

# Lasting social value or a one-off? People with intellectual disabilities' experiences with volunteering for the Youth Olympic Games

Roald Undlien<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Corresponding author email: roald.undlien@inn.no

## ABSTRACT

This article serves as a follow-up on a previous study and looks at how volunteering at a major sporting event has affected the lives of a group of volunteers with intellectual disabilities two years after volunteering. The aim is to examine how volunteering at an Olympic event may be a source for lasting social value, operationalized as an increase in social capital and quality of life. Qualitative interviews were conducted on a selection of former volunteers with intellectual disabilities (n=8). In five of the interviews, parents of the interviewees also functioned as facilitators for the interviews. The same five parents were also interviewed in brief, semistructured interviews. This study shows that the event had a limited effect on bridging social capital, while having a stronger impact on the group's bonding social capital. Moreover, the event has affected the quality of life for the participants to various degrees by being a source for positive memories, enforced by visual reminders such as the volunteer uniform frequently worn by the former volunteers. The volunteer experience also serves as a bridging element, bringing together groups of people with little in common. In some cases, volunteering also led to employment in regular occupations.

## INTRODUCTION

In the public discourse, young people with intellectual disabilities (ID) are often depicted in terms of the "problems" they experience related to their disability and their need for regular assistance. Thus, to some extent, they can be described as recipients of assistance from others (Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998), implying that they are not usually seen as capable. Moreover, people with

disabilities have not, in general, been given chances to access the opportunities and benefits that volunteerism might provide (Miller, Schleien, Rider, & Hall, 2002), such as increased self-confidence, improved communication skills, and new practical skills (Reilly, 2005). According to Bogdan and Taylor (1999), contributing to society by volunteering is significant for being part of the community as opposed to simply being *in* the community. Thus, it is important to understand how people with ID can contribute as volunteers, how they experience volunteering, and how volunteering might affect their lives. Moreover, volunteering at major sporting events may lead to further community engagement, either at other events or on a regular basis in community organizations (Doherty, 2009). However, whether this applies to people with ID is unclear.

To narrow these gaps in the literature, a study of how people with ID experienced working as volunteers at the 2016 Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Lillehammer, Norway, was conducted (Undlien, 2019). This study showed that social entrepreneurs could create social value for people with ID by facilitating their participation as volunteers. Moreover, social value creation was closely linked to the YOG as a social arena beyond the classroom involving interactions with different people, giving those with ID access to discourses that focus on their abilities rather than disabilities. As a result, the volunteers with ID experienced learning valuable practical and social skills that might be useful in everyday life. They experienced volunteering at the YOG as an outstanding event, with rich possibilities to contribute on different levels. Furthermore, the event was considered positive and meaningful due to the careful selection of tasks they were assigned and facilitation by persons who knew them well and was also experienced as

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an event with possibilities for improving bonding, social capital, and networking (Undlien, 2019).

In Undlien's study (2019), social value as conceptualized by Young (2006) was an important element of the theoretical framework. According to Young (2006), social value is open to reappraisal, implying that, even though the volunteers' experiences during the YOG in 2016 may have been considered valuable at the time, this perceived value might have changed in the subsequent two years. Social value is related to subjective, everyday life experiences. Ultimately, it is the targeted group's experiences and perceptions that decide whether something is valuable for them or not (Young, 2006).

This study was conducted to examine whether a sporting event can be a source of positive subjective experiences several years later. The following research question was asked: What possibilities do large sporting events have for creating lasting social value for people with ID through volunteering? In this context, the term "lasting" refers to something beyond the moment itself rather than something permanent.

In this article, social value is operationalized through an increase in social capital and quality of life (QOL). Consequently, to consider if and how volunteering at sporting events creates lasting social value, one must look more closely at how this event affects these constructs. Resulting from this, a second research question was asked: How can volunteering at a major sporting event affect social capital and quality of life for persons with intellectual disabilities?

Additionally, little is known about how people with ID experience volunteer work at Olympic events or how such events may be used to address important issues for this population. Thus, a third research question was raised: To what extent do any changes in social capital, quality of life, and social value for people with ID depend on the nature of the volunteering at a large sporting event? Theoretically, this study sought to contribute to conceptualizations of social value by strengthening the links between social value, social capital, and QOL.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Social Value**

In the initial study of the group of volunteers with ID, social value was one of the key areas for research as well as the aim for the students to participate in the event (Undlien,

2019). Creating social value is well established as the ultimate goal for social entrepreneurs (Auerswald, 2009; Dees, 2001; Guo & Bielefeld, 2014; Helmsing, 2015; Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena, & Carnegie, 2003). However, this theoretical construct remains vague (Dees, 2001). Social value has several definitions. For this study, Young's definition (2006) of something that "benefits people whose urgent and reasonable needs are not being met by any other means" (p. 56) was chosen.

