

Cover Story

Leisure economy



From free time to consumption time?

TEXT Corinne Briault

TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH Martin Davies

Without doubt, a major change brought about by the successive industrial revolutions of recent decades is in the time that societies can now devote to leisure. Free time, compared to working time, has continued to increase for a century, to the point where it raises several questions. As early as 1962, Joffre Dumazedier published "Towards a Civilization of Leisure", a work questioning the importance of leisure and the "slide" from the civilization of "work" towards a civilization where leisure would occupy the main stage. More than 60 years after its publication, the question remains relevant. Far from being trivial, it now raises many other questions: has society shifted towards all-leisure? Has free time become an industry? Are there different forms of leisure? Has free time become a consumer product like any other? What weight does it have in our modern economies? This article attempts to provide some answers.

— "Today, in our advanced societies, leisure is a familiar reality. (...) . The time has come to seriously address this futility," said Joffre Dumazedier in his book "Towards a Civilization of Leisure" But what exactly are we talking about? What is leisure? Leisure time is intimately linked... to humanity. "From the Greek philosophers of antiquity to the Marxists at the end of the 19th century, leisure time was considered as time removed from the "biological" activities of work and rest. It was thought to be time that man could devote to the development of his truly human abilities: political life, culture, art, sport," explained Thomas Schaubert in his Le Monde article of 2018. Obviously, these moments not dedicated to work were the privilege of the wealthiest layers of society, whose wealth and social position allowed them to enjoy time devoted to games, hunting, writing, etc. Little by little, certain professions over the centuries gained the possibility of taking time off. The development of industry and the automation of machines then allowed the labouring sections of society to free up their time: in fact, by producing more quickly, workers gained leisure time.

And then came paid holidays...

In the 20th century, the privilege of days off began to be extended to certain professions: in France, for example, state civil servants had already benefited from 15 days paid leave, thanks to Napoleon III's imperial decree of 1853. This privilege was later extended to the liberal and certain other professions and to certain companies at the initiative of employers: seamstresses, for example, were granted one to two weeks of leave per year depending on seniority in the 1920s. The renowned watchmaker Fred Lip made a name for himself by granting paid leave to all his employees in 1934 before the Popular Front of 1936 awarded two weeks paid leave to all employees (excluding artisans, heads of businesses, and self-employed workers). Paid holidays were introduced in Germany in 1905, in Austria-Hungary and the Scandinavian countries from 1910, in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Luxembourg, between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s.

From idleness to consumption

Initially described by bosses as an "incentive to laziness", time devoted to something other than work quickly seduced many economic sectors who saw significant benefit in it. Transporting, accommodating, feeding, and enabling communication to those millions of workers who were taking advantage of their free time, all caused leisure time to develop into a market over the years. Leisure time has become consumption times. Questioning culture and art in "The Crisis of Culture", Hannah Arendt remarked that "the leisure industry offers new kinds of cultural objects which are not intended to survive over time, they are no longer values but simple consumer products. (...) Mass society does not want culture, but entertainment (...) and the items offered by the leisure industry are indeed consumed by society just like any other consumer products (...)."

But what is leisure? Because not everyone does the same thing! There are a multitude of activities that can be classified under the banner of leisure, whether collective, individual, educational, sporting, cultural, etc. and these activities have also evolved over

"There are a multitude of activities that can be classified under the banner of leisure."



Dragon Ball and Six Flags - outrageously excessive!

After Asterix and Obelix, Walt Disney and so many other themes to attract crowds, it is the turn of the world of manga to also inspire the creators of amusement parks... Saudi Arabia has announced the creation of a park dedicated to Dragon Ball, one of the world's best-selling manga, which will include rides and attractions in seven areas inspired by the series, as well as hotels and restaurants. But that will not be all! The company behind the idea is also working on Six Flags Qiddiya, a gigantic park spanning several hectares. The outrageously excessive project will, according to its promoters, include several theme parks, "revolutionary attractions", including the largest, longest and fastest (250kph) roller coaster in the world, interactive shows, hotels, restaurants, shops, etc. It will be located in the middle of the desert: hello entertainment and goodbye climate emergency!



