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### Delivering sports participation legacies at the grassroots level

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**Article Title:** Delivering Sports Participation Legacies at the Grassroots Level: The Voluntary Sports Clubs of Glasgow 2014

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### **Abstract**

Voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) provide the primary opportunities for organised community sport in the UK and thus hold the responsibility for delivering on mega-event sports participation legacies. This study presents findings from open-ended questionnaires and interviews conducted in two phases (Phase 1 – Spring, 2013; Phase 2 – Summer, 2015) with representatives from a sample (n=39) of VSCs to understand their ability to deliver on the participation legacy goals of London 2012 and the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Thematic analysis of the data outlined three themes where support for VSCs should be placed when planning future mega-events: building VSC capacity; retaining members in the long-term; and general visibility of the VSC throughout the event. Bid teams who hope to use mega-events as catalysts for sports participation increases should direct funding and guidance towards VSCs to ensure they have the tools, knowledge and capacity to deliver on national sports participation ambitions.

**Keywords:** community sport, mega-events legacy, Olympic Games, sport clubs, sports participation, volunteers

In the lead up to the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland ('G2014'), the Games organisers held aspirations for positive post-Games legacies to be sustained in terms of national health, fitness and sports participation rates. As with most mega-events of recent decades, the Scottish nation sought to make the most of their opportunities as hosts by securing an 'active' legacy, as outlined by the Scottish Government Legacy Plan which explicitly aimed to 'increase physical activity and participation in sport' as a result of G2014 (Scottish Government, 2014, p.64). In 2010 Glasgow City Council published the *Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Sustainability Plan*, which set out the ways through which the council would attempt to ensure G2014 was managed sustainably to maximise the 'potential positive impact' of the Games (Glasgow City Council, 2010). As part of this, the Council had a vision to enhance the health of the nation by using G2014 "as a catalyst to inspire people" to develop healthy and active lifestyles (Glasgow City Council, 2010). Glasgow has some of the worst figures in the UK for health and life-expectancy (McCartney, Hanlon, & Bond, 2013). In particular, the sub-area of Glasgow, Dalmarnock, which hosted the main events of G2014, was shown by Shaw, Smith, and Dorling (2005) to have the lowest life expectancy in the UK. In 2010 the Office for National Statistics outlined that, for Scotland as a whole, men had an average life expectancy of 75.4 years and women had an expectancy of 80.1, but for Glasgow residents the average life expectancy figures only reached 71.1 years for men and 77.5 years for women (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Glasgow's poor life expectancy rate has been linked by researchers to wide-ranging factors such as general socio-economic deprivation, Vitamin D deficiencies, diet and physical inactivity (Ahmed et al, 2011; Graham, 2009). Notably, Glasgow City Council's Sustainability Plan stressed that the "inspirational impact of the event itself", as well as the improved sports facilities on offer as a result of the regeneration put in place through the Games, would result in an improvement to the health of

Glasgow’s residents, particularly in relation to sports participation rates (Glasgow City Council, 2010).

Yet, with regards to this health legacy objective, this Sustainability Plan fails to account for the research (Weed et al., 2009) which has shown that a health and participation legacy cannot be guaranteed as a direct result of staging an event such as the Commonwealth Games. Rather, steps need to be taken by local voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) to ensure they make the most of the general rise in sport interest and capitalise on this (Coalter, 2007; McCartney et al., 2010a; McCartney et al., 2010b; McCartney, Hanlon, & Bond, 2013). There is thus often a reliance on VSCs to deliver on these types of participation legacies, as it is they that are at the forefront of sport at the grassroots level in the UK. However, research has shown that VSCs can differ in their commitment and ability to deliver on—and also their knowledge of—policy directed sports participation goals (May, Harris, & Collins, 2013). Therefore, this study investigated the experiences of VSCs in Glasgow, before, during and after key mega-events, with a focus on the impact of both the 2012 London Olympics and, in particular, Glasgow 2014. Data were collected through a mixture of open-ended questionnaires and interviews conducted with key representatives from 39 semi-formal VSCs, to understand their ability and commitment to deliver on the participation legacy goals of mega-events. The research findings identified key areas where focus should be placed when planning for any form of sports participation legacy from future mega-events, namely VSC capacity, tools for retaining new members, and visibility of the VSCs.

In the UK, as Reid (2012) has stressed, most organised sport takes place through a voluntary sports club. These VSCs are accredited by or linked to their sport’s National Governing Body (NGB): a non-profit organisation with responsibility for managing amateur and professional sports and the public funds allocated to these sports to encourage development (Pappous & Hayday, 2015). While informal participation, physical recreation

and private gym memberships are separate to the VSC system, all national and international sports—with recognised NGBs—have and need VSCs at their grassroots level to obtain and retain members locally and encourage progression and development to elite level. Though some government funding is provided to the NGBs of the various sports in Britain and this can be disseminated to VSCs, they survive through membership payments and the use of primarily volunteer—rather than paid—staff at the local community clubs (Reid, 2012). What’s more, as Taylor, Barrett, and Nichols (2009) note, due to being chiefly staffed by volunteers, British VSCs offer an extremely low-cost way of engaging in organised sport and are therefore some of the best ways to provide those in deprived localities with access to participation. Altering club membership levels are also a straightforward way to monitor impact of mega-sporting events in terms of their ability to inspire a rise in participation for the sports they showcase. Following G2014 the national agency for sport in Scotland, SportScotland (2015), released figures showing that between 2011 and 2015 there was an 11% increase in overall memberships (junior and senior) of the 17 Commonwealth Games sports, with sports such as netball (58% rise), triathlon (49% rise), and gymnastics (37% rise) seeing clear improvements. Club memberships were used by SportScotland as a way of measuring and reporting impact on participation levels, thus justifying the focus on VSCs in the present study. But given the importance of VSCs in helping encourage sport participation legacies, it is vital that there is a review of their ability to achieve this, and the areas that they feel they need support in to be able to deliver.

