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EXTENDING THE COMPETENCE OF THE SPORTS
VOLUNTEERS

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Abstract

Volunteering represents the approved participation, by offering assistance, knowledge and abilities or by performing activities in public interest fields, of the individual called “volunteer”. Volunteering can be carried out based on voluntary agreement or outside of it. In the field of sport, volunteering can be considered an important factor in leading, managing and training professional specialists. Through voluntary activities, the sport unites members of a community or even of a nation, generally promoting a feeling of social solidarity. In the Republic of Moldova, sports volunteering is in an incipient stage of organization compared to the more developed countries, where it is a recognized institution at the governmental level, which generates major benefits to the sports performance and not only. In the European Union, the most common areas where volunteers activate are: sport; social, charitable and health activities; culture; recreational activities; education, vocational training and research. Volunteers and voluntary organizations provide activities and vital services that are used by community members and may have a significant impact on their lives, including the welfare of local population. Sports volunteering could contribute to achieving the ample strategic objectives in this field by extending the competencies of professional central and local bodies of public administration, as they participate in the development, monitoring and evaluation for implementing the policy documents. For sports volunteers, using their time to encourage civil society to practice sport for all or their contribution to the organization and conduct of major sporting events can be opportunities for their professional career development.

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1. Introduction

The society in general and athletes in particular have become more demanding regarding the sport and its structures. The sports field offers working opportunities at both the level of public authorities and sports organizations, but these tasks are now insufficiently assumed because of the too small number of created positions. As a rule, these positions must be occupied by qualified staff trained in the field of physical education and sport, and also specialized in promotion, administration or training issues, but they can be equally accomplished by volunteers.

2. Problem Statement

Volunteering can be considered an important factor in the leadership, management and training of specialists in the field of sport. Through volunteering activities, the sport brings together the members of a community or even of a nation, usually promoting a general feeling of unity and social solidarity. Volunteers and volunteer organizations often provide activities and vital services which are used by community members. All this may vary from services of local sports clubs to the transport for older people or health care special services, which have a significant impact on their lives and the welfare of local population, as well as on the local environment (Bocu, 2015; Manolachi, 2016). Moreover, volunteering contributes to increasing self-confidence, because the well-being of the community where it is practiced has an effect of inner fulfilment and satisfaction, but working in a team and an organized framework creates a sense of belonging, pride and identity. Among the benefits of carrying out some volunteering activities in sports, we can mention that they contribute to improving both communication between volunteers and their teamwork skills; offer new activities, motivation and a new vision of the personal and professional lives of the individuals; generate a positive attitude toward one's peers. However, an important increase in sports volunteering, even in its simple and inexpensive forms, involves: mobilisation of considerable means when pursuing public awareness, stimulation of motivation, creation of opportunities to carry out physical activities for improving the health of the population through sport and physical exercise. Although volunteers are human resources that involve substantially lower costs than the employed human resources, the same costs related to the provision of workspace and other resources still remain. Volunteering is not just dedication and altruism, but also responsibility and commitment, and promoting collaboration between employees and volunteers can only lead to a quality service for the beneficiaries. More than ever, volunteers must be characterised by flexibility, dynamism, modern receptivity to the new and critical reflection. The values created by the conduct of sports volunteer activities are shown in Figure 01.



Figure 01. Values of sports volunteer activities

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to reflect the need to increase the number of sports volunteers and broaden their competencies in this activity area for a further development of the field, within a global society.

4. Research Methods

Research methodology: literature analysis, survey, self-observation, systematic observation and graphical method.

5. Findings

To achieve the purpose of the research, we conducted a sociological survey focused on the issue of sports volunteering and the competencies necessary for volunteers carrying out this kind of actions to the benefit of different population categories. The sociological survey was applied to a sample of 121 participants (students from specialised faculties, professors, managers from sports federations and other staff engaged in sports entities). In the observational stage, we opted for a sampling of the subjects, based on a combined methodology, using both random sampling and a rational selection of the subjects by layering the population in order to increase the degree of efficiency of the survey. Among these, 16.9% are male and 83.1% are female. In terms of age, the average is 25-45 years (Figure 02).

