Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

On the way to active citizenship - Examining attitudes of high school students towards school community service

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Debrecen, 2019.
Aim of the thesis, delimiting the topic

In the international literature on education research, the central question for decades is how the education system can contribute to increasing the social participation of young people, strengthening their active citizenship and social solidarity. After the turn of the millennium, Hungarian and international results (European Social Survey, International Social Survey Program, World Values Survey, The European Quality of Life Survey, Eurobarometer, TÁRKI) have highlighted the importance of an effective tool of rising awareness of social responsibility at an early age. In the international literature, the concept of “service-learning” and “community-service” approaches the content of the concept of community service in Hungary. According to Furco, while service-learning is more about learning, community-service focuses on providing services, but both contribute to the development of social and civic responsibility through experiential learning. At the beginning of the 20th century, service-learning programs appeared in the United States and were introduced in several European countries (France, Netherlands, Germany). International experience has shown that the education system is able to provide the formal framework within which pupils' civic education can take place. International research most often investigates the impact of service-learning on volunteering, civil behaviour (Kirlin, Parker et al.) and academic performance (Astin-Sax, Hesser, Eyler, Giles & Braxton). An important research direction is the analysis of the capability-building effect of the program (Amerson, Sautú, Battistoni) and the exploration of the effect of the relationship capital increase (Campbell, Dufour, Kahne et al., Pucino-Penniston, Keller-Dupree et al.).

In Hungary, the school community service was introduced in 2011, where students have to perform community service at any state, municipal, civil or non-profit organization with which the given high school cooperates. Since 1st January 2016, the requirement of acquiring the graduation certificate is to certify the completion of fifty hours of community service, so the graduation exam does not only measure the subject knowledge, but also aims to draw attention to the fact that responsible citizenship, social skills and social sensitivity are just as necessary for someone to mature – so to close high school studies - as subject knowledge.

Looking at the school community service from the educational aspect, it is a new kind of pedagogical method, so it is important to deal with it also from a methodological point of
view. In contrast to American service-learning, the Hungarian community service is not part of the curriculum but complements it. The young person can acquire such knowledge during the service which is not possible within the walls of the school, and the students, with the help of the teachers, process their experience gained during the service in a planned way.

In our dissertation, school community service is clearly seen as a new pedagogical process. An educational research task is to examine the conditions under which the service can be a positive experience for a student group, and whether students perceive capability development at the end of the program, and what socio-cultural, environmental and individual factors influence the effectiveness of the community service.

Since the community service was introduced in Hungary in the 2012 academic year, we can now examine the first experiences and attitudes, and based on our results we can present hypothetical statements about the individual and social impact of the service. The novelty of our research is that the research so far has not focused on an educational sociological approach; it has not been studied what socio-cultural, environmental and individual factors influence attitudes towards community service, the realization of the goals of service and the occurrence of experiential learning and capability development. Nor are they examining whether the service has a social balancing effect.

In our dissertation, the relevance of the school community service and the set service goals was presented in the national and international literature. We divided both the theoretical part and the empirical analysis along the dimensions of the studied concepts (experiential learning, ability development, social participation, career socialization, socio-demographic background). In the first theoretical chapter of our dissertation, besides the history of the development of the school community service in Hungary, we also presented the first research experiences. In our second chapter we interpreted the method of school community service from the aspect of educational theory. Based on international learning models (Kolb - Fry, Dewey, Mooney - Edward, Furco, Mezirow) we have developed a conceptual interpretation of the domestic program, whereby we considered community service as a subsystem of experiential and community based learning, within which active learning, community-service, affective and transformative learning can take place. According to the literature, these forms of learning can also contribute to students' ability to develop and develop intercultural, social and civic competences. In our third chapter, the school community service was placed in an educational policy context, where the relationship between NGOs and the school was explored, and we examined how each educational system (continental and atlantic) can promote juvenile civil activity and volunteering. Our conclusion
is that the promotion of civic activity is best achieved by linking the civil sphere and education.

In the fourth chapter of our dissertation we presented the theoretical framework of the aims of the school community service we examined. One of the aims of the school community service is to increase social participation, measured by three indicators: civil behaviour, willingness to volunteer and social sensitivity. According to the literature (Martínez et al., Katharina Eckstein et al., Astin and Sax, Burnst, Cicognani et al.), the program can help civil and political participation, commitment and the likelihood of future volunteering.

In terms of social sensitivity, literature reveals (Molnar, Kasik et al., Cooper et al., Lundy, Morgan & Steb, Bringle et al.) that, due to emotional experience, altruism, empathy, and tolerance are increasing during service. The service contributes to the understanding, acceptance, reduction of prejudices and stereotypes of social diversity and social responsibility.

