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VOLUNTEER MOTIVES AS A CATALYST OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY*

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Abstract. Volunteering is a catalyst for developing well-being-oriented communities, which are fundamental to the social economy. The transition towards a social economy triggers questions about volunteer roles and the forces which drive them. The paper explores volunteers' motivations, attitudes, and expectations and volunteering as a catalyst for deploying the social economy concept. A survey was conducted among the volunteer community in Bulgaria, and 422 volunteers responded. The study shows that while each person has their motivations for participating in charitable activities, volunteers stand out for their desire to develop new skills, meet new people, belong to a specific community, and change society for the better. The analysis enriches existing views by identifying effective communication as key to attracting and retaining volunteers. Organisations must clearly explain their mission, be transparent about their goals and expectations, and create an environment where volunteers feel valued for their contributions. The obtained insights complement the existing theoretical knowledge in the field of social economy, human resources and motivation. They will also stress the need to develop policies to promote civic and corporate volunteering. The need for more in-depth research in managing voluntary organisations and, more specifically, managing voluntary human resources is emphasised.

Keywords: volunteers; volunteering; motivation; social economy; social responsibility

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JEL Classifications: L31, B55

1. Introduction

Despite not being a new phenomenon, the social economy has experienced a revival in recent decades. Organisations in this field seek to fill the gaps left by the market and the state, demonstrating innovation, adaptability, and readiness to respond to local needs given the right conditions and support to flourish (OECD, 2008). The term "Social economy" can be interpreted broadly, encompassing market and non-market activities. Examples of non-market activities are services offered by communities and cooperatives, often free to users. For this reason, organisations associated with the social economy can be part of both civil society and the market (Vaillancourt, 2009).

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Like any other economic system, the social economy allows for achieving broader goals, such as increased welfare, sustainability and promoting alternatives to the traditional capitalist model (Sumner et al., 2023). Against this background, volunteers are called upon to perform various tasks, from organising events to fundraising for charities and non-profit organisations. Besides, volunteers act as mentors and trainers, sharing their knowledge and experience to empower others through education and personal development (Pearce et al., 2023). They provide practical assistance, timely disaster support, and support for local shelters and community centres (Volunteero, n.d.). They advocate by raising awareness of social issues and promoting positive change (Zhou & Muscente, 2022; Gunn, 2023). Volunteers also contribute to environmental protection by participating in activities such as tree planting, beach cleaning, and wildlife conservation (Gunn, 2023).

Volunteers form the backbone of civic formations and non-profit associations (Zhou & Muscente, 2022). From consistently supporting all events and activities to helping organise specific programs behind the scenes, volunteers are paramount to realising the mission of non-government organisations (Richards, 2019). This gives reason to Miyamoto and Shiojiri (2023) to define volunteers – the main ones involved in realising these goals – as the *unsung heroes* on the way to achieving the socially significant transformation. Therefore, their efforts should be encouraged, mobilised, and directed to stimulate the social economy and local development in general.

The core of the concept of volunteering is that individuals engage spontaneously in private and freely chosen activities and promote or develop some aspect of the common good. No institution in society imposes these activities, and the behaviour of volunteers is not related to financial gain (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003). Different research shows that optimal motivation is achieved by pursuing multiple motives, and some of them indicate that trust, as a result of these motives, also plays the role of a motivator (Bekkers, 2012; Taniguchi & Marshall, 2014; Gaja et al., 2024).

From responding to emergencies following natural disasters to promoting youth development and protecting the environment, volunteers are indispensable in addressing social, environmental and economic challenges in their communities. Their commitment significantly impacts the economy, helping to increase GDP by an estimated 1.9% in OECD countries (OECD, 2024) and 2.4% of global GDP (Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023). Therefore, volunteers are crucial for achieving social transformation in communities of different sizes and achieving significant progress in significant paradigms of our time, including social economy, global sustainability, and green economy (VolunteerMatch, 2023).

Over 860 million people worldwide, or about 15% of the world's population, volunteer each month (OECD, 2024). However, volunteering levels are at an all-time low, with small charities the worst affected. These organisations, which make up 80% of the sector and are more dependent on volunteers, are struggling with declining volunteer numbers. The situation is worsening, with more small organisations reporting problems recruiting volunteers in the last year – 65%, up from 58% the year before (Kitson, 2024).

In Bulgaria, approximately 1.2 million people are members of non-government organisations (NGOs). Thus, practically every fifth adult Bulgarian citizen is a member of some organised form of civil association. Roughly the same share of citizens express trust in NGOs. Simultaneously, data from 2021 show that, on average, an NGO has 5 voluntary collaborators in the country. Compared to the number of NGO members, the number of volunteers seems quite modest – less than 47,000 people (Zahariev, 2018; Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023).

Everything indicates that volunteering, although vital, has been under severe pressure in recent years. Disasters and crises often lead to temporary increases in volunteering, but the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a longer-term decline. Despite the challenges of measuring volunteering globally, urgent action is needed to revitalise volunteering and strengthen its role in the development of local communities (OECD, 2024).

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Given the declining levels of volunteerism on the one hand and the societal and individual benefits gained through community engagement on the other, there is no doubt that there is a growing need to encourage volunteerism among people of different generations. But what are the factors that predispose to distrust and weak volunteer initiative? And is it not imperative for non-profit organisations to change their approach and look for new ways to attract like-minded people?

This article aims to identify the motives, expectations and attitudes of volunteers in Bulgaria. The main question being investigated is what motivates individual citizens to volunteer and do socially oriented selfless activities. For the fulfilment of the goal thus set, the following tasks were completed: *1)* A literature review of publications examining the object of research – volunteering; *2)* A study was conducted identifying the attitudes of volunteers in Bulgaria; *3)* Analysis of results; *4)* Formulation of relevant conclusions and recommendations. In accordance with the completed tasks, the structure of this paper was built.

2. Theoretical background

In a broad sense, volunteerism is defined as a noble act that motivates people to give their personal time, skills and energy to help others. In doing so, they make a positive impact in their communities. Volunteering motives are diverse, ranging from personal fulfilment and new experiences to the desire to support a cause close to one's heart (Bekkers, 2012; Taniguchi & Marshall, 2014).

Volunteering can serve multiple functions simultaneously for any individual. However, this basic functionalist notion does not mean that all volunteer motives are equally related to meaningful outcomes. Self-benefit and other-oriented motives have different relationships with volunteer satisfaction and long-term engagement. Most significantly, the value-related function – the motive to participate in volunteering to express one's principles of solidarity and compassion – was more strongly correlated with satisfaction, intention to continue commitment, and volunteer health than functions that focus on self-esteem or personal benefits (Güntert et al., 2022).

In spite in developed countries, for example, the number of volunteers has declined due to changing socioeconomic conditions, an ageing population, and changing values, volunteering continues to tirelessly fight for causes that matter to current and future generations (Richards, 2019; Zhou & Muscente, 2022). A significant part of this added value is generated at the local level, improving social outcomes and creating more robust, social and inclusive communities, which is also embedded in the social economy concept (Pavlov & Ruskova, 2023; Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023). Any civil society depends almost entirely on volunteer work. Even in societies where volunteering is sufficiently institutionalised, roughly a quarter of the active population takes part in volunteering initiatives in a given year (Wilson & Son, 2022).

Moreover, in the modern world, there is more and more talk about the disintegration of the family and society and the loss of values (Pearce et al., 2023). Against this background, non-profit organisations and volunteerism appear as a powerful countermeasure because through their activity (UN Volunteer, 2022; Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023), they:

- create new connections in society by connecting with other people who share their values and interests;
- stimulate active citizenship by engaging people in solving problems in their community;
- promote social responsibility by learning to think about the needs of others and contribute to the good of society;
- preserve and transmit values such as empathy, mutual aid and solidarity to the next generations.

