

THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING AND THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS THROUGH PRACTICE

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Abstract

This study intended to assess the impact of volunteering on society and understand how its practice allows the acquisition of skills. In addition, it would make the population aware of the value and importance of the different ways of volunteering. One of the central points of this investigation was to understand how institutions should recruit and attract volunteers and ultimately how to retain them, by understanding whether or not the volunteers' initial motivations (i.e. which attract them) remain unchanged along time. This study was carried out within the scope of the ENtRANCE Erasmus+ project, by students of the Research Methods and Techniques course integrated in the Communication Sciences degree at Maia University Institute and had the collaboration of the Volunteer School, Pista Mágica by contacting its volunteers and clarifying relevant information. Several scientific articles were analysed, such as [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]; [5] which allowed a first approach to such topic but with no answers found.

The research was conducted with a mixed methods approach in order to balance between depth and breadth [6], which combined qualitative (participant observation, interviews and their content analysis [7] followed by quantitative methodologies (questionnaire design and analysis following a sequence of steps consistent with conventional guidelines for scale development [8]; [9], in order to understand the motivations and barriers of two different target groups - Formal and Informal Volunteers. The first group can be defined by the set of actions of social and community interest carried out in a disinterested manner by people, within the scope of projects, programs at the service of individuals, families and the community, developed on a non-profit basis, by public or private entities (Portuguese Law No. 71/98, of 3 November). The second group is characterized by work produced directly by the individual himself to other individuals not belonging to his household [10].

The results show that the retention of volunteers for long periods of time in one place is almost impossible, especially doing the same tasks over again. In order to explore the factors associated with the retention of volunteers in voluntary actions, it was possible to show that, in general, there are reasons of altruistic character (concern for the welfare of others / intentions of a solidarity nature) that determine the involvement in informal volunteering. Related to formal volunteering, the curriculum benefits and acquisition of soft skills are the main motivations for volunteers to remain in institutions. About the barriers encountered in attracting volunteers, the lack of assertiveness in the communication of the institutions stands out, the inadequate recruitment processes and the lack of information about the solidarity actions.

This study contributes, above all, to the scarcity of literature regarding informal volunteering, but it also provides valuable tools for the institutions, in order for them to be able to create volunteer recruitment programs, trying to minimize the mentioned barriers that may be the reasons for the low volunteers' attraction and retention in organizations and, consequently, of voluntary activities.

Keywords: Volunteering, Acquisition of skills, Qualitative, Quantitative, Motivations, Barriers, Recruit, Retain.

1 INTRODUCTION

We believe on the feasibility of choosing such topic, as we know that there are numerous doubts about volunteering that have not yet been fully clarified to society. Thus, we formulated some research questions, through a bibliographic review of numerous articles, such as: [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [15] highlighting the following questions: "What are the factors that distinguish the motivations that lead an individual to join an organization?" "What are the factors that distinguish the motivations that lead an

individual to stay in the same institution?" "Was the volunteer plan designed to meet the needs of organizations and volunteers?" and "Do motivations vary depending on the type of organization?"

Some of these problems acquired dimension in our understanding, when we questioned some acquaintances who had or have contact with volunteering and we realized that society does not yet recognize the practice or appreciate the skills acquired by volunteers. Our main aim is to raise awareness about the population the value and importance of different ways of volunteering, thus contributing to the growing praise of the practice.

It is essential to mention that the present work is divided into two complementary phases. In this sense, the study methodology that we decided to apply in the first phase of the project, has a qualitative character and focuses on interviews, which were carried out with individuals who practice and / or practiced volunteering. In order to understand their position in relation to this experience, the motivations that led them to embark on this challenge and the impact it had on their lives.

We also chose to use the participant observation methodology at the institution "Matosinhos Volunteer Firefighters - Leça da Palmeira". Our choice fell mainly on this organization, since one of the members who volunteered to be interviewed was a volunteer in this corporation. Our main objective was to analyze in a non-participatory way the behaviors, attitudes and experiences lived in the "field" by the volunteers, according to some parameters previously established by the group. As a way to obtain more detailed information than isolated interviews couldn't provide.

The second phase was carried out using quantitative data analysis methodologies, namely the application of questionnaires. Subsequently, data collection was carried out, starting with the definition of the recommended sample size for the intended objective. And after the pre-test of the questionnaire, it was distributed. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using software such as Excel and SPSS, first performing the appropriate preparation of all information obtained in the questionnaires. Finally, we proceed with the discussion of the results and the conclusion, with a brief description of the data obtained, summarizing the most important themes and promoting a final reflection of the entire research project developed.

