

The social responsibility of student NGOs in Romania: overview and perspectives

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Abstract. The social responsibility of the non-governmental sector refers to the coherence between the NGO values and the activities carried out in order to satisfy the society needs. The entities of this sector are considered essential actors in the community while generating changes in the field they operate.

The current article provides information related to the social responsibility of the Romanian student NGOs. Based on a set of 21 student NGOs, the paper illustrates how these organizations fulfill the duty towards their human resources and the society as a whole.

Data collection method used in this paper included the questionnaire based-survey which was considered the most appropriate tool to carry out a research on the topic. The sample is composed of individuals activating in different student NGOs across the country. As regards their education, some of the respondents had completed either the *bachelor's* (first cycle), either the *master's* (second cycle) *levels while the others were still attending university courses*. The sample is quite young, aged between 19 and 30 years, because, generally, this is the average age of those activating in student NGOs. As regards the sampling, it was opted for the type of non-probabilistic sampling which involves conducting the research among the most available subjects.

The findings suggest that student NGOs are intensely involved in representing and promoting the interests of their members and volunteers, as well as of the student community. They are also concerned with societal issues, especially those related to environmental protection. As for the pandemic generated by Covid 19, it changed their way of operating because all their activities and projects continued to be carried out, but especially online.

This analysis helps better understand the student NGO responsibility towards their human resources as well as the society while providing a useful perspective of student organizations development and involvement in Romania.

Keywords: social vocation, responsibility, involvement.

1. Introduction

Several concepts are used in the international literature to define the organizations that are both non-governmental and non-commercial (Dekker, 2011; Păceșilă, 2020). These concepts arose from the cultural realities in which the above-mentioned entities had developed and operated: nonprofit sector or nonprofit organizations, social economy, third sector organizations; private voluntary organizations, associations, agencies, human development sector, civil society organizations or civil sector etc (Păceșilă, 2016).

However, the concept of "nongovernmental organization" was used for the first time in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter which was adopted in 1945 (Lewis, 2009) while their purpose was to provide consultancy services and support according to their field of activity. At first, the term NGO was used only when referring to social actors because of UN criteria. In the last four decades, especially since the 1980s, the term NGO has become widely known and generally used (Martens, 2002). Nowadays these organizations are considered private legal entities independent of public authorities which do not seek access to the political apparatus or to profit (Păceșilă, 2014).

Looking through the relevant literature, it can be seen that most papers address the concept of corporate social responsibility. In fact, this concept has a long tradition because it was introduced in the literature almost 70 years ago, by Howard Bowen who rhetorically asked what were the responsibilities of businessmen towards society (Carrol, 1999). However, the large number of scandals involving nongovernmental entities as well as the growing demands for evidence from their funders as regards the use of the funds received and the results obtained, highlighted the idea of social responsibility to NGOs (Gazzola et al., 2017). Moreover, according to some researchers, these organizations were often misperceived as inherently good or democratic (Uhlin, 2006; Argenti and Saghablyan, 2017).

The fact that they are considered well-intentioned and well-done organizations with a clear social vocation which can engage in actions with political impact and generate large-scale social change does not automatically include them in the category of responsible social agents (Vidal et al., 2005; Păceșilă and Colesca, 2020).

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Moreover, according to Gazzola et al. (2017), the starting point of their social responsibility consists in the coherence between the values underlying their emergence and which they promote, on the one hand, and the objectives achieved in their field of activity on the other hand.

2. Literature review

The concept of social responsibility of nongovernmental organizations has appeared quite recently in the literature, but in the last two decades there has been an increase in scientific studies on this topic. However, the number of academic articles is low compared to those dedicated to corporate social responsibility (Păceșilă and Colesca, 2020).

According to Dekker (2011), the social responsibility of NGOs should be seen from several perspectives, such as the decisions taken by the board, the way donors' financial resources are used, the compliance with legal regulations, or even the way of meeting the beneficiaries' needs or of affecting the stakeholders' interests. In the same line, Weidenbaum's (2009) states that a socially responsible NGO should strive to improve its own governance and promote transparent elections for its board members. Moreover, these organizations should focus on consulting members on key issues as well as on providing them with training courses and career development programs in order to reduce staff turnover. An important component of the social responsibility of NGOs is also transparency. In this regard, it is recommended that they provide complete public reports on the activities carried out as well as on the way of spending the donors' money, which are considered essential by the previously mentioned author.

