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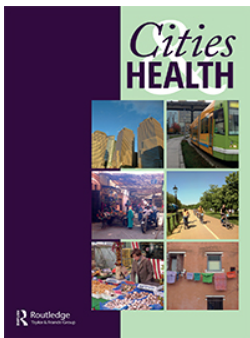
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Volunteerism, social context and health impacts: a qualitative study of Glasgow Commonwealth Games event volunteers

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer engagement is crucial to the effective delivery of mega-sporting events. While evidence points to reported motivations and wellbeing benefits for individual participants during and post event, there is less evidence on how this type of civic participation relates to the social context in which it occurs and the wider social determinants of health. This qualitative study sought to understand the impacts on wellbeing and the determinants of health resulting from the experience of volunteering at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. Focus groups and interviews were conducted one-year post-Games to gather the perspectives of 46 volunteers and 7 unsuccessful applicants on their experiences. Participants provided insight into the volunteer journey, contributions and associated outcomes. Wider social impacts were also reported including a renewed sense of pride in the city. The qualitative analysis suggested an important non-linear relationship between volunteer contributions, impacts and rewards, and the outcome of enhanced social connections. The emergent 'people and place' framework identifies some critical factors around city life and volunteer assets that planners could consider in developing and evaluating sustainable volunteering and its wider impacts beyond a mega-event.

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Volunteerism; mega-sporting event; qualitative; social context; Glasgow; health impact

Introduction

Volunteerism covers a broad range of pro-social activities, motivations and forms (Wilson 2000). As well as intrinsic benefits (Von Bonsdorff and Rantanen 2011, Mundle *et al.* 2012, Jenkinson *et al.* 2013), volunteering is credited with making a significant contribution at a societal level, including bringing economic value (Haldane 2014) and fostering social capital (Forbes and Zampelli 2014, Layton and Moreno 2014). Developing an evidence base on the health and social impacts of volunteering requires attention to the varied socio-cultural contexts in which volunteering occurs, as well as the nature of participation. This paper explores the interplay between social context, volunteerism and wellbeing in the context of a mega-sporting event – the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. Mega-sporting events, many of which are held in global cities, are defined by their size and ability to generate significant tourism, media interest and economic impact (Getz 2012). Such events offer an opportunity for studying volunteering (Baum and Lockstone 2007), as the volunteer contribution, while episodic in nature, can be relatively intensive (Wilks 2016) and involve large numbers of people (Koutrou *et al.* 2016). For host cities and regions, this short-term boost in volunteers offers the promise of a sustained increase in volunteerism and

civic participation. For example, volunteer Games Makers were seen as a crucial to the success of London 2012 and later contributing to a 'social legacy' (Wilson 2014). Over time, there is potential for positive effects to spread out from the event to local communities and sporting associations (Nichols and Ralston 2011). Based on a qualitative study exploring volunteer perspectives 1 year post the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, this paper contributes to understandings of the non-linear relationship between social context, volunteer contributions and benefits. The study aim was to understand the perspectives of volunteers who supported the staging and delivery of the Games (known in the city as 'clyde-siders'), and also those who applied but were not selected. The starting point was an interest, shared by both the research commissioners and the research team, in understanding volunteering processes and outcomes within a social model of health (Marmot *et al.* 2008, Mccartney *et al.* 2013), which recognises the significance of the wider determinants of health alongside individual-level factors. As background to the study, this paper now provides an overview of the evidence and research gaps on mega-event volunteering and on how volunteering can be understood from a 'social determinants of health' perspective (Marmot *et al.* 2008). The importance of social context and place is highlighted prior to

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describing Glasgow as a host city and the ambitions of the clyde-sider volunteer programme.

