

THE EDUCATIVE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S OCCUPANCY

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Abstract: *Volunteering is one of the subjects that asks for an increased interest in the context of pursuing the insertion of the youth on the labor market. Volunteers are mostly free from marginalization, improving by practice their skills which eventually will be turned to account on the labor market. The Northern and Western European countries, which have a culture that encourages volunteering, tend to have lower percentages of young people that are not involved neither in education and training, nor in employment (NEET). Even more, these countries invest a higher percentage from GDP (PIB) in education compared to the other EU countries. Proving a high degree of responsibility toward the education and schooling of the youth is accompanied by a higher interest from youth in involving actively in the life of the society through volunteering and through an easier transition to a workplace.*

Key words: *volunteering, young people's occupancy, investment in education, NEET*

Introduction

Volunteering has been and still is an important index of values that are linked to the idea of European citizenship and to the idea of collective participation in the active support of the society, promoting solidarity and social inclusion. Giving to the the interested persons the possibility to strenghten and develop their knowledge, abilities and social networks, volunteering stimulates development on a personal, social and profesional level (*European Union*, 2012).

Initially, the main advantages of volunteering were linked to the participation and social involvement in community service. During the last period of time, the concept has been enriched with new valences, having a new highlight on the personal benefits of the volunteers, not only the advantages of the individuals or of the communities that have been receivers

in volunteering projects. Young people who have been involved regularly in this kind of programs, beside the aquirement of new social skills and the improvement of professional experience, have been provided with enhanced chances to enrolment and improvement of entrepreneurial skills.

Even though it is considered that volunteering is part of the community service, and the persons involved do not expect any financial or other type of reward for their services, it is generally accepted that this is a win-win situation. Volunteers improve the level of their abilities, create new social contacts and gain new experiences propeling their personal developement. Those who feel socially isolated, experiment a new sense of belonging to the community (*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 2011a).

Volunteering has a strong educational dimension. The skills developed through involvement in practical situations that are part of the daily reality offer increased chances to the enrolment of young people and shortens the transition from school to work. Volunteering can be a good way to improve team work, internal cohesion of a group and to develop transversal skills. This opens the horizon of those involved, offers new perspectives on social problems, offers new experiences, skills, confidence and further enthusiasm in work. Even more, the conclusions of the studies made on european volunteers show that they think that the involvement in the community offers them a state of moral and personal fulfillment (*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 2011b).

In a study made upon students from twelve different nations (Haski-Leventhal et al, 2008) were discovered surprising information about the orientation of the youth who usually enlist in volunteering. Even though it was believed that the students from the social area are more inclined to volunteering than those who study Exact Sciences, the research proves that, in fact, the students of social sciences are less involved in volunteering than the other students. Students who study engineering are involved in this kind of activities much more than it was expected and most involved are those from humanities.

If it is accomplished in other countries than the country of origin, volunteering develop the capacity to understand life from multiple perspectives and has a powerful impact on the young individual. It improves the chances to have a good job, because the employers appreciate the capacity to work in team, communication in multicultural environment and the capacity to use a foreign language. When they work on the behalf of other, young people often discover unknown things about themselves and learn to achieve new performances. Most young people end voluntary

service with an improved self-esteem and a new and fresh life vision (*European Union*, 2012).

Many times volunteering is also seen as a kind of work that is not remunerated, carried out to the benefit of the family, in household. Children's education and taking care of relatives who are old or sick are some examples of activities that fall in this category. Even though these activities are not regarded as genuine volunteering, their nature can be similar to that of volunteering. There are major differences between helping a person who is close to you and the service in the behalf of someone unknown. It is used the term of *formal volunteering* and *informal volunteering* to make the difference between the two forms that can be confused. The first term is a reference to the activities that unfold under the direction and coordination of an organization, while the second term is used to name the activities that are not remunerated and are carried out for the benefit of relatives, known persons or in your own household (*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 2011a).

Aguire and Bolton (2013) through a qualitative-interpretative meta-synthesis that selected the results of more qualitative studies from literature linked to the motivation of volunteers have selected six important themes which were researched and discussed in the chosen studies: internal motivation, volunteers' existentialism, life experience, feeling of personal fulfillment, lack of direction and lack of support. From all these themes, the one linked to existentialism, read as concern for understanding the meaning of life, is present in all the researched studies. Volunteers are usually persons preoccupied to understand the meaning of life, focusing on its discovery through their actions and the assumed values.

