

## Article

# The Impact of the China Open 500 Event on Sense of Community: Comparisons of Volunteers' Pre- and Post-Event Perceptions

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**Abstract:** Volunteers at major sporting events have become a key element for the success of these events. Therefore, the organiser should know exactly those aspects that strengthen the bond between the sports volunteer and the event. The aim of the present research was to assess the change in volunteers' perception of community feeling at the China Open 500 tennis tournament. The sample was selected by using a purposive non-probability sampling procedure with a 99% confidence interval and a sampling error of 0.5% ( $n = 805$ ). The data collection tool was the structured questionnaire applied through a face-to-face personal survey of volunteers before and after the event. The proposed structural model for the perceived community feeling of the China Open 500 volunteers was confirmed via a second-order factor analysis. The results confirmed the existence of the six proposed factors: Administrative Consideration, Common Interests, Equity in Administrative Decisions, Leadership Opportunity, Social Spaces, and Competitiveness. The change in the volunteers' sense of community from the training phase to after the event shows that there is a direct link between a sense of community and the volunteer experience.

**Keywords:** sports events; human resource management; social capital; motivations; corporate social responsibility



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## 1. Introduction

With the increase in the number of sporting events and stakeholders, the value of sporting events goes beyond the mere competition of athletic achievements. Gradually in recent decades, factors that are now vital to any organisation have been brought to light, such as economic and cultural exchange and the enhancement of the human spirit [1–3]. In addition, numerous sporting events around the world promote not only the development of competitive sporting activities but also the sustainable development of the host city in economic, social, environmental, cultural, or artistic aspects [4]. For example, an influential sporting event involving a large audience and number of followers, etc., can encourage people to actively participate in sporting activities; similarly, a large-scale event with international influence can be of great value in strengthening international communication and exchanges and sharing the common culture of humanity. Therefore, the organisation of socially responsible sport events that enhance values that can be acquired by society as a whole has become increasingly important [5].

Although little time has passed since the inclusion and application of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory in sport, there is no doubt that it has been a catalyst for successful sport organisations [1,6,7]. Given this trend, organising a socially responsible and sustainable event has become a challenge for organising committees [8–10].

Nowadays, it is accepted that professional sports organisations are businesses by nature [11]. Therefore, the study of CSR has become one of the main focuses of attention in business management, and it is believed that corporations must assume a certain

level of social responsibility while providing products to consumers in order to obtain an economic benefit [12]. This statement is aligned with Carroll's generalisation [13–15] that social responsibility is widely accepted, i.e., that the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society places on businesses at any given time are accepted.

Freeman [16] established Stakeholder Theory as a strategic management theory with the aim of helping organisations (e.g., organising committee of a sporting event) to achieve their own sustainability. Several issues justify that this theory is suitable for framing our research. This theory states that an organisation should be understood in a pluralistic way. Therefore, an organisation is not only composed of its stakeholders but must also be understood by the agents it affects and by those who affect the organisation (e.g., workers, suppliers, volunteers, etc.) [4]. Furthermore, this business perspective favours the establishment of relationships between the different stakeholders that are not only economic, but it also takes into consideration the moral relationship that generates the expectation of ethical behaviour among stakeholders [4]. These are factors that would enable a corporation to engage in social responsibility, which is highly relevant for organisations that organise sporting events.

Among the theories on CSR, Stakeholder Theory is one of the most widely used in the field of business management [17]. In fact, the definition of stakeholder is relatively broad, and any individual or group of individuals can be called a business stakeholder, because from a dialectical, materialist perspective, business and social contexts are connected, i.e., they influence each other. For this reason, Stakeholder Theory usually narrows the scope of the definition of stakeholders to primary and legitimate individuals and groups [16,18]. Specifically, in the field of sport events, event organisers should pay special attention to the stakeholders who are affected by the development of their events [19–22]. In the present research, those stakeholders are sports volunteers.

In this sense, sports volunteers can be considered to be the “nerve endings” of a sport event. Therefore, in this research, the perception of the sense of community of the sports volunteers of the 2019 China Open 500 was examined, with the aim of understanding the perception of the CSR of the event and proposing the most socially responsible sporting event possible from the perspective of this stakeholder group.

The common characteristic of volunteers is participating in a collective service dependent on co-operation, which is a concept associated with a community. In this line, the sense of community reflects social connectedness and the rootedness of interpersonal relationships [23,24]; therefore, this indicator is valid for identifying the degree of perception of CSR from the volunteers' perspective.

A large part of the volunteers participating in sports events in China constitute organised groups that originally belong to the same environment (e.g., they attend the same university). There are also volunteers with previous experience who have attended similar events but do not know each other. However, as mentioned above, they would all have the same purpose: co-operation. Because of this relationship, when these subjects have gained or increased their perceived sense of community within the group because of their service at the event and have thus reinforced their future intentions to volunteer, it could be seen as a social return from the sports organisation to them [25,26]—“their benefit”.

In traditional Chinese concepts, Confucianism morality is an important bridge between human emotions and interpersonal relationships [27–29]. Therefore, if the organising committee wants to run a successful event, it needs to inter-relate with the local community and strive for relationships between members within the organisation, so it seems that the sense of community is a good starting point for this research [30].

The aim of the research was to assess the change in the perceived sense of community of the China Open 500 volunteers. The data were collected prior to the start of the event after the end of the volunteer training period and then two days before the end of the volunteering. Based on this objective, the following hypothesis was formulated: H1. “Volunteers' sense of community will change after their participation in the China Open 500”.

Volunteering is one of the main assets in the organisation of sporting events, but the changing and specific nature of the context in which events are organised forces us to continually contextualise research. This article, by focusing on a type of large-scale event and in a culture such as China, can provide us with data that have so far been vaguely explored; we have an opportunity to delve into one of the roots of Chinese culture, Confucianism, and to bring to light possible differences and similarities in the behaviour of sports volunteers with other cultures.

The structure of this paper consists of six sections: 1. Introduction, where the research is contextualised; 2. Theoretical framework, where the link and relationship between CSR, Chinese culture, volunteers, sporting events, and sense of community is established; 3. Materials and methods used, which describes the research design and the sample selected for the study; 4. Results, where the data obtained and the relationship between the different variables after analysis are shown; 5. Discussion, where the results found are compared and discussed with the available literature; and 6. Conclusion, where the most relevant results are highlighted, practical applications are reported, limitations encountered in the research are discussed, and future lines of research are presented.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. CSR in China

In each country, national culture fundamentally influences social norms and practices by translating into shared beliefs, attitudes, and identities. To some extent, it even affects national attitudes and corporate culture [31]. Therefore, the interpretation and implementation of CSR may vary due to cultural differences [32–35].

