***Keeping Leisure in mind*: the intervening role of leisure in the blue space - health nexus.**

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Introduction
Blue space is a term coined by environmental and social psychologists to describe predominantly aquatic environments such as riversides, seashores, lakes and oceans. Recently an increasingly significant body of literature has associated these environments with wellness-related benefits such as a feeling of restoration (Foley and Kistemann, 2015). This chapter acknowledges advances in this area, considers the nature of this blue space – health nexus and focusses on the influence of leisure upon it. We contend that leisure, and associated states of mind, play a vital role in the relationship between health/wellness and blue space.

The focus here is the coast rather than all aquatic environments; this is the most obvious example of blue space that is clearly also a leisure zone. More leisure tourism takes place on or near the coast than any other type of environment, for example, 51% of bed capacity in European hotels is concentrated in coastal areas (European Commission, 2017). In 2015 seaside locations accounted for 39% of British holiday nights and there were 14.91 million trips to British beaches, which were associated with £3.84 billion of visitor spending (Visit Britain, 2017). The seaside resort of Blackpool (UK) saw visitor numbers increase to 18 million in 2016 (Marketing Lancashire 2017), a trend which was mirrored nationally.

Before moving onto the significant role of leisure, it is useful to provide a brief history of blue leisure space, with specific reference to wellness. The emphasis here is on the British seaside and the resorts that lie at the heart of the UK's coastal visitor economy. These were the first places to offer leisure tourism on an industrial scale; they were the facilitators of exposure to blue space for millions of people and continue to serve this purpose. As this chapter progresses it should be apparent that observations regarding the function of leisure should, in principle, apply equally to other industrialised societies even if these are differentiated by seasonal differences in access to and engagement with the coast.

The invention of the seaside: leisure and blue space for the masses
The meanings and interpretations of the seaside have varied and changed through history (Andrews and Kearns, 2005; Gillis, 2012). For example, the industrial and post-industrial British seaside resort has been viewed as a site of the Carnivalesque (Shields, 1991) and nostalgia (Jarratt & Gammon 2016; Walton 2000). Amongst the best known and oldest associations with the British seaside resort is that of well-being. It became the driving force behind mass coastal leisure tourism the industrial age. Popular seaside resorts, such as Scarborough, were direct descendants of the inland spa (see Gesler, 1998). The development of these resorts is now well documented by historians (see Brodie, 2018; Walton, 2000). A full review of this development lies outside the scope of this chapter, which instead considers the motivation of visitors to engage with these resorts.
The seaside pioneers, the British upper and middle classes, were motivated to visit the seaside partly because they felt increasingly isolated from the rhythms of nature, as industrialisation

gained momentum (Corbin, 1994; Lenček & Bosker, 1998). In the age of early industrialisation, people returned to the sea in a search for something that was missing from new towns and cities – *wilderness*, which is what the awe-inspiring sea came to represent to Western urbanites (Corbin 1994; Gillis 2012). The medical profession in the eighteenth century seemed to underline the need for rest and treatments to alleviate anxiety and ailments through this powerful tonic. Corbin (1994: 62) writes, 'The sea was expected to cure the evils of urban civilization and correct the ill effects of easy living'. The seaside was 'invented' through the harnessing of the 'healing power' of this environment. The medicalised seaside was to play a key role in the industrial society that had supported it as Perkin (1970: 224) explains,

> 'The seaside resorts as a whole had grown up to meet a need of industrial society as urgent as the need for Lancashire cottons or Birmingham hardware. They were, indeed, industrial towns with a specialised product, recreation and recuperation, made necessary by the growth of other specialised towns and the concentration of most of the population in an urban environment from which periodical escape was important for mental and physical health'. (1970: 224)

