MOVE THE MIND

EMPOWERMENT FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING THROUGH SPORT.

LEARNING UNIT A.2 – ONLINE VERSION

SOCIAL CHALLENGES FOR
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

LEARNING OUTCOMES.

Through this learning unit you will …

- become aware of the broader social context in which a growing number of people suffer from impaired mental well-being or even mental health problems.

- get to know the typical factors that can cause mental distress in a modern social environment and analyse how you are affected by these issues your-self.

- learn to recognize the impact chains between (1) social context, (2) psychological needs and (3) mental well being.

- better understand how sport can be used to mitigate the impact of the different social challenges on our mental health and well being.

ONE OF
THESE DAYS ...

To get started, please look at Maggie´s thoughts below.

Is there anything that sounds familiar to you? Anything that also causes stress in your life?

I got to pay the open bills before Friday

I haven´t even started to plan the boy´s birthday party

Tomorrow morning, I need to take dad to the doctor

I'm late again with the monthly report at work

Why can´t the kids stay in school for an hour longer,
that would make things so much easier

I really don´t want to go by train. What if I
catch that virus?

I'm so tired, my batteries are so empty

How does Emma manage all these things?
Everything looks always so perfect on her Insta posts

Q: Europe is one of the regions that offers the highest levels of safety, health, quality of life and opportunity in the world. So, is Maggie just moaning about "first world problems" or are there real and serious reasons why her mental well being is being affected?

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A: Even though in Europe we may be privileged in many ways, the typical lifestyle of working age adults in Europe is also characterized by a wide range of features that come with great individual challenges and that can create a number of specific psychological demands.

In order not to lose focus, we will limit ourselves in this learning unit to a simplified description of a few selected social characteristics.

A more detailed description of how different social conditions and their complex interplay create psychological needs and stresses can be found in our knowledge base (section 3.1)

→ **CLICK HERE TO SEE THE KNOWLEDGE BASE**

MOVE THE MIND – KNOWLEDGE BASE

Awareness and understanding of the potential contribution that sport can have on mental health and mental well being
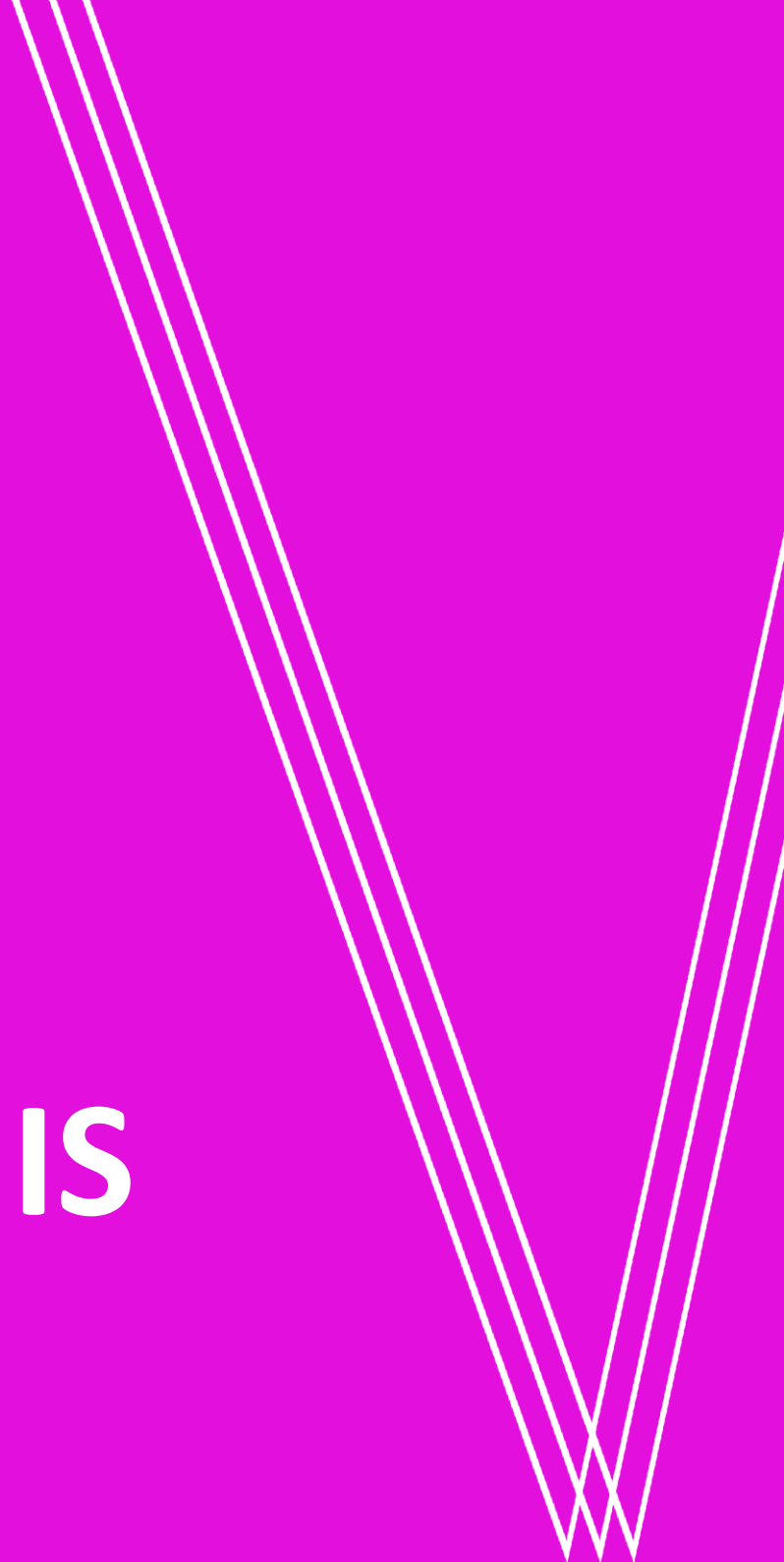
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OUR ANALYTIC APPROACH FOR THIS LEARNING UNIT

