Review Article

**Received:** 05 July 2026
**Accepted:** 04 November 2026
**Published:** 07 November 2026

# On the Application of Social Technologies in the Development of Volunteering within Azerbaijan's Public Administration System

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**Cite this article:**
I. E. Sahadulla et al. (2026). On the Application of Social Technologies in the Development of Volunteering within Azerbaijan's Public Administration System. Revista Cultura Científica, (24), pp. 2443–2451.
https://doi.org/10.70517/revcc2624196

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## Abstract

This historical narrative review examines the social technologies involved in the formation of volunteering at particular stages of social development in the South Caucasus region, with specific reference to Azerbaijan. The characteristics of these technologies are examined through an analysis of the socio-economic, spiritual, and moral development of society, which shaped traditions and customs of mutual assistance and support among different population groups. The review suggests that the ways in which these technologies were used influenced the transformation of the volunteering process itself, as well as the formation of the social qualities of the participants involved in this process.

Through the analysis of various documents concerning the historical development of the region and the country, as well as other sources – including scholarly literature, press publications, and information on the activities of contemporary organizations engaged in the recruitment and practical deployment of volunteers – the article concludes that an essential element in the creation and application of these technologies is not only the need for voluntary, unpaid assistance, but also the spiritual and moral conceptions of such assistance in human consciousness, which are formed through communication and collective labor. Social capital accumulated over time and provides a conceptual basis for interpreting the effectiveness of approaches to organizing volunteer work. The reviewed materials do not establish it as a single measurable indicator of effectiveness across all historical periods. Contemporary digital technologies significantly expand the possibilities for training volunteers, encouraging them, and determining their life and career trajectories. A number of conditions may be identified, the fulfillment of which would substantially improve the organization of volunteer activity in the country.


**Keywords:** social relations; volunteering; social support; history of the volunteer movement; social technologies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mutual assistance and reciprocal support are characteristic of all peoples, with a particular place occupied by assistance provided without financial compensation. The history of the development of such assistance is of considerable interest from the perspective of social management systems and technologies, through which volunteering has today become a widely recognized means of strengthening social cohesion and supporting development in societies around the world.

The present review focuses on the South Caucasus, particularly Azerbaijan, and on the forms of unpaid mutual assistance that have developed in the region over the course of several centuries. Azerbaijan has a long history shaped by its geographical position and by the peoples inhabiting it. The numerous contacts and processes of cultural and ethnic intermingling that occurred in this territory were, to a considerable extent, connected with geopolitical developments, the evolution of material production, the use of resources, and the struggle for control over them. A multitude of cultures, both Eastern and Western, intersected here. These developments influenced people's way of life and upon their social relations, including relations connected with mutual assistance and support at moments of need.

The numerous large-scale migrations in different directions that took place in the region led to the participation of various tribes and peoples in ethnic processes, thereby influencing the formation of distinct peoples.

The formation of new relations based on the sale of labor power created conditions for the protection of people's rights, the restoration of social justice, and the strengthening of communal norms associated with the support of the poor and of those affected by natural disasters, among others. Over time, after the formation, on the remnants of the Russian Empire, of a new state, the Soviet state, social assistance and related public welfare activities developed within a new institutional setting. In particular, campaigns were undertaken to reduce illiteracy among the population; new jobs were created; and industry and agriculture developed at an accelerated pace.

Legislative acts were developed for the protection of motherhood and childhood, for the advancement of all forms of education, and for the restoration of the values of family upbringing. In addition, the system of state guardianship over those in need of such support, above all children, was further improved.

The new foundations of social support for the population served as an important stimulus for practical activity.

Assistance to those in need was encouraged through the formation of public opinion and the consolidation, within collective consciousness, of an understanding of the reciprocal social utility of such initiatives. This process was mediated, among other mechanisms, through rituals, customs, and, in particular, the symbolic glorification of volunteering as a form of socially beneficial action. Whereas, at earlier stages, instruction in practices of assistance and support was transmitted primarily through personal example and communal approval, it subsequently acquired a mass and specialized character. A related contemporary development is the use of open calls and crowdsourcing to reach potential participants. When combined with recruitment, training, and coordination, these approaches can support the mobilization of volunteers for major public events.

