

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING: VARIABILITY ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN DIFFERENT PRACTICES AND LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

In this article, we attempted to assess the level of engagement and immersion into volunteering of young people in a large Russian region – the Sverdlovsk region. The study results demonstrate that variability and engagement level are based on different motives. The basic motive determining willingness of people to spend their time on volunteering is “opportunity to help people.” When motive lacks, the respondents' motivation system has the lowest engagement in volunteering. The main reasons for determining engagement of a person in volunteering constantly are “a favorite thing, a hobby”. The decision tree model identified “communication with interesting people”, “interesting work” and “experience in social and political activity” as the main motives determining the variability of participation. Not only a certain combination of motives (as typical, for example, for regularity or duration of participation in volunteer activities) but the number of actualized motives involved (the greater their number, the higher the variability of participation) helps the variation grow.

Key words: youth volunteering, volunteering frequency, volunteering engagement, region.

JEL Code: L31, J24

Introduction

2018 was the Year of Volunteering in Russia. According to its results, the Concept of development of volunteering in the Russian Federation until 2025 was adopted, denoting the priority areas of voluntary work. The state is taking active measures to create favorable conditions and infrastructure for the development of volunteering. Developed by the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, the strategic initiative “Developing Volunteerism in the Regions” is being implemented in 52 out of 85 regions of Russia. One of the objectives of the initiative is to ensure equal access for people of all ages to volunteering opportunities that take into account their motivation (Development of Volunteering in the Regions..., 2019). However, according to the Russian statistic agency (Rosstat) in 2018, the number of volunteers aged 15

years and older is about 1.5 million people (not more than 1.3% of the country's population over 15 years old). At the same time, 76% of them worked as volunteers less than 9 hours per month, and on average one volunteer worked 7.8 hours per month (Labour Survey..., 2018). The results of the survey of Sverdlovsk region young people aged between 14 and 30 (N = 400, 2018) show that among young people with volunteering experience, 30% participated in only one of the 15 suggested volunteering practices, 50% of young volunteers spent no more than 10 hours per month on volunteering. The presented data actualize the need to study the motives and factors affecting the duration of volunteering, its regularity. Study of the motives of the participation of volunteers in several different volunteer practices is also quite relevant including those that determine engagement level in specific types of volunteer activity, time that volunteers are willing to spend on volunteering. Understanding how the motives that guide the volunteer have an impact on the type (scope) of volunteer activity and the level of its intensity will contribute to the academic discussion of volunteer motivation and further understanding of volunteering.

1 Theoretical background

In the literature, many aspects of engaging people in various volunteer practices are described in detail, the most popular directions of volunteer activity are characterized, and factors affecting the regularity of volunteer work and its duration are explored. A. Maki and M. Snyder developed a typology of interest in eight volunteer behaviors ("Volunteer interest typology"). The authors attempted to understand the similarities and differences between different areas of volunteer activity, including in terms of volunteer motivation (Maki, Snyder, 2017).

Non-profit organizations systematically need to search for new volunteers and retain existing ones reducing average number of hours worked per volunteer and increasing demand for short-term participation, occasional volunteering (Macduff, 2005). Handy et al. researching volunteers at summer festivals in British Columbia, Canada, identified significant differences in motivation as well as Long-term Committed Volunteers (LTV) and Habitual Episodic Volunteers (HEV) of these categories of episodic volunteers - HEV and LTV being significantly more motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons compared with Genuine Episodic Volunteers (GEV) (Handy et al., 2006). M. K. Hyde, J. Dunn, P. A. Scuffham, S. K. Chambers presented a systematic review for the episodic volunteering across sectors (sport, tourism, events, health and social welfare) (Hyde et al., 2016).

T. Ghose and M. Kassam were also interested in levels of engagement in volunteering and operationalized this concept as the frequency of volunteering (weekly, monthly, occasionally, not at all). The perceived benefit of expanding social networks significantly increased frequency of volunteering (Ghose, Kassam, 2014). Article B. Lancee, J. Radl also discusses factors that influence the frequency of volunteering over the Life Course. The researchers modeled the behavior of volunteers on the basis of measuring the frequency of volunteer activity, recorded not only the difference between volunteers and non-volunteers but also differences in the intensity of volunteering (Lancee, Radl, 2014). The intensity of volunteering (hours worked as a volunteer) study presents certain difficulties of evaluation. «Using the time one spends volunteering, such as the number of hours or days one volunteered requires the subject to be able to remember exactly how long they volunteered and is often an estimation or “guesstimate” of time» (Costello et al., 2017). Studies using volunteering intensity have found that a pro-social identity directly impacts volunteering intensity (Rodell, 2013). However, there are not many works focused on the systematic consideration of the young volunteers' engagement in terms of the variability of participation in different practices (“width” of participation) and the degree / level of engagement (“depth” of participation).

