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PhD THESIS

**RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPACT ON
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE PARTICULARITIES OF
VOLUNTEERING IN ROMANIA**

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I CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Relevance of the Research

Volunteering is a complex and widespread phenomenon. The term "volunteer" was first used in the military field to refer to civilians who mobilized for military service in times of emergency as early as the 1750s (Cnaan et al., 1996). Since then, the term has received various interpretations and has been operationalized through many behaviors, such as: offering help in an emergency, helping a relative or friend in need, volunteering at a certain event, or being involved in an NGO or association and carrying out activities regularly. Defining volunteering is a difficult task (see Cnaan et al., 1996; Shachar et al., 2019): what may be considered volunteering in one context at one time might be conceptualized differently in another context or at a different time. As socioeconomic and political realities change, the need for volunteers or volunteer activities also changes: some activities may no longer be needed (for example, military volunteers in some countries) and new practices emerge (for example volunteers for climate change or other events).

Volunteering is not seen the same way around the world. Cnaan and colleagues (Cnaan & Amroffell, 1995; Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996 apud Handy, Cnaan, Brudney, Ascoli & Meijs, 2000) argue that studies that report data on volunteers without specifying the characteristics of the volunteers in question cannot be generalized from one context to another, due to the ambiguity and varied interpretations of the concept of "volunteer". The concept of volunteering is situational and has different meanings depending on the context (Handy et al., 2000; Safrit and Merrill, 2006), as is the case with other concepts in psychology (e.g. executive functions, see

Doebel, 2020; cognitive flexibility, see Ionescu, 2017). Thus, there is no globally agreed definition or conceptualization of volunteering. In addition, a global report on volunteering by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies questions the assumption that definitions of volunteering can be imposed in any context and argues that models of volunteering based on cultural and situational particularities must be met with more much openness (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015). Given the growing popularity of this complex behavior including in Romania, but also its cultural particularities, a detailed analysis of the particularities of volunteering in the Romanian context is required. Volunteering provides a context in which volunteers can develop multiple skills, but also a social network, having numerous benefits for volunteers.

1.2 Conceptualization

1.2.1. Role Identity

Role identity refers to “a set of characteristics or expectations that are simultaneously defined by a social position in the community and become a dimension of a person's self” (Charng et al., 1988, p. 304). In other words, role identities are “components of the self that correspond to the social roles we play” (Grube & Piliavin, 2000, p. 1108). A person has many such role identities, depending on the number of structured relationships in which he is involved. It has been suggested that these role identities are hierarchically structured, that they are more or less important to a person, which is known as role identity relevance, and that they can be more or less internalized, which is called " role-person merger" (eng. "role-person merger"; Turner, 1978). Thus, the more salient the role identity, the greater the probability that the person will behave in accordance with

that identity. In previous studies (e.g., Callero et al., 1987) researchers have shown the importance of a strong role identity: it predicts helping behavior independently of personal and social norms, is strongly associated with a history of prosocial behaviors, and interacts with norms personal and social in the production of future acts of aid.

The authors argue that a general volunteer role identity is developed when a volunteer gives time and effort to multiple organizations, but a specific role identity may develop in relation to a particular organization. Commitment to a role identity is promoted when a volunteer believes that his role is important in the organization and therefore self-confidence should be enhanced. The authors suggest that volunteers of popular organizations should feel more self-enhancement than volunteers of less popular organizations, and this could support role identity (Grube & Piliavin, 2000).

In their role identity model, Grube and Piliavin (2000) show that the single best predictor of role identity is the perceived expectations of others. This implies that social pressure from managers, for example, and engaging volunteers in desired behaviors promotes role identity and this contributes to sustained service. Moreover, volunteers who identify with a particular organization (in this study, the American Cancer Society) give less time to other organizations and are less likely to leave the organization. This model explains extended volunteer service: the more one self-identifies as a volunteer, the more likely they are to remain engaged in one or more of the organizations' activities and the less likely they are to end their service.

1.2.2. Functional Approach

The functional approach to volunteering (Clary et al., 1998) focuses on the interplay between the reasons why people engage in volunteering and the environmental characteristics that

enable them to satisfy these motivations. The main assumption of the functional theory of volunteering is that “people may perform the same action to satisfy different psychological functions” (Clary et al., 1998, p. 1517). The authors therefore suggest that the central themes of functional analysis can also help to understand the complex motivational bases of volunteering and propose 6 functions served by volunteering. The authors state that volunteering differs from other acts of aid because it is planned aid, which "requires considerably more planning, prioritization, and matching of personal capacities and interests to the type of intervention" (Benson et al., 1980, p. 89). At the same time, they mention some defining characteristics of volunteerism, such as voluntary, sustained, and prolonged helping (Clary et al., 1998).

One function served by volunteering activities is to provide opportunities for the individuals involved to express certain personal values, such as altruism or concern for others. These prosocial values are characteristic of volunteers and distinguish between volunteers and non-volunteers, and also predict whether volunteers complete their intended period of involvement. A second function served by volunteering includes the chance to learn by engaging in new experiences and also practicing knowledge, skills, and abilities that cannot be practiced otherwise. Another function served by volunteering activities is related to social relations, namely when involved in such activities, a person can be with his friends and has the opportunity to create new connections with others. Moreover, volunteer activities may also be viewed positively by the volunteer's significant others. A fourth function served by volunteering is career-related. More specifically, there are benefits of volunteering that can be appreciated by future employers. The fifth function involves processes associated with ego defense mechanisms, in that volunteering helps the volunteer to escape negative emotions. The latter function is also ego-related and

involves a motivational process focused on the growth and development of the ego by creating or enhancing positive affect (Clary et al., 1998).

1.2.3. Net-Cost Approach to Volunteering

The Net-Cost approach to volunteering was proposed by Handy et al. (2000). They argue that for a person to begin engaging in an activity, they must perceive some rewards that are greater than the costs of that activity. These rewards or benefits can be personal (such as financial rewards, social interaction, increased self-esteem, and so on) or public, such as the added value brought to the community by the volunteer (increasing literacy among children by a teacher which is voluntary, for example). Volunteer resources for volunteering include time and effort provided, money invested in supporting the activity (personal transportation, for example), and non-involvement in other social opportunities or activities, all of which can be costs. Thus, a person will engage in a volunteer activity if the net existing costs (personal costs minus personal benefits) are lower than the individual's estimate of the public benefit associated with volunteering.

Their findings show that the lower the benefits (and therefore the higher the net cost), the more likely the person is perceived as voluntary by others. Personal benefits reduce the net cost to the volunteer and are very important in the public perception of who is a volunteer: when people perceive that a volunteer derives personal benefits (monetary or social) from the activity they engage in, they consider that person to be "less volunteer" compared to those who incur similar costs but receive no such benefits (Handy et al., 2000). In conclusion, the public considers the benefits of volunteering more than the costs involved. To be considered voluntary by society, a person must engage in activities that provide fewer personal benefits than the personal costs that the activity entails. In other words, the personal costs should outweigh the benefits.

1.2.4. Three-Stage Model of Volunteers' Duration of Service

The three-stage model of volunteers' duration of service ("The Three-Stage Model of Volunteers' Duration of Service") proposed by Chacon et al. (2007) integrates the functional approach to volunteer motivations proposed by Clary et al. (1998) and the role identity model proposed by Piliavin et al. (1987). The three-stage model posits that at the beginning of a volunteer's service, his motivations and their satisfaction are closely related to the length of the volunteer's service. That is, in the initial phase, the reasons why a person decided to volunteer, according to functional approaches, have a greater influence on the length of the volunteer's service than the commitment to an organization or a role that has not yet been assumed. On the other hand, the authors argue that the role identity model explains involvement in long-term volunteering activities. To reach this stage, people must identify themselves as volunteers and integrate this role into their self-concept.

