

LEISURE & LEARNING **Alive!**TM

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The Role of Culture in Leisure/Entertainment Project Design

Culture is a lot like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breath through it. A fish only discovers its need for water when it is taken out of it. People are rarely aware of all the aspects of their own culture until they find themselves in another culture. Then, they become aware how ubiquitous their culture is to all aspects of their lives.

Culture comes in layers, like an onion. To understand it you have to unpeel it layer by layer. On the outer layer are the explicit, observable products of the culture such as the language, food, architecture, fashions and art. They are however, only symbols of deeper layers of culture. Values and norms are the middle layer of culture and more difficult to identify. Norms are the mutual sense a group has of what is "right" and "wrong." Norms are such things as laws and rules of conduct. Values determine the definition of "good" and "bad." What is taken for granted, unquestioned reality, is at the core of culture. These are the things, that when questioned, cannot be answered. In the US, asking someone why they believe all people are equal only brings frustration. In the East, asking someone why they believe in arranged marriages would bring the same frustration.

Although many of the same products will appear in different cultures, they do not necessarily reflect the same values or meaning. To someone in Moscow, eating at a McDonald's is a status symbol, while to a New Yorker, it is only a quick meal for a few bucks. In other cultures, such as parts of Spain, what is designed to be a quick meal doesn't mesh with their custom of long dining experiences. The tables won't turn as fast, so to do the same volume, a McDonald's needs more seating.

All too often, whether by ignorance or arrogance, entertainment/leisure projects fail to match both the physical facility and operations to the culture of their guests. Western design firms typically produce projects from within their familiar Western cultural paradigm, without research and consideration of the unique cultural characteristics of the project's target market.

This problem is greatest when Western design firms venture furthest from their cultural-base into unfamiliar cultures, but can also occur when they are working in geographically close and related cultures. Even in the US, there is considerable variation in different aspects of culture from region to region, even city to city. For example the restaurant industry long ago became aware of territorial spacing. The inches which can separate adjoining tables in New York needs to be many feet in Omaha, Nebraska. Iced tea is served sweetened in the South, whereas, in other parts of the country, it is never served sweetened.

Most areas of the US as well as many other countries have diverse ethnic populations, each with their own unique cultures and customs. It is important for a project to just not consider the culture of the majority population, but also to consider these cultures. One simple example is birthday party facilities. If you design them for Anglos, they will be too small for Latino families who hold large, multi-generational celebrations and there will be no place for the traditional piñata breaking.

When a leisure project is mismatched to the area's culture(s), it leaves the guest feeling ill at ease, uncomfortable, often not totally conscious of the reason. The effect on guests can sometimes be almost as drastic as what happens when you put a fresh water fish in salt water. Unlike a fish, guests do have the option of leaving the project and never coming back. When the management culture doesn't match the staff's, unhappy staff will create unhappy guests. And of course, cultural dissonance results in a project with less than ideal financial performance, even failure.

When Western concepts and designs are literally exported to other cultures, not only is this disrespectful to the guests and their culture, but the effect can be to subtly undermine the very cultural foundations of the society where the project is located.

Culturally respectful development requires an approach that:

- first researches in depth the location's culture, and just not its visible elements, but its core values and norms, and
- then examines Western leisure concepts to see how they should be adapted to that particular culture.

Then it's time to look for design and management solutions that don't exist in the West, but which will work within that cultural context. It's like trying to rewrite the evolution of location-based leisure. You have to try to determine what it would look like today if it had evolved in that culture, rather than in the West.

The crew of the Enterprise in Star Trek followed a Prime Directive when they came in contact with other cultures:

The right of each sentient species to live in accordance with its normal cultural evolution is considered sacred. No Star Fleet personnel may interfere with the healthy development of alien life or culture.

