

1 “Everyone was looking at you smiling”: East London residents’ experiences of 2 the 2012 Olympics and its legacy on the social determinants of health

3 4 **Abstract**

5
6 Mega-sporting event regeneration, as a specific approach to urban renewal, uses impending host-
7 city status as a catalyst for revitalisation and has the potential to improve health both through
8 addressing deprivation and by promoting increased sport and physical activity among the host-city’s
9 population. This qualitative study explored how hosting of the London 2012 Games impacted upon
10 the way East London residents perceived and experienced the social determinants of health in their
11 local neighbourhood. We conducted narrative family interviews, go-along interviews and video
12 focus group workshops with 66 Newham residents, aged 12 to 55 years, immediately after the
13 Games. A narrative analytic approach examined accounts of health and wellbeing experiences in
14 terms of neighbourhood change and the spectacle of the Games. Participants of this qualitative
15 study generally welcomed the respite and the unexpected chance to live in a cleaner, safer and more
16 unified environment. However, this positivity was underscored by an acute awareness that this was
17 a very temporary situation and one that was intended to support the event rather than residents.

18 19 20 **Keywords**

21 London Olympic Games; Health; Newham; Qualitative; Respite; Spectacle.

22 23 **Research Highlights**

- 24
25
- The 2012 Olympic bid promised a health and social legacy for local residents

- 1 • Residents in this deprived locality experienced only temporary respite
- 2 • The long-term 'regeneration' impact of sporting mega-events remains unproven

3

4 **Introduction**

5

6 The economic decline of urban areas over the last three decade is reflected in intensifying spatial
7 segregation and deprivation in many towns and cities (Tallon 2013). The impact of material and
8 social deprivation on health is well described and pervasive (Haan, Kaplan et al. 1987, Wilson, Elliot
9 et al. 2004, Marmot 2010). Exposure to stressors in the social and physical environment adversely
10 affect health chances and health outcomes. They are associated with both short-term changes in
11 physiology, perceptions and behaviour; and longer-term risk of adverse outcomes including
12 cardiovascular disease, diabetes and anxiety disorders (Schulz, Parker et al. 2002, Weaver, Lemonde
13 et al. 2014). Urban regeneration is often framed as a means of addressing inequalities and exclusion
14 by improving the built environment and local economy, and thereby providing enhanced
15 employment, social, educational and recreational opportunities (Meegan and Mitchell 2001). In
16 doing so, such schemes have the potential to improve health by tackling some of its socio-economic
17 determinants.

18

19 Mega-sporting event regeneration, as a specific approach to urban renewal, uses impending host-
20 city status as a catalyst for revitalisation, and, as such, has the potential to improve health both
21 through addressing deprivation (Misener and Mason 2006, Scherer 2011) *and* by promoting
22 increased sport and physical activity among the host-city's population (Weed, Coren et al. 2009).
23 Lasting improvements to physical and mental health were, from the outset, a confidently predicted
24 impact of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games (Campbell 2012). In its report setting out the
25 Government's plans for the legacy the Department for media, culture and sport stated that the one
26 of its key legacy aims was to increase grass roots sports participation, especially in young people,

1 and encourage people to be more physically active, thereby improving the health of the population
2 (DCMS 2010).

3

4 The London 2012 Olympic Games provided a unique opportunity to investigate prospectively how
5 the regeneration efforts associated with a sporting mega-event in a deprived locality affected well-
6 being, social inclusion and other influences on the health of local residents. This paper reports on
7 the qualitative findings of a mixed-methods study of the Games and its immediate aftermath as
8 experienced by those residents.

