

## ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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### AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MOTIVATION OF VOLUNTEERS: REGIONAL CASE

Understanding the motivations of volunteers is crucial for effective engagement with this group. This study examines the motivations of volunteers in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region, focusing on the differences among different age groups, residents of large and small cities, as well as regular and episodic volunteers. Particular attention is paid to assessing the level of satisfaction with volunteering and identifying organizational challenges. This study uses data from a survey of 220 respondents engaged in volunteer activities and residing in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region. The Functional Theory of Motivation, developed by Clary and Snyder, guided the design of the questionnaire. The findings suggest that motivations of volunteers are significantly influenced by age: younger people are primarily interested in self-realization and skill development, while more mature volunteers are driven by the desire to help those in need or address socially meaningful issues. Episodic volunteers tend to be less motivated and less satisfied with the results of their work, suggesting that managing this group requires more effort and attention. Volunteers in the Nizhny Novgorod region are generally more motivated than those in Nizhny Novgorod, although their job satisfaction is relatively low, which may indicate organizational

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shortcomings. The most significant problems in organizing volunteering are insufficient media coverage of volunteering opportunities and the number of participants in projects, as well as limited opportunities for grassroots initiatives. At the same time, urban and rural volunteers differ in their assessment of the importance of these issues. This study contributes to the understanding of volunteer motivation by highlighting areas that require further attention: tailored approaches for older volunteers, differentiated management strategies for traditional and episodic volunteers, and improvements in the organization of volunteering in small towns in the Nizhny Novgorod region.

**Keywords:** volunteering activity, motivation, episodic volunteering, volunteer organizations, non-profit sector

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## Introduction

Volunteer organizations play an essential role in the social and economic life of the country by providing services in areas where the state may not be able to ensure full coverage. Even when the state apparatus functions optimally, there is a preference for standardized solutions to social problems rather than individualized approaches to diverse situations (Mersijanova, Jakobson 2011: 9). The trend of increasing the role of the non-profit sector in solving socially significant problems is typical for most developed countries of the world (Edelman... 2022: 5). In Russia, in conditions of high uncertainty in the economic and social spheres, the role of volunteering has grown significantly. At present, however, Russian non-profit organizations are experiencing financial difficulties associated with a decrease in funding and donations (Agency... 2022).

In today's environment, volunteer organizations need to adopt modern human resource management methods to increase their effectiveness. Such methods are based on understanding the motivations that guide volunteers, as well as the reasons for the population's reluctance to participate in volunteer activities. Studying motivation will actively involve the population in volunteering and improve 'the quality of management of a non-profit organization and create a favorable working environment' (Nezhina et al. 2014: 50). It should also be noted that understanding motivation 'can be valuable for organizational recruitment efforts' (Lopina, Rogelberg 2013: 245).

The nature and motivations of volunteering can vary under the influence of external conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic became a global challenge, and volunteering by citizens, driven primarily by humanitarian motives, became one of the ways in which society responded to this challenge (Tsai et al. 2023; Sirotkina et al. 2021). However, the admission rules of some Russian

universities, which give extra points on the Unified State Examination for participation in volunteer activities, have led to the emergence of people in the volunteer community who are motivated solely by self-interest.

Studies on volunteer motivation reveal a variety of approaches to analyzing and classifying the underlying motives for volunteering. These are examined from the perspective of disciplines such as sociology, public administration, management, and others. One of the best known theories is the Functional theory of Motivation, as outlined in the study by Clary and Snyder (1999: 156). This theory identifies six motivational functions: Values, Understanding, Enhancement, Career, Social, and Protective.

The Values function refers to the desire to contribute to universal values, such as humanism. The Understanding motive drives those who want to learn more about the world and society and develop their skills through new activities. The Enhancement function motivates those who want to develop higher levels of empathy and altruism. Volunteers driven by the Career motive acquire skills and connections necessary for career growth, while those interested in strengthening social connections are guided by the Social motive. Finally, the Protective motive stimulates people who feel guilty, experience negative emotions, or want to address personal problems.

