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On Volunteering – Mostly from the Female Perspective

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to determine students' perceptions of acquired knowledge and information (and experience) on volunteering; personal preparedness/competence for volunteering; the usefulness of different teaching methods; and potential changes in the students' attitude towards volunteering. In addition to the above, the participants were asked to state their reasons for deciding to volunteer in the future, the desirable characteristics of volunteers, and the personal qualities they wish to develop and advance to be prepared for volunteering. The research sample was limited by the number of students in a course and consisted of 24 female students and one male student. Therefore, the research's focus on the female perspective of volunteering is justified. The research results confirmed the following: the appropriateness and usefulness of the course content, which enabled the students to acquire scientific-theoretical and expert knowledge and information on volunteering; the manner in which the students evaluated their preparedness and competence for volunteering as excellent or very good; the manner in which different forms of work contributed to the personal preparedness and competence evaluation, which resulted in the students' change of attitude towards volunteering – 'I want to volunteer' – or confirmation of this attitude. Furthermore, the participants stated different reasons for their volunteering activities; they specified the desired characteristics of a successful volunteer and a number of personal qualities they wish to develop to be prepared for volunteering. It is precisely this aspect (self-improvement) that is considered extremely

important in the early years of study, as it might be expected that the participants will continuously work on empowering themselves and acquiring and improving their own competencies (in all areas). The theoretical framework of the research is William Glasser's Choice Theory.

Keywords: benefits, civil education, students, volunteering, Croatia.

Introduction

Every modern democratic society tends to strengthen its volunteering scene to successfully respond to the challenges of the modern world. However, on the one hand, the volunteer and non-profit work of citizens in different domains (health, education, social care, urbanism, ecology, etc.) is recognized and appreciated as an immeasurable contribution to society. On the other hand, it does not seem to be affirmed and developed enough. What is more, it seems that informing the public, especially children and youth, about the existence and activities of civil associations and their initiatives comes late in relation to new generations and individuals who could have actively participated even sooner if they had timely and complete information.

Civil society is defined as a non-formal, self-organised system of civil connections and initiatives that is recognisable in public through different forms of volunteering associations, non-governmental organisations and interest groups (Štulhofer, 2005). In these entities' activities, generally accepted values such as democracy, the rule of law and rechtsstaat are promoted. Furthermore, they act with the goal of protecting and preserving the environment and natural and cultural heritage, protecting and helping marginalised groups and individuals in need, providing help to children with disabilities and their families, etc. In this context, an active citizen is an individual actively participating in the life of his/her local community, contributing to its welfare and quality, or an individual actively participating in the political life of his/her country (Bianchini, 2022; Sjögren, 2022). Krizmanić (2004) emphasised that active citizens are different because of their motivation and interests. Some of them focus on protecting certain goods, while others think that taking

an active role in society is the task of every individual. What they share is internal motivation and a desire to personally contribute to social welfare without expecting anything in return or gaining personal benefits and/or social status. Amezcua and Sotomayor's (2022) study confirmed that different social contexts create their own participative culture through the incorporation of four different conceptualisations of participation: 1) participation as a right, 2) participation as an attitude, 3) participation as civic engagement, and 4) participation as a slogan.

The idea of volunteering is closely connected to the concepts of the 'civil sector' and 'active citizenship,' as volunteering is mostly implemented in the civil sector. Therefore, Ackermann (2019) emphasised that 'volunteering is an essential element of public life in modern societies' (p. 1119). Volunteering can be defined as 'non-profit and unpaid activity which individuals implement to contribute to the community's welfare and the overall society, and which appears in different forms and includes local and nation-wide volunteering activities' (Begović, 2006, p. 3). In his research, Ackermann (2019) stated and considered three types of volunteering: formal volunteering within associations, informal volunteering for specific purposes and online volunteering as a new form of social participation. The law on Volunteering of the Republic of Croatia (OG 58/07) defines volunteering as the 'voluntary investment of free time, effort, knowledge and skills used to provide services or activities for the welfare of another person or general welfare. It is implemented by different persons in a manner foreseen by this Act with no conditions for the payment or claims in relation to other assets for the implemented volunteering...'