CSR was introduced in China as a Western creation; however, in the Chinese cultural context, it is not simply about doing things according to the requirements of social norms or acting in accordance with national or industry provisions. Rather, CSR, arising from a demand for legitimacy, considers the totality of decisions made under limited conditions in various areas. Traditional Chinese culture is seen as one of the drivers of CSR in China [29]. Linked to CSR is Confucianism, which is the fundamental concept for studying and understanding Chinese management and organisation [36–39]. The combination of traditional Confucianism and market economic principles produces a unique way of thinking, which provides the standard of conduct for the commercial activities of ancient peoples.

Some authors argue that the underlying concepts of CSR could be seen as early as 2500 years ago in the era of Chinese history known as the Spring and Autumn period [40–43]. The philosophy of ancient China is of guiding importance for the growing development of CSR in Chinese business.

In modern China, the period of 2004–2009 is identified as the period of rapid development of Chinese CSR academic research [30]; the topics focus relatively on the international market integration of Chinese enterprises and the national pursuit of comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development. The years 2008–2010 were identified as the period of government-led CSR, and the years after 2010 are considered to be a period of a hybrid global CSR model [28,44]. From 2010 to 2015, a period which was affected by major events and high-level politics, research on Stakeholder Theory, CSR disclosure, corporate financial performance, and corporate governance emerged. Already in the period of 2016–2018, many studies were conducted on corporate issues combined with social issues of responsibility [45].

All this research and the policy of openness towards the West caused China to implement a modern corporate model during a relatively short period of time, which resulted in its CSR awareness and compliance actions being quite different from those of other countries that developed earlier and over a longer period of time [46].

### 2.2. Socially Responsible Sport Events and Their Stakeholders

Sport is a means of social interaction with a certain influence on all aspects of the community [3,4]. In this sense, sport organisations could be considered to be relevant

social entities that can and should assume obligations and responsibilities. As Smith and Westerbeek [3] state, “the nature of sport lends itself to a unique position to influence society in general and communities in particular” (p. 48).

Sporting activities have the power to unite people across religious, ethnic, geographic, cultural, and social barriers and has become one of the new players in global markets [5]. In recent years, sport events have become an increasingly popular vehicle for achieving benefits (e.g., political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, health, infrastructure development, values inculcation, etc.) for the host region or country [1,47–49]. However, there are also negative impacts that could be minimised or even neutralised by using CSR as a tool to that effect [4].

Considered to be unique opportunities, sport events can attract investment, enhance local development initiatives, and increase the awareness of the residents of the host localities [50,51]. Therefore, various studies have proposed the use of the sport event as a tool to implement CSR [3–5,11,47,51].

In recent years, many sport events have adopted CSR plans in consideration of their own influence, strategic marketing, or corporate awareness (Table 1) [4,52].

**Table 1.** CSR actions carried out at sports events.

Dimension	Event-Organising Entity	CSR Actions
Social Economic	Super Bowl 2006	Companies managed by minorities or women (50% or more). They participated in the business process of the event.
Social	FIFA	Different programmes around the world that combine football and sustainable social sustainable social development.
Social	International Olympic Committee	Re-use of the Olympic villages as social housing for disadvantaged people after the event (tangible legacy).
Environmental	Super Bowl 2006	2,500 trees and plants were grown to offset the carbon emissions produced.
Environmental	Olympic Winter Games Turin 2006	Local companies produced environmentally friendly products and complied with green procurement criteria.
Environmental	Olympic Games Tokyo 2021	Manufacture of the podiums from recycled plastics recovered from the oceans. Use of renewable energy for all the logistics of the Games. Recycling of mobile phones, cameras, and computers for the construction of the medals.

Source: Compilation based on various authors [1,7,47].

When considering the dimensions related to CSR in sport, the particularity of sport elements should be highlighted. If sport is to be used as a means to solve social problems or prevent negative influences, sport organisations must clearly identify the corresponding responsibilities and put them into practice when making decisions. In this regard, Smith and Westerbeek [3] established seven characteristics of CSR in the sport environment that make clear the potential for sport organisations to effectively engage in CSR:

1. Communicative power of the media: the popularity of sports helps to promote and disseminate CSR activities to a wide audience.
2. Youth appeal: Youth values are not yet fully formed and are easily influenced by media and information. Sports are more attractive to adolescents, so they can strengthen orientation and convey positive information and values such as promoting co-operation and active lifestyles.
3. Positive health impacts: Sport CSR can generate positive health impacts through programmes and initiatives designed around physical exercise (e.g., preventing childhood obesity, promoting physical development, or reducing government fiscal spending on health).

4. Social interaction: Sport CSR provides a platform where group participation will invariably be involved, thus aiding social interaction.
5. Environmental awareness: sport activities can lead to increased environmental and sustainability awareness (e.g., Olympic Games).
6. Cultural understanding and integration (tradition-inheritance): understanding and tolerance can be spread through the sporting event, e.g., in the opening and closing ceremonies of major sporting events (e.g., Olympic Games).
7. Immediate benefits: participants and organisers can be offered fun and satisfaction or other social advantages.

Following this line, Sánchez-Sáez et al. [4] define CSR in sports events as: “actions adopted in a voluntary way by the organising committee that use the transversality of sports to try to satisfy the expectations of the greatest possible number of stakeholders, especially the local population of the area where the event is held, thereby achieving common objectives by mitigating negative impacts and trying to boost the positive ones in both the present and the future” (p. 5).

On the other hand, academic analysis of the relationship between sport and CSR is a relatively recent trend [4]. A significant proportion of this work was based mainly on the instrumental benefits and the strategic CSR point of view inter-relating it with marketing, corporate communication, sponsorship, etc. [53–56]. That is, that corporations carry out CSR actions while expecting a benefit beyond the merely social, usually economic, by means of strategies to clean up the corporate image [4]. However, whether as a business strategy or as corporate awareness, the combination of sport and CSR can be seen as a driver of cultural and social transformation by using sport events as an implementation tool [4].

Other authors such as Babiak and Wolfe [57] suggested four characteristics that render sport unique for designing and implementing CSR within organisations: passion, economy, transparency, and stakeholder management. They argue that these characteristics contribute to the complexity of stakeholder relationships. Through these relationships, sport organisations could benefit from the CSR activities implemented at the event [8].

