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WELL-BEING RESOURCES AND MASS PARTICIPATION SPORTS EVENTS IN PEMBROKESHIRE

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Mass participation sport events (MPSEs) have grown in popularity. Specifically, in Pembrokeshire, West Wales, participation has seen a continued increase in athlete numbers and events over the last decade. Moreover, extremely high numbers of Pembrokeshire residents are participating in MPSEs. Current research provides a narrow demonstration of the role of MPSEs in supporting health and well-being. A qualitative approach was used as contrast to most methodology in the literature to better understand the embodied experiences of individuals taking part in MPSEs. This article draws on interview data from within a larger study to explore the emerging theme of well-being. Eighteen individuals, 12 females and 6 males, aged between 34 and 58 took part in the research. Findings show that firstly, exercise in several MPSE contexts strengthen psychological resources. Secondly, connections made in MPSEs provide social resources and, finally, nature and the physical environment act as a physical resource. In conclusion, many MPSE contexts, from 5K *parkrun* to long-distance events, provide an opportunity for people in society to develop resources to support well-being. Further analysis is ongoing to fully explore the contribution that MPSE make to the well-being of athletes and the wider community.

Key words: Well-being; Mass participation sports events; Well-being resources; Serious leisure

Introduction

Over the last 10 years there has been unprecedented growth in mass participation sport events (MPSEs) in the UK. MPSE refers to a range of endurance-based sports events that take place outdoors and include events such as marathon running, cycle events, and triathlons, as well as community-level events such as *parkrun*. Televised events such as the London Marathon, and Great North Run have seen record numbers of participants (Fuller, 2017; London Marathon, 2019a). This rise seems to be continuing with London Marathon (2019b) witnessing a "world record total of 414,168 applicants for the 2019 ballot" surpassed by the 2020 ballot, which registered an increase

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of 10.5% (London Marathon, 2019c), unfortunately the race was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. British Triathlon (2020) has also seen a continued increase in memberships, permitted events, and participants across the UK with an 86% increase in race starts since 2009. Even greater rises have been seen in local community-led participation events such as *parkrun* (Parkrun, 2020; Stevinson & Hickson, 2014; Stevinson et al., 2015) as well as events more modern in style growing in popularity (Buning & Walker, 2016; Toughmudder, 2020).

Wales has seen growth in all types of events from the traditional (running, cycling, and swimming events) to the nontraditional (obstacle courses or theme races). The 2020 Cardiff half marathon sold out in record time (Cardiff Half Marathon, 2020). Specifically, in Pembrokeshire, the increase in participation in local events has been dramatic. One example of this is Ironman Wales, Pembrokeshire. In 2014 Ironman reported that the highest number of local participants had entered Ironman Wales, numbering 191 athletes from Pembrokeshire, bigger than any other Ironman event globally (Ironman, 2014). The same article states that "Pembrokeshire County residents boast an astonishing 180 athletes per hundred thousand population, compared to a UK average of just 11" (Ironman, 2014). Data received from Ironman (personal correspondence with Operations Director, Rachel Jackson, 2019) identified 791 Pembrokeshire athletes registered for the annual Ironman Wales event from 2012 to 2019. Using this data, as of 2019, Pembrokeshire County residents now boast 632 ironman athletes per 100,000 population in addition to the many hundreds of local people who take part in smaller-scale events in the area.

Athlete or participant motivation and level of physical activity for health have been highly researched topics within the current MPSE literature. Interestingly, various motivations and goal choices have been linked to a single event (Bennet et al., 2007; Buning & Walker, 2016; Funk et al., 2011). For instance, both intrinsic and extrinsic motives have been linked to participation in MPSEs (Coleman & Sebire, 2016; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012), with health and well-being benefits, personal goals, and enjoyment often the most common reasons to participate (Buning & Walker, 2016; Coleman & Sebire, 2016; Funk et al., 2011; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012).

