
SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI" STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN VOLUNTEERING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS PROMOTION

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Abstract: The importance and benefits of volunteering have long been acknowledged in the European Union. Volunteering activities contribute to strengthening some of the fundamental European values, such as solidarity and connecting with the community. It helps individuals to play a significant role in creating a more democratic, caring and responsible society. Today almost 100 million citizens of all ages make a positive contribution in the EU through an active involvement in volunteering activities in a wide range of organisations including civil society organisations, youth clubs, hospitals, schools, sport clubs and many others. Bulgaria is one of the newest members of the EU (since 2007) and is still adopting and trying to keep up with the good practices and values in the European countries. Being the biggest and oldest in Bulgaria, Sofia University educates young people from all over the country. One of the main targets of their education is to prepare them to be active, valuable and responsible citizens of the Bulgarian society as well as of the European community. The article highlights the importance of volunteering as a way to create more democratic, caring and responsible society as well as what personal benefits come with it. It also emphasizes the significance of volunteering in sport events as a way for introducing the importance of regular physical exercise for humans' health. The article shows the results from a study aimed at exploring the experience of Sofia University' students in volunteering, their motives to stay or become a volunteer as well as their will to volunteer in sport events. Participants were 250 university students in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects. All of them enlisted in different sport classes for the 2017-2018 academic year. For the purposes of the study has been used the Descriptive - explicative method. The results show that young people do not have much experience in volunteering and are not very well educated about all possibilities that it offers today. The author gives some recommendations for the promotion of volunteering among young people. The University could/should establish courses, where students can learn about volunteering in general and volunteering in sport. There could be motivational engines created, which will make students to be more active in volunteering. The University's Authorities could find and provide the legal background for volunteering in its Regulations. University could make regular calls for volunteers for all of its annual events (conferences, university's sport championships, projects and charity events). The author suggests that an additional research should be made to identify the type of events young people are interested in, in order to attract them to become volunteers as well as what are the negative sides they find in volunteering.

Keywords: volunteering, benefits, motives, university students

INTRODUCTION

What is volunteering? It is any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Volunteering provides a way of giving your time and skills to help others and to progress yourself.

The importance and benefits of volunteering have long been acknowledged in the European Union. Volunteering activities contribute to strengthening some of the fundamental European values, such as solidarity and connecting with the community. It helps individuals to play a significant role in creating a more democratic, caring and responsible society (www.europa.eu/volunteering).

In order to draw public attention to volunteering as well as to encourage more people to become volunteers and recognise the value of their work, the EU designated 2011 year as the "European Year of Volunteering" (www.europa.eu/volunteering). The main objectives of the campaign were:

1. To create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU;
2. To empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering;
3. To reward and recognise volunteering activities;

4. To raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering and its significance in the wider European context.

In the European Union, almost 100 million citizens of all ages make a positive contribution through an active involvement in volunteering activities in a wide range of organisations including civil society organisations, youth clubs, hospitals, schools, sport clubs and many others (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/sport/not-for-profit-european-sport-events_en).

Universal Declaration on Volunteering says: "All people in the world should have the right to freely offer their time, talent and energy to others and their communities through individual and collective action, without expectation of financial reward". However, why to become a volunteer? Today volunteering can help get a job, change career or just simply be a way of giving something back to an organisation once you have benefitted

from. It can gain new skills, knowledge and experience and a qualification in a process. It is also a great way to get a reference, new work experiences and to fill gaps in one's work life. Volunteering can simply have big benefits to the personal life. A person can also meet people from different cultures and backgrounds and make new friends with like-minded people. Learning new skills and meeting new people can really increase confidence. You can feel valued as part of a team and in the local community whilst making a difference to the lives of others. Tumanova (2012) examines the opinion of young swimmers on whether they are willing to be partner of a person with intellectual disabilities during their swimming classes. The majority (70%) of them declared that they would do it. They also think that by doing that will contribute for the integration and socialization of the disabled people in the society.

