
UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEERS IN SCOTTISH GOLF: THE OPEN

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Abstract

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AIM: To understand the experiences and motivations of volunteers at The Open, Muirfield 2013

LITERATURE REVIEW: There are estimated to be 195,000 volunteers in Scottish Sport (Scottish Government 2013), approximately 4.5% of adults. These volunteers have been described as the “lifeblood of Scottish Sport” (sportscotland 2008, p1). Golf is an iconic Scottish sport. There are 580 golf clubs affiliated to the Scottish Golf Union and Scottish Ladies Golf Union, comprising of 230,000 playing members. As the home of golf, Scotland boasts several venues for The Open Championship. This is one of the four golf majors held annually – the others are the US Open, the Masters, and the PGA Championship. The Open is held on a rotational basis at a number of venues in the UK. This paper focusses on volunteers at The Open at Muirfield in 2013. While there has been recent research on volunteering at major sports events, there is limited research into volunteering at golf events in the UK (some studies have been undertaken in USA and Canada (e.g. Pauline, 2011, Maclean & Hamm, 2009). Most organisers of major sports competitions cite the need for volunteers to make the event happen. However in the case of the Open Championships, there are very considerable profits generated (at least £5 million (The R&A, 2014)), and yet volunteers are still an important part of the running of the tournament. Pauline (2011) found social exchange theory (as critiqued by Zafirovski, 2005) helped to explain why volunteers were motivated to volunteer and returned at future events through examining rewards and costs of volunteering to individuals. Previous research into volunteers in Scottish golf clubs undertaken by Oman (2012) took a functional approach to volunteer motivations (following for example Clary et al, 1996) and tested this through questionnaires in an attempt to contrast motivations of different

groups of committed volunteer club golf coaches.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS: The paper presents original research findings from primary research. Volunteers from one golf club who were working at the Open were interviewed, the interviews transcribed and analysed. My research approach saw the motivations of marshals as multifaceted. It therefore conducted exploratory research allowing each volunteer to explain their particular situation in relation to volunteering at the event. This gave an insight into and understanding of the complex issues surrounding club volunteers in the context of a traditional major event.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: Thirteen volunteers from one golf club were interviewed. All were volunteer marshals at the Open 2013. Each volunteer had an individual story to tell of their experience and motivations to volunteer. For example some volunteers mentioned the importance of free access to an expensive event, while others wished to be close to the action. One mentioned using the volunteering activity to get to know others in the golf club, another said that being at a live golf event was much worse than watching on TV. These are considered in relation to Scottish trends in volunteering and previous research on motivations including social exchange and functionalist theories. In addition the unique nature of the volunteering experience at The Open is documented. Key features include the high profits generated by the event, hierarchical organisation of the volunteers, and inter-club competitive spirit.

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