The authors argue that volunteering is a planned behavior, and in their model, they show that the best predictor of volunteering duration is behavioral intention, in all three stages (short, medium, and long term). The model also suggests that other predictors are also important. For example, volunteer satisfaction is more influential in predicting short-term service length, but organizational commitment and role identity are more important in predicting medium- and long-term service length. At the same time, these relationships are mediated by volunteers' intention to remain engaged (Chacon et al., 2007).

1.2.5. Volunteer Process Model

This model proposed by Snyder and Omoto (2008) focuses on volunteering as a process that evolves over time and identifies six defining characteristics of this phenomenon: 1) the act of volunteering must be performed based on personal choice and free will, and not due to obligations or constraints; 2) volunteering is a deliberative act, which involves making decisions; it is not an impulsive or spontaneous action as may be the case in emergencies; 3) volunteering activities continue over a long period, rather than as specific helping behaviors offered at specific singular events; 4) volunteering is a function of a person's goals and is not a response to rewards or punishments (such as court orders); 5) volunteering involves services for people or causes that want help; and 6) volunteering is usually done through organizations or associations. These criteria may seem exclusive, but they provide a clear perspective on what should or should not be labeled as volunteering.

In the model, there are three stages (antecedents, experience, and consequences), which are analyzed at four levels (individual, interpersonal, organizational, and cultural context). At the individual level, the model focuses on the activities and psychological processes of both the volunteer and the recipient of volunteer services. Volunteers make decisions about involvement in such activities and look for opportunities, engage in volunteer activities for a certain period, and then end their service. At this level, the antecedents of volunteering include the personality, motivational, and circumstantial characteristics of individuals that predict who will engage in volunteering. Focusing on this stage, the researchers sought to identify personality traits and motivations, but also events or personal life characteristics related to volunteering that predict who will be more effective and satisfied with their volunteer activities. These variables can also influence both the decision to become a volunteer and the decision to continue volunteering in the same or another organization. The volunteering experience phase focuses on the satisfaction

resulting from volunteering behavior, but also on the emotional responses that occur as a result of involvement in volunteering activities. At this level, the consequences stage focuses on changes in attitude, knowledge, and behavior as a result of volunteering, but also on the length of service of volunteers and their subjective and objective effectiveness as volunteers (Snyder and Omoto, 2008).

At interpersonal level, the model focuses on the dynamic relationships formed in volunteering activities (between volunteers, between volunteers and association staff or beneficiaries of their service, and between volunteers and members of their social network). The antecedents stage is about group membership and emergent norms, the experiences stage focuses on the helping relationships that exist and collective esteem. At this level, the stages of consequences are comprised of social network composition and relationship development (Snyder and Omoto, 2008).

At the organizational level, the model draws attention to the objectives associated with recruiting, managing, and retaining volunteers. Work performance, benefits, and volunteer evaluation concerns are also presented at this level. The antecedent stage refers to the recruitment strategies to be adopted, but also to the training to be implemented to prepare the volunteers. The experiential stage considers the efforts made by organizations to train and support volunteers and explores the interpersonal relationships that occur between volunteers, between volunteers and members of the organization's staff, and between volunteers and the beneficiaries of their direct service. Furthermore, this stage focuses on the behavioral patterns and dynamics of existing relationships that facilitate the continuation of volunteer services and the benefits received by beneficiaries. The duration of the service offered by the volunteers and the effects of the volunteer activity on the volunteer, the beneficiaries, the organization, the community, and also on the

sponsors of the organization are addressed in the consequences stage of the model. At the societal level, the model focuses on the links between the individual and social structures and institutions and also considers the collective and cultural dynamics that influence and are influenced by events and activities at the other three levels of analysis (Snyder and Omoto, 2008).

1.3 Volunteering in Romania

From a historical point of view, before 1945, volunteer activities in Romania were only found in the urban environment and had cultural, educational, care, or sports purposes. The fate of voluntary associations changed drastically with the establishment of the socialist regime (Juknevičius & Savicka, 2003). Therefore, in Romania, but also in other former communist countries, the existence of associations and voluntary organizations was discouraged, even prohibited by the centralized government and its political control over society before 1989 (Fukuyama, 1995 apud Voicu and Voicu, 2003). As such, it is not surprising that volunteering rates are lower in these countries compared to the rest of the EU, for example (3.2% Romania; 5.2% Bulgaria; 6.9% Hungary; 13.9% Poland; 16.3% Lithuania; 16.4% Estonia; compared to over 45% Norway; Eurostat, 2015). The first explanation would be a reduced number of voluntary associations or NGOs, as they were banned during the communist period (Voicu and Voicu, 2003). Another reason would be the religious context. Romania has a Christian-Orthodox majority, which promotes the hierarchical structure of society, even in informal contexts. Even if until now organizations have been developed within religious institutions, the rate of involvement in these organizations is lower than in countries with a predominantly Protestant religious history (Curtis, Grabb & Baer, 1992; Voicu & Voicu, 2003). Perhaps a stronger reason for this low rate of

volunteering in Romania is the cultural history of the word "volunteering". During the communist period, people were forced to do "voluntary work" (or "patriotic work", "patriotic volunteering"), which was compulsory and served the "common good" (Voicu & Voicu, 2003).

The first volunteer law appeared in Romania in 2001, law no. 195/2001. The law regulates "the promotion and facilitation of the participation of Romanian citizens, in the spirit of civic solidarity, in voluntary actions organized by legal entities under public law and private law without profit" (Law no. 195/2001, Art. 1, <https://lege5.ro/gratuit/gmztcobz/legea-voluntariatului-nr-195-2001>). The law was subsequently amended in 2014, and then in 2022 (Law no. 78/2014, respectively Law no. 211/2022). Article 2 of Law no. 78/2014 contains 3 points that refer to the support offered by the state to volunteering activities and claims that: a) the state recognizes the social value of volunteering activities, but also their professional value; b) the state supports the development of volunteerism at the local, national and international level; c) the state supports the development of volunteering through all its institutions that operate in areas where volunteering activities are carried out (<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/159292>). Perhaps the most important point brought by law no. 78/2014 is the one captured in Article 10, point (2): "Voluntary activity is considered professional and/or specialized experience, depending on the type of activity, if it is carried out in the field of completed studies". Thus, for the first time, volunteering is recognized as professional experience in Romania.

1.4 Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering brings with it benefits for volunteers, such as increased levels of well-being, empathy, tolerance, and social trust (Pancer & Pratt, 1999; Khasanzyanova, 2017), as well as for

the society in which it occurs, such as the help that beneficiaries they receive it from volunteers (see, for example, Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 2015). For the volunteer, volunteering has some intangible benefits (such as a high level of well-being), but also some pragmatic ones (such as opportunities to find jobs) (see, for example, Stukas et al., 2016). Borgonovi (2008) shows that volunteers have a high level of physical health, while Binder and Freytag (2013) state that volunteers have a significantly higher level of well-being than non-volunteers, even though volunteers had structures of personality similar to non-volunteers. Volunteers claim to have gained more confidence in leadership skills, became better at public speaking, conflict management, or problem-solving skills. Many of these skills can be used in other personal or professional settings (Grant, Maass, Vetter, Harrington, O'Neil, McGlaughlin, & Good, 2020). In a study by Voicu & Raiu (2018) that focused on a small sample of student volunteers, they showed that the primary benefits of engaging in volunteer activities were higher chances of employment due to volunteering being recognized as work experience, a better self-awareness, the development of time management and resource utilization skills, as well as the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Volunteers also state that volunteering was a source of professional guidance and recommended that volunteering be introduced in high schools as an independent subject (Voicu & Raiu, 2018).

