

IPLA, University of Bedfordshire and Active Environments

Background:

A core component in understanding physical literacy is the need to recognise that it is inherently personal. Our physical literacy journey is uniquely our own, and can be influenced by our own personal experiences of engaging with movement and physical activity.

Whilst this is something to celebrate, it can create challenges for activity providers, teachers, coaches, parents, health professionals, etc., when it comes to creating collective programmes and interventions, because each participant is likely to respond to the activity in a different way.

This is also true when applying a physical literacy lens to the design of active environments.

In another case study [link](#) we have learned about the approach being taken by a major UK land developer (Lands Improvement - LIH) to apply a physical literacy flavour to its landscape design at its Linmere development in Bedfordshire, UK.

In a significant move to better understand how this could work, LIH has taken the decision to engage with academia to search for a solution.



Project Description:

There has been much research undertaken which seeks to understand and frame people's motivations and aspirations to be active – mostly applied to sports participation.

Lands Improvement wanted to create a mechanism which not only identifies demand for specific activities, but also go deeper into individuals' dispositions to being active.

By joining forces with IPLA President, Margaret Whitehead, LIH was introduced to her colleagues at the University of Bedfordshire School of Sport and Physical Activity, who were only too happy to provide some support with this aspiration.

The result has been the part-funding of a PhD study by University of Bedfordshire researcher Olivia Flemons which seeks to capture, understand and produce a consultation tool which helps LIH to better connect with the physical activity motivations of its residents, and use this knowledge to assist with the design of an active environment which meets residents' needs and desires.

The literature has positioned that the national policies that seek to improve motivations and aspirations to be active are not always sufficient enough in addressing increased activity sustainably. It is therefore proposed that working at a localised level, using a 'community first' approach, may be more effective. There is currently no research in the UK which explores ways in which we may shape

the physical environment at a community level to facilitate and provide a more meaningful relationship with physical activity, and therefore better provision of physical literacy, to enhance human flourishing (the ability to live virtuously).

The PhD research therefore aims to explore conceptualisations of meaningful physical activity experiences, and human flourishing, through a physical literacy lens, and in the context of active living environments. It is hypothesised that if facilitators can source the meaning-making behind how we move (physical), connect (social), think (cognitive) and feel (affective) about movement and physical activity, we may be able utilise meaningful attachments and schemas to build and develop physical literacy and therefore the ability to flourish through life. This may require inductive, and strengths based methodological approaches.

Linmere's 'Embrace Your Space' investigation explores meaningful attachments and schemas in the context of local residential needs and desires for physical activity spaces and places. Through semi-structured focus group workshops, and online questionnaires, the investigation seeks to explore how to foster physical literacy in active living environments, using a person-centred approach, by delving into the roots of meaningful physical activity experiences. By using elements of appreciative inquiry, the investigation requires residents to reflect on their positive physical activity experiences within their local environment, and envision an ideal scenario for physical activity, guided on the four principles of physical literacy (physical, social, cognitive, affective). From this, residents are given the opportunity to provide recommendations for how they may utilise their space in the future, and what they may require to develop their ability to value their physical activity long term. This initiative aims to offer a comprehensive toolkit for Lands Improvement, to create local environments that align with residents' need and desires, whilst fostering a more resident-centric approach to community development. Furthermore, the initiative will aim to provide a solution to the current issues and gaps within the literature related to sustainable measures to encourage longer-term physical activity and health.

Impact

Whilst the study project is still in its infancy, it is already clear that a growing number of residents are motivated to help LIH design the space in which they live.

Alongside an online survey, the researchers have attended community events organised by LIH and its partners and met with local residents to discuss their views and aspirations. In addition two Focus Group meetings have been held which have engaged over 20 local people and have captured some key insight into what would make a "healthy happy place" for them. An additional Activation Group, recruited from Focus Group attendees and other community events is then tasked with looking at specific aspects of the public realm one by one, including Parks and playgrounds, informal open spaces, and formal sports provision.

Further Focus Groups are planned into the Spring of 2024 and the Activation Group will continue to build on these over the same period.



LINMERE



'Have Your Say' Group 1 Research Review

The data so far...

We have so far found six common themes from the data, which map into the social and affective characteristics of physical literacy. So, if we change and improve these needs, it may be that Lands Improvement can better your environment to embrace healthy, happy communities that are able to value physical activity longer term.

(1) Nature Connectedness



"I like the fact that when you look out the door and its green and untouched space, it gives you the chance to be reflective..."

"I like the view, and that's what I really like, I think... that was what brought me here. I wanted to have a lot of green space..."

"I have been enjoying it kind of, the nature and going out for a walk, some things I like is mainly the walk paths..."

(2) Consideration for Health

"The health of young children's brains are developing... I think if you're planners that's something you need to be cognizant of..."

"I know we've got this lovely park here, but then you've got the fumes coming off the motorway and the A5 junction etcetera. So, you've got to be cognizant of these things when you're planning..."

"I can see you guys are on the right line of adapting to all health and fitness. Like, we're not marathon runners, but you can go out on bigger fields by Charlton, there are little 5k's which you can walk or run. All that stuff and all those ideas look good on there..."







The First Focus Group meeting and the first two feedback points arising from discussions.

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