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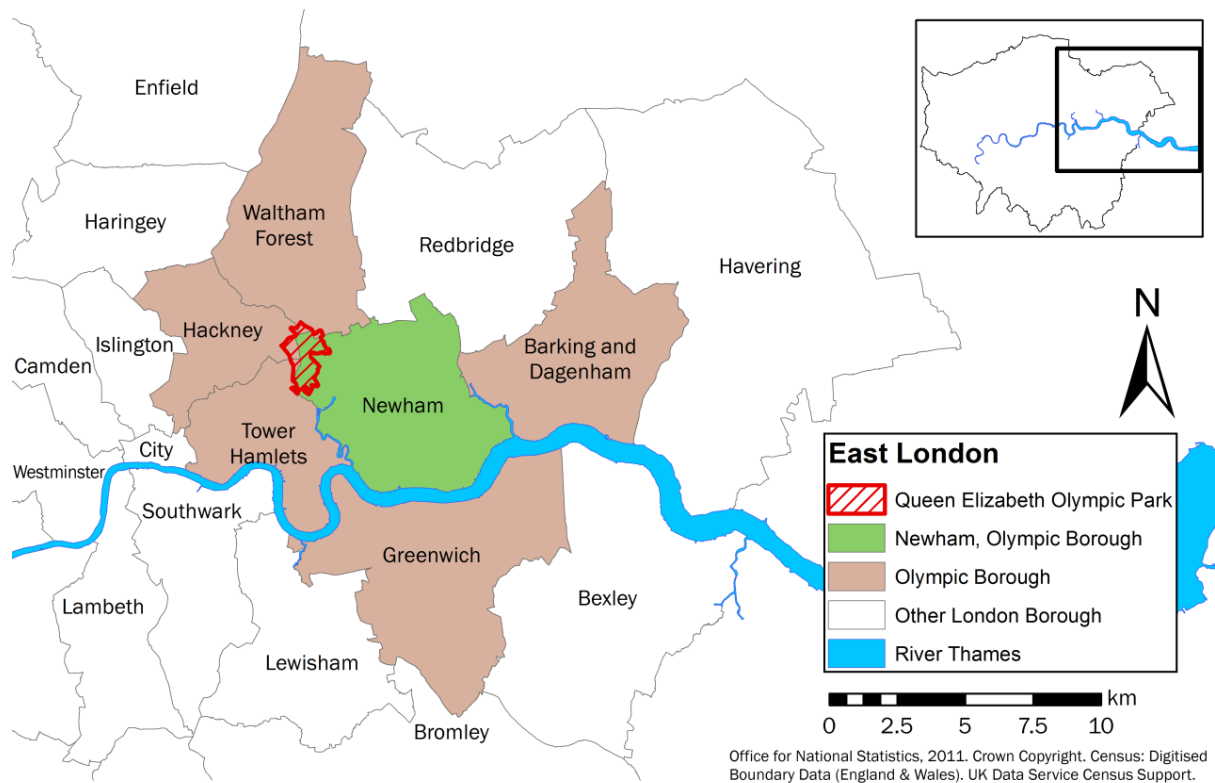
10 ***Redeveloping Newham***

11 The East End of London has a long history of poverty, deprivation and health inequalities. One
12 reason for selecting this area for the Olympic bid was to utilise the Games as an opportunity for local
13 regeneration (Thompson et al, 2013). As the Department for Communities and Local Government
14 acknowledged at the 2012 planning stage, East London has long been the focus for growth-led
15 regeneration in the capital, as it contains large concentrations of severe deprivation (DCLG 2010).
16 Newham, the Olympic borough, is the 4th most deprived borough in the UK (London Borough of
17 Newham 2011). Figure 1 shows Newham and the Olympic Park in the wider context of East London.

18

19 **Figure 1: Newham , East London.**

20



1

2

3 Preparations for the 2012 Games entailed social and structural changes for Newham, some
 4 permanent and others temporary. In particular, the locality saw aesthetic improvements (Kennelly
 5 and Watt 2011), increased security measures, and efforts to rally community awareness and
 6 belonging (Graham 2012). All of these changes had the potential to improve health via its social
 7 determinants.

8

9 Specifically, the area was made more attractive with an extensive programme of street cleaning,
 10 repainting, road repairs, increased street lighting and floral displays. Added to which, the Westfield
 11 shopping centre in the adjacent Stratford City, a £1.4 billion development project, became both a
 12 material and symbolic effort to prepare the area for the expected influx of spectators and tourists.
 13 The Westfield development dominates the local landscape and provides a very visual and
 14 conspicuous marker of redevelopment. Such measures are pertinent to tackling health inequalities
 15 as high levels of well-being have been associated with living in an area perceived as having attractive

1 buildings and an overall appealing and desirable environment (Bond, Kearns et al. 2012). Alongside
2 the potentially therapeutic effects of aesthetic neighbourhood enhancements, Olympic preparations
3 were also geared towards fostering a sense of unity and celebration in Newham for the upcoming
4 spectacle. Locally, this included the planning and delivery of over 4,000 community events. The
5 'Let's Get the Party Started ' Programme supported residents to run their own events and the Local
6 Authority awarded £186,000 worth of grants to help with the costs (Wales 2012). Local school
7 children were widely involved in the Opening and Closing ceremonies and many schools ran
8 Olympic-themed activities. These community-led events provided the conditions to facilitate
9 increasing social interaction and, thereby, social capital; which can be instrumental in improving
10 quality of life in deprived urban areas. In general, populations with high levels of material
11 deprivation have worse health and yet, within these populations and communities, social capital can
12 have a protective effect (Swann and Morgan 2002).