In order to be able to develop sport programmes with an actual impact on our mental well-being it is important to analyse the underlying impact chains.

As a coach you need to understand how (1) the social context creates (2) specific psychological needs which (3) can have negative effects on our mental health and well-being.
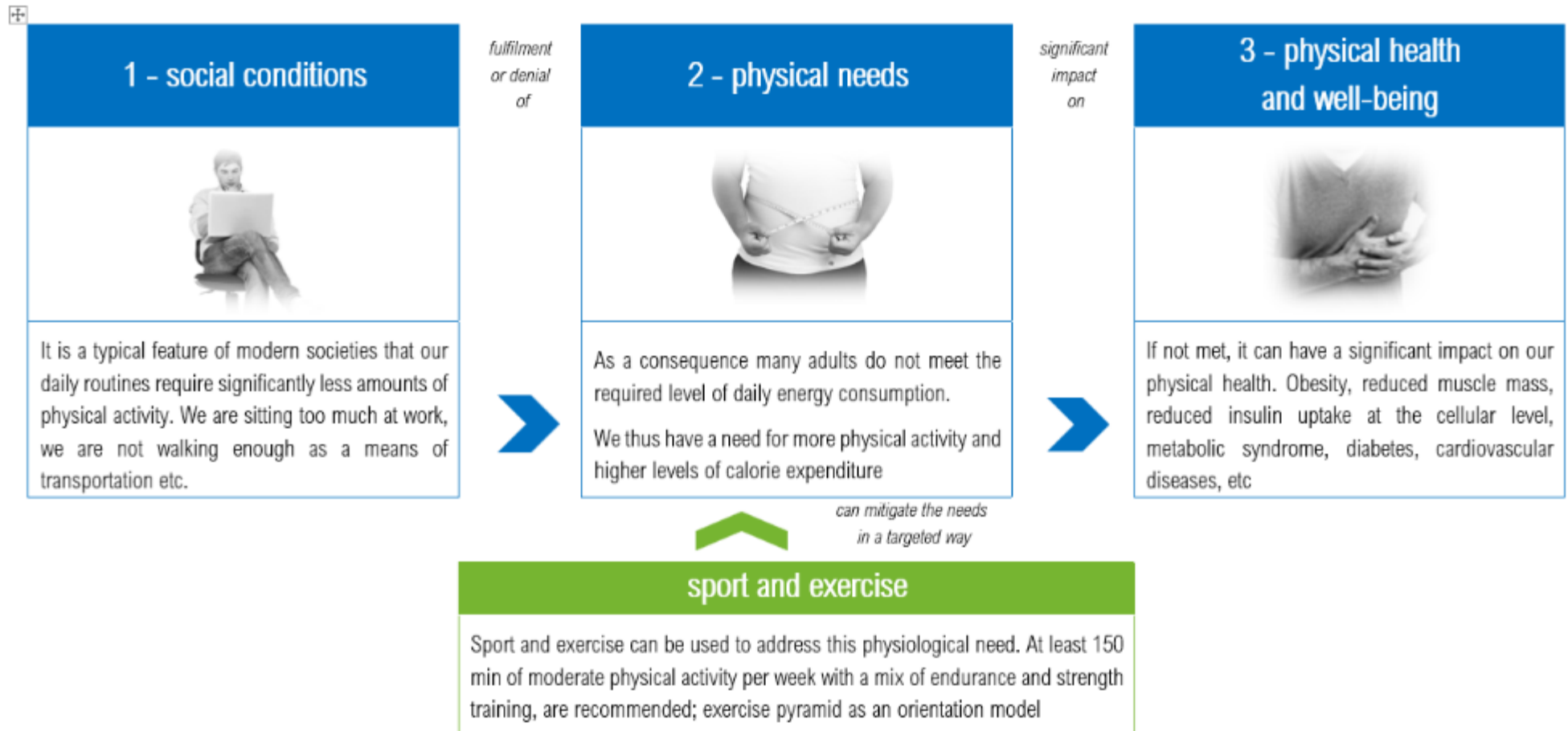
If you understand the impact chain, you can use sport and exercise in a more targeted and individual way to interrupt these chains.

