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What to expect from local authority sport and leisure in 2015?

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What to expect from local authority sport and leisure in 2015?

By Dr Dan Parnell

Sport and leisure, and by its very nature physical activity, has been a key element of Local Authorities (LAs). Some would say, it is now a part of our cultural heritage. Certainly, for me, LA provision allowed for access to football (social inclusion projects) and extra curricular sport based provision (under the guise of '8-15s' years provision – which included the formidable "wet, wild and wobbly" attraction at the Oval leisure centre, on the Wirral!). Call me a romanticist, but I do not want to lose this provision and others, some of who will need them more than me, to miss out. As it stands LA sport and leisure is in dire straits and the status quo remains for 2015.

How do LA's currently look? Ultimately, they have changed significantly over the past 5 years. In response, to the comprehensive spending review in (2010), the financial stability of LA's have weakened. More so, in a report by Dr Neil King for the Association of Public Service Excellence, it was highlighted that certain parts of England are disproportionately affected [PD1] (APSE, 2010 [PD2] ). As a result this has created a landscape of fragmented provision.

To add further to this socio-political circumstance, King (APSE, 2010) reports results from his survey looking forward towards 2015. In doing so, he anticipates several impacts of sport and leisure; including, falling revenue budgets, staff cuts, increased charges, reduced opening hours, facility closures and reduced commitments to parks and pitches utilized for organized and casual participation. We are now seeing these predictions turn reality.

A clear example of this is the fight to "Keep Park Road Baths Open" [PD3] within inner city Liverpool (North West region of England). The current situation within Liverpool and LA areas has been discussed recently (Parnell, Millward and Spracklen, 2015). As has the potential associated negative impacts of these LA cuts on the NHS and Public Health, notably the potential for increased lifestyle related diseases (Parnell, 2014 [PD4] ). Whilst the future management of Park Road Baths remains uncertain, we can expect to see further cases across the UK and expect a number of consequences, especially for health within our local communities.

Why is health important? Well, one prediction for 2015 [that is a bookmakers cert] will be the steady increase in lifestyle related diseases! This has huge impacts for Public Health, none more recognisable to those in government than the financial one. The link between physical activity and

health is clear and something we must begin to use (check out this insight into the Human Capital Model by Bailey et al., 2012 [PD5] ).

Whilst, we might struggle to 'make the case' for sport and leisure, we do know the cost of inactivity. At £940million per year (BHF, 2014 [PD6] ), which is at a serious risk of increasing. It has never been more important to invest in sport, leisure and physical activity. An approach that is both preventative and low-cost. A no-brainer for commissioners and those government policy makers – right?

It is time for government, LA and those in Public Health to get serious about the current state of LA sport and leisure, which is ultimately disappearing. As it does, we can expect to lose the subsequent physical activity opportunities and gain the consequences inactivity. Consequences that will no doubt prove that cutting funding for LA sport and leisure services is one of the major false economies [PD7] of our time.

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[PD1]: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/25/sports-and-leisure-cuts-olympic-legacy>

[PD2]: <http://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/local-authority-sport-and-recreation-services-in-england-where-next/local-authority-sport-and-recreation-services-in-england-where-next/>

[PD3]: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/keeparkroadbaths/>

[PD4]: <https://theconversation.com/austerity-cuts-to-local-leisure-services-is-a-false-economy-33320>

[PD5]: [https://s3.nikecdn.com/dtm/live/en\\_US/Human\\_Capital\\_Model\\_Commentary.pdf](https://s3.nikecdn.com/dtm/live/en_US/Human_Capital_Model_Commentary.pdf)

[PD6]: <http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/userfiles/Documents/economiccosts.pdf>

[PD7]: <https://theconversation.com/austerity-cuts-to-local-leisure-services-is-a-false-economy-33320>