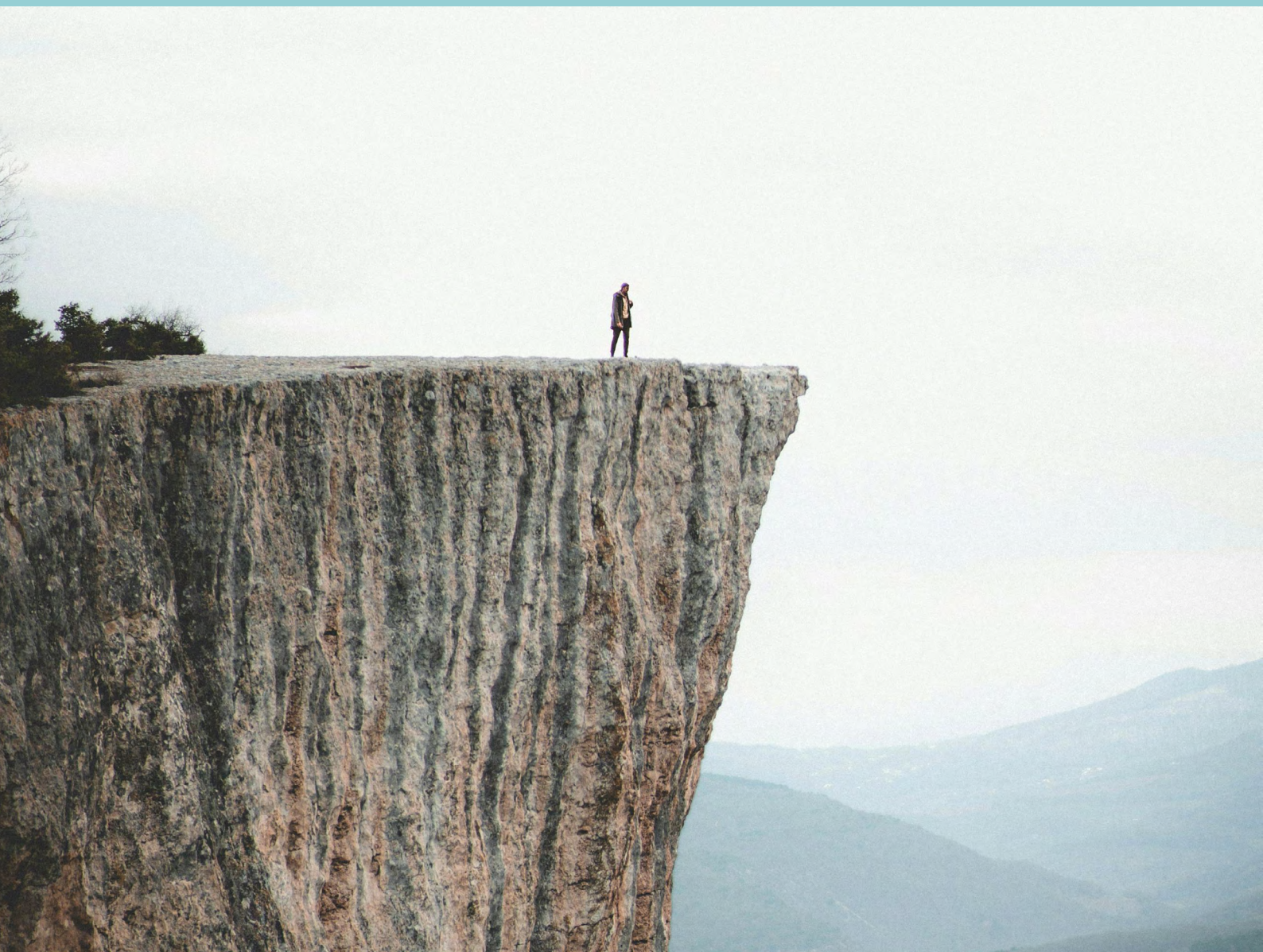


WL NEWS

ISSUE 68

LEISURE LEADERSHIP ACROSS A CHANGING WORLD



NOVEMBER 2025

Editorial

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

Dear members and colleagues,

This month, WLO deepened its global presence through major international events and partnerships. We participated in **IBTM World 2025** in Barcelona, strengthening connections within the events and experience economy. Later in the month, we served as **Conference Partner of Qatar Travel Mart (QTM) 2025**, where WLO curated a three-day program bringing together leaders from culture, heritage, hospitality, innovation, and wellness to explore the future of travel and community well-being.