According to the Functional approach to volunteering, volunteers performing the same task may be motivated by very different reasons. For instance, one volunteer may visit hospital patients to support lonely people and this reflects his/her personal values. For another person, this activity may be primarily related to a desire to work in that hospital in the future (Güntert et al. 2022: 12).

There are numerous extensions of the Functional Theory of Motivation, especially when applied to specific situations and contexts (Erasmus, Morey 2016: 1347). In addition to the functional approach, Jiranek et al. (2013: 523) outline the social justice function, which is characteristic of volunteers in organizations working to protect human rights, for example. Güntert et al. (2015: 686), analyzing the work of 'event volunteering,' identified two additional motivations: civic stance and enthusiasm. When analyzing the motivation of volunteers, researchers often distinguish between internal and external motivation (Nezhina et al. 2014; Voronina 2021). Internal motivation reflects a person's desire to satisfy psychological needs, while external motivation involves confronting external challenges, such as social injustice.

The motivation for volunteering can change over time (Alan, Campbell 2017: 746). Initially, a person may volunteer to achieve career goals, believing that volunteering will help to secure employment. However, over time, a person may become more actively involved in the social aspects of volunteering and build connections with other volunteers, which will later contribute to fulfilling the individual's social motivation (Tsai et al. 2023: 2). Motivation is constantly evolving and goes through different stages. Therefore, it is extremely important for NGO managers to remain vigilant in order to prevent emotional burnout.

The aim of this study is to analyze the motivations of residents of Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region, with a special focus on the diverse motivations characteristic of volunteers of different age groups, as well as permanent and episodic volunteers, including urban residents.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted in April-May 2021 among respondents with volunteering experience living in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region. The survey was conducted with the help of volunteer organizations in the Nizhny Novgorod region and included participants who were actively involved in the work of these organizations on a permanent or occasional basis. The study took into account parameters such as the respondents' age, place of residence, and the nature of their involvement in volunteer activities. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, which were processed using content analysis, as well as closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was hosted on the Google Forms survey platform. The database of respondents was created using the information provided by volunteer organizations in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region. The respondents included volunteers who had been involved in volunteer work for the past three years, regardless of the intensity of their activity. Respondents were sent an email inviting them to complete the questionnaire via the provided link. Thirty four percent of the recipients completed the questionnaire, resulting in 220 completed responses.

The average age of the respondents was 21 years, with the oldest being 64 and the youngest being 12. Women made up 89% of the participants. This high level of female participation in volunteering is in line with global trends (Batmanova 2021). Of the volunteers surveyed, 62% were under the age of 20. The difference in the age structure of the volunteers participating in the study compared to the general population of the Nizhny Novgorod region is evident in the higher proportion of young people, which reflects both the attractiveness of the volunteer movement to this age group and the results of active organizational efforts to involve young people in volunteering activities within the framework of educational and vocational training organizations (Analytical Center... 2020).

At the same time, the activity of men and people of 'silver age' is relatively low. It should be noted that the gender and age composition of participants in the volunteer movement in the Nizhny Novgorod region is in line with the trends in the development of volunteering in the Russian Federation as a whole (Ibid).

Given that the gender and age composition of the respondents is skewed towards a younger population, the following age groups were used for the purposes of the motivation study: volunteers aged up to and including 20 years, from 21 to 30 years, and over 30 years. The number of people in these groups was 131, 50, and 39, respectively.

### Assessment of motivation and satisfaction for volunteers of different age groups

To assess the motivation of volunteers in different age groups, the respondents were asked to rate the significance of each motive on a five-point scale: 1 – not significant, 2 – slightly significant, 3 – moderately significant, 4 – significant, and 5 – very significant. The ratings of the importance of volunteering motives for volunteers of different ages are shown in Figure 1.

The differences between the highest and lowest scores for each indicator are statistically significant (a two-tailed Student's t-test was used with a p-value of 0.05).

