

BSA Leisure & Recreation Study Group Annual Report 2024-2025

For the 2024-2025 academic session the group aimed to recruit a third convenor and to revitalise the activities and profile of the group. Both aims were achieved with the successful staging of an online seminar workshop, as contextualised and described below.

Online Seminar Workshop – BSA Leisure and Recreation Study Group

13 January 2025

‘The re-marginalisation of leisure studies: making the case for why leisure matters sociologically’

January 2025

In 2024, the BSA warned of the crisis facing social science departments across many university sectors in the UK. Sociology departments have faced and are facing harmful and deep reaching cuts and staff restructures. Social scientists are leaving institutions, through voluntary severances and compulsory redundancies, whilst those who remain, are increasingly isolated, marginalised, and under pressure to hit key university metrics across both teaching and research pathways. The personal consequences for social scientists are profound, and the discipline of sociology – and indeed the sociology of leisure, sport, recreation, and tourism – is becoming colonised by programmes designed to promote management, business, and marketing ideologies within the validation and revalidation of sport and leisure programmes. Through this lens, the sociological study of leisure is in a polycrisis; standing at a critical juncture, reflecting wider social transformations and challenges including, but not limited to:

- the cost-of-living-crisis;
- inflation;
- changes to immigration policy.

Such trends have further resulted in the decline of student numbers; underfunding of specific education and research programmes; and the re-marginalisation of sociological modules designed to critically interrogate leisure cultures, consumption, wellbeing, and practice.

At this juncture, in the autumn of 2024 the BSA Leisure & Recreation study group invited sociologists interested in why and how leisure matters sociologically to attend an online seminar discussion to discuss, interrogate, and disseminate stories and experiences of marginalisation, and to explore strategies to find new, innovative, and alternative ways of reading, writing and doing leisure studies in such challenging times. We specifically encouraged Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to attend, and engage in dialogue with mid-career scholars, and senior professors. We recognised that – whether you identify as a sociologist writing about leisure cultures, or a sport/leisure scholar thinking sociologically about issues in your applied work/practice – the social scientific community, increasingly marginalised and dispersed across sociology, or leisure/sport courses under constant surveillance, faces intensifying pressures to, for instance, develop so-called 4* work to be returned for the Research Excellence Framework; to publish in Q1 journals; and to convince a UKRI funder why leisure/sport matters.

The study group's stimulating and online seminar attracted several dozen contributors, and included a challenging opening address by Professor Louise Mansfield of Brunel University. In 10-minute contributions Ken Roberts reflected on the optimism surrounding the formation of the Leisure Studies Association; Stephen Crossley reflected on his personal journey as a late entrant into the field of leisure studies. Louise Platt provided reflections on personal experiences of isolation, loss of identity and threats to informed teaching. The event achieved the Study Group's primary goal of revitalising its activities, successfully making the case for why leisure matters sociologically. As Convenors, we are confident that for the academic year 2025-2026 we will look to develop further workshops, open to both BSA and non-BSA members, to re-imagine how we might read, write, and do leisure studies in times of continuing crisis.

Dr Kalyan Bandhari

Professor Alan Tomlinson

Dr Mark Turner

29th August 2025