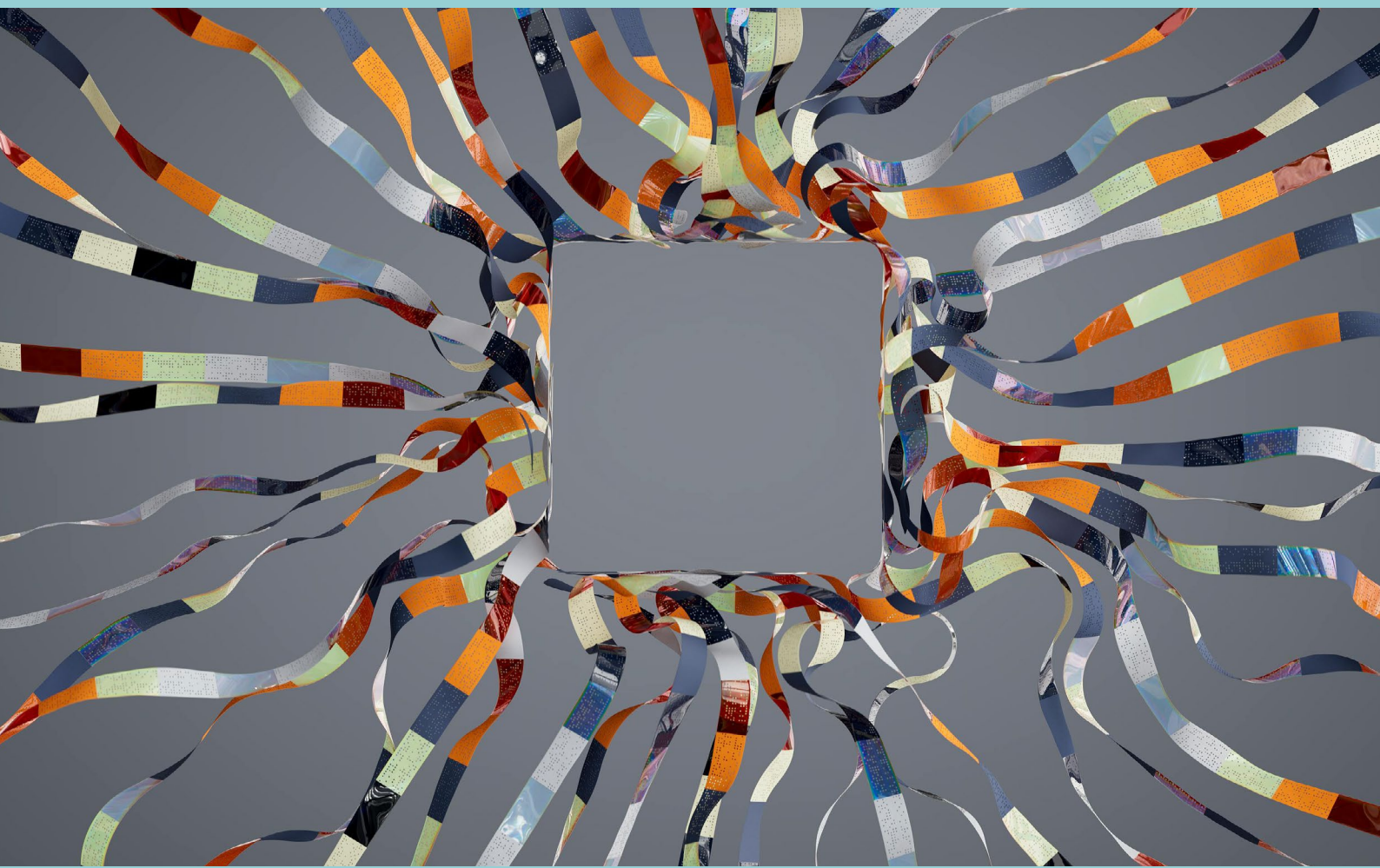


WL NEWS

ISSUE 65

**GLOBAL HIGHLIGHTS:
WORLD LEISURE CONGRESS 2025 PREVIEW
UN TOURISM PANEL APPOINTMENTS
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY JOINS
WLCE NETWORK**



July 2025

Editorial

Are you a
WLO Premium
member?
Submit your
news here!