An examination of the available scholarly literature reveals a plurality of approaches to the evaluation and conceptualization of volunteering within the broader moral coordinates of good and evil. Conceptions of morality and immorality – that is, of good and evil – may differ among peoples and cultural communities [1, p. 224]. For example, understandings of spousal relations, parent-child relations, attitudes toward elders, the sick, and children vary across cultural contexts. Moral values are reflected in language, customs, traditions, religious prescriptions, and patterns of human conduct [2]. Moreover, moral ideas constitute the foundation of the spiritual creativity of peoples, including art and literature. Ultimately, it is precisely the moral assessment of one's own human essence that underlies volunteer activity [3].

The social technology of organizing volunteering has been defined as "a means of achieving a particular social, or public, objective through the implementation of a set of scientifically grounded stages, characteristic of a specific type of activity and possessing the properties of reflexivity and feedback" [4, p. 5393]. A considerable body of practical guidance and theoretical scholarship is devoted to the technologies of organizing volunteer activity, depending on the aims and tasks being pursued [5]. Future tendencies in volunteer work are also being examined, with particular emphasis on technology, engagement, and sustainability [6]. It is argued that "volunteer recruitment strategies, digital engagement, and inclusive program design will determine which organizations will thrive" [7]. The prospects for strengthening the role of information and communication technologies in the development of volunteer activity have likewise been considered [8].

Scholars emphasize the expanding potential of digital spaces in the formation of volunteer teams and in the management of all processes related to their functioning [9]. At the same time, the literature reviewed here provides no single comprehensive account of the historical development of social technologies and their use in the voluntary activity of members of society in the South Caucasus region, and specifically in Azerbaijan. Information is available on the current state of the volunteer movement in Azerbaijan [10]. Considerable work is being conducted to involve, above all, young people in volunteer activity, with higher education institutions achieving particular success in this area [11]. Significant achievements in this direction should also be noted in the activity of centers providing social services to the population. Thus, the "ASAN service" centers were established within the framework of the State Agency for Public Service and Social

Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in accordance with Decree No. 685 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 13, 2012 [12]. It is precisely within such centers that volunteers are recruited from among interested young people who, after acquiring experience and receiving appropriate education, may subsequently work both within the professional profile of these institutions and beyond it.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is a historical narrative review and conceptual discussion of social technologies used to organize volunteering in Azerbaijan. It draws on the scholarly literature, historical accounts, press publications, legal material, and institutional webpages identified in the reference list. The discussion follows broad historical periods and considers how traditions of mutual assistance relate to later organizational practices, public institutions, and digital forms of coordination.

The review examines recurring themes, including unpaid assistance, collective work, moral expectations, youth organizations, recruitment, training, and the administrative coordination of volunteers. These themes provide a basis for comparing the social purposes and organizational arrangements described in different sources. The analysis is interpretive: it considers the development of social experience, cooperative skills, attitudes towards mutual assistance, and the institutionalization of associated practices and customs.

The supplied source base does not document a reproducible database search, formal screening procedure, or systematic assessment of source quality. The article is therefore presented as a narrative review rather than a systematic review. It reports no new survey, interviews, experiment, or quantitative evaluation of volunteer outcomes. Historical accounts and organizational descriptions are interpreted within their respective contexts, and the concluding proposals are recommendations derived from the discussion rather than measured effects of an intervention.

## 3. HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

People frequently interpret their actions in relation to practical needs, shared expectations, and the reasons they consider acceptable within their social environment. On this basis that systems of generally accepted rules and norms historically emerged, functioning, in a broad sense, as regulatory mechanisms that facilitate the development of social relations in the direction of justice, reciprocity, and equality. Already in antiquity, human communities recognized the structural contradiction between egoism and collectivism; consequently, it became necessary to formulate common norms of conduct, elevate them to the status of social values, transmit them intergenerationally, and subject them to continuous refinement and development [13, p. 230]. It was in this way that the contemporary system of moral values, closely connected with volunteering as a form of prosocial activity, gradually took shape.

It is important to recognize that moral values are historically conditioned phenomena [14]. They change from one period to another, remain closely connected with national self-consciousness, and develop under the influence of the social environment. Above all, they represent a complex of social relations embedded in the system of material production and reflected in law, politics, and the spiritual-moral sphere of social life. In the course of their development, these relations culminated in the formation of particular social technologies used in the management and advancement of volunteering as a public movement.

