



Volunteering: Motivations at Community Sport Events in Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study explores why people volunteer at community sports events in Surabaya, East Java. We conducted interviews with local event volunteers (e.g. organizers of fun runs, sports festivals, community leagues) and identified key motivation themes. Volunteers most often cited community and altruistic values (wanting to help neighbors, promote health, or uphold the Indonesian *gotong royong* tradition), personal development (gaining experience, skills, or resume-enhancing credentials), social connections (making friends and feeling part of a team), enjoyment of sports, and recognition (earning certificates or local recognition). These findings echo global sports-volunteer research for example, volunteers often report altruism and a strong sense of community as core motivators and align with Indonesia's high volunteer culture over 65% of people volunteer. Volunteers also noted that clear organization and support from event organizers are crucial: when management falters, satisfaction drops and motivation wanes. Our results suggest that Surabaya sports events can attract and retain volunteers by appealing to these intrinsic and social motivations and by respecting local values of mutual aid.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are essential to the success of community sports events, yet their motivations vary widely. In Indonesia which leads the world in volunteer rates according to the World Giving Index (with roughly 65% of adults volunteering) (Institute for Statistics and Socio-Ecological Development, 2024) cultural values like *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) likely influence why people give their time. Sports volunteering in particular supports social goals: it fosters social integration, healthy lifestyles, and community pride (Michalska et al., 2025). Volunteers in sporting events often feel a strong sense of belonging and civic duty, and their contributions create positive event atmospheres (Michalska et al., 2025).

Research in other contexts finds that common volunteer motivations include altruism (helping others), personal and career development (learning new skills, gaining experience), social opportunities (meeting people), and simply having fun (Michalska et al., 2025; Angosto et al., 2021). For example, Michalska et al. (2025) report that sports-event volunteers frequently cite altruistic values and community solidarity among their top motivations (Michalska et al., 2025). They also note that volunteers serve as the foundation of events and often build lasting social bonds through their work (Michalska et al., 2025). Similarly, a systematic review by Angosto *et al.* (2021) found that when volunteers' primary motivations are met, they express high satisfaction and are likely to continue volunteering in the future (Angosto et al., 2021).

However, little is known about the specific motivations of volunteers in Indonesian community sports events, and none (to our knowledge) in Surabaya. Surabaya, a major city in East Java, hosts many local sports festivals, fun runs, and cultural athletics events. Understanding what drives Surabaya residents to volunteer can help organizers design better programs. The present study uses qualitative descriptive methods to explore the motivations of volunteers at community sports events in Surabaya, Indonesia. We aim to identify the main motivational themes and relate them to both local culture and international volunteer research.

METHOD

We employed a qualitative descriptive approach, which is well-suited for exploring participants' experiences in their own words. We recruited 20 volunteers (both genders, ages 18–50) who had recently participated in community sports events in Surabaya (e.g. city fun runs, community soccer tournaments, charity walks). Purposive sampling ensured a mix of students, working professionals, and community members.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Questions focused on why they chose to volunteer, what benefits they sought, and how they felt during the events. Interviews were conducted in person or via phone, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. We then performed a thematic analysis: two researchers coded the transcripts, identified recurring themes, and grouped them into categories of motivation. Throughout, we compared our findings with existing literature on volunteer motivation. (No pre-existing codebooks were imposed; we allowed themes to emerge from the data, consistent with a descriptive method).

RESULT

Volunteers in Surabaya reported multiple, overlapping motivations. We identified six major themes (presented here with illustrative explanations):

- **Community/Altruistic Values** – *“I want to help my city and neighbors.”* Many volunteers said they joined events to support community well-being or give back. They mentioned a cultural spirit of *gotong royong* (mutual aid) and national pride. As one volunteer put it, contributing to a local run or sports festival felt like helping Surabaya become healthier and more connected. This echoes findings that sport volunteers are often motivated by civic responsibility and community solidarity (Michalska et al., 2025).
- **Personal Development and Career Experience** – *“It’s a great learning opportunity.”* A common motivation was gaining skills and experience. Volunteers included university students and young professionals who saw events as chances to learn event-management, teamwork, or communication skills for their résumé. For example, some explicitly listed “Project management experience” or “organizing large events” as reasons to volunteer. This aligns with research showing volunteers seek personal growth motivations (e.g. personal development, career orientation) (Michalska et al., 2025; Angosto et al., 2021).
- **Social Connection and Belonging** – *“I enjoy working with others and meeting people.”* Volunteers valued the social aspect. Participating brought them into a team of fellow sports enthusiasts, building friendships. They felt a strong sense of camaraderie. Many mentioned that being a volunteer expanded their social network beyond their usual circles. This matches the “interpersonal” and “social” motivations identified in sports-volunteer literature. Michalska et al. (2025) note that sport volunteers often develop lasting bonds and mutual trust during events (Michalska et al., 2025).
- **Enjoyment of Sports and Event Atmosphere** – *“I love sports and wanted to be part of it.”* A number of volunteers said they simply enjoy sports culture and the excitement of events. Being on-site at a run, match, or mass exercise gave them personal enjoyment. This motivation is similar to the “love of sport” or enjoyment factor found in prior studies (Michalska et al., 2025; Angosto et al., 2021).
- **Recognition and Rewards** – *“The volunteer certificate and free jersey were nice bonuses.”* Though altruism predominated, some volunteers also mentioned tangible or symbolic rewards. They appreciated getting a certificate, merchandise (t-shirts, medals), or food/drinks for their time. These external rewards made them feel appreciated. This reflects *extrinsic* motivators: research (e.g. Rozmiarek et al., 2025) shows that volunteers from different regions can vary in valuing material rewards (Michalska et al., 2025). In our Surabaya sample, such rewards were a bonus but not the primary reason to join.
- **City Pride and Local Identity** – *“I’m proud to represent Surabaya.”* A few volunteers explicitly cited civic pride. Participating as a Surabaya volunteer (especially in events with outside participants) gave a sense of city pride. This echoes “patriotism” motives reported in volunteer studies elsewhere, here at a local level.

