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Article

Post-Event Volunteering Legacy: Did the London 2012 Games Induce a Sustainable Volunteer Engagement?

Niki Koutrou *, Athanasios (Sakis) Pappous and Anna Johnson

School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Kent, Chatham ME4 4AG, UK;
A.Pappous@kent.ac.uk (A.P.); annaejohnson@hotmail.co.uk (A.J.)

* Correspondence: N.Koutrou@kent.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-1634-888-952

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Abstract: The hosting of the London 2012 Olympic Games was seen as an opportunity to harness the enthusiasm of the 70,000 volunteers involved and to provide a post-event volunteer legacy. A total of 77 individuals who had acted as volunteers in London 2012 were contacted approximately four years after the Games and agreed to complete a web-based open-ended survey. The participants were asked to indicate their level of current volunteering engagement and whether volunteering at the Games had an impact on their current volunteering levels. The study found that the London Olympics were the first volunteer experience for most of the volunteers who completed the survey, with the main motivation to volunteer being anything related to the Olympic Games. Just over half of the respondents are currently volunteering. Lack of time is shown to be the main barrier towards further volunteering commitment. Only half of respondents had been contacted by a volunteering scheme after London 2012. The implications of the findings for a potential volunteering legacy are then explored.

Keywords: legacy; volunteering; sustainability of volunteer efforts; Olympic Games

1. Introduction

The Olympic Games are one of many proceedings that are deemed ‘mega-events’, due to the large scale upon which they are held [1]. Mega-events are defined as specially constructed and staged large-scale international, cultural, or sport events in which the majority of world states participate. These short term events are often utilised with the aspiration to create long-term post-event impacts for the hosting nation [2]. The hosting of the London 2012 Olympic Games not only intended to deliver a great level of sport to the host city, but also promised to provide a legacy for the years to come [3–5]. The term legacy refers to all ‘planned and unplanned, positive and negative, intangible or tangible structures created through a sports event that remain after the event’ [6]. A mega-sport event can create different types of legacies, be they sporting, environmental, or economic [7]. With 70,000 volunteers acting as ‘Games Makers’, as they were known throughout the sixteen-day event in 2012, it was of vital importance to ensure that their enthusiasm could be harnessed to provide a social legacy of sports volunteering in the local communities. Indeed, the Conservative-majority coalition government in the UK was actively engaged prior to the event in the rhetoric that the Games would inspire an increase in sport participation and an enhanced volunteering culture after the event [3]. However, evidence suggests that there was a lack of precise objectives on how the legacy aspiration to ‘inspire a generation’ to take part in sport and volunteering [8] could be realised following the Games [9]. This paper reflects upon whether a volunteer legacy was realised by exploring the opinions of a small pool of volunteers at the London 2012 Olympic Games. The overarching objectives of the study are to identify:

- (1) the extent to which positive legacy outcomes were achieved for this sample of London 2012 Games Makers;
- (2) whether there was a sustainability of volunteer efforts and increase in volunteer engagement after the London 2012 Games;
- (3) whether volunteer involvement with the London 2012 Olympic Games increased awareness of volunteering opportunities and volunteer schemes after the event;
- (4) which aspects of the volunteering experience with the London 2012 Games might have hindered or contributed to achieving a volunteer legacy after the event.

To this end, the study objectives are addressed by drawing upon the opinions of individuals who volunteered at the Fleet functional area of the London 2012 Olympic Games. As such, an analysis of recently collected data around volunteers' views on the positive and negative impacts of their volunteering experiences at the Games on their post-event volunteering engagement are examined, and implications for organisers for ensuring a sustainable volunteering legacy post-event are discussed.

