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### **The inherently hybrid nature of volunteering: exploring voluntary exchange at pop music festivals**

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Manuscripts

Review

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3 **The inherently hybrid nature of volunteering: exploring voluntary exchange at pop**  
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5 **music festivals**  
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11  
12 **Abstract**  
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15 This paper discusses the nature of volunteering by exploring the features of the exchanges  
16 involved and their precise meanings. The context for this analysis is the UK music festival  
17 industry, where volunteers are offered specific ‘exchange deals’ for providing their working  
18 efforts. The paper argues that it is in such exchanges, and in their inherent meanings, that the  
19 nature of volunteering can be appreciated as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon.  
20 By theorizing volunteering as possessing Janus-face features, represented by its symbolic and  
21 economic faces – this research demonstrates that the practice of volunteering is inherently  
22 hybrid. This paper advances conceptual knowledge on volunteering, by showing the  
23 irreducibility of the concept to either of these two categorizations. It offers a new perspective  
24 that addresses apparently incompatible readings of volunteering, recognizing volunteers’  
25 different experiences and on how they feel about the nature of this exchange.  
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42 **Keywords:** Voluntary work, Janus, Pop music festivals, Symbolic Exchange, Economic  
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## 1. Introduction

The economic relevance of the voluntary sector has gained greater public attention over the last few years. Increasingly, scholars have recognized that voluntary work produces considerable economic value (Sajardo and Serra, 2011; Brown, 1999), and can account for a crucial part of non-profit organizations' workforces (International Labor Organization, 2011). Further, an appreciation of volunteering as primarily a social activity has contributed to positioning the voluntary sector as crucial to civic life (United Nations Volunteers, 2011).

Despite this growing interest in the public debate, scholars writing in the field's specialist literature (e.g. Wilson, 2012; Hustinx et al., 2010; Snyder and Omoto, 2008) have lamented the fact that volunteering is studied from narrow functionalist and egocentric viewpoints, focused on identifying personality traits (e.g. extroversion), demographic categories (e.g. race, age, education) and social resources (e.g. different types of capital) to predict who volunteers and on what conditions.

The extant literature has begun to call (e.g. Hustinx et al., 2010; e.g. Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Wilson, 2012) for a more multi-dimensional approach to volunteering, to explore the broader social and institutional contexts in which voluntary work is situated. This paper uses the concept of 'exchange' (e.g. Blau, 1964), to study this multi-dimensional nature of voluntary work. As Bussell and Forbes (2002) observed, numerous studies have identified an element of exchange in volunteering. Rather than reducing volunteering to a unidimensional concept, the value of studying it as an exchange lies in an appreciation of the "complex reality of volunteering" (Hustinx et al., 2010: 424), as perceived by multiple actors.

Scholars working in different traditions have framed voluntary exchange in diverse ways, from research remarking on its altruistic motives (Unger, 1991; Clohesy, 2000), to approaches that emphasize the economic aspect of the exchange, originating from considering it as an unpaid work activity (Brown, 1999; Sajardo and Serra, 2011), to literatures on

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3 instrumental-based actions motivated by the desire for personal development (Hustinx and  
4 Lammertyn, 2003). However, what all these approaches have in common is perceiving  
5 voluntary exchange as one-dimensional (Cnaan et al., 1996; Barron and Rihova, 2011). This  
6 means that volunteer exchange has been frequently reduced to one of its various dimensions  
7 (see Hustinx and Lamertyn, 2003), suggesting definitions of the phenomenon as an  
8 ‘either/or’. But research into volunteers’ motivations in the festival field has indicated that  
9 they have context-situated motives (Bachman et al., 2014). For example, the enjoyable  
10 environment, friendship, and feelings of community are distinctive aspects that influence  
11 individuals who volunteer at festivals. In this case, spheres of meanings inform volunteers’  
12 engagement, who are driven by the prospect to be part of a collective celebration, and  
13 generally to join the festival community (Wagner, 1991; Turner, 1969). Such aspects pertain  
14 to non-material dimensions and configure the exchange as symbolic. *Pari passu*, exchange  
15 relations primarily determined by instrumental type of returns reveal forms of exchange  
16 grounded on economic considerations (e.g. using volunteering as a career development  
17 strategy or seeing volunteering as a commercial transaction).  
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36 This paper investigates the nature of volunteering, and aims to address the research  
37 questions: *What is the nature of voluntary work exchange?* and *How, precisely, can it be*  
38 *conceived of as an exchange?* It does so by examining volunteers’ understanding of the  
39 exchange within the pop music festival industry in the United Kingdom – a setting where  
40 volunteers form the “largest overall share of festival employment, accounting for 60% of  
41 management and production” (BAFA, 2008, p. 25) – and it shows how their perceptions of  
42 exchanges as merely based on money transfer alternate with symbolic exchange relations.  
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51 Its contribution is threefold. First, we advance research on volunteering, by illustrating  
52 the complexity of the concept and its multi-faceted nature. Second, by recognizing the  
53 economic worth of volunteering, we show that its economic value is constituted as a symbolic  
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3 resource, motivated by social drivers. Finally, we conceptualize and discuss voluntary work  
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5 as possessing Janus-face features. Like the mythological Roman god Janus, we suggest that  
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7 volunteering possesses two faces, which are expressed in complementary antagonism by its  
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9 economic and symbolic features. We argue that tense relations between different dimensions  
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11 seem constitutive of voluntary work as they reflect conflicting views of the concept.  
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14 In recognizing this, we contribute to solving an enduring dilemma that is often  
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16 acknowledged but largely rarely developed: that volunteering is complex rather than one-  
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18 dimensional in nature.  
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21 Our argument is structured as follows. We begin with a review of those studies of  
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23 volunteering that examine its nature, and then focus on the literature on the motivations of  
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25 those who volunteer in festival management. After laying out this theoretical background, we  
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27 describe our multi-sited ethnographic investigation of pop music festivals in the UK, and  
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29 present the findings from our fieldwork. Our final section discusses the nature of the  
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31 voluntary work exchange at festivals, where we illustrate the multiple faces of this concept.  
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33 Finally, we draw implications and future directions for volunteering research.  
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## 38 **2. Widening the theory of volunteering**