Volunteers' diverse roles demonstrate their significant impact as they foster a sense of community and create positive change in the world (Gunn, 2023). Along with the wide range of benefits for society, volunteering also positively affects the volunteers themselves, improving their health and well-being. It is associated with increased life expectancy, adoption of an environmentally friendly and healthy lifestyle, reduction of depression and stress (Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023), as well as personal growth and development, expanded social networks

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and connections, improved professional skills and experience, increased self-esteem and self-confidence, satisfaction from active participation in positive transformation and the realisation of significant causes (Zhou & Muscente, 2022; VolunteerMatch, 2023).

These different roles stand out most prominently in the non-profit sector. Because non-profit organisations typically have limited resources, they constantly need volunteers to achieve their core goals (Pearce et al., 2023; Wilson & Son, 2022). It is the institutions and organisations that make up the third sector and form the basis of civil society that rely heavily on the unpaid work of volunteers. Many governmental and public sector institutions, such as schools, also look to them for support (Wilson & Son, 2022).

It is clear that volunteering is not only the most widespread but also a vital form of civic proactivity. It has the potential to benefit volunteers' physical and mental health and the community as a whole. However, volunteers become involved in socially meaningful causes for various reasons and motivations (Stukas et al., 2016). Andreasen and Kotler (2003) argue that understanding human psychology is vital to effective volunteer management. Some volunteers are intrinsically motivated and need minimal guidance, while others need more specific direction and incentives. The authors argued that the non-profits that care about their volunteers are more likely to attract the right people, motivate and retain their volunteers, and achieve their social goals. In general, volunteers are most effective when:

- they receive assignments tailored to their skills and interests;
- clear and achievable goals are set for them;
- they receive regular feedback;
- they feel part of the team.

Such relationships can only be built based on mutual trust and transparency in actions. That would ensure compatibility in values and hence sharing in social causes. Therefore, circumstances force NGOs to become experts in attracting financial and additional human resources (Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023). The relationship between non-profits and volunteers should be mutually beneficial. Non-profit organisations receive invaluable help from volunteers, which enables them to realise their goals. Volunteers, in turn, get the opportunity to develop, feel useful and contribute to something bigger than themselves (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003).

Furthermore, volunteer recruitment and management strategies must take into account various factors, including changes in the external environment and the individual's internal motivation to undertake one or another action (Pearce et al., 2023; Wilson & Son, 2022). Last but not least, a huge dose of persuasiveness is needed to express the leading maxim of volunteering – the benefits greatly exceed the costs incurred (Miyamoto & Shiojiri, 2023). Akintola (2011) notes that organisations' limited understanding of volunteer motivation, the mismatch between organisational goals and volunteer motivation, and the lack of sufficient funding result in volunteers' basic needs not being met. This can cause dissatisfaction, feelings of resentment and fatigue among volunteers, which in turn reduces the number of socially significant goals achieved.

All this presupposes a better knowledge of volunteering and the motivations for gratuitous engagement by civically active people. A study by Akintola (2011) based on qualitative interviews with 57 volunteers shows their complex motivation behind the decision to engage in volunteer activities. In conformity with functional theory, most of them shared that they had more than one motive for volunteering. Among the 11 motivational categories identified, the most frequently mentioned were those related to altruistic concern for others and the community, professional development or career, and the unemployed's desire to escape from inactivity. Volunteers also see volunteering as an opportunity to develop caring skills, put their abilities into practice, achieve personal development and attract positive experiences into their lives.

Bekkers (2012) found a weak relationship between individuals' willingness to participate in civic engagement and their trust in the respective cause or organisation. As stated by the author, in some countries, trust is not associated with civic engagement at all. Although many studies have found a positive relationship between trust

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and membership in voluntary associations, the relationship is relatively weak. However, the author argues, according to the stability hypothesis, the relationship between trust and civic engagement – albeit weak – results from selection effects: people with high trust are more likely to join and stay involved in voluntary associations than people with low confidence.

Taniguchi and Marshall (2014) share a similar opinion: trust, specifically institutional trust, is more critical in predicting giving than volunteering. Their study revealed a positive and significant correlation between the number of membership organisations and both forms of civic engagement.

In the context of the current research, these statements are critical. NGOs in Bulgaria face more significant difficulties in gaining the trust of various social groups than usual for NGOs worldwide. In addition, the general level of institutional and social trust in Bulgaria is relatively low compared to the level in the world (Zahariev, 2018). The Open Society omnibus research in Bulgaria shows that in 2018, only 22% of respondents fully or somewhat trusted NGOs, 30% distrusted to a lesser or greater extent, and almost half cannot judge or do not answer the question. In 2022, trust dropped to 19.6%, mistrust exceeded 52%, and the share of non-answers and undecideds was 27.2% (Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023).

On the other hand, the share of Bulgarian NGOs that believe they enjoy a low degree of trust from citizens increased from 47.5% in 2017 to 57.2% in 2023. For the same period, the share of NGOs that convey that they don't receive enough real support from local communities and citizens increased from 13% to 17%. NGOs themselves admit to feeling a relatively low degree of public trust, with this feeling rising in 2023 and the share of those sharing very low and relatively low trust in NGOs rising to 58% from 53% in 2017 (Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023).

The presented data confirm, to a certain extent, the connection between the growing mistrust of the NGO sector and the weakening volunteer initiative in Bulgaria. To confirm or reject such a doubt, better understanding the volunteers' motivations and expectations and their reasons for choosing specific NGOs is necessary.

Although volunteering is a long-established practice in many countries, research on its motivation and impact in Bulgaria is relatively new. Recent studies, such as those by Petrova et al. (2018), focus on understanding the role of volunteering in developing students, especially in medical specialities. These studies show that volunteering can contribute to more comprehensive professional development and a deeper understanding of patient needs. Zlatkova (2008) also points out that volunteers are motivated by the desire to contribute to society and meet specific social needs. She emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing this contribution to stimulate the participation of more people in volunteering activities.

In 2017, Ivanova and Nikolova (2018) surveyed students of the Rehabilitation Medicine speciality at the Medical College – Varna, examining the motives and attitudes towards volunteering activities. The study involved 61 students, with more than half of the respondents confirming that they participate in voluntary work in various community activities. Even though the desire to volunteer is present among students, there is a demand for broader participation. The study results highlight the need to create conditions that stimulate volunteering among young people, especially among future medical professionals. Volunteering can prepare students for professional challenges and help them develop the necessary skills to work with patients. Delcheva (2023) identifies multiple motives that drive students to volunteer. In addition to altruistic motives, such as the desire to help others, students also highlight the practical benefits of volunteering, such as developing professional skills and acquiring valuable experience.

The studies by Zlatkova (2008), Ivanova and Nikolova (2018) and Delcheva (2023) are among the few that specifically address and seek the motives of volunteers. Most authors analyse the role and benefits of the prosocial and proactive behaviour of volunteers. But is it enough to know that an action is good enough to

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encourage it among citizens? Isn't the motive and origin of this desire to do good in the name of another's cause more critical?

In 2023, TimeHeroes – one of the largest and most experienced non-profit organisations in Bulgaria, which provides a connection between volunteers and structures with different causes, implemented the fourth national survey on awareness and participation in volunteer initiatives. Although it is mainly aimed at volunteer causes initiated through the organisation's platform, the survey offers valuable insights, both for the current study and future research focused on the motivations of volunteers. In addition to building the volunteer profile, the organisation also analyses aspects such as reasons for *non-participation* in volunteer initiatives. Among the most common answers are: *It was not necessary/I have not come across an initiative; I do not trust the people who organise such initiatives; I do not benefit from participating in such initiatives; I do not believe in the purpose of such initiatives; There is no benefit for people from such initiatives*. The problem of *distrust* among citizens towards the organisations that are the basis of the volunteer initiative is highlighted again. However, there is also distrust of the meaning of volunteering in general.