One of the earliest and most extensive papers on the topic of social responsibility of NGOs, focusing on seven key components, is provided by Vidal et al. (2005). In his opinion, any socially responsible entity should pay attention first of all to the needs, motivations and aspirations of human resources, the essential assets of the organization supporting its mission and values. Regarding the latter, they represent another key component and therefore the organization should ensure their integration into its activities because the mission and values give meaning to its existence. Moreover, the organization should take into account the stakeholders interests because it does not operate in isolation but in partnership with various public or private sector organizations, as well as with beneficiaries or donors. It should also focus on social involvement in order to eliminate social threats as well as on environmental management to reduce its negative impact on the environment. Other key components are communication and transparency which have a great influence on the image and credibility of the NGOs in society.

Debates between proponents and opponents of the social responsibility of NGOs have resulted in the emergence of an important literature identifying the arguments supporting both positions. The proponents of the concept (Weidenbaum, 2009; Gálvez et al., 2012) considers that these organizations are not socially responsible since their establishment, and moreover, they often fail to prove their responsibility to the society members through the activities and projects implemented. Furthermore, the above-mentioned authors criticize the NGOs because they exert a constant pressure on companies and other entities in society claiming they do not behave like socially responsible actors while most of these organizations are not even able to ensure the transparency of the actions carried out or of the way they spent the donors' money.

At the opposite pole, according to the opponents of this concept (Ott, 2009; Łoś-Tomiak and Dalecka, 2013; Andreini et al., 2014; Lin-hi et al., 2015; Gazzola et al., 2017), these entities are set up to meet certain needs of the community as well as to improve the quality of citizens' life which makes useless any discussion about their social responsibility. Further arguments in supporting this statement are their intense involvement in philanthropic actions and in solving social, environmental or other problems as well as the use of revenues obtained from activities and projects or from different donors for their development and not for filling their members' pockets, as in the case of companies.

3. Research methodology

The study achieves its goal by using both primary and secondary data. In collecting the primary data, the questionnaire-based survey was used. The reasons for choosing this method were: limited time for collecting answers, limited resources for research, ease of data collection, multitude of information that could be obtained in a short time. The questionnaire was applied online through Facebook and WhatsApp. As regards the first platform, Facebook, the participants were sent the link of the questionnaire either privately, either as a message sent to the official page of the NGOs. As for WhatsApp, the link was sent to all member organizations of the Romanian Students' Union. In distributing the questionnaire, I was helped by students from the bachelor's and master's program who are members of the student NGOs within Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

In determining the sample size, the non-probabilistic sampling procedure was used which gives the

possibility of selecting the most available persons, based on a predefined purpose (Babbie, 2010). The target group consists of members and/or volunteers of 21 student NGOs, numbering 110 respondents, majority of them aged between 19-29 years. This interval is justified, as this is the average age for volunteering or involving as a member in student NGOs. The research is carried out on an underage population, female and male, from both rural and urban areas having the status of students in the bachelor's, master's or doctoral program.

In collecting the secondary data, scientific articles, books, strategic reports, online publications and websites of the NGOs were used.

The questionnaire is composed of 26 questions and it is structured in four parts. The first part is dedicated to the socio-demographic features of the NGOs human resources participating in the survey: gender, age, status of respondents (student in the bachelor's or master's degree or in the PhD program), area of origin (urban or rural), type of human resources within the organization, nature of their position (management or execution), seniority in the NGO, seniority in volunteering while the second part refers to the characteristics of NGOs under study (type and name of the organization where students are involved, values promoted by NGO). The third part of the questionnaire contains two questions about the concept of social responsibility. The fourth part contains questions related to the student NGO social responsibility. Several items in the second, third and fourth part of the questionnaire were measured using a Likert scale with 5 points (1 = to a small extent; 5 = to a very large extent).

Table 1 – The structure of questionnaire

Item	Question
<i>Socio – economic and demographic factors</i>	
1. Gender	Possible values: Male/Female
2. Age	Possible values: 19-29; 30-40; >40
3. Status of respondents	Possible values: Student in the bachelor's degree; Student in the master's degree; Student in the PhD program
4. Area of origin	Possible values: Urban; Rural
5. Type of human resources within the organization	Possible values: Member; Volunteer
6. Position within the organization	Possible values: Management; Execution
7. Seniority in the NGO	Possible values: 0-1 years; 2-4 years; 5-6 years; >6 years
8. Seniority in volunteering	Possible values: 0-3 years; 4-6 years; 7-9 years; >9 years
<i>Basic characteristics of the organizations under study</i>	
9. Type of the organization where students are involved	Possible values: Association; Federation
10. Name of the organization	Open-ended question
11. Values promoted by NGO	Possible values: Trust; Creativity; Collaboration; Involvement; Empathy; Innovation; Professionalism; Other
<i>Concept of social responsibility</i>	
12. Degree of familiarity of the respondents with the concept of social responsibility	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all
13. Meaning of the concept of social responsibility	Open-ended question
<i>Social responsibility of student NGOs</i>	
14. Activities in which the NGO is generally involved (more possible answers)	Possible values: Workshops dedicated to students; Student-centered projects; Awareness campaigns; Other
15. Activities carried out by NGOs during the pandemic (more possible answers)	Possible values: Workshops dedicated to students; Student-centered projects; Awareness campaigns; Other
16. Way of carrying out the activities during the pandemic	
• Workshops dedicated to students	Possible values: Online; Physically
• Student-centered projects	Possible values: Online; Physically
• Awareness campaigns	Possible values: Online; Physically
• Other	Possible values: Online; Physically
17. Efficiency of the online activities compared to those carried out physically by the NGO	Possible values: Very good; Good; Acceptable; Poor; Very poor
18. Motivation for students' involvement within the organization (more possible answers)	Possible values: Personal/professional development; Experience; Socialization
19. Student NGO you belong to is concerned with:	

