

Motivation matters: distinct clusters of music festival volunteers and their implications for event management

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to understand the motivations of volunteers at music festivals, as event volunteering is becoming increasingly popular. By identifying different motivational clusters, the research provides insights that can help event organizers and volunteer organizations develop efficient management strategies.

Design/methodology/approach – The study integrated the Hungarian adaptation of the volunteer motivation inventory (Bartal and Kmetty, 2011) with festival-specific factors. Data were collected from 656 volunteers at three prominent music festivals in Hungary during the summer of 2023. A hierarchical cluster analysis was performed to identify distinct motivational profiles among the volunteers.

Findings – The analysis identified three distinct clusters of volunteer motivation: “barter traders”, who were motivated by tangible benefits; “social butterflies”, who were driven by expanding their social network and gaining appreciation; and “experience seekers”, who were motivated by the festival atmosphere. These findings reveal the nuanced interplay between tangible rewards and social dynamics, emphasizing the role of community-building in volunteer engagement.

Research limitations/implications – The study expands the understanding of volunteer motivations by identifying distinct motivational clusters among festival volunteers. It highlights the complex interaction between tangible benefits and social dynamics, contributing to the literature on volunteer engagement and motivation in event contexts.

Practical implications – Event organizers can use the findings to develop more targeted volunteer management strategies. Recognizing the motivations – tangible rewards, social interactions and experience-seeking – can help tailor recruitment, training and retention practices to better suit volunteer needs and increase overall engagement.

Social implications – The emphasis on community-building reveals the importance of fostering social connections among volunteers to enhance their experience and engagement. By promoting a sense of belonging and appreciation, event organizers can create a more cohesive volunteer community, thereby improving the social value and impact of volunteering and promoting the success of the festival’s implementation.

Originality/value – This research provides unique insights into the motivational factors influencing music festival volunteers, highlighting how different types of motivations can impact engagement. Our findings

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1. Introduction

Special and mega-events have become prominent features of contemporary societies, serving as focal points of public and media attention while significantly contributing to domestic and international tourism flows (Baum and Lockstone, 2007; Getz and Page, 2019; Holmes *et al.*, 2022). Given their scale and complexity, the success of these events depends heavily on volunteers, whose engagement is essential for achieving operational goals (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2010), and thus, understanding volunteer motivation is critical for effective event management, influencing volunteer recruitment, retention and overall event impact (Farrell *et al.*, 1998; Compion *et al.*, 2022; Petrovic and Stukas, 2021). Research on volunteer motivation has established several theoretical frameworks for understanding how individuals engage with and find meaning in volunteer activities. These frameworks have recently been extended through focused investigations of underlying motivations within specific volunteer contexts (e.g., Alexander *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Kim, 2018).

However, the serious leisure perspective (SLP) has received limited attention in event volunteering research, despite its potential to provide valuable insights into volunteer motivation by conceptualizing it as a blend of leisure and productive work that offers personal and social rewards (Stebbins, 2015, 2020). Within the SLP framework, event volunteering can be understood as a form of project-based leisure, characterized by a combination of structured organization and clearly defined benefits (Stebbins, 2013). This framework aligns with evolving patterns of volunteerism, characterized by a shift toward flexible, short-term and episodic engagements (Handy *et al.*, 2006; Macduff, 2005) that accommodate the demands and constraints of contemporary lifestyles (Cnaan *et al.*, 2022; Macduff, 2005).

Although frameworks for volunteer motivation have been widely applied to certain types of mega-events, particularly sporting and religious events (e.g., Alexander *et al.*, 2015; Cnaan *et al.*, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Kim, 2018), the motivations of music festival volunteers remain underexplored. While some studies have addressed the motivations of volunteers at smaller, specialized festivals (e.g., Argan *et al.*, 2015; Barron and Rihova, 2011), there is a notable gap in understanding how general and event-specific factors interact to influence the motivations of music festival volunteers.

This gap is particularly significant because different event types attract distinct volunteer demographics and interests. Sports events often involve specialized volunteers with prior experience (Bang and Ross, 2009; Alexander *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2018), whereas music festivals typically engage a younger demographic both among visitors (Brown and Sharpley, 2019; Jackson, 2014) and volunteers (Zievinger and Swint, 2018), with varying levels of experience. Specific motivational factors may be particularly prominent among young volunteers (e.g., Gage and Thapa, 2012). At festivals, social interaction (Richards *et al.*, 2013; Wilks, 2011, 2014) and engagement with festival activities often serve as key motivators. However, many festival volunteers lack prior volunteering experience (Auld, 2004), which can influence their expectations and support needs. Given these distinctions, there is a clear need for a more systematic understanding of the event-specific contexts that shape volunteer motivations in music festivals. Addressing this research gap will not only improve recruitment and retention strategies but also enhance the overall volunteer experience, ensuring that engagement efforts align with the unique motivations of this demographic.

This study examines the motivations of volunteers at the three largest Hungarian music festivals during the summer of 2023 ($N_1 = 125$, $N_2 = 82$, $N_3 = 458$). We draw on the framework of the SLP and combine the traditional aspects of volunteer motivation with event-

specific factors associated with music festivals. The analysis segmented volunteers based on their motivations and compared the results with findings from existing studies on both sport and festival volunteering.

2. Literature review

Volunteers play a crucial role in most special and mega-events, including large music festivals. In this literature review, we will first explore how festival volunteering is understood through episodic volunteering and SLP. Then we will review the various methods used in previous studies to measure volunteer motivation, and finally we will introduce our study and explain how we adapted and refined these approaches to assess the motivations of festival volunteers.

