

Success Factors for Retaining Volunteers in Cultural non-profit Third Places: A Case Study on Tankstation Cultural Filling Point

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Abstract

Recognizing the positive influence of Cultural Non-profit Third Places in terms of volunteers' and the local community's well-being, it is then important to explore the factors that contribute to the success of retaining volunteering in these places. Tankstation Cultural Filling Point, as a typical example of a cultural non-profit third place, run by volunteers, with unique characteristics, is chosen as a case study. The study applied a qualitative approach, specifically using in-depth interviews, from which the data were analyzed using thematic coding in ATLAS.ti. Factors such as volunteer motivation, satisfaction, retention, commitment, and incentives were explored. Findings indicate that the success in retaining volunteers could be influenced by three main organizational factors: Being able to create a safe and inclusive community, the organizational culture of recognition, and the organization's offer of programs and opportunities for growth.

Keywords: Volunteer satisfaction, volunteer motivation, volunteer retention, non-profit third places, cultural non-profit

Success Factors for Retaining Volunteers in Cultural non-profit Third Places: A Case Study on Tankstation Cultural Filling Point

In the digital world like today, it is important that we build and sustain third places, as they contribute a lot to the culture of a place, a local community, or a city. Third places, defined by Ray Oldenburg, are defined as informal gathering spaces that serve as the anchor of community life, distinct from the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). These spaces, which include cafes, parks, libraries, and community centers, play a vital role in fostering social interaction, cultural exchange, and civic engagement (Oldenburg, 1999). Oldenburg (1999) also emphasized the importance of third places for the local community since they promote sociality, nurture friendships, and create environments for caring and living (Oldenburg, 1999). Third places come in different forms and can be run in different ways. Some might take the form of cafes and bars where products and services are sold, while for others, it works as a public and free meeting place like parks or libraries. Some of the third places were also seen to operate like a non-profit, offering diverse cultural activities and events to connect the communities, which is crucial to developing the culture of the local community where those third places are located.

One of the outstanding examples of these kinds of non-profit third places is Tankstation. Tankstation Cultural Filling Point (hereafter referred to as “Tankstation”) is located in Enschede, the Netherlands. Founded in 2013, it is one of the most popular third places in Enschede. The 10-year-old place, which first started as a vegetarian restaurant, has now been operating as a restaurant, a give & take shop, a workshop space, a stage, an event venue, and a common kitchen. It is run almost entirely by volunteers and with its diverse “functions” has been providing a unique space for people from all walks of life to socialize, connect, and express themselves. As stated on their website, Tankstation's vision is “to foster a community where people can come together, share their stories, and build something collaboratively, a sanctuary where you can express yourself the way you are, a place where you can let your guard down and connect with the like-minded people”. Indeed, Tankstation has been able to attract not only a diverse audience but also a diverse group of volunteers. Offering various unique activities and spaces, this kind of non-profit cultural third places like Tankstation rely heavily on the commitment of volunteers to sustain the community, therefore, it is essential that they have helpful volunteer management strategies.

Research about volunteer-run non-profit organizations (NPOs) also shows that most of the organizations that other researchers have previously studied fall into the sectors of health, welfare, environment, education, parenting, emergency services, or religion (Stirling et al., 2011), while research about third places were conducted on for-profit places like cafes or bars. However, except for a few on museums/galleries, there is little to no research done on the intersection of these two types of organizations, where a third place is also a non-profit, both falling into the cultural sector.

Furthermore, previous research clearly demonstrated the positive effects of volunteering on the well-being of adults, in terms of their physical and mental health (Schwingel et al., 2009, Tang et al., 2010; Cantillon & Baker, 2022), as well as higher life satisfaction and happiness (Schwingel et al., 2009; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

These benefits of volunteering to the community go hand in hand with the positive impacts that third places have on the local community. This is because according to Oldenburg (1997), third places have a crucial role in promoting caring environment where people can find either casual social connections and foster meaningful friendships. These factors of third places create a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis 1986) which promotes the well-being of members of the community. A study by Cantillon and Baker (2018) which explored heritage organizations and its volunteer experience also found that these places foster a sense of belonging among volunteers, benefiting the mental, physical, and social health of both elderly volunteers as well as the younger ones by offering a caring and welcoming space across diverse audiences. Therefore, Tankstation is a unique case that represents the cultural non-profit kind of third places and it is intriguing to explore more about the characteristics, developing, and sustaining of such a place, in other words, how they implement volunteer management strategies. However, despite bringing valuable contributions to the local community, Tankstation, like many other volunteer-run organizations, has concerns surrounding how to recruit, retain, and get volunteers more involved in the organization. In fact, in order to sustain the place's operation, efforts were made by the volunteer coordinators to fill up the volunteering shifts on days Tankstation is open, posters calling for volunteers were also distributed at the place as a method to attract more volunteers, and so on. The Tankstation manager, A. Hodge, also emphasized her intention of "getting volunteers more involved with how Tankstation runs because the space is to be built by the community and for the community". And since volunteers are the backbone of this place, there is always a need for more volunteers and for finding the most feasible and useful ways of managing and retaining volunteers. That being said, the focal point of this research lies in exploring organizational factors instead of individual motives, in order to provide insightful recommendations to similar cultural non-profit third places, helping enhance the general well-being of the local community.

This research seeks to shed light on the factors influencing volunteer satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, explore organizational practices for incentivizing volunteering, and address the difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers at Tankstation. Hence, the central research question is **"What are the organizational success factors that contribute to volunteer retention efforts in cultural non-profit third places?"**. The results of this research could be helpful for cultural third places in developing volunteer management practices, and possibly provide more insights on how to organize such places.

Research questions

Therefore, in order to examine the central topic, the research questions below are explored.

1. What organizational factors influence volunteer satisfaction in cultural non-profit third places?
2. What organizational factors influence volunteer motivation in cultural non-profit third places?
3. What organizational factors influence volunteer engagement in cultural non-profit third places?
4. What organizational factors influence volunteer commitment in cultural non-profit third places?
5. What are the difficulties of retaining volunteers in cultural non-profit third places?
6. What are the volunteer incentives in cultural non-profit third places and how do they influence volunteer retention?

Literature Review

Cultural Non-profit third places

Third places are the informal gathering spaces that serve as the anchor of community life, distinct from the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). These spaces, which include cafes, parks, libraries, and community centers, play a vital role in fostering social interaction, cultural exchange, and civic engagement. However, research by Putnam (2000) questioned the decline of these collective community spaces where people go to, so as to build and maintain social capital. However, Yuen and Johnson (2017) argued that these third places are rather changing instead of vanishing, which means there is the rise of online communities or interactive digital spaces where people can make connections and experience a sense of belonging. Contrary to home and work, the reason third places have a positive impact on the quality of life is that they provide people with a higher sense of unpredictability with no restrictive routines or hierarchy, and often with diverse groups of visitors and activities (Oldenburg, 1999), which results in the creation of people's social worlds, giving them the freedom for casual sociability, and helps them build social capital and feel less isolated or stressed (Fisher et al., 2007). Many examples were mentioned to demonstrate third places such as café, parks, or restaurants, however, it is crucial to note that the central aspect of third places is the sense of community among regular visitors, indicating the inclusiveness factor (Oldenburg, 1999; Purnell, 2015). It is then important to examine the presence of this aspect in the setting of Tankstation. Tankstation is, however, not only a third place, the place defined itself as a

non-profit, cultural, and artistic organization. It's run by volunteers, and like non-profit organizations, operated for the public rather than private benefits, with varying types of objectives such as promoting arts, preserving cultural heritage, community engagement, etc.

The concept of cultural non-profit third places emerges at the intersection of these two ideas. These spaces combine the informal, community-oriented nature of third places with the mission-driven focus of cultural non-profit. In the case of Tankstation, identifying it as a cultural non-profit third place means that while operating as a non-profit organization with cultural objectives, missions, and programs, it also provides an informal and welcoming space for the community to gather, aligning with Oldenburg's characterization of third places. Despite many studies have its focus on volunteer management and retention in non-profit organizations, there are only a few research examining them under the lens of third places theories. Some organizations belonging to the galleries, libraries, or museums are identified as third places, or potential third places have some similar characteristics as they are operated with the help of volunteers (Fisher et al., 2007; Slater & Koo, 2010; Cantillon & Baker, 2018; Foth & Miller, 2013). Nevertheless, little to no research that particularly examined cultural non-profit third places, specifically in terms of volunteer management.