This is why the present research analysed CSR in sport events from the perspective of Stakeholder Theory [16]. This theory determines that not only should corporations, that is, the organising committees of sporting events, be concerned with the economic interests of their shareholders or owners, but it also becomes essential to meet the needs of all groups or individuals who are involved and/or affected by the business activity developed, including the shareholders themselves, managers, employees, suppliers, customers, trade unions, competitors, the local community, society in general [5], and specifically, in this research, from the interest group of sports volunteers of the China Open 500.

### 2.3. Sports Volunteers

Currently, research on sport volunteers is based mainly on quantitative research methods relating to volunteer motivations, commitment [58,59], satisfaction [60], intentions to stay [61], free or leisure time [62], recruitment and retention [63], motivational differences between volunteer groups [64], and cross-cultural factors [65].

In the context of sport events, it is vital to understand that volunteers sacrifice their time and possible financial compensation, if they were to do other work, to contribute to social development through their skills, knowledge, and experience [66]. Especially in the sports context, according to Chelladurai [67], the economic value of sports volunteers has exceeded \$50 billion. Many sports organisations and events rely heavily on volunteers. For example, the Sydney Olympics and Paralympics required the assistance of more than 40,000 volunteers. Similarly, over 70,000 volunteers were involved in the London 2012 Olympic Games, contributing 8 million volunteer hours [68–71].

From a human resources point of view, recruited volunteers are a valuable form of capital for many sports organisations to fulfil their objectives and pursue their interests, which they might not otherwise be able to cope with. Therefore, the organiser must consider



the particular motivation, skills, and availability of volunteers to ensure the success of the event [72]. Sport events generally occur in a relatively dispersed frequency and in a short period of time; therefore, the strategies for acquiring and retaining volunteer resources is different from that of permanent organisations [71,73,74]. In fact, the skills and experience that volunteers gain during the event are also a resource for the organisation. In addition, the costs of volunteer turnover should not be overlooked. If volunteers are not retained, resources will be lost, and the committee will have to spend more time and financial or human resources to recruit and train new volunteers [75–77].

In addition, Costa et al. [76] found that pre-event training is important for satisfaction, as it provided an opportunity for volunteers to share their opinions and build a sense of community.

#### *2.4. The Volunteers' Sense of Community*

It is thought that there is a sense of community where there is community [78]. The historical background of this concept derives from various previous studies such as those of Tropman [79] and Doolittle and MacDonald [80], who, through the development of scales to measure the sense of community, determined the dimensions to establish the basis for the theoretical development of this concept.

The concept of community and sense of community are key elements and complex social objects with multiple determinations in the field of community psychology, which has been considered to be a branch of psychology, the focus of which is based on the relationship between individuals and the community [81].

The concept of sense of community is used to describe feelings of belonging to different types of communities and applies to territorial communities as well as relational communities or social entities such as sports groups, political groups, voluntary groups, etc. that have a common interest [82,83].

The sense of community in our society is as diverse as its definition. However, there is a lack of descriptive basis for the concept of this topic, and there are relatively few systematic studies involving this concept [84] and even fewer in the context of sports volunteering in Eastern cultures, as is the case of the present research on the China Open 500.

However, Macmillan and Chavis [85] refer to this concept as: “the feeling of belonging, including an emotional connection based on a shared history, as well as interests and concerns” (p. 2). This definition is based on four elements: (i) affiliation: a feeling of belonging or shared sense of personal relationship; (ii) influence: the feeling of mattering, of making a difference in a group, and that the group matters to its members; (iii) reinforcement: integration and satisfaction of needs. This refers to the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through group membership; (iv) shared emotional connection: the commitment and belief that members have and will share history, common ground, common time, and similar experiences [85].

In the sports context, work by Warner and Dixon [86] explored the sense of community among college sports participants and revealed five important factors: administrative consideration, leadership opportunities, equity in administrative decisions, competition, and social spaces. Subsequently, they published the six-factor multidimensional sense of community scale (administrative consideration, common interest, competition, equity in administrative decisions, leadership opportunities, and social spaces) as a valid and reliable measure of sense of community in sport [87]. Their results provided practical solutions to formulate the theoretical framework of the generalised sense of community in the sport context, with the need to explore other sport structures at different levels (e.g., sport event volunteers).

Event volunteers are strongly motivated by the sense of community that can be gained and by the experience derived from this service, which generates a sense of community that overcomes social class barriers [88]. However, there is little research that develops an analysis considering the management of volunteers' sense of community in the context of sporting events.

Kerwin et al. [25], following the work of Warner and Dixon [86], explored the sense of community among volunteers at small-scale sporting events, measuring it along five dimensions: administrative consideration, leadership opportunities, equity in administrative decisions, social spaces, and common interest. The authors stress that volunteering is a collective experience and a direct result of social capital. They highlight that volunteering experiences at small-scale sporting events provide the social bonding opportunities necessary to create a sense of community. This conclusion has been identified from the perspective of human capital potency for sport events [89].

Therefore, a sense of community can be an important social outcome after the organisation of a sport event. Therefore, sport event managers could focus on the previous study of this concept [90]. Some other studies, such as Dickson et al. [91], examined the sense of community of volunteers at the 2010 World Rowing Championships (Karapiro, New Zealand) and the 2011 IPC Athletics World Championships (Christchurch, New Zealand). The study noted that sense of community would be positively supported by determination in the specificity of work roles, clarity of goal setting, tenure, individualised consideration of their supervisor or leader, size of the work group and sport participation.

Consequently, a strong sense of community impacts positively on many aspects such as commitment (an emotional attachment to the organising committee), motivation, and volunteering experience [76,92]. There are indications that it is advisable to use the training period as an opportunity for volunteers to get to know each other and build community. The satisfaction of volunteers during this training period will affect their sense of community and their commitment to the event organisation. In addition, different authors addressed that external stakeholders (such as volunteers) achieve a sense of community easily and quickly [76,91–93]. Along these lines, Costa et al. [76] suggest that a sense of community can be fostered by satisfying the self-esteem and opportunities expected by volunteers during training and indirectly contribute positively to the subject's job satisfaction within the event organisation.

