Both Traditional and Reflexive Volunteerism are Needed in Sport Events

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Volunteering is changing, and traditional ways are challenged. Traditional or “collective” volunteering as a lifelong and demanding commitment to a sport organization does exist to a much lesser degree and a transition to a “new” or more “individualistic” type of volunteer participation has occurred. This type of voluntarism can be called a (post) modern or reflexive/pragmatic type (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003). This new type is linked to sport events and ad hoc volunteers and they have been researched by Cuskelly, Hoyle, and Auld (2006), Doherty (2009), Downward, Lumsdon, and Ralston (2005), Pauline and Pauline (2009), and Strigas and Jackson (2003). The traditional form of voluntarism reproduces the social categories involved in sport from the outset, the men. This new type of individualistic voluntarism is goal focused, give work qualification and useful contacts, no ownership, loosen up social categories, and thereby further females. The demand for event volunteers is increasing as long as the number of big sport events increase. Each organizer is dependent upon numerous enthusiastic volunteers in order to have all jobs done. The sporting events become meeting place between the traditional and the postmodern voluntarism.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first to explore the voluntarism in sport events and second to examine the hypothesis that volunteers in sporting events differ from volunteerism in organized sport.

We investigated the ad hoc volunteers at the FIS Nordic World Cup in Holmenkollen in March 2010 (test world championship), and we will investigate the World Championship in Nordic Skiing in 2011. The volunteer jobs included 22 different tasks ranging from accreditation and hospitality to transport and security. We grouped the volunteer jobs in two distinct categories: the “sport specific” connected to jumping, cross-country skiing and Nordic combined and the “support functions” as host functions, press and media work, transport etc. Both these types of jobs are needed. Different types of volunteers did these jobs. The majority of the older male did the sport specific jobs, and the females were dominating the support jobs. In order to organize a sporting event both groups are needed and a sport event may be classified as situated in the cross-roads of collective and traditional voluntarism and the individualistic and pragmatic one.

All volunteers (1045) were asked to complete a questionnaire by e-mail (QuestBack) designed to bring out information about their motives for volunteering and the factors that contributed to their volunteer experience. The list of e-mail addresses was received from the organizer. Norwegian Social Science Data Services gave permission to conduct this study, and reminders were sent three times to the volunteers. The response rate was 77% (N= 800) for the pre-event round at FIS Nordic World Cup in Holmenkollen in March 2010 and 71% (N= 752) for the after the event round. 106 persons did not reply on the first round, but answered the second. A few interviews at the site were added the two days of the competition.

The volunteers were first divided into two groups according to if they were members of a sport organization or worked voluntary for a sport club or not. 70% of the volunteers had connection to what is defined as organized sport above. 46% of those within organized sport have been volunteers at previous sport events. Among those without a relation to organized sport nine percent has been volunteers in a sport event, and this makes 55% of the volunteers had experience from an event earlier. The newcomer group (21%) which has no connection to organized sport or previous event experience is dominated by females in the age 25-39 years old. Dohorty (2009) recommended that the newcomer group should be larger in future research than in her case. In our case this sample has increased with eight percent compared with hers.

When looking at the motives the volunteers were divided in four groups: (a) Traditional: Connections to organized sport and experience from sport event (46%), (b) Traditional without event: Connections to organized sport but no experience from sport event (24%), (c) Only event: No connection to organized sport but experience from sport event (9%) and (d) Newcomers: No connection to organized sport and no sport event experience (21%).

For the majority of the 20 factors describing the motives on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5, there was no significant difference, but that existed for 9 of the statements. Through an exploring factor analyses one ended up with three sense giving dimensions with clear differences between the volunteers with experience from organized sport and those without it. The three dimensions were: (a) Intrinsic: own sport interest (love of sport), (b) Extrinsic: instrumental (on CV, network contacts) and (c) Social and traditional.
Complementary to these were altruism and genuine engagement, but there existed no difference between the four groups concerning these motives. Event volunteers have better educational background, and a bigger share with high income than traditional sport volunteers. Men tend to be more frequently involved with sport based events (Pold, 1990). In the group of newcomers at events the female share is greater as shown also by Doherty (2009) and Strigas and Jackson (2003). These volunteers are also younger and the composition concerning ethnicity is more varied. Those who are connected to the sport and have event experience from previous sport events have a stronger intrinsic motivation than the first time volunteers. The individualistic voluntarism seems to have increased in general among the ad hoc volunteers. More women among the first time volunteers focus on human and social capital, knowledge, job qualifications and networking.

Information from the research went back to the organizer so they have already implemented the knowledge into the preparation for the FIS NWC 2011. They have recruited 1000 volunteers more for the NWC2011. The percentage of females has increased overall as well as the percentage of persons with minority background, which has been a stated aim for the organizer. Event voluntarism is probably overestimated as a danger for voluntary work in the sport club. For the organizer it is important to retain the volunteers from this year to next year’s event.