ERPA 2014

English language training volunteer program as a new reality for Russia and its social benefits

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to define the achievements of educational project as volunteer intangible legacy of the 27th World Summer University Games, taking place July 6-17 in Kazan, Russia and to prove its positivity. The sample of volunteers training educational project “English4U” is explored to identify how volunteering experience generates public investment. Combined methods as questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, documentary research and on-site observations were used for the investigation. The research project highlighted the event organizers’ exceptional professionalism and high level of the event participants’ qualifications. The project showcased an opportunity to generate wide social capital and greatly improve project members’ chances on the job market as result of skills developed during the event.

Keywords: English language training; educational project; social benefits; volunteer’s legacy; university games; volunteering

1. Introduction

Hosting of mega sports events has become a matter of national pride importance for host countries. The value-added benefits of hosting large-scale events include the promotion of foreign direct investment, new infrastructure developments, and other social, economic and environmental improvements. The subject of sports and cultural events are not new for academic research. We offer an overview of studies that measure impact of large scale events on public investment. Mega-sports events serve as marketing tool to promote products and services of the host

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country in order to acquire new businesses and attract visitors (Mules and Dwyer, 2005). Hosting major sporting event advances the host-country in the minds of people all over the world and promotes a country’s culture (Preuss, 2005). Cultural and social festivals surrounding the Olympics increase the knowledge about a country’s culture (Atkinson et al, 2008). Consequently, mega sporting events are one-time opportunities which have important image impacts (Richards and Wilson, 2004) the tourism industry in the host country gains from this improved international destination image (Mules and Dwyer, 2005): new physical tourist attractions, upgraded and new hotels, better public transportation, and better knowledge in the tourism service industry (Preuss and Solberg, 2006), on national level countries mega events stimulate urban planning, regeneration and renewal (Preuss, 2007). All of these positive impacts can contribute to a long-term positive legacy of the event on a host city. The development of the host city (country) often goes faster than normal because public and private investments are secured on time as a result of financial commitments from central government and local sports organizations, backed by consensus between politicians and businessmen. Taking into consideration the meaning of the legacy as a lasting, long-term benefit on a regional or national scale, we note that creation of sustainable legacies is one of the purposes of the sport. It is usually regarded as the positive benefit rather than the negative impact.

As noted earlier, every city (country) that hosts the world sport events captures worldwide attention. Therefore, Kazan (Russian Federation) had a lifetime chance to create a unique set of environmental, social and economic legacies that can change a city, a region, and a nation forever. Defining volunteer legacy as the subject of our research we consider that intangible legacies are not visible as tangible, but are no less important. It is widely recognized by researchers and planning organizations that mega sport events such as the Olympic Games and world university games would be harder to organize and carry out without the volunteers. A new type of volunteer activity, a volunteering in a major-sport event, is gaining international attention and recognition. Thousands of people volunteer to help organize and deliver world’s biggest sport events. The opportunity to become part of this exciting and special team is not to be missed. The 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester required 10,500 volunteers (Ralston et al., 2005): up to then the largest group of volunteers assembled in the UK in peacetime. The 2000 Sydney Olympics used 70,000 volunteers in total (Cashman, 2006) and the 2012 London Olympics involved 70,000 volunteers. This idea was confirmed by 20000 sport volunteers and about 250000 city volunteers in 26th Summer Universidad Shenzhen, China 2011. Close to 20,000 people were chosen to become volunteers for the XXVII World Summer Universiade 2013 in Kazan (Russia) and 25,000 in 2014 Sochi Olympics.

1.1. Universiade volunteers: Case study background

Review of the history of the project. The hosting of Universiade sport games was a defining moment in the history of Kazan and Russian federation. It provided a unique opportunity to initiate long-lasting and positive changes and to promote positive legacies. However positive legacy cannot simply happen by itself. It requires strong partnerships between city leaders, the organizing committee of the games, regional and national authorities, local communities, commercial partners and, of course, international sports federations and FISU family. It is obvious that the success of the XXVII World Summer Universiade 2013 in Kazan (Russia) was possible due to close collaboration between the government institutions and non-government organizations. However, everything new is a well-forgotten old. We believe that the volunteering concept is a combination of the best traditions of the soviet and Russian volunteering experiences – “dobrovolshestvo” and advanced world technologies. We agree with the statement that low level of participation in volunteer organizations is explained as the communist legacy (Study on Volunteering in the European Union. Final report, 2010). And it is evident that there have been very strong increases in the number of volunteer organizations over the past decade in Russian Federation.

