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## **Volunteers' motivations in a Municipal Academic Solidarity Tutoring Program: a case study**

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**Abstract:** The present study examines the functions that motivate volunteers to participate in a Municipal Academic Solidarity Tutoring Program (MASTP) in Patras, Greece. Thirteen individuals ( $n=13$ ) participated in this qualitative case study through semi-structured interviews. Through thematic analysis of the data eight core themes emerged, aligning with the Functional Approach. The Values function (altruism, solidarity, educational contribution) was dominant. Other functions included understanding, social, enhancement, protective, and to a lesser extent, career ones. Additional motivational factors were positive conditions within the volunteer group, students' feedback, and encouragement from personal networks. These findings may contribute to enhancing volunteers' attraction and engagement in various organizations.



**Keywords:** case study, Functional Approach, motivations, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, volunteering

## Introduction

Volunteering has gained increasing attention across various research fields, including sociology, psychology, economics, political studies and human resources management. Researchers attended to understand the characteristics of individuals who dedicate their time and energy to volunteering causes such as education, culture, health, environmental protection, politics, and social welfare (Mallum, 2016). As Stukas et al. (2016) argue, volunteering offers not only societal benefits but also contributes to the physical and psychological well-being of those who engage in it. In recent years, the topic has become increasingly relevant in the field of public policy. A central question concerns the reasons why individuals choose to engage in unpaid, voluntary work, particularly within the context of modern lifestyles. It has been observed that many volunteers prefer participating occasionally rather than engaging in long-term, consistent commitments (Martins et al., 2024). For non-profit organizations that rely heavily on volunteer contributions, identifying and understanding these motivations is essential to improving both recruitment and retention strategies.

Volunteering behavior is influenced by a range of factors, including individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, perceptions of organizational effectiveness, and broader contextual elements (Tyrrell, 2018). Importantly, the initial factors that lead someone to volunteer do not always match the reasons they remain involved. Internal organizational aspects can significantly affect how volunteers perceive their role identity and whether they decide to continue (Guntert et al., 2022). Even so, the ability to attract potential volunteers remains critical, as it precedes any internal organizational experience. According to Chen et al. (2022), many community-based activities would experience financial collapse without the active involvement of volunteers.

What are the functions that initiate and maintain individuals' engagement in volunteer activities? One of the most widely used theoretical models in this area, *the functional approach* proposed by Clary et al. (1998) gives us the answer. It suggests that volunteering behavior serves different psychological and social purposes for individuals. According to this approach, the psychological functions that are related to individuals' personal needs lead them in volunteering. Furthermore, the satisfaction of these functions during the volunteering process contributes to volunteers' engagement. A bibliometric review by Chen et al. (2022), which examined studies from 2000 to 2021, confirmed that the functional approach is among the most frequently applied approaches in the field of volunteer motivation. Specifically, it identifies six core motivational functions: *values*, *understanding*, *enhancement*, *social*, *career*, and *protective* ones. Each represents a distinct type of motivation. The values function reflects an individual's desire to express personal beliefs and support others, often driven by altruistic or humanitarian ideals (Clary et al., 1998; Martins et al., 2024). The understanding function relates to learning, gaining knowledge, and developing skills through volunteer experiences (Allen et al., 2022; Clary et al., 1998). The enhancement function focuses on personal growth and the improvement of self-image (Clary et al., 1998; Tyrrell, 2018). The social function emphasizes the influence of



interpersonal relationships, social expectations, or the desire for meaningful connection (Clary et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2019). The career function involves acquiring experience relevant to employment or academic advancement (Clary et al., 1998; Tyrrell et al., 2018). Finally, the protective function helps individuals manage negative emotions, such as guilt about personal privilege or a desire to reduce self-focused concerns (Clary et al., 1998; Stukas et al., 2016). In conclusion, although volunteering is a common social activity, the reasons behind it vary greatly between individuals.

Recognizing this diversity allows organizations to design more responsive and effective strategies for engaging, supporting, and retaining volunteers over time. Thus, understanding and addressing volunteer motivations is a key component in encouraging participation and sustaining long-term engagement (Pitsou & Koios, 2025). So, this study focuses on understanding the motivations of volunteers and the functions that drive their action and engagement and it is significant as it will shed light on volunteer motivations in Greece because there are not many such studies.

### Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the present research is to examine the motivational functions (*values, understanding, social, career, protective and enhancement*) that drive volunteers to engage in voluntary action. More specifically, these motivations will be explored through the attitudes and personal experiences of the volunteers at a MASTP, in Patras. The MASTP is a volunteer-based educational initiative, supported by the local municipality, offering free supplementary lessons to primary and secondary school students across Patras, with the aim of promoting equal access to education (Municipality of Patras, n.d.). Within the context of this study, the following research question emerges:

- What types of functions motivate the volunteers to participate in MASTP of Patras?

