



Volunteering for popular music

A CROSSROAD BETWEEN THE 5 FIVE MUSIC RIGHTS AND
THE 5 WAYS TO WELLBEING?

LIVEDMA



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



*Volunteers are the solid base of
grassroots venues¹.*

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1. Read our resource on volunteers [here](#)

Introduction

Due to its missions of observation, cooperation and advocacy towards the recognition of popular music venues, clubs and festivals as key cultural, economic and social operators, Live DMA gets a precise look over the daily life of grassroots music venues and festivals. When reflecting around the notion of music and wellbeing, the network chose to address the topic:

- not through the lens of music-making,
- not through the lens of music-listening either,
- but through the lens of “working in music”,

In this paper, the theme of “working in music” and well-being will then be restrained to people who “work in music” but on top of that, to the ones who “work in music for free”, as we intend to observe more closely what’s going on within our network and to intersect it with recent academic works about “The troubles in volunteering”, such as the one recently published by Dan Ferrand-Bechmann.

1. Who are the volunteers?

VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE: GENERAL APPROACH

When dealing with the notion of volunteering, the first obstacle we come across as a European network aiming to speak with a unified, globalized voice, is obviously a methodological problem, since there is no harmonized consensus over the different countries we represent, as far as:

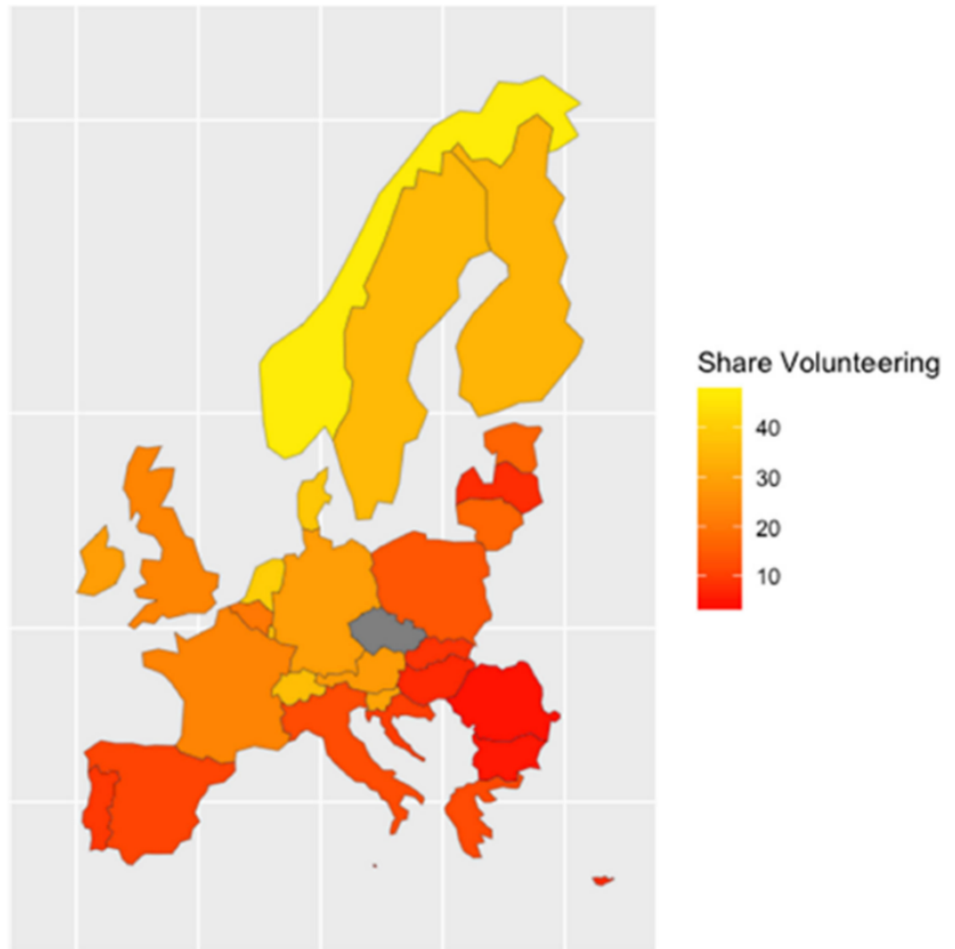
- what does it mean to be a volunteer?
- what does a volunteer do?
- Under which legal frame, if any, does a volunteer intervene? And so on...

