



VOLUNTEERING AND LABOUR MARKET RESEARCH

International Comparison: Czech Republic and Slovenia

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is usually considered an altruistic activity, characterized by an individual or a group of people gaining no financial benefit for their service and input with a goal of providing benefit to another person, group or organization. Volunteering nowadays is a segment of civil society integral to the modern democratic societies as much as the current labour market is inherent to the modern capitalism. Events of the past century have defined the geopolitical terrain of Europe in terms of several dictatorship regimes, and also several revolutions and transformations towards the democratic states. All of these have deeply influenced the labour market, coming from the state-controlled to a free market economy, as well as the utmost essence of the civil society, which was plundered for almost half a century under the authoritarian reign, and eventually freed to struggle to find its footing again in the world of democracy, rule of law, and capitalist labour markets.

It is no wonder that the volunteering in the countries concerned, both the Czech Republic and Slovenia, is a specific one, given the historical outline described above. In the Czech Republic, volunteering is still in recovery after half a century of twisting its meaning under the whip of an aggressive regime for which voluntary meant obligatory, while the labour market has been booming in the Czech Republic in the past years. Although the economic recovery came almost miraculously quick, and the Czech Republic is now one of the most developed countries in the region when it comes to the macroeconomic indicators, the labour market in the Czech Republic still has its specificities, especially when it comes to the relations to the civic society. Labour market and civic society still wrestle to find a common language, and volunteering is a good example of this process. Slovenia, one of the successors of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, had similar experience, yet not as aggressive with regard to authoritarianism of the previous state, however, the meaning of volunteering had still been twisted. Slovenia was recently facing hardships, following the latest economic crisis, and political instability with changing governments. Due to the uncertain circumstances, volunteering has become an important integral part of society yet again, in contrast to the past when it was abused and turned into an exploitative relationship; it is becoming more and more important in the labour market. Partly, we can attribute this to the fact that young people in Slovenia enter the labour market relatively late, in their late twenties, after finishing their formal education at the tertiary level, with little to no work experience; and it is well-known that people who were formerly engaged in voluntary activities enjoy more opportunities and chances when looking for employment.

A study into the relations between the labour market, represented by a chosen sample of companies, and volunteering as an area of civic society more and more represented even in the corporate environments, was conducted throughout 2017 in the Czech Republic and Slovenia. The study explored the potential of the company volunteering in Czech-based companies, as well as the potential for volunteering experience to be utilized within these companies. In Slovenia, the study comprises of a chosen sample of companies and three local branches of Public Employment Services; it focused on the potential of volunteering in Slovenia-based companies, their attitudes towards volunteering, volunteering at the workplace, and positive as well as negative effects of volunteering.

This final report summarizes (a) findings of both studies in the cross-country comparison of the Czech Republic and Slovenia, and (b) provides the reader with national reports from both countries, presenting in detail results within the national-specific studies.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research endeavour into relations between the labour market and volunteering has been conducted throughout 2017 in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, focusing on exploration of the volunteering phenomena from the labour market actors' perception: How does the labour market perceive volunteering? More specifically, the specific interest of the employers in volunteering, the perception of the previous volunteering experience by employers, and communication in the area of volunteering by employers were looked into. Study also seeks for impacts of volunteering experience in the recruitment process.

Initially, interviews with Public Employment Services' officials as well as employers' representatives were planned; nevertheless, the Public Employment Services in the Czech Republic refused to take part in the interviews and therefore the research stayed focused only on the representatives of employers in the Czech Republic. In Slovenia, study includes three local branches of Public Employment Services, where officials gave their insights into volunteering and how they deal with it. Additionally, chosen sample of companies was included in the research, allowing also for the representatives of employers to be interviewed, mainly from either PR or HR departments. In order to gain quality data on volunteering in the labour market context, a simple condition was set when choosing the sample of companies: the company needed to have a strong corporate social awareness, represented by publicly accessible documents such as Corporate Social Responsibility-related materials. All in all, in the Czech Republic 25 companies were approached with an interview request, and out of these addressed companies, officials from 14 companies agreed to research participation. Subsequently, 15 interviews lasting from half an hour to one hour were conducted with 18 informants based in the aforementioned 14 different companies. All of the companies were large international companies based in the Czech Republic. The Slovenian team conducted 10 interviews, 6 were conducted with representatives of large private companies, 1 with a representative of a large public company and 3 with representatives of Public Employment Services. In case of private companies, the informants were mostly based in Human Resources Departments; some of the informants came directly from the CSR area, and there were a few informants from the area of marketing. As can be seen from the previously mentioned figures, most of the interviews were conducted as one-on-one talks (individual interviews), with a few interviews conducted with more than one informant from one company at once (group interviews). In both countries, all of the interviews were face-to-face, and they were conducted from June to September 2017 by 6 different interviewers (3 in the Czech Republic and 3 in Slovenia). All of these interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. All in all, 35 interviews were conducted throughout this research project in both countries (15 in the Czech Republic and 20 in Slovenia).

Preliminary findings were also reported back to the informants in the Czech Republic during a validation workshop which took form of a business breakfast and offered an opportunity not only to present the preliminary findings to the informants themselves, but also to discuss the findings and to gain feedback and better understanding of some of the topics.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

First and foremost, it must be noted that the following paragraphs only contain comparative analysis of the Czech and Slovenian findings on company volunteering from the perspective of the companies based in the respective countries themselves. Due to practical restrictions, it was not possible to collect data on the Czech labour offices, which results in lack of data on this area in the Czech report, and this area therefore could not be compared.

When comparing the results of the study in the Czech Republic and in Slovenia, findings show that volunteering is positively perceived by companies in both of the countries. Apart from the overall positive perception of the volunteering as such, volunteering is seen in both countries as beneficial to both the employees and the companies. To the employees, skills development, teambuilding and socializing effects are seen as the biggest assets; while to the companies, the resulting PR potential is seen as important. Interestingly, loyalty is seen as an important asset which the volunteering of the employees brings to the companies in both countries, with respondents stating, that volunteering experiences increase loyalty of the employees towards their employers, since they are provided with a meaningful activity above the framework of the working contract. Interviewees in both countries also pointed out, that offering satisfactory volunteering experience can positively affect the work performance of the employees, combining all of the aforementioned positive effects: skills gain (organizational and communication skills, creative thinking, etc.), socialization impacts, valuable personal development (self-confidence, determination, openness, etc.), and the overall boost in loyalty of the employee.

When it comes to job applicants, it is seen as important in both countries, that any experience, including the volunteering one, must be related to the working position the person is applying for; and in both countries, the volunteering experience is seen as rather valuable especially to the young people with no or little previous working experience (e.g. fresh graduates, etc.), who are therefore able to show favourable personal attributes, such as willingness to work, or a proactive attitude.

When analysing detailed accounts of approaches towards volunteering, one can see that the terrain is very complex when it comes to practical applications of the company volunteering. Both the Czech and the Slovenian companies use various approaches towards volunteering, which include the direct volunteering of their employees within their working hours, the support of volunteering activities of the employees outside of the working hours, financial and material support of volunteering causes, and many others. What can be seen as differing is the strategic approach towards all of these various activities. While in the Czech Republic, companies tend to have in place CSR strategies containing detailed plans and intentions of the company in the area of volunteering and allowing for longer term planning of the concrete activities of the company, in Slovenia, the volunteering activities tend to happen as one-off events with not much future planning. It is proving advantageous to the company and its employees to have a long-term plan, and Slovenian companies could well benefit from establishing these long-term plans within their structures as well; the Czech report (Appendix A) provides further insight into this arena.

While it is more common in case of the Slovenia-based companies to be active in the area of charity, providing material and financial support to certain causes, the Czech-based companies prefer company volunteering, starting from the basic physical help of employees at an NGO, all the way to a long-term expert volunteering of the employees in the NGOs, providing them with financial management assistance, and other expert services. Both of the aforementioned approaches are complementary and can be successfully used in cooperation between the labour market and the volunteering sector. Interestingly, while the Czech-based companies' references towards the volunteering as such were positive, with no negative effects listed, in case of Slovenia-based companies, a fear of low levels of entrepreneurial spirit in long-term volunteers has been expressed, with specific connotations namely for job applicants, who might then be seen as less entrepreneurial than their peers without the volunteering experience. No such experience has been voiced during the Czech interviews.

On the other hand, while companies based in the Czech Republic usually do not enquire about the volunteering experience of their job applicants, in Slovenia-based companies, the volunteering is one of the topics often touched-upon during the job interview. Volunteering experience is in this context usually considered to be a positive factor and is taken as an advantage of the job applicant.

