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HOW VOLUNTEERING BOOSTS COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: PATHWAYS TO A MORE CONNECTED AND SATISFIED SOCIETY

ABSTRACT

Volunteers significantly improve the well-being of individuals and communities by positively influencing subjective personal factors such as satisfaction with life, mental health, and self-confidence, as well as social factors such as cohesion and trust. This relationship is supported by several theoretical frameworks, including the theory of social capital, which suggests that volunteering improves community interconnection and reciprocal trust. The theory of human capital emphasizes the development of personal and professional skills of volunteers that improve personal growth and social productivity.

However, obstacles such as socioeconomic inequality, cultural norms, limited time, and organizational obstacles have a significant impact on volunteers' participation. Evidence shows that volunteer roles are closely linked to motivations and capacities and positively linked to improved well-being. In particular, official volunteer activities have shown a strong correlation (R = 0,523) with the satisfaction of life in the countries of the European Union.

KEYWORDS: volunteering, well-being, social capital, human capital, social integration

JEL: I31, D64, J24

INTRODUCTION

Today, volunteering is considered an individual or collective commitment for the benefit of others or to support the community, for which volunteers do not receive material compensation. Modern research has found that these activities have a positive impact not only on the recipients of assistance, but also on the volunteers themselves and the wider community. For example, people who regularly volunteer tend to report higher life satisfaction and better mental health than those who do not volunteer (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Pilkington et al., 2018). At the same time, volunteering can strengthen community links and social capital, networks, standards of trust, and reciprocity that promote collective action, i.e., improvement of public welfare (Putnam, 2000; Stukas, 2005). In this sense, it can be considered not only as a catalyst for social development but also as a form of social investment (Jenkinson et al., 2013).

The relationship between volunteering and well-being is complex and is influenced by many factors: (1) Bidirectional relationship because volunteering and well-being strengthen each other. Happier and healthier individuals are more likely to volunteer, and volunteering itself increases personal happiness, satisfaction in life, self-esteem, and social integration (Thoits &

Hewitt, 2001), and (2) contextual facilitators, through cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and modernization processes, significantly reduce the link between volunteers and the well-being of volunteers, forming both levels of participation and the results associated with it (Livingston et al., 2022). In fact, there are significant variations in European countries, influenced by historical contexts and civil traditions. The high civic involvement of the Nordic countries contrasts with the low engagement of the post-communist eastern European countries, reflecting the broad historical and sociocultural influences (European Commission, 2025). Recent data indicate a decline in the official voluntary rate in the EU, from 18,9% in 2015 to 12,3% in 2022, highlighting structural and possibly generational changes affecting participation (Eurostat, 2025). Consequently, social and contextual factors have a significant impact on how volunteering can lead to improved personal and community well-being.

1. VOLUNTEERISM AND WELL-BEING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Several studies have documented positive connections between volunteerism and subjective well-being outcomes for individuals. Volunteers report higher happiness, happiness and purpose than nonvolunteers, and fewer depression and stress levels (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Pilkington et al., 2018). For example, a systematic review by Jenkinson et al. (2013) found that in observation studies, volunteers reported a better self-reported state of well-being and a lower level of depression, and an average mortality rate higher than those who did not. These benefits of mental and physical health can arise because volunteering often provides social contacts, cognitive involvement, and the sense of doing something meaningful, all known to protect mental health, particularly for older adults (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). By participating in volunteer work, people often experience a positive boost or ‘helper high’ after performing altruistic actions, according to the theory that prosocial behavior gives the donor emotional rewards (Post, 2005).

From a psychological point of view, volunteering can meet basic psychological needs and improve the well-being of eudaimonic, the sense of purpose and meaning in life. The theory of role identity suggests that people obtain a sense of self-worth and purpose from the social roles they occupy. ‘Volunteer’ is a role that can become an important part of one’s identity, especially if volunteer work is in line with deeply held values. According to this theory, the more prominent the identity of a volunteer role is for a person, the more it provides a purpose and meaning, which in turn promotes well-being (Thoits, 2012). In other words, volunteering can meet the human need for meaning and contribution and improve overall satisfaction with life and mental health. Volunteers can also increase self-confidence and -efficacy, as volunteers feel proud and useful and learn confidence to master new tasks, which contributes to psychological well-being (Musick & Wilson 2003).