Social value is closely linked to social change for specific groups (Mair & Marti, 2006; Weerawardena, & Mort, 2006; Young, 2006). Thus, to assess whether social value was created "beyond the moment" in the study population, it was important to address eventual changes in the lives of those who volunteered, such as new forms of cooperation or social relationships, networks, acquaintances, friendships, and opportunities.

### **Quality of Life and Social Capital**

Volunteer activities are known to have the potential to improve QOL (Stebbins, 2004). Moreover, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), the quality of leisure activities such as volunteering is influenced by those with whom one volunteers (among other factors). He further states that people are (obviously) happier and more motivated when interacting with friends. Thus, doing something with friends, such as volunteering to collect garbage at a major sports event, may lead to increased QOL (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

According to Stebbins (2004), leisure activities like volunteering can contribute partially or wholly to people's perception of QOL. Although QOL may be seen as a subjective experience of well-being and encompassing feelings of positive involvement and opportunities to achieve personal potential, several circumstances affect this experience (Schalock et al., 2002; Næss, 2011). Volunteering, an activity that might contribute to the need for fulfillment and to the welfare of others, is an example (Velde, 1997). According to Putnam (2001), the more integrated into the community we are, the less likely we are to experience numerous negative health effects. Social networks may also strengthen healthy norms.

Therefore, high social capital is more likely to lead to better social and physical health, both important factors for QOL. Stebbins (2004) states that QOL and volunteerism are interconnected through four components. The three most relevant for this study are: a sense of achievement, links with the wider community, and a sense of fulfillment of

potential through experiencing the reward of self-actualization (Schalock et al., 2002).

As seen in Undlien (2019), the 2016 YOG in Norway were experienced as an arena suitable for the building of social capital for several target groups of social entrepreneurial projects. Moreover, social value is closely linked with social capital in several ways (Westlund & Gawell, 2012). Broadly speaking, social capital includes several aspects of social contexts, such as social ties and trusting relationships (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Putnam (2001) distinguished between “bridging” (inclusive), “bonding” (exclusive), and “linking dimensions” of social capital. Sometimes social capital is inward-looking and reinforces existing identities or strengthens the sense of belonging to a homogeneous group. This can be considered bonding social capital, where an internal group or network has several common values and norms that keep the group together while excluding those on the outside. Event volunteerism might contribute to the creation and maintenance of social capital since volunteers work together for a goal they consider important. However, networks may also be outward-looking, reaching across social divides to connect people. While bridging social capital can form broader identities and mutuality, bonding social capital supplements narrower selves (Putnam, 2001).

Similar to the concept of social value, which is highly subjective and personal (Young, 2006), QOL depends on the individual’s perceptions and values and might aid in identifying and emphasizing necessary support and services (Schalock et al., 2002). Ultimately, the overall goal for making social changes and meeting unmet social needs may (arguably) be to improve QOL for those involved. Disabilities are often associated with problems related to participation in society, meaning this population is at risk of exclusion from certain opportunities available to others (Schalock et al., 2002). Therefore, it is reasonable to operationalize the concept of social value in terms of improved QOL. Furthermore, social inclusion, social networks, and interpersonal relations (together, social capital) are important factors affecting QOL (Schalock et al., 2002). According to Westlund (2006), social capital comprises (among other elements) social networks and relationships. Consequently, it is reasonable to say that increases in social capital and QOL may serve as significant outcomes of social entrepreneurial projects and that social value can be operationalized as an increase in social capital and QOL.

## Project-Based Leisure

Considering the circumstances of the volunteer work performed by the group of students with ID, it is challenging to identify a theoretical perspective on volunteerism that seems appropriate. Stebbins (1982, 2004) contributed significantly to conceptualizing volunteerism through his work on serious leisure. However, for this study, the category of project-based leisure is the most relevant. Project-based leisure can be characterized as a short-term, moderately complicated, one-shot undertaking that happens in a person’s free time. Often, much planning, effort, and skill or knowledge is required to proceed with this kind of project (Stebbins, 2005). In this case and the previous study (Undlien, 2019), the teachers of the students with ID did the planning as they possess the necessary knowledge about the group’s capabilities and the skills for organizing their volunteer participation. Recognizable benefits associated with this type of leisure activity include a special identity and a sense of belonging to a social group (Stebbins, 2005).

Project-based leisure has potential for building community. People who would otherwise not have met can gather and get to know each other. Moreover, in relation to event volunteering, project-based leisure can contribute to producing community events and projects (Stebbins, 2007) that, in turn, have valuable social impacts on local communities and their residents (Chalip, 2006).