Lastly, there is a difference in perception of risks of the company volunteering as such. While in the Czech Republic, no negative effects were mentioned, Slovenia-based companies fear absence of the employees at their working positions, and subsequently also a diminished performance at work, due to the demands of a volunteering practice. The Czech companies deal with these shortcomings based on their long-term plans and are able to substitute for the employees who are currently volunteering, while keeping the company capacities intact.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMPANIES:

Engage in company volunteering.

Findings show that company volunteering has many positive effects on both the company and the employee, as confirmed both in the Czech Republic and in Slovenia. Companies wishing to enhance their team spirits, and to lower the employee fluctuation, might especially give volunteering a try.

Systematically plan company volunteering.

In this respect, a detailed account of the general company volunteering principles from the Czech report could be highly useful to the Slovenian companies when it comes to further refining their company volunteering and turning the one-off activities into long-term strategies. For details, please see chapter 2.1 of the Czech National Report in which three various stages of elaboration of the possible CSR-related and volunteering activities are summed up.

Combine charitable and volunteering activities.

Some of the companies based in the Czech Republic tend to combine the company volunteering and charitable activities, which could, again, be helpful to Slovenian companies in the development of their own plans. Again, the chapter 2.1 of the Czech National Report might be useful in this respect, especially the subchapter Volunteering as Company Pursuit.

Learn from the national reports.

There are numerous differences between the national reports, and these can serve as an inspiration to the companies in both countries in order to improve their company volunteering.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE VOLUNTEERS:

Engage in company volunteering.

Reports from both countries show, that company volunteering has a positive potential for personal and professional development of the employees. Like any volunteering, it cannot exist in absence of initiative. If your company already provides volunteering opportunities, use them. If not, ask for them and initiate them.

Utilize the information to your advantage during job hunt.

In both countries, the findings suggest that simply stating all and any volunteering experience when applying for a job is not enough. Potential job applicants should pick particular volunteering experience to mention in their CVs and during the job interviews, in order to maximize the profits of such experience. This experience should always be linked to the position the applicant is running for.

Stress the creative volunteering experiences.

Job applicants, especially in Slovenia, with long-term volunteering experience might put a special emphasis on their own initiatives within such experience, in order to avoid being perceived as less entrepreneurial than their peers. Examples of such initiatives within their volunteering experience might be included into their CVs (e.g. as a special achievement listed at the volunteering position) and should be presented during the job interview as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Research in two countries, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, has been conducted into the company volunteering. Overall, generally positive attitudes of the companies towards volunteering and charitable work have been described based on the obtained data, and several recommendations were drawn based on the findings as well.

This research brings a valuable insight into the touchpoint of private and public spheres: into the volunteering activities, standing for the public sphere, conducted and organized by private companies. The national research reports (see appendices) contain detailed accounts of both the Czech and the Slovenian realities in the company volunteering context and offers space for further development of the company volunteering in both countries, based on the findings and experiences shared in this report.

At the same time, further research using narrower methodologies, and precisising the findings for various segments of the labour market, and for various forms of volunteering, is still needed. In order to offer both the volunteers, and the companies interested in company volunteering, a more focused support, such research would be necessary, since not all principles and findings listed in this report are applicable to all companies and volunteering contexts.

CSR has proved to be a valuable tool for the Czech-based companies to anchor and further develop their volunteering activities and to interlink these activities with further charitable endeavours these companies engage in. As such, one of promising future avenues of research would be into the CSR strategies and their implications for the company volunteering.

Appendix A

FINAL REPORT: CZECH REPUBLIC

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is a segment of civil society integral to the modern democratic societies as much as the current labour market is inherent to the modern capitalism. Events of the past century have defined the geopolitical terrain of Europe in terms of several dictatorship regimes, and also several revolutions and transformations towards the democratic states. All of these have deeply influenced the labour market, coming from the state-controlled to a free market economy, as well as the utmost essence of the civil society, which was plundered for almost half a century under the authoritarian reign, and eventually freed to struggle to find its footing again in the world of democracy, rule of law, and capitalist labour markets.

It is no wonder that the volunteering in the Czech Republic is a specific one, given the historical outline described above. Volunteering is still in recovery after half a century of twisting its meaning under the whip of an aggressive regime for which voluntary meant obligatory. A similar statement, to some extent, is true for the labour market. Although the economic recovery came almost miraculously quickly, and the Czech Republic is now one of the most developed countries in the region when it comes to the macroeconomic indicators, the labour market in the Czech Republic still has its specificities, especially when it comes to the relations to the civic society. Labour market and civic society still try finding a common language, and volunteering is a good example of this process.

In order to support this process of finding a mutual understanding between the volunteering sector and labour market, it is not only necessary to understand how the volunteering experience can be helpful to the volunteers themselves in finding their place at the labour market; but it is also vital to explore volunteering potential of the labour market itself to enable volunteers to find such place at the labour market, which is mutually beneficial to both the volunteer and the labour market.

A study into the relations between the labour market, represented by a chosen sample of companies, and volunteering as an area of civic society more and more represented even in the corporate environments, was conducted throughout 2017. It focused on exploring and mapping of both abovementioned components: the volunteering potential at the labour market in terms of existent mechanisms as well as reasoning behind the utilization of volunteering at the labour market; and the potential of utilization of the individual volunteering experience in finding a place at the labour market.

Both of the aforementioned components are vital and are summarized in this report. With respect to individual volunteers, the report points out not only how to approach companies during the job application process, but most importantly also how to identify an employer who provides further volunteering opportunities to the volunteers themselves. This not only gives the individuals a better chance of finding a job, but also a better chance of finding a job at a company in which they will be long-term content, and to which they will not only be able to contribute in terms of their professional careers, but also in terms of their volunteering experience and dedication.

In respect of the companies at the labour market, this report provides an overview of the volunteering practices and summarizes the volunteering potential both with respect to its internal processes and concerning the newly accepted employees and job applicants. It provides information valuable for further development of the aforementioned processes, and for optimizing the ones in place. This final report represents Czech findings and comes out together with a Slovenian report which summarizes the situation at the Slovenian labour market.

VOLUNTEERING AND LABOUR MARKET: MAIN FINDINGS

Large international companies based in the Czech Republic at the time of the data collection, represented by their HR, PR, or CSR officials, perceive volunteering positively. It is increasingly seen as an integral part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as a valuable benefit to both employees and companies, as a potential asset to applicants during the job selection process, and as a phenomenon to be supported not only throughout the company cultures, but also in private lives of the employees. Various strategies used in case of company volunteering as well as in internal company processes are also summarized, providing both companies, and volunteers, with an insight and inspiration on how to approach the volunteering experience of the potential and current employees.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research endeavour into relations between the labour market and volunteering has been conducted throughout 2017 in the Czech Republic, focusing on exploration of the volunteering phenomena from the labour market actors' perception: How does the labour market perceive volunteering? More specifically, the specific interest of the employers in volunteering, the perception of the previous volunteering experience by employers, and communication in the area of volunteering by employers were looked into.

Initially, interviews with labour office officials as well as employers' representatives were planned; nevertheless, the labour offices in the Czech Republic refused to take part in the interviews and therefore the research stayed focused only on the representatives of employers in the Czech Republic. In order to gain quality data on volunteering in the labour market context, a simple condition was set when choosing the sample of companies: the company needed to have (publicly accessible) strong CSR policy. All in all, 25 companies were approached with an interview request, and out of these addressed companies, officials from 14 companies agreed to research participation. Subsequently, 15 interviews lasting from half an hour to one hour were conducted with 18 informants based in the aforementioned 14 different companies. All of the companies were large international companies based in the Czech Republic. The informants were mostly based in Human Resources Departments; some of the informants came directly from the CSR area, and there were a few informants from the area of marketing. As can be seen from the previously mentioned figures, most of the interviews were conducted as one-on-one talks (individual interviews), with a few interviews conducted with more than one informant from one company at once (group interviews); all of the interviews were face-to-face, and they were conducted from June to August 2017 by three different interviewers. All of these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions analysed and interpreted in the following chapters of this report.

Preliminary findings were also reported back to the informants during a validation workshop which took form of a business breakfast and offered an opportunity not only to present the preliminary findings to the informants themselves, but also to discuss the findings and to gain feedback and better understanding of some of the topics. This final report has also been circulated amongst the informants in order to get a final feedback, which was taken aboard, and helped to finalize the text into the current form.

VOLUNTEERING AND LABOUR MARKET: DETAILED FINDINGS

Following chapters summarize the detailed findings acquired during the analysis of the aforementioned interviews.

