Chapter 5 Volunteer Work from an International Perspective



Those who volunteer do so for individual motives. A particular volunteering activity may be undertaken for a range of individual motives. At the same time, some motives are more important for commitment than others if we compare one and the same volunteer activity and volunteers with the same socio-demographic background across countries. How can this be explained? In this chapter, we will look at societal factors that can influence individual motives for volunteering (cf. Neufeind et al., 2015).

The French politician and publicist Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting the still young the USA, observed that Americans of all ages, ranks, and walks of life were constantly coming together; wherever you would see the government in France and a great gentleman at the head in England, you would certainly find a civic grouping in the USA (Neufeind et al., 2015, p. 266). After returning to post-revolutionary France in the early nineteenth century, de Tocqueville wrote his famous work *De la démocratieen Amérique* (Democracy in America, cf. de Tocqueville, 1835/2002), describing how the form and extent of civil society differed between countries. This is still true today: More than 40% of adults in the USA or Sweden are engaged in volunteer work, while in Spain or Lithuania, the figure is less than 20% (Hodgkinson, 2003).

How can these differences be explained? When trying to predict whether a person will volunteer, reference is usually made to factors at the individual level. The higher their socioeconomic status; the greater the involvement of family, friends, and acquaintances; the more pronounced the motivation or sense of justice; the more likely it is that a person will volunteer. In addition, various theoretical approaches, broadly categorized as *cultural* or *structural*, are applied to explain inter-country differences. Cultural approaches emphasize values and principles that prevail in certain cultures but not in others. Structural approaches emphasize the economic, social, and political structures of a country.

5.1 Structural Approaches

Structural approaches examine, above all, the connection between social institutions and the altruistic and career-related motivation for engagement.

5.1.1 Social Welfare and Altruistic Motivation

Comparing and Canada and the USA, Hwang et al. (2005) found that US volunteers were more altruistically motivated, whereas their Canadian counterparts expressed more self-referential motives. Hwang et al. (2005) argue that although both countries are liberal democracies, Canada is characterized by a more comprehensive welfare state (such as universal access to public health care). Therefore, Americans see it as part of their role as citizens to help poorer and disadvantaged fellow citizens, while Canadians see this role as largely fulfilled by the welfare state. Consequently, this would also explain the more altruistic motives of US volunteers. When comparing countries at different levels of economic development (Bangladesh, Ghana, Poland, and South Korea), Ziemek (2006) came to a similar conclusion: In countries with established social welfare, altruistic motivation was less pronounced.

Based on these results and the Social Origins Theory (cf. Salamon & Anheier, 1998), Hustinx et al. (2010) formulated the thesis that volunteers are altruistically motivated above all when they provide social services that are not provided by the state. Consequently, one should find strong altruistic motivation, especially in "liberal" countries like the UK or the USA, medium altruistic motivation in corporatist countries like France or Germany, and weak altruistic motivation in social democratic countries like Norway or Sweden. Hustinx et al. (2010) were able to confirm these assumptions empirically: In their study, Belgian, Chinese, and Japanese students who volunteered reported significantly lower altruistic motivation than Canadian and US students. By expanding the sample to 12 countries, the research group (Handy et al., 2010) was able to confirm the results once again. Students in corporatist or "statist" countries (Belgium, China, India, Japan, the Netherlands) showed lower altruistic motivation than those in liberal countries (Canada, UK, USA).

5.1.2 Signal Value and Career Motivation

Often, the motives of volunteers have something to do with the person of the volunteer(s). One motive is to gain career-relevant experience and to open up professional opportunities through the volunteering experience. There is ample evidence that volunteering is "worthwhile" in this sense: People who volunteer have higher salaries and both better jobs and better career prospects (Day & Devlin,

1998; Freeman, 1997; Katz & Rosenberg, 2005; Menchik & Weisbrod, 1987; Prouteau & Wolff, 2006). One explanation for the professional success of volunteers is that volunteering "signals" desirable characteristics to potential employers (according to the Job Market Signaling theory by Spence, 1973). For example, volunteering as a member of an association's board of directors signals organizational and communicative skills that can be of great relevance in the position of project manager or team leader. It can be assumed that in many volunteer activities, general skills can be acquired that are also applicable in a gainful employment context (Strauß, 2009).