This research constitutes a case study, and to address the above question, a qualitative approach was adopted. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with MASTP volunteers in Patras ( $n= 13$ ). The sample was selected through convenience sampling. As part of the research process, steps were taken to ensure validity and reliability. The interview protocol that was developed conformed to the principles of the semi-structured interview. To improve the phrasing of the questions, a think-aloud group was conducted with a peer group, during which participants provided feedback (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Additionally, a pilot interview was conducted with a MASTP volunteer. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' written consent and subsequently transcribed. For data analysis, the principles and steps of inductive thematic analysis were applied, through which patterns emerged that formed themes, codes, and subcodes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical standards were adhered to throughout the research process.

### Research Results

In the context of the analysis aimed at investigating the motivational functions of volunteers, themes were identified, each comprising specific codes and sub-codes. The first theme, *Volunteers' values*, includes the codes: educational contribution to students (Int. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9) empathy/solidarity (Int. 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13), altruism (Int. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12) and commitment to equality (Int. 1, 3, 5, 8,



9). The second theme, *Skills Acquisition*, encompasses the codes: assumption of responsibility (Int. 1, 2, 5, 10), cognitive development (Int. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13), alertness (Int. 2, 4, 10, 12), and management competencies (Int. 4, 8, 10). The third theme, *Volunteers' Sociability*, highlights the importance of relationships with students (Int. 1, 3, 6, 10, 12) and social interaction more broadly (Int. 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12). The fourth theme, *Connection with Professional Experience*, comprises the following codes: educational interest (Int. 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12), alignment of volunteering and professional values (Int. 2, 4, 6, 9), gaining experience for future employment (Int. 4, 10, 12, 13), and relevance between educational and volunteer interests. The last code includes the sub-codes: presence of relevance (Int. 5, 7, 11) and absence of relevance (Int. 3, 8, 9, 9, 10). The fifth theme, *Coping with Personal Difficulties*, includes the codes: emotional support (Int. 1, 3, 12), psychological relief (Int. 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13), and no link to personal difficulties (Int. 7, 9, 11). The sixth theme, *Personal Development*, consists of the codes: sense of fulfillment (Int. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6), enjoyment (Int. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13), and enhancement of self-worth (Int. 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13). The seventh theme, *Conditions within the Volunteer Group Environment*, includes the codes: flexibility (Int. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13), functional cooperation (Int. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), support (Int. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) and feedback from students. The feedback from students' code contains the sub-codes: students' willingness/presence (Int. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13) and non-utilization of the help provided (Int. 5, 7). Finally, the eighth theme, *Influence of the Volunteers' Personal Environment on Volunteering*, incorporates the codes: acceptance/encouragement (Int. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), lack of understanding of unpaid work (Int. 1, 3, 7), and influence from other volunteers, which is further divided into the sub-codes: no influence (Int. 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13), indirect influence (Int. 10), and direct influence from other volunteers (Int. 3, 4). The specific themes, codes, and subcodes emerged from the detection of patterns and trends in the participants' responses. Figure 1 presents the frequency of the codes and subcodes of the data, and Figure 2 provides a detailed thematic analysis visualization. To support the above findings, relevant excerpts are presented below:

Int. 7 "To offer my knowledge. My help. To kids who really need it for their exams and their progress."

Int. 3 "It makes me feel like I'm doing something... that I'm offering some help, some solidarity -as the name itself suggests- to kids who otherwise wouldn't have the chance to attend classes."

Int. 13 "Because many people can't, financially, pay any money, I think it's a form of support for them and for their parents. It feels like we're standing by them, as teachers, since we're part of this social project."

Int. 8 "...and on the other hand, I learn too. I mean, I get into the mindset of studying, of being prepared for the lesson, of interacting with young people..."

Int. 4 "It also helps me organize my time better, like, I plan things out during the week."

Int. 12 "Since I have some knowledge, I can kind of put it into practice ((laughs)), in a way that's a bit more hands-on than just writing and all that."

Int. 4 "...as young teachers or young professionals, we gain experience in a field like education..."



Int. 3 "...it's helped me cope, or not even cope so much, as just notice the positive side of things, to draw strength from it..."

Int. 6 "...that's the meaning of life for a person. I mean, being just on your own, looking out only for yourself, that means nothing. These things are what give you fulfillment."

Int. 10 "There are some basic guidelines, at least when I started out, I found I had to follow them in terms of teaching. But beyond that, there's a lot of freedom."

