VOLUNTEERS' SENSE OF (DIS)CONNECTION AT A SPORT EVENT[1]

Steven Owen

Donna Chambers

ABSTRACT

This paper explores volunteers' sense of (dis)connection and belonging at a major peripatetic sport event. Utilizing qualitative in-depth interviews with 31 volunteers at the Tall Ships race held in Sunderland in 2018, we sought to understand their lived experiences of this event 18 months after it was held. We argue that the Turnerian concepts of liminality and communitas, can be used to comprehend these lived experiences but require more critical problematization in their application. Our contention is that volunteers demonstrate intricate (dis)connections with a range of people, with place, and with the event itself and thus communitas should be conceptualized as more complex and paradoxical when applied within the context of liminal event spaces. We further suggest that volunteers' sense of belonging to place influences how they experience liminal event spaces at least in the medium term. Space and place are therefore intimately connected in the lived experiences of volunteers.

Keywords: communitas*;* (dis)connection; liminality; sense of place; Tall Ships race

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INTRODUCTION

> For those days it's your life. The Tall Ships is such a big thing and just for a short time, on a timeline for a few moments in the life of the Tall Ships, they become your Tall Ships. They were Sunderland's Tall Ships for those 5 days, you touch it, then it moves on again and its gone (Camila, Tall Ships 2018 volunteer).

There is a growing body of scholarly work examining the phenomenon of sport event/festival volunteering. This work, overwhelmingly framed through managerial lens, provides valuable insights into the profiles, motivations, experiences, and satisfaction of volunteers at ephemeral sport events/festivals (Holmes, Nichols, & Ralston, 2018; Rogalsky, Doherty & Paradis, 2016; Wilks, 2016). Emerging from the extant literature is the importance of connectivity and sense of belonging for volunteers and host communities (Doherty, 2009;Nichols , Gardiner & Filo, 2016; Kerwin, Warner, Walker & Stevens, 2015). The desire to connect is an important motivational factor for volunteers (Doherty, 2009; Hamm, MacLean & Misener, 2008) and enhancing the social fabric of communities is an important legacy of festivals/events (Downward, & Ralston, 2006). However, the intricacies of (dis)connections and feelings of belonging, and their influence on how volunteers interpret, remember, and give meaning to their experience at transient sport events is underexplored. This is important as volunteers frame their experience of events through such connectivity, as illustrated in the quote at the beginning of this paper by Camila, a volunteer at the 2018 Tall Ships race in Sunderland, UK.

This paper thus seeks to address this gap in the literature by unpacking the nature of the (dis)connections and sense of belonging experienced by volunteers at an ephemeral sport event. The Turnerian concepts of liminality and communitas are typically applied to understand the unique space volunteers occupy during a sport event. For example, studies

point to the volunteer event space as suspending everyday social status and relations allowing for increased connectivity and bonding - between and among volunteers, managers, and event participants (Fairley, Gardiner & Filo, 2016; Gellweiler, Wise & Fletcher, 2018). The overriding positive accounts by volunteers certainly implies these spaces are conducive for creating a sense of communitas. Underpinning such depictions is an imagined space in which "homogeneity and unity prevails over the disunity of ethnicities, cultures, classes and professions beyond it" (Turner & Turner, 1978, p.39). However, we have very limited insight into any tensions within the event space that may disrupt volunteers' sense of belonging and connectivity. Indeed, several studies of festivals and events refer to the importance of communitas in a rather purist manner (Sterchel & Saint-Blancat, 2015; Welty-Peachey, Borland, Lobpries & Cohen, 2015). Further, the situating of the event space as liminal, as outside of 'everyday lived reality' results in a lack of research which focuses on these spaces, not merely as sites, but as socially constructed *places* which are imbued with meaning by volunteers.

This paper proposes that the uncritical application of the concept of communitas within liminal festival/event spaces elides the complexity of the space volunteers occupy and the intricacies of belonging during transient sport events/festivals. Aligning with works such as St John (2001), Chambers (2015) and Toraldo, Islam & Mangia (2019), this paper argues that the Turnerian concept of communitas, said to exist within liminal spaces, requires greater problematization within the events, leisure, and related literature as current applications are overly simplistic and obfuscate the disruptions and (dis)connections that exist within sport event spaces. Indeed, according to St John (2001, p. 48), in reference to these twin Turnerian concepts, "inflexible application tends to disregard 'complicated' performative spaces and intra-event strife". Moreover, we argue that the extant literature on liminal event spaces negates an interrogation of how these spaces are socially constructed ***places*** that influence

how volunteers interpret and give meaning to the space they occupy during events. The ways in which volunteers interpret the volunteer experience through the complex interplay of space and place at least in the medium term, therefore also requires further problematization.

