

# Serving Others and Gaining Experience: A Study of University Students Participation in Service Learning

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## **Abstract**

*Unlike other countries, Italy has no 'service learning', the method enabling students to join accredited voluntary organisations in order to gain experience in serving others. An investigation was conducted in 2006 and 2007 to understand the opportunity that service learning provides to young adults, community and volunteer associations. The objectives were, first, to determine whether there is a need to forge links between the university and the world of volunteer work and, second, to describe the specific areas of action in the local context. A total of 603 video-recorded interviews were conducted. The findings show that there is a need to create a network for helping institutions, neighbourhoods and young adults to assess the demand and provide an organised response for educational and community needs. As a result, starting from this year, Turin University will be operating the first service learning in Italy.*

## **Introduction**

Voluntary service in Italy is on the rise, as documented by the findings of ISTAT, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2005) and by the Italian Foundation for Voluntary Service (Frisanco, 2001): nationwide data indicate that since 2001 there has been a 14.9% increase in the number of men and women who donate their time, and that volunteers now total around 4 million. Young adults (18-30 years of age) account for 36.7%. Thanks to this commitment, the number of voluntary associations has grown by 152% since 1995, from 8,343 to 21,021 groups now providing services to approximately 8 million people.

Psychologists have investigated the phenomena associated with voluntarism and young adults, focusing attention on motivational patterns (Marta, Guglielmetti & Pozzi, 2006; Pearce, 1993; Wymer, 1998), recruiting and screening procedures (Bussell & Forbes, 2001), how gender differences affect approaches to participation (Taylor, 2005), the learning opportunities afforded by community service (Hedin, 1989; Morgan & Streb, 2001), and the impact that this experience has on individuals and the community (Israel & Ilvento, 1995).

For all of these issues, the research group at the School of Psychology at the Università degli Studi di Torino has conducted a study in Italy's Piedmont region to investigate what encourages young adults' involvement in voluntary organisations in such sectors as social work, health care, environmental protection and cultural promotion (Soro, 2004). The results provided insights into how individuals participate in community life, their reasons for volunteering and the sense of satisfaction provided by working without pay, as well as the rationale of voluntary organisations (the rules for participation, recruiting and screening procedures and approach to community action).

One of the points emerging from the data collected is that voluntary organisations find it difficult to recruit young adults who, having time and resources to dedicate to voluntary work, often fail to do so because of a lack of guidance (Houle et al., 2005). Also, young volunteers are not always able to find activities that suit them, where they can offer their knowledge and skills to other people, or learn new skills themselves.

As suggested by the literature in this area, the assumption underlying the current study is that the presence of a network that can promote the initiatives of voluntary organisations encourages young adults to join and that, at the same time, setting up structures at universities can be advantageous for the various actors involved (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Accordingly, there was a need to find out whether a locally-created network would succeed in maintaining contact between organisational actors: young adults, the community and voluntary organisations. The starting principle was that participating in voluntary work gives young adults an opportunity to gain experience useful to build their educational and professional curriculum (Wittmer, 2004).

Awarding academic credit for voluntary work is common in the English-speaking countries, where the term 'service learning' (service learning) denotes the method whereby students can join accredited voluntary organisations to gain experience in serving others (Lisman,

1998; Speck & Hoppe, 2004). Several authors, including Serow (1991) emphasise that in the humanities, service learning is a source of, and a stimulus to acquire, skills that would otherwise be postponed until the final stages of a student's educational career (for example, work-study programmes), since here, contrary to other disciplines, providing practice as a means of reinforcing and understanding theory is not seen as a primary goal (Hall et al., 2004; Hollis, 2002): research indicates that students who have participated in service learning show better learning performance, more interest in the subject-matter, better problem-solving abilities and greater satisfaction with their chosen educational programme (Sikula & Sikula, 2005). The strategic value of service learning is not just for university students who gain an opportunity to learn and to put to the test the skills they have acquired or can acquire. It is also for the other organisational actors involved in the educational process, namely both community and institutions (Bastedo, 2007; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). While for the community, the value of having committed young adults as a resource lies in society's increased ability to help the disadvantaged or those who need assistance which is affordable, the institutions benefit from voluntarism's intrinsic value, which is its value in educating for citizenship (Annette, 1999) through experience of local area, organisation and workings, thereby enhancing an understanding of opportunities, constraints and limitations involved in dealing with public affairs.