Another main purpose of community service is career socialization. Within this we examined the realization of career orientation and the increase of the network of connections. We emphasized the importance of workplace embeddedness and relationship capital, in which Bourdieu and Coleman's capital theory was projected on the output of the community service, while at the same time, Granovetter's concept of strong and weak ties was investigated during the service. According to the literature (Campbell, Dufour, Kahne et al., Pucino & Penniston), the service plays a prominent role in the development and maintenance of both strong and weak bonds, as well as facilitates embedding in the workplace.

In addition to the growth of relationship capital, career guidance is also an important goal of community service (Mayhew, Feen, Calligan & Matthews, Brown et al., Knight et al., Lautar-Miller, Chen, et al., Bassi, Sanderson, Oakes et al.). Choosing a place of service similar to that of a future professional can help the students' career orientation.

Based on Hungarian and international literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated in our dissertation:

_Hypothesis 1: We assume that students' perceptions of the development of skills during experiential learning are positively correlated with more positive attitudes towards school community service._
According to the studied learning theories, school community service is a form of experiential learning (Dewey, Kolb-Fry) and community-based learning (Mooney-Edward), in which active learning (Prince), transformative learning (Mezirow), affective learning (Kiely) and the community-service (Furco) are also present. These forms of learning contribute to students' ability to develop (Hesser, Eyler, Giles & Braxton; Astin, Sax; Mabry). Based on this, we assume that students can utilize the lessons learned during their service at school and the lessons learnt at school during their service. In addition, we assume that during the experiential learning, in all three areas, students perceive capability development, so in the fields of intercultural, social and civic skills (Fényes et al.), and the perception of ability development is positively correlated with more positive attitudes towards service.

**Hypothesis 2:** We assume that by participating in school community service and positive attitudes towards service in social participation (volunteering and future volunteering plans, civil activity, social sensitivity) and career socialization (facilitating career orientation and occupational integration, acquired contact capital) positive developments come out.

We test this hypothesis with the changes in student social participation from grades 9-12 and the relationship between attitudes towards service and social participation and career orientation among 12th grade students. During the verification of the hypothesis, the effect of other background variables is also filtered by multivariate analyses.

Social participation and career socialization are measured by the following indicators:

- Based on the typology of Ekman and Amna, civil activity is measured by latent political participation, which is characterized by an attitude of interest in political and social issues and membership in organizations.

- In measuring future volunteering plans and social sensitivity, we rely on the achievements of Astin and Sax, according to which, as a result of community service, students become more committed to helping others and volunteering, as well as their future volunteering. In our research, social sensitivity was measured by the willingness to donate and the commitment to the target group. We also assumed that the motivation for volunteering could move towards altruism. In addition, according to Kasik et al., the development of altruistic, empathic, and moral behaviour is primarily based on experiences. Learning and social sensitization through emotional, cognitive,
and conic experiences are taking place in school community service, leading the individual to acquire prosocial behaviour.

- Part of the career socialization is the expansion of the network of contacts through the service, which can help in finding workplace in the future. The growth of workplace embeddedness was measured by Granovetter's development of weak ties, so how well the staff of the host organizations managed to establish a good relationship.

- The school community service also helps career orientation (Astin & Sax), which is also part of career socialization. By this we measured the extent to which young people were able to combine community service with their vocational training area.

**Hypothesis 3:** We assume that the school community service contributes to the reduction of the demographic and social status differences (along the examined goals), so the community service has the effect of balancing social differences.

We assume that students with significant economic, cultural capital and better study outcomes do not report more positive experiences with the service than their counterparts with a poorer economic, cultural background, or the goals of the community service are less successful. Thus, the impact of social service on the equalization of social differences does not only mean that the impact of the social background is weakening for the fourth year on the achievement of service goals, but that the social background does not influence attitudes towards service.

**Presentation of the methods used**

In Hungary, following the surveys accompanying the introduction of the program (Bodó, Bilik, Domján, Velkey, Karlowits-Juhász), there was a need for further scientific research into the effects on students. The novelty of our research is that we analyse the achievement of the goals of the school community service with large-scale quantitative analysis, two- and multivariate statistical methods, and the involvement of many social background variables. Our research method was quantitative research according to the logic of probability sampling, and in terms of time dimension we conducted both longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis. Our research topic justified the quantitative study, as our aim is to reveal changes in attitudes of high school students, which can be measured and quantified with the help of a standardized questionnaire. In Hungary, a large-scale longitudinal testing has not been prepared for school
community service, but international literature confirms that the most reliable longitudinal study can be used to measure attitude changes in school community service (Astin et al.).