2.1 Music festival volunteering as project-based leisure

Contemporary volunteer work patterns reflect a fundamental shift in how individuals engage in civic participation. This transformation is particularly evident in the rise of *episodic volunteer* work – characterized by time-bounded commitments rather than ongoing involvement and reliance on existing skills rather than extensive training (Cnaan *et al.*, 2022; Macduff, 2005; Hyde *et al.*, 2014). This trend aligns with broader societal changes, as individuals increasingly seek defined, shorter-term commitments that can be integrated into their modern lifestyles (Handy *et al.*, 2006; Cnaan and Handy, 2005; Hyde *et al.*, 2016).

Within this broader context of episodic volunteer work, event volunteering stands out as a distinct form of engagement characterized by short-term, project-based and flexible commitments with high turnover and leisure-integrated motivation. Event volunteers typically commit to short, intensive periods of work during specific events, governed by formal agreements that clearly define their responsibilities and benefits, including opportunities to participate in the event itself (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2010; Twynam *et al.*, 2002). This kind of “exchange-based” relationship creates an environment where leisure participation and operational tasks intersect, highlighting the need for theoretical frameworks that capture both task-oriented and recreational dimensions of volunteer work. The dual nature of event volunteer work – combining task-oriented duties with leisure-oriented rewards – necessitates a nuanced theoretical framework to capture its complexity. The SLP (Stebbins, 2015, 2020) offers such a framework by recognizing the leisure aspect of volunteering, extending beyond Hustinx and Lammertyn’s (2003) earlier categorization, which focused on the collective and reflexive dimensions of volunteer work. SLP categorizes leisure into three forms: serious leisure, casual leisure and project-based leisure. Volunteer work, defined as an “un-coerced, intentionally productive, altruistic activity engaged during free time” (Stebbins, 2020, p. 23), can take on various forms within the SLP framework. Serious leisure, such as career volunteering, demands significant personal effort and provides enduring rewards, including self-actualization and social benefits like group accomplishments (Stebbins, 2015). Casual leisure, characterized by shorter-term commitments with minimal training, offers recreational opportunities and the potential for relationship building (Stebbins, 2020). Project-based leisure, typical of time-bound events, rewards volunteers with creative and infrequent accomplishments, described as “one-shot or occasional though infrequent, creative undertaking” (Stebbins, 2020, p. 33).

Among the leisure categories, project-based leisure provides the most appropriate framework for analyzing festival volunteer work (Stebbins, 2013). Music festival volunteer work exemplifies the core characteristics of project-based leisure: it is time-limited, demands advance planning and commitment, and offers specific personal and social rewards. In addition to a vibrant atmosphere and the enjoyment of music and other cultural programs, these events provide a great opportunity to create and maintain social connections (Wilks, 2011). The structured nature of this environment presents a unique context for examining how

volunteers balance their dual roles as operational staff and event participants while actively pursuing various intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2010).

Despite this theoretical alignment, research specifically examining the application of project-based leisure to music festival volunteering remains limited. Studies have broadly examined general and event volunteer work from SLP across various domains, including art festivals (Argan *et al.*, 2015; Barron and Rihova, 2011), sporting events (Gravelle and Larocque, 2005; Twynam *et al.*, 2002; Wilks, 2016), and tourism (Holmes, 2014). We argue that by applying the lens of project-based leisure, we can better understand how the concentrated, episodic structure of festival volunteer work creates unique patterns of engagement and motivation, where task-oriented and leisure-oriented elements coexist. The application of the SLP framework to festival volunteer work offers several key advantages. First, it provides a theoretical basis for understanding how volunteers balance personal fulfillment with altruistic contributions (Stebbins, 2013). Second, it moves beyond traditional dichotomies of altruistic versus instrumental motivations by conceptualizing volunteer motivations as a spectrum of interconnected drivers (Stebbins, 2013). This spectrum is particularly evident in the unique context of music festivals, where volunteers contribute to others' leisure while participating in their own recreation (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2010).

As music festivals expand their volunteer programs, the SLP framework becomes increasingly valuable for understanding how volunteers develop both service commitments and leisure satisfaction. Through this lens, we can see how skill development, community belonging, and personal rewards become integrated with service to others. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of festival volunteer motivation requires integrating multiple measuring approaches, which are reviewed in the following section.

2.2 Understanding and measuring volunteer motivation

Understanding why individuals join, commit to or leave volunteer activities is essential for organizations seeking to attract, retain, and effectively manage volunteers (Petrovic and Stukas, 2021), as the underlying motives to volunteer can affect future volunteer behavior (Compton *et al.*, 2022).

Two primary theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand volunteer motivation: the functional approach and self-determination theory (Petrovic and Stukas, 2021). The functional approach focuses on the psychological functions that volunteering fulfills for individuals, such as personal growth, social connection or value expression. In contrast, self-determination theory emphasizes intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, highlighting the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness in fostering engagement. Notably, empirical research indicates that volunteer motivations are complex and multifaceted, often arising as a combination of various factors rather than operating independently (Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016; Treuren, 2014).

The functional approach has led to the development of key measurement tools for volunteer motivation. Clary *et al.* (1998) proposed the volunteer functions inventory (VFI), identifying six functions: values, understanding, social, career, protective motives and enhancement. Building on this foundation, Esmond and Dunlop (2004) developed the more comprehensive volunteer motivation inventory (VMI), which expanded to ten functions: values, reciprocity, recognition, understanding, self-esteem, reactivity, social, protective, social interaction and career development. The VMI's comprehensive nature and validated measurement properties have made it a valuable tool, including its Hungarian adaptation (Bartal and Kmetty, 2011).

However, event volunteer work presents unique characteristics that require additional consideration. Event volunteers consistently show different motivational patterns compared to volunteers in other fields (Farrell *et al.*, 1998; Pozzi *et al.*, 2019), driven by both general motivational factors and event-specific reasons. This recognition has led to the development of event-specific scales like the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) (Farrell *et al.*, 1998) and the Motivation To Volunteer (MTV) for Special Events (Monga, 2006), both

drawing on [Knobe and Prensky's \(1984\)](#) framework of normative, affective, and utilitarian incentives.

