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Making sense of the intersubjective structure of homeworld/ alienworld to examine the lifeworld of leisure volunteers during Covid 19

Andrew Adams ^a, Ian Jones ^a and John Deane ^b

^aThe Bournemouth University Business School, Bournemouth, UK; ^bUniversity of Wales Trinity St David, Birmingham, UK

ABSTRACT

A common feature of leisure scholarship has been to use the idea of the lifeworld as a symbolic descriptor to signal in-depthness when dealing with qualitative examinations of how someone lives particular sections of their leisure lives. This paper outlines and explains how the concept of lifeworld can be understood via interpretations of homeworld/alienworld (Heimwelt/Fremdwelt) as derived from Edmund Husserl's writings on the phenomenon of intersubjectivity. Recognising that phenomenology is neither univocal nor amorphous, we examine the alien state of being associated with the Covid 19 pandemic and the measures imposed to interrupt the pandemic between 2020 and 2022. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the experiences of 10 habitual leisure volunteers, highlights how the lifeworld of leisure volunteers was interpreted, negotiated and constructed during the Covid 19 pandemic. The outcomes clarify how conceiving of Covid 19 as an alienworld facilitates an interpretation and navigation of meaning and value of a key leisure activity during a period of existential crisis. Second, the data alerts us to how the leisure potential of volunteering can be easily corrupted once perceptions shift from domesticated perspectives of homeworld to an alienworld.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been growing interest in the relationship between leisure and volunteering. This intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, as individuals navigated the global effects of social distancing, government restrictions, and the widespread cancellation of leisure activities (Lee Ludvigsen et al., 2023; Roberts, 2022). Since then, the literature has expanded considerably, with most contributions generally falling into two strands. The first is a broad management-oriented strand, focusing on applied issues such as the sustainability of organisational structures and processes during crises. This includes studies on volunteer retention (e.g. Retzer et al., 2023; Windon et al., 2024), recruitment (Chow et al., 2021), and crisis management strategies (Shamshiri et al.,

CONTACT Andrew Adams  aadams@bournemouth.ac.uk  The Bournemouth University Business School, Bournemouth, UK

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2022). The second explores emerging forms of volunteering as leisure, particularly those enabled by technology. Scholars have examined the rise of virtual volunteering (Lachance, 2021) and the reconfiguration of leisure itself (Tavares & Marinho, 2021). A residual gap remains. The literature has yet to fully explore how habitual leisure volunteers made sense of their everyday realities during the pandemic, and how they actively transformed their voluntary leisure practices in response. This article seeks to address that gap by offering a philosophically informed account of Covid-19 as a journey marked by liminal, transformative, and generative stages, each experienced and negotiated in distinct ways by leisure volunteers.

Drawing on an established body of scholarly work (e.g. Cnaan et al., 1996; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010), we define *habitual leisure volunteers* as: (i) individuals who volunteer regularly as a form of leisure, and/or (ii) individuals who volunteer regularly to enable or facilitate leisure activities. These typically occur in *formal* settings – that is, through organisations in the not-for-profit, public, or corporate sectors (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010, p. 410). This distinction is important, as the Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) holds that all volunteering, whether situated in work or leisure contexts, can be considered leisure when it is ‘organised around enthusiasms’ (Stebbins, 2020). The defining feature of serious leisure volunteering is the individual’s sustained engagement, supported by the acquisition of skills and knowledge that enable continued participation. This developmental process is often described in the SLP literature as a ‘career’ (Stebbins, 2014, 2020). Leisure volunteers typically pursue this career within structured contexts such as sports clubs or hobby-based organisations. To explore how these volunteers navigated the disruptions of Covid-19, we adopted a *generative phenomenological* approach. This method focuses on first-person experience while also attending to the broader context of meaning-making, including tradition, culture, language, and history (Oksala, 2004, p. 20). Within this framework, we draw on the concepts of *homeworld* and *alienworld* to conceptualise how habitual leisure volunteers interpreted, adjusted to, and rationalised their lifeworlds during the pandemic (Van Manen, 1997). Understanding homeworld and alienworld as interdependent concepts, and aligning them with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), enabled us to explore how particular lifeworlds are constructed and understood. This study thus moves beyond functional or utilitarian accounts of volunteering to offer a more humanising and existential perspective, one in which how an experience feels is more significant than what is done (Henderson, 1984). The generative phenomenological lens allows us to consider how cultural and historical forces shape the core of lived experience (Ueland et al., 2021).

Covid 19 and leisure volunteering

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted social interactions, with a paradoxical impact on leisure volunteers. For many, both their leisure activity and the associated volunteering ceased, creating a sudden void and existential disruption in their life-journey (Bland, 2020; Lachance, 2021). Simultaneously, demand for volunteer support surged in critical areas such as food insecurity, mental health, education, and social care (Comas-Herrera et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2020). By June 2020, over 4,200 mutual aid groups had formed across the UK (Read, 2024). Covid 19 confronted humanity as an alien presence that, as Bland notes, pulled ‘individuals out of their routines . . . prompts

pause and reflection on habitual patterns of thinking, experiencing, relating, and behaving' (Bland, 2020, p. 711). In the UK, three national lockdowns were imposed to curb the virus. The final one in England lasting from 6 January to 8 March 2021, and it was during this period that the data was collected.