Seaside leisure tourism grew rapidly in late nineteenth century Britain as well as across much of Europe, North America and Australasia (Walton, 2000). The touristic infrastructure and seaside entertainments, developed to cater for growing numbers of visitors. Industrial workers who had more disposable time, money and affordable transportation options than their rural counterparts were a targeted clientele. Yet their holidays had were often rooted in agricultural holidays of old. Arguably older carnivalesque elements were carried over from these older traditions to the seaside resorts with their new entertainments (Hyman and Malbert, 2000; Shields, 1991). Nevertheless health and wellness were still a significant element of what resorts offered. (Walton, 2000). In 1930s Lancashire, the most significant motivations for Boltonians to visit the resort of Blackpool were: holiday (leisure) pastimes, rest and relaxation, health-seeking, romance, a change from Bolton, and 'nature'. So, while pastimes and pleasure-seeking were of crucial importance, rest, relaxation, health and nature all take their place as important motivators for inter-war seaside leisure (Cross, 1990: 43).

Post-war Britain saw a seaside boom; in developed countries visitors were now more likely to top up their sun-tan instead taking the waters or the 'ozone' (Collins and Kearns, 2007; Walton, 2000). From the 1960s onwards the middle classes could afford Mediterranean package holidays. Increasingly the seaside holiday was therefore not to be restricted to one's home country as we entered an age of cheaper air travel. In addition, stories of water pollution around the British shoreline surfaced in the second half of the 20th century. The traditional British seaside resort now had much more competition and faced a challenging end to the 20th century. The 21st century has marked a period of renewed interest in these resorts and record-breaking growth in the UK's coastal visitor economy, as mentioned earlier. Internationally, the growth of coastal visitor numbers and development shows no sign abating, indeed it provides a significant challenge in terms of sustainability. Wellness continues to be an important element

of the coastal visitor's experience as we discuss in the next section. However, before doing that, the connection between wellness/restoration and the coast needs to be explored.

The contemporary seaside - a restorative 'blue space'?

> 'Nature's most potent antidepressant, the beach moves us with a power of a drug, the rhythm of its tides and shifting margins re-orientating our sense of space and time' (Lenček and Bosker, 1998: xix)

Gallagher (2007: 228) suggests that society has been looking inwards and 'living in the space between our ears' and that we have 'forgotten what our forbearers knew and our scientists are rediscovering'. In other words, we have become disconnected from the natural environment and scientists and psychologists now observe how exposure (or reconnection) to natural environments offers wellness related benefits. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) suggested that restorative natural environments offer an optimal experience which can ease mental fatigue; Attention Restoration Theory argues that such environments can nourish attention and replenish depleted energy. Of course, we should not assume that all people(s) perceive natural environments in an equivalent way; indigenous peoples often feel a more immediate connection to nature and place (see Smith, 2008).

In recent years, research has focussed more specifically on blue spaces and associated wellness benefits (see Foley and Kistemann, 2015; Gascon et al 2017). Researchers associated with The European Centre for Environment and Human Health (www.ecehh.org) have linked positive feelings (for example calm, refreshment and enjoyment) with exposure to the coastal environment. White et. al. (2010) acknowledge that the reasons for the restorative nature of natural environments and blue space are unclear, but suggests three potential explanations:

a) Visual properties, for example, the reflection of light in interesting and restorative ways;
b) These environments are associated with restorative sounds, for example breaking waves;
c) The possibility (real or imagined) or immersing oneself in water and the associated drop in stress levels.

The nature of the seaside experience and the related state of mind of the visitor holds the key to this puzzle. The 'emptiness' of the coast allows for a slowness; strolling, 'pottering' and generally slowing down is of vital importance to the seaside experience today (Baerenholdt et al, 2004: 32). Holidays can offer catharsis and escape from responsibilities and everyday constraints of time. The liminality of the holidaymakers' beach marks an evident break from everyday behaviour. For instance, it's a place and time where various states of undress are not just tolerated but expected and one of the few places where adults can have unstructured childlike fun (Shields. 1991; Ryan. 2010). The importance of time to leisure and travel has been discussed: from Tuan (1977: 122) who observes that timelessness has been associated with some holiday destinations; to taking time to savour leisure experiences (Kurtz and Simmons, 2015).

