A Call to Democratise Access to Sport for All
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A Call to Democratise Access to Sport for All
Introduction

The world in 2024 is marked by increasing urbanisation and challenges stemming from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and pervasive inequalities. In this challenging environment, access to Sport for All emerges as a valuable solution contributing to a better world. Despite the well-documented benefits of physical activity, global activity rates continue to decline, posing significant health risks as well as social and economic burdens. Data reveals that significant portions of the population never exercise or play sports. Especially vulnerable and low-income groups are facing barriers to physical activity due to cost – exacerbated by inflation in some regions and lack of infrastructure.

Active communities, where physical activity is prioritised in all aspects of local life, see enhanced safety, social integration and cohesion, cultural understanding, and quality of life. Reaching their full potential requires accessible and inclusive spaces, political commitment and structured governance, and practical programmes to engage populations. There is a need for a change of paradigm where the goal is not simply to bring people to sport, but rather to embed sport and physical activity in the daily lives of people. For this, democratising access to physical activity is paramount. Access means low-cost, low-barrier, inclusive, accessible, and safe opportunities, spaces, and equipment that enable Sport for All.

With this paper, we would like to increase awareness for the state of inactivity, its consequences and present examples of successful measures to combat it. No one can solve the physical inactivity crisis alone. TAFISA and SportBox are committed to supporting communities and stakeholders in implementing relevant initiatives and activities to address physical inactivity and foster active lifestyles. We are calling upon policymakers, decision-makers and stakeholders at all levels to act. Understand the role you can play to positively contribute to the community you serve, and work with us to democratise access to Sport for All.

Digitals tools should be leveraged to collect data to monitor and evaluate interventions, offer solutions for participation, and inform future strategies. Understanding how people engage in and benefit from Sport for All and physical activity, as well as how they interact with infrastructure and equipment is key for successful and effective evidence-based solutions.
We, the global Sport for All Movement, are calling for the development and implementation of proven and innovative approaches towards this goal and recommend the following:

**Towards Tailored Interventions**

Programmes, events, and initiatives to engage citizens, increase physical activity participation, and sustain it within their everyday lives.

Inclusive approaches to empower vulnerable and at-risk groups to join in.

Innovative forms and formats of physical activity and play to attract and reach inactive groups.

**Rethinking Governance**

Policy enabling the democratisation of access to Sport for All and physical activity for All.

Cross-sectorial governance and partnerships at all levels supporting concerted action among public, private, for-profit, and non-profit sectors.

Participatory approaches involving communities and citizens in the design and implementation of Sport for All.

**Reshaping Environments**

Easy-to-access and well-maintained outdoor parks, sport facilities and infrastructure, and open and public spaces where everyone has the opportunity for play and exercise.

Strategies that position communities as the priority in urban planning and placemaking.

Sporting goods and equipment available on-site at low- or no-cost to utilize infrastructure and encourage Sport for All in public settings.
The World in 2024
STATE OF PLAY

Rapid urbanization of the world population, compounded by crises like COVID-19, climate change, economic instability, and social inequalities, leads to an increasingly challenging environment for maintaining physical activity levels. Despite the clear benefits of exercise for both physical and mental health, the prevalence of sedentary lifestyles continues to rise.

Globally, 23% of adults and 81% of adolescents do not meet the physical activity recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO), resulting in a 20% to 30% increased risk of diseases and death compared to people who are sufficiently active.

45% of Europeans report that they never exercise or play sport, up six percentage points since 2009.

Physical activity has dropped 41% during the pandemic, with vulnerable and low-income communities showing the largest decreases and almost 500 million additional people are expected to develop noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) attributable to physical inactivity between 2020 and 2030.

Public health systems spend approximately $27 billion each year treating NCDs that could have been prevented by increasing physical activity.

People of low socioeconomic status are more likely to have poorer health and shorter life expectancy, attributed in part to a lower prevalence of physical activity.

We know that physical activity is important. The physical and mental health benefits to the individual are well known, but physical activity also brings social health benefits to the community at large. By 2050, it is estimated that 68% of the world’s population will reside in urban areas, up from 55% in 2018. People enjoy their cities more and are happier when they have Sport for All and physical activity options, such as walking or cycling, parks, and play spaces that strengthen community ties. Participation in sport and physical activity drives integration, social cohesion, the sense of belonging, and cultural understanding in communities.

In “Active Cities” - where priority is given to physical activity in all places where people live, work, learn and play - there are significant benefits to safety. Crime has been shown to drop in car-free streets, gardens, and green spaces designed for physical activity. The benefits of physical activity for the individual and community have been well established.
Why do we struggle to be physically active?