First, advantages for companies and their employees in supporting volunteering within a company are described. Secondly, mechanisms the companies are using in order to enable and support volunteering of their employees are explored. Lastly, characteristics of a volunteer-friendly company are shown together with opportunities to enhance volunteering in companies by employees.

Given the research approach which is based on interviews, it is seen as one of the assets to build the findings directly on the statements of our informants, and their personal experience with the phenomena; therefore, even the following pages are based on and illustrated by quotations from the conducted interviews. These quotations are anonymous, and carefully picked in order to provide a deeper insight into the described phenomenon

1. INTEREST OF COMPANIES IN VOLUNTEERING

Interview analysis shows, that volunteering in general seems to be vastly perceived as an integral part of the CSR policy of the company, and the CSR policies are widely seen as strong pillars of the companies these days. Volunteering is, at the same time, seen as a development activity for employees, and part of their career development plans, as a support of company processes in many ways, and generally as a positive asset, since there are no negative effects of volunteering for the company.

In order to provide a neat description, advantages to the company as such are described, followed by the advantages to the employees. Undoubtedly, these two areas are closely interlinked and in reality, these domains to a large extent overlap; but for the sake of clarity and understanding, it is useful to see the detailed assets to the two areas separately as well.

1.1 ADVANTAGES TO THE COMPANY

This section details assets of volunteering towards the company structures and processes.

Employees

Most importantly, the informants stress that access to volunteering activities in employment seems to be rising loyalty of the employees in several ways. It gives the employees further meaningful activity to participate in, apart from their daily working routine; volunteering opportunities enable employees to see the daily reality outside of the company offices:

"I think that, if the volunteering activity is well-organized, it can definitely increase loyalty and motivation of the employees (...), they get in touch with a completely different environment, especially in case of the people who have worked in our company their whole life."

Moreover, it makes employees proud of being part of such a company that is also contributing back into the community and society:

"I know that the feedback from the employees confirms that they are grateful for these [volunteering] opportunities, and they are proud that the company is engaged in such activities. From my perspective, loyalty of the employees is strengthened as well."

Informants also underlined, that company-organized volunteering also provides opportunities for mingling of different departments and employees across the hierarchy levels, which again contributes to the social coherence at the workplace, and increases the loyalty of the employees:

"And you can see that the Chief Executive Officer also has difficulties raking the hay. (...) And it works, people really meet across the whole company, across the hierarchy. Well, this is good, and we are trying to support loyalty towards the company through these activities."

Volunteering opportunities also contribute to the development of the company workforce. This occurs in the area of specific skills, such as, but not limited to, the communication with specific groups of customers:

"Well, for instance, when you are working at a salesroom, and you have a volunteering programme with an NGO which works with handicapped people, so this is broadening your horizons in terms of how to communicate with such a group of people, to see what reality these people live in, and this can be of great help when you are at the salesroom and you are dealing with a customer who is having speech, hearing, or visual impairments."

The interviews also suggested that volunteering activities also contribute to having open-minded, energized, and happy workforce which is willing to go the extra mile, as some of the informants pointed out.

Company Structures

Interview analysis shows that volunteering may well contribute to the development of company services and products, since it is providing unique insights into the world outside of the company walls: *"... [volunteering] is broadening our horizons, and since we are dealing with customers, and our services are customer-oriented, it brings us more contact with a wide variety of people, and this is enriching, and, I think, also contributing to us having better products and services we are developing, simply because we see and take into account various social groups occurring in the society, including handicapped people."*

Clearly, volunteering opportunities can be perceived as teambuilding activities, bringing together teams from across the company structures; moreover, this teambuilding effect comes as part of an activity which is low-cost to the company itself:

"These are traditional activities the employees are looking forward to, and they even take it as a kind of teambuilding activity, giving them an opportunity to get to know each other. This works within the teams, since some of the departments are rather large, having even one hundred and fifty people on board, split into smaller working groups. This way they can get to know each other and see who is doing what in other working groups. It is then easier to tackle some working tasks; and they can even meet people from across the company, you can meet people from the front desk, managers, Chief Executive Officers, and so on."

Nowadays, informants suggest, the volunteering activities are also acknowledged as employment benefits, and these are especially appreciated by young employees:

"It [volunteering] is simply one of the standard benefits for employees, and since we know that it is widely appreciated, because out of the several thousands of employees the company has, a thousand of them are using this benefit, which is a relatively high number of people, so we are even thinking of expanding this benefit further, to explore more volunteering opportunities and types of volunteering, together with the NGOs."

Lastly, interview analysis outlines that volunteering activities have a potential to support a positive atmosphere in the company itself, through common and pleasant experiences of the employees:

"I think this is simply the very humane feeling of helping someone. And this gets spread out. I would say it spreads a positive aura in the company. It does not make everyone content, all of a sudden, but it is this moment when everyone keeps talking about where they were and what they achieved."

Public Relations

Volunteering, according to our informants, has a potential to support the company Public Relations (PR) efforts, be it in general, or specifically in certain media (social networks, newsletters, etc.). It might help to distinguish the company at the labour market, giving it an advantage in attracting young employees, but such a PR also emphasizes the expert qualities and potential of the company:

"... we prefer presenting the expert volunteering activities, that is more important to us. Both internally and externally, because that is what we do best, and we are helping others using what we are good at. (...) Because it is connected to the business sphere, by everything being interlinked, we do in volunteering what we also do in the business sphere."

CSR policy PR is also proving to be one of the areas in which volunteering achievements can be highly useful:

"It is definitely important to us to present ourselves as a responsible company, so we have put stories from some of the NGOs we are cooperating with, on our social media websites, and we are happy to see pictures and public thank-you in there as well."

1.2 ADVANTAGES TO THE EMPLOYEE

While the text so far described advantages to the companies, this section presents an analysis of the assets of volunteering for the employees themselves, both personally and professionally.

Personal

Informants described how opportunities to volunteer provide employees with a chance to socialize with new people, from within and outside of the company, and how volunteering offers a room for relaxing and stepping out of the everyday working routine, as well as a chance to reflect on the lives and values of the employees:

"... in an overwhelming majority, people are attending these [voluntary] activities in teams and use it as a socialization opportunity, teambuilding, some common experience, different from the working experience they usually share, and what they often mention when talking to us, they perceive it as an enormously relaxing, that they are able to cut out the working activities, and think of something completely different for a day, and to understand that, and that is very interesting, thanks to the volunteering activities they get in touch with organizations which bring them the realization that they are happy, that they are leading happy lives. (...) It even changes their values, they suddenly realize that many people are not as lucky as themselves, and they get in touch with the less fortunate this way [via volunteering]."

Furthermore, however trivial it may seem, volunteering activities provide the employees with a good feeling of helping someone, of being outdoors, of enjoying oneself, as one of the informants pointed out:

"... it is basically a good feeling of what has been achieved, to help somewhere, someone. (...) For instance, we threw an all-day set of contests for handicapped people. Firstly, our colleagues were delighted simply for the sake of being outdoors, but at the same time lots of them were for the first time in their lives in contact with handicapped people. At first, you could see the diffidence, communication uncertainties. And after the first fifteen minutes, all barriers came down and all was just fantastic."

Lastly, interviews suggest that the volunteering opportunities within the companies can easily transform into a regular volunteering activity of the employee in their own free time, giving these people even more time to relax, socialize, and become content and open-minded in general, positively influencing their performance at work.

Professional

Socialization has already been mentioned several times: in case of company teambuilding-like volunteering activities, and in case of personal development of the employee during the volunteering activities. This socialization, of course, is beneficial also on the professional level, as the informants also noticed, providing the employee with a chance to get to know colleagues from the same or from very distant areas of work, having potentially profitable effects on the professional development of the employee.

The same can be stressed in case of professional experience and skills development which also go hand in hand with an insight into other areas of expertise, and other professions, as well as with increasing the professional self-esteem and helping employees realize their strong suits:

"... in case of expert volunteering, they asked us 'What are you best at? What can you offer?', and we realized that none of us sitting together were able to define what we could be doing in case of expert volunteering. And the lady from the NGO who was leading the workshop told us 'Stop doubting yourself, you were accepted for a certain position at your company, so you must be pretty good at what you do over there!'. So I think that volunteering helps to boost your professional self-esteem."