According to Gillis (2012), a socio-cultural view of the seemingly timeless sea and empty coast emerged in the late 19th century. As Europeans and North Americans became less physically connected to the coast they became closer to them mentally and imaginatively. 'In its new role as wilderness, the sea offered an escape from time, from history itself' (Gillis, 2012: 141). Gillis also observes that those who derive their living from the sea are unlikely to hold such abstract and landlubber-like views. The timeless, eternal and romantic sea can be considered 'modern' - constructed by those who are alienated from it. This is in stark contrast to our ancestors who were of the edge and did not make as sharp a distinction between land and water; to use a 17th-century term, they saw the world as 'terraqueous' (Gillis, 2012: 99). Finding blue space may be a tonic for contemporary people but the drive to do so is also a symptom of industrialisation and urbanisation, for 'the Industrial Revolution drew the West indoors' (Gallagher, 2007: 13). There are growing concerns that children are spending too much time inside and in front of screens and not enough time outside; amongst the most commonly cited statistics in this area is that the average American now spends over 90% of their time inside a building or vehicle (Gallagher, 2007).

This modern-day reconnection, as described by Gillis, has been considered by Jarratt (2015a), Jarratt and Gammon (2016) and Jarratt and Sharpley (2017) who researched the experience of older visitors to the traditional British seaside. A distinctive sense of place (coined 'seasideness' by Jarratt, 2015a) manifested itself through positive and uplifting experiences of the multi-sensory seaside environment; interviews reveal a belief that the seaside was a 'tonic'. The open vistas, fresh air, the smell of the sea and sound of crashing waves were consistently referred to and described in restorative terms. Furthermore, this distinctive environment was seen to offer a temporary escape from the pressures of contemporary life; interviewees felt themselves relaxing, adjusting to natural rhythms and slowing down - these experiences were a key part of seasideness and visitor appeal. Furthermore, this research suggests that the natural seaside environment held qualities that encouraged contemplation. Interviewees considered their seaside to have a meaningful element that is best described as *spiritual* (Jarratt and Sharpley, 2017). The most common interpretation has been a secular spirituality which involved a (re)connection with the natural world through appreciating its beauty, complexity, scale and timelessness. Such perceptions of the sea were central to these potentially spiritual reactions (Jarratt, 2015b) The visitors saw the seaside experience as an opportunity to re-connect with something bigger or more significant than themselves (the natural world), whilst simultaneously confirming their place within it, and so it did indeed take on a spiritual significance. This research does not stand in isolation; while few other scholars have adressed the role of the seaside enviornment in the *touristic* sense of place, sense of place at the coast more generally has been considered (for example, Wylie, 2005). A particularly resonate study was conducted by Bell et. al. (2015) into the therapeutic nature coastal experiences - in this study participants expressed strong and enduring connections to their local coastline.

For hundreds of years the seaside has been linked to holistic benefits for both body and mind. Most recently this link has been explored by pyschologists but in terms of leisure tourism this appreciation of the coast can be traced back at least as far as the seventeenth century, but remains to this day. The seemingly 'timeless' seaside offered an opportunity to re-connect, tune

into natural rhythms, slow down and contemplate in a place that contrasted with the frenetic pace of modernity (Jarratt and Gammon, 2016; Jarratt and Sharpley, 2017). According to Gillis (2012) and Jarratt (2015b) the most significant feature of the coast that enables all this is a blankness or emptiness – of human-made distractions, of history and especially of our notion of time. Ironically perhaps, this view of the sea is relatively modern and of course anthropomorphic. Gillis argues that since the industrial revolution we have turned our back and the sea, emptied our coasts and we now seek to return to them. A key feature of this return, especially from a visitor perspective, has been, and still is, the perception of wellness. Of course such perceptions may vary, but the aforementioned research by psychologists appears to confirm this connection. Whether it be socio-culturally constructed or not, it is easy for us to conceive a place of slowness, leisure, reverie and introspection as something of a tonic.