13
14 On a much more pragmatic and strategic level, Olympic preparations necessitated a heavy
15 commitment to security, as befitting the hosting of a global sporting mega-event. Preventive
16 measures such as situational crime prevention, increased police presence with zero-tolerance style
17 policing, private security, strict access controls to Olympic sites, and extensive technological
18 surveillance, especially closed-circuit television (CCTV), became the norm (Fussey and Coaffee 2011).
19 The potential health and wellbeing impact of these changes was much less straight forward. On the
20 one hand, perceived neighbourhood safety and fear of crime are social determinants of health and,
21 as such, widely recognised as an important influence on mental health (Lorenc, Clayton et al. 2012).
22 Yet, on the other, increased surveillance and policing on vulnerable and deprived populations can
23 have detrimental effects on access to services and social participation (Kennelly and Watt 2011).

24
25 At present, there is little research that investigates how sporting mega-event preparations and
26 neighbourhood renewal, such as those described above, are perceived and experienced by host-city

1 residents. The aim of this paper is to explore how the hosting of the London 2012 Games impacted
 2 upon the way Newham residents perceived and experienced the social determinants of health in
 3 their local neighbourhood.

4

5 **Methods**

6 This study is part of ORiEL (Olympic Regeneration in East London), a mixed-method longitudinal
 7 study of the health and social legacy of the 2012 Olympic Games on the community of Newham
 8 (Smith, Clark et al. 2012). The data reported here are from ORiEL’s qualitative sub-study conducted
 9 between September and December 2012. The qualitative sample was drawn from local families and
 10 a group of adolescents at East London secondary schools.

11

12 ***Recruitment and Sampling***

13 The total sample was 66 participants. This consisted of 20 core adult participants and an additional
 14 19 young people plus one spouse who were invited by the core participants to take part in the family
 15 interviews; and 26 adolescents who participated in school video focus group workshops. Participant
 16 characteristics are described in Table 1.

17

Table 1: Participant characteristics			
	Characteristic		N
Adult core participants (20 in total)	Sex	Male	8
		Female	12
	Age	Range: 20-55 years	
		Median: 40.5 years	
	Ethnicity	White British	5
		White Other	3
		Black African	4
		Black British	1
		Indian	1
		Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi		1	
Asian British		2	
Asian other	1		

		Mixed	1
Those also in attendance at family narrative interviews a) young people (19 in total)	Sex	Male	10
		Female	9
	Age	12 years	10
		13 years	6
		15 years	2
		16 years	1
	Ethnicity	White British	4
		Black African	3
		Black British	1
		Indian	2
		Pakistani	1
		Bangladeshi	1
		Asian British	2
		Asian other	2
Mixed		3	
.....	
b) adults (1 in total)	Sex	Female	1
	Age	45	1
	Ethnicity	Asian other	1
Adolescent core participants (26 in total)	Sex	Male	12
		Female	14
	Age	12 years	13
		13 years	7
		14 years	4
		15 years	2
	Ethnicity	White British	8
		White Other	6
		Black African	3
		Black British	1
Indian		2	
Pakistani		2	
Asian British		2	
Mixed		2	

1

- 2 **i) Adult core participants** (for family and go-along interviews) - Adult survey participants in the
3 quantitative study were asked if they would consider taking part in this qualitative sub-study. Those

1 who agreed were sent a letter, and subsequently telephoned, and given further details. 130 adults
2 were contacted in this way and 22 agreed to participate. Two withdrew from the study before being
3 interviewed (one due to illness and the other unexplained), leaving a core sample of 20. This core
4 sample then acted as gatekeepers to the rest of their household.

