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Lockdown Leisure

Editorial

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Abstract: This editorial sets the scene for this special issue by unpacking the concept of ‘lockdown leisure’ as closely linked with the Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic which spread globally in early 2020 and throughout 2021 and 2022. It provides a snapshot of the parameters of lockdown leisure, outlines the separate articles in this special issue, and considers the medium-to-long term implications of the pandemic for leisure studies. By incorporating perspectives from a plethora of academic disciplines, the special issue advances our understanding of the social, spatial and cultural impacts of the various lockdowns on leisure and our lives more broadly.

Key words: lockdown, leisure, covid-19, pandemic, digital leisure.

Introduction: Lockdown Leisure

This special issue explores the complex relationship between lockdown and leisure. As the Guest Editors, our two overarching and inter-related aims were tied, first, to extending our knowledge on the medium and long-term impacts of lockdown on leisure lives. Second, the issue seeks to provide a critical, transnational and leisure-oriented understanding of the diverse meanings, compositions and performances of leisure across what we may understand as the ‘(post-)lockdown’ worlds. This is achieved by incorporating the various perspectives represented in the 10 articles that, individually and collectively, advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of the pandemic’s social and cultural impacts.

From early 2020 and onwards, across many countries, one of the key responses to the Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic was the implementation of various forms of national and local lockdowns. At their most basic level, Covid-19 related lockdowns tended to involve (and still do, in some cases) social and disease control restrictions, curfews and quarantines. In this sense, lockdown and other ‘stay-at-home’ policies became largely synonymous with countries’ or regions’ attempts to reduce social contact and simultaneously prevent the spread of Covid-19 and reduce its impact on public health services. Lockdowns – where and when implemented –thus represented a significant departure from ‘normality’. A temporal period – preceding a so-called ‘*new normal*’ – emerged and instantly impacted the

daily lives of populations across the world by altering their ability to work, travel, and maintain social or family relations and, as we explore in this issue, their *leisure lives*.

In explaining the emergence of what he conceptualized as ‘locked down’ leisure in Britain, Ken Roberts (2020), in the summer of 2020, explored a myriad of relevant questions for the study of leisure in a time of lockdown. These spoke to, *inter alia*, the impact of social distancing measures on leisure, the sanitation of leisure lives, the lockdown’s different impacts on different demographic groups, and the new practices of leisure providers. Roberts also drew attention to the importance of time. This temporal aspect, we argue, remains imperative in this context for, as Roberts noted, the medium- and long-term legacies of lockdown on leisure cultures and activities were still likely to play out at the time of writing his paper. Indeed, Roberts concluded that:

There will be more lessons for leisure scholars on the ‘other side’ of the 2020 pandemic. We will gain new, more penetrating insights into for whom, why and which leisure really matters. This paper’s timeline finishes in June 2020 but the narrative is ongoing. It will run for years to come. (Roberts, 2020, p. 626).

Crucially, in many countries, several shorter and longer lockdowns were implemented after the publication of Roberts’ paper (and this special issue’s call for papers), due to the emergence of new Covid-19 variants, increases in transmission, and the absence of a vaccine until late 2020 (which, in many cases, took several months to get rolled out for many populations). That being said, this special issue represents a concentrated and collective effort to gauge and accumulate the lessons for leisure scholars and leisure studies nearly three years after the global lockdowns began. It does this by providing a collection of original research articles focused on various national and cultural contexts and on the multifaceted impacts of lockdown(s) on leisure activities, cultures and industries.

