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The public face of event volunteering at the 2006 Commonwealth Games: The media perspective

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Volunteers play a major role in mega and major events, both cultural and sporting, contributing invaluable human resources. Frequently described (and, maybe, over-emphasised) as the ‘unsung heroes’ of such events, relatively little is known about this group of workers when compared with volunteers who give regular and long-term commitment to their area of interest. This paper focuses on media representation and perceptions of volunteering at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. The exploratory study adopts an extended timeframe and reports on media representation of volunteers over the full event cycle from recruitment through training and the actual event, concluding with consideration of the Games’ aftermath. The findings highlight various positive and negative aspects of the media representation of volunteering at this type of mega event and how this has the potential to influence its public face. Conclusions focus on the implications for the media management of volunteering at major events and suggestions for future research in this area.

Keywords: volunteers, mega sporting events, press reaction, media perspectives, project-based leisure

INTRODUCTION

Mega sporting events, notably those of global interest such as the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games, provide a public interest agenda that addresses issues across a wide spectrum of concerns and opportunities. Such sporting spectacles are part of the wider and growing analysis of major events within diverse fields of urban regeneration, economic development, politics and tourism (Getz, 1997). Major events depend heavily on the participation of volunteers who undertake a wide range of tasks associated with operations and administration. Therefore, the engagement and management of these volunteers within any major event is a major consideration for organisers.

The literature on volunteering is relatively thin with regard to time-bound mega events, sporting and cultural, notwithstanding the

contribution of, for example, Kemp (2002), Ralston *et al.* (2003), Cuskelly *et al.* (2004) and Green and Chalip (2004). What is evident is that without the volunteer contribution, most mega events would find it difficult to operate in either logistical/organisational or financial terms (Green and Chalip, 2004).

The media (print and electronic) plays a significant role in all stages of volunteer engagement associated with mega events. Unlike long-term volunteering, where a relatively stable volunteer workforce can be recruited and trained on an on-going basis, mega events are time-bound and perishable in the sense that the timeline for the processes of awareness creation, recruitment, training and deployment is immutable. As a consequence, communicating with potential volunteers from the onset and then maintaining good relations within the communities

from which volunteers are drawn is a major requirement for event organisers if they are to meet their volunteer participation objectives. This is where the role of the media is crucial.

The purpose of this exploratory paper is to evaluate the manner in which the print media played this information and awareness maintenance role in the context of the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia. In doing so, this paper complements perspectives on volunteering more widely reported in the literature, particularly those of event organisers and the volunteers themselves (Kemp, 2002; Ralston *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, the paper analyses the manner in which the community in the host city of a major games event is informed about volunteers and volunteering over the full chronological cycle of the event, from initial volunteer recruitment through to the euphoria of the event itself and its aftermath. In doing so, we seek to contribute both to the specific literature on volunteering at sporting events and to wider discourse on the role of the media in supporting a volunteering culture in society, recognising the validity of Machin's (2005, p. 2) comment that 'images of, and stereotypes about volunteering can have important influences on the recruitment, retention and diversity of volunteers within organisations' and that, as a consequence, this image making 'deserves considered attention'. Our starting point, therefore, is to consider key themes in the literature, the nature of mega sporting events, volunteering in the context of such events and the, at times ambivalent, representation of volunteering in the media.

MEGA SPORTING EVENTS

Mega events have been described as 'short-term events with long-term consequences' (Roche, 1994, p. 1). This description points clearly to the economic as well as political, social and cultural motives that persuade

cities and countries to bid for the hosting of events such as the Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games and the football World Cup. Roche (2000, p. 1) further defines such happenings as 'large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance' and Getz (1997, p. 6) quantifies the definition by noting that 'their volume should exceed 1 million visits, their capital cost should be at least \$500 million and their reputation should be that of a "must see" event'. This latter point highlights the role such events can have in destination development and image building. These outcomes are most closely associated with hallmark events and as such both Hall (1992) and Getz (1997) have recognised the cross over between these two event types.

Mega sporting events are justified, in terms of the public expenditure that is required to host them, on the basis of their long-term benefits that can be found in new event and urban infrastructure, urban renewal, enhanced international reputation, increased tourist visitation and related benefits (Crompton, 1999; Hall, 1987, 1992; Kasimati, 2003). Such events also develop strong cultural dimensions and the importance of these links to the development of culture and heritage in a community is widely recognised (Scott, 2004). Effectively managed media coverage is also of major importance to mega events in ensuring on-message communication about key elements of pre-event activities and post-event benefits to the local community. This includes our area of interest here, that of volunteer management, particularly relating to recruitment, retention, benefits and public acknowledgement.

Sports events and tourism are inexorably linked and there is considerable evidence that the tourism potential of mega sporting events is a major factor in encouraging cities to bid to host such events. The

literature on sports tourism is one that is growing rapidly (e.g. Getz, 1997; Higham, 2005; Hinch and Higham, 2004; Ritchie and Adair, 2002) but makes scant reference to the core concern of this paper in the mega sporting events context, that of volunteering and, in particular, public representation of the contribution that volunteers undoubtedly make to the success of such events. This contribution is generally recognised as providing an important economic and cultural dimension to the effective operation of mega sporting events (Kemp, 2002; Ralston *et al.*, 2003). Collectively, the official brochure for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne (Melbourne 2006; Commonwealth Games, 2006) formally recognises the contribution of its 'Unsung Heroes' by listing all 14,500 of them by name and state of origin over 12 pages of the publication. These 'unsung heroes' are probably, in numerical terms, the most significant cohort of workers at mega sporting events and are the people who are working without remunerative benefits. We will now consider the phenomenon of volunteering in the context of such events.

