Volunteer selection and social, human and political capital: a case of Beijing 2008

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Sport Volunteer Research Network
Agenda

- Importance of volunteer selection for sport events
- The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games
- Theories of social, human and political capital
- Volunteer selection and theories of capital
- Research methodology
- Selecting volunteers for Beijing 2008
- Discussions and Conclusions
- Implications for sport event managers
Importance of volunteer selection to sport events

- Volunteers play a vital role in the success of events;
- An Olympic tradition to use volunteers for staging the event (Allen et al., 2002; Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, 2001);
- Managerial issue: selecting ‘Right’ candidates for the ‘right’ job.
The Beijing 2008 Olympics

5 types of volunteers:
- Games-time volunteers – 70,000
- City volunteers – 400,000
- Society volunteers – 1,000,000
- “Towards Olympics” volunteers, including those volunteered for Good Luck Beijing Test Events
- Pre-Games volunteers – 1,600
- In addition, cheerleading volunteers – 200,000

70,000 Games-time volunteers selected from more than 1,327,038 applications;

83.43% from university students – the main volunteer force.

(Source: Official Reports of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, 2010: Volume III)
Social capital theory

- The core ideas of social capital:
  - “social networks have value” (Putnam, 2000: 19), and
  - social networks/contacts “can increase productivity (both individual and collective)” and “affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (Putnam, 2000: 19; Coleman, 1998; Bourdieu, 1988).

- Three basic functions of social capital (Portes, 1998: 9):
  - as a source of social control,
  - as a source of family support, and
  - as a source of benefits through extra-familial networks.
Human capital theory

- Purposely invested: education, skills, knowledge, personal experiences and internal migration (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Schultz, 1961).
- Can also enhance productivity and competitive advantage for better job opportunities (Putnam, 2000; Schultz, 1961);
- Entails attributes for achieving an organisation’s vision.
Is the very power that others perceive on a politically involved citizen or a political symbolic object, the credit of which is founded on trust, belief and obedience in and through representation – political processes, which generates political outcome that has positive and/or negative feedback effecting on the future formation of political capital of the person or the object.

(Source: adapted from Birner & Wittmer, 2000: 301)
Volunteer selection and theories of capital

- The role of social, human and political capital in defining the potential for volunteering
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- The role of social, human and political capital in defining the potential for volunteering.
- The role of social, human and political capital in volunteer selection.

Social Capital

Human Capital

Political Capital

Social Capital
Volunteer selection and theories of capital

- The role of social, human and political capital in defining the potential for volunteering

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- The role of social, human and political capital in volunteer selection
Research Methodology
A constructivist qualitative approach

Data Collection: documentation and ...
Between BOCOG and the universities, this Olympics adopted a stadium-university docking system. A university was responsible for the volunteering at one or two nearby Olympic stadia. For example, Beijing University has a large population of students. All the volunteers for the stadium on campus (the Table-tennis Stadium) were mainly their students. At the same time, the university also docked with the Bird Nest (the National Stadium) and the Water Cube (the National Swimming Centre) – providing volunteering for these main stadia […] This docking system was not only efficient but also focused. It was easy to manage, so the outcome of the actual operation was very positive.

-- Henry (Interview with a BOCOG official)
Other universities…had a small quota of volunteers…not like Renmin University in that we had a large quota of volunteers, so our students had more chances of being selected as an Olympic volunteer.

-- Charlie (Interview with an university volunteer manager)
Volunteers selection for Beijing 2008 (2)
Volunteer training and Certification

- You (the volunteers) **must** first of all complete the general training **before being eligible to** participate in the selection tests. The selection tests examined whether you were qualified in the areas of the general knowledge, foreign languages, as well as voluntary spirit and the specialist skills that you are good at.

  -- Betty / Interviews with a BOCOG official

- **No training, no volunteering.** Those who cannot pass the exams and interviews would not be permitted to take assigned volunteering positions.

Volunteers selection for Beijing 2008 (2)
Volunteer training and Certification

The training as a whole, somebody might think it rigorous, but I think it’s full of flaws. To us, specialist volunteers, we did submit applications online and then…most of the exam paper was left blank…well, not exactly that I was forced but it was the fact that I wanted to volunteer very much at the beginning, but when I found out that I was only there to make up numbers then I didn’t want to…

-- Luna (FG/ Student volunteers/ Renmin U-2)
Volunteers selection for Beijing 2008 (3) 
Political background and Security checks

- If a university student was a student prefect, his or her capabilities surely would be reflected during the selection.
  -- Simone (Interviews/ University volunteer managers/ CAU)

- After passing the political background check, one was then qualified as a volunteer.
  -- Robert (FG/ Student volunteers/ CAU-1)

- After the interview, there were political background checks. We could not have a volunteer who was, or was related to, a terrorist, racist or had other dangerous records. All of these got checked. Then, an Olympic volunteer was selected.
  -- Henry / Interviews with a BOCOG official
Discussions

- Followed a conventional practice: the use of university students as volunteers for mega events hosted in China;
- Ensured control over these volunteers;
- Top rankings, docking universities;
- Social capital plays a vital role in providing more direct opportunities for its possessors in participation;
- Skills in foreign languages and experiences of volunteering were the determining factors;
- Students’ possession of political capital played a deciding role in enhancing or diminishing their opportunity of being selected as a volunteer.
Conclusions

- Each capital contributed to volunteers’ successful selection at different stages;
- Human capital was valued more importantly than social and political capital.
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- Each capital contributed to volunteers’ successful selection at different stages;
- Human capital was valued more importantly than social and political capital;
- The selection of volunteers contributed to the successful stage of Beijing 2008.
Implications for sport event managers

- Select a social group that carries sufficient knowledge and skills as the main volunteer force;
- Undertake ‘rigorous’ process(es) to select ‘right’ volunteers within the group;
- Where security becomes a major concern, check up volunteers’ political background (?)
- Stage successful sport events through volunteer
References


Thank you for listening!

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Any questions?