORIAL SCHOLAR
LECTURE AWARD



CORNELIS
WESTLAND
HUMANITARIAN
AWARD



GEORGE
TORKILDSEN
LITERARY
AWARD



DANILO
SANTOS
MIRANDA
AWARD

World Leisure Awards 2025

The World Leisure Organization's Awards Program recognizes individuals who demonstrate strong dedication within the field of leisure.

It honors both scholars whose contributions in advancing best practices and theoretical knowledge have been significant, and students who have demonstrated excellence in areas of leisure, tourism, culture, parks, and recreation. We are thrilled to announce that the following awards and scholarships are now open for applications:

Thomas & Ruth Rivers International Scholarship:

This award provides opportunities for senior or graduate students who are studying recreation, leisure studies, leisure services, leisure resources, or tourism studies in college or university programs to attend and present a scholarly paper at the biennial international World Leisure Congress.

[Learn more and apply here!](#)

Hillel Ruskin Memorial Scholar Lecture Award:

The Hillel Ruskin Memorial Scholar Lecture Award seeks to perpetuate and recognize the contributions of the namesake of this award by sponsoring a scholarly lecture focused on advancing concepts related to leisure, leisure education and leisure policy development.

[Learn more and apply here!](#)

Cornelis Westland Humanitarian Award:

The Cornelis Westland Humanitarian Award seeks to recognize an individual or organization that has made significant and sustained contributions to the worldwide leisure movement, advancing human concerns.

[Learn more and apply here!](#)

George Torkildsen Literary Award:

This award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the recreation, parks and leisure service literature by advancing innovative ideas, thoughts, and/or philosophical perspectives.

[Learn more and apply here!](#)

Danilo Santos Miranda - Culture Entrepreneurship Award:

Further information coming soon! Stay tuned!

May 23, 2025 is the last day to apply for these awards. Submit your application today!

Encounter



Anthony Iracki, CPRP
Professional Development Manager, PlayCore
Vice Chair, Grandville, MI Park and Recreation Board



In this wide-ranging interview led by Anthony Iracki, an experienced strategist and advocate for inclusive design in public spaces, we explore the evolving role of equity, accessibility, and innovation in parks and recreation. With a background spanning local government, nonprofit leadership, and strategic planning, Anthony brings a unique perspective shaped by both policy and practice.

From redefining accessibility to addressing environmental and public health challenges, the interview offers practical lessons and forward-looking perspectives for communities aiming to create more inclusive, sustainable, and socially vibrant public spaces.

How do you define equity in the context of parks and leisure, and can you share an example of a parks and recreation project where accessibility and inclusive design made a real impact on enhancing community participation?

To me, equity in parks and leisure means more than just meeting minimum standards—it's about designing spaces and systems that welcome everyone, reflect the diversity of the community, and intentionally remove barriers to participation. True equity shows up in how decisions are made, who's at the table, and how we ensure that people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds feel a genuine sense of belonging.

One of the most powerful examples I've been part of is the redevelopment of Moss Universal Park in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin—an ambitious transformation of an 18-acre site led by The Ability Center in partnership with Milwaukee County Parks. While the project is still under construction, it's already reshaping what inclusion looks like through the planning process itself.

Damian Buchman, founder of The Ability Center, has played a central role, working alongside our teams at GameTime and Impact Parks, and more importantly, side-by-side with local residents, partners, and stakeholders. Together, we've facilitated on-site walks, hosted

community design sessions, and built cross-sector partnerships to ensure the park is truly shaped by a wide spectrum of voices, especially those often left out of traditional planning processes.

When complete, Moss Universal Park will feature an inclusive playground, sensory-friendly spaces, adaptive sports fields, outdoor fitness zones, and a fully accessible trail network. Every element is designed not only for access, but for agency—for people of all abilities to actively participate and belong.

And yet, the impact is already visible. Just through the design process, the project has sparked new conversations around equity, brought new partners to the table, and created a shared vision that extends far beyond the park boundary. It's a reminder that equity isn't just about what we build—it's about how we build it, who we include, and the values we uphold along the way.

For more information visit <https://universalpark.org/>

As Vice Chair of the Grandville Parks and Recreation Board, what are the key issues or priorities you're currently working on at the local level, and what lessons from your time on the board could help other communities strengthen their public recreation systems?

Grandville, MI is a small but vibrant inner-ring suburb of Grand Rapids with just over 16,000 residents in 7.5 square miles. Despite our size, we draw a lot of people from surrounding areas—not just for our parks, but also for shopping, entertainment, and dining. That means when we talk about the role of parks and recreation in our community, we have to think beyond just city residents. Our amenities serve a regional audience, and that changes how we approach planning and impact.

One of our priorities as a board has been grounding decisions in local data. When you look at a 3-mile radius around Wedgwood Park—our central park—you start to see broader trends: rates of adult poor mental health are 4% above the national average, youth disability is up 4%, and obesity is about 2% higher than the national benchmark. Local poverty rates are also about 5% higher than the state average. These metrics help us prioritize investments where they're needed most.