VOLUNTEERING AND MEGA SPORTING EVENTS

It is important to recognise the role of volunteering in the context of mega sporting events and how this role is represented in the literature. Work on volunteering is relatively recent with regard to these time-bound events, sporting and cultural, although the contribution of, for example, Elstad (1996) and Kemp (2002) in relation to volunteer learning and the wider discussions contained in Farrell *et al.* (1998), Chalip (2000), Moragas *et al.* (2000) and Green and Chalip (2004) are evidence of an emerging field of study.

At the same time, there is also some consideration of volunteering within the broader, participant sports environment (e.g. Amis and Slack, 1996; Andrew, 1996;

Cuskelly, 1995). Ralston *et al.*'s (2003) study of volunteers focused on their profile and motivation prior to the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester and is one of the few studies to provide an in-depth pre-event perspective. In contrast to the event context, rather more is known about volunteering and volunteers within more stable and long-term working environments in areas such as social services and the cultural and heritage sector (Graham and Foley, 1998; Lockstone, 2005; Lockstone *et al.*, 2003). Indeed, the focus of much work to promote volunteering is on the establishment of long-term, essentially professional working relationships between volunteers and their employers (Baum, 2006; Kent Sports Development Unit, n.d.).

The research literature has identified some similarities between volunteering and wider leisure activity and this is important in a discussion of mega events in that a significant proportion of volunteers offer their services because of their specific interest in the event focus (sport, music, etc.). Building upon the concept proposed by Stebbins (1982), Parker (1992, p. 5) defines volunteering as being a type of 'serious leisure', the characteristics of which include a need to persevere with the activity, the tendency to have a career in it, durable benefits, unique culture and participant identification. Stebbins (1996, p. 216) later also referred to his seminal concept as 'career volunteering'. Serious leisure has been compared with its 'casual leisure' counterpart, which Stebbins suggests comprises momentary activities that require little in the way of skill but are nevertheless enjoyable (1996, p. 219).

While the temporal aspect of casual leisure might be most apt in relation to mega event volunteering, the definition itself does not sit well with the skills base often required or acquired as a result of this type of participation. In recognition of this gap, Stebbins (2004) recently added to his theory by

suggesting that, volunteering also occurs in 'project-based' leisure opportunities that can be short term, infrequent, yet of a relatively complicated nature. Volunteering for sports events is given as a specific example of project-based leisure. Despite these similarities, Stebbins (1996, 2004) has noted the failure of leisure and volunteering researchers to crossover and view relevant issues from the perspective of each other's discipline areas.

VOLUNTEERING AND THE MEDIA

There is limited research that specifically examines the impact of the media in promoting awareness of volunteering and enhancing the recruitment and retention of volunteers. A larger body of research exists on the image of volunteers and volunteering, as held by volunteers themselves and the general public. That said, however, little of this work is set in the context of event volunteering. The work of the Voluntary Action Media Unit (VAMU) has been particularly valuable in this area in terms of surveying the existing literature and identifying research gaps (Machin, 2005) and investigating the liaison between voluntary groups and the media on volunteer issues (Machin and Malmersjo, 2006). As Machin (2005, p. 3) notes, the 'research suggests that a person's propensity to get involved in volunteering is influenced by the images they hold of volunteering'. Studies have examined volunteer image based on demographic cohorts (*e.g.* young people and older people) and found similarities and distinctions around within and between cohorts (Callow, 2004; Davis Smith, 1999).

Given the focus of the current paper on media reporting, the more relevant stream of research is that which focuses on the role of the media in influencing volunteering activity through the use of television, radio, print materials and other mediums. Machin (2005) suggests that much of this influence is still in question, particularly in relation to

volunteer recruitment. While noting that the most useful evidence regarding the media's role in influencing people to volunteer comes from analysing specific volunteer recruitment campaigns, Machin (2005) goes on to suggest that there is a lack of evaluation studies that seek to assess how successful these campaigns are in achieving their goals. This is a particularly valid point in the context of mega-event volunteering, where large-scale, large-budget recruitment campaigns are often run to source requisite volunteer numbers.

Furthermore, as Machin (2005) rightly contends, the media's role in recruitment must be questioned in light of the prevalence of research relating to volunteering in general (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Volunteering Australia, 2006) and specific to the events context (Coyne and Coyne, 2001; Williams *et al.*, 1995) that suggests word-of-mouth recruitment of volunteers dominates. It would be reasonable to expect that given the thousands of volunteers needed to operationalise mega events and their often diverse backgrounds, word of mouth would be a less dominant recruitment method, paving the way for the media to create awareness about such events.