Volunteer management

Research on volunteer management has had its focus on finding the best organizational practices, with a similar approach to human resources management practices, however partially ignored the direct volunteer experience and its importance to successful volunteer retention and recruitment. (Piatak & Carman, 2023). Many studies have explored volunteer satisfaction, motivation, and volunteer retention when it comes to finding more about effective volunteer management. It is demonstrated that many factors that leads to high motivation overlap with each other, a study by Cnaan and Goldberg-Glenn (1991) suggested organizations to create a "rewarding experience" to retain volunteers. Other research also found relationship between volunteer satisfaction and retention and good volunteer management processes and practices (Tang et al., 2010).

Volunteer Motivation

A study by Studer et al. (2013) discussed organizational factors that affect volunteers' motivation, namely practices and instruments of volunteer management, the organizations' attitudes towards volunteers, and the organizations' embedded values. The study also discuss the structural features that limit the action space of volunteers and volunteers coordination.

Other studies have also contributed to an understanding of volunteer motivation. Many sociopsychological studies have investigated why people do volunteering, which delved into the altruistic and egoistic aspects of volunteers' motives (Snyder et al., 2000). Other facets of research

focus on the demographic characteristics of volunteer, exploring their motives and personality traits (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Clary et al. (1998) identified six broad functions that might potentially be served by volunteerism and that can be measured with a Volunteer Functions Inventory: expressing humanitarian values; searching for understanding; obtaining career benefits; gaining protection from feelings of guilt about being more fortunate than others; enhancing feelings of self-esteem or self-worth; and fitting in with important social groups. However, only a handful of studies explored how to align those volunteers motives with organizational incentives and strategies (Puffer & Meindl, 1992). Moreover, a research by Nencini et al. (2016) shows that volunteer motivation is affected by their relationship with other volunteers in the NPOs. This is also supported by a study by Vecina et al. (2012) which demonstrated that long-tenure members tend to have more positive relationships with their fellow volunteers.

Volunteer Satisfaction

Volunteer satisfaction is also an important aspect when it comes to exploring volunteer retention success and effective volunteer management strategies. In a study by Nencini et al. (2016), volunteer satisfaction was examined in non-profit organizations where the results found it to be significantly related to volunteers' autonomous motivation, coming from personal motives like because of passion or hobby. This study also suggested that volunteer satisfaction is dependent on how the volunteers perceive their relationship with their fellow volunteers and their motivation. Moreover, volunteer satisfaction is also demonstrated to have a high correlation with volunteer tenure, meaning that the longer period people spend volunteering, the higher their satisfaction with the organization and their volunteering work will be (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Another organizational factor that positively affects volunteer satisfaction is the leadership style within the organization. Indeed, Dwyer et al. (2013) have found that transformational leaders in non-profits helped foster meaningfulness of the volunteering work, as well as good team dynamics and friendships, which leads to a higher level of volunteer satisfaction. Aligning with these findings, another study by Benevise et al. (2018) also indicated the volunteer satisfaction aspect's importance in enhancing commitment and volunteer retention.

In terms of its relationship to volunteer retention, it is shown that job satisfaction, in general, helped reduce the turnover of remunerated workers (Park & Kim, 2009) and volunteers (Vecina et al., 2012). Specifically, the study by Vecina et al. (2012) also demonstrated the strong correlation between volunteers' intention to stay in the organization and the level of their satisfaction within the volunteering organization. Moreover, this study also emphasized another organizational factor affecting volunteer satisfaction: the culture of recognition within the organization, referring to the organizational practices that help volunteers feel useful and recognize the volunteers' contribution.

Garner and Garner (2011) found a link between individuals' satisfaction with support and intent to remain, which also supports the above findings.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteer engagement is an important factor in the sustainability of an organization and ensures volunteer retention. Previous studies have shown that higher levels of volunteer engagement lead to greater satisfaction with organizational management, where they feel more fulfilled and invested in performing the task, which sustains their intentions to continue volunteering. (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Shantz et al., 2014). Research by Huynh et al. (2012) has explored organizational factors that can be implemented to promote high volunteer engagement.

Organizational supportiveness is one of the most prominent influences on volunteer engagement, in which it was divided into 2 types. Task-oriented support refers to the resources and information given by organizations that allow volunteers to handle the volunteering tasks efficiently, while emotion-oriented support refers to encouragement, recognition, and stress-reducing, as well as the type of support that creates positive feelings (Alfes et al., 2016). It is also found that emotion-oriented organizational support leads to better volunteer retention compared to task-oriented one.

Another study by Smithson (2018) which examined a heritage cultural non-profit organization suggested training and development programs offered by the organization to be beneficial to enhance volunteer engagement. Specifically, volunteers started to value opportunities for development after some incentivized workshops and programs. This suggests that learning and growth opportunities are one of the influences on volunteer engagement in cultural non-profit organizations.

Volunteer Commitment

Volunteer commitment was defined by Mowday et al. (1982, p. 226) to be "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization". This means the volunteers believe in the organization's mission and values and want to contribute to the organization, both now and in the long term. Organizational factors are found to influence volunteer commitment. A study by Knoke (1981) demonstrated a significant relationship between volunteer commitment and having the opportunity to be active in an organization's decision-making and communication process. Sociability aspect and leisure benefits are also indicated to be remarkably related to volunteers' intention to commit (Cuskelly, 1995). Specifically, being given a space to find social connections and make friends when volunteering at an organization, or having the opportunities to learn, play, and relax could be predictors of volunteer commitment in non-profit organizations.

Volunteer retention

Volunteer retention is important when it comes to successfully operating a non-profit organization, as keeping volunteers can save be financially beneficial as well as maintain the stability of the organization (Garner & Garner, 2011). There are many factors that influence the volunteer's decision to stay in the organization, including volunteer satisfaction and volunteer initial motivation (Bidee et al., 2017; Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2012; Lowenberg-DeBoer & Akdere, 2018). A study by Merrieas et al. (2020) showed that volunteer retention has a positive relationship with volunteer satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, the study also examined the motives that organizations should consider when trying to retain volunteers, which include organizational mission and values, being of help to the community and people, organizational reputation, satisfactory working space, opportunities to make social connections, being able to utilize their skills, and attractive incentives (free food, drinks, etc.).

Additionally, even though a volunteer's decision to leave comes mostly from personal reasons and circumstances (Locke et al., 2003; Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2012; Tang et al., 2010), the study by Alexander (2003) also examined several organizational factors and contextual influences for volunteer retention. Particularly, it found that organizations' faults in volunteer management and processes are one of the main reasons why organizations cannot succeed in retaining volunteers. These faults could be manifested as not giving volunteers enough recognition, support, and training, or having disconnection of communication between volunteers and management, which makes volunteers feel undervalued within the organization, leading to their decision to leave.

The influencing factors toward volunteer retention are interconnected with other factors in volunteer management such as volunteer satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and commitment. This is because the factors that result in improvements in all these aspects share similarities. Many studies have also shown, for example, the impact of volunteer motivation on volunteer retention (Bidee et al., 2017; Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2012), or the positive influence of organizational support and recognition on both volunteer engagement and volunteer satisfaction (Alfes et al., 2016; Vecina et al., 2012), and volunteer satisfaction being strongly correlated to volunteer motivation (Nencini et al., 2016). Overall, the opportunities to make social connections, the organizational supportiveness, the learning opportunities, and the impact they can make are some outstanding influences on volunteers' desire to stay at an organization. That being said, in the context of third places, where it is not only volunteer tasks but also a social place that facilitates casual and informal interactions (Oldenburg, 1999), the experience of volunteering could have differences. Volunteers in some cultural organizations often engage in volunteering work as "serious leisure", the term coined by Stebbins, (1996) as "the acquisition and expression of a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience" (p. 211). And as these volunteers are not only motivated by the care for a good cause but also the opportunities to find social connections, try new experiences, and have fun, (Stamer et al., 2008; Cantillon & Baker, 2018), the volunteering experiences could be examined in more nuances.

Therefore, researching Tankstation, as a cultural non-profit third place with its unique characteristics, offers an opportunity to explore more about how organizational practices work in different dynamics.

Method

Research design

This research applies the qualitative case study to explore the success factors in cultural non-profit third places, taking Tankstation as the setting. First of all, a case study is defined by Yin (2009) as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context. Creswell's (2014) definition of a case study involves the researcher exploring in depth a program, event, activity, or process, of one or more individuals. These definitions signify the rigorous characteristic of a case study. Additionally, the case study method is feasible specifically for Tankstation since little research was conducted about cultural non-profit third places under the lens of third places theories. As Tankstation is a standard example of what is called a cultural non-profit third place, using a case study will allow the researcher to explore in-depth the intricacies and nuances of volunteers' experience in a unique organization.