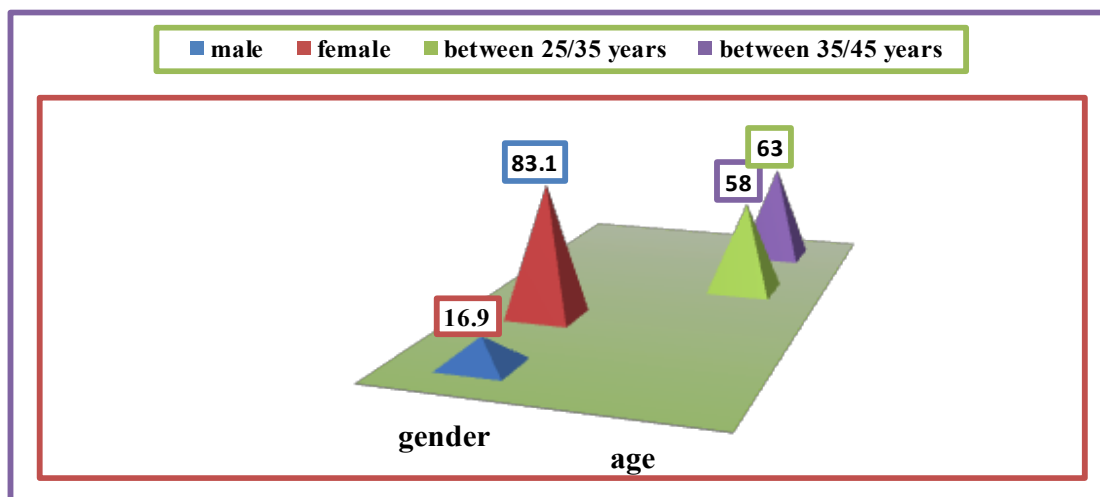


Figure 02. The gender of the respondent categories and their age average

Results of the questionnaire analysis for the respondent categories

To the question “Would you involve in voluntary sports activities aimed at promoting the practice of physical activities?”, the responses registered and reflected in Figure 03 show that a small number of subjects would get involved in such activities, especially due to lack of time. In Romania, under 0.1% of the population does sports volunteering, compared to Finland (16%), Ireland (15%), the Netherlands (11%), Germany (10.9%) and Malta (9.2%). Estonia (1.1%), Greece (0.5%) and Lithuania (0.1%) record percentages close to that of Romania (Voicu & Voicu, 2003; *Voluntariatul în UE*, 2014; *Voluntariatul – școala vieții pentru dezvoltare profesională*, 2011) However, the respondents highlight the importance and role of volunteer activities for their professional career. Especially young people consider that, by conducting some volunteer activities, they can get to coordinate important projects and this way to exercise their leadership abilities. Also, they think that they may have an amazing gratification after the project completion and that the obtained results are wider in terms of their work. At the same time, they can expand their circle of relationships and meet a lot of interesting and career people with which they can get in touch to complete the project. In addition, all future organizations in which they will definitely engage will appreciate their work voluntarily carried out.