Volunteering is most often positively perceived by the public, and it is understood as a 'civil quality that initiates changes in society by developing human potential and strengthening solidarity' (Galović, 2011, p. 48). Research indicates that there are different reasons why individuals engage in volunteering activities. Most frequently, the reason is to help others, to be useful to the community, or to fulfil the individual's own interest and wish to contribute to a completely specific project (certain civil initiative). The

reason for volunteering, especially among adolescents, often lies in the fact that volunteering provides individuals with the opportunity to meet new people and enables them to actively use their free time or educate themselves for their future occupation (Ledić, 2007). Stukas, Snyder and Clary (2016, p. 1) emphasised the benefit that both social communities and volunteers receive from volunteering. They further identified ‘features of efforts that are likely to produce intrinsically motivated other-oriented volunteers and those that may produce extrinsically motivated self-oriented volunteers’ (Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 2016). Although the authors focused on the importance of intrinsic motivation for promoting sustained involvement in volunteers, they also acknowledged ‘that volunteers who come with extrinsic or self-oriented reasons can still offer much to communities and can be satisfied when their activities match their motivations’ (Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 2016). Research by Jiang et al. (2019) confirmed the long-term benefits of volunteering: a longer volunteering period is connected to a higher level of life satisfaction during a four-year period. The emotional goals of Jiang et al.’s (2019) research participants positively correlated with several short- and long-term volunteering behaviours. ‘These discoveries provide us with an insight into mechanisms and motives behind positive volunteering effects in relation to life satisfaction at older age’ (Jiang et al., 2019, p. 183).

In the research implemented by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development in Croatia (2001, pp. 41–46), the structure of volunteers indicated that women are more represented among volunteers than men and that persons with high school education and those under the age of 35 are also significantly represented. These results mostly correspond to the results obtained in similar research all over the world (Taniguchi, 2006; Wymer, 2011; Doğan, 2020; Banerjee & Mustafi, 2020; Borromeo, 2021; Sánchez-García et al., 2022). However, the age limit is extended up to 50 years in some research (Toner et al., 2018). While discussing gender disparity in the field of volunteering, a UN report ‘shows that women are more likely to volunteer for organisations in the areas of social and health services, particularly unpaid care and work beyond the household, while male volunteer participants are often found in political, economic and scientific fields. Roles such as engineer-

ing and peacebuilding missions are still highly male-dominated' (Borromeo, 2021, p. 1). This report also stated that 'Because volunteering is done by and between people, there are differences in the way men and women volunteer, the amount of time they spend, the types of work they do and their levels of responsibilities' (Borromeo, 2021, p. 2).

Research implemented by Ledić (2007) emphasised problems in volunteering, such as a lack of information on, awareness of and motivation for volunteering benefits; a lack of interest; a negative attitude and insufficiently organised volunteering; a poor offer of volunteering jobs; and a lack of interest among companies and institutions for engaging volunteers.

Teaching course used as a medium to inform and raise awareness about volunteering

The course entitled *Introduction into Civil Education* focuses on volunteering in order to, at least partially, respond to some of the volunteering problems highlighted by Ledić (2007), especially the lack of information, by raising awareness of the personal and social benefits of volunteering, and encouraging intrinsic motivation for volunteering among adolescents. This course is listed as a compulsory course in the second year of undergraduate study of pedagogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Split, Croatia. With the completion of 15 lectures and 15 seminars, the students acquire two ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). It is important to emphasise that only one other study program at the Faculty of Philosophy in Split (Teaching Study) includes this course as a selective course. The fact that the Faculty of Philosophy (focusing on social and humanistic fields of interest), with mostly teaching orientations in different study program combinations, does not include this course (or some other course that is similar in content) seems a bit paradoxical.

Within the *Introduction into Civil Education* course, the students:

1. understand the basic terms, concepts and theoretical perspectives of civil education with a special emphasis on volunteerism;

2. get to know the activities of various civil society associations in which it is possible to volunteer;
3. get to know the personal and social benefits of volunteering from different perspectives;
4. acquaint themselves with the principles, policies and practices of education directed at successfully meeting the needs of pupils/students;
5. acquaint themselves with human rights and freedoms as a paradigm of active citizenship;
6. analytically and critically think about human rights in the global and national context, civil society and political culture;
7. familiarise themselves with the social and educational policy to promote human rights, to educate themselves for democratic citizenship in families and institutions and to implement actions and activities that allow and promote the development of civil society;
8. are enabled to design modern teaching programs based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and freedoms, active citizenship and achievement of successful cooperation between educational institutions and civil society organizations;
9. are encouraged to develop the democratic competence of teachers; and
10. are empowered to be autonomous and responsible members of the class and wider community.