Thus, local and national institutions can promote service learning in all situations where a university acts as an information clearing-house bringing young students into contact with the associations that provide answers to the open questions of civil society (Soro, 2004). This contact creates learning opportunities for students, voluntary organisations find resources with the kind of educational background they need and the local community witnesses increased sense of civic responsibility, which is the hallmark of democracy (Barber & Battistoni, 1994).

Hence the objective of investigation, conducted in January–February 2006 and January–February 2007. The first goal was to assess the desirability or otherwise of forging links between university and the world of volunteer work to meet two needs, namely educating and having resources for projects to benefit the community (Giles & Eyler, 1994). The second aim was to identify specific areas of possible action at local level and where young adults can direct their efforts in this area (Bussel & Forbes, 2001). More specifically, the aim was:

1. To determine the relevance or otherwise for university students and other young adults to be involved in volunteer work, whether a structure should be set up in universities for this purpose, and what areas in the community should be the focus of volunteer activities.
2. To find out which voluntary associations university students in the Turin area are familiar with, either directly or indirectly, and which areas they regard as calling for priority action and would be willing to engage in.

Two events thrusting Turin on the international stage provided an opportunity to investigate: the Twentieth Winter Olympics of 2006, and the XXIII World Winter University Games of 2007.

For the Winter Olympics in Turin during January and February 2006 (first event), 20,000 volunteers were recruited and trained for 350 different jobs in five main areas including transportation, security and access control, spectator services, sports and assistance. Many of these volunteers were university students, who applied for and received academic credit for, their participation.

In the following year, Turin hosted the XXIII World Winter University Games (second event, in January–February 2007). 3012 out of the 6326 Organizing Committee staff members were volunteers. In preparation to previous year's event, training courses were organised for these volunteers, who received university credit for their work.

## **Methodology**

Investigation took place in stages. Stage one consisted of a review of the literature dealing with voluntarism and young adults, which resulted in working plans and selection of interview and data analysis methods. In stage two an initial group of subjects was interviewed and the findings evaluated, while stage three involved interviewing a second group of subjects followed by evaluation of results.

The first event (2006) – which drew large numbers – provided a significant sample from the standpoint of subjects' geographical origin.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews that addressed topics in connection with the first aim, namely:

- advantage for young adults of doing volunteer work;
- information/promotion activity by the university;
- priority areas for volunteer action in the community.

The second event (2007), which attracted large numbers of university students, involved a more significant sample for the second aim of the investigation. Questions were asked about:

- voluntary organisations with which interviewees were familiar;
- priority areas for action in and around Turin;
- sectors to which interviewees felt they could or would like to devote their time and resources.

*Participants*

A total of 451 subjects were interviewed for the first event. Fifty subjects were from countries other than that hosting the Olympics (30% Great Britain; 22% USA, 18% France, 10% Canada, 10% Spain, 6% the Netherlands, and 4% Japan). While subjects were evenly divided by sex, with 226 females and 225 males, the same was not true of age (Table 1). As interviewees participated spontaneously, the largest number of subjects was drawn from younger age groups.

During the second event, interviewees totalled 152 (76 males and 76 females), all resident in Turin and the surrounding areas and all students of Turin University. As with the previous sample, interviewees were willing participants. For a better representation of the entire group of university students, interviewers were asked to select subjects ranging from 18 to 28 years (mode 23, median 22) in line with the entire undergraduate degree programme, in accordance with the findings of the AlmaLaurea (2007) study of this institution’s graduates.

The question categories indicated above were used in analysing the text corpus from the interviews.

*Procedure*

A total of 603 interviews were conducted. The same procedure was used for each group of subjects. As interviews were video-recorded, a

TABLE 1  
Interviewees by sex and age

Age	Males %	Females %
15–29	50	43
30–44	36	45
Over 45	14	12

camera operator was present in addition to the interviewer. This technique was used to permit lip reading should the words pronounced be unintelligible or dubious: interviews were held during the events in the presence of a lot of noise. Video taped material was subsequently transcribed for further processing. The text corpus was analysed using the question categories indicated earlier, and Alceste 4.6 software took care of statistical analysis. This software is used in social sciences where data processing calls for studying the distribution of words and how they are associated (Matteucci & Tomasetto, 2002), permitting identification of the most characteristic words in textual units or chunks, and frequency of entire words and their reduced forms, that is, the word's root. It also highlights unique words, the *hapax legomena* occurring only once.