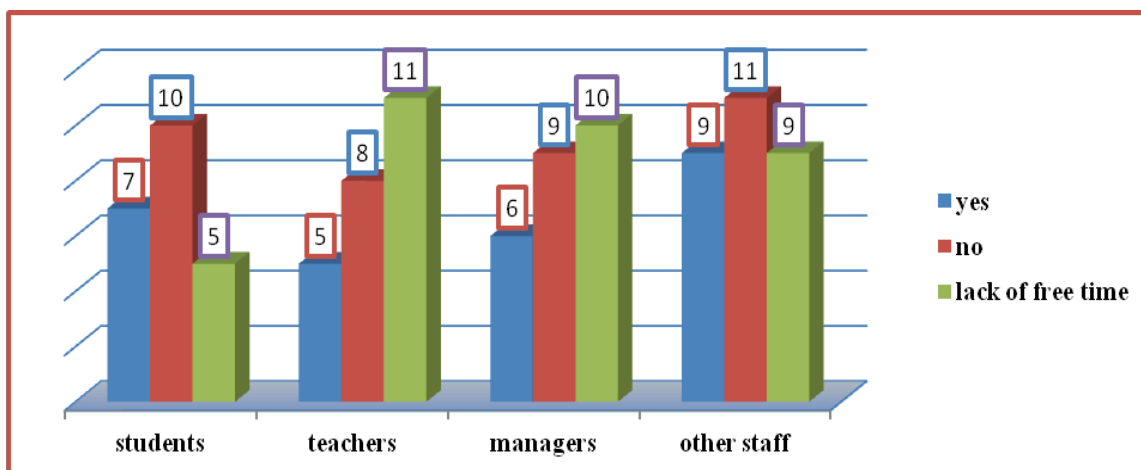


Figure 03. Graphical representation of responses regarding the engagement in sports volunteering activities

Regarding the question “Do you think that the skills of volunteers could be extended through volunteering?”, most responses are affirmative (over 67%), compared to 33%, which are negative (Figure 04). Depending on the specific needs of the sports volunteer, the training carried out in the voluntary activities (by the volunteer coordinator) may have as a theme the development of competencies with varying degrees of specificity/generality, such as:

- Developing the necessary material for the organization and development of sports activities;
- Assistance for people with disabilities;
- Communication (interpersonal, public speech in sports activities);
- Computer operating skills (text or image processing, databases, etc.);
- Organizing sports events, presentations, programs;
- Supervisory skills;
- Communication and public relations skills;
- Problem solving and conflict analysis;
- Time planning and task prioritisation (independent and teamwork).

The involvement in volunteer activities develops a range of social skills and competencies such as solidarity, tolerance, faith, civic spirit and social responsibility. The civic spirit and the faith that any individual can prove in their community, especially when working with other people concerned with the same issues, are learned only by engaging in volunteer activities.

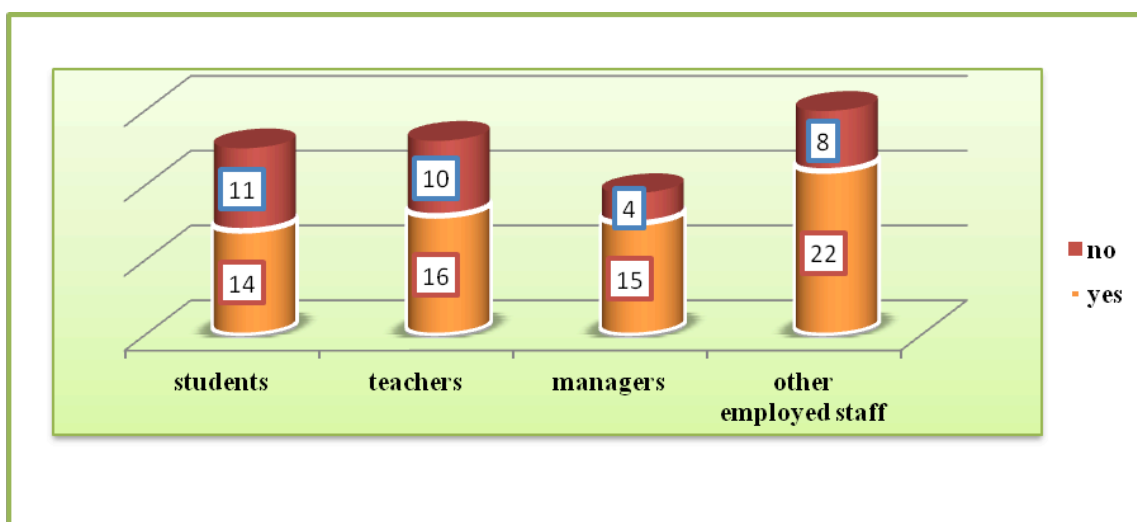


Figure 04. Graphical representation of responses regarding the extension of volunteer competencies