Gladly, we are not the only ones struggling to draft an overview of the differences that volunteering encompasses over the EU.

Although their works are not related to volunteering in the specific field of music, the recent works of Enjolras², published in 2021, is a good first approach to the notion of volunteering in Europe.

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2. Bernard Enjolras, “[Explaining the Varieties of Volunteering in Europe: A Capability Approach](#)”, *Voluntas* (2021) 32:1187–1212

Fig. 1 Formal volunteering across Europe in percent of countries' population (Source: author based on EU-SICL-2015 data)



It starts with a map displaying the volunteering rates in Europe, where we can observe a much heavier rate up in the North than in the south. He then attributes those differences to a combination of individual, micro-level factors, and of larger, sociocultural context.

As far as the larger context is concerned, the work of Edith Archambault with the John Hopkins programme, helped categorize volunteering in Europe, through the lens of non-profit organizations, under 4 main geographical hubs:

- **The Rhine model**, gathering Germany, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, which she describes as “the corporatist model”, where volunteering is massively directed towards cultural and leisure activities, but also towards religious or social affairs (where its publicly funded), according to the subsidiarity principle.
- **The Anglo-Saxon model**, which she describes as “the liberal model”, gathering the UK and Ireland, relying on voluntary organisations, and insisting upon the symbolic value of volunteering meaning from a tradition of private, individual initiative, with an early socialization towards volunteering, being notably valued & compatibilized in educational journeys. The actions are less directed towards culture, sports and leisure than in the rest of Europe, being rather directed towards health, housing and local development and initiatives.

- **The Scandinavian model**, which she describes as “the social-democratic model”, gathering Sweden, Norway and Finland, with a more recent development in its volunteer activities where non-profit organizations are working for their members more than they work for the general community. They are lighter organisations, gathered through “sectors”, run by volunteers³, and massively turned towards culture, sports and leisure activities. It’s where the connections between non-profit and the government is the thinnest,
- **The Mediterranean model**, which she describes as the “emergent one”, gathering Spain and Italy. The non-profit landscape of these countries is less dense, due to the heavy restrictions that weighted upon the population in the course of the 20th century: prohibitions, conflicts between the powerful catholic church and the government, dictatures... Volunteering rates are lower than in the North of Europe, with a powerful, informal system of mutual assistance still in place at the scale of the family or of the neighborhood. Volunteer work is turned towards health and education mostly, less towards culture, sports and leisure.^{4,5}

Hence, these models come up as 4 volunteering ideal-types, which are based:

- On the national histories of the non-profit sector,
- On the relations it has with the national, regional and local governments,
- On the social security systems,
- But also on religions, Unions, political parties....

VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPEAN MUSIC VENUES, CLUBS AND FESTIVALS: AN OVERVIEW BY LIVE DMA

As far as our musical network is concerned, we do come across geographical disparities indeed, coupled with various definitions of what a music-volunteer is. But they all have in common a couple of defining elements:

- A volunteer **freely commits** to engage with a music;
- Volunteering is **open to everyone**;
- A volunteer **does not receive a salary**, though they may receive **small compensations** (a small fee, free goodies or beverages, reimbursement of some costs...);
- Volunteer activities have an **educational value** or **added social value**.

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3. The links between the state and the not-for-profit sector are much weaker than in the other models, although the last decade has seen a move towards the privatisation of some social services and the beginnings of contractualisation accompanied by professionalisation (Magne and Selle, 2002).

4. Archambault, Édith. « [Le travail bénévole en France et en Europe. Résultats du programme de recherche de l'université Johns Hopkins de comparaison internationale du secteur sans but lucratif](#) », French review of social affairs, no. 4, 2002, pp. 11-36.

5. These models largely overlap with Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification of welfare state regimes, or with the classification established during the MiRe colloquia on the social protection in Europe. For each model, we will characterise the non-profit organisations, the importance and orientation of voluntary work and its role as a complement to or substitute for salaried employment.

But there are still heavy differences depending on national/regional legal frames:

- In Spain or Latvia, some music venues and clubs cannot recruit volunteers because they have a private, commercial legal status which does not align with a general interest pattern required to host volunteer work;
- In France, a volunteer cannot take the spot of an employee, and cannot receive any compensation, in any form.
- In Belgium, there is a gradation in volunteering: “volontaire” and “bénévole”. A “volontaire” may receive small compensations for their work. A “bénévole” earns absolutely nothing.

