

Sighted volunteers' motivations to assist people with visual impairments in freetime sport activities

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ABSTRACT

Gombás J. Sighted volunteers' motivations to assist people with visual impairments in freetime sport activities. *J Hum Sport Exerc.* Vol.8, No. Proc2, pp. S220-S227, 2013. Since the changing of the political and economic system in 1989-1990 in Hungary, volunteer movements have appeared all over the country. Volunteers of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds are engaged in a wide range of activities, wishing to add values to the lives of others in need, hoping to improve their micro or/and macro environment. Volunteering has also appeared in the field of sport, and the work of a large number of non-governmental sport organisations is strongly dependent on volunteers' participation. In the socialist era disability sports were neglected by the state. The new democratic state has been paying increasing attention to disability sports and volunteers have been a great asset in improving the accessibility of spare time sport activities. The present empirical research investigates which factors motivate sighted volunteers to join Hungarian Sports and Leisure Association for the Visually Impaired (Látássérültek Szabadidős Sportegyesülete, LÁSS). Results confirm that joining LÁSS was in few cases (N=3) attributed to having parental or other family relations with blind or partially sighted people. Respondents unanimously admit to have a wish to share the joy of physical activity with their visually impaired peers. **Key words:** VOLUNTEERING, FREETIME SPORTS, PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS.

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is a relatively new concept in Hungary. Before the 1989-1990 changes in the political and economic system, Hungarian citizens were obliged to devote a part of their free time to unpaid community work. The ideology according to which each member of the society had to make voluntary efforts for the community was controversial as participation in the activities of the, so called, 'communist Saturday' was obligatory. Volunteering, as it is understood in democratic cultures, started spreading in Hungary after 2001, which was the UNO year of volunteering (Bartal & Kmetty, 2010).

In related literature various definitions intend to determine what the concept of volunteering means. According to the definition of the Institute for Volunteering Research (2002 in Burgham and Downward, 2005) volunteering is any unpaid activity, which involves spending time doing something that aims to benefit individuals, or groups. Bartal (2005) defines volunteering as an activity, which the individual is involved in, based on his or her personal decision and free will, and is performed without having personal interests.

The present article introduces an empirical survey research conducted amongst volunteers (N=42) of Sports and Leisure Association for the Visually Impaired (Látássérültek Szabadidős Sportegyesülete, LÁSS). LÁSS is a Hungarian non-governmental organisation with headquarters in the capital city, Budapest. It was founded in 2006 with the aim of providing accessible spare time sport activities for youth and adults with visual impairments and sighted volunteers. Amongst the regular, weekly activities running, belly dancing, yoga and wall-climbing can be found. Moreover, LÁSS organises inclusive sport camps, such as a yearly ski camp, and regular one-day trips (hiking, tandem biking etc.).

LÁSS has an outstanding role in promoting regular physical activity amongst Hungarian people with visual impairments, since in Hungary sport is one of the least accessible and least inclusive areas of life. A significant part of low-vision adults refrain from being involved in group physical activities, because they are afraid of being excluded from the sighted group of fellows. Their fear of exclusion is, in many cases, nurtured by childhood negative experience. The concept of adapted physical activity is not yet well-known by sport professionals, and visually impaired students' inclusion in P.E. lessons is regarded with significant scepticism (Gombás, 2011). As a result, participation rates of blind and partially sighted youth and adults in sports are extremely low in Hungary, which fact is closely linked to the 'inappropriate knowledge of experts on disabled-specific areas of sport' stress Osváth et al. (2007). Compared to P.E. and professional sport, the accessibility of spare time sports appears to be less challenging. The previous statement is fully varified by the activity of LÁSS, as a blind individual does not need a qualified assistant for getting involved in recreational physical activity. The blind person joins the NGO for fun; there is no intention to become professional. It means that visually impaired participants and sighted assistants have some shared goals: to do sports in non-formal settings.

No Hungarian research has so far been conducted on why volunteers decide to devote their free time to doing physical activities with people with disabilities on a regular basis. The research introduced hereby aimed at investigating which factors motivate sighted people to volunteer and tried to find answers for the following research questions:

Do blind or partially sighted people's family members volunteer with more frequency than other people?

- Do sighted LÁSS volunteers serve as a model and consequently inspire their friends to join the NGO?