The corpus is subjected to a descending hierarchical classification procedure (Reinert, 1993), which partitions the subjects of the analysis, that is, the statements or 'contextual units' constituting the corpus, into classes using a characteristic vocabulary. The use of specific words apparently depends on the conceptual context of the discourse of which they are a part and the situation in which they are expressed. Thus, if a specific word is used frequently, this means that a particular importance is assigned to the concept underlying it. Conversely, an under-used term may mean that it is not relevant to that type of discourse, or even that the speaker is not *predisposed* toward that word. The descending hierarchical analysis used by the Alceste program is a classification procedure in some respects similar to cluster analysis of numerical data. An iterative process is used to break down statements of the entire corpus into increasingly smaller and more homogeneous classes. In the second stage, a chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) is performed on the association between words and classes. This identifies the typical vocabulary of each cluster, which consists of those words that occur more frequently in it than in the rest of the corpus (Matteucci & Tomasetto, 2002). To understand the value of classes and of the words associated with them, work was carried out separately so as to describe and understand lexical worlds (definition of word classes according to Reinert, 1993). Then researchers exchanged notes, read each other's work and took collective decisions about classes through in-depth dialogue. Discrepancies were discussed finally reaching full agreement reflecting complete consensus.

## Findings for the first event

### *The benefit of doing volunteer work*

The text corpus for answering the first question shows a total word count of 5839, of which 153 were in reduced form; average frequency of occurrence was 6, and there were 321 hapaxes, or unique words that were analysed by the program. The classification procedure resulted in three classes grouping together a total of 99 phrases, or 72% of the entire text corpus. For each class, the first five words<sup>1</sup> are identified and ranked by chi-square association.

Class I refers to the impact that volunteer work can have on personal growth. Some of the interviewees stressed that voluntary work is also educational in the sense that it helps develop self-knowledge: 'you get to measure yourself against other people and you learn more about yourself' (20 m); 'it helps you learn in the sense of maturing' (16 f). Others asserted that accepting a commitment in situations differing from those already familiar to them can prove to be a crucial point in their development: 'it can help you with your own personal problems to see that there are people whose problems are a lot worse . . . I mean, teenagers often do a lot of emoting about things that shrink down to size when you see the bigger, more serious things other people have to deal with' (26 m).

Class II refers to the impact that the young volunteer can have on the life of the community. In particular, several interviewees emphasised that volunteer work can be extremely worthwhile in improving management and organisational situations typical of public institutions: 'even if it's well organised, public service can't give as much as voluntary services because it's got other commitments, other things it has to do, while a volunteer, because he's a volunteer, does things willingly, not because he

**TABLE 2**  
Descending hierarchical classification – The advantage of doing  
volunteer work

Class I		Class II		Class III	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
knowl<	20.02	life	33.13	experienc<	25.81
educat<	19.42	public-institutions	27.32	connec<	25.30
develop<	16.24	just+	21.62	job+	19.96
importan<	13.76	civic-consc<	15.78	awakening	17.83
growth	12.49	improv<	13.61	field+	16.74

has to. That's important' (18 m). Some interviewees expressed a concern for the public good: 'having a civic conscience that goes above and beyond what we've got in our own little backyard is essential to growing up' (25 f).

Class III refers to the usefulness of this kind of experience for a young adult, for instance in finding a job in the student's field of study: 'these are helpful experiences, that give you an idea of how you can work . . . they're work experiences that give you a good grounding in a lot of different ways' (23 f); 'it helps you grow up and gain a bit of experience that will stand you in good stead later' (15 f); 'they're always wanting to know if you've got previous experience, so there's no doubt that volunteer work can be a big plus in this respect' (24 f). In some of the interviews, it was clear that volunteer work is seen as a kind of proving ground for a planned career: 'it also helps you get a better idea of what you're like, of what you can do, if you're really cut out for some of the things you're studying' (18 f).