The concept of lifeworld is significant in health-based sources (e.g. Zhang, 2024), often relating to sensitive, humanised service provision during times of great individual stress and existential disturbance (e.g. HIV care, cancer care, end of life care). Following the acceptance of 'new' medical understandings of illness and health (Alonso, 2004; Engels, 1977; Hvidt, 2017; Ueland et al., 2021), the idea of a journey was introduced to describe individually lived experiences. In leisure studies, lifeworld is often cited as a phenomenological domain signifier (e.g. Dederichs, 2023, Diaz-Hernandez & Lazcano, 2022) where the concept is often used descriptively. We use the journey metaphor in a leisure setting to illustrate the disruption to expectations, life-plans, and everyday life (Dahlberg et al., 2009; Hvidt, 2017; Todres et al., 2014). The metaphor also provides a rich contextual device that links the research aim, Steinbock's phenomenological position and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). It facilitates access to individual lived experiences and how people make sense of them, rather than focussing on universal essences of experience and embraces interpretation as a necessary and valuable act (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). This 'idiographic approach' is essential to 'make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them' (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 41). The journey metaphor, suggestive of travel, allows insight into the 'places' that leisure volunteers stop at, offering points of visibility and representation and recovery where individuals understand themselves as volunteers and how the value of their activities intermingles with broader issues of identity, control and relationships (Hvidt, 2017).

The pandemic (and lockdown responses) became a normalising aspect of people's everyday lives moving from something completely unknown (to most) to a temporal and spatial phenomenon (a liminal place) that was no longer alien and became habitual (Priebe et al., 2018). Bland has argued that this represents the potential for freedom from the known, a form of existential liberation, where regeneration is made sustainable through reflection and re-creation of a new normal (Bland, 2020). A journey that in forcing a relinquishing of what may have been an 'ineffective way of being' encourages regeneration of the self and its location in particular social contexts (Bland, 2020, p. 711). It is this tension that drives this paper to understand the context and the lived experiences of habitual leisure volunteers during a period of existential crisis. Moreover, in following Church and Ravenscroft (2011), we argue that policy and management practice concerning habitual leisure volunteering can and should involve a much deeper appreciative understanding of how individual volunteers construct their lifeworlds. This paper is thus positioned as a critical exploration and clarification of leisure lifeworlds inhabited, shaped and configured via the duality of an homeworld/alienworld by individuals during Covid-19.

Making sense of lifeworld through alienworld/homeworld in leisure studies

The concept of lifeworld is central to phenomenology. Popularised by Husserl it refers to a concern to go back to things themselves to examine how the world in which we are already living 'furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance and scientific

determination' (Husserl, 1973a, p. 48) can be perceived and understood through ordinary experiences, interactions and everyday activities (Lee, 2020; Van Manen, 2002). Husserl asserted that individuals make sense of the lifeworld in two ways, through a 'natural attitude' and a 'reflective attitude' (Held, 2003, p. 37). The former is *intuitable* in asserting the primacy of the everydayness of life that is self-evidently real and natural (Steinbock, 1995, pp. 88–9). The natural attitude is 'foundational' (Husserl, 1973a, p. 44) and conveys the unquestioned way that we accept how the world is and is something that we are unaware of. It is pre-reflective and pre-theoretical. The reflective attitude draws upon this, but re-examines an experience in light of scientific approaches that problematise the taken-for granted to shed light on the lived experience (Held, 2003). In short, lifeworld can denote the system of senses and meanings that comprise a form of life that provides meaning and a language to interpret how the world is conceived of and understood (Beyer, 2020). We use the term lifeworld to critically capture and interrogate how 'a sense of the subjects world' can be revealed (Markula & Denison, 2005, p.168) and employ the concepts of homeworld and alienworld to make sense of both natural and reflective attitudes.

We draw liberally on the work of American philosopher Anthony J Steinbock whose interpretations of lifeworld and homeworld/alienworld develop a phenomenology that is primarily 'generative' (Steinbock, 1995). Steinbock's approach expands on Husserl's central concept of lifeworld as a foundation for knowledge within which 'givenness', the presence of things in lived experience, features to make sense of Husserl's claim that the 'existing world' is a 'structure of sense and validity' (Hennigfeld, 2020, p. 41). Steinbock's approach differs from Husserl by adding a generative dimension. While Husserl saw lifeworld primarily as a foundation for knowledge, Steinbock emphasises its generative character, viewing lifeworld as something that is constantly being generated through historical and social processes. These processes provide contextual rationales for understanding how objects, qualities, and events are presented to our consciousness through our senses. Whilst Husserl was interested in finding universal structures, Steinbock appears more concerned to examine how meaning emerges through inter-generational transmission of traditions, historical developments and changes, cultural practices and rituals and social institutions and their evolution (Steinbock, 1995). Central to Steinbock's interpretation of lifeworld (and perhaps his most distinctive contribution) is the home/alien distinction. Indeed, Steinbock argues that lifeworlds are fundamentally structured by this relationship as it is in this relationship that lifeworlds reveal the potential to interact and influence each other (Apostolescu, 2015). Thus, the experience of 'home' and 'alien' is built into the structure of lifeworld.