Research shows that volunteers with strong foreign language skills and knowledge of the cultural differences of visiting delegations were highly valued at the event. These qualities were very important due to the arrival of a large number of international athletes, public sector officials and media representatives. Besides, English was declared the official language of event. According to the document ”Minimum Requirements for Winter and Summer Universiade FISU” (International University Sports Federation), in the most functional areas volunteers offering a broad selection of languages (particularly English, French and the host language) were required to act as liaison officers and to staff administrative centres especially for heads of delegations and team sports. Other areas where
English speaking volunteers were necessary include VIP, team sport attaché positions, language services, press centre, accreditation centre, the Universiade village, FISU and VIP hotels, transportation etc.

English language has become the main means of communication in many multilingual countries and these countries experience little to no difficulties when organizing and hosting global sport events. Unfortunately the level of English language knowledge and comprehension among soviet citizens was quite low. Evidently Russia is a completely different place these days than it was in Soviet times. This situation changed in 1990s when Russia opened to the world. In the present age of globalization almost every job in Russia requires some level of English proficiency. Globally English is the language of business, sport and scientific research. Language learning is a question proposed for solution. Many young Russians now take English language classes at school and universities while trying to master basic conversational skills.

Therefore English language training volunteer programs are a relatively new reality for Russia. Moreover the language training program for staff and volunteers involved in the Universiade was the most important. Event volunteers should be highly qualified professionals. They should make guests’ visit more comfortable while helping to form their positive attitude about Russia. Language education was necessary for volunteers as it guarantees the success of the worldwide event. It was very important to create a special language training project for volunteers. The concept of the XXVII World Summer Universiade volunteer training program was developed in 2010 after the volunteer department of Executive Committee of the 27th Summer Universiade Kazan 2013 had identified quantity, roles and key staff positions. At the same time the educational project “English4U” was set up as a foreign language teaching program for volunteers of the 27th Summer Universiade Kazan 2013. Graduates of the volunteer education program were trained to develop ability to understand and speak fluent English, express their opinion in English language, react adequately to typical life situations and read visual materials such as brochures, flyers, advertisements (Mardanshina, 2012).

A large number of students from Kazan’s colleges and universities expressed their desire to take part in the unique volunteer project. A unique aspect of the program was the involvement of native speaker tutors to improve English language skills of the aspiring volunteers. These language tutors were the participants of international scholarships such as “Algarysh” and “FLEX”. The project also involved several international students attending Kazan Federal University who also joined the tutoring program as event volunteers. This method was called “volunteers teach volunteers”. To aid the volunteer language tutoring process the organizers developed the “English 4U” (English for Universide) language training manual, a set of language training materials designed to improve the volunteers’ experience in assisting international visitors during the event. The manual combined the latest language teaching methods with available training technologies.

Volunteers had on-site exams (midterms) in the form of a business game which took place at one of the sports venues and hotels. They also had to showcase their English writing ability, listening practice skills, and act in real life-like situations such as making a phone call (Galishnikova, 2012). At the end of each season they took final exams. The final test was the prerequisite for those volunteers who wanted to obtain a staff volunteer position such as a delegation attaché. At the end of the season language project alumni got a certificate with grades and pins with the “English 4U” logo in three colours (golden, silver and bronze), indicating their level of language proficiency. As a result of the use of advanced language training methods and technology, aided by passion and enthusiasm of the organizers, the “English4U” project turned out to be a success and provided a unique platform to form dedicated teams of volunteers recognised for exceptional organizational skills, high quality of work and excellent knowledge of English language.

2. Methods

This research project examined the effects of the Kazan Universiade mega sport event and specifically the achievements of the volunteer training project as the legacy of the event. Descriptive statistics and factor analyses were applied in this research project. Combined methods were used for the investigation, which included questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews with project participants, fieldwork in the office of the executive committee, documentary research and investigation of the database. Initial interviews were conducted in 2010 with the coordinator and managers of the project to gain understanding of the management and operations of “English
4U” program. Researchers conducted interviews with two focus groups of (1) entry-level and (2) experienced project volunteers. Based on the feedback gathered during the initial interviews, the researchers were able to develop a detailed mail survey form which was distributed to over 150 active volunteers. The mail survey gathered 271 useable responses. Researchers used a five-point Likert scale format in the survey form. Also, a field for additional/open comments was included at the end of the survey form. Seventeen English language tutors were interviewed in 2011. Additional interviews were conducted in 2011 with the executive committee officers who had key responsibility for developing and managing the legacy of the Universiade Kazan 2013. The final questionnaire survey was held in 2013, after the Universiade.