Leisure trips to which countries?

Among the countries visited by Luxembourg residents, the most popular are the neighbouring countries. France accounts for 23% of stays, followed by Germany with 11% and Belgium with 8%. Italy, Spain and Portugal (7 to 8% each) are also popular destinations for residents of the country. At the bottom of the ranking, with 2 and 3% of stays, are America, Asia and Africa. In 2022, 93% of residents' stays were in Europe. Finally, the majority of stays were in the city (50% in 2022) followed by the seaside and the countryside.



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time. In his work (published in the 1960s, with a "revised and expanded" version in 1970) *"Leisure to do what?"* Jean Fourastié noted that the fastest growth was coming from multimedia equipment: television (households were equipping themselves more and more because television was no longer the prerogative of the wealthiest), records, photo and cinema equipment, as well as articles relating to sport. At the same time, camping, which was becoming more widespread, was also becoming a real fashion, to the point that companies specializing in this sector began inventing means of transport adapted to camping such as caravans and camper vans. Reading, games, gardening and a strong development of scuba diving and water sports items came next in the list of leisure activities. Finally, the author noted that second homes "proliferated" at this time. Paid leave, the generalisation of weekends, and above all the arrival and development of the car and leisure travel marked yet another stage in the conquest of time that people could devote to their leisure.

In their 2007 study *"Measuring Trends in Leisure. The Allocation of Time over five decades"*, Mark Aguiar and Erik Hurst studied several categories of leisure activities such as gardening, entertainment, reading, meeting new people, and even sleeping and taking time to care for oneself... These categories can be further sub-categorised into a multitude of activities: going to the cinema,

"Leisure activities cover the field of all possible."

dancing, taking cooking classes, spending time collaborating on voluntary activities in associations, visiting museums, traveling, etc. Leisure covers all these possibilities.

What leisure for what population?

Whilst people may be interested in a range of different leisure activities, their accessibility also depends on many factors. The possibility of practicing any leisure activity requires, among other things, on being able to access a place to practice, having the right equipment and having the economic resources to participate. In addition, the leisure activities that we can practice on a daily basis are often constrained by a lack of free time and are therefore different from those that we might practice on vacation. Parents of young children who often have difficulty reconciling family and professional life are not able to enjoy the same leisure activities as people living alone. People living far from their workplace, often stuck in traffic jams, cannot do the same activities as those who live in city centres; their leisure



time is more fragmented and spent in capsules of free time. Theatres, shows, and museums are more accessible in the city than in the countryside where leisure activities are more focused on nature activities. And then, obviously, everyone's tastes differ: if some like to stroll through museums, others may prefer to indulge in board games, practice physical activity, or spend their free time gardening or decorating their homes...

Then, some studies note that leisure activities can differ according to qualification levels, working hours and income. Indeed, higher salaries allow greater access to new and/or expensive leisure activities. Alain Chenu and Nicolas Herpin in *"A break in the march towards the civilization of leisure?"* noted that access to certain shows and other outings is influenced by educational diplomas: the more expensive they are, the more they are accessed by qualified

01. 02. The development of industry and the automation machines have enabled workers to gain more leisure time.

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Nadine Emmer
Director Cruise Department
Business development,
Luxembourg Tourism Union, ULT

"Creating unforgettable experiences."

Can you describe ULT Cruises' business to us?

ULT Cruises' cruises make up a large part of ULT's offering. We offer a wide range of cruises, both in Europe and to more distant destinations. As the largest provider of escorted group cruises in the Luxembourg market, we pride ourselves on creating unforgettable experiences for our guests. In addition, there is a robust growth share of individual cruises. Cruises are divided into sea and river cruises, with each category offering its own unique destinations and attractions. We work closely with a large number of renowned shipping companies to provide our customers with the best itineraries and deals. Our goal is to combine comfort and discovery and offer our customers unforgettable travel experiences.

What were your objectives in creating this cruise branch?

We wanted to offer our customers a wider range of travel options in addition to coach travel and air travel, either within Europe or halfway around the world. This is why we have improved our product range by adding both sea and river cruises.