The significance of folkloric traditions for the modern individual lies in the fact that, through various forms of folklore, our ancestors sought to influence both nature and society in order to achieve desired outcomes. Spiritual and moral values and norms associated with mutual assistance were gradually formed in this process, many of which have survived, in one form or another, into the present. A distinctive feature of folklore is the close interrelation of the word with music, dance, and various ritualized actions [15, p. 2]. As social relations developed and collective experience accumulated, the genres and forms of folklore became increasingly diverse. Consequently, the possibilities expanded for articulating, within different themes and genres, culturally sanctioned forms of response to particular social problems, including through voluntary assistance expressed in the form of patronage and charitable support.

As a result, ideas concerning dignity, fairness, social obligations, and, in later periods, human rights gradually developed. Of particular importance in this process is the moral ideal, the content of which changed from one historical epoch to another. Like the aesthetic ideal, this moral ideal found expression in artistic consciousness, both oral and written, as well as in historically established traditions of mutual assistance.

These values were expressed through the practical performance of specific rituals, ceremonies, and actions connected with everyday labor. Subsequently, the increasing complexity of social relations and the conceptualization of problems of social tension transferred these practices to another level – the level of the moral ideal, which was embedded in the structures of identity.

In general, collective labor, including hunting, agriculture, and everyday domestic activity, contributed to the formation of mutual assistance as a distinct direction of social practice, including volunteering, understood as collective action in the context of seasonal work, household rites at various stages of life, ritual practices, and related communal activities.

According to R. Veleva, "volunteer activity is closely connected with motivation and abilities and also positively influences the improvement of well-being" [16]. The practical demands of life encouraged communities to create various technologies of mutual assistance and reciprocal support. Assistance was therefore not limited to material provision in the form of food, household items, clothing, or money; it also included the organization of various collective labor initiatives, communal work campaigns, and joint actions aimed at performing socially necessary tasks, such as the construction of houses and other buildings, crop cultivation, sowing, harvesting, and the processing of agricultural produce.

In later periods, such work acquired a more systematic character due to the development of communication networks and managerial technologies, including those implemented through non-governmental organizations. Mass communication media, social networks, and other platforms also began to be actively employed. These processes require more detailed consideration.

In the contemporary accounts reviewed here, in the region under consideration, and particularly in Azerbaijan, a large body of volunteers has been active throughout the twenty-first century, operating on the basis of state support. As is known, in Azerbaijan, "as early as 1998, a joint project of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Volunteers programme began to operate. As a result of this programme, in 1998-2000 a strong team of volunteers was formed in the country, and the promotion of the principles of volunteering among a broad audience commenced" [17]. A law on voluntary activity was adopted [18], defining the principal areas of volunteer activity, the composition of participants, their rights and obligations, as well as the list of documents on the basis of which the necessary agreements are concluded and activity projects are prepared.

The legal framework also addresses the participation of foreign volunteers. Its provisions should be distinguished from the practical arrangements through which local institutions recruit, coordinate, and support participants. The institutional examples discussed in the reviewed sources describe departments, sectors, or groups responsible for forming volunteer teams within the opportunities provided by this legal framework. These teams simultaneously contribute to the activities of the institutions concerned within the framework of planned events and in accordance with the specific character of the institution's work while also enabling volunteers to acquire experience for their subsequent professional careers.

Under conditions of expanding digitalization, social networks are widely employed, and institutions create their own electronic databases for communication and future activity [19], as well as public movements [20]. Organizations providing social services to the population have been particularly successful in this sphere.

In addition to the above, integrated platforms and centralized databases are being established; the procedures of volunteer registration, preliminary selection, interviewing, and formal admission as project participants are undergoing automation; online training infrastructures are being created; and mechanisms for the certification, monitoring, and final evaluation of the activities of specific volunteer groups are being institutionalized [21]. Taken together, these processes may support the development of digital competence and help participants become familiar with new technological tools. Their effectiveness depends on implementation, accessibility, and the training available to users.

Broader digital initiatives, including those presented through the national digitalization portal, offer a context for considering improvements in volunteer administration. However, their inclusion in a general digitalization strategy does not establish that each initiative functions as a volunteer-management platform. Potential benefits include savings in time and resources, wider access, and clearer administrative procedures [21]. Thus, even a brief historical overview of the social technologies employed in the development of voluntary activity demonstrates the extent of humanity's progress in this sphere. Among the most significant characteristics of contemporary society are the growing role of unification and standardization in the organization of social life; the production of stable cognitive and behavioral stereotypes that reflect and simultaneously shape public opinion; the widespread influence of mass media and digital communication on public understanding; and the increasing use of affective-emotional mechanisms of influence, including public events and other visually prominent forms of social communication.