Interestingly, many studies have made connections between MPSE participation and public health. For example, Coleman and Sebire (2016) found that intrinsic goals were associated with higher perceptions of event achievement and therefore autonomous motivation and moderate to vigorous physical activity after the event. Similarly, several studies looked at the postevent physical activity levels to make connections with long-term exercise behaviors and sustained healthy lifestyles (Bowles et al., 2006; Crofts et al., 2012; Funk et al., 2011; Shipway & Holloway, 2010; Willem et al., 2017). All articles show some drop in postevent physical activity levels yet importantly, of those who were least active, the participant groups categorized as novice or inactive reported a significantly increased number of bike rides (Bowles et al., 2006), stronger attitudes towards regular exercise (Funk et al., 2011), and sufficient activity after the event (Crofts et al., 2012). Although these are promising findings most authors call for further research into the role of MPSEs in public health and well-being (Bowles et al., 2006; Coleman & Sebire, 2016; Funk et al., 2011) and long-term physical activity intentions and behaviors (Crofts et al., 2012; Willem et al., 2017).

At present, the MPSE literature has only provided a narrow picture of this potential. Limitations in research designs have meant that the measures used to explore sustained physical activity behaviors were limited to a 3-month period after the event (this may still be within the MPSE season). Moreover, findings from Funk et al. (2011) found that participants in longer races such as half and full marathons "were most likely already exceeding the threshold for physical activity to receive health benefits before the event . . . and already possess strong attitudes toward exercise" (p. 263). Similar findings were also reported by Willem et al. (2017), who also noted that only a small percentage (3.1%) of participants were not regularly active.

The field of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992, 2007) has helped illustrate the effort needed to participate in MPSEs. It is not just what happens at the event, or through in-season, but significant lifestyle adjustments and commitment to make room for all that is required for the sporting endeavor (Hill

& Robinson, 1991; Lev & Zach, 2020; Masters et al., 1993). For example, McCarville (2007) introduced the idea of training and event going hand-in-hand as one experience. Therefore, it is pertinent to consider training activities as important as event participation itself. Work within this field has also highlighted the need to consider the social context of these activities, as Furness (2010) stated these activities "become meaningful through its relationship to an entire field of cultural practices, discourses and social forces" (p. 9). Consequently, the public health and well-being benefits of MPSE participation lie within the holistic nature of the activity, not only using events as motivation.

Literature Review

Well-being is understood as a multidimensional concept (Diener, 2009; Dodge et al., 2012). Authors have linked and understood well-being by other constructs such as quality of life (Diener, 2006; Uysal et al., 2016); happiness (Diener, 2000; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999); positive psychology, and flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 2006; Seligman, 2011). Although well-being is key part of the World Health Organization (WHO) (1946) definition of health, the organization has not defined well-being. Similarly, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) (Welsh Government [WG], 2015) hailed as the first law of its kind, requires all public bodies to put well-being at the forefront of their thinking. However, the legislation offers no definition, but rather seven "well-being goals" that public bodies must work to achieve. Commonly in literature well-being is described by core dimension or characteristics. For example, Seligman (2011) highlighted positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA) in his theory of well-being. Clearly, well-being is a complex and at times confusing or even contradictory term (Diener, 2009; Pollard & Lee, 2003). Therefore, it may be more constructive to focus on what causes well-being, rather than getting weighed down by nuanced understandings of the concept.

According to Dodge et al. (2012) "stable well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge" (p. 230). This is simplified explanation developed from an in-depth discussion on what constitutes well-being. Basing their understanding around the state of equilibrium or homeostasis, Dodge et al. (2012) demonstrated that well-being is a dynamic concept that rebalances and reacts to ongoing life experiences. They depict well-being as a balanced seesaw between resources and challenges.

Dodge et al. (2012) explained the notion of resources by drawing on the work of Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 2002) concept of flow, where, to achieve a desired state of flow, challenges and skills (in this case, resources) are relatively balanced. If imbalanced, feelings of boredom, anxiety, or control and relaxation will be experienced (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Dodge et al. (2012) also drew on Hendry and Kloep's (2002) idea of a resource pool, the authors suggested that individuals need to be challenged to develop throughout their life span and when challenged the individuals will call on different levels of resources through the process of solving challenges. Hendry and Kloep (2002) listed biological dispositions, social resources, skills, self-efficacy, and structural resources in the pool that can be used. Both these theories link to the idea of equilibrium or homeostasis present in Dodge's (2012) explanation of well-being.

