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Politically Engaged Leisure: The Political Participation of Young People in Contemporary Britain beyond the Serious Leisure Model

Sarah Pickard

1. Introduction

Leisure Studies have grown in breadth and depth since the 1960s, encompassing ever-wider areas of research.¹ The analysis of the relationship between leisure and young people is a fundamental part of Leisure Studies. Within this academic field, leisure in relation to political participation and especially that of young people remains largely unexamined. Existing works on leisure tend not to address the place of political participation, beyond certain aspects of volunteering and citizen participation. In parallel, the political socialisation of young people and their political participation are considered in Political Sociology and Political Studies, but these academic fields tend to elide the potential place and role of leisure.

Young people in Britain have been affected directly by a host of policies from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015) and then the Conservative government since 2015. Notable youth policies within the context of austerity have included the increase in university tuition fees, the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and student maintenance grants, the cuts to spending on higher education and the reduction of Youth Services. Young people have also been affected especially by the lack of affordable accommodation and mental health care, as well as high rate of youth unemployment compared to other age groups (Jones 2017). During the same period, the country has experienced a rise in political participation of young people: youth membership of all the main political parties has increased (Keen and Apostolova 2017; Pickard 2015) and youth-led protest has grown (Pickard 2014a, 2014b, 2018a, b). Indeed, the current generation of young people in Britain — those aged between 16 and 24 — are the most politically active for over a generation (Pickard 2018a, b).

This article brings together the different themes of leisure, young people and political participation. In particular, it examines whether it is possible to apply the ‘serious leisure model’ devised by Robert Stebbins in the 1980s to political participation among young people and to what extent the term ‘politically engaged leisure’ might be appropriate, especially in contemporary Britain. The article first identifies gaps in the existing literature on Leisure Studies regarding leisure, young people and political participation. It then describes and evaluates the theoretical framework of Robert Stebbins’s Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP). The article goes on to analyse whether the SLP can be applied specifically to young people’s political participation in contemporary Britain. It ends by proposing a new term to describe such activities: ‘politically engaged leisure.’

2. A gap in existing literature on leisure, young people and political participation

It is widely acknowledged that leisure as a concept is difficult to define (Bergero 1962: 37-8), ambiguous (Dumazedier 1967) and even “treacherous” (Rapoport and Rapoport 1974: 214). Leisure is traditionally defined as the time that individuals spend when they are free from work obligations (Dumazedier 1967; Parker 1971, 1976) and family or

household responsibilities. Dumazedier (1967) underlines that leisure affords people the opportunity for relaxation, the broadening of knowledge, and social participation. According to Fulcher and Scott (2011: 653), leisure generally provides “freedom, choice, self-expression, and creativity,” terms to which this article will return.² Moreover, leisure is usually considered highly valuable and the emotions it engenders makes it pleasurable for the individual (Rojek 2010; Harris 2012).

In the increasingly documented Sociology of Leisure, there are two main schools of thought. First, there exists the ‘historical and theoretical’ (structuralism-functionalism and neo-Marxism) approach that examines the changing nature of leisure and its place in social change (Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers 1960; Clarke and Critcher 1985). Second, there is the ‘formal approach’ tradition centred on empirical studies, which addresses various questions such as the relation between work and leisure, or leisure and culture. Studies reveal marked differences in leisure patterns according to gender, class, ethnicity, and age. Among others, Scraton and Bramham (1995) point out that the constraints of class, gender and ethnicity remain influential in the consumption of leisure, but they do not discuss fully the specificities of young people, their lifestyles and identities pertaining to leisure. However, one particular angle of investigation within the formal approach to leisure is the examination of how leisure patterns change through the life cycle (Rapoport and Rapoport 1975). Indeed, young people tend to have more free time than other age groups and fewer financial obligations (Pickard 2000). This inevitably impacts on the leisure of young people for whom leisure activities occupy a “preponderant place” (Dumazedier 1967: 58). In addition, leisure interests constitute an essential part of the individual and collective identities of young people, especially regarding self-definition, self-identification and a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded peers with shared values and activities.