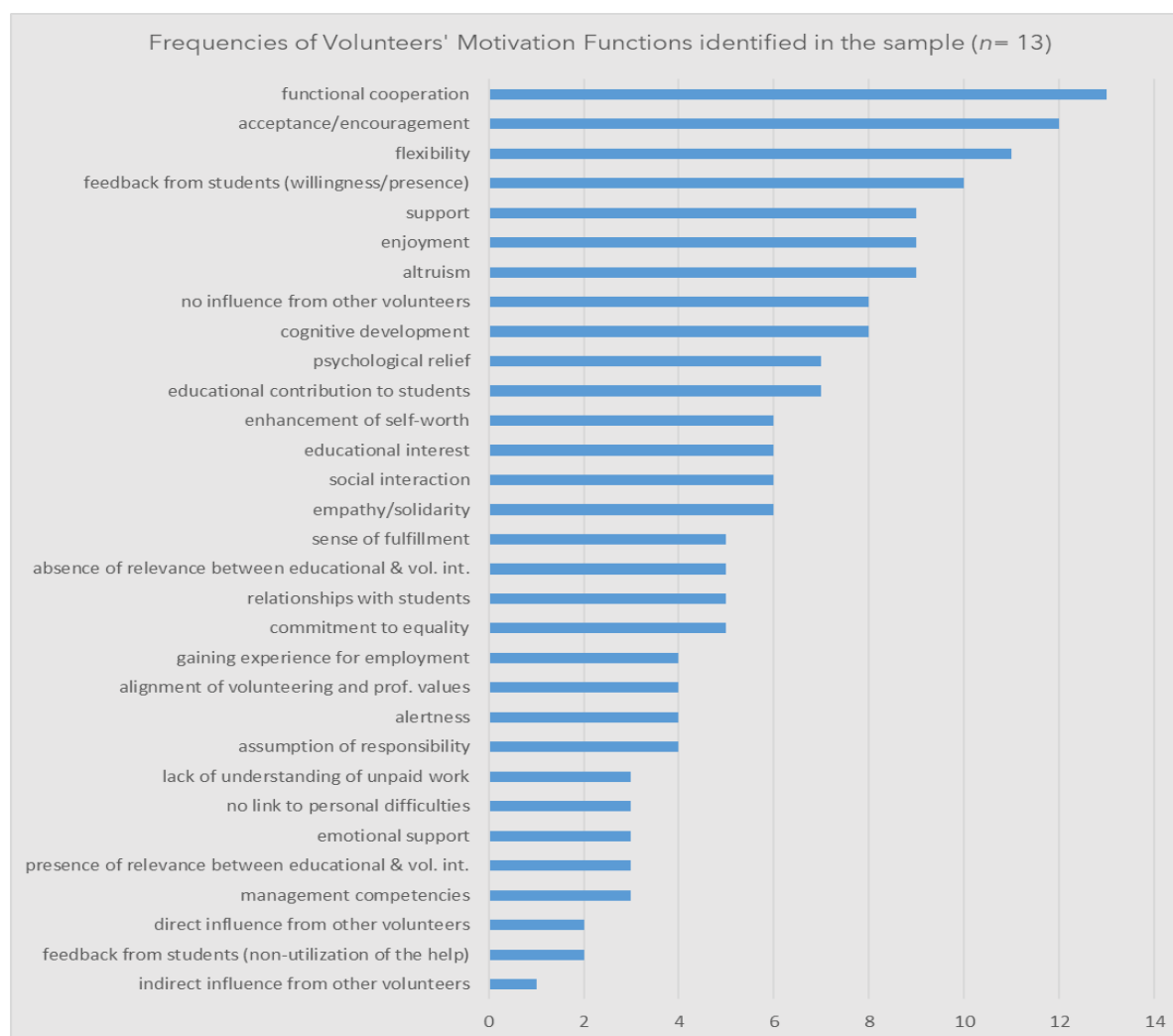
Int. 9 "Whatever I need, I ask them to help me out. Any support material, anything- I get it from them."

Int. 11 "I think they really enjoy it. We all have a great time, they learn, and I'm so happy when they do well at school..."

Int. 1 "(...) Most people just can't understand why I do it. ((laughs)) I mean, especially since I'm not doing well financially, let's say, they really struggle to get why I spend time here-time I could be using to make money."

