

# **Volunteers in Museums in Denmark, Sweden and Norway: A Comparative Report**



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This report was written by Dimitra Christidou and Anna Hansen on behalf of NCK. The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein.



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## 1. Purpose of the Study: Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the Pride, Joy and Surplus (PJS) project was to encourage, promote and facilitate volunteering at cultural heritage institutions in the Nordic countries, nationally and across the borders. A mapping of the volunteer activities and a preliminary evaluation of the experiences of the volunteers at the participating institutions was carried out in order to become better acquainted with the volunteers as individuals and gain a deeper insight into their experiences. The project sought to identify the relation between volunteering and personal development, lifelong learning, and well-being. The partners wished to gain a better insight into volunteering in their organisations and countries by launching an investigation into the following areas:

- the roles undertaken by volunteers,
- the demographic profile of volunteers,
- support for volunteers,
- the policies and practices in volunteer management, and
- the impact of volunteering on volunteers' wellbeing.

As part of the PJS project, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to the volunteers at the five museums across the three countries for the whole February and March 2015. We received 481 replies. The questionnaire, which consists of 33 questions, was sent out either by post or electronically. The questionnaire was designed to capture quantitative data on the involvement of volunteers; their roles and time investment, membership to other organisations, level of satisfaction, the benefits gained after and through their experience, and some information regarding their demographic background (education, employment status, age group, and gender). The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide feedback to our partner museum institutions about the background of their volunteers, and the impact of their involvement in volunteering activities. Specifically, the survey sought to:

- explore the role of volunteers in museums,
- identify the impact of volunteering on the individual,
- build a demographic profile of the volunteers in the partner museums, and
- provide indicative evidence of the social value of volunteering.

## **2. Data Analysis**

The data collected via questionnaire from the volunteers at each museum was input and analysed by Dimitra Christidou and Anna Hansen, on behalf of NCK. For those questions having free comments option, the datasets were clustered under common themes and Word Clouds were created based on these themes. The Clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text.

## **3. Limitations of the research**

The results for the scoping survey are specific to the museums that participated in the research. The results should not be generalised to a wider population.

## **4. Literature Review**

The more recent Eurobarometer survey “European Youth” (No. 408) in 2015, addressing EU citizens aged 15 to 30, explored their participation in society, particularly in voluntary activities, political elections and cultural activities. According to this Eurobarometer, a quarter (25%) of young people in the EU say that they have been involved in an organised voluntary activity in the past 12 months. This is very similar to the proportion observed in 2011 (Eurobarometer 75.2, 2011).

Both Eurobarometers brought to the fore that most are engaged in volunteering activities either in sports (24% in 2011, 40% in 2015) or cultural activities (20% in 2011 and 15% in 2015). With Norway not included in this Eurobarometer, the numbers are very different when it comes to those volunteering in Sweden (21% in 2011 and 15% in 2015) and those in Denmark (43% in 2011 and 39% in 2015), hinting at volunteering being a more common practice for Danish citizens. Nonetheless, the reason why the number of people stating that they are volunteers in Sweden may be lower is that they tend to the phrase “volunteer” when referring to someone going abroad to offer his/her help to the Third World countries or to areas affected by natural disasters. This might also be the reason why Sweden scores higher when it comes to the number of young people doing their voluntary work abroad (19% out of 25% of those European youths who actively engage in volunteering) (Eurobarometer 2015, 30).

If we look at the research conducted on volunteers in the cultural heritage sector, most research has been produced in Britain. Research commissioned by the Museums, Libraries, and Archives Council (Howlett et al., 2005) explored the role and development of volunteers in the sector. Although the scope of the study did not include the measurement of the impact of volunteering, it reported that nearly half of the organisations (49%) thought that the skills volunteers developed helped them to secure paid employment. Additionally, the study found that although **women** were more likely to be involved as volunteers in museums, libraries and archives than men, more men were involved in museums (49% male) compared to libraries (32% male) or archives (41%). In addition to the gender distribution, the study found that the volunteers in the museums, libraries, and archives sector were predominately white and **aged 55 years and over**. The former finding complies with previous research carried out by Holmes (2003), as well as the findings from the surveys conducted by the National Trust of England and Wales and the British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM), both in 1998, which pointed towards the fact that 82% of the volunteers had already retired with the vast majority being over 60 years old. Another very noteworthy point made in these reports is that elder people, despite constituting 19% of the UK population, constitute only 15% of visitors to the museums and galleries. This may be due to the fact that elders constitute the majority of the volunteers.

