

# **TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS FOR SPORT EVENTS IN THE ASSESSMENTS OF THE VOLUNTEERS AND RESOURCE CENTRE MANAGERS**

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## **Abstract**

The success of mega sport events depends largely on the effectiveness of volunteers who work in different directions, help prepare and conduct sport events, receive city guests, accompany athletes. Training of volunteers at sport events expands not only the resources of the volunteers, but also plays an important role for the territories where they live. Part of the proactive, socially oriented population, which has special knowledge, skills and abilities is formed in cities. The purpose of the article is to assess the importance of educational training of sport volunteers in preparation for international sport events from the perspective of the volunteers and the management of infrastructure non-profit organizations responsible for working with sport volunteers. The report analyses data from a survey of sport volunteers in the volunteer centre "Volunteers of the Urals" (N=706; the sample is targeted). This organization is a centre for recruiting volunteers in the Ural Federal district. The region includes 112 cities with a total population of 12.5 million people. The report analyses data from expert semi-formal interviews with managers of NGOs and resource centres (N=10).

**Key words:** volunteers, resource centres, training of volunteers, sport organisations.

**JEL Code:** I25, M53

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## **Introduction**

Holding international sports competitions is one of the image tools for the development of host countries. Mass events ensure the country's recognition in the global information space. They contribute to the economic development of specific cities, affect the attractiveness of territories for investors, expand the conditions for international tourism and contribute to the development of infrastructure in the service sector. New hotels are being built in cities for such events, and transport infrastructure is being developed. Due to the activity of sports volunteers and information campaigns, citizens become open to interacting with people from other cities and countries.

The success of mega sports events depends not only on the quality of events' organization and preparation for them, but also on the effectiveness of volunteers who work in different directions. Volunteers work with people, informing them about the event before it is held. They help organize and conduct sports events, accompany guests of the city, assist athletes, etc. Sports volunteers are a close-knit community. Its members have their own corporate culture, special skills and competencies that they receive in preparation for such events. Volunteering in the field of sports requires a lot of labor and time from volunteers, deep psychological involvement in the context of the event and their work. As a rule, the work of volunteers is associated with great psychological and emotional stress. It requires such personal qualities as efficiency, communication skills, discipline and responsibility. Sports volunteers make a certain effort, they always spend their free time on educational training for international sports projects. Training at such events not only increases the ability of the volunteers themselves, but also plays an important role for their territories of residence. A part of the proactive, socially oriented citizens with special knowledge, skills and abilities is formed.

The purpose of the article is to assess the importance of educational training of sport volunteers in preparation for international sport events from the perspective of the volunteers and the management of infrastructure non-profit organizations responsible for working with sport volunteers. The article provides answers to the following research questions: how does specialized training, in the opinion of the volunteers, affect their personal development? Is it important for sports volunteers to learn and acquire new knowledge in educational process for sports events? Are there any performance indicators for training sports volunteers, according to managers of infrastructure non-profit organizations?

Sports volunteering is a popular research object of sociologists, economists and psychologists. Motivation of volunteers is studied in the context of interpersonal interaction in the volunteer community and non-profit organizations (Alexander, 2015). The connection between motivation to participate in major sporting events and successful employment practices, career growth of volunteers is identified and described (Giannoulakis, 2007). The management of sports volunteering as a research problem is included in the broader research problem of the volunteering management in general. Researchers evaluate the institutional conditions that determine the behavior of volunteers and the actions of organizers, as well as specialists who work directly with the volunteer corps (Kodama, 2013). Sociologists study management decisions that influence the effectiveness of interaction between organizers and sports volunteers in specific projects and, consequently, the effectiveness of sports volunteers

(Dickson, 2013). At the level of individual organizations, researchers study the directions and processes of volunteer management, especially recruitment, training and retention of volunteers (Schlesinger, 2015).

Volunteers training process is a special research interest. Sociologists note that the training and commitment of volunteers to the organization are interrelated. One way to keep volunteers in the organization is to provide opportunities for their ongoing training and development (Newton, 2014). Various forms of volunteer training are being studied. For example, researchers from New Zealand have found that the most suitable forms of training for volunteers are role-playing games and informal learning. It was found that, in order for learning to be an integral part of the volunteer experience, training needs to be re-conceptualised to explicitly include learning (Shaw, 2009).

Researchers call one of the frequent and strategically important mistakes in managing sports volunteers the lack of permanent training programs aimed at their long-term development, rather than at closing current needs (Cuskelly, 2020). Australian researchers note that for sports volunteers, the most important factor in choosing an organization and commitment to it in the future is the possibility of quality training in preparation for sports events. Organizations that provide comprehensive training with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and competencies are more in demand among sports volunteers than those organizations that do not mention such an opportunity at the interview (Costa, 2006). Sociologists claim that training volunteers at sport events contributes to the creation of a social heritage by transferring knowledge to volunteers, thereby creating an expanded base of initiative people who will support the tourism industry and conduct other international events in host cities (Benson, 2014).

