

# VOLUNTEERING IN ROMANIA: A CASE STUDY THAT CAN INFORM GLOBAL VOLUNTEERISM

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**ABSTRACT.** There are many theories that explain why humans display prosocial behaviors towards their fellows. Such prosocial behaviors manifest differently with respect to the culture where they occur. Over time, some prosocial behaviors have been formalized into volunteer work, which often happens in an association or a non-profit organization. In this qualitative research, we seek to grasp volunteering in its developmental phase, and present how volunteers, volunteers coordinators, and human resources experts conceptualize volunteering. We used a semi-structured interview guide to question 15 volunteers, 10 volunteers' coordinators, and 10 human resources experts. Findings indicate that volunteering is a learning opportunity, where people can develop their skills while helping others.

**Keywords:** *volunteer, personal development, cultural context, volunteer work*

## Introduction

Volunteering and nonprofit organizations (NGOs) are important in any society in which they exist. Volunteers' work brings many benefits to the groups they work with, to the society in which they do their work, but also to the volunteers themselves. This phenomenon is growing worldwide, with more people involved in volunteering activities each year. In some parts of the world, volunteering is already a tradition (see for example, Handy et al., 2000), while in others it is a rather new activity (see for example, Voicu & Voicu, 2003). Moreover, volunteerism is greatly influenced by the context in which it occurs, the environment, as well as the time of its' manifestation. We consider that studying volunteerism in a context where it is still a developing phenomenon will clarify the factors that foster or hinder its growth, and in the following we will refer mainly to formal volunteering. While volunteerism has been actively studied in contexts where it has a longstanding tradition, we think that, at the time, the existing research methods did not permit a comprehensive description

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of volunteerism development. Studying volunteerism in a culture where it is still growing will facilitate understanding what activities are considered volunteering, what motivates volunteers, how volunteers develop while doing their service and what prevents people from volunteering. This, in turn, will help researchers, practitioners and policy makers worldwide understand how to build volunteering programs that help beneficiaries, as well as volunteers. This is why the current paper investigates volunteerism in Romania, a country where volunteering is still developing and gaining popularity, but it is not yet a tradition.

Although volunteerism has been studied more intensely in the past 30 years, little systematic work has been done to pinpoint the term “volunteer” in a more precise manner. Some authors do not define volunteering at all, as they believe it is an agreed-upon concept. Similarly, the terms “volunteering” and “volunteerism” are often used interchangeably in the literature (for example, Clary et al., 1998; Stukas et al., 2015), and this only increases the already existing difficulty in defining this construct. However, some authors explain the difference between volunteerism, which is a framework, “a discursive and structural backdrop” (Ganesh and McAllum, 2009, p. 347), and volunteering which is a “contextual activity and experience that individuals, groups, and communities may go through” (Ganesh and McAllum, 2009, p. 347). In the following, we refer to “volunteerism” as the prolonged, planned prosocial behavior (Penner, 2002), and by “volunteering” we refer to the act of giving one’s resources for the benefit of others as a member of an association or an NGO. In the present endeavor, we aim to analyze volunteering in Romania, starting from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), by highlighting the viewpoint of certain actors involved in volunteering (volunteers, volunteers’ coordinators and human resources experts) regarding the benefits of volunteering for volunteers, what volunteering is in Romania and how it differs from volunteering in other countries. We argue that this analysis describes volunteerism in its’ development phase, which can help all parties involved, such as volunteers, associations’ management and policy makers, understand how their actions can endorse or impede volunteerism, and also guide research into observing volunteerism’s (and volunteers’) development course.

## **Volunteerism in Romania**

Historically, before 1945, voluntary activities in Romania were found only in urban areas, having cultural, educational, caring, or sporting purposes. However, the fate of voluntary associations changed drastically once socialism was established. In a socialist society, there were two kinds of associations: “truly voluntary” associations, whose purpose was to oppose the state (such as religious associations or underground political circles), and the “quasivoluntary” associations, that were controlled by the state (Juknevičius & Savicka, 2003).

Moreover, Juknevičius and Savicka (2003) argue that “civil society in communist countries was too weak to serve the purpose of mobilizing citizens for spontaneous voluntary action, and the state was strong enough to restrain it” (p. 130). In former communist Romania, volunteering was associated with “patriotic work”, which was mandatory, as it was in many other socialist cultures, and served the state’s “common welfare”. Not attending these activities was severely punished, which fostered a reluctant attitude towards volunteering (Voicu & Voicu, 2003). However, many people have been helping others, sharing their goods with neighbors, helping a relative in need, even in these severe conditions, which can be considered informal volunteering.<sup>2</sup> In the past 30 years, after the fall of communism, formal volunteering, as different from patriotic work, has been developing steadily in Romania, with an increase in the number of volunteering associations and NGOs, and more people volunteering every year. However, Romania, like other post-communist countries, still has lower formal volunteering rates than other European countries (3,2% Romania, 5.2% Bulgaria, 6.9% Hungary vs. 48% Norway, 40.3% Netherlands; EUROSTAT, 2015). There are several reasons for this low participation. Firstly, during the communist period, volunteerism was discouraged and the few association that remained active, were heavily controlled by the state. Therefore, although now there are many active associations and NGOs, there are still fewer than in other European countries, and so a lack of opportunity explains the low participation in volunteering. Another reason is the religious context. Romania has a Christian-Orthodox majority, which promotes a hierarchic social structure, even in informal environments. Although organizations were built around religious establishments in the past years, involvement in those associations is still lower than in countries with a strong Protestant heritage (Curtis, Grabb & Baer, 1992; Voicu & Voicu, 2003). A cross-national analysis by Salamon and Sokolowski (2003) differentiates between two social roles attributed to nonprofit and voluntary activism: service and expression. The service role refers to activities that have a use-value to society and its members (such as fulfilling people’s needs or solving social problems), while the expression role refers to activities aimed at the fulfilment of participants’ aesthetic, cultural or political preferences, or social bonding. They show that in the case of Romania, volunteering has primarily a service role, rather than an expression one (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2003). Dragan & Popa (2017) state that even if there are European funds available which could support voluntary initiatives, associations have difficulties accessing these funds. They also show that while many NGOs focus on social emergencies, they are thinly spread or even absent

