

A Multi-Dimensional Framework as a New Way of Studying the Management of Olympic Volunteering

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Aim and Literature Review

Research on volunteering has evolved considerably in the past few decades, developing our thinking and understanding of the phenomenon. This is especially pivotal in the area of sport events, many of which would cease to exist without the help of volunteers. Yet, according to Hustinx, Cnaan & Handy (2010), there are at least three layers of complexity with the concept of volunteering: the problem of definition (or a lack of it), the problem of multidisciplinary that presents different meanings and functions of volunteering, and a lack of good theory that would bring all these aspects together. Sport volunteering literature to date lacks a holistic interdisciplinary approach that integrates a wide range of themes and issues that would enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon, particularly in the context of mega sport events (e.g. Baum & Lockstone, 2007; Doherty, 2013). Scholars also acknowledged that gaps still exist in our understanding of many aspects of mega sport event volunteering (e.g. Bang & Chelladurai, 2009; Chanavat & Ferrand, 2010; Ferrand & Skirstad; 2015; Giannoulakis, Wang, & Gray, 2008; Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011; Nedvetskaya & Girginov, 2018; Wicker & Hallmann, 2013). A rather limited insight into the nature of this type of volunteering prevails, which treats volunteering in mega sport events no differently from volunteering in social and community sectors. Scarce knowledge exists about the processes and outcomes of volunteering as well as volunteer management practices in this context. Importantly, most of research on sport event volunteering is focused on the individual level of analysis, overlooking institutional and societal dimensions. This lack of understanding has adverse policy and management implications as the stakeholders involved in planning and delivering volunteer programmes are unable to identify key mechanisms and processes that lead to successful programme results.

Theoretical Background

To address these gaps, the author developed an original multi-dimensional framework. The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the theoretical and practical value of using conjointly three analytical approaches that have not been integrated before and applied to the context of the Olympics. These are: the Volunteer Process Model (VPM, Omoto & Snyder, 2002), the Human Resource Management (HRM) approach (Cuskelly, Hoye & Auld, 2006) and the Legacy Cube model (Preuss, 2007, 2015). A proposed framework was utilised to explore various aspects of London 2012 Olympic volunteering. Thus, the VPM model offered new knowledge into the 'life cycle' of volunteering and helped bring to the fore details on what preceded London 2012 volunteering, experiences as they occurred, and the outcomes of participation on individual, organisational and societal levels. In light of the proposed framework, the study suggested a new comprehensive definition of mega sport event volunteering that reflects its complex multidimensional nature and the context within which it takes place.

Research Design and Method

A longitudinal approach and multiple methods of data collection were used to gather a richer and stronger array of evidence: document analysis, participant observations, an on-line survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews with volunteers and volunteer managers. Thematic

analysis was applied to make sense of the large volume of data and provide a valuable foundation for the results and a subsequent discussion.

Results

The findings revealed that the London 2012 Volunteering Strategy had multiple stakeholders and aims, from running an excellent Games-time Volunteer Programme to creating a sustainable volunteering legacy. Competing demands, poor coordination, and the lack of specific plans on *how* to achieve the expected outcomes coupled with external factors contributed to a legacy not being realised to the extent it was hoped for. Although the Games Maker Programme achieved its target to recruit, train and manage 70,000 volunteers to work in 3,500 Games-time roles, organisers were not always effective in providing volunteers with the best experience, which largely depended on volunteer roles, placements and a management style. This is at odds with the claim that the successful organisation of the Games is largely in the hands of volunteers, whereas the attainment of the volunteering legacy depends on the quality of volunteers' experiences.

Discussion and Implications

The main advantage of using a multi-dimensional framework is in its ability to locate a specific phenomenon – e.g. Olympic volunteering - in its wider socio-economic and political milieu and thus offer a more holistic understanding of mega sport event volunteering and volunteer management. This research brings new insights and strengthens theoretical and practical foundations of the field of sport management as it offers implications for teaching, policy and practice. It is concerned with how to effectively develop volunteer policies and management systems in terms of planning, recruiting, training, developing, managing and rewarding volunteers to achieve better quality programme results and a sustainable volunteering legacy beyond the event. Besides, it gives foundations for a more informed discussion of the phenomenon under study in an academic setting. It is also hoped to provide new directions for continued research in this critical area.

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