II CHAPTER II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General Objectives of the Thesis

The studies that were carried out in Romania and that addressed volunteering are relatively few and focused on specific aspects (for example, the development of volunteering in the Romanian space, Voicu and Voicu, 2003 or the influence of culture on the way volunteering is carried out, Voicu and Voicu, 2009). In addition, as far as we know, volunteering has been very little studied in Romania in the last 5 years. However, volunteering is a growing phenomenon, with young people, especially students, being very often involved in at least one volunteer association. In this sense, we consider it important to analyze volunteering in the Romanian context. The general objective of this doctoral thesis is to reconceptualize volunteering and investigate its effect on personal development, shifting the focus to the perspective of the volunteer, particularly in the context of Romania. In this sense, we are interested in who are the people who get involved in volunteering, in what way volunteers develop different transversal skills, and what is the perception of the people directly involved in volunteering, respectively some experts from the labor market about volunteering. We detail the specific objectives below.

The first objective of the present paper is the development of an integrative theoretical model, which follows the route followed by a volunteer from the stage of searching for volunteering opportunities, until the end of involvement in volunteering. The model aims not only to follow the stages that the volunteer goes through but especially to capture the individual changes that the volunteer goes through during his journey. This theoretical model starts from the critical analysis of 5 main models already existing in the specialized literature. In this sense, in subchapter

1.1.2 we analyzed the theoretical models that are most often encountered in the specialized literature, we offered both a detailed description of the models (see subchapter 1.1.2) and a critical analysis of them (see chapter 1.3).

The second objective consists of understanding how volunteering is conceptualized in Romania. More specifically, we set out to find out how volunteering is defined, if there are differences between volunteering in Romania and other countries, what are the advantages and disadvantages of involvement in volunteering, how volunteers develop on a personal level while volunteering, and if whether or not there are workplace differences between volunteers and non-volunteers. In this sense, we aimed to interview people directly involved in volunteering, more precisely volunteers and volunteer coordinators, but also people who work in a professional environment with people who have volunteered, more precisely experts in the field of human resources.

Since we wanted to investigate the motivation of volunteers to get involved in volunteering, the third objective consists of translating and adapting the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998) to the population of emerging adults in Romania. The process of translating the questionnaire can be seen in subchapter 3.2.2. The fourth objective refers to the translation and adaptation of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) on the population of emerging adults in Romania. The procedure of translation and adaptation of the questionnaire will be detailed in chapter 3.2.2.

Last but not least, the fifth objective is to compare volunteers from a specific volunteering program, called Experimental Program (Exp), with volunteers from other volunteering programs, respectively with non-volunteers, taking into account the perspective of others, at the level of empathy and socio-emotional skills.

2.2 Research methodology

In order to achieve the first objective, that of providing an integrative theoretical model on volunteering, we carried out a theoretical review, in which we described and critically analyzed the main models in the literature on volunteering (see subsection 1.1.2). Based on this analysis, we proposed an alternative, integrative theoretical model that can follow the volunteer's journey in volunteering activities, but above all can capture the personal changes that the volunteer goes through, due to his involvement in volunteering. The details of the theoretical model are presented in subchapter 3.1.

Regarding the second objective, that of operationalizing volunteering in the context of Romania, taking into account the perspective of volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts, we followed a qualitative research approach. Thus, the questions from which the qualitative study started are: 1) What are the characteristics of the typical Romanian volunteer?; 2) What benefits do volunteers have as a result of their involvement in volunteering?; 3) What are the differences between volunteers from Romania and volunteers from other countries? In addition, this approach is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), based on which we developed a semi-structured interview guide, starting from the studies of Randle and Dolnicar (2009). The study is detailed in chapter 3.4.

To achieve the third and fourth objectives, one expert translated the VFI and IRI questionnaires from English into Romanian (translation), and then another expert translated the VFI and IRI questionnaires from Romanian into English (back-translation). A third expert compared the two English versions of the questionnaires, we made the necessary changes (where

applicable), and then the questionnaires were applied to a sample of emerging adults in Romania. The translation procedure, the application of the questionnaires, as well as the data analysis, are detailed in subchapter 3.2.2.

In order to achieve the fifth objective, more precisely that of comparing volunteers from a specific volunteering program, called Experimental Program (Exp), with volunteers from other volunteering programs, respectively with non-volunteers, regarding perspective taking, empathy, and socio-emotional skills we conducted an experimental study. Thus, we developed an intervention (Summer School) and a volunteering program (Student to Student Team) and tested their effectiveness both through self-report questionnaires (CSE, IRI) and a constructed experimental sample (director's sample). This experimental study is detailed in subsection 3.4.

III CHAPTER III. ORIGINAL RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

3.1 Study 1: Integrative Theoretical Model Proposal

As we mentioned in sub-chapter 1.4.7., volunteering has many benefits, for several people involved: volunteers, beneficiaries, the volunteer organization or association, and even society. However, the changes that volunteers go through when volunteering are not known at the moment. The model we propose brings an integrated perspective on volunteering, which will emphasize the personal characteristics of volunteers. More precisely, we developed a theoretical model that focuses on how the volunteer's characteristics develop during the volunteer's involvement in volunteering activities. The proposed model has three stages, namely the pre-volunteering stage, the volunteering stage, and the individual change stage, the model supports studying the evolution of volunteers as they go through the mentioned stages. At the same time, we believe that the way volunteerism manifests itself in a certain context is influenced by the cultural characteristics of that context. Thus, the stages in the proposed model could have the same structure, but a different content, depending on the culture in which the model is used. The proposed theoretical model is an integrative one because it takes into account factors that have already been included in the models presented above, such as motivation (in the Functional Approach to volunteering), the evaluation of costs and benefits (in the Net-Cost Approach to volunteering), role identity and commitment to the volunteer organization (in the Three-Stage Model of Volunteer Service Duration and the Role Identity Model), but also highlights the relationships that exist between these factors. Thus, the proposed model takes the most prominent factors from the specialized literature and emphasizes the connections between the factors. In addition, in describing the model

we will illustrate how the factors influence each other and how they together impact decisions about volunteering.

3.1.1. Model description

3.1.1.1. The pre-volunteer stage

Even before entering this stage, a person may come across a volunteer opportunity or actively seek such opportunities. We believe that the interaction of several factors (such as personality, motivation, and other personal characteristics) has a cumulative effect on a person's decision to volunteer. After the person finds a volunteer opportunity, there is a reflection stage. Thus, the person will ask himself whether he wants to get involved in volunteering or not. At this moment of decision, the person will take into account several personal characteristics, which may have an influence on the decision, such as personality, motivation, empathy, or self-efficacy. Then, the person will weigh the resources they have available, but also the costs of involvement in volunteering. In the Cost-Net Approach to Volunteering, the authors of the model argue that it is other people who evaluate the costs and benefits of a volunteer, not the volunteer himself. However, we argue that the potential volunteer also weighs the possible rewards and costs that the volunteering activity brings with it, in order to be able to evaluate the results that it will obtain, following the investment of some personal resources in the volunteering activity. If the available resources are more numerous than the costs of involvement in volunteering, the result being favorable to involvement in volunteering, the person will choose to be involved in volunteering. The person will also consider the role models they have when deciding whether to volunteer. After this evaluation stage, the person will decide whether or not to get involved in volunteer activities.