Dear members and colleagues,

Welcome to the July 2025 issue of WL News!

We begin this issue with a preview of the 18th World Leisure Congress taking place August 25-28 in Breda, Netherlands. Under the theme **Leisure for a Better Society**, this global event will explore how leisure drives advances in diversity and inclusion, sustainability, and innovation. Don't miss your chance to be part of this transformative gathering.

We are proud to announce that three WLCE experts have been appointed to the UN Tourism Panel of Experts, a milestone which highlights our network's growing influence on international tourism research and policy. We are also thrilled to welcome North Carolina State University to the WLCE Network, further strengthening our global collaboration in leisure research and education.

In addition, WLO Board Member Dr. Hazel Maxwell took part in a keynote panel at the 50th Leisure Studies Association Annual Conference, discussing how leisure can respond to today's global challenges through justice and inclusion.

In our Network news, you'll find updates on Austria's COOLYMP urban revitalization project, Australia's National Community Sport Infrastructure plan, and Kinshasa's inaugural World Music and Tourism Festival.

Our Publications section features research on social and ecological sustainability in tourism, hospitality, and leisure destinations.

Don't miss our Opportunities section, featuring info on becoming a World Leisure Centre of Excellence, hosting the World Leisure Congress 2030, and submitting proposals for the WLO Book Series.

Finally, the issue includes the recent Leisure Management SIG webinar on cross-cultural recreation and sport facilities.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to connecting with you in Breda in August.

Yours truly,

Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere
WLO Chief Operating Officer



WLO News



World Leisure Congress 2025: Transforming society through leisure

From **August 25-28**, the vibrant city of Breda, the Netherlands will host the [18th World Leisure Congress](#), bringing together leisure professionals from over 30 countries. Hosted by [Breda University of Applied Sciences](#) in partnership with the World Leisure Organization, the congress will explore how leisure can help build more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies.

Under the theme **Leisure for a Better Society**, the event will offer sessions covering pressing topics like social justice, sustainability, digital transformation, and human well-being.

Attendees will discuss how responsible tourism can transform communities, the role of urban public spaces in promoting inclusion and

health, and innovative uses of technologies like virtual reality and digital twins to address environmental challenges. Panel discussions will also explore how leisure relates to identity – including gender, sexuality, disability, and race – as well as how play and creative expression influence youth development and intergenerational engagement.

This year's program includes a rich lineup of WLO-led sessions designed for students, researchers, and professionals to explore the transformative power of leisure in diverse contexts. Learn more about these sessions here: [WLO sessions at WLC 2025](#).

Another highlight of the Congress is **Industry Day**, organized with [CELTH](#) (the Dutch Centre of Expertise on Leisure, Tourism, and Hospitality), which connects academic research with real-world challenges through site visits and interactive sessions with industry leaders.

The Congress is just around the corner, but you still have time to register for both the World Leisure Congress and Industry Day. Tickets are priced at €120, and you can **use the discount code 'CELTHID'** to receive a special offer.

Beyond the program, WLC 2025 will immerse attendees in Breda's unique cultural atmosphere, starting with the opening ceremony at the iconic [Grote Kerk](#). The city's blend of medieval charm and modern innovation reflects the congress's core values: connection, accessibility, and shared experience.

In the words of [Prof. Dr. Marcel Bastiaansen](#), a key figure on the organizing committee, “WLC 2025 is not only a platform to present research, but a space to rethink leisure as a transformative force for well-being, inclusion, and sustainability worldwide.”

