Two Phases, Two Tales: Planning and Implementation Phase Experiences of a Para-Sport Event Volunteer

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Facilities/Events - Volunteers (Disability Sport)
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Context and Review of Relevant Literature

Sport volunteers are an important resource for the success of sport events and sport organizations (Bang & Chelladurai, 2009; Cuskelley, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006). To date, research investigating the experience of sport volunteers in events and organizations has resulted in a well-established body of literature, in which elements such as satisfaction (e.g., Pauline, 2011), motivation (e.g., Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998), commitment (e.g., Park & Kim, 2013), and, more recently, sense of community (e.g., Kerwin, Walker, Warner, & Stevens, 2015) are discussed. Related to how the needs of volunteers are met, research pertaining to satisfaction has associated this element of the volunteer experience to motivation and commitment along with retention (Pauline, 2011; Farrell et al., 1998; MacLean & Hamm, 2007). Consequently, research has demonstrated the multidimensionality of motivation and commitment among sport volunteers through theories and models, such as the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale and the Volunteer Motivations Scale for International Sporting Events (e.g., Farrell et al., 1998; Bang & Chelladurai, 2009). Although commitment has received less attention, researchers have demonstrated its importance within the volunteer experience, since it represents an individual’s identification with an organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). In contrast, research on the sense of community among sport event volunteers has yet to be fully conceptualized. Nevertheless, Kerwin, Warner, Walker, and Stevens (2015) described sense of community as a common identity and purpose, and associated it to the sport volunteer experience given its association with relationships and sense of belonging.

Although the literature pertaining to the sport (event) volunteer experience is well established (Wicker, 2017), a gap remains in terms of research examining volunteers in para-sport. Specifically, research in disability sport has investigated programs related to sport development (e.g., Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2014), policy (e.g., Kung & Taylor, 2014), sport organizations (e.g., Misener & Darcy, 2014), event legacies (e.g., Misener, Darcy, Legg, & Gilbert, 2013), and inclusion through physical activity (e.g., Kitchin & Howe, 2014). Research on para-sport volunteers is needed given the recent rise of para-sport events, such as the Invictus Games and the International Wheelchair and Amputee Federation’s Women’s World Games.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study is a follow-up to a research project exploring the first author’s volunteer experience during the planning phase of a para-sport event. These findings were presented at the 2017 NASSM Conference in Denver, Colorado, USA. But, the study stopped before the event’s implementation. Given the present gap in knowledge related to the examination of volunteers in para-sport (events), the purpose of the study is twofold. First, this study seeks to understand the volunteer experience during the implementation phase of a para-sport event. The second purpose is to compare and analyze the first author’s experience during the planning and implementation phases of the para-sport event. The following research questions are proposed: (1) What factors have an impact on characteristics related to the volunteer experience (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) during the implementation phase of a para-sport event?; and (2) What similarities and differences are found between the volunteer experience during the planning and implementation phases of a para-sport event?

Methods and Timeline

The study’s context is the 2017 Canadian Electric Wheelchair Hockey Association Nationals, held from August 4th to August 7th, 2017 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Specifically, the event was hosted by a local non-profit sport organization: The Ottawa Power Wheelchair Hockey League. The event gathered the six best power wheelchair hockey teams from Canada to compete for the Canadian national title.
In order to provide rich insight into the volunteer experience in a para-sport event, an auto-ethnographic approach was utilized. This research approach occurs when the researcher is a complete member of the investigated group or setting (Anderson, 2006). An auto-ethnography entails front-line insights to be provided through simultaneous research and writing along with combining an actively engaged researcher as a group member and reflexive self-observation (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Kodama, Doherty, & Popovic, 2013). Therefore, the first author was a volunteer for the event and was a member of the event’s organizing committee. Data collection included field notes, which comprised noting concepts of interests related to behaviors, emotions, customs, and experience of participants (cf. Kodoma et al., 2013), along with a field journal. The first author’s field journal was written on a weekly basis and documented both subjective (e.g., emotions and reflections) and objective (e.g., sights and sounds) data during the volunteer experience. Additional data collection sources of included non-verbal communications, participant observations, informal interviews, and documents. Given the iterative nature of ethnographies, the author also engaged in a reflective analytical process during the research project with the second author (Kodama et al., 2013).

The research is still in the initial stages of data analysis. However, the data will be analyzed with NVivo 11. The first author will analyze the data inductively by starting with open-coding along with incorporating deductive coding from theories and concepts within the sport (event) volunteer literature, which will lead to higher-order themes (cf. Corley & Gioia, 2004).

Anticipated Results, Discussion and Conclusions
Although the data has yet to be fully analyzed, the following results are anticipated based on preliminary analysis. An anticipated result relates to the impact of the organizing committee’s culture and other relevant factors (e.g., inclusion, sense of belonging, and commitment to the event’s success) on the first author’s experience. Likewise, the impact from the organizing committee’s will to promote para-sport by hosting a successful event is highlighted in the data. In turn, additional anticipated results are also associated with the differences from the first author’s experience during the planning and implementation phases, given the change of roles and tasks along with other factors (e.g., engagement and excitement surrounding the event). Furthermore, satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community during the first author’s experience appear to have been enhanced during the implementation phase, which further highlights possible differences with the volunteer experience during the planning phase.

Contributions
The current study presents contributions to both the sport (event) volunteer literature and para-sport event managers. Specifically, an auto-ethnographic approach provides rich insight into the para-sport volunteer experience through a front-line perspective (cf. Kodama et al., 2013), which begins to address the lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the para-sport volunteer experience. Furthermore, para-sport event managers will benefit from a better understanding of their volunteers’ experience and, thus, be more effective in the management of their volunteer workforce. In contrast, the study helps raise awareness and educate society regarding para-sport by shedding light on power wheelchair hockey and volunteering in para-sport (cf. Misener, 2015).