## Social Innovations and Volunteerism

Within the field of social entrepreneurship, social innovation is a central element in the formation of social value (Dees, Emerson, & Economy, 2002; Pol & Ville, 2009; Hulgård & Lundgaard Andersen, 2014). Hulgård (2007) emphasizes that social innovations may be new ideas that comply with social needs while creating new forms of social relationships or cooperation. Arguably, we can discuss social innovations when people with ID, normally excluded from the volunteer context, work as volunteers through facilitation by social entrepreneurs, with a goal of gaining social value as an outcome of their participation (Undlien, 2019). This is also a new kind of cooperation and way of organizing interpersonal activities to meet common goals (Mumford, 2002), e.g., learning new social skills and being included in new social settings. However, if people with ID working as volunteers is to be defined as social innovation, there is a need to look further at the outcome of the innovation, as an idea with a potential for improving QOL (Pol & Ville, 2009).

## METHODS

### Study Design and Setting

This qualitative study was conducted through semistructured interviews shaped as informal conversations. The goal was to gather descriptions, thoughts, and reflections about the lived world of the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), focusing especially on the beneficial outcomes of volunteering at the 2016 YOG.

The YOG, a major sporting event, gathered 1100 athletes from all over the world to compete in 15 different winter sports (Hanstad, Kristiansen, Sand, Skirstad, & Strittmatter, 2016). It is the newcomer to the Olympic family, with extensive cultural and educational programs (Houlihan, Hanstad, & Parent, 2014). During the five-day event, the group of high-school students with ID enrolled as volunteers, with the task of picking up trash in one of the main arenas of the event. Some volunteers also worked at a storehouse for five days before the event, with different tasks related to organizing and transporting equipment for the various venues. One of the students also worked several days after the event.

### Interviewees

In the initial study (Undlien, 2019), 12 youth with ID, ages 19–23 years, who volunteered during the 2016 YOG were interviewed and observed during the event. The inclusion criteria for participation in the present study were based on the subjects' abilities to communicate about and reflect on events, experiences, and perceptions of the past. Of the 12 original participants, three females and five males met these criteria based on experience from the previous study and were invited to participate in interviews two years after the event; five brought one of their parents to the interview. In addition to assisting their children with the interview, these five consenting parents participated in brief interviews. These interviews were included in the study primarily to strengthen the answers of those with ID and to gain their perspectives of potential changes in the lives of the former volunteers resulting from their work at the YOG, thereby improving the opportunity to collect richer data.

### Procedure and Data Collection

Where to be interviewed and whether to bring a parent were entirely up to each interviewee. One interview was at a public café, another at the local university. The remaining interviews were held in the interviewees' homes. Interviews with former YOG volunteers lasted 30–45 minutes; those with parents were 15–25 minutes long.

Previous work with these particular interviewees informed the creation of an open-interview guide that could easily be adjusted according to individuals' capabilities. In the initial study, most of the interviews were conducted in real-time while they were working as volunteers and relied heavily on observations as well (Undlien, 2019). According to Biklen and Moseley (1988), researchers who conduct interviews with people with disabilities find that observation is an important part of the process. Although observation was not used as a scientific method here, relevant elements were observed during the interviews that told the interviewer something about the importance of the event in the interviewees' lives. For instance, one interviewee had his accreditation card displayed alongside various YOG merchandise in a frame hanging in the most visible place in his living room. Another knew exactly where her volunteer clothing could be found, even though they are warm clothes that had not been worn since last winter, and the interview took place on a warm autumn day.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, with notes inserted for laughter, expressions, and tone of voice (e.g., gesticulating, stuttering, talking rapidly, etc.). In addition, a "reflection log" was written after each interview where parts of the conversation considered particularly interesting were noted.

### Qualitative Interviews with People with ID

Qualitative methods contribute increasingly to highlighting the unknown about people with ID and are highly valuable for enlightening us about their lives and experiences (Beail & Williams, 2014). People with ID have a cognitive impairment that can make it difficult to understand complex questions or to get an overview of the scope of the question(s) asked. Furthermore, many find it difficult to determine which answers to a question might be relevant (Beail & Williams, 2014; Ellingsen, 2010). According to Booth and Booth (1996), researchers conducting qualitative research with this population often face four main challenges, and this was true in this study. These are inarticulateness, unresponsiveness, lack of a concrete frame of reference (such as difficulties related to generalizing in relation to experiences and reflecting in abstract terms), and challenges regarding the order of events/times.

A simple interview guide was created that divided questions by themes into three categories: volunteerism, social capital, and QOL. As these theoretical concepts may be difficult for people with ID to understand, they were rephrased as questions aimed at discovering the effects on the interviewees of volunteering for the YOG. For example, questions regarding new acquaintances addressed bridging social capital, while bonding social capital was forwarded

through questions relating to how volunteering affected and continues to affect relationships among the former volunteers. There were also questions that tried to highlight whether the event continues to be a source of subjective and positive everyday experiences, as identified in the initial study (Undlien, 2019).

Many people with ID experience challenges related to the functioning of working memory (Schuchardt, Gebhardt, & Mäehler, 2010). Such challenges were familiar to the author, given his experience with the interviewees during the previous study. One strategy for overcoming them might be using important people in the interviewees' lives, such as parents (Biklen & Moseley, 1988).