Research on sports event volunteers consistently emphasizes the importance of integrating general and event-specific measures to understand volunteer motivation. While traditional volunteer functions remain significant, studies reveal that event-specific motives – such as personal connection to the cause, physical challenge and incentives – are equally critical ([Dunn et al., 2016](#)). This dual approach has allowed researchers to classify volunteers into distinct types, including material incentive seekers, community supporters and social networkers ([Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016](#); [Kim et al., 2018](#)).

These insights from sports event research establish a key principle: understanding event volunteer motivation requires addressing both general volunteer functions and event-specific drivers. However, music festivals present a fundamentally different context, where commercial entertainment, youth culture, and leisure experiences are deeply interconnected. Through the lens of the SLP, festival volunteer work represents a distinct form of project-based leisure, characterized by formalized exchange relationships. Volunteers operate under structured contractual arrangements involving deposits and leisure-related benefits, thereby shaping motivational dynamics in ways not fully addressed by traditional sports event frameworks.

Research on festival volunteers provides empirical support for this distinctiveness. [Barron and Rihova \(2011\)](#) found that festival volunteers are primarily driven by social and utilitarian motives, contrasting with the community service orientation often observed in sports events. Similarly, [Bachman et al.'s \(2014\)](#) segmentation analysis revealed complex motivational patterns, ranging from broad engagement across multiple dimensions to more selective motivational orientations. These findings suggest the need to reconceptualize festival volunteer motivation to account for both the structured exchange relationships and the unique intersection of entertainment, youth culture, and volunteer work inherent to the festival context. The project-based leisure framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the motivational dynamics at play.

Given these distinct characteristics, measuring festival volunteer motivation requires adapting existing approaches. While the VMI provides a robust foundation for capturing general volunteer functions, standard measures alone fail to account for the unique characteristics of festival volunteer motivation. The formalized arrangements involving deposits, as well as significant material and immaterial benefits, introduce exchange-based elements that fundamentally shape the volunteer experience, factors not addressed by traditional volunteer motivation scales. To address this gap, we supplemented the relevant dimensions from the Hungarian adaptation of the VMI with a dimension covering festival-specific items, enabling us to capture both traditional volunteer motivations and the distinctive transactional aspects of festival volunteer work.

This combined approach enables a systematic examination of how general volunteer functions interact with festival-specific motivations, addressing a critical gap in the literature. By integrating established volunteer motivation measures with additional items targeting festival-specific factors – such as interest in the event's atmosphere, favorite bands or prior festival experiences – we can gain deeper insights into the drivers of volunteer engagement in these dynamic and culturally immersive settings.

This understanding is particularly important given the unique characteristics of festivals: their short-term, high-intensity nature, strong cultural appeal, and the tendency to attract predominantly young audiences, both as participants and as volunteers. Such insights are essential for developing tailored strategies to enhance volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention in this distinct context.

3. Methods

This section outlines how the study was conducted, covering the sampling frame and data collection, the measurement of motivation and our analytical approach.

3.1 Data collection

This study examined volunteers who worked at the three major Hungarian music festivals in the summer of 2023. Their activity was organized and managed by a nonprofit organization specialized in festival volunteering, in structured six-hour daily shifts. Participation required a contractual agreement, which involved a deposit equivalent to the price of a one-day festival ticket, refundable upon duty completion. The organization provided volunteers with essential benefits, including daily meals and designated camping space in a separate area. Despite these transactional elements, volunteering at these festivals met [Cnaan et al.'s \(1996\)](#) four criteria for volunteer activity: voluntary nature of participation, absence of direct monetary compensation, work within an organizational framework and benefit to others.

Our research aimed to include all volunteers who had a signed contract, paid the deposit, and were present on-site. We pursued complete coverage rather than sampling for three key reasons. First, no data were available regarding the on-site volunteer composition due to GDPR considerations and substantial last-minute changes in volunteer participation. Second, the limited data collection timeframe made participant replacement impossible. Third, the festival setting, with volunteers dispersed across a large area and only brief check-in periods, made selective participant recruitment impractical.

Our approach yielded high study registration rates among the target population across the three festivals: $N_1 = 119$ (82%), $N_2 = 79$ (92%), $N_3 = 458$ (70%) ([Table 1](#)). The present study analyzes data from those 656 volunteers who registered for our study in the initial phase, most of whom completed all three questionnaires of the initial phase ($N = 628$). Non-participants comprised those who declined participation, those who only checked in/out without using base facilities, and pre- and post-festival dismantling crew members absent during the main event. We also excluded the coordination level of the volunteer organization from the analysis, since they were permanent employees and had different characteristics from volunteers.

Data collection began when volunteers first arrived (4–5 days prior to the festival) at the volunteer base, where they completed administrative tasks such as wristband collection and deposit submission. After reviewing the study information, volunteers used a QR code to access our custom-developed platform (React App-based). Volunteers registered by providing their name and email address, which served two purposes: collecting data for the network analysis component and allowing researchers to track questionnaire completion status in the database.

Table 1. Number of volunteers in the target group and the respondents' rate

	Balaton sound	Campus festival	Sziget festival
Target group (signed volunteer contracts at the beginning of the festival)	146	86	651
Registered research participants among volunteers (number of volunteers who registered on the research platform irrespective of whether they completed any questionnaires later) (% of volunteers with a contract)	119 (82%)	79 (92%)	458 (70%)
Completion of all three of the first round of questionnaires among registered volunteers (motivation, demographics and network ties at the start of the festival) (% of registered participants)	112 (94.1%)	76 (96.2%)	440 (96.1%)

Source(s): [Table 1](#) created by authors

The research platform displayed the number of required questionnaires and tracked their completion status. Upon registration, volunteers were asked to complete questionnaires covering their socio-demographic background, motivation and their initial ego-networks. The second block of questionnaires, focusing on social networks during the festival and social norms, was collected during the final days of the festival. However, our current study only analyzes the socio-demographic and motivational data collected during the initial questionnaire phase.