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40 The International Labor Organization (2011) recently defined voluntary work as “un-paid  
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42 non-compulsory work - that is, time that individuals give without pay to activities performed  
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44 either through an organization or directly for others outside their household” (ibid. p. 13). As  
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46 the definition suggests, volunteering is work, insofar as it contributes to the production of  
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48 goods or services, suggesting it is an economic activity (Taylor, 2004; Freeman, 1997).  
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52 A consistent body of research, however, has approached volunteering as a social  
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54 activity (Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2000; Cnaan et al., 1996). For example, it has  
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56 been defined as being ingrained in community activities “arising out of long-established  
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3 traditions of sharing and reciprocal exchanges” (United Nations Volunteers, 2011: 2).  
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5 Similarly, as Eckstein (2001) puts it, the collective roots of volunteering enable it to be  
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7 explained as a “giving” practice, based on feelings of affiliation to a group. Booth et al.  
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9 (2009) also describe volunteering “as a ‘gift’”. In their words, “a gift is characterized as an  
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11 intangible or tangible good or service (including the giver’s time, activities and ideas)  
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13 voluntarily provided to another person or group” (Booth et al., 2009, p. 230). For our analysis,  
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15 gift relations are important for the symbolic dynamics between partners in volunteering  
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17 situations. Some authors, guided by the traditional association of volunteering with altruism,  
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19 goodness and mutual support (Clohesy, 2000; Snyder and Omoto, 2008), have focused on  
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21 volunteering as an activity aimed at “doing good” (Clohesy, 2000). To emphasize this point,  
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23 some have even suggested that volunteering and altruism are similar words that ought to be  
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25 studied together (Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Unger, 1991).  
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30 These points underline what has long been established by the sociological literature on  
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32 the topic; i.e., that it is essential to consider the social relations between people when  
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34 discussing volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2010). Increasingly interested in the motives driving  
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36 individuals to volunteer, some authors have explored new “styles of volunteering” (Hustinx  
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38 and Lammertyn, 2003). In effect, whether formulations about the nature of volunteering are  
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40 based on altruistic components, social factors, or an economic viewpoint, knowing what  
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42 motivates volunteers is crucial to understanding the exchange involved in volunteering. In the  
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44 next section, we turn our attention to different motives behind volunteers’ exchanges on the  
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46 festival field.  
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### 50 51 **3. Exploring volunteer motivation from within the festival field**

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53 Research on the motivation of volunteers to become involved in festivals and special events  
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55 has assumed that individuals are driven by diverse reasons, such as personal interest or social  
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3 factors (Love et al, 2012; Elstad, 2003; Guntert et al., 2014). Challenging the idea of  
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5 volunteering as a purely beneficial activity, some researchers have observed that individuals  
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7 can be motivated by self-interest in terms of receiving rewards – either in the form of material  
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9 goods (e.g., festivals’ merchandising, free tickets) or skills (Senior and Naylor, 1984), career  
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11 building, or psychological rewards (Barron and Rihova, 2011; Monga, 2006).

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13 As Bachman et al. (2014) showed in their study of music festivals, the existence of conflicting  
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15 motives – i.e. purposive/altruistic, material/self-interest – among volunteers has been key for  
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17 segmenting volunteers into groups. This interest in identifying the distinct motives that move  
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19 individuals to volunteer at festivals and similar events is not novel; for example, a recent  
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21 study by Barron and Rihova (2011) shows the predominance of utilitarianism in volunteers’  
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23 participation at art festivals. Being insiders in an event, doing it for fun, as well as acquiring  
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25 skills and knowledge are among the motives listed.

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28 By according greater relevance to some sets of motives than to others, volunteers’  
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30 motivations have been frequently polarized around opposite extremes, such as egotism and  
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32 altruism. But Yeung (2004) has framed volunteers’ motivations as being as positioned on a  
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34 continuum, so proposing a model that reconciles individualistic and social motives. In a  
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36 similar perspective, some scholars (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Rehberg, 2005) have  
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38 discussed the notion of the ‘reflexive volunteer’, considering new paths of volunteer  
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40 involvement. The ‘reflexive volunteer’ is somebody who combines self-directed motives with  
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42 a communal or social orientation when engaging in their voluntary actions. The presence of  
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44 different motives underlying the act of volunteering directs our attention to the simultaneous  
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46 exercise of different forms of exchange. The social motive identified in volunteering theory  
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48 (e.g. Snyder and Omoto, 2008) can be framed in terms of a social exchange. These motives  
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50 are situated in anthropological readings of festival-like events (e.g. van Gennep, 1960; Turner,  
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52 1969), where such spaces are seen as important for the symbolic construction of  
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3 ‘communitas’ – denoting an intense sense of togetherness and emerging where social  
4 structure is suspended (Turner, 1969) – and for producing specific social effects. In this  
5 perspective, while volunteers do not receive monetary recompense, they nevertheless receive  
6 some form of symbolic returns or non-monetary benefits as rewards for their efforts. On the  
7 other hand, the instrumental type of returns volunteers may receive can be considered as  
8 forms of exchange primarily based on economic considerations – even though they are not  
9 strictly based on monetary returns. Those who recruit volunteers make the same kind of  
10 economic evaluations when they recognize them as economic resources (Mook et al., 2007;  
11 Sajardo and Serra, 2011).

