



#12 - Delegations

Nacer Zorgani: Hi, I'm Nacer Zorgani, I work for Paris 2024 in the volunteers programme. What is the volunteers programme? What do volunteers do, what are their roles, what are their missions? To answer these questions, to talk about the programme, to talk about the volunteer experience, join me with the men and women who have been, are and will be involved in the Games. Welcome to a volunteer's uniform!

Jingle (Introductory music)

Nacer Zorgani: More than 300,000 of you have applied to take part in the Paris 2024 volunteers programme, and we'd like to thank you!

Then, in this podcast, we invite you to go a little further into the volunteer experience, as we are about to go in the Games backstage, by talking about the Olympic and Paralympic Village: the Athletes' Village, which will be hosting delegations and chefs de mission, what does this mean?

Sophie Lorant, Director of International Relations, Paola Mora, Head of Relations and Services for the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees, and André-Pierre Goubert, Head of the Olympic Division of the French National Olympic Sports Committee, are here to answer our questions. Thank you for joining us!

All: Hello!

Nacer Zorgani: Dear Sophie, you are the Director of International Relations for Paris 2024. I'd like you to tell us about the challenges facing the village and international relations for Paris 2024.

Sophie Lorant: We often say that the village is like the world, we welcome the world into the village, so for Paris 2024, it will be a question of making this village working with all the nations, and today we are living in a very complex geopolitical context.

You have to understand that each delegation has different stakes: some relate to sporting, others are geopolitically related. We often think about which nation has won the most titles, the one with the most medals, but that's not all.

During the Games there are also golden opportunities for running another sort of diplomacy, and we hope that there will be other ways of helping to make the world a little better through sport.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much for that insight, Sophie. Paola, you're in charge of relations and services for the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees, so, what are these committees and what is a delegation?

Paola Mora: So, the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees are the representatives of the Olympic and Paralympic movement in their country. They promote these movements, which is one of their missions, but they also choose the delegations that will take part in the Games: there are the athletes, the chefs de mission and the team officials who take care of the administrative procedures for the whole team, but also the coaches, the physiotherapists and all the people around the athletes.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much for those definitions, and we're going to focus a little more on the role of the chefs de mission, since we're here with someone who was recently a chef de mission in Tokyo, but not only that, since you've taken part in more than a dozen Olympiads, André-Pierre, what is the Chef de Mission?

André-Pierre Goubert: Yes, quickly, as you pointed out, I have been involved in 12 Olympic Games and a multitude of other events, because the National Olympic Committee doesn't just organise the Olympic Games, and lead the delegations, there are 14 events that we are responsible for...

And then, over the course of an Olympiad, the role of the chefs de mission is to ensure that the delegation runs smoothly in the various functional areas. Whether it's accommodation, welcoming the delegations to the village, transport for the delegation, relations with the media, of course, it's an important role because the chef de mission is a spokesperson for the French delegation at the Games.

The chefs de mission must embody the values of Olympism above all else, and has operational responsibility before and during the Games for the sports delegation, which is made up of athletes and team officials.

Nacer Zorgani: As I said, we're going to go a little further in the backstage of the organisation of the Games, and we're going to present you the Olympic and Paralympic Chefs de mission related Seminars, workshops, now that we know what their role is, but before that Paola, can you tell us about the relationships and services available to these previously stated committees?

Paola Mora: We have the privilege of having a daily relationship with each of these committees, so that's the most important thing: to put in place a good team to deal with the day-to-day tasks and the support they need to prepare their athletes and their teams to come to the Games.

Sophie Lorant: Trust is another crucial element! In fact, for the delegations to come and perform at their best, they absolutely have to receive all the information, and for that to happen, trust can't be decreed, it has to be lived day by day, and that's precisely the role of Paola Mora's team.

And then there's the key moment. A year before the Games, we'll be organising this seminar for the Chefs of mission, Paola will be telling us all about it later on...

Nacer Zorgani: It's often said here at Paris 2024 that volunteers help to improve the experience of all those who come to the Games. André-Pierre, did you really experience it when you were head of mission?

André-Pierre Goubert: For us, it's really essential. To put it in context, a delegation... Let's take Paris as an example: the French delegation will consist of around 600 athletes, to which must be added, as Paola was saying, the team officials. So, we're going to have a delegation of nearly 1,400 people. So, there are the team officials who are there for their sport, their discipline.