The signal value of volunteer work differs between countries. In countries where extracurricular experience and general skills are important recruitment criteria, the signal value of volunteering should be high, and career considerations should be an important motive. Hustinx et al. (2010) showed that volunteers in the USA and Canada, where volunteering has a high signal value, have stronger career motivation than volunteers in Belgium, Finland, and Japan, where volunteering has a low signal value. In an extended sample, the research group (Handy et al., 2010) confirmed these results: In Canada, the UK, and USA, career motivation was significantly higher than in Finland, Japan, and Korea.

We therefore believe it makes sense, following Strauß (2009), to consider characteristics of the market economy framework as relevant structural factors. In particular, two factors should play a role: First, the signal value of volunteering should depend on *how often* volunteers can use their volunteering experience to signal desired characteristics (i.e., labor market flexibility). Secondly, the signal value of volunteering should depend on the *importance* of general cognitive and non-cognitive skills that can be signaled by volunteering. Both factors vary considerably between countries.

In "liberal market economies," such as the UK and USA, there is much greater labor market flexibility than in "coordinated market economies" such as Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland (Hall & Gingerich, 2009). Changes in career, employer, and phases of unemployment are more frequent in liberal market economies (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003). In liberal market economies, employers "tend to take the risk of relying on non-certified skills," while in coordinated market economies "certified vocational training is the decisive signal for employers" (Strauß, 2009, p. 650). These differences are reflected both in the individual orientations of university graduates (Hoelscher, 2012) and in the effects that voluntary engagement has on the re-employment opportunities of the unemployed (Strauß, 2009).

5.2 Cultural Approaches

As to cultural approaches, the starting point is the assumption that countries differ in their cultural values. According to Schwartz (1999), cultural values are implicitly- or explicitly-shared abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society. The extensive work of the social psychologists Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz

(1994) clearly shows that countries do indeed differ systematically with respect to these prevailing values. Dekker and Halman (2003) and Finkelstein (2011) argue that cultural values only conditionally determine whether a person volunteers or not, but that they have a strong influence on what motivates someone to volunteer. Grönlund et al. (2011) have attempted to explain country differences in motives for volunteering through cultural values. To provide an overview:

5.2.1 Egalitarianism and Altruistic Motive

From a structural perspective, differences in the altruistic motivation of volunteers can be explained by the existing or non-existing welfare state commitment of the country in which the volunteer is engaged. Grönlund et al. (2011) contrast this with the thesis that altruistic motivation is mainly found in egalitarian countries. Egalitarianism, in the sense of Schwartz (1994), means a socially shared norm of equality, responsibility, and helpfulness. In egalitarian societies, the individual is thus jointly responsible for the well-being of his fellow citizens. In an analysis of 13 countries, Grönlund et al. (2011) showed that in countries with high levels of egalitarianism, such as Finland, volunteers are more altruistically motivated. However, the altruistic motive was also strongly pronounced among respondents from Canada, New Zealand, and the USA, which is more in line with the structural considerations of the welfare state in the section on "Structural Approaches."

5.2.2 Individualism and Career Motive

The significance of the career motive for volunteers depends, among other things, on the signal value of volunteering to potential employers (see section on "Structural Approaches"). Cultural values could also explain differences: Grönlund et al. (2011) argue that in countries with a strong individualistic culture, career motives should be more important. In the sense of Hofstede (2001), individualism refers to the social desirability of self-determination, personal responsibility, and the pursuit of self-defined goals. A high degree of individualism can be found in the UK or USA, for example, and a low degree in China or Korea. Finkelstein (2011) was able to show on an individual level that individualistic volunteers show stronger career motivation. In their comparative study, Grönlund et al. (2011) found that career motivation is significantly stronger in individualistic countries. In contrast, especially in Finland, Japan, and Korea, this motive barely played any role for volunteers.