Whilst the homeworld/alienworld structure provides a robust intersubjective framework for understanding the disruption and reconstruction of leisure volunteers' lifeworlds, we recognise that other interpretive lenses may offer additional insight into the complexity of lived experience. In particular, Ashworth's (2003) articulation of seven 'fragments' of the lifeworld – temporality, spatiality, selfhood, sociality, embodiment, discourse, and project – complements the generative phenomenological approach by identifying domains through which the texture of everyday life can be further understood. Though not explicitly applied here, aspects of these fragments are clearly resonant in participants' accounts. For instance, the experience of existential disruption and loss of temporal structure during lockdowns echoes Ashworth's notion of temporality; the

diminished co-presence and physical withdrawal from volunteering sites reflects a disturbance of embodiment; and the re-evaluation of role and purpose speaks to shifts in selfhood and project. These fragments are therefore not presented as an alternative framework, but as a useful elaboration that helps affirm the layered and multifaceted character of the leisure volunteer lifeworld as it was unsettled and gradually reconstituted during the pandemic.

According to Steinbock homeworld can be understood as ‘... an intersubjectively typically familiar territory in which we are “at home”’ (Steinbock, 1995, p. 179). The backdrop of leisure volunteering against a national trauma is significant and can be understood as a taken for granted ‘tacit normativity’ (Hvidt, 2017, p. 377) that comprises a sphere of experiences, understanding, and situations marking out a world that is comfortable, usual, and ‘the way things are and should be’ (Jeffner, 1981, p. 324). That comprises the homeworld that is shared with ones ‘home-companions’ (Heimgenossen) (Steinbock, 2003, p. 298). The embedding and representation of mutual aid and reciprocity is a fundament of how a volunteer homeworld may be constructed through an implicit normativity that is at odds with an ‘alienworld’ (Steinbock, 1995) and where that homeworld subsequently provides meaning for the everyday lived experience of the individual.

To reveal the concept of homeworld/alienworld Steinbock draws on what Husserl refers to as normality and abnormality as a prelude to explain how the lifeworlds of homeworld/alienworld are connected within an intersubjective framework where there is mutual interdependence. Normality is fashioned from functioning norms that constitutionally, concordantly, optimally, typically and familiarly provide sense to something within ‘the context of an individual’s environing world or community’ (Steinbock, 2003, p. 293). Abnormality, as a sense, is when forms of being deviate from this. Importantly for Husserl the idea of abnormality can only exist when set against normality (Husserl, 1970). However, abnormality whilst usually identified when placed against an accepted norm, in generative phenomenology, is also concerned with action, which defined by its purpose, in turn, creates a new normal and rationality for its existence and persistence. In short, normality and abnormality share a dialectical process that is represented through the interrelations of homeworlds and alienworlds where normatively significant lifeworlds are constructed to make sense of ‘the relationship between realm of facts and the essential structures of reality’ (Steinbock, 2003, p. 296). For example, a homeworld/alienworld is not only a normatively significant special place, but is also a privileged place. Volunteering presents as a homeworld for volunteers with challenges and ‘anomalous deviation’ generating the alienworld (Steinbock, 2003, p. 293). Subsequently in this context Covid 19 was the alien (or alien generator) and through intersubjective and co-constitution by those who perceive the alien, a co-constitutive co-relativity gives rise to a becoming of the alien. Steinbock describes this process as ‘Homeworld and alienworld coexist[ing] in a relation of axiological asymmetry: They are irreversible and not interchangeable’ (Steinbock, 2003, pp. 297–8).

To make sense of how the lifeworld is constituted and understood Steinbock argues that it is the constant reorientation and negotiation that an individual faces in their everyday life that ensures a balance between the homeworld and alienworld. Essentially balancing the familiar with the alien. Steinbock also argues that ruptures in the homeworld can occur. These can vary from a ‘light break’ where

there is minor ‘disruption of normal experiences’ to a ‘heavy break’ that upsets our entire communal homeworld and puts into question our ability to appropriate the homeworld through a ‘limiting off’ of the alienworld (Steinbock, 1995, p. 241). A logical consequence of this is a reflective incomprehensibility where a liminal state between challenge and restructure is entered into, and is part of how a meaningful structured lifeworld is constructed in the constant flux between home and alien homeworlds (Steinbock, 1995). There is then a sense of liminal contestation in creating and recreating the homeworld, particularly when considering the taken for granted value and meaning of volunteering that Husserl refers to as ‘optimalisation’ (20005, 296). For Husserl this is about sense making via modes of appropriation and disappropriation that negotiate alien and home through ‘transgressive liminal encounters’ (Hvidt, 2017, p. 378). Norms are thus communicated via language, ritual, narrative, shared habits, styles of movement and thinking and so on (Steinbock, 2007). Home is thus constituted as the ‘ground horizon’ and which is something that encapsulates and provides a rootedness that is normatively significant. This sense of the home allows for the co-constituting of the alien – something that is neither familiar, optimal or concordant. As Steinbock explains, it is through modes of transgressive experience that ‘not only is the constitution of the home liminally co-constitutive of the alien, but the alien is co-constitutive of the home’ (Steinbock, 2007, p. 297). The Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns in England had contradictory impacts on volunteering and leisure. Volunteering services, particularly those relating to medical and care services, were in-demand and participation was promoted. Whereas strict lockdown regulations proscribed social contact ensuring that virtually all face-to-face leisure and volunteering activities stopped. Leisure volunteering was subsequently restricted to a minimum (Dederichs, 2023). Covid 19 was an existential shock for many. A collective trauma – a group-level cataclysmic, tragic experience that carried a sense of threat and crisis of meaning that impacted on individual’s abilities to reinvent and reconstruct ‘all that was lost’ (Hirschberger, 2018). This was the alien (world) in people’s home (worlds) that impinged on what and how they could conceive of their lifeworld of their leisure experiences.

