

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES' ROLE IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A GRADUATE

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Abstract

Due to globalization, the communication, culture-differences and teamwork became some of the most debated problems. In this context, many new opportunities can be used to solve them. Therefore, the offer of the workforce market is growing continuously, the candidates having to identify new methods for differentiating themselves from the competition. The extracurricular activities have the potential to be an efficient opportunity to gain abilities that may be useful for the professional life. The way the youngsters can improve their communication, time-management skills and their technical knowledge, by participating in different types of projects, mobilities and internships is not an unknown topic. The extent in which graduates consider that the extracurricular activities can contribute to their professional development was analyzed in this paper. Also, the article presents the opinion of several Human Resources specialists regarding the subject in question.

Keywords: Extracurricular activities, Development, Volunteering, Graduates, Recruitment, Employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper seeks to analyze the role of extracurricular activities regarding the professional development of graduates. The aim of this article is to establish the impact of such activities developed during the academic studies on the recruitment and selection process.

The direction of research consisted in determining the extent in which the involvement of students in various activities such as projects organized by different non-profit organizations, in volunteering, competitions, work programs and studies abroad can influence the recruitment process for a person who does not have work-related experience, just extracurricular experience.

The present paper is structured on three chapters. In the first one, theoretical aspects will be approached, regarding the way in which a young person's abilities could be influenced by the involvement in extracurricular activities. At the same time, this section will include statistical data on employment. The second chapter is dedicated to describing the main student organizations from Bucharest University of Economic Studies and the main projects where young people can get involved during their studies. Here, the opportunities offered to students for developing their personal skills will be analyzed, as well as, the potential major impact on their professional abilities. The last chapter is about researching the role of these activities regarding the youth development. This part will offer the answers to the two questionnaires applied to employers and students and graduates in question.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within this chapter, several relevant papers will be analyzed, concerning the benefits of involvement in extracurricular activities. At the same time, statistical data on employment in Europe and Romania will be provided, as an integration of the topic into the big picture.

2.1. Theoretical aspects

By definition, volunteering is a voluntary activity carried out by an individual without waiting for a reward. Volunteering inspires values and habits, and it is important for young people for understanding the need to carry out such activities, beneficial for their personal and professional development (Capilnean, 2011). Volunteering is defined also as any activity in which personal time is provided free of charge for helping another person, group or cause (Bode, 2017) and it is part of a wider action of civic help. Volunteering involves offering free of charge services to those who do not have personal obligations to do so (Abdelkader, 2017). Face-to-face communication is an important factor for influencing long-term volunteering (Jantzi et al., 2017). Volunteers are the main pillars of human development (Shentu et al., 2012).

In addition to volunteering, which is very present in media these days, the young generations have the chance to develop their skills by engaging in cultural, social, competitions and experience exchanges, all shaping the young students of the present and the future employees of tomorrow.

There are many approaches within the management literature that discuss the opportunities and challenges for the development of students, the professional competence chain, as well as the strategies, tactics and even models for developing students' skills (Corbos, 2005, 2011; Plumb and Zamfir, 2011; Zamfir et al., 2009; Zamfir, 2010, 2011, 2013).

The present paper aims to highlight the importance of these extracurricular activities for the harmonious development of young people, having as strategic goal the integration into the business environment. For achieving the proposed goal, it is considered appropriate the description of benefits offered by these activities, as well as the description of the skills that can be acquired through active involvement.

Volunteering is an activity carried out by people interested in evolution, helping, evolving, and helping to create a better world. Through this mutual activity, teamwork, friendship and altruism are stimulated. Over time, volunteering has evolved and represents more than helping others today, becoming an opportunity for personal development, an easy way for shaping the formation of responsible adults as examples for the society. Volunteering provides a stimulating framework for evolution, a friendly setting in which the young people develop through training programs alongside with the communication trainers. "The more a young person spends in a volunteer organization, the more likely he will crystallize his healthy values and build on a skeleton sustained by the majority of the group members" (Capilnean, 2011).

It is probably already well known that volunteering represents a way for acknowledging a field that presents interest for a person. Thus, the young people at the beginning of the road, who do not know the challenges and benefits of the job, can find out what suits them (Klein, 2012).

In 2010, Vossenstein stated that participation in extracurricular activities is a long-term investment for careers. Students motivated by these actions are aware of the opportunity of the various international mobility programs. Participation in such activities also has a positive impact on the achievement of academic, cultural, social and linguistic goals (Bótas and Huisman, 2013).

In an article published by Bryla in 2015, the Polish Minister of Science's opinion on student participation in Erasmus mobilities is presented. He states that studying at another university in a different country allows the participant to overcome complexes, to gain more confidence in himself and to become aware of his own values. The more students are finding their principles and skills, the more their impact will be

found on the country's economy. The General Director of the Education and Culture Directorate of the European Commission also stated that scientific studies have shown that those students participating in international mobilities after completing their studies find a good job faster by earning higher than the colleagues who did not engage in any type of extracurricular activity (Bryla, 2015).

21st century companies are increasingly aware of the importance of the personnel, the persons who represent the company in front of the customers. Thus, nowadays the focus of companies falls on looking for the right people to carry out the job-related activities. "People are the most important category of assets that an enterprise can use" (Chaşovschi and Albu). No organization can exist without human resources.