It is important to recognize that the relationship between volunteering and subjective well-being can be reciprocal and depends on the nature of the volunteer experience. Healthy and happier people can first have more capacity and motivation to volunteer, which complicates the causal interpretation of the observed benefits (Li & Ferraro, 2006). Furthermore, not all volunteer experiences are asymmetric; if a volunteer's role is very demanding or if a volunteer feels ineffective, it can lead to stress or burnout. The net benefits for happiness may depend on a good match between volunteer motivation and volunteer experience (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). This question is addressed by the functionalist approach to the motivation of volunteers (Clary et al., 1998), which suggests that people volunteer to fulfill specific functions (such as expressing altruistic values, seeking personal growth, or gaining experience related to a career). When motivational goals are achieved by volunteering, they are more satisfied, they continue to volunteer, and maximize their positive impact on well-being (Clary 1998; Stukas 2005). In

general, under typical circumstances, volunteering tends to improve subjective well-being through direct psychological rewards and the social mechanisms discussed in the following.

Beyond individual happiness and health, volunteerism is closely related to social capital and community well-being. Social capital refers to resources available in social networks and communities, including interpersonal trust, mutual assistance, and civic participation (Putnam, 2000). Volunteering builds and uses social capital: people often start volunteering through social connections and shared standards, and in turn, volunteering creates new networks and strengthens standards of trust and reciprocity. Community's higher volunteerism often enjoys greater social cohesion as people come together from different backgrounds to work together for common causes (Wilson, 2000).

Empirical research supports the idea that volunteering can strengthen community bonds. Volunteers establish bridges between social capital by meeting and working with people outside their immediate family or friends' circle, thus promoting broader social ties (Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 1999). They also strengthen the bond of social capital within their own group by collaborating towards common objectives. These network connections are accompanied by standards of cooperation and trust. Volunteer experiences can foster a sense of community, shared purpose, and solidarity. For example, Stukas et al. (2005) argue that volunteering contributes to social capital by creating “trust and reciprocity” among participants. By volunteering, people practice citizenship, learn to trust others, and build expectations of reciprocity, extending to the social climate (Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Putnam, 2000). The improvement of social capital through volunteerism has several implications for collective well-being. Higher trust and civic engagement in a community are associated with higher rates of crime, improved governance, and greater resilience to crises (Putnam, 1993; Aldrich, 2012). Volunteering regularly indicates that societies are highly socially generous, and citizen initiatives can improve collective well-being, the overall quality of community life, and the availability of social support. For example, communities with active volunteer networks often offer better social services (through nonprofits or mutual assistance efforts), improving the well-being of vulnerable groups and the community as a whole (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). In addition, the act of volunteering for community projects (cleaning public spaces, organizing cultural events, or helping schools) directly improves the local environment and services and contributes significantly to the quality of life of residents.

The perspective of social capital also emphasizes that the relationship between volunteerism and the well-being of a community can work in both ways: a certain basis of trust and social networks in a community encourage more people to volunteer (because they are more likely to be asked by friends or to believe that others will do the same), creating a virtuous cycle. On the other hand, in communities with very low social capital, characterized by distrust or social isolation, the percentage of volunteers tends to be low, meaning that these communities lose the potential benefits of volunteering. This dynamic suggests that interventions to increase voluntary activities could start broader improvements in social cohesion and vice versa. It also coincides with the theory of social integration in sociology. Volunteering is a pathway by which individuals are socially integrated into their communities, forming links that link them to the social fabric (Durkheim, 1997). Greater social integration is generally associated with positive social outcomes such as lower suicide rates, better public health, and greater collective effectiveness, illustrating how individual volunteer acts can be integrated into social benefits.