The option to divide the work into two parts is justified by the fact that it is intended to collect information of a particular nature. Therefore, it was considered that it would be useful to invest in specific study methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) for an in-depth understanding of the issues that would be the target of this study.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Qualitative Methodology

As it is a research project focused on the theme of volunteering, we believe that it would be pertinent to understand the opinion of those who coexist or coexisted with this daily practice, as well as to understand how voluntary work provide the acquisition of skills.

We emphasize that some of the volunteer respondents who were willing to collaborate with us were people we already knew. Therefore, a non-probabilistic choice can be considered a sample for convenience, which made the first approach more accessible. Subsequently, we contacted the institution to which we associate, the Pista Mágica Volunteer School, which provided us with the contact of some volunteers who are part of the institution itself, as well as volunteers from partner institutions, so that the sample was representative of reality.

For the interviews, we developed a guide with some questions that we consider relevant to obtain the desired information. Following a sequence of steps according to the literature [6]; [7]. Initially, it was planned to interview ten people, and the stipulated "drawing" was not carried out, because in the ninth interview we considered having reached the sample saturation. The effective sample included seven women and two men. More than half of the study population volunteered at more than one institution, referring, by some respondents, to organizations such as the Food Bank, Portuguese Red Cross, São João Hospital, Volunteer Firefighters, Refood, Iberanime, Magic Track and UEFA.

As mentioned in the introduction, our goal is to use a qualitative data collection methodology and for this purpose the group decided to resort to participant observation and the use of interviews. For the action of participant observation carried out in the corporation "Firefighters Matosinhos Volunteers -

Leça da Palmeira", the group previously prepared a table and whose purpose is to evaluate the way in which the volunteers structure their activity in the corporations, the level of cooperation between the members of the institution, the turnover of places and sectors. Understand how the relationship between the volunteer and the organization itself is established and, finally, infer whether the volunteers are satisfied with the actions proposed by the organizations, as well as try to show which strategy the institution uses to retain the volunteers.

2.2 Quantitative Methodology

Our main objective in the second phase, quantitative data analysis, focuses on the exploration of factors associated with the retention of volunteers in institutions. By comparing the motivations and barriers / limitations, which differentiate the group of individuals who still practice volunteering and individuals who currently don't practice. Thus, it is our intention to analyze the differences that are accentuated between the two groups, especially in terms of the perception of motivations that lead individuals to get involved in voluntary actions. As well as in terms of limitations / barriers that are found related to the non-retention of volunteers in voluntary institutions / actions.

Thus, if organizations are able to understand what are the motivations and limitations that significantly influence the decision of individuals to either start or give up voluntary practices. It will become more accessible to find a way to respond, above all, to motivations which determine the entry of individuals into volunteer programs. Thus, increasing the rate of retention of volunteers in institutions.

We divided our study into two questionnaires, one for formal volunteers and another for informal volunteers. We can consider that the developed questionnaires were elaborated and analyzed following a sequence of steps consistent with the conventional guidelines for scale development, for example, [8]; [9].

The use of quantitative methods of data analysis at this stage is the most appropriate and perhaps the most effective option for us, given the complexity of the factors that will be analyzed during this phase. As well as the representativeness of the results, which they intend to obtain since this vast character can be achieved, mostly, by using questionnaire surveys. In addition, these analyses aim to obtain more concrete opinions and, consequently, less probable errors of interpretation.

3 RESULTS

We will now explain the justification for each of the data analysis techniques used. The group opted for the elaboration of tables for some of the procedures, to make the reading and understanding of the data more evident.

3.1 Qualitative Results

3.1.1 Interviews

For conducting the interviews, a semi-structured or semi-director profile was chosen, since an open question was selected to initiate the dialogues, deepening the themes we intended with increasingly specific approaches. Each of the interviewers (several members that make up the group) guaranteed the approach of all topics, guiding the interview according to a general script previously prepared. For our analysis, it was deemed useful to list the topics covered by each volunteer interviewed, comparing their responses, and summarizing each group of ideas with short sentences.

From the comparison of the answers as to the motivations that trigger the practice of volunteering, it is possible to show that all of them have different justifications. Factor that is already predictable, given the completely different experiences in which the interviewees were involved. It is possible to infer that the different motivations that lead individuals to practice volunteering are deeply rooted in the life trajectory they present and in what they hope to benefit from their participation in the projects. The more adult age group seeks permanent contact with the cause, while the younger audience becomes more superficial and fleeting. What can show a possible use of these practices by the younger group in order to produce benefits instead of acting for the benefit of others (Table 1).