People are the most important resource that an entrepreneur can have, all the success coming from the art in which they demonstrate it when it comes to motivating employees to work in a loyal way. "The human resources department is the structure of the organization empowered to use all other resources available to the organization, in order to achieve strategic and immediate objectives" (Stanciu and Ionescu, 2003). In other words, the human resources department is the basic link of a successful company. As long as the staff in this department is prepared, the better the company will work.

Everyone is very well aware of the fact that recruitment is made at this department, therefore it can be said that the company's fate could be in their hands. Taking into consideration that the personnel who will occupy the positions of the human resources department are only specialists (lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, organizational management specialists), they will be able to motivate the staff, to promote the abilities and to set the optimal salary for each employee, depending on the skills and the achievement of the tasks. At the same time, they will provide the best working conditions for the employees.

Therefore, it can be appreciated that employers should be directly interested in extracurricular activities carried out by young students, graduates, who can become future employees of the companies they lead. But the extent in which they appreciate the activities in which young people are involved will be found out after this research. In the following section, the main opportunities for developing of young people will be described.

2.2. Statistical data concerning the employment

In 2015, the European Commission has conducted a Eurostat study on employment. An analysis based on important socio-economic dimensions has been drawn up: employment data is illustrating significant differences depending on gender, age and level of education achieved. There are also considerable differences between EU Member States in the labor market.

In 2009-2014 (the latest available data), there were significant differences in performance in each labor market. Although the overall employment rate for the European Union declined in 2014 compared to the initial level, 11 EU Member States reported an increase in the corresponding rates. The highest increases were registered in Malta and Hungary. Instead, the employment rate has fallen in Greece. In Romania in 2014, the employment rate of the persons having between 15-65 years old was 61%, increasing compared to previous years. While 68.7% of men in this category were employed, the percentage of women was lower, 53.3%.

Employment rates are lower among women and older workers. A long-term comparison shows that while the male employment rate declined in 2014, there was a significant increase in the percentage of women employed.

The employment rates vary significantly depending on the level of education: In 2014, the employment ratio of persons who graduated from a university at the level of the European Union was 83.7%, much higher than the rate of persons who have graduated at most a primary or lower secondary education institution (52.6%). The occupancy rate of persons with a high school or postgraduate level was 73.4%. The most pronounced declines in employment rates since the beginning of the financial and economic crisis have been recorded for persons who have graduated a primary or lower secondary education institution and the lowest decreases have been registered for those who have graduated a university.

According to a press release of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS, 2014-2015), the unemployment rate in Romania was 6.8% in 2014. Our country had one of the lowest rates at European level. The highest level of employment was registered among graduates of higher education (82.5%). As the level of education decreases, the level of occupancy decreases. The highest level of the unemployment rate was among the recently graduates. 23% of them have not found a job after completing their studies.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

In this section, the description of the student organizations within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies was performed. Also, the programs that allow the journey of young people professional and personal skills' development were detailed.

3.1. The NGOs for students within The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, several NGOs for students are working for involving students in programs designed for developing them. In addition to the benefits provided for the members of organizations, they also organize projects on various areas of interest.

1. **ASER** (Romanian Economists' Students Association) is a student organization, founded in 1998 by the initiative of the students from the Faculty of International Business and Economics (REI), today joining together all the economists' students, no matter the university. In 2013, ASER received *The High Patronage of His Royal Highness, Prince Radu of Romania* award, becoming the first student organization having this distinction.

The values that ASER promotes among young people willing to develop are: dedication, self-improvement, team spirit, enthusiasm and responsibility. The main projects developed by ASER will be described below.

Economist Student Guide is a project which elaborates a magazine for the "freshmen" students, having information about the rooms, final papers, CV, events and career opportunities.

Akademiks has as a goal the career counseling for students. The project offers them the opportunity of developing both, personally and professionally, for a successful integration within the Romanian business environment.

Bank to Basics is a project dedicated to the students who are having a passion for the banking field.

Dream Big is the project which joins together the interactive workshops, the successful business people networking and the interaction with students, who are sharing the same values.

Ingenius is a project dedicated to advertising lovers. If a student is willing to find out how a customer brief goes, then Ingenius is probably one of the best solution to do that.

Bloggle aims to develop the students' abilities in learning how to build their personal brand in the online environment.

In addition to all these projects, ASER also carries out campaigns to help students in the most stressful periods of the study years by offering creative stories about students' habits. At the end of the session, the luckiest students, but also the ones with the best results are rewarded by ASER.

The organization is divided into several departments (Logistics & Finance, Human Resources, Marketing, Sales, Organizational Development, Strategic Development). Hence, the students involved can discover the field in which they would like to become a member, the departments being similar to those of the big companies.

2. ASCIG – Accounting and Information Systems Students' Association was founded in 2002, aiming for the professional and personal development of the students. Values of ASCIG are: human potential, devotion, passion, responsibility, development. The main projects developed by ASCIG will be described below.

Practical Accounting Days is facilitating the students' access to the business environment by providing them the opportunity of interacting with specialists from companies within the accounting, audit and taxation fields, by organizing a series of workshops

Oratorica is a project that aims for developing the students' public speaking ability. By joining this project, students have the possibility to find out important aspects from trainers from the communication fields.

Color offers the students the opportunity of career counseling by learning important concepts from the daily activities, such as establishing personal milestones, efficient team work and so on.