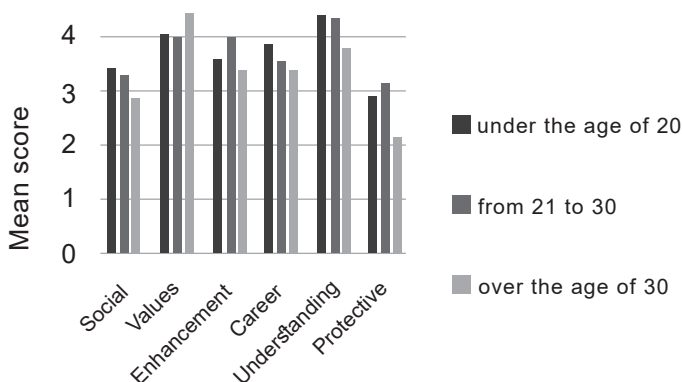


Fig. 1. Significance of volunteering motives for volunteers of different ages

The data show that the most motivated category is young people under 30 years of age (the first two age groups): the rating of the importance of motives for volunteering is higher than that of the third group for all types of motives, except for the Value motive. It should be noted in particular that the Protective motive was ranked as highly important by volunteers under 30 years of age. This may indicate a relatively high level of anxiety among young people. One of the respondents (male, 19 years old) noted that volunteering *'helps to relax, a sense of needfulness appears.'*

While the Value motive predominates among adult volunteers (over 30 years old), for other age groups, the Value motive is complemented by the motives of self-development and acquiring professional skills. One respondent (a 24-year-old woman) noted that she volunteers in the field of sport but would prefer to be employed in this field. She considers the experience of volunteering as *'interesting and useful'* for future employment. Another respondent (a 15-year-old student) wrote that *'it is always a pleasure for me to engage in volunteer activities, because helping people improves my communication skills at the same time'.*

Volunteers over 30 are primarily engaged in value-driven activities and are willing to participate in routine tasks. In contrast, younger volunteers under 30 are looking for opportunities to develop their skills and advance their careers. To effectively attract and retain volunteers of all ages, organizations should tailor their motivational strategies to these different preferences.

In our study, all motives were grouped into six categories. However, some motives are difficult to categorize, such as the desire to meet idols, the hope of finding a life partner, or distrust of the state in solving social problems. Open-ended questions in the questionnaire allowed respondents to express their unique motivations, revealing these 'unexpected' factors. For instance, one respondent noted that volunteering 'allows you to improve your karma.' When developing a motivational policy, it is important to consider these 'unexpected' motivations. While they may not fit into traditional categories, they may be important for certain age groups or regions.

In our study, we assessed not only the motivation of volunteers, but also their satisfaction with their work. The respondents rated their satisfaction on a 10-point scale, with 1 indicating low satisfaction and 10 indicating high satisfaction. The results of this assessment for different age groups are shown in Table 1.

The differences between the highest and lowest scores for the satisfaction indicator are statistically significant (the same two-tailed Student's t-test was used with a p-value of 0.05).

Table 1

**Assessment of different age group volunteers' satisfaction with volunteer activities**

<i>Age of respondents</i>	<i>Mean score of the satisfaction level by a 10-score scale</i>	<i>Standard deviation of the satisfaction indicator</i>
Under 20	8,04	1,85
From 21 to 30	7,71	1,97
Over 30	6,49	2,66

Satisfaction with volunteering decreases with the age of the respondent. Young people up to the age of 20 are the most satisfied with their work in volunteer organizations. Commenting on her high level of satisfaction (10 points), a 13-year-old girl says: *'I get energy from the atmosphere during the events.'* Another 13 year old girl, who also rated her satisfaction the highest, remarks that she *'makes new friends and develops herself.'* There are emotional statements among young people, such as *'It's great to be a volunteer'* and *'Everything is cool.'* It seems that volunteering reduces young people's anxiety and increases their self-confidence.

Respondents aged 21–30 expressed less satisfaction with volunteering than younger participants. They gave more detailed explanations for their positions and highlighted areas for improvement. For instance, some mentioned the '*need for better organization*' or expressed a desire to '*solve more serious problems for citizens*.'