The course content (teaching units) was relayed via interactive lectures and workshops at the faculty via lectures by visiting experts in different fields, especially social care and education; via lectures by visiting students (volunteers in higher years of study); and via visits to different governmental and non-governmental organizations and associations promoting volunteering. Students had the opportunity to visit and get to know Red Cross (the National Red Cross Society in Croatia, with over 370,000 members) volunteers; CARITAS, an institution for charitable, pastoral and humanitarian activities; SKAC, a students' Catholic centre; MoSt Association, a non-governmental, non-political, non-profit organization founded in 1995 with to improve the

life of children, youth, persons living in poverty and the homeless; Addiction Prevention League, which works towards the prevention of risky behaviour and social exclusion; Sunce Association, an association of persons suffering from cerebral palsy; and Community Services Centre, a social care institution whose expert activities focus on children and youth with behavioural problems and those at risk of developing them. During this semester, visiting lecturer Nicolaus Copernicus from the University in Torun, Poland, also contributed to the understanding of active citizenship.

Teaching units (for example, Media and Civil Culture Development, Youth for the Youth, Youth Humanitarian Activities, Volunteerism and Youth, Parents – Change Makers in Local Community, and similar) were created and presented by students organised in teams. Their lectures were an encouragement for group discussion and (self-)evaluation. The students were enabled to develop critical opinions and implement focused introspection. At the end of the semester, the research was implemented to determine the students' perceptions of: a) acquired knowledge and information (and experience) on volunteering; b) personal preparedness/competence for volunteering activities; c) usefulness of the participation of different lecturers and visits to different institutions where the teaching process took place, which contributed to personal preparedness/competencies; and d) possible changes in attitudes towards volunteering. To get a more complete insight into this topic, the student experience of the social benefits arising from volunteering, their volunteering perception in their personal surroundings, and their preferred institutions/activities for volunteering were researched. Apart from the abovementioned, the research aimed to define the participants' personal reasons for making the future decision to volunteer. The research also aimed to define desirable volunteer characteristics from the future volunteers' points of view and to determine the characteristics that the research participants wish to personally develop and improve to be prepared for engagement in volunteering.

Research methodology

This research started with the basic assumption that the content and methods used in implementing the *Introduction into Civil Education* course contributed to providing students with relevant information and improving their theoretical knowledge about volunteering, civil society and activism. Consequently, the research aimed to either confirm the existence of the students' positive attitude towards volunteering or encourage a change in attitude and a decision to pursue active involvement in volunteering.

The purpose of this research was to 1) establish students' perception of volunteering as a concept, which included the acquisition of knowledge, information and experiences; personal willingness to volunteer; assessment of personal competencies; and possible changes in student attitudes and 2) establish students' experience of the course, in particular, the application of different teaching methods in order to detect 'key points' and provide quality solutions for the next generation of students.

Sample

The sample for this research consisted of 24 female students and one male student aged between 19 and 21. Considering the disproportion of participants in relation to gender, focusing on the female perspective in this paper is justified. The number of participants in the sample was determined by the number of students in the course. The obtained results may be compared to the results of recent research. Wymer (2011, p. 832) stated that generally, women volunteer more than men. They dedicate more time to volunteering, they give more funds to charities, and they differ from men in relation to the choice of non-profit organisations for volunteering. Considering these findings, it is possible to understand and interpret the results of this research.

In the previous academic year, the research participants achieved academic results ranging from 3.7 to 5. Currently, 15 of the participants live with both parents, and one participant lives with a single parent. Four participants live in the student dorm, and five live in a rented apartment. One of the

assumptions of this research was that students living with one or both parents are mostly free from house chores (which is typical in Croatian culture) and have more free time for volunteering than those living in the student dorm or other accommodation. This assumption was proved incorrect as none of the participants living with their parents had volunteer experience.

The majority of the participants (N = 15) described their material and financial family situation as 'satisfying.' Eight participants described it as 'very satisfying,' and two participants stated that 'the family successfully meets only their basic needs.' It was assumed that the students with satisfying material and financial family situations do not have to work along with their regular faculty obligations and have free time at their disposal, which may be dedicated to volunteering. This assumption was also proved incorrect: only two participants among those in such a situation had the experience of participating in a volunteer activity.

The geographic origins of the research participants were distributed as follows: a smaller town in the Republic of Croatia (N = 8), a big city (N = 7), a municipality (N = 7) and a village (N = 3). Most of the participants were from cities and towns on the Coast (N = 14), in Zagora (N = 7) and on the islands (N = 2), and two participants were from another country (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The participants from Croatia were mostly from Split-Dalmatia County (N = 18), followed by Dubrovnik-Neretva County (N = 4) and Šibenik-Knin County (N = 1), and the participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina were from Hercegbosna County (N = 1) and Srednjabosna County (N = 1).