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<sup>2</sup> In light of recent events, we have seen that individuals have reacted more rapidly than organizations and helped Ukrainian people any way they could: donating goods (from food to blankets and sleeping bags), offering accommodation and transport. Thus, informal volunteering has great value in many circumstances and should not be overlooked.

in the environments that are most needy from a socio-economic point of view. Most associations and NGOs are found in larger cities and the typical person involved is most likely a university graduate, while in rural areas people engage in informal voluntary activities, such as donating clothes (Dragan & Popa, 2017). As such, we argue that it is important to understand what is the perspective on volunteering in Romania, how is it changing and what the differences are between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in countries where there are higher rates of volunteering. This perspective will help researchers and practitioners see what steps need to be taken in order for volunteering in Romania and other post-communist countries to develop and become more of a habit by choice, not imposed by the state as it used to be. Studying volunteering in countries where it has less formal tradition, but is still developing continuously, using modern strategies and techniques could foster understanding its boundaries, and how it differentiates from other helping or prosocial behaviors. As such, investigating volunteering through its development in a context such as the Romanian environment will lead to a clearer picture of this phenomenon. In turn, this clearer picture will untangle the substance of volunteerism, which is sometimes regarded as a self-evident, agreed upon concept.

### **Benefits for the volunteers**

Volunteering has many benefits for the volunteers, such as increased levels of wellbeing, empathy, tolerance and social trust (Pancer & Pratt, 1999; Khasanzyanova, 2017), as well as for the society in which it manifests, such as the aid the beneficiaries get from volunteers (see, for example Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 2015). For the volunteer, volunteerism has some intangible benefits (such as, increased well-being), and some pragmatic ones (like opportunities to find jobs) (see for example, Stukas et al., 2017). Borgonovi (2008) shows that volunteers have better health, while Binder and Freytag (2013) state that volunteers have a more significant positive well-being than non-volunteers. In their qualitative study, Liszt-Rohlf, Fields, Gerholz, Seco, & Haury (2021) state that volunteering tasks vary and thus the volunteer has the opportunity to acquire different competencies, yet in volunteering, learning is often a „by-product” that is often disregarded (Fields, 2005). The volunteers they interviewed show that the benefits for themselves focus on professional growth (skills relevant to the labor market, such as leadership skills), as well as other social and process-oriented competencies (such as, communication and technical skills). The authors also asked the volunteers how the gained skilled can be used in other contexts. Thus, the volunteers reported that they improved their organizational skills, they gained diverse experience, which resulted in opening their minds and broadening their horizons, and they became more adaptable due to working in teams, dealing with conflict and teaching others (Liszt-Rohlf,

Fields, Gerholz, Seco, & Haury, 2021). Other volunteers affirm they increased their confidence in being a leader, that developed public speaking, problem solving and conflict management skills. Many of these skills can be used in other personal or professional environments (Grant, Maass, Vetter, Harrington, O'Neil, McGlaughlin, & Good, 2020). In a study by Voicu & Raiu (2018) on a small sample of student volunteers, they show that the primary benefits of engaging in voluntary activities were greater employability due to volunteering being recognised as a professional experience, better self-awareness, developing time management and resource valorisation skills, and putting theoretical knowledge to practice. The volunteers also state that volunteerism was a professional orientation source, and they recommended volunteerism to be introduced in high schools as a subject of study (Voicu & Raiu, 2018).

We argue that volunteering is a culturally saturated activity, therefore we should acknowledge what differences are culturally driven, and what differences are determined by the developmental stage of volunteerism in different countries. We start by reviewing the existing literature on volunteerism, on cultural differences in prosocial behavior and volunteering, we explain how the Theory of Planned Behavior relates to volunteerism, and then we present our research methodology, the results, and the conclusions we drew. We believe our results draw a clearer picture on what is considered volunteering in the Romanian context, how this perspective changed across time, and how this differs from volunteering in other countries.

### **Cultural perspectives on volunteerism**

Halsall, Cook & Wankhade (2016) examined volunteering traditions from an international perspective and focused on the history and traditions of volunteering in three countries, namely, the United States, United Kingdom and China. They argue that the strong networks of voluntary associations developed alongside party networks and were helped by the activities of the state. They show that in China the state intervenes more directly in voluntary associations or NGOs, than in the USA or the UK (Halsall, Cook & Wankhade, 2016). Thus, volunteering manifests in many regions across the world, and in each context it embodies the social, cultural, political, economic, and religious norms and practices of that context (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015). For example, the Red Cross has volunteers in many countries around the world, yet their activity is slightly different depending on the context in which it manifests, and it is influenced by cultural and social norms (see for example, Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015).

Cultural differences also exist regarding attitudes towards volunteering. A qualitative research conducted in Australia (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009) aimed to increase the effectiveness of marketing strategies of non-profit organizations,

by highlighting the differences in the cultural background of community members. They discovered that there are differences between these cultural groups on various factors: while the Australian and the Anglo-Celtic groups had a positive attitude towards volunteering and a strong feeling of reciprocity, the Southern European group believed volunteering is a way to support others from their own cultural background and was more restrictive regarding what activities they consider volunteering. The Southern European group was also more influenced by members of their ethnic group than the other two groups, and the groups expressed different reasons why they do not volunteer. Therefore, the authors argue that there are no “generic volunteers” and “generic volunteering tasks”, and so volunteering associations should keep in mind the diversity that exists between volunteers in their efforts to attract them and keep them involved (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009).

Thus, not only do we lack an agreed upon definition of volunteering, but we also must adapt it to each particular cultural context, should researchers reach a consensus. We believe that volunteerism embodies the culture in which it manifests, and therefore research efforts should reveal such cultural particularities. This does not mean that a systematic definition is unnecessary, rather researchers should keep in mind the influence culture could have on such a definition. Perhaps we should aim for a core definition of volunteerism, with several nodes adapted to each cultural context.

