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**PERCEPTION OF VOLUNTEERING BY STUDENTS –
FUTURE EMPLOYEES IN THE CONTEXT
OF BUILDING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
IN A WORKPLACE**

**POSTRZEGANIE WOLONTARIATU
PRZEZ STUDENTÓW – PRZYSZŁYCH PRACOWNIKÓW
W KONTEKŚCIE BUDOWANIA SPOŁECZNEJ
ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI W MIEJSCU PRACY**

DOI: 10.15611/pn.2018.520.08

JEL Classification: I2, J5, M5

Summary: The aim of the paper is to show, how students perceive volunteering, what are their motivations and which activities they undertake most often. In addition, the study aims to investigate whether the notion of ‘corporate volunteering’ is known and understood. The target group consists of students of the WSB University, studying Finances and Accounting and Tourism and Leisure. The applied measurement technique was a distributed survey. The results show that students are aware of benefits arising from volunteering, but their own involvement is limited. Less than 4 per cent of respondents took voluntary jobs while studying. Students do not really know the term ‘corporate volunteering’, even if the majority has some experience in working full-time. The results indicate the necessity of action in this respect, including educational one, since students’ attitudes, i.e. future or even current employees, will translate into building of CSR and, in the long term, shaping of the civil society.

Keywords: volunteering, employees volunteering, students volunteering, CSR.

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest pokazanie na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań własnych jak studenci postrzegają wolontariat, jakimi kierują się motywami i jakie aktywności najczęściej podejmują z tym związane. Dodatkowym celem jest sprawdzenie znajomości przez studentów pojęcia wolontariatu pracowniczego. Badania zostały przeprowadzone wśród studentów Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej we Wrocławiu kierunków Finanse i Rachunkowość oraz Turystyka i Rekreacja. Zastosowaną techniką była ankieta rozdawana. Badania pokazały, że studenci są świadomi korzyści, które daje wolontariat, ale równocześnie w niewielkim stopniu się w niego angażują. Mniej niż 4% badanych udzielało się w czasie studiów jako wolontariusze. Praktycznie studenci nie znają pojęcia wolontariatu pracowniczego, mimo że większość z nich ma już doświadczenie w pracy w pełnym wymiarze godzin. Wyniki badań

wskazują na potrzebę podjęcia działań, także edukacyjnych, w tym zakresie, ponieważ od postawy studentów – przyszłych lub nawet już aktualnych pracowników, będzie w znacznym stopniu zależeć budowanie społecznej odpowiedzialności w miejscu pracy, a w dalszej kolejności kształtowanie społeczeństwa obywatelskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: wolontariat, wolontariat pracowniczy, społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu.

1. Introduction

Volunteering as an element of social life has been known for long. Presently it is becoming an instrument of completion of CSR strategy in an organization and its potential in development of competences of employees is clearly noticed. Success of corporate volunteering in an organization depends on attitude of employees towards the very volunteering i.e. understanding its essence, motivation etc. The purpose of this article is to present, based on the performed research, how students perceive volunteering, what motivations govern them, what activities they most frequently take up. An additional objective is to check understanding of the notion of corporate volunteering. The reason to initiate the research in this respect is confidence that a determinant of CSR development and corporate volunteering is an appropriate attitude of students – future employees towards volunteering.

The paper consists of theoretical background, review of previous research focused on young people's attitude to volunteering, including students of other academic institutions in Poland, presentation of original research, discussion and conclusions.

2. Methodology of the research

The results presented in this article are the outcome of the survey research carried out among the students of WSB University in Wrocław. The applied measurement technique was a distributed survey. It contained fourteen closed questions, one open question and additional questions which facilitated determination of social-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Selection of the respondents was intentional. As a result of the performed research, 332 filled surveys were received and they were then initially analysed. Due to missing replies, only 260 surveys were qualified for further analysis. The analysis of the received data was carried out in Excel software. The analysis applied positioning parameters such as median, quartile or variability co-efficient.

While building the questionnaire for this study, a similar questionnaire elaborated in Great Britain [Brewis, Russell 2010] was used as a template, although adjusted to the specific situation in Poland. The British research was carried out at six universities and involved 3000 students and 5000 graduates.