- Do expected study opportunities prompt voluntary engagement?
- Is volunteering expected to have positive benefits at work?
- Does a presupposed improvement of personality motivate voluntary involvement in the work of LÁSS?
- Are curiosity and/or sorrow for people with visual impairments fundamental motivating factors for volunteers?
- Is the love of sport a stimulus for volunteering?

The questionnaire, the results of which are in part introduced below, is the quantitative part of a more complex research. Researcher aims at getting a deeper insight into the topic of volunteer motivation by making interviews with volunteers in the future. By getting a deeper understanding of volunteers' motivations the overall aim of the research is to spread the experience of LÁSS, encourage a great number of sighted sport friends to assist their blind fellows and, in the long run, to found NGOs similar to LÁSS all over Hungary which results in an increased number of physically active blind people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Volunteers have an important role in the daily work of NGOs of all types: they help elderly people, religious communities, schools of different types and students of different ages and of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, people with disabilities, sport-related organisations and so on. Mirsafian & Mohamadinejad (2012) emphasize that voluntary work has a significant potential for 'overall social development'. Kim et al. (2010) underline that volunteers have a key position in the work force in the sport industry. Moreover, Engelberg et al. (2012) believe that the effective management of community-based sport cannot be achieved without the involvement of volunteers in the work of the organisations. Warner et al. (2011) also point out that not only NGOs rely heavily on volunteers, but their effort, time and energy are also essential for for-profit sport organisations. Moreover, Mihajlovic (2010) claims that sports clubs would not exist without the contribution of volunteers. Volunteers can add to the successful functioning of the organisations on various levels: apart from completing tasks like handing out T-shirts, water etc. at a sport event, they often save money for the organisations by providing their expertise in accounting, PR, marketing and so on (Chelladurai & Madella, 2006 in Warner et al., 2011). In order to recruit and retain the necessary number of volunteers, organisations should be aware of factors, which attract volunteers, of their needs and expectations concerning their voluntary work. Numerous experts believe that volunteers should be regarded as consumers, not as unpaid workers due to the fact that voluntary involvement is a leisure activity (Laverie & McDonald, 2007 in Warner et al., 2011).

Kim and colleagues in their article underline that investigations of volunteer motivation and recreation is a recent phenomenon. Furthermore, they claim that organisation working with volunteers must take into consideration that volunteer' motivations might be different from those of paid employees (Kim et al., 2010). Moreover, it is also valuable information why people decide to volunteer in sport-related settings. A deeper understanding of their motivations, however, improves the process of recruiting and retaining volunteers. As motivating factors, Mihajlovic et al. (2010) list altruism, empathy, affiliation/social contacts and positive benefits/experience gained during volunteering. Knobe & Prensky (1984 in Kim et al., 2010) believed that volunteer motivation has 3 main categories: utilitarian, affective and normative. By utilitarian incentives they meant indirect benefits, like the acquisition of new skills, derived from volunteering. Affective incentives, in their opinion, were all positive spiritual and mental changes resulting from positive interactions with other people and from the positive effect of the community on the individual. New friendships, for instance, or the sense of belonging to a certain community are such affective benefits. Normative incentives are of altruistic

nature and focus on helping others. Furthermore, a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation must be made (Engelberg et al., 2012). Intrinsic motivation is based on individual choice. In the context of volunteering it means getting involved in an activity because it is fun and/or interesting for the individual. Extrinsic motivation results in a separable outcome.

Clary et al. examined volunteer motivations from a functional point of view and determined 6 functions:

- Values function: the individual devotes time and energy to humanitarian and altruistic goals like helping others,
- Understanding function: volunteer wishes to learn about the world and to acquire new skills,
- Enhancement function: a psychological growth via volunteering,
- Career function: a wish to get career-related experience through voluntary engagement,
- Social function: a development of volunteer's social relationships,
- Protective function: the individual aims at addressing personal problems and decrease negative feelings through volunteering.

The functional factors determined by Clary and colleagues provided a guideline for composing the survey research presented in continuation.