2 Data and methods

The article presents the results of a survey of young residents (14-30 years old) of the Sverdlovsk region (N = 421, 2018, the sample type is randomly stratified). The following hypotheses are verified in this article: 1. The variability and level of engagement in volunteering activities are based on different motives; 2. Various groups of volunteers can be allocated depending on the variability of participation in various volunteering activities and on the level of involvement in volunteering. To test the proposed hypotheses and further analysis, we formed a sample selection (subsample) of those young people who answered the question “Which of the above you had to do for free to strangers over the last year on your own decision?” Including a list of 16 specific volunteer practices, at least noted one answer. There were 329 people selected.

The variability of volunteering, the “width” of participation, was estimated by the number of events in which the respondent noted his participation over the past year. Scale type – relationship scale. The maximum value of variation is limited to 7 events. In the

subsample, only 2% of respondents chose more than 7 events, for them the value of the variable was also set to 7.

The level of involvement in volunteering – the “depth” of participation – was estimated by two variables. 1. The duration of volunteering in hours – the time spent on average in a month for volunteering. The data is presented in a relationship scale, where 0 is a complete lack of time spent on volunteering. The zero value is included in the scale, since with the real participation of the respondent in at least one of the proposed practices, it shows that the respondent does not identify his activity as volunteering, a low level of his engagement, “immersion”. Using at least one of the proposed volunteer practices, about 22% of respondents said that they spent 0 hours on average a month on voluntary free work. Considering quite large range of estimating time spent on volunteering among respondents and in a way to level the influence of extreme values when calculating averages, this variable was limited up to 50 hours per month (all costs of time were taken above 50). 7% of the subsample observations were subjected to this transformation.

2. The regularity of participation in volunteering was measured in an ordinal scale with values from 1 to 4, where 1 – “participated in volunteering but did not identify himself as a volunteer”; 2 – “I participated in volunteer activities by chance 1-2 times”; 3 – “from time to time I participate in volunteer projects with a certain regularity”; 4 – “I constantly work as a volunteer” (almost once a month).

To assess the motives for participation in volunteering, respondents were asked the question “What does participation in volunteer activity give you?” It offered a multiple choice from the given variables and possibility of making your own answer. Thus, the motivation system is given 17 dichotomous variables (0 is the motive is not updated; 1 is the motive relevant for the respondent). It is worth saying that the number of actualized motives is statistically significantly correlated with the duration, regularity and variability of volunteering. It means the more varied the motivation system, the greater the number of events the respondent took part in and the more time he devoted to volunteering (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Spearman rank correlation coefficients

	Duration of volunteering (in hours)	Variability of participation in various volunteer practices (number of events)	Frequency of volunteering	The number of updated motives
Duration of volunteering (in hours)	1	0.435**	0.504**	0.499**
Variability of participation in various volunteer practices (number of	0.435**	1	0.690**	0.697**

events)				
Frequency of volunteering	0.504**	0.690**	1	0.569**
The number of updated motives	0.499**	0.697**	0.569**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: authors' calculations.

To make motivation models “depth” and “width” of volunteer participation, the tool decision trees was used, which is suitable for all types of scales. It is important taking into account that one of the engagement variables (regular participation in volunteering) is represented by an ordinal scale, and not by a scale of relationships like the rest. IBM SPSS Statistics software was used for the computation of decision trees. 17 dichotomous variable motives are taken as independent predictors. CHAID (Chi Squared Automatic Interaction Detection) was selected as a construction method, which selects the relationship using chi-square and selects predictors that have the strongest interaction with the dependent variable. The maximum number of tree levels is limited to 3 levels. The minimum observations for the parent (at least 10% of the observations of the subsample) and the child nodes (at least 5%) are also set.

3 Results

3.1 Volunteering motivation and the level of volunteering engagement

On average, respondents spend 11 hours per month volunteering (with a range from 0 to 50). However, these estimates of engagement can vary significantly depending which motives are present. Tab. 2 presents average values of the variable under consideration, depending on the choice of motives.