2. VOLUNTEERING AS AN INDICATOR OF SOCIAL CAPITAL, HUMAN CAPITAL AND THE WELL-BEING OF COMMUNITIES

Beyond individual happiness or health, volunteering is closely related to social capital and the well-being of communities. Social capital refers to the resources of social networks and communities, including interpersonal trust, mutual assistance, and civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Volunteering builds and uses social capital: people often begin volunteering through social connections and shared norms, and in turn volunteering creates new networks and strengthens norms of trust and reciprocity. Putnam (2000) in his seminal work "Bowling Alone" highlighted volunteerism and participation in civil associations as key indicators of the social capital of a community. Communities with higher volunteerism often enjoy greater social cohesion when people come together from different backgrounds to work for common causes (Wilson, 2000). Empirical studies support the idea that volunteerism can strengthen community bonds. Volunteers establish bridges between social capital by meeting and working with people outside their immediate family and friends' circles, thus fostering broader social bonds (Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 1999). They also strengthen the bonds between social capital and their own group by working together on common goals. These networks are accompanied by guidelines for help and trust; volunteer experiences can foster a sense of common destiny and solidarity in the community. For example, according to Stukas et al. (2005), volunteering contributes to social capital by creating “trust and reciprocity” between participants. Through volunteerism, individuals practice citizenship, learn to trust others, and build expectations of reciprocity that expand into the social environment (Uslaner & Brown 2005; Putnam 2000).

The improvement of social capital through volunteering has several implications for collective well-being. High levels of trust and civic engagement in the community have been linked to a reduction in crime rates, an effective government, and greater resilience to crises (Putnam, 1993; Aldrich, 2012). Volunteers regularly show a high level of social solidarity and citizen initiative in society, which in turn can improve collective well-being, the general quality of community life, and the availability of social support. For example, communities with active volunteer networks often have better social services (through nonprofits or mutual assistance), which improves the well-being of vulnerable groups and the community as a whole (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). In addition, volunteering for community projects (cleaning public spaces, organizing cultural events, or helping schools) directly improves the environment and local services, and thereby contributes significantly to the quality of life of residents.

Social capital also argues that the relationship between volunteering and community well-being can function in two ways: a certain baseline of trust, and community social networks encourage more people to volunteer (because they are more likely to be asked by friends or to be confident that others will give in), creating a virtuous cycle. Conversely, communities with low social capital, high distrust, and social isolation have relatively low volunteer rates, missing out on the potential benefits of volunteering. This dynamic suggests that interventions to strengthen volunteering could accelerate broader improvements in social cohesion and vice versa. It also corresponds to the theory of social integration in sociology. Volunteering is a means by which individuals are socially integrated into their communities and form links that link them to the social fabric (Durkheim, 1997). Greater social integration is generally associated with positive social outcomes, such as lower suicide rates, better public health, and greater collective effectiveness, which shows how individual acts of volunteering can be aggregated in terms of social benefits.

Another theoretical lens to understand impact is the theory of human capital. Human capital is the ability, knowledge, experience, and health of individuals to become productive members of society (Becker, 1993). Volunteering can be viewed as a form of informal education and skill training, a way of establishing human capital outside of formal education or employment.

Unlike paid jobs, volunteer positions often offer flexibility for people to take on new roles, learn by doing, and develop their competencies in a relatively low stake environment. Research has shown that volunteering helps people acquire new skills or improve existing skills (communication, leadership, and project management), gain work experience, expand their professional networks, and even improve language and cultural skills when working in various groups (Wilson & Musick 1997; Handy & Mook 2011; Toncheva-Zlatkova 2023). These improvements in human capital can improve the prospects and incomes of a person's long-term employment, which contributes to their economic well-being and their life satisfaction.

From a socio-economic perspective, volunteering can indirectly influence well-being through improved economic results. In Europe, voluntary work is sometimes promoted as an opportunity for young people or the long-term unemployed to gain experience and integrate into the labor market. This concept is conceptually similar to formal dual education models that integrate work-based training with education. For example, the dual system of vocational education in countries such as Germany is recognized to facilitate the transition from school to work by combining structured experience in the workplace with classroom learning (Boyanov, 2018). Volunteers can serve as informal parallels to this approach, offering practical experience and professional networks that complement formal education. In other words, volunteer work can be an investment in human capital that pays off in material well-being, especially for those who do not have formal work experience or educational qualifications. This is supported by the fact that people with higher education and income are more likely to be invited to volunteer and play a leading role in voluntary organizations (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014), creating a cycle where human capital and voluntary activity reinforce each other.