Economic Summer College is a project dedicated to the future students, meant to help them in choosing the university they want to follow, by simulating the authentic student life.

3. BOS-Business Organization for Students is a student organization, having 15 years of experience, focusing on facilitating the student-employer interaction. BOS organizes student projects on annual basis.

Pround is a project that updates students with the latest trends in Marketing and Advertising.

1stEP is a project for the future entrepreneurs. It aims for convincing students that the success in business is not impossible and that they can overcome any obstacles with passion and determination.

IT is Business is combining important topics, such as entrepreneurship and IT, facilitating young people's access to relevant and useful information.

4. **VIP** (Volunteers for Ideas and Projects) is another student organization that currently has two subsidiaries: in Bucharest and in Cluj. The values that VIP is promoting for its members are: team spirit, initiative, professionalism, ethics and leadership. Volunteers for Ideas and Projects also carry out four projects.

Business Club is the project that brings together young enthusiastic entrepreneurs and it is engaging them in creating programs for changing the business environment from Romania in a positive way.

Econosofia offers to the students who have a passion for economy the opportunity to learn and develop, alongside people having the same interests, by interacting with personalities in the field.

International Affairs aims at developing young people who are passionate about international relations, globalization and diplomacy.

Leadership Development is a project for young people interested in developing leadership skills and understanding the organizational environment.

5. **AIESEC** (International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences) is a non-profit global organization led by students and recent graduates of higher education institutions that aims to develop young people by offering international opportunities for their development (internships and international volunteering). This association operates internationally, and in Romania it has offices in the main university centers.

6. **AEGEE Bucharest** (Association of Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe) was founded in 1997 and is made up of students from various universities in Bucharest. The association aims to encourage the dissemination of information, the research activity of students as well as the spirit of initiative. "The objectives and means of achieving this goal are:

- exchange of experience and knowledge among students, through the organization of conferences, seminars, summer schools and debates with specialists from Romania and from abroad;
- stimulating the students' initiatives by promoting personal experiences;
- facilitating the access to the information needed concerning opportunities for students, including career counseling;
- providing an information and skills' platform in the political, social and economic fields, by developing programs, projects and clubs, which to facilitate the adaptation of young people to the European context. (Association des Etats Généraux et Etudiants de l'Europe).

7. **ECOTUR** is a "Tourism and Ecology Club" that brings together ecological enthusiasts and persons eager to draw an alarm signal on the environmental protection.

8. **Students' Syndicate from Cybernetics, Statistics and Economic Informatics** (SiSC) is the first student organization from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, founded in 1996, having the purpose of keeping the students connected to the university life.

Through the projects initiated, SiSC encourages the active participation of students in the academic life by offering learning opportunities (ITFest, Spring it) and cultural and educational activities (Serile Teatrului Studentesc, Academia SpEranței, Tineri de Succes, Gala Profesorului Bologna).

9. **The Bucharest University of Economic Studies Students' Union (USASE)** is the organization that defends the interests of the students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Through its structure, it provides both development opportunities through project organization and representation at all decision-making levels in this university.

The management of the organization is provided through the Permanent Bureau, consisting of seven members: a president, four vice-presidents and two secretaries. It is composed from four departments, each being led by a vice-president: the Professional Department, Economists' Students House, the Economics and Finance Department and the Social Department. Alongside the four departments, the Secretariat is also functioning. This main direction has the following Departments: IT, Marketing, HR and Relationship with Other Associations.

USASE has 6237 registered members, 1 student association (ASEAM) and 234 active volunteers. The representatives of the students are also included (the heads of the series) who are part of the decision-making structures of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Faculty Councils and the Students' Senate).

For the professional and personal development of students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, USASE has created up to 65 projects so far, including: YES - Youth Entrepreneurship School, Speak Your Mind, ASE Job and Internship Fair, Share Smiles - Illuminate Souls, Blood Donation events or Film Sessions. Also, the Conference Department has organized over the years numerous events where professionals from various fields have been invited to speak. The **values** of the organization are: creativity, devotion, enthusiasm, integrity, passion, communication, solidarity and initiative.

USASE also includes representatives from the **Students' Senate**. This entity is made up of about 25 people, usually 2 students per faculty.

Because the Bucharest University of Economic Studies is one of the founding members of the organization, it is actively involved in the development of **social processes**. Members of the faculty councils may be part of: the accommodation commission, the admissions committee, the scholarship committee, the commission for awarding seats to the student camps.

3.2. Work and Travel Program

Work and Travel is a program launched in the 1960s by the US State Department for students from all around the world who want to visit United States during the summer vacation. This program offers, in addition to the opportunity to be a tourist on the American continent, the possibility of working for a period of four months, the students being able to obtain the necessary funds to visit the most important tourist attractions in the US.

There are many agencies that intermediate student enrollment in the Work and Travel program. They are offering both mobility in the United States and in Europe. The participants in this project interact with locals and students coming from all around the world. The aim of this program is to facilitate intercultural exchanges and to develop certain skills, such as cultural tolerance, combating racism, discovery of new cultures, improving the English language level, etc.

The conditions a potential participant has to meet in order to participate in this program are as it follows: to be a bachelor, master or Ph. D student, having no more than 30 years, regardless of whether the university he or she is following is public or private. The student must have high grades in exams and medium English knowledge. No matter the nationality, if the candidate is a student and he or she has the residency in Romania, he or she can join this program through the agencies of this country.

