



BULGARIAN AND MACEDONIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN VOLUNTEERING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

The article highlights the importance of volunteering as a way to create more democratic, caring and responsible society. It overviews the possibilities and personal benefits offered by this activity nowadays. It also emphasizes the significance of volunteering in sport events as a way for introducing the importance of physical exercise for humans' health. It shows the results from a study aimed at exploring the experience in volunteering of university' students in Bulgaria and Macedonia as well as their motives to stay or become a volunteer. The results show that young people do not have much experience in this field and that they are not very well educated about all possibilities that volunteering offers today. The authors give some recommendations for the promotion of volunteering among young people.

Key Words: volunteering, benefits, university students, experience, motives, sport events, Bulgaria, North Macedonia

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 (2).

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" (1). 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 (2).

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

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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 one's benefitted from before. 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 (2).

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 (4).

Bulgaria and Macedonia are neighbor countries located in the Balkan area for which they have a lot in common in their customs and everyday life. Bulgaria is one of the newest members of the EU (since 2007) and still adopting and trying to keep up with the good practices and values in the European countries. Macedonia has applied for becoming a

European Union member and now trying to fulfil the requirements to achieve that.

At present, one of the main targets of educational process at Universities is to prepare the young people to be active, valuable and responsible citizens of the local and national as well as the global society. As mentioned above volunteering is one the best ways to achieve that. To us as being educators at Universities in Macedonia and Bulgaria was interesting to find out what is university students' experience in volunteering, their reasons and motives to be or become one, their commitment to the university and its events as well as their interest to volunteer in sport events.

THUS THE AIM OF THE STUDY WAS

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

METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

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

PARTICIPANTS were total of 500 university' students:

- ✓ 250 in Bulgaria (of which 137 female and 113 male) in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects;
- ✓ 250 in Macedonia (of which 124 female and 127 male) also in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects.

The study took place in the beginning of 2017-2018 school year.

STATISTICAL METHODS

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

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyses of the results in Bulgaria show that 52 % (which is 130 out of 250 people asked) have never volunteered so far (Fig. 2) and the rest – 48 % (120 people) have been volunteers. These figures are quite disappointing because there are so many ways and types of volunteering that the number of young people with experience in it should be much bigger.

The situation in Macedonia is even worse – only 16 % (40 out of 250 people) have volunteered in some way (Figure 1).

Of those 120 Bulgarian students who have already been volunteers - 83 % (100 students) declare that they would do it again (Figure 2). 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.

The numbers for Macedonia show that 59 % out of 40 (23 people) will volunteer again, 36 % ((14 people) doubt and 5 % (2 people) are sure that they will never do it again (Figure 1).

We asked the ones with no experience what could make them volunteer in future. The type of the event was marked the most (70,18 % of all answers) by the Bulgarian students (Figure 2). 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.

In Macedonia, the results showed similar numbers: 64,5 % for the type of event; 7,1 % pointed personal benefits; 18,5 % haven't considered it and 0,9% don't want to be volunteers. The figures show that the young people in both countries are not very well informed that there are a lot of possibilities and personal benefits available in volunteering today.