We, at the White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group, believe that all entertainment/leisure projects should follow a similar prime directive. In June, at the international TiLE conference in London, Randy White, our CEO, proposed to top location-based leisure design company management

and designers in attendance that the leisure/entertainment industry adopt the following:

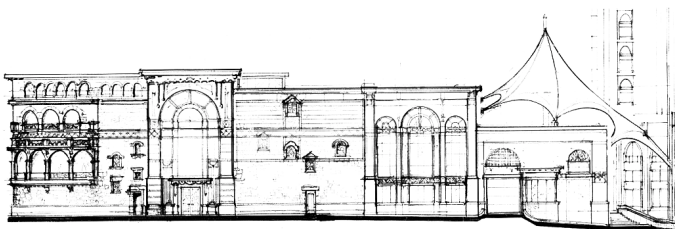
The Prime Directive of Location-Based Leisure:

1. Develop and operate with respect for the cultures of your guests and staff.
2. Don't impose your values and customs on them.
3. Rather:
 - First thoroughly research their culture, including its norms and values;
 - Determine how their culture will relate to the project and how all, or aspects of the project, might be in conflict with their culture; and
 - Then design the physical facility and operations so they will reflect and reinforce the culture and identity of your guests.

Time Magazine Recognition

The 30 April 2001 issue of *Time* magazine focused on children's play and learning. In one article, they discussed commercial children's entertainment and play facilities and said that the edutainment centers the White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group develops for its clients are the Xanadus of children's centers. If you aren't sure what Xanadu means, don't feel bad. We weren't either. So we checked in a dictionary. It is defined as "an idyllic, exotic, or luxurious place."

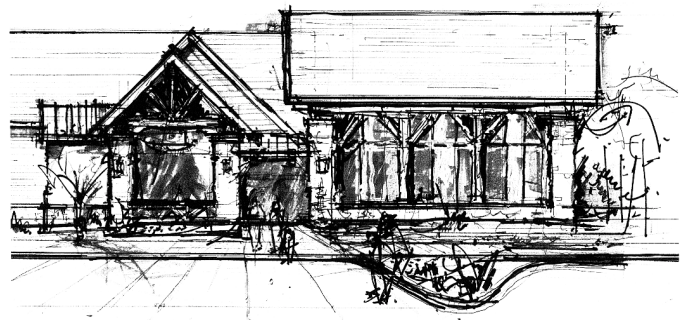
Recent Work



**Proposed Exterior of Entertainment Center & Celebration Hall
Addition to the Sana'a Trade Center**

Sana'a Trade Center, Sana'a, Yemen

The Sana'a Trade Center is Sana'a's only mixed-use project, consisting of the city's largest, enclosed retail mall, office towers and apartment towers. The owners have selected WHLLG as designer/producer for a three-story addition which will include the country's first FEC. The addition will contain 5,200 square meters plus a tensile fabric covered plaza which will connect the addition to the retail mall. The first two levels will contain a family entertainment center. There will be a family area with rides, games, maze, cafe and party rooms and a special children's area for parents with children 8 years and younger. The children's area will include the Middle East's first outdoor adventure play garden with a dinosaur dig, pretend fishing and a 10 meter tall climbing tower. The 3rd level of the addition will include a celebration and wedding hall, a upscale restaurant and the country's first bowling lanes. The project is scheduled for completion in 2003 at a cost of US \$6.0 million, not including parking. Market and economic feasibility studies and schematic plans have been completed.



Study Sketch of New Putter's Paradise Building

Putter's Paradise, Lee's Summit, Missouri, USA

This nine year old FEC has retained WHLLG to develop designs for a major expansion which will include a new 28,000 sf building featuring both family entertainment and children's edutainment centers, an outdoor children's adventure play garden, a go-kart track and a river otter habitat.

York, Pennsylvania USA Family Entertainment Center

WHLLG recently completed a market feasibility study and is currently preparing preliminary plans and assisting client with lease negotiations for a 30,000 sf FEC to be located in an enclosed mall. The center will include both family entertainment and children's edutainment areas as well as an outdoor adventure play garden.

Regina, Canada Children's Edutainment Center

WHLLG recently completed preliminary market feasibility evaluation and site selection for an indoor/outdoor children's edutainment center.