## **1 Data and method**

The report analyzes data from a survey of sports volunteers from database of the volunteer center "Volunteers of the Urals" (N=706; target sample). This organization is a center for recruiting volunteers for the Ural Federal district. The region includes 112 cities with a total population of 12.5 million people. The main criteria for selecting an empirical object of research were the implementation of volunteer programs in the framework of international sports events held in Russia and the presence of experience in sports volunteering among the majority of community members. In 2019, the non-profit organization "Volunteers of the Urals" passed a competitive selection and received the status of an infrastructure organization

for the Ural Federal district. In the next five years, the center will recruit and training volunteers for all major events in the Ural Federal district.

The research is based on data from a secondary analysis of documents regulating requirements of sports volunteers for major international events, as well as internal documents of infrastructure organizations for organizing volunteers training. The report analyzes data from 10 expert semi-formal interviews with managers and employees of non-profit organizations and educational institutions that operate volunteer centers. Experts gave their assessment of the sports volunteers' activities, described the socio-psychological characteristics of a typical volunteer, evaluated the process of interaction with volunteers in their organization, and described the problems of managing sports volunteers during events.

The article evaluates results of 8 in-depth interviews with volunteers who took part in international sports events held in Russia. The age of respondents is from 19 to 26 years, the experience of participation in volunteer activities in general is from 1,5 to 6 years. The qualitative interviews were recorded, and responses were transcribed verbatim. We mainly focused on the coding clusters:

1. Subjective assessment of specialized training's importance for sports volunteers.
2. Changes in the psychological state as a result of specialized training.
3. Assessment of social opportunities for sports volunteers as a result of specialized training.

## **2 The results**

Training of sports volunteers is an important aspect in any volunteer program, and the work of volunteers during sports events depends on its uniqueness and effectiveness. Training programs for sports volunteers are not only a format of lectures, but also various trainings that simulate real situations. This form of working with volunteers makes the learning process interesting and effective for volunteers. Practice-oriented training of volunteers distinguishes it from standard approaches to organizing training, and additionally motivates interest in volunteering. Trainings on team building, psychological resistance to stress, time management, self-analysis, working out behavior in critical situations in their unity form a close atmosphere in the community of sports volunteers.

The analysis of programs for volunteers training allows us to speak about the formation of a comprehensive approach to the training block of sports volunteers in the practice of volunteer management. Volunteer training programs usually include several

modules, each of which meets specific goals. In addition, the specific of training volunteers directly depends on the scale of a particular event. During the organization of training, special attention should be paid not only to providing volunteers with the maximum possible amount of information necessary for work, but also to working out and consolidating the applicable knowledge and skills in practice. Only in this case, sports volunteers acquire the necessary degree of preparedness and confidence in their abilities required to perform the work.

We conducted in-depth interviews with sports volunteers to answer the first research question: how did specialized training, according to the volunteers themselves, affect them? The subjective assessment of specialized training's importance among volunteers is positive. After analyzing 8 in-depth interviews, we found that the importance of educational process is mentioned 47 times. The volunteers used phrases such as "*specialized training is very important, we spend most of our time on this process*", "*I get as much useful and necessary information in a short period of time as I would probably not get anywhere else*", "*I became a volunteer at the Olympic games to improve my English, which we did every day, it is important for me*", etc.

Volunteers note that training process in the framework of sports events is disciplined. Almost all interviewees spoke about their self-realization and expanding their abilities to self-organization, including through the development of new personal qualities (planning their time, commitment, responsibility to themselves and other people). "*You can't miss the interview, then you can't miss the training. And it's not even that you can be expelled for this, but that you will let people down. There is some responsibility inside that the entire championship depends on me and my knowledge. This is not true, of course, but for some reason constantly forced to wake up at 7 am, so as not to be late for the educational block. And I have improved my English so much that now I plan to take the international exam*" (woman, 22 years old).

Volunteers have repeatedly noted that working at sports events helps them feel more confident in different life situations, such as job interviews. "*When I was a volunteer at the Paralympic games, our training lasted almost six months. I think I've learned everything. I became fluent in English, learned to correctly allocate working time in conditions when there is no time for lunch, and even learned to understand sign language. It happened that after the games, I just finished University and had to look for a job. I went for an interview in a large regional company, where everyone was scared by complicated competitive tests. Complicated?! You just weren't a volunteer! I was hired the first time. The only one, by the way, of those who were then at the interview*" (woman, 27 years old).

It is important to note that the admission of volunteers to sports events of different levels has an objective system of restrictions, which is fixed in the regulations of the recruiting organization. In order to become a volunteer at major international sporting events (Olympic games, world championships), you must have experience of volunteering at local sports competitions (city, university, club). We conducted a quantitative survey of sports volunteers in the Sverdlovsk region to answer the second research question: is it important for sports volunteers to learn and acquire new knowledge in educational process for sports events? It was found that the experience of sports volunteering is connected with the motivation of volunteers to learn (the significance of the Chi-square test in all cases turned out to be less than 0.05, which indicates the non-random nature of the correlation). We found differences in the motivation for training volunteers who have different experience of participating in sports events. To assess the motivation of training respondents were asked the question: "Is it important for you to acquire new knowledge and competencies?". The respondents were divided into two groups. We compared the responses of volunteers who had experience working at international sports events (56%) and respondents who were sports volunteers only at local sports events (44%). The data is presented in table 1.