The idea of resources has also been seen in other explanations or descriptions of well-being as well as concepts that influenced the new definition. For example, according to Herzlich (1973) "equilibrium comprises of the following themes: physical well-being; plenty of physical resources; absence of fatigue; psychological well-being and evenness of temper; freedom of movement and effectiveness in action; good relations with other people" (p. 60). Similarly, Headey and Wearing (1991) referred to "stocks" when considering conditions or characteristics that can be relied on to help an individual cope and/or flourish. Likewise, McNaught (2011) referred to "forces" in his definitional framework of well-being. The forces are specific to the four domains of the framework, namely, society (forces such as economic security or political and geographical integrity of the country or state), community (e.g., social cohesion, ecology, and the environment), family (e.g., interpersonal relationships and housing), and individual (e.g., physical,

psychological, and spiritual). Additionally, concepts that describe well-being by its dimensions also integrate resources and their impact on well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2011; WHO, 1997). For example, in positive psychology and the idea of flourishing, Seligman (2011) called for "enabling conditions of life" (p. 2) to enhance well-being. Also, WHO (1997) listed aspects that affect quality of life, including a "person's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships, and their relationship to salient features of their environment" (p. 1).

Resources have also been seen in other areas of health and well-being literature. Antonovsky's (1979) notion of salutogenesis highlighted the importance of what he calls General Resistance Resources (GRRs) and defines them as "any characteristic of the person, the group, or the environment that can facilitate effective tension management" (p. 99). In the salutogenic model, sense of coherence (the ability to views one's life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful) and GRRs work together to deal effectively with stressors of everyday life. In the same way, a higher sense of coherence will allow an individual to identify many GRRs at their disposal, while these resources strengthen an individual's sense of coherence. Importantly, resources can not only be used to deal with challenges and adversity but can encourage well-being and flourishing in everyday life (Bauer et al., 2019). Dodge et al. (2012) listed resources as psychological, social, and physical.

Psychological Resources

According to Hendry and Kloep (2002), self-efficacy and self-esteem would fall under the category of psychological resources. Similarly, when considering previous literature looking at GRRs within the salutogenic model for health, Idan et al. (2017) identified positive/negative affect, low anxiety, and meaning as well as the above. Interestingly, psychological resources have also, at times, been classed as dimensions or aspects of well-being. For example, in positive psychology literature Seligman (2011) suggested that positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment are the building blocks for a flourishing life. Furthermore, Ryff (1989) highlighted autonomy; purpose in life; realization of potential; and self-acceptance as "ideals of well-being" (p. 1080) and, within this journal, the presence of positive psychology domains has been explored in experiences at charity sport events (Filo & Coghlan, 2016). These elements have also been used to measure well-being (Butler & Kern, 2016; Kern et al., 2016).

Clearly, whether they are classed as resources or dimensions of well-being, positive emotions, mood, self-efficacy, and self-esteem as well as positive affect will help deal with challenges experienced throughout life. So, for the case of this study they will be referred to as resources. Therefore, it is important to understand how to improve and support these resources to prevent undesirable conditions linked to poor well-being such as mental health issues.

Due to the nature of MPSEs, it is important to look at the role of physical activity and exercise to not only provide health benefits but also improve and strengthen psychological resources. It is globally accepted that regular physical activity and exercise can aid in the prevention of noncommunicable or chronic diseases (Anderson et al., 2016; Blair, 2009; Das & Horton, 2016; Warburton et al., 2006; WHO, 2018). Likewise, it is widely recognized that physical activity and exercise can help improve mental health (De Moor & de Geus, 2018; Grassman et al., 2018); help ameliorate illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Bartholomew, 2005; Cooney et al., 2013); and improve quality of life (Blacklock et al., 2007; Joseph et al., 2014). Therefore, this study explored the provision of psychological resources through taking part and training for MPSEs.

Social Resources

Drawing on the understanding of Hendry and Kloep (2002), the authors include trust, attachment, size of network, and quality of network in their social resources pool. Within the salutogenic model for health many aspects of social resources are discussed. Specifically, Idan et al. (2017) listed patterns of attachment through the life span with significant others, namely parental and family factors. Additionally, they list social settings such as school and the community as potential resource

structures. Similar resources have been noted in other descriptions and definitions of well-being (McNaught, 2011; Seligman, 2011).

MPSEs have been linked to a sense of community or social cohesion as a resource listed by McNaught (2011). For instance, one of the three core markers of community described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) is consciousness of kind—this is where members of a community feel an intrinsic connection to each other. Literature has shown that accessing a social environment of like-minded people was a key experience of participants (Shipway et al., 2013). Likewise, through a social atmosphere and interaction Robinson et al. (2014) found runners in a club formed a sense of belonging and shared culture. Within the study some of these connections were also seen to develop into friendships. Indeed, Wiltshire and Stevinson (2018) also found that casual social connections fostered an inclusive and welcoming community in *parkrun* events.