2. Literature Review

Undoubtedly, the Olympic Games, the biggest sport event at a worldwide level could not be staged without the efforts of the millions of volunteers involved who carry out their duties without receiving payments or other rewards [10]. For instance, 160,000 people applied to be one of the original 45,000 volunteers in Athens 2004 Olympic Games [11]. Similarly, in London 2012, 240,000 applications were received by LOCOG, the organising committee of the London 2012 Games, to be one of the selected 70,000 Games Makers of the event [12]. Previous research efforts on Olympic volunteers have predominantly focused on their motivations, profiles, job satisfaction, experiences, and future intentions (see for example [13]), rather than the possibility and realisation of transferring volunteer efforts and skills across other activities post-event that may account for legacy [9]. The studies on motivations suggest that the chance of being involved in a unique event and being associated with the Olympic movement are key motivating factors in volunteering for the Olympic Games [14–17]. Recent research interest on the volunteer legacy of the event has started to emerge, examining how event volunteers could be encouraged to sustain their efforts and volunteer again at similar events or in the community after the Games (e.g., [9,18,19]). However, there is a paucity of research on the social legacies such as volunteering for the Olympic Games compared to other legacy aspects that are more tangible, such as urban regeneration and infrastructure. Despite social legacies often being intangible, they are deemed the more important legacies associated with a visible effect of progress towards the general public and all of those involved [20]. However, there have been very few long-term post-event legacy studies [21]. For instance, in [22], a study on the social impacts of seven summer and winter Olympic Games spanning from Atlanta 1996 through to Beijing 2008 was conducted with respect to socially disadvantaged groups. It was found that only in Sydney 2000 were some initiatives created that '[had] brought opportunities for some' to utilise their skills further, but these were 'mainly situated at the 'easier end' of the citizen participation ladder' (p. 368). A number of studies in Olympic and non-Olympic contexts concluded that mega-event volunteering can result in a strong intention to volunteer at another event or to other community activities more generally [19,23,24]. This suggests that good experiences at an event may contribute to creating a post-event volunteer legacy. However, the main limitation of these studies is that they account for the intended rather than the actual volunteering behaviour [25]. What is imperative to consider though is the sustainability of volunteer efforts after the Olympic Games and the long-term perspective of a legacy in order to maximise and capitalise on the benefits, event-related skills, and training in the post-Games period [26]. Nevertheless, a volunteering legacy outcome depends on a number of factors including not only training to support the event, but also training that aims to develop volunteers in the long term as well as the existence of other development strategies in place to support the commitment of individuals to volunteering acts in the future [21].

For example, the choice to volunteer depends on a range of microeconomic and macroeconomic factors and the multitude of existing social networks that an individual has formed rather than on their place of residence [25–27]. In this regard, decisions to volunteer or participate in sport depend on an individuals' interest towards the relative activities compared to alternatives, their socio-economic background, and the relative influence from their peers and mutual acquaintances [25–27]. In addition, individuals or organisations with an already highly established relational network are more likely to engage in social capital activities; that is to form social bonds and develop trust by engaging in different pursuits provided that other mediating factors such as time, effort placed, costs, and other required resources are controlled [26–28].

On the other hand, members of organisations with tight-knit relationships, the so-called 'bonding' of social capital, are more reluctant to move across contexts and further mobilise social capital through 'bridging' social capital processes, as they believe their needs cannot be met elsewhere [28]. For example, volunteering in sport-clubs reflects the interests of like-minded people, which stem from the love of the sport and the volunteers' desire to help the club to function or to help their children to participate in sports [25–27]. These volunteers perceive that their needs cannot be met in other volunteering contexts [25–27]. In this regard, membership is restricted to outsiders since VSCs often do not call out to new volunteers, but wait for the latter to approach them and volunteer for them [26–28]. This is also relevant with regards to the motivations associated with volunteering at mega-events. As mentioned earlier, research has shown that the most important reason to volunteer for an Olympic Games event is in order to take part in a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience, associated with the status of the Olympics [29,30]. This motivation cannot be replicated in general or in sports-club volunteering and suggests that volunteering effort and enthusiasm may not be easily sustained and transferred to a different context. Thus, even if there is a desire to continue volunteering after a mega-event experience, this does not necessarily mean that it can be converted into long-term volunteering in sports, if the necessary support structures and promotion opportunities are not in place [31]. To this end, in [9], the importance of establishing relationships between event organisers and the wider volunteering infrastructure in the host city is emphasised in order to plan for and capitalise on a volunteering legacy. In their study on the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, the authors of [9] concluded 'that had there been more communication about planning for legacy before the Games between VANOC and the community groups represented . . . then the volunteer legacy potential may have been greater' (p. 219). Similarly, the author of [32] suggested that planning for any type of Olympic Games legacy should take place before the event and in the process involving 'all important stakeholders who will be affected by-and benefit' (p. 160). In reality, however, this level of stakeholder engagement does not always occur in practice [22], since organisations charged with sustaining post-event legacies are either limited or not established [9,22,23].

