

## **Introduction**

### **Culture and Lifestyle**

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# INTRODUCTION

## *CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE*

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Guest editors

When we were asked to edit a number on the theme of culture and lifestyles, we saw this as an invitation to a very wide-band reflection on what constitutes the axis of our lives at a period we have designated as ‘the turn of the millennium’. However, the very act of collating the various texts received has allowed us to define more closely the thrust of the subject matter and to bring out the internal cohesiveness of this edition as a whole. Thus, we find ourselves focussing rather more on *lifestyles* than on *culture*, lifestyles that are intrinsically concerned with their relationship to time, spare time, leisure and cultural consumership.

A ‘lifestyle’ is something located at a junction between ‘styles of living’ and ‘living conditions’. But whereas styles of living are determined through personal choices and tastes, and point up the freedom to take decisions affecting one’s daily life, living conditions may be seen more as boundaries, marking out the limits of such freedom. These boundaries are defined both by the social context and by the individuals themselves. The relationship between the impact of the objective determinants of individual behaviour and the role played by the subjects as autonomous beings in control of their destiny is a favourite and constant theme of major debate in the social sciences. However, the objectives of this number of our review are rather more modest. Our contributors are concerned rather with how certain characteristics – of society or of individuals – will affect lifestyles, lifestyles that find their expression in the various concrete practises of daily life and during non-working hours. We should, thus, note that although in our call for papers we have, indeed, translated the expression ‘modes de vie’ by *lifestyles*, our contributors, both English- and French-speaking, have interpreted this concept as re-framed above.

In order to come to a definition of styles of living, or lifestyles, as we have agreed to call them, the contributors noted the importance of certain parameters of the turn of the millennium: demographic changes, the difficulties besetting school-to-work transition, the growing scarcity of ‘time’ as an available resource, cultural intermixing, relational links, the loss of contact with nature, the role played by new technologies. Their analyses are not, however, totally pessimistic: they also

bear witness to the individual's capacity for reflexivity, adaptability and creativity. At the same time, they underline the challenges consequent on the social and cultural changes peculiar to our time and age.

The lifestyle analyses presented by our contributors mainly concern specific social groups, defined by age (young people and the elderly), gender (women), cultural origins (Chinese), migratory experience (Australia), civil status (families), or a shared activity (gardening). Sometimes it is a combination of these characteristics – such as immigrant women. The associated lifestyles may, to some extent, be seen as sub-cultures specific to these groups. But they may also be deemed to be key informants with regard to more universal cultural changes, such as domestic and international mobility, gender relations, the increasing level of schooling, and so on, that affect the life of everyone within our societies. The practices being scrutinized do, indeed, cover a lot of ground. Some contributors discuss a wide range of leisure activities, others have focussed on sporting activities, yet others turn to cultural consumership, to gardening, to gambling or to the whole spectrum of leisure practices. This number begins with an overall examination of the relevance of the very concept of *lifestyle*. The author, A.J. Veal, takes us back over the discussions that have enlivened British writings since the Seventies. Veal first reminds us that the concept of *lifestyle* itself has always been a fringe notion and subject to challenge. Could it replace age, gender or social class as a determining factor in leisure practices, or become a genuine alternative that could provide an explanation of the wide range of leisure practices? Veal suggests that we review the discussions amongst those writers who have given opinions on the subject. It would appear from this that the concept of *lifestyle* sometimes becomes confused with that of *sub-culture*. But *sub-culture* has its own tradition and this, argues Veal, has been compromised by ambiguous use in neo-Marxist and feminist writings and by the narrow interpretation to which it has been subjected in reflections on social classes. He further suggests that the concept of *lifestyle* should be part of the development of a theoretical framework, something truly needed in the field of leisure studies, which are often merely descriptive in nature. Taking as his inspiration Rojek's concepts of *performativity and reservation*, Veal suggests a number of directions that could help advance reflection in this field.

Following this theoretical introduction, the other texts in this number are devoted to reports of analyses based on a range of surveys and studies. The most common characteristic used to identify the group under study is their age or position in the life cycle. This is most noticeable when it comes to discussing young people, or those transiting through to adulthood. But in most of the texts, the implicit leitmotif and subject of examination is the social changes, whether observed or perceived, that have marked the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And we may ask the question – are these changes real or merely suppositions? In fact, a number of our contributors begin by challenging certain preconceived notions concerning, amongst other things, young people, diminishing sociability, the lack of free time, the impact of family blending or the 'so-called' passivity of the elderly.

