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ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

El papel de los movimientos de voluntariado en el desarrollo de la sociedad civil y las políticas estatales

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Resumen. El propósito de este estudio fue examinar la contribución de los movimientos de voluntariado al desarrollo de la sociedad civil y su influencia en la evolución de las políticas públicas en la República de Tartaristán. Se presta atención a la creciente institucionalización del voluntariado como forma de compromiso cívico y a su capacidad para moldear valores sociales, infraestructura comunitaria y respuestas estatales. La investigación emplea una metodología cualitativa basada en diez entrevistas a expertos, incluidos líderes de organizaciones de voluntariado, coordinadores y funcionarios públicos directamente involucrados en el panorama regional. Los resultados indican que los movimientos de voluntariado en Tartaristán se han convertido en una fuerza social significativa que promueve la participación juvenil, fortalece la solidaridad comunitaria y facilita la resolución de problemas locales. Los expertos señalaron que, aunque el apoyo estatal mediante legislación, financiación y reconocimiento ha favorecido la expansión de la actividad voluntaria, la iniciativa y la energía de las organizaciones de base siguen siendo los impulsores centrales del sector. El estudio también identifica

la doble motivación de los voluntarios, quienes combinan intenciones altruistas con la búsqueda de capital social y oportunidades de desarrollo. Entre los desafíos observados se encuentran el predominio del voluntariado basado en eventos, la coordinación regional insuficiente y las desigualdades en la capacidad organizativa. El estudio concluye que los movimientos de voluntariado funcionan no solo como receptores de las políticas estatales, sino también como actores que contribuyen activamente a su formación, impulsando valores cívicos, promoviendo la inclusión y creando espacios de cooperación entre ciudadanía e instituciones públicas.

Palabras clave: sociedad civil, movimiento de voluntariado, organización de voluntariado, Estado, juventud.

The role of volunteer movements in development civil society and state policy

Abstract. Purpose of this study was to examine contribution of volunteer movements to the development of civil society and influence the evolution of public policy in the Republic of Tatarstan. Special attention is given to the growing institutionalization of volunteerism as a form of civic engagement and its capacity to shape social values, community infrastructure, state responses. The research employs a qualitative methodology based on ten expert interviews with leaders of volunteer organizations, coordinators, and public officials directly involved in the region's volunteer landscape. The results indicate that volunteer movements in Tatarstan have become a significant social force that promotes youth involvement, strengthens community solidarity, and facilitates local problem-solving. Experts emphasized that although state support through legislation, funding, and recognition has contributed to the expansion of volunteer activity, the initiative and energy generated by grassroots organizations remain the primary drivers of the sector. The study also identifies the dual motivations of volunteers, who balance altruistic intentions with the pursuit of social capital and career pathways. Challenges noted by experts include the predominance of event-based volunteering, gaps in regional coordination, and disparities in organizational capacity. The study concludes that volunteer movements function not only as recipients of state policy but also as active contributors to its formation, advancing civic values, promoting inclusivity, and creating platforms for cooperation between citizens and public institutions. The long-term sustainability and social impact of volunteering in Tatarstan depend on reinforcing these dynamics through continuous dialogue, institutional support, and deeper integration of volunteer organizations into civil society structures.

Keywords: civil society, volunteer movement, volunteer organization, state, youth.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the volunteer movement has gained considerable momentum globally, and this trend has notably extended to our own nation. Volunteering, as well as its advancing trajectory, has become a cornerstone in fostering civil society, serving as a pivotal means for individuals to manifest their civic engagement (Bodrenkova, 2013).

In the context of Russia, the surge in volunteer activities commenced around 2007-2008. The zenith of this movement coincided with the organization and execution of major athletic and cultural events within the country. Notable examples include the XXVII World Summer Universiade in Kazan, the XXII Olympic and XI Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, the World Aquatics Championships in Kazan, the 2017 Confederations Cup, the FIFA World Cup, among others.

The Federal Law No. 135-FZ (1995), “On Charitable Activities and Volunteering (Volunteering),” defines voluntary (volunteer) activities as “voluntary endeavors in the form of gratuitous execution of work and/or provision of services for socially beneficial purposes”.

The early 1990s in Russia witnessed the emergence of the first non-profit organizations focused on charitable endeavors. These organizations laid the groundwork for the establishment of volunteer groups that are presently active and operate in both formal and spontaneous contexts.