### **Theory of planned behavior and volunteerism**

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) arose from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and its goal is to understand and predict human behavior. The theory of planned behavior postulates that people make rational decisions by systematically using available information. This approach assumes that the immediate antecedent of a behavior is the person’s intention to perform that behavior. Moreover, intentions are a function of three separate factors: 1) the person’s attitude towards performing the behavior, which can be positive or negative; 2) the subjective norm, which is the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform said behavior; and 3) the perceived behavioral control, which indicates whether the person believes the behavior is under their volitional control (Ajzen, 1988). There is empirical support for the theory of planned behavior in relation to the prediction of some prosocial behaviors, such as blood donation (Giles & Cairns, 1995), ethical behaviors (Kurland, 1995) or health behaviors such as smoking or drinking (Conner & Sparks, 1996). In addition, the theory of planned behavior has been tested in the domain of volunteerism (Warburton & Terry, 2000; White & Greenslade, 2004; Randle & Dolnicar 2009).

In this study, we use the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988) because it offers an appropriate framework which guided our explorative work. We used

this approach because it has been used before in studying volunteerism, even in studying the impact of culture on volunteering (Randle & Dolnicar 2009). Using the theory of planned behavior, Randle and Dolnicar (2009) showed how different cultures have different attitudes towards volunteering, but also different social norms regarding this behavior. For example, Randle and Dolnicar (2009) show that while the Australian and the Anglo-Celtic groups had a positive attitude towards volunteerism, in the Southern European group the attitudes varied, and volunteering was seen as a way to support their own community. Moreover, regarding social norms, the three cultural groups display different perceptions on the influence level, with the Southern European group showing the greatest influence of others upon one's decision to volunteer, followed by the Australian group, and the Anglo-Celtic group showing the lowest influence. Lastly, the perceived behavioral control varied as well: the Southern European group showed less control than the Anglo-Celtic group, while the Australian group displayed the greatest control (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009). Moreover, the theory of planned behavior includes the benefits and costs of volunteering, along with control factors within the decision-making model (Greenslade & White, 2004) and therefore, we believe it is a suitable structure in our attempt to understand what volunteering is in Romania.

Our aim is to operationalize volunteering in the Romanian context, from volunteers', volunteers' coordinators', and human resources experts' point of view. Thus, we sought to answer the following questions: 1. What does the typical Romanian volunteer look like?; 2. What benefits do volunteers have from volunteering in Romania?; 3. What are the differences between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in other Western and Eastern countries? By answering these questions, we believe we will learn more about what supports and what hinders volunteerism's development, and how volunteers grow while doing their service as well.

## **Methodology and sampling**

### ***Design***

We used a qualitative design for the current research because there is little information about volunteering in Romania. As such, this will be a case study on volunteerism in Romania, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). In this regard, we developed a semi-structured interview guide, adapted from the one used by Randle and Dolnicar (2009), which follows the structure of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Afterwards, we transcribed the interviews and then we analyzed them, using a two-wave coding method.

### ***Participants***

Fieldwork occurred between April 2019 and February 2020 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The sample for this study comprised three main groups: a) volunteers, b) volunteers' coordinators, and c) human resources experts. In total, we interviewed 35 participants individually: 15 volunteers, 10 volunteers' coordinators, and 10 human resources experts. The sample was a convenience one, and we used the snowball sampling method: the first participants were recruited from one of the author's personal and professional networks, and afterwards they were asked for additional referrals. Most of the volunteers were students, aged between 18 and 35. Their volunteering experience was quite heterogeneous: from church organizations and associations working with hospitalized children, to sports events and students organizations. One of the volunteers had been volunteering for about 4 months, while the others had been volunteering for over 2 years at the time of the interview. The volunteers' coordinators were aged between 20 and approximately 34. Most of them started as volunteers in the association where they were coordinating volunteers at the time of the interview. Some of the coordinators were volunteering as coordinators, while others were working full-time in the association. As in the case of the volunteers, they coordinated other volunteers in diverse areas: preventing addictions, sport events, working with children who suffer from cancer, abused women and others. The human resources experts were aged between 23 and approximately 32 years. They were working in multinational corporations, IT companies, and recruitment agencies at the time of the interview. Although it was not an inclusion criterion, all participants had volunteered or were still volunteering at the time of the interview. Seven participants have volunteered abroad (3 volunteers, 2 human resources experts, and 2 volunteers' coordinators) and five participants worked with foreign volunteers (3 human resources experts and 2 coordinators).

### ***Instruments***

For the interviews, we developed a semi-structured interview guide based on the one used by Randle & Dolnicar (2009). The original interview guide developed by Randle & Dolnicar (2009) had 9 sections: four sections focus on general aspects of volunteering (such as image of certain organizations or past volunteering behavior), three sections focus on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Behavioral Beliefs/Motivations/Attitudes, Normative Beliefs, and Control Beliefs), one focused on a specific volunteer group, and one focused on personal aspects (time spent in Australia).

We adapted the interview guide to match the Romanian culture and environment (for example, we changed the names of the organizations mentioned



in the Organizations Image section to match NGO's that are active in Romania). We also added a few questions regarding volunteering in Romania or other specific aspects for each group we interviewed, because we wanted to focus on volunteering behavior in the Romanian cultural environment. Therefore, we asked all participants a few questions about volunteering in Romania. Specifically, how they would define volunteering, what differences they consider that exist between volunteering in Romania and in other countries, and how volunteering will develop in Romania. To compare volunteering in Romania to volunteering in other countries we only took into consideration responses from participants who volunteered abroad or worked with international volunteers. We asked what the benefits of volunteering for the volunteer are and how the participants think volunteers change throughout their service. Lastly, we asked the human resources group a few questions about the importance of volunteering in the workplace.

### ***Procedure***

One of the authors interviewed each participant individually. It was important that the participants were comfortable, so the interviews occurred at an agreed upon location: at a location proposed either by the researcher, or at a location proposed by the interviewee (usually at their workplace). The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the interviewee's answers. All interviews we transcribed verbatim by the researchers and trained research assistants.