Volunteering in Europe

There are evidence that show that in Europe there are significant differences between the member states regarding the traditional orientation of volunteering. There is a strong culture of volunteering in several countries from the Northern and Western part of Europe and a low level of participation in the most countries from South and Est of Europe. This situation can be the result of a faster growth of services that bring citizens' welfare.

Citizens have the possibility to spend more time in volunteering in Northern states, more than in other member states, where people are traditionally involved in family responsibilities and in householding. Persons who are involved in informal volunteering (old people's nursing, and nursing of persons with disabilities), usually do not participate at formal types of

volunteering (*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 2011a).

Volunteering has a contribution of less than 0,5% from GDB for Poland and Slovakia and more than 3% from GDB in Sweden and Netherlands. During the last decade new areas of volunteering have been developed and volunteering has been promoted more and more widely. The economic crisis has increased the involvement in volunteering in Ireland and Netherlands and has diminished this involvement in Italy, Poland and Baltic countries. Women integrate easier into the social and philanthropic areas, while man participate in larger number in volunteering activities from the sports area and emergency services (Maquet, 2013).

In former communist countries from Central and East Europe, volunteering is influenced by social and political traditions, these countries lacking a volunteering culture. There is a negative connotation for volunteering, because in these countries existed some systems of tying unpaid work for community service. In a great measure, Poland's and Hungary's experiences from this area are similar. In Poland, volunteering was traditionally strong linked to the Catholic Church (*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 2011c).

The member countries of European Union register a number of variations regarding the population's involvement in volunteering activities. Its level is higher (more than 30%) in countries like Austria, Netherlands, Slovenia, UK, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg. Estonia, France and Lithuania register a percentage of 20-30% in population's involvement. Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Czech Republic and Romania register a percentage of 10-20% in population's involvement. The lowest level of population's involvement in volunteering has been registered in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Latvia (less than 10%) (Maquet, 2013).

Volunteering in Romania

Researches that have studied social involvement of Romanian students confirm that the participation in volunteering continues to be low (Blaj & Netedu, 2012). Compared to the other European countries, Romanians are less communicative, less engaged in civic activities and less trustful in individuals who belong to other social groups or in society's organisms or institutions (Neguț, 2013).

The youth and population from urban environment are more prone to volunteering, unlike the rest of population (Voicu, 2010), these being the main representatives of social capital *bridging* type, characterized by open relationships with individuals from outside the primary group, (by) trust in

institutions and (by) social participation through the medium (mediation) of associations or foundations (Neguț, 2013).

Blaj and Neteđu in a research conducted by Al. I. Cuza University, show the fact that only 12% of the students had been involved in voluntary organisations. 27,4% of these had been involved in this type of activities with the purpose of gaining experience, 18,2% because of their need to help, 9,9% to improve their CV activities and to socialize and 5,3% for personal development. The order of preference regarding the fields was: student activities, human rights, education, environment protection and social field.

In Romania, many universities were extremely open in embracing the volunteering model. For example, two of the projects organized by the University of Craiova are called „Volunteering = sure employed” or „Volunteer today, enterpriser tomorrow!”, which proves a deep understanding of the relationship between students’ volunteering and their increased capacity to integrate into the labor market.

Even before and after the admission of the Law of Volunteering of 2014, almost all the articles that analyzed the information brought in by the last version of this law, advert to the fact that the time spend in volunteering will be officially recognized as professional experience, based on a special certificate of aquired skills. On the ground of this new law, new expectations were framed, being anticipated a masive growth of the volume of volunteering in our country. Unfortunately, the growth did not meet the expectations, volunteering still not being definitively embraced in Romania. That can be proved by the low percentage of young and adult population involved in volunteering.

