

## Modern time crunch hijacked ‘leisure society’

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**By Roy Romanow and Tony Gagliano**

Not so long ago we dared to imagine a shift to the leisure society — a world where robots lifted the burden of work, and prosperity allowed more time for stimulating activities and fun. Today's reality, however, is starkly different than yesterday's dream. As the great sage Yogi Berra once put it, "The future isn't what it used to be."

So what happened?

A lot actually: new technologies that keep us tethered to our workplaces 24/7; an expanding consumer appetite for round-the-clock services; sprawling suburbs necessitating long commutes; globalization and urbanization. These and many other transformational forces are reshaping the way we interact — and the time we have to interact — with our families, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and communities.

Not surprisingly, more and more Canadians are finding themselves caught in a time crunch. A just-released report by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, *Caught in the Time Crunch: Time Use, Leisure and Culture in Canada*, found that the number of Canadians who are experiencing high levels of time crunch grew by 20 per cent from 1992 to 2005.

More of us are working in jobs requiring non-standard hours — weekends, evenings, nights and rotating shifts. Women, especially, are feeling the pressure of raising children and providing care to seniors. Meanwhile, we are spending less time on social activities, fewer of us are able to attend arts performances, and fewer of us are volunteering for culture and recreation organizations.

That's unfortunate. Participating in arts, culture or recreation, contributes to the well-being of individuals,

communities and societies. The myriad activities that we pursue define our lives, our well-being. And let's not forget that when we are rejuvenated by engaging in social and cultural activities we are healthier and more productive in our work.

The national decline in arts, culture and leisure activity is more than a time-crunch problem. The past several years have also seen a shift away from funding for public agencies and non-profit, voluntary organizations responsible for arts, culture and leisure programs, services, facilities and other opportunities. Since 1990, community per-capita spending nationally on arts, culture and leisure has failed to keep pace with inflation or population increases.

The world will continue to evolve rapidly, and Canada will change along with it. But there is nothing inevitable about time crunch or declining involvement and support for arts, culture and leisure. All it requires is imaginative ideas and responsive public policy.

We need family-friendly policies for all workers and supports for seniors so that all Canadians can have the time to enjoy activities that enrich their lives and promote good health. Family-friendly work policies, such as flextime, job sharing, parental and eldercare leave benefits, are good for our health and good for our productivity.

We need governments and public policies that support our culture and leisure infrastructure. We must continue to develop meaningful venues and opportunities, mindful of ensuring equity and inclusion are overarching principles in our approach.

We need to encourage barrier-free arts and culture activities by supporting and promoting performing artists, productions, festivals and venues. The annual [Luminato](#) festival, for example, which ends today in Toronto, is a largely free and accessible 10-day celebration of the arts, where stages, streets and public spaces are infused with culturally diverse theatre, dance, classical and contemporary music, film, literature, visual arts, and design. It provides "accidental encounters with art" and incorporates Toronto's cultural diversity in its programming.

It's time we, as a society, adopted a broader view and recognized that our well-being depends on much more than our economic productivity. It's time we invested more in our arts, culture and leisure. It's time we all enjoyed the kind of personal fulfilment and leisure that Canadians once dared to imagine was possible for ourselves and for future generations.

Roy Romanow is chair of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Advisory Board and a former premier of Saskatchewan. Tony Gagliano is co-founder and chair of Luminato. Caught in the Time Crunch: Time Use, Leisure and Culture in Canada is available online at the [Canadian Index of Wellbeing website](#).

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