



Some Observations: Sport, Covid, Leisure and Communities

Introduction

1. *This small contribution aims to add value* to that which will be returned by individual clubs¹. The core observation being (i) that the relative closure of sport including clubs has affected those often on the margins of society disproportionately²; (ii) that sport is an undervalued part of the social contract³ in Scotland that has punched above its weight in relation to responding to Covid; and (iii) that the opportunity for Scottish sport to help other countries through Covid has not been realised.
2. Many local governments and sports organizations have developed innovative approaches to the changed circumstances necessitated by the virus, creating programming that could be delivered on-line and by traditional media such as radio and loudspeakers; modifying and creating new activities appropriate to restricted environments, closing streets and opening new bike lanes to enable physically distanced walking, running and cycling, and working with public health experts to develop safe 'return to play' opportunities⁴.
3. Nor is Scotland alone in needing support for sport. The sports and recreation sector contributes about \$5 billion a year to New Zealand's GDP and employs more than 53,000 people⁵. A \$265 million package over the next four years will be broken into:
 - \$83 million in short-term support to help sport and recreation organisations at all levels get through the initial impact of Covid-19.
 - \$104 million to help the sector rebuild in the medium term. This includes helping national and regional organisations make changes to operate successfully and support new operating models and more collaboration.

¹ The research informing this set of observations recognises the work Christian Cannarella (University of Edinburgh) that has traced the impact of covid on sport since March 2020 and will be published shortly in *Sports Observations*.

² See Marmot, M. (2020, May 2). The art of medicine: Society and the slow burn of inequality. *The Lancet*, 395, 1413-1414.

³ *Financial Times* (2020, April 3). Editorial Board: *Virus lays bare the frailty of the social contract: Radical reforms are required to forge a society that will work for all*. *Financial Times*: <https://www.ft.com/content/7eff769a-74dd-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

⁴ See Donnelly, P., Darnell, S. & Kidd, B. (with Priyansh, Marc Lizoain & Mathew Blundell) (2020). *DISCUSSION PAPER: The Implications of COVID-19 for Community Sport and Sport for Development*. Toronto: Centre for Sport Policy Studies (Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto).

⁵ See <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/budget-2020-sport-to-get-265m-to-survive-covid-19-coronavirus-crisis/45S7SDNGAHJEOZWFHPG6SSUZGU/>

- \$78 million to modernise the sector by finding innovative ways to delivering play, active recreation and sport by using new technology and research.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the frailty of and the urgent need to re-make the social contract⁶. Elderly people in long-term care facilities, low-income individuals, disproportionately women, working in low paid, essential jobs that expose them to risk, or those unemployed as economies have shut down, have been most likely to suffer and die from COVID-19. Countries with impoverished health systems and weak economies have suffered disproportionately from the virus.
 5. Such issues relating to socio-economic status in Scotland, but not just Scotland, remains the strongest determinant of participation in recreational sport⁷. As has been well documented, recreational sport and physical activity are important for individual and population health but not just health. Freely available sport has been replaced, in places, by various pay-to-play initiatives from the public and private sectors and non-profit organizations⁸.
 6. Internationally NGOs, supported by sponsorships, corporate social responsibility and charitable donations, have moved to provide recreational sport and physical activity opportunities as alternatives to comprehensive state programmes in many parts of the world. These programmes may well benefit those they reach yet they only cover a fraction of the population and are rarely sustained. Many rely primarily on well-meaning but inexperienced youthful volunteers.
 7. Sport is not always prioritised appropriately. The current pandemic provides the opportunity to raise the sector's profile and build on cross-sectoral links. Sport and physical activity **need more than ever** to be included in key strategic documents and embedded across different policy areas. Vital questions are being posed which the sport sector can help answer. How do we reconfigure our city spaces? What does a post-pandemic tourist industry look like? How do we encourage a sense of community? What obligations do we have to other countries given that Covid requires an international response?
 8. In the context of Scotland (i) what impact has the reduction in access to sport had on, for example, the para sport community; the BAME community; the walking football community; and the sport for mental health groups; to name but a few. While dealing with the immediate pandemic and financial repercussions is the absolute priority, the opportunity to get involved in what building back better actually means for disadvantaged groups is now vital.

⁶ *The Lancet* (2020, May 2). Editorial: COVID-19: Remaking the social contract. *The Lancet*, 395, p. 1401.