Our study consisted of two waves. In the first wave, in the 2015/16 academic year’s 9th graders (N = 320) and 2018/19 academic year’s 12th graders (N = 265) were the population of an eastern Hungarian county seat. In selecting our sample, the Education Office's Education Information System (KIR) database helped us, from which we sorted out all of the city's graduate schools in the 2015/16 school year. There were 12 secondary schools in the sample, which differed according to the type and maintainer of the institution. We had one questionnaire filled out per school with the class of the highest number of students. Our longitudinal examination is not a clear panel examination, since the identification of students in the 2015/16 school year did not take place, so we could not follow the change of attitude personally. We note that the longitudinal analysis of personal attitude change is not the goal of our research, since it is primarily suitable for the exploration of psychological processes, while the present paper has set educational and sociological research goals. We primarily examined the factors explaining attitudinal changes at group level.

In the second wave, we conducted a questionnaire survey among students from 12th grade in three counties in East Hungary. In the multi-stage stratified group sampling procedure, based on the data of the Central Statistical Office, we chose counties where the volume of volunteering is high (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county), medium (Hajdú-Bihar county) lower (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county) (KSH 2016). In the second stage, we selected the schools to be sampled from the database of the Educational Information System of the Educational Office, where the educational institutions were sorted by counties according to OM identification. The selection of schools was based on a systematic sampling of probabilities from the schools of the counties (all n. schools were included in the sample in proportion to the number of counties). In the third stage the classes were selected, where the graduating class with the highest number was selected. The classes were fully questioned and a total of 637 students completed our paper-based questionnaire. The students completed the questionnaire independently in the presence of the interviewer.

List of theses of results

In our first hypothesis, we assumed that student perceptions of the development of skills during experiential learning are positively correlated with more positive attitudes towards
school community service. We have shown that pupils have reported on capability development after completing the service. Capacity development can be measured by psychological tests and self-declaration by students. In this case we chose the second one, because we wanted to examine primarily the attitude change at group level in our research. In terms of capability development based on self-declaration, labour market and intercultural skills have been organized into separate dimensions (factors).

According to our multivariate statistical analysis, those reported the development of labour market skills that have higher cultural capital and more positive attitudes towards service, while those living in counties with high and medium volunteering rates, those who attended vocational school and had more positive attitudes to the service have reported on the development of the intercultural skills. In both cases, it can be stated that positive attitudes towards service increase the chances of developing these skills in the community service. According to our further findings, experiential learning has also taken place during the service. If we compare the results in connection with two indicators of experiential learning we have used - the use of classroom knowledge during the service, and the experience gained during the service during the course of his studies – we can see that those students had experiential development that had more positive attitudes to service.

In our second hypothesis we assumed that by participating in school community service and positive attitudes towards service in social participation (volunteering and future volunteering plans, civil activity, social sensitivity) and career socialization (facilitating career orientation and occupational integration, acquired contact capital) positive developments come out.

According to the longitudinal analysis of social participation, the willingness of pupils to vote and to talk about politics within civil activity has increased significantly over the years. Future volunteering plans, as the second indicator of social participation, show that more than a quarter of students have volunteered outside the community service, but fewer plan to volunteer in the future. Although we could not prove that the community service would have increased willingness to volunteer, we could see that, despite its obligation, the service did not discourage students from volunteering. In addition, our hypothesis regarding motivation seemed to confirm that the motivation for volunteering moved toward altruism. The third indicator of social participation in terms of social sensitivity has shown that among students the willingness of counselling for foreigners has increased after the completion of the community service, as has the involvement of others in the organization, while care for others has decreased.
All in all we can see that social participation has increased on the basis of the indicators examined, but in the case of volunteering a decrease can be observed. However, it was a limitation of our longitudinal research that the effect of the program was measured by changes in attitudes based on self-declaration and that we were unable to filter out the effects of other factors associated with age change.

Another important result is that, according to the regression analysis performed during the cross-sectional study, positive attitudes towards social participation (civil activity, volunteering, social sensitivity) and career socialization (career orientation, occupational embedding) can be observed in the case of positive attitude towards service, even after filtering out the influence of other essential social background variables. We believe that the key to community service can be captured in the development of positive attitudes, since its existence contributes significantly to the achievement of the goals of the service.

In our third hypothesis we assumed that the school community service contributes to the reduction of the demographic and social status differences (along the examined goals), so the community service has the effect of balancing social differences.

In case of cross-sectional analysis, logistic regression results showed that the positive attitude towards community service is not influenced by the social background, so it is possible to develop positive attitudes towards the service among disadvantaged students, thus, the service has a kind of social balancing role.

According to the results of the longitudinal analysis, from 9th to 12th grade, cultural capital had less influence on civil activity, so students could become more active citizens as a result of community service with lower cultural capital. Our important result is that the community service can contribute to reducing the differences in cultural capital.