2. VOLUNTEERING MECHANISMS IN THE CZECH-BASED COMPANIES

This chapter elaborates on how the volunteering is being implemented into concrete volunteering opportunities, schemes, and programs, based on the interview analysis. Firstly, some general principles mentioned by our informants are outlined, to be followed by concrete mechanisms divided into three subchapters, according to the level of engagement of the company: volunteering as an opening describing options provided to the employees in order to enable them to engage in volunteering, if they so wish; volunteering as a company benefit shows ways of structuring the volunteering opportunities for the employees and arranging and organizing volunteering activities for the employees on a regular basis; and, finally, volunteering as a company pursuit outlines ways of equipping the employees with tools to further explore and develop the volunteering opportunities provided by the company itself. The levels of engagement, as described in here, are an outcome of the interview analysis, and serve a purpose of organizing the findings in a neat and structured way. Although these levels of engagement might be perceived as, to some extent, consequent steps, it does not mean that they cannot or do not overlap. It is also noteworthy, that some companies might be better equipped with certain mechanisms, some with others – it is always best to find a good fit rather than to seek the top level of engagement, which would potentially not make much sense in the given context.

2.1 GENERAL COMPANY VOLUNTEERING PRINCIPLES

Volunteering activities in companies, as the interviews show, are usually supported by some general strategy, policy, or methodology. From the interviews, three such main principles became obvious: head, hands, money; environment, education, entrepreneurship (3E); and the positive circle. All three are described below, but it needs to be pointed out that these are by far not the only guiding principles of company volunteering in existence, nor are they applicable to every company at the labour market. It is obvious, however, that these principles help to guide the company volunteering and steer it in the direction which is beneficial to the employees, companies, and society.

In case of head, hand, and money principle, the company is pursuing pro bono volunteering and expert volunteering (head), as well as physical volunteering (hand), and charity and fundraisers (money). This very general company volunteering principle is opening doors to all sorts of company volunteering, from the simplest (and sometimes most necessary) practical help to some cause, dedicating the physical energy of the employees towards some particular goal; through the expert volunteering bringing wide opportunities in cooperation with NGOs and other organizations as well as exploring employees' own expert capacities; to a wider concept of supporting volunteering of the employees as well as (potentially) their family members, and even wider public, through funding and creating various volunteering activities.

Environment, education, entrepreneurship, or so called "3E principle", covers the topical approach towards the company volunteering, basically summarizing the main priorities of the supported volunteering activities. This principle is based on the sustainable future development, in which healthy environment, educated workforce, and enough entrepreneurship opportunities as well as creative individuals capable of using them, create a basis for further development of the company as such and therefore the company is contributing not only to general socially desirable goals, but also co-creating such labour market reality that supports the future of the company itself.

The positive circle principle is operating on similar premises at the previous 3E approach. Volunteering opportunities supported under this principle focus on developing the potential future workforce, hence aiming at helping in children homes, in schools, in developing entrepreneurship skills of young people, and many more. This, again, brings the benefit of fulfilling the socially responsible company policy, as well as potentially also contributing to the positive future development of the company, which strives in an environment characteristic by a well-educated and high-quality workforce.

As was already stressed in the introductory paragraph to this section, these are merely examples of the potential approaches towards the company volunteering. It is, undoubtedly, possible to come up with many more guiding principles, which could be helpful to the particular company, with its particular aims, labour market conditions, and internal conditions. It is, however, noteworthy, that these guiding principles are useful in terms of defining a CSR policy of the company, and that these principles also state clearly the general playing rules for the employees when it comes to volunteering activities, therefore establishing a common language among the company, its employees, and the external partners, be it NGOs, or other organizations, which could be potentially interested in volunteering cooperation.

Volunteering as an Opening

The most basic level of engagement for the company volunteering, identified in the interviews, is the volunteering as an opening stage. This is the simplest and the least structured approach towards the company volunteering, and it is characteristic by the principle of open doors, but low initiative of the company as such, leaving the burden of organization largely on the employees themselves.

This company volunteering can be manifested through many mechanisms. Companies can provide the basic information (and even some financial support, in some cases) for the volunteering of its employees which takes place outside of the working hours, in the employees' free time. This can come in a form of a volunteering list, which details opportunities for volunteering for the employees, along with contact details for organizations holding or providing these volunteering activities. These lists are usually managed by the company itself, often with an option for the employees to add information to the list as well, therefore widening the information basis.

Another form of the company providing an information support to the employees in finding volunteering opportunities are so called "NGO Cinemas", workshops and talks of NGO officials to the employees, explaining activities of the NGO, and volunteering opportunities within these activities. These can be rather useful as the first step for employees who have never volunteered before, as well as for those who would not take up the initiative of going through the aforementioned lists.

Further step for the company can be based on single, one-time volunteering activities which take place within the working hours, and are based on an initiative of the employees themselves. This way, teams of employees come together and organize their own volunteering activities, with the company assisting in arrangements, especially when it comes to timing the event, and aligning it with company schedules. These one-off events may prove beneficial in the long-run, as they have the potential to become regular activities and to attract both employees' and employers' attention.

The same principle of employee initiative can be found in case of fundraisers, NGO cooperation, pro bono activities, expert volunteering, and so on. All of these are started by employee initiatives, and then supported by the company structures. In case of fundraisers, for instance, the initiative of an employee may become a company interest, apart from the organization and logistical support also contributing to the fundraiser itself in the financial sense (either with a fixed amount of money, or adding a certain amount per each donation, etc.).

Volunteering as a Company Benefit

Conducted analyses show that further step in company volunteering engagement consists of the volunteering as a company benefit approach. All in all, this means that the initiative in organizing the volunteering opportunities and in establishing the connections with the external partners, is taken up by the company itself, and the employees are then presented with a full package volunteering opportunity: fully organized activity for which they can, but do not have to, sign up. These activities are usually also fully recognized as a form of company benefits for employees, and are usually also advertised in a corresponding manner.

The most common form of company volunteering activity in this case is a fixed amount of working time the employee can donate to the volunteering. The amount of time can differ widely from company to company, starting at mere hours (e.g. 2 hours per year, etc.), and going through volunteering days (i.e. the whole working day spent on volunteering within one working year) all the way to volunteering weeks (i.e. 5 working days dedicated by a group of employees to the volunteering, per year; also called "volunteering camps"). What is common in this scheme is that the volunteering is pre-organized by the company, and the employees are getting offers for volunteering activities to which they can then dedicate the given working time (i.e. hours, days, etc.) which is not taken away from their regular vacation days and is still paid for as if the employee were fully working for the company at the time of volunteering. A specific case of "1+1" can also be used, with 1 day of employee regular vacation dedicated to volunteering activity for which the company awards the given employee with one additional paid day which can then also be dedicated to further volunteering activities. Some companies even allow their employees to attend volunteering activities over the weekend, and take a volunteering day off later on, widening the possibilities of the employees to volunteer.

In terms of company planning, the schemes also vary widely. Some companies have settled volunteering days once per year, advertised well-beforehand, and packed with different volunteering activities and opportunities, some companies go for day long activities several times a year, and some launch a week packed with volunteering activities; in all cases the employees are free to sign up for these activities. Sometimes a combination of a company support and employees' initiative is required in order to gain specific working benefit. Employees have an opportunity to come up with their own initiatives, to which, if the company decides to support them, additional working days may be dedicated, increasing the total amount of volunteering days per year, and offering yet more opportunities to the employees to volunteer without the need to take extra vacation days of their own.

A very specific volunteering option is available in some companies through long-term and short-term international volunteering stays. In this case the employee and the company come to an agreement which includes basic organizational support of the volunteering stay (arranging of the volunteering abroad, basic logistical support after arrival, etc.) and a guarantee that the company will hold the working position of the employee for a given time period, allowing the employee to go abroad, volunteer, and then come back and take up the same working position they were leaving behind. This alternative to a sabbatical year provides to the company an opportunity of not losing an employee who might, for various reasons, need time off; and at the same time increase their skillset by providing them with expert volunteering positions abroad.

Volunteering as a Company Pursuit

The highest level of engagement in company volunteering identified from the conducted interviews consists of a highly structured support for volunteering which reaches behind the individual volunteering opportunities, but creates schemes to support volunteering in many various ways.

Internal volunteering programs are set up in these companies, providing complex support, logistics, guidance, and organization of various volunteering opportunities. Most importantly, these are long-term managed and organized schemes, and include volunteering activities with long-term partners and long-term stated goals. Partners of such activities may include hospitals, NGOs, schools, children homes, social companies, and many others, and these partnerships allow not only for planning, but also for a meaningful long-term contribution to the goals of the partner organization.

This long-term cooperation can be based, for instance, on mentoring programmes, in which NGOs and other partner organizations sign up at a list available to company employees, and they are then able to get in touch with them and become their long-term mentors in a certain area.