### 3. Materials and Methods

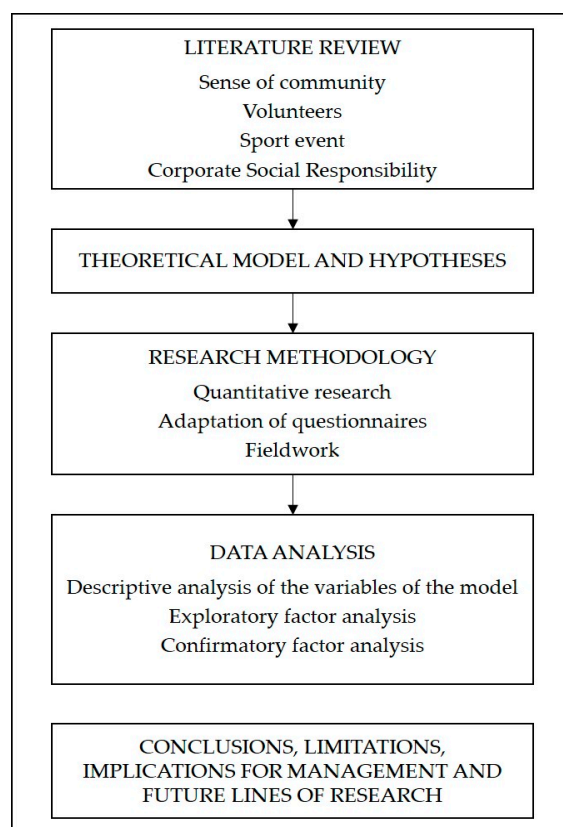
#### 3.1. Research Design

During the research process, quantitative techniques were used in the different phases of the research according to the recommendations of various authors [94–97], following a descriptive and correlational design. The structure of the chosen questionnaire is explained below, as well as the research design and fieldwork (Figure 1). In order to test the hypothesis and achieve the objective, research was carried out on the volunteers' perception of their sense of community, pre- and post-event, at the China Open 500 event.

#### 3.2. Questionnaire Design and Measures

A structured questionnaire was used as a data collection tool and was administered to the China Open 500 volunteers before and after the event by means of a face-to-face personal survey. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to develop this tool, which made it possible both to assess the measurement quality of a set of variables used to measure a latent construct of Perceived Sense of Community (PSC) and to test the associations between variables [98]. For this end, EQS 6.3 software (EQS 6.3 for Windows; Multivariate Software Inc.: Encino, CA, USA) [99] was used to perform the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and SPSS. 21 (v. 21.0; SPSS Inc.; Chicago, IL, USA) was used for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Data were collected prior to the event after the end of the training period and two days before the end of the volunteering. The questionnaire consisted of two blocks answering the following questions: 1st block: age, sex, and previous participation as a volunteer in other events; 2nd block: perception of the sense of community.



**Figure 1.** Phases of research development.

The items related to PSC are based mainly on studies by Kerwin et al. [25], Warner and Dixon [86], Warner and Dixon [100], and Warner et al. [101]. In line with these authors, community perception was structured along six dimensions (Table A1 in Appendix A). The distribution was as follows:

- (i) Perception of Administrative Consideration with a total of 4 items: this dimension collected questions related to the attention, concern, and intentionality of managers towards volunteers.
- (ii) Perception of Common Interests with 3 items: this dimension establishes questions related to group dynamics, social networks, and friendships resulting from common interests towards volunteering.
- (iii) Perception of Equity in Administrative Decisions with 3 items: this dimension determines the perception of decisions that demonstrate that all members of the community are treated equally during their volunteering activity.
- (iv) Perception of Leadership Opportunity with 4 items, which measures the perception of opportunities that arise during volunteering both formally and informally to lead and guide others in the community.
- (v) Perception of Social Spaces with 4 items, assessing the perception of common areas or facilities where volunteers interact with each other.
- (vi) Perception of Competitiveness with 3 items: the perception of the presence of internal and external rivalries and the challenge to excel.

All responses were measured by using a Likert-type scale with a 7-point rating. A 1 indicated total disagreement, and a 7 indicated total agreement with the statement.

Initially, before the structural model was estimated, the psychometric properties of the scales were evaluated. This step was carried out by means of an EFA (construct validity) by using the Varimax principal component method ( $\geq 0.50$ ). The reliability of the proposed scale was calculated by finding Cronbach's  $\alpha$  [102]. Next, the first-order CFA and a subsequent second-order CFA were performed to determine the existence of a superordinate



concept or CSP behind the six dimensions. As one of the preliminary requirements for the structural model analysis is the confirmation that the latent variables or constructs are appropriately measured, it is necessary to verify the measurement models [103].

In this regard, for the proposed model, the model measuring the perceived sense of community of volunteers at a sporting event, the China Open 500, was tested. The fit indices below were used to assess the suitability of this model: Bentler–Bonnet Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA).

Since the data collection was conducted at two separate points in time, it was necessary to check that the same factors measured the same latent variables. Factor invariance is the basis for the comparison of a given construct between sample groups, which, in the present research, was between pre-event and post-event. If the measurement of a certain construct, such as perceived sense of community, is invariant between the two groups, it is assumed that it has the same meaning for the different study groups [104]. Two levels were used: configurational factorial invariance and metric factorial invariance. The two levels were structured around two stages: First Stage: verification of the existence of configurational invariance between pre- and post-event, for each of the measurement models; Second Stage: verification of the existence of metric invariance between pre- and post-event. As in the previous stage, each of the measurement models was tested together for the two samples. In this case, however, the factual saturations were subject to restrictions [98]. If the difference between the unconstrained and constrained model is equal to or less than 0.01, especially in the CFI index, this fit index is the one recognised as the most suitable for testing invariance [105]. It will point to a good result to ensure factorial invariance between pre- and post-event.

### 3.3. Description of the China Open 500

The China Open 500, which was held in Beijing, had 16 events from 2004 to 2019. This event, which was cancelled by the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) because of restrictions due to the coronavirus in China, had the right to host the tournaments of the three major international tennis organisations (ATP, WTA, and ITF). Moreover, it was the most comprehensive international tennis event, with the highest level and the largest number of players in Asia [106]. The China Open 500 was promoted by the General Administration of Sport and the People's Government of Beijing Municipality and organised by the Tennis Administration Centre of the General Administration of Sport of China, the Beijing Municipal Sports Bureau, the People's Government of Chaoyang District of Beijing, and the state-owned China Open Promotions Limited [106]. China Open 500 was an event classified as a major or international event [107], which was held between 28 September and 6 October 2019.