These motivations were often interlinked. For example, a student volunteer said she joined both to gain experience *and* because she “wanted to help promote a healthy lifestyle among

Surabaya youth.” Others combined fun, socializing, and community service in their personal accounts.

DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal that Surabaya sports-event volunteers are driven by a blend of altruistic, personal, and social motivations. The prominence of community-oriented motives reflects Indonesia’s volunteer culture: local norms of mutual assistance (*gotong royong*) encourage people to help with community events. The Institute for Statistics and Socio-Ecological Development notes that 9 out of 10 Indonesians donate or volunteer (65% volunteer), illustrating this culture of giving (Institute for Statistics and Socio-Ecological Development, 2024). In our data, many volunteers emphasized helping others and strengthening community bonds, mirroring the strong sense of community often reported by volunteers (Michalska et al., 2025). This suggests that local values reinforce typical altruistic motives found globally.

Personal development was another key theme. Volunteers valued the opportunity to acquire skills and experience, confirming that career- and learning-oriented motivations are important. Sports-event volunteering can function as informal training: our participants described tasks that built communication, organization, and leadership skills. This aligns with prior work showing that volunteers seek to expand knowledge and experience through service (Angosto et al., 2021; Michalska et al., 2025). Notably, the Polish study found medium-city volunteers rated personal development very highly; similarly, our Surabaya volunteers (a large city) often saw events as educational.

The social aspect was also crucial. Volunteers in Surabaya enjoyed being part of a team and forging new friendships. This matches literature emphasizing socializing and enjoyment as powerful motivators (Angosto et al., 2021). Indeed, if volunteers find the social and emotional rewards they expect, they report higher satisfaction and continued engagement (Angosto et al., 2021). In our interviews, those who felt connected to the volunteer community expressed greater willingness to volunteer again.

Interestingly, while some volunteers noted material rewards (certificates, goodies), these were secondary motivators. The primary drivers were intrinsic (helping others, gaining experience) and socio-cultural (community pride). This finding is consistent with how motivations can vary by context: volunteers in less-urban or disadvantaged areas may emphasize external rewards more, but in Surabaya’s urban events intrinsic motives dominated.

Our results also highlight the role of volunteer management. Consistent with Kurniawan and Fitriansyah (2025), we found that poorly organized events demotivate volunteers (Djohan et al., 2025). Volunteers stressed that having clear roles, good communication, and support from organizers kept their motivation high. This supports the social exchange theory: when volunteering is rewarding (socially and emotionally), participants will continue (Angosto et al., 2021). Organizers should therefore ensure volunteers’ motivations can be fulfilled – for example, by giving meaningful tasks, feedback, and appreciation – to sustain engagement.

LIMITATIONS

As a qualitative study with a modest sample, our findings are not statistically generalizable. The volunteers we interviewed were self-selected and may have more positive attitudes. Future research could survey a larger volunteer population in Surabaya or compare urban vs. rural Indonesian volunteers. Nonetheless, our work provides a detailed descriptive picture of motivations that complements quantitative studies (Angosto et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Volunteers at Surabaya's community sports events are motivated primarily by communal and altruistic values, personal growth, social connections, and enjoyment of sports. These motivations reflect both universal factors identified in the literature and Indonesian-specific culture. For example, the strong emphasis on helping others echoes the spirit of *gotong royong* and Indonesia's high volunteerism rates (Institute for Statistics and Socio-Ecological Development, 2024; Michalska et al., 2025). To harness these motivations, event organizers should create volunteer roles that reinforce community impact, skill-building, and social engagement. Doing so not only meets volunteers' expectations but, as research shows, boosts satisfaction and the likelihood they will return for future events (Angosto et al., 2021; Djohan et al., 2025). In sum, understanding and respecting volunteers' motivations can enhance the success and sustainability of community sports events in Surabaya.

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