In the case of Work and Travel USA, after receiving the confirmation of participation (payment of the application fee) and after signing the employment contract (following a Skype interview or a face to face one with the employer), the documents are sent to the United States Embassy in Romania. The student must obtain a visa (type J1) after an interview with a consul. It consists in several questions about the summer plans the student is about to spend in the US and the future plans when returning in Romania. In our country, interviews for this type of visa begin in the second week of March and they end in the late June (Office for Education and Cultural Affairs of the US State Department, 2016).

3.3. Erasmus+ Program

Launched in 1987, **Erasmus** is the most important learning and training program in the European Union. Its actions are addressed to both, students who wish to study and get involved in internship programs

within the European space, as well as to teachers and other categories of university staff or other youth workers. The program supports higher education institutions from the EU countries that want to cooperate through intensive programs, academic networks and multilateral projects and creating links with the business environment. The Erasmus+ program is running from 2014 to 2020. The program continues the activities of the previous program (Lifelong Learning, which took place from 2007 to 2013) and integrates numerous distinct programs and actions from the past: Gruntvig, Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Alfa, Edulink, Jean Monnet, and sports programs (Department of International Relations of Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 2016).

The Erasmus+ program aims to contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, education and training. It seeks to promote the sustainable development of higher education partners and to contribute to the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.

According to the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP), the objectives of the Erasmus+ program are:

- Reducing unemployment, especially among young people;
- Promoting adult education, especially regarding the new skills and competencies required on the labor market;
- Encourage young people's participation in the European democratic life;
- Supporting innovation, cooperation and reform;
- Reducing school dropout;
- Promoting cooperation and mobility within EU partner countries.

The number of mobilities increased since the development of Bologna university system. From the start of the program in 1987, until the academic year 2012-2013, over 3 million students took part in the Erasmus program activities. Until that moment, more than 4,000 university education institutions from 34 countries have been part of the program.

At the international level, this program is coordinated by the Executive Commission for Culture, Education and Audiovisual of the European Commission. At national level, the activity is supervised by the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP).

In 2013-2014, there were 5.7 million Europeans without jobs. At the same time, only one third of employers managed to find potential employees with the right skills to carry out an effective work within the company. The Erasmus program has helped in strengthening the labor market relations, employability and theoretical knowledge. The aim of this program is to improve the skills needed in the labor market, with the aim of reducing the youth unemployment (European Commission, 2014).

For the 2014-2020 period, the Erasmus program received funds of 14.7 million Euro. The objective is to facilitate mobilities for 4 million people from 125,000 institutions. Of these funds, 63% went to training, volunteering and teaching, scholarships, internships, and intercultural youth exchanges. 28% of the funds are allocated for the cooperation on innovation and exchange of good practices, while 4.2% of the sum is provided for structural policies. Under the Erasmus+ Program, a student can benefit from a maximum of 12 months of mobility for studies and / or placement during a study cycle (bachelor, masters, Ph. D), regardless of the form of mobility (with or without a grant).

For the period 2014-2020, the Erasmus+ program aims for achieving the following objectives:

- the participation of 2,000,000 students in studies or placement mobilities abroad;
- involving 650,000 pupils from vocational schools in internships abroad;
- 200,000 master students who to benefit from the new study loan program;
- 25,000 scholarships for the master students;
- 500,000 young people participating in volunteering and youth exchanges;
- 800,000 teachers, trainers and workers with young participants engaged in teaching programs or training abroad;
- 25.000 strategic partnerships involving 125,000 institutions and organizations in the implementation of projects for experience exchange;
- over 200,000 teachers participating in projects involving over 100,000 schools.

According to studies carried out by the European Commission, 10% of Erasmus participants have started their own businesses. One third of the participants received offers to stay in the companies where they have been in an internship or where they worked for. 40% of these students have changed their country of residence. The average age of people participating in this type of activity is 23.9 years (Department for International Relations of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 2016).

All the student organizations, as well as the opportunities to discover the academic and international business environment are a real bridge between students and the business environment. The

involvement of young people in such projects facilitate their professional development, bringing them one step ahead of others in the moment of hiring.

4. RESEARCH ON THE ACTIVITIES THAT FACILITATE THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GRADUATES

This chapter includes aspects regarding the role of extracurricular activities in the professional development of graduates. The research methodology will be presented and at the same time, the data obtained will be analyzed and interpreted.

4.1. Methodology

The aim of the research is to quantify the extent in which the extracurricular activities are influencing the improvement of students and graduates' skills. Another objective is represented by the identification of the degree of interest awarded by employers regarding the involvement of young people in such activities.

The overall goal of the research is to determine the extent in which the activities of young people have an impact on their professional development. Other research objectives are described in Figure 1.

