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## **Reflections on major sport event volunteer legacy research**

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The focus of major sport event legacy has had several iterations since the 1990s, as reflected in the efforts of a range of scholars and perspectives (see Chappelet, 2012; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005, 2016; Hodges & Hall, 1996; Loepkey & Parent, 2012; Minnaert, 2012; Preuss, 2007, 2015, 2016; Silvestre, 2009). Despite the varying attention over time to economic, infrastructure, tourism, political, environmental, social, and health aspects of the legacy of hosting a major sport event – and acknowledging that this may not be an exhaustive list – the human factor persists. This is not surprising given the acknowledged critical roles and vast numbers of volunteers engaged in the hosting of major sport events like the Olympics or FIFA World Cup (IOC, 2013; Nichols & Ralston, 2011; Zhuang & Girginov, 2012).

Communities of all sizes across the world host what may be considered, from their perspective, major sport events.<sup>1</sup> The volunteer workforce is just one investment of the host community in staging an outstanding if not ‘world class’ event. Certainly, it is critical to ensure the ‘heroes of these Games’ (IOC, 2012) are effective. However, there is a growing focus on the legacy – ‘the tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself’ (Preuss, 2007, p. 211) – of that volunteer effort and engagement (DCMS, 2012; IOC, 2008). The ‘carryover effect of ongoing community support’ (Doherty, 2009, p. 187) as a legacy may be represented by continued or increased volunteer support for other community special events and enhanced community volunteerism in general, in terms of positive attitudes towards, and increased rates and levels of, volunteering.

To that end, scholars continue to investigate the volunteer legacy of major sport events in order to understand the nature of such an effect, as well as its causes and mechanisms, with implications for event bidding and hosting policy, planning, and execution. Doherty’s study of the Jeux du Canada Games volunteers, published in this journal in 2009, is but one investigation along this path. At the time of its publication, only a few scholars had examined future volunteering intentions of major sport event volunteers, and almost all of that work was descriptive in nature (Doherty, 2009). Doherty relied on social exchange theory to frame an examination of the impact of the perceived costs and benefits of Games volunteering on future intentions of planning and on-site or Games delivery volunteers. In

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brief, planning volunteers' future engagement with another event was significantly, and negatively, influenced by experienced costs of the Games – and particularly task overload and personal inconvenience. The likelihood of an increase in the extent of their volunteering in the community was directly associated with having a positive life experience with the Games, yet inversely associated with experienced task overload. In contrast, on-site volunteers' future event volunteering was primarily influenced by the perceived benefits of social and skill enrichment, community contribution, and a positive life experience realized through the Games. Nonetheless, on-site volunteers' perceived costs of being involved – personal inconvenience and task underload – were predictive of the extent to which they would be involved in a future event, while both costs (personal inconvenience) and benefits (positive life experience, community contribution) experienced with the Games predicted any anticipated change in community volunteering. The paper highlights implications of the potential longer term impact of these major sport event volunteer experiences for event strategy and volunteer management. Not only does it provide insight into the collective impact of various event experiences (both positive and negative), it isolates the impact of particular experiences, and distinguishes these for planning and on-site volunteers.

Nonetheless, Doherty (2009, p. 205) reported several limitations to that study, along with recommendations for future research that '[can] provide further insight into factors that shape voluntary action in the community, and the role of major sport events in promoting that legacy.' These include the need to replicate the study with other samples of major sport event volunteers, in similar and different contexts (e.g. event size, event type – single or multi-sport; community size), and especially with 'new' or first-time event volunteers in order to capture that perspective and allow for comparisons with their veteran counterparts. Also highlighted was the importance of robust measures of volunteer behavior subsequent to an event, in order to capture the 'carryover effect' (Doherty, 2009, p. 187) of volunteering that 'remain[s] longer than the event itself' (Preuss, 2007, p. 211). Doherty (2009, p. 204) recommended the measure of actual behavior in the community, in general or in further events, and ideally 'longitudinal research that tracks volunteers' perceptions, intentions, and actual behavior at different points post-event' to better understand these links. At the least, more specific intentions for future volunteering may provide enhanced insight of volunteer legacy (Doherty, 2009). Still further, determinants of variation in experiences that predict future volunteering (e.g. individual, task, and event

characteristics) may provide a more nuanced understanding of the profile and legacy of event volunteers (Doherty, 2009).