But another major notion appears to greatly exercise researchers as we change millennium – the growing individualism of human behaviours. For example, life cycle analyses by Zeijl, du Bois-Reymond and Te Poel, Lavenu or Lalive d'Epinay, Maystre and Bickel take stock of a subtle change of emphasis from group sporting activities to more individualistic sports or recreational occupations. And this phenomenon is noted in children transiting into pre-adolescence, in pre-adulthood and even at the other extremity of the life cycle, as the middle-aged move across the threshold of retirement. However, some other contributors suggest that this perceived individualism usually masks a sociability that finds its outlet in strong relationships with relatives, children, family, friends, relationships that are subject to less formal time frames (Gauthier and Boily). We may, thus, begin to wonder what is the basis for such a predominant image of an insufficient level of sociability in current societies. To judge by what we read, the only form of sociability that can authentically demonstrate the cohesiveness of a society is sociability directed towards strangers.

This question is re-examined by Bouvier-Daclon and Sénécal who remind us of the more or less implicit objectives of public programs that assign areas such as community gardens over to leisure activities, with a mission to 'rehabilitate eroded sociabilities'. The conclusion they draw from their observations is that gardening is an individual pursuit, which has been promoted as a leisure activity or opportunity to make contact with nature rather than with one's neighbour. They also point out that gardeners enjoy bringing along their own families to share their gardening activities. In similar vein, Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, having criticised the prejudice that describes young people so often as spending their leisure time hanging out in shopping centres or public spaces, note that, in fact, the locations most favoured by the young are those in their immediate locale where they have the opportunity to share agreeable activities with family and close friends. Taylor, whose interest lies rather with the leisure activities of women from a range of ethnocultural communities in Australia, also observes that a large number of these often opt for the reassurance of the family environment and the local community when selecting a location for leisure activities. And yet, such practices, which are common to most people, are often seen by the communities in question as an indication of social non-integration.

A number of the other analyses presented by our contributors offer a more negative portrait of some of the effects of social transformation. Papineau sees the cultural mismatch between Chinese and Canadian value systems with regard to gambling as a useful path for the investigation of pathological gambling amongst the Montreal Chinese community. She reminds us that this is a problem that threatens the cohesiveness of both family and community. For their part, Rapoport and Le Bourdais look at the impact of reconstructing or 'blending' families on the amount of time spent with the children. Their conclusions, though nuanced, underline the fact that it is women who remain the most closely involved with many activities

in which children are concerned. Gender and social class are key tools for the study of lifestyles. While researchers such as Rapoport and Le Bourdais focus on the question of gender *per se* or, like Taylor, on the status of women, others are examining the difference between male and female leisure practices. As is shown by Zeijl, du Bois-Reymond and Te Poel, Lavenu or Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, for example, young people's leisure activities appear to be always significantly differentiated along gender lines. On the other hand, Lalive d'Epinay, Maystre and Bickel postulate a closing of the gender gap amongst older people: recent indications suggest indeed that women are becoming more involved in the practice of activities of a physical nature than in the past. These authors also report on the ongoing democratisation of physical and sporting activities, as they see another gap closing, that which separates social classes. This form of levelling is also mentioned by Gauthier and Boily, who point out that young people as a whole are staying longer at school and that this is part of the explanation for their increased participation in cultural activities over the past years. Other writers, such as Lavenu or Zeijl, du Bois-Reymond and Te Poel, move in the other direction, stressing the maintenance of the gap between social classes with regard to certain cultural and leisure activities. This simply underlines the fact that lifestyles are the meeting point of styles of living and living conditions.

Rapoport and Le Bourdais' paper, which focuses less than those preceding it on leisure activities, demonstrates that culture also takes on a wider meaning as a reflection of social modes of using time. Thus, using the 1998 Canadian General Social Survey on Time Use, the writers examine another element that has contributed to the changing social interface of our epoch, the modification of family structures, often considered a major challenge when it comes to redefining parent-child relationships. Their article takes its argument beyond each member of the household's individual timetable and stresses the time parents and children spend together as a factor in the well-being of all the parties concerned.

This number opens up the prospect of a new consideration of the notion of change in lifestyles through the analysis of their impact on the so-called cultural leisure practices. It was to be expected that the contributors to the theme proposed in this number of *Loisir et Société* would understand it in the way they have. But future numbers could return to this subject, reversing the viewpoint to one in which we more specifically examine what new elements the changes associated here with cultural practices have brought into our lifestyles. This could lead us, for example, to reflect on the impact of Internet on family life and social relationships, on the role of public libraries and public spaces as places for socialising. Or on the effect of the mighty increase in the number of museums and other spontaneous cultural activities on the evolution of taste. Much work has been accomplished using this standpoint to investigate television watching. But there are other nodal sources of cultural creativity whose impact on lifestyles merit examination.