The age group over 30 shows not only lower motivation but also a relatively low level of satisfaction with volunteering. The spread of satisfaction index scores (the standard deviation) is relatively high in this group. We believe that may be due to the fact that the respondents over 30 value their experience and qualifications highly and feel disappointed when they encounter a formal attitude. For instance, one respondent (a 56-year-old woman with medical experience and work as a daycare nurse) showed the lowest level of satisfaction (1 point). She explained her dissatisfaction by saying that after contacting a volunteer center three years ago and expressing her wish to participate, she received a promise to be contacted, but no one followed up. As a result, she felt '*denied the opportunity to help orphaned children*.' She is currently involved in environmental protection activities, but it seems that her experience and professional skills have not been fully utilized.

Therefore, the respondents under 20 years of age have a positive perception of volunteering, mainly due to the positive emotions it evokes. Those aged between 21 and 30 have a more rational view, emphasizing the need for proper training, qualified supervisors, and organized work structures. At the same time, people over 30, especially retired people, often do not want to '*gain experience and skills*,' but to share their existing knowledge and expertise. This age group needs more encouragement, feedback, and recognition of their contribution than younger volunteers.

### **Comparative analysis of the motivation of traditional and episodic volunteers**

We conducted a comparative analysis of the motivation of traditional and episodic volunteers. The term 'episodic volunteer' is often used in the literature to refer to individuals who participate in volunteer activities on a one-off basis (Cnaan, Handy 2005: 30). However, it should be noted that the distinction between traditional and episodic volunteers is quite conditional, as episodic volunteers may be regular volunteers in other organizations and vice versa (Holmes 2014: 443). In this study, the respondents identified themselves as 'traditional' or 'episodic' volunteers.

Based on the respondents' answers, two groups were identified: traditional volunteers (120 people) and episodic volunteers (90 people). The graphical representation of the importance of motivations for traditional and episodic volunteers is shown in Figure 2. The differences in the scores for each indicator between these two groups are statistically significant when using a two-tailed Student's t-test with a p-value of 0.05.

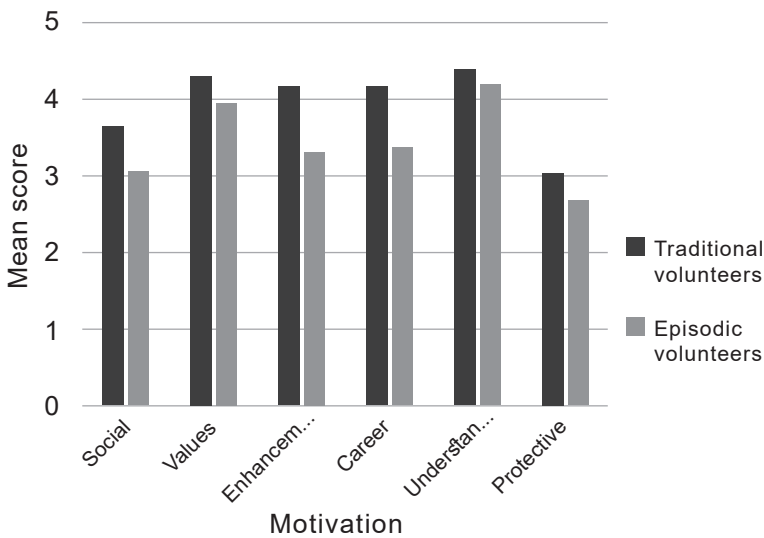


Fig. 2. Motivation of traditional and episodic volunteers

As shown in Figure 2, the level of motivation of traditional volunteers is higher than that of episodic volunteers. For traditional volunteers, all motives are highly significant (scoring 4 or more on a 5-point scale), except for Social and Protective motives. In contrast, for episodic volunteers, the most important motive (scoring above 4 points on a 5-point scale) is self-development (Understanding), indicating a predominance of the 'ego' motivation. It should be noted that episodic volunteers not only have a lower level of motivation, but also a lower level of job satisfaction (see Table 2).