Scholars have built on and extended that study with the investigation of community and event volunteering as a legacy of major sport events. Here, we review a sample of 17 research articles published in English language peer-reviewed journals. The sample was taken from the list of papers that cited the 2009 study<sup>2</sup> as well as similarly focused peer-reviewed articles that did not specifically acknowledge Doherty's work. The purpose of our review is to highlight the focus of research since 2009, including methodological approaches used and variables examined, as well as the findings. It was of interest to determine the extent to which scholars have advanced knowledge of the legacy of major sport event volunteering, and in what ways.

### Volunteer legacy research

The 17 studies reviewed have examined the volunteer legacy of both multi-sport (n = 7) and single sport (n = 9) major events (one study context was undetermined), yet relied heavily (n = 15 studies) on quantitative methodologies and, specifically, field surveys. Two studies used qualitative methods, although one of these comprised a web-based open-ended survey. The quantitative studies employed multivariate analyses to examine the association between various characteristics of the volunteer experience or the volunteers themselves, and various measures of future volunteering. Volunteer characteristics examined include previous experience with an organization or with event volunteering (Aisbett, Randle, & Kappelides, 2015; Dickson, Benson, Blackman, & Terwiel, 2013, 2015; Neufeind, Güntert, & Wehner, 2013; Pauline, 2011; Sand, Strittmatter, & Hanstad, 2017), and motives for volunteering for the event (Dickson et al., 2013; Hallmann & Harms, 2012; Koutrou & Pappous, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2018; Mykletun & Himanen, 2016). A few studies examined or controlled for age and gender (Dickson et al., 2013, 2015; Koutrou & Pappous, 2016; Mykletun & Himanen, 2016; Sand et al., 2017). Volunteer role or event experience characteristics include realization of motives for involvement with the event (Güntert, Neufeind, & Wehner, 2015), experienced job characteristics (Neufeind et al., 2013), role ambiguity (Rogalsky, Doherty, & Paradis, 2016), perceived organizational and supervisor support with the event (Aisbett et al., 2015), and satisfaction with particular aspects of the volunteer experience (Dickson et al., 2013) and overall positive attitude (Bang & Lee, 2014; Lee, Reisinger, Kim, & Yoon, 2014; Love, Hardin, Koo, & Morse, 2011). A variety of types of future volunteering have also been examined, including likelihood of volunteering for the same or another major sport event and increasing/decreasing the extent of that involvement, likelihood of

volunteering for another event (in general), likelihood of volunteering for a community organization and increasing/decreasing the extent of current involvement. One survey study measured actual post-event volunteering (Dickson, Darcy, Edwards, & Terwiel, 2015), investigating the degree of change in volunteering compared to before the event. The qualitative studies examined conditions for long-term or sustained volunteering with a repeat major sport event in a community (World Cup ski event; Kristiansen, Skirstad, Parent, & Waddington, 2015), and narratives around the London 2012 Olympic Games volunteer experience and post-event volunteering (Koutrou, Pappous, & Johnson, 2016).

The reader is invited to examine these works for a fuller sense of their focus and findings. Several highlights around new knowledge regarding volunteer legacy of major sport events are considered here. Taken together, the few studies that examined the link between previous experience and future volunteering intentions found that volunteers with no previous experience (Pauline, 2011; Sand et al., 2017), volunteers who were new to sport or event volunteering (Aisbett et al., 2015), and those who were typically only event volunteers (Neufeind et al., 2013) were more likely than veteran or long-term volunteers to intend to get involved with the same or another event. Those volunteers were also more likely to intend to increase their community volunteering (Aisbett et al., 2015; Dickson et al., 2013; Pauline, 2011), while those who were already volunteering in the community before the event were likely to maintain (but not increase) their engagement (Aisbett et al., 2015; Neufeind et al., 2013). Dickson et al. (2015) reported that volunteers with no previous experience were more likely to have increased or maintained their level of volunteering post-event. These findings are consistent with Doherty's (2009) observations regarding on-site volunteers. Taken together, the body of knowledge to date implies that the legacy of future volunteering may be most realized with event volunteers who have no previous experience. To better understand this particular group, there is a continued need to comprehend 'new' volunteers in the context of major sport events and what factors impel them to continue after the event (Dickson et al., 2015; Doherty, 2009).