Research instrument

The questionnaire used in this research was drafted by the author of this paper and the leader of the *Introduction into Civil Education* course. It consisted of three parts: 1) Questions referring to participants' demographic information (9 questions); 2) Questions referring to course evaluation (5 questions) and open-ended and closed-ended questions on volunteering (14 questions); and 3) Students' attitudes on volunteering, which included 22 statements (rated on

a three-point Likert scale, where 1 = *Completer Disagree* and 3 = *Completely Agree*). First, two parts of the questionnaire were used for the purpose of this paper. Special emphasis was placed on open-ended questions and questions with multiple-choice answers, the results of which are presented and interpreted below. Considering the small sample, descriptive statistics were used when processing the results.

Research results and discussion

Perception of volunteering and youth preferences

To present the results, a table format has been used.

Table 1. Information about volunteerism

Students got their first information on volunteering in:	
Sources of information	N
Secondary school	10
Elementary school	8
Faculty	4
Family	1
Via the Internet	1
Friend/colleague-volunteer	1

Source: Author's research.

Although the questionnaire included other possible sources of information (e.g. preschool education, volunteering centre, leaflets and brochures) as answers, no one chose them. These findings were confirmed by Ledić (2007), who emphasised that better volunteering organisations, including better information on volunteering jobs, promotion and propaganda, would probably encourage a greater number of citizens to get involved in volunteering activities. However, the currently offered forms of information (leaflets, brochures and ads) are obviously not attractive enough to adolescents. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with something more appropriate/dynamic (e.g. video clips, meetings and conversations with volunteers in a real volunteer environment, etc.).

It is interesting to note that only one research participant got the volunteering information from his/her family. Family is considered to transfer basic human values (Visković, 2013; Romić & Ljubetić, 2021), and solidarity, care for those in need and selflessness (as a central concept in volunteering) are just some of the values which we assume are encouraged within families. It is possible that these values are not sufficiently promoted clearly within families as parents are careful to avoid or even afraid of their young ones disregarding their academic obligations and other activities if they focus on volunteering.

Furthermore, it is interesting to compare these results with the participants' answers to the questions specified in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Attitude of the surroundings towards volunteerism

Volunteering is usual in the surroundings that I come from and I spend my time in (family, faculty, student dorm and local community)	
Answers	N
Yes	12
No	6
I don't know	7

Source: Author's research.

Table 3. Evaluation of volunteerism

Do you think that your surroundings value and encourage volunteer work?	
Answers	N
Partially appreciated	15
Very much appreciated	8
Does not appreciate at all	1
No answer	1

Source: Author's research.

From the answers received to the question presented in Table 2, it is clear that volunteerism is either not a common phenomenon or is unknown in the surroundings of more than half of the research participants (N = 13).

Therefore, the results presented in Table 3 are not surprising. The majority of the participants believe that volunteerism is only partially appreciated. It can be concluded that the surroundings and atmosphere in which adolescents exist play an important role in their perception of volunteerism and, consequently, in the decision to actively engage in volunteering.

Furthermore, as assumed, all the participants (N = 25) evaluated that their volunteering would be useful for the community. However, only four participants had a single volunteering experience, two had volunteered from one to several years, and 19 had never volunteered. From the participants' lack of engagement in the field, it was obvious that a high level of awareness of the social benefits of volunteering was not present among them. Therefore, it was nice to see that the question 'Are you planning to get involved in volunteering activities?' was positively answered by 20 participants, while five participants had still not made such a decision (four female students and one male student). These results are not surprising because the research was conducted immediately after the students' *Introduction into Civil Education* classes finished, when they were very enthusiastic and full of positive impressions, which was evident from their discussions of and references to what they had seen and experienced. Also, the researcher made sure not to get 'socially desirable answers' by ensuring that the research was completely anonymous and carried out before the start of classes in another study group, where the researcher could not be present.

The question after the evaluation of volunteerism was 'If you answered positively to the previous question, where would you like to volunteer?' The participants had the possibility of choosing one or more of the 10 provided answers or stating (adding) their own answers.

In answer to the question 'Are you planning to get involved in volunteering activities?', five participants responded that they do not know. Therefore, it is not surprising that none of these five respondents chose any of the offered volunteering possibilities. It is clear that the young have positive attitudes towards volunteering and that, most often, they have clear ideas of the volunteer work they wish to do. Nevertheless, as Ledić (2007) emphasised, there is a certain number of people who think that they cannot be motivated to

Table 4. Student preferences in relation to volunteering

If your answer to the previous question is YES, where would you like to volunteer?	
Answers	N
Home for children without parental care	14
Associations helping children/youth with disabilities in learning	14
Home for children/youth with behavioural disorders	13
Sports institutions	10
Cultural institutions	7
Institutions where you would like to be employed after graduation	7
Organisation of large social events in the town (city races, concerts and similar)	6
Home for the elderly or disabled persons	6
Associations for animal protection	6
Political party base	2
Domine Association – Split (feminist non-governmental association; student proposal)	1
Project of telling stories to children in hospital 'Teta pričalica' (student proposal)	1

Source: Author's research.

volunteer. However, even among those who defined themselves as future volunteers, there are probably many individuals who doubt their decision or are sure that they are not going to volunteer but/ tend to provide socially desirable answers. Miliša (2008, p. 104) explained this behaviour in Croatian society with 'value dualism': most people publicly express positive attitudes towards work and volunteering, but privately, they tend to work as little as possible and gain as much material profit as possible.