The strategy of sampling limits the wider relevance of this research. The survey was carried out in one institution of higher education, among students of two study

programmes, with the dominance of part-time students. In addition, the questionnaire method itself has its own limitations and it is better supplemented by qualitative inquiries such as case study analysis and interviews. Actually, the authors of this study intend to expand this line of research, making use of other data collection techniques as well.

3. Essence of volunteering

Volunteering originates from the Latin word *voluntas* – freedom (volition), so it means work taken of one's good will, which not everyone has to take [Leszczyński 2012]. Volunteering is a well-known notion and it is associated with charity, philanthropy. However, as claimed by M. Górecki, it is the notion broader than charity, philanthropy, charity activity, as these are oriented directly at a man, whereas volunteering covers almost each field of social life, activities for the benefit of environment, assistance to animals etc. [Górecki 2013]. Volunteering is an interdisciplinary notion, defined in law, sociology, psychology or management. As stated by A. Kanios, the notion of volunteering is difficult to define therefore one may encounter a variety of definitions [Kanios 2008]. An opinion-forming organization – Centrum Wolontariatu (Centre for Volunteering) – defines volunteering as a free of charge, voluntary and aware activity for the benefit of others, going far beyond family-colleagues-friends ties [www.wlontariat.org.pl]. In Poland volunteering is stipulated by the Act dated 24 April 2003 on public benefit and volunteering [Ustawa z 24 kwietnia 2003]. In compliance with the Article 3 of the Act a volunteer is an individual who voluntarily and without remuneration renders services under the rules defined in this Act. Searching for an essence of volunteering one cannot ignore a “colloquial” understanding of the notion. In Poland volunteering has a low prestige in a social consciousness and is often associated with a stereotype of a top-down imposed social work. Lack of perception of volunteering as an element of a civic society may be observed in a variety of social groups: on the part of employers there lacks awareness that volunteering may be a form of development of competences, and among the youth one may observe a lack of vogue for engagement in volunteering, low awareness that such activity enriches not only one's personal development, but that this is also an opportunity to obtain competences and skills desired in the labour market [MPiPS 2012]. Voluntary activity of Poles is low compared to other countries of the EU. Only every fifth Pole gets involved in volunteering to benefit one's own community, church, estate, village, town or the needy. An indicator of volunteering at the level of 20% has maintained in Poland for several years, though 10–12 years ago it amounted to 24%. The activity level depends on religious engagement of the surveyed (the highest activity was shown by those who participated in religious practices several times a week – 34%) and on the level of education (individuals with university degree got involved most often – 27%). Community tasks were also clearly more often taken up by respondents aged 25 to 34 years (30%), inhabitants of villages (26%), and in

professional groups – farmers (47%), managerial staff and specialists of senior level (33%), and also qualified workers and pupils and students (25% each) [CBOS 2016].

3.1. Corporate volunteering

Along with development of a concept of social commitment of enterprises, corporate volunteering is performed more and more frequently under CSR strategy in a work place. Corporate volunteering is one of the forms of social activity most willingly taken in the area of CSR [FOR 2015]. The notion of labour volunteering, though it originates from the same source – altruistic help for the benefit of common good, it is a special kind of volunteering [Lorecka 2011]. It is defined as activity consisting in taking up and supporting by a company the activity of its employees for the benefit of non-governmental organizations and institutions defined by legal regulations. Employees-volunteers render various kind of works for the needy using their skills and capabilities, whereas their company enables them to take up such initiatives and supports their activities in a financial or organizational manner [FOB 2009].

Corporate volunteering is not provided for legally and its distinguishing feature is that it is stimulated, supported and completed with participation of an employer. Holistic attitude to development of employees in an organization becomes also a contribution in perception of volunteering as an instrument of development [Kulig-Moskwa 2014]. Much information is given by the research carried out among the employees of London companies engaged in volunteering, in which a level of development of skills obtained and developed by volunteering is presented [Corporate Citizenship 2010]. Below we have presented a percentage of the respondents who stated that their skills underwent certain development or whose increase of skills was significant.

1. Communication skills (66%).
2. Ability to help others (65%).
3. Adaptive abilities (54%).
4. Impact / negotiation skills (45%).
5. Team work (43%).
6. Leadership skills (41%).
7. Willingness to improve continuously (41%).
8. Planning and organization (40%).
9. Making decisions (39%).
10. Solving tasks (39%).
11. Ability to build relations and networks (39%).