3. Results: How to prove its positivity

The central question to be examined in this paper is to define the achievements of our educational project as volunteer legacy and to prove its positivity. We intend to use an experience-based scientific approach to analyse the process of modernization and development of training programs for volunteers. Data analysis illustrates that 352 respondents had expressed an interest in volunteering over the preceding three years. Participants of the educational project were chosen and could be regarded as active volunteers. Eighty five percent of respondents either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that they would be willing to volunteer more frequently after the games. Another eighty five percent has expressed wish to volunteer at a wider range of events or organisations after the games.

3.1. Volunteering and its social benefits

Executive committee of the XXVII World Summer Universiade Kazan 2013 provided opportunities for volunteers to acquire basic-level language qualifications in event volunteering, sports volunteering and events team leadership. They were provided training in how to complete a CV, an application form and interview skills. That’s why they can take a more active supervisory role in events. Some respondents want to continue volunteering because they took pride in involvement in summer Universiade Kazan 2013. This sense of achievement and their association with the global student sports event was reflected in the large number of volunteers in the focus groups. Volunteering at the Universiade became a matter of personal pride for many volunteers as they felt relevant and helpful to many attending international participants and contributed to improving the image of Russia in the eyes of international community. This is supported by researchers’ claim that mega events tend to result in significant emotional and psychological benefits for local residents. These benefits are represented in the heightened sense of national pride, improved self-confidence, or a festival atmosphere (Burgan and Mules, 1992). Moreover, major sporting events offer educational chances for the people involved in the organizational practices of the event (Preuss, 2007).

Volunteers’ participation in event activities and personal motivation to be a part of the mega sport event were key prerequisites for entering the “English4U” language training program. Executive committee provided them with the information and opportunities to participate as a volunteer in a wide range of events, to volunteer as much as they wanted, to pick the events they wanted to work, to keep them informed of events in Russian Federation. This enabled volunteers to lead an active and fulfilling life. Forty seven percent of the respondents ranked this as the most important reward from their volunteering experience. We consider this fact as one of the key achievements of our educational project. The 2013 Kazan Universiade provided a platform for many volunteers to make friends and establish long lasting relationships with their local and international counterparts. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to rank the importance of 22 different expectations from volunteering at events. In general the respondents perceived the impacts of the event in a positively light; however, this perception was not as strong in the period preceding the Universiade. The researchers concluded that the volunteering experience and specifically the “English4U” educational project provided great social benefit.
3.2. Developing skilled volunteer workforce

Volunteers developed skills which were useful in interpersonal relations and professional life. Like other language projects, “English4U” was very popular and its cultural aspect attracted those most of all. The present case study provides evidence of a volunteering legacy in the field of language learning. During the interviews the tutors said they were surprised at how quickly the volunteers learnt and at how extremely well-behaved, focused and responsive the volunteers were. At the same time the volunteers noted how much they benefited from learning English language from native speakers. The Universiade helped many volunteers gain a deeper understanding of the culture behind the language and place it in the context of the world.

Volunteers received free training courses and a certificate which should be of help with future employment. Unfortunately it is impossible to monitor the career paths of all volunteers to tell the impact of how their experience helped them achieve their professional goals. We believe that enthusiasm, experience, language skills, event skills and confidence of Universiade volunteers were of great value to the event organizers and sponsors. Volunteers’ image gained strong public approval and following. Improved language, interpersonal and intercultural skills have helped Kazan team of volunteers to continue their involvement at the winter Olympics 2014 in Sochi. We believe this is a real contribution to a volunteering legacy.