VAMU (2005) further suggests that the relationship between the media and volunteer-dependent organisations and the volunteers themselves can be ambiguous, pointing to levels of mutual hostility and distrust at times, drawn from what they describe as 'the power imbalance in the relationship' (p. 4). Specifically referring to smaller charities, VAMU refers to the widespread feeling that the media processes 'huge power and that a small charity has little possibility of affecting the news agenda' (VAMU, 2005, p. 4). On the face of it, such concerns should not apply in consideration of mega events, which have rather more 'clout' in terms of their media positioning, but nonetheless are required to manage this power relationship in a careful and considered manner.

To go some way to address a dearth of research relating to how volunteering is portrayed by the media, this paper will analyse the role of volunteers at a mega sporting event, an area which is immature in research terms and has, to date, relied upon retrospective data collection, using the volunteers themselves as the evidential voice. The public face of volunteering and volunteers, as represented within the media, and 'fed' both to those engaging directly with the events as spectators and those located within the host community, have not been widely reported. Evidence for this monitoring of the volunteer experience over the full event cycle also appears to be absent in the literature. This exploratory paper seeks to redress these gaps in the context of one recent mega event.

METHODOLOGY

The Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia took place between 15 and 26 March 2006 and was the largest, multi-nation sporting event of the year. A total of 71 countries and 4500 athletes took part in 16 sports and 24 disciplines (Brown, 2006, p. 3) over a period of 10 days. The Commonwealth Games are second only to the Olympic Games in size (countries, athletes and range of sports).

The role of volunteers was very effectively choreographed by the event organisers before, during and after the Games and widely reported in the Melbourne and national Australian press. Understanding media representation of mega events is important in that this, for many remote participants, represents their sole means of access to what is happening. In this sense, therefore, this discussion builds upon the work of Tomlinson (2005) and Machin (2005) in seeking to understand media representation and presentation of volunteering as a phenomenon.

This paper provides a secondary analysis of the manifest content (McMurray *et al.*, 2004, p. 208) of press media coverage, covering the period from the launch of volunteer recruitment on 31 January 2005 (Guest, 2005) through to the event itself and the immediate and short-term aftermath of the Games (up to 30 April 2006). The Dow Jones Business Interactive (Factiva) database was used to select a sample of relevant documents for analysis. Separate searches using the identifiers 'Commonwealth Games volunteer', 'Games volunteer' and 'volunteer and Melbourne' collectively yielded approximately 65 items covering this period. This material incorporates unscripted news as well as correspondence items, which frequently present what might be seen as a rather more balanced public view of volunteering. The majority of items were drawn from a limited number of press sources because of the state/national focus of volunteering at the Games. A high proportion of items appear to be drawn from official press releases by the Games organisers, particularly in advance of March 2006 and, therefore, considerable duplication was evident in coverage across a range of national newspapers in Australia. The approach adopted, of course, was limited by the focus on what might be styled 'establishment' media sources. As a result, alternative sources, particularly electronic Internet sources such as volunteer blogs, were not sourced for the purpose of this study and could provide a rich source for analysis within future research.

The next step of the analysis involved determining appropriate content categories (McMurray *et al.*, 2004, p. 209). Definitive periods in the press reporting of the volunteer experience provided the basis for these categories. The resultant categories are as follows:

- the initial euphoria and volunteer recruitment
- discovering roles and responsibilities

- reality sets in
- immediate lead up and the Games themselves
- post-event euphoria

This temporal classification is important in supporting the chronicle of media coverage that provides the main story within this paper. Given that all previous research on volunteers at mega events have collected data at specific points within the event cycle, before (Ralston *et al.*, 2003) or in retrospect (Kemp, 2002), this approach acknowledges that volunteer expectations and experiences may change over the time period between recruitment and the disbandment of the volunteer team and that not all volunteers last the full course of the event. The methodological strength of this paper, therefore, lies in the manner in which media representations of volunteering are logged and analysed over the full event life cycle.

Categorisation of material was undertaken on a discretionary and judgemental basis and some level of interpretation was inevitable within this process. Our research findings give a representative flavour of the themes and issues addressed within the local and national press against the above headings. These themes and issues, substantively, reflect the image of volunteering with which the wider community in the host city and beyond were confronted and, as such, may have influenced general perceptions of volunteering, both within the context of mega sporting events and beyond.

Press analysis of the volunteer cycle included reference to published sources from nine different newspapers, published during the lead up, the actual event and its aftermath in Australia. Table 1 summarises the range of sources used and quantifies items analysed with respect to each of the key categories identified above.

It is clear from Table 1 that the type and tone of sources accessed during the Games'

cycle changed over time. Information-based supplements were more likely early on as part of the media feed by the Games organisers and letters begin to emerge closer to the start of the event as the reality of the volunteer assignment sets in.

The qualitative approach to the presentation of findings allows the press reports and those represented in them, to talk for themselves, insofar as this is possible. By this means, the voices of those involved and those of the journalists engaged in covering volunteering and the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games can be heard, albeit with the caveat that these voices have, inevitably, been selected and edited by the researchers. The final section of this paper, our discussion and conclusions, will attempt to relate these voices to wider published discussion on volunteering in general and, specifically, work that is applicable in the context of mega sporting events, leisure and the media.