With its forward-thinking agenda and international scope, the 18th World Leisure Congress promises to be an inspiring event focused on using leisure as a foundation for a better future.



Three WLCE representatives join UN Tourism Panel of Experts

WLO is proud to announce that three distinguished scholars from our World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE) network have been appointed to the UN Tourism Panel of Experts and will contribute to the [World Tourism Barometer](#) — one of the most respected global sources for tourism data and analysis.

In our role as an Affiliate Member, WLO was invited by [UN Tourism](#) to submit nominations for this influential panel. In recognition of the outstanding academic and research caliber across our WLCE network, we opened the opportunity to our members and received three exceptional nominations from across the globe:

- [Prof. Dr. Glauber Santos](#), University of São Paulo (Latin America)

- [Prof. Miklós Bánhidi](#), PhD, Hungarian University of Sports Science (Europe)
- [Dr. Joseph M. Cheer](#), Western Sydney University (Asia-Pacific)

We are delighted to share that **UN Tourism has accepted all three nominations**, underscoring the importance of regional diversity and highlighting the depth of expertise within our network.

This remarkable achievement reflects the global recognition of WLO and the WLCE network’s significant role in shaping international tourism research and policy. It also reinforces our commitment to advancing leisure and tourism knowledge through collaborative, cross-regional excellence.

We look forward to sharing further updates on this exciting collaboration.



North Carolina State University joins the World Leisure Centers of Excellence network

The World Leisure Organization is pleased to announce that [North Carolina State University](#) (NC State) has officially joined the World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE) Network.

Through its [Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management](#), founded in 1947, NC State has been at the forefront of educating future leaders, advancing research, and fostering global partnerships to strengthen communities through recreation, sport, tourism, and events.

With a strong commitment to building stronger, healthier communities, the department offers a diverse range of undergraduate, graduate, and online programs, focusing on areas such as parks and recreation management, tourism and event management, and environmental education. Additionally, its innovative Digital Imagery Visualization Lab provides cutting-edge tools for planning and analysis in parks, recreation, and tourism.

By joining the WLCE Network, NC State will collaborate with other leading institutions around the world to promote leisure as a vehicle for community well-being, sustainable development, and social innovation.

Welcome to the Network, NC State University!



Dr. Hazel Maxwell participates in keynote panel at 50th Leisure Studies Association Annual Conference

WLO Board Member [Dr. Hazel Maxwell](#) participated in a keynote panel at the [Leisure Studies Association \(LSA\) 50th Anniversary Conference 2025](#).

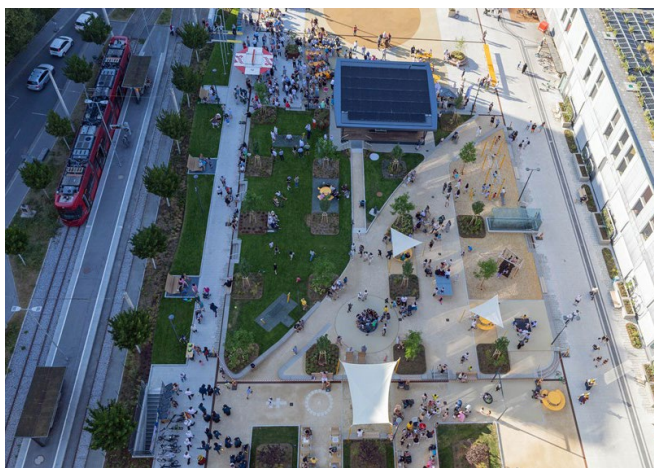
The session, titled **Justice in the Face of Polycrisis: The Future of Leisure?**, brought together leading international scholars representing a cross-section of academic leisure organizations to mark LSA's 50th anniversary.

