

Article

Volunteer Management in Sports Tourism Events: Motivation and Satisfaction as Drivers for Repeat Participation

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Abstract: Effective volunteer management in sports tourism events depends on understanding motivations, segmenting profiles, and fostering satisfaction to ensure continuity and event success. The purpose of this study was to examine volunteer motivation, investigate differences in motivation based on gender and age, and identify key predictors of the intention to continue volunteering. The sample consisted of 390 participants (199 men, 191 women) aged from 18 to 68 who volunteered for the Madeira Island Ultra Trail (MIUT) and completed a survey one week following the event. Seven motivational dimensions were assessed using a questionnaire: community participation, personal development, job opportunities, volunteering tradition, esteem, egoism, and personal experiences. The results show that community participation (4.00 ± 0.79) and personal experiences (3.62 ± 0.82) were the most valued motivations, while job opportunities were the least valued (2.04 ± 1.05). Gender differences were found in some dimensions, with women generally rating motivations higher, except for job opportunities. Age also influenced motivation, with younger participants (<35 years) showing higher ratings for most dimensions. A multiple linear regression analysis identified community participation ($\beta = 0.311$; $p < 0.001$), personal experiences ($\beta = 0.289$; $p < 0.001$), egoism ($\beta = -0.215$; $p = 0.006$), volunteering tradition ($\beta = 0.126$; $p = 0.023$), and age ($\beta = 0.133$; $p < 0.001$) as significant predictors of the intention to repeat volunteering. The findings highlight the role of volunteers in promoting the event and the region as a sports tourism destination, emphasizing the importance of volunteer retention for event and destination success.

Keywords: volunteer management; trail running; motivation; satisfaction; intention to repeat



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1. Introduction

1.1. Volunteer Management in Sports Events: A Comprehensive Perspective

Volunteering in sports events is widely recognized as a critical component for the organization and execution of such events, particularly in large-scale contexts like mega-events [1,2]. Volunteers play key roles, ranging from logistical support to interacting with participants and spectators, making them one of the primary sources of human resources [3–6].

The Madeira Island Ultra Trail (MIUT) is one of the most prominent trail-running events in Europe, attracting both local and international participants. Unlike other sports events, MIUT requires long hours of commitment in challenging conditions, making volunteer involvement particularly demanding. This makes it an ideal case study for examining the factors that influence volunteer motivation and retention. Understanding why volunteers engage in MIUT can provide broader insights into endurance sports volunteering, which remains an underexplored area in the literature.

Research suggests that the quality of volunteer management in these large events is critical for the success of the event and the sustainability of volunteer programs, which can, in turn, influence the broader impact on tourism. However, unlike paid workers, volunteers do not receive financial compensation, which requires a management approach tailored to their motivations and needs. Effective volunteer management hinges on understanding these motivations and implementing strategies such as providing training, clarifying roles, offering recognition, and fostering a positive social environment [6–8]. Research suggests that these practices are essential for improving volunteer satisfaction, which, in turn, contributes to the success of the event and the continuity of volunteering in future events.

Kim, et al. [9] found that volunteers are more likely to feel satisfied with their work and develop strong commitment to the event when they perceive high levels of prestige associated with the event, which, in turn, increases their intention to continue volunteering for future events. This sense of prestige not only boosts volunteer commitment, but also enhances the destination's appeal, attracting both participants and tourists. The satisfaction of volunteers can positively influence visitors' perceptions of the event and the region, indirectly contributing to tourism growth. Similarly, Ralston, et al. [10] suggested that the involvement of volunteers could be enhanced by strengthening the infrastructure for volunteer recruitment and retention, particularly in terms of creating a sustainable legacy, which ties directly into the local tourism impact.

Studies on volunteer motivation in sports events have focused on specific contexts, such as national events or the Olympic Games. Several scales have been used in these studies. The Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) [11] identifies categories such as purpose, social interaction, external traditions, and commitment. The Olympic Volunteer Motivation Scale (OVMS) [6] focuses on motivations related to the Olympic movement, egoistic factors, and purpose. Lastly, the Volunteer Motivations Scale for International Sporting Events (VMS-ISE), developed by Bang and Chelladurai [12], is more comprehensive and includes factors such as leisure, material rewards, and external influences applicable to international events like the FIFA World Cup. Additionally, the research by Downward and Ralston [13] which studied the motivations and expectations of volunteers before the Commonwealth Games contributed to the understanding of volunteer motivations in sports events, particularly by exploring factors such as the desire to help and expectations for social experience.