### **Interviewing Parents and Parent Presence During Interviews**

The brief interviews with five parents were organized into three themes: value gained by their children by participating at the YOG, resulting social or personal changes, and the role the YOG may still play in their children's everyday lives.

Although the literature on using parents as facilitators during interviews with people with ID is scant, several studies have used this approach, especially in research with children (although without disabilities). Irwin and Johnson (2005) found that having parents present while interviewing young children added richness and completeness to the children's stories. Dolva, Kollstad, and Kleiven (2016) also used this approach in their study of adolescents with Down syndrome and their participation in leisure activities.

In this study, the role of the parent present at the interview was similar to that of the parents in Irwin and Johnson's (2005) study. Every interview started with the author asking the interviewee (with ID) if it was okay for his/her parent to help during the interview if the interviewee should need it. The parent could rephrase the question that was asked, assist in finding triggers for memories, and give the interviewee cues, leading to richer answers to questions. Having a parent present is also a way of validating the answers of those with ID, as they could clarify or correct details in the stories of the interviewees.

### **Photo Interviews**

Using photos in interviews with people with ID can have the positive effect of reducing or averting the strangeness of the interview situation (Schwartz, 1989). It is increasingly common to use photographic methods in qualitative research with this population (Aldridge, 2007). Photo

interviewing might prove helpful for researchers by providing nuance, challenging participants, and triggering memories, thereby offering new perspectives and information and helping avoid misinterpretations by the researcher (Hurworth, 2004). In this study, participants were asked to bring three different photos from their volunteer participation, which were used as a basis for the interviews. Not every interviewee did so, but several brought a "memory" book with photos. In addition, photos from the YOG brought by the interviewer and a specific video clip from the YOG were used as starting points for the conversation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All interviewees, including youth and their parents, received written information about the study in advance and provided written informed consent. Initial contact was made with the parents of the eight former volunteers with ID. Of these, three requested that the author contact their respective child directly, as they anticipated the former volunteers would not wish to have a parent present at the interview, which was confirmed by these youth. Parents were only allowed to participate with their child's agreement. Where necessary, parents of the interviewees assisted their child with providing informed consent. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

### **Analysis**

The theoretical concepts of social value, social capital, and QOL served as the basis for the analysis, which was inspired by a "bricolage" approach, through which meaning is generated by applying theoretical terms and significance to the accounts of the interviewees ad hoc. In addition, by choosing this approach, several different meaning-generating techniques may be applied, such as the creation of an overall picture of the material, rereading of data (in this case, the transcripts and the logbooks with reflections), and the creation of narratives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

As several of the interviewees had limited spoken language, it was sometimes necessary to rewrite the interview as a narrative. For instance, a story was developed about the interviewee's new life, such as where he/she lives and works, his or her participation in leisure activities, friends, networks, and how these relate to the volunteer effort during the YOG. The narrative could be created through simple questions (answers could be "yes" or "no"), in addition to some information from the parent present at the interview. By combining these answers and adding context provided by the parent, simple answers and sentences were

reconstructed as whole narratives. An important aspect of this was having the parent present and involved in getting the story correct and ensuring that the interviewee could express his/her intended meaning. The aim of the narratives was to describe what had happened since volunteering at the YOG and to determine whether volunteering affects the person at the present time.

Other interviewees had quite advanced vocabularies; thus, their interviews could be subjects of more rigorous analysis. As is often the case with people with ID, the interviewees could digress from the subject of the conversation; however, according to the author's experience, data can often be found in such digressions. The bricolage approach is particularly useful when rereading passages where the contribution to the data may be missing in the first place (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In the transcripts of these digressions, it was sometimes necessary to "shave off" bits, extracting the most relevant parts and reconstructing them to form a more coherent picture.

Themes and experiences that the interviewees discussed during the conversations were highlighted, taken in relation to each other, and interpreted with reference to the three theoretical categories of the study. The theoretical constructs of the study were used to apply meaning to the interviewees' stories in attempts to discover how the stories could be related to the YOG.

## FINDINGS

### Social Value and Social Capital

All the interviewees described wearing the volunteer uniform regularly and with pride. The uniform was considered highly important and valuable by most interviewees. One interviewee's parent explained humorously that it was difficult to make her daughter wear something other than the uniform. All the interviewees claimed to use some or most of the clothing on a daily basis during winter and some of it even during summer. The volunteer uniform served as a reminder of the days of the event and as a link to others who also volunteered at the YOG. According to the mother of one interviewee, her daughter could "spot a uniform a mile away." She might also talk to others wearing clothing related to the YOG, even if she did not know them.