Physical Resources

This is a broad term that can include many different types of resources; for example, finance and material resources are listed by both Hendry and Kloep (2002), Kloep et al. (2009), and Idan et al. (2017). In other descriptions of well-being, Herzlich (1973) called for "plenty of physical resources" (p. 60) and McNaught (2011) named physical security; geographical integrity; housing; and the environment in his framework for defining well-being.

As the majority of MPSEs take place outside the study considered the role of outdoor space in Pembrokeshire as a physical resource for well-being. Pembrokeshire is a coastal National Park consisting of hundreds of beaches, countryside, and moorland. Therefore, the role of nature was also drawn upon as an essential element of the physical environment. James et al. (2016) demonstrated that connection to nature has a positive effect on stress depression and anxiety. Similarly, several researchers have used the concept of place attachment to better understand the relationship between human well-being and nature (Basu et al., 2020; Cleary et al., 2017; Kyle et al., 2004; Lewicka, 2011). Furthermore, many authors have researched exercise and physical activity in nature, finding that positive mood states and improvements in self-esteem were linked to activity in the outdoors (Pretty et al., 2007; Thompson Coon et al., 2011). Likewise, Shanahan et al. (2016) found that physical activity in the outdoors improved energy levels and decreased signs of anxiety, anger, fatigue, and sadness, compared to the same activity carried out indoors.

The focus of this article seeks to acknowledge the social, environmental, and cultural factors that support training for, and participation in, MPSEs and help us better understand the well-being resources present in the culture of MPSEs. As the phenomenon has been present in Pembrokeshire for 10 years, it can be assumed that some health and well-being behaviors would have already been made and sustained. Therefore, it is vital that the perspectives of the athletes are highlighted to gain a better understanding of their experiences. Importantly, well-being resources have not been fully researched and in places only regarded as implicit to health benefits.

Methodology

Design

This article draws on one qualitative data set from a large 3-year study of MPSEs in Pembrokeshire. A phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2009) was used to explore the lived experiences of athletes (in this case any individual that takes part in any aspect of MPSEs) living and taking part in Pembrokeshire and draws on Husserl's original philosophy that calls for "a return to things themselves." The study provided a rich description of the phenomenon of MPSEs in Pembrokeshire to better understand perceptions and experiences of the individuals involved. A phenomenological approach allowed for the complex nature of reality, where people's lived experiences were individually influenced by their social and cultural contexts and backgrounds.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee. The research committed to follow the ethical rules, obligations, and standards set by both the university (University of Wales Trinity Saint David [UWTSD], 2017) and British Psychological Society (2014) due to the nature of the topics covered. Names were changed for anonymity and informed consent was gained from all participants.

Setting, Sample Strategies, and Participants

The study was set in Pembrokeshire, a rural community in Wales whose industry is mostly based around agriculture and tourism, with a population size of 125,055 (ONS, 2018). Roughly a third of the county's area is the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park consisting of 100s of beaches, countryside, and moorland. A convenience sample strategy was firstly used to approach individuals to take part in the study at MPSEs in Pembrokeshire in the 2019 season (April–October). Of those who agreed to take part, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on the requirements that the athletes take part in MPSEs, were over the age of 18, and a resident of Pembrokeshire. Snowball sampling was then used to target other participants that may not be known to the researcher. Primary participants suggested suitable secondary participants for the interview. Using snowball sampling facilitated the quality of sources within the study and raised the profile of the research within the community (Harrison, 2018). Eighteen individuals, 12 females and six males, aged between 34 and 58 took part in the research. All participants had differing and multiple experiences of MPSEs in the area, some were regular attendees at their local park run and some had completed Ironman Wales, Pembrokeshire on multiple occasions.