In England, sport participation is supported by volunteers, and the sustainability of approximately 85,000 volunteer-led sport clubs depends on volunteer efforts [25,30,31]. Sport England, which is the local sport council and is concerned with increasing mass participation in sport, is aware of the link between increasing sport participation and an increase in volunteer numbers [25,26]. The legacy aspect was an integral part of the London 2012 bid [33,34]. London won the opportunity to host the 2012 Olympic Games by making five promises towards the creation of a legacy following the event [35]. The vision for a legacy was articulated by the UK Government on 'inspiring a generation to take part in sport'; demonstrating the inclusiveness of London for both residents and visitors; making the UK a leading sporting nation; developing the Olympic Park as a blueprint of sustainable living; and transforming previously deprived areas such as the hosting region—East London [36]. Following a change of UK Government in 2010, subsequent promises were made which focused on capitalising on the increased interest around the Games to develop the economic activity of the country; promoting sport participation; urban regeneration; and bringing communities together through the increased number of those volunteering, in particular the youngsters, with the creation of schemes and volunteer infrastructure to get volunteers involved in sport and community activities [35]. The hosting of the

2012 Games presented therefore an ideal opportunity to engender enthusiasm for volunteering through a 'festival effect', in the same way it was anticipated to occur for sports participation [36]. This raised the public's expectations of potential Games legacies related to volunteerism [36]. For example, it was suggested that 40% of applicants for London 2012 volunteer roles were inspired to volunteer for the first time, even though a survey of London 2012 Games Makers found later that only 20% of respondents were volunteering for the first time [37].

Nevertheless, capitalising on a volunteer legacy after the Games is an aspect that many previous host cities have failed to ascertain [23,24,38]. In addition, the claims of sport volunteering and participation legacy from London 2012 have been criticised as a political rhetoric to justify the £9.3 billion public investment [39]. Indeed, the organising committee of the London Games, LOCOG, was a private organisation and followed a governance structure that limited the degree to which a sport volunteering or participation legacy could be achieved, as it prioritised the delivery of the Games over the plans for legacy [23,31]. On the same token, in [36], a series of documents from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport between 2007 and 2010 was summarized, and that neither of them had clear objectives on funding and delivery of a volunteer legacy was concluded [33]. It was also concluded that, despite the early plan of the London 2012 volunteer programme to involve representatives of the local voluntary sector in planning a post-event legacy, this was abandoned when LOCOG focused entirely on the delivery of the event [36].

There is very little research to date to attain whether a volunteering legacy has been formed after the London 2012 Games. Prior to the start of the Games, a survey found that 67% of potential volunteers stated that their main motive to volunteer at the Games would be because it was 'the chance of a lifetime', followed by 59% wanting to provide a friendly welcome to visitors of London and 58% wanting to share their love of London. Interestingly, only 29% potentially wanted to gain new skills and experience [12]. However, as reported in [13], the quality of training provided at an event influences commitment to and satisfaction with the event [40]. It was also concluded that training that is informative and develops volunteers' skills to appropriately fulfil their responsibilities is integral in linking motivations to volunteer and satisfaction with the actual volunteering experience [40].

In relation to future volunteer engagement, a study of 11,541 Games Makers found that 45% expected to increase their volunteering levels after the Games, with 5% reporting that they were intending to volunteer less [41]. Post-Games research on 28 of the volunteer centres located in London highlighted that there was a 31% increase in volunteering numbers within the six months following the Games, increasing to 44% towards the end of 2013 [12]. Furthermore, the total number of volunteers registered at volunteering centres in London increased by 5% in the years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 [12]. Further noticeable increases have been made amongst full time students and young people, those aged between 16 and 19 years, fulfilling the legacy aim to inspire a volunteering spirit beyond the Games, especially amongst young people [42]. However, time was found to be a significant barrier to further volunteering in 2012–2013. Moreover, 58% of individuals identified work commitments as a barrier, followed by 31% looking after their children at home and 24% having other commitments occupying their free time [42].