At the time of the interviews (two years post-YOG), most of the interviewees were working at facilitated workplaces or day centers for people with ID or other special needs. Two worked at regular jobs. According to one mother, her son

learned how to perform physical labor during the YOG. This, in turn, led directly to his securing employment at a regular job as opposed to at a facilitated workplace or day center. Having worked as a volunteer at the YOG served to open doors to another volunteer as well, helping him to gain employment at two different grocery stores. Thus, volunteering had a positive impact on two volunteers' career opportunities.

Only one interviewee mentioned making new acquaintances during the 2016 event, although the two volunteers have not talked since. The rest had minimal social interaction with the other volunteers; thus, access to new networks or expanding existing ones was limited.

Although most of those who volunteered during the YOG meet either in smaller groups or all together on several weekly occasions (especially at a youth club for people with ID in the municipality on a given day every week), they rarely talk about the volunteer experience. However, one expressed joy knowing that they could if they wanted to. The mere possibility that the former volunteers could get together and talk about the event was a source of happiness for him, even though they did so seldom or never. At the local club the DJ would usually play a song that the interviewee and his choir (unrelated to either school or the volunteer work) recorded during the YOG about the event, and as he said, "We hear the song, and we know that we were there."

### Social Value and Quality of Life

Of all the interviewees, only two could mention negative aspects of working as volunteers during the YOG. One explained, "It was slippery; we almost tripped all the time. It was hard to figure where to empty the plastic bags with garbage, and it was kind of a mess when we first got there . . . the [accreditation] cards and everything. We did not know which area we were supposed to be at or anything; it was kind of messy the first time." The other interviewee stated that he did not approve of how the group was organized during the five-day event; he would have preferred that they were divided into smaller groups, thus covering a larger area. This was not an issue he raised at the time but rather something he had realized retrospectively. The interviewee felt that all of them walking as one group was ineffective as opposed to dividing the group into smaller teams that worked all over the venue.

Although the task of collecting trash was considered meaningful, joyful, and suitable by most interviewees, there were others who found that particular task a little boring. As

one said, "It was something that I did not enjoy from the start; it did, however, get better at the end." Another was not pleased about how the group was organized during the day.

While not a negative aspect of volunteering at the event at the time, another interviewee said it was difficult for her when the event ended, as returning to normal, everyday life felt like a letdown. Two years later, this interviewee still felt sad about this.

Several interviewees thought of things that could have been organized differently concerning their work routines, while others felt there was some disorganization regarding when and where they were going to work. Still, all were left with positive experiences and had no trouble mentioning fun aspects of the experience. Most of the interviewees highlighted picking up trash and "people-watching" as the most enjoyable. Those who had also worked at the warehouse before the event considered those days the best as they were more diverse and challenging. As one interviewee said, "Working at the warehouse was the coolest [thing] I have ever done. That made me realize that this was something I could do in the future!"

For those who found work at regular jobs as a result of volunteering, the YOG may have played a particularly important role in improving their QOL. For the rest, the YOG served as a constant source of positive memories and experiences. They still use some or all of the uniform on a regular basis, and the uniform is a visual reminder of the event. All the interviewees said they regularly think about the event as it was such an extraordinary and special experience. Many described talking about the event frequently, in particular with their parents. One interviewee had his accreditation card and a selection of pictures from the YOG in a framed display in the most visible spot in his living room.

To see oneself as someone working and doing physical labor was important to several interviewees. When at work, one of them almost took on a new identity based on his perception of how, in his words, the "working man" looks and acts. The backpack he received from the YOG was his dedicated "work backpack," which he was eager to display during the interview. He also explained that, to his mother's surprise, he drinks coffee when at work, as this is something he perceives working people do.

All five of the parents who were interviewed were immensely proud of their sons and daughters, for getting a chance to do something extraordinary, being a part of something big, and showing that they could be useful and add value to the community. Many described having seen their son or daughter change during the event, grow more

secure, learn new things, and become more ready for adult life after school. Consequently, volunteering at the YOG made an impact on the QOL of the parents as well, as they saw new, positive sides to their respective children, including independence, initiative, and eagerness to perform physical labor.

### Volunteerism

All the interviewees remembered their volunteer days well. They could recall being a part of the event as volunteers, their specific routines in regard to picking up garbage, and the names of those in their group. Some remembered quite a number of details. Although several had limited spoken language, simple sentences could provide a lot of information. For instance, one interviewee said, "We danced, me and (name of teacher)," referring to a spontaneous three-minute dance in the cantina on one occasion. Several other volunteers were present, and the commotion was actually filmed by a national media team. The days when they were volunteering were quite different from ordinary days and, to some extent, remarkable, which may make it easier for the interviewees to remember them.

Most interviewees were aware of what the YOG was, and some were able to describe the event. For instance, one explained: "The YOG was kind of a sport for many [people] around the world, where they were competing and trying to be best in, for instance, ski jumping or ordinary slalom skiing, things like that." When asked the same question, others simply stated it was hard to describe. However, as a whole the interviewees demonstrated that they knew what the event was about. For some, the YOG was just about picking up trash; they were not really concerned about the sports or any other activities associated with the event, such as concerts, "trying the sport" (one of the programs of the event), or spectating at the venues.

