

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Volunteering among youth generation from the
Bazinul Ciucului**

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The main topic and the objective of this paper

The objective of my research is the description of the characteristics of formal volunteering in the Szekler region in a social group, focusing mainly on the students and on the young generation with higher education. Besides this, I try to set a parallel among these characteristics with the traits of volunteers from abroad, completing their volunteering in Szeklerland.

In my research, I was also curious about how the international tendencies of volunteering reflect in the Szekler society. At international level, more and more graduates and students are taking part in institutional volunteering (besides compulsory volunteering). With the prolongment of study years, the civil organization has shown increased demand for the skilled volunteers in recent times. There are a large number of NGOs which are absolutely in need of volunteering, as the main source of their operation. Additionally the patterns of voluntary motivations got changed in the processes of modernization (such as individualism, secularization), and this has caused the appearance of individualistic and civic voluntary motivations. The collectivistic volunteering had been replaced by the individualistic volunteering. Szeklerland has a particular social pattern which may lead to a special kind of volunteering which does not correspond fully with the international voluntary models. In this research my main goal it was to explore and to describe the characteristics of volunteering in such environment where no similar research had been ever conducted, all these being embedded in the international special literature.

The topic of volunteering has a very rich international special literature, which confirms its importance. In the following, I will highlight some of the theoretical approaches that I have found most appropriate to support my research. At international level I consider important to mention names such as Inglehart, Putnam and Hustinx. Their studies have largely determined the theoretical framework of my own research. Putnam researched the phenomenon of volunteering in the United States of America, where he found a decline in volunteering rates, linked to a decline in civic participation. He considers the decline in social participation is one of the consequences of the post-industrial period, which can be explained by lifestyle changes (women entering at the labour market, increased commuting time between home and work, etc.) (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, Inglehart concludes from his international research (research done in almost 50 countries) that volunteering is not in

decline, but is in a process of transformation. This results in the fact that more and more youth is involved in volunteering actions than in previous periods. In contrast to previous periods, formal volunteering does not necessarily involve NGO membership. Nowadays youth have developed a type of volunteering that does not require organizational membership and is based on flexibility. The volunteer decides how long he volunteers for an organization and he decides, too, at how many NGOs volunteers at one time (Inglehart 2003). The special literature describes this type of volunteering as new or modern volunteering.

The research of Hustinx's in the topic of modern volunteering is also determinant. According to Hustinx it is up to the individual to decide whether or not to volunteer, that is based on his or her personal beliefs (Hustinx - Lammertyn 2003). In addition, there is an individually based formal volunteering today. The volunteer has individual expectations, individual ideas and individual needs that NGOs have to respond to with personalized tasks (Hustinx 2010).

The works of Klára Czike and Hajnalka Fényes are outstanding in Hungary. Klára Czike researched volunteering, NGOs and volunteering motivations at a national level. Hajnalka Fényes, with several colleagues, researched the characteristics, influencing factors and motivations of student volunteering, which sometimes involved several countries. Fényes and her colleagues highlight that the rate of volunteers in higher education is increasing internationally in Hungary as well. Furthermore, we can observe the emergence of a new type of volunteering among them, and the examination of motivations shows that among Hungarian students there are three types of motivational sets: traditional, modern and mixed type (Fényes 2015).

From the Romanian special literature, I call the attention to the work of Bogdan Voicu and Mălina Voicu, who have published articles in several international journals on the situation of Romanian volunteering. Their papers also helped me to interpret the situation of Romanian volunteering in the context of post-communism, according to which one of the lowest volunteering rate in Central and Eastern Europe, is in Romania. Four main factors are mentioned by Voicu and Voicu as the reason for the low rate of volunteering: the negative effects of communism, before the year of 1945 Romania it was primarily a rural area, the low incomes and low religious diversity (Voicu-Voicu 2003, 2009).

After studying the literature, I formulated six research questions:

1. To what extent can youth from the Bazinul Ciucului (the Bazinul Ciucului, Harghita County, Romania) or students from the Sapientia Transylvanian Hungarian University of

Miercurea Ciuc (hereinafter: the Sapientia THU or Sapientia University) fall into the categories of old and new types of volunteering?

2. What values do youth from the Bazinul Ciucului have on the Rokeach Scale, and to what extent do these values influence their volunteering and their voluntary motivations?

3. How do the cultural capital, human capital (religiosity, educational attainment) and social capital influence volunteering and how does volunteering effect these types of capital?