Through the example of a unique major sport festival - the 2018 Tall Ships race in Sunderland – we demonstrate the multiple, complex, and paradoxical ways in which volunteers experience connectivity and sense of belonging (communitas) during an ephemeral event. In addition, we make two further contributions to the literature. First, we rely on volunteers' personal memories 18 months after the Tall Ships race thereby adding to literature which has traditionally focused either on volunteers' immediate reflections of event volunteering (Lee, Kim & Koo, 2016; Farrell, Johnston & Twynam, 1998) or on their long-term recollections (Fairley et al., 2016; Koutrou, Pappous & Johnson, 2016). Many research projects have also utilized quantitative approaches. Our focus on an intermediate time frame is pertinent as through a qualitative approach, we can glean detailed insights into how volunteers interpret, remember, and reconfigure their experience at a particular moment in time which is beyond the initial elation after the event and before the onset of long-term nostalgia. Indeed, our focus on this intermediate post-event phase recognizes the existence of a volunteer "life cycle" (Skirstad & Kristiansen, 2017), the final stage of which (the outcomes) is extensive, complex and includes multiple stages each associated with different memories, emotions, and experiences. We suggest that it is important to understand the volunteer life cycle at specific moments during this extended final stage and the literature thus far has neglected the intermediate stage which is just as important as other stages. Our second additional contribution lies in our observation that extant studies tend to draw evidence from mega sport events in global cities such as the London Olympics (Holmes et al., 2018; Wilks, 2016), Vancouver Winter Olympics (Kodama, Doherty & Popovic, 2013) or Glasgow Commonwealth Games (Tomazos & Luke, 2015). This results in volunteer

experiences at large peripatetic events in provincial post-industrial cities being underexplored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liminality and Communitas

The concept of liminality entered the lexicon of the social sciences through the work of Arnold Van Gennep (1960) whose work on 'rites of passage' for individuals and groups identified three stages of this process: separation, transition/liminal, and incorporation. The importance of the liminal is identified as representing what transpires beyond an original state and before that about to be entered. Extending understandings of liminality, Turner (1969) argues that in this liminal space the structures and norms of everyday society are suspended – in his words people are "neither here nor there they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969, p.95). Through the sharing of this space, equality and shared understanding emerge fostering communitas among liminoid people. This communitas represents an "ethically superior human condition where equality, humility, and unselfishness spontaneously prevail" (Sandall, 2011, p. 483).

Communitas then is a unique anti-structural state which unsettles established social orders, but at the same time, facilitates relationship building which is "the relational glue holding social orders together" (Toraldo, Islam & Mangia, 2019 p. 621). The concept of communitas was seen as being most applicable to studies of pilgrimage and while Turner recognized that these were not characterized by absolute unity, he believed that they were "ultimately means of binding diversities together and overcoming cleavages" (Turner, 1973 cited in St John, 2001, p. 49). The concepts of liminality and communitas are widely used to understand the

unique space created during leisure and tourism activities (Bristow, 2020; Huang, Xiao & Wang 2018; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006). Event volunteering is considered a particularly apposite activity which illustrates the concept of liminality as it blurs the distinction between work and leisure (Toraldo et al, 2019).

Despite its popularity there are concerns that an uncritical application of Turner's conceptualization of liminality and communitas negates the inherently contested nature and complexity of event/festival spaces: Chambers (2015) uses secondary data to provide an interpretative account of the inherently heterogenous nature of the liminal spaces of a gospel music festival in Australia. She argues that a purist interpretation of communitas does not provide a sufficiently robust framework for understanding the tensions between competing sacred and secular discourses that manifest within these pilgrimage festival spaces. Toraldo et al (2019) focused on the practice of volunteering as meaningful work and drew on the examples of three UK festivals to demonstrate the ambivalence of communitas as a "source of both meaningfulness and exploitation" (2019, p.619). Communitas, Toraldo et al (2019), argued, was used instrumentally within the liminal, rarefied space of these festivals by both volunteers and festival organizers - the former to "build relational bonds and reframe consumption practices as socially-conscious action" and the latter as a motivational tool to justify the use of unpaid labour, infusing "meaning into work" and obscuring" its monotony" (p. 619). Yet, they suggested, both parties demonstrated a certain cynicism about communitas and used "their sense of solidarity with caution" (p. 650).

St John (2001) in an absorbing account of an alternative festival 'ConFest', argued that in the context of this liminal space, while it might be quite tempting to suggest that there existed a wide sense of communitas, "the presence of multiple publics maintaining sometimes complementary interpretations of the event-space, renders this problematical" (p. 52). St John takes issue with what he deems as the unqualified application of Turner's communitas and concludes that the pilgrimage destination of ConFest oscillates "between inclusive and exclusive tendencies [and is] not impregnated by unity" (p.