This study was initiated in Spring 2013, where the “Phase 1” data were collected, with follow-up “Phase 2” data collected in Summer 2015: the overall findings from both Phases are presented here together. The research aims and objectives overlapped between Phase 1 and Phase 2, but there were specific themes linked to each of these stages which were investigated through open-ended questionnaires and interviews. Phase 1 of data collection—

in Spring 2013—aimed to investigate: what the impact of London 2012 was; whether Glasgow’s clubs were able to cope with a similar spike in sports participation interest in the past; and how prepared Glasgow’s sports clubs were capacity-wise for the possible ‘spike’ that might follow G2014, and which had been witnessed at similar events (Brown, Massey, & Porter, 2004). Phase 2 of the data collection—in Summer 2015—looked into how G2014 affected clubs in terms of participation patterns, and the lessons learned from their experiences with regard to how to prepare for future mega-events. The results and recommendations will have relevance to sport policy makers who rely on the cooperation of VSCs to deliver their aims.

### **Literature Review**

Over the past few decades there has been some limited research into the impact of mega-sporting events upon general sports participation rates. The evidence suggests that mega-sporting events produce little sustained increase in sports participation in the host nation or city, however the exception would be the spike in participation rates, where a rise is witnessed but seldom sustained (Weed et al., 2009). The “trickle-down effect” is frequently referred to in discussions of the impact of mega-sporting events: it is used to describe the theory that extensive sports coverage in the media can “trickle-down” to the general public and inspire them to get involved in sport (Hogan & Norton, 2000). Yet, Weed et al. (2009) have shown that the evidence base for the existence of a trickle-down effect is extremely mixed. As Grix and Carmichael (2012) have argued, though governments view mega-events chiefly as a way of bolstering their international image in the “sporting arms race”, enhanced domestic sport participation levels are still heralded as a primary output, despite the evidence for this being fragmentary (Grix & Carmichael, 2012, p.86). Hindson, Gidlo, and Peebles (1994) questioned the trickle-down effect through their case-study of the Olympics and

stressed that the effect was not clear or certain, but that if development strategies are forged to the event a positive impact can, sometimes, be witnessed. Studies by Murphy and Bauman (2007) and Pappous (2011) recorded decreases in participation amongst certain groups following the Olympics in Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 respectively. Craig and Bauman (2014) examined children’s physical activity levels before and after the Vancouver Winter Olympics and saw no measurable impact on the exercise or sport participation of this group after the event. Other studies (Frawley & Cush, 2011; Veal, Toohey, & Frawley, 2012) have recorded positive impacts on sports participation rates following events, particularly rates amongst children. Thus, with the evidence for the trickle-down effect being patchy at best, the “festival” effect was proposed as an alternative model (Coalter, 2007; Weed et al., 2009; McCartney et al., 2013).

During mega-events we often witness the festival effect—where hosting a mega-sports event increases the festival atmosphere and profile of sport in the host nation—and if this is combined with appropriate marketing and strategic planning by VSCs it can be used as a catalyst to increase overall sports participation (Weed et al., 2009). McCartney et al. (2013) also note that two further factors may encourage participation rates: the new facilities and infrastructure that develop as a result of staging the games, and sports participation legacy programmes. It is the latter of these effects that is of most interest here, as a review of the research to date showed that if sports participation legacies were to be an aim of the event then sports development legacy programmes had to be in place to “catch” and retain the individuals inspired to take part in physical activity (Brown et al., 2004). Therefore, this suggests that the festival effect must be combined with marketing and club development strategies to encourage any sustained improvement in sports participation rates, and voluntary sports clubs would play a large role in helping to achieve this. Of course, a major issue in relation to this is that of who is responsible for delivering sports targets on the ground and the



quality of the sports infrastructure they engage with, as British sport is still largely built around a system of voluntarism at the grassroots club level.

Girginov and Hills (2008) have argued that achieving some form of participation legacy is possible but only if the government and event organising bodies direct sport development appropriately through supplying funds and guidance. The participants in Frawley and Cush’s (2011) study into the 2003 Rugby World Cup stressed that the rising registrations for rugby post event could only be sustained through increased investment in development programmes for the sport. Taks, Green, Misener, and Chalip (2014) evaluated the Pan American Junior Athletics Championships and their findings only further stressed the need to examine the processes through which legacy can potentially be reached, in order to assess the efficacy of present structures and programmes in achieving this task. Charlton’s (2010) research into the potential impact of London 2012 stressed that community sports clubs would struggle to deliver on the participation legacies that had been set out. This was an area of focus for Pappous and Hayday (2015), who studied the impact of London 2012 on participation in fencing and judo in England and indicated that grassroots VSCs play a key role in encouraging post event participation. They have argued that communication should be improved between the head office staff of the NGB and the local clubs to help them build in a way that will allow them to capitalise on the event, for example through marketing and media (Pappous & Hayday, 2015). Therefore, when researching participation legacies our attention should certainly be directed towards VSCs and their ability to deliver on participation goals, and so this was the focus of this study.