4. How does the practice of the szekler cooperation nominated Kaláka¹ in the region influence the volunteering of students?

5. Where does volunteering in the changed world of work can be situated, and what kind of role can it play in the future?

6. How does the historical-social background of Szeklerland influence the development of the culture of volunteering in the region?

The applied methods and the subjects of the research

The research area is geographically limited to the Bazinul Ciucului in Harghita County, which is part of the historical Szeklerland.

In order to expand my research topic, I have applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods. From the quantitative methods, I have applied the self-completed questionnaire.

The survey included the following research dimensions: family background, definition of volunteering, volunteering motivations, volunteer experiences, religiosity, Kaláka practice, values survey, cultural and social capital. The questionnaire was completed at the Sapientia THU in Miercurea-Ciuc. I selected a sample of 354 students representing the sophomore and all the third year students in the 2016/2017 school year. I strove to the full-scale survey. Of the two grades, 237 students returned the questionnaire, representing a 67% success rate for a full-scale survey. 60% of the students surveyed are second-year students and 40% are third-year students, which approximates the distribution of the general population by grade (58% second-year, 42% third-year students). One third (34%) of the subjects are male and two

¹The Kaláka means the exchange of work between households, which is associated with the principle of balanced reciprocity. According to this, “(...) the participants in the transaction strive to achieve a balance in which the “ values” of the received work and the given work are nearly equal, and the return is made promptly upon request” (Sik 2012: 32).

thirds (66%) are female, which is also close to the gender distribution of the general population (36% male, 64% female). 35% of sophomore and third-year students at Sapiientia University in Miercurea-Ciuc are volunteers. Considering the results of the special literature, this rate is considered to be high. On the one hand, it is high compared to national results, as Romania is one of the countries with the lowest volunteering rates in Central and Eastern Europe, eg. this rate was 7% in 2010 (Andronic-Andronic 2010). On the other hand, in the light of researches carried out at other Romanian universities, this rate is also high: according to a 2012 research conducted at the University of Iași, the rate of volunteers did not reached 25% (Blaj-Netedu 2012). However, it is important to remark that this rate is far below the average from Western countries, where two thirds of students are volunteering (see Smith et al. 2010). Students, who do not volunteer, have identified two main reasons: they do not have time to volunteer and they have not yet heard about volunteering opportunities that have aroused their interest.

The database of the questionnaire was analysed by statistical methods, like variance analysis, crosstab analysis, factor analysis, correlation analysis.

From the qualitative research methods I used focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. I also used the focus group interview method for students from the Sapiientia University in Miercurea Ciuc, which helped me to prepare the self-completed questionnaire for students. During my research, I made three focus group interviews with students during the 2016/2017 academic year, with twenty students. The interviewees were selected on the basis of a voluntary application where I did not strive to make the sample representative, as the purpose was to explore the topic.

For the semi-structured interviews, I used the following research dimensions: the history of the volunteer (family background, childhood, school years, studies, high school volunteering), the interpretation of volunteering, voluntary motivations, the benefits of volunteering, volunteering experiences, the networking of the volunteer, the volunteer's future plans for learning and volunteering. I used the semi-structured interview method in the case of the local volunteers from the Bazinul Ciucului, aged between 18-30 years, and for the international volunteers. This method was well suited to supplement the database of my questionnaire research and to explore more deeply the voluntary habits of the youth. It also helped me to conduct a type analysis of young volunteers from the Bazinul Ciucului.

For the selection of local volunteers I used the snowball sampling procedure, as no register has been prepared so far, which contains the database of the volunteers. I interviewed

25 volunteers from the Bazinul Ciucului during the years 2016-2017. The interviewees come from several settlements in the Bazinul Ciucului, some from villages, and some from towns. Some of them are students, and some of them are graduated and are already on the labour market. The expectations about interviewees were to have volunteering experiences in the last year, to be aged between 18 and 30, and to be male and female interviewees.