At the macro level, some academics believe that economic development and volunteerism have positive links. As countries become richer (beyond meeting basic needs), more citizens have time and resources to participate in voluntary activities, and more organizations are established to facilitate voluntary opportunities (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). In advanced economies with a broad education system, there is a greater pool of qualified persons who can play a specialized role (e.g., free advice or volunteer in hospitals and schools). These activities have real value for society, and, the economic value of volunteering is estimated to be considerable, and volunteer hours are equivalent to a significant percentage of GDP when monetized. Although the focus here is on well-being rather than economic production itself, it is important to note that contributions to human capital can have cumulative economic benefits that indirectly improve social well-being (through better productivity, less dependency on welfare, etc.). Recent analysis of human capital in the national context emphasizes that the development of skills and abilities (the essence of human capital) involves not only formal education but also informal and experiential learning (Krasteva, 2024). In this sense, activities such as volunteering contribute to the ‘presence’ of more human capital in society by promoting socialization, organization, and the transfer of knowledge outside traditional economic structures (Krasteva, 2024).

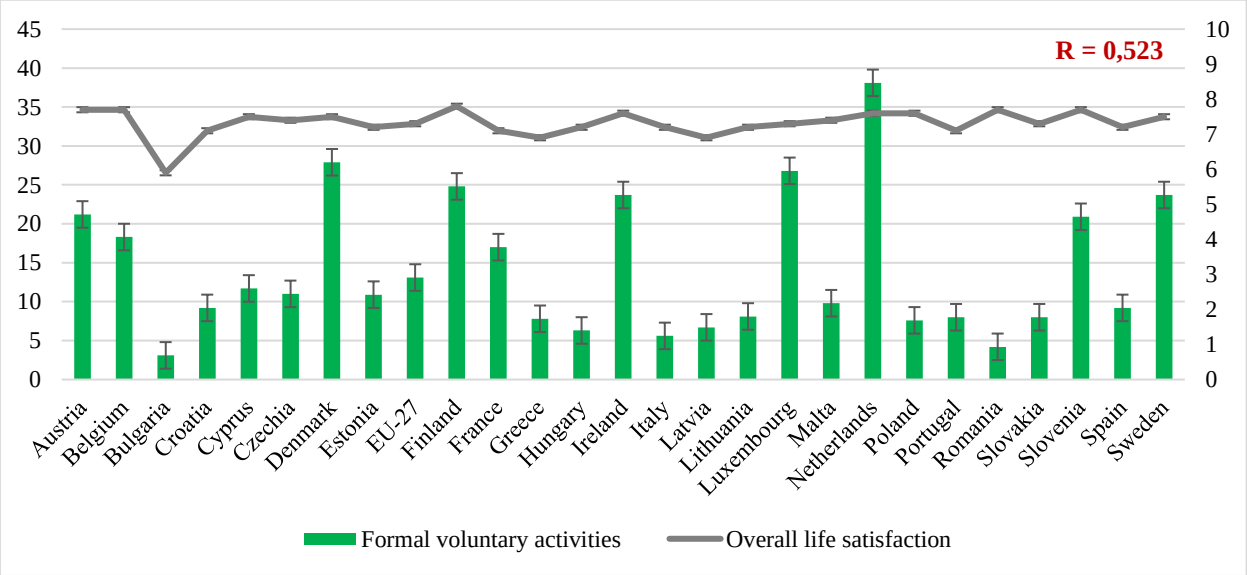
Functionalist perspectives relate to this discussion by highlighting the many functions that volunteerism serves both individuals and society. A classic functionalist view of sociology (in Durkheim or Parsons) suggests that volunteering plays an important role in the social system: it contributes to the socialization of individuals into community values, provides services and support that neither the market nor the government fully provide, and acts as a ‘safe valve’ or integrated mechanism that keeps society united. For example, volunteering in charities or community organizations can address social needs in a way that complements national programs, thus maintaining social stability and solidarity. Modern functional approaches to volunteerism in psychology, such as Clary et al.'s Volunteer Functions Inventory, identify several functions that volunteerism serves individuals, including expression of values, professional experience, social bonds, self-esteem protection, personal improvement, and