Jarvie (2003) has stressed that when thinking about the possibilities for enhancing social capital and community engagement through sport we must first deal with issues of ownership and “obligations” felt by those within this field. This is particularly the case when dealing with participation legacies and understanding who takes ownership for delivering

policy objectives on the ground. The concept of community itself also requires definition. Krieger (2000) refers to “imagined” and “actual” communities, and Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell (2008) have suggested that communities need not refer to one geographical place but more to a collection of ties and social connections that bind people together or indeed, through the darker aspects of bonding social capital, restrict some others from joining the folds of these communities.

In the case of the sports clubs which were the focus in this research, all representatives tended to show a connection to their immediate geographical club area within the city, referring to the “east of the city” as their community (Club 1 Interview, 2015) or noting their “community” to be the suburb their club operated out of (Club 2 Interview, 2013). But there was also recognition that people came from further afield to join the clubs and they were very welcome to do so. Thus in these clubs this was more of an “imagined” community created by the ties and loyalty members had with the club and not necessarily their personal ties to the locality itself, suggesting potential for the development of bridging social capital (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008). Establishing whether this feeling of loyalty is to the club only or is open to the wider community as a whole is important here when dealing with issues of policy delivery and attempts at the ground level to enhance sports participation numbers in response to government aims. If a club has its own interests at heart, but nevertheless does not want to—or feels it is too much work—to grow its numbers, there is little hope for this club contributing to the delivery of government objectives in terms of growing participation rates in sport. There is also little hope for developing the bridging form of social capital that helps to eradicate social exclusion by welcoming newcomers into community sport environments (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). If clubs do not want to grow their numbers or become more inclusive, there is little chance of them contributing to the key government aim of bringing all members of communities closer together.

Community investment in sport development, and links between VSCs and their communities, are key themes for investigation here. Vail (2007) has argued in her research into community development that sustained impact and development occurs when a “community champion” is involved in directing the process, rather than an independent sports development officer who may be viewed as an outsider parachuting in to make changes in the community. Vail argues that the community champion may be someone who is already a club committee member or key volunteer within the club setting, and with their approval and backing the project will take root sustainably. Similarly Hylton and Totten (2008) have suggested that when a community feels empowered to take on and personalise a project for their own local enhancement, this may have much more of an effect than a top-down approach. Thus, the strength of the links between VSCs and the communities they engage with are key components when investigating mega-event participation legacies, given the importance of VSCs in delivering on these types of legacy aims.

Studies by Doherty, Misener, and Cuskelly (2014) have outlined some of the key issues that VSCs are faced with when trying to build capacity, as well as best practice for building capacity, such as ‘shared values’ of volunteers, the constant focus on recruitment as well as retention of volunteers, and succession of volunteers to ensure they can be replaced if they decide to leave. This research has enhanced our understanding of the pressures VSCs face, and though Millar and Doherty (2016, p.2) have proposed a model which they suggest can be used to “measure, predict and explain (in)effective capacity building”, a key part of this is club willingness to grow and readiness to build their capacity. A focus of the present study was to investigate the need and willingness for capacity building in the sampled VSCs, building on the Canadian research by Doherty et al. (2014).

As Nichols, Padmore, Taylor, and Barrett (2012) have argued, any study that looks at delivery of policy objectives on the ground through club sport must establish the types of

clubs under scrutiny, for example their size, level of “formality”, and how this impacts upon their desire and ability to work towards policy goals from above. Nichols et al. have shown that clubs can be clustered by level of formality, and this is a useful tool by which to decipher which clubs will be receptive to guidance from local or national government, and who will be willing to help progress policy aims, such as raising participation rates. In their study of policy delivery at the ground level in England, May et al. (2013) showed how the informal and semi-formal sports clubs in their study often had little or no knowledge of current policy objectives, though some of the more formal clubs had general ideas in terms of enhancing participation levels.

In the context of G2014 the semi-formal clubs that were targeted for this research certainly had some awareness of the general aims that the Scottish Government had for health, participation and urban regeneration legacies, but the clubs’ support, and the degree to which they were willing to contribute to these policy aims differed in accordance with their individual club aims and ambitions. It was not so clear cut in terms of larger, more formal clubs were willing to develop the policy aims and smaller more traditional clubs were not, rather even some larger accredited clubs were still unwilling to become more inclusive and in turn enhance their potential membership pool. If the club itself did not want to develop—for example—a junior section, then there was little that could be done in terms of government marketing or encouragement to change this, fundamentally they were a voluntary club and it was their choice. Thus, research to date has shown that participation legacies from mega-events can sometimes be achieved, but the best results come from having successful infrastructure, planning and development at the grassroots level, and in the UK this means VSCs who have the capacity, tools and knowledge to build their own legacy from the grassroots up. The focus of the present study was to investigate the ability of Glasgow’s VSCs to deliver on this.

## Method

This study consisted of two data collection Phases. Phase 1 was conducted in Spring 2013, where open-ended questionnaires were distributed to 36 VSCs and semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives from six of these VSCs. Phase 2 was conducted in Summer 2015, where one face to face interview was carried out and five qualitative open-ended questionnaires were completed by VSC representatives. Three of the clubs were included in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 and so the experiences of a total of 39 VSCs informed the overall findings presented here.