social conditions — specific psycological need — disturbed mental well being

sport and exercise
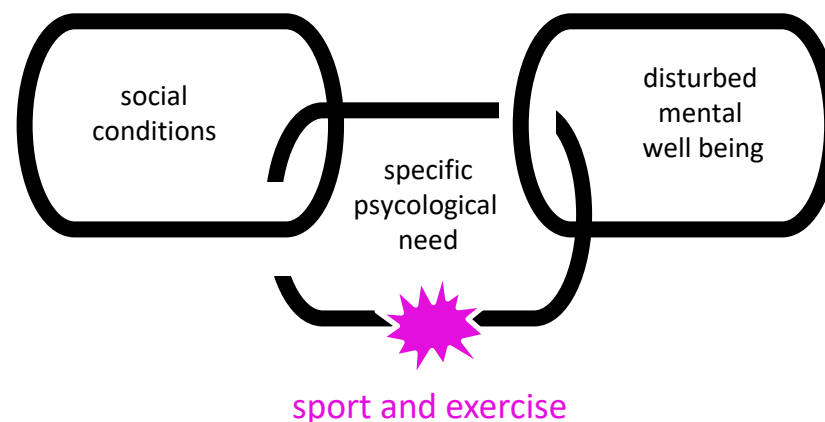
To get into this way of thinking, we will first look at an example from the field of physical activity and physical well-being with which you are already familiar before we will then apply the same approach to social challenges and mental well-being.

Impact Chain - Example from the field of physical health

1 - social conditions

It is a typical feature of modern societies that our daily routines require significantly less amounts of physical activity. We are sitting too much at work, we are not walking enough as a means of transportation etc.

fulfilment or denial of

2 - physical needs

As a consequence many adults do not meet the required level of daily energy consumption.

We thus have a need for more physical activity and higher levels of calorie expenditure

significant impact on

3 - physical health and well-being

If not met, it can have a significant impact on our physical health. Obesity, reduced muscle mass, reduced insulin uptake at the cellular level, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, etc

can mitigate the needs in a targeted way

sport and exercise

Sport and exercise can be used to address this physiological need. At least 150 min of moderate physical activity per week with a mix of endurance and strength training, are recommended; exercise pyramid as an orientation model

With this example from the field of physical activity and physical well-being, as a sports coach and instructor, you were already familiar. Now, let's make a transfer and see, if you would be able to describe the relationship between social conditions, psychological needs and mental well-being in the same way? If not, that´s what will try through this learning unit.