Therefore, following the case study approach, the qualitative method is chosen for the study. Specifically, an in-depth interview method is chosen. Using interviews as a qualitative research method means researchers are allowed to investigate and get insights about their topic from different perspectives, experiences, and the languages of participants (Boeje, 2010). The nature of the in-depth interview aligns with the case study method and helps gather as much information about the place and its volunteers as possible, especially in a short period of time with a small sample size. The purpose of these interviews was to develop an understanding of volunteer satisfaction, commitment, and motivation, how these factors influence volunteer retention and other difficulties of retaining volunteers at Tankstation. A topic list and a semi-structured interview will be developed, allowing participants to answer open questions in their own words.

Sampling and Participants

For the participants selection process, the snowball sampling method is employed. The personal social networks of the researcher will be utilized to recruit participants, and participants are free to refer other volunteers to take part in the study. Participants will be contacted either face-to-face

or online and be informed about the project setting, general information about the research, and the researcher involved.

In order to get diverse insights about Tankstation and volunteers' experience, the sampling approach will be reaching out to people who volunteered at least twice in the last 6 months, have varied volunteering tenure, have different levels of involvement, and have diverse roles within the organization. As it is located in the Netherlands, out of 11 participants, 2 volunteers are from the Netherlands. The interviews will be conducted with eleven participants, out of which 9 are volunteers, and 2 are former and current coordinators. According to the information acquired from participants, volunteering time ranged from 3 months to almost 2 years, with average volunteering tenure of 10,7 months.

Procedure and Instrument

All interviews are conducted between May and June 2024, out of which out of which 3 were online and 9 were in person, adapting to volunteers' logistic circumstances. Interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed after obtaining verbal consent from the interviewees.

The interview length ranges from 30 to 50 minutes, where questions are open-ended, with some optional questions and prompt for follow-ups, which are listed below in the Appendix A. The topic list for the interview were created based on the research sub-questions, deriving from the literature research, with an aim to answer the main question "What are the success factors for retaining volunteers at cultural non-profit third places?". Therefore, the topic list includes topics as follows: general information, volunteer satisfaction, volunteer motivation, volunteer engagement, volunteer commitment, volunteer incentives, and volunteer retention.

Example questions for each topic include:

- General information: How long have you been volunteering at Tankstation?
- Volunteer satisfaction: Would you describe your experience at Tankstation as satisfying? If so, why? And could you recall a specific moment/situation where you had that feeling? Could you reflect on what made it satisfying/pleasant?
- Volunteer motivation: What motivated you initially to become involved as a volunteer at Tankstation?
- Volunteer engagement: Did Tankstation take the initiative to make volunteers a part of its decision-making/planning process? How effective do you think these initiatives are? Could there be any improvements?

- Volunteer commitment: What factors contribute to your ongoing commitment to volunteering at Tankstation?
- Volunteer incentives: Do you think the incentives affect your motivation and commitment to volunteering at Tankstation? Why/why not?
- Volunteer retention: Do you think Tankstation has difficulties in retaining volunteers? Why/why not?

The full list of interview questions will be available in the Appendix A.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews are transcribed and imported into ATLAS.ti for a thematic coding process. The data collected is systematically analyzed using open coding and axial coding methods. Some of the codes are generated before conducting the interview based on literature and some emerge from the patterns of the interview data. Some samples of pre-generated code groups include “volunteer satisfaction”, “volunteer motivation”, “volunteer engagement”, “volunteer commitment”, and “volunteer incentives”.

During the coding process, multiple codes are added, for example, “community”, “supportiveness”, “sense of belonging”, “incentives: satisfied and not a big factor”, etc. After the first round of open coding for the entire transcript, codes arising from the next transcripts will also be added to the main code groups. For example, the code “supportiveness” that belongs in the “Satisfaction” group is a result of merging two codes “manager checking up on volunteers” and “being welcomed the first time volunteering”. Other code groups emerge from the coding process include “Improvement needed” and “uncertainty due to changes”. During the process, multiple codes are regrouped, changed, and added to the list of codes, under different groups, which could be viewed in the Appendix B. Finally, ATLAS.ti will also be utilized to generate diagrams or figures that might be valuable in analysis process.

Results

The data collected from the interview was coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti, where the focal point lies on finding out the organizational factors for successful retaining volunteers in the cultural non-profit third places, with Tankstation as typical environment for research. In order to explore the central topic, it is crucial to examine the organizational factors that influence volunteer satisfaction, motivation, engagement, commitment, incentives, and volunteers’ perspectives on whether Tankstation’s retention matters.

Volunteer satisfaction

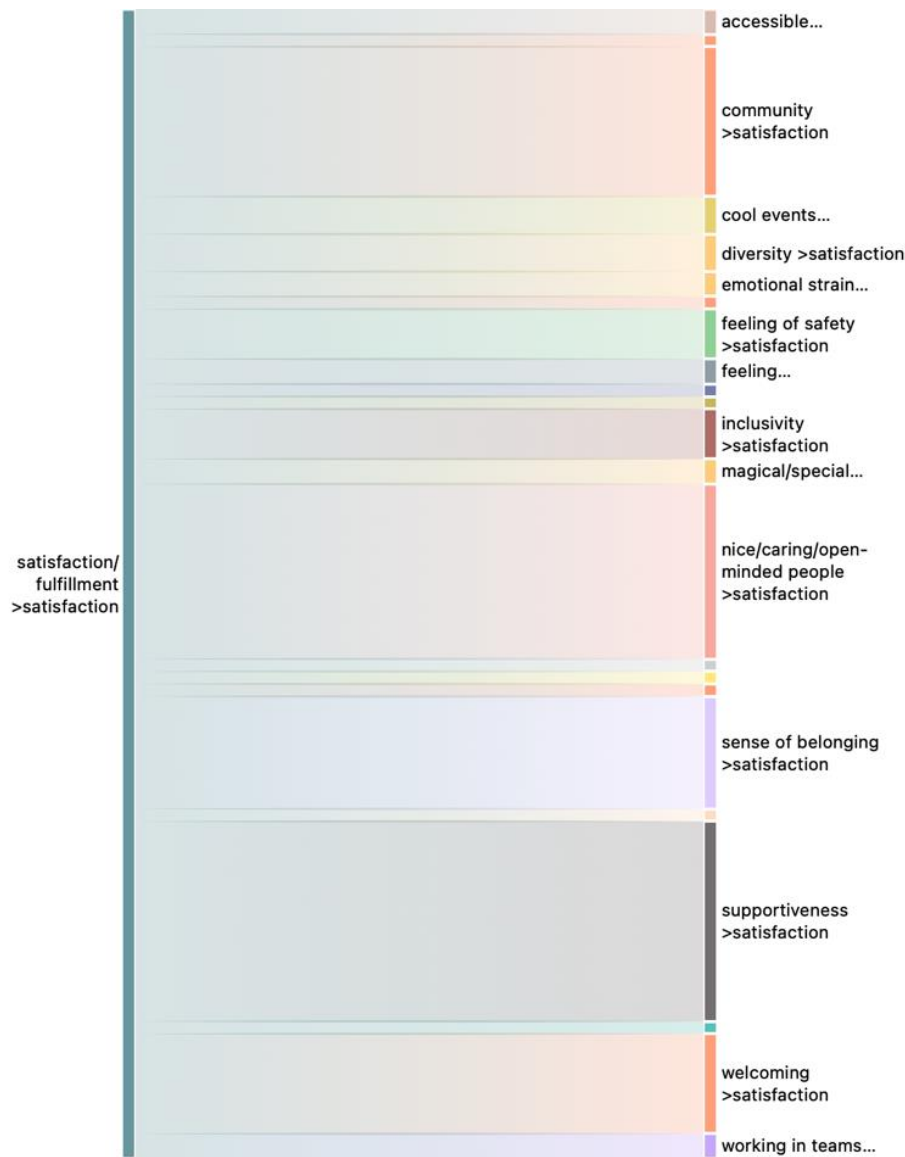
Volunteer satisfaction is remarkably influential in how a volunteer-run organization retains its volunteers. According to Al-Mutawa (2015), volunteers' intention to continue their work at organizations correlated to how satisfied they are with the organization, the volunteering work, and the environment. A study by Nencini et al. (2016) also shows that volunteer satisfaction is significantly maintained by volunteers' relationships with their colleagues/friends within the NPOs. This is indeed reflected in a Sankey diagram where volunteer satisfaction codes were examined in co-occurrence with other positive experiences, making it evident that the volunteers' connection with people at the organization significantly influences their feeling satisfied.

