

Back to the Leisure: Covid Scene vs. the Post-Covid Era in Leisure Activity Participation

Serbest Zamana Dönüş: Serbest Zaman Etkinliklerine Katılımda Covid Esnası ve Sonrası Dönem

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ABSTRACT

Based on the research articles published in the literature on the effects of COVID-19, this study aims to present a suggestion for the behaviors that are predicted to occur in terms of recreational activities when the pandemic process ends. From this point of view, a descriptive search was made in the literature according to the criteria determined by the researchers. As a result of the descriptive search, 21 articles published in 2020-2021 and suitable for the criteria were accessed. Emphasis has been placed on including the concepts of COVID-19, leisure time, recreation and physical activity as keywords in the articles. When the articles were examined, it was seen that the inability of individuals to efficiently manage the increase in leisure time due to their lockdown during the isolation process will create a need for leisure time after the lockdown process. It has been concluded that facilities and recreation leaders should be ready to meet the potential need in order to effectively manage recreational activities after the pandemic process, to realize appropriate orientation to activities and to produce free time programs for the needs of individuals.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, COVID-19'un etkileri üzerine alanyazında yayımlanmış olan araştırma makalelerinden hareket ederek, pandemi süreci sona erdiğinde rekreatif faaliyetler açısından gerçekleşmesi öngörülen davranışlara yönelik bir öneri sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Buradan hareketle araştırmacılar tarafından belirlenen ölçütlere göre alanyazında betimsel tarama yapılmıştır. Yapılan betimsel tarama sonucunda, ölçütlere uygun ve 2020-2021 yılları aralığında yayınlanmış 21 makaleye ulaşım sağlanmıştır. Makalelerde anahtar sözcük olarak COVID-19, serbest zaman, rekreasyon ve fiziksel aktivite kavramlarının yer almasına önem gösterilmiştir. Makaleler incelendiğinde, bireylerin izolasyon sürecinde kısıtlanmalarından kaynaklanan serbest zaman artışı verimli yönetememesi, kısıtlama süreci sonrasında serbest zamana ilgileniminde bir ihtiyaç oluşturacağı görülmüştür. Rekreasyon aktivite kavramlarının pandemi süreci sonrasında etkin bir şekilde yönetilebilmesi, aktivitelere uygun yönelimin gerçekleştirilebilmesi ve bireylerin ihtiyacına yönelik serbest zaman programların üretilebilmesi için tesislerin ve rekreasyon liderlerinin oluşacak potansiyel ihtiyaca karşılık hazır olması gerektiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, lockdown, recreation, leisure.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pandemi, COVID-19, karantina, rekreasyon, serbest zaman.

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INTRODUCTION

Although post-apocalyptic world scenarios are one of the most-loved genres in the movie industry, the pandemic era in which we experience various negativities makes them rather real. That the governments around the world took measures in order to protect their citizens affected the daily life profoundly. Predictions and research showed that restrictions during pandemics may affect individuals in terms of health, social dependence and economics (Roberts, 2020). It can be observed that restrictions affect individuals mentally especially in terms of perceived freedom as well as make individual less physically active. In a study carried out in China two week after the announcement of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than the half of the participants reported that they felt the psychological effects in the medium and/or severe level; and it is revealed that a certain level of the participants showed depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress disorder (Wang et.al., 2020).

Although unfortunately it is uncertain when Covid-19 will disappear and when people can go back to their normal lives, science world has concerns about how the way people behave will be affected; nevertheless, it is thought that when Covid-19 is combined with the pandemics of physical inactivity, there will be greater harms in the upcoming years in terms of health and health related expenses (Hall et.al., 2020). To Lachance (2020), the restrictions showed some adverse effects on the leisure activities. Especially, recreational activities, sports activities, parks, tours and tourism are among the sectors that were affected by the process whereas traditional volunteering related to leisure-based activities are also among the sectors that were affected.

During the time when individuals had to stay home, different leisure activities emerged. In a study conducted in Brazilian population, it was found that 80% of the participants were not affected by the pandemics in terms of leisure activity participation during the time they had to spend at home. The majority of the participants reported that they could find enough space for the leisure experience at home; and the half of the participants reporting this stated that they had not had any problems participating in home-based leisure activities before the pandemics started (Bramante, 2020). Some of the home-based leisure activities included cookery, and this situation was explained by Sivan (2020) as follows: "leisure has transformed into self-reflecting experiences". This allowed individuals to meet their basic needs creatively, to make use of the leisure time, which is longer than it used to, and to show their skills through social media on the quarantine days on which it is not possible to have a face-to-face conversation with people (Easterbrook-Smith, 2020).