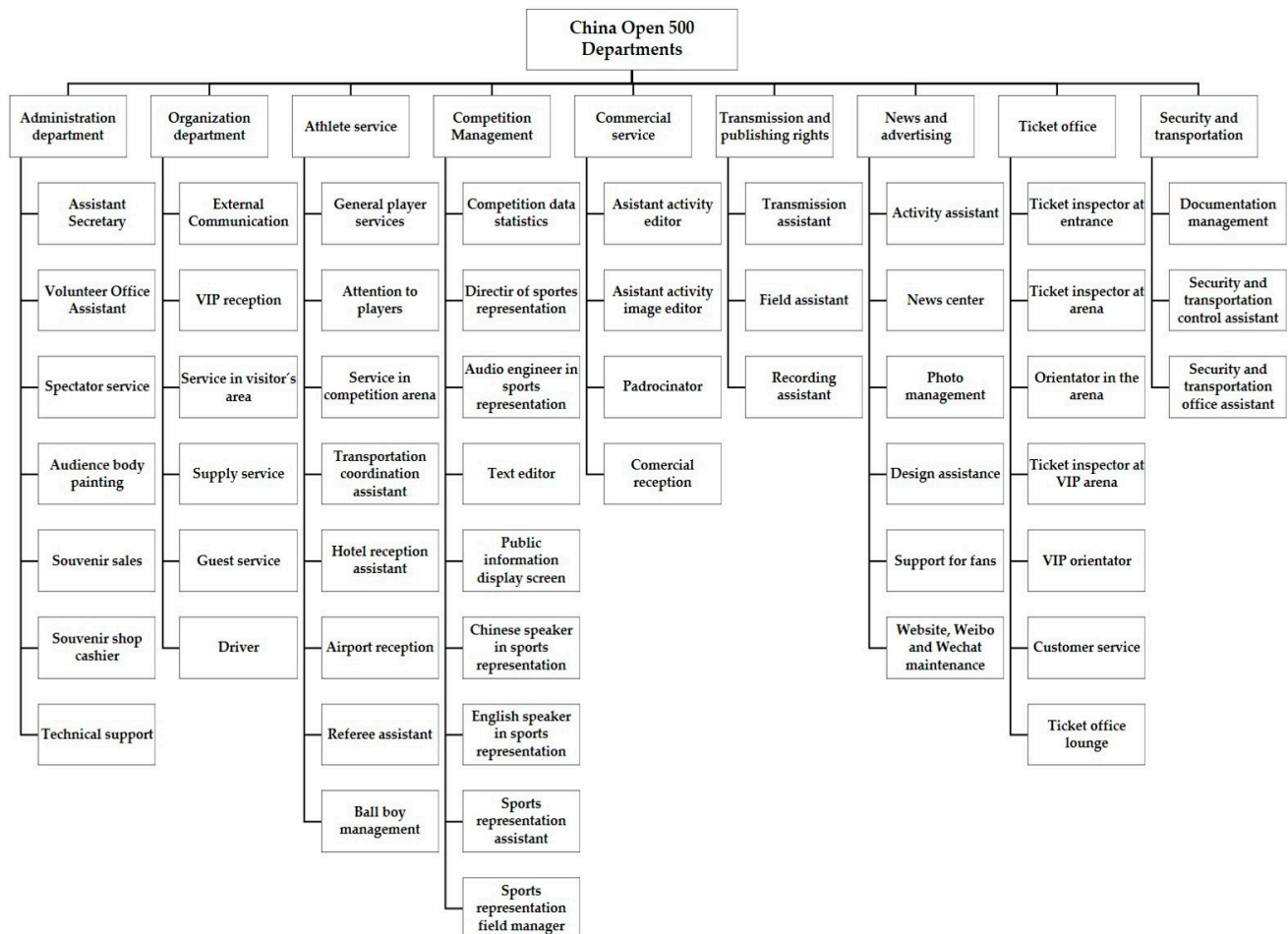
### 3.4. Sample

The target population for this study was volunteers attending the 2019 China Open 500 in Beijing, China. In total, 999 volunteers were part of the study and were distributed in different work areas of the event (Figure 2):

Of the total population (999 volunteers), 805 personal (face-to-face) surveys were conducted by using a purposive non-probability sampling procedure with a 99% confidence interval and a sampling error of 0.5%. This sampling procedure was selected over others because of the absence of a census of volunteers in the city of Beijing; this type of sampling is commonly used in this type of research [108–110]. All respondents were informed prior to data collection and agreed to participate in the study, and their anonymity was assured by the research team.

Nevertheless, although this type of sampling is not representative of the general population, the sample was stratified by sex and age factors. Nevertheless, in order to render the sample as representative as possible and to reduce the bias inherent to this type of sampling, the recommendations of Sudman [111] were followed when selecting the

study population. Thus, two data collections were carried out as follows: (a) Pre-event: after the end of the volunteer training period, and (b) Post-event: two days before the end of the volunteer period.



**Figure 2.** Working areas where the volunteers carry out their tasks at the China Open 500.

A total of 805 surveys was considered valid for analysis (80.58% of total returns). The distribution by sex was 306 males (38%) and 499 females (62.0%); all were  $\geq 18$  years old. In the pre-event, 37.6% of males and 62.4% of females responded; in the post-event, this percentage was almost equal, 38.6% males and 61.4% females.

It was observed in the segmentation by age group that the most representative interval was between 18 and 21 years of age, with 87.5% of the sample (pre-event 87.8% and post-event 87%). However, the age range with the lowest representation in the event was 26–29 years, representing only 0.5% of the total sample; this distribution is practically insignificant in the sub-samples (pre-event 0.4% and post-event 0.6%).

Regarding the area of work that the interviewed subjects occupied, it was observed that volunteers in the ticket office department were the most represented, with 33.9% (pre-event: 31.6% and post-event: 36.9%); followed by volunteers who dealt with office tasks (18.4% total; pre-event: 18.2% and post-event: 18.6%). These two areas represent 52.3% of the total sample.

To the question of whether this was the first time they had participated as a volunteer, 80.5% of the subjects answered that they had participated at least once before (pre-event 84.7% and post-event 75.2%). In this line, most of the subjects had previous volunteer experience in the range of one to five years (80.1%); the same was true for the sub-sample (pre-event 84.0% and post-event 75.2%).

Regarding employment status, 75.8% of the subjects were unemployed during the event (pre-event 77.1% and post-event 74.1%), followed by 15.7% representing subjects with part-time jobs (pre-event 13.8% and post-event 18.0%). It should be noted that no retirees took part in this event as volunteers. In relation to educational level, practically all volunteers were university graduates (95.7% total; pre-event 94.9% and post-event 96.6%).