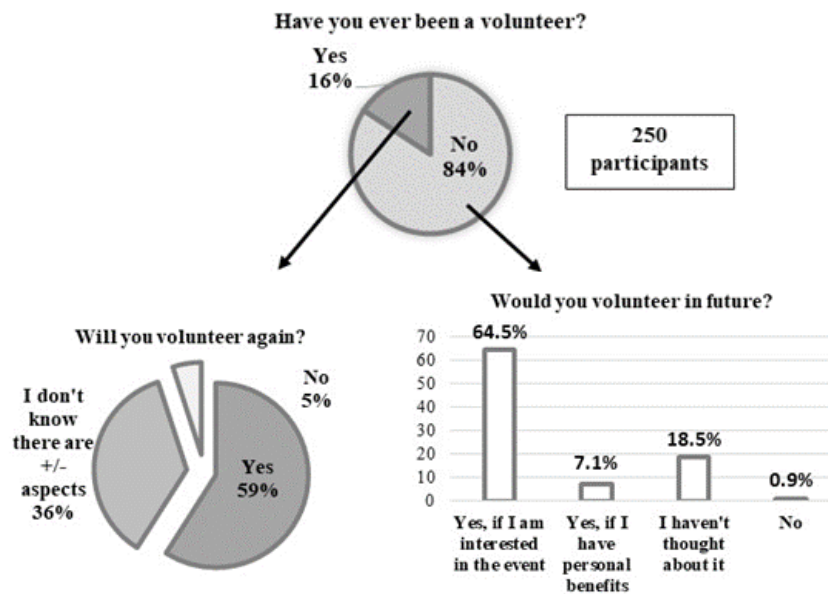


Figure 1. Experience in volunteering of Macedonian students

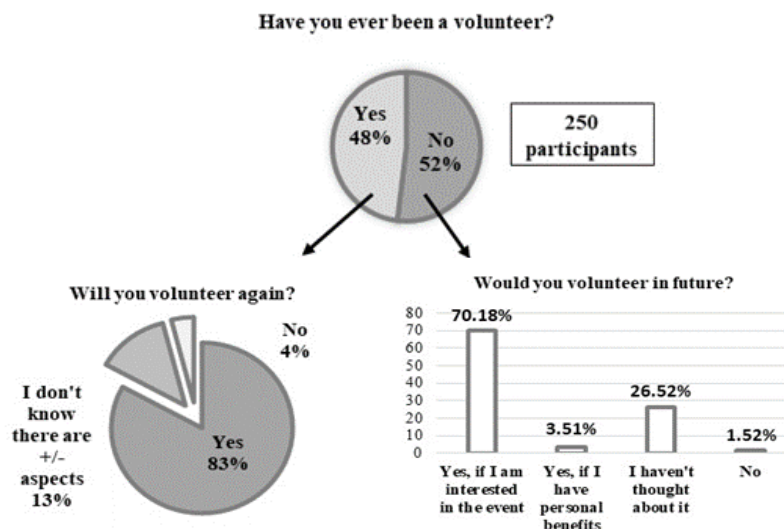


Figure 2. Experience in volunteering of Bulgarian students

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. According to Peltekova (2009), the inclusion of young people working as volunteers in an organization can be an excellent educational opportunity in the way of their personal and social development (5). Consequently, we wanted to check how much students are willing to do for their University (**Figure 3**).

The majority of the Bulgarian students asked (58,8 %) are ready to volunteer in university's events but also a big number – 37,2 % are not convinced and 4 % don't want to do it. In Macedonia 41 % would be volunteers in University's events; 50 % are not sure and 9 % do not want to be.

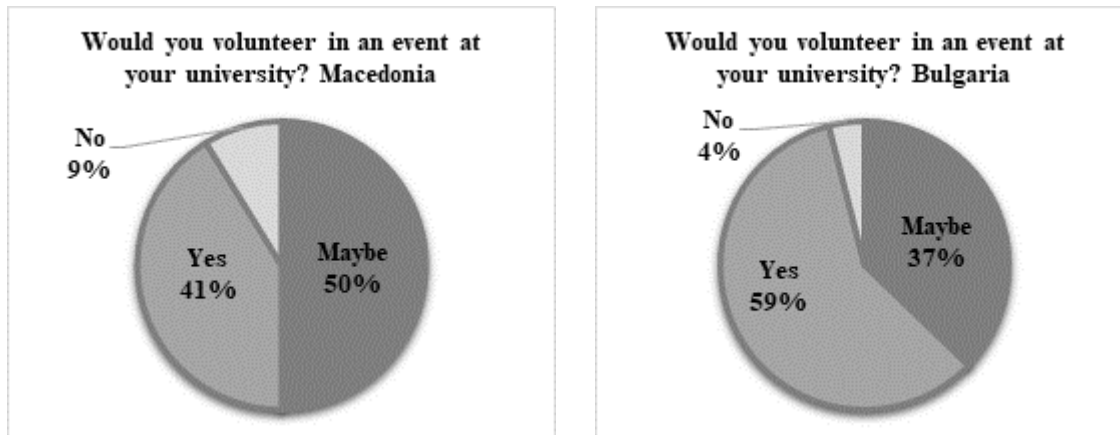


Figure 3. Commitment to University's events in Macedonia and Bulgaria.