The importance and parameters of leisure in lockdown

As a critical juncture in modern societies, the pandemic warrants critical, social scientific engagement. As Connell (2020) reminds us, the Covid-19 pandemic, as much as it is a medical disaster, must also be considered a social disaster that has impacted global societies and local communities alike. Similarly, Matthewman and Huppatz (2020) argue that disasters such as Covid-19 must also be approached as social phenomena. Resultantly, the social sciences have been responsive, and numerous books, edited collections, journal articles and conferences quickly emerged, which reflect on and assess Covid-19’s social impacts following its global spread in early 2020. Indeed, a significant bulk of this work has considered the concept of

‘leisure’ or leisure activities (e.g., Roberts, 2020; Du et al., 2021; Mowatt, 2021; Sharp et al., 2022). As the pandemic unfolded, leisure life was not solely a domain that was deemed crucial from individuals’ points of view, but it was also highly politicized and actively encouraged through public discourses highlighting the social and physical advantages of an active leisure life (Nugent, 2020). And so, within the social study of Covid-19 which Connell (2020) called for, and which still remain under construction, we argue that *leisure* must be positioned centrally in any social analysis of Covid-19. Of course, one of the primary reasons for this is because national lockdowns have ignited a series of critical questions about the elements of rupture, transformation and continuity in people’s (leisure) lives and behaviours. Indeed, as Joe Moran (2020) reminds us, ‘[l]ockdown has laid bare the strangeness of the everyday. It has severed us from many of our routines’. And so, if leisure time broadly refers to ‘that portion of the day not used for meeting the exigencies of existence’ (Weiss, 1965: 1), then, for millions of people, lockdown may have brought about *more* time for leisure although, for others, it may have merely served to blur the work-leisure boundaries.

However, despite the potential quantitative increase in leisure *time*, Covid-19 restrictions also led to the closure of leisure spaces – particularly those taking place indoors or visited by large crowds. Examples of this, as captured by the separate articles in this special issue, include the shutdowns of gyms, galleries, theatres, museums, libraries, leisure centres and the restrictions on team sport trainings and group practices (e.g., Agostino et al., 2020). Sport mega-events (like the 2020 Olympics and Euro 2020), cultural events and festivals, meanwhile, were largely cancelled or took place behind closed doors – without spectators – in 2020 and early 2021 (Lee Ludvigsen, 2022). In terms of the leisure economies, lockdowns also directly influenced the businesses and employees of the sport, exercise and leisure sectors (Sanda et al., 2021; McCulloch et al., this issue), and those scheduled to volunteer or work at sports events (Lee Ludvigsen & Hayton, 2022). In other words, lockdowns thus dramatically impacted when, how and with whom individuals could interact with during their leisure times (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2021). In that sense, we would argue that lockdowns, for many people and societies, became largely synonymous with the *re-definition*, *re-negotiation* and *re-conceptualization* of leisure, especially in terms of altering or adapting the practices of an already existing leisure activity or provisions (see Lenneis et al., this issue), or simply by finding new or rediscovering old leisure activities. During times of lockdown, we also observe the importance of leisure’s ‘digital turn’, or the digital leisure cultures which depend largely

on technologies (Silk et al., 2016), as many ‘offline’ (e.g., physical spaces) leisure services or domains were shut down temporarily or for good.

Throughout the Covid-19 lockdowns, the proliferation of home fitness videos (Allen and Velija, this issue), social media-based challenges such as the ‘stay-at-home challenge’ or #ToiletRollChallenge (Bond et al., 2021), and the migration of professional sport events such as dart and chess (Davis, 2022) and quizzes (Ng, 2021) to home-based online platforms, were among the many adaptations of *physical* practices which emerged across the world. It is thus important to emphasize that the implementation of lockdowns did not automatically translate into the *absence* of leisure activities. Rather, the meanings assigned to leisure by individuals, groups and other stakeholders significantly transformed. Essentially, the study of lockdown leisure is strongly linked to the study of ‘digital leisure’.