Tab. 2: Average values of the duration of volunteering in the context of individual motives for participation in volunteering

What gives you participation in volunteering?	Duration of volunteering, in hours			
	No motive	With motive	Difference	Significance*
Experience	9.3	14.9	5.6	0.000
Professional career prospects	10.2	17.4	7.2	0.088
Interesting work	9.7	17.3	7.6	0.002
New useful contacts	8.6	14.6	6.0	0.000
Access to the information	10.7	12.7	2.1	0.313
Social and political experience	9.8	15.3	5.5	0.001
New knowledge, qualification	10.5	12.6	2.1	0.027
Contacts with influential people	10.4	16.1	5.8	0.255
Respect of others	9.7	16.1	6.3	0.021
Friends	9.9	15.3	5.4	0.005
Favorite thing, hobby	10.1	14.8	4.7	0.001
Communication with interesting people	9.2	13.7	4.5	0.000

Chance to protect your rights, solve your problems	10.5	16.6	6.1	0.152
Promotion of your ideas	9.6	18.1	8.5	0.000
Chance to increase self-esteem	10.5	12.8	2.3	0.897
Opportunity to improve life in your home, street, district, city	9.7	13.7	4.0	0.003
Opportunity to help people	7.9	13.5	5.7	0.002

* Test for significance of differences was carried out using the non-parametric test Mann and Whitney.

Source: authors' calculations.

It is worth noting that a basic motive determining the willingness of people to spend their time on volunteering is opportunity to help people (53%). If this motive lacks, the respondents' motivation system has the lowest engagement in volunteering (7.9 hours), which is almost 3 hours less than average. This motive is the key one engaging a person in volunteering. However, just a motive does not lead to readiness to significantly increase the time for unpaid voluntary work. The increase is only 5.7 hours. Though such motive as “promoting your ideas” contributes to a much greater engagement in volunteer activities up to 18 hours, which is 8.5 hours more than without this motive. However, if in the structure of motives, “promoting your ideas” is not supported by “interesting work”, then an average time for volunteering is reduced to 12.7 hours per month. An analysis of the constructed decision tree model demonstrated that statistically duration of volunteering increases significantly (up to 27.2 hours) if one of the motives is a “chance of promoting your ideas” and “interesting work”. However, among the studied selected volunteers, only 5.5% of respondents have similar motives. It is quite natural when volunteer work gives young people an opportunity to realize their own initiatives and set up useful contacts, they are willing to spend more time on volunteering (duration /engagement in volunteer activity increases). It happens because they consider this activity as an opportunity for professional development both inside the third sector and beyond.

On average, those selected studied respondents who regularly work as volunteers are 18%. Other 27% identify themselves as volunteers and work in volunteer projects from time to time with a certain degree of regularity. The participation of the majority of volunteers (55%) is incidental, episodic, of which 17% do not even identify themselves as volunteers. The main reasons for determining engagement of a person in volunteering constantly are “a favorite thing, a hobby” (39%). If this motive lacks only 14% of respondents are constantly engaged in volunteering. The most significant effect in case of a classification error of less than 5% is given by a combination of motives “favorite business, hobby” and “friends”. Among those who have such a combination of motives, the share of “professionals” (that is, those who constantly work as a volunteer) raises up to 43%. The proportion of those engaged

in volunteering from time to time with a certain degree of regularity is 43%. The proportion of "random" volunteers is only 14% among the people in this group. If there are such motives as “communication with interesting people”, “professional career prospects”, and “work experience” it also increases regularity of participation in volunteering. It can be noted that communication motives (“friends”, “communication with interesting people”, “useful acquaintances”), as well as career motives (“work experience”, “career prospects”, promotion of their ideas”) contribute to the growth of regularity participation but just the motives on their own do not provide a transition to “permanent volunteering”. Only a combination of the motives of these groups in the system of human motivation statistically significantly increases the proportion of volunteers engaged in this activity constantly.

3.2 Volunteering motivation and participation in different volunteering practices

On average, the selected respondents participate in 2.5 events (ranged from 1 to 7). However, the variability of participation in various volunteer practices can vary significantly depending on which motives are actualized among respondents. Tab. 3 presents average values of the studied variable depending on the choice of motives.