London has made a commitment to a volunteering legacy having set up the Join In Trust, which was the London 2012 official Olympic legacy volunteering programme. Join In launched in May 2012 and was partly funded by the Cabinet Office and the Big Lottery Fund. The project aimed to encourage London 2012 volunteers into long-term volunteering by placing more volunteers into community sport, supporting clubs, and groups who are in the most need, and by promoting opportunities for people to volunteer [43]. Sir Charles Allen, Chair of Join In advocated that the aim of the programme was 'to use the excitement and passion generated by the Games to help turn community engagement into a national pastime' [23]. Nowadays, the programme is open to non-Olympic volunteers; however, the awareness of this scheme among volunteers is unreported. Concerns were voiced within the House of Commons Committee report on Public Accounts, as it was felt that not enough had been done to encourage volunteering opportunities beyond the Games and to deliver a legacy despite the work of

Join In in promoting volunteering [44]. The House of Lords echoed this view in their report, suggesting that planning for legacy should have started earlier and well in advance of the Games; despite the good effort from Join In and other related schemes, the delivery of a legacy 'had begun too late to have maximum impact' [45] (p. 17). Similarly, the House of Commons Committee report raised concerns over the lack of clear plans to capitalise on the positive experiences of Games Makers and transfer their efforts to other initiatives since the motivations to volunteer at an Olympic Games are dissimilar to motivations for volunteering in general community roles [23,44]. It is also the case that not all Olympic Games volunteers are interested in sport per se, such that they will continue volunteering in sport organisations on a regular basis [45]. Consequently, volunteering 'broker' organisations such as Join In or Sport England, in the case of sport clubs, were faced with the challenge of capitalising on other less unique motivations for volunteering, if the aim for a volunteering legacy was to be realised [30,31].

This paper aims to determine whether the London 2012 Olympic Games inspired and facilitated an enhanced volunteering culture and the sustainability of volunteer efforts to other similar events or community projects after volunteers' experience at the Games. To this end, the opinions and the current volunteering attitudes of a sample of London 2012 Games Makers are explored to determine the social legacy of the event with regard to volunteering. This research adds to the body of knowledge on volunteer legacies, since it provides a retrospective view on the volunteer legacy of London 2012 and addresses past research's limitations of rarely evaluating post-event legacies over an extended period of time [19,23].

3. Methodology

The research follows an exploratory research design, so no specific theories are prioritised, as it is to the authors' knowledge one of few studies that seeks to examine the volunteering legacy of a mega-event four years on from the London 2012 Games. This study includes a convenience sample of 77 volunteers who offered their services at the London 2012 Olympic Games in London and were known to the researchers. These individuals were Olympic Family Assistants during the Games and acted as personal assistants and drivers for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) working groups, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and the Olympic family. The volunteers were based at the Park-Lane fleet depot. The total population of volunteers who served the Olympic family clients during the London Olympics comprised 200 volunteers. This equates to a 38.5% response rate for the current study. The research instrument was an online survey incorporating a series of open-ended and closed-type questions, so both qualitative and quantitative feedback was obtained. Quantitative responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative results were analysed using Open and Axial coding [46]. The survey was designed to elicit the participants' socio-demographic information, their current volunteering engagement in sport or general contexts, the barriers they may face in engaging with volunteering activities, and how volunteering could become more appealing to them. Data collection took place in April 2016.

4. Results

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

An analysis of the gender of the participants suggested that 60.8% were male and 39.2% female. Of the total respondents, 62.4% were highly educated, holding a university bachelor degree or higher qualification. The employment status revealed that 58.5% of the respondents were in employment (either full or part-time), followed by retired volunteers (40.3%). The participants were more likely to be white and British (89.6%). From the 77 volunteers who completed the questionnaires, 35% were 60 years of age or older, followed by 30% in the 55–64 age range and 16% in the 45–54 age range. The survey participants indicated that volunteering for the London 2012 Games was their first volunteering experience at a mega-event (93.4%), whilst 57.1% of the sample had no other volunteering experience prior to the London 2012 Games. From the 42.9% of the sample who had volunteering experiences

prior to the London 2012 Games, these were in charities (29.5%), sport clubs (27.3%), and school or universities (11.4%). When the participants were asked about the frequency of volunteering engagement in the past 12 months, 41.5% indicated they volunteered one day a week or more followed by 29.3% who volunteered very occasionally in the past 12 months. Finally, 56.4% of the sample indicated that they currently volunteer for other organisations reflecting a high engagement to volunteering. This is important as it shows a large degree of overlap between volunteer activities and motivations, and hints at the potential for transferring volunteer efforts across activities, thus helping to create a volunteer legacy from the London 2012 Olympics [26,30].

4.2. Current Volunteering Engagement and Barriers

More than half of the respondents currently volunteer (56.4%). This is important as it hints at the potential for transferring volunteer efforts across activities after an initial experience, thus helping to create a volunteer legacy from London 2012 Olympics.