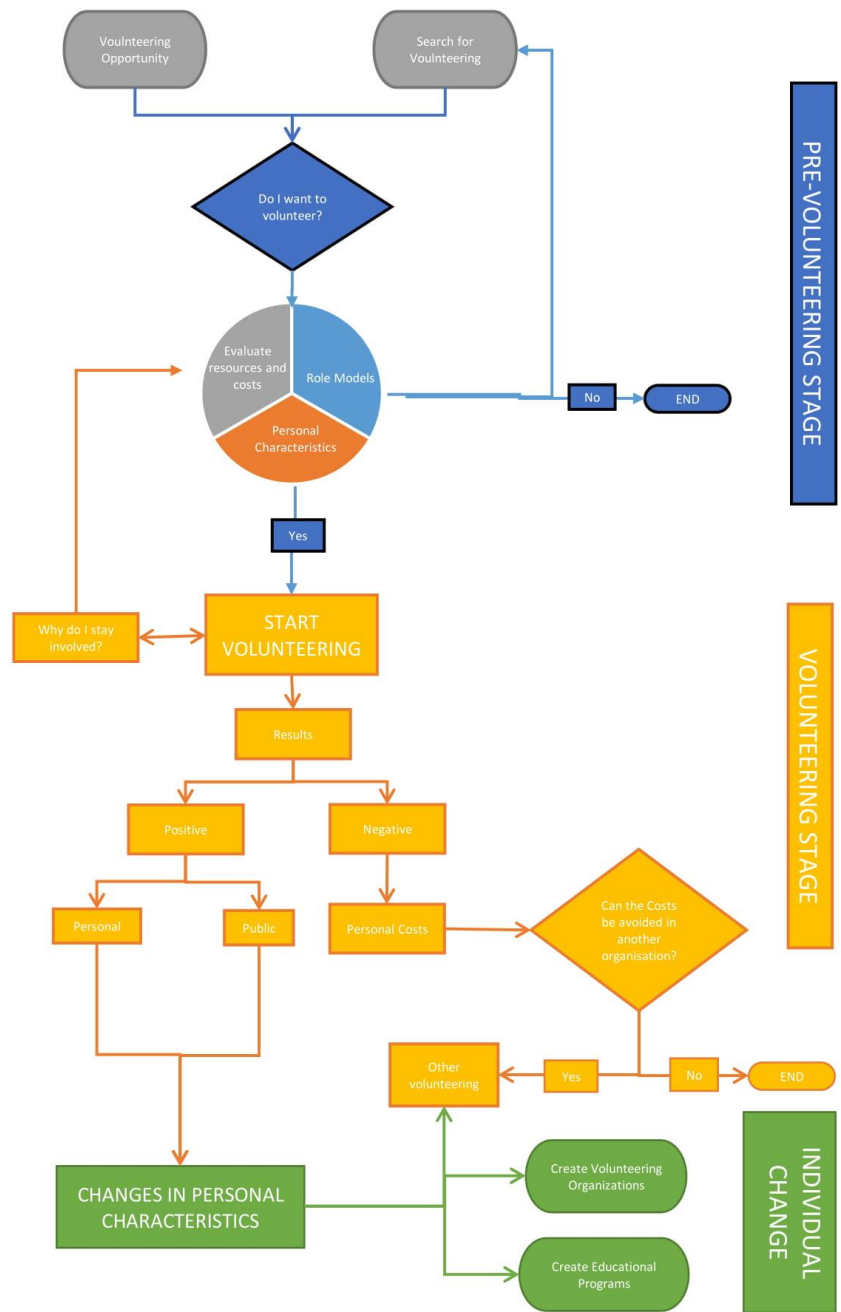


Figure 1. Volunteering as a personal development process

3.1.1.2. Volunteering stage

The action stage consists of performing volunteer tasks. At this stage it is important to understand why people volunteer, but also why they continue to volunteer, either in the same organization or association, or in another. The factors that are involved during the volunteer's involvement in volunteer activities are the same factors that we consider to be important in deciding to become involved in volunteering. The previously described models mention certain variables that keep the volunteer engaged, but in the model we propose these variables interact when the volunteer returns to the decision point. So, in our model, there is no single variable that is decisive in the volunteer's decision to continue or not, but rather the volunteer will take into account all the variables we have described, and their synergy is what will lead to a decision by the volunteer. Also at this stage, the volunteer will evaluate the results that the volunteer activity brings. These results can be negative or positive. Negative outcomes consist of personal costs, which can be: too much time or effort, money spent on transportation or materials needed for activities, compromises the volunteer makes in favor of volunteering, and missed opportunities. If the perceived costs are greater than the benefits, the volunteer will assess whether those costs can be avoided in another organization. If the volunteer concludes that those costs cannot be avoided in another organization, the volunteer will end his volunteer activity. If, on the other hand, the costs can be avoided in another organization or association, the volunteer will move to a context where the costs are not so high. As for the positive outcomes, they can be public (for the beneficiaries, the community, or society at large) or personal (such as increased self-esteem, well-being, or self-efficacy). Positive results will lead to changes in the personal characteristics of volunteering. This is the first step in the individual change stage, the last stage of the model we propose.

3.1.1.3. Individual change stage

The main idea of this stage refers to the changes they have regarding the personal (cognitive-behavioral) characteristics of the volunteer. As mentioned before, volunteering has certain public benefits, but at the same time, it changes the person doing the volunteer work itself. The personal characteristics that change could be the very characteristics that lead to the volunteer's involvement in volunteering activities. Thus, certain characteristics can be developed through volunteering: empathy, tolerance, perspective taking, respect for the common good, autonomy, and conscientiousness as personality traits. Through volunteering, certain skills could be improved in turn: public speaking and socio-emotional skills, given that volunteers often work with other people (other volunteers, beneficiaries, other stakeholders), directly or indirectly. Moreover, volunteers frequently work in groups of different sizes. Thus, the volunteer will learn to work effectively in a group, developing his teamwork skills, and may even lead a team and develop leadership skills. Volunteering can also lead to attitudinal changes. Through volunteering, the volunteer can better understand the existing problems in the society in which he lives, given that he has direct contact with these problems through volunteering.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the volunteer can choose to create other volunteer opportunities themselves. Thus, if the volunteer identifies a problem or a social cause in their environment and believes that they have the knowledge, skills, and resources to address that problem or cause, the volunteer could create an organization or association or propose projects to address the identified problem. The volunteer may want to disperse these gains by creating educational programs that involve volunteer activities. Thus, the proposed educational programs will encourage students or pupils to get involved in volunteering as an alternative way of learning.

3.1.2. Implications, limitations, and future research directions

The model we propose has a different structure compared to other models found in the specialized literature. More precisely, we describe the stages that the volunteer goes through when he is involved in volunteer activities, but also the variables involved in each stage, the main focus being on the change process that the volunteer goes through. First of all, as I mentioned before, this theoretical model focuses on the volunteer's personal development, on the changes in the volunteer's characteristics that may occur, aspects that previous models did not focus on. This is also the innovative aspect of the model, the fact that it does not focus on the profile of the volunteer and the motivations to volunteer, but highlights how volunteers develop while they are involved in volunteering. Thus, this model will guide future research towards following the volunteers in the previously described development process and identifying the mechanisms of change that influence the volunteers' personal development.

Secondly, understanding the mechanisms of change that occur during involvement in volunteer activities may be useful to volunteer organizations or volunteer coordinators. If we could understand when and how these changes occur, we could approach the length of volunteer service from a position that considers volunteer development.

Thirdly, our proposed model can be adapted to different cultures. In this way, future research can highlight the similarities but also the differences between volunteers from different organizations or different parts of the world. The existing models in the literature that we described previously were developed on point populations and have been little tested outside of that population.

Fourthly, our proposed model will emphasize the inter-individual characteristics of volunteers who are involved in different causes. Thus, the model can be used to direct a potential volunteer to one organization or another, depending on its characteristics.

At the same time, we must take into account the limitations of the model we propose. First of all, the model does not address certain personal characteristics that need to be included in the pre-volunteer and individual change stage. We have provided some examples of volunteer attributes that can be included in the two stages, but future research should not be limited here. Another limitation of our proposed model would be model testing. The proposed model is a theoretical one, so it has not been empirically tested and there is no specific instrument to measure the model in its entirety.