AND WHAT DOES A MUSIC-VOLUNTEER DO?

However, volunteers seem to attend to the same variety of functions all over Europe. They can either:

- Have **decisionary functions** (as board members, presidents of associations, being a part of a programming committee...)
- Have an **organization task** (coordination of other volunteers, administrative tasks within an association...)
- Or be “**operational volunteers**” (handling the wardrobe, running the bar, helping with the assembly and dismantling of the event’s site, helping the technical team, managing waste...)



2. So why do people volunteer?

Research tends to show that volunteering, within the musical sector or elsewhere, actually serves as a source of wellbeing. All sectors combined, literature tends to display the following reasons for getting involved as a volunteer:

- To stand up for a cause
- To share skills and experiences
- To bond
- To foster openness
- To give / to receive
- To share
- To get a break
- To feel integrated / have a sense of community
- To pass on knowledge
- To feel useful
- To be acknowledged

It is important to note that the reasons motivating a volunteer activity tend to vary greatly depending on the social characteristics of the volunteer.

- People who retired, for example, justify their volunteer commitment by ethical concerns, altruism, a need of social interactions to avoid a “social death”⁶, or a will to pass-on knowledge and experience⁷.
- Young people, are more driven by a will to fit in, build extra relational circles outside of school, find a place where to be valued especially if things are going unwell at school⁸, and are eager to gain some field experience to be valorized when looking for a first job.
- Gender, level of schooling and personal experience are other key elements that guide a volunteer towards a sector or another: personal experience with sickness for volunteer visiting patients at the hospital, for example. It all points to a collusion of preferences, marked by shared tastes and common interests that could be considered as the bartering of interrelational values⁹.

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6. See Sébastien Poulain, p52

7. Jacques Malet & Cécile Bazin, « Donner du temps pour les autres mais aussi pour soi », *Gérontologie et Société*, n°138, September 2011.

8. Sandrine Cortessis & Saskia Weber Guisan, « [Le bénévolat, une porte d'entrée privilégiée pour mobiliser les jeunes dans des activités d'apprentissage propices au développement de compétences transversales](#) », *Éducation et socialisation*, 21 July 2016,

9. Michel Bellefleur & Johanne Tremblay (2003) *L'action volontaire en loisir ou le troc des valeurs : initiative, engagement et créativité dans la société civile, Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, DOI: 10.1080/07053436.2003.10707626

- On top of that, in addition to the will to be useful, to the crave for solidarity and what is often puts forward as a natural disposition to altruism, it is important to note that these feelings and motivations are highly complex. As Bénédicte Harvard Duclos and Sandrine Nicourd have demonstrated:
 - These feelings are socially constructed, socially encouraged,
 - and to be persistent, they have to be teased, developed, shaped by the non-profit receiving the workforce which must be equipped to fulfill such identity concerns¹⁰.

Within the music sector, we note some extra reasons to justify a volunteer commitment:

- To get to know an ecosystem from within / to discover
- To get professional skills / build a CV
- To get a free access to music / culture
- To discover new artists / bands
- To have professional networking opportunities

In the specific field of music, we notice, in addition to the general motivations listed above, that getting access to the music sector are redundant¹¹. As Romain and Alice Sohier pointed in their study upon rock music festivals volunteers, said volunteers stand in an airlock between production and consumption: they produce value through the tasks they accomplish and the responsibilities they take upon them, but they are also looking for a spectatorship experience, that they trade with workforce instead of money. They are what Alvin Toffler described in *The Third Wave*¹² as the **prosumers**, short for producers and consumers.

In the end, volunteering for the music sector, venues and festivals together, seems to be characterized by a notion of in-betweenness:

- Somewhere between co-creation of value and consuming experience¹³
- Somewhere between work and pleasure,
- Somewhere between tight organization and “creative chaos”¹⁴,
- But also somewhere between work and social life.

10. Harvard Duclos, Bénédicte, et Sandrine Nicourd. « Le bénévolat n'est pas le résultat d'une volonté individuelle », *Pensée plurielle*, vol. no 9, no. 1, 2005, pp. 61-73.