A paradoxical socio-cultural configuration thereby emerges. On the one hand, modernity is characterized by a centuries-long faith in the emancipatory power of reason and science, the progressive development of technology, the institutional improvement of education, the increase in average life expectancy through advances in medical care and nutrition, and the expansion of communication technologies. On the other hand, these developments may also generate tensions concerning creative motivation, particularly in relation to the availability of the entertainment industry, the improvement of everyday living conditions and infrastructural systems, and the neglect of those moral values that constitute the axiological foundation of human existence. It is precisely for this reason that the development and refinement of technologies of volunteer activity should be regarded as one of the most significant directions in the formation of new human qualities, which are particularly necessary in the present historical moment.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The development of capitalist relations generated an increasing differentiation and complication of social ties, as well as the necessity for more systematic regulation of production relations in order to form and reproduce high-quality human

potential. Trade unions emerged; houses and boarding facilities for the recreation of workers were organized; and the organization of labor at enterprises increasingly took into account the human factor as an essential component of production efficiency and social stability. The rights and freedoms of the individual acquired legal protection. In many countries, private charitable foundations of diverse functional orientations were established. One potential social contribution of volunteer activity is the formation of collective self-consciousness, the overcoming of egoism and social indifference, and the development of organizational competencies, including the capacity for rapid decision-making in the interests of the collective as a whole.

Published research discusses relationships between volunteering, social cohesion, and individual well-being. Providing assistance may offer opportunities for meaningful engagement and emotional satisfaction, although these outcomes cannot be assumed to arise uniformly for all participants or in every organizational setting. This is especially significant for socially isolated individuals, who experience an acute need for communication and for the expansion of their social networks [22].

Although volunteering involves people of different ages, youth participation has particular relevance to the historical institutions considered here. In particular,, in the territory now commonly designated as the "post-Soviet space", which includes the Republic of Azerbaijan, special youth organizations were created already in the first years after the formation of the Soviet state. These included the All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth, as well as the All-Union Pioneer Organization, functionally comparable to the scout movements operating abroad. Scouting America provides a contemporary example of an organization that describes youth development through activities concerned with character, citizenship, and practical skills. This example illustrates how structured participation can provide opportunities for cooperation and service, while the differences between historical state-led organizations and contemporary voluntary associations require separate consideration [23].

With regard to Soviet youth and children's organizations, it should be emphasized that their mass character and state supervision facilitated the involvement of children in health-oriented, social, patriotic, and educational activities. These included, for example, the Kozhany Myach and Zolotaya Shayba competitions, assistance to elderly, sick, and lonely people, participation in patriotic initiatives, and broader socialization in accordance with the ideological imperatives of the period [24, 25]. In particular, in 1923, the Pioneer Organization of Azerbaijan was established, and it subsequently developed into a mass organization for schoolchildren. At the same time, an age-based internal differentiation existed: younger children were known as Octobrists, a designation derived from the month of the "Great October Revolution", the political upheaval of 1917 that became the foundation for the creation of the Soviet state, while older children were designated as Pioneers, meaning "the first in everything" [26]. This organization possessed its own periodical press, including the journal Goyercin (Dove) and the newspaper Azerbaycan pioneri (Pioneer of Azerbaijan), later renamed Savalan, after the name of Mount Savalan [27], among others.

Interaction with children within these organizations was carried out by Pioneer leaders, whose position was officially institutionalized in every school, as well as by secretaries of Komsomol committees and members of elected organizational bodies. Membership and active participation in these structures functioned as an important prerequisite for subsequent integration into the ruling Communist Party [28]. From this perspective, such organizations may be interpreted as historical institutions relevant to understanding later forms of organized public participation, including within the Azerbaijani context.