3. Research objective and methodology

The current study is motivated by revelations about Bulgaria's low volunteer participation and the lack of trust in the structures that most need volunteer energy and support – the NGOs. The theoretical background shows that while there is abundant literature on volunteers' role in bringing about positive change, there is significantly less understanding in Bulgaria of *what motivates volunteers and what drives them to give their energy and talent to specific causes freely*. Based on the literature review and the main objective of the study – *to identify the motives, expectations and attitudes of volunteers in Bulgaria*, the two research questions (RQ) were formulated:

> RQ1: *What are the attitudes, expectations, and motives of the Bulgarian volunteers to offer their skills, time, and energy for free?*
> RQ2: *What strategies can organisations develop to encourage volunteerism and attract more like-minded people to their causes?*

A quantitative methodology was developed for the study. The target group comprises self-determined volunteers without restriction on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, etc. Responses were collected through the online Google Form application and processed in a spreadsheet. The instrument used for the survey is an online questionnaire with a Likert scale for the responses, where 1 means "*Definitely NOT essential*" and 5 – "*Definitely IS essential*".

The research was conducted from March 1st to 31st, 2024. TimeHeroes plays a significant role in the distribution of the survey form. The organisation provides a forum for the interaction of 1,134 civil associations and non-profit organisations and over 96,000 volunteers, who together have participated in the successful implementation of about 3,000 significant social causes (TimeHeroes, 2024). The TimeHeroes team actively assisted the research by distributing the survey form through their communication channels. The association also provided up-to-date information on research conducted on volunteering in Bulgaria, which enriches the discussion of the present study.

The authors developed the questionnaire in accordance with the theoretical background, and the questions were selected and grouped based on similar studies already conducted. The aim is to validate or reject previously formulated generalisations and conclusions regarding the study's object – the motivation of volunteers. This would confirm the volunteer profile to a higher degree through independent research.

Three university professors, two representatives of the Bulgarian NGO sector, and the TimeHeroes team tested the questionnaire. After testing, the number and content of the questions were not changed, as they are believed to be reasonable for identifying motivators for volunteering.

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The questionnaire is anonymous and consists of 4 sections with 5 statements each, to which respondents must answer with an option from 1 to 5. In each section, there is also an opportunity (open question) for respondents to formulate a free answer to a question. The sections provide an answer to RQ1 by examining:

- Section I: the reasons for choosing an organisation in whose activities volunteers voluntarily participate;
- Section II: the attitudes of volunteers;
- Section III: the expectations of volunteers;
- Section IV: the motivation of volunteers to share their skills, time and energy for free.

The insights gained from answering RQ1 will enable the answer to the second RQ2. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

Due to the lack of accurate information on the number of volunteers in Bulgaria – less than 47,000 according to the Open Society Institute (Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023) and over 96,000 (as of March 31st, 2024) according to active volunteer profiles on the volunteering platform TimeHeroes (2024) – the authors of the study assume a general a total of 96,000 volunteers. The minimum recommended sample size is 383, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

Two leading software tools were used to process and analyse the collected data: Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics. Excel was used for data entry and initial processing, including creating databases and visualising the data through tables and charts. SPSS was selected for more in-depth statistical analysis, such as calculating descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation), performing correlation analysis, and comparing groups. Using these two software packages allowed for a comprehensive and accurate description of the data and the identification of significant relationships between variables.

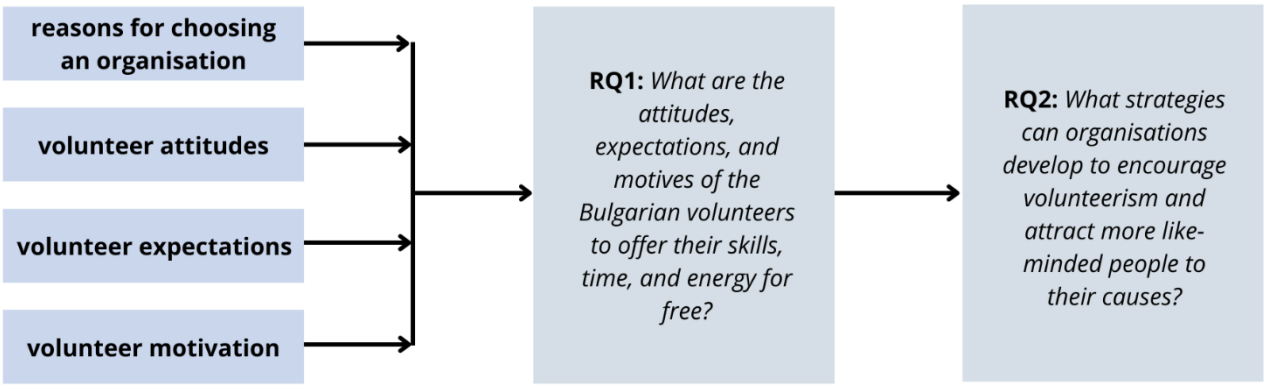


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Source: Authors' development

4. Results and discussion

Four hundred twenty-two (N=422) volunteers took part in the study. As the current research seeks general attitudes, expectations, and motivations for voluntary self-initiative, demographic data such as gender and age were not collected by the respondents. None of the respondents wished to leave a free answer to one or more of the open questions in the survey form. Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive statistical analysis performed.

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The reasons for choosing an organisation in whose activities volunteers voluntarily participate

The first section (Table 1: Q1) of the survey focuses on volunteers' motivations when choosing an organisation. Data analysis shows that respondents value several key factors. The mean, median, and mode of responses to the questions in this section are close to 4 on a 5-point scale, which means "Essentially Important." This indicates that for most survey participants, a clear mission statement, team performance, and transparency of the cause are critical when deciding to volunteer.

The standard deviation, which measures the dispersion of the data around the mean, varies slightly across questions in this section. For questions related to mission and cause, the standard deviation is relatively low (.589; .585), indicating a high level of agreement among respondents. This suggests that these factors are universal motivators for volunteering.

Questions related to the organisation's reputation (.967), team (.854) and social networks (1.085) show a more significant standard deviation, suggesting a greater diversity of opinions. Despite these factors are essential for some volunteers, they are not as defining as the mission, the team, and the cause. Figure 2 visualises in detail the results of Question 1. The stated mission of the organisation and the transparently formulated cause why the organisation needs the assistance of volunteers predetermine to varying degrees the choice of the respondents, with 407 (96.5%) marking this answer as true or definitely accurate. A developed social network presence is essential for 302 (71.6%) of the respondents.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the results obtained from all questions and their answers, according to the 5-point Likert scale used (1 – "*Definitely NOT essential*" and 5 – "*Definitely IS essential*")