Item	Question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging its human resources to take the initiative 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting human resources in the decision-making process 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining motivated human resources for achieving goals and individual satisfaction 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing training programs for human resources development 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning team buildings to facilitate teamwork 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
20. To what extent the organization:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfils its mission 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the stakeholders' interests 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures the beneficiaries' personal and professional development 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is loyal to donors and partners 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
21. Transparency regarding: activities carried out, use of financial and material resources, decisions taken within the NGO	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; Neutral; To some extent; To a small extent
22. Frequency of online posts as regards the NGO activities	Possible values: Very Frequently; Frequently; Occasionally; Rarely; Very Rarely; Never
23. NGO involvement in environmental protection:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to organizing environmental protection actions 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out campaigns/events to raise awareness of the importance of environmental protection 	Possible values: To a very large extent; To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all
24. Human resources' recruitment during the pandemic	Possible values: Yes; No; Don't Know/No opinion
25. Ways to integrate new human resources within the organization during the pandemic	Open-ended question
26. Perspectives/future plans of the NGO after the end of the pandemic	Open-ended question

4. A brief history of student NGOs in Romania

The beginning of the student movement in Romania has its origins in the emergence of the first universities in the country, more precisely in 1860 in Iași and in 1864 in Bucharest. Inspired by the European-Western model, the first student organizations appeared as scientific clubs carrying out their activity mainly in the educational and professional field. Publication of magazines and newspapers, implementation of projects and organizations of various events and protests were the most important activities of these clubs. The Great Union of 1859 was a turning point in the lives of students because since then the student movement has encountered many obstacles affecting their work. The emergence of new universities has led to a significant increase of student NGOs while some of them became politically affiliated or representative for national minorities (ANOSR, n.d.).

During the communist period, independent organizations, which are not affiliated with the regime, are banned. The only representative organizations accepted under communism are UTM (Union of Working Youth), UTC (Union of Communist Youth) and UASCR (Union of Communist Student Associations in Romania) (Cioflâncă, 2006-2007; The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist Dictatorship, 2006). Although the context was not at all favorable, the students kept their civic spirit and turned their attention to the society problems, developing a dissident movement. During the fall of communism, despite the past full of riots, strikes and protests against the precarious conditions imposed by the regime that were violently suppressed, students turned their attention to the re-establishment and establishment of their organizations.

Between October 20-29, 1995, amid the numerous student-led strikes, the National Strike Committee was set up and the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania - ANOSR has appeared. In the future, the latter will consolidate its organizational structure and will acquire legal personality, despite the opposition of the

Government (ANOSR, n.d1.)

In the post-December period the market of student NGOs in Romania has become very dynamic, while it was permanently linked to the development of university centers. New student organizations have appeared in Romania in order to improve the representation of students' interests, promote their rights and obligations and start initiatives with socio-cultural impact on student life (Proteasa et al., 2018). In this sense, they were involved in actions for improving the conditions in the student dorms, increasing the student scholarships and obtaining transport discounts. From an educational perspective, these organizations focused on defending and raising awareness of the rights included in the Student Statute and promoting students' access to education in a fair and transparent manner, as well as students' access to the governing structures of faculties and universities. As regards the professional sphere, student associations are involved in facilitating students' access to the business environment and the labor market, promoting professional opportunities and organizing projects in order to ensure the communication between students and companies representatives (ANOSR, n.d2.).

5. A brief description of student NGOs participating in the research

Uniunea Studenților din România (USR) [*Romanian Students' Union*] represents a nationally established federation operating as an umbrella organization for 100 student and youth associations from 20 university centers. The statutory purpose of the federation is to represent, promote and defend the students' rights in relation to the relevant actors at national level (USR, 2019). In fact, most of the associations answering the questionnaire are members of the Romanian Students' Union.