The impact of volunteering is considered to:

- ✓ The development of the society, the economy and individuals in the EU.
- ✓ The Economy - estimated Volunteering contributes in the range of 0.5% to 3% of the gross domestic product of EU Member States.
- ✓ The social inclusion and employment – many voluntary activities and services involve the promotion of social cohesion, as well as social inclusion and integration. It enhances social solidarity and quality of life in general.
- ✓ Education and training – volunteering can provide individuals with an opportunity to learn new skills and gain the experience needed to integrate into the labour market.
- ✓ Active citizenship – volunteering leads to the direct involvement of citizens in local development, and therefore plays an important role in the fostering of civil society and democracy.
- ✓ Sport – voluntary activities and services in the field of sport have a significant impact on the lives and well-being of local people by introducing physical exercise as a way for being healthy, as well as on the local environment (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/activities/hepa-europe>).

Bulgaria is one of the newest members of the EU (since 2007) and is still adopting and trying to keep up with the good practices and values in the European countries. Being the biggest and oldest in Bulgaria, Sofia University educates young people from all over the country. One of the main targets of their education is to prepare them to be active, valuable and responsible citizens of the Bulgarian society as well as the European community. As mentioned above volunteering is one the best ways to achieve that. At the same time learning how to be a volunteer is a long and complicated process, which includes teaching and learning, motivating, leading and training.

To us as educators at Sofia University was interesting to find out what is our students' experience in volunteering, their reasons and motives to be or become one, their commitment to Sofia University and its events as well as their interest to volunteer in sport events.

AIM OF THE STUDY

1. To establish Sofia University' students' experience in volunteering;
2. To study their motives to stay or become volunteers;
3. To recommend future actions and opportunities for its dissemination among young people.

METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

For the purposes of our study has been used the Descriptive - explicative method. We designed questioner of seven closed questions. For some of them students could point out more than one answer.

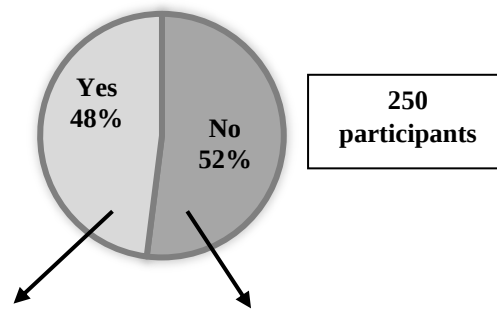
PARTICIPANTS were 250 university students (of which 137 female and 113 male) in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects. All enlisted in different sport classes for 2017-2018 school year.

STATISTICAL METHODS:

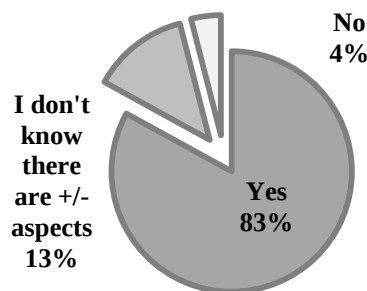
For analyzing the received data, the Frequencies (f) and Percent's (%) analyses have been used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever been a volunteer?



Will you volunteer again?



Would you volunteer in future?

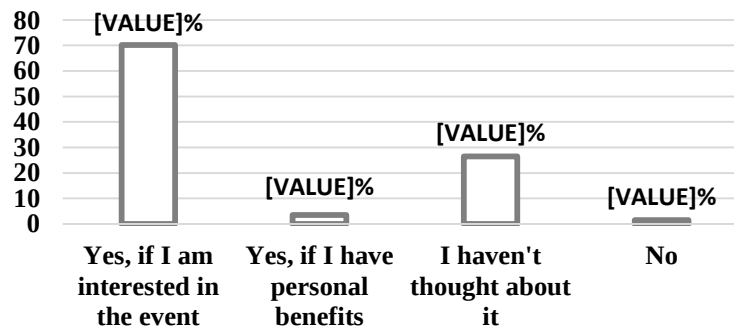


Fig. 1. Experience in volunteering

The analyses of the results showed that 52 % (which is 130 out of 250 people asked) have never volunteered so far (Fig. 1) and the rest – 48 % (120 people) have been volunteers. These figures are very disappointing because there are so many ways and types of volunteering available that the number of young people with experience in it should be much bigger.