To the question “As an employee, would you work with volunteers, getting involved in finding the right solutions to streamline their volunteer sports activities?”, generally there are some objections (over 54%) of employees as regards the volunteers, namely: employees do not want to share the insufficient working space with the volunteers; the employed human resources do not want to lose their working time, to work with volunteers, motivating that the volunteer coordinator is actually committed for this; employees do not know how to involve volunteers in their work; if volunteers make mistakes, employees will be held accountable; volunteers are not stable, leave and come when they want; volunteers are not efficient workers; volunteers will decrease the quality of the organization’s services (because they are not

professionals); in the event of staff reduction, the management might decide to replace part of the employed staff with the volunteer staff (Figure 05).

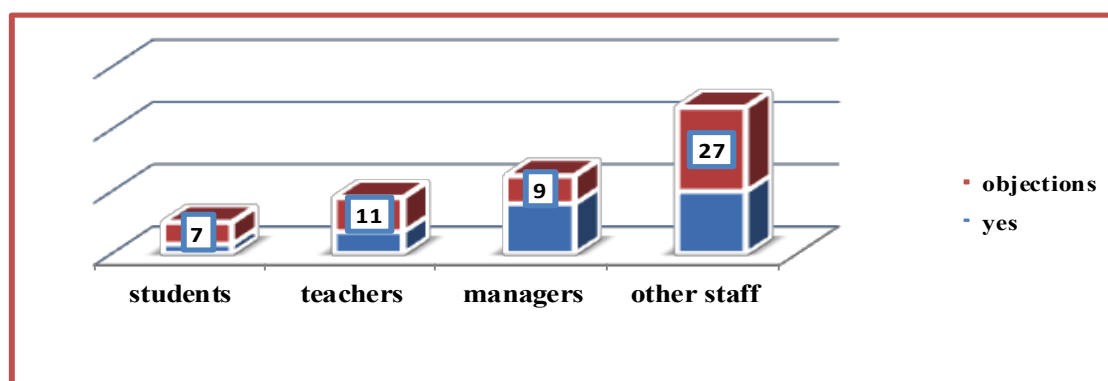


Figure 05. The graphical representation of responses to employees' involvement next to volunteers

In order to support employees working with volunteers, the following actions on behalf of employers are important: to identify the reasons why employees exhibit reticence to work with volunteers and the needs of employees' assistance in working with volunteers; to organize not only formal meetings between employees and volunteers (seminars, meetings, supervision meetings), but also informal meetings; to get involved in supervising the employees working with volunteers in order to make the work with them more efficient; to participate in the orientation of new employees in order to get acquainted with the volunteers of the organization and to have a role in their training, according to the values promoted by the volunteer department; to provide employees with regular seminars/workshops regarding the management of volunteers.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that, by creating a sense of belonging to a team, it can be generated for volunteers a certain level of security that is actually one of the key elements that increase the efficiency of volunteers. Sport volunteering contributes to the build-up of a professional sports experience and can help the volunteer to experience new things and operate with them, by developing thus his/her future professional career. Furthermore, in practical terms, volunteering means to offer unconditional help to beneficiaries who, in turn, can contribute voluntarily to others. As a rule, responsibility is an ability acquired through work, and the respect for oneself and others is gained through the responsibility of making certain decisions, regardless of their nature. Leadership is learned through the three elements: responsibility, communication and socialisation. Volunteering involves investing in our own people as we develop with our projects, take risks and strengthen lasting ties. All situations that may occur in the completion of volunteer projects are the building of professional experience and learning the management of crisis of any kind.

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