The aims of the research overlapped throughout the two Phases but there were specific areas that were more prominent at each stage. Phase 1 aimed to look into whether or not VSCs in Glasgow were preparing for the 2014 Games, and where the gaps were in terms of club readiness and capacity for welcoming newcomers. Thus Phase 1 looked into: the impact of London 2012 on a sample of Glasgow’s sport clubs to identify what the effects were when a similar (albeit significantly larger scale) mega-sporting event was held within Britain; levels of club awareness and preparation for the spike that might occur post-G2014; and club capacity levels for coping with a large influx of new members. At this stage—Spring 2013—basic analysis was conducted on preliminary findings, and recommendations were made to the local sport development team so they could produce an evidence-based pre-G2014 strategy—the *Get Ready Guide*—and distribute this to clubs in the city (Glasgow Sport, 2013). A more detailed analysis of these initial findings took place in 2015 as part of Phase 2 of the data collection and analysis. Phase 2 of the research occurred in Summer 2015 and involved the collection of qualitative data from 6 VSCs in the Glasgow area to establish the impact of G2014 and their clubs’ experiences of the event in terms of the challenges in delivering a participation legacy.

## **Recruitment and Participants**

As Nichols et al. (2012) have noted, larger, accredited (Clubmark) clubs are often over-represented in research samples. Formal and semi-formal clubs are usually more willing to engage with surveys and research due to having more manpower—and consequently more time to contribute—as well as usually having good relationships with local authorities who might encourage them to participate in such things. Less formal, isolated clubs who are not interested in expanding would understandably be less willing to take part in such research, and indeed this probably means that in any case they will be less inclined to deliver on policy objectives. For this study, clubs were purposively sampled in accordance with guidelines from Curtis, Gesler, Smith, and Washburn (2000) which encourage qualitative purposive sampling to ensure relevancy to the research questions in order to enhance the opportunity for generalisation of the findings. Consequently those clubs who were approached to complete questionnaires and/or in-depth interviews were those that were relatively well established; were already known to the local sport development team; and who were keen to progress. The sample therefore consisted of those who would in theory be the key clubs for developing government policy objectives on the ground through working to enhance their membership, and who would be most likely to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them by an event such as London 2012 or G2014.

For Phase 1, 36 clubs were recruited by the researcher through local sports development contacts and through contacting clubs directly using details on their websites, thus all clubs were those who were at least semi-formal as they had contacts with the local development team and/or an online presence. These clubs were sampled from the 17 Commonwealth Sports of 2014, although responses were not received from clubs offering wrestling, shooting or squash. A few Olympic, but non-Commonwealth, sports clubs (namely rowing and tennis) were also included to gather further evidence of the impact of the 2012

Olympics on clubs in Glasgow, and to assess whether these clubs were expecting any impact from the 2014 Commonwealth Games or developing their clubs nonetheless despite not being one of the 17 sports. From these 36 clubs, representatives from six clubs were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview examining the same themes from the questionnaire in more depth.

Phase 2 of the data collection was conducted post-G2014 in the summer of 2015 and involved one interview and five qualitative open-ended questionnaires with representatives (Head Coach or Club Chairperson) from VSCs. Three of the VSC representatives had already been involved in Phase 1 and the remaining three were new to the study in Phase 2. These three new clubs were purposively sampled through their contact details on their website: they were all semi-formal VSCs who already had a connection to their local sport development team and were one of the key commonwealth sports of 2014. As already noted, these would in theory be the clubs most likely to have the ability and desire to deliver on policy directed participation and legacy goals, and so this was the criteria against which they were selected. All club representatives completed informed consent forms before contributing to any aspect of the data collection process, and anonymity was agreed upon for each of the club representatives who contributed data to the questionnaires or interviews. The club representatives were all either the Club Chairperson or the Head Coach: key figures who had an awareness of membership trends and club development strategies.

### **Data collection:**

For Phase 1, after club representatives had been recruited and informed consent secured, open-ended questionnaires were distributed and completed by the 36 sampled clubs. These questionnaires were distributed personally in hardcopy to the club representatives and via personalised emails with a link to an online version of the questionnaire. Comments were

collected through these questionnaires. Though the questionnaires were open-ended, many of the answers given by the VSCs were similar and so this provided an opportunity for basic descriptive statistics to be generated to outline the general trends in responses. The questionnaires included 15 open-ended questions covering the clubs’ general experiences of London 2012 (general positive or negative impact; membership impact; lessons learned); current club capacity levels; and club planning for G2014. The key theme of capacity issues emerged through the questionnaire responses, as will be seen in the Results, and so this informed some of the focus of the subsequent Phase 1 semi-structured interviews.

Phase 1 also included six semi-structured interviews with club representatives that were conducted after the questionnaires were returned: one of these was conducted via telephone with the others being face-to-face interviews held in a private room at the VSC. The chosen interviewees were made up of a random sample of those club representatives who had completed the questionnaires and were available for interview. Interview questions followed the general themes of the initial questionnaires but allowed for more depth. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Initial themes were recorded at this stage, but the Phase 1 data were analysed again after Phase 2 was conducted so that the evidence and overarching themes could be presented together, given that there was much overlap between themes from the two Phases, as noted below.