This work aims to elucidate the terminology associated with our study’s subject. Engaging in charitable work are individuals and legal entities involved in charitable acts, including the establishment of new charitable institutions or supporting existing ones. The recipients of this assistance are philanthropists, volunteers, and beneficiaries. In the realm of volunteer activities, the participants comprise the volunteers themselves, coordinators of volunteer activities, and volunteer organizations. By ‘volunteers,’ we refer to individuals who engage directly in volunteer activities (Temkin, 2019).

The Republic of Tatarstan, a rapidly advancing region of Russia, has prioritized the development of the volunteer movement for over a decade. The region’s volunteer movement infrastructure is extensive, encompassing volunteer centers, regional branches of national movements, and search and rescue teams. Each municipal unit in the Republic of Tatarstan houses a volunteer headquarters, and the total count of volunteer associations reaches 1,247. Current statistics indicate that over 132,000 residents regularly engage in volunteer activities (Ammar Hussein became the Volunteer of the Year..., 2022).

The legal framework and acts underpinning the volunteer and volunteer movements in the Republic of Tatarstan include:

- The Law of the Republic of Tatarstan No. 35-ZRT (2021) “On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Tatarstan ‘On Youth and State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tatarstan’”;
- The Law of the Republic of Tatarstan No. 48-ZRT (2018) “On the regulation of certain issues in the field of volunteerism (volunteering) and on amendments to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Tatarstan”;
- The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tatarstan No. 830 (2012) “On supporting the volunteer movement of the Republic of Tatarstan,” which establishes the key principles of volunteer activities in the Republic of Tatarstan;
- The Concept for the development of the youth volunteer movement in the Republic of Tatarstan until 2020 (currently, a draft Concept for the development of the youth volunteer movement in the Republic of Tatarstan until 2026 is in the works) (Resolution No. 124, 2014).

Moreover, the structure of the Republic of Tatarstan's volunteer movement encompasses the following primary organizations and associations:

- Interregional volunteer movement "Volunteer" (21 centers);
- ANO Information and Resource Center for Volunteering of the Republic of Tatarstan;
- Tatarstan regional branch of the All-Russian movement "Volunteers of Victory";
- Tatarstan regional branch of the All-Russian public movement "Medical Volunteers";
- ANO "Assembly of Tourist Volunteers of the Republic of Tatarstan";
- ANO "Center for Social and Creative Assistance 'I AM A VOLUNTEER'";
- Search and rescue team "Regional Public Rescue Team";
- Volunteer search and rescue team "Lisa Alert";
- ANO "Good Kazan" (Talibova, 2023).

METHODS

The principal methodology of our investigation entailed conducting semi-formalized interviews. These were gleaned from dialogues with experts in the field of volunteering from the Republic of Tatarstan. The interviewees comprised 10 representatives from various republican organizations and movements, each holding specific roles within the region's volunteer movement structure, such as deputy directors, managers, and recruiters.

The study aimed to explore various facets, including the experiences and subjective characteristics of volunteers, evaluations of the volunteer movement within the republic, analyses of volunteer organizations' (centers, associations) activities, assessments of the volunteer movement's and organizations' interactions with the government, insights into the relationship between the volunteer movement and civil society, and perspectives on the current domains of volunteering as well as its future development prospects.

RESULTS

By studying the volunteering experience and the subjective characteristics of the participants we have found that a majority of our respondents had not previously engaged in volunteer activities but were involved in social work, which eventually led them to the volunteer movement. Others, however, have been part of the volunteer scene since its active emergence in our country around 2008. Intriguingly, one expert began volunteering at the age of 15:

"I have been volunteering since I was fifteen. My mother is a doctor, she worked with difficult teenagers, helped difficult children, difficult families, and for me it was always normal, normal to help, and therefore, when I entered a music college, there were no options, my classmates and I went to various houses and institutions where we sang, performed and made them happy" (Informant 4).

Regarding assessments of the volunteer movement in the republic, all experts unanimously rate it highly. The Republic of Tatarstan is singled out as a leader in volunteer movement development nationwide. Significant international events, such as the 2013 Universiade and the 2015 World Aquatics Championships, are cited as key contributors to the growth and popularization of the volunteer movement in Russia.

Nonetheless, some experts pointed out existing challenges in the development of volunteerism in the republic:

“I can say that there are volunteer areas where the departments supervising the departments help a lot and everything is cool there, there are places where it is more difficult, harder, where they have not yet accepted the reality that volunteering is important, it is valuable and that volunteering should be supported, therefore development is underway, but this is not enough today, but my colleagues are working in general, they are great!” (Informant 7).