Unfortunately, that perspective, or a version of it, has been taken up by only one group of scholars: Neufeind et al. (2013) examined and compared factors that explain variation in future volunteering intentions between volunteers who typically only engage in events versus current and former long-term volunteers, who are or have engaged with a community organization. They found that perceived job characteristics of the major sport

event volunteers' tasks were significantly associated with their likelihood of volunteering for the same or another event or a community organization. Further, different job characteristics were impactful for different volunteers, with perceived task identity and autonomy shaping the future intentions of volunteers who typically only engage in events, while perceived skill variety, task significance, and feedback were significant to long-term community volunteers' intentions for future volunteering.

That nuanced study may be held up as an example of capturing both volunteer and role characteristics in a model to examine and understand event volunteer legacy – who was involved, what did they do, and what difference did it make to future volunteering intentions. It provides new and valuable insight into the potential carryover effect of the event experience. However, a few other investigations that examined the impact of volunteers' role and event experiences are also worthy of mention, as such investigations may be well-positioned for replication with a sample that captures and is able to distinguish between new and veteran volunteers. Rogalsky et al. (2016) also examined major sport event volunteers' perceptions of their role and any carryover effect. They found that an effective supervisor was inversely associated with volunteers' perceived role ambiguity around their event tasks, which inversely predicted their role satisfaction and performance. Both of these aspects explained their overall satisfaction with the event with a further significant effect on their intent to volunteer for another event. While Aisbett et al. (2015) did not identify a significant effect for supervisory support of major sport event volunteers, they found that perceived organizational support in general, along with volunteers' satisfaction with the event experience, significantly predicted future volunteering intentions. Relatedly, Dickson et al. (2013) found that major sport event volunteers' satisfaction with their pre-event orientation was meaningful to their intent to volunteer again. These studies help to extend the findings of Love et al. (2011) who reported that volunteers' satisfaction with the major sport event experience in general significantly predicted their intent to volunteer in the future. Insight to particular volunteer experiences and their impact on future volunteering intentions has valuable implications for major sport event volunteer management for effective volunteer legacy.

Güntert et al.'s (2015) work complements this with its focus on the realization of volunteers' motives,<sup>3</sup> rather than specific aspects of the task. They found that to the extent major sport event volunteers gained career-relevant experience and psychological enhancement through the event, the more likely they were to volunteer in the future.

These findings correspond with Doherty's (2009) indication that skill enrichment and a positive life experience were two benefits experienced by planning and on-site volunteers that directly impacted their future volunteering intentions. Yet, Doherty's study also considered perceived costs of the event experience, providing a more comprehensive perspective of the impact of the event for volunteers. Costs, or the downsides of volunteering at an event, do not appear to have gained any traction since Doherty's work, limiting a broader understanding of factors that impact volunteer legacy.

The work reviewed thus far relied exclusively on behavioral intention, which continues to be indicated as a limitation of understanding volunteer legacy (Doherty, 2009; Koutrou et al., 2016). Thus, it is notable that three studies captured actual volunteer behavior post-event. Kristiansen et al. (2015) related that long-term continued volunteering with a repeat event is sustained by citizens' local pride and commitment to the community as well as a collective identity with volunteering. Dickson et al. (2015) measured volunteers' post-event volunteering in terms of change from pre-event levels and reported that almost half of the relatively few who had increased their volunteering were influenced by their event experience. Similarly, Koutrou et al. (2016, p. 1227) concluded that there was 'some evidence that an inspiration effect to volunteer [after the Games] was created' among London 2012 Olympic Games volunteers.

### Directions for future research

While there has been some progress, with research shedding light on the nature of major sport event volunteer legacy – and determinants and mechanisms of that – gaps in knowledge remain. In order to continue to better understand this phenomenon, we present a number of recommendations for future research that extends the efforts to date.