63). St John urges researchers to take cognizance of the "din of voices and morass of bodies in public events" (p. 63).

Our paper adds to this extant, though limited body of knowledge on the complex nature of communitas within event spaces, also heeding the observation by Wu, Li, Wood, Senaux & Dai (2020, n.p) that further research should be conducted on "the conceptualization of liminal event space and experience" as this remains "problematic and underexplored". Moreover, we highlight that liminal spaces are very much linked to sense of place. Liminal spaces "designate moments of discontinuity …in social space" (Shields, 1990, p. 47) and represent temporary movements out of spaces of 'everyday life'. Yet, despite the temporality and inherently disruptive nature of liminal spaces, they are nevertheless imbued with meaning by volunteers and in this sense event space becomes *place*. In our study we will demonstrate how, for the volunteers, the Tall Ships races conjures up a socially constructed sense of place that is intimately linked with Sunderland as a post-industrial city. So, in this sense liminal festival/ event spaces (such as the Tall Ships races) have a certain permanence as they are inextricably linked to a wider socially constructed sense of place. Indeed, Turner himself spoke to the possibility of transition becoming a 'permanent condition'. (Turner,1969, p.367) and in the case of the Tall Ships races this is evident at least in the medium-term, post-event memories of the festival volunteers.

Sense of place

Current literature tends to situate places hosting ephemeral sporting events as mere locations and backdrops. For example, Gellweiler (2011) conceptualizes sport volunteering as 'sport, event, and volunteering' referring to place only in terms of event location. However, events shape how space is interpreted and given meaning. Notions of space and place are of course interconnected and an excellent way of understanding the two is articulated by Tuan (1977) who suggests that spaces are undifferentiated but once they are infused with value, they become place. Tuan expounds that place:

> has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning (1979, p.387)

Downey, Kinane & Parker (2016, p. x) suggest that the Turnerian concept of liminality implies a space of potentiality and they argue that here space and place are inextricably linked:

> The concept of liminality lies somewhere between space and place. The two terms are distinct, but they are also inextricably interrelated, such that it is difficult, even undesirable to speak of one without reference to the other (Downey et al, 2016, p. x)

Quantitative studies such as Doherty (2009) and Hallmann & Zehrer (2017) identify the importance of place on volunteer motivation and how event volunteering can enhance human and social capital in host areas. Research also points to event volunteering as potentially increasing interest in community volunteering, upskilling of volunteers, enhancing community connectivity and community pride (Doherty, 2009; Fairley et al., 2016; Hallmann & Zehrer, 2017; Kerwin et al., 2015). Works such as Kodama et al, (2013) and Sadd (2018) provide valuable insight into the lived experience of volunteers at events, although these personal accounts provide little insight into how their volunteer experience is shaped or unfolds in relation to any wider sense of place. Kristiansen, Skirstad, Parent & Waddington (2015) demonstrate how through the long-term volunteering at a ski-fly event the symbiotic relationship between event volunteering and host community is developed– noting how volunteering reflects and enhances community identity, solidarity, and pride.

The extant literature has thus provided valuable insights into the importance of connectivity for event volunteering, but the complex, multiple and sometimes contradictory forms of

connectivity and belonging (that is, communitas) and how this shapes volunteers' lived experience of event spaces and places clearly requires further problematization. To examine this phenomenon, we conducted research with volunteers at the 2018 Tall Ships race in Sunderland and in the next section we articulate the methodological underpinnings of our investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The Tall Ships race began in 1973 and is an annual event held in European waters involving 70-100 ships. It is aimed at the youth market and seeks to enable them to develop an interest in sailing whilst also promoting international friendship. It is customary for the ships to visit four ports, with each port arranging a diverse range of entertainment and cultural activities for the crews and visitors. Host ports are selected by Sail Training International which assesses prospective bids in line with specific logistical, technical, and support requirements. The potential benefits of hosting the Tall Ships race include - increasing national and international media exposure, boosting local revenue through tourism, and providing entertainment and cultural activities for local communities (Sail Training International, 2020). In the summer of 2018, the Tall Ships visited Sunderland, a city in the North East of England. Sunderland was once the largest ship building city in the world (during the late 19th and early 20th centuries), but with the closing of its shipyards in the 1980s suffered considerable economic decline.