Volunteering may be an instrument for forming competences desired by employers. Volunteers asked about competences obtained thanks to participation in volunteering most often mention the ones which are, at the same time, scarce in the labour market from the point of view of an employer. A result of volunteering, regardless of its type, is that volunteers may develop their personal and interpersonal

competences, and also competences in the area of “hard” knowledge, depending on a type of volunteering. As emphasised by volunteers, participation in voluntary actions simultaneously satisfies and develops passion which is appreciated by employers [Kulig-Moskwa 2013]. So it seems essential for students – future employees, decision-makers to be aware of volunteering and to know its potential in development.

3.2. Volunteering of students in Poland in the aspect of the research carried out so far

According to the research carried out by the association Klon/Jawor it is a group of young people, below the age of 25 years of life – pupils and students, representing 29% of the total of individuals engaged in volunteering who indicates the highest activity in respect of volunteering activities [Prymon-Ryś 2015]. In the research carried out under the project “Projektor – wolontariat studencki” [Szluz 2012] circa 20% of people below 25 years of life declared that they participated in pro-social activities covering both formal volunteering and informal assistance. In the research the students indicated also difficulties which affect their level of engagement in work under volunteering. Among the most often quoted ones there was lack of time (circa 15%), but also perception of a volunteer as an incompetent person (13%) overburden with duties, lack of confidence towards a volunteer and lack of specialist knowledge and skills.

The idea of volunteering is highly promoted in Polish schools and universities. Young people are aware of benefits resulting from this form of social engagement [Pulińska 2012] and declare support for pro-social initiatives [Prymon-Ryś 2015], however, it is not always translated into activities and active approach. They understand volunteering mainly as actions for the benefit of others, and among the most important reasons for taking up this kind of activity they indicate pleasure related to giving help and a possibility of obtaining new experiences, skills, initiating contacts with others. Similar results were obtained in the research carried out among students taking up activities in volunteering under the programme “Projektor – wolontariat studencki” [Szluz 2012]. Among the replies there were also such as feeling useful, a possibility to get to know operation and specific features of a place in which volunteering is carried out and making one’s dreams come true.

Asked about what volunteering gave them, what benefits they noticed for themselves related to volunteering and what features of personality may be formed through volunteering, the respondents often indicated interesting way of spending their spare time, ability to solve a variety of problems, interpersonal skills, understanding, tolerance, but also practical skills such as ability to be assertive, rules for giving first aid or experience in care over the sick [Szluz 2012].

People under 25 years of life more willingly than other age groups get engaged in actions related to ecology, environmental protection [Pulińska 2012], but they

also declare their willingness to get engaged in educative actions (56% of the respondents), social assistance (48.5%), help to the sick (16%), organization of sport events. (13%) [Prymon-Ryś 2015].

In many studies regarding engagement of young people in volunteering (both pupils and students) authors emphasise significance of volunteering for personal development of volunteers, but also development of features and skills desired by their future employers (among others: [Szluz 2012; Kulig-Moskwa 2013; Pieniżek, Zielińska 2017]).

The results of pilot research carried out by B. Józwick [2010] regarding understanding of the notion “corporate volunteering” among students of a selected state university showed that this notion was practically unknown and most often associated with the notion of volunteering. However, the respondents who had encountered this notion, in the majority (85%) declare support for this idea [Józwick 2010].

4. Perception of volunteering by students – own research

4.1. Characteristics of the respondents

The respondents participating in the research are students of WSB University in Wrocław, studying at the departments of Finances and Accounting (50.38%) and Tourism and Leisure (49.62%). Majority of the respondents are part-time students (73.5%). The group consisted of 216 women (83.08%) and 44 men (16.92%). The respondents aged 18–24 years represented 75% of the surveyed, the remaining part represented individuals aged 24–30 years (16.15%) and students over 30 years of life (8.85%). Majority of the respondents – 89.23% work: full time (72.31%), off and on (12.31%) or during holiday (4.62%). 10.77% of the surveyed do not work.

