

## Motives for the participation of volunteers and evaluation of the greatest experiences of volunteers in the project of Olympic festivals in the Czech Republic in 2021-2022

### Abstract:

The paper deals with the motives of volunteers, which led them to actively participate in the organization of the Olympic festivals in 2021 and 2022 in Brno and Prague. Olympic festivals are a project of the Czech Olympic Committee and take place during the Olympic Games. This project was created under the name „Olympic Park” in 2014 and takes place in different places every two years, during the Summer or Winter Games. In 2021, it was held in Prague and Brno; in 2022, in Brno.

The results are processed on the basis of answers from 131 volunteers' questionnaires, where, among other things, they evaluated their motives for participation according to the Olympic Volunteer Motivation Scale (OVMS). In the questionnaire, they also answered the question, „What was your greatest experience or impression that you took away from the Olympic Festival as a volunteer?”

This information is very important for the organizer, and he should know it. First of all, it is an important feedback on the implemented action. Secondly, for long-term successful cooperation with volunteers, and thirdly, for the correct setting of the offer to participate in other events. In this way, he can not only reach as many volunteers as possible to participate but also prepare the best conditions for them so that their participation is an experience for them. This will positively affect their interest in repeated participation in the Olympic Festivals project and, from a broader perspective, in regular volunteering as a regular part of a quality life.

Positive experiences are one of the important benefits of volunteer work. The definition of volunteering according to Sozanská and Tošner (2006) is: „Public volunteering is a conscious, freely chosen activity for the benefit of others, which citizens provide free of charge. The volunteer consciously gives a part of his time, energy, and abilities to the benefit of the activity, which is limited in terms of time and content. Volunteering can be professionally organized without losing its spontaneity. It is a regular and reliable source of help for a citizen or an organization that cooperates with volunteers and, at the same time, a source of new experiences and opportunities for the personal growth of volunteers.”

Thanks to the long-term cooperation with volunteers in the organization of the Olympic Festivals, the results of the mentioned questionnaire are already being applied during the recruitment for the Olympic Festival 2024, which will take place on Lake Most during the Summer Olympic Games in Paris in July and August 2024.

**Keywords:** Olympic Festival, Olympic Games, volunteering, volunteer, motivation to participate.

## INTRODUCTION

A major sporting event, perhaps the largest sporting event for the general public that is regularly organized in the Czech Republic is the Olympic Festival, which is always held during the Olympic Games since 2014, when the first Olympic Festival, still under the name „Olympic Park,” was held in Prague at the time of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. The Olympic Festival lasts 17 days, just like the Olympic Games. Its operation is ensured by hundreds of volunteers in dozens of positions. The work of volunteers is indispensable for the organization of large sports events, and most large sports events, called „mega sports events” abroad, cannot be done without their involvement. The Olympic Festival, which took place in 2022, already on the traditional date, was held only in Brno during the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing and was attended by 210 volunteers.

Reaching such a large number of volunteers and engaging them during the event is an important task for the organizing team, which must look for the ideal ways to reach potential volunteers and the best motives for their participation. Volunteers will then spend at least a few days at the event and need to be continuously offered experiences that will help keep them at the event. The organizer needs to know the most important motives for why volunteers sign up for the event—why they come to the event and stay for the entire event, or at least for the time they have promised.

Knowing the motives for their participation will help set up the right channels of communication with the volunteers and also set up the volunteer program during the event. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that both communication and the volunteer program are cost items for the organizer, so knowing these preferences can help save potential costs for activities that volunteers do not value and do not consider as a motivation for their involvement.

Volunteers included in the research participated in one of two, or both, Olympic festivals that took place in 2021 and 2022. The Olympic Festival that took place in 2021 was at the time of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games, which were postponed due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. They were postponed from 2020 to 2021, but they were still under the name TOKYO 2020. The Olympic Festival in the Czech Republic took place in two cities, Prague and Brno, and was attended by 500 volunteers. Thanks to the postponement of the Olympic Games in Tokyo, the time between the two aforementioned Olympic Games and thus the Olympic Festivals was only 6 months, and the outreach and recruitment of volunteers took place in direct succession. Therefore, both groups were addressed together; in the case of the Olympic Festivals in Brno in 2021 and 2022, it was an intermingling group, and many volunteers participated in both festivals.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The basic tool for data collection was a combined questionnaire. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with the option of choosing answers: absolutely important, completely agree, rather important, rather agree, don't know, rather unimportant, rather disagree, absolutely unimportant, or completely disagree. Responses were scored on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The results were ranked in a table from highest to lowest score.