Despite efforts at regeneration, the city's economic and social development indices continue to lag many other post-industrial cities (Short & Tetlow, 2012) in the UK. However, the

people of Sunderland have developed a strong sense of identity and through symbols such as their soccer team they construct meaning and "express their attachment and sense of belonging to the community" (Burbano-Elizondo, 2006, p. 114). To help with the organization and running of the Tall Ships race, Sunderland City Council recruited 350 volunteers as 'event makers' (Sunderland City Council, n.d.), most of whom were either local to Sunderland or had family and other connections with the city.

Our research adopts a phenomenological approach which is aimed at understanding people's lived experiences of their social world. Phenomenology has been widely used in leisure and tourism studies (Howe, 1991; Lamont, Kennelly & Moyle, 2014; Schmidt & Little, 2007) and enabled us to discern volunteers' experiences through their own lived realities. Consistent with this approach we adopted a qualitative methodology using in-depth semi-structured interviews with volunteers at the Tall Ships race in Sunderland which enabled us to obtain thick descriptions of their lived experiences from the voices of the volunteers themselves. It should be stated at this point that we did not approach the research project as a 'tabula rasa' as we had a general idea of what we wanted to achieve with the research project (broadly, an understanding of volunteers' lived experiences at the event) and this was based on our previous knowledge of work in the field. However, we did not initially have an *a priori* theoretical framework which guided the data collection and within which we framed the initial stages of data analysis.

We followed an inductive process to develop themes from the data and this bears a family resemblance to grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996). Heath (2006, p. 519) contends that most qualitative approaches, as a principle, "avoid imposing predetermined understanding and existing frameworks on the investigation." However, unlike grounded theory, thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) can utilize an inductive approach where "the

themes identified may bear little relation to the specific questions that were asked of the participants" (p. 93). This form of thematic analysis is "data driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). We recognize that this approach has generated several debates in the qualitative literature specifically in terms of whether data is 'forced' into an existing theoretical framework or whether it 'emerges' (Bendassolli, 2013). In this regard, we believe that the "theoretical web is actually a background that guides us, sometimes tacitly, in relation to a phenomenon, its relevant dimensions and ways to better access it" (Bendassolli, 2013, p. 41) Consequently, we used a series of open questions aimed at encouraging our research participants to tell their personal stories and reflections such as 'What is your favorite memory of volunteering at the event'? How did you feel when the Tall Ships left Sunderland? The interviews flowed in a very relaxed, conversational manner with prompts used to elicit more detailed responses such as 'Why did you feel that way?', or 'What was the reason for that?'. We acknowledge that memories cannot be objective recollections of the past but are rather people's reconstructions within the context of their present lives (Lee & Kyle, 2012). We also recognize that memory is by nature "invariably and inevitably selective" (Schacter, 1997 cited in Gellweiler et al, 2018, p. 637) and that memories are fallible, albeit memory storage is "described as being of a permanent nature" (Spinelli, 2005 cited in Gellweiler et al, 2018, p. 637).

To excavate memories and elicit deeper responses, we asked each participant to bring to the interview any photographs or memorabilia that they believed best represented their volunteering experience. External memory aids have been recognized as valuable tools in qualitative social science research (most commonly photographs as in photo elicitation methods) (Harper, 2002; Scarles, 2010). For our study we used several methods to recruit volunteers: contacting all the listed volunteer organizations in Sunderland; placing posters at

different venues around Sunderland; and contacting the volunteer manager for Sunderland City Council.

From these sources we conducted 31 interviews with volunteers each averaging about 1 hour. The volunteers who participated in the study are those who agreed to do so. They were then not representative of the wider pool of volunteers. This aligns with our qualitative approach which does not rely on representativeness and makes no claim to universality. Interviews took place over a four-month period between November 2019 and February 2020 and were mainly conducted on the premises of the researchers' university (19), with others taking place in local cafes (3), at the homes of the volunteers (3) and at a community center (1). Interviews were also conducted via Skype or telephone (5), when it was not practical to meet in person. All 31 research participants were White, and all but one British. All but two were also local to Sunderland. Women outnumbered men (21 and 10 respectively) and were overwhelmingly in the 50+ age category (26 participants). The volunteers performed several roles at the event from managerial to a variety of general positions (see Table 1) Volunteers brought a variety of photographs and memorabilia (such as t-shirts, hats, newspaper clippings, and the event programme) to the interviews with many stating that the act of looking for these prior to the interview refreshed their memories of the event.

