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The Event Volunteer Potential of Sports-Club Volunteering

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1. Aim of paper

The purpose of this study is to examine if the experiences of volunteers at women's rugby clubs in the UK impact upon individuals' sport participation and future voluntary activity in rugby clubs, rugby events like the world cup and other sport and general contexts.

2. Literature review

Volunteering refers to the enthusiasm, skills, non-obliged commitment, dedication and gift of time that individuals offer to others, with their own free will and expecting to receive no financial remuneration other than expenses (Zappala & Burrell, 2001). Sport volunteering in the UK accounts for 26% of the total voluntary activity, and largely takes place within the Voluntary Sport Club (VSC) system (Sport England, 2003). It provides the basis for the development of grass-roots sports. Sport volunteering also takes place at sport events. Here, the one-off or periodic nature suggests that they rely on volunteers with different characteristics and motivations compared to club volunteers (Downward & Ralston, 2006). It is known, however, that if the volunteering experience is satisfying then this may lead to higher levels of commitment with the sports organization, which may affect volunteers' longevity and intentions to continue volunteering (Doherty, 2009). As recruiting new volunteers is five times more time consuming than retaining existing volunteers (Strigas *et al* 2003), sport organizations could place more emphasis on understanding their volunteers' characteristics and motivations and on developing a volunteer experience that may help to develop volunteering in both clubs and events, that is across the whole sporting experience. This paper aims to contribute to this literature, by exploring if aspects of the volunteering experience at women's rugby clubs in the UK, influences the likelihood of volunteers to engage in future volunteering at their club, in sports events like the Rugby World Cup and in different or other than sport settings.

3. Methodology, research design and data analysis

Women's rugby was selected as a case study, as the 2010 Women's Rugby World Cup was held in England. This facilitated comparisons between club and event volunteers. With the cooperation of the Rugby Football Union for Women (RFUW), 150 clubs were identified as taking part in the national league structure of women's rugby out of which 100 had an active online page at the time of the survey. Research participants were recruited via an email invitation including a link to an internet-administered questionnaire. A total of 168 volunteers completed the online survey which is deemed satisfactory considering that most women's rugby clubs are being run by no more than 5 volunteers, though precise population data is lacking. The survey instrument included questions aiming to elicit the participants'

demographic characteristics, experiences, expectations, motivation, satisfaction with their club experiences and on their future volunteering behaviour in the club, and actual volunteering or not at the rugby world cup. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to summarise volunteer experiences, and then these factors plus other covariates employed in logistic and other regression analysis to analyse volunteering at the world cup, and future intentions to volunteer in the club and elsewhere.

4. Results, discussion and implications/conclusion

This study is the first that has examined the linkage between sports clubs and sport events volunteering and addressed the possibility of the former acting as a basis upon which the latter may be built. The Factor analysis yielded six reliable dimensions of satisfaction: satisfaction with their role and their contribution, with club's support, with contingent rewards, with co-workers, with communications and with appreciation of them as volunteers'. Logistic regression analysis was then applied to identify which of these factors plus socio-demographic characteristics had an impact on their volunteering for the world cup, and linear regression on their future plans for sport volunteering and sport event volunteering. The results indicated no strong evidence of a volunteer continuum in sports between VSC and events. Even though playing the sport could act as a link between the activities, other aspects of volunteering mitigated the desire to get involved in other contexts with strong club identity being the most important constraint. Therefore, satisfaction with experiences in clubs and strong club identity might both encourage as well as constrain volunteers being involved in other settings. Consequently, event organisers should work closely with club authorities to help volunteers to make a better connection from their club to the sport more widely and with the role of clubs and events to support the sport generally, and to increase volunteers' development opportunities through deploying their efforts in more than one setting.

5. References

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