A limitation in this study relates to the extent to which our sources represent a balanced view of volunteering and volunteers at the event in question. We do not seek this balance in this paper and recognise that to achieve this would require wider data collection from other stakeholders and also reference to the non-mainstream press. This is the work of further research and we develop suggestions with respect to an agenda to accommodate this within our discussion and conclusions section. What we seek to do here is to investigate how the mainstream press engages with volunteering at mega events and how it reports what takes place, both through its use of 'passive sources' such as press releases and through more intrusive investigative reporting of happenings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Using the analysis criteria outlined above, the findings of this study are reported in a

Table 1 Media analysed by source, type and tone

Stage	Number of items	Tone						Type		
		Source		Melbourne		National		News/ Features	Letters	Special supplements
		Melbourne	National	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative			
Initial euphoria	18	14	4	12	2	4	0	10	0	8
Discovering roles	11	5	6	5	0	4	2	3	0	8
Reality sets in	14	8	6	2	6	4	2	7	3	4
Immediate lead up	15	10	5	7	3	4	1	10	1	4
Post-event euphoria	7	5	2	4	1	2	0	4	1	0
Total	65									

Note: Melbourne sources included: *The Age Newspaper*, *The Herald Sun Newspaper*. National sources included: *The Australian Newspaper* (National), *The Australian Financial Review* (National), *The Advertiser* (Adelaide, South Australia), *Mercury* (Hobart, Tasmania), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (New South Wales), *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, New South Wales), *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane, Queensland).

chronological fashion that covers the full event life cycle, as each category can be approximately aligned to a period or significant juncture in the history or reporting of the Commonwealth Games. The findings, in the form of direct quotes supporting each category, are identified by media type (news/features, letters, special information supplement).

The Initial Euphoria (1 February 2005) and Volunteer Recruitment (10 May 2005)

Charting the volunteer experience associated with Commonwealth Games begins with the launch of the volunteer programme on 31 January 2005 by the Australian Federal Treasurer Peter Costello (Edwards, 2005a, p. 1). Press reports at the time highlighted the positive response to the launch:

'I was determined to get in', she said. 'I think everyone was concerned because they said they would stop at a certain number and everyone wants to get their application in' (volunteer Leonora Antonello cited in Ker, 2005a, p. 2, News).

With more than 9,000 online applications received on the first day alone, once again Australians have shown how willing they are to donate their time to worthwhile causes. The global response has also exceeded expectations with applications received from Azerbaijan to Wales (Peter Costello cited in Edwards, 2005a, p. 1, Supplement).

This level of enthusiasm helps to explain why, within 1 week of its launch, the volunteer programme had reached its self-imposed cap of 20,000 applicants (Ker, 2005b, p. 5).

Moving on from this initial stage of the recruitment process, in early March 2005 applicants who had undergone a telephone screening interview were further assessed during roadshows held in regional Victoria and all the Australian capitals. Press

reports emphasised the scope of this process:

Although more than 220 people went through the Geelong-based volunteer assessment process in the three days from March 3, so many people from the Geelong region lodged applications that the roadshow returned on April 19 to assess a further 100 people (Adams, 2005, p. 6, Supplement).

Volunteer Phillip Tang, 21, described the roadshow as a 'real eye-opener in terms of how big the Commonwealth Games are going to be' (Adams, 2005, p. 6, Supplement).

The same could also be said of initial reports regarding the training programme. Games volunteers would be expected to complete. Specific aspects mentioned were an initial induction, role specific training, venue specific training and event leadership training (for those volunteers assigned to leadership roles). CEO of the Melbourne Commonwealth Games Corporation, John Harnden, commented that 'training will be a key ingredient of the volunteer experience, not only to ensure that everyone has the skills to carry out their roles, but more importantly to excite and enthuse people about the journey they are about to embark on' (cited in Training: What to Expect, 2005, p. 7, Supplement).

The official journey commenced with the selection of volunteers from early May 2005. Reporting of the event at this time positively focused on the background of the volunteers and how they hoped to contribute to the event. Some examples include:

Liz Bostock is a self-confessed 'serial volunteer'. She has been volunteering on and off for 20 years, including at events such as the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 2004 Athens Games (Kerbaj, 2005, p. 13, News).

Although excited, Kate said she was hoping to follow in Maidie's footsteps (her mother-in-law) and become an official driver (volunteer Kate Hyams cited in Ker, 2005c, p. 6, News).

If he could nominate a role at the Games it would be to commentate basketball (volunteer Sean Zimmerman cited in Gurvich, 2005a, p. 8, Supplement).

It should be noted, however, that not all reporting was positive, especially after it was revealed that errors made during security checks had resulted in a small number of people being wrongly disqualified from the volunteer programme (Ker, 2005d, p. 7), perhaps giving the general public a more worrying impression:

Almost 100 people have had their applications to join the Commonwealth Games program rejected after failing checks of their criminal records (Ker, 2005e, p. 6, News).

The Age believes that up to 50 people with criminal convictions will remain in the program (Ker, 2005d, p. 6, News).

The evidence presented here points to the controlled use of media as a means by which event organisers were able to ensure sufficient interest and participation in the volunteering programme for the Games. The reports also indicate the presence of normal human resource management activities associated with the volunteering process – professional recruitment, suitability checking and training in particular. The presence of a competitive volunteer labour market (with supply exceeding demand for volunteers) is a characteristic of time-bound mega events not generally found in volunteering for extended time commitments.