British youth culture centred on leisure and consumerism emerged during the 1950s following the advent of the teenager and the consumer society that originated in the United States.³ Since then, the pastimes and interests enjoyed specifically by the younger generation — generally to the exclusion of older generations — have been studied comprehensively in Cultural Studies and Youth Studies. The original focus of research was on the role of clothing, music, movies, radio and television programmes, magazines, etc. in the lives of increasingly numerous and affluent British youth with a growing disposable income and free time (Abrams 1959; Hopkins 1963) due to changes in labour law. Research then shifted to analysing the leisure activities of British young people in relation to youth subcultures (Brake 1980), especially deviancy and resistance in terms of tastes in music and clothing, pioneered by the influential (Marxist, post-structuralist and feminist) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, for example, Teddy Boys, Mods and Skinheads (Cohen 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige 1979), followed by Punks and Ravers (Hendry 1983, 1993). An ongoing criticism emerged regarding the commodification and consumerist nature of mass culture and leisure (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972; Adorno 1991) that could be applied to exploited young people (and other age groups). Subsequently, there was a move away from the term ‘youth culture,’ towards the use of terms such as ‘tribes’ and ‘scenes’ (Maffesoli 1988, 1996; Bennett 1999; Hesmondhalgh 2005), lifestyles and ‘neo-tribes’ (Hetherington 1998), in post-modern society (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006). More recent studies of youth leisure are overwhelmingly centred on the role of new social media, digital media and new technologies (Buckingham and Willett 2013; Buckingham, Bragg and Kehily 2014) in the lives of ‘digital natives’ (Prensky 2001). There is thus a very substantial and ever-increasing amount of academic literature on

leisure, young people and youth culture, as well as Youth Studies more generally (Furlong 2009, 2012).

At the same time, there is a growing body of work on the relationship between young people in Britain and political participation, originally driven by anxiety about falling rates of turnout at elections since the 1960s and especially at the start of the twenty-first century among 18 to 24-year-olds. The academic narrative previously tended to argue that young people were politically apathetic and disinterested in traditional or conventional politics, such as voting or being a member of a political party (Pirie and Worcester 1998; Putnam 2000; Phelps 2004, 2005). However, more recent discourse refutes this stance and posits that this age group is alienated from electoral politics (Henn, Weinstein and Wring 2003; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007; Henn and Foard 2014; Fox 2015), in part due to political institutions incapacity and/or reluctance to engage with young people (Pickard and Bessant 2017), preferring to focus on the 'grey vote' as older generations have higher electoral turnout rates (Pickard 2009). There is a growing emphasis on young people taking part increasingly in non-electoral forms of political participation (Muxel 2010; Grasso 2017), such as demonstrating, flash mobs and e-politics, as well as how they 'live' politics through 'everyday' politics (Bang 2005), such as ethical consumerism (boycotts and buycotts) and vegetarianism, as well as one-issue politics, such as environmental concerns and political protest (Pickard 2018c). In particular, researchers are exploring how young people 'do' politics online through social media, new technologies (Bessant 2015; Pickard 2015, 2018b) and whether this can be a key to increasing political participation and reducing the democratic deficit (Loader, Vromen and Xenos 2014).

Three striking parallels stand out here. First, both leisure and political participation play crucial roles in the individual and collective identities of young people. Second, the internet and social media are playing burgeoning roles in the ways young people experience both leisure and politics in contemporary Britain. Third, there is a clear growth of academic studies on leisure and young people, on youth culture and on the political participation of young people. Nonetheless, there exists very little research on political participation as a leisure activity. Indeed, Leisure Studies, Political Sociology and Political Science remain largely compartmentalised leading to gaps in intellectual thinking (Pickard 2016). This article attempts to open some of the doors linking these disciplines.

3. The Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP): a theoretical framework of leisure

Robert Stebbins⁴ began carrying out research on the nature and function of leisure in the early 1970s. Most of his work has been based on findings from ethnographic studies, insider accounts, participant observation and interviews. Stebbins's definition of 'leisure' has barely changed during his decades of research on the subject; in one of his more recent works, he imbues leisure with the following meaning: "Un-coerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both)" (Stebbins 2007: 4), which is close to traditional definitions of leisure (see above). For Stebbins, leisure can range from casual, fleeting engagements, to intensive short term projects, to more serious lifetime commitments that require a great deal of time, money, and energy. His theoretical framework evolved early on into three main forms of leisure, first 'casual leisure,' second 'project-based leisure' and third 'serious leisure'⁵ (Stebbins 1982). Within Stebbins's theoretical framework, 'casual leisure' is immediately

and intrinsically rewarding. It tends to be a relatively short-lived, pleasurable activity that requires little or no special training to enjoy it. Furthermore, it is fundamentally hedonic, engaged in for the significant level of pure enjoyment, or pleasure.⁶ Examples of casual leisure include, passive entertainment (television, recorded music), active entertainment (games of chance, party games), play, relaxation, sociable conversation, and sensory stimulation (eating, drinking, having sex) (Stebbins 1997). 'Project-based leisure' for Stebbins is short-term, moderately complicated and either one-shot or occasional. It tends to be a creative undertaking carried out in free time that involves considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge. Examples of project-based leisure include, arts festivals, sports events, religious holidays, individual birthdays and national holidays (Stebbins 2015).