The deliberate use of the journey metaphor facilitates an analysis that enables us to plot points of lifeworld disruption for leisure volunteers to make sense of natural attitudes in flux (e.g. Hvidt, 2017; Ueland et al., 2021). This understanding of a movement away from a normal way of life with its tacit acceptance of normality can facilitate a generative phenomenological consideration of the existential journey individuals undertook and the challenges they faced. A key element to the journey metaphor for this paper is the temporal and ethical encounter with the liminal. In this instance a liminal space, a psycho-social space between where one has been and where one is going, was created by the disruption of the everyday experience. To make sense of the disruption and the changing perceptions encountered and interpreted by leisure volunteers, IPA was used to explore unique, personal accounts of the lived experience. The phenomenological principle of perceiving phenomena as they arise was thus aligned to the opaqueness of the liminal journey of habitual leisure volunteers, where meaning, identity, norms and expectations were reinterpreted and reconstructed.

Methodology

Design

The research used in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 habitual leisure volunteers to examine how they made sense of the impact of the third lockdown on their voluntary activity. This lockdown (6 January to 8 March 2021) represented a phased exit and was based on the UK government's *Roadmap out of Lockdown*. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was identified as appropriate for the analytic strategy being well-suited to examining how individuals make sense of their experiences (Rathore et al., 2025), including feelings of familiarity and estrangement through sense and meaning making related to their lived experiences and activities (Joseph & Southcott, 2018; Smith, 2017). IPA is a qualitative and interpretative research approach rooted in phenomenology. It was developed to explore how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds and produces an account of lived experience in its own terms which is then validated by the insights it brings. IPA has particular resonance with Steinbock's generative phenomenology (Apostolescu, 2015) as it captures both the essence of participants' lived experiences and incorporates an awareness and sensitivity in describing and interpreting the experiences of participants. This aligns closely with IPA's core methodological principles, which prioritise detailed, idiographic examination of individual meaning-making processes. Steinbock's 'generative phenomenology' approach, which emphasises the dynamic, historical, and intersubjective nature of experience ensures that IPA's suitability was twofold. First, the idiographic focus was apposite for the small, purposively selected sample of leisure volunteers (information relating to the sample can be seen in Table 1, below). Second, the double hermeneutic harmonises with Steinbock's framework in acknowledging and working with, rather than trying to eliminate, the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. IPA was chosen with care to explore the territory of leisure volunteering as it 'is especially valuable when examining topics which are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden' (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 42).

Participants

Our strategy sought to deliberately uncover participants' intimate and significant life moments at a time of existential disruption and stress (Bland, 2020). Whilst this research was passed by the institution's ethics committee, the researchers were cognisant of practicing reflexivity within the research to establish positions consistent with interpreting individual lifeworlds as constituted by appreciation of homeworld and alienworld constructs. It is also the case that any emotional entanglement between researcher and participants was considered as a proper ethical strategy (Pitti, 2022). This, consistent with both IPA and Steinbock's phenomenology, recognises the active construction of experience through complex hermeneutic interactions between the researcher, participant, and the contextual lifeworld (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). This research thus rejects dominant positivist approaches based on separating researcher and participant in a drive for objectivism. Rather, and reflected in the strategy for recruiting participants, we sought non-exploitative contact with individuals known as acquaintances to the researcher. In agreeing with Irwin (2006, p.155) that 'subjectivity is not more or less

Table 1. Volunteers and their roles.

Volunteers	Gender	Age	Volunteering experience	Main voluntary activity
1	M	40–50	6 years	Youth rugby club coach
2	M	60–70	7 years	Railway volunteer
3	M	50–60	5 years	Scout District Chair
4	M	20–30	8 years	Scout leader
5	F	50–60	4 years	Museum volunteer
6	M	50–60	7 years	Park Run ambassador
7	F	50–60	5 years	Park Run Race Director
8	F	50–60	5 years	Sport club secretary
9	M	70+	12 years	Roller hockey referee/club social secretary
10	M	30–40	3 years	Tennis club Social Secretary

exploitative than objectivity’, our sample population, derived from acquaintances, facilitated trust and rapport to uncover the impact of Covid 19 on a leisure practice as lived experience. In keeping with our generative phenomenological stance, we approached the research relationship not as a source of bias to be bracketed, but as a meaningful context through which lifeworlds could be interpreted and shared. This level of emotional engagement and understanding of participants is ‘vital in navigating and making sense of everyday lives and environments’ (Funk & Thajib, 2019, p. 8). This highlights the potential value of emotionally aware, ethically embedded research relationships, especially during periods of widespread existential disruption.

Procedure

Verbal consent was obtained before each participant was provided with an explanatory letter detailing the research. The authors then discussed issues such as confidentiality, anonymity with each person as part of their voluntary participation. Consent was obtained prior to interviews taking place. This procedure based on IPA method protocols (Smith & Osborn, 2008) was also designed to facilitate credibility in our data interpretation. These processes were crucial to unearth insight from participants about their subjective viewpoints concerning how they perceived their lifeworld as a leisure volunteer. The 10 semi-structured interviews were each conducted virtually. At the time this was the only means to engage on a face-to-face basis and given the rapid embracing of online platforms during the pandemic appeared to help participants feel comfortable in voluntarily engaging with the research process (Smith & Sparkes, 2011). Each interview was approximately 90 minutes long, recorded (with permission), transcribed and anonymised. The IPA method also facilitated credibility by enhancing rigour by first, empathising emotionally through initial contact (Pitti, 2022), second, ensuring sensitivity to context, third, ensuring commitment and rigour in undertaking the analysis, fourth, ensuring transparency and coherence of the narrative produced and finally an attempt to ensure that the data and analysis were appropriate in terms of impact and importance (Finlay, 2002).