Leisure in blue space
As detailed above there is mounting evidence of the many potential health benefits gained by being in and around blue spaces. However, the overwhelming majority of studies tend to explore either the health-giving properties of the environment or the resulting impacts on the individual. What is missing is any consideration of the psychological state of those benefiting from such environs, before, during and after interaction. For, as in radio transmission, the quality of the communication is largely dependent upon the condition of the receiver. Since a significant proportion of visits to the coast are leisure-related, it would seem logical to explore how being in and/or at leisure may affect the extent of any given benefit. Consequently, we ask: to what extent does leisure positively enhance the potential health benefits from the environment? Before exploring this question further, it is first necessary to outline, from the many meanings and definitions that the term leisure attracts, which is pertinent to this proposition.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a comprehensive discussion on the numerous manifestations of leisure (see Best. 2010; Bull et al.. 2003; Elkington and Gammon. 2014; Page and Connell. 2010; Torkildsen, 2005). Yet it is possible to indicate the salient approaches that have been taken to enhance our understanding of it. In simple terms, leisure can be explained from either temporal, objective or subjective viewpoints (Stockdale, 1985). Temporal approaches view leisure as those *activities* that take place during periods perceived as being free from obligation. The primary focus of studies that take this approach has been to determine the differences and potential inequalities in leisure opportunities between individuals and various social groups. It is important to note that an integral feature of the temporal component of leisure is that *leisure time* is not synonymous to *free time* - as *free time* can be both imposed and/or enforced, whereas leisure time is welcomed, and valued.

The activities that take place during such leisure episodes occupy the interest of those who take a more objective approach to leisure. In this case, it is what people choose to do – or not do - during their leisure that is deemed important. The applications of this approach are many and varied, including the health consequences of active and passive leisure (Iso-Ahola, 1997); the social consequences of positive leisure episodes in adolescence (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000); the impact of leisure on the elderly (Silverstein and Parker, 2002); identity acquisition and

affirmation in leisure (Haggard and William, 1992), and numerous studies that explore the choices and constraints of leisure between social groups (Critcher, 2006; Roberts, 1999). While there is little doubt that studies exploring the activities undertaken offer important insights into leisure's meaning and purpose, they also highlight the problems of delineating specific activities as leisure. Even though in most developed countries there is a recognised 'leisure industry', there is a distinct lack of agreement as to the leisure status of all the activities offered. As a result, leisure activities are only related to what people choose to do in their leisure, rather than being prescriptive pursuits that denote indisputable leisure episodes.

To offer some continuity and agreement as to what constitutes leisure; psychologically driven studies have argued that, irrespective of what individuals choose to do with their leisure, the one constant is the experience itself. In other words, leisure is a distinct and unique state of mind that is common to all those who experience it. This leisure-state has been identified as comprising perceived freedom blended with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Neulinger, 1976) and has a number of important implications. First, it releases leisure from the dependence on work; no longer considered as little more than residual time left over after work or other obligations, leisure can now be experienced at any time or place. Second, it can now be valued as something desirable in and of itself: 'It has become a state of mind brought about by a feeling of freedom and a feeling of doing something worthwhile, both highly cherished values in our society' (Neulinger, 1976:17). Third, it brings attention to the numerous therapeutic features that the experience of leisure can have upon an individual (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997) – a factor that will be explored further in the following section.

Leisure and health
The notion that engaging in leisure has numerous health benefits has been discussed extensively in the literature (Caldwell, 2005; Driver, 1991; Haworth, 1997; Newman et al 2014; Page and Connell, 2010). However, the overwhelming majority of studies have tended to explore the health-enhancing benefits of the chosen activities – rather than the physiological and psychological rewards of simply being at leisure. Nevertheless, there remains a significant body of research that has explored the numerous benefits to a person's health and well-being by entering the leisure state (Caldwell, 2005; Lloyd and Auld, 2002; Sonnentag, 2012; Watkins and Bond, 2007). For example, Lloyd and Auld, (2002) found there to be a direct correlation between leisure satisfaction and life satisfaction. Furthermore, freely entering states that are primarily intrinsic in nature cultivate feelings of competence, life meaning and purpose, relaxation, and focus. Not only do such experiences positively affect subjective well-being, but they also act as a buffer against negative life events through distraction and creating optimism about the future. This is not to suggest that all individuals will accrue similar benefits from entering leisure, as this will depend on a number of factors – one of which is value (Neulinger, 1981). It is unlikely there will be any significant health benefit of leisure when there is little or no intrinsic value present. If leisure is sought only for its extrinsic value – then it just becomes nothing more than a means to an end. Therefore, the extent to which any chosen activity in leisure is rewarding and enjoyable is dependent upon whether it is appreciated and deemed a justifiable use of time. As Iso- Ahola (1997:132) notes: 'The fact that an individual acknowledges, values and engages in leisure for its own sake, for its inherent characteristics,