Our goal was to offer these cruises to allow our customers to enjoy different fantastic experiences. We strive to give our customers a superior service that meets their needs throughout the journey. This includes providing experienced travel guides for accompanied group trips. Thanks to our many years of experience, we have extensive knowledge in the field of cruises. This allows us to offer tailor-made trips that meet our customers' individual preferences and requirements. We want to establish and maintain long-term relationships with them by creating unforgettable travel experiences, and always putting their needs and wishes at the centre of our concerns.

How do you see your future developments?

On the Luxembourg market, the outlook for the cruise sector is very positive. Luxembourg travellers are showing a growing interest in cruises as a form of vacation offering both comfort and the opportunity to discover different destinations. The flexibility of cruises, which allows passengers to visit different destinations in a single trip, is particularly attractive to vacationers who want to maximise their travel experience.

In addition to growing interest in cruises, there is a trend toward more personalised travel experiences. Luxembourg vacationers are looking for cruises that meet very specific requirements and expectations; we can cite the growing attraction for so-called "expedition" cruises, whether they take you close to the two poles, to the heart of the Amazon or up the Saint Lawrence to meet Indigenous populations! At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the environment, which is pushing cruise lines to focus more on sustainability and environmental protection measures. Overall, the trend in the cruise sector in the Luxembourg market is positive and is expected to continue to be a key component of the travel behaviour of Luxembourgers.



Pierre Plumer
General manager,
Mondorf Domäne Thermal

“The Domäne Thermal has been able to adapt and reinvent itself throughout its long history.”

The Domäne Thermal has existed for more than a century. How do you explain this longevity?

The inauguration of the first thermal establishment took place on June 20, 1847, and we have just celebrated 177 years of hydrotherapy. Despite various crises that the thermal centre has experienced, including in particular the wars of 1870, 1914 and 1939, it has been able to adapt and reinvent itself throughout its long history. In 1886 the Luxembourg State acquired the thermal spring and the installations in order to rehabilitate and expand the installations. The 1987 law not only transformed the Thermal Centre into a public establishment managed according to private law, but assigned it missions of cure, rehabilitation, recreation and accommodation. Thus, we manage the departments – excluding Health – in the forms and according to the methods of private law, without municipal or state subsidies.

You have started a major phase of work. What reasons guided this choice?

The construction of the new thermal centre dates from 1981 and after more than 40 years of existence, renovation and compliance work was necessary, whether in terms of the roof, the facades or the swimming pools as well as the ventilation, heating, pipes, electricity, etc. Added to this are other elements which have been taken into account for the well-being and safety of our customers and employees, relating to hygiene, comfort, functionality, aesthetics and operating costs savings as well as a reorganisation for reasons of efficiency, rationality and flow of our diverse types of customers (patients, business, events and leisure).

Who are your customers? How do you adapt to their needs?

The type and origin of our customers strongly depends on the activity. Health activities require support and are aimed at policyholders living in Luxembourg or cross-border workers. These activities are regularly reviewed with the medical profession, social insurance and the competent ministries. Accommodation mainly concerns leisure customers (mainly Belgian and French), but also welcomes spa guests and business customers. Refinement, tranquillity, quality and comfort are our watchwords.

Spa treatments are synonymous with well-being and relaxation for hosted and regional customers. Wellness & Fitness offers impressive infrastructure and services, and its catchment area is approximately 60 minutes away. The restaurant mainly welcomes customers from the surrounding region and its philosophy can be summed up in a few words: homemade, quality, local, seasonal and organic. Permanent monitoring as well as regular investments and training ensure that all our services remain competitive and attractive.



socio-demographic groups. In addition, women's leisure activities must also be considered, because they have benefited over the years from the improvement in women's position in the job market and the relative decline of domestic tasks.