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23 We analyze this tension between symbolic and economic types of exchange below,  
24 arguing that such tension contributes to the complexity of the volunteering phenomenon.

#### 25 26 27 28 29 30 **4. Research Methods**

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32 This research is based on a multi-sited ethnographic investigation conducted at three different  
33 music festivals in the United Kingdom (the Latitude Festival, Camp Bestival and the Reading  
34 Festival).

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Choosing the festival industry as an analysis setting is important for two main reasons. First,  
the importance of music festivals in economic terms makes them a growing part in the event  
industry – in fact, the popularity and profitability of the UK’s festival business has made  
“Britain’s festival market the world leader” (Stone, 2009).

Second, as the economic importance of events has grown, festival operations have become  
increasingly commercially and market-oriented (Stone, 2009), which has been paralleled by a  
growing professionalization of their activities that had previously been confined to more  
amateur and spontaneous modes of organization. This is particularly true of their use of  
volunteering, which, from being a spontaneous and loosely-organized phenomenon, has been



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3 transformed into a more professionally organized enterprise.  
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## 7 8 **5. Data Collection**

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10 The aim of our research was to understand volunteers' motivations and how they interpreted  
11 volunteer exchange at festivals. We therefore adopted an emic approach, which involved us in  
12 being deeply immersed in the context, favoring participants' self-understanding of the  
13 volunteering situation (Headland et al. 1990).  
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18 The first author entered the field as a volunteer, going through any selection and  
19 training processes required and eventually was recruited to work as a volunteer during the  
20 2012 Summer Music Festival Season, which denotes the summer's best festivals, which take  
21 place across the UK and are usually listed in newspapers and major festivals' websites. The  
22 first author accessed these festivals via supplier organizations, which recruited volunteers and  
23 provided volunteers' services to various festivals, including recycling and bar services. The  
24 three festivals were accessed between July and August, each running for between 4 and 7  
25 days. The data set included: the notes based on participant observations of four different  
26 festivals, the interviews with managers of the various organizations involved; archival data,  
27 such as websites content, training material etc.  
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40 Participant observation was the bulk of the data collection. As part of our data  
41 collection strategy, we relied extensively on oral accounts from volunteer participants at the  
42 three focal festivals. Our interviews with them took the form of unstructured, informal - i.e.  
43 ethnographic-interviews (Hayl, 2001; Spradley, 1979). The value of this type of interview is  
44 in the opportunity to elicit participants' views directly, without imposing categorizations  
45 previously developed by the researcher (Hayl, 2001). These informal conversations involved  
46 interactions with large numbers of volunteers – from fellow volunteers working on the  
47 researcher's team to casual meetings with others working at the festivals. As such, they  
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3 ranged from lengthy in depth discussions oriented around a set of topics selected as relevant  
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5 by the researcher, to short interactions about volunteers' personal views of their day-to-day  
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7 activities. Twenty-five volunteers, who worked in various functions in the same teams as the  
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9 researcher, talked at length about the meanings they attributed to the volunteer exchange,  
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11 while hundreds were involved in more casual interactions. This interpretivist study of  
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13 volunteering permitted to fruitfully explore the process of volunteering in its practical  
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15 realization.  
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18 In addition to the fieldwork, we carried out interviews with managers of the various  
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20 organizations involved. Semi-structured interviews with managers covered questions about  
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22 the processes and procedures of managing volunteers. Interviews typically lasted between one  
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24 and two hours and were tape-recorded. This enabled us to grasp the views of different actors  
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26 and also a comparative take between the for-profit and non-for-profit organizations  
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28 "employing" the volunteers.  
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### 34 **5.1. The research setting**

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36 This section provides an overview of the volunteer providers analyzed in this study [1]  
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38 Voluntary work at pop music festivals is at the center of an exchange that involves different  
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40 organizations: those that organize the festivals, and those that organize the recruitment of  
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42 volunteers and their working practices on site. Our analysis of the voluntary exchange as it  
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44 exists in the festival setting shows that the recruitment of volunteers is generally contracted  
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46 out and is strictly regulated by agreements stating what the volunteer providers offer the  
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48 festival organizer in terms of a trained workforce.  
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52 After mapping the organizations involved in the supply of volunteers at pop music  
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54 festivals, we chose four providers according to three features: 1) their formal organizational  
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56 types and characteristics (e.g. for-profit, not for-profit, etc.), 2) the roles for which they recruit  
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3 volunteers (stewards, bartenders, etc.), 3) the returns they receive in exchange for providing  
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5 volunteers (donations, payments). We included one charity, two non-profit organizations and  
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7 one for-profit. To preserve their anonymity, we give these organizations four pseudonyms: 1.  
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9 *Stewarding against Unfairness*; 2. *Bars for Equality*; 3. *Recycling First*; 4. *Baristas*.