In terms of the movement’s quantitative aspects, almost all experts agree on its positive trajectory, particularly noting the increase in volunteer numbers and the effective engagement of youth in volunteer activities. Additional perspectives further enrich this overview:

“The indicators are growing every month and this is encouraging, but again, for me there is a story when a person registers here, and there, and there, and we count him everywhere and he is distributed. I think this is a very sad story. It is also important to understand that there is one-time volunteering, this is not bad, a person should try once and understand whether it is for him or not, but there is stable volunteering and, in fact, it would be correct to count not those who registered once and went to the event, namely those who consistently and constantly help” (Informant 2).

Discussing recent changes in the republic’s volunteer movement, informants mention significant forums, events, volunteer camps, and honorary awards from the head of the republic, marking these as pivotal in acknowledging the relevance and importance of the volunteer movement today.

In examining volunteer organizations (centers and associations) and their interactions with citizens, this segment evaluates the openness of volunteer organizations to the public, the necessity of experience, language proficiency, and good relations with volunteer organization representatives and leaders for leadership roles. Experts generally observe that volunteer organizations are accessible to all, with the primary restriction being a minimum age of 14 years.

“I believe that anyone can become a volunteer and engage in volunteer activities. There are no barriers”. (Informant 9).

However, the specific skills and competencies required for different volunteering areas also play a crucial role in recruitment for various positions. According to informants, it is vital that *“a person is in his place.”*

“Volunteer organizations are open, the question is the desire and competence of those who come. Experience is also important and certain skills are still needed. If he has different skills, then I will send him in a different direction” (Informant 1).

Furthermore, experts concur that there is significant collaboration among volunteer organizations at both the republican and national levels. These organizations actively engage with each other, share experiences, convene meetings, and jointly organize events and projects.

We now turn our attention to the interplay between the volunteer movement, volunteer organizations, and the state: the nature of these relationships, the development level of such interactions, and the necessity of state participation in the fostering and support of volunteerism in our country. Informants highlight the substantial appreciation and acknowledgment of volunteerism by the state, both at regional and federal levels. The 2018 Federal Law, which clearly defined the rights and duties of volunteer organizations and volunteers, and clarified the terminology, provided a significant boost and support. This legislation served as a benchmark and a guideline for the entire volunteer community in our country, underscoring the importance of this sector and its development at the state level.

Experts point out the evolving relationships with government entities and departments, as well as the support extended to volunteer organizations, which in turn are creating more opportunities. For instance, the practice of recognizing volunteer experience for employment and the volunteer book as a formalization and structuring element of volunteer activities are noteworthy developments.

Informants advocate for more effective state support of volunteer organizations and centers, promoting and acknowledging these activities, including through prestigious events and additional incentives.

“It seems to me that we are all right with incentives, because the most important thing is not to help someone and then expect that they will give you something, no, you just help and help, if you really sincerely do it, then you they will notice and help you in every possible way, and there are a lot of such examples.” (Informant 8).

Opinions vary among experts regarding the dependence of volunteer organizations on the state:

“I won’t say that the dependence is strong, but it is there: someone wins federal grants, someone does joint projects, this is all state history, so in any case there is some dependence” (Informant 6).

Concerning the connection between the volunteer movement and civil society, experts generally view volunteers as individuals with a proactive civic stance, eager to express and demonstrate this through voluntary activities that benefit others.

Interestingly, some informants acknowledge the potential of volunteering as a social ladder or a means to accumulate social capital (Bourdieu, 2022), which could later convert into economic and political capital. This represents a primary contradiction in volunteers’ motivational attitudes. Nevertheless, experts assert that altruistic motives are also prevalent among volunteers and using one’s activities as a social ladder necessitates considerable experience and skills, typically acquired during the volunteering process.

“Yes, of course, these are rather initiative people, with an active civic position, such altruists and philanthropists, even if they pursue some career goals in the future, this is, in principle, acceptable, because they already leave here with experience and skills, they deserve it for the most part.” (Informant 3)

Finally, we present informant perspectives on the future directions and prospects of volunteering. The discussion includes the most popular volunteer activities and future developmental plans. Experts note that plans and events are scheduled years in advance, with numerous projects and events in the pipeline to enhance volunteer work quality and assist the population. Additionally, there is an anticipation of increased state attention, support for volunteer initiatives, and growth in quantitative metrics. The most popular and in-demand volunteer areas are expected to remain event volunteering, particularly in significant sporting and cultural events.