During the 20 years since its establishment in July 2001, the federation has developed a range of projects that take place annually, with a major impact nationally. Among the Union areas of interest are: social and cultural dimension, volunteering, education and non-formal education, youth policies, youth employability, health education, financial education etc (USR, 2021).

Asociația Studenților Economiști din România (ASER) [*Association of Students in Economics from Romania*] is a student association within Bucharest University of Economic Studies whose purpose is to take volunteering to another level, so that the students' experience become unique. It implements various projects and organizes events, but also campaigns in collaboration with its partners for those students who are eager for new experiences (ASER, n.d.).

Asociația Studenților din Universitatea București (ASUB) [*The Students Association from the University of Bucharest*] is a student organization acting on a voluntary basis. The organization aims to meet the students' needs and operates based on values such as facilitating teamwork, encouraging the personal and professional development of members etc. (Universitatea din București, 2020).

Forumul Tinerilor din România (FTR) [*Romanian Youth Forum*] is a nongovernmental federation consisting of 165 youth organizations in Romania. Its purpose is to encourage, support, involve and represent all young people in this country. Thus, it organizes projects and programs in collaboration with various partners to fulfill its mission and it believes in young people's potential to do beautiful things for their community. It is guided by values such as innovation, non-discrimination, recognition, equality, respect for diversity and minorities, but also involvement (Forumul Tinerilor din România, n.d.).

Business Organization for Students România (BOS) is a student organization focusing on the professional and personal development of students through volunteering. The values underlying the BOS activities are the following: initiative, responsibility, professionalism, team spirit (BOS, n.d.).

Liga Studenților de la Geografie și Geologie Iași (L.S.G.G.) [*The League of Students in Geography and Geology from Iași*] is a nongovernmental and apolitical student association whose purpose is to support and promote the socio-professional interests of students in the field, but also to support the modernization of geographical education in Iași as well as to strengthen the relations with academia. As most student organizations, values such as work, team spirit and communication are pursued in order to develop this association (L.S.G.G., n.d.).

Uniunea Studenților Academiei de Studii Economice din București (USASE) [*Students' Union of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies*] is also a nongovernmental, apolitical and independent association of volunteers which are students of different faculties within Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Its main purpose is to represent the students interest within the university and it is based on values such as spirit of initiative, active involvement, volunteering, devotion, communication, integrity, professionalism, passion and solidarity (USASE, n.d.).

Asociația Studenților în Contabilitate și Informatică de Gestiune (ASCIG) [*Association of Students in Accounting and Management Informatics*] was established in 2002 to facilitate the acquisition of useful information

regarding internships, integration into the labor market, scholarships or other opportunities. The projects developed by ASCIG have a professional and socio-cultural purpose, with an emphasis on non-formal education while they are intended for all students within the university. Through its mission and vision, but also through its activities, ASCIG facilitates the transition from academia to the harsh business environment (ASCIG, n.d.).

Asociația Studenților Fizicieni (ASF) [*Physics Students Association*] is a student association of the Faculty of Physics within the University of Bucharest recognized nationally and internationally. Its main purpose is to support the interests of students and to identify solutions to the difficulties they encounter (ASF-UB, n.d.).

Liga Studenților Români din Străinătate (LSRS) [*The League of Romanian Students Abroad*] is a student non-governmental organization, but on a larger scale. It has several branches consisting of students who choose to study abroad. The purpose of the organization is to show the world the living and active image of Romania by building communities and developing young people. The vision of LSRS is to conceive a united community that inspires trust, while the mission is to represent, defend and promote the academic, professional and cultural rights as well as the interests of its members (LSRS, n.d.).

Erasmus Student Network Romania is an international student organization representing their interests internationally and providing opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development (ESN, n.d.).

Asociația Studenților Geografie (ASG) [*Geography Students Association*] is a non-governmental entity made-up of students of the Faculty of Geography within the University of Bucharest. ASG represents the rights of students, but it is also the main way of communication between the faculty management and its students (ASG, 2017).

Asociația Liga Studenților ETH din Iași (LS ETH) [*ETH Students League Association from Iași*] is a nongovernmental and nonprofit organization made up of electrical engineering students and it has several objectives including representing the students' interest and providing support for their personal and professional development (LSETH, n.d.).

Asociația Studenților Facultății de Economie și Administrarea Afacerilor (ASFEEA) [*Students' Association of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration*] represents a nongovernmental organization of students from the University of Craiova. The association has dedicated and involved members who implement its projects and it focus on values such as intelligence, knowledge, workforce and determination (ASFEEA, 2021).