For individuals with **sedentary jobs**, physical activity opportunities centre around the **transport** and **leisure time parts** of the day. Decreases in physical activity in these areas have been caused by both internal individual factors such as **motivation**, **self-efficacy**, and history of physical activity, and external factors, such as the **built environment**, i.e. urban planning and lack of opportunity and **access** to physical activity. Even when individuals have active jobs that require high levels of physical activity, this does not always provide the expected health benefits of physical activity, as evidenced by the term ‘Physical Activity Paradox’. **Leisure time** remains the most **beneficial time** for physical activity and our public spaces **must seize the opportunity**.

Individuals cite **many barriers** to practicing and incorporating physical activity into their **daily lives**. We see dropout rates in sports club memberships increase with age due to a **lack of motivation** and **enjoyment**. Sports clubs are not often ideal places for physical activity for people who are not interested in **competitive activities**. Outside sports clubs, there is a **lack of infrastructure** available within local communities for physical activity - and when there is infrastructure, it can be **cost-prohibitive**. These factors combined equal an overall **lack of access** to sport for **huge portions** of the **population**.
Barriers to Physical Activity

Around one in ten Europeans say physical activity is **too expensive** (10%), they **do not like competitive activities** (9%, +3 percentage points since 2017) or they are **afraid of the risk of injuries** (8%, +3 percentage points since 2017).

There are large dropout rates of adolescents in sports clubs related to the **lack of motivation and enjoyment** at sports clubs.

At least one in twenty adults mention that there is **no suitable or accessible** sport infrastructure close to where they live (5%, +2 percentage points since 2017).

Adults across sociodemographic and socioeconomic groups do not have **equal access** to physical activity opportunities as part of their **daily lifestyle**.

There is a **lack of sports infrastructure**, lack of access to sport **practice settings**, lack of **offers** with favourable settings, cost-prohibitive options for sport practice, and more, especially in more urban environments.

Most public sport infrastructures require **additional equipment** for utilisation, which is not often on-site.

Better overall health could add over **$12 trillion** in GDP by 2040, and daily physical activity can result in healthcare savings of over **$2,700** per person/per year. Investing in physical activity interventions benefits **families, communities**, and the wider environments of **target groups**. It is also cost-effective – economic investments in physical activity generate positive return on investment as high as **1:1.7**, meaning for every dollar invested in the promotion of physical activity, **$1.70** is seen in **added value**.

The data is clear; the physical inactivity crisis is **increasing** and poses numerous **health threats** to the population with **massive costs** to economies worldwide as a result. However, there is a silver lining. Recommendations from leading organisations and numerous examples of proven methods help **improve the situation** and **provide benefits** to society. These solutions centre around **breaking down barriers** and **embedding** physical activity as part of lifestyles and changing policies with a diverse group of stakeholders.

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The Way Forward: WHAT IS WORKING?

Seamlessly embedding physical activity as part of the everyday life is a powerful way to remove barriers to participation, especially for the physically inactive. The recent COVID-19 pandemic stressed the importance of outdoor parks and public spaces, especially close to homes, as great resources for well-being and physical activity. This highlights the paradigm change to embed sport and physical activity in the daily lives of people with infrastructure and increased access. Proximity plays a huge roll - when physical activity opportunities and access to basic needs are within a short distance to where people live, work, or learn, it can be quite effective in increasing physical activity levels. The proportion of people using these spaces for sport and physical activity increased in the past few years. This will also aid in increasing children’s exposure to physical activity, which has a positive influence on physical activity levels later in life. Strengthening access and promotion of participation in sports and active recreation across all ages and abilities is an important element of increasing participation levels of physical activity. Improving outdoor access to physical activity aligns with what we know works.

The most popular settings in which to engage in sport or physical activity in Europe are in parks and outdoor spaces (47%), at home (37%), and on the way between home and school, work, or stores (24%), all increasing since 2017.

Several countries where sport clubs and other facilities were closed due to pandemic-related restrictions saw significant increases in public and open spaces usage for physical activity, sport, and play.

The urban planning concept ‘15-minute city’, where citizens can reach any daily necessity within a 15-minute walk, bike ride, or public transport trip, encourages physical activity and promotes an active lifestyle.

Movement opportunities near individuals’ homes or workplaces can be of utmost importance to foster an active lifestyle, especially for those people who are interested in physical activity and health but are not currently sufficiently physically active.