We are also pleased to share positive news from our flagship publication: the **World Leisure Journal** reached a record number of downloads in 2025, demonstrating the growing relevance of leisure research worldwide. Preparations for **World Leisure Day 2026** are now underway as well, with Dr. Rasul A. Mowatt announced as keynote speaker.

Across our **Network**, this issue highlights the work of **WLCE Western Sydney University**, which launched a Visiting Research Scholar Program focused on leisure and aging; and **WLCE Vancouver Island University**, recently selected to host the **2026 Canadian Congress on Leisure Research**. We also celebrate the renewal of WLO's participation in the governing bodies of the **UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)** through 2029.

Our **Research, Policy, and Industry** sections continue to show how leisure connects to broader global challenges and opportunities. This month, we feature insights on outdoor inclusion; heroic narratives in adventure leisure; new leadership at UNESCO and UN Tourism; AI shaping the tourism sector; and emerging trends in wellness, youth well-being, and destination sustainability.

In the **Publications** section, we spotlight recent **World Leisure Journal** articles examining volunteering—from Eurocentrism in volunteer research to the role of social media in 'voluntourism', and pathways toward more ethical, community-focused volunteer travel.

Finally, we encourage our members to take part in several upcoming **Opportunities**, including open calls to host the **World Leisure Congress 2030**, join the **WLCE Network**, and **contribute to WLJ Special Issues**.

We hope you enjoy this issue and continue to connect with us across the WLO community.

Yours truly,

Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere
WLO Chief Operating Officer



WLO News



WLO at IBTM World 2025 in Barcelona

The World Leisure Organization (WLO) participated in [IBTM World 2025](#), held from **November 18–20** at [Fira Barcelona Gran Via](#), Spain. As one of the world's leading events for **meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE)**, IBTM World brought together more than **12,000 professionals** and **2,500 exhibitors** to explore the latest trends shaping the global experience economy.

The 2025 theme, **'Creating Connections that Matter'**, highlighted innovation, inclusion, and legacy-building in business and cultural events.

Representing the WLO Secretariat, Communication and Events Officer [Mireia Iglesias](#) attended on Tuesday, November 18, engaging with industry and institutional partners.

Through its participation, WLO strengthened partnerships and increased its visibility within the global events sector, reaffirming its commitment to **sustainable and people-centered approaches** to event design and leisure management. The organization also emphasized the essential role of **creativity and culture** in supporting global cooperation and well-being.



WLO at Qatar Travel Mart (QTM) 2025

The World Leisure Organization (WLO) was proud to serve as a **Conference Partner** of [Qatar Travel Mart \(QTM\) 2025](#), held from **November 24–26** at the [Doha Exhibition and Convention Center \(DECC\)](#) under the theme **'Bridging Cultures, Connecting Futures'**.

The QTM 2025 Conference, which was curated by WLO, brought together more than 40 international leaders to examine how **culture, sustainability, wellness, and innovation** are reshaping the future of travel. Across three days, the program highlighted key ideas and emerging trends driving destination development and community well-being.

On Monday, November 24, the session on **Culture and Heritage Tourism**, led by Chair of the WLO Board [Prof. Joanne A. Schroeder](#), explored how storytelling, design, and innovation help preserve heritage while creating meaningful, sustainable visitor experiences.

On Tuesday, November 25, the focus shifted to **Hospitality, Innovation, and Sustainability**, chaired by WLO's CEO [Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere](#). Speakers discussed how technology, design, and talent investment are shaping a more responsible and resilient hospitality industry.

On Wednesday, November 26, under the leadership of [Dr. Sandro Carnicelli](#), Editor-in-Chief of the World Leisure Journal, the session on **(Mega) Events, Wellness, and Health Tourism** examined how global events and wellness tourism contribute to well-being, economic growth, and destination competitiveness.

QTM 2025 showcased Qatar's growing role as a **forward-thinking hub** for global travel and cultural exchange. WLO's active participation reinforced its mission to promote leisure as a catalyst for **sustainability, cultural connection, and social innovation**, while contributing to international dialogue on the future of tourism and community well-being.



WLJ: Record growth in 2025 downloads

The *World Leisure Journal* (WLJ) continues to expand its global reach, achieving **record-breaking engagement in 2025**. According to third-quarter data, downloads rose from 18,897 in 2024 to 24,460 in 2025, marking a **29% increase** and, for the first time, surpassing 20,000 downloads every quarter.

This steady rise underscores the journal's growing influence and the relevance of leisure research in addressing key **social, cultural, and environmental issues**.