Our study showed that the students in both countries acknowledge why is valuable to be a volunteer (**Figures 4, 5**):

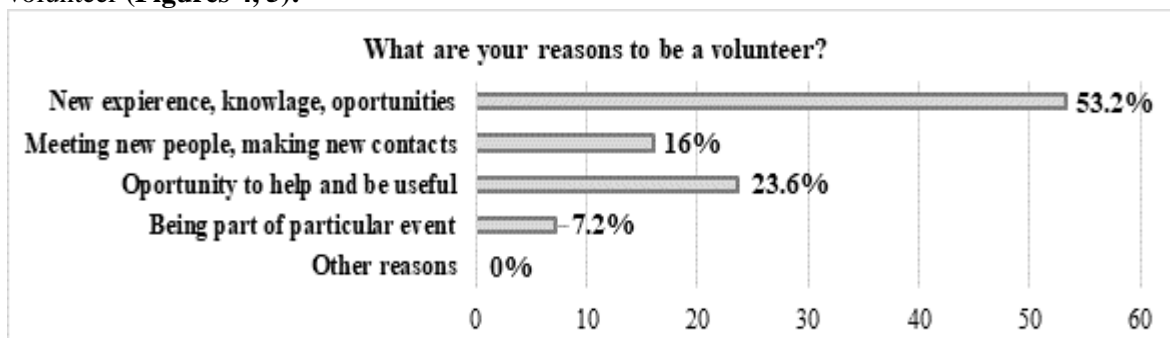


Figure 4. Macedonian students' reasons to be a volunteer

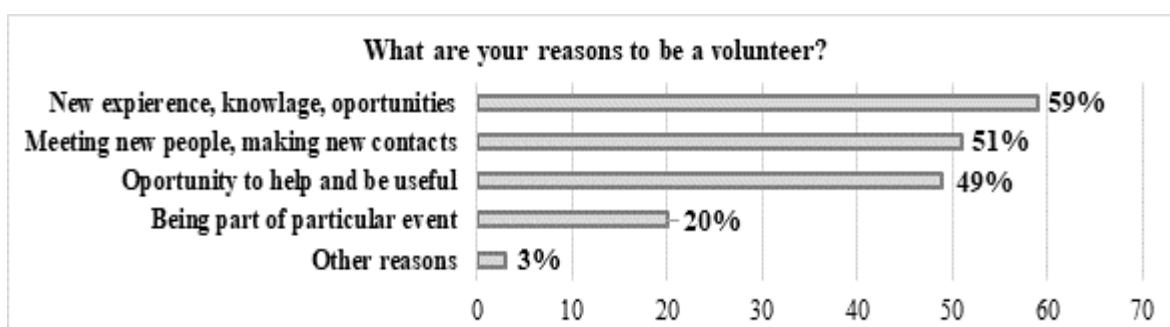


Figure 5. Bulgarian students' reasons to be a volunteer

However, at the same time when asked what will motivate them to volunteer, the students in Macedonia point out "getting certificate" the most (**Figure 6**). Only 21 % could be attracted

by "the free access". Only few students (13 %) consider that there are certain privileges and benefits available in volunteering.

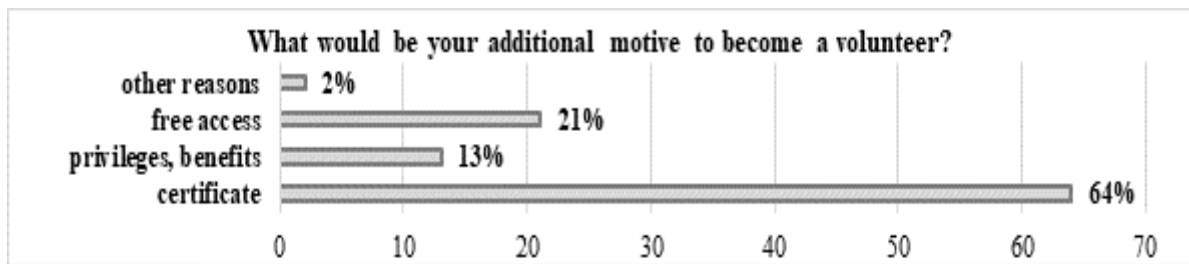


Figure 6. Macedonian students' additional motives to become a volunteer

Disappointingly, the “free access” will motivate the most, the students in Bulgaria (Figure 7). 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 very well informed about those benefits.