#### 14 *Charities and Non-profit organizations*

16 Charities and non-profit organizations play pivotal roles in providing temporary volunteers.  
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18 *Stewarding against Unfairness (SaU)* is one of the UK's most popular charitable recruiters of  
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20 festival stewards. Typically, in exchange for their services over the course of the festival  
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22 (from 3 to 6 days), stewards receive free tickets to festival events, staff camping and hot  
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24 meals. Before the festival starts, they are asked to pay a deposit (which usually corresponds to  
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26 the festival ticket price) which is returned to them once they have fulfilled their work tasks.  
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28 The festival pays the charity for every volunteer it provides at an hourly rate, in return for  
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30 which the volunteers work for 8.25 hour shifts over the course of the festival. As the charity is  
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32 in the business of 'doing good', it reinvests this money in its various global humanitarian  
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34 causes. So making profits by organizing volunteer staff for festivals is a major business for  
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36 the charity.  
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40 *Bars for Equality* and *Recycling First* are the two non-profit organizations analyzed in this  
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42 study. *Recycling First* has a similar scheme for volunteers to *Stewarding against Unfairness*.  
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44 This company provides environmental services to festivals, using volunteers for recycling  
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46 operations, litter-picking or composting. After paying a deposit, volunteers are allowed to  
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48 camp in staff camping areas and work for three six hours shifts.  
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51 *Bars for Equality* has a major role in providing bars at festivals and staff to manage them.  
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53 This non-profit organization cooperates with several campaigning organizations which  
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55 provide the volunteers - those who volunteer for *Bars* must be members of the organizations  
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3 for which they campaign. This is the main reason why these volunteers are not required to pay  
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5 deposits to the festival, since their commitment to work is achieved through the mutual trust  
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7 that bonds the campaign group. Similarly to *SaU*, *Bars* is paid by festivals for every hour that  
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9 volunteers work; usually on six hour shifts. This money is transferred to the campaign  
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11 organization to support its ethical or communitarian projects, and *Bars* also retains the profits  
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13 from selling alcohol at the bars.  
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### 16 17 18 *For-profit Organizations* 19

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21 *Baristas* is the sole for-profit organization included in this analysis. The company manages all  
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23 the phases of bar provision, offering a customized service to festivals. *Baristas* only uses  
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25 voluntary staff for basic bars (rather than branded or cocktail bars). In terms of work  
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27 exchange, *Baristas*' volunteers work eight hour shifts, and in exchange receive free entrance  
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29 to the festival and one meal and one drink per shift: they are also required to pay a deposit  
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31 which is returned when the festival ends.  
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## 36 **5.2. Data analysis**

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38 Data derived through participant observations were collected via the use of a diary, in which  
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40 the researcher recorded manually notes about conversations that she had or listened to each  
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42 day: some were written while she was working with fellow volunteers and others written up  
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44 afterwards from jottings taken at the time.  
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48 Our inductive research started with generating concepts by following the approach delineated  
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50 by Van Maanen (1979) and developed by Gioia et al. (2012). Through an accurate reading  
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52 of our notes, we firstly identified 'first-order concepts', which were capturing "informant's  
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54 conception on what was going on in the setting" (p. 540). In this stage, the data was coded  
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56 without trying to fit them in to any conceptual constructs. We paid particular attention to  
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3 significant aspects of the informant's experiences on the field. From here we then moved to  
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5 develop 'second-order concepts' where we linked initial emerging themes with categories that  
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7 were relevant for our research questions. Codes were collected into clusters and finally into  
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9 overreaching themes.  
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12 Following the approach outlined by Gioia et al. (2012) we distilled the second-order  
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14 themes even further into second-order "aggregate dimensions." At this point, we had laid the  
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16 ground for building up a data structure (fig. 2). Data structure was a central step in the process  
17  
18 of interpretation of the field notes. Particularly, as suggested by Gioia et al. (2012) the graphic  
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20 representation permitted to understand how we progressed from raw data to terms and themes  
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22 in conducting the analyses.  
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29 *Insert Figure 1 about here*  
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35 We did not start with the concept of exchange - rather this was the product of our  
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37 inductive process of data collection, interpretation and concept generation. Data interpretation  
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39 showed that a variety of similar narratives emerged that related to how participants perceived  
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41 the nature of the voluntary exchange in their cases.  
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44 Semi-structured interviews with managers were also analyzed following the same  
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46 inductive approach grounded in the data. Analysis of the interviews complemented our notes:  
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48 particularly those enabled us to understand the values underpinning the volunteers' actions  
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50 from the point of view of the organizations recruiting and managing the work.  
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## 6. Findings

### 6.1 The experience of community and social support: volunteering as socializing

*For me, the most valuable part of all this is that when you work with these people: everyone respects each other because we all work long hours and everyone is responsible and very sensitive to their friends' needs. (Penelope, Bars for Equality volunteer)*

In a classical definition, volunteering is intuitively associated with senses of solidarity and cooperation. Penelope recognizes something special about working as a volunteer, which she explains as being related to a sense of community and friendship with her team members.

While friendship is valued, it is also linked specifically with being in the special festival space and atmosphere that facilitates the creation of social bonds and connections.

*You know, Pen and I enjoy doing things together. When she asked me to come to the festival with her, I was so excited about the idea of enjoying the vibe of the music with her and a group of friends. That's awesome! (Gemma, Bars for Equality volunteer)*

Reflecting on the importance of friendships shows that volunteers' working processes are facilitated when they are infused with a community spirit. For Gemma, participating in a festival means more than being an 'ordinary' volunteer - the festival atmosphere is a catalyst which reinterprets normally uninteresting tasks, whose meanings are increased in value when associated with social attributes.