Data analysis

Interviews were analysed using IPA processes as detailed by Smith and Osborn (2008) and Peat et al. (2019). The method enabled a dialogue between researchers and participants

allowing freedom to explore and understand how experiences become meaningful for an individual within their personal, social, and cultural context (May 2001). For each interview we followed an iterative process involving repeated cycles of independently reading and rereading, noting and coding interview data. We then undertook data chunking and notational intersectional analysis for each subject making notes and recording keywords and phrases in line with IPA procedures (Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Initial coding of each transcript was then discussed enabling themes to emerge to form an emergent conceptual framework from which we could collectively develop explanatory representations of the data (Mawson et al., 2011; Peat et al., 2019). Our shared interpretations were then organised into concept groups (Mawson et al., 2011). Ultimately, the findings were written up under headings that emerged from our data.

Trustworthiness

In considering trustworthiness we wanted to ensure we met the key criteria as established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, credibility is affirmed through clarifying our experience as experienced qualitative researchers, and our engagement as leisure volunteers who are cognisant of the language, the normative context and the everyday world of the leisure volunteer. Our prior experience made it easier to connect with and make sense of how the world was described, but this did not influence the study. Second, we believe there is transferability in the potential for thick description to provide context and reason. It is for others who may want to transfer findings to their own site to make judgement. However, we recognise that transferability is only really possible on a case-to-case basis. Third, sought to achieve dependability through our detailing of IPA method and process and to ensure we have been logical, consistent and transparent. Finally, confirmability was assured by meeting the first three criteria and through our attempt to be clear about our reasoning for undertaking and employing the methods chosen. On this basis we assert that our interpretations are credible and worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and we would argue that in tune with IPA that it is this approach that enables intersubjectivity, or as Glancy puts it ‘to become one with or in tune with the mind of the subject . . . in order to understand the personal meanings constructed by people experiencing leisure’ (cited in Howe, 1991, p. 58).

Findings and discussion

Three themes emerged from our data: the heavy break, realising a new homefellowship and transforming and returning to the homeworld.

The heavy break – transforming the homeworld

The interviews reflected a narrative space where multi-level description and reflection were the dominant modes of storytelling for individuals. This highlighted how each person identified and related to the significance that volunteering held in the construction of their leisure identity and their leisure lives. Whilst it may seem cursory to simply emphasise the importance of leisure volunteering to respondents, the way in which

respondents spoke about their volunteering roles is evidence of how crucial it was to their everyday existence. This is useful to consider as it prefigures the double impact of the heavy break on leisure choice. First, volunteering as leisure was stopped, and second the leisure activity itself wherein the volunteering took place, also stopped. This is indeed a heavy break encompassing a profound sense of incomprehensibility (compounded by other regular activities also stopping at this time). This insight is furnished further by Steinbock's generative consideration of how antecedent constitutive aspects of peoples world constitution are interpreted by each individual in such a way to delimit 'absolutes in experience in their own ways' (Apostolescu, 2015, p. 14). For the leisure volunteer, understanding is experienced through interpretations of self-sacrifice, mutual aid and reciprocity, wherein the expression of *communitas* that reinforces the organisational benefit of mutual aid become critical dimensions of the experience.

According to Steinbock (1995, p. 241), the heavy break with the homeworld gives rise to an explicit 'limit-situation' (*Grenzsituation*) in which the individual does not reside fully in either lifeworlds, being existentially homeless. When reflecting on 'cessation time', several participants signalled loss, distress, rupture, abruptness, bewilderment, distress and change. Here was the first stage of a journey that, at the time of speaking had no clear endpoint. For these volunteers their lives had now entered a liminal state that now challenged the taken-for-granted, as exemplified by the comments from two different interviews, first a twenty-five-year-old scout leader and second a forty-five-year-old sport club coach:

I've heard lots of people and lots of friends who got to the lockdowns and their world pretty much ended, you know, in terms of like every part of their structure disappeared and then they couldn't work out how to co-create or recreate a new structural form . . . You can't meet to do as much physically, then you realize actually how much I needed scouting just to structure my own life, but also then to see the impact you're having on other people, [Scout Leader]

Personally, it's been empty as far as that goes, and then later on, there's a sort of acceptance of that's what it is, at the moment I'm probably quite disheartened . . . there was days, where, if I didn't have work, I wouldn't know didn't know what I would do. And also, there was so much pressure, and you didn't really have time to feel sorry for yourself. [Youth rugby club coach]

It is possible to see here how the break from normative everyday experience – the unquestioned and the taken for granted – has been transformed into something that is not known nor fully understood. Steinbock argues that this state comprises a 'reflective incomprehensibility' (Steinbock, 1995, p. 241). This presages a state of liminality where the everyday anchors that root an individual to their sense of being have become uncertain. It is at this point that according to Steinbock active generativity forms the relation 'home/alien' and it is 'in and through this relation' that exists a 'dynamic tension' (Apostolescu, 2015, p. 16). Consequently, the comments reflect a general sense of gradual dominance over pre-conceptions of the self with which an individual possesses in relation to a leisure experience in an activity, which itself has become normatively significant as individual experiences are shaped 'concordantly and optimally' by time and familiarity (Steinbock, 2003, p. 296). Much of the shock is expressed through the loss of structure (temporal and spatial) which provides essential everyday homeliness from

which each person can make sense of their everyday life. This is part of an act of appropriation through which the homeworld is co-constituted often through a sense of connection between leisure and community, where it is the leisure activity that provides the space that is open with possibilities for mutuality, belonging, and collective expression (Glover & Sharpe, 2020).