Under the leadership of Editor-in-Chief [Dr. Sandro Carnicelli](#), WLJ continues to publish high-quality, interdisciplinary work that connects leisure to **well-being, sustainability, and innovation**.

WLO celebrates this collective achievement and extends its appreciation to the **authors, reviewers, and editorial team** whose contributions ensure that the *World Leisure Journal* remains a cornerstone of academic excellence and a driving force for knowledge exchange in the leisure field.

Network



A WLCE visiting scholar experience at Western Sydney University

In Spring 2025, [Western Sydney University's World Leisure Center of Excellence](#) launched a **Visiting Research Scholar Program**, bringing together faculty from WSU and Penn State University to explore how leisure enhances the lives of older Australians.

Alongside this, the WSU WLCE unveiled a **new logo** reflecting its values of **connection, innovation, and global impact**.

[READ MORE...](#)



WLCE Vancouver Island University to host the 2026 Canadian Congress on Leisure Research

The **World Leisure Centre of Excellence (WLCE)** at [Vancouver Island University](#) will host the **2026 Canadian Congress on Leisure Research (CCLR)** from **June 24–26, 2026**, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on the ancestral unceded territory of the [Snuneymuxw First Nation](#).

Organized under the theme '**Leisure is Transformation**', the Congress will bring together scholars, practitioners, and academics from around the world to examine how leisure can inspire and sustain **social, cultural, and ecological change**.

The Congress program will feature **keynotes, presentations, panels, workshops, and interactive sessions**.

Building on the **seven dimensions of leisure** — Recreation, Travel & Tourism, Parks & Trails, Arts & Culture, Sports, Festivals & Events, and Play — CCLR 2026 aims to foster dialogue across disciplines and highlight innovative approaches to **well-being, inclusion, and sustainability**.

By hosting this international gathering, WLCE Vancouver Island University reaffirms its leadership in advancing **leisure research** and **knowledge exchange**.

The Congress reflects the ongoing contribution of **WLO Centers of Excellence** to global scholarship, promoting leisure as a **transformative force** for communities and a pathway to **individual and collective well-being**.

[READ MORE...](#)



WLO and UNESCO Convention 2005 — Participation renewed until 2029

The World Leisure Organization (WLO) has successfully renewed its participation in the sessions of the governing bodies of the **UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)** until 2029.

Through this renewal, WLO reaffirms its commitment to promoting **cultural diversity** as an essential component of **sustainable development** and **inclusive leisure** worldwide.

The organization will continue engaging as a **civil society partner**, contributing its expertise to future statutory meetings of the Convention.

This recognition further strengthens WLO's long-standing collaboration with **UNESCO** in advancing culture-based approaches to **education, creativity, and community well-being**.

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Research



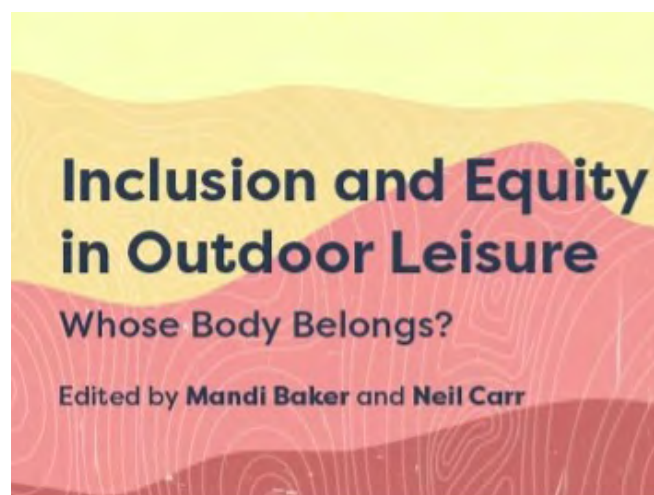
Dr. Paul Gilchrist – “Other Everests: The Heroic in Leisure”

from The Leisure Society Podcast

The **Leisure Society Podcast**, which regularly features the social and cultural dimensions of leisure, wellbeing, leisure spaces, and contemporary trends shaping the field, marks its 30th episode by featuring [Dr. Paul Gilchrist](#), co-editor of [Other Everests: One Mountain, Many Worlds](#), a fascinating book which brings together new voices and perspectives on the historical and cultural significance of Mount Everest in the modern world.

The podcast episode explores **adventure, risk, and heroism in leisure**, revealing how endurance and aspiration shape human experience in outdoor environments.