*They call themselves the XX family. Their interactions year around are amazing. The forum carries on all year. Facebook is there all year. So there is a real sense of*

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3 *community as well. I think that's very important. And it makes them do a better job as*  
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5 *far as I'm concerned because they look after each other and support each other*  
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7 (Anna, Steward against Unfairness Festival Team Manager).  
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11 As this excerpt makes clear, team managers also acknowledge that work on the festival field  
12 is closely associated with a sense of community. Here the manager suggests that the work  
13 processes are embedded with the quality of social relations. This is because - as most studies  
14 have assumed - a key feature of volunteering is the interpersonal relationships that become  
15 visible when volunteers are involved together in different activities.  
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19 Further, volunteers acted in ways that reinforced the sense of belonging during their  
20 work shifts. For example (as the researcher noted in her diary) one of the questions volunteers  
21 asked most often was: *'What time is it, mate?'*: during the long shifts such questions  
22 strengthened the sense of living a shared experience.  
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26 *I can take care of you, no worries ..... you don't have to do much and if I see that*  
27 *you're struggling for something, no hesitation! There is no pressure when ..... we are*  
28 *working all together on the same side of the bar..... we can help each other and take*  
29 *the breaks if we feel too tired (Mike, older volunteer for Bars for Equality)*  
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35 The subjective experience of volunteering shows that meanings associated with social  
36 cooperation permeated volunteers' festival experiences. Bonds of *communitas*, where  
37 individuals feel themselves members of the whole community whilst performing their work,  
38 is another aspect that distinguishes volunteering. People tend to support each other during  
39 their work: even if tasks and activities are quite simple and intuitive, inexperienced volunteers  
40 usually rely on their fellows' help.  
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3 Our analysis suggests that mutual support, sense of trust and good intentions often  
4 emerged as key aspects of volunteering on the festival field. A volunteer explained that he  
5 decided to volunteer to help a good friend who was managing an ethical project.  
6  
7  
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9  
10  
11 *My friend is involved in this charity project where the aim is collecting ring pulls from*  
12 *cans. Each ring pull is worth 5p, and we send them to the Philippines where local*  
13 *women make fancy bags, rings and earrings. The objects are sold and the profit goes*  
14 *to building homes, schools and providing health care (Mark, Recycling First)*  
15  
16  
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18  
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21  
22 Mark supports the community in the Philippines and a social project with the local economy.  
23 Most of the volunteers have a sense that their efforts in support of good causes are useful for  
24 changing the world.  
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## 30 31 32 **6.2 The practice of producing the festival: volunteering as enjoyment**

33  
34 What being at a music festival means to volunteers cannot be separated from the idea that  
35 festivals mobilize a bacchanalian impulse to excess, subverting the ordinary and the festive  
36 connotation conveyed by the notion of *carnival*. The liberating dimension of music festivals is  
37 an aspect that emerges vividly in volunteers' conversations and observations. A volunteer at  
38 *Camp Bestival* explained:  
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46  
47 *I like the idea that here we can actually breathe the same atmosphere of the 60'. You*  
48 *can be yourself here, you can wear a wig, you can be dressed in the weirdest ways and*  
49 *no one judges you (Jack, a volunteer met on the field)*  
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3 Festival is understood by this volunteer as a temporal point in which norms are flouted and  
4  
5 spaces for experimenting with 'weird' ways of being (such as dressing) and acting are licit. In  
6  
7 a sense, temporariness alters the behaviour, perceptions and expectations of volunteers which  
8  
9 experiment a sort of subversion from straight-forward flows of actions.  
10

11  
12 At the same time, the liberating dimension is often attained through the sense of living in a  
13  
14 party atmosphere.  
15

16  
17  
18 *I have been part of Bars for Equality for ages now and they know me. I accept to be a*  
19  
20 *station supervisor since I really like parties and as for my job I don't go much [at*  
21  
22 *parties]. I meet the same old people that I have been known for years and I can have*  
23  
24 *party with them all night long (Station supervisor).*  
25  
26

27  
28  
29 Getting into the festival means to grant a special space in which to enjoy the 'party'. The  
30  
31 experience of festivals as a collective party is symbolically associated with the  
32  
33 'carnavalesque', with its true liberating potential. Such an approach to volunteering seems  
34  
35 associated with the perception that festivals engender collective social euphoria that spreads  
36  
37 via the interaction of participants in an unconventional space.  
38  
39

40  
41 A similar consideration emerged from the following excerpt:  
42  
43

44  
45 *So I took the task to arrange the kitchen and cook for the ones [fellow volunteers] who*  
46  
47 *want to hang around under this tent after their shift. All is subverted here. I can't cook*  
48  
49 *in real life but here I do .Who cares! We just enjoy staying together, chat, smoke and*  
50  
51 *have a drink (Andy, friend of Recycling first owner)*  
52  
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56 The sense of festivity also fuels the feeling of having a special status in the festivals.  
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3 Volunteers see themselves as possessing an “insider role” within the festivals; the pleasure of  
4  
5 hearing and enjoying music runs in parallel with the feeling of being involved in producing  
6  
7 the event:  
8  
9

10  
11 *Oh, I really enjoy to be behind the scenes, being backstage in a sense! Last year I*  
12 *went to Glastonbury with a friend, actually she brought me there and this year I*  
13 *decided to come alone. This is a great way to be behind the scenes!* (Jude, Recycling  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18 First volunteer)  
19

20  
21  
22  
23 Being part of those who make the presentation of music at summer pop-music  
24  
25 festivals possible has all sorts of positive symbolic values for volunteers, as they effectively  
26  
27 enter into social relationships where they are producers of the event (just as the artists  
28  
29 themselves): this distinguishes them from those who simply pay to go to the festival, and are  
30  
31 therefore mere consumers of the event.  
32  
33