Phase 2 of the data collection occurred in Summer 2015, a year after G2014. The VSC representatives were contacted via email and asked to engage in either a face to face interview or an open-ended questionnaire where they could provide detailed responses. These open-ended questionnaires and interviews covered areas such as: preparation or changes made by the club in response to both their London 2012 experience and in preparation for G2014; current club capacity levels and relevant gaps in capacity; lessons learned from G2014. Ten VSC representatives responded positively, however only five actually returned



their questionnaires by the research deadline set, and only one participant agreed to an interview, therefore one interview and five questionnaires were completed in total. The interview was conducted at the representative’s VSC facility and the questionnaires were emailed to respondents with an agreed return date of two weeks’ time via email. A follow up email was sent to encourage responses from those who did not meet the two week deadline, but this did not yield any further questionnaire returns or positive responses for interview. There was an initial assumption by the researcher that the uptake for participation in the interviews would be higher, and this was a limitation of this aspect of the study which could not be rectified in the research period available to the researcher. Nonetheless, the responses via open-ended questionnaire were extremely detailed –with some single answers running to several paragraphs—and thus secured a substantial level of relevant data which could be analysed in conjunction with the Phase 2 interview material and data collected from Phase 1.

### **Data Analysis**

As with Phase 1, the Phase 2 face-to face interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data from Phase 1 and Phase 2 were analysed together after all of the data collection had been carried out. The Phase 1 questionnaires uncovered some key areas and recurring themes: despite being open-ended there was much overlap in the responses given by participants, and so some basic descriptive statistics could be generated at this stage to show common responses. The Phase 1 and Phase 2 interview transcripts and the detailed responses from the five Phase 2 open-ended questionnaires were then analysed line-by-line through inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mathews and Ross, 2010). Initial concepts were identified, which were then reduced down and categorised into key themes. There was much overlap between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 data and, consequently, the overarching themes generated. Therefore, given this overlap between the

themes in the two Phases, in the following results section the questionnaire and interview data from both Phases will be presented together thematically. Within this the interviews and questionnaires can be identified as Phase 1 or Phase 2 by the year they were conducted: 2013 or 2015 respectively.

## Results

### The need to build VSC Capacity

Evidence points to a phenomenon of a spike in participation numbers for many sports immediately following certain mega-events (Weed et al., 2009). Following the London Olympics, in October 2012 the Sport and Recreation Alliance published results of a snapshot survey of volunteers at UK sports clubs. Whilst 69% of surveyed clubs providing Olympic sports had witnessed an increase in people joining, 43% of these clubs stated that they were struggling to meet this increase in demand and thus were seeing a fall-off in numbers, or a “spike” in their participation figures (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2012). Increased running costs, lack of affordable venues/facilities and funding were noted as key reasons why these clubs were struggling to cope with increases in membership numbers. Similarly, in the Phase 1 questionnaires for this project, 50% (18/36 clubs) of sampled VSCs reported that they held “come and try” events to encourage newcomers after the Olympics, and 72% (13/18) of these clubs saw newcomers wish to join their club as a result of this. Of those clubs who saw interest from potential new members, 85% (11/13) had the capacity for the new members, but 15% (2/13) reported that they were not able to welcome all of the newcomers due to space and coach shortages. Whilst most of these clubs reported that they would be able to support a small number of new members, elsewhere in the questionnaire they were asked how their club would cope with a large influx of new members: 64% (23/36 clubs) stated that they would not have the capacity for a significant increase in newcomers to

their club (the example given in the survey was up to 50 new members), due to shortages in facility space, volunteers and coaches. One athletics club in the Phase 1 interview sample held a come and try taster event in August 2012 in an attempt to make the most of the publicity surrounding the Olympics. As their Club Chairperson notes below, this VSC had always held monthly induction evenings to welcome any potential new members, but this post-Olympics induction session—which they had publicised in the local community through their website and email mailing list—attracted an unprecedented level of interest, which they struggled to cope with:

A: [We had] a “come and try” type induction experience...separate from a training night... and we had 140 people, juniors, signing up to that on the night.

Q: And at the usual taster sessions: how many would you usually get?

A: Well I’ve got the figures, nothing like anything like that. An unusual night would be up to 30, and that would’ve been because something else had provoked interest. So there were 17 in February 2010, there were 30 in some cases...And in the weeks subsequent to that it was quite challenging. Even in September [2012] there was 50 people at the induction again so there was a follow on... We then had to start a waiting list which we have never in our history had. And it was because, well, we hadn’t any forward planning, *didn’t have enough coaches, didn’t have a system for dealing with [those numbers]. Well, we didn’t think it would be quite so overwhelming* [Emphasis added] (Club 2 interview, 2013).

This club was keen to welcome new members but was unprepared for such a high number. This meant that the VSC could not safely accommodate the 140 junior newcomers who attended the come and try session. As the high numbers were so unexpected there was no contingency plan in place to ensure these newcomers had an alternative pathway to follow and did not simply fall away from the sport. The club could offer information and guidance at the end of the taster session, but they were unable to offer full membership to the club for everyone who attended, and they had to start a waiting list:

I put out an email... a request saying, “Look guys, we’re at the stage of the health and safety problems, meaning that we can’t take on any more people”. The word of mouth message got through fairly quickly: that their wee sisters couldn’t get into the club; that friends couldn’t get into the club and so on and so on. So that spreads through a community, “[our club], they’ve got a waiting list for the first time” (Club 2 interview, 2013).

