

Voluntary engagement in sports clubs: between rational calculation and social commitment

Authors: Siegfried Nagel, Benjamin Egli & Torsten Schlesinger

Institution: University of Bern

E-mail: siegfried.nagel@ispw.unibe.ch

Abstract keywords

Voluntary engagement, sports clubs, organisational factors, volunteer job satisfaction, social commitment

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Volunteers are the most important resource for non-profit sports clubs seeking to bolster their viability (e.g. sporting programs). Although many people do voluntary work in sports clubs, stable voluntary engagement can no longer be assumed. This predicament is confirmed by existing research across various countries (see Wicker & Breuer, 2011). From a club management point of view, a detailed understanding of how to attract volunteers and retain them in the long term is a high priority.

The central importance of volunteering in the work of sports clubs gives rise to the need to identify organisational factors that motivate engagement in voluntary work. In this context the commitment to a sports club as well as volunteer job satisfaction play critical roles in ongoing voluntary engagement, as already shown for sports clubs in Switzerland (Egli, et al. 2011). The purpose of this paper is to analyse the influence of these factors on volunteers in sports clubs in Germany. Aside from comparing the factors influencing these two countries, differences between volunteers with various expectations concerning their voluntary work is identified.

Theoretical background or literature review

Economic approaches with reliance on utility maximization models are unable to precisely explain decision-making behaviour observed in volunteer work for sports clubs. Esser's "frame selection approach" has the objective of providing an integrated methodology, and offers a possibility to bridge crucial gaps in explaining this behaviour. The risk of termination is formalised as a decision based on both rational calculation and social norms. The stability of voluntary work (intention to remain) is modelled on the basis of individual expectations and an evaluation of the volunteer in relation to voluntary work conditions and the specific organisational commitment to the sports club. It is assumed

that the degree of work satisfaction and identification with the club are positively correlated to the intention to remain (Schlesinger & Nagel, 2011).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Evaluation of the hypothesised developed relationships is based on two studies of sports clubs in Switzerland and Germany. In Switzerland n= 441 volunteers of n=45 sports clubs were studied using an online questionnaire. The same design was used in Germany (n= 179 volunteers of n=8 sports clubs). In light of theoretical considerations, expectations of particular working conditions in the sports club were collected with a measure inventory of 27 items and then reduced by exploratory factor analysis (principal components analysis, varimax rotation) to seven dimensions. The volunteer satisfaction was measured against these dimensions. Furthermore, these seven factors were subjected to a cluster analysis (Ward method, Squared Euclidean distance) to determine typical volunteer profiles. Validated measurement instruments used in existing sports club studies have been used to acquire commitment to the sports club (Nagel, 2006).

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

Results confirmed the validity of the hypotheses to analyse voluntary commitment in sports clubs in Switzerland and Germany. They show that the risk of terminating volunteering was determined by both instrumental considerations (satisfaction with expected volunteering conditions) and normative aspects (social and collective interest). These correlations are valid in a similar way for various types of volunteer with different expectations of working conditions. Findings suggest that in future, sports clubs should give more attention to volunteer retention by creating voluntary work conditions according to the volunteers' needs, and to identification management. The intention to remain in voluntary work can therefore be stabilised.

References – limited to 5

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