is one way in which leisure contributes to health'. If leisure is not valued then the extent to which it positively impacts upon health is significantly reduced (Neulinger, 1981).

A further outcome of entering the leisure state relates to agency: the ability for people to immerse themselves in whatever they have chosen to engage in. Csikszentmihalyi' s (1988, 1992) work on flow is often used as an example of individuals commonly immersed in high investment activities to such a degree that little else matters - except for what is in front of them. Csikszentmihalyi (1988:170) refers to the resulting benefit of these types of experiences as psychic negentropy – a 'state we usually describe by such terms as "joy," "happiness," "satisfaction," "clarity," or "sense of achievement"'. Obviously, powerful outcomes like these have beneficial effects on health and well-being. However, it is important to note that while flow-like experiences are not the sole preserve of leisure episodes, the more powerful flow experiences are more likely to take place in activities freely chosen that generate intrinsic interest to the recipient.

Savouring is another form of focus, which in simple terms refers to those moments when someone can, '…attend to, appreciate, and enhance the positive experiences in their lives'. (Bryant and Veroff, 2007: 2). Therefore, when there is little or no distraction and time to soak in and cherish a meaningful life episode – then savouring takes place. It can be triggered by external stimuli like an awe-inspiring landscape (Gammon and Elkington, 2018), or can emanate internally through an appreciation of a particularly pleasant mind-set. The outcome of these types of events are many and varied, though primarily revolve around adding clarity to any given situation and potentially contributing to individuals' personal growth:

> '…focused attending gives positive stimuli greater emotional power, gives people greater access to their feelings in response to these stimuli, and establishes a more reliable way to recall and relive a positive experience later. We suggest that focussed attending makes a positive experience more distinctive, more vivid, and more easily and fully savored'. (Bryant and Veroff, 2007:69)
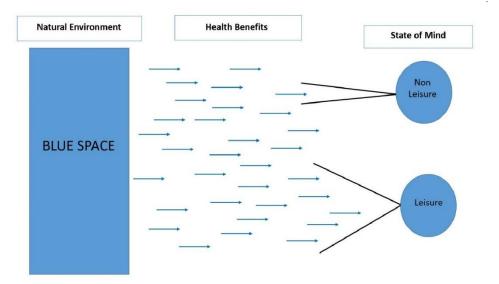
Similarly to flow, savouring can take place in moments outside leisure but are more likely to take place when a sense of freedom and intrinsic interest is evident. Furthermore, savouring and leisure have been identified as being closely related; each positively influencing the other (Kurtz and Simmons, 2015).

In sum, leisure is beneficial to health through the activities chosen, coupled with the inherent intrinsic properties that it produces. Of course, this is not to suggest that all choices in leisure are beneficial to health, as clearly long-term inactivity or the consumption of large amounts of alcohol, for instance, can have a deleterious effect on health and well-being. Moreover, such deleterious behaviour has directly been linked to some seaside resorts (Agarwal and Brunt, 2005). However, in these cases the harmful consequences of the environment stem from the influences associated with the in-land aspects of a place, rather than the natural vistas that it offers. Yet, such harmful choices should not distract from the innate qualities of entering and valuing the leisure state, coupled with self-determined visits to coastal regions.

Leisure, health and blue space.