3.2 Study 2: Translation and Adaptation of Two Instruments

The objective of this research is to translate the volunteer function inventory (VFI, Clary et al., 1998) and the Interpersonal reactivity index (IRI, Davis, 1980) and adapt them to the population of emerging adults in Romania. Given the fact that the population of emerging Romanian adults who get involved in volunteer activities is relatively little studied, we consider it necessary to adapt relevant tools to study this population.

To translate the questionnaires from English to Romanian, we used the *back translation* method. First, an English language expert translated the questionnaires from Romanian to English. Then, another expert translated the questionnaires from Romanian to English, without seeing the original version of the two questionnaires. Finally, a third expert compared the initial version of the questionnaires with the version resulting from the translation process. 3 different English language experts were involved in this procedure: 2 experts who translated the English/Romanian and Romanian/English questionnaires and an expert who evaluated the English versions of the questionnaires. The latter did not identify major differences in meaning between the two versions of the questionnaires, so the version in Romanian could be used. Following the assessment of the third expert, we proceeded to apply the questionnaires to a sample of emerging adults in Romania.

3.2.1. Method

Participants

342 students of Babeş-Bolyai University took part in this study. Of these, 301 were female and 41 male. The age of the participants was between 17 and 26 years ($M = 19.02$, $SD = 1.026$). All participants were in their first year of study, undergraduate level.

Research Instruments

In this research we used 3 questionnaires (Volunteering Functions Inventory, Interpersonal Reactivity Index, and 5-Factor Personality Questionnaire) and several items investigating demographics and information about volunteer involvement. Items on participant demographics were taken from the World Values Survey. They were only translated from English to Romanian and investigated the date of birth, ethnicity, involvement in volunteering in the last 12 months (with answer options "yes" and "no"), the type of organization in which he volunteered, if applicable, frequency of involvement in volunteering, socio-economic status (on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = low and 5 = high), belonging to a religion/confession.

Motivation. Volunteer Functions Inventory, Clary et al., 1998. The questionnaire has 30 items, which are answered on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "not at all important/correct", and 7 means "extremely important/correct". The questionnaire measures 6 different functions of volunteering: a) expression of personal values; b) understanding; c) related to; d) social function; e) the protective function and f) the function of promoting positive emotions.

Empathy. Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980). The questionnaire contains 28 items, which are answered on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means "Does not describe me at all"

and 4 means "Describes me perfectly". The questionnaire has 4 empathy subscales, namely: a) empathic concern; b) personal distress; c) fantasy, and d) perspective taking.

Personality. The 5-Factor Personality Questionnaire (CP5F, Cognitrom). The questionnaire has 130 statements, which are answered on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "It suits me very little" and 5 means "It suits me very much". The questionnaire measures 5 personality factors, namely: extraversion; conscientiousness; kindness; emotional stability, and autonomy.

Procedure.

In the case of the participants from the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Management and the Faculty of Law, the research was presented during a seminar hour from the discipline of Educational Psychology, with the consent of the head of the discipline. Thus, either at the beginning of the seminar or at the end of the seminar, students were invited to participate in this study. Those who stayed and completed the booklet containing the quizzes received a bonus point towards their final grade in the Educational Psychology discipline, with the consent of the subject holder. Participants from the Faculty of Psychology were approached online by posting the invitation to participate in the study to their year group. Then, students who wanted to participate showed up on the day and time set to complete the questionnaires.

Data analysis.

In order to confirm the factorial structure of the questionnaires, confirmatory factor analyses were performed. In this sense, the software R 3.5.3 (2019) was used. Regarding the VFI questionnaire, the factorial structure proposed by Clary et al. (1998) could not be confirmed on the

population of young Romanians (RMSEA > .06; GFI < .90; AGFI < .90). An attempt was made to build a shortened version of the questionnaire, but even this could not be confirmed on the initial structure.

In the case of the IRI questionnaire, a shortened version of it was obtained (RMSEA = .05; GFI = .938; AGFI = .914). The abbreviated version retains the 4-factor structure proposed by Davis (1980) and has a total of 16 items, 4 items on each subscale. Each subscale has acceptable internal consistency coefficients: Fantasy – $\alpha = 0.79$; Personal distress - $\alpha = 0.83$; Empathic concern - $\alpha = 0.69$; Perspective taking – $\alpha = 0.68$.

3.2.2. Discussions

The fact that the factorial structure of the VFI questionnaire could not be confirmed on the young Romanian population may be due, first of all, to the fact that less than half of the participants had not volunteered in the last 12 months, before the assessment. On the other hand, the reasons why Romanian students or young people get involved in volunteering may differ from those in the questionnaire.

For the IRI questionnaire, a short form was obtained, which respects the factorial structure proposed by the authors (Davis, 1980). Confirmatory analysis captures good indices of the IRI short form (RMSEA = .05; GFI = .938; AGFI = .914), and the subscales show acceptable indices of internal consistency (Fantasy – $\alpha = 0.79$; Personal Distress – $\alpha = 0.83$; Empathic Concern - $\alpha = 0.69$; Perspective taking– $\alpha = 0.68$).

A limitation of this study would be the relatively small number of participants involved in volunteering. Thus, this may have a role in the difficulty of confirming the factorial structure proposed by the authors of the VFI questionnaire. Another limitation could be the way the

participants were completed by the students, more specifically the fact that the participants completed the questionnaires in the classroom, with their peers, and not in a space where they could be alone. At the same time, the sample was one of convenience, made up of students from Cluj, which may bring doubts about the generalization of the results for the student population in Romania.

3.3 Study 3: Volunteering in Romania: Case Study

The objective of this research is to operationalize volunteering in the context of Romania, taking into account the perspective of volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts. Consequently, the research starts from the following research questions: 1) What are the characteristics of the typical Romanian volunteer?; 2) What benefits do volunteers have as a result of their involvement in volunteering?; 3) What are the differences between volunteers from Romania and volunteers from other countries? By asking these questions, we expect to obtain information about the factors that support or hinder the development of volunteering, but also about how volunteers develop personally through the volunteering activities they undertake, the inquiry being a continuation of Study 1. In this research, we used the theory of planned behavior because it provides a suitable framework to guide this exploratory study. We chose this approach because it has previously been used in the study of volunteering, including the investigation of cultural influences on volunteering (Randle and Dolnicar, 2009).

3.3.1. Method

Participants.

The sample consisted of 3 main groups: volunteers, volunteer coordinators and HR experts. 35 participants were interviewed individually (15 volunteers, 10 volunteer coordinators and 10 HR experts). The sampling method used was convenience sampling supplemented by the snowball sampling technique. Most of the volunteers were students, aged between 18 and 35. Most of the coordinators started their coordination involvement in the association as volunteers in the same association. Some of the coordinators performed this role on a voluntary (unpaid) basis, while

others were employed full-time by the association. The HR experts were aged between 23 and approximately 32 years old, employed in multinational corporations, IT companies and recruitment agencies at the time of the interviews. Although not a prerequisite for participation, all participants had volunteered in the past or were still actively involved in volunteering at the time of the interview. Seven participants volunteered abroad (3 volunteers, 2 HR experts and 2 volunteer coordinators), and five participants worked with foreign volunteers (3 HR experts and 2 coordinators).

Research Instruments.

For the interviews, we developed a semi-structured interview guide based on the one used by Randle & Dolnicar (2009). We adapted the interview guide to fit the Romanian culture and environment (for example, we changed the names of the organizations mentioned in the Image Organizations section to fit the NGOs that are active in Romania). I also added some questions about volunteering in Romania or other specific aspects for each interviewed group, because I wanted to focus on volunteering behavior in the Romanian cultural environment.

Procedure.

Meetings with each participant were individual and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. They took place in a quiet space, which allowed the audio recording of the interview, either at one of the offices of the Career, Alumni and Business Relations Center of Babeş-Bolyai University or at a place proposed by the interviewee (the office or the cabinet where they carry out their activity). All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the PhD student and several research assistants, who were trained in advance.

