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DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES

EXPLORING THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING AT THE OLYMPIC AND YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

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Tuesday, October 8th 2019 at 13u

Promotion Room D2.01, campus Etterbeek

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ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

Volunteering is an effective approach to involve the general public to actively participate in sport mega-events. For example, 70,000 volunteers participated in the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games, making them an important stakeholder in delivering a successful event. Legacy promises claim that volunteers will be forever changed by their Olympic experiences, benefitting them in terms of positive life experiences (2016 Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games), skills enrichment and employability (2016 Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games), greater interest in the Olympic values and the Olympic Movement (2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games) and an improved volunteer network with more opportunities (2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games). However, relatively little research has followed-up on the actual impact on Olympic volunteers. Therefore, this PhD aims to explore if, to what extent, and how volunteering at the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games has impacted the volunteers in the long-term.

This dissertation includes three studies to understand the long-term impact arising from Olympic volunteering in terms of memory, perception, attitude, and behaviour. For the purpose of this PhD study, three cases were selected, including the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2010 Singapore Youth Olympic Games and the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected four, eight and ten years after the closing of the sport mega-events, respectively. Study 1 investigated why some individuals continue to volunteer following their sport mega-event experience and others do not in the scope of social exchange theory. Study 2 adopted a broader view of potential long-term impacts, including not only behaviour change, perceived benefits and costs, but also the memory of the volunteer experiences and the interest towards the Olympic Movement. Study 3 further explored the transition from past volunteer experiences to present memories of those experiences.

In sum, this PhD study revealed that volunteering at the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games is a participatory experience that creates long-term impacts among the young volunteers, to varying degrees, including memory, perception of benefits and costs, attitude towards the Olympic Movement, and subsequent volunteer behaviour change. This PhD extended the existing findings that the impact of volunteering at the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games can be prolonged even four, eight, and ten years after the event. It is the first set of studies to directly adopt the concept of memory within sport event volunteering to link the past, present and future. Memory as a central analysing tool is considered as useful, thereby, establishing a connection between Olympic volunteering and subsequent impacts. Several practical implications are formulated for the stakeholders interested in creating long-term impacts for sport mega-event volunteers.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Yan Wang is a doctoral student within the Sport & Society (SASO) research group at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She obtained her master's degree in Sport Event Management at the Shanghai University of Sport (SUS) in China. Following graduation, she started her academic career at SUS. Her main research interest focuses on the management of sport events. Yan enrolled at the VUB in October 2015. In her doctoral research, she was inspired by her own experience as an Olympic volunteer at the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games to explore the long-term impact of the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games. During her study at VUB, she was awarded the International Olympic Committee PhD Research Grant.