Research has found that sport volunteers may have different motivations from other volunteers (Strigas & Jackson, 2003 in Surujlal, 2010). However, not much is known stress Engelberg et al. (2012) 'about the nature of sport volunteer commitment and, more specifically, its dimensionality and targets'.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Participants

Respondents (N=42) were contacted and recruited via the mailing list of LÁSS, and had access to the questionnaire on Google Docs. Responding was voluntary. In this stage of the empirical research no demographic data were collected, as a more focused and detailed analysis of individual cases is planned for the following stage of interviews. No question inquired about age, but LÁSS has registered volunteers only over 18. It is worth mentioning that the relatively low number of respondents can be attributed to the fact that volunteering in sports on a regular basis with disabled people is not yet characteristic in Hungary. Moreover, LÁSS finds it extremely important to promote direct contact among sighted volunteers and their visually impaired folks, which means that although many volunteers complete tasks like giving a hand in PR and marketing, web design, fundraising etc., but their primary activity is in every case doing free time sports with a blind or partially sighted fellow.

Measures

Data collection was carried out via an online questionnaire during November 2012. Some of the motivating factors examined appear in Clary et al.'s Volunteer Functions Inventory; however, items focusing on volunteering with people with visual impairments were added. The questionnaire contains 29 multiple choice and Lickert-scale items. No open questions are included, but for 3 questions respondents have the opportunity to give a detailed answer under the category 'other'.

When composing the set of questions one of the guiding criteria was length. As the questionnaire is the initial step of a complex investigation, and researcher wishes to work with the same sample in the future, it was important not to put an extra burden on respondents. Furthermore, the form was designed to be user-friendly and easy to use; therefore each different set of questions was headed by clear instructions. The

online form was designed to be fully accessible for the blind researcher who worked with the questionnaire as well as the database with the aid of a screen reader.

Analysis

Since the present article focuses on the issue of volunteer motivations, only results of the related 15 items of the 28-item questionnaire, the ones which sought answers for the research questions listed in the introduction, are hereby presented. Respondents were asked to mark on a 1-5 likert scale to what extent each statement is characteristic of their voluntary involvement, 1 meaning not at all, 5 meaning fully characteristic. As regards volunteering, peer and parental influence must be investigated. 42% (N=18) say their engagement was not at all connected to having friends who volunteer and only 17% (N=7) claim to have been fully motivated by their friends. It is conspicuous that only 3 respondents confirmed to have joined LÁSS due to having blind or partially sighted family members.

4 of the 15 items are specifically related to volunteers' attitudes to blind and partially sighted people. The research aimed at finding out if sorrow for the target group was included amongst volunteers' motivations. 17 respondents marked 1 and 16 respondents marked 2, meaning that sorrow for blind and partially sighted people is not at all or is hardly present in their case; one single respondent confirmed, marking 5, that sorrow is a fundamental stimulus of his/her voluntary engagement. 25 out of the 42 respondents agreed that curiosity about how people with visual impairments live strongly motivated them and 0 said curiosity had no importance at all in their case. As regards openness towards people with disabilities, almost 60% (N=24) confirm to have become more open concerning disability, which implies their former worries or fear have parallelly decreased.

A sport-specific result of the research is that the majority of respondents (N=30) confirmed with a 5 that sharing the joy of physical activity fully motivates their voluntary participation. 11 respondents marked with a 4 that it is also important for them. 1 respondent chose 3 and no one marked 1 or 2, meaning that sport is a stimulus LÁSS volunteers have in common.

Opinions concerning the statement 'As a volunteer I can acquire skills and knowledge which are beneficial for my career' are really varied. Of the 42 respondents 11 confirmed that no new skills at all he or she acquired as a volunteer can be benefited from at work, 7 respondents marked 2, 8 marked 3, 9 marked 4 and 7 believe that voluntary experience really supports them at work by providing them a pool of new skills. Great differences can be observed in respondents' experience concerning the acquisition of new skills. 11 respondents marking 1 and 5 marking 2 claimed that experience gained during volunteering does not contribute to their success at work. Proportions are similar on the positive end of the scale as, though only 5 respondents answered with a 5, 13 gave a 4 meaning that volunteering did enrich their work skills.

As most research on volunteers' motivations underline, the present survey also proves that altruism and volunteerism are closely connected: 35 out of 42 respondents make all possible efforts to help others. As for positive psychological benefits, altogether 31 volunteers marking 4 and 5 feel to have an increased self-esteem thanks to their voluntary engagement and only 3 said it has not at all been influenced by volunteering. Compared to self-esteem, ego defence shows a contrastive picture: volunteering and personal negative feelings and problems appear to have no connection at all in the lives of 31 respondents.