By analysing the frequencies of the respondents' answers, it was clear that their motivation is primarily of an altruistic nature (wishing to help people in need). However, their motivation is also very personal, thoughtful and useful in the long term, as the participants are aware that by volunteering, they can gain something 'for themselves' (practical knowledge, meeting new people, broadening their horizons), and most importantly, they become aware that in this manner, they can acquire and strengthen their own competencies for future occupation. The participants' answers justified the selection of Choice Theory (Glasser, 2000) as the theoretical framework within which

Table 5. Personal reasons for volunteering

If you wish to volunteer in the near future, state the reason why you decided to volunteer	
Offered answers (multiple choice):	N
I wish to help people in need.	24
Volunteering enables me to acquire practical knowledge, meet new people, and broaden my horizons.	23
It is a great way to build and strengthen competencies among future teachers.	21
It is my concrete contribution to community improvement.	18
It satisfies an individual and raises his/her level of self-confidence; it makes an individual a better person.	17
Volunteering provides me with a sense of use.	14
I wish to use my free time in a quality manner; it simultaneously meets all an individual's needs (love/belonging, power, freedom and fun)	13
I (or someone in my close/extended family) once needed help and this is how I wish to 'pay off my debt.'	4
It's fun to meet people and hang out with them	

Source: Author's research.

an individual's motivation for volunteering is understood. 'Choice theory teaches that we all choose what we do and that we are all responsible for our choices' (Glasser, 2000, p. 37). Also, Glasser (2000) emphasised that throughout every individual's life, he/she strives to successfully and evenly meet, in addition to the need for survival, four basic psychological needs (love and belonging, power, freedom and fun), 'which are genetically embedded in us' (p. 37). Depending on an individual's choice of behaviours, he/she can more or less successfully satisfy his/her psychological needs. 'If we are unhappy, it is because one or more of our basic needs are not really being met. No matter how hard we try, we cannot ignore our basic needs. They are the basic source of our behaviour' (Glasser, 2001, p. 37).

It is important to note that very often, by successfully choosing one activity, an individual can meet several or even all his/her psychological needs at once. This was recognised by more than half (N = 13) of the participants in this research, who stated that volunteerism 'meets all the needs of an individual at the same time.' Although the participants of this research placed the need for belonging (*I want to help people in need*) and power/competence (*It is an excellent way of building and strengthening the competencies needed by future*

teachers), in the ‘first plan,’ they did not neglect the need for freedom (*I want to make better use of my free time*) or fun (*It’s fun to meet people and hang out with them*) either.

An individual’s needs being successfully and evenly met makes for a safer, better and more responsible and satisfied person (e.g. volunteering *fulfils the individual and raises his level of self-confidence, makes the individual a better person, provides a sense of usefulness*).

These results are confirmed by Ledić (2007, p. 75), who stated that citizens wish ‘to achieve personal satisfaction’ through good and interesting offers of volunteer work, to acquire knowledge and meet other people and to gain respect for their volunteering efforts as well as acknowledgement and gratitude, belief in the same goals and ideas, and realization of personal altruistic motives.

Desirable volunteer characteristics

As the research participants were mostly young people without personal experience in volunteering, this research aimed to determine which characteristics the participants consider desirable in volunteers (Table 6) and which personal traits the participants wish to develop and/or advance to strengthen and prepare for their role as a volunteer (Table 7).

Table 6. Desirable characteristics of volunteers

Generated answers (multiple choice):	N
Empathy	12
Wish to help	7
Communication skills	6
Openness, selflessness	5
Flexibility, organisational skills, diligence, patience	4
Humanism, dedication	3
Responsibility, kindness, understanding, courage, activity	2
Being relaxed, persistent, generous, compassionate, sociable, adjustable, reliable, conscientious and a team player	1

Source: Author’s research.

Most of these characteristics can be connected to five major personality models known collectively as the Big Five Model (Morgan, 1999, according to Halis et al., 2020; Ackermann, 2019), which consists of five factors: extraversion, comfort, conscientiousness/self-discipline, neuroticism/emotional balance and openness to experiences.