#### 4. Results

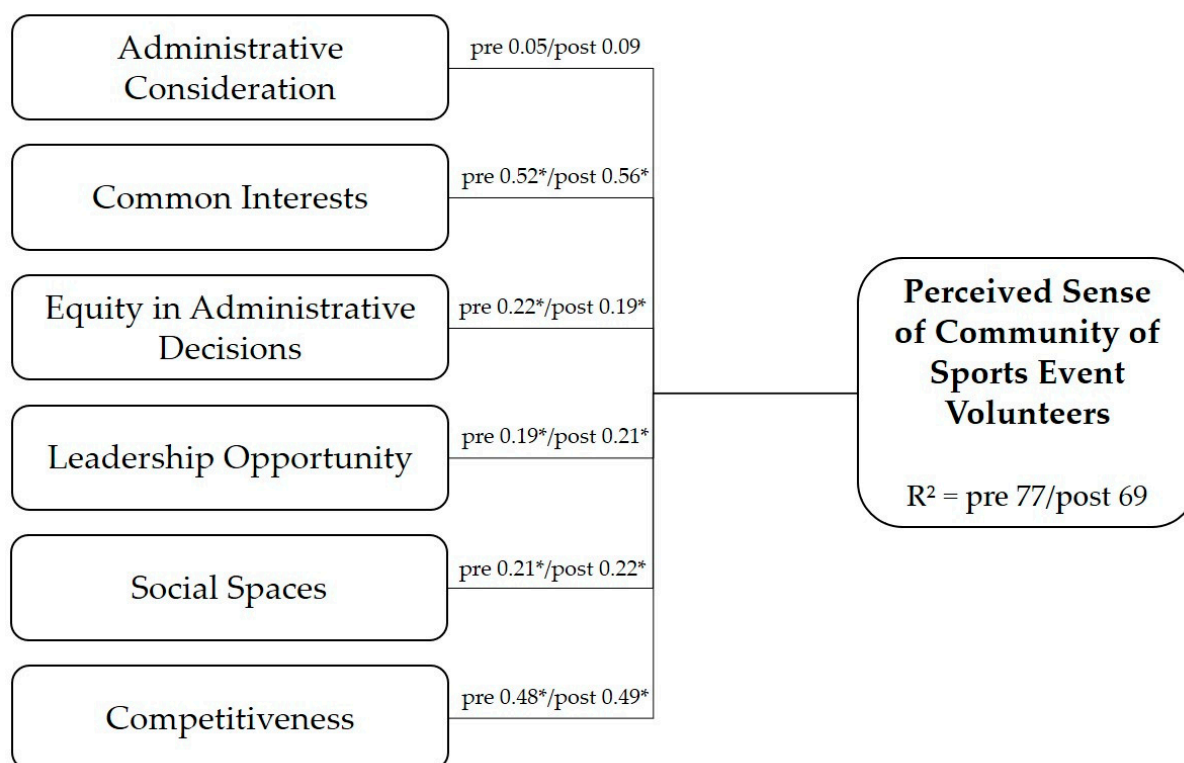
##### *Measurement Quality and Relationship between Variables*

The index Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin sample adequacy test (KMO = pre 0.970/post 0.815) and the Barlett sphericity test ( $\chi^2$  = pre 7464.898/post 5914.380) indicate appropriate construct validity. The items were grouped into six dimensions after factor rotation. Almost all the pre-event factors have factor loadings >0.5; only two factors (SC\_Equi.Deci. Admi2/SC\_Opor.Lide4) have lower factor loadings, but they will be kept for further confirmatory factor analysis. Similarly, all the variables saturate a single factor that corresponds to the proposed dimensionality. The post-event analysis allows us to extract the six factors again, although this set of variables offers lower factor loadings than those measured in the pre-event, practically all of the loadings are above 0.5. This allows us to keep the variables within their factor.

The resulting Cronbach's  $\alpha$  correlations were higher than those suggested by different researchers [102], achieving a value of 0.961 pre-event and 0.934 post-event. The dimensions found determined, the factor "Administrative Consideration" achieved a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of pre 0.890 and post 0.899; the factor "Common Interests" achieved pre 0.874 and post 0.834; and the factor "Equity in Administrative Decisions" achieved pre 0.921 and post 0.899. The "Leadership Opportunity" factor achieved pre 0.903 and post 0.910; the "Social Spaces" factor achieved pre 0.922 and post 0.914; and the dimension "Competitiveness" achieved a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  pre 0.902 and post 0.911. Therefore, high internal consistency and stability of the scale was guaranteed. Consequently, the allocation of the items was logical. Based on the data obtained, factorial validity was interpreted in the absence of the results of the CFA data.

An adequate model fit will be indicated by values greater than 0.90 on the NNFI (pre 0.910/post 0.911) and CFI (pre 0.905/post 0.933) indices and less than 0.05 on the SRMR (pre 0.048/post 0.040) and RMSEA (pre 0.043/post 0.043) indices. Although different authors, in relation to the RMSEA index, indicate acceptable values to be lower than 0.08 [112–114]. The indices presented (except for the SRMR index–ML method) were extracted by using the Robust method (Yuan–Bentler correction). This method is adopted when the multivariate kurtosis values suggest that the sample does not have a normal distribution, as in the present analysis (Mardia's normalised coefficient = 77.28) [100]. The final model was obtained after several adjustments composed of 6 dimensions and 21 items, after the 2-stage adjustment. In the final model, all items are within their factors, and no items had to be removed to improve the model fit. The results confirm the existence of the six factors initially proposed: "Administrative Consideration", "Common Interests", "Equity in Administrative Decisions", "Opportunity Leadership", "Social Spaces", and "Competitiveness".

The proposed structural model for the perceived sense of community of the China Open 500 volunteers was confirmed via second-order factor analysis (Figure 3). It can be affirmed, thanks to the  $\beta$  coefficients resulting from the standardised solution, that all factors have a positive and significant impact on the volunteers' perceived sense of community. We observe how the "Common Interests" factor has the greatest impact ( $\beta$  = pre 0.52\*/post 0.56\*) on the perception of the sense of community. The second factor by importance in impact is the "Competitiveness" ( $\beta$  = pre 0.48\*/post 0.49\*). The factor that has the least impact on the perception of the sense of community in sports events is "Administrative Consideration" ( $\beta$  = pre 0.05/post 0.09).