Mega-events are associated with economic, social and political impacts for cities and regions (Preuss 2015, Fairley *et al.* 2016). Assessing the 'legacy' of specific mega-events is a complex task as multiple stakeholders may be affected in diverse ways by a range of structural changes within an area (Preuss 2015). A systematic review of health and socioeconomic impacts of major sporting events found only limited evidence of positive health outcomes for host populations (Mccartney *et al.* 2010). Part of the interest in 'legacy', crossing policy, practice and research perspectives, concerns how volunteering and more broadly, civic participation in cultural or sporting activities, can be stimulated by a mega-event and sustained afterwards (Nichols and Ralston 2011, Koutrou *et al.* 2016, Rogerson 2016). Much research to date has focussed on volunteer motivations and experiences before and during a mega-event (Baum and Lockstone 2007, Tomazos and Luke 2015, Nichols and Ralston 2016), with much less research examining post-event outcomes (Koutrou *et al.* 2016). Motivations to volunteer at a mega-event may be driven by a blend of personal, social and material factors (Wang 2004, Treuren 2014, Alexander *et al.* 2015, Nichols and Ralston 2016) and involve distinct motivations from other volunteering opportunities (Bang and Chelladurai 2009, Wilks 2016). Volunteering at mega-sporting events is not always socially and ethnically inclusive (Baum and Lockstone 2007), with some groups, such as those with disabilities, facing barriers to participation (Darcy *et al.* 2014). Studies show increased intention to volunteer in the future, particularly at another mega-sporting event (Reeser *et al.* 2005, Doherty 2009, Edwards *et al.* 2010), but there is mixed evidence on whether this translates into increased volunteer activity post-event (Downward and Ralston 2006, Nichols and Ralston 2011, Mccartney *et al.* 2013, Koutrou *et al.* 2016, May 2017). There is scant research on non-participation in volunteering at mega-events, despite numbers of applicants typically exceeding the places available (Jones and Yates 2015). Questions of who participates (and who does not) and whether this pro-social activity can be sustained post-event are critical issues for local policy makers who aim to build a legacy in a city or region.

Positive, mostly short-term, outcomes reported for mega-event volunteers include social enrichment, wellbeing, and personal growth (Doherty 2009, Wicker and Hallmann 2013, The Scottish Government 2014, Tomazos and Luke 2015) and extension of social networks and friendships (Fairley *et al.* 2007, Allen and Shaw 2009, Kodama *et al.* 2012, Tomazos and Luke 2015). Nichols and Ralston (2011), in a study of an organisation that brokered volunteer involvement during and after the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games, found evidence of longer-term effects in terms of improved employability and social inclusion (through

increased skills and having a volunteer identity). More research is needed on long-term health and wellbeing impacts of mega-event volunteering and who benefits (Mccartney *et al.* 2013, Tomazos and Luke 2015, Koutrou *et al.* 2016). Baum and Lockstone (2007) also highlight a research agenda around host communities, and whether social and human capital is built.

Understanding how mega-event volunteering in a host city might link to wider objectives is of interest to local policy makers tasked with improving the health, wellbeing and economic prospects of their population. As Rogerson's research with key stakeholders in Glasgow showed, there was a shared ambition for a Games legacy encompassing environmental, economic and social aspects (Rogerson 2016). Based on a prospective analysis of health impacts from Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, Mccartney *et al.* (2013) argue that volunteering potentially offers a 'critical pathway' to health impact; however, evidence is limited. Our retrospective study of volunteer experiences and perceived impacts drew on an understanding of the potential health benefits arising from volunteering. Being a volunteer is associated with lower risk of mortality (Jenkinson *et al.* 2013), improved physical and mental health (Von Bonsdorff and Rantanen 2011, Tabassum *et al.* 2016), increased life satisfaction (Jones *et al.* 2016, Yeung *et al.* 2017) and reduced incidence of depression (Jenkinson *et al.* 2013, Yeung *et al.* 2017). Much of the literature on health benefits is focused on older people (Tabassum *et al.* 2016) and the effects of formal or regular volunteering, while less is known about episodic volunteering, such as event volunteering (Hyde *et al.* 2014, Yeung *et al.* 2017). There are also questions about inequalities in who volunteers (Southby and South 2016) and whether being healthy is a determinant of volunteering or an outcome (Nazroo and Matthews 2012, Jenkinson *et al.* 2013).

Volunteering should not therefore be viewed in isolation, because it is a form of civic engagement that is both affected by socioeconomic conditions and offers a means to mitigate them (Southby and South 2016). This may occur, for example, through volunteering leading to increased skills, employment or social integration (Flanagan and Sadowksi 2011). In terms of the social determinants of health, there is a complex relationship between social capital, area inequalities and health (Walsh *et al.* 2015), which is likely to affect volunteer participation and impacts. Gathering lay perspectives on volunteering journeys (Milligan *et al.* 2011) is therefore essential for critical exploration of the interplay between the individual, community context and the wider determinants of health (Trickett *et al.* 2011). This fits with the emerging research agenda around geographies of volunteering, described by Skinner and Power (2011) as the 'trinity' of the 'multifaceted and interdependent nature of voluntarism, health and place' (p. 3). As this study illustrates, this has particular resonance when exploring volunteerism in the context of a mega-event hosted in