Childhood exposure and participation to exercise, social spaces for physical activity, outdoor time, and proximity to physical activity facilities positively influences their physical activity later in life.

Concepts and approaches to enable and increase access to sports equipment in public spaces have increased since 2020 in offers, availability, and utilization.
Recommendations from leading authorities

This information is not only supported by data, but what the leading health organisations recommend.

**UN Habitat** recommends that 15% of the total urban area be used for public open space.

**WHO** recommends implementing regular mass participation initiatives in public spaces, strengthening access to good-quality public and green open spaces, recreational spaces, and sports amenities by all people, and enhancing provision and opportunity for more physical activity programmes and promotion in parks, private and public workplaces, community centres, recreation and sports facilities, and faith-based centres.

**The European Commission** recommends that rethinking and redesigning existing public and open spaces for physical activity and play allows citizens to be active anytime, anywhere, removing barriers to participation.

Physical activity promotion, especially involving urban design infrastructure, community-based programmes, and transport policies, have strong synergy in working towards **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.

**ISPAH** (International Society for Physical Activity and Health) cites active transport, active urban design, and sport and recreation for all, such as creating the spaces for everyone to access and be physically active, in their 8 investments that work for physical activity.
We know that physical activity is beneficial and that there are solutions to breaking down the barriers that individuals face in starting and maintaining regular exercise. But how sustainable is this in the context of other global challenges? In alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, increasing the amount of physical activity practiced outdoors can provide relief to climate change challenges and help create a better world.\textsuperscript{42,43} Green and blue exercise promotes planetary health and well-being by promoting natural settings and a more sustainable lifestyle.\textsuperscript{44,45} Not to mention the physical and mental health benefits of green exercise. When people exercise outdoors in green spaces and natural environments, they enjoy the exercise more and show higher psychological improvements such as better mood and increased energy compared to just spending time outside or practicing physical activity on its own.\textsuperscript{45,46} Exercising outdoors requires less facilities, which often require a large amount of energy to build and maintain. There is also less financial investment, especially if the facility is being subsidised by the public sector.
Taking Action

Something has to change. Municipalities and the Sport for All Movement can help level the playing field by removing barriers and offering accessible and fun physical activity opportunities for their citizens, with the help of the private sectors innovation. Governance models and policies that prioritise physical activity via easy-to-access infrastructure, facilities, sports equipment, as well as practical programmes and initiatives that are inclusive and open to all are especially important. Urban areas, facing rising real estate costs, are increasingly repurposing greenspaces and public plazas as versatile “sports halls of the future”.

There is a need for 24/7 accessibility, multifunctionality, and integration of digital technologies in spaces, prompting traditional sports halls and outdoor spaces to evolve into common spaces, as municipal governments recognise the value of interdepartmental cooperation in incorporating activity and sports into urban planning.

It is widely known that making outdoor and public spaces friendlier to physical activity is the way forward. But how to practically move towards these goals? There is already research and recommendations for continuing this important work.

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**Good practices in promoting physical activity participation through active spaces often see local governments taking a leading role.**

**Active spaces initiatives are typically implemented in partnerships involving the private sector, academia, and NGOs.**

**Sport officials can cooperate closely with local governments to plan solutions that better serve the needs of the community by rethinking public open space planning and usage for leisure, sport, and recreation, as well as striking a balance between different types of open space and outlining key practices, initiatives, and infrastructures.**

**Implement policy changes to increase and promote physical activity, including setting-specific programmes in schools, workplaces, and the health care system to increase access to sports facilities, create communication and information campaigns, and promote physical activity-friendly urban designs, environments, and transport policies.**
To make the changes that people need, we need better tools and collaboration. One of the most important tools is technology that continuously improves overall available data. Physical activity monitoring is especially important. Data that shows the current levels of physical activity, especially showing what and where interventions are working, will help guide future strategy and policies. Additionally, cooperation and collaboration of public and private sectors is needed to leverage the hardware (facilities and infrastructures), software (access, programmes, and events), and orgware (governance and policies) towards positive change.

The policies that are proposed and implemented by the public sector can be aided by the know-how and expertise of private sector actors in the physical activity field. The private sector can pivot quicker and provide scalable solutions that benefit the health, policies, and economies of their countries.

Technology appears as an element that can drive innovation in successful good practices promoting physical activity. This can include phone apps and online platforms.

While nearly all countries report a system for monitoring physical activity in adults, only 75% of countries monitor physical activity among adolescents.