In terms of Satisfaction, codes that emerged from the interviews with Tankstation's volunteers include: accessible, affordable, community, cool events, diverse audience, diversity, feeling helpful/ like making a change, feeling of safety, feeling of recognition, flexibility, good communication, good structure/system, inclusivity, learn new skills, magical/special place, management culture of recognition, nice/caring/open-minded people, open for opinions/feedbacks, organizational improvement, people advocate for changes (in society), satisfaction/fulfillment, sense of belonging, shared liking for Tankstation, supportiveness, talented people, volunteers are responsible, volunteers work well under pressure, welcoming, working in teams.

In a Sankey diagram, the code "satisfaction/fulfillment" was examined by its co-occurrence with other positive factors. The diagram depicted the most mentioned factors including the sense of community, nice people, the feeling of safety, a sense of belonging, supportiveness, and a welcoming environment as the major indicators of volunteers' satisfaction and positive experience at Tankstation. Based on the line connected to different factors, "community" and "nice/caring/open-minded people" are the two most significant influences on volunteers' satisfaction, which signifies that volunteers value social aspects and interpersonal relationships when assessing if they are satisfied with their experience at Tankstation. Moreover, "supportiveness, welcoming, and sense of belonging" being the significant contributors shows that an inclusive environment with enough support and care, is highly valued. During the coding process, the code "supportiveness" was used when volunteers mentioned positive and fulfilling experiences related to, for example, being taken seriously when an unwanted situation happens, being cared for by volunteers, coordinators, or managers, when efforts are recognized by management, the processes/systems that are accommodating to disabilities or illness, and so on. This indicated that being offered a space to get connected to and accepted within the community and the culture of support (coming from other volunteers and management) are the most significant organizational components in volunteer satisfaction.

Figure 1

Co-occurrence of positive volunteer experience and the central code “Satisfaction/Fulfillment”



Note. The figure shows the Co-occurrence of positive volunteer experience and the central code “Satisfaction/Fulfillment”. The length of each line refers to the density of time these codes are assigned together. The thickest line being “nice/caring/open-minded people”, “supportiveness”, and “community”, implying these factors to be the most influential to volunteer satisfaction.

Indeed, many of the participants highlighted the sense of community and nice people at Tankstation as a factor for their satisfaction.

“I founded this place accidentally. But then when I started volunteering, I started making connections and meeting every week. It was especially enjoyable because I knew, like, all the people I know. And I want to see they will be there.” – Int 2

The fragment above shows that the connections and friends that volunteers made after they started volunteering was described as enjoyable and acts as a motivator for them to keep going to Tankstation, in the presence of positive connections with their colleagues. Indeed, the biggest factor for a satisfied experience, mentioned by the participants was **nice, caring, and open-minded people**. *“People are mostly very open and caring, they will ask you if you want drinks and are very willing to just give you a coin so you get a drink... when you are tired you will be checked up on, after your working shift you will eat together, and just being in a space together, saying thanking, enjoying a meal together also is a form of care for me I think.” – Int 11*

Furthermore, other aspects mentioned by volunteers indicating satisfaction include the sense of community, the diversity in activities and people, cool events, the feeling of safety, the sense of belonging, the shared liking for the place, and the culture of recognition. These positive aspects and experiences shared by the volunteers are demonstrative of Tankstation’s **Organizational Culture and Support**, aligning with the first theme that emerged from the analysis. Specifically, Tankstation offers their volunteers and visitors various activities including monthly exhibitions, jam sessions, open mics, and many different workshops. On top of that, participants also mentioned seeing a wide varieties of age groups. It is clear that wide range of activities offered a space for different audiences to find a space for themselves.

“And when I saw at the Tankfest how many people came to like, to teach how to make breads or like to teach how to make jewelry or different ones, like, also there were more children that were selling their own products... And close to the entrance, I saw, like the really, wide age groups, like it was not only like children or like young people, it was also older people. And I think, oh my gosh, this is really a place that could reach out different generations and like, together, like them together. Yeah. This is so yeah, I think this is the best experience.” – Int 6

Indeed, a big community with nice volunteers, and diverse audience created an accommodating, accessible, and welcoming environment at Tankstation. Opening its space for all visitors, **the safety feeling** that volunteers indicated could not be achieved without supportiveness from the management team, including volunteer coordinators and managers.

“Because the place is welcoming to everyone, sometimes there could also be conflicts, or acts of sexism, or racism, which is out of Tankstation’s control, but these incidents are always taken seriously by the coordinators and board and managers I think. I mean at least in my case, I didn’t see the people coming, or behaving in the same way again. And that was very nice, I think it made me feel safer”. – Int 11

Furthermore, a culture of **recognition** is also mentioned by volunteers as an organizational factor related to their satisfaction. This is accomplished by building a culture of noticing and explicitly showing gratitude towards volunteers, from the top down, from management to coordinators, and other volunteers.

“...Alex (the manager) always noticing all the work and saying, thank you. And people would just follow her lead in this way. So I felt appreciated and I felt seen. I know that there were people who didn't feel this way, especially before I became a coordinator. That was part of my job there, to be with people, to hear what they have to say... It's like a part of my coordinating job to listen to people or to like, give a hand if I can, just being open for that. And that was, the part of making the place nice for people”. – Int 8

Organizational operations and communication is another theme emerging from the satisfying experience of volunteers. This is demonstrated through the good system set up by the organization, where the highlighted organizational aspects are flexibility (volunteers being able to decide their own pace and frequency) *“It's not like a fixed schedule you always have to commit to, so it's easier to come and leave and come back when you have time.”*, organizational improvements as a result of being open to opinions and feedbacks, and communications being effective. Volunteers stated *“Seeing Tankstation's good system where we know what to do and whom to ask for information”, “before it was more chaotic and less structured, now it is more optimized and there is more information”, “I think for me, everything is very clear, it's communicated, If you want to have feedback that's also very welcome, so far it's very nice”*. It is evident that the system in place at Tankstation has been receiving feedback and improving over time, providing volunteers with role clarity and the support they need to perform the task.

Aside from organizational culture and support system, participants also indicated their positive experience in terms of **Opportunities for growth and impact**. This means they expressed their appreciation for the place being “accessible and affordable”, for different cultures, genders, backgrounds, and disabilities. Moreover, it is also emphasized that participants feel like they are learning new skills, being helpful and making a change while volunteering at Tankstation.

“What makes it satisfying is you can help building a community and, making sure the community stays alive. And it feels good. Like we make a place altogether where people can feel at home. And this also the feeling I got when I came to Tankstation, really inviting people and a lot of volunteers who, like, help you around, have nice conversations, have dinner. ... I think that's the most exciting part, because you are part of a community and your help is staying alive”. – Int 3

It is evident that volunteers feel empowered to collaborate with each other to contribute to a place that they have the shared liking. This theme also reflects volunteers' appreciation for the engaging opportunities offered by Tankstation do take part in initiatives that allow them to grow personally, develop their skills, and help make an impact in a supportive environment.

Volunteer motivation

Volunteer motivation is another aspect that was explored during the interviews, where participants were asked about the motivation for starting volunteering at Tankstation, and the reasons that motivation have either changed or been sustained. Arising from the data analysis process, the codes related to volunteer motivation include: **being asked to help**, nice people, people in their social circle are there, a place for neurodivergent, be part of something, community feeling, feel more responsibility, feeling lonely/depressed, find new connections, **good food**, have a function, liking of the place, meet made friends, **past time/a place out of home**, **social media post calling for help**, support from management. Unsurprisingly, the themes emerging from the coding overlap with volunteer satisfaction. The prominent theme was because Tankstation offers a sense of community and belonging. This is demonstrated by the community feeling people experience, finding a place for neurodivergent people, the desire to find new connections as a result of being lonely/depressed, and the enjoyable experience of meeting nice people when they visit Tankstation.

“I think I have a really good, feeling about volunteering here. Cause I feel that, Tankstation is not about even about events or something like this. This is about community. And all people there, they gather together to talk, to have activities, events, or eat together. But overall it’s about the connections between people, something you can only feel. So I have a feeling that I’m doing something important.” – Int 5

More than mere affordability of the place, or people being nice and helpful, or the cool activities happening, volunteers who feel motivated to start working at Tankstation seem to find a place where they belong, perhaps outside society “norms”. The welcoming and accepting environment of Tankstation have significantly influence all kinds of visitors to go to the place.

“...My friend used to volunteer at Tankstation earlier. And she also told me a lot about Tank, and it's really a good place. And like, the final point, in my decision, it was when she made a joke that this is, place for neurodivergent. And I was like, oh, maybe I should go there. ...and when I'm at Tankstation I'm like, oh, I feel like in my own place.” – Int 6

“I think, it's one of the most neurodivergent spaces. And I just it does make me feel more at home because I'm less weird there than I would otherwise be.” – int 7

Furthermore, besides from feeling a sense of belonging and community, new volunteers and volunteers who managed to sustain their motivation expressed their wish for **growth opportunities and other personal fulfillment**. Volunteers seem to share their liking of the place, and want to have a function and be a part of something.