Asociația Studenților din Administrație și Afaceri (ASAA) [*Students Association of Administration and Business*] is a student association of the Faculty of Administration and Business within the University of Bucharest. It carries out many projects supporting and facilitating the personal and professional as well as formal and informal development of students (Universitatea din București, 2020).

Asociația Studenților Chimisti a Universității din București (ASC-UB) [*Chemistry Students Association of the University of Bucharest*] was set up to represent students' rights and to support them throughout their studies. It ensures the connection between the faculty management and students and it is involved in many projects in the field of chemistry (Universitatea din București, 2020).

Asociația Studenților la Istorie – Dacia (ASID) [*History Students Association - Dacia*] aims at integrating students in an active social, cultural and sports environment by promoting volunteering, civic spirit and social involvement. It also improves the dialogue between the students and the management of the Faculty of History within the University of Bucharest (Universitatea din București, 2020).

Asociația Studenților în Științe Politice din Universitatea București (ASSP-UB) [*Association of Students in Political Science of the University of Bucharest*] is a young nongovernmental organization aiming at creating an environment conducive to increasing the personal and professional performance of students in political science within the university mentioned-above (Universitatea din București, 2020).

Clubul Studenților din Universitatea Româno-Americană (CS-URA) [*The Students' Club within the Romanian-American University*] is a student organization made up of students eager for innovation and involvement in projects supporting different ideas. It is interested in proactive students who want to evolve continuously and for whom learning means more than courses and seminars (Universitatea Româno-Americană, 2021).

Organizația Studenților Economiști Cluj (OSE) [*Cluj Economics Students Organization*] is a student NGO with over 14 years of activity, providing opportunities for students' personal and professional development. Through its projects and programs, the organization aims to train the future generations of leaders in the fields of activity of the Faculty of Economics and Business Management in Cluj-Napoca (OSE, 2021).

Liga Studenților din Universitatea Aurel Vlaicu Arad (LSUAV) [*League of the Students from Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad*] is a nongovernmental and nonprofit student organization defending the rights and supporting the students' interests of Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad (Universitatea Aurel Valicu din Arad, 2019).

6. Results and discussions

In order to investigate the social responsibility of student organizations, a questionnaire was administered to the students who are members or volunteers within student NGOs in Romania between May and June 2021. Table 2 and table 3, shown below, present the demographic profile of the respondents as well as the basic characteristics of student NGOs participating in the research:

Table 2 - Demographic Profile of Respondents

Item	Possible values	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	57	51.82%
	Male	53	48.18%
Age	19-29	106	96.36%
	30-39	3	2.73%
	>40	1	0.91%
Status of respondents	Student in the bachelor's degree	81	73.64%
	Student in the master's degree	25	22.73%
	Student in the PhD program	4	3.63%
Area of origin	Urban	79	71.82%
	Rural	31	28.18%
Type of human resources within the organization	Member	83	75.45%
	Volunteer	27	24.55%
Position within the organization	Management	30	27.27%
	Execution	80	72.73%
Seniority in the NGO	0-1 years	63	57.27%
	2-4 years	35	31.82%
	5-6 years	7	6.36%
	>6 years	5	4.55%
Seniority in volunteering	0-3 years	63	57.27%
	4-6 years	39	35.46%
	7-9 years	6	5.45%
	>9 years	2	1.82%

Table 3 – Basic characteristics of student NGOs

Item	Possible values	Frequency	Percentage
Type of the organization where students are involved	Association	101	91.82%
	Federation	9	8.18%
Name of the organization	Uniunea Studenților din România (USR)	4	3.63%
	Asociația Studenților Economiști din România (ASER)	10	9.09%
	Asociația Studenților din Universitatea București (ASUB)	4	3.63%
	Forumul Tinerilor din România (FTR)	5	4.55%
	Business Organization for Students România (BOS)	14	12.73%
	Liga Studenților de la Geografie și Geologie Iași (L.S.G.G.)	2	1.82%
	Uniunea Studenților Academiei de Studii Economice din București (USASE)	17	15.45%
	Asociația Studenților în Contabilitate și Informatică de Gestiune (ASCIG)	11	10%
	Asociația Studenților Fizicieni (ASF)	3	2.73%
	Liga Studenților Români din Străinătate (LSRS)	2	1.82%
	Erasmus Student Network Romania	3	2.73%
	Asociația Studenților Geografie (ASG)	5	4.55%
	Asociația Liga Studenților ETH din Iași (LS ETH)	2	1.82%