Yet another step for some companies is to set up funding opportunities for partner organizations and NGOs to support their own activities not only via company volunteering contributions, but also through financial help. This financial support does not need to be only directed outside, but can also be provided to the employees of the company, in order to fund their own volunteering activities: e.g. employees coming up with projects based on volunteering, either on their own, or in collaboration with some partner organization, and are provided with basic funds to make the project work, and to create the volunteering opportunities (meaningfully providing internal funding of volunteering activities).

All of the aforementioned fundraising activities of the company lead to another option, which is setting up a foundation or a charity which then directly opens up funding possibilities not only for the partner organizations or NGOs, and not only for the company employees, but also to the wider public. Both the foundation and the charity work can, again, be well interlinked with the idea of company volunteering, both on the level of foundation and charity operations, and on the level of the projects funded through these bodies.

2.2 GOOD PRACTICE IN COMPANY VOLUNTEERING

There are a number of things which help bringing the company volunteering to life and keep it active, and there are also several things that could damage the process, or make it less joyful and efficient than it could be. The informants pointed some of the good and bad practices out.

When it comes to sharing information on company volunteering, monitoring in terms of keeping statistics, feedback, and volunteering stories to share, can be highly useful. All of these can feed into motivating more employees to engage in volunteering, and the ones who have volunteered to staying in touch with the partner organizations. It can show the employees where the partner organizations are headed and what the volunteers helped to achieve, and it can also be used as a PR material. Moreover, from 2018, volunteering statistics and further feedback can be used in compulsory reporting with respect to the EU legislation. Companies may even ask the partner organizations to prepare part of the monitoring process, like feedback questionnaire, or to collect direct feedback in terms of short written feedback at the end of the volunteering activity. Partner organizations in connection to the volunteering activity should also be part of this monitoring, with respect to improving the activities in the future. All of the information can be used in internal as well as in external PR activities of the company.

In connection to the monitoring of the volunteering activities, it is also important to align the expectations of the company and its partner organization, in order for the volunteering activity to make sense to both. Volunteers need to have a chance to contribute, and the partner organization should be ready to assign them as much work to be done as possible, especially in case of manual volunteering:

“They [volunteers] usually are done with the work rather fast, that is a never-ending story with the NGOs, I always tell them: ‘Please prepare lots of work, our people are highly motivated and will get the work done faster than you thought.’ ”

Apart from aligning the expectations of the company and the partner organization, the purpose of the volunteering also needs to be clearly explained to the employees. Explanations and connections of the volunteering work and long-term partner organization functioning helps the employees to see the meaning in such an activity, it increases their motivation, and increases the chances of them being willing to come for volunteering activities again in the future:

“... I have to say that when our team was volunteering in an organization, and they took good care of us, explaining what they do as an organization, what target group they focus on, and so on, meaning that they also gave us their time apart from the volunteering activity itself, and we simply did not only come and do some work and then leave; and then there was another organization in which the only person who took care of us was a grounds-keeper, or whoever that was, and he never told us anything about the organization, and that is a shame. So when I compare these two situations, I will rather come back to a place where they also gave me a nice experience, meaning that I learned the purpose of why I was there.”

In case of volunteering activities, it is highly important and beneficial, as our informants underline, that the managerial levels of the company take part in the volunteering as well. It leads to higher motivation for other employees, and it strengthens the role of the volunteering as well, not to mention the increase in teambuilding and social coherence effects:

“... in many cases the managers are taking a lead, they take it as a teambuilding, (...) and ask if the whole team could take part in a common volunteering project, (...) or they take it as a networking between the teams, but they take a lead. They sign up for everything. They not only look after the team, but they take part themselves.”

It might be beneficial, interview analysis shows, to the company to set an ethical code for volunteering, in particular defining what partner organizations are and are not suitable for the company to cooperate with. Some organizations might have political affiliations, some might be under investigation, some might have other potentially harmful connotations to the company; and all of these should be taken into account before establishing ties with any particular partner organizations, as well as clearly communicated in case changes occur in already established partnerships. Conditions need to be clearly set for the cooperation to be established and abolished in order to prevent the company from being damaged by actions of its partner organization.

Once the company volunteering mechanisms are defined and implemented, all of the employees should be able to use them. In small branches, this can, at times, be seen as difficult, given the small number of employees, and therefore a limited potential for them leaving while keeping the branch operational at the same time. This needs to be taken into account when designing the company volunteering mechanisms, offering, for instance, branch transfers of personnel, to compensate for the employees leaving for their volunteering days. If this is not the case, it might be perceived as unfair by the employees of the small branches, since they see the volunteering opportunities, but have no real chance of participating in them. Also, given the time restraints, it is beneficial to the employees at the small branches to have the volunteering opportunities ready without a need to further organize it themselves; it saves their time and increases the chances of them participating in volunteering activities.

Generally speaking, the volunteering activities have higher turnout in cases they are pre-organized by the company. There are numbers of employees who are up for the volunteering activities as such, but vast majority of them do not take initiative to organize such activities themselves. This might be especially true for employees who do not speak the language of the country they are currently in, for instance foreigners working in the Czech Republic. Volunteering options of these employees are rather limited, giving the language barrier, but they also should be able to participate in these activities, and it needs to be taken into account when preparing them.

Lastly, it has been observed by some of the informants, that the volunteering is often one the first to be abolished in case of financial hardships of the company. This is not seen as a smart solution, since it further decreases morale of the employees, not to mention that some employees consider the CSR to be one of the important reasons why they work for a particular company, and changes in this respect might have implications in case they are considering other working opportunities as well. The informants saw volunteering options as one of the ways to keep the atmosphere positive even in times of hardship, and to keep employees loyal to push through and eventually help the whole company to get better off in the long run.

3. COMPANIES AND EMPLOYEES' VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

Volunteering is becoming part of the experience portfolio of the job applicants, especially in case of young people. It is important to work with such an experience during the application process, as well as in case of being hired and becoming part of the company structure, as described in the following chapters.

3.1 UTILIZING VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE IN THE JOB APPLICATION PROCESS

In case volunteering experience is to be useful during the job application process, it needs to be, first and foremost, presented in line with the job specifications and demands. In other words, the volunteering experience needs to be relevant for the job position one is applying to. This relates to both the CV writing, and to the job interview volunteering presentation. Volunteering experience should be, shortly, mentioned in the CV, if the experience itself is in any way related and relevant to the job position a person is applying for. At the interview, the applicant should be able to elaborate on the volunteering experience, again, linking it to the job position, and explaining on why that should be seen as relevant.

"It depends on the concrete volunteering experience. If someone volunteered in terms of painting fences, it makes no sense to mention. If, on the other hand, someone has been doing an expert activity, then it makes sense to state it, if it is relevant in the given area. If a person is applying for a tax consultancy job and also has engaged in a similar activity pro bono, that is definitely relevant to write down."

Volunteering, according to the informants, can indicate a team player, a person who goes the extra mile, a person with good working and social habits, and an engaged person, and it should also be stressed out during a job interview, underlining the reasons why the person does devote time to volunteering: *"To me, it is a sign of a certain level of activity of an individual. Which I see as a positive thing. At the same time, I would strongly look into how authentic the presentation of the volunteering during the job interview is. Whether it is just patting on our backs, or whether it is something I do because I really see a meaning in that."*

Company volunteering should also, if relevant, be mentioned among the reasons for the particular job application. If CSR policy, and volunteering in particular, is one of the company benefits the applicant is pursuing, then this should be explicitly mentioned as well, as it indicates potentially a good fit between the applicant and the company.

3.2 UTILIZING VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE ON THE JOB

When accepted for a new job, and finding a way through the new company environment, volunteering options are one of the things to ask about. CSR Department, in case it exists, is an excellent source of information, as well as a CSR strategy. At the same time, if there are company benefits such as volunteering days, the new coming employee should get informed on these at the Human Resources Department, if possible.

Volunteering opportunities the new coming employee already uses might well be incorporated into the company volunteering schemes (listed among the volunteering options, or among the partner organizations, etc.), and the company volunteers, or even fundraising activities could help develop the volunteering even further.

Generally, the new coming employees should not be shy to mention their previous or ongoing volunteering opportunities informally among their colleagues; in some cases, even an article into a newsletter might be an option.

“If someone really is pleased and wants to share the experience, we give them the chance to write an article and this article then gets send to the newsletter (...) and lets the internal world within the company know that they were somewhere and that it was cool, and maybe there is a hidden message of ‘Hey, why don’t you try it as well, maybe it’s cool for you too?!’ “

4. COMPANY VOLUNTEERING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Company volunteering often connects with the area of company presentation and public relations. This connection is invaluable especially in case of job seekers, who would like to learn about the company policy towards volunteering.