Previous research on the motivations of volunteers within the UK (Holmes 1999; National Trust 1998; BAFM 1998) has found that they tend to engage in volunteering activities as they ‘do something enjoyable’ and they meet new people and make friends, while getting a sense of personal achievement. In Holmes’ research regarding volunteers’ motivations (2003) within ten case studies in the UK, she found that **social opportunities**, such as meeting new people and friends, and **enjoyment** were by far the most cited reasons for volunteering.

## 5. A Nordic Overview: Norway, Denmark and Sweden

A research conducted among 101 volunteers in two open air museums in **Norway** in 2012 showed that most volunteers are senior citizens aged between 60 and 79 (75%) and 15,8% are 80 years old or more, whereas only 7,9% is under 60. As far as gender is concerned, there are slightly more men than women (51% and 49% respectively).

They are all considered highly educated, with more than half of them being university/high school-educated (Hegseth-Garberg, 2012).

In a recent electronic survey exploring volunteers in Danish state museums, conducted by the Association of Danish Museums (2014), 59 out of 99 state-funded museums participated. Findings pointed at the fact that 4 out of 5 museums (83%) have volunteers, with the cultural heritage museums having the most of them. For 40% of the museums participating in this research, the involvement of volunteers was initiated by the museum management whereas for 38% of these, it was self-initiated by the volunteers themselves. In their majority (83%), volunteers are 55 years old and older, with 53% of them being women. Furthermore, according to the findings, it is more common to find female volunteers in an art museum. Volunteers in Denmark seem to contribute with approximately 6.5 hours per month. By investing around 7 hours per month, volunteers carry out 14% of the museum's annual workload. Volunteers are involved in a wide range of tasks, although those tasks involving education –guiding (58%) and practical tasks (57%) seem to involve most of the volunteers. This diversity in the range of tasks they carry out may reflect the longstanding tradition of museums working closely with volunteers in Denmark.

When it comes to the Swedish museums and their volunteers, Hansen (2011) pointed out that few museums work close with associations of volunteers or “friends of the museum”. Although collaborating with these associations does not imply involvement of volunteers, it is often the case that members of these associations volunteer at the museums they relate to. Additionally, according to Hansen (2011), volunteers are in their majority 50 – 75 years old, who value the social milieu of their experience and reinforce their self-esteem while learning how to learn new things and gaining new skills.

## **6. Findings**

The profile of volunteers in this study largely conforms to those identified in previous heritage studies (Association of Danish Museums 2004; Hegseth-Garberg 2012; Hansen 2012) – that is, the dominant group is people who have finished their working life such as retired and elder people.

Volunteers undertake a range of roles within the sector and are both learning themselves and helping others to learn. The amount and the nature of the contact between museum employees and volunteers may differ. Regardless of how closely volunteers work with museum employees, volunteers receive feedback and feel that their efforts are appreciated by paid staff.

Being, and feeling, part of a team is an important reward for most of the volunteers. Social interaction is an important aspect of volunteers' experience, and seems as a pivotal source of motivation and reward. The desire to 'meet people', 'be part of the community' and 'be part of a group' and the enjoyment derived from this were recurring features of the volunteers' responses to the question about what they thought as the best thing about their experience. Some of them were more specific about the type of people they valued mingling with (i.e. likeminded people; sharing the same interests and so forth). Additionally, volunteers seem to assert the importance of the museum within the local community/history and thus, volunteering was seen as a way of helping, 'giving back' to the community and preserve, promote and take pride in local heritage.

The significant role of social interaction and coming together with other likeminded individuals may be the reason why volunteers are not a diverse group of individuals but rather, a homogenous group of elder people, with long-serving commitment to the same organisation.

Not only meeting new people was an important outcome of their time invested in volunteering at the museum, but existing friendships were also mentioned as a powerful means for disseminating information about volunteering vacancies/opportunities.

## **7. Who are our volunteers?**

Generally speaking, there are no significant differences across the three countries when it comes to the gender of the museum volunteers. Despite Swedish and Norwegian volunteers in their majority being female, aged between 66 -75, in Denmark there are more men (118) to women (94). Irrespectively of the gender, most

volunteers are between 66 -75 years old, followed by those aged 51-65. There is none aged 17-30 while there are just few younger than 16 years old. This means that the majority of the volunteers are pensioners at the time of volunteering.