Table 2

Assessment of volunteers' satisfaction with volunteer activity		
Category of volunteers	Mean score of the satisfaction level by a 10-score scale	Standard deviation of the satisfaction indicator
Traditional volunteers	8,29	2,02
Episodic volunteers	7,02	2,03

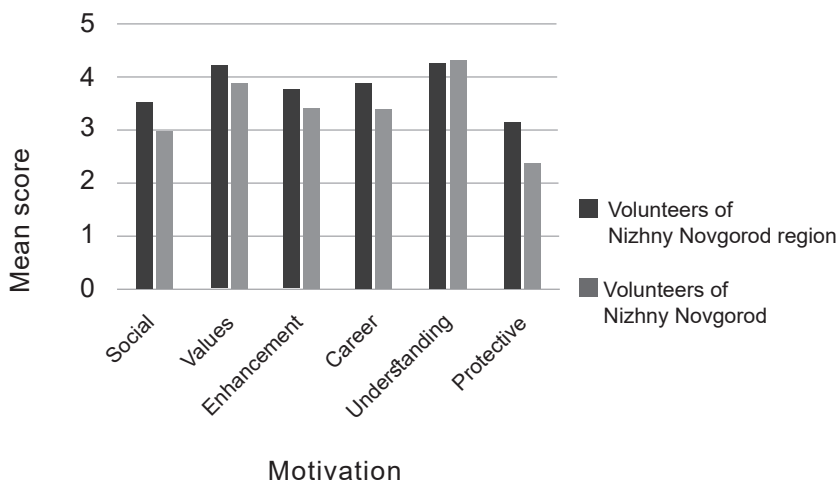
Thus, each of the selected groups (traditional and episodic volunteers) requires a different approach, taking into account their different levels of satisfaction, diverse motivations, and differing 'intensities' of these motivations. Karr and Meijs



note that managing episodic volunteers requires more effort and attention, as this category is typically less trained and tends to 'improvise' (Karr, Meijs 2006: 11).

### **Assessment of the significance of the motives for volunteering for volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region.**

In our study, we compared the motivations of volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region. There were 93 respondents from Nizhny Novgorod and 127 from the Nizhny Novgorod region. The results of the assessment of the importance of the motives for volunteering for these groups are shown in Figure 3. The differences for each indicator, with the exception of 'Values,' are statistically significant (as before, a Student's t-test with a p-value of 0.05 was used).



*Fig. 3.* Assessment of the significance of the motives for volunteering for volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region

Volunteers from the Nizhny Novgorod region showed higher levels of motivation than residents of Nizhny Novgorod. However, their average score for job satisfaction was 7,17 out of 10, which is relatively low (see Table 3). Conversely, volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod showed a lower level of motivation, but their satisfaction with volunteering was higher, scoring 8,06 out of 10.

The difference in satisfaction ratings between volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region can be explained by the relatively limited experience of developing and supporting volunteering in the small towns and villages of the Nizhny Novgorod region. As a result, the organization of volunteer work in these areas does not always meet the expectations of participants.

Table 3

Assessment of satisfaction with the volunteer work of volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region

<i>Category of volunteers</i>	<i>Mean score of the satisfaction level by a 10-score scale</i>	<i>Standard deviation of the satisfaction indicator</i>
Volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod	8,06	2,01
Volunteers from the Nizhny Novgorod region	7,17	1,95

Problems of organizing volunteer work for volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region

The respondents were asked to identify organizational problems they encounter when volunteering from the following list:

- Initiatives come mainly from the curators of the project;
- Lack of participants in volunteer projects;
- Lack of full-time professional staff;
- Need to train new volunteers in basic rules;
- Weak media coverage of volunteer activities.

They also had the opportunity to indicate other problems not listed or to report no problems. The list of organizational problems faced by volunteers was compiled on the basis of interviews with volunteers and staff of volunteer organizations in the region, as well as an analysis of the literature. The percentage distribution of respondents' answers is shown in Figures 4 and 5.