**Figure 3.** Proposed structural model for the perceived sense of community of the China Open 500 volunteers. \*  $p < 0.05$ .

The results obtained in the comparison between the pre-event and post-event measurement models allow us to verify the configurational invariance, insofar as the fit indices are within the reference values (unrestricted model) (Table 2). Metric invariance, on the other hand, is also guaranteed to the extent that the difference in the CFI index is not greater than 0.01; moreover, in this case, there is no difference between the indices, so that metric invariance is practically total.

**Table 2.** Fit indices of the structural model with and without restrictions.

Absolute Measures of Fit	Optimum Value	Unrestricted	Restricted
SRMR	<0.05	0.048	0.048
RMSEA (90% I.C.) <sup>2</sup>	<0.05 < 0.08	0.043 (0.041–0.047)	0.043 (0.041–0.047)
Measures of incremental fit			
Bentler–Bonett Non-Normed FIT index <sup>2</sup>	Choosing the largest	0.909	0.909
CFI <sup>2</sup>	Close to 1	0.917	0.916
Bollen (IFI) <sup>2</sup>	Close to 1	0.918	0.917

With regard to the hypothesis, the aim was to test the difference between the perception of the sense of community pre-event and post-event, and for this purpose, a one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out (perception of the sense of community pre-event/perception of the sense of community post-event). A  $p$ -value < 0.05 was set to determine the statistical significance of the results obtained. This statistical analysis of variance was performed by using SPSS software.

As can be seen in Table 3, the analysis of variance shows significant differences between the perception of the sense of community before the event and after the event.

**Table 3.** ANOVA of all pre- and post-event data for pre-post perceived sense of community.

Dimensions	Prevent ( <i>n</i> = 450)	Post Event ( <i>n</i> = 355)	Pre-Post
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	<i>p</i> -value
Administrative Consideration	5.72 (1.07)	5.82 (0.97)	0.456
Common Interests	5.74 (1.06)	6.44 (0.86)	0.032 *
Equity in Administrative Decisions	5.68 (1.08)	6.08 (1.02)	0.003 **
Leadership Opportunity	5.33 (1.03)	5.72 (1.08)	0.012 *
Social Spaces	5.84 (1.00)	6.02 (0.97)	0.022 *
Competitiveness	5.55 (1.14)	6.48 (1.03)	0.007 *

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

All dimensions increased their perception in a positive way after the event, with the difference being higher in the dimensions “Common Interests” and “Competitiveness” and lower in the dimension “Administrative Consideration”.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The previous sections set out the objective of testing the effect of volunteering on the perceived sense of community at the China Open 500 tennis tournament. In the present research, the results on the change in volunteers’ sense of community from the training phase to after the event reveal that there is a direct link between sense of community and the volunteer experience. The sense of community develops as a function of volunteer training and volunteer experience in the sport context. This finding is similar to that proposed by Kerwin et al. [25] and Boyd and Nowell [90] that sense of community is an important social outcome of the processes of a sport event organisation. Additionally, in the field of human resource management, the results obtained are consistent with their proposals in that scenarios must be sought to create a sense of community among volunteers in the training phase prior to the volunteering of the sport event itself. Therefore, managers should focus on the perception of the sense of community at the beginning, creating opportunities during training and volunteering to satisfy the need for social interaction and sense of belonging of volunteers, as well as to get to know each other better, thus fostering the subject’s sense of community.

The extracted results are in line with the majority of the studies consulted [86,92,100,115–120], where the sense of community can be assessed in a variety of contexts due to its effects on different types of collectives. The sport event as a special event has a range of implications and influence for the host community and its stakeholders. Therefore, it is important to highlight the importance of the practical application of CSR in the strategies of sport organisations in order to respond to the stakeholders that may be involved. In this sense, the data extracted show that the experience of volunteers in sport events is important and is another human resource management tool to be developed and promoted.

According to the results of the socio-demographic characteristics, considering life stage, the majority of the China Open 500 volunteers are university students aged 16–25 years. The significant differences between the data on perceived sense of communication pre-event and post-event are consistent with the findings of Cicognani et al. [121]. According to their work, adolescents and young adults who participate in collective organisations and activities benefit from a sense of community, which contributes to their empowerment and, thus, influences their social well-being.

According to the studies mentioned in the theoretical framework, volunteers of these ages are more inclined towards independence from their parents, would be making more autonomous decisions, and would face numerous interpersonal relationships and social challenges [86,100]. The present study demonstrates that for volunteers with an emerging awareness of independence, the volunteer experience can provide them with opportunities for leadership and decision-making that strengthen their feelings of responsibility and



ownership, increasing their self-confidence and psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with the fact that leadership opportunities can be vital to creating a sense of community in the sport context [86,100]. It seems clear, therefore, that sport event administrators should continue to seek avenues that provide volunteers with appropriate opportunities to lead and direct their own experiences.

In the results obtained, the validity of the dimensions “Common Interest” and “Social Spaces” shows that the sporting event provides an environment for the volunteers in which the social relationship has been established and from which collective consciousness can result. This finding agrees with Reed and Selbee’s [122] argument that volunteering can foster community concern and members’ sense of responsibility for the common good. It is also consistent with the studies of Montero [78], Jacob [123], and Sanchez [124], as the human relationships and interpersonal values in volunteering create the opportunity to foster social cohesion and collective consciousness, laying a powerful foundation for influencing social change.

On the other hand, from a stakeholder perspective, the increased sense of community between pre- and post-event shows that external stakeholders achieve a sense of community efficiently and effectively [92]. Therefore, for an event to be considered successful from a CSR perspective, the effect of the sense of community, which is inherent in the experience of its volunteers, must be considered. This statement is in line with several studies [12,20,21,47,125], which consider that in the sports field, it is necessary to strengthen and develop relationships with the different stakeholders. Furthermore, the event manager is asked to find a balance with the needs of the stakeholders, as shown in the studies by Smith and Westerbeek [3] and Friedman et al. [125].

Therefore, it would be important to consider the needs of event stakeholders and use the sport event as a tool to implement CSR [3,5,11,47]. In particular, it is important for managers to articulate the sense of community when making management decisions and policies that foster a sense of community to meet the needs of volunteers as a way to enhance the psychological well-being of volunteers and, thus, facilitate the management of the sport event organisation.