In the summer of 2016, I conducted interviews with foreign volunteers in English. I also used the snowball sampling procedure to select the interviewees. During my research, I conducted interviews with 12 foreign volunteers. The majority of international volunteers came from economically developed countries such as the United States, England, Australia, Sweden and Singapore. But some of them were also from developing countries like Afghanistan or Mauritius. All of the interviewee had already volunteered at home and some of them had also international voluntary experiences, but for the majority, this was their first international volunteering. In terms of gender, the majority were women, ranging their age from 19 to 54, the majority were in their 20s, the oldest being 54 years old in 2017. The majority have graduated or were studying at university. The majority of them came from families with a dominant status: parents having high education and well-paid jobs (family doctor, ambassador, lawyer, IT manager, etc.). It was mentioned by just one or two interviewees that one of his/her parents does not have a university degree and is a workman. Every interviewee has been in Romania, including in Szeklerland, for the first time. I applied the snowball sampling procedure in both cases, because there isn't an official database in the region about the two groups of volunteers, and there is no data about the number of international volunteers in the region. Therefore, the sample is not representative.

I have considered important to involve in the research the non-volunteer students also, as I was curious about all the students opinion related to volunteering, comparing in the same time the group of volunteers and the group of non-volunteers.

The findings of the research in the form of thesis

Firstly I present the answers to the research questions and then further results of the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews.

My first research question focused on the phenomenon of the new and the old type of volunteering, where the motivations and values of the two types of volunteering can be clearly distinguished. Therefore my aim it was to examine this pattern in the case of szekler and

student volunteers: how they can be classified according to the old and the new type of volunteering? In order to find this out, I have revealed the subjects' voluntary motivations and their general opinion about volunteering. The general image of volunteering reflects the student's three most important reasons for volunteering: helping others, gaining professional experience and testing their skills. According to the factor analysis, there are five groups of students' perceptions of volunteering: dedicated, egocentric, challenging, community-centric and trendy volunteering: dedicated, self-centred, challenged, common-centred and trendy volunteering. According to the motivational analysis, the students of the Sapientia University are the most motivated by the following three factors: helping others, gaining new competences/ professional development and work experience. Based on the factor analysis, the following motivational categories can be found: instrumental, self-defence, career oriented, social affair, social and mixed motivations. Both the image of volunteering and the voluntary motivations indicate that there are elements of the new type and the old type of volunteering that are found in the case of the students from Sapientia THU and the interviewees from the Bazinul Ciucului, in a rather mixed way. The common student from the Bazinul Ciucului is not a clear type of the new or the old type of volunteering, but rather a mixed type, for who, helping others and developing their own careers is equally important.

The second research question is related to the first one: according to the special literature, one's value system influences the volunteering, so we could observe that the community value based traditional volunteering was replaced by the rational value based individualistic volunteering. In order to demonstrate this, I tried to reveal the value system of the Sapientia University students with the help of the Rokeach value-scale. Based on this, I analysed the influence of the measured values on the volunteering and the voluntary motivations. Based on the results of the empirical research, the students' value system can be classified into four groups according to the target values: hedonist, intellectual-materialistic, pacifist and socialist. Based on the asset values there are five groups of characters: creative, educated, kind, clever and trustworthy.

From the target values the social esteem and from the asset values the responsible behaviour influence the volunteering of the target group, while the other values have no effect on volunteering. From the group of the value categories, there are several values influencing voluntary motivations: the hedonistic value system influences the development of instrumental motivations, the pacifist and kind value system affect the self-defence and mixed-type motivations, while the educated value preferences influences the social type

motivations. From these we can conclude that there are groups of students of Sapientia University of Miercurea Ciuc who hold traditional and modern values, whose value preferences directly influence their volunteering and their voluntary motivation. In other words, we can discover a mixed type of volunteering that is, carrying both modern and traditional features in the light of the study of values, too.

In the third research question I tried to explore the relationship between volunteering and the types of capital among the students from Sapientia University. During my research, I examined the effects of social and cultural capital on students volunteering, together with the religious aspect. The social capital research has shown that social relationships are an important factor in the volunteering of students at Sapientia THU in Miercurea Ciuc, as students whose friends or family members have volunteering experience are more likely to volunteer. The interviews also revealed that some volunteers came into contact with volunteering by a friend or teacher, but there are also examples of volunteering with a friend. This result is in line with other international studies of young volunteers (e.g. Haski-Leventhal et al. 2008).

The analysis of the relationship between cultural capital and volunteering resulted in that the consumption of the classical culture does not influence the volunteering of the students. While looking at the relationship between the different cultural activities and the volunteering, I came to the conclusion that only participating on academic lectures has an impact on volunteering. Students' cultural consumption is roughly in the middle range (50-60%) and the proportion of volunteering is one third, which is in line with international results, ie the level of cultural capital influences the rate of volunteering. Those with high cultural capital tend to volunteer more (Lee - Brudney 2012).