#### *Promotion of volunteer work by the university*

The answers to this question form a text corpus showing a total word count of 5155, of which 157 were in reduced form. Average frequency of occurrence was 5, and there were 373 hapaxes. The classification procedure resulted in three classes grouping together a total of 65 phrases, or 53% of the entire text corpus. For each class, the first five words are identified and ranked by chi-square association.

Class I refers to the *university as a clearing house for providing information and promoting initiatives*: 'that way, whoever needs it can find a single source of information that's lacking now' (21 m); 'the more knowledge is available, the easier it is to find something you like' (20 f); 'there's often

TABLE 3

Descending hierarchical classification – Promotion by the university

Class I		Class II		Class III	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
information+	20.92	free	15.53	public<	34.42
promo+	12.61	time	15.51	school	24.89
place	11.63	quant<	11.55	kid<	20.85
work+	11.43	plan+	11.50	talk+	14.62
risk<	10.37	stud+	10.95	route	13.89



nowhere to find information, nobody to turn to, nobody you can rely on' (22 f). This latter consideration was a major concern to interviewees, who would like the university to safeguard them from the risk of ending up in situations that in actual fact are just unpaid jobs masquerading under another name: 'I think that volunteer work is a great thing, a great experience; it's good for everybody to do something for others, to know what it means to do something for others. The only thing that worries me is that when people do volunteer work, they ought to know exactly what happens to their work, or in other words who benefits from it and whether somebody is making money off their work or getting something out of it' (24 f). It is interesting to note that the university is also asked to keep an eye on how young adults are recruited, as underscored by one interviewee who was already active in volunteer work: 'you have to make sure the people you're recruiting are really convinced, because most of the time you recruit people who at the end of the day make a lot of promises but actually do very little' (30 m). Finally, one young female interviewee emphasised that volunteer work must be a practical learning opportunity that is recognised as a credit-earning educational activity: 'especially for those of us in the international studies degree programme, it's very hard to find work-study opportunities and activities that are relevant to what we do' (25 f).

Class II refers to the *problems associated with university commitments*, which make it difficult to find room for voluntary work. Some of the interviewees said that their course workload often prevented them from engaging in other activities: 'something well-organised and useful should be done that's compatible with class schedules' (26 f); 'since there's very little free time, I don't see how a university student can bring any kind of volunteer work to completion' (19 m).

Class III refers to the *need to find a route that can encourage people to commit themselves to volunteer work* even before university, in high school, to raise awareness among young people of the value of such commitments: 'it's a subject that ought to be part of the curriculum at university and even in high school, because even in high school there are kids who are grown up enough for it' (16 f); 'and not just in college . . . at high school, too . . . at least they get started earlier' (30 m); 'school can be your first introduction to this kind of work' (21 f).

### *The priority areas for volunteer action in the community*

The text corpus for the answers to this question showed a total word count of 5601, 196 being in reduced form. Average frequency of occur-

TABLE 4  
Descending hierarchical classification – Priority areas for the  
community

Class I		Class II		Class III	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
area<	42.48	cross	18.65	social	19.37
organization+	31.39	green	17.87	disabil<	15.10
dipend<	31.01	red	15.07	eld+	12.27
serv+	20.14	interven<	14.73	child<	11.89
pleasure	17.27	diffic<	14.31	countr+	10.90

rence was 6, and there were 414 hapaxes. The classification procedure resulted in three classes grouping together a total of 81 phrases, or 57% of the entire text corpus. For each class, the first five words were identified and ranked by chi-square association.

Class I refers to what the interviewees said about themselves in their answers. In responding, the subjects' first thoughts were about *the areas that they themselves could engage in*, before turning to the areas that are necessary and useful for the community: 'I couldn't really say which area ought to take priority, there are so many of them . . . for me, the most important thing is trying, and then if you can try several different things . . . I like that' (21 f); 'I believe that you have to have skills in order to do volunteer work. That's why I think that if you know how to do something, you should do it for others; it's something everybody should do . . . the particular area doesn't matter, children, old people, remedial lessons . . . anything' (23 f); 'I would split areas up according to what university programme the student is in: hospital work for medical students, work at schools for people in humanities programs' (26 m).