Given the seemingly greater impact of major sport event volunteering on new or inexperienced volunteers with regard to a legacy of post-event engagement, we renew the call for further research to build on the insights about this cohort generated by Doherty (2009), Pauline (2011), Aisbett et al. (2015), and Sand et al. (2017). Further, given that most major sport event volunteers likely have previous experience (Dickson et al., 2013; Doherty, 2009; Sand et al., 2017), it is equally important to learn more about this group and factors associated with their continued volunteering. Building on the studies reviewed here, further investigation of potentially meaningful subgroups – such as by age, gender or other demographics (e.g. Mykletun & Himanen, 2016; Sand et al., 2017), types of previous experience (e.g. Aisbett et al., 2015; Neufeind et al., 2013), or by volunteer roles (e.g. Doherty, 2009)

– can provide valuable insight to the major sport event volunteer legacy of experienced volunteers.

Importantly, research needs to continue to examine potentially positive and negative volunteer experiences. There do not appear to be any efforts to build on Doherty's (2009) consideration of realized benefits and costs of involvement with an event and the further impact on future volunteering; yet doing so provides a fuller profile of the experience. While a major sport event tends to generate a generally good feeling among volunteers and in a host community (Radford, 2010), Doherty's study highlights the perceived downsides for volunteers and, perhaps more importantly, the impact on further engagement. To ignore any perceived challenges on the part of volunteers associated with a major sport event is to overlook factors that may violate their exchange relationship with the host and event (Doherty, 2009). Greater use of qualitative or mixed methods approaches may be a useful avenue for uncovering a more robust picture of the event volunteer experience.

Very few studies that focused on a legacy of future volunteering used a qualitative approach, yet doing so can provide in-depth insight into the context of volunteers' future intentions (Tomazos & Luke, 2015). A qualitative approach may be particularly useful for longitudinal investigation and the consideration of actual volunteering behavior post-event. Again, only a few studies have considered this (Dickson et al., 2015; Kristiansen et al., 2015). Longitudinal research could help to capture the personal transformation process experienced with major sport event volunteering (Tomazos & Luke, 2015), through to post-event engagement.

The focus of this reflection, and recommendations for research, has been major sport event legacy of community support in terms of continued volunteering. However, a few scholars have considered other carryover effects of major sport event volunteering, including the generation of human capital in terms of skills and knowledge that may benefit individuals and the broader community (Blackman, Benson, & Dickson, 2017; Nichols & Ralston, 2012; Schnitzer, Kristiansen, & Hanstad, 2018); the development of positive attitudes of volunteers to the particular population served by the event (i.e. LGBTQ athletes [Jarvis, 2017] and athletes with a disability [Paradis, Misener, McPherson, McGillivray, & Legg, 2017]); and, benefits to local sport clubs from members volunteering (Skirstad & Kristiansen, 2017). This work helps to expand the conceptualization of the volunteer legacy of major sport events and provides a springboard for still further investigation that captures additional impacts.



Nonetheless, there are challenges to studying the volunteer aspect of event legacy, including access to volunteers before, during and after the event, and the collection of relevant volunteer profile data and volunteer management measures. These and other challenges may be addressed by a commitment from the host organization to understanding volunteer legacy as part of the event, and so building in research and evaluative mechanisms that may capture the volunteer experience and carryover effect (see also Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Shipway, & Smith, 2016). With the wealth of community volunteers who contribute to an effective event, this may be one of the most importance legacies to consider. Continued insight into the nuances and range of impacts of major sport event volunteering may inform meaningful event bidding and hosting policy, planning, and execution, and legacy that remains longer than the event itself.

## Notes

1. Whether a sport event is ‘major’ may be relative to the host community – for example, the 2001 Jeux du Canada Games held in the London, Ontario region (and the focus of the 2009 paper), was the biggest sporting event ever held in that city of 336,500 (at the time of the Games). The ‘magnitude of the event ... resulted in significant economic benefits to the London area ... and helped to develop London as a sport tourism destination in Ontario, and increasing pride and spirit throughout the community’ (Jeux du Canada Games, 2001).
2. Doherty (2009) has been cited 148 times as of 31 December 2018.
3. Studies, or parts of studies, that examined the relationship between volunteers’ motives for being involved and their future volunteering intentions (Dickson et al., 2013; Hallmann & Harms, 2012; Koutrou & Pappous, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2018; Love et al., 2011; Mykletun & Himanen, 2016) are not reviewed here as they do not intentionally capture any effect of the event itself.

## Disclosure statement

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