Data Collection

Two main interview strategies were used. Firstly, semistructured phenomenological interviews set the basis of the discussion with the researcher having themes and starter questions to discuss with the participants to gather "as complete a description as possible for the experience that a participant has lived through" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 122). To complement this, an ethnographic interview style was used in part to provide "more opportunities for the research participants to author their own understandings of the world" (Harrison, 2018, p. 73). The aim was to provide the participants the license to articulate what is central to their MPSE experiences; this meant that at times the interview became unstructured, the questions more fluid, allowing the participant to talk freely about their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). When done well this allowed the researcher to act as a "facilitator, not a coproducer of pertinent information" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016, p. 71), allowing themes to emerge that may not have been considered in the first instance by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed by the same researcher who interviewed the participants allowing for greater immersion and familiarization that supports a trustworthy qualitative analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). The data were then imported into NVivo 11 software for thematic analysis. This provided the first phase of the data analysis processes suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2014). Due to the nature of the rich descriptive information provided by the participants the second and third phase of this process was essential to allow for themes to emerge without researcher bias. Generating initial codes was carried out by running queries within the software such as word frequency and text searching. Theme searching was built on top of this as well as revisiting the original transcriptions to read the themes within context. Themes were defined, reviewed, and refined.

To enhance the research quality further considerations were made to the sensitivity of context, reflexivity, rigor, and coherence (Sparkes & Smith, 2009; Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2000). As part of the wider study the first author spent time in the field, spectating and helping at events, observing club swim sessions, and getting to know "key players" such as event organizers, club members, and athletes. Reflective journaling was also used for reflexivity to allow of "critical self-evaluation" of the researchers position and "draw a line between their subjectivity and the observable phenomenon" (Peredaryenko & Karuss, 2013, p. 2; see also Jasper, 2005).

Findings and Discussion

Three themes emerged from the data. Firstly, exercise in MPSEs strengthens psychological resources. Secondly, connections made in MPSEs can provide social resources. Finally, nature and the physical environment act as a physical resource. Interestingly, all themes were noted by different

athletes showing that although there are differences in the experiences of athletes (in discipline and distance), commonalities of resources are evident in all contexts.

Exercise in Several MPSE Contexts Strengthen Psychological Resources

As stated above psychological resources such as positive emotions and affect, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and low anxiety can help cope with life's challenges and help stabilize well-being (Dodge et al., 2012; Hendry & Kloep, 2002; Idan et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011). Specifically, positive emotions have been seen to "build enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008, p. 782), such as cognitive, psychological, and social (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002) and has "lead to higher levels of well-being and functioning over time" (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 25; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018). The use of physical activity to increase positive emotions was discussed by all participants. Key words and phrases included "feeling more myself" (Natalie); "feel refreshed" (Emma); "felt better" (Tina), several talk about feeling low if they have not trained in a while. Emma, a regular at the local *parkrun*, who also does short training runs in the week, noted "I love doing it because it makes me feel refreshed, because I haven't done anything for a week I feel really rubbish, and if you haven't been for a week it's bound to affect your well-being." Rachel, who enjoys middle distance events like half marathons and has started training for triathlons, also links this to her premenstrual syndrome emotions stating:

> When I am on my period I don't do much and my mood is much worse, whereas if I do some exercise before and straight after I can manage it much better and I don't take it out on other people, it's a real noticeable change in my personality if I'm not doing any exercise.

The wives of two male athletes notice the mood changes and encourage their partners to run to boost positive emotions. Ross (an Ironman several times over) admits:

> I get grumpy, especially if I planned to go for a run . . . [and family commitments mean he is unable to] . . . I have to do my bit at home, but she can see it as well, sometimes she will say "just go for a run, you know, and I will deal with these [children]" . . . because I am a different person when I come back, I've done my 20 minutes and I am a different person around the house, not moping around and grumpy for the sake of what was a 20-minute run.

Trevor, who spends as much of his week as he can fell running around the Preseli hills, also attests to this "if I can't go for a run for a week I am a moody-old-whatnot but when I go for a run it's like a release, if I've got stuff to do or I am really stress the wife always makes me go." In turn, this also supports the *upward spiral theory of lifestyle change* (Fredrickson, 2013; Van Capellen et al., 2017), where positive emotions experienced in training and participation in MPSEs trigger "wanting" and seeking behaviors to further embed habitual positive health behaviors, in this case physical activity and exercise, causing the upward spiral.