Asking students about giving unpaid assistance or engagement in volunteering, the research also checked other activities taken by them on daily basis. One of the questions was: *In what activities do you participate on regular active basis?* Possible answers to be chosen were as follows: practicing sport, organizations developing a hobby (e.g. a theatre group, dancing, photography, musical group, tourist group etc.), a study group, religious groups, political organizations, student council, environmental organizations, scouting or other social organizations, organizations acting to benefit of animals or other (which ones?). The activity taken up most frequently by the respondents is sport, then engagement in organizations developing their hobbies (Figure 1).

As it was possible to choose several answers in the above question, a number of activities taken up by the students was also analysed. In addition, it was verified for what percentage of people sport is the only permanent activity. 6.92% of the surveyed does not take up any permanent activity. 71.53% participate actively in indicated activities, out of which 56.15% practice sport only (Table1).

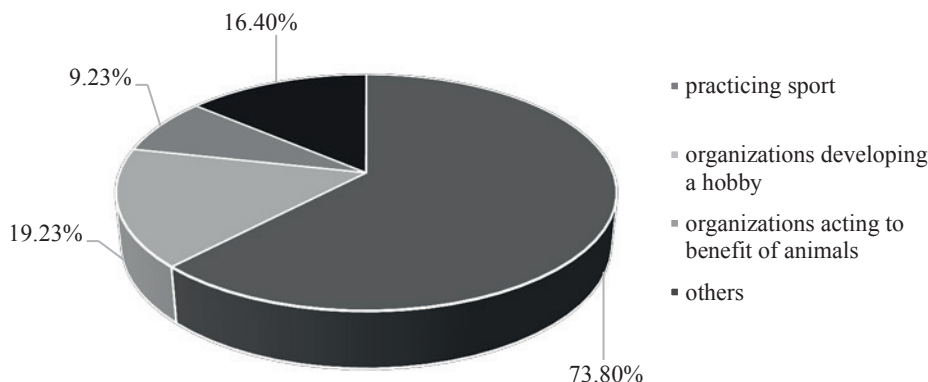


Figure 1. Activities taken up by the respondents

Source: own studies.

Table 1. Activities taken up by the respondents

Number of activities	Percentage of respondents
0	6.92
1	56.15 (sport)
	71.53 (in total)
2	18.08
3	2.31
4	0.77

Source: own studies.

4.2. Understanding the notion of volunteering

Volunteering for the respondents is first of all helping. To the question *What is volunteering in your opinion?* over 80% of the surveyed indicated this answer. For 71% volunteering is also a community service (Figure 2)¹. The respondents do not associate volunteering with preparation to professional work (6.92%) or fun (3.46%). Three of them chose the answer *Others* indicating that volunteering is improving one’s self-esteem, doing something altruistically, without remuneration, one’s self-fulfilment.

Associating volunteering with aid is also confirmed by the answers to the question in which the students were asked to choose 5 associations related to volunteering. Over 90% of the indications is aid. The next two are support and volition (40.38%) (Figure 3).

¹ In this question the respondents could choose at most 3 answers, therefore the percentages do not sum up to 100.

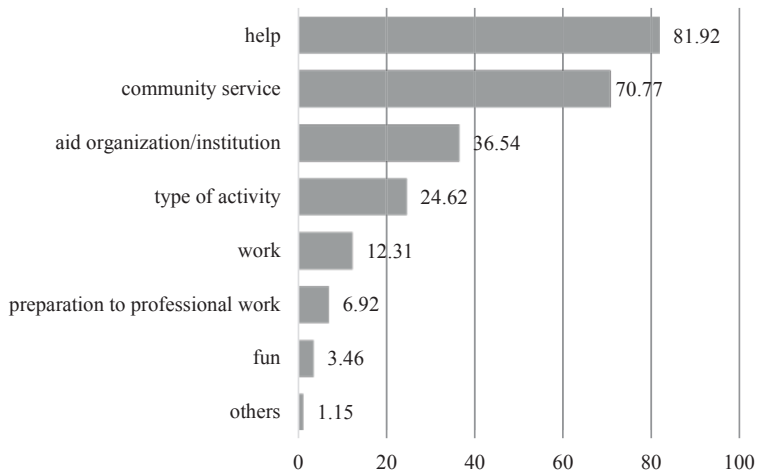


Figure 2. The notion of volunteering according to the respondents (%)

Source: own research.