“I can tell you that the plans for our center are simply enormous, everything is planned for the year ahead. We are planning many events, launching several projects, including joint ones, as well as grants for all areas of volunteering in the republic. New volunteer organizations will be opened next year, we will attract even more volunteers and much more.” (Informant 5).

DISCUSSION

The findings from our study elucidate the underlying motivations for volunteering. In general, experts acknowledge the presence of career-related motives among volunteers. However, this acknowledgement does not diminish the altruistic moral motives of volunteers, nor their desire to express an active civic stance through volunteer work. Importantly, volunteering is characterized as an inclusive system, welcoming any citizen.

John Wilson and Marc Musick (1997) developed an integrated theory of formal and informal volunteering, examining the interplay between these two forms of volunteering and various forms of capital. A broad body of international research has examined volunteerism as an element of civil society and a form of civic participation. Foundational studies by Smith (1999) and Anheier and Salomon (1999) demonstrated that volunteer engagement is shaped by institutional conditions, cultural norms, and community structures. Subsequent work has focused on specific domains of participation. Research on youth and student volunteering, including Lukman and Normah (2020) and Normah et al. (2022), highlights the role of motivation, organizational arrangements, and educational settings in influencing involvement.

Recent theoretical contributions further expand this field. Koolen-Maas et al. (2023) conceptualize volunteering as a renewable social resource, while Rotolo and Wilson (2012) identify demographic and institutional predictors of regional variation in volunteer activity. Studies on volunteer motivation, such as Haski-Leventhal (2009) and Naumovski and Naumovska (2022), emphasize the interplay between altruistic motives, identity formation, and the mediating effects of public communication.

Sector-specific examinations also contribute to a more differentiated understanding of the phenomenon. Lough (2015) addresses international volunteering as a civic and educational practice, Lockstone-Binney et al. (2010) analyze leisure-based forms, and Paull et al. (2022),

Sapir (2022), and Williamson et al. (2018) document misconceptions, historical developments, and educational benefits associated with volunteer participation. Together, these studies frame volunteerism as a multidimensional social practice and provide an analytical foundation for interpreting the findings of the present research.

In parallel with discerning the motivations for volunteering, its role within the social system is pivotal. Based on the author's research, experts highly rate the status of the volunteer movement in the Republic of Tatarstan, emphasizing tangible quantitative metrics of activity in this area. The active and constructive support from local government bodies is highlighted, including the acknowledgement of volunteerism as a crucial focus by the region's head. Informants also touch upon the dynamics between the state and volunteer organizations, indicating the state as a principal collaborator in this domain. Furthermore, they note robust connections among volunteer organizations, with significant interactions at both regional and federal levels.

In the context of contemporary Russian research on volunteering, scholars such as Kudrinskaya (2006), Bodrenkova (2013), Pevnaya (2013), and Loginova (2012). Loginova have made noteworthy contributions. Bodrenkova (2013) for instance, emphasizes the foundational values and principles of volunteering, its interaction with state policies, and the trajectories for the development of youth volunteering within the framework of youth policy and youth socialization through volunteerism. The findings of the author's research align with the tenets presented in these scholarly works.

The outcomes of our investigation underscore the significance of delving into the intricacies of the volunteer movement in our nation. Paramount to this exploration is not merely the quantitative aspects, which are poised to escalate annually and often dominate discussions about the growth of Russia's volunteer movement, but also the intrinsic motivational attitudes of the volunteers actively engaged in this sector (Talibova et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

It is crucial that all developmental models for volunteering acknowledge its role as a progressive catalyst for civil society evolution. This understanding necessitates that all mechanisms in this domain, ranging from volunteer recruitment to the provision of various incentives, be as transparent and accessible as possible for the entire populace.

This study indicates the importance of volunteer projects for building civic identity and sense of collective responsibility, as well as for meeting short-term social needs. Participation in volunteer projects is one path to citizenship, where the skills of cooperation, connections to the community, and problem solving are developed. These processes support the growth of civil society by fostering aware and politically-engaged citizens.

Voluntary organizations are increasingly becoming linked to public sector organizations as volunteers participate in welfare activities, public policy implementation and community development, often acting as a linkage between the state and its citizens, and contributing to social cohesion and resiliency.

The full inclusivity and recognition of motivation within volunteering and the role of education, recognition, and community-based support programs, are essential to the sustainable development of volunteer movements and the social value and impact of volunteering.

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