### ***Analysis***

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using a two-wave coding method. We categorized the data in an iterative process, as suggested by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2015). First, we coded each interview individually, and then we clustered the codes into themes. Because the interview guide was constructed on the theory of planned behavior, the results are structured on the three main constructs of said theory: attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. Separately, we describe the additional findings from the other questions we introduced in the interview guide.

### ***Findings and discussion***

We will start the results section by explaining the results regarding the attitudes, the social norms and the perceived behavioral control from the perspective of all of the three groups. Then we will focus on how the volunteers, volunteers coordinators, and the human resources experts conceptualize volunteerism, from their personal experiences with this behavior, on their

perspective on the development of volunteering and the personal benefits of the volunteers. Separately, we will present the differences from other countries regarding volunteering, described by participants who either volunteered in other countries or worked with international volunteers. Lastly, we will explain the importance of volunteering at the workplace, from the perspective of human resources experts.

### *Attitude*

When asked about the typical volunteer, the volunteers, the volunteers' coordinators and the HR experts indicated that the typical volunteer has certain attitudes, such as proactivity, openness, and involvement, and they are also people- and community-oriented. They all agreed that the typical volunteer already has some soft skills developed: communication, time management, problem solving skills, empathy, and perspective taking, responsibility, altruism, adaptability. Nonetheless, they suggested that the typical volunteer is also aware of the problems of the society they live in. We did not give any indications about who is a typical volunteer, each participant answered based on their own image of the volunteer prototype.

“[Typical volunteers] are actively looking for a way to enter society and do something more. They are very empathetic, they understand the needs of others and can adapt to those needs. At the same time, they are responsible people, who realize that they have been exposed to a certain vulnerable group. When I think of volunteering, I think of getting in touch with people, not necessarily with animals or the environment in general and that is why I believe that they are responsible people, who understand the emotional charge and the fact that this comes with a lot of proactivity from them.” (D. D., female human resources expert, aged 32-37)

“[The typical volunteer is] a person with good communication skills, with many ideas, a very flexible person, who can adapt to the situation and the people and who can interact with different categories of people.” (A. B., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

In terms of motivation, the participants identified a few reasons why people decide to involve in volunteering: the need for belonging, to express their values and find a purpose (“make a difference”), to increase their wellbeing, to develop some skills, gain work experience, or simply spend their spare time. Moreover, they associated their need for connection with being with a group of people with whom they share values or they work together for the same purpose. They also mentioned that some people volunteer because others modeled this behavior. The human resources experts added that a reason to volunteer would be expanding one's social network and that some people start volunteering to acquire professional experience.

"[When you volunteer] you gain a *family*, some friends, who end up being your friends not only while working on the project, but also outside the NGO." (C. O., female volunteer, aged 27-32)

"I think it starts with a need of theirs. From a need to be in a group, to be integrated, to share what they know, to spend their free time, to feel useful. Others volunteer because they learn from that environment; they want to grow, to develop in general, but also on some specific tasks and abilities." (V. B., female volunteers' coordinator, aged 30-35)

"I think that people who volunteer want to see what they would like from a professional point of view, they explore some options because it is a somewhat safe environment." (A. C., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

Lastly, the participants described the typical non-volunteer as being un- or misinformed about volunteering and volunteering opportunities, comfortable with their routine or focusing on other priorities, such as work or family life. Furthermore, the volunteers argued that a typical non-volunteer avoids volunteering because they underestimate their resources or skills, they lack the time needed, they are afraid or they simply do not know how and where they can volunteer. In addition, the volunteers' coordinators also highlight the importance of behavioral modeling that the typical non-volunteer may lack. The human resources experts stated that the typical non-volunteer focuses on other priorities in their life, which is a normative aspect of life, regardless of one's age.

"They may be misinformed, maybe they have never had contact with people who are volunteers and then they do not know what volunteering is." (C. O., female volunteer, aged 27-32)

"Maybe they don't want to [volunteer] or maybe they were not given such opportunities. Maybe the person's social circle is not involved in such things and thus the person is not involved either." (B. S., female volunteers' coordinator, aged 25-30)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) states that the first factor that influences intention to perform a behavior is the attitude towards that behavior. Our participants display a positive attitude towards volunteerism, explaining that the typical volunteer has some personal resources (such as interpersonal or problem-solving skills among others) that will support their decision to start or continue volunteering. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) mentions that the performance of said behavior "depends at least to some degree on non-motivational factors as availability of requisite opportunities and resources" (Ajzen, 1991, p.182). Thus, our participant explained that non-volunteers lack these non-motivational factors, as they do not have the necessary information about volunteering opportunities, or they do not have sufficient time to dedicate to volunteering.

### ***Social norm***

The participants we interviewed generally believed that the opinion of significant others (family and friends) would have a moderate influence on their decision to volunteer. While some volunteers' parents and friends are involved and supportive, some of the volunteers' parents and friends were more skeptical. Because they encounter these opposite attitudes, some volunteers tried to explain to and show their parents or friends what volunteering is, in an attempt to change their views. The volunteers' coordinators further explained that the way the volunteers explain their work to their families and friends is essential, and could influence their families' and their friends' opinion.

"[My father] did not care before. Now he is a little more proud, but because I took him with me, we made packages for children, he came to the association and I showed him << we receive the women here, we do this here>> ... and he is more proud now." (S. T. female volunteer, aged 18-35)

"[My family and friends] have a positive attitude towards my work as a volunteer, I believe because I present it in a manner that shows I enjoy what I do." (B. T., male volunteers' coordinator, aged 30-35)

On the other hand, the human resources experts' opinion was slightly different. A few experts said that the family's opinion is a very important factor in the volunteer's decision to get involved, especially if they are of younger age.