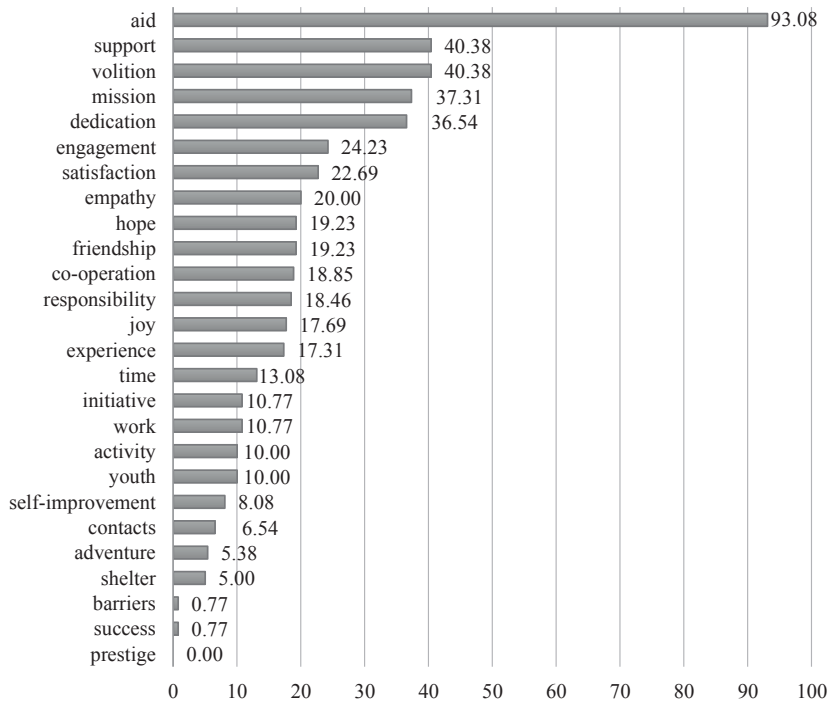


Figure 3. Associations related to volunteering (%)

Source: own research.

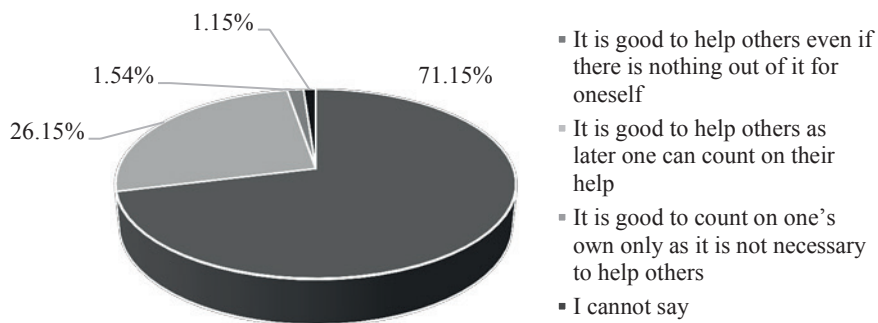


Figure 4. Opinions on volunteering

Source: own research.

It is interesting that students think it is good to help others even if there are no benefits related to it (71.15%). Only 1.54 of the surveyed thinks that it is good to count on one's own only (Figure 4).

4.3. Activity under volunteering and helping others

Positive associations with volunteering do not always lead to actual engagement in such activities. Only 3.46% of the surveyed (9 people) are students who presently are volunteers (Figure5). 41.92% of the respondents have experience in this respect and do not exclude activity as a volunteer again. 23.46% of the surveyed intend in future to become volunteers, even though by the date of the survey they had not been volunteers.