Questions		N		Central tendency			Spread measures
		Valid	Missing	Mean (M)	Median (Mdn)	Mode (MO)	Std. deviation (s)
Q1: When selecting an organisation to volunteer with, it is essential to you that it has…							
	Q1.1: ...a stated mission that defines its existence.	422	0	4.44	4.00	4	.589
	Q1.2: ...introduced his team.	422	0	4.18	4.00	4	.854
	Q1.3: ...a transparently formulated cause, for the realisation of which it needs volunteer support.	422	0	4.41	4.00	4	.585
	Q1.4: ...developed presence in various social networks.	422	0	3.78	4.00	4	1.085
	Q1.5: ...an established reputation in the community to which it belongs.	422	0	3.94	4.00	4	.967
Q2: When applying to be a volunteer, is it important to you…							
	Q2.1: ...to share the cause in the implementation of which you want to get involved.	422	0	4.42	4.00	4	.621
	Q2.2: ...the opinion of your relatives, loved ones, friends, colleagues.	422	0	2.20	2.00	2	.971
	Q2.3: ...to receive training in a field related to the tasks you are expected to perform.	422	0	3.71	4.00	4	.821
	Q2.4: ...the availability of references from previous volunteers.	422	0	3.40	4.00	4	1.003
	Q2.5: ...the transparency of the skills and time that the volunteer is expected to provide for free.	422	0	4.40	4.00	5	.724
Q3: When your participation as a volunteer is over, it is important to you…							
	Q3.1: ...your support remains anonymous.	422	0	2.46	2.00	2	1.242
	Q3.2: ... get public recognition for your grant.	422	0	1.63	1.00	1	.840
	Q3.3: ...to receive an apparent reward for your grant.	422	0	1.47	1.00	1	.681

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	Q3.4: ...to hear/read a non-personalised "Thank you".	422	0	3.45	4.00	4	1.154
	Q3.5: ... to be offered a new cause to join.	422	0	3.37	4.00	4	1.097
Q4: What motivates you to volunteer?							
	Q4.1: The desire to be helpful with your skills and experience.	422	0	4.50	5.00	5	.555
	Q4.2: Possible social and professional contacts.	422	0	3.65	4.00	4	1.200
	Q4.3: The experience you will get by getting involved in different causes.	422	0	3.86	4.00	4	1.078
	Q4.4: The satisfaction of being an hour of meaningful change.	422	0	4.53	5.00	5	.579
	Q4.5: Your acquaintance is a volunteer and motivated you to get involved.	422	0	3.32	4.00	2	1.414

Source: Authors' development

These data resonate positively with the results of a 2023 study by the organisation TimeHeroes (2023) about volunteering activities. Based on the association's analysis, over 83% of respondents (N=244) are interested in various causes and possible participation in them through *social networks*. That implies developing social channels for the respective initiators of social causes and publishing up-to-date information in them. An active presence in social networks is also suggested by the age profile of the volunteer, derived from the TimeHeroes survey: the most significant share – 27% is occupied by the volunteers between the ages of 35-44, followed respectively by the demographic groups of 18-24 years (19.7 %), 25-34 (18.0%), under 18 (15.6%), 45-54 (12.7%), 55-64 (4.1%) and 65+ (2.9%). As can be seen from the data, the most active demographic groups are also the most actively present in the various social networks (Newman, 2023). It makes sense that this would be the preferred channel for gathering information and choosing a cause.

From the answers received, as well as from the applied descriptive statistical metrics (Table 1: Q1.1 – Q1.5), it can be concluded that the most important of the proposed factors for choosing an organisation is its clearly stated mission. Second is the transparently formulated cause, followed by the business card of the organisation's team and the established reputation. The developed social networks of the relevant organisation are positioned last, and this does not mean that this factor should be downplayed – 71.6% of respondents defined it as significant. Instead, it should be kept in mind that communicating the strengths of organisations aiming to achieve a specific cause is imperative to start first with the mission, vision, values, and team.

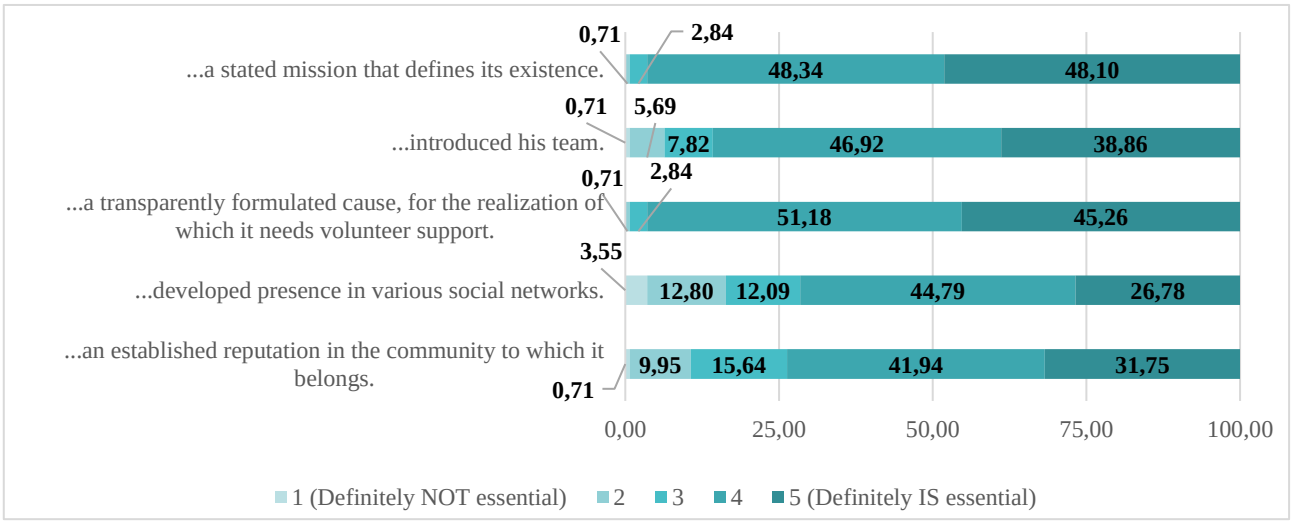


Figure 2. Answers to Question 1. When selecting an organisation to volunteer with, it is essential to you that it has...? (%), N=422.

Source: Authors' development

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Volunteer attitudes

Descriptive statistical analysis regarding the second cluster of questions (Table 1: Q2) shows that for most volunteers, it is imperative to share the cause they are involved in (Q2.1). This suggests that volunteers are looking for organisations with a clear mission and purpose. The opportunity for training (Q2.3) also emerges as an essential factor. Volunteers want to acquire new skills and knowledge.

At the same time, questions Q2.4 and Q2.5 show that volunteers value transparency and clarity regarding expectations. They want to know what is expected of them and what their responsibilities are. The results regarding question Q2.2 are surprising – the opinion of relatives and colleagues is less critical when deciding to volunteer. This categorically points to internal motivation, rather than social influences and examples, as the leading factor in deciding to engage in volunteer initiatives. Although the mean values of most questions are high, the standard deviation varies – from .621 to 1.003. This shows that while some factors are extremely important to most volunteers (e.g., the mission of the organisation), other factors (e.g., the opinion of loved ones) are less critical, and there is a greater diversity of views.

The results of the second group of questions (Q2) are presented in detail in Figure 3. For almost 100% of respondents – 410 (97.2%) to varying degrees, it is essential to share the cause in which they intend to be involved. The opinion of relatives, friends, and acquaintances is not crucial for volunteer participation – 311 (73.7%) considered the statement false or strongly false. Specialised training is expected by just under 72% of the respondents – 42 (10.0%) mark the statement categorically true. The presence of recommendations from previous volunteers was determined to be a significant factor by a total of 245 (58.1%) of the respondents. A considerable number of volunteers – 398 (94.3%) strongly agreed that transparency regarding the skills and time the volunteer is expected to provide is essential when applying to volunteer.

