Motivations of Sport Event Volunteers: An Empirical Study of 2010 Taiwan Citizens Games

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Every year, millions of volunteers in different fields devote time and effort to society (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Many sporting events regardless of size tend to rely on volunteers for the execution of their event (Downward & Ralston, 2005). People regard volunteering as a positive activity, because volunteers benefit society and themselves. However, recruiting and retaining volunteers is challenging for most organizations (Monga, 2006).

Multiple factors may influence volunteer motivation. As a result, it is necessary to explore what motivates people to become involved in a sport organization or event, and further to donate their time and energy. However few studies have been conducted to form a clear model to describe the relationship between context factors and volunteer motivation (Pauline, 2006). In accordance with this need, this study will construct a participative motivation model of sport event volunteers via self-determination theory.

Self-determination theory is a need-based theory of motivation which suggests that humans have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an more unified sense of self. The foundation of self-determination theory recognizes that the social environments around which people live and work can either facilitate or thwart this natural growth tendency, leading to a broad array of developmental outcomes, ranging from an active and integrated sense of self to a highly fragmented and sometimes passive, reactive, or alienated self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Haggar & Chatzisarantis, 2007).

The theory focuses primarily on three such innate needs: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions; relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social milieu; and autonomy refers to being self-initiating and self-regulating of one’s own actions (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Haggar & Chatzisarantis, 2007). According to self-determination theory, social situation, autonomy support and control were the main feeling in working as a sport volunteer. Perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness represented psychological mediators. Intentions of retain and turnover were variables as behavioral consequences of sport volunteers (Fan, 2009). The researchers modified and used the survey designed by Fan (2009) that was utilized to explore the relationships among the above and variables mediators.

The study focused on volunteer motivation in sport events which attract a large number of short-term volunteers. A total of 361 volunteers from the 2010 Taiwan Citizens Games completed the paper-based survey prior to the event. Taiwan Citizens Games was started from the year 2000 and held every two-year by different cities in Taiwan. Most contest projects of the games followed The World Games. Totally 6063 athletes competed in the 2010 Taiwan Citizens Games, and over 700 volunteers devote more than 5 day to benefit the game. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis will be used to explore the variables of sport event volunteer motivation. Confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with LISREL to compare and explore the factorial structure of research variables and mediators.

Volunteers are an important resource, not only because they assist with events but also because they reduce the costs of running events (Monga, 2006). Considering that sport event volunteers have different motivations, this study may help sport event organizers better understand their volunteers and develop more effective volunteer programs, which may ultimately benefit the event/organization, volunteers and service recipients.