

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

### A Conceptual Approach to Studying Sport Volunteers: Adapting the SOV Framework

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**Management/leadership**

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**Abstract 2013-140**

**1:15 PM**

**(including questions)  
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Sport volunteers are those who freely give their time, energy, skills, and abilities to help others (Donnelly & Harvey, 2011). According to Taylor, Nichols, Holmes, James, Gratton, Garrett, Kokolakis, and Mulder (2003), these volunteers are significant because they enable sports clubs to exist and community sports to be sustained. They have even been referred to as the lifeblood of sport (Safai, 2005) as sport volunteering was the single largest category of volunteering compared to any other, even religion (Donnelly & Harvey, 2011).

There has been an increase in research striving to understand this important group of people. These studies highlight topics like sport volunteers' characteristics, activities, and patterns of service. Yet, the majority of research focuses on volunteer motivations, indicating that practitioners and scholars are interested in 'why' people volunteer (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010; Wilson, 2000). For example Haski-Leventhal (2009) highlighted that scholars from psychological and sociological disciplines have been interested in the complex interplay between altruistic and self-interested natures of volunteering. This would suggest to practitioners and scholars sport volunteers personal and social motives of why they engage in unpaid service. Such information is significant for scholars because it uses theory to gain a better understanding about the type of people who volunteer. In addition, helps practitioners have a better understanding about participants' motivations for volunteering, such as whether people have personal (hidden) agendas or are simply doing for others.

While the area of volunteer motivation demonstrates depth in the research field, it also highlights the limitations within the existing voluntary literature. Wang (2004) found that most of the sport motivational research drew on non-sport disciplines, and also identified similar debates about the structure and dimensionality of volunteer motivations. These debates address whether volunteering should be identified and explored as a uni-dimensional construct (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991), a two-dimensional structure (Frisch & Gerrard, 1981; Smith, 1981), a three-dimensional structure (McCurley & Lynch, 1994), or a five-dimensional model (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Wang (2004) highlighted that studies that focused on fewer dimensions only provided part of the picture about people's volunteering activities. Wang (2004, p. 421) referred to uni-dimensional structures as being "weak" and argued that voluntary motivations needed to be studied from multidimensional constructs. In addition to these limited dimensional construct, many scholars utilized quantitative research approaches to identify reasons for volunteer participation. Quantitative approaches provide significant foundational information (i.e. age, gender, motivations, and activities). While current literature presents research on specific information on sport volunteers, there is a greater need to research the sport volunteer from a multidimensional perspective. These quantitative approaches also leave scholars with narrow or limited perspectives about volunteers as they present a 'snap shot', or an understanding at the moment in time, of why an individual volunteers based on a list of structured questions.

These same limitations in volunteer research are evident in other areas of volunteer research, such as volunteer's characteristics (Bekkers, 2004; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2000), life cycles and processes (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Hustinx, 2006), and frequency (Handy, Brudeur, & Cnaan, 2006; Macduff, 2004; Pearce, 1993) because scholars are interested in investigating very specific topics. Such limited concerns fragment the field of sport volunteering research (Hustinx, Cnaan & Handy, 2010). Consequently, since sport volunteers have an array of personal and social needs, backgrounds, and interests, researchers need to look beyond the traditional approaches and consider utilizing a multidimensional approach. Currently, the only model that focuses on sport volunteering with a multidimensional framework was developed by Baum and Lockstone (2007) in their work on sport event volunteering. This model stems from Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) Collective and Reflexive Styles of Volunteering (SOV) framework. Unlike Baum and Lockstone's (2007) sport event model, the SOV framework proposes factors related to personal and social settings required by sport volunteers. I propose that applying the SOV as a conceptual framework for sport volunteers will demonstrate the potential value of examining sport volunteers from a holistic perspective. It can extend previous research to gain a greater understanding about why

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volunteers engage in unpaid service. The framework can be used to guide researchers on its six dimensions of: volunteers' backgrounds which developed their perception of the world, their personal and social motivational structures, their intensity of commitment, the organizational environment, their choice and field of activity, and the relation to paid work.

The application of the SOV framework has only been applied to research outside of sport. However, further studies from the framework are needed in a variety of sport contexts (e.g., mega-sporting events, community sport, and organizational settings) to test and to fully explore the ability to produce a holistic understanding of sport volunteers. This conceptual presentation will illustrate movement of sport volunteers beyond general volunteer research to address different the sport volunteer's time demands, roles obtained, and motivations. The ways in which the framework can be adapted for sport volunteering will be discussed with examples from academic literature. Specific suggestions for implementing the framework for future studies will be highlighted and discussed.