

# RUNNING OUT OF TIME? TIME AND SPACE MANAGEMENT FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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## Abstract

### Background and Research Questions

A few years ago I was standing outside an office building in London Docklands around noon watching a group of people cooling down after a running session. I interpreted the situation as follows: this was a group of people in the middle of their careers, working hard, commuting, having children to take care of after work and as a consequence trying to find a time slot for physical activity in the lunch hour. These thoughts ended up in one pilot study, one article (Book, 2009) and one extended project based on the following questions:

1. How, when and where do employed people (qualified work, mainly academics) in the age between 30 and 50 find time and space for physical activities? The selected group is likely to work a lot and have children living at home. By physical activity is meant everything from walking to the bus stop to heavy, conscious training (see for instance Caspersen, Powell & Christenson, 1985).
2. How does the design of the work place and its surroundings affect the opportunities for activities in connection to the working day?

### Theoretical Departures

The perspectives used in the study are three-fold:

- Time perception and management with focus on people in the middle of their life and careers. It is today well-known that a lot of people in this part of the life cycle feel a lack of time. Concepts like time famine and time pressure are used to describe the situation (see for instance Robinson & Godbey, 2000; Zuzanek, 2004). The time pressure of course affects our opportunities and strategies for physical activities.
- Physical activity perception and management. As mentioned below a wide definition of physical activity is used in order to incorporate micro and time squeeze

strategies. Interestingly, we know based on existing knowledge that the study group in question somehow finds time for a number of activities in their daily lives, a phenomenon called time elasticity (Roberts, 2006).

- Space perception and management. There is a lot of research showing that the planning of the environment and our perception thereof affects our opportunities for physical activity. In this study both indoor and outdoor environments are of interest.

### Methods and Results

My pilot study (a survey made among 50 employed academics at Malmö University, Sweden) showed that the selected group finds it hard to find room for physical activities in their daily programs, and usually prefer flexible solutions like walking and running. A majority of the people however aimed to be physically active, had a full schedule but still a certain degree of flexibility regarding work hours. Strategies (from what I – based on intensity and aims – call micro strategies to heavy training) in connection to or during the work day were common. An example of micro strategies is for instance using the stairs, while an example of more heavy training is going to the nearby gym on the lunch hour. Furthermore, I found examples of time squeeze strategies, like taking a walk while supervising students. Another strategy was to use time slots that nobody else in the family claimed, like very early mornings. Several of the strategies used are dependent on a work place environment and surroundings which make physical activity attractive or at least possible. In Sweden we can see a growing number of gyms locating in areas where a lot of people are during the work day.

At the moment a far more extensive material is being analyzed. This material includes 550 surveys among qualified employees at three major work places at different locations in Malmö, interviews with gym managers regarding location strategies and training trends of relevance for my study, field studies at and around the work places and interviews with a smaller number of the employees included in the study. The final analysis of my material will be ready to present at the EASM conference. In my main conclusions I will highlight favourable conditions for getting physical activities into the daily programme with regards to time, space and activity among people in the middle of the life cycle and career.

References:

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