The vast majority of the museum volunteers in our survey are highly educated, which means they have a university education or higher vocational training - 71% in Norway; 68% in Denmark and 85% in Sweden respectively.

## **8. Membership to other associations**

More than half of those active as volunteers at the museums are also members to other associations, clubs and societies such as pensioners' organizations, political organizations, sports clubs and Odd Fellow or Rotary. Despite the large number of the different associations and clubs, a large number of the museum volunteers are also members of clubs with cultural activities – it can be other museum associations or local history associations as well as clubs for dancing folkdance, painting or theatre. The trend is the same in all countries, and this is the most common type of association/club/society that the museum volunteers also belong to.

There are, however, some differences between the different countries when it comes to other types of associations. In Norway, there is a larger number of people who are members of hunting and fishing clubs than in the other countries, while in Denmark we can find people in clubs for jazz and rock music. However, the differences are quite small between the countries. Health related organizations, such as Red Cross, or associations connected to a particular disease, such as the Breast Cancer Association, appear in Norway and Sweden slightly more often than in Denmark, and clubs such as Rotary and the closed order of Maria are more frequent in Norway.

Having many memberships to different clubs/associations/societies may reveal an interest in engaging in activities with likeminded people with whom you share interests.

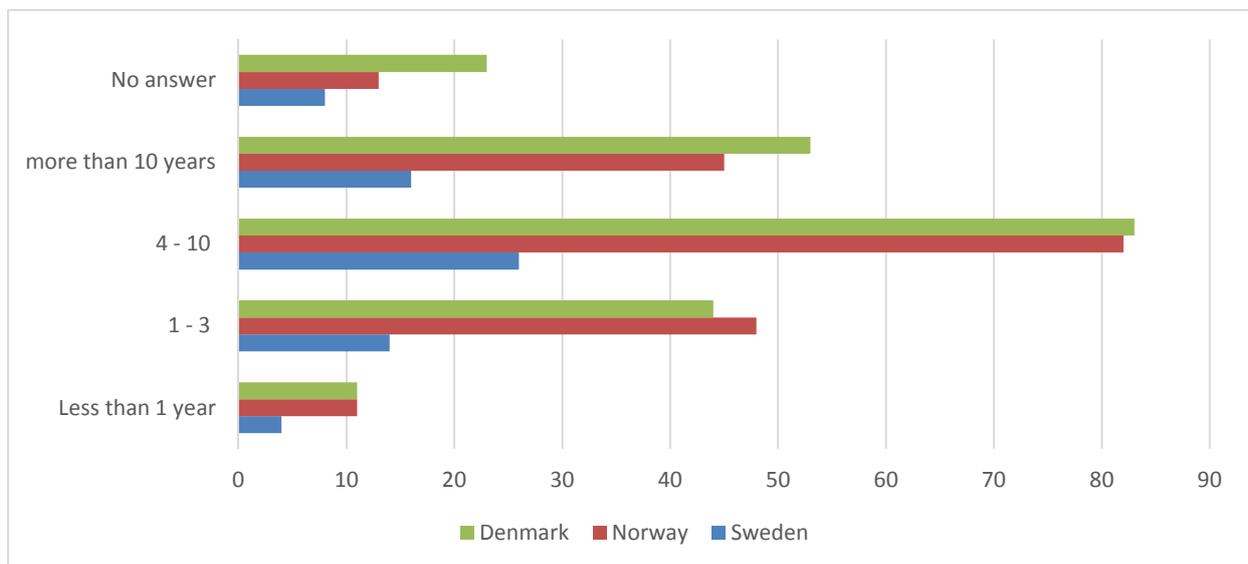
## **9. Time and years invested in volunteering**

The majority of the museum volunteers have been involved in volunteering activities for four to ten years. In Denmark, 34% of their volunteers devote between six and 20 days annually and 21% 11 –40 hours per year. In Norway, approximately 27% of their

volunteers at MiSt and Maihaugen devote either six to 20 days or, alternatively, 11 – 40 hours per year. In Sweden, approximately 29% of their volunteers devote 11 – 40 hours per year whereas 26% of them devote between six and 20 days annually.