Finally, after the shutdown of leisure activities hit hard by the Covid lockdown, and continuing inflation, which is affecting all sectors of the economy, leisure spending has seen a slight fall. In its Infographic 11/2023, *“The main consumption trends since the health crisis in Luxembourg”*, Statec noted that household consumption habits have changed, even if the lifting of health restrictions in 2022 marked a *“return to normal for households. The Covid-19 period nevertheless seems to have left lasting traces and households have not completely resumed the consumption habits that prevailed before the start of the health crisis. The recent surge in energy and food prices have forced households to make choices regarding their consumption. Consequently, certain expenditures are at a higher level today than in 2019, while others have not returned to their pre-crisis value”*. In terms of leisure, certain habits have persisted while others have run out of steam and are even in slight decline. Thus, the infographic highlights, for example, that *“spending on cultural*

03. In the countryside, leisure activities are more focused 'nature'.

04. 06. Leisure activities diversify over the years. Camping became a real trend in the years 1950s-1960s, as did scuba diving.

05. 07. If the field of leisure is vast, a large part of it is occupied by tourism and travel.



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and sporting services is increasing again but remains well below its pre-crisis trend. (...) Demand for motorhomes exploded in 2021 but was also temporary (...) and preliminary data obtained for 2023 suggests stagnation or even a slight decline in food and catering spending compared to 2022. This could be the result of choices made by households due to the rise in prices'.

Martine Emmer, Director Cruise Department Business Development, at ULT (see Side Interview) also notes that since "the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen some notable changes. On the one hand, customer booking behaviour has changed, with many travellers now seeking greater flexibility and security. We can see some changes in behaviour among cruise passengers. Above all, we observe an increased sensitivity to health and safety measures. Passengers are often more aware of hygiene measures and follow crew instructions more strictly. The

demand for flexible booking conditions and insurance has also increased. Additionally, demand is seen to be increasing for smaller ships, itineraries with less crowded destinations, and more outdoor activities."

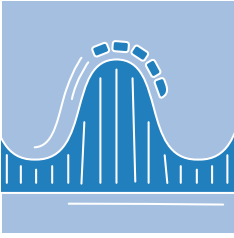
And tourism...

If the field of leisure is vast, a large part of it is occupied by tourism and travel, which may also be divided into "rest" holidays, visits to families, sporting activities, cultural or well-being stays, etc. Human and social aspects should not be neglected because, as at its origin, tourism is a means for a substantial proportion of travellers to take care of their health and well-being (rest, treatment, thalassotherapy, etc.) and this element of leisure is the opportunity to take part in numerous sports or entertainment activities.

In Luxembourg, the first data collected was in 1986, when a Eurobarometer survey of

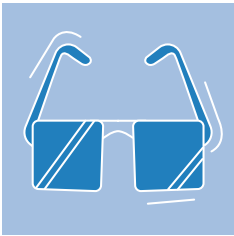
"Tourism is a means for a substantial proportion of travellers to take care of their health and well-being."

around twenty questions was sent to a sample of 300 residents. We learned then that 58% of residents took at least one leisure trip during the year. Since 1997, Statec has regularly conducted surveys dedicated to tourism. Thus, we could see that by 1998, the number of residents taking at least one trip during the year had risen to 66%, but this included more white-collar employees than blue-collar workers, and more young people than people over 65 years old. The car and the hotel were the primary modes of transport and accommodation. The percentage of residents going on a trip increased



Leisure parks have been around for a very long time

The origins of these parks date back to antiquity where it was already necessary to entertain the crowds. Over the centuries, entertainment attractions found a place at trade fairs, then in the gardens of royal estates to entertain the court. The establishment of amusement parks appeared first in England and Denmark: the Dyrehavsbakken in Denmark, created in 1583, is said to be the oldest amusement park in the world still in operation. Circuses, especially Russian circuses with their menageries and American circuses in their nomadic "big tops" would then inspire leisure parks. First bringing together fairgrounds, they were set up on the outskirts of cities at the end of urban public transport lines and were sometimes called "tramway parks". They made it possible to render land and lines profitable outside peak hours. It was definitely Walt Disney who popularised the concept of the sedentary theme park, with Disneyland in Anaheim (California) in the 1950s.



Supermiro's helpful tips!