Of the total number of 131 respondents, 38.2% answered (50 responses) that they participated in the Olympic Festival in 2021, and 61.8% (81 responses) said that they participated in the Olympic Festival in 2022. This distribution could also be influenced by the fact that respondents were asked if they had attended both Olympic festivals to refer their answers to 2022.



**Chart No. 1: Distribution of Responses between 2021 and 2022**

Source: author's own research.

The questions were based on the validated „Olympic Volunteer Motivation Scale (OVMS)” scale, which contains 24 possible motives for participation:

1. To help others and the community
2. To become associated with the Olympics
3. To make job contacts
4. To support my nation
5. To gain work experience, which might lead to employment
6. Volunteer tradition in my family
7. Opportunity to establish contacts with experts from the same field
8. Commitment as a citizen
9. Individual challenge
10. Belonging to a team
11. To feel valued and respected
12. Opportunity to meet with elite athletes
13. Gain knowledge about the culture of the country where the Olympiad is held.
14. To meet new people and make new friends
15. Passion for the Games
16. The spirit of solidarity and peace enshrined in the Olympic philosophy
17. To support the spirit of volunteerism
18. To learn new skills
19. Memories that will last a lifetime

20. For nationalistic pride
21. For materialistic rewards (e.g., official volunteer uniforms),
22. To attend an Olympic event
23. I'm involved in sports.
24. Being a volunteer at the Olympic Festival is considered prestigious.

Four questions (numbers 2, 4, 22, and 24) were worded slightly differently for the needs of research within the Olympic Festivals to correspond to the participation of volunteers at the Olympic Festival in the Czech Republic and not the Olympics directly, but their meaning remained unchanged.

Based on the results of the previous survey in 2019 (it is not part of this research and the results have already been published), two questions, numbers 25 and 26, were added to the questionnaire:

1. Make new friendly contacts and make more friends for my leisure activities.
2. To acquire and learn new skills that I will use in my future life.

## **RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS**

All 26 possible motives were ranked according to the frequency of responses, from the most important to the least important. The five most important and five least important motives from the point of view of the volunteers were ranked as follows.

Table 1. Evaluating motives for participating as a volunteer in the 2021 and 2022 Olympic Festival

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.	25.	26.
	91	77	78	61	57	58	60	60	51	50	46	41	41	45	30	33	31	25	24	21	14	21	14	12	9	15
very important																										
rather important	29	43	40	55	52	49	49	42	54	52	55	54	47	38	43	47	44	34	36	42	45	34	34	24	24	16
Neutral	5	7	3	6	17	15	10	16	15	19	19	24	25	22	32	24	30	41	37	31	37	24	37	51	32	21
rather unimportant	3	2	8	6	4	6	8	6	6	5	6	7	9	13	9	10	9	18	20	23	18	25	19	22	25	12
very unimportant	2	1	2	3	1	2	4	5	4	4	5	4	6	10	10	14	15	10	13	12	15	25	24	21	29	48
Average rating on a 5-point scale	4,57	4,48	4,40	4,26	4,22	4,19	4,17	4,13	4,09	4,07	4,00	3,93	3,84	3,74	3,60	3,59	3,52	3,36	3,29	3,29	3,19	3,01	2,96	2,88	2,66	2,45
	Get memories that will last a lifetime	Meet new people and make new friends	Being part of the Olympic event	Participate in an event related to the Olympics	Helping others and the community	To learn new skills	Individual challenge	Passion for the Games	To support the spirit of volunteerism	Make new friendly contacts, make more friends for my leisure activities	To acquire, to learn new skills that I will use in my future life	Spirit of solidarity and peace enshrined in the Olympic philosophy	Opportunity to meet with elite athletes	I'm involved in sports	Being a volunteer at the Olympic Festival is considered prestigious	Belonging to a team	To support my nation	Opportunity to establish contacts with experts from the same field	Support your city, your region	Gain knowledge about the culture of the country where the Olympiad is held	For materialistic rewards (e.g. official volunteer uniforms)	Gain work experience that that could lead to employment	Feel valued and respected	Make working contacts	Commitment as a citizen	Volunteer tradition in my family

Source: author's own research.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Out of all 26 motives for participating, the five most important motives were ranked in order from most important: To gain memories that will last a lifetime, Meet new people and make new friends; be part of the Olympic event; Participate in an event associated with the Olympics to help others and the community.