Lockdowns have also impacted various populations differently in different places. For example, as Sanda et al. (2020) note, Covid-19 meant that in some cases older people with underlying health conditions, or people from ethnic minority backgrounds, had fewer opportunities to participate in outdoor physical activities. Moreover, leisure’s increasingly digital turn, described above, relied and continues to rely heavily on access to and understandings of technologies, wi-fi and specific devices (e.g., tablets, computers, smartphones). Hence, the trends that emerged within the realm of lockdown leisure also say something about and reflect wider structural issues of social inequality and exclusion that the pandemic, in many ways, amplified and exacerbated. In this regard, one of the key premises upon which our special issue was originally motivated by was the idea that Covid-19 and lockdowns represented one of – if not *the* – biggest social transformations scholars of leisure in the post-War era would come to analyse, especially in relation to ‘(lockdown) leisure’. As the emerging and often responsive scholarship in the area implies, we are not the first ones to acknowledge the nexus between lockdown and leisure. Nevertheless, the timing of the publication of this special issue means that the medium- and- long-term impacts of lockdown have played out to a greater extent than they had in 2020 and 2021, and therefore could be uniquely captured in the various articles included here.

This special issue: A summary

This special issue consists of 10 articles written by scholars from across various disciplines including, but not limited to, leisure studies, sociology, sport management, education and early

childhood studies, and cultural studies. Indeed, whilst this reflects the multi-disciplinary interest in lockdowns across the world, it simultaneously indicates something about the sheer importance of public health measures for individuals and societies. It is also necessary to mention the variety of methodological approaches taken by the authors which were designed with social distancing measures and pandemic restrictions in mind.

Contributions to the special issue are divided into two broad inter-connecting themes: *changing leisure practices* and *reconfigured leisure spaces*. First, with regards to *changing leisure practices*, we get an insight into how leisure practices were modified by individuals and leisure providers to adapt to lockdown restrictions in diverse national contexts. This, however, opens up larger questions regarding inequality, access, digital leisure and inclusion. On local, national and international levels, the periods of lockdown have amplified (or made visible) pre-existing inequalities and socially exclusionary practices. In this context, McCulloch et al. (this issue) empirically explore how the services provided by disability sport charities were impacted by lockdowns in the UK. The organisation they call ‘*Admit*’ (a pseudonym) was able to extend its organisational mission in relation to social inclusion and physical activity for children and adults by adapting their working practices through online working practices, delivery packages and physical activity programmes. The theme of (online) physical activity is also explored by Allen and Velija (this issue) who draw upon survey and interview data to explore how physical activity was managed by pre-school children’s parents during the UK lockdown. Whilst their study highlights the importance of alternative digital technologies to maintain levels of physical activity in home environments, they also document how the pandemic led to a reduction in physical activity for many toddlers and pre-school aged children and the challenges associated with some of the physical activity videos.

Despite the potential of diversifying audiences through new online platforms (e.g. the ‘National Theatre at Home’), however, Feder et. al.'s (this issue) quantitative analysis of two cultural participation monitor surveys (measuring the frequency and ways in which people consumed culture during the global pandemic in England) demonstrate that cultural consumption remained the same as pre-pandemic trends. They found people who had never previously participated in cultural forms did not increase their participation and any reduction in cultural consumption were amongst those who already faced barriers to their participation (e.g. due to

health or geographical barriers). The only increase in cultural consumption was amongst those who were already highly engaged in consuming forms of culture pre-pandemic. Ultimately, inequalities in the cultural sector were reproduced during the pandemic and if more diverse audiences of culture are to be reached, further creative vision and motivation for change is required. This article is followed by Roberts' (this issue) examination of time use in the UK before, during, between and following the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. As Roberts finds, the results revealed no rush back to the 'old normal' post-lockdown – whereas extra leisure time was primarily filled by the use of media.

The altered meanings of leisure are also located at the core of Lenné et al.'s (this issue) empirical study into CrossFit in the Danish context. In the context of closed CrossFit gyms, the authors seek to give a voice to the users of these gyms – the CrossFitters – to understand how these individuals perceived the transformations to their leisure lives. The migration towards online-based workouts emerges as one key theme – specifically, the article constructs an understanding of how digitally mediated communities can work to complement physical training. Whilst clearly highlighting the social aspects of CrossFit, Lenné et al.'s study will also prove useful for future (post-lockdown) work in the area, as they present a series of important questions for other researchers to engage with regards to 'traditional' gym goers as well as CrossFitters.