4.1 COMPANY VOLUNTEERING PRESENTATION FOR JOB APPLICANTS

There are several sources companies use to disseminate information on their CSR in general, and the volunteering activities in particular. Applicants who are interested in the volunteering activities of the company should look into company websites, company recruitment brochures, social media websites of the company (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram), publicly accessible newsletters of the company, CSR policy documents, CSR reports, final reports on company volunteering activities, and potentially also into the stories of the employees themselves, published in any of these sources. If the applicant is interested in the CSR and volunteering, they should gather information on that before attending the job interview, in order to be able to use these as well.

4.2 COMPANY VOLUNTEERING PRESENTATION FOR COMPETITIVENESS

Although, as the informants see it, the company volunteering should not be done primarily for the PR purposes, and at the same time, the company PR should not be based primarily on the information on company volunteering, there is a consensus among the informants of this research that there is a PR potential in company volunteering area. In case of decent and humble presentation of the company volunteering, there is a chance of standing out in the labour market competition, especially in case of the expert volunteering presentation, which is directly linked to the expert suit of the company itself, stressing both the CSR and the business side of the company.

“In our case, we prefer presenting the expert volunteering, because that is the most important to us. Both internally and externally, because that is what we do best, and we are helping through what we do best. (...) Because at the moment when you teach someone to do his own taxes, or to refine their internal processes, that has got a larger impact than painting them a fence.”

PR should be always in line with the aforementioned ethical standards of the volunteering cooperation, to avoid a harmful PR. At the same time, PR of the CSR and volunteering schemes should always be put in perspective, to avoid potentially negative PR as well: the amount of financial support the company is providing to a given cause, and the PR attention the company dedicates to such financial support need to be aligned.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE COMPANIES:

Engage in company volunteering.

Company volunteering has beneficial effects on companies, their employees, and the company PR.

Use company volunteering for PR purposes.

Company volunteering can provide a direct PR advantage against competitors, as well as prove beneficial in recruitment process, due to attracting job applicants with a potentially good company culture fit.

Link your company volunteering activities with your CSR policy.

Link between the company volunteering and its CSR policy provides a common frame of reference, making the whole approach understandable to all actors within the company and all potential partners outside.

Get inspired by the three different levels of engagement.

There are numerous mechanisms, listed under each of the engagement levels. It is vital to find a good fit to the company situation, culture, and other aspects, rather than to try reaching the top.

Get inspired by the good practices.

Important aspects of company volunteering, like monitoring, expectation alignment, explanation provision, or ethical code establishment, can be found described in the text and help you to improve your own processes.

FOR THE VOLUNTEERS:

Engage in company volunteering.

Company volunteering offers numerous advantages to your personal and professional development, and they are for free.

Be proactive and initiative.

Company volunteering cannot exist without engaged employees. Your initiative may help to improve the current company volunteering processes, or start new ones.

Utilize the information to your advantage during your job hunt.

Use the previous volunteering experience to your advantage using the right CV, get prepared for the job interview, use existing information sources.

Utilize the information on company volunteering to your advantage.

Use the information sources listed in the text, explore the volunteering opportunities described in the text, and use your own volunteering practice to enrich the company.

CONCLUSIONS

Volunteering is a highly under-researched area in the Czech Republic, especially when it comes to its links to the labour market. This study represents one of the first insights into this arena, and provides valuable observations both for the companies and for the individual volunteers. Aforementioned findings and recommendations have a potential to feed back into the labour market, and to support and foster company volunteering practices (including the CSR policy development), as well as to enhance understanding between the individual volunteers and the companies these volunteers work for or apply at.

This being said, there definitely is potential for follow-up research, given the limitations of this study, which mainly consists of a specific target group (rather large, international companies with rather deep experience in the CSR area), and also of the data sources (interviews with informants; but no document analyses were included, although the CSR policies are usually summarized in publicly accessible documents).

Future research endeavours should focus on different target group, use document analysis as one of the data sources, and also expand the list of informants to include the active volunteers working at the targeted companies. This being said, quantitative research into the company volunteering would be much useful as well, to provide an overall picture of the area.

Appendix B

FINAL REPORT: SLOVENIA

MAIN FINDINGS

Companies based in the Republic of Slovenia at the time of the data collection, represented mainly by their HR or PR officials, perceive volunteering positively. Volunteering is yet not integral part of wider and comprehensive volunteering strategies, which, as we find, is still underdeveloped area. At the same time, both, companies and public employment services see volunteering as beneficial. Companies mostly believe volunteering complements work performance of their employees, therefore management supports volunteering activities, however, there are cases when reservations towards volunteering are expressed. For example, if employee would put too much emphasis and focus on volunteering activities and one's work performance would hinder. In most cases, it is potent asset to applicants during the job selection process. Both, employees and companies' management, support and encourage volunteering, and participate in mostly one-off volunteering events. Volunteering is usually also in service of team bonding, as both employees and management participate, cross-sectorial bonding and idea sharing are often pointed out as one of the upsides of volunteering.

Along with companies, three local branches of Public Employment Service took part in research survey. In general, we find that volunteering is not overlooked in the job-search process at employment services, in fact, opposite applies. Great deal of importance is put on experience, skills and knowledge gained from voluntary activities, which come in handy and are helpful for potential job seekers. Systematic support for volunteering in the job search process is not in place, consequently every branch of Public Employment Service deals with volunteering in a way they see fit and beneficial for both, potential employee and employers. When lacking proper skills and competence, young people are encouraged to engage in voluntary activities.

1. INTEREST OF COMPANIES IN VOLUNTEERING

Interview analysis show that volunteering is yet to be part of integral part of wider strategy on volunteering. Companies support and encourage volunteering activities of their employees, they value their engagement, which is often used as the means for promotion and PR. As mentioned, we find that companies have not yet adopted comprehensive policies on volunteering, meaning they usually participate in one-off volunteering events, but mostly they support various volunteering activities and clubs materially or financially.

Great deal of tolerance can be observed towards potential effects of volunteering activities on workplace performance, however, in some cases, we find that volunteering can be of negative effect for candidates applying for a job.

PERCEPTION OF VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Employers generally perceive volunteering as positive, especially in terms of additional knowledge and skills, as well as the diverse experiences of their employees or potential employees. One of the interviewees said that volunteering and its implications are often misused and abused in their line of work. One interviewer added that in the case of potential employees, volunteering is seen partly as an obstacle as it is perceived as a professional anchor, assuming that such an individual does not have developed entrepreneurial skills and an entrepreneurial way of thinking:

"... I immediately think of what kind of professional anchor this person has, it is unlikely that he has developed entrepreneurship [spirit]."

INTEREST OF PARTICIPATING COMPANIES FOR VOLUNTEERING

In general, we find that the participating companies have not developed volunteer strategies, but rather they act in a different manner on a case-by-case basis in relation to volunteering. The general attitude towards volunteering is positive, participating companies support the volunteering of their employees, although warning that there are restrictions when volunteering affects the performance at work and completion of work obligations, but adds that attitude towards volunteering of employees is highly tolerant and understanding. Companies appreciate and support volunteering of their employees, they also pay attention to volunteering for potential employees. Mostly, companies support a variety of projects by financial support, in fewer cases they participate in volunteer projects, volunteer projects are usually one-off occasions and personal projects of employees, which they share with their colleagues. Those are often used by companies for positive promotion and communication with the public:

"[We are interest in volunteering, especially we put emphasis on] 2 aspects. The first, we value in our employees the fact that the employee is a volunteer, this somehow confirms one has some motivation for work and it is not just money. The other reason, volunteering can be used [for purposes of] external promotion, a socially responsible action can also give positive feedback to other people and the public."

COMPANIES' BENEFITS FROM VOLUNTEERING

The companies emphasize that the benefits of volunteering are many and diverse, adding that none of the participating companies puts an emphasis on volunteering and do not devote special attention to it. They support individual employee projects, participate in one-off volunteer events. Most commonly, companies use volunteering for promotional purposes and to consolidate visibility between target groups and target audiences, they also see added value to building a common spirit of employees, connecting employees in different sectors, socializing with employees and superiors, and promoting socially responsible behavior:

"Certainly [volunteering] is a socially responsible work, there is the aspect of strengthening the brand, in this some socially responsible works have impact. That could be a benefit [for us]."

