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Living in a lockdown: An opportunity to enhance physical activities?

As a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, lockdowns in the United Kingdom (UK) have restricted nearly every aspect of human life. Though challenging for many people, the present circumstances does bring thoughts and questions in regard to what can be socially, politically and economically salvaged from the wreckage. In this article, two UK-based scholars focus upon the field of sport and physical activity (S-PA) and discuss how spatial, social and value aspects of S-PA have shifted during this current crisis.

A new reality of everyday life

Pandemic is defined as [‘the spread of a disease on a global scale’ \[1\]](#). Given this risk to human health, it is questionable that in the modern world pandemic is more synonymous with Hollywood blockbusters or historical events than present-day reality. This is strange considering that in the past two decades there have been as many pandemic outbreaks as there were in the entire 20th Century. This should not be a surprising to anyone within the backdrop of globalisation, in which the compression of the world has meant more humans travelling from place to place, across varied times and spaces with more ease. The surprising element is that there have not been more pandemic outbreaks. The idea of a pandemic almost seemed unimaginable in the contemporary western world, because in truth, if there is one area in which the western world seems to have excelled over the rest, it is within the area of health and sanitation. [2] However, the recent pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has brought a truth to the unimaginable, cast a realistic lens on the Hollywood blockbuster; many around the globe, especially in the western world, have become familiar with the term ‘pandemic’ and what it means for everyday life.

Social practices in isolation: A chance to increase physical activities?

As Albert Einstein famously said, ‘in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity’. And here lies an opportunity to address the issue of S-PA participation within the United Kingdom. This may seem paradoxical, given that S-PA is considered at its best a tool of global unity and therefore would be unusable in a time where we are meant to be socially distancing. Indeed, S-PA are more often than not practiced socially. During this unfolding global pandemic, social distancing is becoming the norm, restricting people from coming together, at least physically. How is this reflected in S-PA? New social practices emerge, and people adapt, often by coming up with innovative solutions. Those who have been physically active seem to be finding ways to remain engaged in S-PA; we have seen people taking online yoga classes or running a marathon in their garden. But what about those who previously did not engage in S-PA? And those who

do not have access to green spaces? Is this perhaps a chance to achieve benefits for all or will this situation reinforce inequalities among social groups?

To be able to salvage this situation and enhance S-PA, we need to get a grasp of the circumstances. We believe that there are three key aspects of the lockdown that should be considered. These are the spatial, social, and value aspects of our everyday life. Even though—at the time of the writing—people are allowed to leave their home to exercise once a day, we are confined between four walls most of the time. It is evident that the spatial perspectives of our lives have changed dramatically with the significance of virtual spaces soaring. The opportunities and barriers of social landscapes that people encounter when crossing real, virtual and hybrid spaces [3] has been acknowledged by scholars in ‘normal circumstances’; these are even more relevant during the lockdown.

Relatedly, the social perspectives—and often the social norms—of our everyday lives have shifted as well; most people are, at least physically, limited to their home settings. Indeed, many children and youth spend most of their time with their parents. Nevertheless, digital devices allow them to switch between real and virtual spaces and stay connected with others. For instance, sport clubs provide tools and training sessions so that they remain active. Engaging people online, however, cannot be taken for granted; [digital technologies are not only tools but social forces](#) that impact on how we perceive reality and interact with each other [4].

As a result of the shifting spatial and social connotations of everyday life, physical exercising may be given new meanings. In a time of curtailed freedoms, [sport might empower people or provide them with comfort](#) [5]. And who knows, the limited circumstance to go outside might lead to the routine of daily physical activities. In the process, however, [we should remember to maintain positive experiences of S-PA and the social relationships with friends via virtual spaces](#) [6].

Public sport bodies need to act

Although individuals have creatively come up with a variety of novel activities—such as playing keepy uppy with a toilet roll or running marathons in their own gardens—we believe that public sport bodies have the responsibility to analyse and actively respond to the pandemic. For example, Sport England are the national provider and supporter of sport, especially at amateur level, and their main strategy is an active nation regardless of age, gender, background or disability to be a part of S-PA, and now this must include pandemics. In the past, the speed of modern-day living was simply too much to keep up with for many, the divisions of people were too much to bridge, or the historical connotations of S-PA were too much to overcome. Now many people are at home avoiding their to-do list and looking for ways to meaningfully interact with people, to be inspired, and with time to be inspired.

The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics were supposed to inspire a generation and the legitimacy of the legacy created by this event as with any mega sporting events generally is still in question by many scholars [7]. Much like London 2012, the current pandemic will have an immense public expenditure and therefore—perhaps ironically—the way to grow S-PA participation is not by inspiring a generation but to [‘imprison a generation’ who have no](#)

[alternative \[5\]](#). Accordingly, as of the 31st of March 2020, Sport England announced funding of up to £195 million to support the S-PA sector in this current crisis. The question however still remains how Sport England and the respective National Governing Bodies (NGB) will configure S-PA to the new parameters to bridge social divisions, reduce inequalities and reach the less active and vulnerable population. Therefore, we are calling Sport England and the NGBs to action and asking them to show the way in how we can all engage and participate in S-PA, equally and with the same opportunities.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the insightful comments from Dr Ben Powis.

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