[Place Table 1 about here}

Prior to conducting the interviews, we obtained ethical clearance from our university's research ethics committee, which is a requirement for conducting research with human participants. After the volunteers were recruited, the purpose of the research was discussed with them in detail and they were all requested to sign consent forms as an indication and a record of their agreement to take part in the research. All the interviews were conducted,

digitally recorded, and transcribed by the first author. The names of research participants were replaced with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

Our thematic analysis involved six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). . In the first phase, we each read the transcripts multiple times to familiarize ourselves with the data. In the second phase initial codes were manually generated and in the third we looked for themes which we interpreted from the identified codes. It is important to note that it was in these first three phases that we worked independently in an inductive process, uninfluenced by preordained categorizations. In the fourth phase we both convened to collectively review our themes, now relating these to relevant existing theoretical constructs. In the fifth phase we further refined and named our themes, again through the lens of the apposite theory. The sixth and final phase is where we report on our themes which had been derived through collaboration, consensus and working through extant theory. We discerned five key themes which broadly captured the volunteers' lived experiences, and which related to their sense of belonging and connectivity (communitas).

These five themes reflect the complexities and problematics of volunteers' sense of belonging and connectivity to a range of people (the 'volunteer community', the Tall Ships crew, and the Sunderland community), to place (the city of Sunderland) and to the event (the Tall Ships race). We recognize that as is the case with all research, our accounts of the volunteers' lived realities must nevertheless be seen through the prism of our own interpretations. That said, we believe that our illustration of the way the research was conducted, the use of verbatim quotations from the research participants along with the theoretical framing of the discussion presents a credible and plausible interpretation of the volunteers' lived experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

(Dis)connections within the volunteer community

The establishment of personal relationships within volunteer groups during sport events is well documented (Fairley, et al., 2007; Kodama, et al., 2013;) and this is supported by our findings. Several volunteers in our study noted that the unique event space created during the Tall Ships race resulted in them forming friendships and a collective identity:

> "There was a general feeling of togetherness, there was probably 7 or 8 of us as a team, and it was a very close-knit team. I never heard anybody say, 'I can't do that' or 'I won't do that' it was a case of whatever was needed was needed - it was teamwork". (Simon)

> "Everybody worked well together, everybody knew each other, it was like a mini family an extended family. Everybody helped each other, if you were stuck you would ask somebody, and somebody was bound to know the answer. Everybody was lovely, always happy, laughing, cheerful". (Sarah)

These excerpts demonstrate how the unique event space disrupted existing social hierarchies allowing for a sense of solidarity or communitas, to emerge through the shared experience of volunteering. For some volunteers, the relationships made lasted beyond the event:

> "There's a few that I still volunteer with now, they let us know if there is any other volunteering activity going on and I meet up with them. It's quite nice as you walk in and you know somebody straight away" (Lucy)

> "I made friends with people of all ages and all capabilities… I think the most important thing for me is the relationships that I made. I made some really good friends through it and we still keep in touch". (Mia)

These reflections by Lucy and Mia evidence that volunteering at events can increase connectivity and the social fabric of host communities. Yet, for some volunteers, this sense of belonging to a volunteer community was ephemeral and dissipated with the passage of time and the return to the everyday realities of life. This point is reflected in the quotations from Emma and Daniel:

> "No, I thought we would keep in touch, but that's just sort of fizzled out". (Emma).

> "When we finished for a few months afterwards there was a few sort of people saying 'oh let's keep in touch, we will have few nights out', like you always do after a big event, then gradually people say 'oh I can't make this one and I can't make that one' then gradually you lose contact". (Daniel)

There were also findings that contradict the portrayal of the volunteer space as harmonious with some volunteers expressing resentment at what they perceived to be its hierarchical nature:

> "There was a couple of people who were professional volunteers who came in and immediately assumed a supervisor or managerial role and liked nothing better than to order other volunteers around … We did have a few little discussions about how superior they thought they were because a lot of them have got boating experience". (Robert)

Robert describes his disappointment at the differing status ascribed and performed by volunteers within the event space. Those volunteers directly involved with the visitors and with the Tall Ships (those in technical and ship liaison roles) were deemed to be of a higher status than those volunteers helping and directing members of the public (general volunteers). Studies point to the importance of volunteers feeling valued (Fairley et al., 2007) and how non-hierarchical structures can facilitate connectivity between all involved (Allen & Shaw,

2009). However, the above quote illustrates frissons in volunteers' sense of belonging and feelings of connectivity with other volunteers, with the hierarchical structures particularly frustrating for those volunteers who experienced a diminished status to that of their everyday reality:

> "I have been a senior manager in many different roles and have a master's degree. I told them I had an extensive experience, and maybe I would be best placed doing something I could use my skills. This was just completely ignored, and I ended up handing out leaflets … [one day] this guy says 'can you go and work in the bridges?' I said 'ok', he said 'it will be great you will be able to go shopping'. As a woman who has been a senior manager who has way more qualifications than these idiots, it was deeply offensive! Like I was some sort of bleb from the street. I didn't expect to be treated as a moron who goes shopping for a living". (Charlotte)

> "From a volunteering experience it was horrible. Some people were extremely self-important and actually took it on that they were the leaders and you were going to do what you were told to do. The segregation happens quite early in the training, whereas they are shown to be the important ones, and then the other people lower down the organization chart are deemed to be the workers/scum of it all you know… They could have been the person emptying the bins around the corner but in this role, they are actually the team leader" (Peter).