Additionally, several individuals discuss the role of physical activity to rebalance psychological challenges. Rachel thinks that taking part in physical activity is "more for the mental side of things than the physical." With several others discussing a "a good headspace . . . and mental boost" (Jo); "it clears your mind" (Emma & Trevor). Geri, Tina, and Louise suggest it is synonymous with mental health. Geri, one of the first females in Tenby to complete the ironman and now does trail running states "my mind is more settled if I have trained, I get really quite anxious, so it helps." Tina, who can only take part in swimming events due to a disability, adds "for me I think it helps my well-being . . . I went swimming on Tuesday for the first time in two weeks, it's easy to get out of the habit of doing it, but for me it really helps my mental health." In fact, supporting Dodge et al. (2012), Louise, who is training for her first Ironman Wales, discusses challenges she has faced where physical activity has supported her psychological resources:

> My dad passed away this year so going through that but trying to self-help because there is a lot of research around that sort of thing, and that's why I think I was in a dark place when my back went—I would use exercise as a mental release, even before my dad passed away, but I need it more and more.

MPSE Connections Can Provide Social Resources

More generally, all athletes discussed the social aspect of MPSEs. All individuals have experienced and used social resources differently. Some joined a club for the expertise of the coaching sessions, or the experience of clubmates who have been participating longer in events. Some highlighted the social support of their close family both specifically during events as spectators or supporters and being understanding about their training program. Several athletes discuss the social support that you can get from friends you take part with. In both these examples, the friends have met through events. Jason gives the example of his friend:

> He and I have jobs that sort of get to you, because I am in the military and around PTSD, and he is a first responder, we talk a lot about that, when we go out on our bike rides it's like we can self-counsel each other as well because of the shit we have seen, so the mental health aspect through sport is that way too, it should not be underestimated.

Both men have completed multiple Ironman Wales races, Jason tries to beat his time each year and Matthew, the friend, is happy to just finish but is one of only 10 individuals that have completed all Ironman Wales events since 2011. This supports the work of Cohen (2004), demonstrating that social resources assist an individual to cope with stressful challenges in their daily lives through psychological support.

Likewise, Tina and Rachel both talk about the support of friends they have met taking part in MPSEs. Speaking together in a follow-up interview Rachel starts, "I felt really isolated, things got really dark and horrible"; she was petrified of the water, but her new friends were doing a swimming event. When asked why she went along with it she said:

> Because it frightened me and I wanted so desperately to be part of a group of friends again and that kind of outweighed the "oh shit I can't do it" . . . it was something to get out of the door for—those couple of hours while our children were in nursery we would run.

Her and Tina talk about the friendship now beyond events and training, Rachel says "All the training and stuff is great but in between we have messenger chats now and the friendship has developed from a couple of exercises to be really good friends." Tina agrees, continuing:

> That's the best thing I think and from my well-being point of view it's much better now than rewind like 3 years ago when I didn't really see anybody and now there is always messages flying backwards and forwards obviously we see each other at school often but we also help each other with kids, like "I'm running late can you grab mine for me," it's just really nice and "oh I'm stuck I need a lift to Narberth . . . yeah I'll take you.

This evolution of friendship has also been seen in other leisure events (Robinson et al., 2014; Shipway et al., 2013) and the sense of belonging established has been positively associated with subjective well-being (Elgar et al., 2011; Glover & Parry, 2008; Wang & Wong, 2014).

Nature and the Physical Environment Act as a Physical Resource

Studies have demonstrated a connection with nature can boost mood and positive affect as well as greater vitality (Mayer et al., 2009; Nisbet et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2010). Nicole, Jo, Trevor, and Hannah all speak of a "sense of freedom" when they are out either on their bikes or for a run. Many link this with the views and scenery that they can witness while running or cycling. For example, Nicole, who organizes three informal run sessions per week for people in her community and mainly takes part in endurance cycle events, was asked what her favorite thing is about cycling around Pembrokeshire. She replied:

> I think it's probably the freedom, I like the freedom and the peace and quiet, I like some of the things you see, I've seen some amazing things when I have been out cycling which you just wouldn't see if you were in the car.

All but one athlete talks about the views that you can see and the scenery when cycling or running. Several athletes specifically talk about the uniqueness of Pembrokeshire in comparison to other places. For example, Jo, who has "pretty much

tried everything" available in Pembrokeshire and normally finishes in the top two for her age group in most events, states "it gave me the actual space I needed, because when I was in London I was like a caged animal and I needed that space and time on my own"; she goes on the describe the environment, "I mean look at our environment, it's perfect it's like a playground, when I found my bike and started cycling that was a bit more adventure and that's what I needed." While on a run Hannah, who also finishes in the top two for her age groups and focuses on triathlons and ultra-running events, realized what she would be giving up if she moved away:

> But this run is food for the soul—you wouldn't get this in California, you'd get the sunshine but you wouldn't get these views, this is my happy place, get out and straight away your spirit is lifted . . . you see some beautiful things you wouldn't see in a city environment, its proper healthy living.