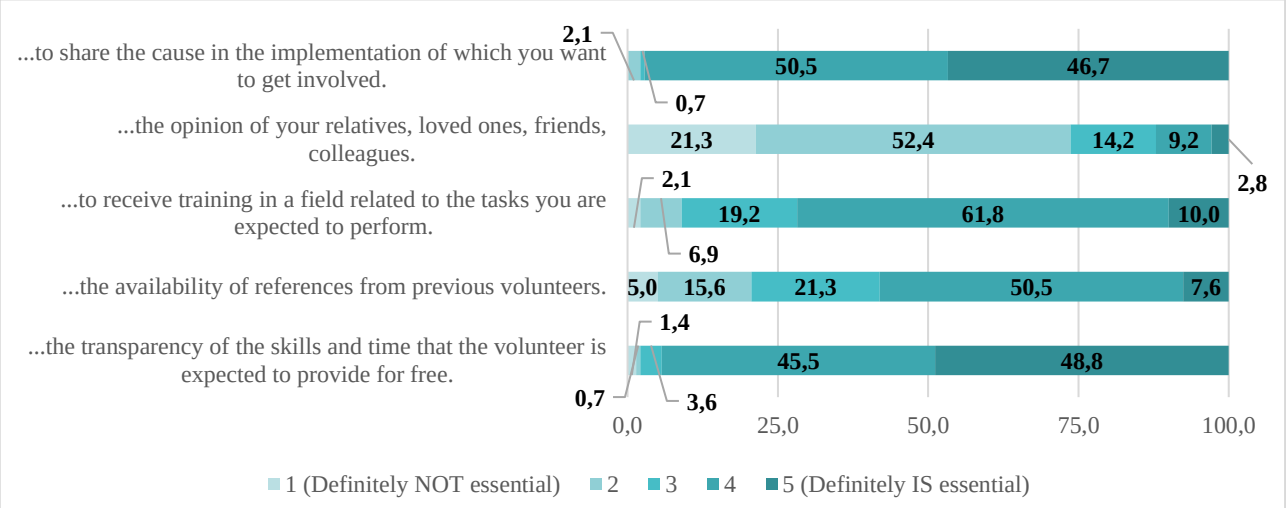


Figure 3. Answers to Question 2: When applying to be a volunteer, is it important to you…? (%), N=422.

Source: Authors' development

The conclusion that can be drawn so far is that volunteers are primarily looking for a shared cause in the realisation in which they wish to participate, as well as transparency regarding what is expected of them and the time they are supposed to dedicate to the cause. Volunteers also assume training and the availability of recommendations, while the opinion of relatives and friends is instead an insignificant factor for volunteer self-initiative.

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Volunteer expectations

The third cluster of statements (Table 1: Q3) examines the expectations of volunteers. Volunteers do not attach much importance to the anonymity (Q3.1). The mean value is below 3 on a 5-point scale, which suggests that most volunteers do not expect anonymity. Volunteer respondents also demonstrate a lack of interest in public recognition and material rewards (Q3.2 and Q3.3). The mean values (M=1.63/1.47) are very low, so it can be concluded that these factors are not the primary motivators for volunteering. At the same time, although volunteers do not seek public recognition, they value gratitude Q3.4 and would like minimal recognition for their contribution. The mean values of question Q3.5 show that volunteers are open to new opportunities for participation. This suggests that they are committed to the causes they support and want to continue contributing.

In the case of the third cluster of questions, the standard deviation maintains significantly high values. The most substantial dispersion of the data around the mean value is observed in question Q3.1. Although the mean is 2.46, the standard deviation is 1.242, which shows that there is a large group of participants who think that anonymity is important. Still, there is another large group that does not think it is crucial. The picture is similar to Q3.4 and Q3.5 – the questions analysing gratitude as a motive and the proposal to join a new cause. In this case, the categoricalness in the answers is dispersed (s=1.154/1.097).

Figure 4 visually presents the trend in the individual answers to Q3 of the respondents according to the Likert scale. The statement that volunteers would like their support to remain anonymous was endorsed as true to varying degrees by just under a quarter of respondents, or 98 (23.2%). That means that a significant proportion of those who give their time and labour for free do not want the emphasis to be on themselves but on the relevant cause. Conversely, 249 (59.0%), to varying degrees, consider the statement to be false. For them, the preservation of anonymity is not a significant factor.

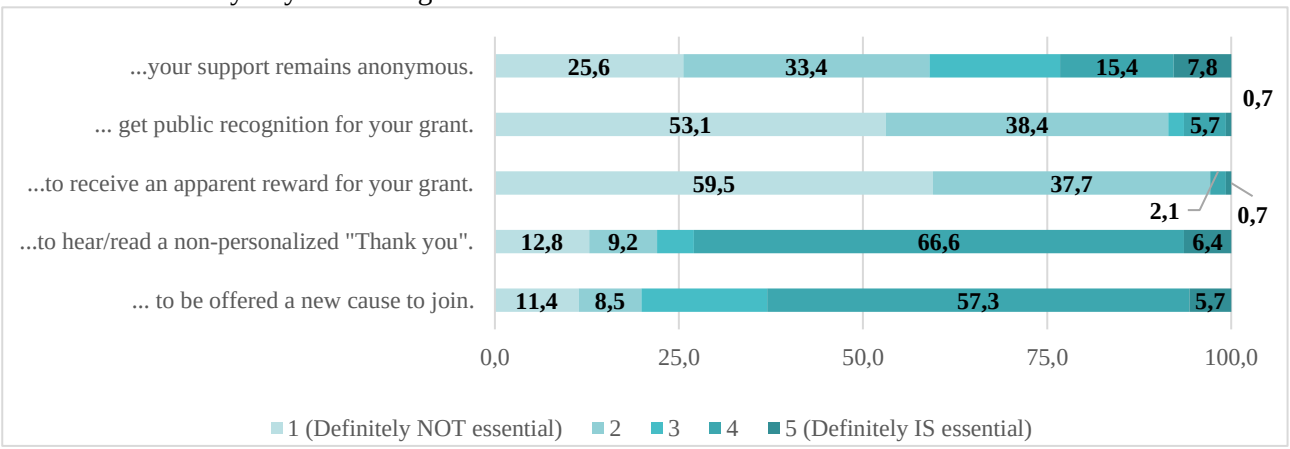


Figure 4. Answers to Question 3. When your participation as a volunteer is over, it is important to you...? (%), N=422.

Source: Authors' development

A total of 27 (6.4%) of the respondents expect to receive public recognition for their contribution, and 386 (91.5%), to varying degrees, define the statement as false. 12 (2.8%) people expect a reward for their help, not one has any hesitation in the statement, and 410 (97.2%) do not wish to be rewarded for their participation as volunteers. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents – 308 (73.0%) would like to hear or read a non-personalised "*Thank you*" for their volunteering.

The last statement in the cluster informs not only how to attract but also how to retain volunteers as such. Quite a few of them – 266 (63.0%) expect to varying degrees to be offered a new cause to join. Another 84 (19.9%)

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mark the statement as false or categorically false. The latter most likely prefer to choose the causes in which they want to get involved rather than being attracted by concrete organisations. It can also be assumed that volunteers do not wish to limit their voluntary activity within a single organisation but would feel more satisfied if they participated in more causes regardless of the association behind them.

Motivation of volunteers to share their skills, time and energy for free

The data for responses from cluster 4 (Table 1: Q4) provide us with information about what motivates people to engage in volunteering. The satisfaction of contributing to change (Q4.4) emerges as the strongest motivator for volunteers. Respondents want to see the results of their work and feel that they are part of something bigger. The desire to be helpful with their skills (Q4.1) is the second strongest motivator for volunteers. The most common response is 5 on the Likert scale, which indicates that most volunteers want to use their skills and experience for a good cause. These are both responses with the smallest standard deviation values, which shows the categorical nature of the respondents' choices.