This sense of the liminal within and acting upon the homeworld of volunteers has echoes of Hvidt's (2017, p. 380) work in decoding the homeworld of cancer patients, where Hvidt argues that the move away from 'ordinariness and familiarity' ensures transgression of homeworld barriers making individuals 'foretaste human vulnerability and finitude'. For the research participants the change of life state was mixed with sadness, negativity and a desire to physically reconnect with the old world.

So, I have had occasion on a few times and go to the club. And you know the obvious this is closed, the ground is closed, by just physically being present at the club brings a huge sense of calmness to me [Youth rugby club coach]

We've got a campsite up the road . . . and so I pop up there every now and again on Saturday mornings, and there's a few volunteers do a little bit of maintenance work up there. [Scout District Chair]

Yes, it's not exactly tactile . . . but I go in one day a week to the office . . . I do some shopping as well, so, if I do get stopped by the police, so I can say I've got some shopping and everything like that. But it's just, being in the office and seeing the physical structure of the station and such like, it is sort of uplifting . . . I do look forward to actually going in there and sitting in an office, no trains running or anything like that, but I feel part of the of the family so to speak. [Railway volunteer]

It is telling that the last words of the respondent above refer to feeling 'part of the family'. Using Steinbock's interpretation of homeworld/alienworld these comments are a symptom of the heavy break. In this instance the liminal state that an individual finds him/herself in is conditioned by an existential angst which reflects a 'limit situation' where an individual is existentially homeless and does not fully reside in either the homeworld or the alienworld (Steinbock, 1995, p. 241). For these leisure volunteers their leisure identity has been challenged and they are somewhere between recognising and not recognising themselves in their regular leisure context. Subsequently, the comments of the final respondents are transgressive insofar as they demarcate a crossing over of the limits of the home while 'remaining rooted in the home, and thus bringing an explicit experience of limits into being' (Steinbock, 1995, p. 297). In short, longing to be 'part of the family' emerges through liminal experience generated by encountering of the home with the alien.

Realising a new homefellowship

According to Steinbock, Husserl's idea of the homeworld not only demarcates the alien as always an alien, but also indicates that within that homeworld individuals co-exist with 'homecomrades' and 'homefellows' who co-bear the home. For Husserl it is language, values, customs, reactions to life experiences that are familiar and embodied that enable the recognition of a homecomrade (Steinbock, 1995, p. 187). Whilst leisure volunteering stopped, there were many opportunities in the UK for individuals to volunteer. The

leisure volunteers of this study all became involved in some level of civic minded volunteering, much of it driven via a moral and reciprocal sense of purpose that identified civic volunteering as a community level reaction to Covid-19 (Aksoy et al., 2021). It is in this sense that Covid 19 is the alien as the subject of the alienworld, which is unanimously experienced as 'I' and 'we'. The alienworld is a practical lifeworld of people who have different experiences, different natural surroundings, other lifegoals, habits, practical behaviours and traditions. According to Steinbock the alienworld-homeworld dichotomy enables individuals to be immersed in the 'conditions for the possibility of sense emergence' to enable subjective realisations of their particular journeys (Steinbock, 1993). Importantly the alienworld as co-constituted via 'homefellows' and 'homecomrades' ensures that the unfamiliar context of volunteering becomes the new normal and is reinterpreted and reconstituted as the new leisure activity.

One participant describes a period where leisure volunteering had stopped, but other avenues to volunteer were created. This part of the leisure journey through Covid 19 as expressed by this participant is dominated by a reflective capacity to make sense of how others have become part of their volunteering 'family', others (the new homefellows) that may not have been on their social radar beforehand;

Let me say a little bit about the food bank. We now work down at the warehouse. I used to be on the team to give food out. I don't do that anymore. I didn't find that so easy. There is a certain sort of person that relates to that and I'm not sure that's me. But we work at the warehouse and there's a little team of us and we're quite a diverse little collection of people. But the thing that interests me about it is a very calming thing. It's most strange sorting out the tins of beans. It's something we can all manage and it's easy enough to do and then there's the interaction between the people. Everybody's quite different, and you have to get on, and that's fine. But there are people amongst our little crowd, who have problems of their own. And they're there, for whatever reason, they're there, but they're there with us. And we have one man who wouldn't talk to us very much at all. He was very, very shy and he didn't join in the banter, or, you know, just the day-to-day chat. And then bit by bit, he came out of himself, and by the time he left, actually he became one of the team. And he then one day told me about his family life, which was very tragic actually. But he learned to trust us and to get to know us and he became one of the gang, and we learned to be able to tease him about, you know, silly little things. But he suddenly blossomed for it, in this funny little crowd of people, and I thought, then, you know, there's volunteering, which are helping other people with the food bank aspect of the tins of beans, and then there's helping people without you realizing it, who were struggling socially. [Park Run Race Director]