That said, we also have strengths to build on. Grandville ranks 2.7% above the national average for walkability, and many of our residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park—an ideal benchmark according to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). That's something we take pride in and are always working to improve.

One of our standout projects was the development of a National Demonstration Site Playground at Wedgwood Park. This wasn't just a typical playground—it was built using research-backed design that supports youth activity, inclusive play, and intergenerational use. We focused on six key elements: balancing, sliding, brachiating (overhead arm-over-arm movement), spinning, climbing, and swinging. Combine that with accessible surfacing, transfer points, and multi-user swings, and it becomes a space where families of all ages and abilities can come together and engage in meaningful play and directly address the issues outlined in the data above.

But our focus isn't just on built spaces. One of Grandville's defining natural features is Buck Creek, which runs through the city and has a history of trout fishing. Over time, erosion has reduced the quality of the stream for aquatic life. We're now working with conservation groups to restore it, not just to support marine habitats, but also to create inclusive shoreline access so everyone in our community has the chance to connect with nature.

If there's one thing my time on the board has taught me, it's that small cities can absolutely punch above their weight, especially when they approach parks and recreation with intention. In Grandville, we've learned to think regionally, understanding that our parks serve not just our residents, but families

from surrounding communities who come here to shop, eat, play, and connect. We rely on local data to guide our decisions, ensuring that we're addressing the real, measurable needs of our community. We've seen firsthand how partnerships with schools, nonprofits, businesses, and conservation groups can multiply our impact and bring projects to life that wouldn't be possible otherwise. We've prioritized inclusive design so that every park we build or improve welcomes people of all ages and abilities. And we've expanded our focus beyond just recreation infrastructure to also include environmental stewardship, like our work restoring Buck Creek. These lessons aren't unique to Grandville—they're approaches any community can adopt to strengthen their public recreation systems and create spaces that truly reflect the needs and values of the people they serve.

According to Airparif, air pollution in Paris has dropped dramatically in recent years, with nitrogen dioxide levels falling by 50% since 2005, following major efforts to reduce car traffic and invest in parks, bike lanes, and walkable spaces. These changes have had clear environmental and public health impacts. How do you think parks and leisure planning can help cities become not only cleaner but also healthier, more inclusive, and socially vibrant — particularly for children, older adults, and vulnerable groups?

To answer this question, we need to examine the very strategies already delivering proven results: investing in parks, bike lanes, and walkable spaces. With nearly 70% of the world's population expected to live in urban areas by 2050, cities must prioritize quality-of-life improvements that support cleaner air, healthier lifestyles, and greater social equity.

One of the most effective strategies is increasing urban tree canopy. Trees play a critical role in improving air quality, reducing urban heat, managing stormwater, and even calming traffic. Beyond environmental benefits, shaded, tree-lined streets promote both mental and physical health by encouraging outdoor activity, social interaction, and walkability. However, these benefits must be distributed equitably, not just concentrated in popular downtown areas or tourist corridors. Prioritizing historically underserved neighborhoods ensures that all residents, including vulnerable populations, have access to the same environmental and social advantages.

Expanding tree canopy often begins with community partnerships. Cities can work with local nonprofits, neighborhood groups, and residents to host planting events, provide tools and resources, and offer education on tree care. When planting efforts are inclusive, offering assistance to residents who may not be physically able to plant or maintain a tree, the impact goes beyond sustainability and becomes a catalyst for community connectedness and inclusion.

In tandem with green infrastructure, cities must also continue investing in active transportation systems. Bicycling, for many, is not just recreational—it's essential. For youth, older adults, and up to one-third of people who do not drive, bikes are a primary form of transportation. Building safe, well-maintained bike lanes, trails, and non-motorized corridors improves mobility, encourages physical activity, and reduces emissions. These improvements also support individuals using mobility devices by providing smoother, safer, and more predictable pathways throughout the city.

The public health benefits are clear: reduced pollution, increased physical activity, and a decrease in chronic conditions linked to sedentary lifestyles. But just as important are the social and economic outcomes. Inclusive park and transportation planning supports mental health, mitigates poverty by improving access to jobs and resources, and helps communities thrive socially by inviting people to share space in meaningful ways.

Ultimately, by expanding green space, enhancing tree canopy, and investing in equitable biking infrastructure, cities can simultaneously address environmental challenges and societal needs. I encourage all communities to take a data-driven, community-informed approach—one that listens to

residents, engages local stakeholders, and avoids one-size-fits-all solutions. When we plan intentionally and equitably, parks and leisure services become far more than amenities—they become engines of public health, inclusion, and civic resilience.

Beyond just these areas, there are many other ways we can positively impact community health. At PlayCore's Center for Outreach, Research, & Education (CORE), we believe that play and recreation are essential to building a healthier, happier society and are critical to improving quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. Our mission is to build communities through play and recreation. Our passion is collaborating with and learning from leading scholars and experts to study these topics and share knowledge that addresses diverse community needs. Visit education.playcore.com to explore our best practice design guides and planning tools focused on inclusion, nature, outdoor adult fitness, pathways for play, and promoting physical activity through active play. We also offer research and resources on music in parks, bicycle advocacy, intergenerational play, recreational surfacing, and design trends for dog parks.