Classes II and III refer to the sectors where *voluntary organisations can make a difference in responding to society's needs*. In particular, Class II includes references to the health care sector, where interviewees noted that it is not easy for a 'layman' to deal with an area as unapproachable as medicine and health: 'hospitals have a tremendous need for volunteers because there's a chronic shortage of personnel, but this is my first experience with volunteer work and so I'm not sure I'm the right person' (26 f); 'having volunteers in hospitals, in the Red Cross and organisations like that is all very well and good, but the thing that worries me is . . . what if they're not ready for the job?' (31 m).

Class III refers to *social work*, where the areas indicated included eldercare, childcare, helping the disabled, prostitutes, immigrants: 'I

think that old people need a lot, even if they're healthy, in retirement homes, they're probably very lonely, maybe this is an area where voluntary work is most needed, because a volunteer, just by providing companionship, can do a lot of good, regardless of whether of what he or she really knows' (27 f); 'I think it's useful for old people, kids and teenagers, people in trouble, in jail' (26 m). Interestingly, one of the words to emerge was 'paese', which in Italian can mean either town or country, and is used in both senses by the interviewees. On the one hand, the subjects mentioned the need for voluntary organisations in small towns and villages that would not otherwise have groups capable of taking action where needed: 'as I see it, it's important in situations where maybe there are no public services, where there isn't a service already operating . . . if you're in a town that doesn't have any recreational facilities for children, it's right to try to do something about it as a volunteer, if necessary; if the town already has facilities then it's probably better to devote yourself to something else' (25 m). As used in the second sense, the term refers to the large numbers of immigrants from other countries in urban areas, who now find themselves in very unfamiliar circumstances and thus need the kind of help to integrate through interactions between young people providing aid and support: 'to improve interracial tolerance in multicultural cities, volunteer work can probably be useful in achieving greater integration between the various ethnic groups and native-born citizens' (24 m); 'I think it's important to see that people who come from other countries can fit in and be part of the community; by helping children with their homework, for example, you can even learn about other cultures' (28 f).

## Findings for the second event

### *Voluntary organisations familiar to interviewees*

Taken together, the answers to the first question form a text corpus showing a total word count of 3839, of which 144 were in reduced form. Average frequency of occurrence was 6, and there were 83 hapaxes. The classification procedure resulted in three classes grouping together a total of 81 phrases, or 86% of the entire text corpus. As in the previous analyses, the first five words in each class are identified and ranked by chi-square association.

Class I refers to the *organisations which have an international impact*. The areas they address chiefly involve medical care (the Red Cross, Emergency, the blood donors' association AVIS) and aid for the disad-

TABLE 5  
Descending hierarchical classification – Voluntary organizations  
familiar to the interviewee

Class I		Class II		Class III	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
redcross	28.60	sermig	23.81	group+	16.25
emergency	23.63	gruppoabele	22.47	community	12.83
avis	21.47	nessunotocchicaino	17.38	ngo	12.08
sanvincent	18.94	cottolengo	14.29	collect+	9.25
scout	13.38	libera	13.28	hospit<	8.77

vantaged (the Society of St. Vincent De Paul). The interviewees' familiarity with these organisations stems from the projects that receive media attention 'I know that the Red Cross works in war zones . . . it's a good thing there are people who aren't afraid, perhaps they think that the symbol of the red cross guarantees that their non-combatant status will be recognised everywhere, and keep them out of harm's way' (23 f); 'I saw Mr. Strada, the guy from Emergency, on the TV yesterday . . . I think they're in Afghanistan now, but maybe they're somewhere else where they're needed' (19 m); 'I know about the St. Vincent Society youth group, who gives food and clothing to the poor and disadvantaged' (20 m). As for the Scouts, the interviewees spoke of this group's ability to take action in many different areas: 'there are the Scouts, who can put you in contact with a variety of organisation' (19 f).

Class II refers to the *organisations that have local origins or connotations*. Not surprisingly, one of the words that follow the first five is Don Ciotti ( $\chi^2$  12.54), one of the leading lights of voluntary and social work in Turin: the founder of the Gruppo Abele, and mentor to the associations 'Nessuno Tocchi Caino' and 'Libera'. The word Cottolengo refers to the work of Giuseppe Cottolengo, whose mission in aid of the poor now extending to countries throughout the world was born in a Turin neighborhood. His work still has an enormous influence in the city, as does Sermig, the Arsenal of Peace whose civic and socially oriented programs play such an important part in the city's life.