The results obtained allow us to discuss the multidimensionality of the perception of the sense of community before and after the event; according to previous studies, the concept of CSR is multidimensional [4], and so it has behaved in the results of the present research. Sport events will have a variety of implications for the local community and stakeholders. This suggests an opportunity for organisers to create a sense of community in volunteers through a range of management interventions to create a socially responsible sporting event by using the different dimensions that have shaped the concept. Finally, this work has identified and analysed one of the key stakeholders in the delivery of a socially responsible sport event; the results are in line with those of Friedman et al. [125], who demonstrate that the identification of stakeholder categories can better systematise the conceptualisation of stakeholders. Sport event managers must interact effectively with the stakeholder (e.g., volunteers) to have a successful event. In turn, stakeholder reactions to CSR events can help managers formulate strategies and differentiate the impact of key actors in strategy development [126]. It could be said, therefore, that the results obtained confirm hypothesis H1. In previous sections, it was stated as H1 that: “Volunteers’ sense of community will change after their participation in the China Open 500”. Based on the results obtained in the empirical phase, we can conclude with respect to the hypothesis formulated that the holding of the China Open 500 serves as a stimulus to increase the positive perception of the volunteers’ sense of community after the holding of the China Open 500. All the dimensions increase their perception in a positive way after the event, with this difference being greater in the dimensions “Common Interests”—that is, all the relationships resulting from the event and which are linked to the interest in volunteering—and “Competitiveness”—which is understood to be the challenge or challenges to excel or do well as a volunteer. With less difference but with an increase in results from pre- to

post-event, the “Administrative Consideration” dimension captures issues related to the intention of managers towards volunteering.

### 5.1. Managerial Implications

Although the previous conclusions have already given ideas about the practical applications of the research, in this section, we will try to render these applications more concrete. The present research has resulted in the validity of the measurement scale for the analysis of sport events from the perspective of CSR and the perceived sense of community of its volunteers. This model will be used to assess the multidimensional aspects of CSR in large sport events, always from the perspective of the volunteers.

In this sense, the managers of the organisation of the China Open 500 and, by extension, of similar events could determine the profile of the largest segment of volunteers on which to focus their efforts in order to carry out adequate recruitment. Specifically, in this research, it was a group of university volunteers aged 18–25 years old, mostly without work experience but with 1 to 5 years of volunteering experience. Among the volunteers surveyed, women are represented in a higher proportion. These data remind us that event organisers should consciously consider position, age, length of service, and volunteer experience when recruiting, adopting appropriate management and orientation methods. The above factors must also be considered holistically when motivating volunteer behaviours.

The research reviewed on CSR in the sport context lacks a sample of volunteers. Through the data presented in this paper, sport event organisers will be able to understand the main target audience on which to focus their management efforts and choose strategies in line with the target segment. This research has confirmed the validity and reliability of the proposed scale in the context of a large-scale sporting event. This provides organisational managers with a suitable tool to measure the perceived sense of community of their volunteers.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the concept of CSR is multidimensional. Sports volunteers as well as event stakeholders have the direct perception of CSR actions. For the model of measuring the sense of community, the six factors that constitute the model for analysing the perception of CSR from the perspective of volunteers’ sense of community at sport events were determined: “Administrative Considerations”, “Leadership Opportunities”, “Equity in Administrative Decisions”, “Competitiveness”, “Social Spaces”, and “Common Interest”.

Furthermore, from a broad perspective, the result of this research explains that sports volunteering can be a way for volunteers to participate in society and improve their public life. In the relationship between sport volunteering and social capital, sport organisations are a bridge between individuals, families, and communities. By building a platform for shared emotions and interpersonal communication to enhance volunteers’ sense of community, civic values, and trust, these factors can improve for all stakeholders in communities where sport events are held.

### 5.2. Limitations and Future Research Lines

It has not been possible to cover the different motivations that are triggered in the context of sports volunteering. Motivation is a psychological tendency that is constantly changing with the age and developmental state of the volunteer, hence the intention to include this factor in future studies. Although the sample of study subjects collected included volunteers from all departments (e.g., administration, security and transport, ticket office, etc.), the proportion of volunteers among them is not evenly distributed. That is, there may be a tendency for volunteer data from different departments to affect the final result. In addition, in the context of Chinese culture, the humble and introverted personality characteristics of the respondents may also have affected the survey results.

As a dynamic, subjective perception, the perception of sense of community will evolve as societies do. Post-event sampling for this variable in this research was conducted two days before the end of the event. Although this time point has been used and verified in

other research, it is still recommended to consider adjusting the timing to collect data after the event or in the future to compare the results obtained. Nevertheless, it was considered an appropriate option to ensure the subjects' response.

During the course of this study, it has been discovered that social media (such as the mobile application WeChat) can play a potential role in forming a sense of community in China. Therefore, it could be applied to the actual work area to improve the effectiveness of the work, especially for teams with a large number of volunteers and little time to get to know each other. This could lead to the construction of a digital community group and, thus, direct inter-relations in the group, assignment of work tasks, etc., leading to a diversified development of the organisational management model of the sport event. The creation of such a medium and its impact on volunteers may be a future line of research.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Sense of Community Perception Scale of Sport Event Volunteers (China Open 500).

Items	
1	The managers of the China Open 500 care about their volunteers.
2	The managers of the China Open 500 make me feel like a valued volunteer.
3	The managers of the China Open 500 support their volunteers.
4	I feel comfortable talking freely with the managers of the China Open 500.
5	I share similar values with other China Open 500 volunteers.
6	I feel like I belong to the China Open 500 volunteer group.
7	Volunteering brings me into contact with friends who share a strong commitment to volunteering.
8	The workers at the China Open 500 make decisions that benefit everyone.
9	China Open 500 workers make decisions that are fair.
10	The staff of the China Open 500 take everyone's needs into account when making decisions.
11	I feel like I'm going to have an influence on the China Open 500.
12	If there is a problem at the China Open 500, I can help solve it.
13	I will have criteria (formed opinion) to talk about the China Open 500.

Table A1. Cont.

Items	
14	Volunteering for the China Open 500 will give me opportunities to make decisions.
15	When I go to training, there are facilities where I can interact with other volunteers.
16	The virtual spaces created by the China Open 500 facilitate relationships with other volunteers.
17	I will have facilities where I can interact with other volunteers.
18	The China Open 500 provides me with virtual resources to interact with other volunteers.
19	The China Open 500 provides me with virtual resources to interact with other volunteers.
20	The level of competitiveness at the China Open 500 makes me enjoy volunteering.
21	Being involved in a highly competitively driven event is fun.

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