However, there is a staff called a transversal staff, which manages the whole delegation. And this cross-disciplinary staff is small for the national Olympic committee, just 18 people.

So these people need support, and the role of the assistant is very important. With a member of staff, we pair up an assistant in very specific areas, such as welcoming delegations when you arrive in the village, accommodation, day-to-day life in the village, secretarial services, entertainment during the Games, etc. There's a whole life here, it's a community, a family, so we live the Games together.

Nacer Zorgani: And there will be volunteers already mobilised for the famous chefs de mission seminars. Paola, What are these two seminars: Olympic and Paralympic chefs de mission?

Paola Mora: This is the time when we bring together all the committees and NOCs and show them where we are in our preparations for the Games and showcase them Paris and the competition and non-competition venues.

Nacer Zorgani: I'd like to take this opportunity to point out to our listeners that the competition venues, such as the Stade de France or the Velodrome in Marseille, are the places where the events will take place, and the non-competition venues such as hotels, accommodation, hospitality, the Olympic and Paralympic Village, as well as press centres and accreditation centres.

But let's get back to the seminar. Can Paola tell us more about it? What's going to happen there?

Paola Mora: It's a week of activities, with plenary sessions where the directors of the Paris 2024 departments will present the progress of the project. There will be venues visits and, very importantly, visits to the Olympic and Paralympic Village.

But it's also a time for sharing and conviviality, because in most cases it's the first time we meet the National Committees, so it's crucial in building the trust that Sophie has just mentioned.

Nacer Zorgani: So, Sophie, can we say that these seminars are really the kick-off for the preparation of these delegations for the Paris 2024 Games?

Sophie Lorant: Yes, that's really it. It's the kick-off one year before the Games, because this seminar is structuring for the committees and the NOCs, i.e. the different delegations, to prepare for the Games.

And it's at this point that we give as many details as possible to get prepared as an athlete gets prepared. The chef de mission and his team will prepare themselves mentally and structurally, so that the athletes perform at their best.

Nacer Zorgani: Paola, we've seen what's going to happen before the Games, what's going to happen during them?

Paola Mora: We're continuing with this relationship of trust, we're looking after the reception of the teams, we're organising meetings where we finalise the registration of all the athletes and team officials, so that they can be validated to take part in the Games.

In the village, which is our base, we are in direct contact with the chefs de mission appointed by their delegations. We also work with the other departments to resolve problems during the Games.

Nacer Zorgani: Sophie, André-Pierre, in your respective experiences at the various Olympic Games you've taken part in, is there an anecdote about your contact with a delegation, an athlete or a volunteer that stood out for you?

Sophie Lorant: I worked on the London 2012 Games, and what really stood out for me were the volunteers, their human richness, and their diversity.

And indeed, when you bring them together for the first time, you see all these different profiles, and you think: "Oh dear, how am I going to get all this to become one big family?" Well, it comes naturally.

So in my team, I had an older lady, and the volunteer who was the most committed, who succeeded in giving more impetus, was precisely this lady. She ensured that all the NOCs for which she was responsible actually became her own. In the end, she even managed the route with the Head of State.

André-Pierre Goubert: From memory, I remember it was during the Winter Games. I went to a competition to see how it went.

On the side of the road, I see a local athlete with a snowboard, hitchhiking. I recognised her. We stopped and I asked her: "Where are you off to?" She replies, "Well, I'm on my way to my competition. I missed the bus and didn't know how to get there. So we picked her up. She still missed the warm-up training, but she took part in the competition. In the end, she became Olympic silver medalist... an Olympic title comes down to a few things.

Nacer Zorgani: Thank you very much! With all the flags in the Olympic and Paralympic Village, all the nations, all the delegations, you'd think it was a bit like the United Nations. Sophie, how does the Olympic and Paralympic Village inspire you?

Sophie Lorant: The comparison with the United Nations is interesting, Nacer, but the beauty of the village is that sport transcends nations.

In the catering area, for example, we have athletes of different nationalities, who can potentially be at war with each other. So, during the Games, the athletes discover each other's culture, it's a huge intercultural melting pot. The main value in this environment is respect, particularly respect for the competitor.

Sport really does transcend all difficulties, and we always hope that these Games will help the world to interact on the basis of respect and fraternity.

Nacer Zorgani: And thanks to the energy that Sport could bring! Sophie, Paola, André-Pierre, thank you so much for being with us!

And for you who are listening to us, thank you for keeping listening and see you next time. See you soon!