Of those 120 who have already been volunteers - 83 % (100 students) declare that they would do it again (Fig. 1). Which is a sign that they have a good experience and satisfaction of what they did. Only 13 % (15 people) doubt because they find that there are positive and negative sides in volunteering and 4 % (5 persons) are sure that they will never do it again.

We asked the ones with no experience what could make them volunteer in future (Fig. 1). The type of the event was marked the most (70,18 % of all answers). They don't see volunteering as a way of getting personal benefits (only 3,51 % of all answers). 26,92 % (35 students) haven't even thought about that and 2 persons don't want to be volunteers. The figures show that the young people in Bulgaria are not very well informed that there are a lot of possibilities and personal benefits available in volunteering today.

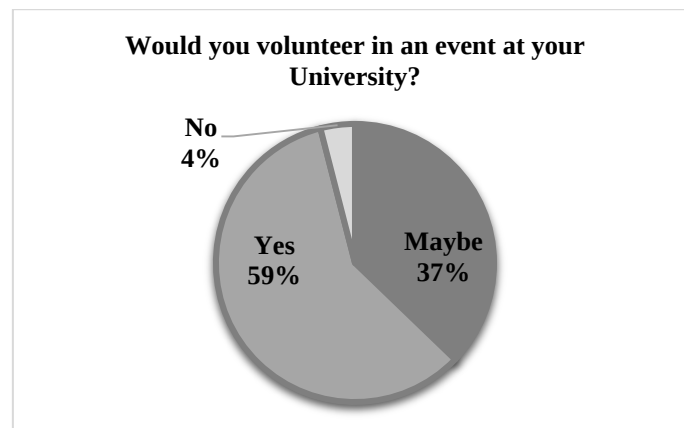


Fig. 2. Commitment to University's events

Volunteering is a way of being part of the community. During their bachelor studies, young people spend the most time at the university, which means that for this period in their life, it is their main community. Therefore, we wanted to check how much they are willing to do for it (Fig. 2). The majority of students (58,8 %) are ready to volunteer in Sofia University's events but also a big number – 37,2 % (93 people) are not convinced and 4 % (10 persons) don't want to do so.

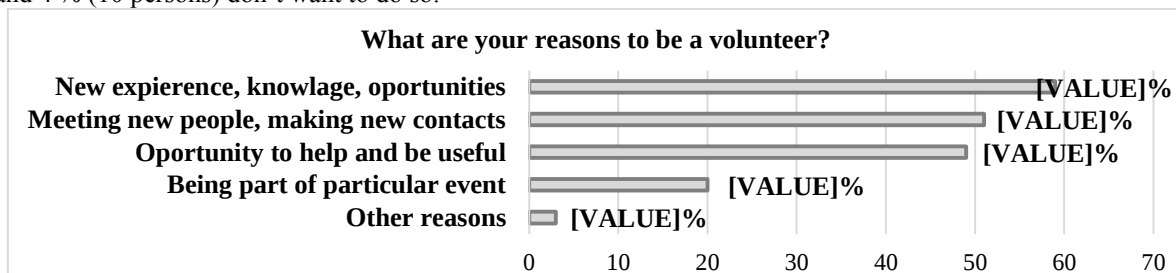


Fig. 3. Reasons to be a volunteer

Our study showed that the students acknowledge why is valuable to be a volunteer (Fig. 3). However, at the same time when asked what will motivate them to volunteer, they point out the “free access” the most (Fig. 4). The interviewed are not much motivated (20 % and 23 % of all answers given) by the main benefits which volunteering offers today, such as: getting a reference in the CV, a job, changing career, gaining new skills, knowledge, experience and a qualification in a process. Which can only mean that they are not enough informed about those benefits. To us is noticeable that 4 % (10 students) will volunteer for a cause.