A must in Luxembourg, Supermiro was created in 2015, to "reinvent going out and take care of people's free time"! Now through an app, Supermiro shares good deals, and allows its users to discover various events, find good addresses, etc. In short, you can find anything you might want to do with friends, family or colleagues, particularly with Supermiro Le Club which offers the professional world moments between colleagues or teams. Since its creation, Supermiro has enjoyed remarkable success, has grown to now extend beyond Luxembourg's borders and has been awarded several prizes.

"The possibility of practicing any leisure activity requires, among other things, on being able to access a place to practice."



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regularly to reach 84% in 2009. Since then, this level has remained stable and is now around 80%, with an obvious Covid-inspired fall in 2020. In its 2023 edition of Tourism in Figures, Statec underlined that "although 2022 is a year marked by inflation, we observe a fairly significant increase in tourist practices compared to 2019. The figures went from 4 to 5 stays and from 26 to 36 nights per resident per year. There are several explanations for this. In 2020 and 2021, disrupted by restrictions due to the health crisis, residents were able to accumulate savings. In 2022, with all restrictions linked to the health crisis lifted, residents were once again able to take advantage of tourist offers as a whole and make up for stays that could not take place in 2020 and 2021. In addition, the installation of teleworking in the daily lives of many residents has left more flexibility to travel and choosing departure days and the possibility of extending stays by including

teleworking days". In addition, during these stays, the publication notes that "resting is the favourite activity of residents on leisure stays: 68% of residents take advantage of their vacations or their visits with family or friends to rest. Leisure stays are also an opportunity to create connections: 45% of residents say they take advantage of their vacation to spend time with their loved ones who are traveling with them (45%), or they take the opportunity to visit loved ones (41%). Compared to 2019, 2022 saw the share of certain leisure activities increase: playing sports (+10 percentage points), going to an amusement park (+7 points), going shopping (+4 points), go to a show (+2 points). Cultural visits remained stable (31%). Sports practice had increased during the Covid period, a sporting practice which then consisted mainly of outdoor activities with a minimum of contact: walking, hiking, cycling, beach sports... These new habits seem to have been maintained since



08. 09. 10. Leisure activities range from dancing to music and travel. It has an impact on both land and infrastructure, as we can see with ski resorts and seaside resorts.

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sport was an activity carried out in 30% of stays in 2022."

In terms of budget, a Statec study published in 2012 on Tourist Behaviour since the mid-1980s noted that average spending on leisure trips was 611 euros per person, per trip in 2002, 661 euros in 2011 but this had risen to 1,253 euros by 2022. This sharp increase can mostly be explained by inflation. The publication emphasised that these expenses are obviously linked to household income. *"The average expenditure per stay and per individual amounts to 990 euros in households belonging to the first quartile of income (in 2022, in the survey, the 1st quartile was less than 2,150 euros, editor's note) compared to 1,480 euros for a person from a household belonging to the 4th income quartile (quartile 4 is more than 4,500 euros). The differences become more pronounced when it comes to spending per night since stays made by residents in the first income quartile are 2 nights longer than in the fourth quartile. Thus, expenses per night increase from 113 euros to 206 euros depending on income. Multiplied by*

the average number of leisure nights spent during the year, the total annual expenditure per resident is around 3,600 euros for a resident in the first quartile and 10,000 euros for a resident in the last quartile (4th)."

Luxembourg, land of leisure and tourism?