When the warnings of WHO are considered, it is important to direct individuals to focus on recreational activities that can positively affect the healthy life standards of the individuals who stay home during the pandemics. Inasmuch as, social distance rules and restrictions generally decrease the daily steps which is one of the indicators of being physically active (Tison et.al., 2020). In a study on Netherland sample, it was found that individuals tended to do more traditional leisure activities such as gardening, reading, house-works and board games; in addition, it is also reported that outdoor activities that participants can organize themselves such as hiking, running and cycling gained popularity again (van Leeuwen et.al., 2020).

Being physically active has certain effects both under normal conditions and during pandemics. There are studies showing the difference between individuals who spend their leisure in a passive manner and individuals who are physically active. Lockdown measurements may increase the sedentary behaviors, decrease the general physical activity level and cause negative health outcomes since decrease in physical activity level means decrease in mechanic load, metabolic rate and energy expenditure (Jakobsson et.al., 2020). Also, the duration of social media use which can promote sedentary behavior can also affect the mental health of individuals (Moreira et.al., 2020). It is thought that making use of the surplus leisure time obtained due to lockdown through physical activity can positively affect the mental health of individuals in a period to which they are not used (Cheval et.al., 2020).

Pieh et.al., (2020) aimed to reveal the effect of pandemics process on individuals' mental health and found out that when compared to pre-Covid-19 period, there is a significant increase in mental health problems in the general population. Among the findings, there are increase in sleeping problems such as insomnia and decrease in psychological health and wellbeing levels. One of the most important findings of the study is that young adults, women, individuals with low income levels, unemployed individuals and individuals with low levels of physical activity need a rapid intervention in terms of psychological health as they are deemed to be the risk group. Rossi et.al., (2020) investigated the psychological effects of Covid-19 pandemics on individuals on Italian sample and concluded that a 3-4 week lockdown had an adverse effect on this population in terms of psychological health.

Ahmad et.al. (2020) investigated the psychological effects of Covid-19 on the Indian population which has a great sociocultural variety and revealed that the duration spent at home during lockdown caused a great level of psychological boredom, and this caused the related anxiety to become widespread. As a result of the statistical analyses, the risk groups were reported as follows: women, Muslim, self-employed, individuals who have never married, individuals with previous health problems and individuals with sleeping problems; and the anxiety levels of these individuals were found significantly high. Huang & Zhao (2020) who carried out their study on Chinese population determined that during the pandemics, young individuals spent a lot of time thinking about the emergence of the pandemics resulting in adverse effects on their psychology; on the other hand, health care professionals are reported to have high risk of showing psychological problems. In this case, they emphasized that it is important to follow up these individuals in terms of situations that threaten their lives and early interventions need to be done.

Schuch et.al. (2020) determined that individuals who report doing 15-30 minutes of medium/intense physical activity has low frequency of showing anxiety and/or depression indicators whereas individuals who have sedentary behaviors more frequently indicate anxiety and depression. López-Bueno et.al., (2020) reported that the anxiety levels and perceived existing bad mood levels of the individuals of the Spanish sample who comply with the recommendations of WHO were found low. It is also seen that the habits related to healthy lifestyle especially affect women in terms of these two variables. Therefore, the importance of home-based activities was emphasized.

A constantly inactive lifestyle brings about a depressive mood, and this can even result in suicidal behaviors. Also studies in the literature reported that natural disasters just as the pandemics cause an increase in the suicidal attempts of individuals. The constraints occurring in the access to the social support makes the quarantine a harder period and emerges the adverse mood. That the individuals have been compulsorily kept at their homes since the beginning of the pandemics, that the educational activities have taken place at home which is far away from real social interactions, and that meeting with peers has become socially distant have increased the level of loneliness and created a mood which still feels like the pandemics will never come to an end. In addition, these negative thoughts may lead to an inactive population.