Several people discussed the way they connect with nature when they are taking part in MPSE or training for an event. Both David and Ross talk about running without music: "I just love the sound of the countryside" (Ross). David adds "I don't use music; I wouldn't run with music . . . if I am out running the coastal path I want to be out listening to things. To me it is about being in the environment." Geri without finding a more suitable phrase suggests "it's more of like a . . . I don't really want to say spiritual, but spiritual thing I suppose." Natalie agrees with this:

> I think it's a mixture of the elements, it's a very sensory aspect. The feeling of the wind on you, the rawness of the elements, it's kind of like it makes you feel awake . . . being part of nature and connected to that. Just the beauty of it and feeling small within that, being a part of it.

Interestingly she goes on to demonstrate how this physical resource links with the psychological resources from physical activity:

> Yeah, I think for me now and always it's . . . if I'm feeling stressed, being able to get out for a walk or a run, being in nature, the mixture of the physical movement and being out in nature centers me. It has always been one of my coping mechanisms. And I think even from a young child, being outside made me feel calmer. But also, not necessarily just sitting outside. It's a mixture of the physical, being able to run or move in it.

She also links this back to participating in MPSEs, "it made me fall in love with being outdoors and active even more."

Although many of the athletes discuss well-being benefits gained from cycling, a couple of athletes discuss the growing issue that comes with the popularity of MPSEs in the area. For example, Sara states "yeah I do it for fitness but one of the most important reasons for me is well-being and mental health and a time to relax." She goes on to say:

> These days I don't really like going out on the bike much anymore, because I'm another cyclist on the road. I'm more anxious, I would now always choose to go running over cycling now because I can relax and enjoy it, I always feel anxious on the bike now, and when we do go, I make sure we go out super early to try and avoid traffic.

Jo also agrees with this:

> I just planned to carry on cycling but the phenomenon of cycling is getting more and more dangerous, the bubble will burst and eventually someone will die, and it will probably be me because I cycle about 500 miles a month and the amount of abuse you get on the road now is unbelievable, unbelievable!

This supports Kloep et al.'s (2009) understanding of the nature of resources and challenges, explaining that in some situations resources can become challenges for many. This also supports the dynamic equilibrium theory of well-being used by Dodge et al. (2012) in their explanation of well-being as a balance point between resources and challenge. The situation discussed by the athletes may unbalance the see-saw image, reducing resources and increasing challenges.

Conclusion

We already know from literature that the MPSEs have potential to support health and well-being (Bowles et al., 2006; Coleman & Sebire, 2016; Funk et al., 2011). This study provided a qualitative perspective to explore the lived experience of

athletes where MPSE participation is part of their lifestyle. The study found that several MPSE contexts, from 5k *parkrun* to long-distance events such as ironman, are opportunities for people in society to develop resources to support well-being. Firstly, athletes demonstrated how training for the events and taking part in shorter events such as *parkrun* can strengthen psychological resources and support their mental health, acting as strategies used to cope with anxiety and depression. Secondly, literature in serious leisure has already demonstrated the social connections and friendships that can be created by taking part in MPSEs (Shipway et al., 2013). The athletes in this study have explained how these relationships become resources for well-being, providing connection and support. Thirdly, the physical environment, as the context for MPSE training and participation, has been seen to center the athletes and provide the feeling of freedom. This article helps move the discourse from an individualistic focus, dominant in the literature to a perspective where the importance of contexts is highlighted including, the experiences of the individual, social connections, and physical environments.

At a time where there is a growing focus on the need to develop and maintain good levels of health and well-being, this article demonstrates the potential of MPSE events in all their variety to foster greater well-being support mechanisms and their role in supporting broader public health policies. If, as this article suggests, participation in MPSEs supports psychological, social, and physical resources—holistically supporting well-being, this raises questions about the need to ensure a variety of these opportunities are available in all communities to enable all people to access events at both an introductory and more advanced level. Policy makers should look to capitalize on natural landscapes that are ideal for events and invest in long-term infrastructure to support the development of opportunities for people not only to take part in the events but also to train for them in the local environment and as leisure provision. This should be done both safely and sustainably so that resources do not become challenges for the community.

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