In our research - besides the control of our hypotheses - we also investigated the effect of social and demographic background factors on the purpose of service with the method of regression. The cross-sectional study supported the positive effect of the acquired cultural capital, and the fact that civilian activity is more common among boys. At the same time, we have also shown that the children of higher-educated mothers and those with a more positive attitude to the service have shown more active civil behaviour.

With regard to attitudes towards volunteering, we have seen that higher self-cultural capital, religion – in case of longitudinal study, community membership, in case of cross-sectional study, the community religion - and more positive attitudes to the service increase willingness to volunteering. The positive relationship between religiosity and
Volunteering has been proven in the literature. Our new result is that the community service further strengthens the importance of helping others among the religious.

In terms of social sensitivity, our longitudinal results showed that girls' social sensitivity increased from grade 9 to grade 12, while cultural capital had a strong impact on both surveys. The longitudinal study also showed that social sensitivity increased to grade 12 among the villagers. Both grades show that religious community membership and their own cultural capital have a positive impact on social sensitivity. The results of the cross-sectional study also confirmed the above results, that the role of cultural capital is of paramount importance for the achievement of the social service objective of the community service, but we can also see that those with better financial background and religious students, and people with more positive attitudes towards service have greater social sensitivity.

In terms of relationship capital, our results showed that pupils relied primarily on their own network of relationships in relation to institution selection (strong ties), followed by friends, parents and school. Some background variables (gender, school type, maintenance type, county, parents' education, cultural capital, financial situation, frequency of praying) show differences in the advice of the learner's choice. From the point of view of the relationships established among the employees of the host organization, it can be seen that young people are basically positive about the relationships established during the service, but only a quarter of the pupils saw that these relationships will be useful in their later work. Among the more positive youngsters were those living in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, the villagers and young people with positive attitudes, who still had the advantage over the other students after filtering out the effect of the background variables. So they are the ones who, according to the cross-sectional survey, were able to establish positive relationships with the staff of the institutions during community service.

According to the results of our cross-sectional study on career orientation, people in the county with high volunteering rates, the students of technical schools, the children of the higher educated mothers, the students with higher cultural capital, those with lower grade point average, and those with a more positive attitude to the service were helped by the service in the career orientation. It can also be seen that the majority of technical students are striving to serve in a field appropriate to their field of science (pupils in the fields of health sciences, state sciences, humanities, economics and art). In some cases, we have also seen that, if the field of science does not fit into the chosen area, young people have chosen the same area of interest as the gender-based field of interest (e.g. the proportion of IT students is high among those who choose law enforcement). Where they succeeded in linking the field to
the community service area (law enforcement), we saw that the study success was more positively influenced by the service.

As a summary of our thesis we can state that the school community service can be a way to a more active citizenship, but only in the case of positive student attitudes. Positive attitudes can be shaped by professional preparation and processing lessons as well as motivated mentor teachers and host institution coordinators. We believe this is the most important message of our research and our future research goal is to further investigate the factors that can help to develop positive attitudes. We plan to investigate this with a qualitative study, where we can map out possible solutions for mentoring teachers and host organization coordinators. In the meantime, we consider it important for educational institutions to place greater emphasis on organizing preparation and processing lessons, preparing and supporting coordinators of host organizations (financial or in-kind support, eg. lesson allowance). On the basis of the results, we can also conclude that the preparatory classes have to put even more emphasis on social sensitization and processing lessons to discuss reflections. The learning models presented have highlighted the fact that presenting experiences, observing and reflecting often helps young people to realize and become more relevant to individual societal problems, and to induce self-examination, which can cause the individual to invoke action. In the future, we recommend the creation of coordination offices where trained professionals provide assistance to teachers, staff in host organizations and students.
List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (3)
1. Fényes, H., Markos, V., Pusztai, G.: A civil aktivitás és a lemorzsolódási esély összefüggéseinek vizsgálata a felsőoktatási hallgatók körében.

2. Fényes, H., Markos, V.: Az intézményi környezet hatása az önkéntességre.

   In: Juvenilia VI. : debreceni bölcsész diákkörösök antológiája. Szerk.: Dobi Edit, Printart-Press Kft., Debrecen, 209-224, 2015, (Juvenilia, ISSN 1788-6848 ; 6.)

Foreign language Hungarian book chapters (1)

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (7)
   DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18392/metsz/2018/3/6


Hungarian scientific articles in international journals (1)


Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (2)


Other journal articles (2)


List of other publications

Hungarian books (1)

Hungarian book chapters (4)


Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (2)

Other journal articles (3)


Hungarian abstracts (15)


Foreign language abstracts (1)

42. Fényes, H., Bocsi, V., Markos, V.: Motives of volunteering and values of work among higher education students.
   In: Innováció, kutatás, pedagógusok, Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatáskutatók Egyesülete,
   Budapest, 64, 2017.

The Candidate’s publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

05 July, 2019