Charlotte and Peter illustrate how, within the context of the liminal event space, traditional social hierarchies are disrupted, leading to disharmony, rather than fostering a sense of communitas. Within the event space new social orders were created, which for some volunteers was a source of significant disappointment and even resentment. The lack of consideration of individual volunteers' requirements and circumstances - is indicative of the

'program management approach' typically applied to the management of volunteers at large events (Holmes et al., 2018). Such an approach is not conducive to the fostering of a sense of communitas amongst volunteers.

(Dis)connections with the Tall Ships crew

Many volunteers valued the connections they made with the crews of the Tall Ships and some even felt that they had developed a relationship based on mutuality:

> "Once you got to know the people on the ships, they were fab. I loved it. We helped them and they helped us. For example, one lad asked, 'will I be able to bring my grandchildren down?' and the captain went 'no problem'. One day we landed up sitting on the back of this beautiful, restored ship with a bottle beer, sort of, you help us, and we help you". (Liam)

This excerpt indicates how volunteers felt that they were able to engage with the Ships' crew in an equitable, mutually beneficial manner. These findings are supported by studies in the extant literature (e.g., Allen & Shaw, 2009) which notes connections forming between volunteers and performers at events. However, our findings also reveal that these connections can be fleeting, only lasting for the duration of the event, leading to feelings of disappointment among the volunteers:

> "I enjoyed working with the captain and the people on the ship, the crew. In terms of a memory, it was how we built a friendship you could call it to a degree, never heard from him since and he's never going to hear from me ever again, but let's call it a working relationship". (Peter)

> "I kept in touch with them until they went, sadly he just hasn't responded to any of my contact attempts since." (Simon)

(Dis)connections with the wider local community

There is a sense from some volunteers that the event helped build local pride and connections with people in the city:

> "I think Sunderland needed a lift and the Tall Ships it sort of brought people together". (Kelvin)

> "The Tall Ships was a boost it kind of, just builds faith, and makes people proud again of the area that they are in". (Mia)

In this way, the event renewed a sense of community and provided a respite from the everyday reality of the city. However, the volunteers also expressed disappointment that more people did not volunteer to help ensure the success of the event:

> "I think it can be a slightly Sunderland thing that 'somebody else will volunteer' it doesn't have to be me. That's the impression I get. Older people like me do volunteer, but I do think there's a lot of younger people that could help, but didn't, then probably moan about things when they didn't do anything". (Chloe)

> "I think some people in Sunderland are thick like they got no appreciation of anything like that. Some of them were like 'what's that'. Not enough educated people to know what it was… So that was a shame." (Leah)

From these excerpts it is evident that these volunteers believe themselves to be active and engaged citizens who take their responsibility for improving the city seriously. However, there is here an element of resentment for what was perceived as the wider community's lack

of interest in the Tall Ships race and the future prosperity of Sunderland. Indeed, for some volunteers, there was a feeling that the Tall Ships event space was distinct from the rest of the city:

> "One of the evenings, England were playing football, I walked from here and once you got away from the immediate confines of the Tall Ships people were only interested in going to the pub to see the World Cup match. I met up with a few people and said 'have you been down to the Tall Ships?' 'No not bothered'. Talking to people in the vicinity of the ships they would be gushing about them, but once you got out of the actual confines of it, it wasn't much" (Simon).

Fairley et al., (2016) note how during the Sydney Olympics volunteers felt the whole city embraced the 'Olympic Spirit' and there were evident feelings of communitas. For Simon in the quote above however, there is clear frustration that some community members outside the demarcated event space were unwilling to embrace the carnivalesque and unique atmosphere and opportunities provided by the Tall Ships race. It is interesting also that while some volunteers resented the hierarchies created among volunteers within the event space, some volunteers established a hierarchy with 'other' community residents. The latter were perceived to be of lower status due to their lack of engagement with the event which the volunteers believed also translated into a lack of pride in the city. For these volunteers then, the extent to which the event space was appreciated was intimately connected to the way in which Sunderland as a place was imbued with value.