Table1: Motivations that lead into doing volunteer work.

	Man; 74 years old; Retired	Woman; 19 years old; Student.	Man; 19 years old; Student.	Woman; 47 years old; Education Assistant.	Woman; 19 years old; Student.
Motivations	Having a constant and permanent activity.	Get the opportunity to enter an event for free	Family's connection to the organization and curiosity	Being able to help the ones in need	Spirit of companionship gained while in the scouts

	Woman; 19 years old; Student.	Woman; 26 years old; Social Educator.	Woman; 27 years old; Doctor	Woman; 26 years old; Event organizer.
Motivations	Help others and see her job as a citizen completed	Being a great way to stay active in the working field	Have a positive impact in others	Moved by the sensation of helping others

About the factors that are implicit in the permanence of an individual in an institution, we question only the volunteers who still maintain contact with institutions. It is possible to infer that the motivations responsible for the continuity of these individuals in the respective institutions are the same. The feeling of happiness provided by giving and sharing with others. As well as all the effort, sacrifice and all the hours dedicated to a cause that is deeply rooted in their lives. And it is also curious to realize that these people mentioned at the beginning of the interviews that the motivation to embark on voluntary projects is something they have always wanted, despite the influence they have suffered from the people around them. A differentiating aspect from the other volunteers (Table 2).

Table 2: Factors leading to the permanent stay of volunteers.

	Man; 74 years old; Retired	Woman; 19 years old; Student.	Woman; 26 years old; Social Educator.	Woman; 26 years old; Event organizer.
Factors	Pleasure and happiness to help the other.	Proudness of helping and saving people from being a firefighter.	Work and sacrifice that was put into the project.	Need of taking some time out for the ones in need.

With regard to work and the way companies / institutions value voluntary actions, we can infer from the data obtained that the actions developed by companies to value and captivate volunteers are practically nil, since most individuals did not notice, if during the period they were in the service of the company, it had a volunteer plan. Thus, it appears that the communication plans between institutions and employees are not effective. One of our suggestions would be to fill this gap by unequivocally exposing the organizations' voluntary plans to volunteers, from the moment they start activities at the respective institution.

Throughout the interviews, only the interviewees associated with projects / foundations were asked whether the motivations that lead them to join the institution, for which they provide services, are still the same as those that retained them. In that sense, the responses were divergent. Among the 4 people questioned, half answered that the motivations were the same and the other half that the reasons changed.

Finally, and relating how volunteers benefit at a professional level with their practice and what skills they acquire throughout their experience, we come to one of the nuclei of this work. Through the answers provided, we can see that through their practice, respond objectively to all everyday situations, having team spirit and between help, patience in the execution of tasks, baggage to face situations for which they thought they were not prepared, better communicate with audiences, fluency in linguistic level, learning in time management , tolerance, coping and empathy were some of the soft skills obtained. Bearing in mind that only 4 maintain contact with the practice on a daily basis, it is possible to deduce that the majority were only involved in volunteer programs, to acquire skills that confer professional benefits to them. Bearing in mind that 6 out of 9 respondents answered that they participated based on the added value that their presence in volunteer activities constitutes in the curriculum.

3.1.2 *Participant Observation*

The participant observation methodology intends to analyze several aspects that relate the volunteers' behaviour towards the institution. Using a frequency scale that measures the intensity of the volunteers' behaviour from 1 to 5, we classify their actions.

For the parameter that assesses the daily structuring of activities, we consider planning to be very objective and concise. Through plans posted on the panels of the barracks, the firefighters who were on duty knew exactly what tasks were assigned to them, in situations where they were not needed on the ground.

The level of cooperation and interaction between colleagues can be pointed out as one of the main highlights of the observation. The cooperation and team spirit and mutual help that was evident among colleagues are some of the main tools / soft skills acquired through practice, so it was one of the valences that was best observed.

Finally, about the method used to keep volunteers in the corporation, it was only possible to show as a strategy, the motivation provided by the coordinator after each successful mission.

3.2 **Quantitative Results**

3.2.1 *Informal Volunteering*

After data collection, it was intended to make an initial organization of all information obtained. In order to understand the distinctions between the variables that are relevant to be analyzed and those that interfere in the responses that are valid. In our work, we chose to do a multivariate analysis of data, used when it is intended to find specific relationships or groupings, between people who practice volunteering and those who have already practiced. That is, to perceive how some relationships influence others or even to understand the dependence between them. And for that we use the SPSS software, due to the greater analysis capacity that it can achieve, which allowed us to validate a series of questions for each category.