Phillipsburg, New Jersey FEC

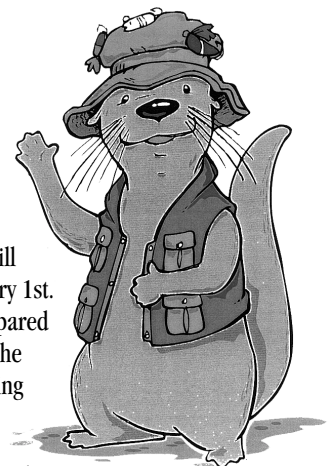
Completed a market feasibility study for an indoor/outdoor family entertainment center.

Naval Air Station FEC, Brunswick, Maine USA

The Navy's 1st family entertainment center is nearing completion for a summer 2001 opening. The 20,000 sf facility will include bowling, a food court, a children's play area, flexible space and an outdoor plaza with a zero-depth water playground.

Totter Otterville, Covington, Kentucky, USA

This 9,000 sf children's edutainment center is currently under construction in the new 45,000 sf Johnny's Toy store for a September 2001 opening. The center will include the Otterly Delicious Café, which will also serve toy store customers, a toy industry 1st. WHLLG conducted the feasibility study, prepared full design documentation and is assisting the owner with all aspects of staffing and opening the center.



Davis' Farmland Water Playground, Sterling, Massachusetts, USA

After completing the feasibility study earlier this year, we have now completed schematic plans and costs estimates for this major zero-depth water playground addition to this popular farm-based children's attraction.

Rookies & Newcomer's Seminar

The International Association for the Leisure and Entertainment Industry (IALEI) has selected our CEO, Randy White, to organize an all day Rookies & Newcomers seminar at this year's Fun Expo in Las Vegas. The Seminar will be held on Tuesday, October 2nd, one-day before Fun Expo, and cover developing a entertainment/leisure facility from site selection and feasibility to opening day. For registration information, visit www.funexpo.com or call 708-226-1300.

The Importance of Food to Location-Based Leisure

Food can produce substantial revenue and profits for a location-based leisure facility (LBL). Yet too often, it is relegated to a stepchild status with a snack bar, and usually one that is poorly done at that. In LBLs, quality food service can generate as much as 50% of total revenues. Even more important, it is a critical success factor for creating a project that results in loyal, repeat guests. The most successful and oldest operating LBLs have built their reputation and following around food as much as the entertainment components.

Socialization is a key reason people visit a leisure project. It is a chance for a family or group to go out and have some fun together. Culturally, socialization tends to revolve around food and beverage, especially for adults. This is even more significant in parts of Latin America and Europe than in the US. Without a quality food service operation and pleasant seating area, this socialization component will be missing and the facility will not be as attractive of a destination.

In the projects White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group produces for our clients, we take food and beverage seriously. It is treated as one of the most important components of a facility-not only the selection and quality of food, but also the food service seating areas. It is so important, that the food service is given a unique, distinctive name in each facility. Food service facilities in projects we have produced include:

Max's Café *Dinotropolis*, Caracas, VZ
Yummy in Your Tummy Café *Bamboola*, San Jose, CA, USA
Charlie's Diner *Olathe Lanes East*, Olathe, KS, USA
Herd Rock Café *Davis' Farmland*, Sterling, MA, USA
LouLou's Café *LouLou Al Dugong's*, Dubai, UAE
Otterly Delicious Café *Totter Otterville*, Covington, KY, USA



LouLou's Cafe in Dubai

In family oriented facilities, where parents accompany children, the food and beverage selection and the atmosphere and ambience of the seating areas are a very important consideration in parents' attendance decisions. Studies have found that up to 70% of the decisions to attend are made by mothers, not children.