VOLUNTEERING AMONG EMPLOYEES

In line with the finding that participating companies do not give special emphasis and attention to volunteering, employers are not aware of the potential voluntary activities of their employees. One of the interviewees acknowledged that there was a volunteer firefighter among the employees, while many of them were youth leaders in the past. Another interviewee adds that the company does not yet have integrated system for encouraging and monitoring volunteering, but they have a positive attitude towards volunteering and support their employees in their efforts. In the near future, they intend to establish a corner where employees will be able to share their experiences and thus engage colleagues:

“Through what we do, we want to create a corner where employees can share [their activities with us and other coworkers]. And in order to be able to reward and praise [their efforts] ... we are not there yet. But it’s certainly in the plan.”

APPLICATION OF VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN FAVOR OF COMPANY

We re-establish that volunteering companies use volunteering for the benefit of the company, in particular through team building activities, the exchange of ideas between employees in different sectors, and for the purpose of promotion and public relations. One of the interviewees added that volunteering is not used for the purposes of the company, but it would be difficult to give priority to voluntary activities before working obligations:

“Unfortunately, we would tolerate leaving workplace immediately, for example, the store, but if the replacement has been arranged, then we support it.”

The other interviewer said that the company has a sports society, which is used primarily for building a common spirit and spreading the values of the company:

“These efforts regarding the sports society we have are excellent team-building ... It is certainly also great to support good cause, I think that this is consistent with our values, with the values of our company.”

COMPETENCES OF EMPLOYEES

Employers appreciate engagement of their employees in volunteering, particularly they see positive effects on i.e. soft skills that they develop during voluntary engagement, for example: organizational skills, creativity, social sense, communication, flexibility, mobility, openness. They add that they also notice other positive effects that volunteering has on employees such as self-confidence and determination. One of the interviewees added that it is also important for them that employees have other interests also beside work, while another add that volunteering is also appreciated from the point of view that an individual proves his loyalty and affiliation, the desire for socially beneficial work.

“Of course, it depends on the function of people as volunteers, but it is important to show some affiliation, activity, that they want to do good for others.”

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF VOLUNTEERING

Companies do not perceive obstacles or negative aspects of volunteering. Many support and encourage the volunteering of their employees, adding that the biggest obstacle is the free time available for their employees. They add that as far as voluntary activities are in line with values from the company, they support the activities of their employees:

“No [we do not see any obstacles], if it is in line with our company rules, with values,..., then I see no obstacle. It must, however, be carried out transparently.”

While one of the interviewees acknowledges that they do not perceive the negative aspects, the problem would arise if the employees were missing too often due to their voluntary engagement:

“I do not see [obstacles] personally, but it is true that we do not encounter much with volunteering ourselves. To be honest, if you imagine that someone was missing out on volunteer work, then it would not be well accepted.”

PRESENTATION OF EXPERIENCE FROM VOLUNTEERING

Participating companies see volunteering of potential employees as a positive addition when applying for a job, but they add that it is important that the job seeker emphasize how his volunteer experience is relevant for the performance of his or her work obligations with the potential employer. When checking the received job applications, employers also look for the potential experience of volunteering, especially for those job seekers who are applying for their first job:

“Someone who has never been busy who cannot write much about concrete work experiences can be introduced [with volunteering].”

They add that they do not differentiate between work experience and volunteer experience, since it is the most important for employers *“how can the candidate transfer his experience, does not matter whether it is work experience or experience from volunteering, to his working environment.”*

VOLUNTEERING AS A TERM IN A COMPANY

Employers say that volunteering as a term is well accepted in their work environment, they even add that when looking for potential employees, in addition to their work experience, knowledge and education, they emphasize and value the voluntary engagement:

“Volunteering is something I always look at. The level of education, foreign languages or experience, and the next thing is volunteering, because this tells you a lot about the personality of a person.”

Employers also believe that the term is gaining momentum and has a positive connotation.

UNDERSTANDING OF VOLUNTEERING – COMPANY LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEES

We find that there are no significant differences in the understanding of volunteering between employees and company management. One of the interviewees added that occasionally in the company's management a question arises regarding the performance of work obligations, if an individual is too involved in voluntary activity: *“whether this person can then work actively [and perform up to the standards], if it is dispersed all around. Sometimes, in cases like this, volunteering can be a minus.”*

PRIOR EXPERIENCE OF EMPLOYEES FROM VOLUNTEERING

We find that employers do not give a strong emphasis on volunteering. The experience of volunteering is examined together with other categories as part of the applications for job, and most often employers learn of volunteering experience from the CVs, often they ask about those experience when interviewing potential employees. They add that it is especially desirable that those job seekers who do not have work experience have to emphasize that they were in some way active:

“Even if it is someone who is only a beginner, [it is important to us that we see] one was engaged in some kind of activities during studying, whether student work, how active he is in various organizations in general, whether it is volunteering, or that he has other interests. In short, it is desirable that in addition to studying, he has been involved in other activities.”

Employers add that it is desirable that jobseekers display the acquired experience from volunteering either in the competence section or as other experiences. Despite the fact that such experiences are welcome, they do not constitute a decisive factor, which suggests that employers continue to give preference to formal education prior to experience:

“Personally, this would mean a lot, and in our company this also has a great value. However, it would not be decisive, certainly there are other more important factors here. But definitely with two people with similar experiences, I think we would hire the one with volunteer experience.”

PREFERENCE FOR VOLUNTEERING

We find that employers support voluntary activities, including the voluntary activities of their employees, adding that they are aware of the importance of voluntary activities and their support for the satisfaction of their employees:

“as a company, we co-fund activities, we are aware that people through afternoon activities, volunteer work, hobbies, are ‘recharging’. We are aware that what we do in the afternoon affects our work in the morning. And if people are dissatisfied in their free time, then they are also unhappy about work. This goes hand in hand.”

We reiterate that employers do not have comprehensive strategies in the field of volunteering and that this area remains underdeveloped.

2. PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND VOLUNTEERING IN THE PROCESS OF JOB SEARCHING

Public Employment Services (in Slovenia Employment Service of Slovenia) shared their view of volunteering in the process of job selection. Public Employment Services, local branches Ljubljana, Idrija and Novo mesto took part in research survey.

MAIN FINDINGS

Public employment services put a great deal of importance on experience gained from voluntary activities and generally do not differentiate between voluntary and workplace experience, similarly they observe for employers. We find that there is no systemic support for volunteering in job selection process, however, as mentioned, it is not overseen by any means. Services also encourage young people to engage in voluntary activities in order to gain knowledge, skills and experience.

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING BENEFIT FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

We find that the Employment Services use volunteering to determine the employment goals of jobseekers. They try to combine his experience, education with wishes and motivation for the future. They add that it is important for an individual to be active, gaining experience and knowledge, focusing in particular on soft skills, such as communication and organizational skills, flexibility, social sensibility, etc. Volunteering has a positive connotation, and with regard to past experience, they advise candidates to include them in their presentations. In cases where an individual does not have work experience and is unemployed for a long time, they advise the candidate to try to gain experience in volunteering: *“for those who are waiting for the first job, volunteering can be unloading, because at that time they learn and gain a lot.”*

There are no specific procedures for perceiving the experience of volunteering, most often they are derived from the CVs or after at the interview with the candidate. Their observation is that higher educated people are more interested in volunteering, as their view of volunteering is also different.

IDEAL / BEST JOB CANDIDATE FOR VOLUNTEERING

Employment Services advise their candidates to display past experience and acquired skills and competences, in particular, and especially when they are relevant for the performance of work obligations with a potential employer. PES, in general, positively perceive volunteering, similarly they observe with employers. They add that loyalty and belonging to the company is of great importance to the employers, therefore, they advise their candidates to display personal predisposition to the desired characteristics, which can often be proved precisely by volunteering, which, in the opinion of the Employment Service, is characterized by the fact that by this candidate proves:

“Its affiliation, loyalty and commitment and responsibility to work.”

They point out that it is necessary to be careful when listing volunteer activities and hobbies, especially when candidates are still active volunteers, as potential negative effects are possible with the potential employer:

“It is very important that the job seeker knows the potential employer very well and knows what his needs are. Sometimes the presentation of volunteer experiences or hobbies is not the most desirable, and does more damage than a benefit. I am saying this in a case when the candidate is an active volunteer or is actively engaged in his hobbies. It has already happened that the person did not get a job because the employer felt that he was too busy doing a volunteer work.”

ASSISTANCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE WITH PRESENTATION OF THEIR EXPERIENCE IN VOLUNTEERING AND THEIR INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING

Employment Services say that it is difficult to evaluate the interest of young people for volunteering, but generally, they believe that young people are not interested in volunteering by the age of thirty, they are more interested for their own achievements and benefits. From this perspective, the interest in volunteering is greater when the person is unemployed for a long time, and through volunteering he acquires both experience and source of motivation for further work. Employment Services therefore encourage young people to engage in voluntary activities, at the same time they observe that the candidates like do not hesitate in mentioning their engagement in voluntary activities:

"I have to say that usually the candidates relatively quickly bring to light that they are volunteers."

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF VOLUNTEER WORK OF REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED PERSONS

Employment Services are keen on encouraging young people to take on voluntary activities as they gain soft skills, such as: flexibility, sensibility, work ethics, organisational skills, communication skills. They also develop personal traits, for example: courage, self-esteem, determination, loyalty, affiliation. Only one negative aspect was pointed out, which was already mentioned above, when employer felt that candidate was putting too much emphasis and focus on its hobbies and voluntary activities.

SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT TO VOLUNTEERING

The participating Employment Agencies do not offer systematic support to volunteering in the recruitment process, but they nevertheless give important emphasis to the experiences that individuals acquire from volunteering. The institutes thus conduct interviews with their candidates, record their data and work experience. On the basis of the obtained data, they help the candidate in directing and finding a job.

"Unfortunately, no. I do it like this - I always ask everyone to send me my CV before the first visits [and prepare for the interview, where I put emphasis on experience gained from various activities]."

ADVANTAGES OF ENGAGEMENT IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Employment Services estimate that the advantages are mostly in more developed soft skills, with emphasis on a sense of social sensibility and compassion, greater flexibility for working in the group, and also highlighting the wider social network. In cases where an individual works voluntarily with a potential employer, they also highlight the benefits of an employer who can meet a worker, on the other side, for candidate this serves as training at a potential workplace.

HOW COMPANIES PERCEIVE VOLUNTEERING?

Employment agencies find it difficult to assess how companies perceive volunteering. In general, it is considered that volunteering is well accepted among employers, but they emphasize that, when evaluating and forwarding candidates, they retain a *"wider and holistic view of the person and his experience."*

They add that the experience is very different:

"The experiences are really different, I do not think volunteering is interested in our endeavors. As already said, if the experience is presented in the right way and corresponds to their profile, then it is definitely added value."

3. IMPACT ON EMPLOYABILITY

Employers value individuals who have been active in volunteering for the competencies and knowledge acquired during their engagement. Additionally, they appreciate the fact that an individual is engaged even when he does not receive payment; in particular, this is a good indicator of the affiliation and values of the potential employee. Employers also consider that volunteers are characterized by a greater degree of engagement in team work (they are team players) and, accordingly, they have developed the following competencies and skills: communicativeness, fairness, solidarity. These are the qualities that employers value in their (potential) employees. In the eyes of employers, volunteering enriches work experience, contributes to the acquisition of competencies and skills that are desirable at the workplace and bring benefits and added value to the employer.

“So this is it, I believe, again, this is positive. [Company really does benefit] by employing such a person.”

Employment services on the other side of job-search process usually have easier task if one was previously active and engaged in voluntary activities.

The previous activity helps in determining the employment targets of the job seeker. Experience shows that employers do not pursue only the criteria of formal education, but also the values and skills that the individual does not acquire during the course of their (formal) education. Volunteering thus develops important skills that help in finding a job (i.e., soft skills, personal qualities are also important).

For employment services, it is difficult to assess how companies perceive volunteering as it is a highly subjective as well as a specific issue that differs from company to company. Generally, employers do not focus on engagement in voluntary activities as such, but they are primarily interested in acquired work experience, knowledge, skills, and competences. Accordingly, the institutes advise their clients to highlight their experience. They also recommend that they communicate to their employers their reasons for participating in volunteering, as they should demonstrate their commitment to work and accountability, as well as loyalty.

However, warning must be given, as the experience show, over emphasizing engagement in voluntary activities and hobbies has proven to have negative effect, as some employers tend to believe that potential employee would not put enough focus on work performance and tasks at work and that one's engagement could hinder its performance at work. Consequently, they recommend that jobseekers focus on previous experience, skills, knowledge and competences that were developed during their engagement.

4. IN CONCLUSION

MAIN BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THE VOLUNTEERING

The following benefits and risks were brought to light by various interviewees, which we gathered and grouped in categories, according to similarity, in the tables below.

COMPANIES:

Benefits

Team building and common group spirit between: different and separate sectors in companies, among colleagues, between company management and employees

Sharing ideas, expanding (companies') values

Positive public image, targeted communication with target groups and customers

Employee satisfaction

Risks

Diminished performance at workplace

Absence from workplace due to obligations at voluntary activities

Lack of focus on tasks at workplace

EMPLOYEES:

Benefits

Hobbies and interest activities outside work obligations

Development of certain skills and knowledge, valueable to employers

Development of personal traits

Personal satisfaction

Risks

Diminished performance at workplace

Absence from workplace due to obligations at voluntary activities

Lack of focus on tasks at workplace

Risk of getting harmed at voluntary activity (e.g. voluntary firefighter brigades)

FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES:

Benefits

Easier career guidance

Greater employability and greater chance of successful employment

Risks

Finding fine line between emphasizing voluntary activities and affiliation to the company

In general, we find that the field of volunteering is still underdeveloped among Slovenian companies, since the area is not dealt with strategically; the activities are defined by individual events and actions. In most companies they support the voluntary activity of their employees and benefit from the positive aspects of their engagement. They appreciate commitment of their employees, as well as appreciate the values, knowledge and skills that individuals develop during their engagement. This is also a positive aspect for the Employment Services, for which prior engagement of the individual facilitates career guidance, as goes for the individual, it presents a greater possibility of successful employment. Nevertheless, a warning must be given. Volunteering is generally accepted positively, but in certain circumstances it can also have negative effects. Thus we find that one can connect someone's volunteering with a lack of an entrepreneurial spirit, and excessive emphasis on volunteering can deter an employer from employing a potential worker, such examples stem from reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPANIES:

Engage in company volunteering.

Company volunteering should be taken on board even in companies which have not yet engaged in this area, as it has many positive effects on both the company and the employee.

Systematically plan company volunteering.

Slovenian companies do not engage with volunteering systematically. We recommend to develop integrated approach, a detailed account of general principles from the Czech companies is shown in Appendix 1. This could be highly useful to the Slovenian companies when it comes to further refining their company volunteering and turning the one-off activities into long-term strategies.

Combine charitable and volunteering activities.

Slovenian companies mainly engage in charity activities in a way of financial and material support. It would be beneficial for companies to combine volunteering and charitable activities. Appendix 2 shows examples of Czech companies, which can be helpful in further development of volunteering activities for Slovenian companies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS:

Utilize the information to your advantage during job hunt.

Findings suggest that simply stating volunteering experience during job application process is not enough. Job applicants should pick particular experience to mention in their CVs and during the interviews, furthermore, it is recommended that volunteering experience is relevant or linked to the position applicant is running for..

Do not overdo on volunteering activities, stress the creative experiences.

Job applicants, especially in Slovenia, with long-term volunteering experience are advised to put aspecial emphasis on their own initiatives within such experience, in order to avoid being perceived as less entrepreneurial than their peers. Examples of such initiatives within their volunteering experience might be included into their CVs (e.g. as a special achievement listed at the volunteering position) and should be presented during the job interview as well. Furthermore, job applicants should not overemphasize their volunteering activities, especially those that are time-demanding. In some cases, employers estimated that potential employee's engagement in volunteering activities could beharmful for workplace performance, therefore they disqualified from the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE:

Systematical inclusion of volunteering in job application process

There is no integral strategy for inclusion of volunteering in the job application process in effect for Public Employment Service. Consequently, each branch has its own way of dealing with it. We recommend the development and design of integral strategy for Public Employment Service at large, according to which they engage with volunteering in a uniform way.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Project Youth Employability via Volunteering is focused on support and increasing the employability of young people, who have volunteering experiences. It is implemented between 2016 and 2018 by three organisations: INEX- Sdružení dobrovolných aktivit (Czech Republic), Zavod Voluntariat (Slovenia) and Solidarités Jeunesses (France).

The project researches the recognition of non-formal learning, creates connections with private sector to enquire the validation of voluntary experiences on a labour market. Part of this project is also further upgrade of the on-line tool IM-PROVE, which helps the volunteers translate their voluntary experiences into the language of competences, and use this when applying for a job.

The project is supported by the Erasmus + Programme of the European Commission.

More information on www.inexsda.cz.



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