11. See rapport Collectif des festivals

12. Toffler, A. (1980). *The third wave*. New York, NY: William

13. Sohier, Alice et Sohier, Romain. *BENEVOLE DE FESTIVAL ROCK, UNE EXPERIENCE DE CONSOMMATION SUBLIMEE*,

14èmes Journées Normandes de Recherches sur la Consommation : Société et Consommation

14. (Chen, 2009), cited in Toraldo, M.L., Islam, G. & Mangia, G. (2018) “Serving time: Volunteer work, liminality and the uses of meaningfulness at music festivals”. *Journal of Management Studies*,

Anyway, these lists of assets and motivations behind the notion of volunteering then seems to demonstrate how volunteering for music matches the 5 ways to wellbeing¹⁵ developed by the New Economic Foundation, and hence contributes to both individual and collective wellbeing.



We can clearly match the reasons we listed on the previous slides with this list. But in an article published last year, Coren, Philipps, Moore, Brownnett and Whitfield, although they acknowledge “the relevance of this framework in understanding the benefits of festival volunteering”, also note:

- That the focus is set on the individual: it is up to the volunteer to take steps to improve its own wellbeing, but we should also underline the responsibilities of the organisations hosting volunteers in creating the conditions for such wellbeing;
- Plus, they point out that said organisations might not dispose of the social and economic factors needed to offer a safe and cosy volunteering place to their unpaid workers¹⁶.

3. Volunteering as a risk

The last section of this paper addresses a less joyful aspect of volunteering in the music sector, pointing out the possible risks behind it, especially when the “essential balance” between “freely provided volunteer action” on one hand and the “performance requirements”¹⁷ on the other end are not respected, hence creating what Bonzi calls “the tired heroes”¹⁸.

15. [Read the «Five Ways to Wellbeing»](#)

16. E. Coren¹ · J. Phillips² · J. Moore¹ · T. Brownnett³ · L. Whitfield² «An Examination of the Impacts of Volunteering and Community Contribution at a Community Festival». Through the Lens of the Five Ways to Wellbeing, International Journal of Community Well-Being (2022) 5:137–156

17. André Thibault & Julie Fortier (2003) Comprendre et développer le bénévolat en loisir dans un univers technique et « clientéliste », Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure, 26:2, 315-344, DOI: 10.1080/07053436.2003.10707625

18. Bonzi, Bénédicte. « De l'utilité à l'utilitarisme », Trouble dans le bénévolat, 2023, pp 55-59.

VOLUNTEERS: THE TIRED HEROES

Numerous works are already denouncing the excessive use of volunteer workforce, to the point of “exploitation” and “commercialization”. Indeed, management studies refer to the volunteer as « an unpaid worker” who not only alleviate the payroll, but who also take upon them many expenses: they pay for their membership, their commutes, they use their days off-work to work elsewhere...¹⁹

In addition to that, Toraldo, Islam and Mangia have demonstrated in 2018 that the sense of community, the sense of belonging that we noted earlier as a benefit from volunteering, might be weaponized by the organizations hosting volunteer workers, hence creating meaningfulness AND exploitation at the same time.

Through a case study of music festival volunteering, they show how tedious and exploitative work may be experienced as meaningful, enlightening or socially valuable, masking the workforce’s economic instrumentality (O’Toole & Grey, 2015)²⁰. ”Consciously or not, some music venues or festivals are using the sense of community and meaningfulness sought by many individuals to, as Toraldo phrases it, “infuse meaning into work” ; “producing satisfaction and a sense of togetherness that may be commodified and used to motivate labour”, which is basically a feature of contemporary work.²¹



19. Sohier, Alice et Sohier, Romain. BENEVOLE DE FESTIVAL ROCK, UNE EXPERIENCE DE CONSOMMATION SUBLIMEE, 14èmes Journées Normandes de Recherches sur la Consommation : Société et Consommation, 26-27 Novembre 2015, Angers, p28

20. Toraldo, M.L., Islam, G. & Mangia, G. (2018) Serving time: Volunteer work, liminality and the uses of meaningfulness at music festivals. Journal of Management Studies,

21. Same as 20

CONCERNS FOR THE INDIVIDUALS

But the volunteers are not naïve, and they can perfectly word their disappointments upon their volunteering experiences. The Breton network “Le Collectif des Festivals” recently published a report upon the ups and downs of music-volunteering, that strongly echoes the very last book of Dan Ferrand-Bechmann which explores the normalization, banalization, trivialization of volunteering, possibly leading to a sense of demotivation, weariness, or even burn-out²².