To ensure data quality in the challenging festival environment, we divided our survey into multiple shorter questionnaires rather than administering one comprehensive instrument. This decision addressed practical constraints, including unstable Internet connectivity, limited device battery life and restricted charging opportunities. Additionally, we implemented rigorous data protection through a double re-coding system for anonymization and strategically timed the motivation questionnaire administration to minimize response fatigue.

3.2 Measures for motivation

The Hungarian adaptation of functional volunteer motivation measures (Hungarian Volunteer Motivation Questionnaire – MÖMK), was developed and applied by [Bartal and Kmetty \(2011\)](#). This adaptation introduced a novel approach by incorporating four motivational functions from the VFI – values, understanding, social and protective – alongside six functions from the VMI – career development, recognition, social interaction, reciprocity, reactive and self-esteem. Additionally, five unique functions were included: governmental deficits, local governmental deficits, religion, environmental concerns and cultural interests.

In our study, we selected the most relevant functions from the MÖMK for application in the context of festival volunteering and supplemented these with festival-specific questions about volunteer motivation. The selected and measured motivational functions, corresponding to MÖMK and also with the original VFI and VMI, with minor modifications during translation were: Recognition (Rn: the importance of feeling valued); Social interaction (SI: being part of the social networks of volunteers); Self-esteem (SE: increasing their sense of value, importance, or self-worth); Social (So: the normative influence of people volunteers care about); Career development (CD: desire to acquire experience and skills through volunteering that could aid them in finding a job) and Understanding (Un: a deeper understanding of themselves, the organization or the people they help). The selection of functions and festival-specific questions was based partly on [Snyder and Omoto's \(2008\)](#) findings, which align with [Hustinx and Lammertyn's \(2003\)](#) concept of reflective volunteering – a paradigm of the modernization of volunteering. Unlike collective volunteering, reflective volunteering represents a more individualized, self-reflective and flexible form of commitment.

To better capture the festival-specific dimensions of volunteer motivation, we incorporated additional questions tailored to the festival context. This decision was informed by our pilot research one year prior at one of the festivals in the summer of 2022 ($N = 311$), where interviews conducted with volunteers alongside the motivation survey consistently revealed festival-specific factors influencing their motivations ([Bodor-Eranus et al., 2023](#)). The festival-specific items were constructed based on both the interview findings from the pilot study and the benefits offered through volunteer organization. To enable more effective segmentation of festival volunteers, we also analyzed socio-demographic variables, including gender, age, and country of origin, as well as their involvement in other volunteer activities and the amount of time they dedicated to volunteering.

Motivational data were collected using 36 items, each measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated “not important,” 2 “slightly important,” 3 “somewhat important,” 4 “very important” and 5 “extremely important.” This approach allowed for a detailed examination of the relative importance of various motivational factors.

3.3 Analytical approach

The objective of this study was to identify a smaller set of latent motivational factors and to group volunteers with similar underlying motivations. We used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation on the scaled version of the 36 motivation items.

EFA is used when the identification of latent constructs is needed and there is no specific empirical evidence to make assumptions about how many factors exist (Fabrigar, 1999). These items included festival-specific motivation items and items taken from MÖNK to uncover the underlying structure and dimensions of what motivated volunteers' participation at the three festivals (items and their measures are presented in Supplemental 1). To account for missing data, missing values were imputed by $N = 20$ multiple imputations using the mice package in R. The explanatory factor analysis was carried out on the complete dataset of volunteers who registered in the study ($N = 656$). The variables were scaled for factor analysis, ensuring that each had a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

To enhance clarity of interpretation, we excluded three items one-by-one because they did not have factor loadings greater than or equal to 0.3 on any of the factors (Field, 2013). Ultimately, we retained seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (Table 2).

In the final solution, the seven factors altogether accounted for approximately 53% of the total variance. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The alpha values for the factors were 0.9 for F1 (Career Orientation), 0.9 for F2 (Strong-ties Effect), 0.8 for F3 (New Relations Effect), 0.9 for F4 (Self-esteem Effect), 0.7 for F5 (Appreciation and Recognition effect), 0.6 for F6 (Festival Effect and Incentives) and 0.4 for F7 (Appreciation of Work), respectively (Table 2). The general guidance for the alpha value is to accept values 0.7 or higher as acceptable (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). Following this approach, the last two factors show less than ideal and low internal consistency. We still included those factors in the cluster analysis because they offered clear interpretation and accounted for as much variance in the data as possible.

Subsequently, we conducted hierarchical clustering with the Ward method to minimize within-cluster differences, applying the FactoMineR package in R (Lê, 2008) on the regression scores obtained from the seven factors. Hierarchical clustering provides a stable cluster structure and does not require specifying the number of clusters in advance (James *et al.*, 2017). The dendrogram generated by hierarchical clustering provides a visual representation of the data's structure, showing how clusters are merged or split at each step. This helps in determining the number of clusters. In the present analysis, the hierarchical tree suggested a three-cluster solution.

4. Results

4.1 Exploratory factor analysis and cluster profiles

The exploratory factor analysis identified seven motivational dimensions that serve as the foundation for understanding music festival volunteer motivations. These factors capture both general volunteer motivations and festival-specific incentives. Seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained. Following the exclusion of items with loadings below 0.3 on all factors, the final analysis included 33 items with their primary factor loadings ranging from 0.31 to 0.85 (Table 2). The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) in most cases were over 0.6 and estimated well the internal consistency of the items within the factors.