Glasgow, a city facing economic and health challenges (Walsh *et al.* 2015)

Study context

Greater Glasgow is Scotland's largest settlement (National Records of Scotland 2018) and its biggest and fastest-growing city economy (BBC 2017). The local authority has Scotland's second highest job density (Office for National Statistics 2018), but the rate of adults claiming out-of-work benefits is higher than any other Scottish city (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, undated). Deprivation, poverty and deindustrialisation continue to be key drivers of poor health (Walsh *et al.* 2016), despite extensive physical, economic and social renewal (Crawford *et al.* 2007). This is illustrated by the high concentration of deprivation; almost half of the population live in an area defined as the 20% most deprived in Scotland (National Statistics 2016).

In July 2014, Glasgow hosted the 20th Commonwealth Games. The event brought nearly 5,000 athletes from 71 competing nations to Scotland, as well as over 18,000 volunteers and 700,000 visitors (Yates and Jones 2016). City-wide (Glasgow City Council 2009) and national (Scottish Government 2009) frameworks were developed to track several outcomes, and volunteers were deemed a central part of the Games experience, both in ensuring its delivery and contributing directly to legacy. To this end, over 12,500 applicants were appointed to participate in the clyde-sider volunteer programme. The programme was delivered within a context of low volunteering rates in Glasgow compared to the national average, which was compounded by particularly low rates in the most deprived parts of the city (Scottish Government 2016). Volunteering rates in Glasgow are also significantly lower than Manchester and Liverpool, which have similar levels of deprivation but lower levels of mortality (Walsh *et al.* 2013). The delivery of a successful volunteering programme, therefore, provided an opportunity to support a broader legacy from the Games (Scottish Government 2009, Glasgow City Council 2009).

Between 2014 and 2016, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) undertook research to generate learning on the delivery and expectations, experiences and impacts of the clyde-sider volunteering programme. The clyde-sider study included three quantitative elements; a baseline survey issued in September 2013 (Jones and Yates 2015), a follow up in November 2014 (Yates and Jones 2016) and a second follow up in July 2016 (Yates and Jones 2017). All clyde-sider applicants were invited to participate in the baseline questionnaire. In total, 7,722 unique responses were received from over 50,000 applicants, achieving a response rate of 15%.

Available demographic data on applicants show that just 29% went on to become clyde-siders. Volunteer applicants were more likely to be female than male (62% vs. 38%) and just over a quarter (26%) came from Glasgow. The rest came from other parts of Scotland (42%), the rest of the UK (30%) or out-with the UK (2%). Applicants represented a spread of ages, but were most common from young people (age 16–24). Findings from a post-Games survey and a two year follow up (Yates and Jones 2016, 2017) show that being a clyde-sider was largely a positive experience, and there was recognition for the role that Glasgow played in delivering the Games. An additional qualitative research study, which is reported here, was commissioned to allow processes, experiences and impacts that were not captured by these three surveys to be explored, including in what ways social context and place shaped how the Games were experienced.

Methods

Qualitative approaches enable exploration of an array of dimensions concerning the social world, including people's understandings and experiences and the way that social processes, institutions and relationships work (Mason 2002). In this study, focus group discussions were the primary method as they allowed clyde-siders (referred to here as Games volunteers) and applicants who had been not been selected (referred to as Games applicants) to discuss their experiences in a comfortable and communal environment where group discussion elicited key themes. Ralston *et al.* (2004), in researching the volunteer experience at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, found the focus group effective in mirroring the volunteer experience in terms of being participatory, social and interactive. Others note the challenges of focus groups, particularly where dominant perspectives on volunteering eclipse other viewpoints (Allen and Shaw 2009), although this can be minimised by experienced focus group facilitators (Then *et al.* 2014).

The sampling strategy was developed in collaboration with the GCPH team (RJ, GY) who conducted the volunteer surveys. The first follow-up survey had gathered feedback from a sample of Games volunteers (n = 1,822) and unsuccessful applicants (n = 896). Respondents who opted into a question on willingness to participate in future research activities became part of the sampling frame for this qualitative study. Purposive sampling techniques were then employed to obtain a maximum variation sample (Patton 2002) that broadly reflected the socio-demographic profile of Games volunteers and applicants. Criteria included prior volunteer experience, area of residence, age, gender and employment status.