5.2.3 Conservatism and the Motive of Social Adaptation

Voluntary engagement is often promoted by the expectations of the social environment (for example, when family and friends also volunteer). In addition, individuals can strengthen their own integration into a group through volunteering. This function of volunteering is known as social adaptation. Grönlund et al. (2011) have suggested that the motive of social adaptation should be particularly important in conservative countries. According to Schwartz (1999), conservatism means that the existing—usually unequal—distribution of roles and resources is considered legitimate and that the individual must adapt to obligations and regulations. However, Grönlund et al. (2011) did not find a significant positive correlation between a country's conservatism and the importance of the motive of social adaptation.

5.2.4 Affective Autonomy and Protective Motive

Volunteering can distract from one's own worries, reduce feelings of loneliness, and relieve feelings of guilt that arise from the fact that one has it better than other people. If volunteers consider this function of their commitment to be particularly important, they have a strong protective motive. Grönlund et al. (2011) put forward the thesis that the motive for protection should be found particularly in countries where affective autonomy is important. According to Schwartz (1999), affective autonomy means that individuals are encouraged to have positive affective experiences and to lead exciting and varied lives. Schwartz (1999) found high values for affective autonomy, above all, in Anglo-Saxon countries and in Israel. In the study by Grönlund et al. (2011), the motive of protection was highly pronounced in Israel, but overall there was no significant connection between affective autonomy and the motive of protection.

5.2.5 Intellectual Autonomy and Motive for Understanding

For many people, volunteering is an opportunity to learn new things, pursue interests, gain practical experience, get to know a specific social environment, and, last but not least, to better understand themselves. This is termed the experiential motive. Analogous to the considerations of affective autonomy, Grönlund et al. (2011) assume that this motive for experience should be found particularly in countries where intellectual autonomy is important. Schwartz (1999) understands intellectual autonomy to mean that, in a society, the individual, independent pursuit of one's own ideas and ways of thinking is desired and that curiosity, flexibility in thinking, and creativity are positively sanctioned. Schwartz (1999) found high values for intellectual autonomy in Canada, the Netherlands, and French-speaking

Switzerland, for example. However, Grönlund et al. (2011) did not find a significant positive correlation between intellectual autonomy and the motive of experience.

The Swiss Militia System (cf. Ketterer et al., 2015) The ways in which volunteering is embedded in distinct structural and cultural contexts can be illustrated by the case of Switzerland. Central to Swiss democracy is the idea of *self-government* vested in the so-called militia system, which institutionalizes citizens' participation in local politics and administration. According to Geser (1987, p. 16), the militia system can be seen as a form of "self-government:" it relies on citizens volunteering in political-administrative offices alongside their job duties. This arrangement ought to prevent the centralization of power, the formation of special interests, and the abuse of power (p. 17). Such a system fits into a decentralized federalism that originated from a small-scale and homogeneous polity in the Swiss *Alteidgenossenschaften* (confederations) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The original cells of the militia system are considered the *military service*, the *Landsgemeinde* (assembly of voters) and the *agricultural commons*. As the militia system was originally located in traditional communities organized around the cultivation of collectively owned land, it served the organization of community life not only politically but also economically. That is, citizens were mutually dependent on each other's voluntary engagement for the provision of security and material needs. For these reasons, citizens would gain recognition from other community members when participating in the militia system. However, with the development of modern capitalism and the introduction of wage labor, the traditional community has lost not only its economic function but also its importance as a primary source of recognition.

In contrast to a board of professional experts, the *lav authority* created by the militia system represents the unity of state and society (Kussau et al., 2007). The militia system relies on the Helvetic virtue of citizen participation and on "opportunities for participation" created by the state and linked to citizenship (Kussau et al., 2007, p. 6). Kussau and Wehner (2007) also refer to the lay authority as a "paradoxical form of a non-voluntary participation necessity based on voluntary participation." However, it is not only Helvetic republicanism that characterizes Switzerland's political culture, but rather the interplay between republicanism and liberalism. In the militia system, these two opposing ideational currents clash in a sensitive way: republican virtues rub up against liberal value orientations. If one understands participation in shaping the community as a republican civic virtue, it requires Swiss citizens not only to fulfill their rights at the ballot box on election or voting day, but also to commit themselves in the form of regular, active participation in the res publica. In contrast, liberal value orientations free citizens from normative regulation, including from the duty of political participation.