- Feeling of rejection due to the heavier “recruitment process”: “Before, anyone willing to come was welcome. Now, you need to have a car, you need to be over 20, you need to already have experience in a related field, you need to speak this language on top of your mother tongue, as if it was an actual job (...)”²³
- Inequalities: young people at ease at school are more available to commit;
- Disrespect: pressured people from staff are lashing out at volunteers, or not trained enough to guide them²⁴
- The lack of organisation / planning strategies: difficulty to find a rota, a running order, a planning... Hence putting the volunteer in an uncomfortable position;
- The lack of breaks to attend concerts, the too many working hours “am I at work?”
- The lack of volunteers: work overload, too many tasks to be done
- Thankless or complex tasks
- Flirting with legality: “they’re using me”
- Poor quality / atmosphere
- Professional and familial obligations jeopardized: issues of control around the encroachment of organizations into the private sphere²⁵
- Poorly behaved, possibly drunk spectators
- Decision-making situations : accidents, faints, fights, drug (ab)use²⁶

COVID AS A BREAKING POINT

Then, on top of everything, the pandemic struck, and it seems to have fostered what was already on the edge of collapsing. In early 2023, Live DMA published a [report](#) upon the post-covid19 challenges of the live music sector in Europe, in addition to a previous [Survey](#) upon the impact of Covid 19 on music venues and clubs. Enclosed were displayed both qualitative and quantitative data underlying the social impact of the pandemic.

22. Sandrine Cortessis et Saskia Weber Guisan, « [Le bénévolat, une porte d'entrée privilégiée pour mobiliser les jeunes dans des activités d'apprentissage propices au développement de compétences transversales](#) », Éducation et socialisation [En ligne], 41 | 2016, mis en ligne le 21 juillet 2016, consulté le 13 septembre 2023.

23. Same as 22

24. Le Collectif des Festivals [«Very Important bénévoles!»](#)

25. (Bailey et al, 2016).

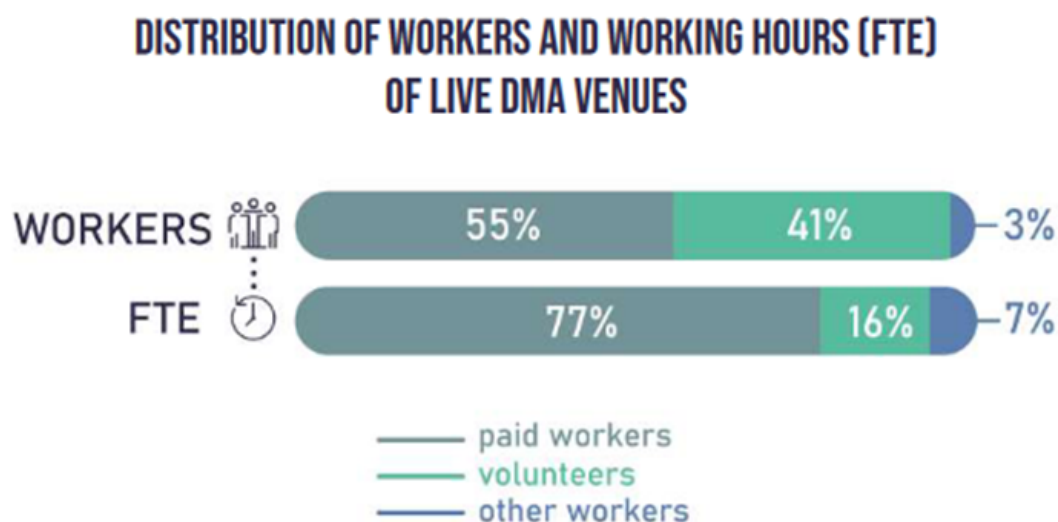
26. Collectif des festivals

Among them, we noted much less participation in music venues and clubs for ten thousands of volunteers, many of them having left the organisations to never come back. In the same time, hired workers also left the music sector massively.

This shared tendency between hired and volunteer workers from the music sector raises heavy concerns: what if, in order to cope with the lack of financial and human ressources, the music sector had directed too much pressure and responsibilities upon volunteers, to the point that “it’s not fun anymore”, it’s “too formalized²⁷” too be satisfying, and hence... not a source of wellbeing anymore?

