The culture of high security:
A case study of the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games (G2014)

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In 2014, twenty-four months after London 2012, Glasgow will be hosting the Commonwealth Games, the largest event ever to have been hosted by Scotland. The 2014 Games are anticipated to attract 1.5 million spectators and 4,500 athletes over the 11 days of competition and 13 of the 15 venues will be located in the Glasgow area. The overall Games budget for G2014 is £524 million[1] with the security budget of £27 million making up 5% of the total budget (Audit Scotland, 2012). In comparison, the security budget for the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in Melbourne was 8% of the total Games budget and the 2012 Olympic security costs are estimated to be 5% of the overall Games budget (Graham, 2012), so the proportion being spent on security aligns with other mega-events. The security structure for G2014 consists of several governing bodies made up of the Scottish Government, Strathclyde Police, the Games Organising Committee, and Glasgow City Council. In addition the sub-level working groups consist of partnerships with several additional security and safety organisations including Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, the Scottish Ambulance Service, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS), British Transport Police, The Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) and private security contractors. The private security contractors will play a crucial role in G2014, in that they will be involved in securing all the venues and access points, and it is estimated there will be nearly three times the number of private security personnel (3000) than police officers (1,100) on competition days ('Glasgow 2014', 2007). The security planning for G2014, including risk assessment and securitization, is already well under way and the security vision for a safe, secure and peaceful Games has been developed with the purported aim of ensuring that G2014 is fundamentally a mega-sporting, rather than a mega-security event.

Mega-sporting events have attracted academic research from a wide range of disciplines. For criminology, such events offer a unique opportunity to gain an insight into crime control, police management and securitisation at the national and international level. A team of researchers from the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research and the Scottish Institute for Policing Research have been funded by the European Commission to study the security planning process, through a grant under the Prevention of and Fight against Crime programme, within the general funding programme on Security and Safeguarding Liberties, in the Freedom, Justice and Security work area.

The G2014 research project is concerned with the governance of security in relation to this specific mega-event: in particular the negotiation of the multi-level (central and local) government relationships and public-private partnerships required for the delivery of 'security' through policing. While mega-events are, due to their scale and infrequency, sometimes portrayed as exceptions to everyday security processes and discourses, our approach is to analyse the heightened tensions and responses around security during large spectacular events as reflective of broader and more mundane

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[1] This was the new budget set in 2010 and is an increase of £151 million from the budget set in 2007

public and official sensibilities around security. Mega-events like G2014 are potential case studies for analytical work about the 'culture of security' more widely conceived in contemporary society, as opposed to merely time and place bound 'moments' of high security. By looking beyond the often turbo-charged (and sometimes rather extreme) concerns with security, spectacular events can sometimes render visible wider trends in policing, regulation and social control which may be more difficult to recognise in the routine activities of our day-to-day lives.

The culture of security is clearly a topic which can be examined from multiple perspectives, but our analytical framework seeks to focus on the culture of 'high' security. The securitisation processes we are concerned with are 'high' in the same sense that Sheptycki (2007) has identified a layer of 'high policing' which operates as an international-facing model of police thinking and practice, and which is largely occupied with risk and threat assessments of perceived global or inter-regional crime and security issues. The discursive norms of this layer of high security have produced a distinctive cultural orientation towards the concept of security which is manifest in the risk assessment and precautionary approaches adopted and promulgated by mega-event security staff.