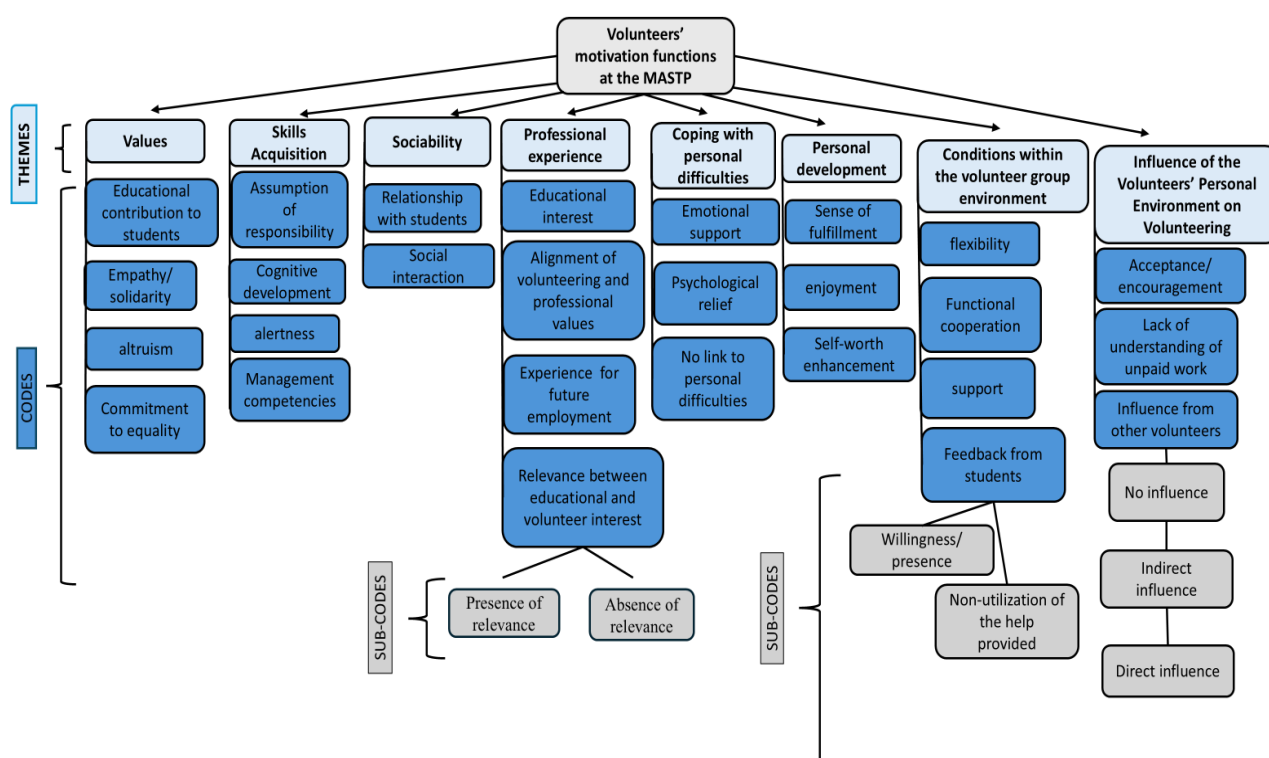
**Figure 1**

### *Frequencies of Volunteer Motivation Functions*



**Figure 2**

Tree diagram of thematic analysis



## Conclusions

This study examined through qualitative method the functions of volunteers motivations. The analysis highlighted the function of “values” as dominant, as all participants linked their actions to their value framework, such as altruism, equality, and educational contribution. The function of “understanding” was also significant (Alender, 2016). The “social function” was recorded in relation to interaction and connection with students, while the “career” function appeared at a low frequency, as also confirmed by Alender (2016). The “protective function” was partially confirmed, primarily as an outlet and a means of coping with personal difficulties, while the dimension of guilt was not empirically supported (Guntert et al., 2016). The function of “self-enhancement” appeared with less intensity compared to other functions, while the characteristics of the action context (organization, autonomy, support) seemed to enhance motivation (Fernandez & Matos, 2022; Sullivan, 2017). Deviations were mainly observed regarding the significance of social recognition (Alender, 2016; Sullivan, 2017) and the low rate of connection to professional motives. Moreover, the significance of the conditions within the volunteer group environment theme is confirmed by Clary et al. (1998) as part of the general volunteering process. Finally, the element of acceptance/encouragement within the volunteers’ personal environment that was not mentioned at the main theory, was added as important.

This study presents certain limitations. It followed a purely qualitative approach, which may reflect the researchers’ subjectivity. The case study design and non-probability (convenience) sampling



prevent the generalization of findings (Bhandari, 2023a). Social desirability bias may have influenced participants' responses (Nikolopoulou, 2023). Future research could reduce such biases through triangulation, involving diverse theories, methods, data, and researchers (Bhandari, 2023b). Mixed-method designs and probability sampling would further enhance objectivity and validity. Broader data collection from volunteers across different organizations could reveal more reliable patterns. Overall, this research, which examined the functions of volunteers' motivations at the MASTP in Patras, largely aligns with existing theories and studies, while certain limitations highlight the need for further investigation.

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