Two-hundred and twenty individuals were invited (via email) to take part in focus group discussions. Participants were recruited exclusively from locations in central Scotland to understand the impact of volunteering on those living in close proximity to Glasgow and surrounding areas. Three cities within Central Scotland (Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling) were selected to host eleven focus group discussions (7 with Games volunteers and 4 with Games applicants). Each focus group was facilitated by two members of the research team and sessions lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. A focus group schedule covered the process of applying to be a volunteer; activities and contributions during the Games; future volunteering intentions; and impacts on health and wellbeing. In total, 41 participants (35 Games volunteers and 6 Games unsuccessful applicants) contributed to discussions.

Following the focus groups, some individual interviews were conducted to broaden the sample where individuals were not able to attend focus group locations due to logistical issues limiting their travel. In order to ensure those participant views were heard in the research an interview, which could be arranged over the telephone, was deemed a pragmatic strategy. Sampling for individual interviews broadly followed a similar purposive strategy, although a greater emphasis was placed on recruiting those from outside of Scotland to add further variation. In total, 12 interviews were conducted (11 Games volunteers and one Games applicant). Seven of these interviews were with Games volunteers from outside of Scotland. All aspects of the study had ethical approval from Leeds Beckett University Ethics Committee. This included approval for all participants to receive a high-street shopping voucher as recognition of their contribution to the study.

Data were analysed using Framework Analysis (Ritchie *et al.* 2003), an analytical approach which has applicability in health as well as social policy research (Gale *et al.* 2013). This was an appropriate analytical method given the applied nature of the study and provided a transparent and structured approach to analysis for the research team. Moreover, the advantage of a Framework approach, and arguably its defining feature, is a matrix-output of the analytical processes (Gale *et al.* 2013). This enables themes to be mapped across the entire data set and also for individual views to be retrieved and retained in context.

All qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and data familiarisation was conducted by the research team (JW, JS, KS, KK, EM). Coding was undertaken having first established a joint coding framework through several team discussions. The coding framework was constructed primarily deductively from a review of the literature (Woodall *et al.* 2015), but

some inductive codes were also established (Gale *et al.* 2013). The matrix comprised four major thematic categories (volunteer journey; volunteer contribution to Games; individual outcomes; wider social impacts) and 22 subthemes. ‘Charting’, whereby summarised data (sometimes direct quotations) are entered into the matrix (Ritchie *et al.* 2003), then took place. Again, this was a collaborative approach across the research team with care taken to summarise but not to ‘fragment’ the data, which can occur when segments of text are divorced from the context in which they were originally stated. The use of a matrix allowed disaggregation of thematic differences and similarities between differing geographical contexts and between volunteers and non-volunteers. The final stage was the development of an explanatory framework that was displayed a simple causal network diagram with accompanying text (Miles *et al.* 2014) to show the non-linear connections between themes grouped around a central concept of people and place (Woodall *et al.* 2015). The focus of this paper is on understanding volunteer contributions and impacts within the city and while all major themes are represented, process issues about the volunteer programme, for example, regarding the training, are not reported here (see Woodall *et al.* 2015).

Findings

The findings are presented under major thematic categories derived through Framework Analysis. There was much consistency in the narratives of both Games volunteers and applicants, although data from volunteers inevitably reflected a broader range of experiences. Cross-cutting issues are illustrated with quotations from both groups. Themes reflect the non-linear nature of links between journey, contribution, impacts and context.

Volunteer journey

The analysis revealed common motivations for applying to volunteer at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, and some differences. Many Games volunteers reported enjoying previous sports volunteering experiences, at mega-events or more frequently at local sports clubs, whereas most Games applicants in our sample had limited prior volunteering experiences. One prominent theme was the opportunity to help raise their country’s profile and to participate in a unique and prestigious event that was unlikely to return to Scotland during their lifetime:

“Volunteering at the Commonwealth Games is once in a lifetime, you don’t know when the next time the Commonwealth Games is going to come to Scotland”
(Games volunteer, FG1)

“I thought it would be a nice thing to sort of stand up for my country and show people from all over the world that we’re a friendly bunch.” (Games applicant, FG8)

Many had also been inspired by watching the London 2012 Olympics and the central role that the volunteers (the ‘Games Makers’) played at this event. Some motivations varied according to the demographic characteristics of respondents. Several younger participants volunteered at the Games to enhance their employability, whereas other individuals who had retired from work were motivated to apply as they were able to devote time and often had the financial resources to participate fully in the Games.