Class III groups together the words referring to the *volunteer organisations* known to interviewees but *not named*, i.e., all answers given by subjects who mentioned organisations but could not remember what they were called. In this case, the answers were considered as applying to areas of action: 'I know about organisations for helping people in the Third World, through NGOs and things like that' (18 f).

*Priority areas for action in and around Turin*

The text corpus for the answers to the second question shows a total word count of 7199, where 207 were in reduced form. The average frequency of occurrence was 5, and there were 770 hapaxes. The classification procedure resulted in three classes grouping together a total of 142 out of 165 phrases, or 86.06% of the entire text corpus. For each class, the first five words were identified and ranked by chi-square association.

In class I, we find sectors involving *charitable work for the ill*. A good example is provided by the following interview: 'I imagine that helping sick people is important to ensure that their convalescence is less difficult from the psychological standpoint, and that it's essential in the hospitals in Turin, where people from the entire region and beyond come for treatment . . . their relatives aren't always able to come here for weeks on end' (22 m); 'without doubt, I'd say helping sick people, even if it's only to bring a smile to the lips of somebody who's suffering, or doing something useful to lend a hand to health care personnel' (24 f).

Class II refers to *situations where there is a risk of marginalisation*: 'you should do something for people who're having trouble, and who are thus a bit marginalised, like drug addicts, the poor . . . maybe even foreign immigrants' (25 m). The problem of integration and poverty is a major concern in Turin, which since the Fifties has seen successive waves of immigration, first from the south of Italy and later from the poorer countries of Africa and Eastern Europe.

Class III refers to the *more vulnerable segments of society*, such as women and children, whom the interviewees see as deserving special attention: 'In my opinion, something ought to be done for abandoned children, sick children . . . and then to help women who are expecting babies and may have trouble supporting them and taking care of them, especially if

**TABLE 6**  
Descending hierarchical classification – Priority areas for local action

Class I		Class II		Class III	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
ill<	50.77	old+	27.93	children	16.44
help<	37.69	drug-addict<	19.31	orphan<	15.98
sector<	23.40	poor<	16.16	women	10.36
hospital<	20.19	foreign-immigr<	15.26	disable	10.33
smil<	18.24	margin<	13.70	support<	10.08

they're immigrants and don't know their rights, where to go or what to do' (23 f). Interestingly, one of the terms to emerge is 'orfano', the Italian root form for orphan and orphanage. Interviewees viewed working with orphans as one of the most important areas of action in Turin: 'without doubt, helping people in trouble, like children in orphanages (20 f)', though in reality orphanages were abolished by law some time ago.

*Sectors to which interviewees felt they could or would like to devote their time and resources*

The answers to the third question form a text corpus showing a total word count of 9386, of which 448 were in reduced form. The average frequency of occurrence was 7, and there were 103 hapaxes. The classification procedure resulted in four classes grouping together a total of 201 phrases, or 89% of the entire text corpus. For each class, the first five words were identified and ranked by chi-square association.

The first class consists of terms referring to *health care and social work*. Interviewees chose the ill, the handicapped, the disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of society as one of the sectors where they would be willing to be personally involved: 'I'd like to work with the handicapped, I think' (27 m); 'I'd like to do something in childcare, after school' (21 m); 'not with the Red Cross because I'd faint, maybe the elderly, or maybe children would be better' (20 f).

Class II, bore echoes of the *major sports events* hosted by the city. Interviewees stated their potential willingness to be involved in organising sports events, artistic or cultural events, exhibitions: 'I'd do something concerning sports, like anti-doping, timekeeping at races, or manning the starting gates' (21 f); 'I'd like to do volunteer work during sports events . . . some of my friends did it during the Olympics and

TABLE 7  
Descending hierarchical classification – Sectors of choice

Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV	
Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$	Words	$\chi^2$
disable	97.41	artist<	66.94	protec<	61.45	project<	34.34
terminal<	94.55	cultur+	66.24	mountain+	56.31	develop	22.92
eld<	81.62	sport<	58.49	animal<	37.55	africa	20.02
juven<	71.51	exhibition	55.50	keep<	30.10	asia	14.25
social<	59.29	organiz<	54.72	fauna	30.10	situation	13.17

were really enthusiastic about it' (22 f); 'I'd like an area that has something to do with cultural activities, like exhibitions, concerts . . .' (24 m).