Discovering Roles and Responsibilities (29 October 2005)

As the Commonwealth Games drew closer, in early November 2005, focus shifted towards the allocation of volunteer roles and associated responsibilities, giving insights that were both positive and negative about the responsibilities that volunteers were

expected to take aboard. The positive flavour of the reporting at this juncture is evidenced by the following excerpt from *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

To all our Games volunteers, thank you for playing your part in ensuring a successful Games. We look forward to sharing this experience with you (Gearing up for Success, 2005, p. 2, Supplement).

This pat on the back for volunteers, several months out from the event, was echoed by celebrity basketballer Andrew Gaze:

We appreciate their support and the contribution they're going to make to the Commonwealth Games. We also encourage them to do their very best to ensure our country is presented in the best possible light (cited in Gurvich, 2005b, p. 5, Supplement).

For the volunteers themselves, this stage of the event was a chance to rejoice in the roles they had been given. In reference to Jane MacCubbin's role as spectator services team leader, Gurvich (2005c, p. 6, Supplement) noted, she 'is looking forward to being a part of the Games, seeing some of the sports, and is excited about "what it (the Games) will bring to the whole of Victoria"'.

The reporting of operational aspects relating to volunteer roles gave cause to highlight the complexities surrounding the organisation of events that are the scope of the Commonwealth Games. Although the role and training requirements in themselves should not be viewed as negatives, they do serve to highlight the delicate balance between a volunteer's freedom to choose the activities they participate in and the Games organiser's need to fill roles and rosters.

In relation to training, as noted above, volunteers were expected to attend a number of different types of training sessions. Edwards (2005b, p. 4) noted that this requirement on average meant 16 h of training per volunteer. Elsewhere, it was highlighted that training was mandatory and 'non attendance at a

training session may result in organisers removing you (volunteers) from the program' (More Vital Questions, 2005, p. 15, Supplement).

Turning to work roles, the point was made that 'due to the logistics involved in rostering up to 15,000 volunteers, it will not be possible for volunteers to swap roles before or during the Games. In some circumstances, however, due to changing demand in certain areas, volunteers may be redeployed into other roles or more than one role' (More Vital Questions, 2005, p. 15, Supplement). Games organisers called on volunteers to have a flexible attitude in relation to their role and particular rosters (Edwards, 2005c, p. 1). Indeed, 'volunteers were told they had to make themselves available for every day of the Games' (Phillips, 2005, p. 7, News). It may be questioned whether the apparent lack of reciprocal flexibility might be a small price to pay for those volunteers who chose to participate in the Games.

Reported in a more harsh fashion ('Rule book muzzles volunteers', 'No hugging at Games') were details of the code of conduct affecting volunteers. Examples include:

A section of the volunteer rule book titled Embracing Cultures makes it clear that not only will there be no hugging, there will be no physical contact at all (Phillips, 2005, p. 7, News).

Commonwealth Games chiefs have banned volunteers from talking about politics and religion (No Hugging at Games, 2005, p. 3, News).

The media reporting here extends beyond the use of press release material for almost the first time as correspondence and specific investigations uncover some negative responses to role allocations by intending volunteers. This is consistent with issues raised in volunteer studies (Kemp, 2002) and points to behaviour that is little different to that of paid employees, reacting to

perceived inappropriate management decision-making.

The extent to which these roles and responsibilities impacted upon the reporting of the volunteer experience is examined the coming sections.

Reality Sets in (6 January 2006)

For some volunteers, with the event only months away, the reality of their decision to volunteer sets in. Reporting of the volunteering experience at this time focused on issues to do with work schedules and transport. In general, the tone of the reporting was quite negative.

The first sign of dissonance was an article in *The Age* newspaper detailing the workload issues of one volunteer. The report contends that Ms Angela Eeles had been upfront with Games organisers in stating that she only had 2 weeks annual leave available to devote to her volunteering assignment (Szego, 2006, p. 4). Despite this disclosure, she received a schedule that the article labelled as 'gruelling'. The negative tone of the report is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

Ms Eeles said she was forced to quit as a volunteer driver after the organisers issued her with a gruelling schedule on which they refused to compromise. Her roster, seen by *The Age*, entailing working almost 60 hours a week, Monday to Saturday, for most of March (Szego, 2006, p. 4, News).

I said: 'Is there anything you can do to reduce the hours?' And they said, 'Well, if you can't do this, then you can't do anything' (volunteer Angela Eeles cited in Szego, 2006, p. 4, News).

Another volunteer countered Ms Eeles' view with a more positive outlook on the expected workloads:

I volunteered for the 2000 Sydney Olympics and was rostered on for a similar number of hours; it was no 'walk in the park', but it was one of the most rewarding experiences

of my life. I met so many people from all over the world and the memories from those two weeks will never fade – but funnily enough, I can't remember my roster (volunteer Cheryl Bittmann, Letters and Emails, 2006, p. 10).

Despite this bright spot, several articles ('1200 volunteers quit: Drop-out rates soars as opening ceremony nears', 'Unhappy Games volunteers quit', '1500 volunteers throw in the towel') provided the general public with a less positive impression about the state of the volunteer programme. For example:

Officials confirmed another 250 volunteers had left in the past two weeks, taking total losses to 1,500 – or one in 10 – since November (1500 Volunteers Throw in the Towel, 2006, p. 23, News).