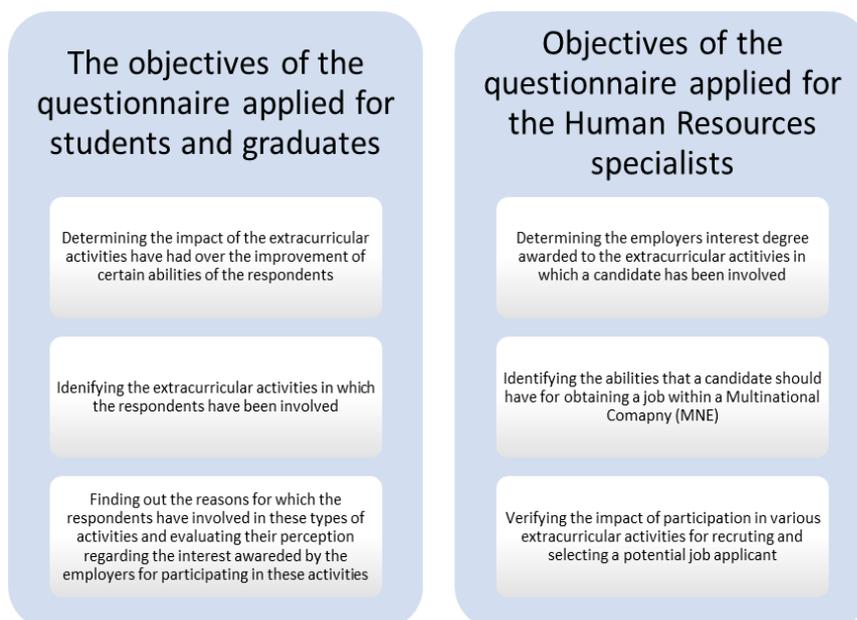


FIGURE 1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
Source: Figure realized by the authors

For carrying out the research, a quantitative analysis was used. This was performed in the online environment. Respondents were asked, both personally and through social media instruments, to participate in the survey. The method used for carrying out the quantitative research was done by means of survey. This is an effective method of producing statistical analysis, allowing data to be obtained from the entire target group.

The tool used was the questionnaire. In order for the results to be as suggestive as possible, two questionnaires were submitted for completion. One was addressed to people working in the Human Resources department of several multinational companies (MNEs) based in Bucharest. The second questionnaire addressed the students and graduates.

The questionnaire dedicated to students and graduates aimed for determining their views on how engaging in such activities contributed to their professional training and in finding a job tailored to personal needs. It was applied to a sample of 75 people. They were invited to participate in the poll through social media instruments, having the research announcement displayed on various groups where the target group was relevant (faculty groups, student associations, and other NGOs).

The questionnaire dedicated to employers, was applied to a sample of 22 people and aimed for determining the perceived importance related to extracurricular activities, carried out by young people during their studies. The respondents were composed by people working in Human Resources departments within MNEs from diverse fields of activity. Also, several people working in the same field for a recruitment campaign were invited to participate at the survey. The invitation to participate in the survey was made both at the ASE Job & Internship Fair Job Fair, held in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies – ASE, and in the online environment via e-mails and LinkedIn profiles. Also, other HR people have been invited, with whom the researchers of this research have had contact during their period of studies.

For completing the questionnaires, the survey participants accessed a link which was directed to a Google form, both compatible with desktops and smartphones. Both questionnaires had, in the introductory part, a message about the purpose of research and the confidentiality of the data: "*This questionnaire will be used to investigate the influence of extracurricular activities of the graduates and students during their studies over the recruitment and selection process. The purpose of this research is to participate in the Students Scientific Session of the Faculty of Business and Tourism within Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The answers are anonymous. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Response time: 5-7 minutes.*"

The questionnaires were composed by sixteen, respectively thirteen questions with a mandatory response. The only optional answer question was an open one in which students and graduates can choose to talk about the extra-curricular activity that influenced the most their way of thinking and which they felt that had the greatest impact on their development. The questionnaires for students and graduates were designed in the following way: ten multiple choice questions, from which there should have been selected one answer, two multiple choice questions from which there should have been selected two or more possible answers, one under the form of a matrix and two open questions. In the case of the questionnaire addressed to employers, there were used eight multiple choices questions, from which there should have been selected one answer, two multiple choice questions, from which there should have been selected two or more possible answers, one under the form of a matrix and two open questions. Also, according to the position in the questionnaire, their structure contains introductory questions (simple, closed-ended, allowing people to respond without great effort), transition ones (which are meant to mark the transition to a new category of questions), content and identification ones (to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents).

No specific method (such as the funnel technique) has been used since it was not advisable to ask the questions in an order that could be anticipated by the respondent for not guiding him or her to a response that might not represent their real opinion. However, a certain logic was applied regarding the order of the questions, depending on their degree of difficulty. The demographic and identification responses were eventually placed on both questionnaires to mark the conclusion of the survey.

The questionnaire design was simple, standard, specific to those made through Google Forms. Graphics (photos) were used only for decorating the header. The phrasing of the questions was simple, not existing difficulties in understanding the language. The topics were not ones which to create difficulties for the respondents. No complex responses were requested, as it was aimed the identification of the respondents' perceptions on the activities carried out.

Both questionnaires were divided into two sections. In the questionnaire addressed to graduates and students, the first section contained three questions: one related to the importance of the extracurricular activities over one person's development, a second one on the impact of these activities in the CV, and a third one on the involvement of respondents in such activities. If they have not participated in extracurricular activities during their studies, the survey ended. In the questionnaire addressed to employers, the first section contained only one question about the perception of importance for

extracurricular activities. If respondents were not interested in involving candidates in such activities, the survey ended.

The participants of the analysis are represented by people working in the human resources department and by students or graduates. The sample is randomly selected, depending on the availability and willingness for participating to the survey.

This research facilitated therefore the identification of the impact of extracurricular activities on the graduates' development, correlating the perceptions of the participants in these actions with those of the employers.