To support the delivery of the Games, successful applicants were assigned to one of a number of diverse volunteer roles. Participants reported different experiences depending on their role, for example, some were ‘public facing’ – advising or signposting spectators, or working alongside athletes and officials – while others were working ‘behind the scenes’, often in communications or logistic roles. Despite describing some challenges, including long shifts, early morning travel difficulties, financial pressures and the time commitment to being a volunteer, all volunteers enjoyed their experience of supporting the Games:

“It was fantastic. We were doing, it’s silly, I think I did over a hundred hours in ten days and that was my holiday . . . We were absolutely shattered physically but boy, it was great, it was great.” (Games volunteer, FG6)

Volunteer contribution

Participants were clear that overall the Games volunteers added an important dimension to the Games and brought commitment, energy and enthusiasm. Within their respective roles, volunteers were seen as bringing experience and skills, as volunteers frequently transferred skills from their professional background, such as communication skills, to benefit the Games:

“I mean I had been a teacher, so I am used to dealing with people and used to speaking to people.” (Games volunteer, FG1)

The local knowledge of some volunteers was also seen as a key asset and many of those interviewed from Glasgow and the surrounding areas felt strongly that they contributed an understanding of geographical knowledge of the area. In one focus group discussion, Games volunteers queried why people without local knowledge were selected to be volunteers:

“Those people came to the city, and knew nothing about the city. So when people asked them questions, they didn’t know. They didn’t know anything about the city. So they might be at a clyde-sider venue, and they

say, ‘Well, how do I get to Canon Street?’ ‘I don’t know where Canon Street is.’” (Games volunteer, FG7)

Individual outcomes

Games volunteers reported a range of positive individual outcomes as a result of their experiences of the Games; some of these outcomes were also reported by Games applicants. Thematic categories covered outcomes derived from the social aspects of participation (increased social networks and experiencing the buzz) and outcomes relating to skills, confidence and employability. There were fewer negative outcomes, although several mentioned the travel and financial impacts associated with taking days off work to volunteer.

A strong cross-cutting theme was the immediate growth of social networks as a result of participation, either as a volunteer, which generally involved an intensive period of meeting people, or through being in the city during the Games. The social networks developed through volunteering included both developing new friendships and ‘bridging’ with others across social and cultural boundaries and also generations:

“We were very much a white community that I’m from. So for these young guys, and even for myself as well, it was the first opportunity to interact with people of different cultures.” (Games volunteer, FG2)

“I think the thing that I enjoyed most: it was working with a whole bunch of young people again because, let’s face it, I’ve got to a stage in life where most of the people that I deal with are probably nearer to my age than the people at the Games, and it was very nice.” (Games volunteer, FG7)

Games applicants also reported that having the Games in the city provided a stimulus for enhanced social connections:

“ . . . certainly meeting people that I wouldn’t normally meet, that was a large part of it; a different social group.” (Games applicant, FG3)

The sense of euphoria from participating as a Games volunteer provided a ‘feel good’ factor. A year post event, both Games volunteers and applicants spoke of the ‘buzz’ and energy within the city and the impact that it had on people’s attitudes and behaviours:

“ . . . just getting the atmosphere and the buzz in the city, getting some photographs of folk from other countries and such like. It was great, it was really nice.” (Games applicant, FG10)

A common theme was how participation at the Games had increased volunteers’ confidence, especially in relation to interpersonal communication. For some, volunteering had changed their outlook and given them confidence to try new things. This was exemplified by one response:

“I wouldn’t say that I was lacking in confidence, but more of a boost to stick my fingers in all the pies and try more things that are out of my comfort zone a bit more.” (Games volunteer, FG7)

Many Games volunteers spoke of gaining practical knowledge and skills through their volunteer role – skills which they anticipated transferring into other aspects of their life. For example, gaining insight into event management was reported by several volunteers. Volunteers who were unemployed or in education viewed the experience as beneficial for their future job prospects, and something that could be added to their CV. Transferable skills were seen to aid employability:

“I was at a job interview this morning; I’ve been looking for a job for the past few months since I’ve graduated . . . I can bring up so many examples [from her experience of volunteering at the Games] . . . like the way you’re negotiating with people, talking with people, meeting clients’ needs” (Games volunteer, FG7)

Games applicants also highlighted the positives from applying to be a volunteer:

“So even having got through the application process and then getting to the stage of interview was just quite good – knowing that my application was successful and getting through to the interview.” (Games applicant, FG3).

Wider social outcomes

In the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked to reflect on the wider impacts of volunteering. Discussions often broadened out from the focus on event volunteering, to more general experiences of ‘being there’ in the host city and the collective impact of hosting the Games. The main thematic categories were: future volunteering intentions; pride and social cohesion in the city; and economic impacts.

