
VOLUNTEER LEGACY: STORIES FROM THE LONDON 2012 PARALYMPIC GAMES

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION

Whilst the complexion and nature of event volunteering differs internationally, it is increasingly recognised that without the services of volunteers' events of all sizes may not take place (Neufeind, Güntert, & Wehner, 2013). Indeed, scholars have undertaken research to identify what factors are related to future volunteer engagement (Dickson, Benson, Blackman & Terwiel, 2013; Neufeind, et al., 2013). Future volunteer engagement is synonymous with volunteer retention, individuals' intentions to volunteer in the future and within the context of mega events, volunteer legacy.

It is evident that limited research has been undertaken into future volunteer engagement at mega sporting events, particularly the Olympic and Paralympic Games. When the literature relating to volunteerism at the Paralympic Games is examined, the dearth of empirical research is even more apparent. This is surprising, given the vast numbers of volunteers involved in staging the Olympic and Paralympic Games it is suggested that the volunteer legacy potential is more substantial. In addition, hosting mega sporting events is often associated with significant political interest that seeks to maximise the benefits of staging mega events in order to justify the large investment made by the host nation (Dickson, et al., 2013). For example, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (2007:50) stated that the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games would 'inspire a new generation of young people to take part in voluntary activity', that the Games would 'shape a new culture of volunteering across the UK' and that 'volunteers will go on to support their local communities'.

Given this kind of political imperative and the associated policy surrounding the potential of the London 2012 Games to increase volunteer engagement, the event presents an important area for potential research. However despite this potential, there is a scarcity of research

investigating voluntary engagement following the event. Dickson (2013) begins to address these issues by exploring what factors influence volunteers intention to volunteer after the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Research with volunteers immediately after the Games suggests that 52% of Paralympic volunteers planned to increase their level of volunteering after the Games. This was particularly evident amongst young people and those who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months. Although this research is valuable in highlighting individuals future intention to volunteer there is a need for longitudinal research to explore what voluntary activity individuals actually engage in and the factors which influence their decision.

AIM OF THE ABSTRACT/PAPER

This research paper seeks to expand the body of academic work by exploring volunteer engagement at the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Drawing upon data which is part of a broader PhD research project, this paper aims to specifically explore volunteers' intention to volunteering post the London 2012 Paralympics. Conceptually the paper will draw on Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) framework of collective and reflexive forms of volunteering to differentiate between the forms of volunteering undertaken by individuals. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) distinguish between collective forms of volunteering which is considered to be long term volunteering driven by altruism and a sense of duty to help the local community and reflexive volunteering which is seen to be more sporadic and temporary in nature with volunteers participating in ad hoc, project based volunteer assignments. These different forms of volunteering will be used to conceptualise individuals volunteering history, understandings of volunteering and motivations for volunteering.

METHODS

The context for the study is the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games were held between 29th August and 9th September 2012 and utilised 23,157 volunteers to help stage the event. The research adopted a qualitative approach involving repeat semi-structured interviews with a cohort of twenty five volunteers at various stages of their volunteering experience at the Paralympic Games. Specifically, interviews were undertaken with the same group of volunteers before (twenty five interviews), during (sixteen interviews), after (twenty five interviews) and 12 months after the Paralympic Games (twenty three interviews). The study was approved and supported by the International Paralympic Committee.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is still in progress however preliminary results will be presented through a series of case studies from volunteers. The volunteer case studies will highlight individuals' volunteer journey including considering their history of volunteering prior to the Games, motivations for volunteering and the nature of volunteering undertaken following the event. The case studies will provide an insight into the legacy of the Paralympic Games and in concluding I will discuss the implications for the volunteer legacy of mega sporting events and sport

management theory in terms of volunteer management.

References

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