The pandemic period created a global effect and affected people in terms of various factors. The Covid-19 virus which became a global pandemic triggered individual and societal anxiety and created a pathological effect which covers every part of the human life by affecting individuals' behaviors socially, economically and psychologically. Just as the previous pandemics happened in the world history, this pandemic shaped people and economies greatly. The pandemic triggered the existing consumer/throwaway society during this process.

People around the world experienced a great social depression during the pandemics and tended to meet their socialization needs in different manners. That the individuals spent excessive amount of time on electronic environments caused some conspiracy theories which is rather unscientific. The negative tendencies emerging from the perception of boredom also triggered negative outcomes. In global electronic archives, reports have shown that individuals become deeply interested in digital life during the time they spent at home; and this interest has increased significantly for every age group.

The results of the studies conducted to examine the negative behavioral outcomes of the individuals which is due to the pessimist mood emerging during pandemics show that individuals tend to use excessive alcohol and narcotic drugs, and that this situation constitutes a risk factor in terms of public health. According to the findings of the previous research, the preliminary reasons for individuals' tendencies towards these negative behaviors are boredom caused by the lockdown, social contact, loneliness, loss of previous routine, sensation seeking, recreation and entertainment (Vanderbruggen et.al., 2020; Bochicchio et.al., 2021).

Although there was a negative mood all around the world, the contrary aspects of this should also be considered. Centuries ago, Şems-i Tebrizi (Shams of Tabriz) sated "do not worry saying 'my life will be disturbed, and it will turn upside down'. How do you know if down side will not be better than its upside" (Şafak, 2010). Therefore, things may seem negative on the outside, but with professional help, many can change. Thanks to recreation leaders, the increased leisure activity demands of individuals can be met after Covid-19. In addition, leisure education which is crucial to raise more physically active and healthy generations will have a great importance. It is estimated by the current study's authors that there will be a recreational activity demand boom after the pandemic period; therefore, the importance of recreation leaders will be better understood by both governments and the leisure participants since experts on leisure activities can help individuals to adapt to the social life yet again. In this case, there are some important issue concerning pandemic period and post-pandemic period.

Recreation and Leisure Management in Today's Scenario

The steps that will help individuals to manage their leisure recreational activities are very important in today's scenario especially because these activities provide escape from negative thoughts by making people feel strong, vigorous and healthy both mentally and physically. Pandemic period is a milestone which has changed and is still changing the course of events for humanity and turning this bad event into a positive situation is the duty of people, especially recreation experts. Domestic leisure activities which include physical exercises can provide this chance to the individuals; forasmuch as, physical activities not only provide with physical outcomes but also social and psychological outcomes. Therefore, the public must receive leisure education. This will help taking measures that can prevent impairment of health as well as protect it. Although the Republic of Turkey has collaborated with sports federation, this can be achieved locally through municipal corporations, universities and schools. Therefore, action plans that will lead public to domestic physical activities and will motivate them to participate are required. Although living spaces of people used to be perceived as passive leisure spaces, the obligations brought by the pandemics transformed them into active recreational areas. Providing a space for domestic leisure activities may not be enough; therefore, programs that will enable people to make use of these spaces should be prepared.

In order to develop the sense of responsibility within the family and to increase the participation of domestic recreational activities, one of the members of family can be determined as the leader and be responsible of finding and/or applying activities that family can participate together. Today, we can see that individuals have already got used to the distant communication process. This proves that technology is a tool that can be used for the sake of people. Thus, it is important to make technology be used in order to stay physically active. Also, every individual is intrinsically motivated to play games; therefore, this can be used as a motivator for the participation in domestic recreational activities. Certain exercise programs can be programmed as an educational game which can meet both the need of challenge and the need of physical activity. In this case, housework can be turned into games and micro-recreational spaces can be formed at home. Since the notion of game appeals to individuals of all ages, playing recreational games at home can help decrease the internet addiction levels of children. The quality leisure time spent doing domestic recreational activities especially can have a significant role in preventing the aforementioned psychological problems which affect a variety of individuals as well as preventing possible sedentary behaviors in the future.

When compared to the pre-social isolation period, although the limitations related to being physically active in the society helped preventing pandemic from sweeping, getting used to the restrictions which forced a heavy and compact lifestyle tested people's patience. In this process which was coined as the "new normal", cities which applied measurements without an innovation in the

urban planning impeded the access to recreational activities since they could no longer offer recreational areas outside which offer social environments. Therefore, cities need to revise their plans to offer solutions for future problems and prevent boredom and monotony (Abusaada & Elshater, 2020).