	Asociația Studenților Facultății de Economie și Administrarea Afacerilor (ASFEAA)	4	3.63%
	Asociația Studenților din Administrație și Afaceri (ASAA)	6	5.45%
	Asociația Studenților Chimisti a Universității din București (ASC-UB)	2	1.82%
	Asociația Studenților la Istorie – Dacia (ASID)	2	1.82%
	Asociația Studenților în Științe Politice din Universitatea București (ASSP-UB)	4	3.63%
	Clubul Studenților din Universitatea Româno-Americană (CS-URA)	5	4.55%
	Organizația Studenților Economiști Cluj (OSE)	2	1.82%
	Liga Studenților din Universitatea Aurel Vlaicu Arad (LSUAV)	3	2.73%
Values promoted by NGO	Trust	16	14.55%
	Creativity	12	10.9%
	Collaboration	15	13.64%
	Involvement	16	14.55%
	Empathy	14	12.73%
	Innovation	9	8.18%
	Professionalism	13	11.81%
	Other (ex. unity in diversity, respect, devotion, responsibility etc.)	15	13.64%

The concept of social responsibility

The third part of the questionnaire, analyzing the students' level of knowledge regarding the concept of social responsibility, includes two questions. Question 12 aims to find out to what extent respondents are familiar with the notion of social responsibility while question 13 highlights the meanings given by the respondents to this notion. The results obtained were positive, because most participants attending this study (82.73%) are aware of this concept. As regards the open-ended question no. 13, out of 110 respondents only 82 (74.55%) answered. Thus, most of them (79.27%) provided a definition to the concept of corporate social responsibility while the other 17 (20.73%) focused on the general meaning of the social responsibility. Some conclusive answers provided by the respondents are mentioned below:

- “Responsibilities of an organization towards its stakeholders”;
- “Responsibilities of an organization towards the society”;
- “Responsibilities of each individual towards the society”;
- “Manifestation of civic spirit”;
- “Involvement in solving the society problems”;
- “Involvement in promoting and supporting different causes”.

In fact, in Romania most of the information available to the public (studies, reports, etc.) about social responsibility comes from private organizations (especially consulting companies). The implementation of responsible practices in the private sector became stronger after EU accession and was mainly determined by the involvement of multinational companies that transferred practices in the field from headquarters to local level, as well as by the subsequent opportunity to access European funds. Moreover, in the last decade, higher education institutions have contributed to the spread of the concept among young people by including the notion of corporate social responsibility in the curricula of study programs focusing on economics, technics, environmental protection etc (Anca et al., 2011).

The social responsibility of student NGOs

• *Activities carried out by NGOs before and during the pandemic; way of carrying out them; efficiency of the online activities compared to those carried out physically*

Analyzing the responses to the question about the activities carried out by NGOs before the pandemic, it is found that most of the responses went to *student-centered projects* (90), followed by *workshop dedicated to students* (69) and *awareness campaigns* (45). Section *Other* recorded 78 responses: *teambuilding* (30), *charitable activities during the Christmas and Easter holidays* (25), *training courses* (16), *environmental protection activities* (7). As for the activities carried out by NGOs during the pandemic, the section *workshop dedicated to students*

received the most responses in the survey (101), followed by *awareness campaigns* (37) and *student-centered projects* (25). Section *Other* obtained fewer responses compared to the previous question: *events related to the impact of the Covid pandemic 19* (43), *delivery of products/food to vulnerable people* (15), *charitable activities during the Christmas and Easter holidays* (9).

When asked about the way of carrying them during the pandemic, the responses were as follows: workshop dedicated to students (online – 100%); awareness campaigns (online - 94.59%; physically – 5.41%); student-centered projects (online - 92%; physically – 8%); events related to the impact of the Covid pandemic 19 (online – 100%); delivery of products/food to vulnerable people (physically – 100%); charitable activities during the Christmas and Easter holidays (physically – 100%).

Another item of interest to this study is related to the efficiency of the online activities compared to those carried out physically. Consequently, 60.91% of the respondents (67 persons) expressed positive opinions while 19.09% (21 persons) reported that they found this situation to be acceptable. The remaining 20% (22 respondents) were at the opposite pole.

During the pandemic, Romanian student NGOs gave up certain activities, but developed others more appropriate to the context. Despite that most of the activities carried out have moved online, these organizations have managed to adapt and cope with the changes, continuing to keep in touch with their members and volunteers. However, teleworking poses challenges especially regarding the human resources involved, namely the difficulty of monitoring them, measuring their outcomes and even establishing an appropriate dialogue with them. Perhaps this explains the relatively high number of respondents who declared dissatisfied with the efficiency of online activities carried out by student NGOs or perceived it as acceptable.

- *Motivation for students' involvement within the NGOs; concerns of the organizations regarding their human resources*

Most respondents (95.45%) join student NGOs as members or volunteers to develop personally and professionally. This option is closely followed by the acquisition of experience (92.73%) which is very useful for Romanian students in employment. The option socialization ranks last (79.1%).