Officials yesterday confirmed the alarming drop-out rate as efforts continued to fill the breach just 67 days from the opening ceremony. Melbourne 2006 welcomed 15,000 volunteers in November, but since then the unpaid army has been shrinking at a rate equal to 17 a day (Phillips, 2006a, p. 15, News).

Games organisers at this juncture were keen to minimise any potential damage done by such reporting. Evidence of their attempts to do so is highlighted in the following excerpts:

Mr Harnden (Games CEO) said the attrition rate was below what had been expected (Phillips, 2006a, p. 15, News).

Games chief executive John Harnden said most of the initial withdrawals were because of changed personal circumstances (Phillips, 2006b, p. 13, News).

The transport issues surrounding volunteers getting to and from the Games venues also attracted a certain amount of negative publicity. Cost issues were of particular importance for country volunteers who unlike their city counterparts were not

granted access to free public transport. For example:

I read about the Government's VIP list, with all those fats cats and all their free perks, and it made me sick to think they are making country volunteers shell out their own money just to get to their venues (volunteer Marylynne cited in Phillips, 2006b, p. 13, News).

Given the lack of car parking at venues, volunteers were urged to take public transport to and from the Games sites, however, access also proved a problem:

As a Games volunteer, I have been told to travel to/from my site on public transport. Unfortunately there are no trains at 4 am for a 5.30 pm start. No wonder 1200 quit (50/50, 2006, p. 18, Letters).

For volunteers who quit at this point, their departure may be symptomatic of some natural attrition process typically associated with mega or major events or of wider problems in the Commonwealth Games volunteer programme. If the latter scenario were true, it would be reasonable to expect that similar outcomes (*i.e.* drop-outs) would continue to be reported in the lead up to the Games and during the Games themselves. To determine whether this is the case or not, the paper will now focus on the pertinent issues from this time period.

The Immediate Lead Up (28 January 2006 onwards) and Games themselves (15–26 March 2006)

Positive dimensions of the Games volunteering experience were reported in the media through a series of profile pieces published in the immediate lead up to the event. Not only do these pieces provide background information about the volunteers and their various motivations for volunteering, but they also convey a sense of eagerly awaited anticipation about what the experience will bring. For example:

I'm pretty excited about it. I have volunteered before, when Melbourne had the soccer during the Sydney 2000 Games, and that was a real buzz. I think we will see the same buzzy atmosphere in Melbourne in March. Once it gets close to Games time I think the excitement is really going to set in and there is going to be a great atmosphere in Melbourne (volunteer Vanda Bourandas cited in Smith and Gurvich, 2006, p. 4, Supplement).

I've got one of the best jobs at the Games! I'll get to meet everybody – athletes, officials, visitors. I was a massage therapist at the (Sydney) Olympics and Paralympics and wanted to volunteer at the Commonwealth Games as well. You get people at their highs and lows. You can get somebody who's just lost a race or just won. They're the ends of the spectrum (volunteer Margaret Erdmanis cited in Smith and Gurvich, 2006, p. 4, Supplement).

These profiles continued over the course of the event. Reports also charted an increasing recognition by locals and visitors alike of the support role volunteers were providing to help Melbourne with its hosting duties:

Nan from East Malvern was so impressed with this helper, she has enlisted our help to find him. Apparently Gavin was just wonderful when vertigo set in for Nan, who was seated way up in row GG at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre. 'He was just so wonderful and gentle', Nan gushed to us (Edmonds *et al.*, 2006a, p. 31, News).

The more we hear about them, the more we love the whole volunteer force (Edmonds *et al.*, 2006a, p. 31, News).

There was further kudos for the volunteer programme with reports that its training model might be replicated at other major events. Excerpts include:

India, which is hosting the next Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010, is keen to replicate the volunteer program. Indian International Olympic Committee member and

Commonwealth Games Federation vice-president Randhir Singh said while the numbers of potential volunteers are not a problem in India, 'we will have to train them as well as Melbourne trained the volunteers' (Smith, 2006, p. 6, Supplement).

The volunteers here have been absolutely fantastic – I'd like to import a few of them back to Glasgow for 2014 (Derek Casey, director of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games bid, cited in Smith, 2006, p. 6, Supplement).

To assess whether this positive reporting is indicative of the nature of mega sporting events, the paper will now explore whether any of the previously identified negatives (see 'Reality Sets In') featured in reports published immediately prior to or during the Games period.

Once Melbourne got caught up in the atmosphere of Games, as might be expected, there was very little negative publicity surrounding the volunteer experience. The issues that had previously afforded a less than positive impression of the volunteer programme for the most part received no coverage at this point in time. An exception occurred in relation to the reported assault of an elderly Games volunteer at a suburban train station just prior to the event (Ker, 2006a). While responsibility for this occurrence cannot rest with Games organisers, the point was made that 'with no parking available at most venues, most volunteers – even those who work until late at night – have little choice but to use public transport' (Ker, 2006a, p. 10, News). The extent to which such reporting might present wider ramifications for the volunteering experience would likely be assessed in terms of whether this outcome was viewed by the general public as being foreseeable and preventable. The alleged sexual assault of a volunteer at the Games village (Wallace, 2006, p. 4) was neither foreseeable nor preventable, but it cast further doubts on volunteer safety.