Table 1. On a 1-5 scale, please, mark to what extent the following things motivated you to become a volunteer. 1 means that the statement is not at all true in your case, 5 means that it is totally characteristic. Of course, the numbers in between can also be used.

	1 (no at all true for me)	2	3	4	5 totally true for me)	Total number of respondents
1. Some of my friends are volunteers.	18	4	4	9	7	42
2. I'm interested in how people with visual impairments live.	0	1	3	13	25	42
3. As a volunteer I can acquire skills and knowledge, which are beneficial for my career.	11	7	8	9	7	42
4. Volunteering has made me aware how lucky I am compared to lots of other people.	6	6	7	14	9	42
5. Volunteering has been increasing my self-esteem.	3	3	5	18	13	42
6. Thanks to my volunteer experience I'm turning with increased openness towards people with disabilities.	3	2	4	9	24	42
7. I believe it is important to help other people.	0	1	2	4	35	42
8. I'm sorry for blind people.	17	16	6	2	1	42
9. I'd like to share the joy of doing sports with people with visual impairments.	0	0	1	11	30	42
10. The experience gained during volunteering contributes to my success at work.	11	5	8	13	5	42
11. Volunteering means an escape for me from my own problems.	28	8	4	2	0	42
12. As a volunteer I feel to be needed.	2	3	16	11	10	42
13. Voluntary work looks good in my CV.	22	6	U7	3	4	42
14. Without volunteering I wouldn't be too active in my free time.	26	7	5	4	0	42
15. My voluntary work is more useful for the society than my paid work.	14	5	9	10	4	42

DISCUSSION

As in Hungary no other research has investigated the role of volunteering in the spare time sport participation of people with visual impairments, a comparison of data is impossible. This fact explains the necessity of continuing the research. When investigating motivations, it is essential to find out why volunteers decide to join a particular NGO, club, project etc. As answers gained in this first phase of the research show, only 0.7 % (N=3) of volunteers confirmed to have joined LÁSS for having a blind or partially sighted family member. This result is especially conspicuous if we compare it with Kim et al. (2010)'s findings, which claim that in the case of organisations serving children with special needs parents, siblings and other family members are an essential resource of volunteers. However, it must also be noted that LÁSS members are without exception over 18. Consequently, the distinct experience may originate in the different age groups the NGOs work for.

One of the most interesting questions for the researcher was whether sorrow is present in respondents. Though in some cultures this factor may not be valid, in Hungary people with disabilities still often face sorrow expressed for them by their non-disabled fellows.

Questions related to the benefits of volunteering on the individual's career show that members of the sample have highly different impressions. While Bartal & Kmetty (2010) in their research found that work-related motivation is no tan important factor amongst Hungarian volunteers, the data collected from LÁSS volunteers shows they feel volunteerism is useful in their career. However, more than half of respondents believe that including volunteering in their CV has no importance at all.

CONCLUSIONS

Each and every individual, irrespective of his or her physical or mental abilities, has the right to take an active part in sports (Földesiné, 1997). Thus in a high number of countries around the world people with disabilities are not yet provided the necessary adaptations. Blind and partially sighted people's sport participation rates are extremely low in Hungary. Their physical activity levels can only be increased if efficient stimuli, accessible opportunities, a wide range of choice and the necessary human resources are at their disposal. It is also clear that a high number of sports, e.g. running, biking, skating, skiing, hiking etc. are only accessible with the help of sighted assistants. Consequently, the number of visually impaired participants and that of sighted guides in many cases must be the same. In the context of leisure it is not realistic to expect to have such a high number of qualified professionals. The enthusiasm and openness of sighted volunteers is thus indispensable and is an available and cost-efficient solution for providing the necessary help for those in need.

The present article has introduced findings of a quantitative research, which is meant to serve as a basis for further and deeper investigation into the field of volunteering with people with visual impairments. In the following phase of the research semi-structured interviews are going to be conducted with the aim of collecting further demographic data about volunteers, getting a deeper understanding of what benefits their voluntary involvement has for them and with the goal of understanding how regular, personal contact with people with visual impairments affects their personality. The research is based on the author's strong belief that regular, personal contact among disabled and non-disabled people and their joint participation in leisure activities is a tool that promotes blind and partially sighted people's social inclusion.

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