The experience of being involved in the Games (either as a Games volunteer or applicant) typically stimulated interest in, and actual, future volunteering participation. Some individuals were keen to volunteer again at mega-sporting events (particularly the Olympics and Commonwealth Games) but explained that the personal costs in terms of travel and accommodation would be prohibitive. While Games applicants were not deterred from volunteering in the future, several described being put-off volunteering at mega-sporting events because of the lack of feedback on their application.

In describing motivations for future volunteering, an altruistic sense of ‘giving back’ could be more important than participating in a mega-event. Those individuals who had subsequently volunteered after the Games volunteered in their local communities in non-sporting contexts, such as food bank provision or environmental projects. Volunteering in any form was

described as being an important route to contribute positively to society:

“So there is that sense of doing it because you are giving back and contributing in a positive way to society, the community, and enhancing people’s lives around you, which is a good feeling. That’s worth getting out of bed for in the morning, rather than just a paycheque.” (Games volunteer, FG2)

Several older volunteers had found the experience of participating in the Games highly worthwhile and anticipated that volunteering would become a more integral aspect of their retirement going forward:

“Yes, it’s just to be able to commit to something later on in my life, when I do make retirement. I want to have a fulfilling life after I’ve retired from work as well, and you can do that through the volunteering.” (Games volunteer, FG2)

A strong cross-cutting theme was how volunteering, and more generally public engagement during the Games, had increased pride and social cohesion in the city. Both Games volunteers and applicants suggested that the reputation of the city had been enhanced, in part, by the volunteers and the role they played in showcasing Glasgow to a global audience. Some argued that this had gone some way to creating a more positive identity for the city and dispelling negative stereotypes:

“I think the reputation of the city has grown and changed as well . . . Nobody sees Glasgow with the same look they used to. It used to be sniggered at . . . Now it’s, Glasgow, oh yeah, they were fabulous in the Games. It’s a different attitude.” (Games volunteer, FG11)

“I suppose just very proud that we carried it off in a way, as a city We were the sick man of Europe and had a dreadful reputation for our health and suddenly we’re a sporting city.” (Games applicant, FG3)

A greater sense of community spirit and cohesion both during the Games and for a period of time after the Games were reported. Having spontaneous conversations with strangers or helping tourists get to a location were examples of the changing atmosphere in the city:

“What was really interesting, was you had conversations . . . I mean, I had conversations with the police. Not that I don’t have conversations with the police. But there was one example, where people had conversations with people who they would never normally have a conversation with.” (Games volunteer, FG2).

“I think that it was the people of Glasgow, and the sunshine obviously, but it was the people of Glasgow that really embraced the whole everything that was there, and the atmosphere. It really was that that made a huge, huge difference.” (Games applicant, FG10)

Some longer-term effects were noted, for example, it was suggested that for a month after the Games, the

city remained a friendlier place to live and work. One participant spoke of how being a volunteer at the Games was an affirmation of his sense of belonging in the city:

“I’d say it’s made it feel more like home to me, not living here. I mean, I’ve been here ten years now but I wouldn’t say I didn’t feel at home but I was always an outsider. Now, knowing that I was part of it and helped make it what it was, I consider it home now.” (Games volunteer, FG11)

Together with more positive social conditions in the city, some participants discussed positive economic impacts. The way in which the volunteers represented the city and made visitors welcome was described as a contribution that could stimulate future tourism:

“I think we’re [the volunteers] a good advertisement for Scotland. I think folk who were at the Games helped to make the Games what they were and hopefully that will help the tourism for Scotland . . . It might not be a direct impact but you know folk who’ve gone are bound to go back saying, gosh they’re really friendly in Scotland.” (Games volunteer, FG 6).

Discussion

This study sought to understand volunteer experiences and impacts 1 year on from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, with a focus on understanding how volunteering might impact on health and wider determinants of health. Preuss (2015) argues that assessing legacy from mega-events needs to take account of who is affected, how and when, in relation to the quality of life in a city or region. Although this study took only two groups of stakeholders, Games volunteers and unsuccessful Games applicants, both groups were in a good position to assess those aspects and were able to identify wider effects in the city as well as more personal benefits associated directly with being a volunteer.