Extraverts are people who are active and communicative (Ackermann, 2019), who like to be in contact with other people and who are friendly and sociable. They tend to present themselves as happy and optimistic (Halis et al., 2020). Pleasant people are those who like truth, who are modest, moderate, believable and selfless (Halis et al. 2020). They can be trusted, they like to cooperate, and they are caring and considerate (Ackermann, 2019). Conscientious people are disciplined, careful, decisive, and they have a high sense of achievement (Halis et al., 2020). They are organised and efficient, they comply with rules and they work hard to achieve their goals (Ackermann, 2019). Ackermann (2019, p. 1123) emphasised that ‘A person’s score on [the] *emotional stability* scale quantifies their level of resistance to stress, resilience and emotional control. A high degree of emotional stability indicates that a person is relaxed, can handle stress well, stays calm in tense situations, and does not worry a lot’ and concluded, ‘We argue that these characteristics are good preconditions for volunteering.’ The factor of openness to experiences most frequently refers to artistic individuals with great imagination and high creative tendencies (Halis et al., 2020). These persons have open minds, are

Table 7. Personal qualities that the research participants want to develop and/or improve

Generated answers (multiple choice)	N
Self-confidence and organisational skills	7
Social and communication skills and openness to new opportunities and experiences	6
Courage	4
Persistence and determination	3
Diligence, flexibility, sensitivity to others and patience	2
Wish to eliminate their fear of public speaking, self-doubt and prejudices towards others	2

Source: Author’s research.

curious, critical, non-conformists and they question their system of values (Ackermann, 2019).

The next logical question was related to the detection of the characteristics that the participants wanted to develop and improve to prepare for volunteering.

Obviously, this question encouraged the research participants to engage in introspection, which they were encouraged to undertake, either directly or indirectly, during the whole semester. They also stated the wish *'to overcome self-evaluation in all situations'*; *'to decrease the level of my perfectionism'*; *'to be self-critical and more tolerant'*; *'to have more understanding for other people'*; *'to eliminate the fear from the first contact towards someone/something'*; *'to become relaxed with people I wish to help'*; *'to eliminate fear from expressing personal opinion'*; *'to stop fear from getting in the way'*; *'to be more active and flexible'*; *'to broaden the horizons and acquire new experiences'*; *'and to acquire experience, knowledge and skills through volunteering and education'*.

By analysing the stated wishes of the participants, one can find the need for power/competence (N = 3; e.g. *'I want to gain experience, knowledge and skills through volunteering and education'*) and belonging (N = 4; e.g., *'I want to have more understanding for other people'*), which are components of William Glasser's (2000) Choice Theory. The research participants consider these needs insufficiently met and are ready to improve them.

It is important to emphasise that some of the research participants pointed out personal fears (N = 7) that they want to face because they are aware that they prevent them from successfully meeting all their psychological needs (for example, *'to reduce the fear of freely expressing my opinion'*, *'not to allow my fear get in the way of life'*, *'to reduce the fear of the first contact with someone/something'*). These are participants who, due to self-doubt, constantly question themselves and struggle with their own fears, doubts, 'frames' and insecurities. One can expect that after being put in a situation where they think about and verbalise their 'brakes,' they will actively stand up for themselves and work on overcoming the obstacles they have set for themselves. Also, the self-insights that the participants gained while working on this course are valuable for gaining security and building a positive self-image (e.g., *'overcome*

self-assessment in all situations, 'reduce perfectionism,' 'be self-critical and more tolerant'). In the long run, this could have a positive effect on creating better quality relationships and more successful satisfaction of the primary need for belonging.

It is clear that the participants in this research were open and honest with themselves. They clearly expressed the characteristics they wish to develop and advance, probably being aware that this would make them stronger and more efficient in their daily lives and relationships. Self-assessment is one of the most powerful tools to change and improve an individual (Glasser, 2000); individuals do not feel the fear of being stigmatised, and they independently determine the dynamics of their own changes. One can expect that after these young people have detected their 'field of change,' they will also work on implementing the change.

To volunteer or not to volunteer?

All the participants answered the question on what their desire to get involved in volunteering depends on. The answers obtained are classified into five subgroups (Table 8).

Table 8. Decisive factors for deciding to volunteer

Groups of participants according to the similarity of their answers	Generated responses (Example answers)
1. Group: resolute and precise	'About free time'; 'On the amount of obligations at the university and other activities.'
2. Group: careful in decision making	'Mostly about the amount of university obligations, although volunteering is definitely worth setting aside time and getting better organised'; 'I plan to volunteer next semester, the only problem is my time management.'
3. Group: no doubt, 'YES'	'After gaining this knowledge about volunteering, I decided to get involved'; 'Unquestionably, I decided to get involved in volunteering.'
4. Group: alibi seekers (for exclusion)	'About whether the association will accept me,' 'About the distance of the association, free time and days when volunteering.'
5. Group: suspicious (according to their own capacities)	'About myself, about whether I am ready to go beyond my limits and do something useful not only for me but also for society'; 'It depends on whether I consider myself sufficiently ready, competent for it'; 'about my own fears.'