The study identified that time availability was the main barrier in further volunteering (40%) among those who do not currently volunteer, followed by location (13.3%), and 'nothing being as inspiring as the Olympic Games' (13.3%), which reflects the uniqueness of the event in attracting volunteers who wanted to be part of it rather than part of a general volunteering interest.

The 43.6% of the sample, who do not currently volunteer, were also asked what would make the prospect of volunteering more appealing to them. Alongside this, three practical issues were identified by the respondents. Firstly, the participants indicated the opportunity of 'having more time to do so' (29.2%), as 'lack of time leads to inability to make regular commitments' in volunteering (Respondent 1). Secondly, it was also suggested that a better use of the volunteers' skill-set could have been made to ensure they feel that they have made a difference (32.3%). As suggested by some individuals, 'feeling that my specific skills are useful' (Respondent 10) and 'a belief that my skills would be used rather than simply being "another pair of hands"' (Respondent 50) is associated to satisfaction with the experience and the volunteer role and can promote future volunteering [13]. Another volunteer summarises this point well by noting that, if you 'know that the organisation was using your skills to help in its objectives' (Respondent 15), long-term volunteering could become more appealing. Two individuals have also suggested that '[f]inding an organisation (like MOLA) with a properly resourced programme for recruiting, training, and developing volunteers' (Respondent, 25) can help to make volunteering more appealing. This further exemplifies the point made in the literature review that, if appropriate support networks are in place, the process of creating a volunteer legacy can be realised [9,31]. Lastly, locality and close proximity to the volunteer activity (13.8%) could also make volunteering more appealing to those who do not currently volunteer, suggesting the relevance of the social exchange theory of volunteering. The social exchange theory suggests that, when the costs outweigh the rewards associated with volunteering, individuals may choose not to engage in volunteering further [21].

When the participants were asked about the frequency of volunteering engagement in the past 12 months, 41.5% indicated that they volunteered one day a week or more followed by 29.3% who volunteered very occasionally in the past 12 months. This might be because of the reasons mentioned earlier such as lack of time, locality, and motivations for volunteering that could not be met by what is on offer in the local area.

4.3. Impact of Olympic Experience on Future Volunteering

The respondents of the survey were asked to indicate whether the experience at the London 2012 Olympic Games had influenced them to consider volunteering at other events or organisations. An important determinant of event satisfaction is the volunteer role and the contribution made [13,40]. In this regard, some volunteers (33.8%) reported negative views in relation to the lack of challenge in their role, their skills being underused and their role not matching their previous experiences during their involvement with the London 2012 Games. For example, a participant stated, 'I am more aware

than before just how poor some organisations are at cherishing their volunteers. This includes large charities (National Trust) that appear to treat volunteers as cheap labour' (Respondent 36).

Respondent 9 echoes this view by stating, 'There were too many volunteers and not enough for them to do. I spent hours, days and possibly a whole week without doing a thing. My brother in law gave up after a week as there was nothing for him to do at all'.

In addition, another respondent reflected on his experience and noted, 'The activities at the Games [were] rather generic, and the work I was asked to do made little use of my skills' (Respondent 50).

This potentially is one of the reasons why some of the volunteers did not consider any future volunteering. These findings are in support of previous research that demonstrated that London 2012 Games Makers were left disappointed by the low levels of knowledge and the lack of challenge that was included in their role [47]. To a similar extent, it is argued that this is a result of LOCOG's following a rational systems approach to managing their volunteers [31]. In this approach, the organisation's resources are allocated in the most rational way to achieve its objectives; thus, LOCOG's interests were prioritised over those of the volunteers. As the supply of the potential Games' volunteers (Games Makers) was greater than the demand, this allowed LOCOG to treat the volunteers in an unusual way, since the volunteers had limited choice in their roles, shifts, and training allocation [31]. This had a negative impact upon the volunteering legacy of the Games.

However, 66.2% of the sample did suggest that volunteering at the Games influenced them to consider future volunteering in other sport event and general activities. For example, a respondent reported extensively the benefits of volunteering at the Games: 'I re-joined Girlguiding and am now a Brownie Leader of a unit in East London. I am also chair of governors at a school in north London' (Respondent 5).

On the same token, another volunteer stated, 'Yes, since London 2012. I volunteered at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014, I also volunteered at the Rugby World Cup in 2015. In between these events I have also been able to have some casual employment' (Respondent 6).