(continued)

In a comparative study on volunteers' motives for participating in militia offices in municipalities, churches, and schools across the canton of Zürich, Ketterer et al. (2015) find that both other-oriented and self-enhancing motives matter for participation. Citizens volunteer their time because they want to do a service to the local community, but also because they aim to shape local affairs and want to do an activity that is meaningful to them personally. Further, the findings highlight that participation is also perceived as a moral obligation to the community.

Recently, the militia system has come under increased criticism, as militia offices in many municipalities remain unfilled or have been abandoned due to resignations (see, for example, Freitag et al., 2019; Kussau & Wehner, 2007). Every other municipality reports difficulties in finding candidates (Ladner et al., 2013). However, from the available data, it is difficult to assess the extent of the crisis that has been identified: Since the beginnings of municipal monitoring in the 1980s, there have been continuous reports of difficulties experienced by municipalities in finding suitable candidates for advertised militia offices (Ladner et al., 2013). Yet, research suggests that the issue of vacancies and uncontested elections has worsened over time. Dlabac et al. (2014) show for the German-speaking northern canton of Aargau that this problem has increased over time and particularly affects small, rural municipalities. In view of this problem of unfilled civic posts, institutional reform, constitutional changes (abolition of the school board, for example, in the canton of Aargau), and pressures for professionalization, the future of the lay authority is increasingly uncertain. In this context, the think tank "Avenir Suisse" also speaks of the "crisis of the militia system" (Müller, 2013) and proposes a universal civic service that would be obligatory for Swiss citizens and non-citizens with permanent residence in Switzerland.

Meanwhile, the issue of non-participation remains central to public discourse, with various assumptions about lack of engagement in the militia system attributed to *tensions between modern lifestyles and a traditional commitment*. Research, however, suggests examining a number of factors to explain non-participation both at the individual (e.g., age, gender) and organizational (e.g., strategic vs. operative task, support of employer) levels, but also at the structural level (Freitag et al., 2019). With regard to structural factors, the literature points to *increased demands concerning qualification and commitment* (Dlabac, 2016). Furthermore, difficulties should also be seen in the context of declining political participation at the municipal level and a decrease in party members overall (cf. Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008). As a result, where once potential candidates had been nominated by fellow party members, municipal councils today are *increasingly nonpartisan*. For example, in school boards less than 60% of militia members are members of a political party.

Nevertheless, self-reported data seem to support public discourse on a number of issues. From the perspective of those volunteering in municipalities, difficulties arise from the time-intensity of the commitment, the issue of balancing professional and private life (Ladner, 2015), and a lack of public and social recognition of the militia service (Freitag et al., 2019; Ketterer et al., 2015; Ladner, 2015). Hence, commitment to the local community appears no longer compatible with the opportunities and demands of a modern, globalized working world, which has undermined the unity of economic and political life as it existed in the traditional community.

5.3 Cultural and Structural Differences: Volunteer Work at the Red Cross in Europe

In a cross-national study (cf. Neufeind, 2013), we applied structural and cultural approaches to explain differences in motives for volunteering in eight European countries. Our data originated from a large survey of more than 6000 Red Cross volunteers in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, which we conducted in 2012. The sample consisted of first aid volunteers (32%), social services volunteers (55%), and administrative or supportive volunteers (13%). The eight sample countries differ with regard to several welfare, labor, and civil society characteristics (see Table 5.1) which we assumed to affect motives to volunteer, building upon the existing literature outline above. We particularly focused on aspects of the *labor market* and *work organization* in the realm of paid employment, such as discretion or workload, as well as citizenship norms and attitudes.