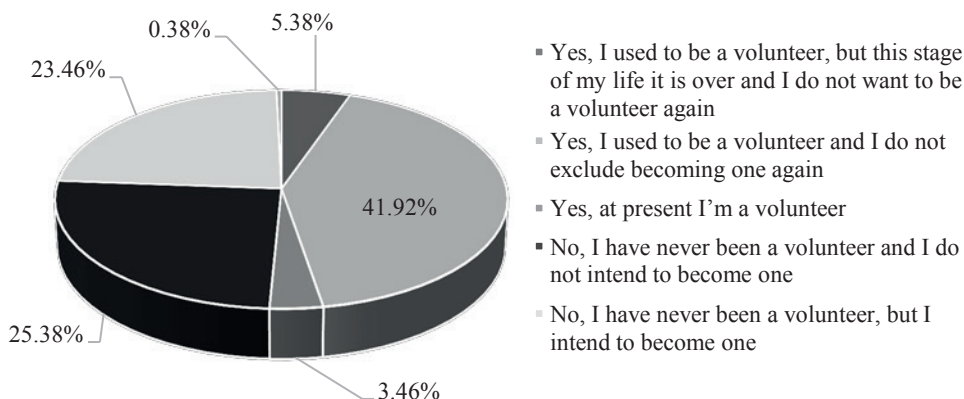


Figure 5. Experience as a volunteer – reply to the question: have you ever been a volunteer?

Source: own research.

The most frequent activity taken up by the respondents as giving help for free or volunteering are: collection of money, food, clothes etc. for charity purposes (49.62% indications), unpaid study aid to classmates or fellow students (45.77%) and offering free of charge lift by car (45.38%). 7.69% of the respondents had not given unpaid aid until the date of the survey (Figure 6).

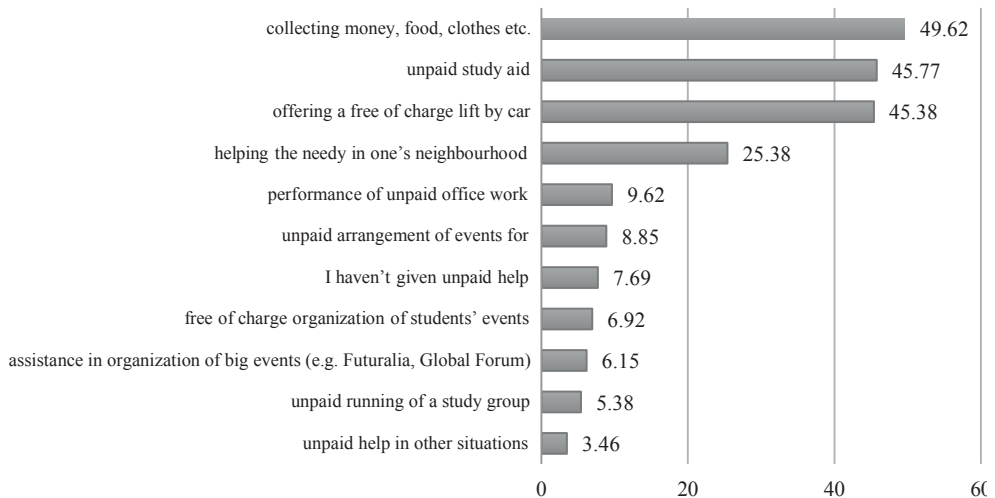


Figure 6. Type of unpaid help offered to others by the respondents (%)

Source: own research.

4.4. Reasons and benefits related to taking up voluntary activity

In order to determine reasons for taking up voluntary activity by students they were asked to evaluate importance of the specified reasons. Each of the reasons could be evaluated on a five-point scale 0 (completely unimportant) – 4 (very important). The median of the evaluation of each of the reasons is shown in Figure 7.

Analysing evaluation of importance of the reasons for offering unpaid help/volunteering it was stated that the most important reason of such activity is a need to help others. 75% of the respondents considered this reason important or very important ($Q1 = 3$). Only 3.08% of the respondents considered this reason not very important or completely unimportant. It is interesting that in the event of this reason the respondents were most unanimous (the variability co-efficient at the level of 12.5%). Other important reasons to grant unpaid help/voluntary activity were: personal values and development of skills. 6.92% of the surveyed considered 'my personal values' not very important or completely unimportant. According to students the least important reasons to take up the discussed activity are: a possibility to obtain an award, certificate (mode is 0) and the fact that friends/family were volunteers (mode is 1).

