

VOLUNTEERING AS A PLATFORM FOR FUTURE CAREERS: HOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT HELPS YOUTH BUILD THEIR PROFESSIONAL FUTURE

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Abstract: *Volunteering is often viewed as a noble act of giving back to the community. However, it also serves as a powerful platform for personal and professional development. This article explores how civic engagement through volunteering influences the future careers of young individuals, focusing on sociological and psychological scales used to measure the impact on 55 students from the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Arad, specifically 11th and 12th graders. The findings reveal significant benefits in skill development, social capital, and career orientation.*

Key words: *volunteering, civic engagement; career development; youth; social capital; skill development; professional growth; orthodox theological seminary; sociological scales; psychological scales.*

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive job market, young people are looking for ways to distinguish themselves. Volunteering has emerged as a valuable avenue for developing skills, gaining experience, and building networks. This paper investigates the role of volunteering in shaping future career paths for youth, with a specific focus on students from the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Arad.

Literature Review

The literature on volunteering highlights its dual impact: personal growth and societal benefit. Scholars like Wilson and Musick (1999) emphasize that volunteering enhances social and human capital. Additionally, Clary et al. (1998) discuss the functional approach to volunteer motivations, linking personal and professional benefits to civic engagement.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was used to assess the impact of volunteering on the students. Quantitative data were collected using sociological and

psychological scales, including the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) and the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSES). Qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions and interviews.

Description of Scales

1. **Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI)** The VFI, developed by Clary et al. (1998), is a tool used to assess the motivations behind volunteering. It consists of six functional motives:
 - **Values:** Expressing altruistic and humanitarian values.
 - **Understanding:** Gaining knowledge and learning through experience.
 - **Social:** Strengthening social relationships.
 - **Career:** Gaining career-related experience.
 - **Protective:** Reducing negative feelings or addressing personal problems.
 - **Enhancement:** Enhancing personal growth and self-esteem. Each motive is measured through a series of questions, allowing researchers to determine the primary drivers for volunteer engagement.
2. **Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSES)** The CDSES, developed by Taylor and Betz (1983), measures an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully make career-related decisions. It focuses on five areas:
 - **Self-Appraisal:** Assessing one's abilities and interests.
 - **Occupational Information:** Gathering information about different careers.
 - **Goal Selection:** Setting realistic and appropriate career goals.
 - **Planning:** Developing a plan to achieve career goals.
 - **Problem Solving:** Overcoming obstacles related to career decisions. The scale uses a Likert-type format where respondents rate their confidence in performing various career-related tasks.

Results

The analysis of the data collected from 55 students revealed several key findings:

1. **Skill Development:** Students reported significant improvements in soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
2. **Social Capital:** Participation in volunteering activities expanded their social networks, providing mentorship opportunities and professional contacts.

3. **Career Orientation:** Many students indicated a clearer understanding of their career goals and increased confidence in their career decision-making abilities.

Discussion

The findings align with existing literature, which underscores the role of volunteering in career development. The sociological and psychological scales used in this study confirm that volunteering provides practical benefits that extend beyond altruism. For instance, the VFI highlighted that students were motivated by both altruistic and career-oriented reasons.

The Role of Schools in Promoting Volunteering: The Case of the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Arad

Education systems have long been recognized as critical platforms for fostering social values and civic engagement. Schools do not merely serve as institutions for academic instruction but are also instrumental in shaping the character and social responsibility of their students (Dewey, 1938). Among these, the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Arad exemplifies the unique role that faith-based educational institutions play in promoting volunteerism as a core value. One of the primary objectives of the Orthodox Theological Seminary is to instill a sense of altruism and community service in its students. Drawing from Christian teachings, the seminary emphasizes the importance of serving others as an expression of faith and moral duty. According to Smith and Davidson (2014), religious institutions often provide a framework for volunteerism that integrates spiritual growth with practical community engagement. The seminary's curriculum incorporates theological reflections on service, inspiring students to view volunteering not just as an act of charity but as a fundamental aspect of their personal and spiritual development.

To translate values into action, the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Arad offers structured volunteering programs. These initiatives range from organizing food drives for underprivileged families to providing mentorship for younger students in local schools. Such programs align with findings from Clary et al. (1998), who argue that volunteering opportunities integrated into educational environments are more likely to cultivate long-term engagement. By participating in these activities, students develop practical skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, which further reinforce their commitment to civic responsibility.

The seminary's approach also emphasizes the role of volunteering in strengthening social networks. Through collaborative projects, students build relationships with peers, faculty, and community members,

fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Putnam (2000) highlights the importance of social capital—the networks and relationships that facilitate cooperation and mutual support—as a critical outcome of civic engagement. In the context of the seminary, these bonds not only enrich the students' educational experience but also prepare them to become active and connected members of society.