CONCERNS FOR THE MUSIC SECTOR

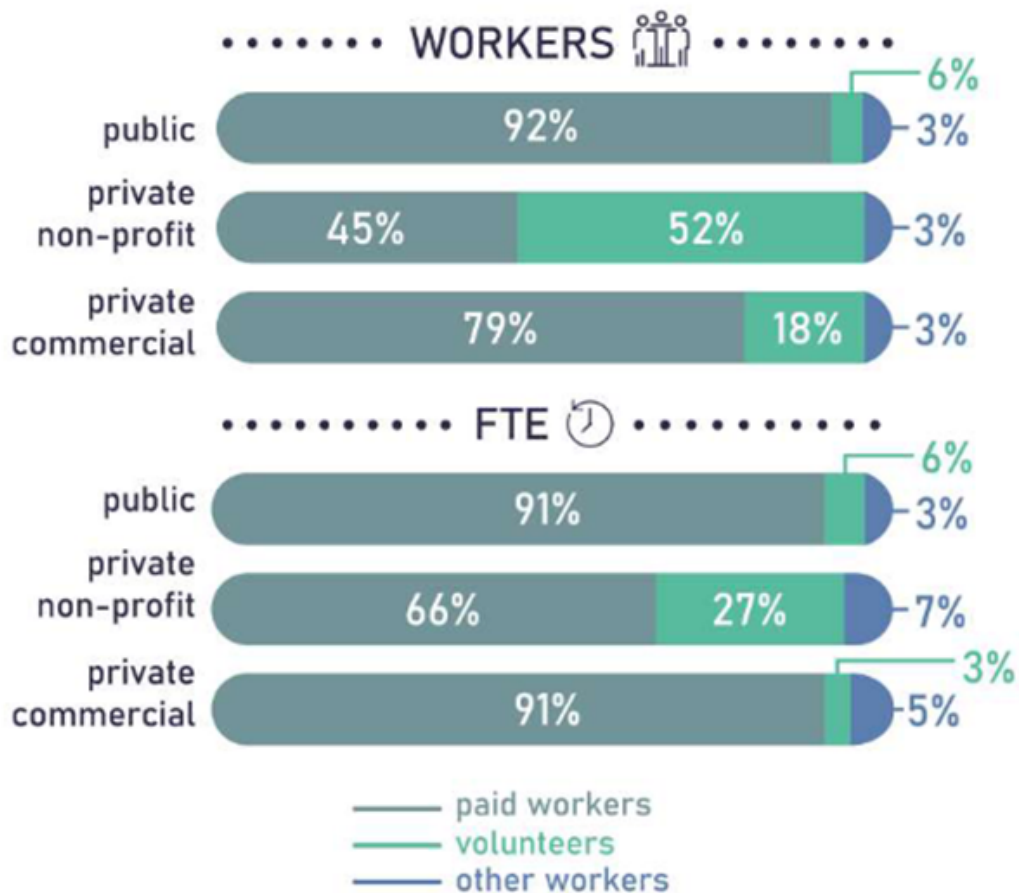
If the music sector is not the only one being struck by a volunteer crisis, the repercussions are especially strong, jeopardizing the whole live music ecosystem (Emin, Guibert, Parent, 2021). According to the Survey 2020, 7,8% of venues part of the Live DMA network are exclusively run by volunteers. All the work is done without anyone receiving a wage for it: from the accountancy, the programming or the communication to the tending of the bar or the lights & sound. Some of these venues or festivals are exclusively volunteer-run by choice, but others simply don’t have the financial capacity to hire.



To illustrate the weight of the volunteers’ in live music organizations further those figures, Live DMA gathered the testimony of the network Norwegian Live which explained that after the pandemic, many Norwegian festivals had to choose between either paying workers to provide for the tasks that used to be taken care of by volunteers, or to simply cancel their event due to a lack of workforce. So as a conclusion: if you want to support live music, whether you enjoy it in clubs, venues or festivals: remember to care for, and to thank the volunteers!

27. Erin K. Sharpe (2003) “It’s Not Fun Any More:” A Case Study of Organizing a Contemporary Grassroots Recreation Association, *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, 26:2, 431-452, DOI: 10.1080/07053436.2003.10707630

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS AND WORKING HOURS (FTE) OF LIVE DMA VENUES PER TYPE OF LEGAL STATUS



You can find inspirations among the numerous, recent publications that are calling for a better acknowledgement of how precious volunteer work is (the volunteerhub website, on The Collectif des Festivals report, on the Guide to create a volunteer recognition program by the award force, but also from Live DMA, some of our members having their own lists of recommendations to preserve the connection between music-volunteering and well-being.

As far as an example, the Swiss network Petzi has developed a «volunteer certification» in order to valorize the skills acquired by volunteers evolving in music venues and festivals.

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