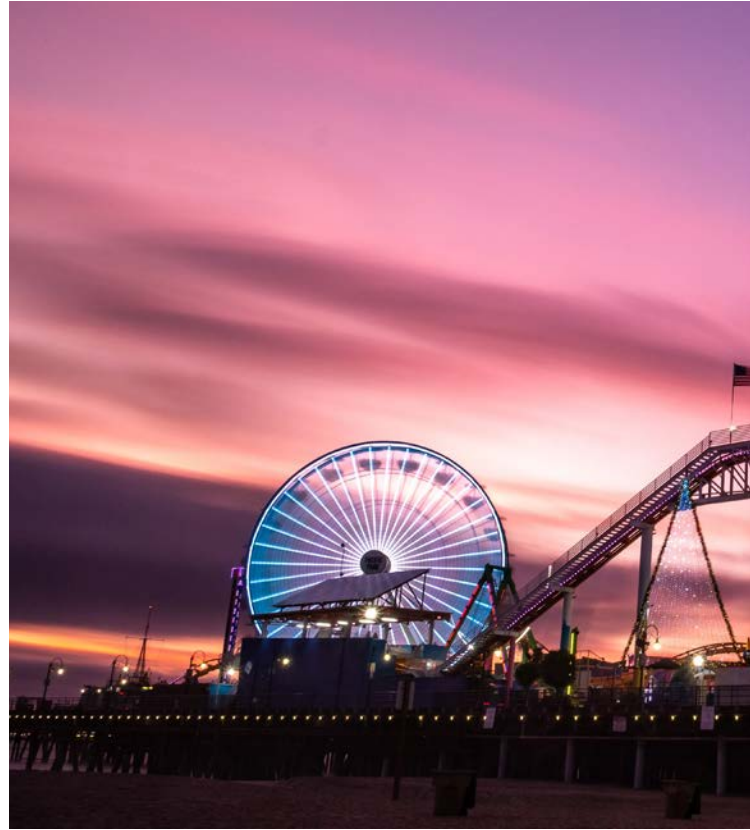
As mentioned previously, taking part in leisure activities strongly depends on their accessibility and the available local options. At the start of 2024, Statec's panorama of the cultural sector in Luxembourg demonstrated that the country had 53 museums and castles. Luxembourg also has 5 heritage sites or places classified and recognised by UNESCO. Most of these museums and castles are located in the north of the country. On the other hand, the venues for shows are concentrated in the centre which has 13. Cinemas are rather well distributed across the country: 3 in the north, 3 in the east, 3 in the centre and 6 in the south. As mentioned previously, although spending on cultural and sporting services increased after Covid, it still remains below its pre-crisis

level: in total, attendance at cultural institutions "fell by 67% between 2019 and 2020. Performance venues were the most affected with a spectacular drop of 74%, followed by cinemas which fell by 69%. Museums and castles fell by 58%. (...) In 2022, admissions to performance venues were at 94% of their 2019 level, those to museums and castles at 91% and those to cinemas at 67%." Note that the sector (castles and museums, performance venues and cinemas) employed 1,278 people in 2022.

Whether welcoming residents during their free time or visitors from other countries, tourism and leisure account for a significant part of the economy. In the 2023 edition of *Tourism in Figures*, it was noted that the share of spending on cultural, sporting and leisure services by residents is almost equal to that of non-resident visitors with 13% and 12% respectively of total tourism spending. Thus, "employment in the tourism sector fell slightly by 193 people between 2020 and 2021, which is equivalent to a drop of less than 1%. (...). However, very slight changes in the distribution of jobs



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“Leisure parks are becoming temples to consumerism.”

were observed between 2019 and 2021. In 2021, the catering sector employed almost half of those active in tourism (46%). Road transport services come in second place (12%), tied with cultural, sporting and leisure services. Next come accommodation services (9%) and air transport services (8%). Other jobs include travel agencies and transport equipment rental services which each, in 2021, employed 1% of the total tourism sector and boat transport services which employed fewer than 1% of the people active in tourism”.

If leisure time has an impact on the businesses and jobs in a country, its impact is concentrated in certain regions: we can see

this in countries with ski resorts or seaside resorts. The establishment of infrastructure follows the development of the regions. In Luxembourg, 2022 showed some regions in slight decline whilst others gained momentum in welcoming tourists (Tourism in figures, 2023, Statec). The Centre, the Ardennes and the Moselle were in slight decline while the Mullerthal and the South exceeded 2019 levels.

Furthermore, free time in society is changing the job market: travel, culture and sports stimulate entire sectors of the economy and can create jobs and they have also raised questions in recent years on ecology (roads, waste treatment, etc.) which also create

businesses and jobs. The digital transition also has an impact on certain jobs, for example through the possibility of booking activities or trips online.