Impact Chain - Example from the field of mental health and well-being
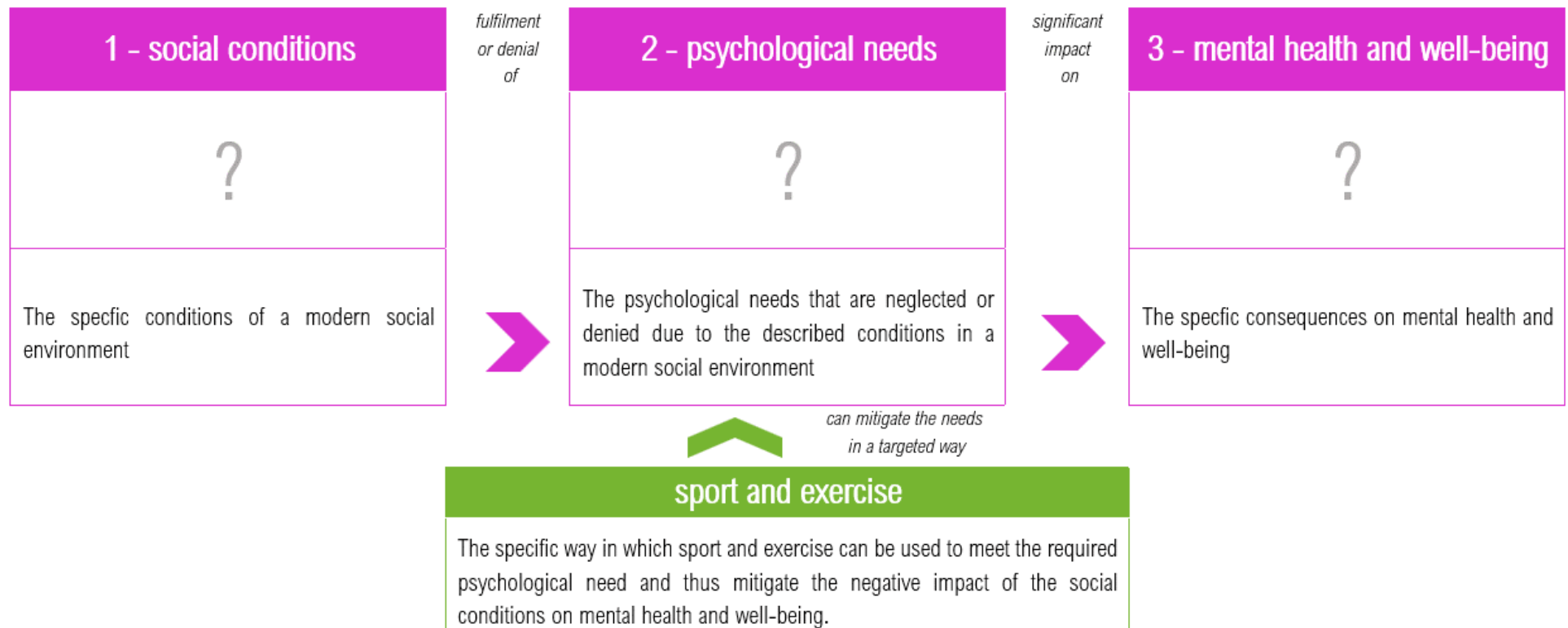
Congratulations, if you have been able to fill the impact chain model and to describe the relationship between social conditions, psychological needs and mental well-being . And, if you have not been able to make this transfer yet, don't worry: That´s what we will try to do through this learning unit.

SELECTED SOCIAL DEMANDS RELATED TO BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Now, let's dig deeper into the topic and look at selected social demands related to basic psychological needs.

Selected Social Conditions

COMPETING SOCIAL DEMANDS	MODERN TIME STRUCTURE	DIGITALISATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE
DISEMBODIMENT OF EVERYDAY LIFE	INDIVIDUALISATION AND SOCIAL ISOLATION	SCOPE AND FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL CRISIS

Now, let's investigate each of these social conditions in more detail.

A particularly characteristic of modern societies is that time is perceived by most people as a scarce commodity.

