

Volunteering In Sports Clubs In Europe

Nagel, Siegfried

University of Bern, Institute of Sport Science, Switzerland

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

Voluntary work is still the most important resource that allow clubs to survive and to offer interesting programs to their members. However, volunteering is not only relevant for sport clubs and members, but also for civil society, since inclusion in a club leads to inclusion in the broader community. Volunteering in sport clubs gives people the opportunity to engage for society and make experiences with democratic decision making. However, many sport clubs have difficulties in recruiting and retaining enough qualified volunteers. Therefore, the question arises, what characterises the clubs that are successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers, and how can the clubs manage this problem effectively. In this context, the role of paid staff as well as certain measures to recruit and retain volunteers seem relevant.

According to the conceptual framework of the SIVSCE project volunteering is characterised as follows: Voluntary activities are unpaid or paid for with a symbolic amount. The voluntary activities must be carried out for the benefit of other people than the family and have a formal character (organised or agreed; Ibsen 1992).

Based on data analysis of the club and the member survey the following results can be pointed out: In all ten countries integrated in the study volunteering is a central element of sports clubs. It is interesting that the volunteer development show quite stable figures for the last five years. The density of paid staff relative to members is in all countries far lower than the rate of volunteers in the sport club. Only a minority of the sports clubs employ a paid manager (full-time or part-time). Particularly clubs with more than 1,000 members have a paid manager, whereas only a minority of the clubs with less than 300 members has a full or part time management. In a majority of the clubs across all ten countries, the primary way to recruit volunteers is carried out through the existing networks of current volunteers and the volunteers are encouraged verbally. The following measures are relatively more often taken by clubs that also reported more frequently an increase in the number of volunteers: having a person responsible for volunteer management, giving benefits in kind to the volunteers, recruiting through the networks of current volunteers.

Across all ten countries a clear majority of the volunteers is satisfied with the general conditions that clubs provide for their work. A closer look on the specific conditions for volunteering shows only minor differences between the countries. The members approve that particularly the following conditions are evaluated in a positive way: the tasks are interesting and challenging; my problems and concerns are taken seriously; my work as volunteer is appreciated; I can carry out my work autonomously; I am informed about major club affairs; other club members support my work as a volunteer. Further analysis show that all these aspects are relevant for the volunteer satisfaction. The most relevant factor is recognition. The factors leadership (feedback and information) and support of volunteers show also quite relevant effects for volunteers' satisfaction whereas material incentives as well as interesting tasks and autonomy play a less important role.

References

Ibsen, B. (1992). *Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger* [Volunteering in sports clubs]. Copenhagen: DHL/Systeme.