Using digital tools and modern solutions to gather many kinds of data to better understand barriers and the mechanisms of successful interventions is pivotal in evaluating and enhancing the impact of initiatives aiming to reduce physical inactivity.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors towards health outcomes has shown promise in generating positive health changes.

Technology can enhance and unlock utilization of infrastructure for physical activity by opening the space for more purposes, augmenting physical spaces with the digital world, and enabling access to spaces and equipment for all.
Call to Action

Increasing the amount of physical activity practiced outdoors and outside traditional settings can provide relief to current global challenges and help create a better world. At the community level, investing in initiatives which allow citizens to be physically active and play in open and public settings can have tremendous benefits for both individuals and society at large. Democratising access to Sport for All and physical activity should be a top priority. Accomplishing and working towards this goal requires the active participation of stakeholders at many levels from both the public and private sectors. Citizens need to be reached in the spaces they are in and with the infrastructure, equipment, and resources they need. We need to invest in solutions at a larger scale that align with what is currently working for people and communities, and recommended by leading organisations in the health field. The solution will be multifaceted and will look different in various contexts and environments. Now is the time to capitalise on the spaces in our communities to address the physical inactivity crisis.
Best practice examples of what is working

Reshaping Environments

SportBox
SportBox offers a mobile, multifunctional equipment unit installed in key urban areas, providing outdoor enthusiasts with high-quality workout options and equipment. Accessing the equipment is low barrier for individuals and offers sustainable solutions for municipalities looking to promote physical activity.

Buenos Aires Healthy Stations
The Healthy Stations in Buenos Aires are a municipal programme and neighbourhood meeting points for leisure, recreation, and overall well-being. They are located in strategic public green spaces in the city so as to encourage all residents and passers-by to join in on fitness classes, art workshops, educational initiatives, and other group activities.

Towards Tailored Interventions

ReStart - Sport Moves Germany
ReStart aims to revitalise sports participation post-pandemic by engaging associations, clubs, volunteers, municipalities, and citizens. It offers various modules and tools to empower stakeholders at all levels and places the practice of sport and physical activity in public spaces as one of its main pillars.

Buurtspor Coaches Programme
The Buurtspor Coaches programme is a community sports coaching initiative aimed at promoting physical activity and well-being by deploying coaches to engage with residents in neighbourhoods and facilitate access to sports and recreational activities.

Rethinking Governance

Active City Hamburg
The Active City Hamburg strategy is an urban planning strategy focused on promoting active transportation, green spaces, and sustainable development to enhance the quality of life for residents and create a more vibrant city. There is close cooperation between different stakeholders, including sports clubs, medical institutions, educational institutions, businesses, and Hamburg's administration to develop innovative approaches to integrate sports and physical activity into everyday lives and to remove obstacles that may stand in the way of an active lifestyle. Full report here.

Sport Ireland Active Cities Project
Based on the WHO Global Action Plan for Physical Activity and coordinated by the national governmental sport agency, Sport Ireland, the project seeks to ensure that there is cross-sector buy-in to the need for Active Cities, that the voices of the most inactive are heard, and that there is strategic input from all relevant stakeholders in the development of local physical activity strategies and plans in 5 Irish cities.

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SportBox

App and Move is a startup that has the vision to make the world more active by providing access to sports equipment in public areas. The SportBox concept by App and Move offers a mobile, multifunctional equipment unit installed in urban areas, providing outdoor enthusiasts with high-quality workout options. Equipped with diverse sports equipment like kettlebells, Padel rackets, and more, the SportBox enables a wide range of activities to be conducted. It integrates seamlessly into urban environments, encouraging community engagement and supporting active lifestyles. With interactive features like integrated training videos for guidance, the SportBox promotes accessible and cost-effective outdoor active leisure and exercise opportunities, empowering individuals to pursue their health goals anytime, anywhere.

www.sportbox.de
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SportBox - app and move GmbH

TAFISA

TAFISA is the leading international Sport for All organisation. TAFISA’s ultimate vision is a better world through Sport for All, and it actively pursues that vision by leading the global Sport for All Movement, providing networking and experience sharing opportunities for its 400 members across 170 countries and stakeholders, supporting member and stakeholder development by providing appropriate programs, events, and bespoke services, and advocating and lobbying internationally for sustainable Sport for All and physical activity. TAFISA aims to bring joy, health, social interaction, integration, and development to communities and citizens around the globe through the promotion of Sport for All. Our guiding policy document is TAFISA’s Mission 2030: For training World through Sport for All, which identifies 13 themes where the Sport for All and physical activity movement can contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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