Leisure park time

The era of leisure has seen parks of all kinds develop at an impressive speed: theme parks, aquatic, zoological, educational, cultural, historical... They exist all over the world and are of all sizes and for all audiences - some combining different attractions to offer a wider range of entertainment and accommodate more visitors. Having to constantly renew itself to attract visitors, the sector must continually invest to innovate.



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Participating in the development of countries and regions, parks are also increasingly becoming a means by which countries develop as tourist destinations. Many of them now offer accommodation. Guided by profitability, the question then arises: have we not moved once again towards an industrialised leisure society where we are mere consumers? Véronique Chesneau studied the question in the publication *Leisure Supermarkets*, notably through the study of one of the oldest and best-known parks in the world: Disneyland. She notes that: *“leisure parks thus appear to be the result of a supply of consumer goods adapted to the characteristics of modern life. This mass-market product is based on a clever mix between the relentless sanitisation of the leisure offered and the constant reference to the world of dreams”* (...). She also makes a comparison between leisure parks and supermarkets which have similarities since these parks are *“organised”* for consumption: *“you can have fun there, eat there, window shop, play, etc. Like the shelves of a supermarket organised logically and according to proven*

11. 12. Leisure time has seen the amusement parks of all kinds. Walt Disney was the first to endorse the concept of sedentary theme park.

© 11 : Clara Breme (Disneyland)



Charles Hary
President of the National Federation of Fairground Traders, FNCF

“Bringing to life all the festive events that exist in Luxembourg.”

Why did you create the National Federation of Fairground Traders?

The creation of the National Federation of Fairground Traders is quite recent, since it dates from 2017. Before its creation, there was a group in another form. The main mission of the FNCF is to promote the activities of fairground traders, such as fairs and funfairs, and to defend, encourage and maintain the interests of the fairground profession in Luxembourg. It is also through the federation that fairground traders can begin discussions with the municipalities to organise the various fairs. Thanks to our organisation, we can have calm and professional relations with the municipalities, develop our activities and continue to bring to life all the festive events that exist in Luxembourg throughout the year.

The fairground traders are not only active during the Schueberfouer. What are your other activities during the rest of the year?

The season for fairground traders begins with the Easter holidays, notably the Eimaischen, then it extends throughout the year with all the small fairs and folkloric and traditional markets that exist in Luxembourg. Obviously, the Schueberfouer, being the largest funfair in Luxembourg and the Greater Region, remains the highlight of the end of summer and of the season. Then there are still the Christmas markets. So, we are busy all year round!

Fairs and other traditional events should become classified as UNESCO intangible heritage. What advantages do you see there?

Luxembourg already has events that are classified by UNESCO. The dancing procession at Echternach is on UNESCO's representative list of living heritage. But countries have the possibility to add other events and fairs to its inventory. We therefore began discussions with Patrick Dondelinger, the person responsible for the inventory, to include among others, the Schueberfouer which has a long history. We collaborated in developing the application file, but there are still a number of steps to take. The interest for the fairgrounds would not be so much financial, it would above all be an enormous pride to tell us that every year, we would participate in an event classified as a UNESCO intangible heritage and that we would continue to keep popular traditions alive!



Marc Neu
Manager,
Parc Merveilleux

“The Parc Merveilleux was created to be family-friendly and we want to keep this authenticity!”

Parc Merveilleux has been open since 1956. What is the key to its success?

In fact, the park has existed for almost 70 years. It is the oldest and only recognised zoo in Luxembourg. We - the APEMH Foundation, an association of parents of mentally handicapped children - have managed it since 1997. At the time, we were looking for a place to host a new professional inclusion workshop - at the time called a sheltered workshop - and coming across by chance an announcement of the restaurant's bankruptcy, we took over the shares in Parc Merveilleux and later became the main shareholder. The key to success undoubtedly lies in the fact that we were able to retain the original idea: the Parc Merveilleux was created to be family-friendly, it offers attractions and games based around the most popular fairy tales, in a wooded setting, with domestic and exotic animals. Children, parents and grandparents can find what they are looking for. We want to keep this authenticity!

Have you seen visitor habits change? How are you adapting?

