

Challenges for theories of volunteering in sport

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Aim of paper

To discuss broad frameworks for explaining the complexity on volunteering in sport.

Three frameworks which has been used in analyzing volunteerism in general will be used on sport: i) a hybrid conceptual framework of volunteering (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010), ii) the volunteer process model with the 'life-cycle of volunteers' (Omoto & Snyder, 2002) and iii) the volunteer stages and transitions model (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). The concern is to examine important aspects of the phenomenon of volunteerism in sport. The first model interprets three challenges or layers of complexity in the framework: the problem of definition of volunteerism, the problem of multidisciplinary, and the problem of theory as multidimensional. The second model analyses the life-cycle phases the volunteer goes through as well as three levels of analysis (individual, organization and social system). The third model analyzes the transitions the volunteers go through and the processes. The question is how well do such theoretical frameworks 'travel' beyond the sphere of the social voluntary organizations and to sport organizations?

Volunteering is often discussed as a unidimensional category lacking any complexity. Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996) reviewed over 200 definitions and made a content analysis of the definitions. They wrote that most definitions had four main components: free will behaviour, no monetary reward, aimed to help others than family on a long-term basis or in a voluntary setting, and a formal agency. In sport it is important to divide between event and organized sport volunteers. A further division goes on formal and informal volunteering. Even within sport events there are different types of volunteering as we give examples of.

Volunteering is a meaningful study object across several study fields as sociology, political science, economy, and psychology according to Hustinx, Cnaan & Handy (2010). There exists little consensus about which theoretical perspective to use in the study of volunteers, and many use references, data, diagrams and hypothesis instead of theory (Sutton & Staw, 1995). This paper seeks to find out what the specificities of volunteering in sport management are, and what the different theories can add to our knowledge of sport volunteering.

The second theoretical framework, volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 2002) looks at the life-cycle of volunteers. They looked at the different stages of the volunteer process as antecedents, experiences and consequences. Data that supports this volunteer process are from our event data-base built on five on-line surveys to the

volunteers based on both pre-and post-competition on-line surveys (n= 659) in 2010 for the Nordic Skiing World Cup, The World Championship in Nordic Skiing in 2011, and after the World Cup in Nordic Skiing in 2012. Interviews from some of these events in ski-competitions reveal that voluntarism is started and maintained for different and sometimes also changing motives. The second stage is where the experience may determine their continuing engagement. In this stage the volunteers develop their relationship with other volunteers and the ones they are helping. They establish their networks, which are embedded in the sport organization or the sport event.

The third model, transition model (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008) makes use of five stages of the volunteers (nominee, newcomer, emotional involvement, established volunteering and retiring). They focus on the changes (the process) the volunteers undergo when they enter an organization. The process perspective of volunteering is important in order to understand what is going on in the different stages. Volunteers start to volunteer for specific reasons. It is like a socialization process in a more detailed manner. Probably the most important stage of socialization happens after one enters the organization. These reasons for volunteering can change and may result in different motives for continuing.

Implications of the review of the different theoretical frameworks

The different models have been of help in locating issues that have not been explored enough previously and to discover new approaches and insights. Firstly the definition of volunteering was made according to its many nuances and meanings, and that was much needed. Previously many researchers used the term as if it had only one exact meaning. The different theoretical frameworks were of value in order to see what needed to be added as components to the existing knowledge as e.g. the life-cycle of volunteering and how volunteering changes the volunteers. It helped to illumine what was missing in the process the volunteers went through. There were differences between newcomers, volunteers and veteran volunteers and those who have left the organization after burnout or other reasons.

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