34  
35 One of the motives for volunteering is for being part of the ‘crew’. Being a backstage  
36  
37 volunteer means having access the VIP area, and this gives a sense of exclusiveness.  
38  
39 Volunteers value the opportunity to camp in a dedicated spot with free meals and drinks:  
40  
41

42  
43 *It’s like they go on holiday together every year. So they camp with the same people*  
44  
45 *and they might only see them, you know, once a year at festivals. The festival*  
46  
47 *happens, the community builds and then the festival goes again and that’s their one*  
48  
49 *chance in a year to catch up with their festival colleagues’* (Anna, Stewarding  
50  
51  
52 against Unfairness Festival Team Manager)  
53  
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55  
56 The importance of the ‘holiday’ atmosphere on-site gradually came to light during the  
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3 interviews with volunteer providers. While many volunteers saw the ‘producer area’ as a  
4  
5 space for connecting with people with a specific social status (i.e. backstage volunteers), some  
6  
7 providers used the rhetoric of ‘being behind the scenes’ strategically (Woods, 2006) by  
8  
9 creating a dedicated staff camping area for volunteers, providing staff passes for the events  
10  
11 etc. to foster this informal social environment.  
12

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15  
16 *So, we give them the possibility of staying together and gathering around the*  
17  
18 *common arena. I think that when they come to our festivals, they have the feeling*  
19  
20 *that they are sharing an experience* (Emma, Recycling First Manager)  
21  
22

23  
24  
25 The sense of enjoyment is a core aspect for volunteers. While some volunteers  
26  
27 emphasized their altruistic dimension and philanthropic motives, some frankly said that they  
28  
29 were just ‘doing it for fun’  
30  
31

32  
33  
34 *I accepted being a station supervisor since I really like parties and because of my*  
35  
36 *job, I don’t go to many [parties]. It is true that I have back pain after each shift as I*  
37  
38 *have twelve hour shifts during the festival, but I am happy when I meet the same*  
39  
40 *old people that I have been known for years and I can have party with them all*  
41  
42 *night* (Volunteers’ supervisor, Baristas).  
43  
44

### 45 46 47 **6.3 Volunteering experienced as a commercial transaction: volunteering as work**

48  
49 *I didn’t know that you could be hired by the company and be paid. On their website*  
50  
51 *this is not clear or at least it is not clear that you can end up being the worst*  
52  
53 *treated. Also it is unfair that they ask us to stay longer or to clean after bars close.*  
54  
55 *And this is just because they have our deposit!* (Jane, volunteer for Baristas)  
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5 In contrast to the experience of volunteering as a social activity, volunteers sometimes frame  
6  
7 volunteering just as unpaid work and as exploitative. Jane expressed dissatisfaction at not  
8  
9 being treated equally to paid employees when she compared asymmetry in responsibilities  
10  
11 and roles; complaining about the unfair use of the deposit, that it suggested an air of mistrust.  
12  
13 Although the provider may intend the deposit to function as a way of ensuring that volunteers  
14  
15 show up for their shifts, in this case the volunteer complains that they use the deposit  
16  
17 strategically, to make volunteers work longer hours.  
18  
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22  
23 *Things have changed through times.....You see, the problem is that we used to be in a*  
24  
25 *very informal environment, but now they are more alert with what we do when we*  
26  
27 *work, the breaks that we take and all what is around it. We never had cameras in the*  
28  
29 *past, while now you really feel that you're always under check (Jim, volunteer for*  
30  
31 *Bars for Equality).*  
32  
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36 At the same time, issues related to money handling recurred in another conversation.  
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41 *I gave £10 more in change in a rush shift and luckily none of the supervisors*  
42  
43 *noticed. I was under so much pressure from people waiting that I got confused and*  
44  
45 *I didn't take enough care about the money I was handling (Gemma, volunteer for*  
46  
47 *Bars for Equality)*  
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52 In the context of a temporary job like a festival, handling working tasks under pressure is a  
53  
54 critical activity for volunteers. They may resent being overtly controlled by supervisors and  
55  
56 this demotivates them.  
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3 In contrast to the discontent experienced by volunteers about monitoring mechanisms,  
4 the providers emphasized that the volunteers' festival work was imbued with a general sense  
5 of mutual trust.  
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11 *You know this is a position based on trust. My main tasks are to check through the*  
12 *work of volunteers when they serve on-site, by being sure that they do not steal*  
13 *money, that do not give drinks for free and that they pour the right quantity of*  
14 *alcohol in the glasses* (Lisa, Baristas Station Manager)  
15  
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21  
22 Here managerial control seems directed to ensure that volunteers engage in productive labor,  
23 avoiding any opportunistic behaviors, such as stealing or measuring alcohol incorrectly.  
24

25 Organizers were aware that services the volunteers give generate value. An economic  
26 evaluation, partly related to the use of unpaid work, also seems to be suggested here:  
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34 *... It is the quality of the service and that's why they [festivals] come to us. We are*  
35 *renowned in the industry for being very reliable, easy to work with, and we provide*  
36 *a professional service.* (Stewarding Team Manager)  
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43 This reflection emphasizes the commercial nature of this provider, which has an  
44 industry reputation for the quality of its service. Highlighting that the services they provide to  
45 festivals is professional implies that working practices and procedures are efficiently  
46 organized to make work productive.  
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53  
54 *You know, if you buy in us and we work on your festival site, you don't need to be*  
55 *looking after us 24 hours a day; we are a well-managed self-contained*  
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3 *organization that responds well to crises and manages the festival with a light hand*  
4  
5 (Stewarding Team Manager).  
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9  
10 But the volunteers recognized this commercial aspect: for example, one pointed out that all  
11 work was organized productively. In a conversation the researcher had while volunteering for  
12 Baristas, a fellow volunteer remarked: *'this is real work!'*  
13  
14