All in all, when prompted to describe the level of their satisfaction regarding the time invested in volunteering activities, more than 70% stated that they are satisfied with the current situation while 21% in Norway and 18% in Denmark expressed their wish to spend more time in volunteering.

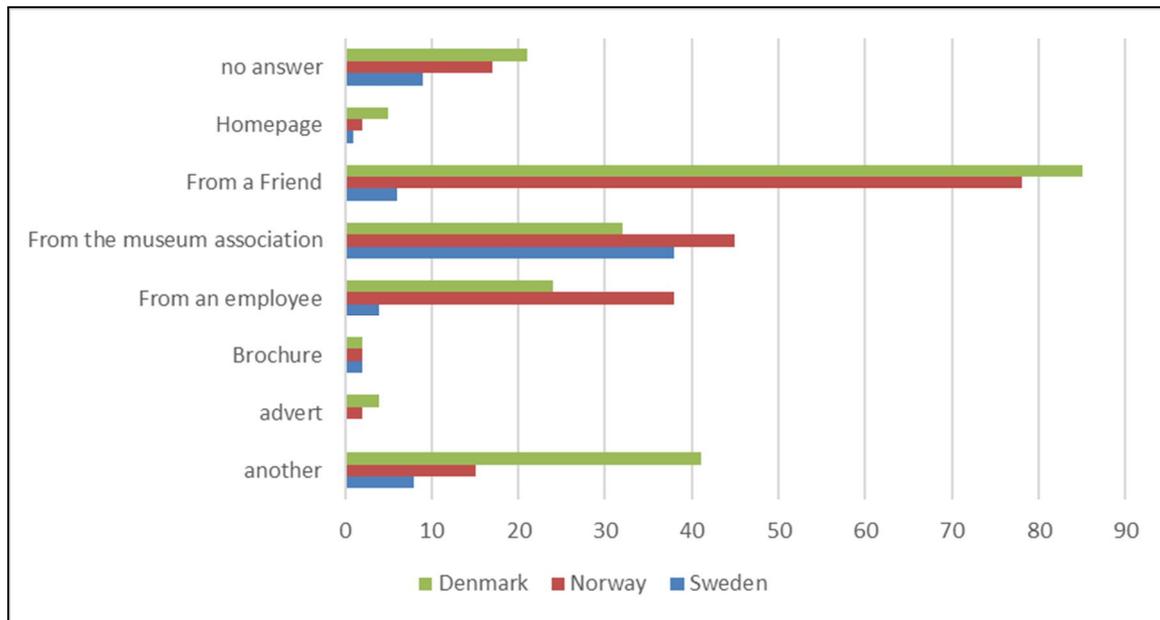
*Figure 1. Years spent in volunteering activities at the museum*



## 10. How did they find out about volunteering opportunities?

The most popular methods of recruiting volunteers are through the museum association and museum employees and word of mouth (Figure 2). This finding complies with the findings of the UK survey conducted by Chambers in 2002, bringing to the fore the fact that the most popular method for getting more volunteers was either word of mouth or being approached by other volunteers. Given that socialising and togetherness are highly valued by volunteers, it seems natural why word-of-mouth recommendation is a popular means of recruitment (see Figure 2, category ‘from a friend’).

Figure 2. Ways in which volunteers find out about volunteering opportunities



When the respondents were asked to offer additional ways through which they found out about volunteering opportunities at the museums, we received several interesting additions to the alternatives included in the aforementioned question. It appears from their replies that their engagement with different organisations seems to be one alternative means through which they come across volunteering opportunities. Indeed, as we mentioned previously in section 6, many of the volunteers participating in the survey are members of other organisations and their engagement and network of other organisations may very well be a good way for recruiting new volunteers.

Another way to inform potential volunteers is on site through museum employees and other volunteers. Several of those answering the question indicated that they were directly approached and asked to join as a volunteer by a museum staff member. Nonetheless, there were also a few who stated that engaging in volunteering activities at the museum was their own initiative. This, however, does not explain how they were informed about the museum having such an opportunity.

Additionally, the dissemination of volunteering opportunities may take place at lectures or other public events during which the importance and the role of volunteers is stressed.

