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Koutrou, Niki (2014) Measuring Olympic Volunteers' Motivations. *Intersections and Intersectionalities in Olympic and Paralympic Studies* . pp. 55-61.

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Measuring Olympic Volunteers' Motivation

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Volunteers, who donate to the best of their ability, time, and effort, for achieving the organizational goals of an Olympic Games Organizing Committee, have in recent years become a vital part of the human resources required for the effective staging of the Olympic Games. Furthermore, volunteers are often seen as the 'soft infrastructure' following the legacy plans of host nations aiming to stage the Olympic Games. Despite the significance of volunteers for the delivery of the Olympic Games, research on Olympic volunteers' motivations, characteristics, and experiences is still limited. The purpose of this study was to explore and investigate the characteristics and motives of volunteers at the London 2012 Olympics and examine the factorial structure of the Motivation Scale adapted for this purpose. Data was gathered from a volunteer sample of 163 individuals, who offered their services as volunteer drivers at the Fleet Transport Department for the London 2012 Olympic Games. The 27-item motivation scale demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability. The five extracted factors (patriotism and community values; love of sport and the Olympics; interpersonal contacts; personal growth; career orientation) were well defined and interpreted in terms of the items included. The findings demonstrate that volunteers at the Olympic Games are motivated by a variety of factors, different from those who volunteer at local sporting events or sport clubs, and the impact of these factors may vary considerably from one individual to another. Therefore, this study will enhance event organizers' understanding of the reasons that initiate volunteer involvement with the Games, in order to maximize the value that can be derived from the effective use of volunteers. It can also enable the host community to adopt effective retention policies after the Games, to further utilize this network of committed and trained individuals for future community events or organizations, and develop social capital and benefit the society in the long term.



Introduction

Many sectors of society benefit each year from the contributions of volunteers. Specifically, the sport and recreation sector relies heavily on volunteer resources.¹ Sport volunteers perform various roles such as coaching, administrating, officiating, or fundraising for community organizations, sport clubs, schools, or sport governing bodies. Sport events that take place at a local, regional, national, or international level are one of the main avenues for volunteering in sport, yet they are of an episodic nature in terms of the time commitments expected from the volunteers.

Major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, have grown considerably in size and complexity. Thus, their staging presents organizational difficulties and financial bur-

dens to Organizing Committees. Consequently, they involve a substantial number of volunteers in a variety of functional areas to sustain their operations. This suggests that considerable planning and effort is required from event managers to recruit and train members of the public to fulfill these tasks.² For instance, 70,000 individuals contributed to the London 2012 Games' operations in areas such as media, athletes and spectator services, tickets, and transportation.³ Given the international nature of such major sporting events and the media attention they attract, a greater understanding of volunteer motivations is integral to the development of effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.⁴ Interestingly, despite the heavy reliance on volunteers to meet the Games' goals, a limited number of studies investigating the factors that motivate individuals to volunteer for an Olympic Games have been published. Organising Committees should place more emphasis on understanding the reasons that motivate individuals to volunteer at major sporting events in order to enhance their experiences by responding to their needs and, subsequently, develop a potential volunteer base willing to help with future community events and organizations.⁵

The purpose of this exploratory study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on volunteerism by identifying the motivational factors that underpinned volunteer participation in the London 2012 Olympic Games, which will inform volunteer strategies for Organizing Committees of future Games.

Literature Review

The act of volunteering can take many forms, including community work, cultural and social development, education, and sporting events.⁶ Overall, volunteering is often considered to be an altruistic act reflecting a caring approach towards the community, and this has been shown to be the case in community projects and social development strategies.⁷ However, a large body of the literature shows that the motivation to volunteer is multi-dimensional, arising out of the divide between altruism and self-interest (albeit, expressed in different forms). For instance, Clark and Wilson concluded that both tangible and intangible aspects can motivate volunteers.⁸ These stem from the material rewards being engaged in the activity, such as free admission to events, uniforms, or related apparel,⁹ or the emotional benefits that can be gained from such an experience, including enjoyment and friendship.¹⁰

Several theories have been applied to understanding the nature of volunteer motivation. Many authors have attempted to quantify the measurement of volunteer motivations in a variety of settings, through the development of formalised scales. Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen developed the Motivation to Volunteer (MTV) scale, in which motivations that reflect both egoistic and altruistic aspects are identified.¹¹ Similarly, Clary et al. developed the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) scale, in which six different sets of motives are identified: altruistic; skills' development; career opportunities; social networking; self-esteem; and personal development.¹²