Lastly, and more significantly for this article, according to Stebbins, the third category is 'serious leisure.' This describes a leisure activity involving knowledge, experience, and specific skills (as opposed to casual leisure). Serious leisure is highly interesting, important and fulfilling to the participant for whom it "embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness" (Elkington and Stebbins 2014: 16). Serious leisure is distinguished from casual leisure by six characteristics: the need to persevere at the activity, the need to put in effort to gain skill and knowledge, the realisation of various special benefits, the unique ethos and social world, an attractive personal and social identity, and the availability of a "leisure career." Stebbins also states:

Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins 1992: 3).

Partaking in serious leisure provides a number of 'personal rewards' and 'social rewards' for the participant, which partially explain his/her motivations. The personal rewards can be summed up as personal enrichment (cherished experiences), self-image (known to others as a serious leisure participant), self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge), self-gratification (superficial enjoyment and deep fulfilment), self-actualisation (developing skills, abilities, knowledge), and re-creation (or regeneration of oneself through serious leisure after a day's work financial return) (Elkington and Stebbins 2014). The social rewards include: social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants, with clients as a volunteer, participating in the social world of the activity), group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project; senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic), and contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in making the contribution) (Elkington and Stebbins 2014).

The Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) has been the focus of Stebbins's continuing research; he has written about serious leisure in relation to numerous fields, including liberal arts hobbies (1994), cultural tourism (1996a), barbershop singers (1996b) and musical production (2017). Other academics have written about the Serious Leisure Perspective on various subjects, such as folk music (Henderson and Spracklen 2014), bird watching (Lee, McMahan and Scott 2015) and DIY (Brayham 2015). However, there has been little research on young people and/or political participation within the Serious Leisure Perspective theoretical framework.

4. The Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) pertaining to young people and to politics

Notwithstanding the substantial body of work on the Serious Leisure Perspective since 1979 (see reference list), some lacunas stand out in Stebbins's work. Arguably, the most noteworthy is the quasi absence of consideration of the traditional sociological variables of social economic class, gender, ethnicity and age in the Serious Leisure Perspective theoretical framework. This is despite numerous other sociological works underlining the different experiences of leisure according to one's social class, as well as post-modern feminist works and research on the specificities of young people's experience of leisure (see above). Stebbins barely mentions the particularities of leisure regarding young people, despite the key role it plays in their lives.

Indeed, young people are mostly invisible in Stebbins's Serious Leisure Perspective analyses and when they do appear, it is almost solely within negative contexts. The cursory references to young people concern "deviant" youth seeking thrills and stimulation, such as drugs, alcohol, gangs and gambling (Stebbins 2007: 66). For errant youth, certain serious leisure activities are portrayed by Stebbins as sufficiently risky to potentially entertain them (and implicitly keep them out of trouble):

To the extent that wayward youth have little or no taste for repetitions and constant experiences, then what kind of leisure will alleviate their boredom? [...] Spelunking, orienteering and some kinds of sports volunteering exemplify non-repetitive serious leisure that is both exciting and, with the first two reasonably adventurous (Stebbins 2007: 67).

The lack of acknowledgement of young people as actors in leisure and their specificities, as well as the highly normative and reductive references to young people in Stebbins's work can be viewed as problematic. Together, they constitute a weakness in the understanding of how young people pursue leisure and how leisure is experienced by young people. However, recent work on young people learning about and participating in performing popular music as a positive and productive leisure pursuit (Moir 2017) shows well how the Serious Leisure Perspective can be applied efficaciously to them in relation to self-development, identity and belonging.