4.2. Analysis and interpretation of data

Within this subchapter, the results obtained by applying two questionnaires (one on students and graduates and the other on people working in Human Resources) will be analyzed. Using these data, pivot tables will be created for correlating the variables within the same questionnaire.

It should be noted that for the two questionnaires a pre-test was carried out to ascertain whether the questions are conclusive and to find out what were the opinions of the data subjects. For the employers' questionnaire, pre-testing was done with the help of a human resource specialist from a MNE. Following this pre-test, improvements were made to the questionnaire, with the aim of becoming more explicit and more conclusive for the present research.

As far as the pre-test of the questionnaire addressed to students and graduates is concerned, it should be mentioned that it was analyzed after applying it to a current student and to a graduate. The questionnaire was modified to make it simpler by synthesizing the response alternatives.

4.2.1. Analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire

The questionnaire applied to students and graduates received 75 answers. 97.7% of them considering the extracurricular activities as important for the development of a person's abilities. Only 2.3% do not agree with this idea.

Regarding their opinion about the analysis of a candidate's CV, 90.9% of respondents believe that, when employers analyze their CV, their attention tends to be focused on extracurricular activities, while 9.1% of them not sharing the same opinion.

62 respondents said they had taken part in extracurricular activities during their studies, and the remaining 13 people said they had not been involved in such actions.

So far, respondents have been involved in the following activities: volunteering in Romania (77.4%), competitions / Olympics (71%), participation in trainings and obtaining additional certifications (67.7%), Work and Travel or Erasmus + Internships (51.6%), Internships in Romania (51.6%), Youth Exchange (41.9%), Study visits (in universities or companies) (35.5%), sports competitions (19.4%), studies abroad (16.1%), European volunteering (EVS) (3.2%) and volunteering outside the European Union (3.2%).

Regarding the importance of extra-curricular activities for the development of a person, 71% of the respondents considered them to be "extremely important", while 25.8% chose "important" as being more relevant and 3.2% chose them to be "neither important, nor insignificant".

Regarding the main reason they chose for engaging in this type of activity, the respondents chose the following proportions: 48.4% wanted to acquire new knowledge, 25.8% were willing to know new people and cultures, 12.9% followed the quest of soft skills development, 6.5% were going for the need for appreciation, while 3.2% searched enrichment experience and the same extent is applied for other reasons.

Regarding the main skill that can be developed by participating in certain activities, the respondents chose:

- Volunteering – 64.52% communication and teamwork, 22.58% time-management, 12.9% explicit knowledge developing;
- Competitions/Olympics – 3.23% communication and teamwork, 32.26% time-management, 64.52% explicit knowledge developing;
- Intercultural projects – 74.19% communication and teamwork, 12.9% time-management, 12.9% explicit knowledge developing;
- Study visits – 12.9% communication and teamwork, 3.23% time-management, 83.87% explicit knowledge developing;
- Working abroad – 29.03% communication and teamwork, 38.71% time-management, 32.26% explicit knowledge developing;
- Internships – 9.68% communication and teamwork, 48.39% time-management, 41.94% explicit knowledge developing;
- Studies abroad – 12.9% communication and teamwork, 29.03% time-management, 58.06% explicit knowledge developing;
- Outstanding academic results – 3.22% communication and teamwork, 9.67% time-management, 87.1% explicit knowledge developing;

- Trainings and certifications – 19.35% communication and teamwork, 19.35% time-management, 61.3% explicit knowledge developing.

Therefore, volunteering and intercultural projects are the extracurricular activities that participants consider them having the greatest contribution to the development of communication skills. At best, time management contributes to jobs abroad and to internships. The most theoretical knowledge is accumulated through competitions / Olympics, study visits, outstanding academic results and trainings.

Asked about which of the extracurricular activities are considered to become an advantage for employment, 54.8% of the respondents have selected volunteering, the same preference being encountered also for internships. These activities are followed in preference by the additional training and certifications (51.6%), participation in intercultural projects and with the outstanding academic results with 45.2%. Next in line are coming the work experience abroad (through Work and Travel or Erasmus + programs) with 38.7%, 35.5% the participation in competitions / Olympics and the studies abroad with the same percentage. 90.3% of respondents argue that during an interview, employers wanted to discuss the extracurricular activities of the candidates. In contrast, 9.7% of them did not have such discussions.

There was an open, optional question about the extracurricular activity that had the greatest impact on the respondents. The answers can be seen in Appendix 1. It seems that for the students surveyed, the activity with the greatest impact is the one developed in the Erasmus+ program (studies and intercultural projects), followed by volunteering. The Work & Travel program is on the third place, and fourth place is occupied by the internship and internships.

54.8% of the survey participants are currently employed, while 45.2% are not. Out of the employed persons, 58.1% are working in the field where they were specialized, and 41.9% do not.

Respondents consisted in 77.4% females and 22.6% males. 61.3% of respondents are between 18 and 22 years old and 38.7% between 23 and 26 years old. People who attended the survey are currently living in Bucharest, Timisoara, Iasi, Chisinau, Târgoviște and in Cluj-Napoca. The relationship between the employers' interest in extracurricular activities and the persons currently employed is highlighted in Table 1.