3.3. Volunteer management, volunteer training programme

“English4U” project management was developed. Its contribution for future events dealing with volunteers was noted by interviewees as the legacy of Universiade. Volunteers followed a structured, well-defined management structure which includes planning, monitoring and control. The research methodology was used at all stages of the project. The project, which included the function and activity of each participant, the coordination of work at each stage, the organization of the results presentation and the evaluation of the project was well structured. There were a number of consultations and workshops with the textbook authors and tutors. It was decided to make observations and publications on project results. After every language training season tutors and students were interviewed, the results were analysed by means of social network analysis theory and techniques and the data was collected.

Organizers carried out a detailed evaluation of the educational project “English4U”. The coordinator, manager of educational project assisted in the development of a full business plan for the programme showing how it might be rolled out. It was emphasized that language training was based on certain well-defined principles derived from linguistic science as well as psychological science. Methodology of teaching English in our project was based on the fundamental principles of didactics and also specific principles of psychology (Khusainova, 2012). The survey has shown high qualifications gained by volunteers through informal learning (learning in practice). These qualities have a high worldwide added value, and can improve the evidence base. A project in this field was highly appreciated by FISU and its value is out of dispute.

3.4. Investment in human capital

Research indicates that the most reliable social positive intangible impact affects individual level. Target groups of the project were active members of volunteer organization. Volunteers “Kazan 2013” was offered professional education, free language courses, as a great volunteer opportunity, as a part of motivation program. In addition to their economic benefits, voluntary activities had a variety of broader social impacts that deliver significant added benefits to volunteers. Now they have a chance to take on a leadership role or to become a team leader. The project also increased participation in sports, motivated students to take up a balanced combination of school and sport, contributed to good school results, supported the development of healthy lifestyles. The results of survey indicated that the activity of our team and the project itself as a part of volunteers training program can be regarded as an investment in human capital.
4. Conclusion

The aim of the research paper is to identify the evidence and measure legacy achievements of major sporting event. Sports development implications of public investment in major sports events are not well researched. Some ideas written by experts in the field of our interest have been founded and offered. “English 4U” project was developed as a perfect fusion of reliability and diversity in its different forms which include: common educational format for all regional volunteer centres Universiade 2013 in Russia; various age groups (from teenagers to "silver" age volunteers); short-courses “English 4U – Village” program for Universiade village staff; worldwide volunteer internships for the most successful project alumni: winter Universiade in Turkey 2011, summer Universiade in Shenzhen 2011 (China), Youth Olympic Games 2010 (Singapore), Innsbruck 2011 (Austria), APEC summit 2012 in Vladivostok (Russia). The combination of efficient technology of language teaching and the enthusiasm of the organizers of the project ensured a good result. Organized and supported by executive committee of XXVII World Summer Universiade Kazan 2013, initiated by volunteers “Kazan 2013” the project lasted for 3 years (7 seasons) engaging close to 50 volunteer tutors and hundreds of graduates all over Russia.

The uniqueness of the project is that in addition to the promotion of the ideas of volunteering the “English 4U” program enriched academic and educational process. The knowledge and skills gained during the program helped young people achieve success in their studies or professional lives. Our research and educational experience pointed out external evaluation of the project: relevance and importance of the project in preparation for the major sport event; organizers’ professionalism and participants’ qualification; activity of each member of the project in accordance with his individual capacity; use of knowledge from other areas. By means of engaging in the volunteer movement the country solves not only the internal task of training of future professionals, but also improves social problems, promote a healthy lifestyle, patriotism and sporting values as to encourage friendship, fraternity, fair play, perseverance, integrity, cooperation, and application among students, former volunteers, who will one day hold responsible positions—even key appointments—in politics, the economy, industry, and culture. (FISU - International University Sports Federation.2013)

Hosting the university game provided an opportunity to initiate long-lasting, positive changes in the history of Kazan and Russian federation. We consider that besides building event organization skills and enhancing Russia’s reputation as a destination for major events the Kazan Universiade increased the quantity and quality of volunteers. The evidence suggests that legacy ambitions could not be achieved without a long-term perspective. There has also been a focus on improving people’s chances on the job market through achievement of qualifications and skills development. Executive committee targeted a part of their volunteer training programs as well as desire to find a good job. This way long-term legacy was carefully planned and implemented.

Findings indicate that mega sport events give the opportunity to generate wide social capital, the achievements of our educational project are defined and its positivity is proved. Being the intellectual property of the executive committee “Kazan 2013” educational project “English 4U” as one of the most effective forms of volunteers training and management is a worthy legacy of the XXVII World Summer Universiade Kazan 2013.

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