First, we start by analyzing the missing values in detail (missing data types), trying to understand if they were significant. Then we made the detection of outliers, that is, of data that have very different values from the sample cases. They are very important because they can change the results of the data analysis. As we collected the information and proceeded to this organization, we recorded the data, to understand the reason why we felt the need to remove or not variables. It should also be noted that the informal volunteer questionnaire was answered by 64 people.

By analyzing the missing values, we realized that the question that most presented missing data was "In the options below, evaluate from 1 to 7, the statements that best relate to the reasons for the practice of informal volunteering: [Influence of friends]". And we can use as a justification the fact that perhaps the individuals did not understand the question or its foundation and, therefore, we also propose that it would be one of the variables to be eliminated. The criterion for eliminating the variables is based on the percentage of data loss and on the variables that have more than 50% of lost responses.

In this sense and according to the data obtained in SPSS, through the table "Missing Value Analysis" we consider eliminating 3 variables. We infer that the rates of missing values, related to this set of questions included in the same section (which aimed understand the motivations and interactions during the volunteer work provided), may indicate that the construction of the questions for this block would not be properly clear and objective, as expected.

Not all respondents were involved in the same volunteer actions. And, therefore, it also became important to understand why they did not continue with the type of volunteering they practiced as well as why they did not want to go up in the type of actions - formal volunteering.

When asked about the type of motivation that led them to practice informal voluntary actions, respondents responded that it was due to the action itself and their intentions of solidarity. This together, with the fact that they are activities that they like or would like to try. Which means that their reasons for not pursuing these actions must "necessarily" be greater than the fact that they feel good and fulfilled by doing something they like in line with something that can help others. In this line, we can easily see that the reasons are mainly related to time / availability factors. Respondents admit that these actions are not compatible with their schedules and for family reasons they cannot experience

voluntary actions. Table 3 shows the variables that we consider valid for the analysis of the questionnaire related to informal volunteering.

Table 3: Valid Variables: Informal Volunteering.

"Age"
"Genre"
"Marital status"
"Level of Education"
"Professional status"
"What were the circumstances in which you volunteered"
"What activities were you involved in / what help did you provide"
"In the options below, evaluate from 1 to 7 (being 1 nothing true and 7 totally true), the statements that best relate to the reasons for the practice of informal volunteering": <i>Do an activity I like; Family Influence; Experience a new activity; Curiosity; The action itself; Concern for the welfare of others; Professional benefits; Increasing of self-esteem; Not feeling so lonely; Help to deal with personal problems; Develop friendships; Feeling useful.</i>
"Rate with the Likert scale from 1 to 7 with (1 very negative and 7 very positive) your experience relatively": <i>The people you interacted with; The way you approached the cases that helped; Time management; To the goals you deposited for each share you performed; The speed of response.</i>
"Do you intend to get involved again in an informal volunteering experience?"
"Mark, in the options below, the reasons in which you don't consider evolving from informal volunteer to formal volunteer": <i>I myself benefit from aid from institutions; Didn't captivate me enough; I have no one to participate with me; I didn't like the attitude of the people I helped; Not compatible with my schedules; I have no money to do so; I am busy with family and other obligations; I have a lot of hobbies.</i>
"Mark, in the options below, the possible reasons for not continuing doing volunteer work": <i>Did not meet my expectations and therefore did not raise my interest; I had a bad experience with the management; I didn't like the attitude of the people I communicated with; Not compatible with my schedules.</i>

3.2.2 Formal Volunteering

In the analysis of formal volunteering we reached a broader sample, managing to collect a total of 97 responses. For the analysis of the lost values, it was decided to eliminate, according to the table "Absent standards" obtained in the SPSS, 25 variables, for presenting a rate of lost values above 50%. Therefore, and contrary to what was verified in the analysis of the informal questionnaire, we found, in the analysis corresponding to formal volunteering, a list or pattern of missing variables for several cases. In about 34 cases, a similar non-response pattern was found for several variables.

Now, considering that the questionnaire was readapted from tested and scientifically validated versions, we can infer that the reason why these variables obtained a high rate of non-response is due to the extension of the groups of questions. What may have contributed to the demotivation of the respondents, leading to the non-filling of the questionnaire, since these variables are found in the last two sections. To that extent, we chose to eliminate 10 variables, since there are similar variables throughout the questionnaire and, therefore, their exclusion was not very critical.