**Tab. 1: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "Is it important for you to acquire new knowledge and competencies?" (%)**

Respondents' answers	International experience	Local experience
Yes	46	75
No	54	25
Total	100	100

Source: author's calculation

The motive of "getting new knowledge and competencies" correlates with the local level of participation in sports events (Cramer's  $V=0,545$  with an error probability of 0.000, that is, below the permissible 0.050, which means that there is a connection between the variables). As can be seen from table 1, the majority of volunteers with such experience (75 %) consider it important to acquire new knowledge and competencies in the framework of working at sports events. Beginning volunteers use every opportunity to gain new knowledge, skills and competencies at local events in order to successfully qualify for international competitions in the future.

The assessment of the regional volunteer center's activity in search and educational training of volunteers revealed two important features. Firstly, the training of volunteers in local sports events is not organized in accordance with the standards developed for

international events. According to experts, this is due to the limited time and resources allocated to this area of work. Secondly, the acquisition of new knowledge and skills does not appear as an incentive for potential sports volunteers in information campaigns to recruit sports volunteers for local events.

We conducted expert interviews with managers and employees of non-profit organizations to answer the third research question: are there any performance indicators for training sports volunteers, according to managers of infrastructure non-profit organizations? The main indicator of training effectiveness for resource center employees is the return of trained volunteers to work on other projects of the organization. Here are quotes from an interview with the head of the volunteer center: *"Of course, the most important result for us is the number of volunteers who will stay with us after the event and will do something. We have about 15 000 volunteers in our database. All of them have ever worked with us. And how many of them continue to do this? Which of them can our employees and I always count on? No more than 1500 – 2000 volunteers"* (man, 29 years old).

After conducting expert interviews with heads of educational institutions, we found that employers are primarily interested in active students with experience in social activities. Director of the Geological Engineering College notes: "I communicate daily with potential employers of our students. We have organizations that have signed agreements on employment of graduates, but we are, of course, constantly searching for new partners. I must say that a good quality education in the specialty will not surprise anyone today. Graduates should be able to adapt to constant changes. For this purpose, one specialized education is not enough. More and more often I hear from graduates that their employers are interested in their experience of social activities. This is the right trend, the right one. It doesn't matter what we call "social workers". Earlier it was pioneers, today it is volunteers. The essence remains the same – these guys have a powerful competitive advantage over ordinary students. A student with an engineering degree is great. But a student with an engineering degree and volunteer experience is absolutely out of competition" (man, 56 years old).

## **Conclusion**

The results of empirical research prove that training of sports volunteers is an important stage in organizing the work of volunteer resource centers. Training of volunteers in regional resource centers of Russia is seriously organized only for international sports events, as it is recorded in international documents. Organizations receive funding, comply with certain regulations and actively use volunteer training technologies developed in other countries. In

the organization of local sports events, educational training of sports volunteers is carried out situationally, mainly it is limited to familiarizing volunteers with their functions and responsibilities.

We present conclusions on the first research question: how does specialized training, in the opinion of the volunteers, affect their personal development? The educational process within the framework of sports events contributes to the development of new personal qualities of volunteers (planning their time, commitment, responsibility), develops discipline and self-confidence, increases the chances in various life situations outside of sports volunteering, for example, when applying for employment. Our study confirms the findings of American researchers that training sports volunteers should be conceived and designed as an opportunity for personal development. This contributes to their satisfaction and generates a commitment of volunteers to this type of activity (Costa, 2006).

Training of sports volunteers as a way to acquire new knowledge and skills is an important motivation for those who are just starting to engage in sports volunteering and help organize local and regional sports events. However, volunteer centers do not focus on this in information and recruitment campaigns for local sports events. An important role for recruiting of sports volunteers can be played by the desire of potential volunteers to develop and acquire the necessary competencies. The professionalism of resource center employees who organize information campaigns and conduct training is also important.

After analyzing the respondents' answers to the second research question, we can say that the process of learning and gaining new knowledge in sports events is very important for sports volunteers. According to the results of our research, information and recruitment campaigns to attract volunteers for non-profit organizations should consider the importance of "getting new knowledge and skills" motive for potential volunteers of local sports events. In this case, the organization solves two management tasks at once: it attracts sports volunteers to local events at the lowest cost, and expands the base of volunteers who are committed to their organization and ready to work in its projects on a permanent basis.

We present conclusions on the third research question: are there any performance indicators for training sports volunteers, according to managers of infrastructure non-profit organizations? According to an expert survey, the effectiveness of sports volunteers training for resource centers is to return the trained volunteers to work on other projects of the organization. For volunteers, indicators of training effectiveness are new knowledge that can be useful for them to achieve their own, including career goals. The specifics of organizing



training at sports events work to develop certain personal characteristics of sports volunteers, which are extremely important for potential employers of young professionals.

## Acknowledgment

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 19-311-90055 “Management of sport volunteering in the Russian region: the potential of community and infrastructure”.

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