Source: Author's research.

Although during the classroom discussions, the participants were very optimistic and enthusiastic about volunteering, they remained aware of the student's reality, so they decided to get involved in volunteering with caution. Especially interesting is the opinion of one participant who looked at the current possibilities realistically and stated, *'I certainly want and I will get involved in volunteering, but lack of time due to university and other (private) obligations is currently "an obstacle" for me. However, I will try to volunteer at least occasionally (and in the future more actively) because I really have the desire and need to contribute to the community in some way. So far, I have participated at least in the SKAC project "72 hours without compromise" and, recently, in the new "Erasmus +60" project.'* It is clear that there is still a significantly small number of participants who are determined to embark on the 'volunteering adventure.' However, the fact that two months after the end of the *Introduction into Civil Education* classes, two students asked for the teacher's recommendation to apply for the volunteering competition is pleasing.

One of the main characteristics of volunteering is personal choice and the volunteer's decision to contribute to the field he/she feels most motivated towards intrinsically. In this case, location, type of task, distance, dynamics, etc. do not present obstacles, but rather challenges being decided on and arranged between the association and the volunteer. However, the openness of associations towards receiving volunteers sometimes depends on the association's purpose. Therefore, volunteering in a 'Safe house' (accommodation for women and children who are family violence victims), for example, is not possible as the location is protected and users have to be safe; although, one of the participants in this research was interested in this type of volunteering. From a pedagogical point of view, the fifth group of participants seems particularly intriguing. These students are still doubting and questioning their capacity, which is somewhat understandable; they are questioning themselves and fighting their personal fears, doubts, limits and insecurities. It can be expected that once they think volunteering through and verbalise the obstacles, they will actively stand up for themselves and start working on overcoming these obstacles, which they have made for themselves. The teacher's role is to create a pedagogical context and an accepting atmosphere that will enable them to do so.

Course quality evaluation

A set of five questions (questions 11, 12, 13, 27 and 28) investigated the students' evaluation of the quality of the content and performance of the *Introduction into Civil Education* course (Tables 9 to 11). The analysis of the obtained answers will be used to further advance the teaching process in terms of content and organisation. The participants had the possibility of providing multiple-choice answers and/or providing their comments.

Table 9. Gains from the course – Cognitive level

Question no. 11 'As part of the Introduction to Civic Education Course, I received theoretical and professional knowledge and information about...'	
Answers (multiple choice)	N
Social benefit of volunteering; volunteer opportunities in the Republic of Croatia, especially in the City of Split; associations where it is possible to volunteer	24
Concept of volunteering and legal framework that regulates volunteering	22
Personal benefit from volunteering	21
Hear personal experiences and advice from volunteers	3

Source: Author's research.

Table 10. Assessment of personal competence for volunteering

Question no. 12 'On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of personal competence for volunteering'	
Answers	N
Excellent (5)	12
Very good (4)	11
Good (3)	2

Source: Author's research.

As the expected outcome refers to students' acquiring competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) for active involvement and participation in civil society, it can be concluded that the work content and teaching methods of the course are suitable and enable the acquisition of needed

competencies. Further, it can be concluded that the participants evaluated the course very highly.

Table 11. Personal benefits from the course

Question no. 13 'In this course, I consider the following to be the most useful...'	
Answers (multiple choice)	N
Visits to different associations in the City of Split	22
Possibility of active participation and expressing one's views without fear of condemnation	19
Guest lectures by experts from various associations in the City of Split	19
Interactive lectures and workshops	18
Guest lecture by a professor from Poland	6
Getting out of the 'comfort zone' (own comment)	1
Relaxation during the entire course (own comment)	1

Source: Author's research.

A teaching plan has to combine different teaching forms (Koludrović & Rajić, 2019; Grčić, Kosanović & Koludrović, 2021; Koludrović, 2022) and methods of reaching students to support students' intrinsic motivation. Their motivation will increase or stagnate, and maybe even decrease, if they do not understand the use and applicability of the acquired knowledge. Therefore, Glasser (2001), addressing teachers, emphasised that 'usefulness does not depend on facts but on the connection your students can make between their lives and what you teach. Like it or not, you are the only person who can help them make that connection' (p. 59).