From the respondents who received question interviews related to the extracurricular activities they have participated in (90.32% of all respondents), only 42.86% are working, while 57.14% are not employed. The reasons vary as it follows: either the candidates were not suitable for the job or there was no firm / employee compatibility, or the candidate considered that the company could not provide

them with sufficient opportunities for improving their skills. Only few were the people who were not asked in the interviews about their involvement in extracurricular activities (9.68%). 66.63% of these are employed and 33.37% are not.

TABLE 1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EMPLOYEES' INTEREST REGARDING THE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THE CURRENT EMPLOYED PERSONS

Are you presently employed?	Are questions related to extracurricular activities present at an interview?		Grand Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	38,71%	6,45%	45,16%
No	51,61%	3,23%	54,84%
Grand Total	90,32%	9,68%	100%

Source: table created by the authors

Table 2 highlights the relationship between the reason for involvement in extracurricular activities and their importance for the persons' development.

TABLE 2. RELATION BETWEEN THE REASON OF INVOLVING IN THE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE PERSON'S DEVELOPMENT

Main reason for involving the extracurricular activities	Importance of the extracurricular activities for the person's development			Grand Total
	Extremely important	Important	Neither important or unimportant	
Development of soft skills	9,68%	3,23%		12,90%
Knowing new persons and cultures	22,58%	3,23%		25,81%
Acquiring new knowledge	29,03%	16,13%	3,23%	48,39%
Adding CV experience		3,23%		3,23%
Need for appreciation	6,45%			6,45%
Grand Total	70,97%	25,81%	3,23%	100%

Source: table created by the authors

Of the persons who have been involved in extracurricular activities to develop their soft skills, 75% consider them to be extremely important for a person's development, and 25% think they are important. The persons involved from the desire to know new people and cultures, 87.5% consider them extremely important and 12.5% important. For those who participated with the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, 60% consider them extremely important, 33.33% important and 6.67% neither important nor important. Hence, most of these participants believe that participation in such actions was useful, while almost 7% do not think they were influenced in any way. All the persons who aimed getting involved in extracurricular activities for enriching their CVs considered these activities as being important. Several

respondents have only been involved for the need of appreciation, and unanimously consider that this type of activity is extremely important.

4.2.2. Analysis and discussion of the questionnaire applied to the human resources specialists

After analyzing the 22 responses, it was found that those asked whether they thought extracurricular activities were important for the development of a person's abilities unanimously agreed. The same percentage of positive responses were also obtained for the question concerning the presence of extracurricular activities in a CV, which is drawing the attention of employers.

Asked about the importance of extra-curricular activities for a person's professional and personal development, 54.5% of the respondents consider them "extremely important", 36.4% as "important" and 9.1% "extremely unimportant".

Regarding the types of extracurricular activities that employers consider to be an advantage in the recruitment-selection process, 90.9% of the respondents selected volunteering as being the most important, followed by the internships and the work experience abroad with 86.4%, participation in intercultural projects, (through work and travel programs or Erasmus +) with 77.3%, studies abroad, trainings and additional certifications with 59.1%, study visits (54.5%) and participation at various competitions/Olympics (40.9%).

- Volunteering – 81.81% communication and teamwork, 18.18% time-management, 0% explicit knowledge developing;
- Competitions/ Olympics – 0% communication and teamwork, 22.73% time-management, 77.27% explicit knowledge developing;
- Intercultural projects – 81.82% communication and teamwork, 18.18% time-management, 0% explicit knowledge developing;
- Study Visits – 36.36% communication and teamwork, 18.18% time-management, 45.45% explicit knowledge developing;
- Abroad jobs – 40.91% communication and teamwork, 18.18% time-management, 45.45% explicit knowledge developing;
- Internships – 13.64% communication and teamwork, 59.09% time-management, 27.27% explicit knowledge developing;
- Studies abroad – 9.09% communication and teamwork, 13.64% time-management, 77.27% explicit knowledge developing;

- Outstanding academic results – 0% communication and teamwork, 18.18% time-management, 81.82% explicit knowledge developing;
- Trainings and certifications – 13.64% communication and teamwork, 9.09% time-management, 77.27% explicit knowledge developing.

Therefore, extracurricular activities in which the participants have the greatest contribution regarding the development of communication skills are volunteering and intercultural projects. The jobs abroad and internship programs contributed the most to development of time management skill. The most explicit knowledge is gained through competitions / Olympics, studies abroad, outstanding college results and training.

After a first interview, the reasons why people working in the HR choose to continue the candidate's recruitment process are: matching the personality of the person with the company's management style (72.7%), matching the job requirements (63.6%), extracurricular experience (18.2%) and knowledge in the field (27.3%). As a result, employers are attracted by the extracurricular activities that the candidate has in his CV, which facilitate them to schedule an interview. However, at the second meeting, candidates have to prove the skills they have learned from participating in these extracurricular activities, as passing an interview and continuing with the selection process is done by taking into account their personality, skills and knowledge.

Being asked about the main reasons why young people are involved in extracurricular activities, respondents provided the following opinions: 34.4% of them are searching to enrich their CV experience, 22.7% of them are developing soft skills, 18.2% of them are willing to know new people and cultures, the same extent being prone in acquiring new knowledge, while 4.5% of them have the need for appreciation and recognition.

From the pool of respondents, 86.4% participated in extracurricular activities during their studies, while 13.6% did not.