Tab. 3: Average values of participation variability in different volunteer practices in the context of individual motives for participation in volunteering

What gives you participation in volunteering?	Variability of participation in different volunteer practices, number of events			
	No motive	With motive	Difference	Significance*
Experience	2.3	3.2	1.0	0.000
Professional career prospects	2.5	3.4	0.9	0.001
Interesting work	2.3	3.7	1.4	0.000
New useful contacts	2.2	3.2	1.0	0.000
Access to the information	2.5	3.2	0.8	0.010
Social and political experience	2.4	3.2	0.8	0.000
New knowledge, qualification	2.4	3.2	0.9	0.000
Contacts with influential people	2.5	3.5	1.1	0.001
Respect of others	2.4	3.1	0.7	0.014
Friends	2.3	3.6	1.3	0.000
Favorite thing, hobby	2.4	3.3	0.9	0.001
Communication with interesting people	2.1	3.4	1.3	0.000
Chance to protect your rights, solve your problems	2.5	3.4	0.9	0.055
Promotion of your ideas	2.4	3.7	1.3	0.000
Chance to increase self-esteem	2.4	3.4	1.0	0.000
Opportunity to improve life in your home, street district, city	2.4	3.0	0.7	0.001
Opportunity to help people	2.2	2.8	0.6	0.001

* Test for significance of differences was carried out using the non-parametric test Mann and Whitney.

Source: authors' calculations

The “width” of voluntary participation (variation of volunteer practices) is determined by about the same group of motives as the “depth”. However, an increase in the participation of more than one event happens only due to such motives as opportunity to get interesting work, to find friends, to get in touch with interesting people, to ensure the promotion of their ideas, to establish contacts with influential people. Here the basic motive is to communicate with interesting people. If this motive lacks a person is engaged in fewer events. It is reasonable because a large number of diverse volunteer practices can significantly expand the circle of communication; get to know a lot of interesting, full of initiatives, like-minded people. The motives for expanding social contacts are crucial here but an evolving motive is a chance to get an interesting job. According to the decision tree model such motives as “communication with interesting people”, “interesting work” and “experience of social and political activity” are the main ones determining the variability of participation. Not a certain combination of motives (as is typical, for example, for regularity or immersion (time) of participation in volunteering) stimulate growth of variation but rather the number of actualized motives engaged (the greater their number, the higher the variability of participation).

3.3 Groups of volunteers depending on the variability of participation in different volunteering activities and on the level of engagement in volunteering

The analysis of the obtained data didn’t identify clusters and groups of volunteers in terms of the “width” and “depth” of participation in volunteering. Tab. 4 presents the cross-distribution of respondents depending on the number of different events in which they participated and duration of volunteer work.

Tab. 4: Groups of young volunteers on the “width” and “depth” of participation in volunteering

Variability of participation in different volunteer practices, number of events		Duration of volunteering, in hours			Total
		Less than 5 hours	5 to 10 hours	Over 10 hours	
Participation in 1 event	Number	71	20	23	114
	% of total	22%	6%	7%	35%
Participation in 2-3 events	Number	74	30	31	135
	% of total	23%	9%	9%	41%
Participation in 4 events and more	Number	28	19	33	80
	% of total	8%	6%	10%	24%
Total	Number	173	69	87	329
	% of total	53%	21%	26%	100%

Source: authors' calculations

On average, 53% of respondents spend less than five hours on volunteering per month, 76% of young people participated in not more than three different volunteering practices. The most numerous groups of volunteers are those that spend not more than 5 hours on this activity and

participated in only one (22%) or 2-3 (23%) volunteer practices proposed. The most promising from the study point of view is the group of “professional volunteers” (7%) participating in one particular direction / sphere of volunteering more than 10 hours per month. From our point of view, they have the greatest potential to ensure quality service delivery within non-profit organizations, and a study of their needs is important for identifying factors contributing to their retention in NPOs.

Conclusion

According to the results of a survey of young residents in the Sverdlovsk region, with a sufficiently high involvement in volunteering (78%), the proportion of those who are regularly engaged in volunteering, actively involved in various practices and ready to spend a significant part of their time on them is relatively small. The proposed methodological framework of the study allowed to investigate the motives for engaging in volunteering not separately but as a combination and identify those “motivational complexes” that most contribute to attracting young people to the volunteer movement. The number of actualized motives is statistically significantly correlated with the duration, regularity and variability of volunteering. An analysis of the constructed decision tree model demonstrated that statistically duration of volunteering increases significantly if the motivational complex includes such motives as “chance of promoting your ideas” and “interesting work”. According to the decision tree model “communication with interesting people”, “interesting work” and “experience of social and political activity” are the main motives determining the variability of participation. It is worth noting that even a slight change in the motivational complex may possibly have a fundamentally different effect. Most likely that the hypothesis about distinct clusters, groups of volunteers in terms of "width" and "depth" of participation in volunteering was not confirmed because of numerous combinations of motives.

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