Beyond its immediate social and spiritual benefits, the seminary's focus on volunteering also supports students' career aspirations. Many initiatives are designed to align with career-related skills, such as communication and project management, which are increasingly valued in the job market (Astin & Sax, 1998). For example, students involved in organizing community events gain experience in planning and logistics, which can be directly applied in professional contexts. This dual focus on personal growth and career readiness underscores the seminary's holistic approach to education. The success of the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Arad in promoting volunteering highlights the potential for educational institutions to play a transformative role in society. By integrating values-based education with practical opportunities for engagement, the seminary provides a model for fostering a culture of service that extends beyond the classroom. As education policy increasingly emphasizes the importance of social-emotional learning and civic responsibility (OECD, 2018), the seminary's approach offers valuable insights for schools worldwide.

Future Professional Opportunities

Volunteering serves as a significant platform for skill acquisition and professional development, particularly for students at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Arad. (Wilson & Musick, 1999). Engaging in civic activities allows youth to develop both hard and soft skills, which are highly valued in the job market. This chapter delves into the types of skills gained through volunteering and how they contribute to career readiness. One of the primary benefits of volunteering is the enhancement of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and leadership. (Clary et al., 1998). Students participating in volunteer programs frequently report improvements in these areas due to their interactions with diverse groups and the necessity to collaborate effectively.

For example, organizing community events or participating in outreach programs helps students improve their public speaking and interpersonal skills. These experiences are crucial for career paths in theology, education, and beyond, where effective communication and collaboration are essential. Beyond soft skills, volunteering also offers opportunities to acquire hard skills and technical expertise. Tasks such as managing budgets, organizing logistics, or utilizing specific software

tools during volunteer projects provide practical experience that can be directly applied in professional settings. For instance, students who volunteer with the Association of Orthodox Christians in Romania, Arad branch, often engage in administrative tasks, event planning, and educational programming, all of which contribute to their technical skill set. (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

The combination of soft and hard skills gained through volunteering enhances overall career readiness. By applying these skills in real-world contexts, students gain a competitive edge in the job market. The experiences they accumulate not only bolster their resumes but also provide concrete examples to discuss during job interviews, demonstrating their capability and initiative. Social capital and networking are critical components of career development. Volunteering enables students to build relationships with peers, mentors, and professionals, which can significantly impact their career trajectories. (Wilson & Musick, 1999). This chapter explores how volunteering fosters these connections and the long-term benefits of such networks. Through volunteering, students interact with a variety of individuals, including community leaders, professionals in their field, and fellow volunteers. These interactions often lead to the formation of valuable professional networks.

The Association of Orthodox Christians in Romania provides a prime example of this. Students who volunteer with the association have the opportunity to meet and work with established theologians, educators, and community organizers. These connections often result in mentorships and recommendations that are invaluable when seeking employment or further educational opportunities. (Clary et al., 1998).

Mentorship is a key benefit of the networking opportunities provided by volunteering. Experienced professionals who oversee volunteer projects often take on mentorship roles, offering guidance, feedback, and support to young volunteers. This relationship helps students navigate their career paths more effectively, providing insights into their chosen fields and helping them avoid common pitfalls. The relationships built through volunteering can lead to long-term career benefits. Networking often results in job offers, internships, and other professional opportunities. Additionally, the social capital accumulated through volunteering enhances students' reputations within their communities and professional circles, making them more attractive candidates for future roles.

Volunteering provides a unique platform for career exploration and goal setting. It allows students to gain firsthand experience in various fields, helping them identify their interests and strengths. (Taylor & Betz, 1983). This chapter examines how volunteering aids in career exploration and the establishment of clear career goals. Volunteering

exposes students to a range of professional environments and roles, offering a clearer understanding of potential career paths. By engaging in diverse activities, students can explore different fields, gaining insights into what aligns with their interests and skills. For instance, students at the Orthodox Theological Seminary who volunteer in educational programs may discover a passion for teaching, while those involved in community outreach might be drawn to social work or nonprofit management.

Through hands-on experience, students can better assess their career goals. Volunteering helps them understand the practical aspects of various professions, allowing them to set realistic and informed career objectives. (Clary et al., 1998). The reflective nature of volunteer work also encourages students to consider their long-term aspirations and the steps needed to achieve them. The experiences gained through volunteering bolster students' confidence in their career decisions. As they acquire new skills, overcome challenges, and achieve tangible results, their self-efficacy in career-related tasks increases. (Taylor & Betz, 1983). This confidence is reflected in their ability to set ambitious goals and pursue them with determination.