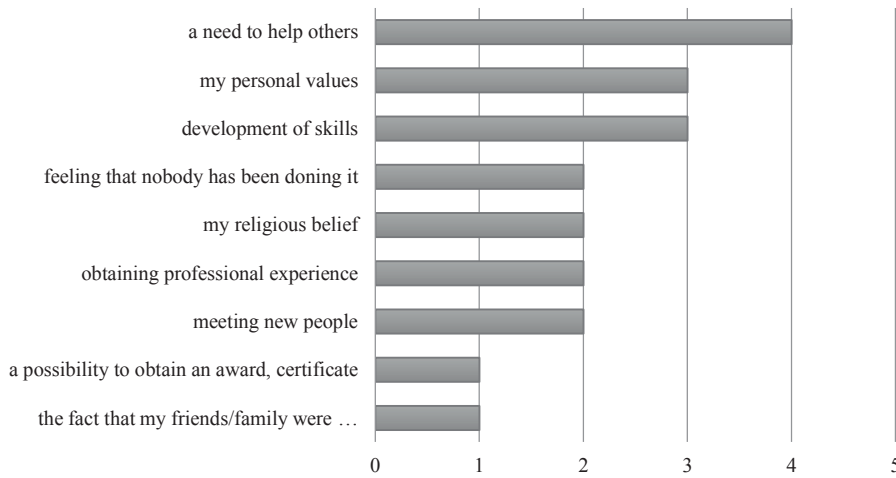


Figure 7. The median of evaluation of the reasons for granting unpaid help

Source: own study.

The respondents were asked not only to evaluate the reasons for giving unpaid help/taking up voluntary activity, but also to evaluate reasons for not getting engaged in volunteering. Similarly as above, on a five-point scale – from 0 (completely unimportant) to 4 (very important). The quartiles of evaluation of the discussed reasons are presented in Figure 8.

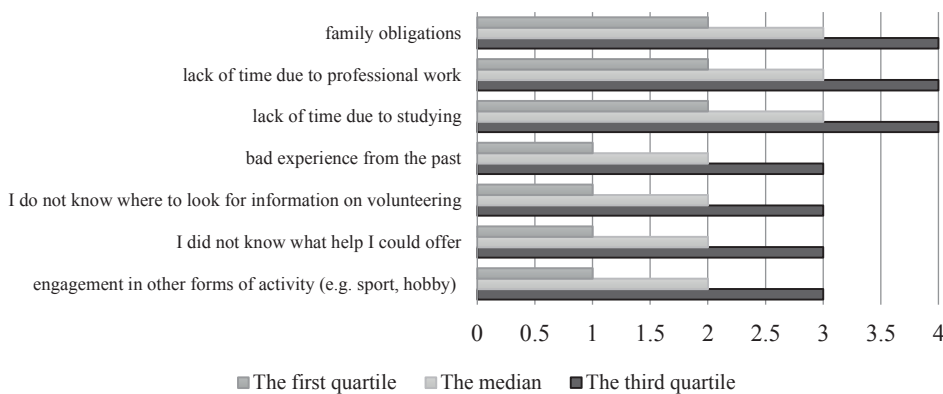


Figure 8. The quartiles of evaluation of reasons for not getting engaged in volunteering

Source: own study.

The reasons for not getting engaged in volunteering, which were considered important by the respondents were: family obligations, lack of time due to work and

to studying. Each of them was considered as at least quite important by circa 80% of the surveyed.

Except for the reasons to grant unpaid help or to be a volunteer, the surveyed students were also asked about benefits resulting from such activity. They were asked to evaluate impact of volunteering on several indicated skills. As in the preceding two questions, the evaluation was carried out on a five-point scale – from 0 (no impact) to 4 (strong impact). The quartiles of evaluation are presented in Figure 9.

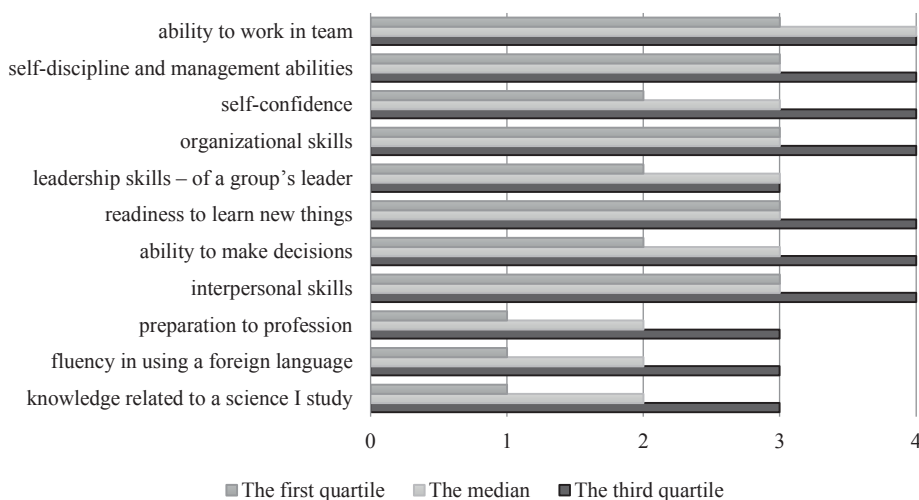


Figure 9. The quartiles of evaluation of impact of voluntary activity on the indicated skills

Source: own study.