The research participants highly evaluated active participation and interaction, even at the price of leaving their comfort zones, which can be achieved only in a surrounding that is accepting, supportive and free of judgement. The sense of 'being relaxed,' as one of the participants stated, is necessary in a 'learning community' (Ljubetić & Slunjski, 2012), because only then can one actively participate, create new ideas, define and defend personal opinions, constructively contribute to the discussion and co-define personal knowledge. Everything stated above is desirable and applicable to

volunteering. Students can apply the experience acquired from volunteering in their future teaching.

The participants were also provided with the possibility ‘*to additionally comment, and express their (dis)satisfaction with the course, to suggest...*’ (question 27, open-ended). Seven participants took this opportunity to state the following: ‘*I suggest introducing more similar courses or courses like this one, well done*’; ‘*This course made me realise the importance of small steps – from collecting 5 kn in school to cleaning school garden. Volunteering has always been a part of us, and even the smallest contribution means a lot*’; ‘*Volunteering seems to be the right way of fulfilling my life purpose*’; ‘*This course raises awareness as regards to what happens in society, and as regards to the fact that things might not be what they seem*’; ‘*I want to stand up for what I believe in*’; and ‘*I think it would be useful if students were regularly informed on volunteering tenders and open work places*’, as well as the answer quoted in the conclusion section of this paper.

The aim of question 28, ‘*After having attended the course entitled Introduction into Civil Education, my attitude to volunteering is...*’, was to determine whether and how much the offered content and its method of delivery contributed to establishing or changing the participants’ existing/previous attitudes towards volunteering. The obtained results are encouraging as the greatest number of participants stated that their attitude has ‘changed – I wish to volunteer’ (N = 16) or ‘remained the same – I wish to volunteer’ (N = 9). None of the participants directly stated that they did not wish to volunteer, and in that sense, the existing attitude was not established and there was no change of a negative attitude.

Advantages and limitations of the research

This research served its purpose by providing insight into students’ understanding of the volunteering concept, the existence/variability of students’ attitudes and personal choice to volunteer (or not), the preferred fields (social domains) for active inclusion of youth in volunteering and personal reasons why youth decide to volunteer. Apart from the aforementioned, it is worth

mentioning that this research allowed for insight into the opinions of the youth regarding the desirable characteristics of volunteers as well as the personal characteristics they wish to change or improve to achieve personal and social benefits. This is extremely important considering these young people are future teachers. Furthermore, unlike formal (institutional) questionnaires implemented at the end of each semester, this research enabled an overall and more detailed insight into course quality and confirmed that the selected content and methods are suitable and lead to the desired outcome. Still, two obvious limitations of this research are its sample size and gender misbalance, which should be avoided in future research.

Conclusion

To begin the end of this paper, it is worth sharing one of the participant's answers to question 27: *'I really liked the concept of this course; method of presenting and introducing us to volunteering (active participation in society, that is contribution to the community by investing free time, knowledge and skills) and method of raising our awareness on its importance and benefits – both for society and volunteers (in the sense of personal development, feeling satisfied, useful, etc.)'*

The author of this paper is aware of the fact that the results of this research are more interesting in a narrow, national context because, in recent years, the public discourse has been focused on whether the introduction of Civic Education into the educational system in the Republic of Croatia is (un)justified. However, at the same time, the obtained research results encourage the implementation of further similar research or comparative research at the level of, for example, teaching faculties in the European Union that include a Civic Education course in their curriculum and pay special attention to volunteering and/or provide or do not provide this course to different study groups within the faculty. It would be worth determining whether the course, selected content and method of implementation impact (and how) students' (who are future teachers) choice to volunteer. It is highly likely that students with personal volunteering experience will promote, encourage and support

volunteering engagement among their future students and, thus, continue improving the volunteering scene in their local community. Furthermore, the implementation of such research could serve as encouragement for the exchange of experience and positive practice as well as a contribution to scientific research in the field of volunteering.

The conducted research fulfilled its goal: it gained insight into the students' perception of volunteering as a concept and their experience of the entire course, particularly the application of different teaching methods. Also, the research emphasised a 'critical point' in the implementation of this course: a group of students (fifth subgroup, Table 8), who became aware of and verbalised their fears, blockages and 'frames' were detected. From the pedagogical aspect, this group of participants seems particularly intriguing. These students are still doubting and questioning their capacity, which is somewhat understandable; they are questioning themselves and fighting their personal fears, doubts, limits and insecurities. It can be expected that after they think volunteering through and verbalise the obstacles, they will actively stand up for themselves and start working on overcoming them. The teacher's role is to create a pedagogical context and an accepting atmosphere that will enable them to do so. This should be kept in mind to pay even more attention to student self-assessment and enable a 'work on yourself' approach in class, in accordance with the interests and needs of students.

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