⁷ StreetGames (2020, n.d.). *The Experience of the Coronavirus Lockdown in Low-income Areas of England and Wales*. <https://www.streetgames.org/the-experience-of-the-coronavirus-lockdown-in-low-income-areas-of-england-and-wales>

⁸ The research informing this set of observations recognises the work Christian Cannarella (University of Edinburgh) that has traced the impact of covid on sport since March 2020 and will published shortly in Sports Observations.

9. The opportunity exists for Scotland to advance its international relations reputation as a carrying country⁹. Funding for sport events, sport ambassadors, sport visitors, the exchange of sports knowledge from Scotland can also help other places. The French for example are reaching out to the African Union through sport.
10. Sport is not necessarily part of the Scottish effort to help Rwanda, Zambia, Pakistan, and Malawi- but it should be. New Zealand's approach to partnership, wellbeing and international co-operation is recognised by sportscotland but it is not necessarily funded to advance international relations through sport in the way that UK Sport is. No technical reason exists as to why sport, particularly in the context of the current situation can't be funded and or assisted to help countries in need.

General Impact on Sport

11. Lockdown measures, other restrictions and the pandemic itself has impacted considerably on the sport sector as a whole. With there being several different ways that the sport sector can be affected by the current pandemic, different sub-sectors have been affected to varying extents, albeit all have been affected at some level.
12. As COVID-19 has had a widespread impact across the economy there are a variety of ways that organisers, federations, clubs, athletes, local grassroots sport clubs, associations, coaches and other employees have been affected or may be affected in the future. The following are real.
13. **Broad economic changes:** the wider economic changes were always likely to impact on the economic situation of the sport industry as a whole in a wide variety of ways. It was always likely that the demand for goods and services would be reduced due to unemployment, reduced working hours and/or fear of infection. Export slumps could also arise due to a lack of transport facilities and lower demand. Supply could be considerably affected by lockdown and social distancing measures affecting employment across the sector both in the short and long-term.
14. **Reduced governmental income:** reduced tax intake and increased fiscal measures to deal directly with COVID-19 may affect the amount that can be spent on sport and infrastructure. The extent to which sport has been supported through direct Holyrood funding or indirect Westminster funding has been uneven between sports, between parts of Scotland and different social groups.
15. **Cancellation of events:** has resulted in an immediate lack of income and directly affecting the financial situation of sport events, stadia, and tourism. This was always likely to affect all levels of sport, including both professional and grassroots levels but lessons need to be learned in terms of building back better and strengthening the resilience of the sports sector.
16. **Sponsorship money:** This in most cases has reduced in the short and potentially long term due to the economic downturn putting financial pressure on existing sponsors.

⁹ See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2020/05/covid-19-sport/>

17. **Member financing:** research has suggested this may be affected by wider economic trends, with considerable impact among membership organisations. Individuals may look to save money by stopping memberships or ad-hoc payments to sport organisations. It is possible that this will be affected by the nature of social distancing requirements, with team-based sports being more affected than individual sports.
18. **Sport broadcasting:** suggestions were that broadcasting deals may be reduced. Television, radio, and Internet broadcasters all affected by COVID-19 through reduced income from advertising and from cancelled subscriptions, with reductions in income for sport leagues or clubs following as a result.
19. **Sport tourism:** the potential impact on sport tourism was widely reported, both because of cancellation of events and the pandemic and associated lockdown measures affecting the ability and/or willingness of individuals to travel and attend events.
20. **Production and retail of sporting goods and equipment:** impacted by wider economic trends, such as the closure of production facilities and the retail trade. As a result of the likely severe impact of the pandemic across all elements of the sport sector, several measures and initiatives had already been recommended or begun to be implemented. Participant organisations in the European SHARE initiative produced a position paper on the impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector, calling for EU and national authorities and sport stakeholders to quickly put in place a range of support measures for the sport sector. The point being made is the complexity of Covid and Brexit together is impacting upon the Scottish sport sector.
21. With key revenue streams affected different Scottish sports and clubs have been differentially affected as a result of:
 - **Lost revenue.** Organisations unable to provide their services to the public. This includes considerable reductions in income from across various sources, e.g., membership, licensing, participation, ticketing, broadcasts, sponsorship, or subscriptions.
 - **Cash flow difficulties.** Organisations have struggled to pay fixed costs, including wages, rents, and contractual obligations. Due to lost revenue to cover obligations, this risks cuts to staff numbers and activity in order to remain solvent.
 - **Unemployment and insecure work.** Employees, athletes, coaches, and other workers risk being laid-off, with subsequent loss of skills. Employees also generally feel less secure in their jobs.
 - **Freelancers.** As they are self-employed, freelancers are particularly vulnerable to losses in income, largely due to having fewer legal protections.
 - **Athlete income.** Athletes have been affected by loss of income due to lack of events, as well as the financial implications of reduced sponsorship, prize money and other public and private sources of funds.
 - **Unpaid workforces.** Organisations have lost capacity, with volunteers often restricted to their homes or having limited mobility or ability to continue work due to the pandemic.
22. The vast majority of sport, particularly recreation sport is delivered through the 27 local trusts. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the closure of many facilities and