The answers show that volunteers consider the most important motives to be those connected with the essence of sport and volunteering; in the case of the Olympic Festivals, the connection with the Olympic Games also plays a significant role. As stated by Dovalil (2004), “the most important feature of sport as a game is freedom, freedom of voluntary participation, and freedom of decision. Sport as a game brings dramatic tension and its solution, provides a deep experience, but at the same time satisfaction, calming, and balancing. In addition, sport is also a game in which everyone who wants to participate must voluntarily comply with the officially approved rules, which determine the ways of their behaviour in competitive situations and unwritten sportsmanship—fair play—and outside of them.” And for the involvement of volunteers at a sports event, the most important motives for participation are very similar.

Volunteers also had the option to fill in the answer to the question „What was your greatest experience or impression that you took away from the Olympic Festival as a volunteer?“ With the fact that it was not specified whether it was a positive or negative impression. This was an optional question, and respondents answered in the form of text.

The vast majority of respondents reported positive experiences. This positive feedback shows that the Olympic Festival was a very rewarding and motivating experience for many volunteers.

Among the most frequent positive experiences were:

1. Meeting famous athletes and Olympians: This was a frequently mentioned experience, showing that interacting with inspirational figures was special for the volunteers.
2. The joy of children and young athletes: The impression of helping and involving children and young people in sports and the Olympic Festival was of particular importance to the volunteers.
3. Friendly and collaborative atmosphere: The importance of a positive work environment where people feel part of a great team is clearly evident.
4. Experiences from new sports and volunteer activities: The opportunity to try new sports and acquire new skills was motivating for volunteers.
5. A sense of pride and belonging: Being part of the event and showing the Olympic spirit had an impact on the volunteers.
6. The joy of being able to meet and play sports after the pandemic: The pandemic had a significant impact on public life, so this event offered volunteers a chance to meet and play sports again.
7. Responsibility, enthusiasm, and experience gained: Many volunteers perceived their work as meaningful and gained experience and skills that could benefit them in the future.



The most positive experiences were associated with the opportunity to meet Olympic athletes and well-known athletes, which is a benefit that can be applied thanks to the connection with the organization of the Czech Olympic Committee and the Olympic Games and is brought about by participation in this unique project. It does not cost the organizer any extra funds. They only need to ensure that the athletes have dedicated time in their program to meet the volunteers, and this meeting needs to be prepared by the volunteer coordinators. It is therefore not a difficult or demanding task, but the outcome is very important for the volunteers.

The OF project also includes school events or summer camps. The results also show that the involvement of children in sports is a very important motivation for volunteers to help with the organization.

## **LEAST IMPORTANT MOTIVES AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**

Volunteers consider the following to be the five least important motives (ranked in last place): Volunteering tradition in my family; commitment as a citizen; establishment of business contacts; feeling valued and respected; gaining work experience that could lead to employment

It follows from the answers of the respondents that in the Czech Republic there is not yet a tradition of volunteering in the family and that the respondents do not consider it an important motive. Thanks to the experience of organizing this exceptional event since 2014, however, we can see that more parents with children appear among the volunteers; some volunteers bring their younger siblings, and it is therefore possible that this family involvement will gradually reappear.

It is interesting that volunteers do not consider the opportunity to gain work experience or establish work contacts as an important motive for participation. In his research report, Frič (2001) mentions profit orientation, i.e., „the volunteer’s main goal is personal benefit, e.g., gaining practice, contacts, and experience,” as one of the three basic motivations for volunteering. In the case of Olympic festivals, this motivation is unimportant, according to the volunteers’ answers.

In the answers to the question „What was your biggest experience or impression that you took away from the Olympic Festival as a volunteer?” four answers were negative. Although this is a small number of negative comments compared to the total number of respondents, it is important to focus on them. Every vote and piece of feedback is valuable, and if there are negative comments, the organizer should try to understand what led to those feelings and whether it is possible to improve the volunteer experience.

These comments contain useful information about volunteer experiences and areas where improvements could be made. Here are some key points that could be highlighted:

1. Communication and information: There were problems with communication and the way volunteers were informed. Some do not have access to social networks, which could cause a drop in information. More significant effort should be devoted to ensuring that all volunteers have equal access to information.
2. Ensuring a volunteer environment: Some comments indicate that the organizational structure and

the way volunteers were recruited were not optimal. The organization of shifts and ensuring that volunteers are assigned to positions that match their skills and expectations should be improved.