Another ongoing shortfall of the Serious Leisure Perspective, as devised and examined by Stebbins, is that it almost completely omits to take into account political engagement or participation, i.e. involvement in political parties, participation in social movements for/against socio-political change and political collective action. Stebbins does examine volunteering as a serious leisure pursuit relative to being an unpaid helper in a museum, hospital or a non-profit organisation (Stebbins 1992, 1996c, 2007, 2015).⁷ But volunteering within an overtly political organisation or association is largely absent from his analyses. In a more recent work, he mentions tantalisingly and transitorily political participation within the context of volunteering:

The goal of bringing people together to create and enhance democracy, government legitimacy and general community functioning can be accomplished through many forms of social leisure. Political volunteering is but one kind of such leisure. Leisure when it brings us in contact with other people, can be

conceived of as community citizen participation or more specifically, if it has political import, as political citizen participation (Elkington and Stebbins 2014: 147).

20 Yet Stebbins does not develop here how citizen participation can be considered a serious leisure pursuit. Elsewhere, he mentions briefly participation in (social) 'movements':

Movements are abound that gain members through their own volition, suggesting that the members experience no coercion to become involved. Some religious movements serve as examples, as do movements centered on values like physical fitness and healthy eating. Still, the latter two also attract people who feel pressured by outside forces to participate, as when their physical prescribes exercise or weight loss or face an early death. Thus some social movements are composed of enthusiasts who are there for leisure reasons and other people who are compelled to be there (not leisure). Finally, there are movements that seem to find their impetus primarily in people who feel driven to champion a particular cause, such as the temperance movement of early last century and the vigorous antismoking movement of modern times. A strong sense of obligation fuels their participation. Those who make up the gun control and nuclear disarmament movements seem cut from the same cloth. Whether this is leisure must be determined empirically through interviews with members (Stebbins 2007: 57).

But Stebbins does not allude to the 'politicalness' of participating in movements that defend causes that are highly political (for example, gun control and nuclear disarmament). Furthermore, for Stebbins, such activities cannot be considered serious leisure when participation is "coerced." The origin of the obligation is not made fully explicit, but we can deduce it might be coercion from peers or one's conscience. Thus, the SLP theoretical framework contests the hegemonic notion that leisure must be centred uniquely on hedonism, as serious leisure does not have to be always enjoyable and associated with freedom. This is undeniably a strength of Stebbins's work, according to Raisborough (2007). Nonetheless, the SLP generally elides the potential for political participation to be considered a serious leisure pursuit. Indeed, Raisborough (2007) also argues that serious leisure remains for the most part apolitical in nature. For Puddephatt, Stebbins tends to "ignore many of the more latent aspects of leisure that make it such an interesting and important topic for study" (Puddephatt, 2007: 1). In his analysis, Puddephatt regrets that the Serious Leisure Perspective does not explore how "different types of leisure help to focus the community, improve social solidarity, and positively affect collective political participation," which constitutes a key positive outcome of taking part in politics. Moreover, Stebbins does not address how "leisure serve[s] to distract people from politics and civic issues, encourage consumerism, delay maturity and moral development, and prevent upward mobility" (Puddephatt 2007: 1). Political participation is thus largely under-analysed as a leisure activity within the Serious Leisure Perspective.

There is a vast repertoire of individual and collective political participation (a term that is almost as nebulous as leisure), which spans from signing an e-petition and wearing a sticker supporting a cause or organisation, to burning down a government building and other violent acts (Braud 2016: 359-360). In Political Science, political participation is usually divided into 'traditional,' 'institutional,' or 'conventional' forms (e.g. voting and being a member of a political party) and 'non-traditional,' 'non-institutional' or 'unconventional' forms (e.g. taking part in a social movement, going on a march and occupying a space). Thus, different forms of political participation demand different degrees of effort and engagement from the participant. Klandermans outlines the "taxonomies of participation" pertaining to political participation. For him:

Two important dimensions to distinguish forms of participation are *time* and *effort*. Some forms of participation are limited in time or of a once-only kind and involve little effort or risk — giving money, signing a petition, or taking part in a peaceful demonstration. [...]. Other forms of participation are also short-lived but involve considerable effort or risk — a sit-in at a site occupation, or a strike. [...] Participation can also be indefinite but demanding little — paying a membership fee to an organisation or being on call for two nights a month. [...] Finally, there are forms of participation that are both enduring and taxing, like being a member on a committee or a volunteer in a movement organization (Klandermans 2004: 360).