It follows that not any widely accepted approach exists to explain volunteer motivations, meaning that the context of the volunteer work determines volunteer participation. For example, it is argued that long-term volunteers, such as those who run sport clubs, often have strong ties to their organisation and volunteer in order to give something back, while short-term volunteers are more likely to volunteer for the opportunity to be part of a unique experience or for social interaction, and, therefore, are less likely to act altruistically.¹³ Reasons of volunteering that reflect a degree of self-interest, such as the need for social interaction and the opportunity to experience something unique are more applicable to volunteers involved at sporting events, given their relatively episodic occurrence.¹⁴

Investigations into the motivations of volunteers at sporting events have also resulted in the development of formalised scales that were subsequently tested in event-specific settings. Farrell, Johnston

and Twynam¹⁵ adapted Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen's¹⁶ MTV scale and later proposed the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) to investigate the motivation of volunteers at the 1998 Canadian Women's Curling Championship. The SEVMS identified four different categories of volunteer motivations: the desire to do something useful for the community; group identification and networking; external influences on volunteers' decisions, such as time availability and family traditions; and the expectations of one's self or significant others for volunteering. Further studies provided support for the SEVMS at sporting events. Strigas and Jackson confirmed the SEVMS by identifying five factors of volunteer motivations: external links; material rewards; desire to contribute to the event; leisure; social interaction and networking.¹⁷

Despite SEVMS being used extensively in evaluating volunteer motivations in a variety of local recurring sporting events, it was argued that large-scale international sporting events may attract volunteers for reasons that reflect their uniqueness and the enjoyment derived from being involved.¹⁸ To extend sporting event volunteering research, Bang and Chelladurai explored the motivational factors underlying volunteering during the 2002 FIFA World Cup and proposed the Volunteer Motivation Scale for International Sporting Events (VMS-ISE).¹⁹ The results of the factor analysis revealed six main factors for volunteering: expression of values, such as concern for others; patriotism through allegiance to the country; interpersonal contacts through forming friendships; personal growth through feeling needed; career orientation through gaining experience, and extrinsic rewards related to tangible gains, such as getting free uniforms and admission to the event.

The findings of Bang and Chelladurai provide supporting evidence to the idea that major sporting events attract volunteers for different reasons compared to volunteers in other contexts.²⁰ For instance, the notion of patriotism is a significant motivation that leads individuals to volunteer at major sporting events. In an early study, Williams and Colleagues found the need to support the national team and strengthen community spirit were among the top motivators for volunteers during a World Cup downhill skiing event.²¹ However, to the authors' own admission, the VMS-ISE did not account for the mere "love of sport" as a general motivation to volunteer for a major sporting event and was thus incomplete.²² Other studies have noted that love of sport frequently ranks among the highest factors that have motivated volunteers during the early stages of competition, and, therefore, it can be concluded that volunteers of international sporting events are likely to be fans of individual sports for which they have volunteered their services.²³ For instance, volunteers at the 2006 Canadian Women's Golf Championship noted that a love of sport (in particular, golf) was a major determinant for volunteering.²⁴ Subsequently, Bang and Ross added the love of sport factor in the VMS-ISE to measure volunteers' motivation for the 2004 Twin Cities Marathon.²⁵

Olympic-related Motivations

Undoubtedly, the modern Olympic Games have grown considerably since their inception in 1896, to the extent that they are now considered the largest sporting event in the world. However, the concept of Olympic volunteering is fairly young – the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics are considered its starting point.²⁶ The need for volunteers in the Olympic setting has been well recognised. Former president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Jacques Rogge, even suggested that governments should use volunteer resources after the Olympics as a form of sustainable development and social capital. Therefore, Olympic Organising Committees should aim to make the best possible match of volunteers with the respective positions they are given. Therefore, understanding the motivations underlying volunteer participation in the Olympic Games is integral to achieving that goal.²⁷

However, a limited number of studies have assessed the specific characteristics, experiences, and motivations that lead individuals to volunteer for Olympic Games. One of the major problems with attributing research from other volunteering settings is that the Olympics represent a unique short-term volunteering event, rather than the long-term volunteering seen with other commitments.²⁸ Furthermore, the unique ethos of the Olympics relates to national pride and sports, two attributes that do not feature heavily in other forms of volunteering.²⁹ The vast global audience and the expectations surrounding the host city place a heavy emphasis on the local community to provide world-class venues and services during the competition. Engagement of the community is thus an integral aspect of the Olympics. The desire to contribute towards the good of the community, show the city in a positive way, and assist in the improvement of local services is a strong marketing aspect of volunteering. Organisers hope to instil this sense of community in the volunteer population.³⁰ Furthermore, the focus of the Olympics is sporting achievement, and it is often noted that volunteers are devoted fans of the Olympics or several sporting events therein.³¹

Moreover, the distinctive nature of the Olympic Games suggests that individuals may be willing to offer their services because of the opportunity to be part of a unique experience, meet with Olympic athletes, and be associated with Olympic values. Giannoulakis et al. were the first to note the importance of Olympic-related reasons in explaining individuals' involvement in the Olympic Games as volunteers.³² The opportunity to gain work-related experience, to learn from the best in the event management field, and build a social network that may be beneficial for future career prospects are other significant motivational factors for volunteering at the Olympic Games.