On the one hand, this is due to the constantly growing demands that are placed on us from the outside, but which we also place on ourselves.

The amount of potential events therefore constantly exceeds our personal budget of time.

People feel that they should become more and more efficient and better manage their time.

No matter how much you do, there will always be something that still needs to be done.

COMPETING SOCIAL DEMANDS

In addition, modern time structure is characterised by several trends that make it very challenging.

This includes the acceleration of life (our life is getting faster and faster); a compression of life (we do more and more things within the same limited period of time, breaks or time outs thus become shorter or are omitted altogether); the round-the-clock society (almost everything is possible almost anytime) and a desynchronized society in which different social systems (such as work or school) have different time systems and are no longer aligned.

MODERN TIME STRUCTURE

These developments are considerably reinforced by digitalisation and the influence of social media.

In both, our private and professional life, we communicate predominantly through digital channels.

As a result, we are always available everywhere. Our field of action has hardly any geographical or temporal boundaries anymore.

Social media also reinforce social comparison and constantly distract us, many people report that they are experience digital stress and a fear of missing out.

DIGITALISATION AND
SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

In a predominantly digital world, some form of disembodiment becomes an inevitable consequence as well.

We are less and less physically active in many areas, from work to household chores to leisure time.

In a digitalised world, there are fewer opportunities to smell, taste, touch, feel things.

Visual and auditory sensory stimuli dominate here.

DISEMBODIMENT OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Modern European societies are also increasingly individualised.

This affects both the value base that each individual defines for themselves and the living conditions that are characterised by transformed family structures, anonymous urban neighbourhoods and more single households for example.

Increased levels of loneliness and friendships that are limited to the contacts in social media are just two observable consequences.

INDIVIDUALISATION AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Last but not least people in Europe have experienced a scope and frequency of social crisis that probably exceeds everything since World War II.

Real and perceived threats of the last decade include the international terror threat, the financial crisis, the war in Syria and the resulting refugee crisis, climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war with all their still unforeseeable consequences.

All this creates a high degree of real or perceived uncertainty and insecurity for almost everyone.

SCOPE AND FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL CRISIS

RESULTING PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS
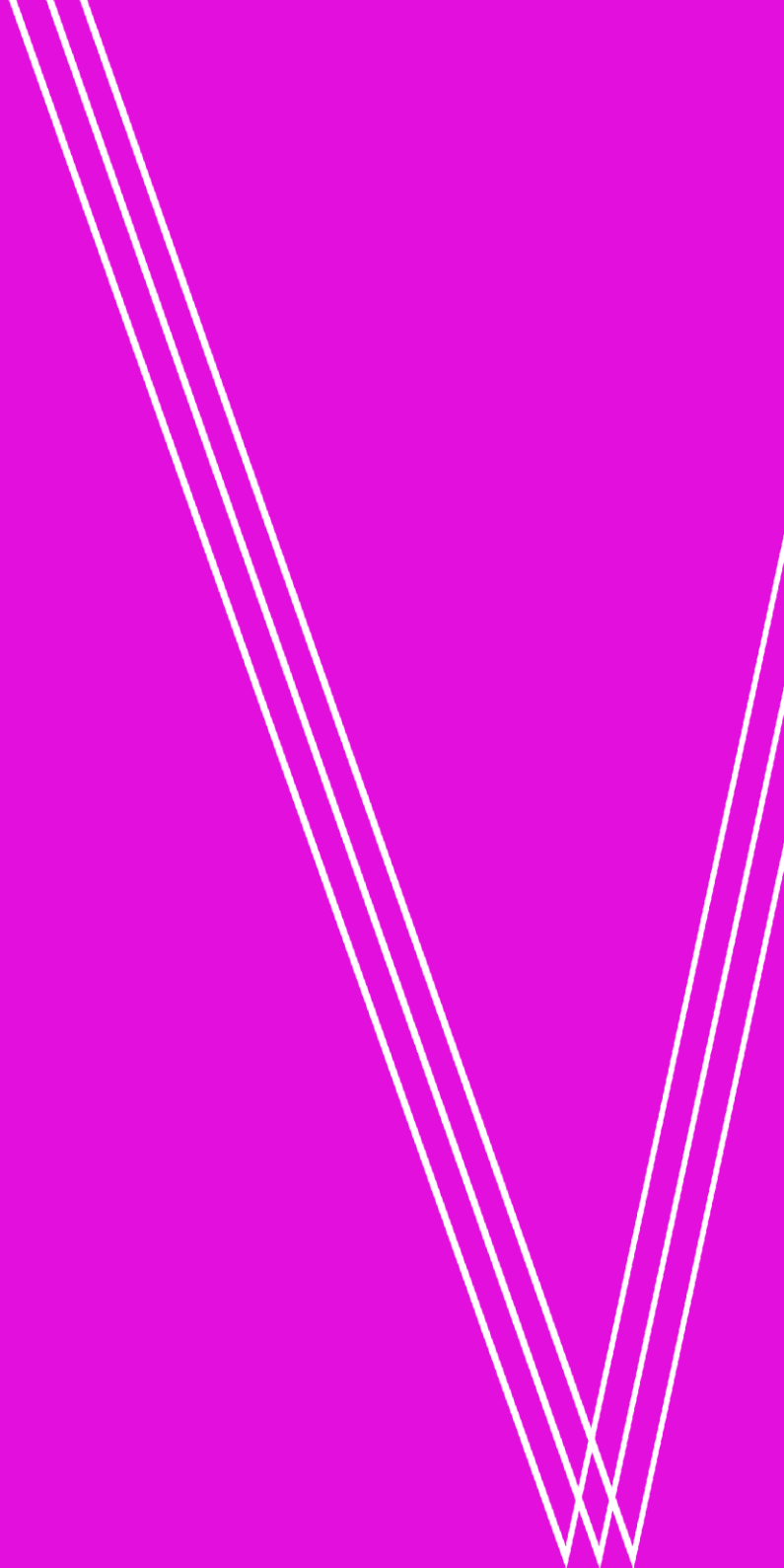
From this (not exhaustive) list of selected characteristics of modern societies, some basic psychological needs can be derived which, if permanently neglected or denied, can have negative consequences on our mental health and well-being.