“I think I also was very terrified of new places, and new people, but Tankstation has nice events, and going alone sometimes is scary, and if I am a volunteer, then I have a function there, you know what I mean, like I’m useful there and I do my work and I have other volunteers to be around, so I’m less scared. Then in my head it makes more sense to stay and joined the event after my shift” – Int 11

Some also stated feeling more responsibility after working at Tankstation, which motivated them to keep volunteering.

“I guess it did, in a sense, because now when I go to Tankstation I’m not in the same state anymore, before it was because I wanted to make friends and maybe feel useful after a period of depression, but after a while, you felt a bit more responsibility and you know how the place is so dependent on volunteers, and you know, sometimes when it’s harder to find people for a certain shift, you will want to help out and take on that shift, so the place could run nicely, it’s the liking for the place, more than the desire to make connections” – Int 2

Lastly, the reason for motivated volunteers were also shown to be from external trigger, which is **organization communication**. Volunteers mentioned seeing social media post calling for help from Tankstation before deciding to volunteer.

“I’ve been to Tankstation a few times, and then I saw an Instagram message like, hey, come volunteer with us. And that’s I was like, yeah, come and try it out.”

Besides online outreach, participants shared their being motivated to volunteer came from being directly asked whether they want to help out by another Tankstation’s volunteer.

“...I was just there as a visitor. And apparently nobody was doing dishes and A asked me if I want to help. And I ended up not doing the dishes that night, but I finally downloaded a telegram. I hate downloading apps that I didn’t already have, and I’d like to volunteer, but I’m not downloading another app for this. And yeah, but then I did and it turned out to be fun” – Int 7

This demonstrated an informal process of recruiting volunteers from the organization. According to Oldenburg (1999), Tankstation is existing as a “leveler” since it is functioning without formal restriction for participation in terms of age, occupation, gender, class, nationality, or skills.

Volunteer engagement

Volunteer engagement is another aspect that was explored in order to find out the organizational factors that promote volunteer retention. During the interviews, participants were asked to give opinions about whether they are involved in Tankstation’s planning/decision-making process, and whether they feel included and engaged with the Tankstation community and management. Arising from the data analysis process, the codes related to volunteer engagement include:

engagement reason: being asked for opinions, engagement reason: personal communication, engagement reason: going to volunteer meeting, engagement reason: being asked to help, engagement: organization being open for opinion, engagement reason: big events, engagement reason: change in management (motivate volunteer to step up and take charge), engagement reason: high frequency.

The most prominent theme arising from volunteer engagement is **organizational communication and culture**. This is because volunteers significantly reported feeling more engaged because Tankstation is open to opinions, and actively asks volunteers for ideas and feedback, which makes it easier for volunteer to step up and execute their own ideas.

“And I know that, you know, meetings are happening. People are asked for their opinion, and that they take account of the volunteers opinion.” – Int 1

As mentioned above, since Tankstation is operated in an informal way, informal communication is often used by volunteers, coordinators, and management to initiate more involvement. This ranged from posting a call for help, and organizing monthly volunteer meetings, to approaching individuals personally to ask them for opinions and feedback. This gave volunteers more direction and information on what area they could offer their help with. While engaging in behind-the-scenes work, participants also expressed feeling more motivated to volunteer, knowing the importance of what Tankstation is doing.

“I was asked by G. to help with writing the subsidy document and being involved in the translation process.... I could read a lot about the backstage, the background of Tankstation and, their plans for the future. That was really interesting... And if you read through that, you're like this place doing something really important and motivated me more. In fact.”

Apart from a supportive culture and direct communication that make volunteers more engaged, **other organization circumstances** offer people with opportunities to get involved. Specifically, participants reported feeling more engaged during big events, where volunteers have the chance to host their own workshops or being specifically asked for help with organizing. Since it is out-of-the-ordinary activity, big events can act as a “push” to incentivize participants to think about how they want to be involved.

“I think whenever there are big events, like spring festivals, or Tankfest this season, there were posts about coming up with events, or hosting your own workshop as volunteers, or thinking of what to do for the festival in general. It really incentivize me to think about oh what should be done for this event.” – Int 11

It is also demonstrated that high frequency of volunteering leads to more engagement behind the scene. Specifically, participants mentioned *“I was already volunteering pretty much twice a week (everyday Tankstation is open), which was not the plan. So then I felt that moving the responsibilities from just always being there to kind of behind the scenes might be nice. And Z. said she could use the help, so I agree.”*. This shows that combined with direct and personal communication, the high frequency of a volunteer is also a reason that gets volunteers more engaged. This result goes hand in hand with the fact that participants who are not frequently at Tankstation do not seem to notice the initiative or communication from Tankstation about getting more involved.

Another note-worthy result arising from the analysis is that due to the changes happening at Tankstation in terms of finance, planning, and management, which came as a big news for the community, people feel more of the need to step up and take charge to keep the place running. *“Yes, it was previous week. We have volunteers meetings for people who want to get involved and save Tankstation. So it’s not only current volunteers but also people who used to 2 years ago, who also joined because they want to help...”* - Int 6

Volunteer Commitment

Reasons for volunteers’ long-term commitment and their intention to commit to working at Tankstation for a longer time are examined in regard to a better understanding of volunteer commitment. The codes arising from the analysis include: commitment depending on certainty, commitment reason: community, commitment reason: diversity in events, commitment reason: feeling helpful, commitment reason: flexibility, commitment reason: food, commitment reason: interest in arts, commitment reason: liking of Tankstation, commitment reason: nice events, commitment reason: not feel pressured, commitment reason: opportunities, commitment challenge: overwhelmed from responsibilities, commitment reason: own wellbeing, commitment reason: social connections, commitment: accessible to different cultures and disabilities, commitment: identification: not profit-focused, no long-term commitment.

Seven out of eleven participants indicated the sense of community and the overall welcoming culture of Tankstation as a reason for their commitment. This includes the fact that the organization is accessible to different cultures and disabilities, as well as the social connections they can make, the flexibility when it comes to volunteering, and the sense of community they feel while volunteering at Tankstation.

Accessibility is one of the most mentioned organizational factors that influence the ongoing commitment of volunteers, where the longer one works at Tankstation, the more they notice and appreciate the diversity and how accommodating the place is to different marginalized communities.

“... This place is all about, well, promoting equality, giving everybody opportunities and helping people who don't have much ... It's a safe space for, several marginalized communities. And like the subsidy application was also talking about how everything is deliberately in English. Because one of the few places that has a lot of, international students, expats, and is welcoming to a lot of them” 8:18 ¶ 61 in Int_7.docx

Participants also mentioned their own well-being as one of the reason for the ongoing commitment at Tankstation, similar to one of the reason for motivation to start volunteering, participants noticed improvements in terms of health while engaging with a community at Tankstation.

“I don't know. I hope that (I can commit) for quite a long time if I have enough strength. Because maybe if I have another period of depression, I change my mind, but I also think it could be helpful to go here if I have depression, it makes it easier, because you are not closed in and you are in connection with other people.” 2:14 ¶ 44 in Int_4.docx

”I keep coming here because It's for my own wellbeing, like when I come there, I feel better. And it's also the friends that I made, and the events, also the food.” - Int 2

The sustaining of volunteer motivation that leads to a longer-term commitment was also related to the offerings of diverse cultural activities. Volunteers showed interest in the diverse program offered at Tankstation, with a high affinity for arts.

“I would say it's events that added a fuel to this flame. So initially I would go there just to see people. And then at some point I would go there to see a concert for the people or to participate in the market and like try on different types of jobs there.. So that was I guess, the most interesting thing is also that you can try this or that. It's If it would be just a cafe where you can come and, like, stay behind the bar and have a food for that and just talk to people. It would still be nice, but it's so much better the way it is right now that you can do art, the cooking, the cleaning, the serving reception or special events. That also requires a lot. So the, variety of things that you can do there. I think it really brings. Like. The interest every time, back and back my mind.” 3:12 ¶ 34 in Int_6.docx

In the above fragments, aside from arts, the volunteers also mentioned being able to try different things including volunteering positions, skills, and workshops. This shows their appreciation for opportunities to personally learn and grow, highlighting the difference between a regular third place where the chance for growth is not very present. As the participant mentioned, it kept their motivation to keep coming back.

When being asked about their intention to stay for a longer period, volunteers also expressed challenges related to commitment. One of the biggest challenges, especially for people who are significantly active or highly engaged, like coordinators, is the overwhelming of tasks being the only

one who manages the volunteer schedule. This however has been recognized and changed as Tankstation has since been operated with two coordinators, making the work more streamline and less overwhelming. This reflects the culture of being open to feedback that was mentioned above.