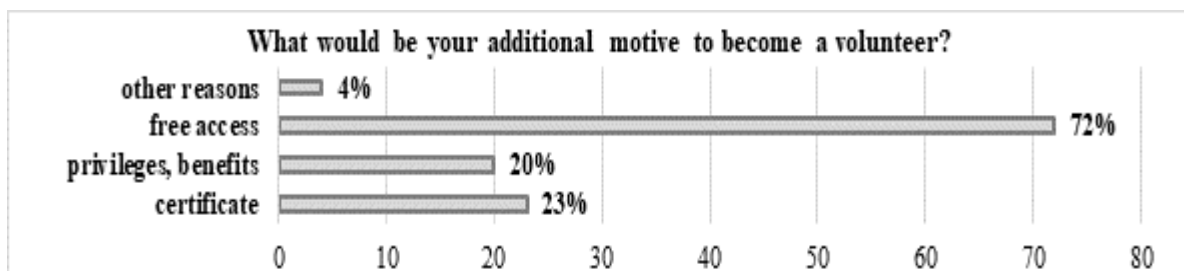


Figure 7. Bulgarian students' additional motives to become a volunteer

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 Erasmus + sport and HEPA Europe (European network) programs had been

founded, in order to promote health-enhancing physical activity among European population (3). 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”.

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, we asked our students weather they are willing to volunteer in a sport event (Figure 8).

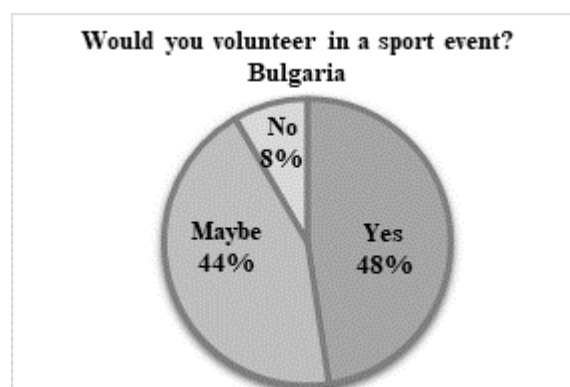
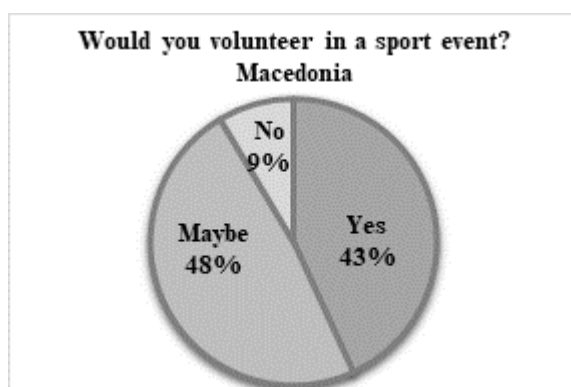


Figure 8. Volunteering in sport event in Macedonia and Bulgaria

Disappointingly less than the half of the 250 interviewed in Bulgaria – 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. The figures in Macedonia are very similar: 43 % (107

people) would; 48 % (120 people) are not sure and 9 % (22 people) do not want to be.

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 considered as one of the best ways to achieve that.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

❖ Universities in Bulgaria and Macedonia 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);

❖ Universities in Bulgaria and Macedonia to find and/or 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;

❖ To find and provide the legal background for volunteering in University Regulations;

❖ To make calls for volunteers in all annual

University's 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 order to attract them to become volunteers as well as what are the negative sides they find in volunteering.

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