This hierarchy of time and effort in terms of perseverance and commitment mirrors markedly the Serious Leisure Perspective's triptych categorisation of the types of participation in leisure (casual, project-based, serious). What Klandermans classifies as "enduring" and "taxing" resonates with what Stebbins's classifies as characteristics of serious leisure. Moreover, such activities can involve knowledge, experience, and specific skills, as well being highly interesting, important and fulfilling to the participant and embodying earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness, which are all characteristics of serious leisure, according to Stebbins (see above).

For some young people, their involvement in politics corresponds more to what Stebbins calls casual leisure or project based leisure. For these young people, their participation is occasional, with few costs (and benefits), and some may only get involved due to encouragement from peers. In other words, such young participants are not fully engaged in their political participation and might be there for 'just for fun,' dabbling in politics when the opportunity arises (for example, at election time or a demonstration) like any other leisure activity as part of their development.

For other young people, taking part in politics ticks many of the boxes associated with the Serious Leisure Perspective definition of serious leisure, as it can be highly interesting, important and fulfilling to the participant for whom it "embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness" (Elkington and Stebbins 2014: 16). Moreover, participating in politics can provide young people with several of the 'personal rewards' associated with serious leisure: personal enrichment, self-image, self-expression, self-gratification, self-actualisation and re-creation, as well as the 'social rewards': social attraction, group accomplishment and contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (Elkington and Stebbins 2014). The more committed

young people take politics seriously and are involved in politics across the range of political participation, from sharing a political tweet to canvassing and protesting. In this way, political participation of young people can indeed meet the criteria of serious leisure within the Serious Leisure Perspective theoretical framework established by Stebbins. Nevertheless, the Serious Leisure Perspective does not seem to consider political participation to be a form of serious leisure. One explanation might be that Stebbins does not deem it possible for political participation to be carried out on a voluntary basis (uncoerced) and potentially a pleasurable experience.

5. From serious leisure to politically “engaged leisure”

The absence of analysis of political participation within the Serious Leisure Perspective is partially addressed by what Mair terms “civic leisure,” which she defines as “leisure that resists the hegemonic tendencies towards consumerization and commodification and most importantly, attempts to generate open and public discussion about issues that are important to society” (Mair 2002: 215). Lamond, Kilbride and Spracklen also address the counter-hegemonic nature of political protest as leisure:

As global capitalism and state controls exert enormously limiting power on the spaces and forms of work and popular culture, leisure time becomes the only time when it becomes possible to resist the hegemonies in other parts of everyday life. [...] Thus, protest becomes a form of communicative leisure, the only space and practice where counter-hegemonic resistance becomes possible, and new public spheres are potentially constructed (Lamond, Kilbride and Spracklen 2015: 21-22).

Thus, there are clearly leisure activities that do not comprise the passive consumption of leisure-related commodities, but do encompass taking part in activities of a serious, political nature.

To take this conceptualisation of certain leisure activities further, I suggest a new term — politically ‘engaged leisure’ — as a form of post-materialistic leisure within the context of neoliberalism. Politically engaged leisure is dependent on a sense of citizenship and it is important to individual and collective identities through shared political values and goals. Notably, the concept of politically engaged leisure acknowledges the satisfaction and pleasure of participating in politics individually and collectively for a perceived good (citizenship), rather than a consumer good. Young people (especially students) tend to have fewer responsibilities and more free time than older generations to pursue leisure interests and thus they are generally more available and able to take part in politically engaged leisure pursuits. Participating in politically engaged leisure can be a formative part of the political socialisation of young people as they are exposed to political influence.

Politically engaged leisure meets the criteria traditionally prescribed to leisure activities and many of the characteristics of ‘serious leisure,’ whilst emphasising the deliberate act of being involved in a leisure activity encompassing politics. Thus, politically engaged leisure takes place during time free from work, obligations and responsibilities on a voluntary basis. Politically engaged leisure provides opportunities for relaxation, self-expression, creativity, broadening of knowledge and social participation. In addition, politically engaged leisure embraces knowledge, experience, and specific skills, as well

as being highly interesting, important and fulfilling to the participant, involving earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness, as stated in the SLP. Politically engaged leisure is therefore both a conventional and a counter-hegemonic form of leisure, which embraces the contemporary political context.