Most interviewees understood the concept of volunteering, described by one of them this way: "Being a volunteer is simply enjoyable, helping, and being a part of something that is fun for others, seeing it in a more important way." Another described volunteering as "working together, doing things for the environment, helping people, and if not, events may not happen." Furthermore, all of them understood that they were doing this work without getting paid or compensated in any way.

Only one interviewee had engaged in some kind of volunteer work during the two years after the event by being involved to some extent in a political youth organization. However, the mother of one interviewee said she had attempted to show interest in volunteering on her daughter's

behalf. When she talked with representatives of a major local sporting event, she was left with the impression that it was difficult to include people with ID in that particular event. Instead of an embracing welcome, she felt resistance when she suggested that the group, or at least her child, could volunteer as they had done during the YOG, so she abandoned her effort.

The interviews show that the school played an important part in facilitating the participation of the students with ID as volunteers at the YOG. Now that they are out of school and scattered, they do not volunteer unless someone takes the initiative on their behalf. They need someone other than their parents leading them. As the mother of one interviewee said, "If no one asks, it won't happen," meaning that the initiative to volunteer needs to come from outside.

The volunteers who worked in the warehouse found that those chores were the most fun, interesting, and challenging. Two years after the YOG, picking up trash at the event was still considered something positive, meaningful, and fun. For some interviewees, picking up trash was what they wanted to talk about when discussing the YOG, rather than the facts that they met celebrities, got airtime on Norwegian television, or attended the opening ceremony. For these interviewees, this task was considered the most important aspect of volunteering at the YOG. When asked what they remember most about the event, some simply answered "trash" or "throwing trash." However, there were also those who enjoyed being part of the YOG atmosphere and the extraordinary events that took place during the YOG as well as being part of a larger community and working toward the shared goal of successfully hosting a big sporting event. One interviewee described his tasks during the event: "Picking up trash, cleaning the area, actually being a part of the community; we were a part of the community. Meeting the people, meeting the athletes, meeting the Olympic community. Also meeting celebrities (naming several)."

## DISCUSSION

This article aimed to answer three questions:

- *What possibilities do large sporting events offer for creating **lasting** social value for people with intellectual disabilities through volunteering?*
- *How can volunteering at an event such as the YOG affect the social capital and quality of life for persons with intellectual disabilities?*
- *To what extent do any changes in social capital, quality*

*of life, and social value for people with ID depend on the nature of the volunteer work at a large sporting event?*

## Social Value

Within the concept of social entrepreneurship, the ultimate goal is the creation of social value through social innovation (Dees, 2001). In the previous study conducted at the 2016 YOG (Undlien, 2019), the teachers served as social innovators by initiating cooperation with the event organizers. The cooperation between the school and the YOG was new, with a potential for improving QOL, thereby aligning with the characteristics of social innovations (Pol & Ville, 2009). The main objectives were inclusion and improving the participants' opportunities for future employment by learning new social and practical skills (Undlien, 2019) or, in other words, facilitating a better future and increase in QOL.

While the initial study by Undlien (2019) operationalized social value according to Young (2006) as highly subjective and positive experiences, this study used a different approach. Theoretically, this article aimed to further address whether there was a change in social capital and quality of life for the former volunteers, as these arguably can be seen as important aspects of social value. In addition, examining social value further than a feeling of belonging to a group and society as whole is needed in order to see whether lasting social value was created.

Social value is often conceptualized as the addressing of social needs and work toward social change resulting from social innovations (Mair & Marti, 2006). Therefore, the first factor to be addressed is the clarification of this group's unmet social needs and the attempt to identify the kinds of changes desired. Moreover, to determine whether social innovation was successful and created social value, it is crucial to address the de facto social changes of the project's target group.

The desire to belong, to participate in society, and to be seen as an equal is important and not exclusive to people with ID. Furthermore, these may be considered the overall goals for initiating the volunteer project (Undlien, 2019), and, to some extent, the teachers succeeded in meeting these objectives. This particular feeling of belonging may have been context-specific; thus, the event's coming to an end and the passage of time took their toll. However, this study demonstrates that most of the group with ID who volunteered during the event continue to see each other on a regular basis and to wear parts of the volunteer uniform, thereby enhancing this feeling of belonging and serving as

an indicator of enhanced social value.

### Social Capital and Quality of Life

The volunteer uniform functioned as a source for pride for the group of students with ID during the event (Undlien, 2019), and it still does, acting as a daily reminder of “who they were” during their days volunteering at the YOG. For those particular days, they could see themselves as useful and part of a large team working toward the same goal. At the present time, the uniform plays an important role in building bonding social capital among the former volunteers with ID while helping to provide bridging social capital to others who also volunteered during the event (Putnam, 2001). All the interviewees in this study recognize the uniform when it is worn by others, and some of them talk with people they have not met before simply because they are wearing the uniform.