In terms of the task to enable public to be physically active, it falls on certain institutions and organizations as well as formal and private enterprises. For instance, the notion of recreation can be introduced to the individuals with the help of governments and ministry of sports during television broadcastings, and the public awareness related to having a fulfilling leisure can be raised. Since prime-time news bulletins and various entertainment and/or competition shows are followed by the majority of the public, recommendations related to physical activities can be made, and applicable moves which can be done by every individual with the everyday objects at home can be shown compulsorily; thereby, increase in physical activity and leisure awareness can be achieved. Also, children, adolescents and young adults all around the world visit online platforms with educational purposes almost everyday during pandemic; therefore, these platforms can also be used by the schools in order to increase levels of leisure awareness and physical activity. The recreational activities to be applied by the members of the family alone or as a group are accepted as crucial during the times of need such as restrictions brought by the pandemic in order to eliminate or reduce the negative outcomes of the hard times. Also, domestic recreational activities, especially physical activities, help maintain and/or improve the health of the individuals who are in the risk group. Especially in Turkey, the individuals living with their elderly family members reduced their contact with outside world to the level of mere human needs in order to prevent them from becoming affected by the Covid-19. It is completely normal that as a result of this, many individuals developed a more sedentary lifestyle; however, these individuals and their elderly family members should receive a domestic physical activity support in order to stay healthy. The recreational applications that will be developed in the future are a significant key to public health both mentally and physically in order to challenge and overcome the obstacles created by the wicked scenario of the pandemic.

Predictions and Recommendations for the Post-Pandemic Period

What will happen when individuals who spent almost two years inside their homes with the measures taken by the governments all around the world start spending time outside their homes? As seen today, new variations of the virus still threaten the world. Anticipating that there will be a recreational activity craze in the post-pandemic period, it is important to emphasize the need for plans that will enable their soft transition to normal life. Also, local governments should use their current potential to the most in order to meet the recreational needs which will enable them to restore the balance between demand and supply that will emerge.

Sometimes the hardships in life may lead people to a darker, more pessimistic and less active behavior; furthermore, the existence of a huge phenomenon that is pandemic is still affecting the health of millions of people both directly and indirectly. This situation may cost great health expenses and even lives of many people. Considering physically inactive individuals, there are many illnesses brought by inactive lifestyle such as increase in the cases of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cerebral oedema as well as depression, anxiety and stress disorder. If aforementioned steps are applied and individuals become more active, what will keep the recreation experts working in the field busy is the demand burst for the recreational activities. Therefore, local and country-wide planning is a must along with the education and directions related to leisure activities. When the individuals are informed about the recreational circumstances and opportunities of the area that they live, both leisure economy and the overall health of these individuals can be improved.

CONCLUSION

During pandemics, the effect of digital progress helped people in some ways. Many online concerts, online museum tours, and online city walking tours were held in order to make people forget about the negativity of the process. Later, this evolved into the metaverse which turn the virtual world into another land where people has become virtual citizens. This was the positive side of what was accepted as a disaster by many since it allowed people all around the world meet up and have fun in the safety of their homes. However, this was available for the ones who were chasing leisure opportunities even during the lockdown. Today, boredom and monotony, which was the case of lack of leisure before the modernity and post-industrial revolution era, is the case of surplus leisure created compulsorily by the flexible working hours at home. Therefore, the importance of a balanced leisure emerges since boredom and monotony can affect individuals adversely. What should be deemed significant is the efficient use of the leisure instead of how much leisure time one has.

Various philosophers discussed certain issues related to leisure and the right to leisure until today. However, none of them was expected to predict the conditions that we are facing around the world today. When the conditions in our hand and what they brought are considered, the way to establish happiness in a general sense is by making use of the surplus leisure time in a correct way. Therefore, as recreation leaders, evaluating the leisure education and leisure management of the public and showing that a physically active life can be achieved inside our homes as well as outside are the main duties of professionals working in the field. In addition,

planning of the leisure activities and opportunities as well as reviving and managing facilities to enjoy leisure fall on to the recreation experts.

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