## 11. What type of activities are they involved in?

The range of activities in which volunteers are involved is wide. British research has stressed the increasing involvement of volunteers within the heritage sector in front-of-house activities (BAFM 1998). According to Hansen (2013), the most prominent volunteer activities fall under five categories as follows: (A) service, (b) handicraft, (c) collections/objects, (d) events, and (E) others. Tasks such as attending the shop or café, keeping the gallery spaces or outdoor area tidy or work as guides or museum educators fall under the category “service”. “Handicraft” includes restoration and maintenance of various vehicles, demonstration of a professional craft, rope making or setting up a fence, while “collections/objects” category includes tasks such as picture registration or cleaning and packing of objects. Helping out at different special occasions such as Christmas markets or theme evenings when tasks such as parking guard, making coffee or selling tickets are common fall under the “events” category. Lastly, the “other” category includes a large variety of tasks such as being on the museum’s board, research, building exhibitions or publication of books.

As the volunteers are involved in numerous tasks, we grouped their most prominent answers in the following figure, starting from the most recurring answer to the least frequent one. Based on Hansen’s (2013) aforementioned categories, it can be said that volunteers are mostly involved in tasks that either have to do with events or services.

*Figure 3. Tasks volunteers are involved in*



## 12. Receiving feedback

According to an earlier study conducted in Sweden (Hansen 2013), volunteers seem to welcome receiving feedback as it acknowledges their own contribution to the museum and reinforces their self-esteem. It can be said that feedback is perceived as a type of ‘informal remuneration’ for them as it was a ‘gesture’ of showing appreciation and gratification for their work and time investment.

The vast majority of the replies we received confirmed that the volunteers receive feedback for their work at the museum, with 59% in Sweden; 69% in Denmark and, 66% in Norway.

The ways in which volunteers reported being supported varied considerably. Most of them said that they receive praise or acknowledgement in very general terms while some of them named visitors or other guests as the source of their feedback. Specifically, 58% in Sweden, 52% in Denmark and 71% in Norway of the volunteers reported that they generally receive some sort of positive feedback as part of their answers to the free comment question. Comments like “that the work contributes to the museums” or “that we are useful” were included in these percentages.

If we look at the feedback that can be identified as coming from the museums, 10% in Denmark, 5% in Norway and zero in Sweden reported that they receive feedback through e-mail or letters, including newsletters, Christmas greetings and so forth. Written feedback seems to be more common in Denmark.

The volunteer organisations seems to play a larger role in Sweden than in the other countries where 20% claim that they get the feedback from the organisation, at meetings, from people they are working with or through other ways. The figure is 4% for both Denmark and Norway. This is likely to reflect the ways in which the volunteers are organised and managed in each country. In Sweden, most of the volunteers who answered the survey have their own organisations, quite independent from the museums they are connected to. When the volunteer association is the body responsible for organising the work, naturally it will also play a greater part in the feedback.

In Denmark, the current situation is different with the volunteers being more closely connected to a member of staff leading the volunteers' workforce in general or at an individual level. This is also visible when 24% claim that they get the feedback from the work leader or sometimes from the museum management. In Norway and Sweden 5% of the volunteers state that the museum manager or their work leader is the person giving them feedback. Other staff members in the museum also seem to offer the volunteers praise and appreciation as 10% in Sweden, 5% in Denmark and 7% in Norway mention museum staff among their answers.

Another part of the feedback is the benefits the volunteers may get. Some of them regard the annual party they are invited to, or other gatherings, as a sign of appreciation, with 5% in Norway and Denmark and 2% in Sweden mentioning these benefits as a type of feedback. Another one being mentioned, but only in Sweden, is the satisfaction the volunteers feel when they have been successful in fundraising, mentioning the money they make as a sign of a job well done.

### 13. What do people get out of volunteering?

Most museums try to provide volunteers with a number of benefits in a systematic attempt to attract them or as a manifestation of gratitude for their time and work invested. According to the replies we received, 81% of the respondents confirm that they benefit from volunteering, with only 19% claiming that they don't. When asked to elaborate upon the benefits they get in a free comment question, the most prominent benefit (34%) was the "annual pass to the museum" or "getting free entry" The results have been grouped together into different categories as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The benefits of volunteering according to the volunteers

Free entry/annual pass	34%
Free entry to other museums	20%
Togetherness, co-presence, socializing	10%
Knowledge, courses, learning	8%
Party/social events	8%
Discount at the museum shop	6%
Free food or coffee when working	6%
Other things	8%

The benefits vary depending on the museum, with most of them granting free access or an annual pass to the volunteers. Remarkable is that a large number of respondents

stressed socializing as a benefit of their volunteering experience, valuing co-presence and the sense of belonging to a community highly.