“I guess. I was tired from the responsibility in TankStation” 3:25 ¶ 59 in Int_6.docx

”It was quite a lot of work. And coordinating wasn't structured at all when I came because it was different platforms. No single place where people can apply for, like volunteering shifts. So it was a lot to take on. But also since it's volunteering, the specific of this is that I can never count on people coming. Yeah. So it's always, part of the of me was worrying over will it be enough people? Will it be enough volunteers to fill all the shifts? Yeah. And it always, often meant that. Oh, maybe I will have to do something. Apart from organizing it, I will have to be there.” Int_6.docx

Volunteers incentives

Participants were asked inquired about what the incentives are for their volunteering at Tankstation, and whether they think it is sufficient and satisfactory. During data analysis process, emerging codes include: *a place to try things >incentives, cool workshops/events >incentives, social connections >incentives, incentive: satisfied and important, incentive: satisfied and not a big factors, incentive should not be money because it becomes a first place instead of third place.*

Six out of eleven participants perceived the incentives they received to be satisfactory yet important to start volunteering work at Tankstation. This means some volunteers think it is nice and beneficial to have these incentives, yet find that it is not of utmost importance for their continued involvement.

“Yeah. If I would be completely honest. I'm not sure if I would be still coming and putting so much time and effort in this, kind of job. Even though maybe it's little, but Free drinks are nice, not too much but it's nice for socializing”. 7:14 ¶ 43 in Int_3.docx

The other five participants think they are satisfied, but do not mind paying partly or not having free meals from Tankstation. Volunteers perceive the incentives to be “very generous”, on top of the social connections or opportunities they received while working at Tankstation. In one instance, participant stated that

“This is a social platform where you can make a lot of, Social connections and gives you a lot of opportunities. Cause, for example, when I was struggling and searching for the job, almost all the volunteers that I work here say “you can come and work with us”. And there was like, oh, thank you. This is someone that's like, you know, this benefit. As of the food, I'm not really there for the food, it's good, of courses, I also appreciate that they give us coins for the drinks. I don't drink alcohol and

almost all my coins, either collecting or give it to someone. It's not about food and drink at all for me....” 2:9 ¶ 30 in Int_4.docx

Additionally, participants addressed more organizational factors that act as an incentive for their volunteering. This includes the offer of opportunities to make connections and try new things, like organizing a workshop or joining one.

“...It was always enough... the thing you're gonna get is the socializing and making new friends and helping the place. And not about if you get, like money or whatever. That's the whole point of volunteering. 10:14 ¶ 53 in Int_9.docx

“And that was one of the reasons why I after that workshop that I joined briefly, I joined for the entire, workshop. And I decided to join Tankstation.” 7:13 ¶ 37 in Int_3.docx

Since Tankstation is a volunteer-run cultural third place, one participant addressed their consideration of not letting monetary value be the most important incentive for volunteers, since “it then becomes a first place instead of a third place” which made it demotivating to continue regular volunteering.

”But not paying at all also seems kind of unfair. So it should either be something apart from money value, I don't know, connections or something. Or like a little amount. So I don't really see as a good change to have a big salary there.” Int.6

As participants share their positive aspects of Tankstation as a place, it is evident that the incentives given by Tankstation act as a supplementary instead of a complementary factor. Besides, volunteers mentioned the nature of volunteering since “normally when you volunteer you don't expect things in return”. None of the participants perceive the given incentives to be insufficient for them to start or sustain the motivation to volunteer.

Volunteers retention

Volunteer retention is another aspect that was explored in order to find out insights about Tankstation's retention strategies and whether volunteers think Tankstation is struggling with retaining volunteers. Arising from the data analysis process, the codes related to volunteer retention include: *no difficulties retaining >retaining volunteers, retention not reliant on Tankstation >retaining volunteers, retention problems due to students schedule >retaining volunteers, search for new people instead of retaining >retaining volunteers, tiring late shifts >retaining volunteers, unstable due to summer/weather >retaining volunteers, unstable frequency >retaining volunteers*

The most prominent theme emerging from the data was that Retention of volunteers is not reliant on Tankstation. This is because ten out of eleven participants stated that the reason for volunteers turnaround is out of Tankstation's control, or that there are many other factors that affect whether volunteers decide to stay involved or not. These factors include: personal health problems, the summer period, the students' schedule, the nature of university students after graduation, etc.

"...I know some of them having burnout, but it's not about burning out from volunteering at Tank but life it happens. There is one guy who lives somewhere in Germany, it's on the other part of Germany so not very close by, but he came because he really likes Tank. Yeah. So I think that volunteers change not because of Tankstation, but I think something changed in their life and it's not now comfortable for volunteering because I don't have a lot of hours free or something like this. Yeah." 2:17 ¶ 55 in Int_4.docx

Moreover, some participants mentioned an observed trend in the decline in active volunteers during spring, summer months.

"I experienced this last year as well when it's there is people become less involved. I don't know if it makes sense, but I see it now and I saw it last year as well during that period. It was just harder to fill up the schedule. I feel like during some people, maybe because most things are open and more things are happening around, then people don't have the same free time as in the winter, which is, you know, but a lot of things are happening" 4:17 ¶ 85 in Int_5.docx

However, this does not necessarily mean Tankstation has retention difficulties. According to the volunteers, the biggest challenge is the frequency of volunteering. This is because many of the volunteers are students, and whether the shifts are filled on days that Tankstation is open, depends on the schedule of students. In other words, volunteers accept the certain turnaround in volunteers every year as a natural part of volunteering at Tankstation, since it is flexible and dependent on students' and workers' schedules. Indeed, volunteers are reported to continue working at Tankstation out of their liking for the place and its organizational culture and only leave because of personal reasons. This leads to many participants addressing that the focus should be on searching for new volunteers instead of retaining them.

"Not really keeping them, but getting new ones. Yeah, because a lot of people who volunteer Tankstation are also like international people, students or students who were there for half a year. And it's quite logical that the volunteers change. A lot of, also people do it because there are no strings attached, so you can volunteer, but if you get too busy or you get other things, then you're not coming anymore. And that's totally normal. So I think that that's not a bad thing. It's more like getting new volunteers in."

10:19 ¶ 69 in Int_9.docx

Discussion

A cultural non-profit third place is more than just a restaurant, a give-and-take shop, a music venue, or an art space. Hence, volunteer retention success comes from different interconnected organizational factors. These factors include creating a safe environment and community, having a culture of recognition from management, and building trust in the program offered.

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Community

A sense of community is an outstanding theme emerging from the research. Volunteer satisfaction, motivation, and commitment are significantly influenced by the community that volunteers have at Tankstation. It is also important to note that the community is not characterized by the fostering of cliques of friends, but rather a collective sense of friendship, which is displayed through the sense of community and belonging that volunteers recognized from the very beginning stage of working at Tankstation. Indeed, this is also in alignment with “The Great Good Place” by Oldenburg (1999), where it’s stated that the sense of friendship/community is often achieved within third places since there is “no dependence on a particular friend”. On top of that, as argued by Yuen and Johnson (2016), diversity is the most important aspect to consider when it comes to creating third places as a platform for community. In the case of Tankstation, volunteers often feel satisfied and motivated by the place’s accessibility and how diverse the visitor and volunteer groups are. In fact, the diversity could be seen in the volunteers’ demographics, where many participants come from different countries, different age groups, as well as neurodivergent people. This implies that the sense of community, perceived and felt by volunteers within an organization, is significantly influenced by how diverse, accessible, and inclusive the organization is. Indeed, the study by Ozyurt and Villicana-Reyna (2016) reveals that the fundamental aspect of volunteer retention is inclusiveness, since this results in volunteers finding their role at the organization to be meaningful, motivating them to help the organization engage more potential volunteers.

Furthermore, retention of volunteers at an organization is remarkably affected by its flexibility. Different from regular non-profit organizations such as ones in healthcare, environmental groups, or educational institutions, non-profit organizations focusing on cultural events that functions as a third place retain its volunteers by functioning in a flexible and informal way. Even though volunteering means working and putting effort in keeping an organization alive, the flexibility makes cultural non-profit third places a “leveler”, according to Oldenburg (1999), functioning without a formal restriction for participation, making it easy for people to engage and stick around as both volunteers and visitors. According to Chen and Yu (2014), flexibility results in less burnout in

volunteers, which helped them sustain their motivation to stay involved. Undoubtedly, the sense of community is not achieved through only a group of volunteers and coordinators but also its openness to many other groups of people. As demonstrated by Mair (2009), to survive as a third place, the organization be open to change, in addition to creating and maintaining a sense of familiarity. Somerville (2011) also stated that heterogeneous communities are strong because of their diversity of resources and adaptability to change. Indeed, volunteers in a flexible organization like Tankstation mentioned the challenge of instability in volunteer flow, however at the same time, felt eager to help out and stick around. In other words, as one of people's motivations to volunteer is to find more social connections and their place in the community, it is important to sustain that motivation by providing them with flexibility options where volunteers could contribute on their own terms.