(Dis)connections with the city of Sunderland

Our findings also demonstrated how volunteering enhanced volunteers' connection to Sunderland as a place. This is because the unique event space opened areas and experiences in Sunderland that were previously inaccessible:

> "One of the reasons I was interested in doing it was, and this might sound ridiculous, is that it is probably one of the only opportunities I will get to see the Sunderland docks. Because it is normally closed off to the public". (Daniel)

> "I've been doing my family tree and all of my family have worked generation after generation at the River Wear and I was the only one of my side of the family who hadn't worked on the River Wear. So, I thought here is my opportunity to go and at least do one week of work on the River Wear". (Wayne)

These quotations illustrate how volunteering afforded volunteers the ability to access the city in new ways - allowing them to both experience contemporary Sunderland and (re)connect with its industrial maritime history. Volunteers' knowledge of Sunderland was further enhanced through formal training before the event, and informal conversations facilitated by the unique space created during the event:

> "I thought I knew Sunderland, but you don't know Sunderland until you do these treasure hunts. I was telling people things I didn't know before the training. I was telling people there's a lovely little pub around the port side, and things like that I didn't know about before. So, I learnt a lot more about the city" (Olivia)

> "I didn't know about some of the history. It was quite interesting to find out about this on training days, but also though speaking to other people about what they knew about the city. The tale about the boy climbing to the top of the mast to nail the colors (Jack Crawford), I didn't know about that until somebody told me. And I actually went to the

> park the week after the Tall Ships to find the memorial to him and have a read of it. So, it certainly led me onto other things. Inspires your interest without a doubt". (Robert)

Olivia and Robert both indicate how accessing previously inaccessible spaces through the event, resulted in them learning more about Sunderland's past and its present. The training for events is typically understood as helping volunteers connect to the event (Costa et al, 2006), other volunteers (Kodama et al., 2013), or to enhance their individual skills (Shaw, 2009). However, our findings reveal the importance of the knowledge gained *within* the event space to volunteers' understanding and appreciation of place.

Our findings also demonstrate that paradoxically, the Tall Ships race brought to the fore aspects of Sunderland that volunteers found frustrating or that epitomized the city's post-industrial malaise. In particular, the apparent lack of synergy between different stakeholders and the absence of political will to maximize the benefits from hosting such a prestigious event:

> "I don't think there was enough advertising. I think some people knew absolutely nothing about it. I don't know whether they had a tight budget for advertising or what I think they could have made it better. We asked the taxi driver in Sunderland and he said 'never heard of it' well that's not a good advert for Sunderland if the taxi driver doesn't know nothing about it" (Liam).

> "I was disappointed that local businesses didn't really make any effort. The city didn't stay open long enough. Because there were thousands of people came down then when you went into the city centre, the city centre was closed... It just seemed as though there were two halves to the event there was a disconnect between the Tall Ships and the economic side of the city. I don't know why that happened". (Daniel)

> "I was thinking that it could be the springboard which Sunderland needs…But I really don't think the Local Authority or business picked it up and run forward with it. I really don't" (Robert)

These narratives reveal volunteers' disappointment in the apparent failure of the city to leverage the event to maximize possible benefits. The extant literature highlights volunteers' disappointment resulting from aspects of the event space – such as the nature of their assigned tasks or personal inconvenience (Coyne & Coyne, 2001; Doherty, 2009; Holmes et al., 2018). However, the above quotes illustrate that, beyond the individual experience in the event space, disappointment can reflect a feeling of missed opportunity for the wider city. This further emerges when volunteers reflect on the lack of change in Sunderland since the event:

> "It brought the place to life, but then it went and what was left? There was no legacy. I mean they didn't do any big infrastructure changes or anything, as far as I can remember, it just looks the same old, same old… I don't know, if a city is going to invest that kind of money, as it did cost the city a lot of money, maybe you are entitled to hope that something will be left from it". (Charlotte)

Charlotte expresses disillusionment that after the initial excitement and euphoria of the event there was little long-term change in the city. There is a feeling that the Tall Ships event represents a missed opportunity for Sunderland to alter its everyday reality and develop a more prosperous future. A large body of published work examines the legacy of cities hosting sport festivals/events (Lee & Taylor, 2005; Preuss, 2007; Preuss, 2019; Stewart & Rayner, 2016). Extant studies suggest economic and social benefits are possible, however, to maximise this requires a clear vision and strategic planning to integrate the festival/event into the city's long-term development plan (Preuss, 2007). The above quote indicates

disappointment that the commitment of volunteers to the future of Sunderland was not matched by other stakeholders (for example the Local Authority, businesses, 'other' community members), thus failing to fulfill their responsibilities to the city.