According to the respondents voluntary activity has a strong impact on an ability to work in team. They are united in their opinion as the variability co-efficient is 12.5%. Only 1.92% of the surveyed (5 people) evaluated this skill as 0 or 1.

4.5. Knowing the notion of corporate volunteering

The survey carried out among the students, except for closed questions, contained one open question. That is: *Corporate volunteering is ... (describe how you understand this notion)*. The purpose of formulating the question in this manner was to check if and how the respondents understood this notion. 60.77% of the respondents did not answer the above question. It may result not only from lack of knowledge or understanding of the notion, but also from unwillingness to answer open questions. 7 people (2.69%) did not know what corporate volunteering was answering the question “I don’t know” or “?”. The remaining answers were sorted out and grouped and presented in the table 2. Most people think that corporate volunteering is unpaid help to others or help to weaker colleagues (employees) (17.31%).

Table 2. List of attempts to explain the notion of corporate volunteering by the students

Answer	Number of answers	Percentage of answers (%)
Unpaid/altruistic help to others / the needy	25	9.62
Help to colleagues/weaker employees	20	7.69
Participating in voluntary activity in work hours	13	5.00
Person/group of people helping others	8	3.08
Work/additional work/charity work/volunteering treated as work	7	2.69
Unpaid work for the benefit of an enterprise facilitating obtaining experience	5	1.92
Charity aid of entrepreneurs for the benefit of the needy	3	1.15
Remunerated volunteering	2	0.77
Mutual help in improving one's skills/improving competences	2	0.77
Help with regard to a job I perform	2	0.77

Source: own study.

The remaining answers, not included in the table, which were indicated only once, are: engagement of employees in volunteering, helping others in a place of work, volunteering which reimburses incurred costs related to volunteering, life experience and adventure, actions supporting activity of employees who deal with helping other people, helping employees by an employer, represented by a company in which we work, organised by a work place in which they work.

5. Conclusions

The performed research showed that students understand volunteering mainly as helping. In addition it is associated with a term of community service, and much less with an aid organisation or institution. The majority of students think that it is worthwhile helping even if there are no benefits out of it.

Unfortunately positive associations with volunteering and awareness of benefits related to it, only to a slight extent, are translated into actions. Less than 4% of the surveyed during their studies were volunteers. Many of them, before starting their studies, had acted as volunteers, but gave it up.

A question occurs about a reason for resigning from this form of activity, particularly almost 24% of the respondents would like to become volunteers again. Why during studies many individuals suspend their activities for the benefit of others, despite the fact that a centre for volunteering operates in their university, voluntary initiatives are promoted and actions taken? The research did not bring an explicit response, however we may suppose that it is caused by family duties, lack of time due to professional work or studying. Moreover, such a small number of people

engaged in volunteering may result from the specific conditions of this University which is oriented at education in a part-time system and where most of the students work full time.

It is disturbing that despite experience in professional work, the notion of corporate volunteering is practically unknown. It may also indicate a need of better promotion of this concept by employers, but also by the University as part of educational programme.

Students are aware of benefits that engagement in volunteering may bring to the development of their personality and skills, in particular in the aspect of team work and self-discipline. It may indicate occurrence of certain discrepancies between perception of benefits and competences, which may be formed and developed through voluntary work by institutions and employers and students' opinions in this respect.

The research described above and the conclusions whose purpose was to examine perception of volunteering by the students, potential employees, show an image of a student as rather uninterested in volunteering. In the context of development of social organization of business it is an unfavourable phenomenon and may be perceived as a hindering factor. It is also a signal indicating a need to educate young people in order to create a civil society in which volunteering is important and even crucial type of activity.

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