The category of “knowledge, learning, courses” also rates high. Sometimes the museum organizes courses or learning opportunities for the volunteers, but within this category, there is also learning taking place “during the job” as they learn from each other and through their participation.

It is interesting to note that apart from the tangible benefits provided by the museums themselves (i.e. annual pass, free entry, free coffee and food), volunteers appreciate greatly some other ‘intangible’ benefits (i.e. getting together with others, learning by and through doing and being), not usually promoted, or even arranged, by the museums, but benefits that are an important part of volunteering.

When further prompted to reflect upon the benefits they wished they received from the museums, 77% of the volunteers said that there are no (other) benefits they want from these organizations. Despite the vast majority of volunteers being content with the current benefits, 23% of them expressed their desire to get more. Specifically, out of the 31 suggestions we received as free comments, 11 concerned free entry to other museums in the region or in the country; five were about covering financially their transportation to and from the museum when volunteering, and the rest involved free food while volunteering, gaining more knowledge about the museum, taking volunteers’ feedback and investment of time seriously, and provide them with further discounts.

#### **14. The best thing about being a volunteer**

In order to recruit new volunteers and to take better care of the volunteers we already have, there is a need for reaching a better understanding of what the volunteers appreciate the most. To address this need, the survey included a question asking volunteers to name the best thing about being a volunteer. The answers were grouped together into different categories, which can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. What the volunteers appreciate most about volunteering

	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	Denmark	Sweden	Norway
Socializing, belong to a group, meet new people	91	27	59	46%	39%	31%
Being useful, do something meaningful	24	10	59	12%	15%	31%
Teach others/use knowledge/give information to tourists/others	27	3	7	14%	4%	4%
Do something for society/the museum	7	7	18	3%	10%	10%
Learn something/history	17	0	13	9%	0%	7%
work with something the person is interested in, have fun	7	9	14	3%	13%	7%
That it is voluntary	6	9	7	3%	13%	4%
To preserve the past, traditions	6	1	3	3%	1%	2%
Active life, physical activity, crafts	4	1	5	2%	1%	3%
Nice surroundings	4	1	2	2%	1%	1%
Other things	6	2	0	3%	3%	0%
Total number of answers	199	70	187			

It becomes overwhelmingly clear that the social context is the most important driving force for volunteers in all countries: being part of a group, belonging to a community, meeting new people, and meeting people with similar interests. Volunteering is usually a social activity and people often use this opportunity to meet new people who share their interests and values. The importance of social interaction for the museum volunteers may be further revealed from their replies to the question prompting them to reflect upon them making new friends. Specifically, 76% of them stated that they made new friends/met new people during their volunteering experience. This finding

hints at the necessity for the museums to provide opportunities for interaction, and for volunteers having fun as well as time and space for the volunteers to have coffee, talk, or work together.

According to a study conducted in Sweden (Svedberg et al. 2010), the most common motivation/reason for volunteers was their intention to help and be of benefit to others as well as to meet new people and make new friends. Additionally, in other study by Höglund (2012), volunteers indicated that the best thing about being a volunteer was that ‘they feel useful’, ‘they have fun’, ‘feel better as a person’ and that ‘they evolve as a person’.

To “feel useful” was the second most common answer we received to our survey addressing volunteers in museums. Volunteers stated that the best thing about being a volunteer was that they “do something meaningful, to be useful, to feel appreciated and valued”. As volunteers could elaborate on that in free comments, the need to feel appreciated has been expressed in different ways i.e. “*I think it’s wonderful to still have value in society*” (answer from Denmark) or “*to do a meaningful job as a pensioner*” (answer from Norway). What is worth noting is that this seems to be a considerably stronger motivation in Norway than in the other countries (see Table 2).

Sweden is the odd one out when it comes to “learning something/history”: no reply in the Swedish survey brings this up as important to the volunteers, but in both Denmark and Norway, this is mentioned as important. Instead, in Sweden, there is a high number of respondents who state that they volunteer because they are interested in a particular topic, for which they can devote time while and through volunteering. In Sweden, there is also a very high (compared to Norway and Denmark) number of volunteers who find that the best thing about volunteering is that it is voluntary – a dimension of this type of experience that gives them a sense of freedom and power to determine what they either want to do or not to do.