A cycling club interviewed for Phase 1 of the study also noted their capacity issues, not only in their own club but for the city as a whole: “We have lots of coaches and just as many volunteers, but the coaches are very busy and at the moment they are largely working to capacity, as are most of the clubs in Glasgow, many have waiting lists.” (Club 4 Interview, 2013). It should be stressed that these capacity issues were known about pre-Games and throughout Scotland numbers of coaches rose dramatically throughout these years. SportScotland reported in 2015 that the number of United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) awards had risen dramatically: in 2009/10 there were 764 UKCC Level Two coaches, but by 2014/15 this number had grown to 4,202, showing a 450 per cent rise (SportScotland, 2015). Yet notably, these capacity issues were still experienced by some VSCs in the Phase 2 sample, and in the following data from another cycling club we can see that capacity issues meant that many newcomers inspired by G2014 had to be placed on a waiting list rather than being immediately welcomed into the club:

We did prepare the club coaching staff and venue hire for an increase in interest in the club...and despite more coaches and increasing our membership we still had a waiting list of over 90 kids.

In February 2015 we let another 65 kids join but sadly a large proportion of the waiting list has lost interest in joining, as we now have cleared it. If you can take as many kids straight away they may stay. People quickly lose interest on a waiting list. We didn’t lose many kids to other cycling clubs as they are all full, but we haven’t received feedback on where they went (Club 3 Questionnaire, 2015).

It is likely that by potential new members being placed on a waiting list rather than being welcomed into the club membership, the initial enthusiasm sparked by the mega-event will be lost, thus perpetuating the spike phenomenon, and we see evidence for this from

VSCs in both Phase 1 and 2. Learning from the missed opportunities of London 2012 and M2002, an athletics VSC sampled in Phase 2 made a point of ensuring they avoided placing any newcomers on a waiting list during the post-G2014 period:

A: We make sure we don't have a waiting list. Now the reason that we don't have a waiting list is, I'm a great believer of if a child comes down here tonight and he was say [someone with potential] and we say “sorry come back in three months”, then they won't come back again. Now there are all sorts of arguments over this. I don't know if some clubs think it is a status symbol to have a waiting list, but for us, we turn nobody away.

Q: Have you always been able to manage that then?

A: Yeah we do. Some night it's, well...we try and involve parents, okay? Parents as helpers to look after, and they can hold watches for us. And some nights it's scary, right, some nights it's scary, but I know for me personally, and the club, no we definitely have a policy where we're not turning anybody away, because we don't think they'll come back. But certain clubs would argue against that. (Club 1 Interview, 2015).

Another Phase 2 club managed to avoid this potential pitfall by ensuring all newcomers at taster sessions were integrated: “We have had no ‘drop offs’. All new members are immediately incorporated or welcomed into a specific session with a permanent, regular coach and if possible an assistant coach.” (Club 6 Questionnaire, 2015). Evidently capacity issues can easily become safety concerns for many VSCs and so it can be difficult to avoid starting a waiting list when numbers peak. Yet, it is worth noting that evidence from M2002, London 2012 and G2014 all showed that those clubs that could immediately welcome newcomers into a training programme were able to retain these members in the long term. Therefore, here we can see some of the real-life barriers of delivering on participation legacies on the ground, and areas that should be targeted. Clubs must be made aware of the possibility for a sharp rise in numbers post-games that could potentially be capitalised on, and the capacity issues that should be dealt with pre-Games so that this opportunity is not lost due to a shortage of resources. In 2013 the local sport development team provided Glasgow VSCs with a ‘Get Ready Guide’ to flag up the spike phenomenon and the sources available for sport

development guidance and funding so clubs could prepare to make the most of the Games, but we can see from the above evidence that some clubs still struggled with capacity issues post-Games.

### **Visibility of the VSC**

A second theme drawn from the data pointed to the importance of club visibility during the mega-event to ensure potential new members can easily access them. Those clubs who were approached by high numbers of newcomers were those that had a visible presence at the event, either by hosting events themselves; having club members who were acting as volunteers and championing the club; or by advertising their club throughout the host city. An athletics club noted their own visibility, through an event they staged themselves during the period of the 2014 Games: “As a celebration of the Games we organised a road race in support of [a local charity] which was so successful we have staged another race in 2015.” (Club 2 Questionnaire, 2015). Another semi-formal club (100 members) who witnessed a 20 per cent rise in their membership following the Games, stressed that their visibility at the Games played a large part in encouraging these new members: “As we were already working [with our sport development officers] we were invited to provide ‘come and try’ at their ‘live’ sites throughout the games themselves.” (Club 6 Questionnaire, 2015). Similarly a hockey club noted their communication with their NGB and direct involvement in the Games as key reasons for their club seeing enhanced numbers:

We supplied some helpers for the inflatable hockey pitch sessions which were organised, and I think we were lucky in terms of having very direct links into Glasgow 2014 and Scottish Hockey, so I think if we hadn’t had that, we would have been needing more advice. I think I would advise clubs to seize on any options offered by their local sports organisation to get involved. I was a Clydesider [Games volunteer] as well at the hockey centre, so even doing something like that helped raise the profile of the sport and so the club. (Club 5 Questionnaire, 2015).

Their results were clear:

We picked up new members from outside our normal area - we usually get players from the local schools and graduating students, but this year we got lots of enquiries through our website who said they had seen the hockey at the Games and then looked for somewhere local to them. (Club 5 Questionnaire, 2015).