Choosing to visit blue (and / or green) spaces in leisure, and the consequent health benefits of such choices, have been recognised and acknowledged for centuries. Yet the overwhelming focus has been in exploring the health-giving properties of the environment, rather than the psychological mind-sets of those benefiting from the surroundings. As Volker and Kistemann (2011: 458) affirm, 'Emotional and experiential responses to blue space have not yet been adequately recognised'. Equally, neither has the necessary mind states before entering blue spaces been fully acknowledged. As a result, the aim of this section is to make the case that to enter and engage with blue spaces when at leisure amplifies the benefits that such spaces emit. We hypothesise that leisure is a potential intervening variable - simply put, as BS + L Λ H. This proposition is based on the idea that individuals are more open and more sensitive to the health-giving properties of blue spaces when there is time to focus and savour the moment. In addition, a duality of value takes place – where the value and appreciation of experiencing leisure combines with the value and appreciation of the environment. The resulting mind-state analogously equates to a widening of an aperture that (see Figure 1) enables the individual to be more receptive to the health-inducing properties of the environment.

Figure 1 - The leisure health receptor model.

When the mind is not distracted, there is time and motive to savour and soak in the environment, which may create a reciprocal benefit to both the experience of leisure and to the appreciation of the surroundings. Furthermore, the feelings of well-being and mood improvement continue well after the interaction has taken place (Caltabiano, 1995), a condition Foley (2017) refers to as 'accretive practice'. As intimated above, there are still health-related advantages from working and living in and around blues spaces, but there is a reduction in these benefits, primarily due to increased distraction and complacency towards the environment. The notion that all blue spaces endow intrinsic therapeutic benefits have come

into question (Williams 2007), the fact remains that, for many people, they offer sanctuary from the many pressures that modern life engenders. It has been suggested that the sense of well-being resulting from coastal areas arise through what Bell et. al. (2015) refer to as four overlapping therapeutic experience dimensions: immersive, symbolic, social, and achieving experiences. There is little doubt that such life affirming experiences impact positively upon the wellbeing of the recipients, yet it is unlikely that such experiences would be achievable without first entering a leisure mind state.

Conclusion

The many health-related benefits that can accrue from being in around blue spaces continue to occupy researchers across the globe. In simple terms, these benefits are derived from direct and indirect factors; such as the positive physical and psychological consequences of being in such environments, or the symbolic and social experiences linked to well-being that blue spaces enable. However, there is good evidence to suggest that these positive outcomes do not occur osmotically; that to take full advantage of the varied benefits to health, individuals should first achieve the appropriate mind-state. We have argued that the leisure state of mind can nurture, amplify and reify the health-giving properties of blue spaces and that leisure is the intervening variable that helps enable and accentuate the many positive experiences that are on offer.

The likely reason as to why the leisure state of mind should have such an affect is due, in part, to its own much-researched benefits to well-being. Blue spaces and leisure enjoy a symbiotic relationship, whereby each component benefits from the other. The positive health outcomes of choosing *to leisure* in natural environments is well documented, but the notion that the extent of these benefits is as much to do with the accompanying leisure state as it is to the environment, has been largely neglected. What is more, little discussion has taken place on how the environment reinforces and enhances the leisure state. For example, experiences of freedom are integral elements of both being at the seaside - and at leisure. But, there are also specific aspects of entering the leisure state that helps those visiting blue spaces to be more receptive to its potential benefits. To be at leisure at least minimises if not removes life's unwanted distractions. It allows us to be more open and welcoming to the environment. We are more likely to value, savour and focus on what is important and meaningful to us, whilst allowing ourselves the time to reflect and enjoy such transformational experiences.

Whilst interest in the therapeutic nature of many natural environments continues to grow, the importance of the concomitant mind-state has generated less interest. Consequently, future studies exploring the health benefits of blue spaces should not only explore the affects that the environment has upon the individual, but also to be cognisant of the accompanying mind-state that occur during such episodes. Of course, the experiences encountered when visiting coastal regions remain important but so too is the mind state when entering them. To gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the nature and processes involved in blue space-related heath, it is vital to explore why some individuals accrue deeper feelings of well-being than others. Future research might usefully consider how respondents feel whilst encountering blue spaces – and so to keep always leisure in mind.

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