learning/understanding (Clary et al., 1998). This functional approach means that, when motivation functions are met by volunteering, they are more satisfied and more likely to continue volunteering (Clary et al., 1998; Stukas et al., 2005). To meet these motivations (for example, a volunteer who values altruism expresses altruistic values, or a person seeking professional skills acquires relevant experience) leads to personal growth and satisfaction, again linked to improved subjective well-being. In short, human capital and functional perspectives show that volunteering is not simply an activity that 'gives time' but that can build valuable skills and fulfil purposeful functions for individuals and society, thus improving well-being in various dimensions.

3. EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOLUNTEERING AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The latest cross-border data provide empirical support for the theoretical link between volunteering and subjective well-being in Europe. Analysis of 2022 and 2023 EU countries (excluding Germany due to data constraints) shows a moderately strong positive correlation between the number of formal volunteers and the average level of satisfaction (Pearson R = 0,523). In general, countries with a higher proportion of adults engaged in official volunteer work tend to report on average a greater satisfaction with life. For example, the Netherlands has the highest number of volunteers (approximately 36% of adults in 2022) and is one of the countries with the highest quality of life satisfaction, while Bulgaria is at the lowest level in both metrics (only 3,1% of volunteers; 5,9/10, the lowest in the EU) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The relationship between the level of volunteering and the satisfaction score of life in the European Union (2022, 2023)



Source: own, based on Eurostat, 2025 [ilc_scp39__custom_16890068, ilc_pw01__custom_14745205]

In general, figures throughout the EU show that life satisfaction increases along with volunteering – a pattern consistent with the idea that an active civil society contributes to social well-being. The scale of the correlation suggests a significant connection in the social sciences: Volunteerism accounts for a significant part of the intercultural variation in happiness, although far from the entire, which implies that other factors also play an important role in national well-being.

Interpretation of the correlation. A Pearson r of 0,523 indicates a strong positive relationship that is statistically and substantively significant in cross-border contexts. This conclusion is

consistent with the theory of social capital, which states that communities rich in civic involvement and trust enjoy a higher quality of life. Countries with active voluntary sectors tend to cultivate stronger interpersonal networks, greater social cohesion, and greater mutual trust, conditions that promote overall well-being. Consequently, earlier studies have shown that societies with strong civic participation generally report better overall outcomes of life (Putnam, 2000; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). This correlation is also consistent with the perspectives of human capital and modernization. More wealthy and educated societies often have more citizens able to volunteer (if basic material needs are met) and report higher life satisfaction, indicating a shared development basis for both phenomena (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001).

For example, Eurostat data (2019) show that people with higher education volunteer at a much higher rate than those with only primary education; countries characterized by a highly educated population (e.g., Nordic countries) therefore show above-average volunteerism and life satisfaction. Modernization theory also argues that post-industrial values promote self-expression and civic participation, which go hand in hand with a greater emphasis on the quality of life. In highly modernized democracies such as Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands, volunteering has become a widespread and reflective activity (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003), providing citizens with meaningful social roles (the theory of role identification) and opportunities for development of skills (the theory of human capital), contributing to subjective well-being. Indeed, when volunteer work meets important personal motivation and identity needs, it is related to greater purposes in life and greater satisfaction in life for individuals (Thoits, 2012). At the macro-level, these individual benefits can be combined to improve national well-being. In summary, the moderate correlation observed is very consistent with theoretical expectations. Volunteer societies tend to be happier societies, partly because volunteerism is a product of social capital, skills, and positive identities that support human prosperity.