Psychological Needs

NEED FOR RECOVERY, DISCONNECTION AND RECREATION	NEED TO FOCUS ON THE HERE AND NOW	NEED FOR SENSORY AND BODY PERCEPTION
NEED FOR AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY	NEED FOR SAFETY, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND CONNECTEDNESS	NEED FOR POSITIVE AND JOYFUL EXPERIENCES

Now, let's look into each of these psychological needs into more detail.

Due to the nature of stressors of modern life, most threats do not warrant a physical response We can´t fight or run away from them.

Consequently, there is no release or relief from this state of high alert. Over time, we run the risk of plunging into the exhaustion stage of the general stress model, with all its associated mental and physical health complications.

To avoid this we need to recover, disconnect and recreate. While the need for physical recreation is relatively obvious and can only be ignored to a limited extent over longer periods of time, the need for psychological or mental recreation is less tangible and more difficult to determine.

NEED FOR RECOVERY, DISCONNECTION AND RECREATION

Future-orientation, competing social demands and social media use lead to a permanent state of "not being ready yet", of "still having something to do", of "also having to focus on other places", etc.

Such a mindset makes it difficult to switch off and recover so that a need arises to interrupt this constant background noises in our perception.

Mindfulness is a concept that relates to the idea of having a psychological need for connecting to the present moment and situation. Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory points in the same direction and describes the flow as a ''subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself'.

NEED TO FOCUS ON
THE HERE AND NOW

In an increasingly digital world, sensory activities that help embodiment are important tools in sensory integration.

As found by Eastern Inner Science, activating sense awareness is a key factor in bringing harmony and empathy to oneself, providing a stabilising and anti-dissociative factor.

Through increased body-sensation and reduced dependence on cognitive and language perception tools, one's self-reference feeling could be strengthened, leading to an increasingly internal support system (of simply being), feelings of safety, and natural grit and resilience.

NEED FOR SENSORY AND BODY PERCEPTION

In a globalised, digitalised world with a division of labour, individuals often have the feeling that they are only small cogs in the big wheel. The threat of major global crises adds to this sense of being vulnerable and powerless.

However, Ryan & Deci have shown in their self-determination theory that autonomy, competence and self-efficacy are basic human needs. And from Bandura we know that the perceived level of efficacy decides if a person judges a situation as stressful or not.