Even though there are some differences between the countries, it is quite clear that the top answers are the same. Additionally, there are of course answers which capture the huge joy the volunteers feel about volunteering i.e. “it widens my horizon” (answer

from Denmark), “it is sooo much fun! (sic)” (Answer from Sweden) or “it can’t be explained in a few words” (answer from Norway).

“To be useful” when it comes to their contribution to the society or the museum is very important for the Norwegians and the Swedes whereas it is less important for the Danish. Instead, “to use one’s knowledge/give information to teach others” is of great importance for the volunteers in Denmark. The variations among the aspects that volunteers appreciate the most may be resulting from the variations among the tasks they carry out in the different countries as for example the volunteers in Sweden and Norway engage with the visitors/tourists to a lesser extent.

### 15. Effects of volunteering on wellbeing

The question on the development or reinforcement of positive feelings and competences as an outcome of their involvement in volunteering activities allowed for multiple answers. We wanted to know how they felt that they developed from volunteering, and it was possible to add other alternatives than the ones listed. We grouped the answers from all countries together as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Effects of volunteering



It is not surprising that the most favoured answer was that the volunteers find their experience nice. Indeed, if they had not had a good time, they would have most probably stopped volunteering. The second most favoured answer was that the work

they carry out is meaningful and that they make a contribution. This is completely in line with the previous question on what the best things about being a volunteer are, where a similar answer scored high. Learning new things and helping others or making use of one's own competences and experiences were also highly valued. All these feelings of being useful, have a nice time, feel happier, feel better, and participating in physical activities all contribute to the individual's wellbeing. This sense of belonging and wellbeing was also included in some other questions, but in a different form, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the volunteers' development and position at the museums. It becomes clear that in different ways volunteering is increasing the quality of life for the participants as it improves their wellbeing.

## **16. It 'feels like home'**

The replies we received also highlighted the overall positive experience that volunteers have. Volunteers are something between staff and visitors, since they help out with many important things, but often have less responsibility than staff, and also appreciate the museum as a place to visit, just like the visitors. As Goodlad and McIvor (1998) argue, volunteers are "effectively visitors who participate actively".

It is also important for the museums to have volunteers who feel at home and know their way around as they often need to assist with visitors' inquiries. Thus, we were particularly interested in exploring how comfortable volunteers feel when in the museum in terms of knowing the gallery spaces, the museum's activities and events and the museum staff.

The results show that 60% of the volunteers feel that they know the plans, purpose and activities of the museums well or very well. This perhaps indicates that the communication between the museum and the volunteers works efficiently since they feel they have knowledge about what is going on at the institution. It might also be the result of having the same volunteers for a long time, building their awareness of the events going on based on their long commitment and involvement in the museum activities.

Feeling at ease when in the museum, which also contributes to volunteers' wellbeing, can be further facilitated by volunteers' developing good orientation skills and knowledge of the museum's buildings and facilities. Again, their longstanding involvement in volunteering for the same organisation may be the reason why 73% of

the respondents feel they have good or very good knowledge of the location of rooms and museum buildings. 77% of the volunteers stated that they feel at home at the museums to a large or very large extent. Knowing their way around is very important for all case studies in this survey as all museums participating are large institutions with buildings dispersed in a wider area.

The relation between volunteers and the museum staff members was also explored. Only 45% of the respondents feel that they know the staff well or very well, while 6% answers that they hardly know the staff at all. If the volunteers are to be included into the organisation, staff and volunteers need to get to know each other and develop a sense of community aiming at the same direction. If volunteers are organised as a separate group which works with things different from those that the staff members are involved with, the degree of interaction between them is very limited as both groups work more or less individually. Some museums may either have a volunteer manager or several staff members who are responsible for different groups of volunteers, or keep volunteers to a large extent self-organised, but with contacts to the museums staff. Even though the participating museums organize their volunteers in different ways, 77% of the volunteers are happy or very happy with the way their work is organised, and there is no significant difference between the three different countries. However, the volunteers contribute to the museum and it might be worth looking into the staff's knowledge about the volunteers if the relation between the groups is to be reinforced.

## **17. Doing something useful & help others with my knowledge and skills**

Mutual aid – helping people in one's own community, giving something back to the community, society or museum so as to make it better for everyone and improve community spirit, is important and brought forward in several of the questions of the survey. Volunteering also can create a great way to get together with friends on a regular basis and contribute to team building. However, people often volunteer to work with a particular group or sort of person.