Given the importance of the sense of community in volunteers' retention, and the interconnectedness between flexibility, accessibility, and diversity, cultural non-profit third place could benefit remarkably from putting effort into building a diverse and inclusive community where people have a neutral ground for connecting in a safe and informal way.

The organizational culture of recognition

Community is a crucial influence on retention, especially if the organization is functioning as a third place. However, a volunteer-run organization thrives on the culture of recognition, manifested in both leadership strategies and volunteer interactions. In the case of Tankstation, volunteers reported positive experiences with Tankstation's culture of noticing and explicitly showing gratitude towards volunteers, from management to coordinators, and fellow volunteers. Even though there is no formal recognition program, the fact that volunteers received individual and public acknowledgment of their efforts makes them feel supported within the organization. A study by Dwyer et al. (2013) also reveals that higher volunteer satisfaction was achieved when their leaders or coordinators exhibit characteristics such as being open to opinions, initiating engagement in decision-making, and making volunteers feel that their work is meaningful. Alfes et al. (2016) also demonstrated emotion-oriented organizational support to be the prominent influence on volunteer retention, which includes the acts of care, culture of recognition, as well as words of encouragements. Undoubtedly, in Tankstation's case, supportiveness is one of the five biggest influences on volunteer satisfaction. Furthermore, coordinators not only showed gratitude towards the received recognition from the managers but also try to adopt it, making recognition and supportiveness part of the organizational culture. The culture of recognition, combined with being open to volunteers' feedback has in fact led to organizational improvements made at Tankstation, where coordinators receive enough support to implement new initiatives and changes.

A study by Corso (2019), shows that by enabling volunteers to see the importance of people supporting each other, managers can promote a sense of identity and make volunteer work more

satisfying, leading to higher intention to stay involved (Wisner et al., 2005). Indeed, as one participant mentioned, the attentiveness and appreciation from management is also considered as “a form of care”, implying the sense of supportiveness they feel while working as a volunteer.

A literature review by Einolf (2018) also found that multiple studies have shown organizations with fewer problems with volunteer retention often implemented more ways of volunteer recognition. This is in alignment with studies about volunteers’ motivation to start volunteering and stay in an organization because of “esteem function”, referred to as the desire to feel needed and useful in their work (Joseph & Carolissen, 2022). In other words, the ability to recognize, and notice volunteers’ contributions and express them genuinely and consistently further strengthens the relationship between volunteers, and volunteers’ satisfaction, and helps create a culture of recognition that retains volunteers in the organization.

Importance of Program and Opportunities for Growth

The sense of community and organizational culture of recognition is important, especially for an organization that is operated both as a third place and as a non-profit. At the intersection of it, these can act as foundational elements for cultural non-profit third places to build trust in the program offered. Like Tankstation, cultural organizations distinguish themselves by offering diverse activities, such as art exhibitions, music nights, workshops, and many other cultural and community events. Additionally, volunteers also perceive a regular fun and meaningful program to be an incentive for working at an organization as many volunteers first know Tankstation through an event that piques their interest. This is especially effective in creating an informal and fun environment for volunteers to engage, outside of their normal volunteering tasks. Cultural non-profit third places in this case provides their program as an opportunity for intentional informal sociability, fostering both casual interactions and meaningful friendships. Moreover, volunteers who are highly engaged, both in regular volunteering and behind the scene work, mentioned feeling more motivated to contribute and get involved when big events are happening. The trust in the program is also a manifestation of the opportunities for personal and professional growth since volunteers have a chance to make a change and try something new, in which more social connections and networks happen.

Furthermore, aside from a fun program that facilitates informal connections, clear organizational mission and values are crucial in building the trust of volunteers. A study by Mitchell and Taylor (2004) emphasizes the importance of the organization’s mission and internal promotion in retaining volunteers. Taking Tankstation as an example, the accessibility (free events, affordable meals, attractive art exhibitions, etc.) and the support offered by the organization are beneficial to volunteers not only when they are on shift but also as visitors. This motivated them to maintain the existing safe space, to attract and connect with other people. Volunteers also mentioned feeling a shared sense of responsibility since people in the organization are invested and putting effort into the

program they are building. Putting it into context when an organization is going through phases of instability, it is the trust that they are doing something important that helps sustain their motivation to step up keep contributing. The study by Doyle (2006) considers volunteer work an “expression of agreement” and trust in the organization’s mission. This implies that when volunteers see their values reflected in the organization’s mission and directly observe and experience these values, they are more likely to remain committed.

Practical implications

Findings about organizational success factors for volunteer retention could be beneficial for the cultural maker, the management of other cultural non-profit third places. For practical purposes, the results are translated into tangible strategies that enhance volunteer retention efforts. First of all, creating a sense of community for volunteers is crucial in successfully operating cultural non-profit third places and retaining volunteers. The sense of community is achieved by making the space welcoming, inclusive and safe, in which organizations encourage accessibility by having no participation restriction and be intentional about welcoming all groups of people with different genders, age, race, abilities, occupation, class, and skills, since being accommodating to differences means improving the inclusivity overall. As an informal environment where people have a chance to find social connections is of equal importance, volunteers should be given the flexibility to get involved on their own terms, while ensuring the work is responsibly executed. On top of that, the social connection aspect could be further encouraged by offering a program with diversity in terms of events and activities. Furthermore, to ensure that volunteers feel safe, a trusted mechanism for supporting volunteers should be implemented, this could be coordinators, managers, or board members, who are to help in distressing situations. In addition, since volunteers who intend to stay longer often feel responsible and useful in their work, management in cultural non-profit organizations should create a culture of recognition, where volunteers’ and coordinators’ contributions are explicitly acknowledged. Lastly, focusing on the cultural aspect, non-profit third places should have clear organizational mission and values, demonstrated by how the offered program is operated, where volunteers can engage in learning opportunities, including beyond their regular volunteer tasks. Since third places are important for the well-being of citizens, cultural makers could make use of the study to organize programs that reinforce the vibrance of the culture in their local environment and beyond.

Theoretical implications

The findings from this research suggest resonance with previous research about the importance of enhancing volunteer satisfaction, and motivation to retain volunteers, as well as how managers in cultural third places need the balance between the use of structure and the need for flexibility and informality that characterizes these spaces. The findings, in addition, helped further examine the theories of Third places by Oldenburg (1999), in a unique organization, where the elements of third places are both present and challenged. This is because while having the community aspect, the promotion of well-being, social functions, and the “leveling” function of third places that contribute to volunteer satisfaction and commitment, this is also a non-profit organization which a system of board members, managers, coordinators, and volunteers are working at, which challenged the clear boundaries mentioned by Oldenburg between home, work, and community places. These findings also support another research in a somewhat similar setting by Cantillon and Baker (2018) in a volunteer-run DIY Heritage institution, where the sense of community and informality are emphasized. Furthermore, having an uncommon research setting, this study could help expand the perspective and understand the intricacies of how third places and cultural non-profit organizations are operated, especially when these types of spaces are combined.

Limitations and Future Research

While the research provided insights into cultural non-profit third places, the focus on one single case study at Tankstation, where unique characteristics exist, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other organizations. Moreover, due to the small sample size of 11 participants, despite the different nationalities, ages, and volunteer tenure, their self-reported experience might not completely cover all ranges of perspectives and experiences. Additionally, since there is a limited time period for research, the longitudinal element that might be helpful in identifying long-term commitment and retention trends over time is not present. However, despite these limitations, the study provides suggestions for future research to expand the scope and try other methodologies to other variations of organizations in different parts of the world, to see whether these values could be applied to different purposes or cultures. Additionally, studies related to the neurodivergent community could benefit from examining how cultural non-profit third places could be more accommodating to the experiences of people with different disabilities.

Conclusion

The research, despite a narrow focus, has provided some relevant insights regarding how cultural non-profit third places are operated, especially with an emphasis on the factors that help such organizations retain volunteers and sustain the place. In summary, cultural makes in such organizations should focus on creating a safe and inclusive community, developing a culture of recognition to make volunteers feel valued, as well as building a program gains trust from volunteers and provide them with opportunities for growth and learning. And as these spaces plays an important role in the quality of life in local community and beyond, understanding these factors about retaining volunteers can help enhance the sustainability and impact of these cultural non-profit third places.