Social change, where private actors step in where no or few others can or will in order to change a suboptimal situation regarding equity for a specific group, is central for social entrepreneurs (Martin & Osberg, 2007). It is arguable whether participating as volunteers at the YOG led to any social change in relation to integration in society or an increase in social networks for the students with ID or, put another way, whether there has been a change in their social capital as a result of volunteering that affects their QOL. In regard to social capital in terms of social networks and connections among individuals (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994), the effect has been minor. The volunteers with ID had limited contact with other volunteers during the event and acquired few or no new acquaintances with whom they have kept in touch. However, for two of them, working as volunteers provided them with linking social capital, connecting individuals across social and institutional hierarchies (Putnam, 2001) and leading to their employment as regular employees with salaries.

Having people with ID employed at regular jobs, as opposed to government-funded day centers where many people with ID (Söderström & Tøssebro, 2011) spend their time, is also an empirical example of how social capital may be converted into benefits for society (Tan, Williams, & Tan, 2005). The two that were employed in regular jobs were both able to express themselves clearly, understood how to perform a variety of practical tasks, and were accustomed to being independent in their everyday life. In their positions, they had social interaction with customers and coworkers on a daily basis. For these two, being employed may hold potential for extending their social networks, thus providing them with increased social capital, potentially affecting

QOL. Whether they will take advantage of this and actually use this opportunity remains unclear, but the option is present. While the effect of volunteering on bridging social capital may have been limited (i.e., applicable for only two of the interviewees), its effect on bonding social capital within the group has been much stronger. One can argue that this leaves the group in a relatively unchanged state concerning social capital. However, their volunteer participation still serves as an experience that can be shared and discussed with others. At the event, 3,368 people volunteered, and half that number were 29 years old or younger (Hanstad et al, 2016). Most of the volunteers also reside in the relatively small city of Lillehammer; thus, the chance of meeting someone who volunteered is high. Having shared this experience may serve as a linking element, supported by the use of the volunteer uniform, providing the group with ID with a common ground with others and, potentially, an increase in social capital at a later stage of life.

Although the event is over, the interviewees still find a sense of achievement. There were also links to the wider community (the two who were employed). Some interviewees even experienced a sense of fulfillment of potential by feeling the reward of self-actualization (Schallock et al., 2002).

Serious leisure, such as volunteering, is characterized by the development of skills and knowledge (Stebbins, 2004). As time has passed, two of the interviewees have reflected on aspects of the volunteer experience that could have been better. There was room for improvement in regard to organizing the group of volunteers differently, choosing the task they were assigned, and increasing their level of influence. However, those particular interviewees also achieved learning outcomes in the form of new practical and social skills. Moreover, sharing negative experiences might provide a bonding element with others who share this view. This aspect of learning might have been lost had they not volunteered for the event. It may also imply that the interviewees wish to be taken seriously, both as volunteers and as adults.

Volunteering at the YOG may have affected social capital and quality of life for the group of volunteers with ID to some extent, although certain requirements needed to be present. Quality of life might have been affected by being involved in an extraordinary experience doing something that was experienced as meaningful together with friends. This in turn may also have influenced their bonding social capital, bringing them closer together as a group, despite having a limited effect on bridging social capital.

## Volunteerism

From this study, we see that people with ID can understand the concept of volunteering and the benefits it might offer others. There are three aspects that were important in order for this group to be able to volunteer: (1) someone taking the initiative to volunteer on their behalf; (2) an open-minded and flexible event, with a variety of tasks to choose from; and (3) a group with which to volunteer (see also, Stebbins, 2004).

The interviews revealed that the task the volunteers were doing and with whom they were doing it was important for making this a positive experience. This supports the views of Csikszentmihalyi (1997) that volunteering with friends might lead to an increase in life quality. Moreover, volunteering led to the formation of new friendships within the group. Although they were already familiar with each other, working together allowed them to see and appreciate new aspects of each other.