The factors are: Career Orientation (F1), emphasizing professional development; Strong-ties Effect (F2), highlighting the influence of friends or family; New Relations Effect (F3), focusing on forming new relationships and meeting social needs; Self-esteem Effect (F4), enhancing self-worth; Appreciation and Recognition Effect (F5), valuing recognition from the organization; Festival Effects and Incentives (F6), emphasizing the festival atmosphere, partying and perks such as free tickets; and Appreciation of Work (F7), addressing social recognition for efforts.

Table 2. Factor analysis of motivation ($N = 656$)

	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained (cumulative)	Reliability (Cronbach's alfa)
<i>F1 Carrer Orientation</i>		4.32	0.13	0.9
CD1 Networks useful on labor market	0.58			
CD3 Find employment opportunities	0.59			
CD4* Plans to find employment	0.80			
Un1 Understanding organizational mission	0.53			
Un3 Gathering practical experience	0.74			
Un4 Learning to deal with people	0.55			
Un5 Exploring own strengths	0.61			
<i>F2 Strong-ties Effect</i>		3.49	0.24	0.9
Mo2 Friends have also registered for festival volunteering	0.57			
So1 Friends are volunteering	0.81			
So2 Close people are volunteering	0.61			
So3 Acquaintances are volunteering	0.76			
So4 Close people place a high value on volunteering	0.85			
So5 Volunteering is important for better known people	0.59			
<i>F3 New Relations Effect</i>		3.01	0.33	0.8
S11 Looking forward social events	0.50			
S13 Volunteering builds social network	0.76			
S14 Volunteering provides new friends	0.75			
Rn4 Volunteers are treated equality within organization	0.44			
S12 Social events are important	0.48			
Un2 Volunteering gains new perspective on things	0.43			
<i>F4 Self-esteem Effect</i>		2.21	0.40	0.9
SE2 Sense of feeling a good person	0.57			
SE3 Sense of feeling important	0.69			
SE4 Sense of feeling useful	0.70			
<i>F5 Appreciation and Recognition effect</i>		1.58	0.44	0.7
SE1 Sense of pleasure	0.66			
Rn1 Organizational recognition	0.46			
<i>F6 Festival Effect and Incentives</i>		1.51	0.49	0.6
Mo3 I'm interested in the atmosphere of the festival	0.51			
Mo7 I like to party	0.53			
Mo1 For the free festival tickets	0.48			
Mo4 My favorite band will perform at the festival	0.4			
Mo5 I've been before, and it was fun	0.31			
Mo6 You get to meet a lot of people	0.49			
<i>F7 Appreciation of Work</i>		1.27	0.53	0.4
Rn5 Social recognition for volunteer work	0.83			
Rn3* Feedback from the organization	0.31			
Total variance explained			0.53	

Note(s): *The negated statements were reverse-coded for the overall means and further data analysis

Extraction method: MLE. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 21 iterations

Measure of sampling adequacy: 0.91

5-point Likert scale (1 = not important, 2 = slightly important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important)

Source(s): Table 2 created by authors. Supplemental II created by authors. Source of items used from MÖMK – Hungarian adaptation of the Volunteer Motivation Inventory is Bartal and Kmetty (2011)

These factors provided the basis for hierarchical cluster analysis that grouped volunteers into three distinct subgroups based on their scores on motivational items: Barter Traders ($n = 172$), Social Butterflies ($n = 271$), and Experience Seekers ($n = 213$). Each cluster reflects varying levels of engagement with these factors, offering a nuanced view of festival volunteer motivations.

Table 3 outlines the primary motivations for volunteering across the three distinct clusters expressed as the average of factor scores (Avg_F). Means by clusters of the used items are presented in Supplemental II. While Barter Traders showed the lowest motivation scores across all clusters, their strongest motivators were festival-specific incentives ($Avg_{F6} = -0.05$) and strong-ties effect ($Avg_{F2} = 0.27$), with new relations effect being their weakest motivation ($Avg_{F3} = -0.84$). This pattern suggests they view volunteering primarily as a convenient means to attend festivals with their existing friends, showing some appreciation for tangible benefits like free tickets while having minimal interest in other aspects of the volunteer experience.

Social Butterflies were primarily motivated by social and recognition factors, with positive scores in new relations effect ($Avg_{F3} = 0.28$), appreciation of work ($Avg_{F7} = 0.20$), appreciation/recognition ($Avg_{F5} = 0.17$) and festival effect ($Avg_{F6} = 0.14$). However, they showed a strong negative score in strong-ties effect ($Avg_{F2} = -0.84$). For these volunteers, festivals serve as a platform for expanding social networks and gaining recognition – they strongly prefer making new connections over volunteering with existing friends, while valuing community appreciation and the sense of belonging that comes from contributing to the festival.

Experience Seekers demonstrated the highest scores across all clusters in multiple factors. Their strongest motivations were strong-ties effect ($Avg_{F2} = 0.84$), career orientation ($Avg_{F1} = 0.48$) and self-esteem effect ($Avg_{F4} = 0.39$). They also scored positively on new relations ($Avg_{F3} = 0.32$) and appreciation/recognition ($Avg_{F5} = 0.15$). This reflects their dual focus on both professional development and social experience – they value the opportunity to develop career skills and understand organizational operations while sharing unique behind-the-scenes festival experiences with friends. Their motivations highlight the intrinsic

Table 3. Hierarchical cluster analysis on standardized motivation variables ($N = 656$)

	Cluster1 Barter traders ($n = 172$ / 26.2%)	Cluster2 Social butterflies ($n = 271$ / 41.3%)	Cluster3 Experience seekers ($n = 213$ / 32.5%)
Main motivation in the cluster groups	Festival ticket, having a good time with friends	Extending one's social network, having a sense of community, being appreciated	Enjoying the atmosphere of being part of the festival as a volunteer and sharing this experience with friends
F1 Career Orientation	-0.51	-0.06	<i>0.48</i>
F2 Strong-ties Effect	0.27	-0.84	<i>0.84</i>
F3 New Relations Effect	-0.84	<i>0.28</i>	<i>0.32</i>
F4 Self-esteem Effect	-0.34	-0.09	<i>0.39</i>
F5 Appreciation and Recognition Effect	-0.46	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.15</i>
F6 Festival Effect and Incentives	-0.05	0.14	-0.14
F7 Appreciation of Work	-0.44	0.20	0.10

Note(s): Highest cluster scores across groups are italicized

Source(s): Table 3 created by authors

satisfaction of participating in behind-the-scenes activities while also aligning with longer-term personal growth.