5

6 **ii) Adolescent core participants** (for the school video focus group workshops) - Twenty-six adolescent
7 participants were recruited from three schools participating in the quantitative study. School
8 contacts, serving as gatekeepers, were each asked to select up to 9 students from their years 8 to 10
9 cohorts (aged 12 -15 years) to participate in a half-day video focus group workshop. Given the
10 performative nature of the workshops it was deemed appropriate to let school gatekeepers select
11 participants whom they thought would engage with the activity and work productively as a group.

12

13 **Data collection**

14

15 Data were collected in three stages:

- 16 1) Narrative family interviews (with 20 families)
- 17 2) Go-along interviews (six interviews with a sub sample of the families).
- 18 3) School video focus group workshops in three schools (with the adolescent participants).

19

20 **i) Narrative family interviews** - Narrative family interviews were conducted with 20 adult core
21 participants and whichever family members they chose to invite (see table 1). Typically, the family
22 interviews involved two people (core adult participant and one of their children). This format
23 accounted for ten of the 20 interviews. The largest family interview involved four members of the
24 same household. Narrative family interviews were used to examine how wider cultural discourse
25 about Olympic regeneration and change featured in participants personal narratives and how this

1 was achieved in interaction. These initial interviews were intended to provide insight into how
2 participants positioned the Games and regeneration in relation to their own lives, trajectories and
3 local areas. Narrative interviews are particularly useful for eliciting accounts of change and
4 (perceived) causality as they encourage participants to explain and rationalise events. The Self-
5 narratives that emerge from them serve as forms of social accounting and public discourse (Gergen
6 2001). Initially, participants were asked to provide a narrative account of their experience of the
7 Games. The interview then moved on to what had changed in their local area and daily life, and how
8 they perceived their neighbourhood. Interviewing more than one family member at a time
9 highlighted how shared narratives are dialogically constructed as individual family members
10 negotiated the emerging account of their lives (Maybin 2001).

11

12 **ii) Go-along interviews** - The go-along interviews were used to explore places that participants felt
13 had particular meaning for them and/or illustrated their personal experiences of Olympic change
14 and spectacle. A total of six go-along interviews were conducted with those participants who, during
15 family narrative interviews, spoke about particular sites in detail and expressed a willingness to take
16 the researcher to see them. Of these six interview: two were conducted with adult core participants
17 on their own; two involved adult core participants and their children (12 year olds in both cases);
18 one was conducted with a 13 year old on their own; and one was conducted with a pair of siblings
19 (aged 20 and 13 years old). A go-along interview is a mixture of observation and interview,
20 concentrated around a particular site, journey or activity (Carpiano 2009). The researcher
21 accompanies the participant(s) on a routine journey or activity to a specific place, or asks that the
22 participant give them a 'tour' of part of their local environment. In this way, they provide direct
23 experience of practices and perceptions as they unfold in real time and space (Kusenbach 2003).
24 This participant-led format was selected in order to access how residents interacted with their local
25 neighbourhood and how they rationalised their perceptions.

26

1 **iii) School video focus group workshops** - Half-day video focus group workshops were organised at
2 three participating schools. The first half of each session addressed participants' perceptions and
3 experiences of the Games and of their local neighbourhoods. In the second half, participants were
4 split into small groups and given the task of interviewing each other about topics arising from the
5 focus group discussion. Focus groups were used because these types of interview generate rich
6 information within a social context where interaction between participants can reveal cultural values
7 and shared meanings that may not arise in individual interviews (Robinson 1999). Further, the
8 conversational nature of this method reflects the way children and adolescents discuss issues both
9 within their peer groups and in classroom settings, thereby revealing both individual and group
10 norms (Krueger 1994).

11

12

13 ***Ethics and informed consent***

14

15 All adult participants were given an information sheet, a consent form, and a verbal explanation of
16 the study, which included information about what would happen to their data and their right to
17 withdraw. In the case of the video focus group workshops, teachers were given opt-out parental
18 consent forms and information sheets to send out to the parents or guardians of those adolescents
19 they selected to participate. At the outset of the workshop sessions, consent forms and information
20 sheets were distributed to the adolescents themselves, to deal with both the interview data and the
21 video footage. It was explained that data would be anonymised and that they could withdraw from
22 the study at any time. Full ethical approval was obtained from the Queen Mary University of London
23 Research Ethics Committee (QMREC2011/40).