Significantly, politically engaged leisure can also be congenial, a characteristic of political participation that is often overlooked in Political Science. Indeed, politically engaged leisure can be considered valuable and pleasurable to the participant in part due to the positive emotions it engenders. However, the role of emotions in politics is usually overlooked (Braud 2016: 392).⁸ Jasper stresses how participating in social movements is important to one's identity and he underlines the "joy and pride" (Jasper 1998: 417) to be had through expressing "oneself and one's moral," by taking part in collective behaviour:

A collective identity is not simply the drawing of a cognitive boundary; most of all, it is an emotion, a positive affect toward other group members on the grounds of that common membership. Defining oneself through the help of a collective label entails an affective as well as cognitive mapping of the social world. Partly because of this affection, participation in social movements can be pleasurable in itself, independently of the ultimate goals and outcomes (Jasper 1998: 145).

For this sociologist, "the richer a movement's culture — with more rituals, songs, folktales, heroes, denunciation of enemies, and so on — the greater these pleasures" (Jasper 1998: 417). These points are echoed by Klandermans (2004: 367) who argues that "movement organizations not only supply sources of identification; they also offer all kinds of opportunities to enjoy and celebrate the collective identity: marches, rituals, songs, meetings signs, symbols and common codes" (see also Hunt and Benford 2004). Over a century ago, Durkheim described the "collective effervescence" experienced during collective religious acts:

The very fact of the concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others (Durkheim 1915: 215-216).⁹

This collective pleasure obtained from participating in politics resembles the pleasures of participating in leisure due to what Rojek calls "sociability." This is the "pleasurable enjoyment and emotional stimulation that follow from voluntary interaction with others. The pleasure generated by being in the company of others is often experienced as feelings of emotional closeness, fellowship or camaraderie" (Rojek 2010: 122). These pleasures rooted in collective leisure (see also Best 2010: 14) and collective political participation, for example, being an activist in the youth wing of a political party, taking part in a march, producing political art, or staying on a peace camp (see Gallant 2012; Latzko-Toth, Pastinelli and Gallant 2017; Van de Velde 2011) mirror many of the

personal and social rewards provided by serious leisure according to Stebbins (see above).

Even though conceptualisations of both leisure and pleasure are evolving, the two remain intimately linked according to Rojek (2010: 187):

The old idea that leisure study is about what pleasure-accumulating individuals and groups do in their free time has been modified by a new research agenda having to do with the multiple meanings of pleasure, the social economic and political context in which time is coded and represented as 'free,' the use of leisure in enhancing personal and group direction, and the ideological connotation of freedom in a society based on inequality. [...] Freedom and pleasure are slowly being redefined as socially and economically conditioned human qualities rather than timeless, natural capacities of authority and power.

Politically engaged leisure is thus intimately linked to the context when and where it is taking place. Indeed, for Roberts, leisure should be defined by its economic, political and social contexts (Roberts 1986: 1) and "leisure is highly context-dependent" (Roberts, 1986: 2).

The specificities of the contemporary political context in Britain and the political reactions of young people illustrate well how the concept of politically engaged leisure can be applied. In Britain, since the arrival of the Conservatives in power, in 2010, there has been an increase in traditional/conventional/electoral and non-traditional/unconventional/non-electoral forms of political participation and young people are the major actors. Young people have been at the vanguard of both forms of political participation in Britain, including increased membership among all the main political parties' youth wings, especially the Labour Party after Jeremy Corbyn became leader in September 2015 and the creation of Momentum (Pickard 2017a, b), increased turnout of 18-24 year-olds in the 2015 General Election, a high turnout rate for the 2014 Scottish referendum on independence (approximately 75%) (Electoral Commission 2014; Batchelor, Fraser, Ling and Whittaker 2017), and increased involvement in diverse forms of collective political protest (university tuition fees, Occupy London, etc.) both offline and online (Grasso 2017; Pickard 2018b). This political participation of young people in Britain sits within the context of a "growth of global social movements and transnational collective action" (della Porta and Mattoni 2014; see also Braud 2016) and young people around the world are regenerating politics through imaginative and creative forms in times of diverse crises (Pickard and Bessant 2017).

For many of these young people in Britain, politically engaged leisure is dependent on the political context marked by numerous policies having a negative impact on their well-being, and political participation is essential to their individual identity, but also a source of pleasure and positive emotions via collective political identities.