Young people in Romania face problems related to access to the labor market and finding a job in accordance with their personal and professional profile. Lack of personal skills, limited possibilities of interaction with potential employers, lack of experience, lack of necessary skills at work are just some of the problems encountered. Therefore, their involvement in a student NGO could help them choose the right career.

The mechanisms for motivating human resources vary depending on the individuals' interests and desires as well as the organization's ability to support them. The analysis of the responses obtained shows that student NGOs investigated are preferred due to their openness to encouraging the initiative (96.36%) and consulting the members and volunteers in the decision-making process (73.64%). Training courses (15.45%) and teambuilding (30%) are at the opposite pole, receiving much fewer answers compared to the first ones. The cost involved in their organization could be the reason for such a difference. Moreover, student NGOs are regularly aware of the reasons for young people's involvement within the organization and are constantly concerned with meeting their needs (80%), because human resources are their most important assets contributing to achieving their goals.

- *Key aspects having a directly impact on the NGOs reasons of being: fulfilling the mission, promoting the stakeholders' interests, ensuring the beneficiaries' personal and professional development, showing loyalty to donors and partners*

Student organizations are born and operate based on a mission helping them structure their activity and the way of functioning (Păceșilă, 2016). The mission gives meaning to the existence of the organization that seeks to fulfill it (Vidal et al, 2005; Păceșilă and Colesca, 2020). Obtaining a positive response from 99.1% of the persons surveyed regarding the interest of the organization they belong to in fulfilling the mission, shows that student NGOs are aware they should remain faithful to the mission to ensure their survival and development as well as to promote a coherent message to members, volunteers and donors.

Moreover, student organizations do not operate in isolation, but in relation to stakeholders (universities, partners, donors, etc.). In this regard, the affirmative responses provided by those surveyed (85.45%) show that student NGOs are aware that promoting the interests of all stakeholders is essential for their survival.

In general, student NGOs serve the needs of beneficiaries, namely the students who determine their existence and structure and may accept or reject its services, sometimes in favor of another organization (Păceșilă, 2016). Therefore, by means of the activities and projects implemented as well as the training courses and events organized, these organizations should prepare the students to integrate on the labor market as well as to acquire personal skills to help them express themselves and interact more easily with other persons. The responses to the questionnaire (91.82% of the responses went to the Likert Scale options *to a very large extent* and *to a large extent*) show that NGOs under analysis understand that taking into account the beneficiaries' needs and consulting them

provides sustainability to the organization.

As regards the loyalty to donors and partners, positive responses were received from 66.36% of those surveyed. Usually, student NGOs do not need financial resources to cover their expenses related to rent and utilities because their headquarters are inside the university. However, they implement certain projects and carry out actions requiring financial resources which they often obtain from the private companies. Furthermore, in many cases they operate in partnership because it is more difficult for a single organization to have a major impact. Therefore, it is recommended to treat their donors and partners with respect, to thank them for their time/for the donation made, both personally and in public.

- *Transparency regarding the activities carried out by the NGOs, the use of financial and material resources, the decisions taken; frequency of online posts regarding NGOs activities*

Despite that most NGOs are reluctant to provide information about them and constantly refuse to admit that they are accountable to society for their actions (Burger and Owens, 2008), according to the answers given by 98.18% of the respondents, it seems that the student NGOs under analysis attach great importance to transparency regarding the activities carried out, the use of financial and material resources and the decisions taken. As regards the frequency of online posts, most respondents (97.27%) pointed out that student organizations take care of their image in the community and consequently they are very active in the online environment. Thus, the information about the activities and projects implemented is accessible to the stakeholders providing them external visibility and contributing to increasing people's confidence in their actions.

Transparency is a particularly important aspect for the image and functioning of NGOs contributing to the elimination of discrepancies between what NGOs say and what they do (Burger and Owens, 2008). Moreover, according to Gazzola and Ratti (2014), NGOs have an ethical obligation to the general public to conduct their activities in a transparent manner, regularly providing information to all interested people (beneficiaries, stakeholders, members, donors, etc.) about their mission, objectives, projects, activities, decision-making process and organizational structure. In the same vein, Gazzola et al. (2017) consider that providing correct data and information about the actions carried out is crucial for maintaining public trust and for obtaining financial resources from donors. Only a well-organized communication process could ensure the survival of these organizations.