This individual identifies a 'team', a 'diverse collection', 'our little crowd' and a 'gang' as the group of volunteers who were now interacting with new people. From a homefellowship perspective, these reflections concern her assessment of who belongs to her homeworld as homecomrades. In essence we see how a rendered anonymity is almost an alter ego of someone who this participant may never usually come across and have dealings with. However, through the influence of constrained circumstances, a dynamic historicity and intersubjective experiences (as an experienced leisure volunteer) the man in question has been specified as a community co-member and is identified as a 'homecomrade'. In this way it is possible to identify the emergence of an embryonic new lifeworld that accommodates the alien. This is through a process that Husserl calls eidetic reduction which discloses the various structures that emerge from relative subjective lifeworlds, even though structures are not relative themselves (Steinbock, 1995, pp.

94–95). Harnessed to the natural and reflective attitudes, it is possible to clarify how structurally Covid 19 impinged on how participants interpreted, reinterpreted and reconfigured their homeworld and consequently the place of leisure volunteering within it.

The world doesn't just stop, there are still people or needs, there are always people that need some help. And, you know, even if we're all in a pandemic, and there's chaos, there's always people who are in more need than you. And you know, we always need to have time for them. [Tennis club Social Secretary]

Both my knowledge of the city itself and my circle of sort of what I suppose network of acquaintances, perhaps you would say, became a lot wider, And it has made me feel a lot more part of the city. [Museum volunteer]

Volunteering has had a definite impact on your quality of life. I mean it's got to the stage where of the things that have continued . . . during the pandemic it's been not a lifesaver, but it's been something we've really looked forward to doing. [Park Run Ambassador]

The Covid 19 structures – personal restrictions on movement and contact with others, a government drive for civic volunteering at clinics and vaccination sites – appeared to be framed as normalising features that drew in homefellows to be co-bearers of their individual lifeworlds. In each of these experiences there is a sense of reconstitution of the homeworld and that a sense of homefellowship in the face of an alienworld predicated on civic volunteering, accommodating 'good people' and being able to share similar life experiences. The final comment also captures something of the transitional value of homefellowship where continued volunteering is considered vital for continued well-being. It is notable that the 'journey' has necessitated an acceptance of a conflation of volunteering and leisure. For this respondent the journey through a liminal place, where the alien is constituted as unfamiliar, atypical and abnormal, has resulted in the configuration of an alienworld, and with home-comrades, the co-constitution of a reconstructed homeworld.

Transforming and returning to the homeworld

For Steinbock (1995, p. 246) the heavy break with the homeworld provides a critical moment that grounds an initial stage in the process of transformation and renewal of the homeworld. Several participants described their leisure volunteering journey under Covid 19 as a transformative process that began to move them beyond the incomprehensibility of the initial heavy break. The homeworld and alienworld were interpreted as beginning to meet or merge providing the context for a liminal encounter that attempts to deal with the perceived 'brokenness' in a critical homeworld versus alienworld alignment (Ueland et al., 2021, p. 706). For most participants this new way of being was expressed as a form of doing things differently, summed up by a Scout District Chair:

To do it on zoom over two hours is far more efficient and our district meetings we have them on zoom, rather than rambling on for a couple of hours they're focused, more focused. A lot of the safeguarding training is now online so there's been significant improvements there. And it's much easier for someone to do something online in their own time, rather than having to spend a Saturday afternoon in a scout hut somewhere in front of someone. So, it makes it a bit more accessible, although of course you missed the personal contact.

For this participant the heavy break and threat to the homeworld enabled reflection on functional processes associated with volunteering around their leisure activity. In these instances, paths of movement and transformation have been created and suggest a welcoming of change to particular homeworlds of volunteering practice, a form of normative participation, that here reflects on potential long-term change to necessary back-office functions. However, all participants allude to what is missing. In both cases the personal element is cited:

So, in some ways it's cut things, it's a bit more straightforward. On the other side of course, you don't get the nice cup of tea and a chat . . . it's made some things more efficient, but then you've lost all the rest. [Sport club Secretary]

we need to go back to something which is normal and enjoy it again. So, I think we need to get the enjoyment back into volunteering. [Roller hockey referee/club social secretary]

This trade off which appeared to be transforming the homeworld and its associated norms, values and mores was also apparent for other participants. Reminiscent of the point made by Steinbock that 'homeworld and alienworld become constitutive conditions for the possibility of sense emergence, conditions which are themselves formative of "subjectivity"' (Steinbock, 1993, p. 28). The journey that these participants have embarked upon is transgressive as it enables individuals to confront the alienness of their lived situation. It is the brokenness emerging from the homeworld versus alienworld conjunction and demonstrates expression in dealing with an unfamiliar terrain that has become part of their lives. This unfamiliar liminal space allows an understanding of a generative tension in the desire expressed by most if not all of the leisure volunteers for their activity to start up again 'we are raring to go, so to speak' [Railway volunteer] and 'we're desperate to start up again' [Youth rugby club coach], 'let's get back I'm sick of it' [Scout leader]. This corresponds with Steinbock's outline of a heavy break being transformative, impacting on each individual's state of being in life which will correspond to how each individual interprets consciously and sub consciously understands this experience. According to Husserl it concerns the distinctive 'manners of givenness' of leisure volunteering (Apostolescu, 2015, p. 14).