3.3.2. Results

Attitudes.

When asked about the characteristics of a typical volunteer, volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts indicated that volunteers usually have certain attitudes, such as proactivity, and openness to new experiences, but also high levels of involvement. In addition, all participants agreed that the typical volunteer already possesses a set of developed cross-cutting skills such as effective communication, time management, problem-solving skills, empathy, the ability to consider others' perspectives, responsibility, altruism, and adaptability.

"A typical volunteer [is] a curious person, who wants to explore, who wants to know himself better, who wants to help, to leave his mark somehow, in a good way." (A. C., female HR expert, age 22-27)

Finally, participants provided information about the characteristics of a typical non-volunteer. They described these people as either uninformed or misinformed about volunteering and the opportunities available. Typical non-volunteers were described as being satisfied with their established routines or prioritizing other aspects of life such as work or family commitments.

"Maybe I would say it's a lack of information, in the sense that they don't know, or don't necessarily know all the benefits of volunteering, or maybe they've heard, but they can't figure out how to quantify them, what you actually feel." (C.O., female volunteer, aged between 27-32)

Social norms.

In our interviews, participants generally believed that the opinions of significant others, such as family and friends, would moderately influence their decision to volunteer. Among the volunteers, some had supportive parents and friends and even became actively involved in volunteering, while other volunteers faced skepticism from their parents and friends. Volunteer coordinators emphasized the importance of how volunteers talk about their volunteer work with their families and friends because how volunteers describe volunteering can greatly influence the opinions of their loved ones.

“[Parents and friends] have a positive attitude. Because I think I present it in a way that I show that I like what I do.” (B. T., male volunteer coordinator, aged 30-35)

Our participants emphasized the importance of behavioral modeling regarding volunteering. First, volunteers share their own volunteering experiences with their family and friends, creating a learning opportunity for the latter. Furthermore, the majority of volunteers in our study said that one of the main motivations behind their involvement in volunteering is that someone important to them, such as a family member or close friend, is either currently volunteering or has been volunteering in the past.

"Somehow my great-grandmother, who had no resources, especially material ones, mainly that's what I'm referring to, inspired me. She didn't even have it for herself and, I remember that, being a child and visiting her, somehow she always had time to participate in the classic activities of making cabbage rolls for the village wedding or for almsgiving." (C.O. female volunteer, aged between 27-32)

Perceived behavioral control.

All the interviewed volunteers claimed that they would continue their volunteer work in the same association or that they would join other associations and that they would volunteer in several places at the same time. Some volunteers have expressed their desire to establish their own volunteer associations. The volunteer coordinators we interviewed had volunteering experience either in the past or at the time of the interviews. Some of these coordinators have made the transition from being volunteers to taking on the role of coordinators within the same organization. Most of the coordinators expressed their intention to continue their volunteer work, either within the same organization or to explore opportunities in different associations. The HR experts we interviewed had previous volunteering experience or were involved in volunteering at the time of the interview. For some of them, volunteering served as a way to launch their careers, while others saw it as a leisure activity, often with friends.

"I would really like, at some point, if I were to change and open something of my own, if I were to return to [hometown], I thought about doing some programs for young people, teenagers." (A. B., female human resources expert, aged 27-32).

Defining volunteering.

When asked about the definition of volunteering, participants described volunteering as a structured activity that takes place in an association or non-governmental organization and is different from donating money or other goods. Participants emphasized that volunteering involves giving personal resources to help those in need, being both a responsibility that involves dedication and an opportunity to experience belonging to a particular group.

"In my opinion, a very good definition would be that volunteering is a way of helping society, and at the same time helping yourself. I think that would be - A win-win relationship. That's volunteering." (M. M., male volunteer, aged 20-25)

Personal benefits of volunteering.

Participants claimed that volunteering facilitates personal growth and development. They identified numerous cross-cutting skills that are cultivated through volunteering, including time management, teamwork, adaptability, giving and receiving feedback, leadership, taking others' perspectives into account, problem-solving, communication, and social skills. Volunteers pointed out that their experiences also fostered self-efficacy, self-confidence, and, for some, a change in personal values and the discovery of a new meaning in life. In addition, HR experts highlighted professional experience gained through volunteering, allowing individuals to explore different career paths and test their fit with different professional fields.

"Including the professional side, beyond the personal one. Because the job also requires you to have a certain experience and it's very difficult for you, after graduating from university, to go directly to work, because no one will hire you. Or it is much easier for you to find a job when you are recommended or you have in your CV that you have done certain volunteer actions or that you have been in certain associations, and that you have developed certain skills beyond college. Because, in college, it's often theoretical and helps you have the background, I wouldn't want to exclude it, but to be able to apply it, even to face it, it's different. And only by doing that can you develop your skills." (A. B., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

Differences from other countries.

Some of the volunteers we interviewed had volunteering experience abroad or interacted with international volunteers, which allowed them to make comparisons between volunteering in Romania and in other European countries. First, they noted that each society has distinct needs, resulting in NGOs and associations that respond to these specific contextual requirements. In addition, access to financial resources varied, with NGOs and voluntary associations from other European countries often having greater financial support compared to associations in Romania. Finally, those who volunteered abroad mentioned the presence of a "culture of volunteering" that favored a better organization of volunteering activities and a different societal perspective on volunteering. Several coordinators we interviewed had the opportunity to collaborate with international volunteers or engage in volunteer activities in other countries. Consequently, they highlighted certain differences between volunteering in Romania and volunteering abroad. The main distinction lies at the level of the volunteers' involvement.

"Yes, I had a few series of foreign volunteers that I interacted with who thought that volunteering was very natural. It is not so easy to find good volunteers in Romania. I have sometimes noticed that there is this feeling that volunteering is on the back burner. If I have something to do, I do everything else, and volunteering last. Or if a problem occurs and I can no longer do an activity, the first time I give up volunteering. It is not yet very... neither well defined nor [nor] valued by others. I think that's a big difference." (V. B., coordinator of female volunteers, aged between 30-35)

3.3.3. Discussion

In this exploratory paper, our aim was to examine the concept of volunteering from the perspectives of three key parties: volunteers, volunteer coordinators and human resource experts. The study focused on understanding the characteristics of the typical Romanian volunteer, the personal benefits that volunteers receive from volunteering, and the distinctions between volunteering in Romania and other countries. In terms of attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, as outlined in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), the results in the three interview groups were similar. All three groups showed a positive attitude towards volunteering. Volunteers and volunteer coordinators believe that the opinions of significant others play a moderate role in influencing a person's decision to volunteer. In our study, volunteers and coordinators emphasized the importance of behavioral modeling in motivating people to volunteer. However, they also noted that while some family members offer support to volunteers, others express doubts and encourage volunteers to prioritize activities related to their academic path. This perspective may be influenced by historical factors, such as the compulsory nature of volunteering during the communist period, which provided limited benefits to the volunteers themselves. The participants we interviewed showed a high level of perceived behavioral control when it comes to involvement in volunteer activities. While some volunteers expressed aspirations to start their own non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some coordinators considered their extra work as a form of volunteering, and several HR experts saw volunteering as a means to enter the labor market.

Participants in this study also characterized volunteering as an activity that brings benefits to all parties involved, although there may be some differences compared to volunteering in other countries. Participants emphasized that volunteering provides a safe environment where individuals can explore new activities, take initiative in solving problems, and propose innovative

ideas and projects, all while receiving support from their peers and coordinators. Consequently, in Romania, volunteering is seen as a vital opportunity for personal development, especially for students and those at the beginning of their professional careers.