The discussion highlighted the growing importance of leisure in today's society while recognizing that worldwide access to leisure is unequal. The panel focused on the many overlapping global crises – social inequalities, environmental problems, and challenges related to space and communities – which affect how people experience leisure, and explored how leisure scholars can respond to these complex issues through fair and thoughtful approaches. The goal of the session was to find ways to create more just and inclusive leisure opportunities, both now and in the future.

Dr. Hazel Maxwell is a highly accomplished leisure educator and practitioner with more than 30 years of experience in the UK, USA, and Australia. She is currently an academic at [Western Sydney University](#) and has held leadership and editorial roles across several international leisure and sport organizations.



Network



credits © IKM/F.Bär

Austria's COOLYMP project: Redesigning public space through climate-sensitive urban planning and community engagement

On June 24, 2025, the city of Innsbruck, Austria officially opened the redesigned Dr. Alois Lugger Square as part of the [COOLYMP project](#) — a transformative initiative to turn sealed, overheated surfaces into inclusive, climate-resilient spaces for leisure and social life.

Located in the heart of Innsbruck's Olympic Village, the square was previously a shadeless concrete expanse. Today, thanks to close collaboration with over 400 residents, it has become a 'green living room' filled with trees, water features, elevated green zones, and a multifunctional stage that invites everyday use and connection.

At its core, the COOLYMP project is about sustainable, participatory urban planning. Residents helped shape every stage of the project – from debating ideas to planting vegetation – showing how local engagement can drive resilient and meaningful change.

"Living isn't just about the apartment — it's always about the surrounding environment," noted Franz Danler, Managing Director of IIG, Innsbruck's housing company, underscoring the focus on quality of life.

The redesign has increased green coverage from just 0.34% to nearly 25%, and surface temperatures are expected to drop by 3-4°C during summer months.

Beyond Lugger Square, the project also includes the redevelopment of Olympic Park and Ander-Lan-Straße, with a total of over 8,800 m² of public space being revitalized to promote accessibility, climate adaptation, and everyday leisure. The initiative is monitored by the University of Innsbruck and partners to assess long-term impact, offering a replicable model for people-centered urban transformation.



Shape the future of community sport infrastructure in Australia!

The [Australian Sports Commission](#) (ASC) is inviting everyone involved in the sport, recreation, and leisure industry across Australia to contribute to the country's first [National Community Sport Infrastructure Action Plan](#).

This is a unique opportunity to help design inclusive, accessible, and fit-for-purpose sport facilities that support long-term participation and healthier communities.

As part of this process, the ASC particularly welcomes input from [Parks & Leisure Australia](#) (PLA) Members! The more people participate, the stronger and more representative the final plan will be.

The survey takes just 15 minutes and will remain open until late August. Get all the info and [access the survey here](#).

This is your chance to make a real impact on Australia's sport and leisure spaces!



Kinshasa hosts first UN Tourism-backed World Music and Tourism Festival

Under the High Patronage of H.E. Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in partnership with [UN Tourism](#), Kinshasa successfully hosted the inaugural [World Music and Tourism Festival](#) from July 16-18, 2025.

Held under the theme **The Rumba Route for Peace**, the Festival celebrated [Congolese Rumba](#) – recognized on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity – as a driver of cultural identity, tourism, and inclusive growth.

Over three days at the [Central African Cultural and Arts Centre](#) (CCAPAC), participants engaged in policy roundtables on musical diplomacy, artists' rights, youth innovation, and destination branding, alongside performances, a cultural village, exhibitions, and a Rumba-themed gala.