24

25 ***Data analysis***

26

1 Interviews were transcribed verbatim and NVivo9 software used to facilitate a thematic and
2 narrative analysis of the dataset. The aim of the analysis was to study how people construct causal
3 accounts (Williams 2000) and draw upon shared meanings (Milligan, Gatrell et al. 2004, Greenhalgh,
4 Russell et al. 2005), especially in relation to the lived experience of deprivation and the interaction
5 between life chances (structural and material constraints and opportunities) and health-related life
6 choices (Sen 1993). A narrative analysis allows the researcher to examine how individuals interpret
7 biographical experiences, broader social trends and events (like the Games), and how they position
8 themselves in relation to them.

9

10 The qualitative dataset was large and multi-modal, comprising a total of 632 pages of transcribed
11 interviews, 38 pages of field notes and 211 minutes of video recording. We used a five-step process:
12 First, we repeatedly read the textual material and watched the video clips to gain familiarity. Second,
13 we annotated the interview transcripts thematically, beginning with open coding and then
14 systematically combining codes into broader categories using the NVivo9 software. This step served
15 two functions: it further familiarised us with the dataset and it provided a way of organising and
16 indexing the data prior to a more theoretical analysis. Third, we identified key narrative sequences –
17 that is, accounts of the unfolding of actions and/or events over time, in which the narrator makes
18 sense of an experience through temporal emplotment (weaving a causal thread between one event
19 and a prior action or event), and in which different characters are variously depicted as (for example)
20 heroes, villains or victims. Fourth, we analysed particular narratives using the lens of socio-cultural
21 and material context in the unfolding narrative, which we used to explore positioning and conflict. In
22 this way, we examined the way individuals framed their personal and family narratives within wider
23 societal and cultural discourses (Squire 2008). In this interpretive reading, we used the concept of
24 the hermeneutic circle, developing a picture of the whole which we refined iteratively as we worked
25 through the data (Krieger and Higgins 2002). Finally, we produced an account of the findings that
26 reflected the totality of the dataset and selected illustrative examples and quotes to accompany this.

1

2 **Results**

3 Newham was consistently described as a place very much in need of regeneration, investment and
4 change. Narratives about the Games addressed three main themes relating to the regeneration
5 effort: aesthetic improvements to the area, community awareness and pride, and increased security
6 measures. Residents' focused on aspects of the social and physical environment that were pertinent
7 to them, and were built from their direct personal experience of changes and activities in the area.
8 Overall, the regeneration effort served to lessen participants' sense of social exclusion and seemed
9 to generate a sense of *inclusion* and *respite*, even if this was only temporary.

10

11 ***Aesthetic improvements***

12

13 Participants explained how cosmetic improvements to the area made a substantial difference to
14 their daily lives. Improving 'the look' of the area by measures such as resurfacing roads, re-painting,
15 and replacing street lighting, meant that residents perceived and experienced their neighbourhood
16 more positively. Relatively minor changes to the local physical environment sometimes had a
17 significant impact on participants' sense of well-being. They described how the Games had put
18 Newham in the limelight and prompted a series of area enhancements and 'tidying up' that
19 improved the area and its image and enabled residents to feel proud rather than ashamed of where
20 they lived. David, a stay-at home father of two who lived very close to the Olympic park, described
21 what these changes meant to him in a narrative family interview:

22

23 *It's changed it 100%, you know, especially where the actual Olympics*
24 *was based used to be like waste ground and train tracks and all that*
25 *crap and what they've done to it is just amazing, you know, I've been*

1 *over there a few times and it is just amazing ... it seems to have made*
2 *people feel better about living in this area now got more people*
3 *coming in, more events, more upgrade in housing, no more it's the*
4 *slums of East London, more the London East, as I've heard people*
5 *call it now instead of East London*

6
7
8 The Westfield shopping centre development, especially, was described as the most tangible and
9 symbolic site of Olympic area improvement, providing a sense of aspiration and featuring heavily in
10 accounts of Olympic rebranding. It was felt to have improved the 'look' and reputation of the area.
11 Although generally positive about this development and the income it might bring to the area,
12 participants also observed a rejection of the unadorned locality by the Olympic brand and a
13 perceived need to make the area more presentable to 'showcase' it for visitors and investors. There
14 was a strong sense that these improvements were temporary in nature, being for the benefit of the
15 Games, and concentrated mostly in Stratford (the site of the Olympic venues and Westfield, see
16 Figure 1). Loretta, a 40-year-old mother of four, commented: '*everything in the borough was aimed*
17 *at Stratford, we were sort of like forgotten about*'. The Westfield development was even depicted as
18 physically 'blocking off' the less salubrious parts of the borough, as two pupils in a school video focus
19 group workshop discussed:

20
21 *Luke: Yeah, it's just in the way of everything and it blocks off all the*
22 *dirtiness behind the shopping centre like how it looks, all the big flats and*
23 *everything, it just blocks it off. Because people don't see it because they*
24 *come out of the station and they go to Westfield and they just come back*
25 *in the station and then they go home.*

26

1 *Emraan: It was only like made for the Olympics so I just think its like*
2 *Just to um make the place look good because before, what was there? ...*
3 *... It was just er Stratford Station and then there was a shopping centre*
4 *and then there was nothing there So that I guess they just made*
5 *that for like just for that few weeks when people were here.*

6
7 These pupils make an important distinction between the smart, new, consumer-focused Westfield
8 shopping centre and what they call ‘old Stratford’ and the ‘dirtiness’ that lay behind the Westfield
9 centre. They emphasise the aesthetic of the new facilities (and particularly the significance to
10 Olympic visitors, who are perceived as the viewers of the spectacle and the main consumers of its
11 goods). They point out that only some parts of Newham have been smartened up, creating an
12 artificial façade to hide from view the borough’s dirt and deprivation.

13
14

15 ***Community belonging: a symbolic rather than material legacy***

16

17 The sense of spectacle around the Games was generally very strong. Those who were not normally
18 interested in sport watched the Games and got ‘caught up’ in the flashpoint of celebration and
19 belonging, often reporting that they ended up going to screenings in local parks and other events
20 that they would not normally have been interested in. Living in the host borough during the peri-
21 Olympic period thus provided a sense of community and belonging that was new to many residents.
22 The numerous activities and events, along with the Games themselves, provided a respite from the
23 frustration and lack of unity that they felt had previously characterised day-to-day life in Newham.
24 Undoubtedly, the profile of Newham was raised and its reputation improved. However, participants
25 did not perceive the renewed sense of community pride to be permanent or necessarily to have any
26 material benefits. The anticipated legacy seemed to be a symbolic rather than a material one.

1 Abiola, a full time student and father of three, explained the very temporary and ultimately cosmetic
2 nature of the community Olympic experience in the following extract from a narrative family
3 interview:

4
5 *The question are we really getting anything, now the Olympic is end,*
6 *the good image, we all love it, yeah, we are part of this country, you*
7 *get what I mean now because this is the way I believe now, this is*
8 *the way I'm raising my family, and I'm proud to be here, yeah, but*
9 *the question is this, everyone's proud of the Olympic, the people*
10 *doing the business, they find it difficult, they've been miserable, you*
11 *can't park there, you can't park, you know, and all this, we made the*
12 *sacrifice and it's gone, and after that now what is happening, we*
13 *don't see anything.*

14

15 For Abiola, who expressed a deep sense of pride in living in the Olympic borough, any long-term
16 benefits from the Games were vague and elusive. Tellingly, he refers to the 'sacrifice' made by
17 residents. In fact, many participants talked about hosting the Games in terms of long term costs and
18 expense. Yet, other than possible revenue and employment from the Westfield shopping centre
19 they did not envisage a legacy of direct benefits and more permanent community level
20 improvements. For example, the temporary Olympic site jobs, although exciting, were also largely
21 interpreted as further evidence of the transient nature of the event, as yet another temporary
22 measure that failed to offer permanent solutions to problems in the area. In a narrative family
23 interview, Tasha, an unemployed 20 year-old, put it like this:

24 *In terms of jobs I don't think there are many jobs available right*
25 *now around here, like so many people unemployed, jobs haven't*

1 *really increased, it was only during the Olympic times that people*
2 *were like, oh yeah, we've got a job in the Olympics but our heads*
3 *were thinking, okay, how long is that going to last, it's until the*
4 *Olympics are over, after that, I don't know what the Olympic park*
5 *is used for now, I don't think it's used for anything.*

6
7 Like the other participants quoted above, Tasha was positive about the hosting of the Games overall
8 because they brought attention and celebration and 'got people talking'. However, when asked to
9 comment in more detail about the possible impact on wider aspects of life in Newham, such as
10 employment, she was doubtful as to how any material legacy or benefits might manifest themselves.