Although many parents will play with their children, most prefer to sit, relax and enjoy coffee, other beverages and food while they socialize and/or monitor their children. The placement of seating areas needs to consider this monitoring function. If the seating areas have good visibility of children's play areas, then the children will receive more supervision from parents and the facility will have less behavior problems. Likewise, it is very important to the comfort of young children to be able to see their parents while they play, so parent seating needs to be located especially close to areas where the youngest children are playing.

Acoustics is also an important consideration. If the seating areas are noisy, and conversation is so difficult that you have to raise your voice, the experience can actually be unpleasant and stressful to parents. Loud environments induce physiological stress in not only adults, but also in children.

The once standard fare of pre-frozen hamburgers, pre-frozen shell pizza and soft drinks will no longer 'cut the mustard' in today's sophisticated restaurant environment. Just look at the menu selections of many casual cuisine, chain restaurants such as Chili's or Applebee's. Consumers are becoming more and more sophisticated in their food choices, and expect the same quality and variety in LBLs.

Our research with families has shown that there is an interest in healthy and high quality food. LBL food service facilities we have produced have included ethic wraps, branded gourmet coffee bars, thin crust gourmet pizzas (for adults, children still like the classic style), fresh salads, grills, fresh fruit smoothies and specialty menus for children.

When it come to families, we make sure the café areas are both parent and child friendly, paying special attention to the needs of parents with infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers. Picture menus are developed for young children who don't yet read. Child-size silverware is offered as well as spill-proof cups. We give staff special customer service training for working with parents and children.

When providing food service in a variety of cultures and settings, special religious and local practices have to be taken into consideration in the design of the seating areas and the kitchen, sanitation practices, food selection and food preparation.

Sometimes meeting parents' needs means stepping outside societal paradigms. To address parents' concerns about the unhealthy effect of cola and soda drinks on their children, *LouLou Al Dugong's* in Dubai offers no soda drinks, only fruit juices, including fresh squeezed ones. This operating decision supported parents in not having to say "no" to their children's choices when they visited the café. The value of children's nutrition and health came first in this facility.

Children have always been fascinated by food preparation. That is why in 1997 we introduced the industry's first do-it-yourself cooking for children as young as 3 years old and now, in 2001, have introduced the industry's first do-it-yourself campfire cooking for children.

Quality food service is an essential component of any LBL. It requires research, attention to detail and understanding the needs of both parents and children's. Treat it like a necessary evil, and success will be elusive. Get it right and your business will prosper.

Update of Our Web Site

Our web site has undergone an extensive update with many additions, including some information on obtaining financing. Most of our published and in-publication articles are available for downloading. Check it out at www.whitehutchinson.com.

Conference/Convention Presentations

International Play Association (IPA) International Conference – The Child's Right to Play; A Global Approach, Hofstra University, New York; May 2001; *Multi-Cultural Dimensions of a Children's Play & Discovery Center in Arabia*; by Randy White & Vicki Stoecklin.

TILE 2001 (Trends in Leisure Entertainment); London, UK; 12-14 June 2001; *The Cultural Gulf: Matching the Product to the Guest*; by Randy White

Fun Expo 2001, Las Vegas, Nevada; 2-6 October 2001 (www.funexpo.com)

- *Rookies & Newcomers Seminar*, 9 AM-5 PM, Tuesday 2 October, by Randy White
- *Making Your Facility Family Friendly*, 8:30-10 AM, Thursday 4 October, by Vicki Stoecklin
- *Edutainment*, 3:00-4:30 PM, Thursday, 4 October, by Randy White

New Articles

- *A Spoonful of Sugar Makes an Existing LBL a Smart Destination*, in publication, *Tourist Attractions and Parks*
- *Multi-Cultural Dimensions of a Children's Play & Discovery Center In Arabia*, in publication for new book, *The Child's Right to Play: A Global Approach*

These and over 40 of our company's past articles are available for downloading at our web site www.whitehutchinson.com. Or just let us know if you would like a copy of one sent to you via snail mail.

If you are planning a new project, or have an existing center that you are planning to expand or have some issues with, don't hesitate to contact us. Randy White, our CEO, will be glad to talk to you and discuss your project.



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