Connections with the Tall Ships race

The final theme emerging through the findings is the connections respondents felt with the Tall Ships race. Scholars such as Coyne & Coyne (2001) and Monga (2006) note an important motivation to volunteer is an affinity with the sport or event. Our findings similarly point to many of the volunteers having a personal connection to the Tall Ships race resulting from volunteering at previous Tall Ships races or simply seeing them when they visited other cities in Northern England (Blyth, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Newcastle). For example, the following volunteers reflect on their deep feelings of connection with the Tall Ships race:

> "My wife and I have an emotional connection to the Tall Ships race because 30 odd years ago we had our 1st date watching the Tall Ships passing in Gateshead. A few years ago, we went down to Hartlepool to watch it. Being on the dockside in Sunderland and seeing some of the bigger ships we had seen 30 plus years ago was quite something. Was an emotional connection for the two of us" (William)

> "I've always loved the Tall Ships and really I only asked [to volunteer] to try and get on the Mir (the biggest Tall Ship). I went to them when they were in Newcastle, Liverpool. I just love them love the ships". (Leah)

These quotes illustrate the deep sense of connection and belonging that these volunteers feel for the Tall Ships, and how volunteering offered them the opportunity to further enhance this. Additional evidence of this is provided by William when he reflects on his feeling on the last day of the event:

> "You get attached to them, when I stood watching them all leave, I felt a little bit emotional when they disappeared. It was just such a great event to be part of and I will not forget it. I would like to see them come back, and if they did come back, I would probably put my hand up again to be part of it". (William)

William describes how volunteering enhanced his feeling of attachment and connectivity to the ships and how this would motivate him to volunteer if the Tall Ships returned to Sunderland. Important for establishing such strong connections is the feeling that they were insiders to the event as Sarah describes:

> "If I just went to watch it, it would have been the case of going there, having a look around, seeing what was there then going home. Being a volunteer, we were more involved, they let us see the background not just the event. So could see how it works. How they were going to do it and stuff like that. It was like I was a part of the making of the Tall Ships in Sunderland, and that's how they made you feel. They were really welcoming really warm". (Sarah)

For Sarah the opportunity to go beyond the spectacle of the Tall Ships to see behind the scenes enhanced her feeling of being part of, and connected to, the event.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have demonstrated how volunteers' experience of sport festivals can be understood through complex feelings of (dis)connectivity and sense of belonging to a range of people, to place and to the event. This is an important contribution to the extant literature in leisure and event studies, which while identifying the importance of such connections, provides little insight into the problematics of how such connections ***and*** disconnections frame and give meaning to volunteers lived experiences at these events. We have shown that

the Turnerian concept of communitas, useful for understanding the bonds volunteers form within the liminal event space, has thus far been applied in a rather simplistic and uncritical way within the event and leisure literature with the exception of limited extant critiques of this concept provided by for example St John (2001), Chambers, (2015) and Toraldo et al (2019). Building on these limited studies, we argue that uncritical applications of the concept of communitas fail to account for the disruptions to feelings of connectivity and sense of belonging for example occasioned by the hierarchical nature of the volunteer role.

The problematics associated with volunteers' sense of belonging to place is also highlighted as while on the one hand volunteers expressed a sense of pride in the city, on the other they voiced a sense of disappointment and frustration with the fact that key stakeholders in the city did not appear to have leveraged the benefits of the event to alter its continued post-industrial decline. Volunteers also expressed their frustration at the seeming lack of effective marketing of the event to residents of the Sunderland community who they believed were disconnected from the event and who failed to recognize its potential value for the upliftment of the city. The event therefore also brought to the fore volunteers' feelings of (dis)connection from the city and from 'other' residents. How volunteers frame and reflect on their experiences within the event space thus provides important pointers to how they construct and experience Sunderland as a place. Space and place are therefore intimately connected in the lived experiences of volunteers at liminal events and this sense of connectivity is inherently riddled with contradictions which last well beyond the temporality of the event itself.

Our findings resonate beyond this case by bringing to the fore the complexity of (dis)connections and sense of belonging experienced by volunteers in the context of large-scale peripatetic events. There is considerable scope for future research to expand on these findings in three main respects. First, this paper focuses on volunteers with a personal

connection to place (residents of Sunderland and those with close family or other connections to the city). How volunteers interpret their experience in the absence of such place connections is an interesting avenue for further exploration. Second, more qualitative, longitudinal comparative analyses could provide further insights into how volunteers' (dis)connections and feelings of belonging change over time. Third, while we did not aim to characterize volunteers in terms of whether they could be said to be serious leisure enthusiasts (see Stebbins, 1996), it might be interesting to examine whether there are differences amongst volunteers' experiences in this regard.

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