To better understand volunteer motivation and retention in MIUT, this study is grounded in the following theoretical perspectives: (i) Self-Determination Theory [14], which explains how intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence volunteer engagement; (ii) Social Exchange Theory [15], which suggests that volunteerism is driven by perceived benefits in return for their efforts; and (iii) Social Capital Theory [16], which highlights the role of community bonds in sustaining volunteer commitment.

By integrating these frameworks, we provide a comprehensive understanding of what motivates volunteers in endurance sports events.

Managing volunteers in large-scale sports events requires a comprehensive approach, considering the diversity of volunteer roles, the clarity of their responsibilities, and appropriate recognition. According to Wisner, Stringfellow, Youngdahl and Parker [8], volun-

teer satisfaction is strongly related to these factors, with the implementation of effective management resulting in more efficient performance and a higher likelihood of repeated volunteering. Cho, Li and Wu [7] further emphasize that volunteers highly value management that offers opportunities for personal development and symbolic rewards, which strengthens their intrinsic motivation and commitment to the event.

1.2. Volunteer Profiles and Their Motivations

The diversity of volunteer profiles in mega-sporting events, such as the Olympics or the World Cup, demands detailed segmentation to optimize volunteer management. Alexander, et al. [17] identify three main profiles of volunteers in large-scale events: the “Obligated”, typically older and with limited involvement; the “Enthusiasts”, who are highly motivated and satisfied with their experience; and the “Semi-Enthusiasts”, who exhibit moderate motivation and commitment. Similarly, in smaller-scale sporting events, Angosto, et al. [18] identified similar profiles, including “Altruists” and “Community Supporters”, who are mainly driven by the social mission of the event, and the “Career-Oriented” participants, whose motivation is centered on professional development.

Segmentation by volunteer profile is critical for tailoring management strategies that meet the expectations and motivations of each group. Furthermore, Okada et al. [19] argue that cultural and demographic factors play a significant role in shaping volunteer motivations and satisfaction, as management strategies must be adapted to fit the cultural context of the volunteers. Eraslan, et al. [20] also suggest that autonomy in volunteer roles is important for fostering continued volunteer engagement, especially in smaller events where flexibility and involvement in decision-making are more feasible.

1.3. Motivation, Satisfaction, and the Intention to Repeat Volunteering

Motivation is a central factor influencing volunteer behavior, being shaped by both internal and external factors. Bavaresco, et al. [21] identified a range of motivations among volunteers, including the desire to contribute to a greater cause and the pursuit of personal or professional development. While extrinsic rewards, such as payment for services, play a secondary role, intrinsic motivation is the primary factor in ensuring volunteer commitment [22–24]. The satisfaction derived from fulfilling voluntary work, the joy of helping others, and the sense of belonging to a community are key motivators that contribute to a positive experience.

Demographic factors such as age and gender also influence volunteer motivations and behavior. Renfree and West [25] observe that women tend to prioritize leisure and personal well-being, while men are often motivated by competitiveness and the opportunity to participate in major sporting events. Age also plays a role: younger volunteers typically prioritize social interaction and fun, while older volunteers are more often motivated by the social and community impact of the event [20].

The relationship between motivation, satisfaction, and the intention to repeat volunteering is complex. Research suggests that volunteer satisfaction increases when their motivations are adequately met during the event [9,26,27]. Organizational strategies that promote strong social support, personal growth opportunities, and social integration positively affect the volunteer experience. When personal goals align with organizational objectives, volunteers are more satisfied, reinforcing their commitment and intention to volunteer in future events [17].

Finally, the intention to continue volunteering is directly influenced by the quality of the experience, social interactions, and support received during the event. Bang, Bravo, Mello Figuerôa and Mezzadri [5] highlight that both initial motivation and satisfaction during the event play crucial roles in the decision to continue. Chiu, et al. [28] emphasize

the importance of a positive work environment and minimizing stress, which leads to a more satisfying volunteer experience, fostering retention and contributing to the success of future events.