An aspect of the volunteer programme to attract the ire of at least one volunteer was the provision of free tickets to the Games opening ceremony rehearsal. While John McCulloch noted that 'the two free tickets were welcome', he maintained they came with an excessive number of accompanying terms and conditions (Letters, 2006, p. 8). He went on to state:

My impression of Games management is that they are control freaks who are frightened that any unofficial public comment might conflict with 'official' spin. I'm beginning to regret that I volunteered (volunteer John McCulloch cited in Letters, 2006, p. 8).

Other volunteers were quick to respond in the affirmative voice:

'Those volunteers who are moaning should think themselves lucky', said Danni from Glen Waverley. 'Monday's rehearsal for the public is a sell-out, and to be able to see how it will all come together on Wednesday night is a huge privilege' (Edmonds *et al.*, 2006b, p. 19, News).

The Commonwealth Games organisation is absolutely beyond reproach in its dealings with volunteers (volunteer Kaye cited in Edmonds *et al.*, 2006b, p. 19, News).

This positive outlook was also typical of press reports from the post-event stage.

Post-event Euphoria (27 March 2006 onwards)

Post-event, a sense of euphoria (reminiscent of the initial launch of the volunteer programme in February 2005) was inexorably linked to the participation of volunteers in hosting the Games. Their role in ensuring success was widely recognised and praised by a number of influential people and high profile athletes. Examples include:

One of the great highlights of the Games was our magnificent volunteers. Their 15,000 friendly faces, from across Australia, made everyone feel welcome and safe. Many of

these people took leave from their jobs or gave up holiday time away from their families to volunteer. They showcased our city on street corners, at the venues, behind the scenes, while driving Games vehicles and at our regional events. Their good humour and enthusiasm was infectious. The Games would not have been the same without them (Bracks, Premier of Victoria, 2006, p. 16, News/Editorial).

'There were some fairly mundane jobs, let's be honest about it, but they did bring that personality and they did it with a smile', he said. 'They deserve the highest praise and we sincerely thank them for their efforts' (Basketballer and volunteer ambassador Andrew Gaze cited in Berry and Murphy, 2006, p. 2, News).

She said the volunteers were the 'unsung heroes' of the Games. 'They give up their time willingly and they support us and they go away hopefully with a lot of memories' (Dual gold medalist Jana Pittman cited in Games Parade Thanks Athletes, Volunteers, 2006, News).

The mention of memories highlights an intangible reward associated with the volunteer experience. Speaking of her participation in the tribute parade for athletes and volunteers (27 March 2006), Games volunteer Wendy Dunstan stated 'I was getting all teary just walking along, Melbourne is so appreciative of what we've done – it's really great' (Protyniak and Mitchell, 2006a, p. 5, News). It would be reasonable to expect that the opportunity to be part of a 9000 strong procession filing past an estimated crowd of 50,000 spectators (Berry and Murphy, 2006, p. 2) does not come along too often for most volunteers and therefore would be a memorable occasion.

Tangible rewards of volunteering were also provided to impress upon volunteers the value of their contribution. Namely:

As our way of saying 'thank you', every volunteer will receive a commemorative medal and a free pass to an AFL (Australian Football

League) match (Bracks, Premier of Victoria, 2006, p. 16, News/Editorial).

It is important to note that although post-event reporting associated with the Games volunteering experience was remarkably positive, its impact appeared to be short-lived. Perhaps it is the transitory nature of news reporting or of events themselves (the Commonwealth Games was followed closely by the launch of the 2006 AFL season and the staging of the Melbourne Formula One Grand Prix) but coverage of the Commonwealth Games volunteer programme and its participants appeared to cease in the immediate aftermath of the event. The ultimate impact on behaviour of such reporting, in this instance willingness to volunteer, is also debateable given research conducted in the months following the event. Based on a general population survey of 1000 people, Ker (2006b, p. 6) reported that 'despite the success of the Games volunteers programme and its 15,000 strong workforce, 59% of those surveyed reported no increased desire to join in community activities'. Ker's report points to the need for further research into the relationship between episodic volunteering and participation in longer-term volunteering commitments within the community.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper represents an exploratory discussion of media representation of the public face of volunteering at mega sporting events through the eyes of the national press in Australia prior to, during and immediately after the Melbourne Commonwealth Games in March 2006. In doing so, the paper complements the work of researchers such as Kemp (2002), Ralston *et al.* (2004), Ralston *et al.* (2003) and Green and Chalip (2004) who all looked at this phenomenon directly through the responses and reports of the volunteers themselves

at specific time points during the event cycle. This paper is the first attempt of its kind to adopt this media-focused analytical approach to mega-event volunteering and to represent a series of press 'collages' depicted over the full cycle of the volunteer process, from recruitment through to the end of their assignment.

It is recognised that the press data has been drawn from what was largely controlled access in the mainstream print media. The Commonwealth Games organisers appear to have been highly effective and efficient in their presentation of volunteers and volunteering and the manner in which they were able to work with the media in order to ensure a strong representation of an 'official' point of view. This is clear from the number of very similar or identical press reports found across a range of the newspaper sources analysed. However, some varying perspectives are represented in the coverage, through reports of various problems, relating to individual incidents and volunteers, in the media and through some lively debate and exchanges in the letters pages of the newspapers. Our analysis here is a selective representation of the coverage of volunteering during the stated timeframe. Replication of this study elsewhere would benefit from moving beyond official media sources in order to accommodate the growing, unofficial media in the form of Internet blogs and discussion on social networking sites.