What gaps do you currently see in parks and leisure education, and how can institutions, organizations, and international collaborations—between universities and professional associations—address these needs, particularly in response to global challenges like accessibility, climate change, social justice, and digital transformation?

I recently had the chance to explore a similar question in an article I co-authored for Parks & Recreation magazine titled "The Switchback Career Path: Resilience and Growth in Parks and Recreation." In it, we looked at how career development in our field doesn't always follow a straight, upward climb. More often, it's a series of intentional turns—what we described as a switchback trail. And just like on a real hike, those winding paths aren't a sign that you're lost—they're often the smartest, most sustainable way to reach the top.

That switchback metaphor has stuck with me because it captures what's missing in many of our current educational models. A lot of parks and leisure programs are still built around a traditional framework, training students to follow a predictable path from entry-level job to leadership role. But that's not how most of us are navigating our careers anymore. The work is changing. The world is changing. And we need to make sure the way we prepare future professionals is evolving, too.

Today's workforce is moving fluidly across sectors—between public, nonprofit, and private spaces. People are bringing skills from one role into another, building resilience and adaptability as they go. But many education programs haven't fully caught up to that reality. We should be helping students develop practical, transferable skills—things like leadership, communication, digital literacy, and community engagement—while also giving them real-world experiences that reflect the challenges they'll face on the ground.

At the same time, we need to broaden the way we think about partnerships. Schools and universities can't do this alone. Collaborating with parks departments, associations, and even international partners can open up valuable learning opportunities and help students see the bigger picture of where their career could take them. There's a lot of power in cross-sector, hands-on experience—and it's often what sets a future leader apart.

We also need to shift how we talk about careers in this field. Outdoor recreation is a \$1 trillion contributor to the U.S. economy. It's not just a stepping stone or a summer job—it's a meaningful, long-term career path that impacts community wellbeing in a major way. That message needs to come through loud and clear in the classroom, in our outreach, and in how we support the next generation of professionals.

In the end, the most important thing we can do is prepare people for a career that isn't always predictable, but is full of opportunity. The goal isn't to get everyone climbing the same ladder. It's to give them the tools, perspective, and confidence to take the turns, make the pivots, and keep moving forward—wherever the path may lead.

How do you foresee the future of public parks and leisure services evolving, and what regulatory measures are necessary to ensure that these innovations, including technological advancements, meet legal requirements, community needs, and ethical considerations? Do you think technology can help make these spaces more inclusive for all people?

I see the future of public parks and leisure services continuing to prioritize inclusion, accessibility, intergenerational play, and support for mental and physical health. In the United States, we're facing a well-documented loneliness epidemic, and many individuals, across age and demographic groups, are struggling to find meaningful connections in their communities. Parks and leisure services are uniquely positioned to address this need, acting as catalysts for connection, healing, and community well-being.

Time spent in parks has measurable impacts on mental health and physical wellness. Likewise, guided leisure programs provide a safe, low-pressure environment where individuals can learn new skills, explore hobbies, and connect with others. One thing I've observed in my career is that while extroverts may find it easier to engage, many people, including myself, can feel intimidated trying something new. Parks offer a welcoming space where structured programs help break down social barriers and create opportunities for genuine interaction.

As the field evolves, I believe parks and leisure services will remain on the cutting edge of emerging trends. This is a workforce that is highly adaptable and attuned to what's current or on the horizon—whether it's through new fitness modalities, cultural programs, or environmental initiatives. Globally, I continue to be impressed by how committed leisure professionals are to innovation and selfless service.

From a regulatory standpoint, several measures are essential to ensure that future innovations, particularly those involving technology, remain ethical, equitable, and legally sound. First, we must design programs with an ecological lens, prioritizing sustainability, community history, and local input. Community engagement, transparency, and environmentally responsible development practices should be non-negotiable in building trust and ensuring long-term success.

Second, as AI and digital tools become more prominent in planning, programming, and administration, we must establish policies around human oversight. This ensures consistency, mitigates algorithmic bias, and maintains a level of quality that serves people, not just systems. Technology should enhance our work, not replace the human relationships and insights that are the heart of our profession.

When thoughtfully applied, technology can absolutely make parks and leisure spaces more inclusive. We already rely on systems for registration, scheduling, budgeting, and more, but AI has the potential to revolutionize these tools. Through data analysis, generative AI can help us identify emerging needs, tailor services to specific communities, and evaluate impact in real time.

Imagine using AI to synthesize local trends, government datasets, and community feedback to build dynamic, scalable action plans. We can use this insight to better address key priorities like accessibility, intergenerational engagement, social connection, mental health, and environmental stewardship—and to do so in partnership with local stakeholders, rather than in isolation.

The future of our field is both human-centered and data-informed. As long as we lead with empathy, equity, and ethics, I believe technology will be a powerful ally in shaping parks and leisure services that truly serve everyone.



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