In summary, the literature demonstrates that effective volunteer management in sports events requires a thorough understanding of volunteer motivations, segmentation of profiles, and practices that promote satisfaction and continuity. These elements are critical for the success of sports events, as volunteer management aligned with their expectations and needs enhances the overall experience, leading to more successful events.

Despite significant research on volunteer motivation and management in sports events, the current literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of how motivations vary by gender and age, as well as their influence on the intention to continue volunteering. Additionally, no studies have been conducted within the context of the MIUT, one of the most significant events that contributes to boosting tourism, the local economy, sustainability, sports, and community engagement, while globally promoting Madeira as a premier destination. The MIUT, attracting nearly 1000 tourists annually who specifically travel to participate, is a key driver for the regional economy, with the race involving around 3000 participants from 45 countries. This makes the event an important element in promoting sports tourism and enhancing the appeal of Madeira as a tourist destination [29]. Understanding volunteers' motivations and their impact on event success is essential for effective volunteer management.

Existing studies on volunteer motivation in sports events have primarily focused on large-scale events, such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup. These studies have provided valuable insights into the motivations and expectations of volunteers in globally recognized events. However, research on volunteer motivation in endurance sports, such as trail running, remains limited. Additionally, little attention has been given to how previous sports engagement influences an individual's decision to volunteer and continue volunteering in future editions of an event.

Given this gap, further research is needed to explore volunteer motivation in trail running, particularly within the context of sports tourism events, where volunteers often have a unique connection to the sport.

Thus, this study aims to answer the following key research questions:

- What are the primary motivations for volunteers at MIUT?
- How do demographic variables such as gender and age influence volunteer motivations?
- What factors contribute to the intention of volunteers to continue participating in future events?

Answering these questions will provide valuable insights into how volunteers engage with endurance sports events and how their retention can be optimized.

2. Materials and Methods

Based on the literature and theoretical framework, this study tests the following hypotheses:

H1. *Volunteers with stronger community engagement motivations are more likely to continue volunteering.*

H2. *Previous participation in sports increases the likelihood of repeat volunteering.*

H3. *Women and men exhibit different motivational patterns, with women placing higher importance on social and esteem factors.*

2.1. Sample

The sample comprised a total of 390 participants (199 men and 191 women), aged between 18 and 68 years (43.07 ± 11.02), who volunteered for the Madeira Island Ultra Trail (MIUT). One week after the event concluded, the organizers sent the survey via email to all volunteers, inviting them to participate in the study. Responses were considered valid if submitted within one month after the event. Only volunteers over 18 years of age who had worked as volunteers for a minimum of 8 h during the event were included in the study. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, that participation in the survey was voluntary, and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be ensured. Only individuals who provided informed consent were included in the final sample.

2.2. Instrument

All participants completed the Downward and Ralston [13] questionnaire on the motivations and expectations of volunteers at sports events, translated into Portuguese by Rodrigues and Soares [30]. The questionnaire consists of 33 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not important) to 5 (Extremely important). These 33 statements result in 7 dimensions: (i) community participation, (ii) personal development, (iii) job opportunities, (iv) volunteering tradition, (v) esteem, (vi) egoism, and (vii) personal experiences. The calculation of these dimensions is described in Downward and Ralston [13]. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.742 to 0.891. Demographic questions (gender and age), marital status, professional situation, educational background, and volunteering experience (yes/no) were also included. The intention to repeat the volunteering experience was evaluated on a scale of 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely yes). Participants were also asked to describe their volunteering experience in three words.

2.3. Statistical Procedures

The mean and standard deviation were used to characterize the sample with the study variables. MANOVA was applied to assess the effect of gender and age group on the dimensions. Age was categorized into three groups: <35 years, 36–50 years, and >50 years. Multiple linear regression using the stepwise method was conducted to determine the predictors of the intention to repeat the volunteering experience. The independent variables included in the model were the dimensions (community participation, personal development, job opportunities, volunteering tradition, esteem, egoism, and personal experiences), age, and gender. The significance level adopted was 5%. All statistical procedures were carried out using SPSS version 27.0.