Five hypotheses were tested (using multiple regression analysis and controlling for gender, age, occupation, volunteer job, household income, paid work hours, and volunteer work hours):

- 1. Following Social Origins Theory (Salamon & Anheier, 1998), volunteers in countries with low social protection should report higher motivation by altruistic values than volunteers in countries with high social protection. In line with this hypothesis, we found the highest level of values-motivation to be reported by volunteers in countries with the lowest per capita social spending (Lithuania and Spain), while in countries with high per capita social spending (Switzerland and Austria), the lowest levels of value-motivation were reported. However, volunteers in Sweden and Italy showed higher and lower levels of value-motivation, respectively, than the level of social protection would predict.
- 2. Volunteering is a way to "signal" desirable characteristics to potential employers (Hustinx et al., 2010). *Volunteers in countries with high labor market flexibility*

Table 5.1 Country characteristics

	Welfare regime	Labor market set-up	t-up	Civil society		Work organization	
	Social spending	Flexibility	Skill regime	Discontent	Citizenship	Resources	Demands
						Prevalence of	
	Social protection in PPS	Average job	Level of skill	Confidence in	Norm of critical	discretion and	Workload and
	per capita, 2008^a	tenure 2011^b	specificity ^c	institutions ^d	citizenship ^e	learning ^f	mental demand ⁸
Austria	8844	11.13	Industry	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
France	8353	11.95	Industry	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Germany	8145	11.47	Industry	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Italy	7233	12.87	Firm	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
Lithuania	2465	7.70	General	Low	Moderate	Low	High
Spain	5730	10.95	Firm	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
Sweden	9142	10.57	Industry	High	High	High	High
Switzerland 9264	9264	9.73	Industry	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Sources: ^a Eurostat (2008); ^b OECD (2011); ^c Hall and Gingerich (2009), Cingano (2003), Culpepper (2007), Knell and Srholec (2006), Sippola (2009); ^d Bellucci and Memoli (2012), Zmerli et al. (2007); ^e Blom (2009), Denters et al. (2007); [†] Eurofound (2009), Gallie (2007), Parent-Thirion et al., 2007; ^g Holman (2012)

- (thus, a higher number of situations in which volunteer experiences might be used to signal desirable characteristics) and a general skill regime (where general skills such as those acquired while volunteering are valued) should report higher career-related motivation than volunteers in countries with low labor market flexibility and a firm-specific skill regime. In line with this hypothesis, we found volunteers in countries with low labor market flexibility and high importance of firm-specific skills, such as Italy and Spain, to report the lowest career motivation. In turn, volunteers in Lithuania, where labor market flexibility is high, and skill specificity is low, reported the highest career motivation.
- 3. Volunteers are not only motivated to help people in need, i.e., volunteer for altruistic reasons, but also to address problems faced by societies and political systems, i.e., volunteer out of political responsibility (Neufeind et al., 2014). This motivation should be affected by the current situation in a country as well as dominant norms. Thus, we hypothesized that volunteers in societies displaying high levels of citizen discontent with their government and its institutions would report a higher motivation through political responsibility than those in societies with low levels of political discontent. Furthermore, we predicted that volunteers in countries with a strong societal norm of critical citizenship would report higher political-responsibility motivation than those in countries with a weak societal norm of critical citizenship. We found across the eight countries that low or medium levels of confidence, as in Lithuania or Spain, as well as a high prevalence of critical citizenship norms, as in Sweden, correlated with high political-responsibility motivation.
- 4. Volunteering is an activity that can compensate for deficiencies in one's paid job and substitute for what is missing in the work domain (Grant, 2012), for instance, in terms of significance or autonomy. Volunteers in countries with low levels of discretion and learning in the workplace should report higher paid work complementation motivation than those in countries with high levels of discretion and learning in the workplace. In line with this hypothesis, we found volunteers in Italy, Lithuania, and Spain, where discretion and learning in the workplace tend to be lower, reported the highest complementation motivation, while volunteers in Austria, France, and Sweden, where autonomy in the workplace tends to be higher, reported significantly lower complementation motivations.
- 5. Volunteering can function as a buffer against stress and demands of the paid work domain (Mojza & Sonnentag, 2010). Thus, volunteers in countries with high levels of stress and demand in the workplace should report higher paid work compensation motivation than those in countries with low levels of stress and demand in the workplace. We found some evidence for this hypothesis, as volunteers in countries with high demand, such as Lithuania and Sweden, report high work-compensation motivation. However, volunteers in Austria and France showed unexpectedly high compensation motivation, while those in Germany and Switzerland showed unexpectedly low compensation. These findings need further exploration.