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Appendix

During the preparation of this work, the author used the free Grammarly tool integrated into Word for checking spelling mistakes, and Chat GPT to reorganize the alphabetical order of the reference list. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the work.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

General questions

1. How long have you been volunteering at Tankstation?
2. What kinds of volunteering did you take on as a volunteer at Tankstation?
3. Have you volunteered before? In what kinds of organization?
4. *(For coordinators)* How long does it take for you to switch to coordinator role?
5. *(For coordinators)* What are your responsibilities as a volunteer coordinator?
6. *(For coordinators)* Why did you take on the role?

a. Volunteer satisfaction

1. Can you describe your overall experience volunteering at Tankstation?
2. Would you describe your experience at Tankstation as satisfying? If so, why? And could you recall a specific moment/situation where you had that feeling? Could you reflect on what made it satisfying/pleasant?
3. How do you feel your contributions are valued and recognized by Tankstation?
4. Can you describe any experiences that have made you feel particularly fulfilled as a volunteer at Tankstation?
5. Is there any improvement Tankstation should make to make you or other volunteers have a more satisfying and pleasant experience?

b. Volunteer motivation

1. What motivated you initially to become involved as a volunteer at Tankstation?
2. Has the motivation changed since then? If so, in what way? What do you think changed the motivation, is it more of a personal reason, or because of the organization?
3. What are the factors that helped sustain your motivation as a volunteer at Tankstation? Could you identify any experience that makes you feel more motivated to volunteer?
4. Have there been some challenges or obstacles that affected your motivation? How did you deal with it/react to it?

c. Volunteer incentives

1. What were the incentives given when you started volunteering at Tankstation? How effective do you think the incentives are?
2. What are your incentives now to continue to volunteer at Tankstation?
3. Do you think different types of volunteers in different positions need different types of incentives?
4. How do volunteers perceive the incentives given by Tankstation? Was there any feedback on it?
5. Do you think the incentives affect your motivation and commitment to volunteering at Tankstation?

d. Volunteer engagement (*explain what it means by engagement*)

1. How would you describe your level of engagement with Tankstation's activities and initiatives?
2. Could you describe a situation/experience where you feel particularly engaged/included with Tankstation and its activities? Why was that?
3. Did Tankstation take the initiative to make volunteers a part of its decision-making/planning process? How effective do you think these initiatives are? Could there be any improvements?
4. Does the way Tankstation engage you with its community give you a sense of belonging or connection with others? If so, how?/could you describe a specific situation where you feel a strong sense of connection/inclusion/belonging at Tankstation?
5. (*Optional*) In which other way do you want to be more involved and engaged with Tankstation? In what ways can your skills, experiences, and interests could be utilized at Tankstation?

e. Volunteer commitment

1. You have been volunteering at Tankstation for....
 - 1.1. How long do you think this will continue?
 - 1.2. What is the reason for this?
2. What factors contribute to your ongoing commitment to volunteering at Tankstation?
3. Have there been any instances where you've considered discontinuing your volunteer involvement at Tankstation? If so, what factors influenced this decision?
4. (*Optional*) How does volunteering at Tankstation align with your goals, ideals, or inspirations? (How do you think Tankstation's goals and impact are similar to your aspirations/...)
5. What factors do you think contribute to the commitment of other volunteers at Tankstation?

f. Difficulties of retaining volunteer (for board members and volunteer coordinators)

1. Do you think Tankstation has difficulties in retaining volunteers? Why/why not?
2. What do you think are the main reasons why volunteers may choose to volunteering Tankstation?
3. (*For coordinators*) How do you make sure all the shifts are filled up on the days Tankstation are open? Could you tell me about some retention strategies or initiatives that has been present at Tankstation? How effective do you think they are?
4. (*For coordinators*) What are the main difficulties you faced in terms of managing volunteers at Tankstation?

Appendix B: The list of codes

ATLAS.ti Report

Project: Thesis

Code groups and Members

◆ Commitment

Members:

- committent: positive
- commitment depending on certainty
- commitment reason: community
- commitment reason: diversity in events
- commitment reason: feeling helpful
- commitment reason: flexibility
- commitment reason: food
- commitment reason: interest in arts
- commitment reason: liking of Tankstation
- commitment reason: nice events
- commitment reason: not feel pressured
- commitment reason: opportunities
- commitment reason: overwhelmed from responsibilities
- commitment reason: own wellbeing

commitment reason: social connections ● commitment same things that sustain my motivation. ● commitment: accessible to different cultures and disabilities ● commitment: identification: not profit-focused ● commitment: identification: some same opinions ● no long-term commitment

◆ Dissatisfaction

Members:

● chaotic/less organized >dissatisfaction ● emotional strain >dissatisfaction ● imbalance in workload >dissatisfaction ● initial confusion >dissatisfaction ● lack of coordination >dissatisfaction ● longer shift than expected >dissatisfaction ● negative social dynamics >dissatisfaction ● overwhelming >dissatisfaction ● physical fatigue >dissatisfaction

◆ Engagement

Members:

engagement ideas but no investment in executing, engagement initiative goes unnoticed, engagement reason: being asked for opinions, engagement reason: big events, engagement reason: change in management (motivate volunteer to step up and take charge), engagement reason: high frequency leads to more engagement behind the scene naturally, engagement reason: liking for the place/trying to keep customers, engagement reason: personal communication, engagement reason: going to volunteer meeting, engagement/motivation reason: being asked to help, engagement: organization being open for opinion

◆ Improvement needed

Members:

● a mechanism to support volunteers > improvement ● clearer communication > improvement ● different time for volunteer meeting > improvement ● less repeating type of workshop > improvement ● management being more consistent > improvement ● management being more involved > improvement ● management being more reliable > improvement ● more arts related workshop > improvement ● more connection between coordinators and management > improvement ● more coordination > improvement ● more diverse workshops > improvement ● more financial resource > improvement ● more human resource > improvement ● more info > improvement ● more information for upcoming volunteers/promo > improvement ● more personal > improvement ● more playful and casual activities > improvement ● more promotion > improvement ● more structure > improvement ● more support from board > improvement ● more time to plan > improvement ● more volunteer activities (hang-outs) > improvement ● need more finance > improvement ● suggestion: exchange the place as incentive for coordinators > improvement ● suggestion: open for workspace > improvement

◆ Incentives

Members:

● a place to try things >incentives ● cool workshops/events >incentives ● incentive: satisfied and important ● incentive: satisfied and not a big factor (willing to pay partly) ● social connections >incentives ● third place instead of workplace >incentives

◆ Motivation

Members:

● engagement/motivation reason: being asked to help ● motivation challenge: bored/nothing new ● motivation influence: nice people ● motivation influence: people in their social circle are there ● motivation reason: a place for neurodivergent ● motivation reason: be a part of

something ● motivation reason: community feeling ● motivation reason: convenience (join events after) ● motivation reason: feel more responsibility ● motivation reason: feeling lonely/depressed ● motivation reason: feeling useful ● motivation reason: find new connections ● motivation reason: good food ● motivation reason: habit ● motivation reason: have a function ● motivation reason: liking of the place ● motivation reason: meet (made) friends ● motivation reason: past time/a place out of home ● motivation reason: social media call for volunteers ● motivation reason: support from management ● motivation reason: volunteers stepping up to help ● motivation shouldn't be mostly from compensation ● reason unmotivated: overwhelming > motivation ● reason unmotivated: pressure from responsibility > motivation ● reason unmotivated: uncertainty > motivation

◆ Retaining volunteers

Members:

● no difficulties retaining >retaining volunteers ● retention not reliant on Tankstation >retaining volunteers ● retention problems due to students schedule >retaining volunteers ● search for new people instead of retaining >retaining volunteers ● tiring late shifts >retaining volunteers ● unstable due to summer/weather >retaining volunteers ● unstable frequency >retaining volunteers

◆ Satisfaction

Members:

accessible, affordable, bit tiring, or overwhelming, or even underwhelming,, community, cool events, diverse audience, diversity, feeling helpful/ like making a change, feeling of safety, feeling of recognition, flexibility, good communication, good structure/system, Improvements needed inclusivity, learn new skills, magical/special place, management culture of recognition, nice/caring/open-minded people, open for opinions/feedbacks, organizational improvement, people advocate for changes (in society), satisfaction/fulfillment, sense of belonging, shared liking for Tankstation, supportiveness, talented people, volunteers are responsible, volunteers work well under pressure, welcoming, working in teams

◆ Uncertainty due to changes

Members:

● change can affect sense of safety uncertainty due to changes ● demotivating due to change uncertainty due to changes ● feeling like they can make a change ● feeling like uncertainty due to changes ● hopeful uncertainty due to changes ● respect for management uncertainty due to changes