We believe that the results of this qualitative study provide valuable insight into the development of volunteering, particularly in a context where there is no well-established tradition of volunteering. Through our qualitative approach, we captured changing attitudes towards volunteering, how family members or friends who have formal or informal volunteer experience can shape a person's involvement in volunteering, and the factors that lead people to choose alternative activities instead of volunteering. Our results also capture how volunteers go through a process of personal growth and development from the perspective of volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and employers. These results support our previous research (see subchapter 3.1), where we emphasize the importance of studying how volunteers develop skills and knowledge during their work, skills that are subsequently used in their professional lives.

3.4 Study 4: The influence of volunteering programs on socio-emotional skills, empathy, and the ability to consider the perspective of others

The objective of this research is to compare volunteers from a specific volunteering program, called the Experimental Program (Exp), with volunteers from other volunteering programs, respectively with non-volunteers, regarding taking into account the perspective of others, empathy and socio-emotional skills. Thus, the hypotheses of this research are:

Hypothesis 1: Volunteers in the experimental program and volunteers in other programs will have significantly higher levels of taking the perspective of others, empathy, and social-emotional skills than non-volunteers at the first time point of testing.

Hypothesis 2: Volunteers in the experimental program will have significantly higher levels of consideration of others' perspectives, empathy, and social-emotional skills at the last test time than at the first test time.

Hypothesis 3: Volunteers in the experimental program will have significantly higher levels of perspective-taking, empathy, and social-emotional skills at the posttest compared to volunteers in other programs and to non-volunteers.

Hypothesis 4: Non-volunteers will not have significantly different levels of perspective-taking, empathy, and social-emotional skills at the last test time compared to the first test time.

3.4.1. Method

Participants.

92 people (84 female and 8 male) took part in this study, aged between 19 and 53 years ($m = 23.4$, $SD = 6.1$). Of these, 39 were part of the group of volunteers involved in the experimental program, 31 were part of other volunteer programs and 22 were not involved in volunteering.

Instruments

Empathy. To measure empathy, we used the short form of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1980), which we validated in the previous study (see chapter 3.2.). The short form IRI has 4 subscales (Fantasy, Considering Others' Perspectives, Personal Distress, and Empathic Concern), 16 items, 4 for each subscale. The answers to this questionnaire are given on a Likert scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means "Does not describe me at all" and 4 means "Describes me perfectly".

Socio-emotional skills. To measure socio-emotional skills, we used the Socio-Emotional Competence questionnaire (CSE, Vaida, Seal & Naumann, 2013). The Socio-Emotional Competence Questionnaire is the version translated and adapted for the Romanian population of the Social Emotional Competence Inventory (SECD-I; Seal, Naumann, Scott and Royce-Davis, 2011).

Perspective taking. To measure the ability to take into account the perspective of others we constructed 2 different samples. The first test consisted of constructing a vignette (stories), similar to those proposed by Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt & Ortiz (2007). The second sample constructed was an experimental sample, constructed after the principal's sample (Wu & Keysar, 2007; Wang, Tseng, Juan, Frisson, & Apperly, 2019; Wang, Ciranova, Woods, Apperly, 2020). In

this trial, the participants take the role of listener and carry out the instructions given by the director (character). In the sample, there is a significant discrepancy between the perspective of the participant and that of the director (see Figure 1), each having a unique perspective about the shelf on which the target objects are placed. To correctly carry out the instructions given by the director, the participant must take into account that some objects cannot be seen by the director, so the instructions cannot refer to those objects. The sample was created in the Psychopy program by a research assistant, and then uploaded to the pavlovia.org platform, the PhD student purchased the necessary credits to collect data, and the sample was prepared to be completed by participants online.

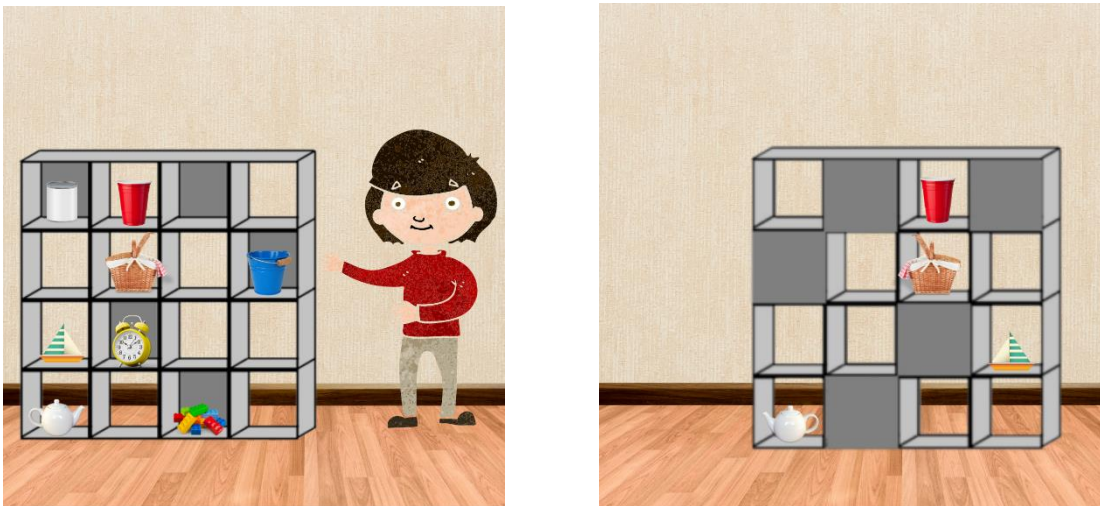


Figure 1. Participant's perspective (left) and director's perspective (right)

Procedure.

Given that the data were collected towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (August 2021 – March 2022), the consent, questionnaires, and experimental samples were completed

online. The volunteers from the experimental program received the participation agreement by email, after which they sent it to the doctoral student completed it with personal data, and signed. After receiving the signed consent, each Exp volunteer was emailed a link to an online form containing the IRI, CSE and first vignette questionnaires.

Volunteers from the experimental program then participated in a Summer School. This was organized by the Career, Professional Orientation and Alumni Center, UBB between August 23 - 27, 2021, respectively August 30 - September 3, 2021 (there were 2 weeks available, and the participants chose which week to come to the camp, the activities being identical).

3.4.2. Results and discussion

None of the hypotheses of this study were confirmed. At no time point of testing did we identify statistically significant inter-group differences for either the IRI and CSE questionnaire results or the principal's sample. Statistically significant results were obtained only for the correct answers chosen to the vignette, in the first moment of testing. In this sense, it seems that volunteers from other volunteer programs chose significantly more correct answers out of the possible ones than volunteers from the experimental program. This may be because volunteers in other programs already had some volunteering experience, which may have led to a better ability to take the other's perspective into account as measured by the vignette. Regarding intra-group differences, comparing the 2 test moments, we did not obtain statistically significant results neither for the IRI and CSE questionnaires nor for the answers given to the director's test (reaction time and correctness of answers). Making the test-retest comparison for each group of participants, the results show no significant intra-group differences. This can be partly explained by familiarity with the IRI and CSE scales, considering that the second testing was done approximately 5 months after

the first testing. Thus, the participants could have remembered the given answers and chosen similarly on the second completion. Last but not least, during the data collection period (August 2021 – February 2022), a good part of the extracurricular activities were carried out online. Thus, it is possible that the commitment of volunteers from the experimental program, as well as that of volunteers from other programs, was lower (Lachance, 2020), and the intervention did not have the effect of increasing characteristics such as empathy, perspective taking or social-emotional skills, as I would have liked.