In their study of the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games Brown et al. (2004) showed that capacity issues were certainly a concern in the aftermath of these Games, but there was also a lack of marketing from clubs themselves, and the visibility aspect was not there:

If there was [sic] phone numbers around the track so people saying “I want to do this” could call, we wouldn’t have been able to deal with them.... It wasn’t easy to know what to do with the few that I did get calling anyway.... And I dread to think what some clubs would do if they suddenly had hundreds of potential new members knocking on their door. (Interview 19), (Brown et al., 2004, 39).

So these two themes of capacity and visibility must be coupled to ensure clubs are aware of how to plan so they can rise to the challenge of delivering on a participation policy goal. Linked to this, clubs must be made aware of the spike phenomenon and trend for drop-offs, and be informed of ways in which they can encourage sustained participation.

### **Retaining members at VSCs**

As well as working through capacity issues and ensuring they are visible to potential new members, the evidence shows that clubs also need to consider techniques to retain members to encourage a sustained rise in participation. A rowing club in the Phase 1 sample noted their attempts to deal with this following London 2012:

Following the Olympics—like every other club I would imagine—there was a huge surge in interest, and we had a taster session. When you run any sort of taster session there’s always a fair bit of interest at the outset but that kind of tails away and it’s a big demand for the clubs in terms of being able to host that in terms of having the numbers of volunteers and safety cover for these things. We’ve run two Learn to Row courses, so that’s essentially another 24 people who had done a taster session. 40 people went through the taster session one weekend and of that we had about 24 who went on to the Learn

to Row. Now, a few months on, there are about 12 people who have been retained so it has dropped, but this is still a good number...At the end of the taster session today we'll tell them “the next learn to row course is in the Spring, a couple of months' time”, which is long enough for us to get ready in terms of making sure we've got volunteers on the go, but also short enough that they're still going to be interested. If the gap is too big then it falls apart (Club 5 Interview, 2013).

Attempts to sustain the participation rise was something also noted by the hockey club in the 2015 sample:

Before we entered the [new] team in the 2015 cup competition, we asked everybody who had come to these sessions if they were coming back in August, so we got seven positive replies and decided to enter the competition. Also we encouraged anybody who had come to winter training to play fun summer hockey – there are various summer teams loosely associated with our club, so we advertised this before the winter season ended. (Club 5 Questionnaire, 2015).

Consequently, their numbers were retained as they prompted their newcomers to think about the future through having goals in mind and competitions to work towards: they were shown to be valued members of the club. It was also noted in Phase 1 that an important part of retaining newcomers is ensuring their experience at the club is positive so that they feel welcomed and want to stay, as noted in this extract from the Phase 1 data:

I think we need to get our act in gear actually to try and organise for the deluge that will come. And things suffer if you just have everybody coming into the club [with no plan]. The kids who are performing athletes at age group level, we need to make sure that the experience for them remains good. (Club 2 Interview, 2013).

This was something also stressed in the Phase 2 data:

What we tend to do is people can come down [to the club], and we've already got a group [for them to join], and this group kind of welcome them and encourage them...You've got to make it fun, make it enjoyable. And I think with any sport, it's more than sport: you're developing the whole person...Discipline in life, good friendship groups, good style of life, that's really what our coaching philosophy is about in the club. It's more than athletics. (Club 1 Interview, 2015).



The emphasis here was on ensuring newcomers were immediately welcomed and shown an interest from the club, and this is advice that can be grouped with the points made earlier regarding avoiding waiting lists: “You’ve got to show a willingness of new members that come down, to tap into them right away. Because when the buzz is in the city, the excitement, you’ve got to really pull the people in.” (Club 1 Interview, 2015). Interestingly, this club witnessed a sustained membership rise in both the junior and senior athlete age groups:

We actually had an increase in our senior membership. We had a lot of adults who, I don’t know if it was the games or just general fitness but we’ve had an increase in [those who] were moving from maybe sedentary lifestyle to a bit more active. We’ve certainly found that we’ve got a group of fast joggers, but not quite the elite athletes. We got more youngsters coming down definitely, and the interesting thing was that a lot of them stayed. That’s what we found most interesting, because quite often what you do is you get transient members. (Club 1 Interview, 2015).

The hockey club mentioned above also saw interest from older adults looking for general fitness, and they catered accordingly for this:

We identified from the enquiries to the website that there was a demand for starter sessions whether as re-introduction or complete beginners, so last September [2014] we started Back to Basics. We put this up on the website on the front page. We had around a dozen enquiries at the start of the season, and of the ones who came at first, three have moved up to regular training and playing in teams; then over the course of the season we had enquiries from another 12, and two of them are now playing in teams.(Club 5 Questionnaire, 2015).

## Discussion

The experiences of these VSCs aid our understanding of some of the key development issues to be faced with when preparing to host major sports events. Policy makers continue to champion the idea that the trickle-down effect of hosting will encourage a rise in post-event sport participation rates, but the evidence suggests that there is a need for localised strategies and initiatives to be set in place to encourage any sustained positive impact on participation. The success stories in this sample came from those VSCs who were visible. These were