services across the country. The resulting loss in income has placed many trusts in a financially challenged position with a long road to recovery. Trusts vary in terms of size and focus and are partly paid for by a management fee by local authorities to deliver agreed services. For most trusts this is only part of their overall turnover. For example, the average management fee is £5.5million, compared to the average turnover of trusts being about £17.7 million.

23. The most resilient trusts are likely to be those where the trust and local authority have a close working relationship, mutual goals and a joined-up plan for sport. East Renfrewshire would be a good model to look at. The trusts deliver recreational sport and reach parts of the community that are not always cost effective for the private sector.
24. A recent report from Community Leisure UK indicate that the public sport and leisure sector will reopen in a phased approach, primarily driven by financial viability. The financial pressures on Leisure Trusts cannot be ignored, and there is a very risk that inequalities will be widened due to the limited way in which facilities and services may be provided for universally.
25. As has been pointed out many times the term adequate provision to describe local authority responsibilities remains problematic. The evidence and the argument for sport to be really valued in Scotland exists. This is not the place to assert the often-quoted discourse on sport as a low cost, effective popular intervention. The covid pandemic has done many things but one of these has been to expose how much sport and related areas are needed across society and particularly in hard-to-reach communities and groups.
26. The UK Government £300 million emergency sport fund plus other funds for sport do not equate to the £ 1.57 billion support package for the British arts industry¹⁰. The Barnett consequential do not recognise equity between sport and the arts but neither does sport figure greatly in Scottish discussions of culture and or funding and yet it is one of the most popular aspects of Scottish culture.
27. Rugby League has received at least £12 million of additional funding through DCMS but what would the equivalent sport be in Scotland be – shinty, football, some other sport that should funded at scale because it reaches traditional social class niches in communities but has been stopped because of Covid?
28. Football is Scotland’s most popular sport, and it delivers in communities and connects with those on the margins of society on a scale that other sports fail to match¹¹. One can accept the need for different governments to react differently to different government announcements but football in Scotland it seems has been treated differently from that in England both in terms of fans, funding, and pilots and in a way that is hard to explain in terms of the science or the logic. Women’s football in its first year of going professional in Scotland remains economically fragile.

¹⁰ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/54998979>

¹¹ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/55030350>

Conclusion

29. This contribution to the call on the impact of Covid 19 on sports clubs, leisure venues and communities is not exhaustive but aims to be add value.
30. It places a particular emphasis on those on the margins of society and the organisations responsible for delivering, sport and recreation to those on the margins of Scottish society.
31. The vast majority of sport in Scotland is delivered through local authority trusts and while clubs have a vital part to play and play a vital part in recreational sport only a small amount of sports participation is delivered through clubs
32. It calls for greater recognition for the part played by sport before, during and after the pandemic.
33. A primary lesson of the pandemic within and beyond Scotland remains that any preventive strategy must begin with planning and investment.
34. The need to invest in community sport and sport for development as a strategy of prevention. Governments should plan for, fund, monitor and evaluate community sport and sport for development as essential components of national population health strategies, but not just health.
35. The importance of advancing international aid to grassroots sport in other countries during and beyond this crisis is an opportunity that Scotland should grasp and catch up with other countries who value obligations to other countries through using sport. Widening access to sport is a value that should be lauded both within Scotland and beyond Scotland. Scottish sport can help withy both.

Contact: Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk

7 December 2020