- *Environmental protection: openness to organizing environmental protection actions; carrying out campaigns/events to raise awareness of the importance of this aspect*

Out of 110 respondents, 97 (88.18%) mentioned that the organization to which they are members or volunteers is open to organize events dedicated to environmental protection. Unfortunately, the situation is not similar as regards the involvement of student NGOs in environmental awareness campaigns. Only 17 respondents from 6 organizations (two in the field of geography and geology, one in the field of physics, one in the field of electrical engineering as well as Cluj Economics Students Organization and League of Students from Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad) gave an affirmative answer to this question.

Student NGOs could play a significant role in raising awareness among young people about environmental priorities and issues: from climate change and disaster management to sustainable livelihoods; from deforestation to the identification of solutions for the rapid growth of forested areas, etc. Starting from the above considerations, it can be seen that student organizations in Romania have not fully exploited this potential. However, the openness of most NGOs under study to environmental protection actions is auspicious, especially since they have the capacity to mobilize student support, to determine young people to no longer be passive, but to become active participants in society.

- *Recruitment and integration of human resources within the organization during the pandemic*

In all the students' organizations investigated the recruitment process of members and volunteers has continued during the pandemic. However, they had to change overnight the process of recruiting and integrating human resources into the organization. In fact, the majority of respondents (90%) stated that the organization they belong to had to change the way of interaction with its human resources during the pandemic. Therefore, online meetings, usually on Zoom or Google Meet platform were held in order to integrate the newcomers into the organization as well as to communicate with them. However, according to 11 respondents (10%), there were also physical meetings to help new members or volunteers to adapt more easily to the organization requirements.

The pandemic has generated unexpected changes in student organizations and forced them to use the technology in the recruitment process. Moreover, the restrictions and social distancing led them to look for alternatives ways to manage and integrate human resources. Most changes were related to the communication process and the way of carrying out the activities not to compromise the human resources' safety. However, the implementation of these changes within student NGOs has not been difficult because both those in the leadership group and those holding executive positions have a high level of education and, therefore, they are much more able to adapt to crisis situation, such as the current pandemic.

- *Perspectives/future plans of the NGO after the end of the pandemic*

Out of 110 participants in the study, only 81 (73.64) answered to the last question. Most of the responses (37) focused on *continuing the digitization process started during the pandemic*, while the other 44 respondents mentioned either *team revival* (22), either *resumption of postponed or suspended events/activities/projects* (14), either *improvement of the relationship with the organization's donors* (8).

The pandemic generated restrictions on social interaction and new ways of carrying out activities. In this context, while the student organizations in Romania could not carry out their activities as before, they had to change and adapt their budgets as well as to be intensely concerned about the safety of volunteers and members. Moreover, as the restrictions started to be implemented, student organizations were forced to begin an immediate digitization process and to continue most of the activities in the online environment. According to Sassu and Vaş (2020), these changes will take effect after the pandemic ends, as many of these organizations will continue to use digital tools and carry out online some of their activities and events. However, this approach could be beneficial both for the development of the organizations and for attracting a wider audience.

Another problematic issue generated by the pandemic is the increased competition for the limited resources available. In this regard, in the future many organizations will put a special emphasis on improving the relationship with their donors, especially as many corporate sponsors are reducing their budgets due to the economic crisis while the individual donors are becoming more conservative about spending.

7. Conclusions and research limitations

The contribution of the present study consists in providing an overview of the social responsibility of student NGOs in Romania. According to the research results, student NGOs attach great importance to social responsibility due to their degree of involvement in activities specific to this concept such as: importance of fulfilling the mission, concern for meeting the needs of NGO members and volunteers as well as for its beneficiaries' problems, transparency, environmental protection.

Taken into account that student NGOs do not seek to make a profit, but focus on the professional and personal development of members and of student community in general, several researchers might consider the concept of social responsibility of student NGOs useless. However, these organizations, like all non-governmental entities, should take responsibility for their actions towards their human resources, partners, donors, the academic community and even towards the society.

While this research aims at analyzing the social responsibility of student NGOs in Romania, it presents some limitations. The investigation of the literature focused on highlighting the perception of different authors regarding the elements that a socially responsible NGO should take into account. Moreover, the papers supporting the idea of social responsibility of these organizations in opposition to those considering that such an approach is not necessary have been analyzed. However, other researchers may have a completely different approach compared to the one presented in this paper that could be more interesting and compelling. Moreover, the sample comes only from few student organizations in Romania. Therefore, the results obtained should not be generalized to all student NGOs in Romania. Furthermore, the absence of interviews with the leaders of the student organizations under analysis represents another limitation. The use of the interview method would have allowed a more complete analysis as well as a better knowledge of the realities within the Romanian student NGOs regarding their social responsibility.

However, the results obtained could be seen as a key element in characterizing student NGOs as regards their social responsibility as well as the changes suffered during the pandemic. Moreover, knowing the consequences of the latter on the activity of student organizations is useful for their survival.

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