[LISTEN TO THE PODCAST...](#)



Mandi Baker & Neil Carr – Inclusion and Equity in Outdoor Leisure: Whose Body Belongs?

from CABI Digital Library

This insightful book examines how **inclusion, power, and representation** shape outdoor leisure. Through diverse narratives and perspectives, it challenges dominant assumptions and highlights barriers faced by minoritized participants, offering insights for creating **more equitable, accessible, and empowering outdoor spaces**.

[READ THE BOOK...](#)

Policy



UN Tourism confirms new Secretary-General: Shaikha Al Nowais to become first woman leader in 2026

UN Tourism has confirmed Shaikha Al Nowais as its next Secretary-General, marking a historic milestone as **the first woman to lead the United Nations specialized agency for tourism.**

Her appointment, ratified in Riyadh, signals a new era of **inclusive, innovative, and responsible leadership** in the global tourism sector.

[READ MORE...](#)



UN Tourism sets artificial intelligence agenda for sector as General Assembly concludes in Riyadh

UN Tourism has concluded its largest-ever General Assembly in Riyadh, uniting 148 Member States to advance **a shared vision for innovation and artificial intelligence.**

The organization pledged to harness AI to drive **inclusivity, sustainability, and growth** across the global tourism industry.

[READ MORE...](#)



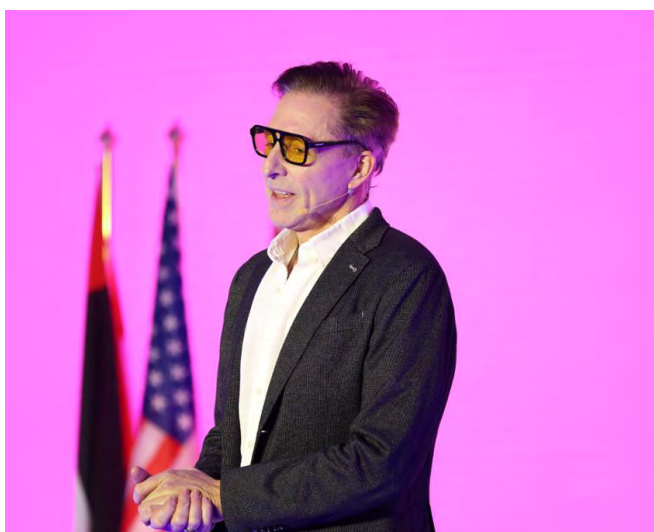
UNESCO elects Khaled El-Enany as new Director-General

Following a vote in the General Conference, UNESCO has elected **Khaled El-Enany** (Egypt) as its new Director-General.

His mandate began November 15, 2025 and marks the **first time an Arab national has led the organization**. The election signals potential shifts in global cultural heritage and education policies under renewed leadership.

[READ MORE...](#)

Industry



Upgrade Labs announces new AI-driven longevity centre in Dubai

by Helen Andrews

Longevity entrepreneur **Dave Asprey** announced that **Upgrade Labs** will open its first UAE center in Dubai, marking the brand's first step into the international economy.

Speaking at the Global Wellness Summit, Asprey highlighted the company's **data-driven, AI-supported approach to improving recovery, energy, and fitness**, claiming to have demonstrated significant gains in VO2 Max and overall well-being through highly personalized, technology-enhanced training.

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Youth Sport Trust's Class of 2035 Report warns of health crisis facing children

by Kath Hudson

The Youth Sport Trust's Class of 2035 Report warns that declining physical activity will lead to **poorer health, lower happiness, and reduced life chances** for today's children.

AI-based projections show rising obesity, worsening mental health, and increasing inactivity unless urgent action is taken.

In response, the charity has launched the **Sport Changes Lives Commission** to develop recommendations for reversing these trends by 2026.

[READ MORE...](#)



Therme Group outlines plan to welcome 100–120 million guests globally in the next 15 years

by Helen Andrews

At the Global Wellness Summit in Dubai, **Robert Hanea**, founder and CEO of **Therme Group**, outlined plans to expand accessible social bathing experiences to **100–120 million guests** over the next 15 years.

He emphasized the need to democratize wellness through large-scale, affordable facilities that foster **community, belonging, and shared urban experiences**, rejecting negative views of ‘crowding’ as contrary to the social and health benefits of communal bathing.

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Beyond Tourism: Coordinated Pathways to Inclusive Prosperity

from World Economic Forum

This white paper, developed in collaboration with Kearney, argues that coordinated, ecosystem-wide action is essential for building a **resilient, inclusive, and sustainable** travel and tourism sector.