In line with other volunteering studies (O’Brien *et al.* 2010, Mundle *et al.* 2012, Jenkinson *et al.* 2013, Morrow-Howell *et al.* 2014), the reported wellbeing benefits included enjoyment, increased social connections, increased confidence, broadened experience and skills. This qualitative study confirms findings of the post-Games surveys (Yates and Jones 2016, 2017), which show that being a clyde-sider was rewarding for most volunteers, who reported feeling proud and grateful to have been part of a successful event. The acquisition of skills and experience may be particularly helpful for younger volunteers or those not in work, although they may not have access to the same resources to support volunteering (Nichols and Ralston 2016). Increased employability through volunteering is one potential pathway to health impact (Mccartney *et al.* 2013), and an outcome that has particular relevance given some of the economic

drivers of poor health in Glasgow. Interestingly, unsuccessful applicants also saw the recruitment process as useful. This contrasts with the findings of Holmes *et al.* (2018) who found that a ‘top down program management’ approach to volunteer recruitment and preparation prior to the London 2012 Olympics could be off-putting and lead to some applicants withdrawing. Overall, there was a consensus amongst study participants that volunteering at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games was beneficial for those involved, and very few negative impacts were reported. Notwithstanding the variation in individual-level impacts, the findings support Tomazo and Luke’s (2015) argument that the mega-event volunteering brings valuable experience, which for some people is transformative.

Volunteer perspectives in this study provide some limited evidence that mega-sporting events have the potential to affect wider determinants of population health in an urban area, notably through community volunteering, a renewed sense of pride in the city and greater social cohesion. This mirrors the clyde-sider survey findings where most Games volunteers felt that the Games had been positive for Glasgow and Scotland, particularly in relation to the atmosphere, the cultural transformation and the sense of togetherness that developed throughout the city (Yates and Jones 2018). As other literature on mega-event volunteering suggests (Baum and Lockstone 2007, Nichols and Ralston 2011, Wilks 2016), there was evidence of enhanced social capital, particularly in terms of increased social networks, shared identity and a commitment to further volunteering. These were not exclusively identified as outcomes of volunteering, but also as integral to the experience of being in the city during that period. Indeed, study participants talked considerably more about their affinity with Glasgow than they did about the sport or the staging of the Games. In keeping with May’s study of Paralympic volunteers in London (May 2017), taking part led to increased bridging social capital, with greater awareness of other social groups, cultures and needs. The follow-up study of the Glasgow Host City Volunteer programme similarly found what the authors termed ‘intangible benefits’ of civic pride, greater awareness of the community and feeling more socially connected (Rogerson *et al.* 2018, 2019).

A distinctive contribution of this study is the inclusion of a limited sample of unsuccessful applicants, as there is scant research exploring the views of those unable to volunteer (Fairley *et al.* 2016). It has been suggested that the experience of being an unsuccessful applicant may result in disillusionment and act as a barrier to future volunteering (Koutrou *et al.* 2016). In contrast, study applicants talked positively about the Games and expressed frustration only with the application process. Findings from the clyde-sider

survey, where positive outcomes in relation to volunteering were more common for Games volunteers 2-years post Games, also showed that not being selected did not decrease future volunteering, but rather, many chose to pursue local forms of volunteering instead (Yates and Jones 2017). The qualitative sampling strategy was designed to provide a counterbalance to what we expected would be broadly positive views of the volunteering experience. We were therefore surprised by the consistency of themes across groups. While those who did volunteer described more intensive experiences and associated impacts, many similar themes also emerged in interviews with unsuccessful Games applicants, with outcomes reported in relation to the experience of applying to be a volunteer and being a resident during the Games. With small numbers, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. Overall, qualitative findings illustrate the need for caution in attributing positive impacts exclusively to mega-event volunteering, in the linear way in which it is often described, as this may not show the whole picture.

People and place

In developing the final analytical framework (Miles *et al.* 2014), what became a more convincing explanation, and one that was consistent with the data, was that event volunteering needed to be seen in relation to civic

participation within the city. This ranged from the formal volunteer (clyde-sider) roles, through to more informal pro-social action, such as connecting informally with others. See Figure 1 for a representation of this analytic framework organised around the central theme of 'People and Place'. For many study participants, civic participation was linked to the place and a heightened sense of shared identity in the city during and immediately after the Games. The connection between volunteering, collective identity and other forms of civic participation is an important finding. Interestingly, and despite the markedly different context, this mirrors the conclusions of a study of event volunteering in a small community in Norway (Kristiansen *et al.* 2015). It also complements research on Glasgow Host City Volunteer programme (Rogerson *et al.* 2018, 2019). The implications are that mega-event volunteering is shaped by the socio-geographic context in which it takes place. The social context of city life in Glasgow was not a backdrop but a factor in people's motivations, their participation and how they perceived impacts. This fits with a social determinants of health perspective on volunteering (McCartney *et al.* 2013), linked to the geographies of volunteering (Skinner and Power 2011) and the wider value of citizen participation in strategies to improve urban health (Patrick *et al.* 2016). A further point is the non-linear nature of impacts; Games volunteers and applicants contributed to the collective ethos of a welcoming city and derived benefits from it.



