Volunteer Motivations at Small-Scale Special Sporting Events

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Small-scale special sport events can generate positive impacts for host communities while avoiding the negative issues that are usually linked with large-scale ‘hallmark’ or ‘mega’ events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup Championships, or the Super Bowl (Veltri, Miller, & Harris, 2011). Gibson, Williming, and Holdnak (2003) stated that small-scale sporting events are “not simply related to the size of the event, but is also related to the fact that regular season games do not tax the resources of the host city in the same manner as hosting a mega event” (p. 182). One of the main resources for conducting a special sports event is volunteers. The use of volunteers has been shown to be an integral aspect of sport events, particularly small-scale events, since they can be a significant resource of timely human power, skills, and abilities (Flood, Gardner, & Yarrell, 2006; Veltri et al., 2011).

As the competition for volunteers becomes critically important, sport event managers are questioning motivations of volunteers in recruiting them (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Previous studies of relevant literature have identified four categories that may be useful in recognizing volunteer motivations (Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Tomazos & Butler, 2012). The first category refers to external commitments in which the volunteer may be searching to increase their knowledge in hope that it will permit them to gain new personal skills that will assist them in later career opportunities (Farrell et al., 1998). The second category suggests solidary motivations in which the volunteer is motivated through social interactions, interpersonal relationships, friendships, or group status and group identification (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Tomazos & Butler, 2012). The third category indicates purposive motivations for which a volunteer values community action and support as well as civic responsibility but little thought towards material benefits (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). The fourth category, external traditions, identifies motivations related to family traditions and use of free time as reasons for volunteering (Farrell et al., 1998).

Ritchie (1984) defined special events as a “major one-time or recurring events of limited duration” (p. 2. As such, the “motivation for special event volunteers is different from that for other volunteers” (Farrell et al., 1998, p. 298). In fact Green and Chalip (2004) noted that: “Volunteers have become particularly vital for the delivery of special events, as most events now depend to some degree on volunteers for event planning and operations” (p. 49). Thus, it is essential to understand the unique challenges of managing volunteers at a small scale special sport event. The purpose of this study is to fill the gap regarding the motivation of volunteers at small scale special sports events.

A convenience sample of volunteers at small-scale sports activities, USA Cycling Collegiate & Para-Cycling Road National Championship held over a four consecutive day period, were used in this study. To prevent redundancy, the investigators cross-checked the volunteer lists for each day of the championships. Of the original 200, one hundred and twenty-five individuals were identified as non-redundant volunteers for these activities. Forty-seven of the 125 volunteers completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 38%.

The Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) 28-item questionnaire developed by Farrell, Johnston, and Twynam (1998) provided the foundation of the questionnaire used in this study. The investigators choose to use a 4-point Likert scale to prevent the misuse of a mid-point in an odd-numbered scale as a “dumping ground” for unsure or non-applicable responses in a Likert scale (DuBois & Burns, 1975). Thus, while the number of statements remained the same, the SEVMS was modified from a 5-point Likert scale to a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree) which required the participants to answer either positively or negatively without a mid-point. To ensure that the modified questionnaire was a reliable and valid instrument, a test-retest method and content validity were used. The result of the test-retest was α = .82, while validity was established at .80.

The respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each of the 28 items that influenced their motivations to...
volunteer. As per the SEVMS, the questionnaire statements were divided into the four categories: external commitments, solidary, purposive, and external traditions (Farrell et al., 1998. It is important to note that the statements were not grouped together in the questionnaire. On the 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree), the most important item with a mean of 1.53 was “I wanted to help make the event a success” and the least important item, with a mean of 3.81, was “I did not have anything else to do with my time”. A table exhibiting the eight highest and lowest ranking reasons will be provided in this poster presentation. Finally, the average of the four categories (external commitment, external traditions, purposive, and solidary) indicated that the respondent volunteered mainly due purposive reasons (M=2.15), followed by solidary (M=2.37), external commitment (M=3.26), and external traditions (M=3.49).

It appears that individuals in this study volunteered to realize the satisfaction of providing positive support without concern of material profits (purposive). Additionally, the results indicated that solidary reasons such as achieving prestige or social approval (such as job advancement) through the social interactions, interpersonal relationships, friendships, or group status and group identification were also significant. This may be the result of volunteering to specifically increase their social network to gain prestige or in order to get a (material) reward like a better job. Finally, the respondents did not agree that external commitments, which would allow them to gain new personal skills, nor external traditions associated to family traditions and use of free time, were motivations for volunteering.

Since volunteers can be motivated for a number of reasons concerns, it is significant for a small scale special event sport manager to understand which of their needs are the most pressing. The comprehension of the motivations of special sports events volunteers may lead to enhanced planning, management, and recruitment strategies for maintaining a strong volunteer base. As such, this study contributes advancing knowledge regarding the volunteer motivations at small-scale special sports events.