3. Results

It is observed that the majority of participants in the study are male (51%), married or in a domestic partnership (48.5%), employed (81%), and hold a degree (57.9%). Approximately three out of four volunteers (73.6%) had volunteering experience in non-sporting events or activities (e.g., cultural events), and 79.2% had experience in sports events. The majority are connected to the trail-running sport (65.9%), specifically as athletes (30.3%), family members of athletes (14.1%), or former athletes (11%) (Table 1).

The dimensions of community participation (4.00 ± 0.79) and personal experience (3.62 ± 0.82) were the most valued by participants (Table 2). The dimension of employment opportunity was the least valued (2.04 ± 1.05), also showing the greatest variability in responses ($sd = 1.05$). On average, women rated all dimensions higher, except for the employment opportunity dimension, with statistical significances found only in three dimensions (volunteering tradition, esteem, and personal experience).

Table 1. Sample characterization (n = 390).

n (volunteer participants)	390
Sex (male)	51% (199)
Age (mean $\pm$ sd)	43.07 $\pm$ 11.02
Civil status % (n)	
Single or widowed	37.9% (148)
Married or in a de facto union	48.5% (189)
Divorced	13.6% (53)
Professional status % (n)	
Retired	2.1% (8)
Self-employed	7.7% (30)
Employee	81% (316)
Unemployed	2.1% (8)
Student	7.2% (28)
Academic qualifications % (n)	
Elementary School	1.3% (5)
Middle School	4.1% (16)
High School	36.7% (143)
Degree/Master/PhD	57.9% (226)
Volunteering experience % (n)	
Volunteering experience in non-sporting events (yes)	73.6% (287)
Volunteering experience in sporting events (yes)	79.2% (309)
Volunteering experience in previous editions of MIUT (yes)	72.1% (281)
Relationship with the event's sport—trail running	
None	34.1% (133)
Organizer/official	3.6% (14)
Athlete	30.3% (118)
Former athlete	11% (43)
Athlete's family member	14.1% (55)
Athlete's friend	3.3% (13)
Other	3.6% (14)

Table 2. Motivation dimensions: gender and age (mean $\pm$ standard deviation).

Dimensions (1–5)	Total (n = 390)	Sex		Age		
		Men (n = 199)	Women (n = 191)	≤ 35 (n = 86)	(36–50) (n = 203)	>50 (n = 101)
Community participation	4.00 $\pm$ 0.79	3.96 $\pm$ 0.82	4.05 $\pm$ 0.77	4.05 $\pm$ 0.86	4.01 $\pm$ 0.78	3.96 $\pm$ 0.77
Personal development	3.58 $\pm$ 0.97	3.47 $\pm$ 0.98	3.68 $\pm$ 0.95	3.97 $\pm$ 0.97 ***	3.51 $\pm$ 0.92	3.37 $\pm$ 0.99
Job opportunities	2.04 $\pm$ 1.05	2.09 $\pm$ 1.06	1.99 $\pm$ 1.03	2.81 $\pm$ 1.17 ***	1.89 $\pm$ 0.89	1.67 $\pm$ 0.88
Volunteering tradition	3.42 $\pm$ 0.97	3.33 $\pm$ 1.03	3.52 $\pm$ 0.89 *	3.50 $\pm$ 1.09	3.42 $\pm$ 0.93	3.35 $\pm$ 0.94
Esteem	3.55 $\pm$ 0.78	3.39 $\pm$ 0.84	3.72 $\pm$ 0.69 ***	3.84 $\pm$ 0.86 ***	3.50 $\pm$ 0.71	3.41 $\pm$ 0.80
Egoism	3.14 $\pm$ 0.96	3.10 $\pm$ 0.97	3.17 $\pm$ 0.96	3.41 $\pm$ 0.99 **	3.11 $\pm$ 0.92	2.96 $\pm$ 0.99
Personal experiences	3.62 $\pm$ 0.82	3.53 $\pm$ 0.86	3.71 $\pm$ 0.77 *	3.87 $\pm$ 0.77 ***	3.60 $\pm$ 0.78	3.43 $\pm$ 0.86

Legend: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Considering age groups, it was found that younger participants (<35 years) had, on average, higher values compared to the other two age groups. The differences were significant in all dimensions, except for community participation and volunteering tradition ($p > 0.05$). No significant interaction effects between gender and age group were found ($p > 0.05$).