6. Conclusion

This article underlines the nebulousness of the terms leisure, political participation and young people. It also shows the lack of cross fertilisation among academic fields, especially between the Sociology of Leisure and Political Science. Regarding the Serious

Leisure Perspective developed by Robert Stebbins, the specificities of young people's relationships to leisure and their role in leisure remain under-examined. Yet both leisure and political participation play key roles in the individual and collective identities of young people. The potential for individual and collective political participation to be considered a serious leisure pursuit is also under-analysed within the Serious Leisure Perspective. Thus, Stebbins seems to discount the specificities of young people in leisure depoliticise serious leisure. Not encompassing political participation — especially among young people — as a form of serious leisure in the Serious Leisure Perspective reveals a limit of this theoretical framework to date. However, with the growth of Leisure Studies, Youth Studies and Political Sociology the Serious Leisure Perspective is being applied to ever-wider contexts; there thus exists increasing scope for political participation to be examined as a serious leisure pursuit as it does fit many of the criteria ascribed to serious leisure pursuits by Stebbins.

40The concept of politically engaged leisure goes some way addressing whether taking part in electoral and non-electoral politics can be considered a form of leisure. Here politics and leisure are combined primarily through a sense of pleasure from shared belonging, shared identities and shared post-materialistic goals within the realm of citizenship, which are appealing to young people. In Britain, in the twenty-first century, political participation across the scale of committed is growing particularly among young people. Much participation is facilitated through the increasing use of social media and new technologies in leisure and politics.

41However, more qualitative work is needed with young political activists within conventional/traditional and unconventional/new forms of political participation regarding their motivations for participating in politics, especially the place of emotions, identity and context, and to what extent they consider it leisure. Such studies will improve our understanding of leisure, young people, politics and the forces at play in contemporary British society, where the leisure activities of young people do not all correspond to Adornian and Gramscian versions of consumerist leisure as a form of oppression, or other negative portrayals of young people's consumption of individualised, privatised, self-serving or hedonistic leisure.¹¹ Political participation can be considered a counter hegemonic form of serious leisure and young people in Britain and around the world today the agents of political change, in politically engaged leisure.

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Notes

1 Earlier studies of leisure do exist, in particular Veblen (1899), but Leisure Studies flourished as from the second half of the twentieth century.

2 Rojek (2000) states that this is an “old fashioned” definition of leisure and that the “leisure society” is dead, hence the need for post-modern definitions of leisure.

3 The term ‘youth culture’ was devised by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in 1942 (Parsons, 1942).

4 Robert Stebbins works at the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary, in Canada.

5 For diagrams that classify different types of leisure according to Robert Stebbins’s theoretical framework, see here: <http://www.seriousleisure.net/slp-diagrams.html>.

6 In this way, Robert Stebbins’s definition of casual leisure is linked to Chris Rojek’s definition of ‘deviant leisure’ (Rojek, 1997: 392-393).

7 Other researchers also discuss the Serious Leisure Perspective in relation to volunteering (Parker, 1987, 1992; Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Smith, and Baum, 2010).

8 Braud (2016 : 392) : *“Dans l’état actuel des analyses savantes du comportement électoral restera toujours difficile de bien saisir cette part de l’imagination et d’émotion qui conditionne les comportements des électeurs. Les auteurs de The American Voter [Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1980] ne les avaient pourtant pas totalement négligées mais les études qui se sont situées dans leur sillage leur ont accordé peu d’attention.”*

9 Durkheim (1912: 308) : *“Or, le seul fait de l’agglomération agit comme un excitant exceptionnellement puissant. Une fois les individus rassemblés il se dégage de leur rapprochement une sorte d’électricité qui les transporte vite à un degré extraordinaire d’exaltation. Chaque sentiment exprimé vient retentir, sans résistance, dans toutes ces consciences largement ouvertes aux impressions extérieures : chacune d’elles fait écho aux autres et réciproquement.”*

10 The turnout rates of 18-24-year-olds based on surveys after general elections are as follows: 1979 = 62.5, 1983 = 63.9%, 1987 = 66.6%, 1992 = 67.3%, 2001 = 40.4%, 2005 = 38.2%, 2010 = 51.8% and 2015 = 58.0%. However, turnout of young people remains lower than the average for the British population: 2001 = 59.4%, 2005 = 61.3%, 2010 = 65.0% and 2015 = 66.1% (British Election Study 2015).

11 Young people also participate in other forms of leisure that can be considered, at times, political and resistant, for example, such as dance / rave culture (Blackman, 2005).