Analysing the database in the light of religiosity, the students of Sapientia University did not consider their volunteering to be influenced by religious affiliation or church attendance. Prayer habits, on the other hand, influence the volunteering. Fényes (2015) also came to this conclusion, who explained that nowadays it is becoming more widespread among youth when the individual is religious in his own way, and the rate of those who go to church is decreasing (Fényes 2015). However, it is important to highlight that praying is an inner urge, so volunteering, from the point of view of religiosity and praying, is driven by intrinsic motivations and beliefs in religious values. This can also be found among the students of Sapientia THU. Church attendance involves belonging to a community, where the individual can be influenced by the members and events of the community. Thus, the volunteering of the

churchgoers is also motivated by external factors, such as the temple community or their perceptions of volunteering. According to international research, church attendance has a positive effect on volunteering (e.g. Voicu - Voicu 2009, Wilson - Musick 1997, Wilson - Janoski 1995).

The fourth research question concerns on the relationship between the szekler community work nominated Kaláka and volunteering. The relationship between Kaláka and volunteering reveals that a student who is involved in traditional szekler cooperation “kaláka” organized in the local community, is more likely to volunteer. There is no international data on this dimension, but it is certainly important that the ever-shrinking kaláka work is still able to influence volunteering. Other supporting activities also have an impact on the volunteering of the students, such as supporting church communities (the majority of the population from the Bazinul Ciucului is Hungarian Roman Catholic), helping in social, cultural and sporting institutions, and providing assistance to organizations, clubs and associations.

In the fifth research question, I was looking for an answer to where volunteering is located in the changed world of work and what role it can play in the future. In the changing world of work, volunteering could be an atypical form of work, since it is not just a hobby or leisure activity but it has important benefits for society as well as for the practitioner. Volunteering contributes to the improvement of the labour market situation, the standard of living and the quality of life of individuals, and to the maintenance of social well-being. In addition, it is an activity in which the individual can express himself/herself, a value which will become more and more important in the new perspective of work. Furthermore, volunteering can fulfil functions like paid work: it can integrate, create and develop social status, achieve professional development, socialize for paid work, and it can also contribute to one’s livelihood through the goods and services received in exchange. Altogether, volunteering has a place in the new paradigm of work as an atypical form of work, complementing other money-making activities.

The sixth research question focuses on the historical and social backgrounds, which can influence the development of volunteering in a society, most notably in Romanian society and the Szekler community. I have tried to find an answer to this question in the special literature, which is to be found in the already mentioned low proportion of Romanian volunteering (see Voicu-Voicu 2003). According to Rebeleanu and Nicoară (2011), the legal background of volunteering is still embryonic: in the early 2000s, the legal background of volunteering began to be developed, and has continued to evolve ever since. All of this

highlights that the consequences of social processes and of historical events do indeed influence the development of volunteering. And in the case of Romania, they can slow it down.

Most volunteers at Sapientia University have volunteered for youth organizations, charities and cultural institutions. In recent years, a kind of movement has been launched in the Szeklerland region aimed at reviving youth NGOs. This can also be seen in volunteering as it has led many young people to become actively involved in the life of local youth organizations. The increase of volunteering in the youth area is in line with international patterns, as found in Inglehart's (2003) paper, that youth volunteering has been transformed into youth and sport associations.

At the individual level, volunteering is stimulated by university degree, religiosity, social networking, the level of income and young age (Voicu - Voicu 2009). According to the results of the questionnaire research, the level of education of the father and mother, the subjective financial security and the average of monthly income of the family do not influence the volunteering of students in the Bazinul Ciucului. The results of the interview research also confirm that the majority of parents of volunteers have a secondary education, i.e. the students come from a lower-educated social environment. The employment of parents and the average of the monthly income of the family also show a lower social status, which is interesting because the special literature emphasizes the dominant (university degree, high income) status as a factor stimulating volunteering in the case of young people (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2008). However, in the case of Sapientia University students from Miercurea Ciuc, it can be concluded that dominant social status does not play a role in volunteering, as most do not have a dominant social background. This result is not in line with international trends.

By analysing the local volunteers' experiences of the qualitative research, I conducted a type analysis, which resulted in six types of local volunteers: festival supporting volunteer, human centric volunteer, organizational worker, patriot volunteer, experimenter volunteer, and a mixed type volunteer. In the analysis the main dimension it was the volunteer's interest, along with dimensions such as the location of volunteering, performed tasks, voluntary motivations, personality traits, the aim of volunteering, and Stebbins (2007) time typology. I also consider this to be an important result of the research, as it has made it possible to create a smaller volunteer map where similar future researches from other regions of Szeklerland can be gathered.