15  
16 Recognizing the business-like nature of for-profit volunteer providers dispelled the  
17 idea that everyone was motivated by altruistic principles. As one volunteer explained:  
18  
19

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22  
23 *I think it is difficult to find the right cause to support when you volunteer.*  
24  
25 *Especially at festivals, there are plenty of organizations and lots of them invite you*  
26  
27 *to work with them and are doing good. In my case, I wanted to be sure not to waste*  
28  
29 *my time* (Carol, volunteer, Stewarding against Unfairness Training session)  
30  
31

## 32 33 34 **7. Discussion**

35  
36 The emerging literatures on volunteering have suggested that it is a polyvalent concept that  
37 cannot be grasped via one theory alone (Wilson, 2000; Hustinx et al., 2010; Brudney and  
38 Meijjs, 2009). To explore the multi-dimensional quality of volunteering, we have avoided  
39 considering the multiple interpretations of the concept as if they were competing theories, of  
40 which one would prevail. Instead, we have highlighted the complexity of the issue, and  
41 focused on unravelling its situated and socially embedded character, in which economic and  
42 symbolic dimensions appear to co-exist (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011; Murningham et al; 1994)  
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52 In building on the literature that has dealt with volunteering, we have examined how it  
53 has been conceptualized as an exchange, and argued that it can be understood as a complex  
54 and multi-dimensional phenomenon.  
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3 Given the multiple-sided nature of the work experience in this setting, this empirical study has  
4  
5 enabled us to observe that volunteering is characterized by the concurrence of its symbolic  
6  
7 components (i.e. friendships, the sense of community), and those that relate to its productive  
8  
9 dimension (i.e. the organization of work).  
10

11  
12 Scholars have struggled with the question of which motives are the most salient in explaining  
13  
14 what drives volunteers. For instance, while Clohesy (2000) identifies altruism – intended as  
15  
16 concern for others’ well-being – as a distinguished trait of volunteering, Freeman (1997)  
17  
18 frames volunteering as a “productive activity performed without monetary recompense” (p.  
19  
20 141). This tension between the collective experience of togetherness and community building  
21  
22 and the instrumental use of volunteers for economic benefits seems odd occurrence, but it  
23  
24 reveals what La Cour and Højlund (2008) have defined as the paradox of voluntary work, i.e.  
25  
26 describing voluntary engagement as interactionally driven or conditioned by the  
27  
28 organizational system. Our contribution has extended this point, by looking at the micro-  
29  
30 dynamics of volunteers’ experiences and their understandings of the phenomenon.  
31  
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33  
34 In such fine-grained analysis volunteering emerges as having a complex nature which  
35  
36 we conceptualised as having a Janus-face quality being both ‘symbolic’ and ‘economic’ at  
37  
38 once. We distinguish two different aspects of volunteering: where the symbolic face prevails -  
39  
40 for example, when volunteers describe their experience as ‘a collective’ or ‘enjoyable’ - and  
41  
42 where the economic dimension operates, and the volunteer workforce is productively  
43  
44 harnessed by for-profit providers. This Janus characterization illustrates the ambiguity and yet  
45  
46 impossibility to dissolve the paradox of the volunteering concept,  
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49  
50 In our interviews, volunteers very often described the centrality of volunteering as a symbolic  
51  
52 exchange in which they see their labor as a ‘gift’, and understood symbolic values – such as  
53  
54 making new friends, the sense of community, and altruism - as parts of the exchange involved  
55  
56 in the act of volunteering (Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Clohesy, 2000). As our analysis shows, the  
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3 opportunity to live an experience with friends is pivotal for many volunteers: socializing rests  
4  
5 on the assumption that the practice of volunteering is a highly relational activity, in which the  
6  
7 commitment to donate their time and efforts to a charitable cause serves to strengthen social  
8  
9 relations between partners (Eckstein, 2001).  
10