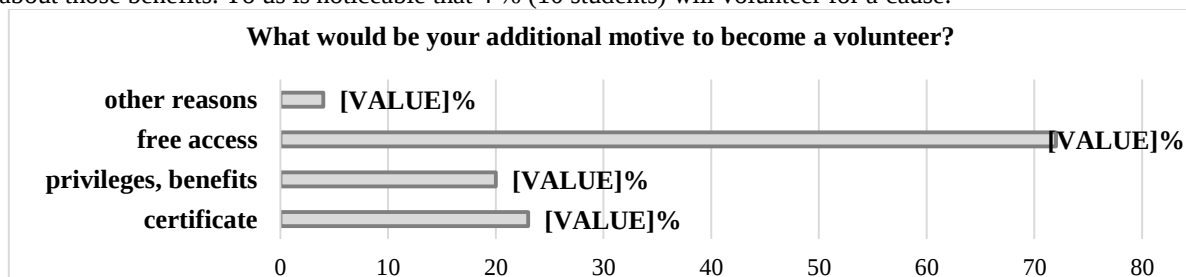


Fig. 4. Additional motives to become a volunteer

At this stage of the development of humankind, the negative effects from sedentary life style affect all social spheres of society, including students. Immobilization is the main cause for premature aging and many diseases. The importance of physical exercise for human's health has long been acknowledged in the European Union. That is why for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity among European population, programs such as Erasmus + sport and HEPA Europe (European network) were founded

(<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/activities/hepa-europe>). They see volunteering in sport events as one of the ways to achieve that goal. “More physical activity can save 1.370 deaths globally every day”.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we asked our students weather they are willing to volunteer in a sport event. Disappointingly (as shown in Fig. 5) less than the half of the 250 interviewed – 47,7 % (119 people) are ready to do that, 44 % (110 people) are not sure and 8,4 % (21 people) don't want be volunteers in sport events.

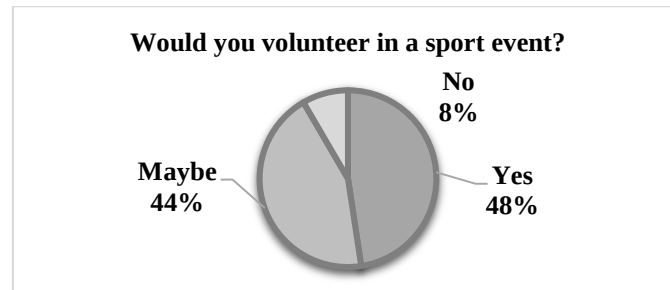


Fig. 5. Volunteering in sport event

CONCLUSIONS

University student age is the time of building and shaping of the personality. At this stage, the young person reorganizes his value system, forms his point of view and builds up his self-esteem and self-consciousness. This is the right time to learn how to be an active, valuable and responsible citizen of the society. As highlighted above volunteering is recognized to be one of the best ways to achieve that.

Our study's results show that much less, than expected young people have experience in volunteering and that they are not very well informed about the opportunities and benefits available in it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” to identify and establish those courses where students can learn about volunteering in general and volunteering in sport events (example: EU basic, EU and Sport, Project Management, Event Organization);
- ✓ Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Authorities to find and create motivational engines which could make students to be more active (such as references in the CV) and other benefits (such as awards and prizes) an University can provide;
- ✓ The University's Authorities to find and provide the legal background for volunteering in University Regulations;
- ✓ The University to make regular calls for volunteers in all its annual events (such as Conferences, University's sport championships, projects and charity events);
- ✓ An additional research should be made to identify the type of events young people are interested in, in order to attract them to become volunteers as well as what are the negative sides they find in volunteering.

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