Figure 1. People and place – an analytic framework.

The study findings have relevance to those planning large-scale cultural or sporting events and to local and regional government, as hosting mega-events is often linked to the achievement of wider social and economic goals. The construct of 'people and place' positions the contribution of volunteering within the context of city life during and after the event. The implications for practice are around broadening the range of opportunities for people to contribute and highlighting the value of informal acts of citizenship that create a collective ethos, alongside the formal roles. This fits with recommendations emerging from the Glasgow Host City Volunteer programme on the need for legacy planning to address how long-term social outcomes will be supported (Rogerson *et al.* 2019). Local knowledge of a host city should be deemed an important asset in recruitment campaigns. Furthermore, the study shows that volunteers can have a role in articulating the identity of people and place to a broader audience. This suggests gathering volunteer perspectives is a critical process in planning and promoting events. In developing frameworks for evaluation of mega-events, a more integrated assessment of the impacts and benefits of event volunteering is called for.

Limitations

This study confirms the value of qualitative research examining volunteering in context, using a social determinants lens to explore impacts. While the timing of the study, 1-year post-Games, enabled participants to assess their experiences retrospectively, it may have meant that negative experiences were less prominent. It was not possible to compare to any qualitative data on early experiences, and this limitation highlights the value of qualitative longitudinal research with volunteers (May 2017). A strength of the study design was the variation in the sample and the strategy of including unsuccessful applicants, which is rare in volunteering research. There were undoubted challenges in recruiting non-volunteers for a retrospective study, and only a small number ($n = 7$) took part. This could be due to feeling less inclined or motivated having been not selected to volunteer at the Games. Nonetheless, this element provided some useful points of contrast and helped build explanations that went beyond event experiences. The sample frame was limited to individuals who had already committed to taking part in further research and these groups may have had more pro-social views from the wider cohort of volunteers/applicants. Gathering more detailed information on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample would have been useful in interpreting findings.

Transferability cannot be claimed as this was a unique setting for volunteering. Indeed, a key

message from study participants was that the city had special social assets that could be contrasted with a more negative image of Glasgow. The outsider position of an English research team potentially could have led to more public accounts, nevertheless, participants offered us rich descriptions of how they perceived the place and social fabric, often gaining agreement with others within focus groups. It was difficult to distinguish impacts arising from the event and the specific outcomes arising from volunteering, as discussed earlier. Nonetheless, the study raises important themes about place and identity that may have resonance in other urban contexts where major cultural or sporting events take place. The broad range of reported benefits mostly related to individual (subjective) wellbeing and wider determinants of health, such as social cohesion. In contrast, and despite the explicit aims to examine health impact, the study generated very little evidence on individual health benefits, such improved physical and mental health, suggested by other literature (Von Bonsdorff and Rantanen 2011, Jenkinson *et al.* 2013, Tabassum *et al.* 2016, Yeung *et al.* 2017). Further research on the wider health and social impacts of mega-event volunteering on a host population is indicated and on population groups that may have different experiences of participation and non-participation.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the interplay between social context, volunteerism and impacts in relation to the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. As stakeholders in this mega-event, and by all accounts engaged citizens, study participants provided valuable insights into individual benefits of volunteering and wider social impacts. In particular, exploring the perspectives of unsuccessful applicants, albeit with limitations in terms of sample size, adds to a scant literature about non-participation. Overall, the findings contribute to an evidence base that attempts to critically assess positive and negative health impacts of mega-events. What is most significant here are the mechanisms through which event volunteering might lead to improved community conditions in the host city. In this study, the place was a more critical factor than the sport in shaping volunteer experiences. Moreover, event volunteering was only part of the picture, as the active engagement of citizens in city life during the mega-event also enhanced social connections. In describing a non-linear relationship between volunteer contributions, impacts and rewards in the context of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, the

emergent explanatory account presented here provides a potential framework for future investigation in other contexts. Overall, the implications are that people and place need to be considered together when planning how events will add to city life and when studying the health and social impacts of mega-event volunteering.

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