

WCC Domain Advisor for MSc Student:

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WCC Problem Owner(s):

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Project title:

Explore the impact of COVID-19 on the use of our outdoor spaces and places for physical activity across the City.
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Project description:

Project Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to engaging communities in physical activity, leisure and sport. Shielding, self-isolation and social distancing measures have placed an increased focus in facilitating engagement both online and outdoors. Obesity rates in Westminster are alarmingly high; participation in physical activity, leisure and sport amongst particular population groups is very low. Some areas of our City present less attractive, less supportive and less permissive environments to take part in physical activity, often there is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available, particularly at a neighbourhood and individual level. Westminster has 56 parks and formally launched our overall ActiveStreets programme on the 23rd August 2019 by signing the Car Free Day Pledge at our 'Play Street' at Fisherton/Luton Street, which coincided with the publication of updated guidance on 'Street Play', from the Department for Transport (DfT).

Through the ActiveWestminster strategy, the Council's aim is to create more positive, supportive and permissive environments that encourage people to be physically active, where, when and how they choose. By building an understanding of our communities and the demands within them, we hope to more effectively engage those who are currently inactive. To tailor engagement and set behavioural change objectives appropriately, we need to garner intelligence about existing use and behaviour patterns and perceptions, service gaps and needs in the City. There is huge potential to derive impactful insights from this information to guide evidence-led decision-making.

Projects could examine the following (Please note some suggested projects do not directly refer to COVID-19 but should be considered as an integral part of the research).

- 1) How did physical activity engagement impact use of our outdoor spaces and places over multiple timepoints e.g. before, during and after COVID-19?
- 2) Explore if use of outdoor spaces and places were affected by COVID-19.

- 3) Do different types of infrastructure affect uptake of outdoor physical activity in our City environment during COVID-19?
- 4) Investigate if a change in demographic users exist as a result of COVID-19.
- 5) Explore the location and engagement in relation to levels of affluence within the City.
- 6) Investigate the proximity of outdoor spaces and places in relation to physical inactivity.

We welcome student's interpretations of the topic and suggestions to further specify it. All projects should provide insight to engagement or disengagement in physical activity and our outdoor spaces and places across the City and identify possible recommendations to the Council to increase up-take.

Communication and support

It is important to have a high level of communication throughout the project with students and staff. ActiveWestminster have identified our Relationship Officer - Insight, Laura Quayle, to provide both supervised support of the project and to ensure that the output is mutually beneficial to all parties.

Data sources:

- Mosaic/Acorn geo-segmentation data + City Survey
- Open data (e.g. Census, IMD etc)
- Other sources may be available dependent on project undertaken – to be requested

Deliverables:

- Dissertation in full
- Executive summary for policy and practitioner audience
- Presentation to staff
- Access and sharing of code on WestminsterBI GitHub