It is observed that the majority of participants reported an intention to repeat the volunteering experience (94.4%). In the multiple linear regression, age, gender, and the seven dimensions (community participation, personal development, job opportunities,

volunteering tradition, esteem, egoism, and personal experiences) were integrated into the model as independent variables.

The predictors of the intention to repeat the experience were community participation, personal experiences, egoism, volunteering tradition, and age. The community participation dimension explained 15.8% of the variability in the intention to repeat the experience, the personal experiences dimension 3.8%, age 2.5%, egoism 1.5%, and volunteering tradition 1%. The association between the intention to repeat the volunteering experience was positive with all the predictor variables, except for egoism, which had a negative association (Table 3).

Table 3. Predictors of the intention to repeat volunteering (n = 390).

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	β	Change F	Sig	Standard Error of Estimate	Change R ² (%)	R ² Adjusted (%)
Intention to repeat the volunteering experience	Community participation	0.311	72.591	<0.001	0.155	15.8%	15.8%
	Personal experiences	0.289	16.029	<0.001	0.187	3.4%	19.1%
	Age	0.133	12.189	<0.001	0.210	2.5%	21.6%
	Egoism	−0.215	7.539	0.006	0.233	1.5%	23.1%
	Volunteering tradition	0.126	5.229	0.023	0.231	1%	24.1%

4. Discussion

Sporting events play a significant role in regional and national economies, tourism development, and brand promotion. Additionally, international sporting events are effective economic and promotional instruments for the host nations, utilizing worldwide media attention to improve their reputation and brand [31,32]. The MIUT is an example of a sporting event promoted by the autonomous region of Madeira, Portugal, which generates a positive economic impact on the region [29]. As a sports tourism event, MIUT not only generates direct economic benefits, but also contributes to the promotion of Madeira as a key destination for outdoor tourism.

Given the economic, social, and political effects that these sports events have on the host city or region, volunteering is even more crucial because it helps the organization cut costs while also offering a variety of high-quality services that are more suited to the needs of the customer [19]. In the context of sports tourism, volunteers contribute to the broader experience by ensuring that visitors feel welcomed and informed, enriching the tourism appeal of the region.

The purpose of this study was to determine the motivational profile of MIUT volunteers and the main factors that might be linked to the intention to repeat the volunteering experience at future events, given the significance of volunteers in the success of athletic events. The demographic profile of MIUT participants in this study indicates a small male predominance, but balanced gender involvement. This gender profile was less balanced in earlier research on volunteering at major athletic events, with certain events having a higher proportion of women [33–35] and others having a higher proportion of men [36,37]. However, the perception of the advantages of engaging in unpaid work, like sports volunteering, in the context of the paid labor market is highly relevant to the development of volunteer tasks and is a determining factor in social sustainability. The underlying discipline of the sporting event may explain why the majority of volunteers are of one gender or the other [38].

Still, with regard to sociodemographic characteristics, we found a high level of education among the study participants, which suggests a highly qualified volunteer corps. This profile is consistent with previous studies on large-scale sporting events [33], which have also identified a trend towards volunteers with a higher level of education, and may be a

consequence of the role of universities in encouraging the integration of volunteering [39]. Educated volunteers play a crucial role in sports tourism events by enhancing the quality of services and facilitating cross-cultural communication with international participants, which can lead to an overall improvement in the destination's image.