The event brought together partners including [UNESCO](#), the [African Regional Intellectual Property Organization](#) (ARIPO), [Sony Music Entertainment](#), and [Sound Diplomacy](#), along with cultural leaders from Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili remarked: *"This Festival celebrated Congolese creativity while fostering local development, regional cooperation, and international understanding."*

Research

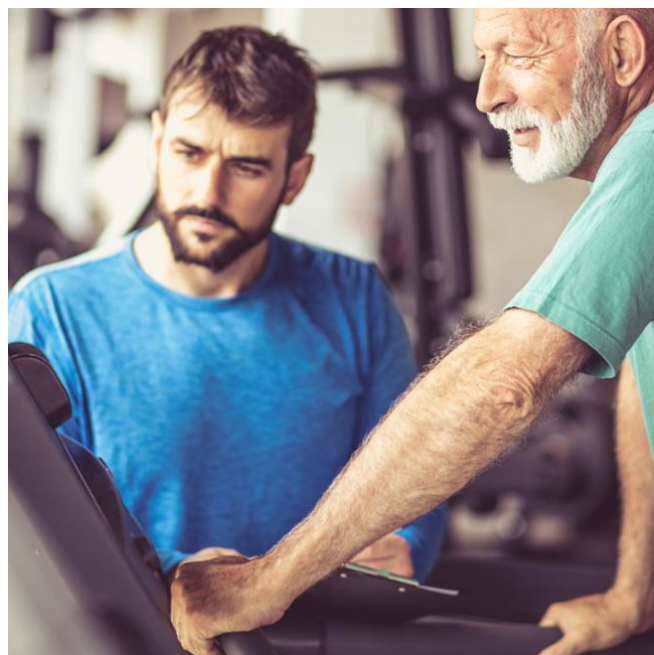


UNESCO highlights the economic and cultural potential of Africa's book industry in a new report

from [UNESCO](#)

UNESCO's research report reveals that Africa's book industry holds an estimated \$18.5 billion in revenue potential, fueled by vibrant festivals, digital platforms, and emerging literary talent. The study calls for stronger policies and investments to expand access, support creative industries, and boost cultural and leisure opportunities across the continent.

[READ MORE...](#)



GM Active study reveals the power of health intervention programs

by [Kath Hudson](#)

A study by [GM Active](#) on health intervention programs in the Greater Manchester area reveals that these initiatives provide over £20,000 of social value per person each year, as well as £5,600 worth of health improvements. Participants reported better well-being, fewer GP visits, and strong motivation to stay active over the long-term. The findings support expanding physical activity programs as a cost-effective public health strategy.

[READ MORE...](#)

Policy



UN Tourism and E1 Series join forces to promote sustainable mobility and tourism through sport

by *UN Tourism*

UN Tourism and the [E1 Series](#), the world's first all-electric raceboat championship, have partnered to promote electric boat racing as a means of engaging in sustainable sports tourism. The agreement focuses on advancing clean marine technologies, supporting sustainable development goals, and raising awareness for marine conservation. This collaboration highlights the growing role of sports tourism in driving environmental and economic progress worldwide.

[READ MORE...](#)



Tourism and culture take center stage at Executive Training Program in Mongolia

by *UN Tourism*

The 19th UN Tourism Executive Training Program in Mongolia focused on the idea of using culture to build resilient and inclusive tourism. Bringing together 33 delegates from 21 countries, the program served as a unique forum for knowledge exchange on issues related to policy trends and strategies. Led by UN Tourism consultant and global expert on sustainable tourism, Professor Joseph M. Cheer, the program aimed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of how culture-driven tourism can support economic recovery, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

[READ MORE...](#)