"I think [the family's opinion would matter] quite a lot. For example, the parents' opinion. They might say <<You will not have time for school>> [...] On the other hand, they might say <<Well done, you realize how difficult it is for others, you put yourself in their shoes, you help them, you understand them better, you spend your time doing something useful, you don't expose yourself to certain harmful environments>>." (D. D., female human resources expert, aged 32-37)

Additionally, our participants stated that behavioral modeling is important for volunteering. On the one hand, volunteers describe their volunteering experiences to their family and friends, which will be a learning experience for the latter. On the other hand, most volunteers in the group said that one of the main reasons why they involved in volunteering is the fact that someone important to them volunteers or used to volunteer. As we stated above, all human resources experts have volunteered at some point in their lives. While some of them explained how important behavioral modeling is for volunteering, others described some neutral attitudes they faced.

"[your parents] are satisfied that you arrive in the evening and you tell them about all kinds of events and all kinds of situations, from the simplest to the worst and they learn from your experience." (I. C., female volunteer, aged 22-27)

"My great-grandmother, who did not have many financial resources, inspired me. She did not have many resources for herself either, I remember that, as a child, and visiting her, somehow she always had time to participate in community activities, such as preparing food for weddings or funerals. Being part of a small community in the village, everyone knew each other. She was one of the village elders and had expertise in these activities." [C. O., female volunteer, aged 18-15]

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), the perceived social pressure one gets from significant others influences the likelihood to engage in a specific behavior. In this study, the participants mention that oftentimes volunteering is a modeled behavior, meaning they had a family member or a friend who volunteered and encouraged them to do so as well. At the same time, some participants faced the opposite attitude, that of being encouraged by family members to focus on other activities (usually the academic ones), rather than volunteer. In this case, many participants proceeded to volunteer despite their family's opinion. Moreover, they tried to highlight the benefits volunteering has for them, which in some cases changed the reticent attitude of the family to a more neutral or even positive one.

### ***Perceived behavioral control***

All volunteers we interviewed had been involved in volunteering for at least 6 months when the interview occurred, although this was not an inclusion criterion, as we mentioned above. Some of them have volunteered in multiple NGOs or associations, while few of them have been active in one NGO in their volunteering career. All volunteers predicted that they will continue volunteering in the same or multiple organizations. Some of the volunteers stated that they wish to have their own volunteering association.

"I would like to show young people that they can be a very active part of other people's lives. I would like to set up my own association from scratch. This is my dream - to have my own NGO at some point. [Until then] I will continue to volunteer." (A. C., female volunteer, aged 25-30)

The volunteers' coordinators we interviewed were either still volunteering or used to volunteer. Two of them have coordinated a group of volunteers at a one-time event, while the other eight coordinators have been coordinating a group of volunteers for at least 3 month at the time of the interview. Some of them were "promoted" from volunteers to coordinators in the same association.

Most of the coordinators said that they plan to continue their volunteer work, either in the same organization or in another. Some of them stated that they do not want to volunteer in the near future, but they will work with volunteers or they will promote volunteering. Others, on the other hand, plan to have their own NGO.

“I don’t plan to volunteer soon, but I will continue to coordinate volunteers. However, I must admit that the job in a volunteer organization also requires a lot of volunteering and openness. However, whether I am employed in an NGO or not, volunteering will always be an important part of my life and I will always want to do this activity as well.” (D. T., female volunteers’ coordinator, aged 27-32)

“I want to start an NGO with a friend of mine. We’d like to work on health education for children in the poor areas nearby.” (C. P., female volunteers’ coordinator, aged 25-30)

Similarly, the human resources experts we interviewed volunteered before or were still volunteering at the time the interview occurred. Some of them started as a way to start their career or because it was a leisure activity, sometimes spent with friends. All experts we interviewed said they were open to volunteer again, even though they do not do it regularly, they would like to help in one time or shorter time events. In addition, some of the experts already started their own association or plan to do it.

“Coming out of college without professional experience, I realized that I would need something extra to differentiate myself from my other colleagues who graduated from college.” (D. D., female human resources expert, aged 32-37)

“We started this NGO because we had friends who suffered from cancer and we knew people who were sick, and I saw how important the way you think is during and after the treatment, and this is where it all started [...] The idea was to help other people [who suffer from cancer].” (A. R., female human resources expert, aged 32-37)

“[...] I would like very much to start an association back in my home town, for teenagers or young adults.” (A. B., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

We asked the participants about the factors that could prevent someone from involving in volunteering. The barriers identified were twofold: some personal intrinsic factors (such as beliefs and emotions) and some extrinsic factors (such as available information and other priorities). Therefore, when pondering whether to involve in volunteering or not, one may encounter some beliefs about their skills and knowledge, specifically the lack of skills and information needed to be a volunteer. Another intrinsic obstacle may be fear. Many participants said that someone may not involve in volunteering activities

because they are afraid they will not fit in or that they will not do a good job. The lack of information about volunteering may be another impediment. Lastly, another drawback may be time management, when one has different activities that are more important or urgent. The human resources experts also mention the lack of positive examples of volunteering or not finding a suitable association as reasons to not involve in volunteering.

“Some people won’t know how to interact with people or how to work in such a big team or they don’t have enough knowledge to do many things. Others do not consider that [they] could help or have expertise in that area of volunteering.” (M. I., female volunteer, aged 30-35)

“Maybe they are anxious and afraid they will make mistakes or they don’t know which organization to choose or what to go for: nature, children, teenagers, the elderly... And that’s a kind of impediment.” (C. M., female volunteer, aged 22-27)

“The main reason they can’t volunteer is time - maybe they’re busy, maybe they have certain personal problems that require time that could be given to volunteering.” (S. P., female volunteer aged 20-25)

“Maybe they did not find the right organization, they do not identify with a group of beneficiaries. Perhaps [the potential volunteer’s] friends do not volunteer and thus they prefer to go out together rather than volunteer. Maybe in [the potential volunteer’s] social group volunteering is not promoted, but it is actually discouraged and that’s why they don’t volunteer”. (I. M., female human resources expert, aged 25-30)

We also asked the participants about the things that could help one overcome the obstacles they described. Therefore, one aspect that may help reduce the difficulties we described would be having realistic expectations regarding one’s time and performance. The participants also indicated that to overcome the barriers described, one should gather more information about volunteering. Perhaps the strongest factor that could help someone surmount the reasons they have not to volunteer is learning. Whether it is direct or indirect, learning was the most probable factor to encourage someone to volunteer. As such, some participants said that one should start volunteering to understand what it actually is like and see if it is a good fit. If they do not want to involve directly, one can learn from other volunteers’ experience, which can also lead to their involvement. Having their friends’ and family’s support can also be beneficial and other factors that could help people involve in volunteering would be getting informed about volunteering opportunities and time management. Some of the human resources experts put emphasis on the role of education in involving in activities like volunteering.