The legal framework of volunteering in Romania has been difficult to develop since the 1989 regime change. The Law No. 195/2001 on volunteering (in Romanian: *Legea voluntariatului nr. 195/2001*) defines the concept of volunteering. This law has been amended several times since: 2002, 2006 and 2007 (Rebeleanu - Nicoara 2011). In 2014, Law No. 78/2014 on voluntary activities in Romania (in Romanian: *Lege privind reglementarea activității de voluntariat în România*) came into force, which was also amended in 2016. Currently, in Romania, volunteering in the field of study is considered to be professional experience under the Law No. 78/2014, and a volunteer contract must be signed with the volunteer, which includes coordinating the volunteer and providing the costs of volunteering by the host organization. Therefore, we can declare that volunteering is a new phenomenon in Romania, especially in the case of youth volunteering. The above mentioned laws on volunteering also seek to stimulate youth volunteering. Qualitative research has shown that a significant number of young people in Bazinul Ciucului have not heard about the Romanian Voluntary Law, and are not aware of its content (possibility of voluntary contract, officially recognized professional experience, etc.). This results in, on the one hand, not informing students at educational institutions about volunteering and, on the other hand, the NGOs themselves not being informed about volunteerism. Interviews with volunteers from the Bazinul Ciucului also suggest this.

Conscious volunteering has not yet been developed among youth in the Bazinul Ciucului, as is the case of international volunteers coming to the Szeklerland. As a result, locals do not generally consider volunteering as an opportunity to acquire or validate different competencies, as noted in the special literature on university volunteers (see Smith et al. 2010).

The case of international volunteers arriving in the Bazinul Ciucului is fully in line with the results of international research data. Their motivations are mixed: they want to help, get to know a new culture, to go on trips, to have an adventure. They come from high-status families, meaning that parents usually hold high prestige positions such as doctor, ambassador, lawyer, businessman. In line with international trends, these young people also believe that volunteering abroad can "change the world". The host organization from the Bazinul Ciucului is performing in the social area, organizing programs for orphaned children. As a result, most of the foreign volunteers are interested in helping those in need.

However, this is a unique case in the region as it is the only non-governmental organization dedicated to foreign volunteers, build on the case of orphaned children. In

addition, the organization's international presence is also helped by the fact that its leader and founder, is also a foreigner (moved from England to Miercurea Ciuc) with volunteer tourist experiences. We can conclude that international volunteering is present in the area, even though it is in its infancy, and is operated so far by a single organization. According to international research, volunteer tourism has both positive and negative effects. However, no such research has been conducted in our area.

Summarizing, youth volunteering has developed a lot in the Bazinul Ciucului in recent years. Formal volunteering with non-governmental organizations is still in its infancy, as is volunteer tourism, but there is potential in the area for both forms of volunteering to develop and become operational.

The novelty of the research and of the results

The novelty of my research can be summarized in the next points. First of all, the process of the research is novel: I examined the volunteering of students from the Bazinul Ciucului by gaining empirical experiences of local and foreign volunteers in one research project. Besides that I was trying to put the results into an international context, this gave me the opportunity to compare these two groups. Along the international special literature, there was a group of international volunteers, which formed a control group for the group of local volunteers.

Secondly, some of the results also brought new things in volunteering. As long as the international literature and foreign volunteers emphasize the value of volunteering to build a conscious professional career, this is refuted by the students of the Sapientia University students and volunteers from Miercurea Ciuc. The most important motivating factors for these volunteers are to help others, professional development and work experience. Substantially a mixed set of motivations encourages them to volunteer. However the initial step in volunteering is the willingness to help others, associated with professional motivations, which developed during the volunteering.

Thirdly, volunteering it was not examined in association with the szekler cooperation nominated “kaláka” The results of my research suggest that it is important the examination of this segment of volunteering, because the szekler cooperation “kaláka” influences the volunteering.

Fourthly, it was not done yet a typology analysis of the volunteers from Bazinul Ciucului, which describes the types of volunteers in the area: festival volunteer, human-

centric volunteer, organizational colleague volunteer, patriot volunteer, experimenter volunteer and mixed-type volunteer.

Otherwise, this research can be considered to be innovative in the Szeklerland region, as this research topic, volunteering, has not yet been studied scientifically.

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (2)

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