In sum, our findings demonstrate that volunteering is not (only) an individual prosocial behavior but is also embedded in and determined by economic, political, and cultural contexts. While volunteering can be understood from a social-psychological perspective as "longer term, sustained prosocial behavior" (Penner et al., 2005), only by adding the perspectives of political psychology as well as work psychology can a complete picture be obtained: volunteering as a multifunctional activity that reflects individuals' environment.

5.3.1 Same Language, Similar Motives

In our cross-national study, we found language-related differences between France, Germany, and Switzerland in the motives for volunteering at the Red Cross (cf. Neufeind et al., 2015). This is remarkable, given that all volunteers are Western Europeans working for the same organization. In addition to the national differences between the three countries, however, French and German cultural characteristics also extend into the respective linguistic regions of Switzerland: The French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland differ from each other, but at the same time resemble the motives in Germany and France, with more similar motives between France and the French-speaking part of Switzerland than between Germany and the German-speaking part of Switzerland. When all the motives are considered together, the significance of the motives in French-speaking Switzerland is more similar to that in France than to that in German-speaking Switzerland (Fig. 5.1).

5.3.2 Volunteers in Non-Profit Organizations

What are the implications of these results? For volunteers in non-profit organizations, the most important insight is certainly that, even in countries with broad structural and cultural similarities, such as France, Germany, and Switzerland, there are significant differences in motivation. Since we were able to control for the influence of the organization and the activity relatively well in our study (all volunteers worked for the Red Cross, differences between the areas of activity were statistically controlled), our results show that the importance of different motives for taking up the same volunteering activity does indeed differ between countries. For practitioners in multi- and international non-profit organizations such as the Red Cross or Amnesty International, this means that it is not possible to make a blanket assumption about "the" motives of "their" volunteers. Rather, recruitment strategies and organizational practices must take into account country-specific motives. This means that there are certain limits to the current trends toward standardization in volunteer management.

However, the findings reported in this chapter serve to discuss the current efforts of many political and third-sector actors to promote civil society. Our findings show

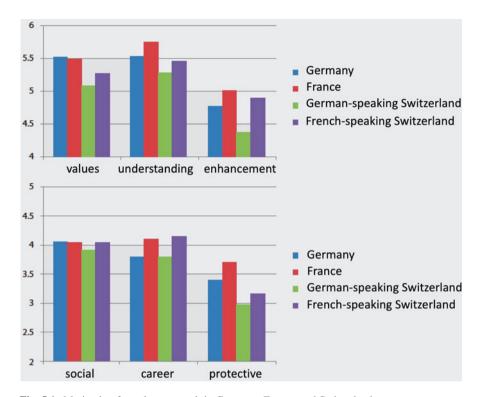


Fig. 5.1 Motivation for volunteer work in Germany, France, and Switzerland

that volunteering is not only individual prosocial behavior, but a *multifunctional* activity that is embedded in and influenced by an economic, political, and cultural context. Volunteering is not only a result of individual attitudes, but also represents a reaction to a social context. Consequently, the potential level of involvement—the potential for engagement (Gensicke, 2006)—is not universal, but rather determined by the specific social context in which volunteers are embedded. The fact that 40% of adults in Sweden are engaged in volunteer work, but less than 20% in Spain, does not necessarily mean that political and civil society actors in Spain are less good at "raising the engagement potential." Rather, structural as well as cultural factors suggest precisely these differences. However, this should not be misunderstood as determinism. Even if structural factors such as welfare state and labor market institutions are relatively rigid, cultural factors, such as values of egalitarianism and solidarity, are subject to social change. The direction in which societies are changing is also determined by civil society activities. In short, volunteering is determined by the social context, but also plays a role in determining it.

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