Another volunteer suggested, 'It has definitely made me WANT to volunteer as it was fun, rewarding and gave me a sense of purpose, but in reality it hasn't made me volunteer (I have a new job with very unpredictable, long hours, but I hope to volunteer more in the future!)' (Respondent 1). This further supports the finding from past research that the lack of time due to work or family commitments impacts upon future volunteering decisions, even if there is a general interest towards volunteering [25,30,42].

Therefore, there is some evidence that an inspiration effect to volunteer was created after the London 2012 Olympic Games. However, there is no evidence that LOCOG planned the creation of this 'inspiration effect'. Nevertheless, in this way, the volunteer programme of the London 2012 Games has encouraged further volunteering by allowing individuals who were attracted to volunteer for the chance to be part of a lifetime experience to then experience the more altruistic and other general rewards of volunteering. This echoes previous studies [30,32].

4.4. Opportunities to Volunteer

Following the London 2012 Olympic Games, only 51.9% of volunteers were approached or were aware of any volunteering schemes that act as broker organisations matching volunteer profiles with relevant activities. The main schemes that approached volunteers were the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games (29.6%), some National Governing Bodies (22.2%) including UK athletics and British Swimming, Join In Trust, the Olympic Volunteering Legacy scheme (14.8%), the 2015 Rugby World Cup (11.1%), and Be Inspired (11.1%). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the remaining 48.1% of participants suggested that they have not been approached by any volunteer schemes after the Games. Surprisingly, 75.3% of the volunteers in this study were unaware of the Olympic Legacy volunteering scheme, Join In, with a further 39% of respondents indicating that they were unaware of any local volunteering scheme in their area. Although 58.4% were aware of schemes in close proximity to their place of residence, they have not necessarily contributed with their skills to any of the available

volunteering activities after the Games. The most prevalent factor that prevented further involvement was lack of time (70.6%), illness (11.8%), location (11.8%), and other reasons (11.8%), including the difficulty of the application process and the dissolution from being unsuccessful in the selection process for volunteering at other sport mega-events.

5. Discussion

This research study is one of the few that sought to determine the extent of a volunteering legacy after the London 2012 Games. It has sought to address some of the limitations of previous volunteer legacies studies, which were conducted in the immediate aftermath of the event or were measuring intentions of volunteers rather than actual behaviour (see, for example, [48]). Thus, the study took place three years and eight months after the event. From the responses in this study, it is demonstrated that the amount of people who are currently volunteering is of respectable level following the Games and has increased by 14.2% or 11 individuals when compared to pre-event figures for the current sample. This suggests some evidence of an effect but cannot be directly attributed to the Games experience, as in fact there are many other influences on volunteering opportunities in the UK, which may have impacted upon the volunteering attitudes in this period [31]. Additionally, these results should be interpreted with caution, since recent figures from the Community Life Survey (2013–2014) indicate a decline in formal volunteering, with once a year volunteering levels dropping by 3% and once a month volunteering decreasing by 2% [42].

This study further exemplified the little reported impact that post-Olympics volunteering schemes have had on the engagement of the Games Makers. It is also argued that the Games themselves only resulted in a small and short-term increase in participation in sport and that more proactive methods to encourage participation are required to have a greater and longer-term impact [23,31,49]. In addition, local opportunities are integral in leveraging a potential demonstration event following a mega-event [23,31,49]. However, the results of this study suggest that the participants were either not aware or not sure about how to get involved in further volunteering in their area. Thus, support mechanisms to promote and sustain such opportunities are vital in realising a volunteer legacy following a sport mega-event. It seems that, in the case of London 2012, while there was evidence of London- and regional-based volunteer legacies, these were actualised quite late, potentially hindering a take-up of volunteering in the immediate aftermath of the Games [23]. It also appears that, while a new volunteer infrastructure was created to facilitate a volunteer legacy such as for example Join In, the existing volunteering infrastructure and organisations were overlooked and not involved in the process [23]. Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of such schemes in encouraging people to get involved in volunteering and the methods that they use in planning to realise a volunteer legacy after a mega sport event.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2012 suggested that 40% of all Games Makers were volunteering for the first time at the London 2012 Games. However, 57.1% of the participants of the current study indicated that they did not have volunteering experience prior to the 2012 Games. This contradicts the findings of past research that noted that 80% of Games Makers had volunteered elsewhere prior to the London 2012 Games. However, it appears that previous volunteering experience has little influence over future volunteering decisions [41]. In fact, the author of [21] highlighted the fact that volunteers without any previous volunteering experience were more likely to increase their levels of community volunteering in comparison to those with experience following a large-scale sports event. Similarly, another study indicated that the majority of the London 2012 Games Makers, including those who had not volunteered before, would like to continue volunteering after the Games, either for a mega-event or in other general settings [48]. On the other hand, the current study echoes the findings of past research [23], which suggests that there was limited emphasis on the training and development of volunteers during the Games to develop skills beyond the role they played during the Games that could be transferred and used to other community activities in the future.