The main purpose of preparing the questionnaire on formal volunteering is related to the fact that we try to understand the retention of volunteers in the institutions. For this, we compare the motivations, with the barriers or limitations that differentiate volunteer practitioners from those who have practiced it previously. Thus, we set out to analyze the differences between volunteers and ex-volunteers, emphasizing the motivations that led individuals to become involved in voluntary activities, as well as the limitations that these individuals felt. Thus, leading us to the problem of employee retention volunteers in the institutions. In this sense, a questionnaire aimed at obtaining answers to this problem was distributed.

64.9% of people said that they are now not involved in any voluntary activity. However, 54.6% say it was voluntary, but currently it is not. We can already see the existence of the problem of volunteer

retention due to the disparity between those who claim to have already practiced (54.6%) and those who still practice (20.6%). On the other hand, it is unthinkable to deny interest in professional benefits, acquired by the practice of volunteering. And which are fundamental, from the perspective of some individuals for entering the labor market. With about 20.5% of respondents answering in the affirmative to the question: "The practice of volunteering can bring me benefits at a professional level, namely favoring my entry into the place where I intend to work". As the group predicted the career parameter, according to the characteristics mentioned in the phase corresponding to the data collection methodology, it has a significant weight in the population's decision.

We also address the barriers that lead individuals to give up or not to start the activity. In the first question of this group, respondents revealed that more than 50% would still practice volunteering if "They knew that the experience of volunteering would make a difference in people's lives or be significant"; "Find an organization, in which they really believed, in their philosophy and mission"; "If the institutions were more assertive in communication"; "If they knew what skills were needed to do a good job" and "If they had more information about the opportunities volunteering ". Table 4 shows the variables that we consider valid for the analysis of the questionnaire related to formal volunteering.

Table 4: Valid Variables - Formal Volunteering.

"Do you currently practice voluntary actions?"
"How long did your activity as a volunteer last?"
"In how many institutions do you have / have you volunteered?"
"In which areas do you volunteer?"
"According to the following classification, mention the institution, for which you provided / provides services"
"Mention the tasks / functions that you perform / performed according to the following classification"
"I started my activity as a volunteer to be part of a group"
"The practice of volunteering can provide me with benefits at a professional level, namely favoring my entry into the place where I intend to work"
"My friends also practice volunteering"
"I care about those who are less fortunate than me"
"Volunteer actions make me feel important"
"I am concerned about the group, to which my work is currently directed, as a volunteer"
"I volunteer as I feel it is my mission"
"Volunteering allows me to learn more about the cause, for which I am working"
"Volunteering makes me enrich my knowledge, as it allows me to discover new "paths" through direct experience"
"Volunteering will help me to be successful in the profession I choose"
"Volunteering creates a better society"
"Knowing that volunteering experience would make a difference in people's lives or be meaningful"
"I wasn't so busy with my family and other obligations"
"Be assertive in the way they communicate the tasks that need to be performed"
"Know that I have the necessary skills to do a good job"
"Had more information about volunteering opportunities"
"Receive some kind of benefit, for example, meals or fuel allowance, in exchange for the service provided"

On the other hand, it should be noted that the validity and reliability were also tested for each of the questionnaires carried out. These issues are very important in any measuring instrument. Using again the statistical analysis of the SPSS, we were able to infer that for the analysis of the questionnaire of formal nature, we obtained good measures of reliability, since the Cronbach's Alpha obtained is 0.995, that is to say higher than 0.6. In addition, the correlations between the various variables are well above 0.3.

And so, it is possible to understand the high level of reliability of the questionnaire, through the table "Item - Total Statistics", obtained in SPSS, in which for all that are being analyzed the Cronbach's Alpha is equal to the original. This means that it does not make sense to eliminate any variable, because, according to the respondents' answers, these variables make sense associated with the same theme. The same goes for the questionnaire corresponding to informal volunteering, since Cronbach's Alpha is 0.984, that is, again above 0.6. The correlations between the various variables continue to be greater than 0.3. The resulting value from the "Item -Total Statistics" table confirms a value of Cronbach's Alpha equal to and lower than the original. Factor that allows inferring the high reliability index, in the two questionnaires analyzed.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In fact, it was possible to show through the results obtained that the younger age groups had a more superficial and fleeting contact with the practice of volunteering, compared to the older age groups. Since their main sources of influence were the context in which they were inserted and the nucleus of people with whom they lived, it is possible to see the great influence that these dynamics exhibited, particularly in the younger group. On the contrary, it was evident in the members that, currently, they are in contact with voluntary projects, an inner predisposition, a feeling that individuality itself has been building and that we consider to be one of the key points for the permanence of these employees at the service of their respective institutions. In general, voluntary actions were valued after their experimentation, with a considerably positive balance in all the analyzed experiences. Interestingly, the communication plans were mostly identified as one of the main gaps present in the institutions due to the lack of assertiveness presented. In general, the main appeal focuses on the use, by companies, of digital and traditional media as a way of raising public awareness of the importance that volunteering constitutes in society.