Volunteering, the investement in education and youth in NEET

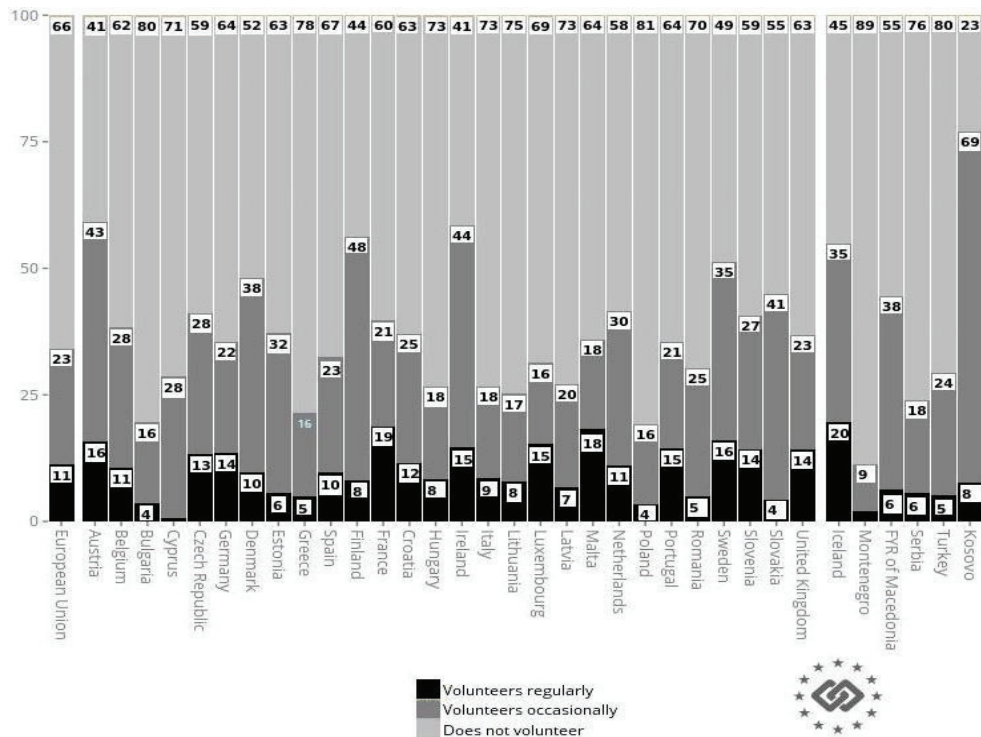
One of the many concerns of European Quality of Life Survey (2012) is also the study of european population’s way of involvement in volunteering. At the division of Social Exclusion and Community involvement, through the question number eleven, the studied population is classified in three main categories: persons who are regularly involved in volunteering, persons who are occasionally involved in volunteering and persons who are not involved in volunteering. Figure 1 shows the three categories of population for European citizens with age between 18 and 24.

As can be seen, Romania, along with Bulgaria, Estonia Greece, Poland and Slovakia, has a very low percentage of young people who are regularly involved in volunteering. The volunteering culture is much better represented in Western countries. It seems that the communist memory of „obligatory volunteering” programs determine the population of the former communist countries to remain cautious regarding the involvement in

volunteering. The study mentioned above indicates a Romanian reality where the category of young population has the higher percentage of involvement in volunteering, compared to the categories of population at a higher age. These percentages represent a defining feature of our country, considering the fact that, in the other populations from European countries, adults and old citizens have higher percentages of involvement in volunteering compared to the youth.

Starting from this reality known through the medium of *European Quality Life Survey* (2012), in the present research, is hypothesized that the percentage of the European youth involved in volunteering, on the three mentioned categories, are related both with the GDP percentage (*Gross domestic product*) invested in education and with the NEET (percentage of the youth who are not involved neither in education or training, nor in employment – *Not in Education, Employment or Training*).

Figure 1. The three categories of young persons, function of the time spent in volunteering.



Source: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/data-visualisation/european-quality-of-life-survey-2012>

Based on the data obtained from the European Union agencies, *Eurofund* and *Eurostat*, it has been constituted a new database that has been analyzed by the instrumentality of PSPP program, a statistical analysis program which is offered free for the users of Linux system. Tabel 1 shows the results calculated with this program with *Pearson* correlation coefficient. The five variables which were taken into consideration were:

1. Percentage of the youth involved regularly in volunteering;
2. Percentage of the youth involved occasionally in volunteering;
3. Percentage of the youth who are not involved in volunteering activities;
4. Percentage of the youth in *NEET*.
5. Percentage of *GDB* assigned to education.