In relation to the second theme of the special issue – *reconfigured leisure spaces* – three articles pay specific attention to the socio-spatial implications of lockdown and how - as some public spaces were closed down - 'new' spaces emerged or were given new meanings or negotiated by its users. The importance of spaces has been highlighted in the pandemic's context and Covid-19 'has provoked our understandings of fixed spatial scales' (Jensen, 2021: 78). For example, the slow-down of human mobility and activity in the months of lockdown caused what Bustad et al. (this issue) call the 'anthropause' which captures the enormous interruption on contemporary patterns of human interaction and action. This time limited period was, *inter alia*, characterized by empty streets, little traffic, and the return of animals to human-centred spaces which are explored in relation to the prospects of a post-anthropause period; that is to say, when mobility and activity gradually resumed. By highlighting the ecological impacts of the resumed human activity and consumption in the post-anthropause, Bustad et al. break new

conceptual ground as they point out that the post-anthropause – as a diagnostic and conceptual relation – helps us understand the intersection between human activity, environments, and the future.

Urban green spaces are also central to King and Dickinson's (this issue) investigation into how exactly green spaces were valued by individuals in lockdown. Drawing from participants' Mobile Instant Messaging Diaries through the smartphone app WhatsApp, their paper aids our understanding of how social practices are built into leisure lives in green spaces. The public nature of urban green spaces provided participants with a feeling of shared spaces and an escape from lockdown's boredom and, to that end, King and Dickinson provide new evidence of how green spaces became purposeful spaces during 'post-lockdown'. Dalmer et al.'s (this issue) study of older adults' is concerned with the closure of another leisure space, namely, public libraries in Canada. More specifically, the authors investigate how the library closures impacted older adults' magazine leisure reading practices. As they argue, the pandemic became a catalyst for adapted practices where the library as a *place of leisure* became transformed as it became a virtual space where online portals and magazines could be accessed and read. As Dalmer et al. maintain, however, the reading of digital magazines was also disliked by many participants, indicating the barriers to adaptation and older adults' reading preferences. Then, Uzunogullari's (this issue) article analyses lockdown leisure through the exemplar of single-player sandbox videogames. With relevance to reconfigured spaces, Uzunogullari discusses how videogames became a tool for 'armchair travel' and how domestic spaces could be 'escaped from' through the sensory and emotional experiences generated from videogames. Finally, children and young people's perspectives of lockdown in the UK are explored by Gennings et al. (this issue) in their research note. Their study documents how the lockdown disrupted children and young people's usual leisure lives and milestones and provided an isolated 'leisure-experience' despite finding some positive impacts of lockdown (e.g., a better appreciation of what was once considered normal or mundane).

Future directions

To end this editorial, we re-emphasize that the collection of articles in this special issue, when taken together, provide a clear indication of the social importance of leisure lives in lockdown. As Jensen (2021: 78) writes, 'dramatic events like Covid-19 not only require instant reaction

but also opens up for reflections and analysis of existing conditions'. This is a contention we agree with, and it is hoped that the articles included here represent a collective effort to do exactly this: to reflect and analyse. We also concede that many questions remain unanswered and that it might take decades to understand and measure the full impacts of Covid-19, especially the impact of lockdowns on leisure practices and the discipline of leisure studies. In this regard, the papers included in this special issue act as a stepping stone for future studies of the leisure-related impacts of Covid-19. Indeed, as Roberts (2020: 625) has noted, the 'worldwide debate about a new normal' remains on-going. Moreover, uncertainty persists given the current invasion of Ukraine, global financial crisis, and the long-term impacts of Covid-19. Hence, as Guest Editors, we remain both hopeful and positive that this special issue will ignite continued and sustained work and research initiatives on leisure in what is often characterized as 'post-pandemic' societies, and especially in relation to 'for whom, why and which leisure really matters' (Roberts, 2020, p. 626) in times of crisis and recovery.

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