Being asked about the main focus elements when analyzing a CV of recent graduate, the participants answered: the field in which they graduated, the extracurricular activities, the projects involving the technologies that the job requires, previous experience, average score of the last year of study, internships and foreign languages, projects, trainings, openness for learning and willingness to engage in the desired field, determination to continually learn something new within the range of the gained experience, participation to conferences / specialized courses in the desired field, consistency in building a career, the extra activities converging towards a specialization, volunteering, studies abroad,

Erasmus, Work & Travel, attention to details, format, originality in designing the CV. Extracurricular experience was one of the answers of 15 of the 22 respondents.

90.9% of the companies represented by respondents are developing programs for students and recent graduates, while 9.1% do not. Within these, the percentage of fresh graduates is: 0-25% (for 45.5%), 26-50% (13.6%), 51-75% (22.7%) and 76-100% (18.2%).

In Table 3 it is illustrated the relationship between the importance of extracurricular activities for the development of a person and the percentage of recent graduates employed in a company.

Among the people who have between 0% and 25% of people who have recently graduated, 80% consider extracurricular activities to be extremely important for a person's development and 20% important. Of those having between 26-50% young employees, 66.67% consider that these activities are extremely important and 33.33% are extremely unimportant. Employers in whose companies the recent graduates' employees have a proportion of 51 to 75%, believe that extracurricular activities are 40% extremely important and 60% important. In the case of companies with more than 76% of graduates in recent years, the representatives considered that these activities are either extremely insignificant (25%) or important (75%).

TABLE 3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSON AND THE PERCENTAGE OF RECENT GRADUATES EMPLOYED IN THE COMPANY

Percentage of recent graduates employed out of the total number of employees of the firm	The importance of the extracurricular activities in the development of a person			
	Extremely important	Extremely unimportant	Important	Grand Total
0-25%	36,36%		9,09%	45,45%
26-50%	9,09%	4,55%		13,64%
51-75%	9,09%		13,64%	22,73%
76-100%		4,55%	13,64%	18,18%
Grand Total	54,55%	9,09%	36,36%	100%

Source: table created by the authors

50% of respondents have experience in human resources from 1 to 3 years, 18.2% more than 5 years, 18.2% less than 1 year and 13.6% between 4 and 5 years. They come from MNEs from different fields (IT, retail, banking, call center, consultancy, telecommunications), as well as from companies with personnel recruitment.

The analysis of the common question of the two questionnaires "What do you think is the main skill that a graduate has acquired as a result of the following activities? / What do you think is the main skill that can be gained as a result of the following activities?" was done in the Table 4.

TABLE 4. DIFFERENCE IN PERCEPTION BETWEEN STUDENTS / GRADUATES AND EMPLOYERS

	Communication			Time-management			Theoretical knowledge		
	Studenti	Angajatori	Diferență	Studenti	Angajatori	Diferență	Studenti	Angajatori	Diferență
Volunteering	64.52%	81.81%	17.29%	22.58%	18.18%	-4.40%	12.90%	0%	-12.90%
Contests	3.23%	0%	-3.23%	32.26%	22.73%	-9.53%	64.52%	77.27%	12.75%
Intercultural projects	74.19%	81.82%	7.63%	12.90%	18.18%	5.28%	12.90%	0%	-12.90%
Study visits	12.90%	36.36%	23.46%	3.23%	18.18%	14.95%	83.87%	45.45%	-38.42%
Working abroad	29.03%	40.91%	11.88%	38.71%	18.18%	-20.53%	32.26%	45.45%	13.19%
Internships	9.68%	13.64%	3.96%	48.39%	59.09%	10.70%	41.94%	27.27%	-14.67%
Studying abroad	12.90%	9.09%	-3.81%	29.03%	13.64%	-15.39%	58.06%	77.27%	19.21%
Good grades	3.22%	0%	-3.22%	9.67%	18.18%	8.51%	87.10%	81.82%	-5.28%
Trainings	19.35%	13.64%	-5.71%	19.35%	9.09%	-10.26%	61.30%	77.27%	15.97%

Source: table created by the authors

As shown in the table above, the difference in perception between students/graduates and employers is in some cases significant.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the present research, it was found that the perception of employers in comparison with the students and graduates' one regarding the extracurricular activities is generally different. Thus, while half of students and graduates are eager to acquire new knowledge, employers believe that young people are involved in such activities to enrich their CV experience. Although young people believe that the most significant experience has been gained through the Erasmus + program, employers consider it to be a great advantage and a confirmation for involvement in volunteering and internships.

The difference of perception between the two sides was highlighted using the common question "What do you think is the main skill that a graduate has acquired as a result of the following activities? What do you think is the main skill that can be gained as a result of the following activities?" The greatest difference in perception was recorded in the theoretical knowledge gained from the study visits where 83.87% of the students considered that they had acquired theoretical knowledge from the study visits and only 45.45% of the employers agreed to this.

However, there are issues where the two sides have "reached" the mutual agreement. Students and graduates believe employers are keen to know more about extracurricular activities they have attended. This is also confirmed by employers, who unanimously state that they are attracted to this aspect when analyzing a CV.

Therefore, following the development of this paper, it should be noted that although employers and young people who are finding themselves at the beginning of a career may have different views on how the extracurricular activities influence personal and professional development, they are of great importance for their future. Surely, young people are gaining experience and skills through active involvement, and employers also benefiting by selecting competent people willing to learn from any opportunity.

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