It is possible to consider the devaluation of its practice, the main "failure", which makes it impossible for the action itself to take on the market and compete with other areas. The role of organizations and their importance in promoting solidarity projects was highlighted by all respondents. And one of the main suggestions and perhaps the most useful would be a large-scale bet at national level, which would awaken the critical spirit of the population for importance of developing these initiatives.

Thus, through the data collected, it is possible to verify that the motivations that induce individuals to practice actions of a solidarity character are related to personal benefit and the intrinsic feeling of helping others. It was clear from the results obtained that volunteering is an important instrument for personal and professional differentiation. The activity promotes curricular enhancement and the meeting of contacts that may be useful in the future. It also allows for new experiences. In addition, it guides people in life, giving volunteers a new look at the challenges and vicissitudes of everyday life. Activity is an important pole of personal appreciation through the acquisition of soft skills.

With the data obtained, it is also possible to point out some barriers / limitations that prevent individuals from volunteering. The highlight goes to the communication problems of the institutions. These problems are related to organizations' internal and external communication. The group of individuals who are currently volunteers pointed out deficiencies in the recruitment process. While the group of former volunteers or those who were never involved in the practice of solidarity actions complained about the lack of information about volunteering opportunities. In our opinion, these are two views for the same problem: the external communication of the associations.

In the questionnaire referring to informal volunteering, it was found that the motivations that led the volunteers to practice informal volunteering actions are related to the action itself and to the solidarity intentions of the same. On the other hand, the limitations found were related to situations of a personal nature: incompatibility of schedules and time with the family. It should be noted that in the formal questionnaire, the reason "family" was not considered an impediment.

We can consider that the primary objective of this investigation was fulfilled, since we were able to obtain satisfactory answers to the proposed research questions. One of the major limitations of the study was related to the insufficient responses we obtained to one of the hypotheses formulated in the intermediate phase. And whose purpose was to understand whether the youth's propensity for volunteering is greater in institutions, whose recognition is high. We decided to ask the question, due to the contact we had with people who practiced volunteering, the feeling they gave us was that their involvement in solidarity projects came a lot from the benefit they obtained at the curricular level. Especially by young people who wanted to join other companies that have nothing to do with the

business. In fact, through the interviews, the data we collect confirms our suspicions. Of the nine respondents only 4 maintain contact with projects, with the majority of young people stressed that their participation was in fact influenced by the added value obtained. And after this confirmation, it was intended to understand whether the renowned institutions in Portugal receive many applications, mainly from young people. And if that happened, to understand why this age group developed this stereotype. Thus, we leave these questions as a suggestion, as good starting points for future investigations.

The disparity between the number of responses to the questionnaires necessary to be able to have a significant sample and the number of responses obtained is also pointed out as one of the main gaps. To have a representative sample, we should have obtained 2391 responses in the questionnaire regarding formal volunteering and 2359 responses to the questionnaire regarding informal volunteering. Unfortunately, we only collected 97 responses in the formal volunteering questionnaire and 64 in the informal volunteering questionnaire. Naturally, the current Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation, given that all questionnaires were disseminated online, without the possibility of going personally to some places that could have been useful in obtaining more answers. There are still some constraints from a methodological and ethical point of view: the impossibility of internet access by some of the volunteers who intend to inquire, lack of support / clarification of doubts when filling out the questionnaire, falsification of information, no guarantee of that the answer is given by a single respondent and less concentration during filling.

We closed this project in the certainty that a long way will have to be taken, so that volunteering and its recognition are notorious, not only at national level, but also worldwide. Who knows, soon, the importance and impact that this practice has already produced in meeting social demands will be realized. It is important to remember that we all need to be helped and this is only possible if this philosophy of life is rooted in everyone. *Those who do not live to serve are not fit to live.*

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