Since the Covid pandemic, and now with inflation, we have noticed that we are welcoming more residents, but that everyone is careful with their wallet! For this reason, our prices have remained reasonable, we are attentive to this so that families with 2 or 3 children can continue to enjoy the park. Then, we are also sensitive to climate change. We have adapted by creating play areas protected by the shade of trees and we have created areas with water games. This allows us to no longer be deserted by families in the event of extreme heat. We always listen to our visitors; they are also the ones who guide our choices.

Any upcoming projects?

Every year we try to offer something new. This season, we will create a space with a new fairy tale, new play areas and we will finish the animal enclosures and the African aviary. Then, we work with the inclusion workshop on a space where older games will be re-proposed, some dating back to the time the park opened. What visitors do not see, but which affects their comfort, will be a major phase of work on our underground electrical and heating networks. These are very expensive investments, and we have to find a fair financial balance because we are only open six months of the year while our maintenance costs and for the animals and staff run over 12 months. We never stop, there is always a project in progress!



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marketing techniques, the opportunities to give in to the temptation to buy are rationally organised."

Shopping centres of leisure!

Leisure parks that look like supermarkets, temples of consumption and shopping centres that increasingly tend to accommodate leisure areas to retain customers... this is the latest trend. An article in the magazine *Le Point* from 2018 notes that *"leisure has become an essential element in the recipe for a successful commercial project (...)* Through this bias, the shopping centre has once again become a centre of life and ensured it is attractive to "ever more demanding" customers". This was the view of Christian Dubois, director of the distribution and services branch of the commercial real estate consultancy firm Cushman & Wakefield. In this same article, we can also see the analysis of Thierry Behiels, director of the Belgian real estate company Codic

13. 14. 15. Luxembourg also has an impressive range of leisure activities.

© 13 : LCTO

16. Today, we're seeing mix of styles, with shopping centres with playgrounds and restaurants and amusement parks that are veritable temples to consumerism.



“Having to constantly renew themselves to attract visitors, leisure parks must continually invest to innovate.”

- instigator of Royal Hamilius in downtown Luxembourg - speaking about the B'Est shopping centre project in Farébersviller (in the French Moselle). This centre *“thus includes a very varied indoor and outdoor leisure offer: climbing wall, laser game, trampoline park, mini-golf, tree climbing which account for 30% of the brands present on site... It is now necessary to introduce an almost infinite range of activities to render a shopping centre attractive again to visitors whom the Internet has made hungry for new things”*.

To the happiness of children

Increasingly popular in recent years are shopping centres which offer play areas, restaurants, cafes, bars and places to relax allowing the entire family to find what they want. Parents can leave their children to have fun in a play area and are thus freed to comply with the stated intention of being consumers in the shopping area for as long as possible. Going to a shopping centre allows parents to fulfil their family obligations, by allowing children to play, whilst they consume in the shops. It becomes an "experience". For several years, the new shopping centres and commercial properties to emerge in Luxembourg have relied on this concept to bring added value: Belval

Plaza for example, offers a play area and other activities which allow parents to go shopping while the children have fun!

The country also has an impressive range of leisure activities for children: from the Parc Merveilleux in Bettembourg (one of the pioneers, see interview), to the numerous gardens and parks in the country's communes, adventure theme parks, tree climbing parks, and the Schueberfouer and the Yoyo and Zig Zag indoor play zones, etc.

Parents can turn to the many escape games that exist in the region, with varied themes (see interview in the Success Story section). This booming market no longer only affects free time but has invaded the business sphere, since these spaces now offer team-building activities!

Does leisure mean happiness?

Leisure may be considered as a moment outside the constraints of time and the pressures of everyday life which offers relaxation and entertainment to “clear your head” and improve your quality of life. But leisure time also poses many other new questions: what is the right balance between professional life and leisure? This question is often asked by younger generations. What are

the implications for the length of working hours? The debate on the four-day week is also regularly on the table and is already being evaluated in certain countries. Then, more ideologically: how do individuals construct themselves according to the leisure activities they practice? Jean Fourastié, French economist, was already asking himself the question. Indeed, we are not the same depending on whether we spend our leisure time in front of social networks or television than if we use our free time to participate in study circles or play chess. —