The impact that volunteering at the YOG has made on the group of students with ID and its contribution to providing lasting social value is closely connected to the Olympic context and atmosphere. From the perspective of project-based leisure, the YOG was an extraordinary event, moderately complicated, and conducted in a relatively brief time frame (Stebbins, 2004). The group of volunteers with ID gained access to a special identity as volunteers at an Olympic event that resulting in their bonding. Stebbins (2004) noted this as one of the benefits often associated with project-based leisure. Related to the findings of this study, it may also be that it is more difficult for this particular type of volunteer to gain access to local events. However, future studies should investigate this further. Still, there are certain conditions related to Olympic events that do not apply to local ones, especially in regard to relatively high media coverage, the presence of celebrities, exciting opportunities for various activities, and attention within the local community. These combined factors result in a unique event for volunteering and influencing the experience of those who participated. It is arguable that these elements contributed significantly to the creation of social value through an increase in social capital and quality of life for the group of former volunteers. The task itself was important in this process, as it was experienced as meaningful and something that could be managed by all, but the environment and circumstances in which the task was performed may have played an equally important role in the creation of lasting social value. As long as the job to be done at an event is perceived as important, significant, and manageable, it can be a source for lasting social value. Still,

it is reasonable to claim that larger events are better able to provide an exceptional atmosphere for volunteering than smaller ones. Whether sporting events depend on these elements in order to achieve these results needs to be explored in future studies.

One can argue that there is a danger in looking back too much on the event instead of working toward the future. There is a risk that, for the interviewees, volunteering at the YOG becomes an experience that overshadows any future involvement as volunteers. In a Norwegian context, volunteer uniforms and meeting celebrities are uncommon in regular sporting events. However, Undlien's study (2019) demonstrated that the main value of volunteering was related to the task itself (picking up garbage) and who they were doing it with (friends and classmates). Thus, there is also a chance that looking back at their YOG experience—as was done in this study—the group of former volunteers may wish to pursue an opportunity to again experience value through physical labor with people they know. In doing so, the experiences gained during the YOG may influence the former volunteers' desire to do volunteer work in the future and require them to adjust their expectations, as volunteering at non-Olympic events may not be considered as extraordinary.

## LIMITATIONS

While only eight interviewees participated in this study, as a qualitative study, the aim is not to generalize but rather examine how volunteering at the YOG has affected the lived lives of the interviewees. Moreover, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), it is often advantageous to have few interviewees and to spend more time on the preparation and analysis of the interviews.

Furthermore, two years after the event may seem brief, as many of the experiences and memories may still be fresh. However, for the interviewees, these two years have involved a transition from students to young adults. Most of the former volunteers now have daytime jobs, either in facilitated day centers or regular jobs. They all live in or around the same city; some have moved into their own apartments, either alone or with assistance from municipally employed people. At the time of the study, others still lived with their parents but were about to move into their own apartments. Accordingly, all of the interviewees found themselves at a new stage in life, adding richness to the picture compared to the initial study by Undlien (2019).

In qualitative research, there is always a risk that the interviewees will simply tell the interviewer what they

believe he or she wants to hear (Biklen & Moseley, 1988). In this study, a parent would intervene at some points if the youth gave an inaccurate answer to the interviewer's question that made his or her response less relevant to the study. Thus, having a parent present may have been another way to add richness to the data and serve as a check on the youth's responses. In addition, questions could be rephrased by the interviewer and asked again in order to strengthen an interviewee's response.

There are also limitations associated with the capabilities of the interviewees to express themselves and to reflect on the past and the future. The interviewees may also have been more prone to remembering the positive aspects of the event as it was so exclusive and outstanding, thus focusing less on potential negative aspects. The impacts of these limitations have been minimized by relying on close reading and interpretation of the data supported by the previous study and also including the perspective of parents in the cases where this was necessary.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Two years after the event, the YOG is still a source of positive experiences for the volunteers with ID interviewed for this study, which are, in turn, important aspects of social value (Young, 2006). To some extent, the volunteer activities appear to have led to a change in how the youth with ID see themselves, allowing for an opportunity to resist being labeled as persons in need of assistance and instead being seen as useful and important people who provided aid at an event (Grue, 2001). Although the picture has shifted from exclusively positive (Undlien, 2019) to one where room for improvement has been identified or where memories of things that did not work as well have been expressed, the overall picture remains positive among all the former volunteers interviewed.

Volunteering at the YOG granted the volunteers several benefits including learning new skills (doing physical labor) and a special identity (as a volunteer at an Olympic event, enforced by the volunteer uniform). Thus, project-based leisure, such as volunteering at the YOG, has made and is still making an impact on the QOL for those who were part of the 2016 event (Stebbins, 2005). It is an entry for conversation with people they would otherwise have nothing in common with. In two cases, it has led to employment opportunities, and it continues to provide a strong bonding social capital for the group. However, it seems to have provided the group with limited bridging or linking social capital (Putnam, 2001) in terms of extended

networks that might be advantageous for the former volunteers. Moreover, volunteering at the YOG has led to personal development for some in several areas, and others continue to experience a sense of well-being and positive involvement (Schalock et al., 2002). An added dimension is the impact it has had on some of the parents of the former volunteers, who discovered new sides to their sons or daughters. The findings from this small study suggest that it may be possible to use an event such as the YOG to create lasting social value for people with ID through volunteerism.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that it is not my intention to make any kind of comparison between people with intellectual disabilities and children.

<sup>2</sup>This is translated directly from Norwegian, where "throwing" the trash means getting rid of it.

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