The opportunity to gain new experience and develop (Q4.3) is also an essential motivation for volunteers. The mean value is 3.86, which indicates that volunteers appreciate the opportunity to participate in different causes and broaden their horizons. The possibility of social and professional contacts (Q4.2) is also a necessary factor, but not as strong as the first one. The average value is 3.65, which indicates that volunteers see opportunities to make new contacts as a bonus. Despite the influence of other people (Q4.25) as a factor also matters, it is not as strong as the others. The average value is 3.32, which indicates that although recommendations from loved ones can influence the decision to volunteer, it is not the primary motivator. These three questions have high standard deviation values (s=1.078/1.200/1.414), which means that most respondents do not agree with a given question or statement. As can be seen from Figure 5 in detail, almost 100% of the respondents – 416 (98.6%) mark the desire to be helpful with their skills as true or categorically accurate. Possible social and professional contacts are evaluated as a significant factor to varying degrees by 290 (68.7%) of the volunteers. The experience gained from participating in various causes was marked as significant by just under 80% of respondents – 117 (27.7%) and 218 (51.7%) rated the statement as definitely accurate or correct, respectively. Almost 100% or 416 (98.6%) of the respondents marked as definitely accurate or true the option that their primary motive was the satisfaction of being part of a meaningful change. The last statement to the question finds the most minor support – a familiar volunteer as a motivator for involvement in a social cause. Of the respondents, 224 (53.1%) chose this option as accurate.

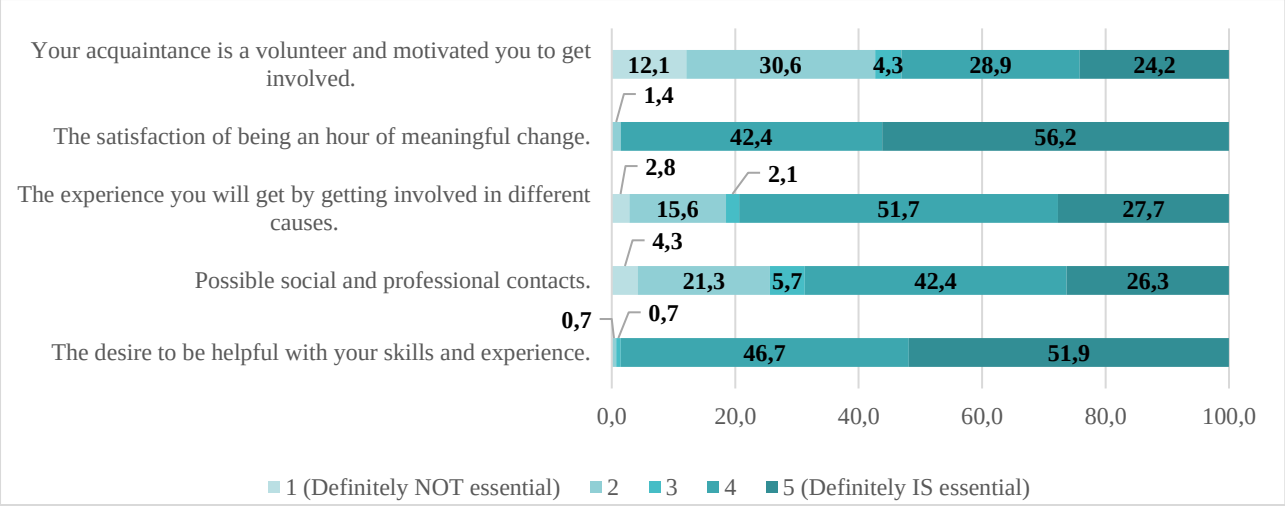


Figure 5. Answers to Question 4: What motivates you to volunteer? (%), N=422.

Source: Authors' development

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The answers to this last option (*Your acquaintance is a volunteer and motivated you to get involved*.), together with the marked answers to the second statement of the second question cluster (*When applying to volunteer, is it essential for you [...the opinion of your relatives, loved ones, friends, colleagues.*]) demonstrate independence in making a decision to be involved in volunteer initiatives. The opinions, support and experiences of relatives and friends have the most minor influence on the attitudes and motives of volunteers. Such a decision is instead the result of internal motives and attitudes, and this predetermines the power and energy that volunteers can exert on the social transformation of any society. Respondents in the current study noted the most potent motivator for their actions as having the desire to be helpful and, on the other hand, the satisfaction of being part of a meaningful change.

Of the four clusters of questions, the first (Q1) directly expresses the volunteers' intention to join a specific cause by choosing a suitable NGO. In fact, the questions in this group directly relate to the expression of trust (through the direct choice of organisation) by volunteers and their unpaid participation through the donation of labour and time. Therefore, the correlations between this and the other clusters are of interest. By calculating the Spearman coefficient between the different questions with the Likert scale, one can understand whether there is a relationship between the various motivations of the volunteers.

Correlations between the different variables determining volunteering

The data in Table 2 examine the correlations between clusters 1 and 2. It is evident that in all cases, the relationship is significant. Still, the highest positive coefficient (.978) and closest to +1 is observed in the correlation between Q1.1 (...*a stated mission that defines its existence*) and Q2.5 (...*the transparency of the skills and time that the volunteer is expected to provide for free*). Volunteers who value a clear mission will likely seek out opportunities for meaningful involvement and want to know how their skills and time will be used. Transparency about expectations helps them to be confident that their participation will be effective and contribute to the overall goal. These two factors, in addition to being significantly correlated with each other, were also identified as the leading motivators for volunteers.

Table 2. Spearman's correlation coefficient between the results of questions from Q1 cluster & Q2 cluster

		Q1.1	Q1.2	Q1.3	Q1.4	Q1.5
Q2.1	Correlation Coefficient	.971**	.846**	.971**	.756**	.785**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q2.2	Correlation Coefficient	.709**	.819**	.718**	.946**	.904**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q2.3	Correlation Coefficient	.670**	.729**	.655**	.874**	.840**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q2.4	Correlation Coefficient	.807**	.793**	.777**	.844**	.835**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q2.5	Correlation Coefficient	.978**	.842**	.929**	.770**	.794**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Authors' development

Strong correlations (.971) are observed between Q2.1 (...*to share the cause in the implementation of which you want to get involved*), on the one hand, and Q1.1 (...*a stated mission that defines its existence*) and Q1.3 (...*a transparently formulated cause, for the realisation of which it needs volunteer support*), on the other. Volunteers

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who want to share the cause (Q2.1) tend to choose organisations with a clear mission (Q1.1) and a transparently formulated cause (Q1.3). This shows that these three aspects are closely related and mutually supportive.

The results clearly indicate that it is essential for volunteers to understand and share the mission of the organisation they work for. They want to know that their contribution matters and that they are contributing to something bigger than themselves. In addition, volunteers seek opportunities for meaningful participation where they can use their skills and knowledge for a given cause. A clear mission and transparency of the organisation create a sense of purpose and direction, which is vital for the motivation of volunteers.

The weakest, although significant, relationship (.655) is between variables Q2.3 (*...to receive training in a field related to the tasks you are expected to perform*) and Q1.3 *(...a transparently formulated cause for the realisation of which it needs volunteer support*). Therefore, volunteers can be motivated by different factors, such as the desire for personal development (training) and the desire to contribute to a specific cause. In spite of the fact that these two motivations can coexist, they are not necessarily strongly related.

Table 3 presents the correlations between clusters 1 and 3. The most significant and positive (.937) is the relationship between Q1.5 (*...an established reputation in the community to which it belongs)* and Q3.1 (*...your support remains anonymous*). At first glance, it seems counterintuitive that volunteers who value the established reputation of the organisation would prefer their support to remain anonymous. Wouldn't volunteers want to contribute to the reputation of the respective volunteer organisation through their visible actions? Many scenarios are possible, given that these correlations do not allow for the discovery of a causal relationship.