Beyond these distinct volunteer profiles, our factor analysis reveals important structural differences from traditional volunteering frameworks like MÖMK, VFI and VMI. Most distinctively, recognition among festival volunteers splits into three separate dimensions: general organizational recognition (F5), appreciation of volunteer work (F7) and equal treatment within the organization (F3). While traditional frameworks separate understanding from social aspects, our new relations factor (F3) shows these merging through shared social experiences and gaining new perspectives. The festival context also emerges clearly – most event-specific motivations group together (F6), though notably, volunteering with friends aligns with traditional frameworks by loading onto a separate strong-ties factor (F2). This unique factor structure underscores how festival volunteering represents a distinct form of engagement.

4.2 The characteristics of the motivational clusters

Having established the motivational characteristics of each cluster, we next examined their socio-demographic characteristics and volunteering background. Chi-squared tests indicate statistically significant differences between the clusters in terms of whether volunteers applied alone or with a company, their previous volunteer experience, gender, and student status. However, no significant differences were found concerning place of residence or festivals (Table 4).

The festival volunteers demonstrated a very homogeneous composition regarding age ($Avg_{age} = 22.5$, $SD_{age} = 5.5$) with negligible average age differences between the clusters ($Avg_{Barter\ Traders} = 21.2$, $Avg_{Social\ Butterflies} = 22.8$, $Avg_{Experience\ Seekers} = 23.1$). The majority of these young volunteers were students at the time (76.49% of respondents), though the proportion of non-students was higher in the Social Butterflies (28.07%) and Experience Seekers (24.06%) clusters compared to Barter Traders (15.7%). Although most respondents were Hungarians, the proportion of foreign volunteers was highest in the Social Butterflies cluster (25.93%), but the difference between the clusters is not significant. Females comprised the majority of our sample (66%), though gender distribution varied across clusters. While Social Butterflies had the highest proportion of female volunteers (73.7%), Barter Traders showed a more balanced gender composition with 48.26% male volunteers.

Given the episodic nature of festival volunteer work, and most of our respondents do not volunteer regularly beyond the present experience either – only 4.58% are regular volunteers, while 35.12% participated in volunteer engagement for the first time. The proportion of newcomers is even higher in cultural volunteering, with 49% of respondents having never taken part in a volunteer program in the cultural sector before. Nevertheless, prior volunteering experience varied significantly across clusters, with Social Butterflies and Experience Seekers showing higher proportions of volunteers with previous experience. Overall, 44.71% of volunteers applied alone; however, clusters significantly differed in this regard. Barter Traders included a higher proportion of individuals applying with friends (34.88%) or in groups (27.91%), while the majority of Social Butterflies applied alone (67.9%).

5. Theoretical and practical implications

Our study examined the motivation of volunteers at three Hungarian music festivals. We drew on the SLP framework of Stebbins (2015, 2020) and positioned music festival volunteering as a form of project-based leisure. While the SLP framework has already been applied to sporting events (Gravelle and Larocque, 2005; Wilks, 2016) and art festivals (Argan et al., 2015), to our knowledge, our study is the first to use it for music festivals. Further, our research integrated general (VFI, VMI) and event-specific motivation approaches, emphasizing the importance of context-specific factors in understanding volunteer motivation. Finally, our results have some

Table 4. Characteristics of motivational clusters (N = 656)

Characteristics	Cluster1 Barter traders %	Cluster2 Social butterflies %	Cluster3 Experience seekers %	Total	Statistics
<i>How volunteers applied to the festival</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 271)	% (n = 213)	%	Chi-squared = 104.01. p-value <0.01
I applied alone	26.74	67.9	29.72	44.71 (n = 293)	
I applied with my partner	10.47	5.54	8.02	7.64 (n = 50)	
I applied with a friend	34.88	17.71	37.26	28.56 (n = 187)	
I applied with a group of friends (at least two other friends/girlfriends)	27.91	8.86	25	19.09 (n = 125)	
<i>Volunteering experience</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 271)	% (n = 212)	%	Chi-squared = 26.6. p-value <0.001
This is the first time	45.35	31.37	31.6	35.12 (n = 230)	
1 time per year	27.33	19.19	27.83	24.12 (n = 158)	
Sometimes (between 2 and 6 times per year)	19.19	36.16	28.3	29.16 (n = 191)	
Regularly (at least 6 times per year)	5.23	7.01	8.49	7.02 (n = 46)	
Permanently (I am a permanent member of a voluntary organization)	2.91	6.27	3.77	4.58 (n = 30)	
<i>Volunteer experience at cultural events (if has any volunteer motivation)</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 271)	% (n = 212)	%	Chi-squared = 14.6. p-value = 0.02
I have never been before, this is my first time	58.72	45.02	46.23	49.01 (n = 321)	
I have been last year	15.7	18.82	23.11	19.39 (n = 127)	
I have been a few times in the past few years	22.09	25.83	23.58	24.12 (n = 158)	
I regularly participate in cultural events as a volunteer	3.49	10.33	7.08	7.48 (n = 49)	
<i>Gender</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 270)	% (n = 212)	%	Chi-squared = 22.6. p-value <0.001
Male	48.26	26.3	33.49	34 (n = 225)	
Female	51.74	73.7	66.51	66 (n = 429)	
<i>Currently studying</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 271)	% (n = 212)	%	Chi-squared = 8.97. p-value = 0.01
Yes	84.3	71.96	75.94	76.49 (n = 501)	
No	15.7	28.04	24.06	23.51 (n = 154)	