Tabel 1. Pearson Correlation for the five variables of the research

		Regularly	Occasionally	Never	NEET	GDP Percentage
		1	2	3	4	5
Regularly	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1,00	,14	-,57	-,57	,26
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>		,45	,00	,00	,16
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31
Occasionally	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	,14	1,00	-,89	-,34	,47
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,45		,00	,06	,01
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31
Never	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	-,57	-,89	1,00	,54	-,50
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,00	,00		,00	,00
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31
NEET	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	-,57	-,34	,54	1,00	-,32
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,00	,06	,00		,08
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31
GDP Percentage	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	,26	,47	-,50	-,32	1,00
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,16	,01	,00	,08	
	<i>N</i>	31	31	31	31	31

Source: Own processing of data obtained from Eurofound and Eurostat, 2012.

As expected, there is a negative correlation between the series registered by the youth regularly involved in volunteering and the

uninvolved youth from European Union Countries. The higher the percentage of the involved youth, the lower the percentage of those uninvolved tends to be. Even more, the percentage of the population occasionally involved in volunteering is even more strongly negatively correlated with the population uninvolved in volunteering. Countries which have a low percentage of youth regularly involved in volunteering tend to have higher percentages of youth uninvolved. Likewise, the higher the percentage of the youth uninvolved in volunteering, the higher the tendency to be lower the percentage of the youth occasionally involved in volunteering.

The tabel also indicates a powerful negative correlation between the percentage of youth regularly involved in volunteering activities and *NEET*. The lower the percentage of actively involved youth in volunteering, the higher the *NEET* rate tends to be.

The percentage of the youth occasionally involved in volunteering is positively correlated with the percentage from GDB assigned to education. Countries that have a higher percentage of youth involved in volunteering also have a lower percentage from GDB assigned to education.

As expected, the high percentages of youth that are never involved in volunteering are positively associated with high values of *NEET*. Even more, high percentages of youth that are not involved in volunteering tend to be associated with low percentages from GDB assigned for education. Those countries that have high percentages of youth uninvolved, also have low percentages of GDB assigned for their education.

We cannot speak here about a causality, but rather about a variety of factors interconnected in a mentality that ignores the cumulative impact of individual decisions and the importance of civicism and social responsibility. In that place where the youth do not feel responsible for the good of society, neither the society has enough resources for their support and education. In other words, as long as the investment of the state in youth is minimal, it is also expected a minimal involvement from the youth in communitary service.

Therefore, the increased tendency towards the inactivity of the youth from several european countries can be observed also at the level of their involvement in community aid projects as well as in their training, education and entering the labor market level. This can be a problem of mentality, education or training of the youth that are overprotected by the adult generations, without being encouraged to involve as early in social life or the labor market. Countries which have higher percentages of youth who do not involve in volunteering tend to also have higher *NEET* values. This phenomenon supports the conclusions of the previously studies that were

advertising the fact that volunteering increase the youth chances to find sooner and easier a job.

Countries that give a greater importance to education funding are exactly those countries where the volunteering culture already exist. The involvement in those countries comes from both ways: the government gives the youth increased funds for education, youth are involved in a larger number in activities of communitary aid and support, thus engaging actively in community life through volunteering.

Conclusions

The involvement of youth in volunteering could be a first important step that young people could make to activate themselves, to create a real and healthy vision upon the needs of the society, to define themselves, to get experience and confidence in their own strenghts, to be able to think free and to broaden the horizons of their knowledge.

Education, social involvement and integration on the labor market are the three great challenges of each young person. These do not coexist separately, but are in a tight symbiosis, supporting each other, each of the three elements playing an important part in defining the others. Alongside with education, it is necessary to be recognized the formative value of social involvement and the huge contribution that each young person can bring through involvement in volunteering. When they will recognize the power from the proverb: "helping others, you help yourself," young people will hold one of the important keys to success in life.

To be able to educate the new generation in a culture open to volunteering, it is necessary to make significant changes of background in the work philosophy of all the factors involved in educating and training the youth and in creating projects, plans and strategies for their integration both in social and in economical life of a country.

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