For example, volunteers who choose organisations with an established reputation may be likely to have greater trust in institutions in general. This trust may make them comfortable even if their support remains anonymous. They believe that the organisation will use their contribution appropriately, regardless of whether they know their name or not. At the same time, a direct focus on the cause rather than on personal recognition is not excluded – for these volunteers, the cause itself is more important than personal recognition. They may engage in volunteering to contribute to something greater than themselves and not seek individual recognition, i.e. they do not mind remaining anonymous in their actions. In other cases, volunteers who choose organisations with an established reputation may fear social pressure or being associated with particular groups or ideas. Anonymity may provide them with a sense of security and allow them to engage in volunteering without fear of negative consequences. Therefore, it is essential to note that this relationship may also be influenced by a number of other factors not included in the survey. For example, cultural differences, personal values, and previous volunteering experiences may influence volunteers' preferences.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation coefficient between the results of questions from Q1 cluster & Q3cluster

		Q1.1	**Q1.2**	**Q1.3**	**Q1.4**	**Q1.5**
Q3.1	Correlation Coefficient	.832**	.900**	.851**	.929**	.937**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q3.2	Correlation Coefficient	.931**	.823**	.928**	.757**	.778**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q3.3	Correlation Coefficient	.835**	.894**	.882**	.747**	.793**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q3.4	Correlation Coefficient	.638**	.716**	.619**	.844**	.830**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q3.5	Correlation Coefficient	.745**	.764**	.717**	.838**	.824**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Authors' development

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The weakest but still significant relationship (.619) is between Q1.3 (*...a transparently formulated cause, for the realisation of which it needs volunteer support*) and Q3.4 (*...to hear/read a non-personalised "Thank you"*). This means that although there is a relationship between the two, it is not very strong. Volunteers who value a precise formulation of the cause also value at least minimal recognition for their participation. The strength of the relationship may vary depending on the specific organisation and type of volunteering. For example, in organisations where volunteers have greater autonomy, they may attach greater importance to a clearly formulated cause than to formal recognition.

In addition, the weaker relationship between Q1.3 and Q3.4 indicates that despite the fact that volunteers value a precise formulation of the cause, they do not always expect formal recognition for their contribution. This means that organisations can use different strategies to motivate volunteers, such as providing development opportunities, creating a sense of community, and emphasising the impact of volunteering on society.

When comparing the last cluster (Table 4), the most significant correlation (.979) is found between Q1.4 (*...developed presence in various social networks*) and Q4.2 (*Possible social and professional contacts*). The finding of a strong positive correlation between them is interesting. This means that volunteers who believe that it is essential for the organisation to have active participation in social media are more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to create new social and professional contacts.

Social networks allow people to develop and maintain connections with other people who share their interests. Volunteers who are active on social media may be more likely to facilitate opportunities to create new contacts and expand their professional network. The results show that social media plays a vital role in attracting and engaging volunteers, although this response was found to be inconsistent (Table 1: Q1.4) with a standard deviation of 1.085. The organisation should invest in building a strong social media following and use these platforms to communicate with potential and current volunteers.

Significant, although with the lowest value (.732) in this group, is the correlation between Q1.1 (*...a stated mission that defines its existence*) and Q4.3 (*The experience you will get by getting involved in different causes*). The correlation between these two questions suggests that there is some connection between volunteers' desire to participate in organisations with a clear mission and their desire to gain experience through volunteering. Last but not least, some volunteers may prefer to focus on specific causes without necessarily seeking opportunities for personal development.

Table 4. Spearman's correlation coefficient between the results of questions from Q1 cluster & Q4 cluster

		Q1.1	**Q1.2**	**Q1.3**	**Q1.4**	**Q1.5**
Q4.1	Correlation Coefficient	.923**	.787**	.876**	.746**	.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q4.2	Correlation Coefficient	.774**	.832**	.774**	.979**	.938**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q4.3	Correlation Coefficient	.732**	.850**	.744**	.952**	.924**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q4.4	Correlation Coefficient	.855**	.752**	.811**	.752**	.760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422
Q4.5	Correlation Coefficient	.867**	.874**	.849**	.905**	.892**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	422	422	422	422	422

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Authors' development

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Discussion

The findings in the present research regarding volunteer motivation are significantly supported by the above-cited research conducted by TimeHeroes (2023), which founds that:

- almost 80% of respondents indicated the desire to be beneficial to society as their primary motivation. The same option in the current research was supported by nearly 100% of the respondents;
- over 41% chose the opportunity to develop new skills and gain practical experience – an option supported by over 79% of respondents to the current survey;
- almost 37% mark the creation of valuable contacts and friendships, and in the current study, this option was supported to varying degrees by nearly 69% of respondents;
- slightly less than 13% indicated receiving recognition as their motivator. In the current research, this option also finds support – almost 7% of the volunteers involved in the study shared that they expect some public recognition for their participation in a particular cause.

The research gives a satisfactory answer to the first research question – *What are the attitudes, expectations, and motives of the Bulgarian volunteers to offer their skills, time, and energy for free?* The data from the survey conducted among the Bulgarian volunteer community determine the stated organisational mission and the clearly formulated need for help as the essential factors for choosing an NGO. Over 96% of volunteers marked both statements as significant. Concurrently, just over 97% of volunteers expect transparency regarding the skill and time they are expected to give for free, and over 94% primarily choose causes they share. In terms of recognition for their voluntary work, the survey shows that almost a quarter of respondents would prefer their participation to remain anonymous.

In spite of attesting to the altruistic motives of the respondents, the preservation of anonymity is also a potential obstacle to attracting new volunteers. Volunteerism and charity initiatives where good examples are visible are more contagious and effective, respectively. If such examples remain anonymous, the happening of good causes will be limited. Simultaneously, the research makes an interesting correlation – although an expectedly high proportion (97%) of volunteers do not want a material reward for their volunteering, 73% would like to receive feedback for their efforts in the form of a non-personalised thank you. In terms of motives, just under 99% of the respondents indicated their desire to be helpful with their skills and experience as the leading motive for volunteering. The same proportion of respondents chose the potential satisfaction of being part of meaningful change as a reason for involvement.

Answer to the second research question – *What strategies can organisations develop to encourage volunteerism and attract more like-minded people to their causes?* Albeit indirectly, it can also be found in the volunteers' responses. First, organisations whose activities require volunteering should know the volunteers' motives. They also need to be aware of the reasons for choosing an organisation and a cause. Meanwhile, the non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria often underestimate transparency in terms of elements such as vision, mission, and values. In parallel, the survey shows that they are vital to the volunteers. Therefore, a successful volunteer recruitment strategy can be defined as clearly articulating the why, what and how from the perspective of the non-profit organisation.

The closeness of the results of the two independent surveys – the current one and the one conducted by the TimeHeroes organisation in 2023 – clarifies and confirms the volunteers' main motives, attitudes, and expectations. That will significantly improve work with volunteers. Knowing the main drivers of voluntary giving of time, labour, and energy would help to develop and enhance specific measures to encourage and support volunteering among citizens and companies.

Such measures, according to TimeHeroes report (2023), could be planned additional paid leave for volunteers participating in actions during crises; the provision of conditions for familiarising pupils and students with the

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activities of organisations that organise volunteer activities; the possibility of recognise a period of volunteering for social security experience; tax breaks for employers that enable workers to take additional paid leave for volunteering; preferential conditions for insurance of volunteers, etc. The significance of the proposed measures is the choice of the volunteer respondents themselves in the study, which emphasises their importance for such a socially engaged citizen group of our society. That also emphasises the need to develop an effective policy to promote civic and corporate volunteering if our country is really aiming for social and sustainable transformation.