11  
12 At the individual level, volunteers seem to be driven by what is referred to in the  
13  
14 literature as “altruistic individualism” (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). The collaborative  
15  
16 spirit is closely intertwined in the volunteer exchange with more personal motives; the  
17  
18 collectivist dimension is particularly manifested when they engage in non-working activities,  
19  
20 in situations where mutual help is needed. At the same time, volunteers’ commitment to  
21  
22 supporting charities by working at festivals and events is entangled with more self-centered  
23  
24 motives and egoistic considerations (Love et al, 2012; Bachman et al., 2014) for valuing the  
25  
26 experience - enjoying the fun atmosphere of the festival, the vibe of the music as well as skills  
27  
28 development are key returns for volunteers. The temporary setting of festivals, which are  
29  
30 unusual kinds of (work-) places that last for only a few days, has particular consequences for  
31  
32 the symbolic meanings associated with the experience. As our findings show, the creation of  
33  
34 spatial and temporal “events” symbolically differentiated from “the everyday” is used to  
35  
36 create symbolic inversion from daily routines. The fun at festivals is fostered by their  
37  
38 temporary atmosphere, where the ordinariness of everyday life is suspended and forgotten  
39  
40 about: dancing, dressing up in costumes and painting their faces in colors are just some of the  
41  
42 ways that volunteers experience the sense of freedom and reinforce their sense of *communitas*  
43  
44 (Turner, 1969). Yet they also value the opportunity to participate in the event as active agents  
45  
46 – some describe themselves as producers – of the festival. Thus they produce and consume  
47  
48 the festival at the same time - contributing to setting up the space for the festival, and then  
49  
50 enjoying participating in the music and communal experience.  
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56 Our analysis has shown that volunteering is Janus-like, being at once ‘economic’  
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3 and 'symbolic'. The providers we interviewed all acknowledged the economic calculations  
4 inherent in volunteering. From the perspective of volunteer providers and festival organizers,  
5 the symbolic face of this exchange needs to be managed, which they achieve by encouraging  
6 working practices that foster the 'social' element of volunteering. Providers create on-site  
7 conditions to promote an informal social environment, creating a dedicated staff camping area  
8 in a compound zone, allocating friends to the same shifts and giving them staff passes to  
9 make them part of the production side of the event. This is further manifested in mechanisms  
10 to make the work efficient, comprising shifts, uniforms, hierarchy levels, infrastructure and all  
11 the other managerial devices necessary to organize work production, unravelling the  
12 economic face of the volunteer exchange, where the primary logic is organizing volunteering  
13 efficiently.  
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27 Organizations use symbolic components to attract volunteers and use those elements  
28 as instrumental parts of the exchange. As our analysis suggests, one managerial device used to  
29 organize volunteers efficiently is the deposit which they are required to pay to enter the  
30 festival. This is the strongest barrier to entry to festivals, as prices are high (£180-£200).  
31 Although it is refunded at the end of the festival (although not any transaction costs that might  
32 have been involved), the deposit is actually a way of controlling volunteers' on-site behaviors  
33 (respecting shifts, being polite, etc.), and creates a bond with festivals and providers that is  
34 both symbolic and economic. It acts as a guarantee for the volunteering exchange and a  
35 promise from the volunteers' side to perform the work on-site until the very end of the event.  
36  
37 Our interview data shows that volunteers also perceive the economic calculation underpinning  
38 the act of volunteering, which emerges when they express dissatisfaction about the control  
39 exerted by companies over their work processes. They show disappointment about the poor  
40 quality of work management with statements like '*this is a business nowadays*', and are often  
41 more explicit, recognizing differences in treatment between volunteers and paid employees in  
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3 statements like *'it's not clear that you end up being the worst treated'*.  
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5 Our analysis offers a deep understanding of the complexity of volunteering (Hustinx et  
6 al, 2010; Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Hartenian and Lilly, 2009), and so to make a contribution  
7 to the literature on voluntary studies. First, we offer a new perspective that addresses  
8 seemingly incompatible readings of volunteering (as an either/or), recognizing the co-  
9 occurrence of different experiences and perceptions about the nature of this exchange.  
10 Second, we link volunteering and productive work, an interface whose neglect has made it  
11 difficult to appreciate volunteering as an economically productive activity. Finally, extending  
12 this last point, we propose a definition of volunteering as Janus-like, demonstrating that its  
13 economic elements alternate with symbolic practices, each dimension emphasized over the  
14 other at different times. This is a conceptual contribution which highlights the hybrid, multi-  
15 dimensional nature of volunteering.  
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## 32 **8. Conclusions**

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34 This paper offers an analysis of voluntary work within the field of UK pop music festivals,  
35 exploring it from the perspective of the different exchanges involved. Building on the  
36 literature on volunteering, it theorizes an understanding of volunteering as having a Janus  
37 face, aiming to fill a gap in the literature which has previously studied volunteering as one-  
38 dimensional. By studying the context of pop music festivals in the UK, we have argued that  
39 the practice of voluntary work is inherently hybrid, both economic and symbolic: sometimes  
40 one face emerges, sometimes the other. In conclusion, the paper shows the irreducibility of  
41 the voluntary exchange to either of its constituent elements.  
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## 54 **9. Limitations and future avenues for research**

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56 Studying volunteering from the perspective of social actors involves conceptual and practical  
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3 difficulties. First, our choice of focusing on the understanding of meanings volunteers  
4 attribute to the exchange means that their experiences and perceptions are central to informing  
5 our study. Because the phenomenon of festivals volunteering involves a multiplicity of actors,  
6 we believe that representing these different experiences is the best way to deepen our  
7 understanding of volunteering. Yet we are aware that a fully in-depth discussion ought to  
8 include other actors involved in the festival business (e.g., festival organizers, paid staff,  
9 festival-goers), than we are able to provide here. Such an endeavor will require additional  
10 periods of observation and engagement with actors providing a wider range of personal  
11 accounts of the exchange. While developing a more complete theory of volunteering is  
12 beyond the scope of the current paper, it may be possible and we hope it will be addressed in  
13 more depth in future studies.

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Second, the choice of adopting an inductive approach may attract some criticism about the qualitative rigor of this approach and the difficulty of generalizing our results to a larger set of voluntary phenomena. To establish the validity of our research results, we first incorporated our reflexivity into the participants' accounts (e.g. Creswell and Miller, 2000). Further, we tried "to give voice to the informants in the early stages of data gathering and analysis" (Gioia et al., 2012: p. 3). Doubtless, some volunteers had more critical views, whereas others gave more naturalistic descriptions of the action performed. These differences are interesting, and the different motives of further actors (such as festival participants) that contribute to define the notion of volunteering deserve future exploration. We believe that further investigation into the experience of volunteers is important to building theory about volunteering. We have provided an initial attempt to broaden the scope for research into its multi-faceted nature: we hope future studies will play an increasing role in shaping our understanding on the nature of this phenomenon, enabling us to avoid reductionism in its study.

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NOTES

We selected four different volunteers' providers and the presentation of results is based on our experience in volunteering with them. We acknowledge the existence of further organizations involved in this business.

For Peer Review

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**Fig. 1 Data structure**