VSCs whose members acted as volunteers throughout the mega-event, had a good level of engagement with their NGB, a strong community profile to begin with, and who had programmes in place to attract and retain members. This aligns with research by Frawley and Cush (2011), McCartney et al. (2013), Taks, Green, Misener, and Chalip (2014) and Pappous and Hayday (2015), who all stressed that infrastructure, planning and development were the keys to success in this area, with communication between NGBs and VSCs being crucial. Mackintosh, Darko, and May-Wilkins (2015) noted that amongst their participants it was felt that there was an information barrier towards getting involved in sport post-London 2012, with not enough information being obviously available about where to go to participate. When conducting online searches for those lesser known sports, such as archery, families in their study found it difficult to gain information. They also mentioned their use of traditional sources to gain information—such as local newspapers—reminding us that there is a need to populate a variety of media sources. Given the findings presented here and through previous research, evidently during and around these events visibility of VSCs and communication between NGBs and local clubs must be prioritised. It is recommended that NGBs work towards mega-events well in advance, with clear strategies for building the profile of local VSCs during the event itself, as well as NGB strategies for capacity-building that can be implemented at the local level where required. Some of the clubs in this sample knew that they needed to build their capacity pre-event, and they did so, but post-event they still struggled to meet demand. NGBs must work with their own VSCs at the local level and improve the communication channels to their grassroots VSCs to understand where support should be directed. This study has shown that the need to build capacity tends to be an ongoing issue for VSCs, and so there is a clear need for NGBs and policy makers to support grassroots sports clubs in this process.

Frawley and Cush (2011) witnessed a higher number of junior members registering with rugby clubs after the 2003 Rugby World Cup in South Africa, and they suggested that it might primarily be youths who would be encouraged through an event. The evidence presented here shows that there was youth interest, but also interest from older adults looking to develop their fitness in a more organised club environment. This was the case in athletics, cycling, hockey and rowing clubs. Whilst this would be unlikely to result in an increased pool of medal winners for the country, if it is increased sport participation and physical activity that is the policy goal then we can see positive impacts. A key factor linked to this is the visibility of VSCs in the local community, as mentioned above. To enhance the opportunity for people to engage with a new sport post-event the process needs to be easy and, if potential members do make it to a VSC, they must be welcomed and not placed on a waiting list. Therefore it is recommended that NGBs and VSCs ensure that local people can engage with a new sport easily if they have an inclination to do so. The process for doing this must be clear, easy and visible throughout the event, with VSCs having a presence at the Games, in local media, and online.

The evidence from the experiences of these VSCs overwhelmingly shows that capacity remains a key theme. For participation growth to take place there is a primary need to build capacity of VSCs further and also a need for NGBs and policy makers to get this message across to those clubs who have the desire and ability to grow. Sixty-four percent of clubs in Phase 1 stated that they would not have the capacity for a significant increase in newcomers to their club and they linked this to capacity issues in their facilities and numbers of volunteers. A cycling club (Club 3 questionnaire, 2015) noted that they had been aware of their capacity issues and had been building between London 2012 and G2014, but still they had to start a waiting list, meaning they lost some of the enthusiastic newcomers to their club post-G2014. Girginov and Hills (2008) stressed the need for governments to channel funds

appropriately to encourage the right types of sport development if a participation legacy is sought. These findings indicate the key areas where successes and failings were made and thus where future efforts should be channelled, and helping clubs to build club capacity is an evident priority. Millar and Doherty (2016) have provided a process model of capacity building, but this only outlines themes of capacity building such as ‘readiness for capacity building’. They stress that there is a need for the sharing of more case-studies of practical strategies and best practice of capacity building in sport, and though the above evidence provides some detail on this, future research must develop it.

### **Conclusions and Future Study**

Looking towards preparation for future mega-events, the evidence suggests that participation legacies can be witnessed in those NGBs and VSCs who ensure the routes into their sport are visible, and those that have development programmes in place to catch and retain members. Clubs must also be ready to cope with any rise in participation levels, and this is where capacity building comes in. As Millar and Doherty (2016) have noted, organisational change theory shows that capacity building is stimulated as a result of some external environmental force, where the organisation acts in response to an opportunity or a threat which stimulates change. As nations prepare to host future events, the upcoming mega-events should be used as catalysts for capacity building and planning. The clubs in this sample that had success were those who saw an opportunity in the upcoming event and built themselves up accordingly, using the event as a stimulant to attract and retain new volunteers and enhance their capacity as a club. However, it has been stressed that some VSCs still struggled with this capacity building, and strategic planning from their NGB in terms of national and local support for capacity building might have aided this process. More research is needed into the strategic processes that VSCs should follow if they wish to see success in

terms of capacity building and retaining new members post-event. A limitation here was the low participation in Phase 2 of the study due to lack of engagement from all suitable VSCs, thus future research should work with a larger sample and track clubs from pre- to post-event, to provide detailed models of best practice in terms of planning, capacity building, and post-Games programmes to retain new members. Successful models and practical strategies of capacity building in sport must be shared more widely to aid our understanding of best practice. Future research should be directed here, and we must ensure findings are disseminated to the NGBs and VSCs to inform practice.

A further vital aspect lies in the issue of communication between NGBs and the VSCs at their grassroots. Pappous and Hayday (2015) stressed this in their research into fencing and judo, and the evidence from the present study also indicates the need for improved communication pathways, guidance and training in the run up to events, with NGBs being the obvious sources of leadership for this in the UK. Yet this is best delivered as guidance and support from NGBs to allow VSCs to take ownership of their own development on their own terms. As Vail (2007) and Hylton and Totten (2008) have stressed, club development works best when it is directed at the grassroots through community ownership, rather than from the top down. Policy-makers and NGBs must appreciate the barriers faced by VSCs at the grassroots level and provide support, guidance and funding where possible. Those interested in developing any form of sports participation legacy must provide VSCs with the knowledge and tools from which they can build their own capacity and develop where they need to. This is essentially classic sports development, but framed under the urgency of mega-event planning.

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