

# Sports Entrepreneurship And Non-Traditional Volunteerism In The Youth Olympic Games

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## **Aim of the research**

Volunteerism is a thoroughly studied subject within sports management, and according to Wicker (2017), there has been a substantial contribution to the field from an individual perspective. Furthermore, the study of the experiences of volunteers and development of social capital through volunteerism has received a lot of focus within the research. Little attention has been given to the extent, or circumstances for the volunteer effort of people with physical or intellectual disabilities (ID).

## **Background**

A high-school class for people with ID in Lillehammer volunteered at the Lillehammer Youth Olympic games in 2016. The tasks of the students were to pick up garbage at one of the largest venues of the event.

The aim of the study was to contribute to the field of sports entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and to the field of volunteerism. Following research question was raised;

*How can people with intellectual disabilities gain social value through volunteer work at a major sporting event?*

## **Theoretical background**

The theoretical framework of this study was sports entrepreneurship (Ratten, 2011) and social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998). Ratten (2011) conceptualizes sports entrepreneurship as social entrepreneurship in a sports context. Thus, the teachers of the high school were seen as sports entrepreneurs, as they aimed for creating social value by using a sporting event.

In order to do so, they had to discover an entrepreneurial opportunity, acknowledge that there was a risk involved in participating as volunteers, but even so; use the resources available, and be optimistic that the result would turn out advantageous for their target group (Baron, 2006).

## **Methodology**

Twelve qualitative interviews with students with ID were conducted, as well as the head of volunteers from the organizing committee of the event. In addition, the teachers involved in the project were interviewed prior to and after the event.

The students were interviewed prior to the games. However, as it was hard for many of them to talk about something that had not yet happened, it was necessary to do interviews during the event as well. In addition, the students were observed as they worked throughout the event, as several of them had some additional limitations when it came to communication, and especially to express their feelings and experiences towards volunteering.

## **Data analysis**

The analysis followed what Kvale, Brinkmann, Anderssen, and Rygge (2009) calls a "bricolage-approach", where transcriptions of all the interviews were analyzed, and the observations that were made during the event were used, while focusing on the bigger picture.

The teachers' descriptions of their experiences of the event were used in order to identify what they saw as the biggest risk, and biggest reward for their target group in participating as volunteers. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial skills of the teachers were identified, and the role they played in creating social value for their students was studied. Social value was studied in relation to various sources of delight and joy in the work of the volunteers, and seen in a bigger perspective, in order to identify how this could benefit the students in a unique way, on a potential long term basis. The constraints of volunteering for this particular group also emerged during the observations, thus the possibilities and constraints of volunteering for social value were also considered.

## **Results**

The study showed that the group of students with ID used volunteerism as a valuable arena for learning new skills, and cooperation. In the YOG, the teachers found a safe and real arena for their students to experience mastering of relevant skills for living every-day life, in a setting outside of the classroom. In addition,

an event as diverse as the YOG had several possibilities to find tasks that were meaningful and suitable for this particular group

The students were also a part of a “normal” discourse by volunteering for the YOG, something that many of their peers were doing as well. This was particularly emphasized by the importance of the volunteer-uniform, making the appearance between the volunteers more similar. Lastly, they got to be someone useful who aids, instead of someone who are aided.

### **Implications for management**

By working towards inclusion for a broader group of volunteers, events can be more diverse. Furthermore, there are possibilities for people with and without ID to learn from each other through volunteering. There are relatively simple measures that event organizers might do in order to make events more available for this particular group, such as ease the registration process and facilitate so that it becomes easier for companions to aid their volunteers.

### **References**

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