The results from this sample of London 2012 volunteers, similar to other relevant studies (see for example, [9,47]), suggest that the overall experience with the Games did little to inspire a wider volunteering legacy. For example, as stated by the chief executive of Volunteering England, 'without investment the dream of a lasting legacy from the Games will remain just that' [50]. Thus, in order to sustain current volunteering levels in the UK and encourage new volunteers to become involved and develop a higher level of social capital, volunteering opportunities must be clearly advertised and communicated. Volunteering 'broker' organisations and schemes must make a greater effort in reaching volunteers with previous volunteering experiences at events and advertise new opportunities on a regular base. The findings of this study suggest that, in general, volunteers were unaware of the Join In programme, which was developed to encourage local sport volunteering after the Games [43]. A further 39% reported a lack of awareness of any other local volunteering schemes in which they could get involved and about which they could find more information. This was also evident in the qualitative element of the study. For example, one participant stated, 'If I had gone into a local or national volunteer list, maybe I would do more volunteering' (Respondent 62). In a similar vein, another respondent suggested having considered other volunteering opportunities after the Games, but 'not sure how to get involved' (Respondent 28). However, it seems that Join In and other related initiatives had a narrow focus of matching volunteers to opportunities across sport clubs. While this has potentially benefited the sports sector, other community areas in need of volunteers were perhaps overlooked [23], despite the fact that not all mega sport event volunteers are involved for the love of sports [15–17]. This further questions the extent to which a 'new culture of volunteering for the UK' has been achieved [23].

6. Conclusions

This study offers new insights upon the creation of a volunteer legacy approximately four years on from the Games. The literature suggests that the optimum timeframe for maximising legacies is three to four years after the Games [23]. Primary evidence from the perspectives of a sample of London 2012 volunteers was examined and substantiated with secondary evidence from other sources to determine whether a positive volunteer legacy was created after the Games. The respondents reported positive aspects of their experiences at the Games, such as the chance to be part of a lifetime experience, as well as negative aspects in relation to their skills being underused. A considerable number of the participants currently volunteer; however, the extent to which a broad volunteering legacy was inspired is questionable since volunteer legacy initiatives such as the Join In programme had little reported impact among this volunteer sample. However, due to the small sample size used in this study, the generalisability of the findings to the 70,000 population of volunteers that assisted with the London 2012 Games cannot be ensured. The researchers had limited access to a higher number of London 2012 volunteers. Future research could address this limitation. In addition, the response rate could have been affected by the lack of authoritative standing of the researchers. Research conducted on behalf of large organisations, such as Sport England or the Join In trust may have obtained a higher response rate, as respondents are more aware of whom the researcher is and thus are more confident that anonymity will be ensured.

In addition, an interesting area that has surfaced during this research includes the volunteer commitments of the 170,000 unsuccessful applicants that applied to volunteer for the 2012 Games. An investigation into whether their unsuccessful application caused them to feel disempowered and disillusioned towards volunteering in general, thus creating a barrier to the aim of a volunteering legacy, would be an interesting avenue for future research.

This case study provides responses from a sample of Games Makers three years and eight months on from the London 2012 Games, eliminating any post-event euphoria and satisfaction and thus accounting for the behaviour of volunteers and not their intentions, as with previous studies (see, for example, [17,21,48]). Although a time frame of approximately four years following the Games is a suitable time to determine a legacy, a true volunteer legacy cannot be determined until a considerable

number of years after an event. For example, it is noted that legacy must be seen as a ten-year project to realise lasting change [51]. This study has highlighted the need for future research to explore the extent of a volunteer legacy further and to account for other factors mediating the legacy process, such as the planning phase, design, and implementation for a legacy prior to the event [9], as well as the existing policy environment and the support or training available to volunteers and volunteering ‘broker’ organisations after the event [31].

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