3.1. NOTABLE CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATIONS

Despite the overall positive trend, the data also reveal significant differences and outliers that reduce the relationship between volunteering and well-being. Some countries diverge from the main trend, underlining that volunteering is not the only determinant of life satisfaction. Romania is a remarkable anomaly, with an average life satisfaction of the EU (7,7 on a scale of 0 to 10) among the highest, despite one of the lowest official volunteering rates in Europe (4,2%). Similar trends have been observed in Poland, which is more than average in terms of satisfaction (7,6) with a very low percentage of volunteers (7,6%). These cases suggest that other factors, cultural, economic, and social – can compensate for a low level of formal volunteering. In Romania and Poland, rapid economic growth and improved living conditions in recent years have contributed to increasing life satisfaction, but the legacy of communist distrust and the weakening of civil society continue to suppress formal volunteering (Howard 2003; Voicu & Voicu 2009). In addition, informal support networks (family support, neighbor support) are not included in official volunteer statistics and can contribute to the well-being of these societies. In other words, citizens of these countries could benefit from social support and objectives from family and community links instead of organized volunteer activities. This would reduce the expected life satisfaction deficit from low volunteering. Italy represents another notable case: Italian volunteer participation is astonishingly low (approximately 5,6% of adults), but Italians are relatively satisfied with life (7,2 near the EU average). This paradox follows Putnam's observations of strong family-based "social capital" in southern Italy, which compensates for lower civic involvement (Putnam, 1993). Traditional family structures, religions, and other cultural supports in these situations can improve well-being independently

of formal volunteering. These national idiosyncrasies highlight that the impact is influenced by a broader sociocultural context, a point highlighted by previous research.

On the other hand, there are cases where the high prevalence of volunteerism does not lead to an exceptionally high level of life satisfaction, suggesting a reduction in profits or compensatory factors. For example, Luxembourg has one of the highest forms of volunteering in Europe (26,8%, equal to that of the Netherlands and the Nordic countries), but only average life satisfaction (7,3, about the EU-27 average). France also has relatively vigorous volunteer participation (about 17%), but a little lower life satisfaction (7,1) than its volunteer level may predict. These discrepancies mean that while volunteering contributes to well-being, it cannot completely overcome other influences that limit overall satisfaction with life. In the case of Luxembourg, extremely high living costs, income inequality, or culturally stringent assessment of life satisfaction can counteract the benefits of strong civic engagement (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). The example of France reminds us that social well-being is influenced by factors such as economic security, political climate, and social cohesion, and even if voluntary work is widespread, it is only part of this puzzle. These outliers highlight a critical view: The connection between volunteerism and happiness is real but mediated by context. As Eurostat notes, 'cultural norms, economic conditions and historical traces' form the way in which volunteering effectively translates into well-being results. Societies differ in the degree to which volunteering is integrated into daily life or rewarded with psychosocial benefits, which in turn affects the strength of its influence on national happiness.

3.2. INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS AND THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

The significant correlation (R = 0,523) must be interpreted in terms of understanding the underlying causal complexity. First, the direction of influence can be reciprocal: A flourishing volunteer sector can improve not only the quality of life, but a healthier and more satisfied population can also have greater capacity and motivation to participate in volunteerism (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Thus, part of the association can reflect happier societies that produce more volunteers, rather than volunteering that causes happiness unilaterally. Secondly, both volunteering and satisfaction in life are jointly influenced by third variables, in particular economic development and quality of governance. Wealthier countries tend to have both higher happiness and more resources (education, time, civic infrastructure) to support voluntary work. This confusing factor means that the correlation partially captures a broader modernization effect. However, even after accounting for development, cultural factors seem to modulate the relationship. For example, modernization and secularization have led to a 'reflexive' type of volunteering in northwestern Europe – more episodic and individually guided - that can produce personal fulfillment but rather weaker community connections (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). In contrast, in countries where voluntary service is not standard or very rare (e.g., parts of eastern Europe), the few who volunteer may face structural obstacles – lack of volunteer organizations, low confidence – limiting their benefits. Empirical research by Morawski et al. (2022) found a reverse U form in the relationship between volunteer and well-being: in countries where volunteering is widespread (such as Scandinavia) or extremely rare (post-communist environments), the difference in the quality of life between volunteers and nonvolunteers is lower, while in countries with middle-income volunteering rates, volunteering gives a greater boost to well-being. The interpretation is that in high-civil countries, even nonvolunteers benefit from many indirect advantages of living in a rich and trusted environment of civic interest (reducing the marginal gain from voluntary activity), while in low-civil countries, systemic barriers (weak civil society, limited trust) limit the potential gains from voluntary activity. This nuance helps explain why the cross-country correlation, although