The academic study of a security culture involves looking behind the surface presentation of objectified risks in order to uncover the ideological drivers of risk-based approaches. By analysing risk as a culturally constructed 'reality' (Douglas, 1992), risk assessments can be understood as socio-political processes of decision making. In Scotland, there is much by way of social and political circumstance which needs to be taken into account when considering the official constructions of risk and security for the Games. Despite Scottish police services having considerable experience preparing for and policing significant events such as the G8 summit in 2005 and the Papal visit in 2010 (see Gorringe and Rosie, 2008a; 2008b) this will be the largest ever security operation organised in Scotland. G2014 is taking place in a highly sensitive political context, with the Scottish Police and Fire and Rescue reforms underway which, in 2013, will amalgamate Scotland's eight regional police forces into one national organisation, the Police Service of Scotland. And of course the Scottish Referendum is due to take place in autumn 2014, so that very shortly after the Games the country will be asked to vote on the question of independence from the UK. The successful 'delivery' of the Games is therefore part of a much wider story of the political aspirations of the Scottish National Party.

In addition to this political context, a bureaucratic context supports the current landscape of multi-level public-private partnerships which make key decisions in the governance of the security 'blanket' that envelops the Games. The initial observations of the G2014 planning process have shown very complex security governance structures with varying levels of working groups and committees developed to ensure comprehensive security preparations are in place. The G2014 structure is an example of nodal governance (Button, 2008) in which networks of security and safety organisations (both public and private) have a particular role and responsibility in securing G2014. For instance, the Games Organising Committee have responsibility for securing the Games venues, including the athletes' village, while Strathclyde Police are in control of securing people and places outside the vicinities of the venues. It is estimated that 80% of the security at venues, including access points, will be carried out by private security contractors recruited by the Organising Committee. These roles and responsibilities are closely defined such that risks not only become things that are culturally constructed, as Douglas (1992) has said, but also a type of property, whereby each identified risk is 'owned' by a particular organisation in the security network. This functions not only as a division of labour, but in practice for the police as a means of farming out responsibility for the management of many risks, through defensible processes which will insulate blame if one of those risks comes to fruition through improper management. This kind of implied blame that lies within the apparently more neutral concept of risk has been observed by writers including Douglas (1992) and Giddens (1999). This is a form of responsibilisation; but whereas the term has commonly been used with reference to the State shifting the burden of protection against crime onto citizens, here the police are 'responsibilising' partner agencies.

This is, however, an overly neat analysis, and actually responsibilisation or risk-shifting in the G2014 security planning process is far more complex. Multi-level governance blurs accountability boundaries and despite the best efforts of the police and security partners to define the limits of responsibility, an obscuring of responsibility can still occur where the co-working structures become highly complex (Stoker, 1998). The Audit Scotland (2012) G2014 progress report has already highlighted this concern, particularly at the operational level, where the working partners have yet to be clear on defining the responsibilities and accountabilities for each of the security organisations. So governing large scale sporting events involves such multi-layered hierarchies that it can be unclear who is ultimately responsible for what; but this is made even more complex when trying to balance security with the idea of family-orientated Games. Whilst the police and private security companies look through a lens of security, the Games organisers insist that the Games are a sporting, not a security, event. This causes tension between security partnerships and Games organisers and can increase the fuzziness of the responsibilisation processes mentioned.

We are currently around half-way through the G2014 project and as the above discussion suggests, perhaps the most notable interim observation in our exploration of the culture of high security is related to the subjective experiences and interpretations of the risk assessment procedures which form the basic architecture of the security processes ultimately developed. A top-down view of these risk assessments presents an official and fairly logical picture of the identification of risks, their allocation to the most suitable 'managers' or 'owners' in the security governance network, and the development and implementation of security responses which aim to reduce any given risk to an acceptable level. The bottom-up view of risk offers a very different insight. The interim findings reveal that the risks identified for G2014 have reputational implications for their 'owners' in the case of mismanagement as well as consequences for Games delivery. This ever-present blame culture invites overkill in securitisation and a pre-emptive approach to security (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009; Fussey et al., 2011) in which the ideal is 'total security'. The reputational risk for a risk-owner of catastrophic but highly unlikely events such as serious terror strikes substantially outweighs the risk of more likely but less severe crimes and incivilities. The result can be a huge expense on securing against such high-level risks, as we have seen with the semi-militarized approach at the London Olympics.

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