Class III refers to interviewees' possible involvement in *environmental protection*. The recent Winter Olympics drew attention to the need to preserve the environment, its potential in terms of tourism and the risks of neglect 'I'd join emergency services, you know, because of the mountains, forest fires . . . maybe even keeping trails in order, I don't know them and could learn' (25 m). Class IV includes terms referring to involvement in projects for *promoting development in other countries*. Such commitments are seen as an opportunity to gain experience in places that the interviewee can learn about only through volunteer work: 'going to Africa, anyway, would be a dream' (24 m); 'I'd go to the east, to Asia, because in addition to being useful, it'd also be fun . . . seeing new places that have always fascinated me' (22 m); 'I'd like to go abroad, follow development projects in Africa or even in other poor countries, they're places and situations that are often ignored because nobody talks about them . . . nobody pays any attention, nobody does a thing unless a war breaks out' (23 f).

## Conclusion

As was expected from reviewing the literature, the findings that came to light in the course of the two investigations indicate a broad participation in voluntary work among young adults, who spoke of their willingness to do work of this kind (Table 2), and also identified the priority areas for action on the global scale (Table 4) and local level (Table 6). In particular, the two groups of subjects assigned priority to the same areas (hospital, elderly, children . . .), with an significant difference: as the subjects interviewed at the time of the second event have experience and memories of the Winter Olympics of the previous year, the areas they indicated included those associated with sports events and culture (Table 7, Class III). As for voluntary organisations known to interviewees, mention was made both of those active locally (Table 5, Class II) and those operating in broader contexts (Table 5, Class I). However, there was little real understanding of the local situation and its needs, particularly to the presumed need for volunteers in orphanages (Table 6, Class III), institutions that no longer exist, as well as those organisations mentioned by the subjects in general terms, without knowing their names or even their aims (Table 5, Class III). Interviewees also considered volunteer work as an opportunity for education for citizenship, which otherwise risks remaining unacknowledged and disregarded by

institutions that are ubiquitous in public life (Table 2, Class II). Interviews pointed to the lack of a support network as a real problem (one of the assumptions behind our study) which the university can solve (Table 3), as well as overseeing implementation of initiatives to ensure that they are in fact what they purport to be, and that the experience will be meaningful, organised, consistent with the educational programme and recognised in terms of academic credit (Table 3, Class I). Interviewees see multiple opportunities in this sort of experience, which they believe can help them both gain skills and gauge the types of skill and abilities they still need to acquire; additionally, it can be useful from the motivational standpoint, as they learn more about the local context where they can choose to pursue their future career (Table 2, Class III). In some cases, such experience may also prompt students to change their educational programme, should it prove incompatible with what volunteer work has taught them about themselves and the job they had planned.

These data also reveal the limits of the survey: selection of sample subjects was based on individual willingness to participate whereas, especially as regards the second event, it would have been desirable to differentiate between those already engaged in voluntary work and those who do not have extra-university activities.

These limits notwithstanding, the research group has proposed a service learning programme to be undertaken at the Turin University, based on information from such authors as Bringle and Hatcher (1996), and their service learning implementation stages, namely planning a network of accredited organisations and institutional actors, raising awareness by informing all institutional and community groups about the project so that they are encouraged to participate, creating a prototype to provide initial experience needed to identify and develop resources, strong points and critical factors, monitoring to ensure that the university provides the necessary guarantees for all parties involved, and research to provide updated information about the experience and the areas requiring further development.

The survey enabled assessment of the gap currently separating institutions, the community and young adults, and of university's central role in creating a network, fostering demand and providing an organised response: starting from this year, service learning (thanks to the participation and supervision of the Department of Psychology) will be available to all students enrolled in humanities, technical and scientific programmes at Turin University.



## Note

1. The program uses symbols to indicate the type of root. If the word is followed by the symbol <, this means that only the root of the word is recognised by the program. The + symbol, on the other hand, means that the terminations and multiple forms of the same root are recognised. An example of the first type is the word know<, which stands for know, knowledge, known, and so forth, while the word right+ may refer to right, rightly, rights, etc.

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