“[they should] actually try at least once to volunteer in a project that is suitable to their requirements. That is, something they know they like,

an environment in which they feel good, that is in line with their passions.” (M. M., male volunteer, aged 20-25)

“I think they need the support of a few people at first so that they can have self-confidence and succeed.” (N. H., female volunteer, aged 22-27)

“I think it also starts from education, I mean the one received at home, but also the one from school, because I was lucky to be in schools where I had the opportunity to interact with certain associations. I think that this spirit of volunteering should be educated in school as well.” (B. T., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), the perceived behavioral control refers to “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). All of the participants have volunteered at some point. Some volunteers took a bigger role in the association where they volunteered and they coordinate others, while some participants wished to have their own association. Therefore, they all show high levels of perceived behavioral control. Moreover, they mention the main intrinsic (such as personal beliefs) and extrinsic (such as lack of information) factors that can prevent someone from volunteering, as well as strategies for overcoming these barriers.

### ***Defining volunteering***

When asked about what volunteering is, the participants described volunteering as a win-win relationship, which involves the community and the volunteers as well. They also stated that volunteering is an opportunity to offer personal resources for others in need, a responsibility that requires dedication and an opportunity to experience belonging to a group. Moreover, they defined volunteering as a professional experience, but also a value expression experience. Some coordinators focused on the resources invested by the volunteers. Thus, they recognized that volunteers are a precious resource for many NGOs. The human resources experts said that it is a personal and professional development opportunity for the volunteer. It is an activity that one engages in out of free will, it is intrinsically motivated, and it occurs in an organization. They also explained that volunteering is an active process, and donating money to a certain organization is not volunteering.

“I think it is an activity that brings mutual benefits, both for the one who receives the respective benefits from the volunteer, but also for the volunteer, because we also receive some rewards that are not necessarily material. Volunteering is a way to help society, and at the



same time to help yourself. It is a win-win relationship.” (M. M., male volunteer, aged 20-25)

“I think it is an activity that requires a lot of time, involvement and responsibility from the volunteers. It is something that you must dedicate both body and soul to. [Volunteering] means love, acceptance, connectivity, a very close relationship with people. I think it captures people’s values, which they cannot necessarily fulfill through friends, through work, through the job they have or through their studies. [It is an experience] that most clearly describes my values and who I am as a person.” (A. C., female volunteer, aged 25-30)

“For me and for the association I work at, volunteers are an extraordinary resource.” (V. B., female volunteers’ coordinator, aged 30-35)

“Volunteering, from my point of view, is any activity that you carry out in an organization, so it must be a somewhat structured entity. When you donate a sum of money, I do not really see that as volunteering.” (M. P., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

Thus, the participants see volunteering as giving one’s resources without expecting anything in return, yet it is an activity that has benefits for the volunteers, for the association and its beneficiaries. Volunteering is a structured activity that occurs in an association or an NGO, and it is different from donating goods or money.

### ***Future development***

We also asked the participants to describe how they expect volunteering to develop in Romania in the near future. They stated that volunteering will grow in terms of opportunities, the number of people who volunteer and variety of the volunteers. Furthermore, the coordinators emphasize the training most volunteers will need, while some human resources experts said that the development of this phenomenon will be greater in big cities, and less pronounced smaller towns or rural areas.

“I see more and more associations being created for different causes; I believe that more and more people will volunteer and will want to get involved in the community. And not just the student world [will volunteer], but also people who are over 30, who have a job, maybe even a family and from time to time they know that they want to do more volunteering.” (M. I., female volunteer, aged 30-35)

Lastly, the volunteers stated that, to develop, volunteering needs more publicity. With this positive reinforcement, volunteers predict an attitudinal change in the society.

“Hopefully, [there will be] more positive advertising for volunteering and volunteers in general. People look for volunteering opportunities, so we probably start realizing how important it is.” (I. C., female volunteer, aged 22-27)

“I think people are starting to be more willing to [volunteer], to realize that there are some benefits for them, not just a waste of their time.” (M. I., female volunteer, aged 30-35)

Our participants believe that with more advertising and publicity, volunteering will grow in Romania, and the volunteer profile will diversify: if students are more involved in volunteering at the moment, in the future employed adults and even retired adults will volunteer more often. At the same time, there will be more volunteering opportunities.

### ***Personal benefits***

We asked participants what they think the personal benefits of volunteering are and what changes do volunteers undergo while they volunteer. The participants described volunteering as a personal development experience. First of all, they identified several soft skills that develop while one volunteers, such as time management, team work, adaptability, giving and receiving feedback, leadership, perspective taking, problem solving, communication, and social skills. Moreover, volunteering is an adequate environment for self-knowledge, for making meaningful connections with other volunteers and networking. The volunteers stated that they also gained self-efficacy and self-confidence and some volunteers noticed changes in their values and some stated that they gained meaning in life. Lastly, the human resources experts said that another advantage is the professional experience volunteers gain while they volunteer, but also exploring a professional field and see if it is suitable for them.

“I feel that my self-esteem is increasing, because before [volunteering] I felt that I had no purpose or meaning. By helping others [...] I feel useful, I feel helpful.” (I. N., female volunteer, aged 25-30)

“The benefits are on the professional side, beyond the personal one. It is much easier for you to find a job when you are recommended or you have certain volunteer actions in your resume or that you were in certain associations, so you developed certain skills beyond what you did in college.” (A. B., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

Our participants describe volunteering as a safe environment, where one can try new experiences, learn new things, even make mistakes without suffering great consequences, as one would at a work place, for example. It is also a learning experience, where the volunteer develops many soft skills, and puts theory into practice, while helping others.