The dominant narrative coming from participants of wanting to maintain some of the changes – mainly enabling volunteering activities that allow a leisure activity to take place can be understood as part of the process of generating a new homeworld emanating from the intersubjective constitutive dependence of the aftermath with the alien (Covid 19) which is abnormal and unfamiliar. In the comments above efficiency is embraced as a feature of a new leisure volunteering homeworld, but this realisation is set against a loss of sociability. Further comments from other participants also reinforce this point and indicating a desire to return to the homeworld albeit a homeworld that is transformed and reinterpreted.

So, I hope that when things start up again, they are re-evaluated from scratch really. So that we don't have to go and do the same again, because we used to do it like that, if there are improvements. [Park Run Race Director]

But I think What will happen actually well when we get to go back is we will probably reassess all the different things, and say 'actually do we want to do it the same way do we want to continue doing what I was doing before'. I suspect, in most cases, the answer will be yes, but not necessarily in the same way. [Park Run Ambassador]

One participant expressed a concern for a newly interpreted homeworld that he will be part of, but also how that homeworld has a hermeneutic impact on the homeworld of the young people that he will be leading:

coming out of this lockdown probably more of a challenge than ever, how are we going to get these young people to feel comfortable to go outside of the place they've only seen for the last 12 months? [Scout Leader]

We have argued previously that the alienworld of Covid 19 presented itself as a transgressive experience of the liminal journey undertaken by these leisure volunteers. Steinbock argues that another mode of the liminal experience is appropriation, which is a form of sense constitution (Steinbock, 1995, p. 180). This involves making sense of the homeworld by recognising and differentiating particular alienworld and homeworld qualities. In the comments above there is a clear separation between synthesis of home and alienworlds, but more of encountering the alien without it becoming homogenous with the homeworld. Part of this can be understood in Husserl's term as a 'generative bond' (Steinbock, 1995, p. 246), and identifies a realisation of the value of their leisure activity as part of an oppositional relationship that is generative, ensuring that the homeworld/alienworld remains distinct from each other. The leisure activity and the act of volunteering as leisure are fundamental to how these habitual leisure volunteers have realised the generative potential of a co-generative structure. In a foundational sense the desperation 'to start up again' reinforces the dominant relation that their leisure activities have, but also how the oppositional positioning of the alienworld of Covid 19 provides a generative interpretation of existential meaningfulness for a transformed homeworld.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how habitual leisure volunteers made sense of the sudden cessation of their leisure practices during Covid-19 using a generative phenomenological framework grounded in Steinbock's homeworld/alienworld structure. By interpreting the pandemic as an alien incursion into the lifeworld, we have highlighted the existential rupture experienced by volunteers and the dynamic reconstitution of meaning that followed. For participants in this study, leisure volunteering formed an anchoring structure in their lives – a source of identity, routine, and community. Its removal triggered a period of liminality, prompting re-evaluation and adaptation that eventually led to a transformed, if not fully restored, homeworld.

Our approach, rooted in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, has enabled us to uncover rich, idiographic accounts of meaning-making in crisis. While this method prioritises depth and interpretative nuance over breadth, it does impose certain limitations. The study's small, purposively selected sample means that broader demographic patterns across gender, age, culture or activity type, remain underexplored. However, the aim has not been to generalise, but to understand how

leisure volunteers constructed meaning during an unprecedented rupture to their lives.

These findings carry implications for how volunteering and leisure organisations might better support their communities in times of disruption. Recognising leisure volunteering not just as a functional act but as a key structure of lifeworld offers a more human-centred lens for future policy and organisational practice. Volunteering environments might be strengthened by fostering continuity of connection and identity, even when in-person activity is disrupted, by maintaining meaningful social bonds, validating volunteer identity, and enabling modified forms of participation.

This research also prompts further inquiry. Future studies might examine how the existential journey observed here unfolds over time, or how lifeworld disruption and reconstruction play out in other domains of voluntary and leisure activity. Additionally, Ashworth's (2003) seven lifeworld fragments, including temporality, embodiment and selfhood, offer a valuable framework through which future studies might further deepen analysis of lived experience. These fragments could be brought into closer analytical focus to complement the homeworld/alienworld structure and explore how meaning is negotiated across different domains of the volunteer lifeworld.

This study also makes a methodological contribution by demonstrating how Steinbock's generative phenomenology can be meaningfully integrated with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. While IPA is often used descriptively, here it is not only philosophically underpinned but actively enriched by a deep engagement with Steinbock's co-constitutive concepts of homeworld/alienworld. This goes beyond typical uses of phenomenology in qualitative research. This integration allows for a more structurally sensitive reading of participants' accounts, highlighting not only the meanings they ascribe to their experiences but also the intersubjective and existential conditions under which such meanings are generated. By linking the idiographic, double hermeneutic nature of IPA with Steinbock's generative lens, the study provides a model for future research seeking to capture the complexity of lifeworld disruption, identity reformation, and meaning-making during periods of existential rupture.

By framing Covid-19 as a generative crisis that reconfigured the intersubjective structure of leisure volunteering, this paper contributes to a richer understanding of how lifeworlds are unsettled, challenged, and ultimately reformed. In doing so, it suggests a more expansive and existentially attuned approach to understanding leisure in a post-pandemic world.

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ORCID

Andrew Adams  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4135-0213>

Ian Jones  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4490-6678>

John Deane  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7873-5726>

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