Previous experience of volunteering at sporting events or other types of events can increase interest and participation in sporting events [40,41]. Furthermore, satisfaction with volunteering and the intention to repeat it may vary between individuals with different levels of experience [42]. A large number of MIUT volunteers who participated in this study had prior experience volunteering at previous sporting or other events. This high level of prior volunteer experience suggests a group with substantial experience and social capital. This trait can help with event management and improve the level of services delivered. Therefore, factors such as satisfaction with previous volunteering experience or previous sporting involvement may be related to continuing to volunteer at new events [41]. The transfer of volunteering efforts between events is supported, indicating the potential to stimulate community involvement through sports volunteering [43]. On the other hand, planned volunteers and on-site volunteers may have different effects on future volunteering aspirations. While on-site volunteers are more impacted by the advantages they encounter (such as social enrichment), planning volunteers' future intentions are greatly influenced by the expenses they incur (such as task overload) [44].

A key element in comprehending the dynamics of volunteering at MIUT is the noteworthy relationship that exists between volunteers and trail running. Active athletes, former athletes, athletes' families, and athletes' friends are some of the ways that this relationship shows up. The participants' deep connection to trail running can help to explain a number of their motivational and behavioral traits. First of all, the technical and cultural information gained from participation in the sport can enhance the quality of voluntary work. Volunteers who are or have been trail runners are more familiar with the needs of the athletes, the route's particulars, the technical difficulties, and the physical strain of competition. This innate understanding may lead to more sympathetic and efficient assistance for participants. Through a feeling of common identification, a past association with trail running might also increase dedication to the activity. Volunteers who have a strong connection to the sport typically view their involvement as helping to advance the activity they love as well as providing a service to the community. One of the reasons given by other research for helping at sporting events is a love for sports [12].

Volunteers' motivations are complex and can vary based on the characteristics of the event [45]. Regarding the motivations for participating in the MIUT, "participation in the community" emerged as the most valued dimension, followed by "personal experience". This result supports H1, confirming that community engagement is a crucial factor influencing volunteer retention [46]. The low score in the "job opportunity" dimension indicates that extrinsic motivations are less important to this group and that they do not see volunteering as a chance to acquire skills that will make them valuable in the job market. This result is the opposite of that found in other running events, such as the Florida Marathon, where utilitarian reasons, such as the advantages of work or professional orientation, and intentional reasons were the main motivating factors for volunteers [47].

The findings also support H2, indicating that previous engagement in sports influences continued volunteering. The strong relationship between MIUT volunteers and trail running suggests that individuals with prior involvement in the sport are more inclined to remain engaged in volunteer activities, reinforcing the importance of leveraging existing sports communities for recruitment and retention efforts.

Regarding H3, women, on average, value all dimensions more, except the opportunity to work, with statistically significant differences in "tradition of volunteering", "esteem",

and “personal experience”. This suggests that women have diverse and intense motivations for volunteering at sports events, placing greater emphasis on social bonds and personal recognition compared to men. These findings align with prior studies that show that women are more likely to volunteer to enhance their social capital and expand professional networks [13,48]. Additionally, they frequently see volunteering as a means of boosting their social and personal capital, which could help them move beyond barriers to community involvement and employment [13]. Although this effect decreases with age and increases in nations with better gender equality, women are more likely to view volunteering in sports as a favorable signal on their professional record [38]. Although the motivations that lead women to volunteer at the MIUT are not entirely the same as those presented in other studies, this information is relevant for the event’s managers, who should look for differentiated management strategies according to gender.

Younger volunteers (<35 years) show higher values on average in several dimensions compared to the other two age groups, with significant differences in all dimensions except community participation and tradition of volunteering. While older volunteers may have more consistent and community-focused motivations, this pattern may be related to the age group’s need for experiences and personal development. In other research, young volunteers most frequently cite gaining career-enhancing abilities as one of their motivations [49,50].

While this study primarily analyzes gender and age differences, future research should consider socioeconomic factors as well. Volunteers from different income levels and educational backgrounds may have distinct motivations and expectations. Understanding these additional factors could lead to more inclusive and effective volunteer management strategies.