A limitation of this research is the number of participants, more precisely their distribution in the 3 groups (39 volunteers in the experimental group, 31 volunteers in other projects and 22 non-volunteers). Given the uneven distribution of participants, it is possible that the number of participants/group was too small to detect an effect, even if it existed. A second limitation would be that all data were collected online, so the testing environment was not controlled. Thus, participants could have been distracted or stopped completing the questionnaires, which could have influenced the data. At the same time, the director's test was completed online. Although the instructions were detailed, there were practice trials, and the trial as a whole was piloted, there is a possibility that the participants had questions that the experimenter could not answer, given that he was not in the same environment as the participants. In addition, although there were no problems in the pilot, the online platform did not record all the responses of the participants in the "no director" condition, which means that the data from this condition cannot be analyzed and compared to the "with director" condition. Last but not least, we must consider experimental death. If at the beginning we had a total of 198 participants enrolled (cumulative across the 3 groups), only 130 completed the questionnaires at the first time of testing, and at the retest only 92 participants completed the questionnaires and the test.

CHAPTER IV. GENERAL DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present research started from the general objective of reconceptualizing volunteering and investigating its effect on personal development, shifting the focus to the perspective of the volunteer, particularly in the context of Romania. In Study 1, we investigated the literature, identifying and analyzing in detail the main theoretical models existing in the literature addressing volunteering. Thus, in Study 1 we proposed a theoretical model, that focuses on the process a volunteer goes through, from the moment a volunteer opportunity appears or he is actively looking for an association to get involved. Each stage of the model follows the volunteer throughout their involvement in volunteering, captures possible returns to previous decision moments, and, perhaps most importantly, allows investigation of the personal changes the volunteer undergoes. **Study 1 is therefore realized through a theoretical model of particular relevance in the study of volunteering, with an emphasis on the process of individual change that the volunteer goes through when he gets involved in volunteering activities.** Starting from Study 1, in Study 2 I selected 2 questionnaires, namely the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and the Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI), which I translated into Romanian. After the translation, the 2 questionnaires were applied to a population of students from Romania, the population being made up of both volunteers and non-volunteers. Following confirmatory factor analysis, only the IRI questionnaire proved adequate psychometric properties, thus obtaining a shortened version of the questionnaire, adapted to the Romanian population. **Study 2 thus results in the abbreviated form of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, translated into Romanian and adapted to the Romanian population. The importance of the existence of this questionnaire also in the Romanian language is given by the fact that it is the questionnaire most often used in the**

literature, in research investigating empathy not only in the context of volunteering but also in other research. We used the IRI questionnaire later, in Study 3. The theoretical model proposed in Study 1 led us to examine in more detail how volunteering is conceptualized, but also the consequences of volunteering. We thus started a qualitative, exploratory research, in which we interviewed the main actors directly or indirectly involved in volunteering: volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts. The qualitative research in Study 3 captures the fact that, as proposed by the theoretical model in Study 1, volunteers go through an extensive process of change, developing many skills. Study 3 shows that this change is noticed not only by volunteers but also by their coordinators and human resources experts. Moreover, the effects of the changes they go through when they volunteer persist even after they finish volunteering and enter the labor market. **Study 3 confirms the existence of individual changes that volunteers go through when they volunteer, as we proposed in Study 1. Moreover, Study 3 describes volunteering as a beneficial activity for all parties involved, comparing the way volunteering in Romania is manifested with that in other countries, from the perspective of people directly involved in volunteering.** Taking into account the results of Study 3, but also the model proposed in Study 1, Study 4 aims to compare volunteers from a specific volunteering program, called Experimental Program (Exp), with volunteers from other volunteering programs, respectively with non-volunteers, on taking into account the perspective of others, empathy and socio-emotional skills. More precisely, in Study 4 we compared the level of taking into account the perspective of others, empathy, and socio-emotional skills of some volunteers who went through an intervention that targeted exactly the mentioned characteristics, with the level of volunteers from other volunteering programs and of non-volunteers, on the 3 characteristics. In this sense, we used the IRI questionnaire obtained from Study 2, we created an online experimental sample (following the

principal test proposed by Wu and Keysar, 2007; Apperly et al., 2019, 2020) and the CSE questionnaire (Vaida, Seal & Naumann, 2013). The research results did not confirm the hypotheses we proposed, and an explanation would be the small number of participants in the 3 experimental groups, the size of the effect being probably too small to be identified. Another explanation would be that the testing was started online, so we could not control for other distracting factors that could have influenced the completion of the experimental trials. **However, Study 4 resulted in the construction of an online test (the director's test) available to other researchers who are concerned with people's ability to take another's perspective into account. In addition, as far as we know, Study 4 is the first research to compare perspective-taking skills, empathy, and socio-emotional skills in volunteers and non-volunteers in Romania.**

Contributions and theoretical implications:

- ✓ The description and analysis of existing definitions of volunteering in the specialized literature, with an emphasis on the conceptual differences that appear when volunteering is defined;
- ✓ Description of the main models existing in the specialized literature and the instruments used in these models to measure different aspects related to volunteering;
- ✓ Critical analysis of existing models in specialized literature and their measuring instruments, with emphasis on their theoretical and methodological limits;
- ✓ Description of intercultural differences regarding volunteering;
- ✓ Extensive description of volunteering in different parts of the world, as described in specialized literature;

- ✓ Description of the antecedents of volunteering, which can be personal (intrinsic) or environmental (extrinsic) characteristics;
- ✓ Description of the benefits of volunteering both on an individual level, for the volunteer or beneficiary, and on a broad level, for society;
- ✓ The proposed theoretical model in 3 stages, which follows the trajectory of the volunteer, from the moments immediately preceding the decision to engage in volunteering until the end of the volunteering activity;
- ✓ Definition of volunteering from the perspective of volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts.

Methodological contributions and implications:

- ✓ Translation and adaptation of the IRI questionnaire on the population of emerging adults in Romania;
- ✓ Translation of the VFI questionnaire into Romanian;
- ✓ Correlating the personality characteristics of the volunteers with the volunteer organizations in which they were active (secondary analyses);
- ✓ Adaptation of an experimental sample (director's sample) and creation of an online version of the sample, using the Psychopy and Pavlovia platform;
- ✓ Creating vignettes that capture the ability to take into account the perspective of the other.

Contributions and practical implications:

- ✓ Description of how volunteering in Romania is perceived by volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and experts in the field of human resources, through the lens of the theory of planned behavior;
- ✓ Description of the main benefits of volunteers identified by volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts;
- ✓ Description of the main advantages and disadvantages of involvement in volunteer activities, from the perspective of volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and human resources experts;
- ✓ Describing the behavior of volunteers at work, compared to that of non-volunteers, according to human resources experts.

Limitations.

The first limitation of this thesis would be the fact that the proposed model is a theoretical one, and it has not yet been tested. Although the theoretical model we propose is an integrative one, which could capture the entire evolution of the volunteer while volunteering, we have not yet built tools to measure and attest to the validity of the model. So, for now, it remains a theoretical model. At the same time, the model does not include certain personal characteristics in the pre-volunteer and individual change stage. We have provided some examples of possible personal characteristics targeted by the model, but this is not an exhaustive list, there may be other variables.

A second limitation, which comes from the translation study of the 2 questionnaires, would be the small number of participants involved in volunteering. This could be a possible cause of the difficulty in confirming the initial factor structure of the VFI questionnaire. In addition, the data

collection procedure could be improved, in the case of this study we had a convenience sample consisting of students, who completed the booklet containing the questionnaires in a lecture room with other colleagues, not in a more controlled environment.

A third limitation, originating from the experimental study, would be the small number of participants and the heterogeneity of their distribution in the 3 participant groups. Since the participants were not distributed by us in the 3 experimental groups, but they were selected as coming from a certain group, it resulted in an unequal number of participants in each group (39 volunteers in the experimental group, 31 volunteers in other projects, and 22 non-volunteers). This could also be one of the reasons why we did not detect an effect, even if it did exist. In addition, as it was still the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, all data was collected online. There could have been numerous variables that could have interfered with participants' performance on the online test or in completing the questionnaires, variables that we could not control. Last but not least, a limitation would be the technical difficulties we faced, namely the fact that the platform did not record all the answers of the participants in the director's test.

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