(continued)

Table 4. Continued

Characteristics	Cluster1 Barter traders %	Cluster2 Social butterflies %	Cluster3 Experience seekers %	Total	Statistics
<i>Hungarian vs. international residence</i>	% (n = 170)	% (n = 270)	% (n = 207)	%	Chi-squared = 3.78, p-value = 0.15
Hungarian	81.76	74.07	78.74	77.59 (n = 502)	
International	18.24	25.93	21.26	22.41 (n = 145)	
<i>Festival</i>	% (n = 172)	% (n = 271)	% (n = 213)	%	Chi-squared = 4, p-value = 0.41
#1	13.95	13.65	8.45	12.04 (n = 79)	
#2	17.44	18.45	18.31	18.14 (n = 119)	
#3	68.60	67.90	73.24	69.82 (n = 458)	

Note(s): Proportions are reported within columns, largest proportions within characteristics are italic faced
Source(s): Table 4 created by authors

practical implications for effective volunteer management. In this section, we will discuss these key contributions and their theoretical and practical implications.

Understanding event volunteers' motivation is crucial due to the growing interest and opportunities in volunteering for mega-events, such as music festivals or concerts. Flexible, short-term, and episodic volunteering align with the demands of contemporary lifestyles (Cnaan *et al.*, 2022; Handy *et al.*, 2006; Macduff, 2005) and large music festivals attract a substantial number of volunteers (ranging from 200 to 700 per festival in Hungary), driven by a wide spectrum of motivations. The identification of these distinct motivational profiles among volunteers has both theoretical and practical implications.

Moreover, similar to the demographic profile of music festival attendees (Brown and Sharpley, 2019; Jackson, 2014), festival volunteers predominantly belong to younger generations and tend to be younger than volunteers in other sectors (Zievinger and Swint, 2018) and often lack prior volunteering experience (Auld, 2004). Additionally, the dynamic atmosphere of music festivals and the unique social opportunities they offer distinguish this form of volunteering from other types (Richards *et al.*, 2013; Wilks, 2016) and consequently their motivations may differ from those in other volunteer contexts (Gage and Thapa, 2012).

Therefore, we applied the Hungarian adaptation of the VMI, supplemented with festival-specific measures, to investigate the motivations of festival volunteers. Our findings identified three distinct motivational profiles, highlighting the inherently multifaceted nature of music festival volunteering. Festival volunteers in our study exhibited complex motivational patterns driven by practical benefits, social connections, and opportunities for personal growth. These profiles largely align with existing research on event volunteer motivation while also revealing patterns specific to the festival context. The results demonstrate that volunteer work in these settings is shaped by a combination of general volunteer functions and festival-specific incentives.

Within this context, music festival volunteering emerges as a form of project-based leisure – short-term and episodic yet requiring substantial personal investment and offering personal rewards tied to leisure (Stebbins, 2015, 2020). Our analysis of the motivational patterns of festival volunteers provides empirical evidence that volunteer work creates unique opportunities for combining different types of leisure experiences – from project-based leisure (one-off volunteer work experience) to casual leisure (festival participation). By integrating festival-specific factors with established functional approaches to volunteer

motivation, we sought to understand how these different leisure forms and motivational drivers interact within individual volunteers.

Our findings demonstrate that music festival volunteering creates a unique context within the SLP framework by enabling different forms of leisure to coexist and reinforce one another. Across all profiles, social elements emerged as significant influences, though they manifested in distinct ways that bridged recreational and more committed, serious and casual leisure experiences. Social Butterflies pursued serious leisure through volunteering, using it as an opportunity to build new relationships and integrate into the festival community. Barter Traders and Experience Seekers, on the other hand, primarily engaged in volunteering to enhance their casual leisure experiences with friends, with the latter also finding leisure in the volunteer tasks themselves, thus becoming “insiders.”

Similarly, our cluster profiles support previous findings regarding the multidimensional nature of event volunteer motivations, while also revealing distinct patterns in festival volunteer work. The Barter Traders align with established findings on the relevance of material or transactional incentives among event volunteers in various contexts (Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Treuren, 2014; Hersberger-Langloh *et al.*, 2022), while the Social Butterflies reflect motivations centered on social networking and relational gains also identified previously (Hersberger-Langloh *et al.*, 2022; Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016). The Experience Seekers, driven by the festival atmosphere, contextualize previous drivers such as “event enthusiasm” (Treuren, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2018) contributing to an event or community (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2015; Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016) or gaining experiences (Schlesinger and Gubler, 2016). While the Barter Traders demonstrate the importance of event-specific incentives (Hersberger-Langloh *et al.*, 2022; Monga, 2006), the Social Butterflies resonate primarily with the functional motivations of social interaction, feeling valued and belongingness, as identified in the broader volunteer motivation literature (Clary *et al.*, 1998; Esmond and Dunlop, 2004). Finally, the Experience Seekers exemplify festival volunteers’ pursuit of personal growth and meaningful involvement in the event itself, aligning with the SLP (Stebbins, 2015; 2020) and the functional motivations of understanding, values and enhancement (Clary *et al.*, 1998).