A particularly relevant result for MIUT managers is the high rate of intention to repeat the volunteering experience, which is a very positive indicator of overall satisfaction with the event. The predictive model identified five significant factors: participation in the community, personal experiences, age, selfishness, and a tradition of volunteering. The most influential factor in the intention to repeat volunteering was participation in the community, explaining 15.8% of the variability. This suggests that volunteers significantly value the feeling of contributing to the community and strategies that emphasize the community impact of the event can increase volunteer retention. Other studies have also found this to be a significant contributing factor to the occurrence of repeat volunteering [12,51]. The community-oriented nature of volunteering aligns well with the social and tourism aspects of the event, as volunteers who contribute to local development can enhance the visitor experience and foster long-term engagement with the destination. Personal experiences ranked as the second most explanatory factor for repetition, suggesting that the quality of the experiences had during the event was essential for retention. The volunteering experience can be influenced directly by satisfaction and commitment and indirectly by a sense of community [52]. The negative relationship between “egoism” and the intention to repeat suggests that altruistic motivations are more likely to generate long-term commitment.

4.1. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide practical implications for event organizers and volunteer managers. Given that community engagement is a predominant motivation for volunteers, recruitment strategies should emphasize the impact of volunteering on both the event and the broader community, fostering a sense of belonging and contribution. To enhance retention, organizers should implement training programs that highlight the professional and personal benefits of volunteering, ensuring that volunteers perceive value beyond their immediate participation.

In addition, volunteer programs should be structured to address gender-specific motivations, recognizing that esteem, recognition, and personal experience play a crucial

role, particularly for women. Tailoring engagement strategies to these differences can enhance participation rates. Moreover, since many MIUT volunteers have strong ties to trail running—either as athletes, former athletes, or supporters—managers should leverage these connections by partnering with trail-running clubs and associations to expand the recruitment base. Understanding volunteers' prior experience in the sport can also help in assigning roles that maximize their skills and improve service quality.

Furthermore, the significant presence of family members and friends of athletes underscores the importance of social networks in volunteer mobilization. These personal connections can contribute to the sustainability of the volunteer program through word-of-mouth recruitment and the strengthening of community ties, ensuring long-term engagement and continuity across event editions.

4.2. Study Limitations and Future Recommendations

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations, particularly its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for tracking changes in volunteer motivation over time. Additionally, as this study focuses on a single event, its findings may be influenced by the unique characteristics of the Madeira Island Ultra Trail (MIUT). To enhance generalizability, comparative studies across different trail-running events in varied geographic and cultural contexts are needed, as regional distinctions may shape volunteer motivations differently.

Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to assess how volunteer motivations evolve across different editions of MIUT, as the current cross-sectional approach only captures motivations at a single point in time. In addition, exploring the organization's support and the training provided to volunteers could offer deeper insights into how these factors influence satisfaction and long-term engagement. Finally, comparative studies across endurance events in diverse cultural contexts would further enhance our understanding of the broader dynamics of volunteer participation, identifying potential universal and event-specific motivational patterns.

5. Conclusions

This study enhances our understanding of volunteer management in endurance sports events by analyzing the motivations and commitment of MIUT volunteers. By testing three key hypotheses, this research provides a structured approach to understanding the primary factors influencing volunteer retention.

The results confirm that community engagement is a key driver of continued volunteer participation (H1), reinforcing the need for event organizers to foster strong social bonds among volunteers. Previous engagement in sports (H2) was also a significant predictor, suggesting that leveraging connections within the sports community can be an effective recruitment strategy. However, the findings regarding gender differences (H3) show that while women place higher importance on esteem and personal experiences, other gender-based variations were less pronounced than expected.

In terms of general findings, community participation and personal experiences emerged as the most valued motivational dimensions, while job opportunities were the least relevant, reinforcing the idea that social and emotional factors outweigh financial motivations. Motivational differences were observed based on gender and age, with women prioritizing volunteering tradition, esteem, and personal experiences, while younger volunteers placed greater emphasis on motivational dimensions such as egoism and personal benefits. The intention to continue volunteering was primarily influenced by community participation, personal experiences, egoism, and volunteering tradition, with community engagement being the most significant predictor.

By integrating these insights, event organizers can develop more effective volunteer management strategies, ensuring that recruitment, training, and engagement programs align with the diverse motivations of volunteers. Tailoring recruitment campaigns to different demographic profiles, strengthening community-based engagement efforts, and fostering strong ties with the sporting community through partnerships with trail running clubs and associations can enhance both volunteer satisfaction and long-term retention.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

MIUT: Madeira Island Ultra Trail

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