positive, is not stronger: the impact of voluntary action on social well-being can be weakened or suppressed in the extreme context.

Finally, when comparing countries, it is necessary to take into account methodological factors. The volunteer fees here refer only to formal volunteering (organized activities by groups or institutions). Societies differ in their definition and reporting of volunteering; some cultures have rich traditions of informal help (care, neighbourhood assistance) that are not registered in official statistics. Therefore, the 'low' volunteer rate of a country can underestimates its true social participation, leading to apparent anomalies in the data. The reliability also varies: in the EU-SILC well-being survey, life satisfaction data (such as France, Poland, Hungary) have been identified as less reliable, allowing noise to be introduced into the correlation. However, despite these shortcomings, the broad pattern is robust enough to emerge. Collectively, empirical evidence supports the proposition that volunteerism and social well-being are positively interconnected throughout Europe, while reaffirming the importance of contextualizing this relationship. The moderate correlation observed is significant – volunteering clearly correlates with happier and more cohesive societies – but it is not deterministic, as cultural norms, economic development, and historical paths communicate how volunteering translates into improvements in the quality of life. This analysis thus strengthens the theoretical frameworks previously discussed: it demonstrates how the social capital generated by volunteering can improve the well-being of the nation, how the mechanisms of role identity and human capital can operate at a large scale, and how modernization and cultural context provide the ground for these effects. Empirical insights such as these complement qualitative theories that illustrate that volunteering can actually be a catalyst for social well-being while attracting attention to the different factors that can accelerate or restrict this catalyst in different national environments.

CONCLUSION

Volunteering plays a multifaceted role in improving social well-being. The theoretical research presented in this paper demonstrates that volunteerism can contribute to individual well-being by providing meaningful roles, fostering social connections, and developing skills and self-efficacy. At the same time, volunteerism builds social capital at the community level, strengthens community bonds, and contributes to the provision of services and support that improve the quality of life. Evidence from various studies and contexts generally supports these positive effects: societies with active volunteer sectors tend to have higher levels of trust, cohesion, and overall well-being. However, these advantages depend on contextual factors. Cultural norms, economic conditions, and historical traces determine how and to what extent volunteering leads to health outcomes. For volunteerism to function as an effective catalyst for social well-being, it is crucial to link volunteer activities to motivations and to create supportive conditions that maximize their positive impact.

Importantly, the analysis highlights that simply affirming the virtues of volunteering is not enough; practical obstacles to preventing people from volunteering must be addressed. Time constraints, lack of awareness, skill gaps, social inequalities, cultural attitudes, and organizational deficiencies can all hinder volunteer participation. The overcoming of these obstacles requires concerted efforts from policy makers, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and communities. Strategies such as promoting work-life balance, providing volunteer training and matching services, promoting inclusive and trustworthy environments, and promoting partnership in all sectors can create a more enabling ecosystem for volunteering. When more members of society are empowered to volunteer, the results are double: individuals gain personal satisfaction and growth, and communities become stronger, more connected, and more supportive.

In summary, volunteering has the potential to significantly improve the well-being of individuals and groups, but realizing this potential requires understanding and action on the complex factors that influence the participation of volunteers. By eliminating barriers to participation and actively promoting a culture of volunteerism, societies can benefit from volunteerism. Such efforts would not only improve the lives of the people directly involved but also strengthen the social fabric and create a healthier, more inclusive, and better equipped community to face shared challenges.

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