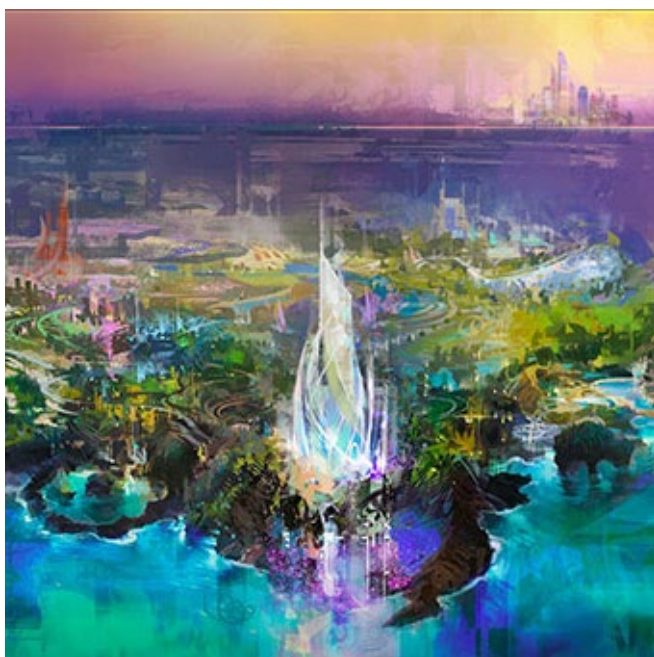
Legacy Impact Program announced to create inclusive paddling participation pathways across NSW

from [Australasian Leisure Management](#)

Inspired by the achievements of athletes participating in the 2025 ICF Slalom World Championships, the NSW Government is investing AU\$250,000 in a Legacy Impact Program to support inclusive pathways for future paddlers. Olympic champions Jess and Noemie Fox joined NSW Minister for Sport Steve Kamper to announce the program, which includes community outreach initiatives, scholarships, coach training, and para-athlete support. The event is expected to host top paddlers from 50 nations and attract around 20,000 spectators.

[READ MORE...](#)

Industry



Disney theme park resort planned for Abu Dhabi's Yas Island

from [Australasian Leisure Management](#)

The Walt Disney Company and [Miral](#), a leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences in UAE, have announced that a new Disney resort is being planned for Yas Island in Abu Dhabi. The new waterfront theme park will blend Disney's iconic stories with Emirati culture, architecture, and scenery. Set to open in 2032 or 2033, it will be Disney's seventh global destination and a major addition to Abu Dhabi's growing entertainment hub.

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Go Media Stadium solar panels power sold-out One New Zealand Warriors match

from [Australasian Leisure Management](#)

Auckland's [Go Media Stadium](#) has installed over 1600 solar panels to supply 60% of the arena's energy and significantly reduce its carbon emissions. The stadium's recent [One New Zealand Warriors](#) match against the [Gold Coast Titans](#) was the world's first-ever solar-powered National Rugby League fixture. The panels will save an estimated AU\$150K annually, and it is hoped other venues will soon be inspired to follow suit.

[READ MORE...](#)

Member Quote

Experiencing the WLO Awards: Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship



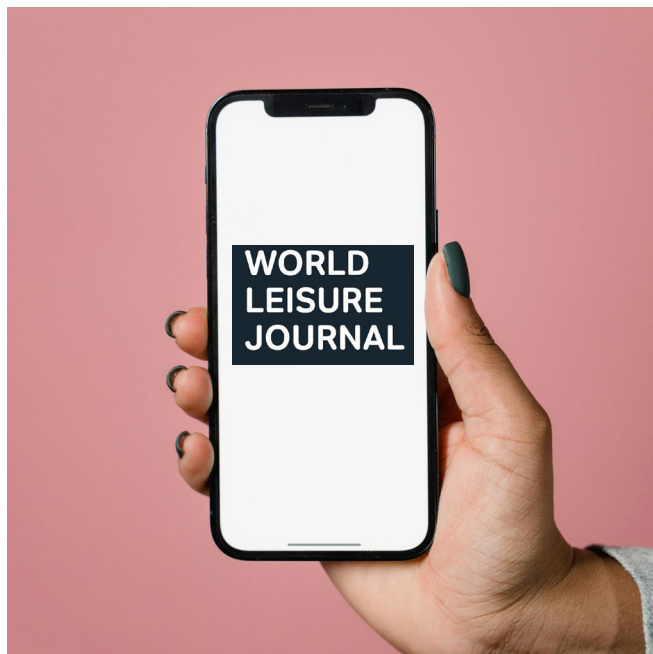
"Participating in the World Leisure Congress in New Zealand as a TRISS Scholarship recipient was a turning point in my personal, professional, and academic journey. Sharing the outcomes of my dissertation in an international setting not only enhanced the visibility of my research but also provided meaningful 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

Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship



Publications



World Leisure Journal articles with free access this month

[“Few people and the birds”. Negotiating tourism development and more-than-human hospitality on the margin: World Leisure Journal \(Vol 66 , No 4\)](#): This study on rural tourism explores the relationship between tourism development in the remote region of Melrakkaslétta, Iceland and the area’s significant bird populations, and evaluates the potential for these creatures to act as an attraction that could lead to socio-economic revitalisation.

[Public perception and preferences towards recreation ecosystem service in green spaces of Addis Ababa and its surroundings: World Leisure Journal \(Vol 0, No 0\)](#): This paper investigates public perceptions of outdoor recreation and seeks to determine preferred types of green spaces in order to enhance green space planning in central Ethiopia. It argues that by aligning green space development with these community insights, the utility and enjoyment of public recreational areas can be enhanced.

[Perceived setting interdependencies: the hidden barrier to urban parks’ stress-alleviation potential: World Leisure Journal: \(Vol 0, No 0\)](#): This study examines how perceived interdependencies between settings in urban parks influence visitors’ stress recovery, emphasizing the role of biodiversity and park design in supporting restorative leisure experiences.

Opportunities

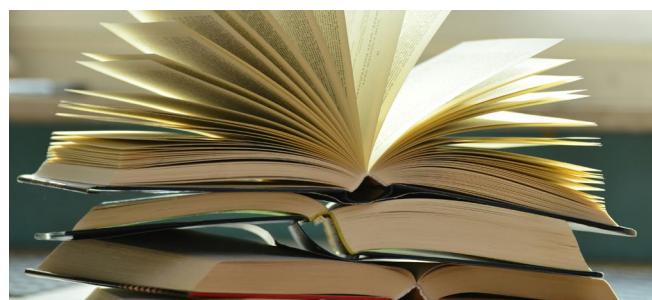


Open call to host the World Leisure Congress 2030!

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](#).



Call for Submissions: WLO Book Series

The World Leisure Organization, in partnership with [Routledge](#), invites you to contribute to the prestigious **WLO Book Series** — a leading platform for advancing international scholarship and critical dialogue on leisure.

This interdisciplinary series aims to publish the most up-to-date and innovative critical perspectives on the leisure field. It reflects WLO's broad view of leisure as a multi-dimensional reality encompassing tourism, sports, culture, and recreation. The series also explores cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral connections — both within and beyond leisure studies — while developing valuable educational tools for both academic and professional communities.

We're especially interested in bold, interdisciplinary proposals that connect leisure with health, sustainability, policy, education, and technology. This is your chance to showcase innovative ideas and help shape the global conversation on leisure.

Don't miss out — learn more and submit your proposal here: [Book Series | World Leisure Organization](#)



Encounter



Cross-cultural analysis of Australian and American recreation and sport facilities

Insights from Texas State University's World Leisure Centre of Excellence Students

Produced by WLO's Special Interest Group (SIG) on Leisure Management, this webinar featured students from Texas State University, a World Leisure Centre of Excellence, who were studying abroad in Melbourne as part of a course on Cross-Cultural Studies in Recreation and Sport Facility Design. They shared comparative insights on aquatic centers, strength and cardio facilities, and martial arts training centers in the U.S. and Australia, exploring differences in accessibility, target markets, amenities, fee structures, and branding — offering valuable perspectives on how recreation and sport facilities are designed and experienced across cultures.

Watch the video [here](#).

Stay connected with the World Leisure Organization!



Follow our social media channels to keep up with the latest WLO news, global leisure opportunities, and updates from our vibrant international network. Join the conversation and be part of the community shaping the future of leisure worldwide!



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