### ***Volunteers in the workplace***

We asked the human resources experts how much volunteering matters when they see a candidate's resume. They said that volunteering is a "big plus" especially for entry-level candidates, because it reflects the workplace discipline that volunteers have.

"I look at volunteering for people who do not have a lot of experience and I can see what they did besides [going to classes] because it is already work experience. It disciplines you, it helps you organize, it helps you take some responsibilities, to know why you are there, it shows that you can stay in a task for several hours or that you can take on something and you do it by the deadline. And [volunteering matters for] those who are at the beginning of their careers." (D. D., female human resources expert, aged 32-37)

The human resources experts described how differently people who volunteer act at the workplace. They said that volunteers are more adaptable and they integrate more easily. Another difference is the way volunteers interact and communicate in interviews, and with other employees. Lastly, the experts explained that volunteers have their soft skills more developed than candidates who do not volunteer, and they are more proactive.

"I think the difference is that they get into the organization's rhythm much easier, because, in the end, we are talking about some processes. They know how to deliver the relevant information, they know how to give punctual answers or information. It is like you already know the dance steps. You enter the ring, but you already know where to walk, who you dance with, than some people who don't volunteer and they need to see what others do. [The volunteering experience shows] in how they interact in interviews, they were a little more relaxed and communicative than those who did not have such activities. They answer questions based on their experience and skills. There are differences [between volunteers and nonvolunteers], I would say, in soft skills. Two people can be very good technically, so to speak, to know the job very well, but at the level of communication, negotiation, conflict situations, teamwork situations they can differ a lot and volunteering matters. Two candidates may have the same professional experience and technical know-how, but they may have very different levels in soft skills." (M. P., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

"I notice this part of involvement and initiative. The people who can come up with proposals and ideas are those who have volunteered at some point." (I. M., female human resources expert, aged 25-30)

The human resources experts we interviewed argued that they notices some differences between employees who volunteer, and those who do not. They said that even in the interviews, volunteers are more open, and after they are hired, they adapt more easily to the discipline of a workplace.

### ***Differences from other countries***

Some of the volunteers we interviewed also volunteered abroad or interacted with international volunteers, so they were able to describe the differences between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in other European countries. These volunteers said that one thing that differs by context would be the needs each society has and, as such, the NGOs and associations have different profiles, according to the contextual needs. Another difference would be the access to financial resources, that is, in other European countries the NGOs and volunteering associations have more finances than the Romanian volunteering organizations. Lastly, those who volunteered abroad mentioned a “volunteering culture” that they encountered, which led to a better organization of volunteering activities and a different societal perspective of volunteering.

“I think that, in fact, the difference consists in the needs that the countries have. [Abroad] they have more resources, so they can do more, but unfortunately we have this lack of resources.” (I. E., female volunteer, aged 25-30)

“I think they have more tradition in volunteering and then they seem a little more organized.” (M. I., female volunteer, aged 30-35)

Some of the coordinators we interviewed had the chance to work with international volunteers or they volunteered in other countries. As such, they mentioned some differences between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in other countries. The main difference would be people’s involvement in such activities. Abroad, people start volunteering at younger ages and this activity is widespread. Moreover, in other countries volunteering is a habitual part of people’s lives.

“[Abroad] volunteering is appreciated and children are supported from a younger age to engage in volunteer activities than in Romania. We had a 14-year-old Canadian volunteer, and usually we do not accept such young volunteers, but she was very insistent.” (D. T., female volunteers’ coordinator, aged 27-32)

“We had several series of international volunteers with whom I interacted and who thought that volunteering is very natural. It is not so easy to find such volunteers in Romania. I noticed that for Romanian volunteers it is rather a background activity, it usually comes last.” (V. B., female volunteers’ coordinator, aged 30-35)

Regarding the differences they noticed between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in other countries, the group of HR experts stated that the scope of volunteering is the same, but some of them highlighted cultural influence. However, a few experts stated that volunteering is the same, regardless of where it occurs.

“The idea is the same. If we talk about volunteering, regardless of the field or the cause it supports, we follow the same principles and ideas. I think it is different concerning culture. In the sense that it is different where you are, in what country you are, no matter what you do, whether it is about volunteering, the profession, culture makes its mark. I do not think there is a big difference, from heaven to earth, but the culture is there and I think it shows.” (A. C., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

“I volunteered both in Romania and abroad and I cannot say that I necessarily noticed many differences. It seemed to me that we were very well coordinated in that project [abroad], but we also worked in Romania on projects that we were well coordinated, so I do not think that's a difference.” (M. R., female human resources expert, aged 27-32)

The main differences between Romania and other countries regarding volunteering are twofold: access to resources and the volunteer profile. Our participants said that, in their experience, the associations and NGOs abroad have easier access to financial resources that support their activity. At the same time, in some countries they visited, people start volunteering at younger ages, and they prioritize volunteering to other activities.

### ***Integrating results from the case study into the broader picture of global volunteerism***

In this exploratory paper, we tried to pinpoint volunteerism as a concept, from the viewpoint of three important actors involved in volunteering: volunteers, volunteers' coordinators, and human resources experts. The study focused on the profile of the typical Romanian volunteer, the benefits volunteers gain from volunteering and the differences between Romania and other countries regarding volunteering. Previous studies show that volunteerism has positive effects on the volunteer, such as higher levels of empathy, trust, tolerance, and wellbeing, as well as developing new skills and knowledge (Pancer & Pratt, 1999). These effects have been studied as consequences of volunteering that manifest at the end of one's service, not as a process. In this paper, we tried to apprehend the ongoing effects of volunteering during the volunteers' service.