A further significant component of this system was the extensive practice of organizing Pioneer camps, in which children between the ages of six and fourteen spent the period of their summer school holidays. The costs associated with nutrition and with the remuneration of the personnel responsible for educational and supervisory work with children were covered by the trade-union committee of the relevant enterprise [29]. The pedagogical and organizational work conducted in these camps contributed to the formation of collectivist competencies, the consolidation of a positive socio-psychological microclimate within the detachment, and the acquisition of practices of mutual assistance, solidarity, and support. These educational and organizational practices introduced participants to collective activity and mutual assistance. They should nevertheless be distinguished from contemporary volunteering, because participation also took place within a state-directed ideological system. This process was conditioned by the dominant political ideology, the broader socio-political atmosphere of the country, the organization of everyday life, the regulation of the daily routine, and the professional competence of teachers and Pioneer leaders. In general, hundreds of thousands of children annually participated in these camps, thereby strengthening their health, internalizing collective norms of conduct, and developing elementary leadership skills.

It should be emphasized that this organizational system included both official state bodies responsible for its centralized administration and local voluntary membership-based structures. Admission to membership was regulated by the organization's charter, that is, by a codified set of normative prescriptions binding upon every member. The system also included mechanisms of encouragement and sanction, which performed both disciplinary and motivational functions [30]. In contemporary schools of the country, voluntary children's organizations also exist; however, in most cases their functioning remains largely formalized and institutionally limited [30]. Accordingly, the contemporary volunteer movement is represented predominantly by university students and university graduates. The reviewed accounts suggest that some organizations generate substantial demand among those wishing to become volunteers, while others attract participants with

considerably less enthusiasm. This circumstance points to differences in organizational quality, institutional reputation, the perceived value of volunteer experience, and the future career prospects associated with participation in a particular structure.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The governance and regulation of all forms of social life are inseparable from corresponding social technologies, which are realized through traditions, ritual practices, institutional procedures, and technological mechanisms generated by scientific and technical progress. Mutual assistance and social support, historically embodied in traditional ceremonial practices, including communal celebrations, seasonal labor, family rites, and other forms of collective participation, created within public consciousness the axiological foundations of collective creativity, communal cohesion, and social self-confidence. During the medieval period and in subsequent stages of social development, despite internecine wars and military incursions by regional powers, economic relations, education, science, and culture continued to develop.

In general, the forms of regulation of mutual assistance and support, including those provided without financial compensation, were directly determined by the socio-economic development of the country and the region. Following Azerbaijan's incorporation into Tsarist Russia, the problems of social justice and the protection of human rights acquired a new institutional and political configuration, since capitalist relations began to develop at an accelerated pace. Under these conditions, the labor force was consolidated within various professional associations, which, in turn, expanded the possibilities for diversifying forms of unpaid assistance. During the Soviet period, Pioneer camps were established for young people, where they were inculcated with skills of unpaid community work, including assistance to pensioners, participation in harvesting, support in emergency situations, and other socially useful activities.

In contemporary Azerbaijan, digital platforms are widely used for the recruitment of volunteers, including social media channels, as well as for the implementation of social campaigns during pandemics and in situations involving natural disasters. The performance of assignments and their evaluation are increasingly carried out in digital formats. Tasks are implemented through various instruments of corporate social responsibility, including those mediated through the Internet. Government-supported digitalization provides a possible foundation for more integrated volunteer-management systems, including the use of appropriately designed mobile applications. Artificial intelligence is capable of playing a significant role in this process, particularly when directly integrated into the relevant management system. The rapid development of technologies improves the organization of volunteering; however, the review identifies several issues that merit assessment when introducing more advanced technological arrangements into volunteer organizations:

- differences in Internet access between major cities and other regions, which may affect the ability of interested individuals to participate in digitally coordinated volunteer activity;
- potential inequalities in opportunities for young men and young women to participate in volunteer work, including barriers associated with public expectations and traditional norms;
- the lag in the use of contemporary technologies caused by the insufficient professional training of the managerial personnel of particular enterprises and institutions, which results in the weak adaptation of this movement to the conditions required for effective volunteer activity;
- the need for reforms in school and higher education should also be emphasized, so that schools and universities provide stronger preparation for adult life, community participation, and professional responsibility. It is precisely literacy, breadth of worldview, a high level of general culture, and mental qualities grounded in humanism that will contribute to the development of the volunteer movement so urgently needed by contemporary society.

### Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and development of the article, reviewed its content, and approved the final version for publication.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Funding

This research received no external funding.

**Data Availability**

This article draws on published literature, historical accounts, and publicly accessible institutional documents cited in the reference list. No new participant-level data were collected. Access to the reviewed materials is subject to the availability and access conditions of their respective publishers and institutional repositories.

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