11

12

13 ***Increased security: Newham 'in a bubble'***

14

15 One of the most visible and significant changes to Newham in the peri-Olympic period was increased
16 security, surveillance and police presence. Most participants described Newham as a 'dangerous'
17 place, characterised by high levels of crime, and much in need of increased security. Closed-circuit
18 television (CCTV) in particular was depicted very positively. Participants explained how necessary
19 CCTV was to preventing crime and apprehending criminals. We were struck by some silences in the
20 data. In particular, there was very little anxiety about fear of being watched or concern about what
21 the footage might be used for. Overall, and somewhat to the surprise of the research team,
22 increased security was welcomed by participants for the simple reason that it made them feel safe.
23 Many participants commented that if you had not done anything wrong then you would not have
24 anything to fear from being watched. Security measures, they said, allowed them to go to places and
25 go out at times that would normally be unsafe and risky. Increased security and feelings of safety
26 thus opened up more of the neighbourhood and its facilities to residents. It provided a respite from

1 the fears, anxieties and insecurities of living in an environment perceived as dangerous and unsafe.
2 For Julie, a 32 year old part-time supermarket worker living in Stratford, Newham, and Nisha, her 12
3 year-old daughter, increased security made them feel protected, as they explained in a family
4 interview:

5

6 *Nisha: I think that's the only problem, at that, it was so safe round here,*
7 *the Olympics was such a big thing and they paid so much for security but*
8 *then it's like they're protecting us so much with the Olympics, why aren't*
9 *they protecting us that much when it's not the Olympics? Even*
10 *though it's not a big event like all of us live here, we want to feel safe*

11

12 Later, Nisha commented:

13

14 *I felt when the Olympics was on, I felt almost like the whole*
15 *of Newham was in a bubble, everyone was just... everyone was*
16 *looking at you smiling, "hello".*

17

18 *Julie: The thing is, when the Olympics was on to get in any of the parks,*
19 *there was security at the gates, yeah, I think it should be like that all*
20 *the time What protection you need, innit. I felt really safe to live*
21 *here when it was on.*

22

23 The security 'bubble', in terms of increased policing, security, protection and feelings of safety, was
24 temporary. Once Newham was out of the spotlight the extra policing and security was no longer
25 warranted. The 'bubble' of the Olympic period had burst; security levels returned to their previous
26 low levels and it was once again unsafe to go out, enjoy the area and join in community events.

1 Minal, a 15 year-old resident, summed this up neatly when talking about policing in the peri-Olympic
2 period during a family interview:

3 *Minal: A lot of police were walking around in case if anything happened*
4 *so they could catch the criminals.*

5
6 *Interviewer: And then once the Olympics stopped?*

7
8 *Minal: They just wandered off somewhere.*
9
10

11 **Discussion**

12 Our findings suggest that Olympic reordering and regeneration served to reduce and temporarily
13 alleviate the stresses and lived experiences of deprivation and thereby have potentially positive
14 impacts on health and well-being. Olympic preparations changed, albeit temporarily, the way
15 residents perceived their neighbourhood and shaped their hopes and expectations for the future.

16 The role of neighbourhood perceptions are now recognized as instrumental in shaping individual and
17 population health (Wilson, Elliot et al. 2004). Newham residents described attitudes to Olympic-led
18 changes around aesthetic improvements, community belonging and security which, taken together,
19 are indicative of the capacity for sporting mega-events to make a difference to people and places.
20

21

22 ***Aesthetics***

23

24 Attempts by Olympic host cities to improve the aesthetic conditions of deprived areas as part of a
25 larger mega-event led regeneration help co-produce the conflicting attitudes towards improvements
26 that we encountered and reflect the contradictory intents to at once provide a welcoming area for
27 visitors, as well as revitalising areas for residents. For example, aesthetic improvements during

1 Vancouver 2010 were rationalised with reference to how visitors would perceive the city, it was
2 important to the Olympic 'brand' that enduring memories were not of a deteriorating environment
3 (Pevalin 2007). Newham residents articulate this in London in what they perceive as attempt to hide
4 away the 'dirtiness', in favour of the new facilities of Westfield and the Olympic Park.