Furthermore, the results also stress the importance of considering event-specific factors of volunteer motivation that may differ considerably in the music festival context from other types of mega-events such as sports competitions or religious gatherings, thereby underscoring the importance of understanding the distinct social and cultural elements of each event type. Our findings also illustrate how the broader context of volunteer work (regional or socio-economic factors) may interplay with festival-specific motivations. The prominence of tangible incentives among Barter Traders may reflect the economic realities of some (mainly local) students as the prices of the examined festivals are more aligned with Western European salaries, which can amplify the importance of free access and material benefits. However, these motivations are not purely extrinsic; they are tied to the opportunity for active leisure participation in the festival itself, highlighting how transactional rewards can serve as enablers of meaningful engagement. This extends the SLP by illustrating how material rewards can coexist with intrinsic motivations in shaping leisure experiences.

Our study also addresses a research gap by refining methodological and conceptual approaches to applying volunteer motivation functions in event volunteering contexts. While Bachman *et al.* (2014) and Wakelin (2013) identified the complexity of festival volunteer motivation, they did not fully capture the role of tangible benefits and festival-specific drivers in festival volunteer motivation. Our inclusion of event-specific factors, such as free tickets, favorite performers, and social opportunities, highlights how these motivations not only exist alongside but also interact with general volunteer motivation constructs. This approach incorporated the leisure aspect in addition to the traditional collective and reflexive dimensions of volunteer work (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003).

Our research demonstrates that the development of festival-specific standardized measurement tools for assessing volunteer motivation is both timely and necessary. Similar

efforts have been made in the past, such as the SEVMS developed by Farrell *et al.* (1998) and the MTV framework introduced by Monga (2006) in other fields. These tools serve as valuable precedents, highlighting the importance of tailoring instruments to the unique characteristics and dynamics of festival volunteer work.

Our research results also carry implications for volunteer retention, event atmosphere, and the positioning of the festival within the wider tourism and cultural landscape. By understanding the diverse motivations driving different volunteer segments, organizers can design targeted recruitment and retention strategies tailored to each profile's unique needs and motivations, as Kim *et al.* (2018) emphasize. The study reaffirms that a high percentage of festival volunteers are newcomers, both to volunteer work in the festival setting and to the experience of volunteering more generally. This pattern underscores the importance of structured but accessible orientation sessions, clear communication about tasks and benefits, and well-monitored feedback channels to ensure that novices feel supported.

Understanding of the strong-ties dimension can help volunteer mentors and coordinators anticipate that many volunteers will apply in groups or with friends, a phenomenon that can be leveraged for efficient scheduling and group-based tasks. This may be particularly relevant for volunteers in the *Barter Traders* segment, for whom festival organizers might also consider offering tailored tangible incentives and event-specific rewards to attract and retain those motivated by transactional factors. Equally, mentors and coordinators can support individuals who join without preexisting social connections by placing them in roles or spaces that foster new relationships. This may be especially relevant for the *Social Butterflies* segment, who are primarily motivated by opportunities for new social interactions.

In the longer term, a reward system that goes beyond a simple deposit refund – such as social events, gatherings or networking opportunities at the festival's conclusion – can sustain interest and foster a volunteer community that is more likely to return for future events. This may be particularly important for retaining volunteers from the *Social Butterflies* and *Experience Seekers* segments. For the former, organizers can create opportunities for social interaction, community building and recognition of volunteers' efforts, aligning with their desire for social connections and a sense of appreciation. For the latter, who are primarily driven by personal growth and meaningful engagement, organizers can provide enriching volunteer experiences that emphasize personal development and active participation in the festival's core activities.

By tailoring their approaches to cater to these diverse motivational profiles, festival organizers can enhance their ability to recruit, retain and engage a diverse pool of volunteers, ultimately contributing to the overall success and sustainability of their events.

6. Limitations and future research directions

While this study offers valuable insights into festival volunteer motivation, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and suggest directions for future research. First, the study was conducted within a specific cultural context (Hungary), and therefore, the findings may differ in other cultural settings. Future research should explore festival volunteer motivations across diverse cultures to assess the generalizability of the identified motivational profiles.

Additionally, the low relevance of some general volunteer functions suggests that understanding event volunteers' motivations may require a different approach, placing more emphasis on context-specific factors. Longitudinal studies could also provide important insights into how volunteer motivations evolve over time, revealing how motivational profiles shift at various stages of the volunteer experience, from initial recruitment to long-term retention. Such research could inform strategies for maintaining volunteer engagement and addressing changes in motivation throughout the volunteering lifecycle.

Finally, it's important to note that the motivations of non-respondents may differ from those of the volunteers who participated in the study. Therefore, our findings should be interpreted within this constraint. However, the diversity of respondents across the three festival sites, the

high response rates, and the robustness of our models contributed to a reliable analysis. We believe our findings can be effectively integrated into existing research on event volunteer motivations, which has predominantly focused on sports event volunteers.

For future research on volunteer motivation, we recommend incorporating event-specific measures to better capture the unique characteristics of event volunteers' motivations. Additionally, examining the relationship between engagement levels and motivation would provide valuable insights into event volunteering dynamics. Another promising avenue for research is exploring volunteer motivation in relation to social networks, identifying how different network positions (e.g., opinion leaders, opinion brokers, followers, isolates) and social capital building correspond to distinct motivational profiles.

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Ethical approval

The research meets all ethical requirements, participants were involved with written consent, and personal data was anonymized during the analysis. The research was approved by the Ethical Committee of HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, the approval number is: 1-FOIG/26-5/2023.

Data availability

All data used in this study have been collected by the HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Computational Social Science – Research Center for Educational and Network Studies (CSS-RECENS) research group, and data set used is available by request from the authors or from Research Documentation Centre of ELTE Centre for Social Sciences (URL: <https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/id/eprint/644>; DOI: [10.17203/KDK644](https://doi.org/10.17203/KDK644)).

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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