Regarding attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control (i.e., Theory of Planned Behavior, Ajzen, 1985, 1991), the results from the

three groups we interviewed did not differ very much. They all showed a positive attitude towards volunteering, just as the Australian and Anglo-Celtic groups in Randle & Dolnicar's study (2009). In their study, the Southern European group had a varying attitude towards volunteering, which we did not find among the groups we interviewed. Our participants suggested that the typical volunteer is already equipped with some soft skills and prosocial attitudes, yet one of their motivations for volunteering may still be skill development. The human resources experts added that a reason why people volunteer would be gaining work experience, which the other participants did not mention. This may be because of the profile of the associations where the volunteers were involved or the coordinators worked: most of them were involved in associations with humanitarian profiles (working with children who suffer from cancer, preventing addictions and bullying in schools etc.) which the volunteers did not see as work experience, but rather as giving back to the community.

The volunteers and the volunteers' coordinators believed that the opinion of significant others has a moderate influence on one's decision to volunteer, similar to the Australian group in Randle & Dolnicar's (2009) research. In their study, the authors found that only the Australian group perceived a moderate influence of the social norms on the participants' decision to volunteer, while the Anglo-Celtic group expresses a low influence, and the Southern European group reports a high influence. The volunteers and the volunteers' coordinators explained how behavioral modeling is an important factor for involving in such activities. However, many participants stated that while some family members are supportive, others are rather doubtful and they encouraged the volunteers to focus on activities related to their field of study. The last perception could be an effect of what volunteerism was in the communist period: a mandatory activity for the state, with little benefits for the volunteer. While the volunteers and the coordinators believed that if one has a strong desire to volunteer, they would do so regardless of others' opinion, the human resources experts argued that the family's opinion would influence one's decision to volunteer if they are of younger age. In this case, the experts claim that the opinion of their family surpasses one's desire to volunteer.

The participants we interviewed see a high level of perceived behavioral control regarding engaging in volunteering activities. While some volunteers expressed plans to develop their own NGOs, some coordinators said they work overtime and they see this as volunteering and some of the human resources experts declared that volunteering was a way to enter the labor market. Compared to the different ethnic groups in Randle & Dolnicar's (2009) study, our participants are more similar with the Australian group regarding perceived

behavioral control, who also declare greater control. On the other hand, the Anglo-Celtic group reported a moderate control, while the Southern European group indicated lesser control over engaging in volunteering activities, which is opposite to our results.

They also describe volunteering as an activity that has benefits for everyone involved, yet there may be some differences from other countries. Perhaps the most important results are those describing the benefits volunteers have from volunteering and the changes they undergo while doing their service. Each person we interviewed described how volunteering is a learning opportunity, an environment in which one can develop their self-knowledge, their hard and soft skills. Moreover, they mentioned that volunteering is a safe environment in which one can try new things, one can try to solve problems on their own, or propose new ideas and projects, while receiving support from their colleagues and coordinators. Therefore, in Romania, volunteering is considered an essential development opportunity, especially for students or those at the beginning of their careers.

With respect to volunteers in the workplace, the human resources experts highlighted some differences between employees who volunteered and employees who did not volunteer. They state that volunteering is sometimes a differentiation criterion when they choose a candidate in the hiring process, but they also explain the differences they observed even in the initial interviews: candidates who volunteered before are usually more relaxed, they give examples for different skills they claim to have. The experts stated that when they start working, employees who volunteered are more adaptable to the work environment, they have a certain discipline and work ethic, and they have better teamwork skills.

At the same time, some of the people we interviewed had experience with volunteering abroad. Thus, they were able to identify the differences between volunteering in Romania and volunteering in other parts of the world. It is clear that volunteering in Romania is still growing. We have not reached a tradition or a "volunteer culture" as our interviewees mention they have seen in other countries. In Romania, people still see volunteering as an activity one does in their spare time and it is easily given up when something more urgent appears, at least when it comes to formal volunteering. On the other hand, informal volunteering has been taking place in Romania, even in the rural areas, as it emerges from our interviews. Because it is rather informal and not very systematic, volunteering is somewhat "hidden", and difficult to point out. However, should volunteering in Romania develop as our interviewees foresee, it may foster the development of such volunteering traditions.

We believe our results capture volunteerism in its development process, in a context where volunteerism does not have a longstanding tradition. Using a qualitative approach, our results illustrate the changing attitudes regarding volunteerism, how volunteering is often modeled by family members or friends who may have been involved in informal volunteering, and why some people chose to involve in other activities, rather than volunteer. Our results describe how the volunteers themselves develop while doing their service, from their own perspective, but also from their coordinators' and employers' point of view. This supports our previous work (authors) in which we emphasize the need to study how the volunteers improve their skills or knowledge while volunteering, skills that, as we show, they use later on at their jobs. Although our results shed light on volunteers in Romania, this light can be reflected on volunteers in other countries: volunteering is a developing phenomenon, and volunteers are improving their skills, knowledge and social networks by volunteering. Thus, these results can offer guidelines for grasping the development of global volunteerism, as well as the volunteers' personal development worldwide. Our ongoing work is studying how skills like empathy, and perspective taking are endorsed by volunteering.

Lastly, we hope our exploratory work will guide future research into investigating volunteering development. Although we identified many benefits volunteers have from volunteering, including soft skills development and increased employability, systematic work should be conducted to have rigorous data about these benefits. Similarly, future research should differentiate into profiles of volunteering associations and their volunteers. We strongly believe that one develops in any volunteering activity, yet there may be differences according to the association's profile and its' activities. However, this development may depend on the training the volunteers get. Research should also focus on investigating what kind of training different associations offer, and what is its effect on the volunteers' skills and work in that particular organization. Thus, our results can guide associations and NGOs into training their volunteers in such a way that they see their growth and continue their work over longer periods, while policy makers can promote volunteering as an activity that has benefits for the volunteer as well. In our previous endeavor (author), we argue that volunteers go through a process of personal development during their service, and stress the importance of studying this process. Nonetheless, research on volunteerism development in contexts where it is not yet as formalized will help set definite boundaries between volunteerism and other prosocial behaviors, which will lead to having a straightforward definition of this concept.



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