As it became clear, a share of volunteers preferred to keep their participation in various volunteer initiatives in anonymity. In this sense, civil organisations should invest resources and study the motives for such behaviour since anonymity prevents the dissemination of good examples and, hence, the scale of the consequences of voluntary actions. Only knowing the motivations of volunteers, both in terms of their involvement in causes and in relation to their desire to remain anonymous, would allow the formulation and construction of clear strategies for attracting and retaining volunteers.

The problem of trust, covered in the literature review, is a significant reason for actively introducing volunteering storytelling or sharing volunteers' experiences in NGO practices. The 2023 data shows that NGOs are clearly aware that between 2017 and 2023, distrust and lack of support for the civil sector by citizens and their communities, fueled by an adverse media environment, is growing, albeit slightly. This fact indicates the need for NGOs to communicate more actively and effectively with citizens and the media. In general, civil organisations share that they enjoy a relatively low degree of trust from various public institutions and communities, except European institutions (Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023). Some organisations tend to attribute the generated distrust towards their activities to deliberate efforts to discredit them, as their causes affect policies and personal interests that have influence (Zahariev & Yordanov, 2023). This distrust is reflected in weak support and difficulty, bordering on impossibility, in attracting volunteers for various causes.

In summary, the present study demonstrates that volunteers need to be understood and motivated in a way they would want to continue giving their energy. The summaries of the current research outline essential aspects of voluntary self-initiative, such as a clearly formulated mission and cause, transparency regarding donated time and labour, training, etc. The data presented fully confirm Peter Drucker's statement, cited by Philip Kotler (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003), that volunteers require three things: *a clear mission of the organisation, training* and *personal responsibility*. An important finding is that despite their gratuitous actions, volunteers expect at least a thank you as feedback. That suggests they wish to receive a sign that their efforts have been appreciated. It is a vital motivator for their involvement in future causes.

The conducted study fully confirms the understanding that organisations' limited knowledge about the motivation of volunteers and the discrepancy between their goals and the motivation of volunteers leads to misunderstandings between these two critical subjects of the social economy. There is no doubt that volunteers are primarily motivated by the desire to contribute to society and satisfy specific social needs. The current analysis contributes with the understanding that the decision for volunteer proactivity is due to at least two factors: first, this prosociality has primarily an *internal locus* and is little influenced by the opinions of loved ones, relatives, and friends, and second – it is directly influenced by *transparency* as a phenomenon: transparency in actions, the stated mission and cause, transparency in results and expectations on the part of those employed in volunteer organisations, transparency as a way of communication. Therefore, the essence of the problem of distrust and low volunteer activity is not necessarily a problem of missing volunteer motivation. Perhaps the problem with trust in organisations from the NGO sector in Bulgaria is due to their underestimated or neglected transparency towards people who altruistically give their time and energy to a given cause.

Therefore, the problem with low levels of volunteering is not necessarily to be found only in the motivation of the volunteers themselves but in the attitude of volunteer organisations towards them. Are they not treated and controlled as ordinary employees due to a lack of knowledge in the field of *volunteer human resources*

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management? Are volunteer organisations not crossing the line of volunteer labour and energy by unintentionally or intentionally categorising volunteers as their employees and demanding from them a complete dedication to an organisational cause, but without considering their values and motives? Such assumptions should not be taken as an accusation against volunteer organisations. The latter are most likely doing their best given the available knowledge, resources and the environment around them. However, it is a fact that they fail to fully attract the trust of both the general public and the volunteers. In this sense, the new questions formulated here signal that the volunteering process is at least two-sided – a volunteer body and a volunteer. When looking for the reason for the low volunteer activity, it should be sought in each of the directly interested parties.

Limitations and Future Research

The research was conducted among a limited (geographical) sample of volunteers from Bulgaria. Results may not be representative of the wider volunteer population. The research method used (surveys) may be limited in its ability to capture the nuances of volunteer motivation. Therefore, factors that have not been taken into account and that actually predetermine the attitudes and motivation of the volunteers, such as personal values, social norms, and cultural contexts, may exist. The authors aim to conduct more in-depth research on volunteer motivation using different methods, such as interviews and focus groups. Subsequent studies will attempt to identify and include the mentioned limiting factors since their recognition may prove to be key to the attraction and retention of volunteers and the achievement of a more socially responsible society.

In addition, the authors of this study identify a new gap in the existing knowledge – management of voluntary organisations (NGOs, civil associations, etc.) and volunteer human resources, which are undoubtedly different from traditional ones. Suppose society as a whole wants the social economy to surpass theoretical paradigms and become a real, socially responsible, sustainable present. In that case, more detailed attention should be paid to each of its aspects, including the management of the voluntary organisations and volunteers. Future studies by the authors may focus on these aspects.

Theoretical and practical implications

The results of the study can be used to improve the theory of volunteer motivation as well as social economics and related educational disciplines. Newly acquired knowledge can be applied in theory and practice to develop more effective and transparent strategies for recruiting and retaining volunteers, including marketing strategies to communicate the values and goals of the respective organisation, attract the right audiences and help achieve the socially oriented cause. In this sense, the study enriches motivational theory and social economy theory.
Furthermore, the results of the research will be made available to non-governmental and other organisations that work with volunteers. That would allow them to develop more effective programs and activities, and the strategies for motivating volunteers identified based on the results can be applied in different contexts. In this sense, it is essential to note that volunteer motivation is complex and influenced by various factors, and organisations that work with volunteers must adapt to the individual needs and motivations of their volunteers. The current research sets the direction in which successful collaboration can happen in practice.

Conclusions

The current research outlines the phenomenon of volunteering from the point of view of the attitudes, expectations and motives of those directly employed in this sector – the volunteers themselves. The analysis of the answers shows that the most significant factor in choosing an organisation is the clearly formulated mission. It is followed by the transparently defined cause, team and reputation of the organisation. Developed social networks are positioned last, but this does not mean they are unimportant. That gives reason to conclude that organisations that focus on clearly articulating their values, goals and team will have a better chance of attracting volunteer support.

Seeking an answer to the question, *"What are the attitudes, expectations, and motives of Bulgarian volunteers to offer their skills, time, and energy for free?"* the study reveals that Bulgarian volunteers are strongly motivated by the desire to contribute to meaningful causes and to use their skills for society. A clear mission of the organisation and transparency in communication are key factors influencing volunteers' decision to get involved in a given initiative. Despite the fact that volunteers value recognition for their work, they are more motivated by internal factors, such as the desire for personal development and a sense of belonging to the community. This finding has important implications for organisations that work with volunteers. In addition, it allows for the formulation of insights regarding the second research question – *What strategies can organisations develop to encourage volunteerism and attract more like-minded people to their causes?* The conducted descriptive statistical analysis, as well as the identified statistically significant correlations between various variables, show that to attract and retain volunteers, organisations must focus on creating a clear and inspiring mission, ensure transparent communication, and create an environment where volunteers feel valued and appreciated.

Moreover, the analysis of the results shows that the most critical factors for volunteers are: *1) Shared cause:* volunteers are motivated by the desire to contribute to something they believe in; respectively, they look for organisations whose values and goals correspond to their own; *2) Transparency:* volunteers appreciate organisations that are transparent about their mission and cause and want to know what is expected of them as tasks, time and resources required for volunteering; *3) Training:* volunteers want to feel confident and competent in their tasks and often choose organisations that offer training and support.

The study shows that volunteer motivation is strongly linked to their desire to contribute to a specific cause and to receive clear information about that cause. Unlike previous studies focusing on extrinsic motivators, such as social recognition, our study emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation related to the meaning and purpose of volunteering. Furthermore, we found that the lack of a relationship between volunteers' motivation and the opinions of their loved ones indicates that volunteering is a highly individual decision that is not significantly influenced by social pressure.

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