The findings substantially affirm previous studies of volunteers, both within the widest interpretation of the concept and in terms of specific, time-bound events. However, the extended analytical framework employed means that a series of themes and issues relating to the period prior to the event emerge strongly, notably relating to the process of recruitment, induction and training and pre-event attrition. Often these themes are addressed with a focus either on volunteers in action or retrospectively through post-event perception and

evaluation. However, as Getz (1997, p. 203) rightly contends, 'the intense time and energy commitment before, during, and after the event' is a leading cause of volunteer burnout. Evidence of negative volunteering experiences generally related to organisational and administrative problems faced by those involved. Issues such as time expectations, inflexible schedules and the cost and availability of local transport feature periodically in reports and also serve to confirm particular findings of Ralston *et al.*'s (2004) qualitative study of the pre-event expectations of Manchester Commonwealth Games volunteers. Attrition from the volunteer workforce is acknowledged but remains unexplained in the press sources and would be a valuable theme for further study. Indeed, a more considered and reflective consideration of the whole volunteer life cycle during events similar to the Commonwealth Games would be of considerable value. In this sense, replicated longitudinal study of volunteering at mega events, not only focusing on media representation but also drawing on wider multi-stakeholder perspectives and employing a variety of data collection methods, will be of value as the basis for future study.

Evidence of what Stebbins (2004) calls 'project-based leisure' can be gleaned from the press reports relating to volunteer training. The various types of training, the required time commitment and the mandatory nature of the activity suggest that volunteers involved in the Commonwealth Games would likely undergo a multi-faceted skill development process for what is essentially a one-off event. Such an outcome is most closely aligned with 'project-based leisure', as distinct from 'serious leisure' requiring ongoing commitment and unskilled 'casual leisure' opportunities. Due to the newness of this concept, 'project-based leisure' (Stebbins, 2004) will provide fertile ground for future research in relation to mega sports events.

Press engagement with the public lauding of volunteers by politicians and celebrities is high and attracts extended coverage and is, therefore, effectively managed by the event organisers. Lauding such as public recognition for services given to the event on a voluntary basis is clearly important as a means of profiling volunteering in general. It features at all stages of the process, at the launch of volunteer recruitment, during the lead up to the Games (*e.g.* in the Melbourne 2006 catalogue) and during post-event celebrations. This is a very open acknowledgement of the fact that, without volunteer input and the press attention that is devoted to it, mega sporting events could not take place for both organisational and financial reasons. The language of praise (*e.g.* *unsung heroes*), however, suggests titling of such acclaim.

This paper set out to investigate 'formal' press representation of volunteers and their roles during a mega sporting event as an alternative to the perspectives hitherto reported in the literature, primarily that of the volunteers themselves or event organisers. What has emerged is an image of tightly controlled and managed reporting of the volunteer cycle and the role of volunteers, dominated by effective press relations by the Games organisers except at such times when issues (generally negative) emerged. The overall positive and bland reporting may be a reflecting of media indolence, aversion or apathy when confronted by 'good news stories'; in the case of the first, effective news management and the presentation of news items about volunteers for placement are evident in that common items appeared across a number of publications in Australia simultaneously. Overall, the reporting of volunteers and the volunteering experience are consistent with the findings of other studies addressing the theme from different perspectives. However, hints at darker sides to the volunteer experience point to the need for the media to be

more searching in its investigations in order to counter the impression that they are merely acting as a public relations mouthpiece for the event. There is also a case to be made that event organisers should show greater trust in the media in order to ensure credible and balanced representation of volunteering.

Notwithstanding this effective management of information, it is clear from the voices that the press permit to emerge from the event cycle that information-based supplements, which may be more likely to be content driven by the Games organisers, were generally positive in tone. News items, however, which given their nature may be viewed as more balanced and credible sources by the public, were more likely to identify problems and to be negative in tone, particularly at various stages of the event cycle (discovering roles and responsibilities, reality sets in and the immediate lead up to the Games).

Given that this study is exploratory and seeks to add a new dimension to the study of volunteers and mega sporting events, methodologically, the study affirms the value of the analysis of media sources to information collection and analysis, although evident limitations must also be acknowledged. Perhaps, the main value of this process was the extended perspective that it provides on volunteers and volunteering and, as such, merits replication and adaptation to different contexts and events. Machin's (2005) call for greater research on the impact of media on perceptions of volunteering supports this view. In this paper, we have responded to this call and have also identified a number of areas where further research could be of value, which we can summarise here as follows.

- Complementing media coverage in order to extend our research approach so as to engage longitudinally with volunteers themselves and portray their experiences

over the full event life cycle, employing a mix of data collection methods.

- Applying Stebbins (2004) emerging concept of 'project-based leisure' to the area of volunteering and mega events as a fertile ground for future research.
- Replication of this study elsewhere to include analysis that goes beyond official media sources in order to accommodate the growing, unofficial media in the form of Internet blogs and discussion on social networking sites.

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