With global tourism projected to reach 30 billion visits by 2034, the paper highlights both rising pressures and successful case studies showing how **aligned governance, investment, innovation, and community-focused policies** can transform challenges into opportunities for shared prosperity.

[READ THE WHITE PAPER...](#)



Publications



Publications

This month, we suggest three *World Leisure Journal* articles aligned with the 2026 WL Day theme **'Leisure that inspires change: Volunteering for a sustainable future.'**

[Challenging the Eurocentrism in Volunteering | *World Leisure Journal*](#)

This paper critiques dominant Eurocentric models of volunteering, arguing that they overlook the **diverse cultural meanings and practices** that shape volunteering as a leisure experience. By examining the limitations of these frameworks, the authors highlight the complexity and variability of volunteering experiences across contexts and call for approaches that recognize **culturally-driven interpretations** of leisure and **empower individuals** to define their own participation.

[From Pictures to Perceptions: Instagram's Role in Shaping Volunteer Leisure Experiences Abroad | *World Leisure Journal*](#)

This study examines how Instagram shapes volunteer tourism by analyzing posts using the hashtag **#voluntourism**, their narrative imagery, and interviews with 27 volunteers. Findings

show that Instagram's visuals and captions emphasize the volunteers themselves, thus encouraging participation and influencing motivations and perceptions. The research highlights how social media mediates 'voluntourism' experiences and contributes to ongoing ethical debates about **the gap between online portrayals and offline realities**.

[Benefits and Opportunities of International Volunteer Tourism – Sustainable Travel Post-Pandemic | *World Leisure Journal*](#)

This publication provides a critical overview of the volunteer tourism industry, tracing its rapid growth and exposing **the shortcomings of profit-driven models** that often fail to benefit local communities. The authors identify challenges, such as mismatches between volunteer skills and local needs, and insufficient preparation for volunteers. Importantly, the study outlines **strategies for more equitable, sustainable, and meaningful volunteer experiences**—identifying steps travelers and organizations can take to create more responsible, effective, and community-centered volunteer experiences in the post-COVID context.

Opportunities



Open call to host the World Leisure Congress 2030!

The World Leisure Organization (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 contribute to a global conversation, this is an opportunity to make a **meaningful and lasting impact**.

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

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



Open call to join the World Leisure Centres of Excellence (WLCE) Network

WLO invites accredited colleges and universities to submit applications to establish your institution as a World Leisure Center of Excellence (WLCE) and join the prestigious global WLCE network.

WLCEs are tertiary institutions offering programs in leisure and leisure-related fields, such as **play, recreation, arts and culture, sport, festivals and events, health and fitness, and travel and tourism**. Programs in English are preferred, but not mandatory.

Selected institutions will become part of an international network dedicated to advancing research, education, and professional development in leisure.

Learn more about the [WLCE Network](#) and its upcoming [Open Call](#).



WLJ Special Issues – Call for Contributions

The *World Leisure Journal* invites scholars, researchers, and practitioners to contribute to its upcoming **Special Issue**, which aim to advance critical and innovative perspectives in leisure studies.

The Special Issue titled *Leisure and the Far Right: Critical Interdisciplinary Interventions* welcomes submissions that explore the intersections between **leisure, ideology, identity, and contemporary socio-political dynamics**. The editors seek interdisciplinary approaches that broaden our understanding of leisure's role in shaping and responding to emerging global challenges.

In addition, the recently published *You Can't Get a Tan in the Metaverse, but You Can Visit the Beach* highlights the journal's commitment to pioneering topics and forward-looking research, showcasing how **digital worlds and immersive technologies** are transforming leisure experiences.

WLO encourages researchers from diverse fields to engage with these Special Issues and contribute original work that enriches global dialogue within the leisure community.

World Leisure Day 2026



Save the date and mark your calendars!

On **April 16, 2026**, the World Leisure Organization will proudly celebrate the sixth edition of World Leisure Day (WL Day), shining a spotlight on the theme **"Leisure that inspires change: Volunteering for a sustainable future."**

Leisure is more than a moment of pause—it is a powerful catalyst for active citizenship, social commitment, and community resilience. Through volunteering, leisure becomes a force that empowers individuals, strengthens communities, and contributes to a more equitable and sustainable world.

This sixth edition of World Leisure Day marks an important milestone, as it is officially included in the United Nations Tourism Work Plan, reinforcing a shared global commitment to well-being, sustainability, and social responsibility.

Let your passion lead the way and join us in celebrating the transformative role of volunteering in shaping a brighter future for all.



Stay connected with the World Leisure Organization!



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