3. Lack of equipment and preparation: Some volunteers felt unprepared for their roles and were not given the necessary equipment, which can cause stress and an unsatisfactory experience.
4. Discrimination against child visitors due to technical issues: The commercial quiz and mobile app may have created a sense of discrimination among children who do not have mobile phones or access to data. Alternatives or ways to include all children should be considered. This comment was not directly related to the limitations of the volunteers' work but was related to the involvement of the children in the care of the volunteers. That is, the work that the volunteer performed as part of the Olympic Festival and did not have the opportunity to intervene in the preparation or implementation of the program.

It is important that the organizers always take note of these comments and try to address these issues in the preparation of future events. Volunteer feedback can lead to significant improvements and create more positive experiences for all participants.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

As already mentioned, although the interval of the Olympic Games is two years (the move of the Olympic Games from 2020 to 2021 was due to an exceptional situation that happened for the first time during the modern Olympic Games), and therefore relatively long, it is a recurring event whose results can be relied upon.

The results of this research show that the OF volunteers consider the motives associated with the Olympics to be the most important, as the top five most important motives were three falling into this category: being part of the Olympic event; having memories that will last a lifetime; and attending an event associated with the Olympics. This result demonstrates the link between the OF and the Olympic Games and thus confirms the possibility of using the OVMS to meet the needs of a local event associated with the Olympic Games.

If the organizer finds out the main motives of volunteers for participation at the beginning of the recruitment, they can then even better set up communication with other volunteers and set up benefits for participating in the event in such a way as to best meet the expectations of the volunteers and bring them the best possible experience as a reward, for their voluntary and free connection. In the case of recruiting volunteers for the OF, the results show that recruitment should focus on the connection with the Olympics and on experiences that other events cannot provide (meeting successful Olympians).

*„The Olympic Festival has one great advantage, and that is its connection with the biggest sporting event in the world, the Olympic Games. It is a sporting event known to almost everyone in the world. It has great prestige and a large following. In addition, the Olympic Parks and Olympic Festivals project already has its history in 2022; it was held for the fifth time, and therefore its familiarity and prestige*



*are increasing. Thanks to these connections, participation in the event itself, the connection with the Olympic Games, and the prestige of the Olympic Festival are great motivations for volunteers. And with that comes the motivation to help, which is inherent to all volunteers at the same time, and the desire to make new friends”<sup>1</sup>.*

An interesting result is the placement of the topic „Volunteer tradition in my family” in the last place. In similar research from Canada, published in 1998 by Farrell, Jocelyn M., Margaret E. Johnson, and David TWYNAM, which used the 28-item „Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale” to determine motives in a sample of 300 volunteers, A five-point Likert scale, the same as was used in the OF research, was also used for evaluation. Thus, some motives can be directly compared here. And also in this research, the motive „volunteer tradition in my family” ended up being one of the least important, namely in the penultimate place with a score of 1.43 points (in the OF volunteers’ evaluation, this motive scored 2.24 points). In the Canadian research, the motive „I had nothing else to do”, which is not mentioned in the OVMS used, was in last place with a score of 1.16 points.

For further research, it would be interesting to focus on this motivation, as there are several literal family teams among OF volunteers, with parents bringing their children to volunteer, but the „volunteer tradition in the family” motive is not considered important even in the Czech Republic, Canada, or Hungary, where a similar questionnaire (20-point scale) was used by MEZEI, Tímea, Balázs POLCSIK, and Szilvia PERÉNYI (2021) in their work, and where volunteer tradition also came last.

Many large sporting events do not have this repetition, or have it, but in other countries and under other conditions, where majority of the results of the detection of motives may not be transferable (e.g., the World Cup in football held in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America). Then you need to deal with one action. Again, motives for participation can be ascertained by, for example, surveying at the start of volunteer recruitment, which often starts a year or more before the event itself, and using the results to better set up communications over the next period.

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## **MOTYWY UDZIAŁU WOLONTARIUSZY I OCENA NAJWIĘKSZYCH DOŚWIADCZEŃ WOLONTARIUSZY W PROJEKCIE FESTIWALI OLIMPIJSKICH W CZECHACH W LATACH 2021-2022**

### **Streszczenie:**

Artykuł to kolejny tekst z serii badań nad postawami wolontariuszy współpracujących przy organizacji Olympic festivals w Czechach w edycjach 2021 i 2022. Autor koncentruje się na głównych motywach skłaniających wolontariuszy do zaangażowania w organizację tego wydarzenia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Festiwal Olimpijski, Igrzyska Olimpijskie, wolontariat, motywacja.