Indeed, one of the earliest studies to assess motivation among Olympic volunteers at the Winter Olympic Games highlighted that volunteers considered job-related competence and networking among the major factors behind their participation.³³ Consequently, organisers should consider the fact that long-term opportunities and career-focused tasks during Olympic volunteering may reinforce a strong volunteer base, particularly in the current economic climate where task-related experience is critical in securing employment.³⁴

Overall, field research suggests that Olympic volunteers are motivated by a variety of factors, and the impact of such factors may vary considerably from one individual to another. Some volunteers may act altruistically, motivated by a desire to contribute to their community and to the promotion of sport, while others seek to gain specific experience or pleasure from Olympic volunteering that could be beneficial in career development or in forming social networks and making friends. Consequently, this suggests a combination of factors is required to explain volunteer behaviour in sport. Thus the purpose of this study was to develop an instrument that would examine the motivation of volunteers participating in an Olympic Games context, by accounting for the different motivating factors identified in the scholarly literature.

Methodology

Participants

A convenience sample of 163 volunteer-Games Makers, who were assigned the role of Olympic Family Assistants at the Park Lane, Fleet Transport Department completed an online survey during the London 2012 Olympic Games. From the 163 Games Makers who completed the questionnaires, 50.9% were male and 42.9% were educated to a degree level. The majority of volunteers were employed full-time (49.1%), followed by retired volunteers (24.5%), students (12.3%), part-time employees (9.8%), and the unemployed (4.3%). The majority of participants were British nationals

(87.1%), and between 45 to 59 years of age (28.8%), followed by 26.4% in the 60-69 age range, 19% in the 18-24 age range, 16% aged 25 to 34 years, 8.6% aged between 35 to 44 years and, lastly, 1.2% in the 70+ age range. A high engagement in sport and volunteering was demonstrated, as 66.9% of the participants stated, at the time of the survey, they participated in sports with 62% stating they were also actively volunteering for other organisations. The majority of the participants (98.8%) indicated that this was their first experience as an Olympic volunteer.

Instrument

The volunteer motivation scale developed for this study included items adapted from the Volunteer Function Inventory (VSE-ISE) proposed by Bang, Alexandris, and Ross, and was validated on a sample of volunteers at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.³⁵ In an attempt to reflect the unique context of the Olympic Games, as an event that represents specific values, a set of items were adapted from Gianoulakis's et al. Olympic Volunteer Motivation Scale (OVMS), that was also used at the Athens 2004 Games.³⁶

The motivation scale used in the current study comprised 36 items in total. The items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale indicating the level of agreement ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). Data collection took place during the London 2012 Olympic Games. The survey was distributed through an email invitation that was sent to the relevant volunteers asking them whether they would be willing to assist the researcher in assessing the reasons behind their participation at the Games, by completing the survey.

Results

The data analysis in this study involved principal component analysis with varimax rotation (PCA) to examine the construct validity of the adapted motivation scale and internal consistency analysis to examine the reliability of the emergent factors. The PCA resulted in a five-factor solution that explained 67% of the total variance and demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability scores on each factor. The five extracted factors were labelled: Patriotism and Community Values; Career Orientation and Other Contingent Rewards; Love of Sport and the Olympic Games; Interpersonal Contacts; and Personal Growth. Mean Scores were also calculated for each factor to assess their importance in determining volunteers' motivations. The predominant factors were Love of Sports and the Olympic Games, followed by the Interpersonal Contacts factor, while Career Orientation and Other Contingent Rewards was the least prevalent factor contributing to individuals' decisions to volunteer for the Games.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm the findings of the general sporting event volunteering literature, which suggests that the context of volunteer work determines volunteers' motivations. In particular, volunteering at the Olympic Games attracts individuals with a different set of motivations compared to other sport volunteer settings.

The participants in this study were more likely to volunteer to satisfy their desire to experience a unique celebratory atmosphere, for the love of sport, and to form social networks or to meet people rather than for career benefits or other rewards. The research instrument developed in this study exhibited high internal consistency and validity and will enable future Olympic Games organisers or other international sporting event committees to measure the motivation of their volunteer resources accurately and further develop effective recruitment strategies.

Sampling issues may limit the generalizability of the research findings. Therefore, the research instrument developed for this study should be tested in other Olympic contexts with the aim to include a representative sample of the Olympic volunteer population and increase its external validity. This would enable the development of a research framework that can explore and investigate accurately the specific nature of Olympic volunteering and the characteristics of Olympic volunteers.

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