5

6 At the same time, some Newham residents saw aesthetic improvements in more positive terms, in
7 line with the aspirational context for regeneration. There is a large body of work demonstrating
8 independent associations between the quality of the environment and health improvement (Burns
9 2014). However, less well known are the causal mechanisms that relate changes in the environment
10 with changes in health and wellbeing. Leslie and Cerin (2008) put forward the view that visible
11 evidence of physical disorder in the form of graffiti, litter and vandalism may trigger negative
12 emotions and thereby impact upon wellbeing (Leslie and Cerin 2008).

13

14 ***Community belonging***

15

16 Narratives of social fragmentation were frequently encountered among Newham residents, often as
17 the social reflection of perceptions of a borough believed to be disconnected from local services and
18 governance, and home to a transient and often isolated population. A lack of social participation is
19 significantly associated with poor self-reported mental health (Blankenship, Friedman et al. 2006,
20 Guite, Clark et al. 2006). The Games provided extensive opportunities for social interaction.
21 Participants' positive accounts of this and their experiences of community pride are perhaps
22 unsurprising in light of the 'festival' effect of the event. Sporting mega events can facilitate a
23 willingness to participate, particularly if the significance of the event is perceived to be broader than
24 sport alone (Weed, Coren et al. 2009). This is also born-out in similar findings about legacy
25 expectations in Glasgow, host city of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. The health impact
26 assessment (HIA) reported that a desire for enhanced community engagement, social inclusion and

1 community cohesion were widely expressed by local residents and that the boosting of civic pride
2 via the cultural programmes attached to the Games were viewed as particularly important (Gibson,
3 Petticrew et al. 2011).

4

5 ***Security***

6

7 One aspect of our findings that does run counter to previous research is the acceptance and
8 welcoming of increased security measures by local residents. Temporary security measures for
9 sporting mega-events have been interpreted, by some, as contributing to the militarization and
10 repression of urban spaces and populations (Giulianotti and Klauser 2010) and yet are viewed
11 bureaucratically as 'common sense' (Pevalin 2007) in the context of preparing for such events.
12 Trepidation over the anticipated 'security legacy' of the London Games centred on the fear that the
13 markedly visible expansion of security by the state for the duration of the Games would become
14 permanent and oppressive. Measures such as the London Olympic and Paralympic Games Act
15 (2006) which, among other things, gave the police and private security contractors extra powers to
16 clamp down on 'disruptive' protests excited criticism on these grounds. Findings from both London
17 and Vancouver showed that, for low-income young people, the re-ordering of Olympic cities resulted
18 in exclusion from former recreational spaces, increased surveillance and detrimental effects on
19 social participation (Guite, Clark et al. 2006, Kennelly and Watt 2011).

20

21 By contrast, Newham residents interviewed for this present study accepted the legitimacy of the
22 perceived security threat and actively welcomed intensified security. Clearly, experiences of
23 Olympic security were not uniform among residents. This ready acceptance of increased security by
24 some Olympic borough residents needs to be understood in the context of how Newham is
25 experienced. Newham is a deprived area and records the greatest proportion of residents

1 perceiving high levels of anti-social behaviour in the whole country (Ames, Powell et al. 2007). In
2 this context, desiring securitisation and protection seems a reasonable response.

3

4 **Conclusion**

5

6 While it is still too early to determine the long-term benefits of the Games, the experiences of
7 residents interviewed for this study indicate a much more modest and specific impact than the
8 rhetoric around it would suggest. Residents generally welcomed the respite and the unexpected
9 chance to live in a cleaner, safer and more unified environment. However, this positivity was
10 underscored by an acute awareness that this was a very temporary situation and one that was
11 intended to support the event rather than residents

12

13 Few published studies have looked at local residents' assumptions and experiences in the context of
14 the urban and global processes that sporting mega-events encompass (Hiller and Wanner 2011) and
15 even fewer have measured the benefits to health and well-being (McCartney, Thomas et al. 2010).

16 The physical environments in which people live and their perceptions of those environments are
17 important determinants of health, arguably even more so than socioeconomic influences (Haan,
18 Kaplan et al. 1987). Understanding the complex impact and legacy of mega sporting events requires
19 further mixed methods longitudinal research that examines both 'hard' factors like socioeconomic
20 influences *and* 'softer' ones such as the perceptions and experiences reported here. This qualitative
21 study is part of an ongoing large scale project that aims to do just that.

22

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