Against this backdrop, it is important that we regularly have the experience of mastering something well, of being in control of a situation, in order to boost our general self-efficacy beliefs.

NEED FOR AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY

The large number of crises in current society, compounded by the social pressures of digitalisation and time pressures of modern-day life all make the need for a "safe haven" even more acute.

An important way of empowering people, especially those affected by crises, is through psychosocial support, which is an approach aiming at promoting the resilience of individuals, groups and communities.

Based on the Hobfoll Principles, the five core elements of psychosocial support are: (1) promoting a sense of safety, (2) calming, (3) connecting people, (4) supporting efficacy in individuals and communities and (5) instilling hope.

NEED FOR SAFETY,
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND CONNECTEDNESS

As positive and negative emotions seem to be independent, eliminating negative emotions (e.g., the fear of threats from current crises) does not mean that positive emotions automatically emerge.

But, because we know from positive psychology that positive emotions are closely linked to physical and mental health, it is necessary to apply positive psychological interventions (e.g., have a good time while playing sports) when it comes to mental health.

Gay for example argued that adult distress often occurs because people cannot recollect joy.

NEED FOR POSITIVE AND JOYFUL EXPERIENCES

SPORT AND EXERCISE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

What is then the exact role of sport and exercise related to mental health and well-being?

The crucial question now is how exactly sport and exercise can be used to promote not only physical but also mental health and well-being.

The simple answer here is "by satisfying the psychological needs that we have described in this learning unit".
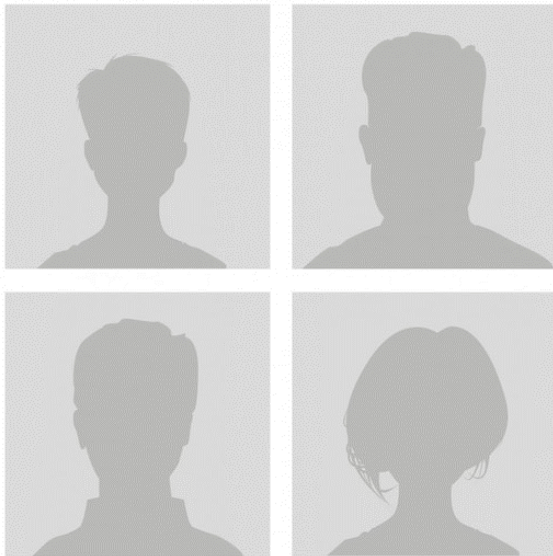

This is where we will pick-up the discussion again in our practical learning units where we present specific activities that can be used to tackle specific psychological needs.

A SHORT ASSESSMENT.

move
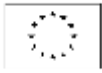THE MIND

SELF-REFLECTION CHALLENGE

Look at yourself from the outside for a moment and try to answer the three questions below:

1. How would you describe your own day-to-day life? What demands and tasks does your social environment impose on you?

2. What are you missing due to these external circumstances? What stresses or overwhelms you?

3. How does sport help you personally to deal with your everyday worries and stresses?

Self-Assessment

Look at yourself from the outside for a moment and try to answer the three questions below:
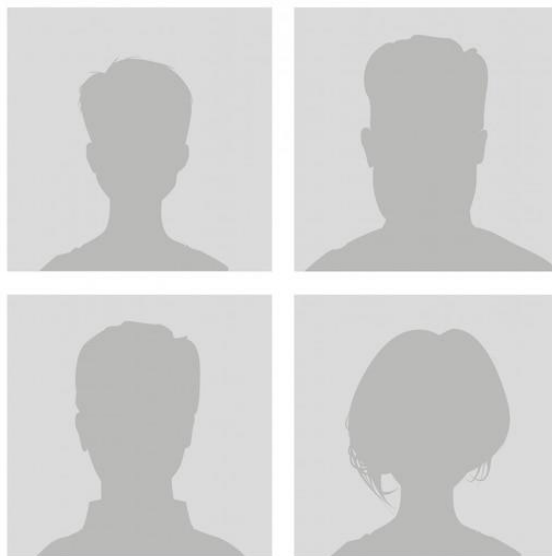
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