Volunteering offers a multitude of professional opportunities for young individuals. Students who engage in volunteering often develop a diverse skill set, which makes them attractive candidates in various fields. Beyond skill development, volunteering facilitates access to professional networks and mentorships that can lead to internships, job offers, and career advancements. One significant example is the impact of volunteering through the Association of Orthodox Christians in Romania, Arad branch. Many of the students from the Orthodox Theological Seminary who were involved with this association have successfully transitioned into professional roles in theology and education. The association provided structured volunteering opportunities that allowed students to gain hands-on experience, develop leadership skills, and foster a sense of community service. These experiences have proven instrumental in their career trajectories, with many now holding esteemed positions as educators and theologians. The practical skills and networks gained through their volunteering efforts have laid a solid foundation for their professional success. This highlights the long-term benefits of integrating volunteering into the educational journey, preparing students not just for immediate job prospects, but for sustained career growth.

Volunteering and Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a crucial aspect of modern societies, focusing on providing equal opportunities and breaking down barriers that exclude individuals or groups from fully participating in economic, social, and

cultural life. Volunteering plays a pivotal role in fostering social inclusion, creating a more equitable and cohesive society. This chapter explores how volunteering contributes to social inclusion through building bridges across communities, empowering marginalized individuals, and fostering a sense of belonging. Volunteering initiatives often bring together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering interactions that might not occur otherwise (Putnam, 2000). These interactions help dismantle stereotypes, reduce prejudice, and build mutual understanding. For instance, community projects involving diverse cultural groups allow participants to share their experiences, traditions, and values, promoting cultural exchange and tolerance (Auld & Cuskelly, 2001).

By encouraging collaboration, volunteering creates opportunities for meaningful connections, bridging the gap between different social, ethnic, or economic groups. For example, programs that pair local volunteers with refugees or migrants can help newcomers integrate into society while providing the local community with a broader perspective. Volunteering empowers marginalized individuals by providing them with a platform to contribute and showcase their abilities (Wilson, 2000). Often, people facing challenges such as unemployment, disabilities, or social discrimination feel excluded from society. Volunteering offers them opportunities to develop skills, gain confidence, and build social networks.

For example, initiatives that involve people with disabilities in community service projects highlight their capabilities and potential, challenging societal stereotypes (Grönlund, 2011). Similarly, volunteering can help unemployed individuals gain valuable work experience, improving their employability and self-esteem. Engaging in volunteer activities fosters a sense of belonging and purpose for individuals who might otherwise feel isolated. Social isolation is a significant issue for groups such as the elderly, single parents, or those living in poverty. Participating in volunteering projects connects individuals with their communities and helps combat loneliness (Cattan et al., 2005).

Moreover, volunteering allows individuals to contribute to causes they care about, reinforcing their sense of purpose. For example, environmental clean-up projects not only improve local surroundings but also give volunteers a shared mission, creating a strong sense of camaraderie and collective achievement. Volunteering initiatives often focus on addressing inequalities and advocating for social justice. Whether it is through food banks, educational programs, or healthcare initiatives, volunteers work to ensure that basic rights and services are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004). Such efforts help reduce disparities and enable

disadvantaged individuals to participate more fully in society. For example, literacy programs run by volunteers provide educational opportunities to underserved populations, empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion. These programs not only uplift individuals but also contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. Volunteers often play a role in advocating for inclusive policies by raising awareness of social issues and engaging in grassroots activism. Their on-the-ground experiences provide valuable insights that can inform policymakers and drive systemic change. For instance, volunteer organizations working with homeless populations can highlight the root causes of homelessness and propose targeted interventions to address them (Cloke et al., 2010). By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, volunteering helps to shape policies that promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for all.

Conclusion

Volunteering acts as a bridge between education and the professional world, offering young people a platform to acquire essential skills and build valuable networks. For the students at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Arad, these experiences have proven instrumental in shaping their future careers. By participating in volunteer activities, students not only enhance their personal and professional skill sets but also expand their social capital, which is crucial for career advancement. This study underscores the importance of integrating volunteering into educational curricula to maximize its benefits for youth development. The findings suggest that educational institutions should actively promote and facilitate volunteering opportunities as part of their programs. Doing so will provide students with experiential learning that complements academic knowledge, thereby preparing them for the challenges of the job market. Furthermore, fostering a culture of civic engagement within educational settings can cultivate a generation of socially responsible and professionally competent individuals, ultimately contributing to both personal success and community well-being.

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