

COJEDES 2003 THE MEGA SPORT EVENT VENEZUELA: A VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

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In order to contribute to the substantial growth of the volunteer movement, this paper presentation discusses an experience develop during the most important mega sport event in Venezuela. It specifically deals with the project for volunteers to Cojedes 2003, the recruitment process and post event evaluation.

The XV National Sport Games were given to Cojedes State in late 2001. It was considered by many a mistake. There was a great resistance in the Venezuelan sport community to do the games in a state that is not traditionally considered sportive, few population, economically depressed, few sport practitioners, few sport experts, and besides the political tensions at present in the country. This state had no tradition in sport, it was always placed in the last two positions of the medal table in the history of the Games, and it was a poor, rural and folk state, no sport infrastructure and very few people with experience in elite sport. This research describes the process experienced at the preparation of the project in order to make people aware of the relevance of incorporating the whole state community in the games process, understanding that a volunteer program to incorporate non practitioners and people in general who are not involved in sport was never implemented in the history of the Venezuelan National Sport Games. Idea that was taken by the organising committee as a way to incorporate a new managerial experience. Also This study examines the way the volunteer project conducted as part of the organisation of the National Sport Games 2003 contributed to the growth of social capital in the region, as well as the social benefit in terms of economy, physical education and facilities.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on qualitative research, in which detailed information about the way residents of Cojedes were involved within volunteering, just motivated by the intention of promoting their state and their identity. The objectives were: 1) To promote Cojedes state as pioneer in a volunteer project in mega sport event (NSG); 2) To involve the community in the preparation of the Games; 3) To incorporate 2500 volunteers; 4) To coordinate new managerial projects in order to present a new model of organizational experience in the NSG. This research was divided in four phases, not including the preparation of the project and acceptance by the organizing committee. 1- Promotion. 2- Training of leaders, 3- participation in the event itself including the previous conversation, 4- The volunteers' recognition to keep a data base to make them continue contributing in other experiences as well.

The intention was to obtain information related to the impact of the volunteering project in Cojedes 2003 from an ethnographic perspective. The volunteer project for this mega sport event was based on the experience of the Sydney Olympic volunteer role played by one of the authors. The motivation period lasted 4 months and it included visits to different localities in which the events were going to be. As the Games were a success and the volunteers program was very well accepted, the evaluation was not considered necessary, nevertheless a year later after the Games finished the consent to research was allowed.

An evaluation stage was initiated with a literary review. Researchers decided that the survey used by Green and Chalip (2004) - Volunteer Post-Olympic Survey - was suitable to be applied in the developed study. Under Green's consent this survey was translated into Spanish by one of the authors and adapted

to our context. After this, the questionnaires delivery started in mid 2005, and in early 2006. The questionnaires were distributed twice and the analysis of all the data is in process; the interviews were conducted with different volunteers who participated in the experience and they were analyzed with discourse analysis.

CONCLUSIONS/ FINDINGS

The benefits obtained throughout this experience are in several directions: Economical, social, cultural, geographical, psychological, political, ecological, and educational; this is also similar in other experiences of volunteer work (Chalip, 1999; Green, & Chalip, 2004). Also, this enhanced life quality for people in Cojedes, through physical activity and more facilities. Volunteering provides better chances for Building social capital. During all the process of the Games, a great quantity of people was trained in all areas of knowledge related with technical administrative activities, which later worked independently in other sport events organisations at regional and state level. Besides the volunteer experience, in the history of the Venezuela's National Games is prices as it left significant sport legacy (Ramirez, 2004). The greatest one is that the slogan used in this Game "Cojedes 2003 where Venezuela wins" was fulfilled. Volunteerism enhances the power of people to promote social, economic, political, human changes. The volunteers living in Cojedes, provided a unique set of complementary skills based on their own characteristics and experiences. In communities or networks like Cojedes State, that are isolated, provincial, or rural, there is a considerable benefit to be gained from the effect of developing volunteering at any level, and in social capital development in particular. This country as many other has a strong tradition on individuals undertaking voluntary work in their communities, but there are fewer examples, if none.

Volunteers help to solve different needs in mega sport events; they are really constructive, not only in terms of economy, organisation or commitment. Volunteering is also an important indicator of social capital and a tool for building it. here are significant benefits from volunteering both at a societal level as well as to the individual. This encourages participation, public engagement and the construction of hope among the population, which in turn contributes to the growing of society.

DISCUSSION

The social characteristics of poor countries and communities had been defined almost exclusively in terms of production intrinsic to capital and labor force and almost no attention has been paid to mutual benefit through human interaction. In communities or networks like Cojedes state, that are isolated, provincial, or rural, there is a considerable benefit to be gained from the effect of developing volunteering at any level, and in social capital development in particular. Volunteerism enhances the power of people to promote social, economical and political, human changes. The volunteers provided a unique set of complementary skills based on their own characteristics and experiences, their personal skill, sense of group work and their strong desire for the entire gues to have the best memories from Cojedes.

The experiences at the XV NSG – Cojedes 2003 – demonstrates that they are an excellent scenario, medium and method to develop sport, especially when they are celebrated in regions in which there is poor sport and physical activity development

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