As shown in Figure 4, volunteers in Nizhny Novgorod consider the most important problems in organizing volunteer work to be poor media coverage of volunteering activities, insufficient participation in volunteer projects, and limited opportunities for bottom-up initiatives. Residents of Nizhny Novgorod region generally agree with the position of volunteers in the city when it comes to assessing the organisational problems of volunteering. However, residents of the Nizhny Novgorod region consider the problem of weak media coverage of volunteering to be less important than it is for residents of Nizhny Novgorod. This may be because the issue of poor media coverage is less noticeable in small towns, settlements, and villages where people are more closely connected, and information is often spread less through the media and social networks and more through personal contacts. It is also noteworthy that the residents of

the region are less critical and demanding of the organization of volunteer work: more than a third of respondents (35,43 % of the total number of respondents) did not identify any problems.

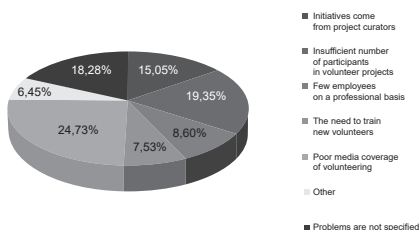


Fig. 4. Problems of organizing volunteer work for volunteers from Nizhny Novgorod

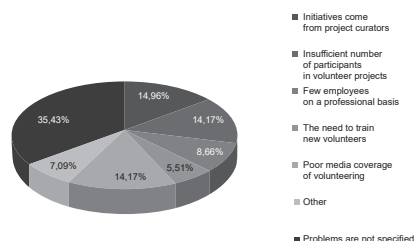


Fig. 5. Problems of organizing volunteer work for volunteers from the Nizhny Novgorod region

In order to improve the organization of volunteering, it is important to consider the specific needs of both volunteers from large cities as well as those living in smaller towns and villages. In large urban centers, volunteers often look for structured programs, professional development opportunities, and clear communication channels. In contrast, volunteers in smaller communities may value personal connections, flexible involvement, and activities that have a direct impact on their local environment.

## Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. First, the survey was conducted only among volunteer organizations in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region. Therefore, our findings may not be generalizable to all regions of the Russian Federation. Secondly, we were unable to collect a sufficient number of questionnaires to ensure an equal number of respondents in different groups, which would have allowed a more accurate comparison of data. The authors plan to address these limitations in future work, which will allow us to verify the reliability of the results presented in the study.

## Conclusion

The study shows that each category of volunteer requires a tailored approach that takes into account their different motivations. While young people are driven by self-development and the acquisition of new skills, the 'mature' generation is motivated by a desire to help those in need or to address socially significant issues. It is important to note that older volunteers not only possess experience and motivation but also have a crucial resource—

free time. However, they are very sensitive and often volunteer 'because they are asked, not because they take the initiative to get involved' (Morrow-Howell, Mui 1989: 31). Therefore, engaging older volunteers requires special attention and specific recruitment strategies.

Another category of volunteer that requires a nuanced approach is the episodic volunteer. Often, the success of an event 'depends on recruiting large numbers of willing one-time volunteers' (Cnaan 2021:1). Our research suggests that episodic volunteers are less motivated and less satisfied with the results of their work. This group often includes young people with minimal skills, making them more difficult for organizers to manage.

Our study shows that volunteers from the Nizhny Novgorod region are generally more motivated than residents of Nizhny Novgorod; however, their satisfaction with activities is lower. We believe this is related to the organizational challenges of volunteering in smaller towns in the Nizhny Novgorod region. Indeed, small communities often have limited opportunities for project implementation, and the qualifications of the management teams are typically lower (Ivanov 2022: 101).

The study concludes that there is significant potential for further development of the volunteer movement both in Nizhny Novgorod and in the small towns of the Nizhny Novgorod region. Further research and expert work is needed to develop specific formats and mechanisms for involving the population in volunteering.

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