## **18. Learn new things**

When looking more closely at the different competences the volunteers have the opportunity to practice and develop, the correlation between their answers to the rest

of the questions becomes apparent. The most practiced skill according to them is that of communication, as well as doing meaningful work. They are also using the skills and competences they have to help other and solve problems. If museums want to increase their learning areas, communication in foreign languages, IT skills and cultural activities could be on the agenda, since these are the least practiced competences. However, it is interesting to see that volunteering is clearly about learning and practicing skills and competences, which is an important contribution to lifelong learning when learning opportunities for the age-group to which most volunteers belong are less available than for other groups. Development of competences and skills while practicing skills which would have been redundant otherwise.

Table 3. Competences practiced by volunteers

	To a small extent				To a large extent
Communication with other people	6	10	66	136	210
Communication in foreign languages	143	71	103	53	49
Use of IT and technology	174	55	67	68	55
Calculations (e.g. handling money, building things)	213	53	63	43	43
Learn new things/get experiences	44	56	141	98	94
Learn to make practical things	72	65	126	88	61
Help others to get better at things	54	58	118	118	65
Find new ideas and solutions to problems	66	74	114	119	41
Use my skills and competences to help others	63	52	90	129	77
Make useful work at the museum	8	18	60	139	189
Participate in cultural activities	100	57	98	74	83

## 19. Become happier and feel better

Most volunteers asserted that their experience at the museums is a positive one, which fosters their creativity and desire to learn. Specifically, 19% of them took up a new

activity/hobby. Their overall time spent at the museum increased their self-esteem and reinforced feelings of self-worth and ‘doing something good’ and ‘doing something important’. It can be said that volunteering makes people feel better about themselves and reinforces their wellbeing.

## **20. Overall positive experience**

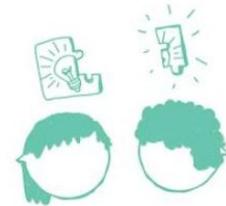
For approximately 60% of the museum volunteers, their experience at the museums influenced positively their attitudes towards museums. They would also recommend others to join volunteering activities. Many volunteer jobs come with intrinsic benefits for their participants. A volunteer sees behind the scenes at a museum where the public cannot go, they may be able to handle objects, try out a completely new hobby, or get a break from their day job. They may just love the area or venue and want to be involved and, above all, enjoy doing something they love.

Pride, Joy & Surplus Value

# Volunteering and wellbeing



## Positive experience



Help others with their knowledge

**Feeling Creative**  
Feeling Motivated & Inspired

19% started a new hobby



Meet new people & become part of a community



Feel what they do has importance  
Feel proud of themselves

## 21. Summary and Future Recommendations for Research

From the 481 replies we received, the vast majority of the museum volunteers across all three countries attested their positive experience. Having a good time and gaining a positive experience may be reflected through their long term involvement in similar activities (four to ten years). Additionally, this very positive experience at the museum has prompted their interests and creativity further, with many of them starting a new hobby or taking up a new activity, contributing to the person's wellbeing. According to them, the best thing of their time at the museum while volunteering is the feeling of togetherness and the community coming together. Their answers highlight the social dimensions and benefits of volunteering.

They appear to feel quite at home when they are at the museums, knowing pretty well what takes place at the museum and the gallery spaces and rooms. When it comes to knowing well the rest of the museum employees, the replies revealed that there is space for improvement as most of them across three countries stated that they don't know them well. Volunteers feel comfortable in the museum's surroundings, and have a high awareness of the ongoing and forthcoming events and activities. It seems that volunteering is not only contributing to the museum institutions and the community these serve but also the volunteers themselves. Some aspects of the volunteer experience become apparent when they recur among the volunteers' replies both in close and open comment questions. The socialization, being together with other people and belonging to a group is one of the most apparent benefits of volunteering. The other one is that being useful, making a contribution and feeling that the work they do is important clearly gives a feeling a satisfaction, pride and increased self-esteem. However, in order to increase this feeling further the study shows that feedback to volunteers can be improved.

Managers play a central role in the management and wellbeing of the volunteers. There is a need for better understanding the relationship between the managers and the volunteers, as well as the rest of museum employees and the wider community. This will be further explored in the forthcoming reports of this project.



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