

VOLUNTEERING AS THE UNIVERSITIES' THIRD MISSION INDICATOR

Anna Kuzminchuk

Abstract

The measurement of Universities' third mission impact has now become crucial. The best-known World University Rankings do not include indicators for the implementation of the third mission, the volunteer activity of teachers and students is not considered as an indicator in these rankings. The purpose of the study is to assess the potential of teachers and students volunteering and investigate the connection between the volunteering of teachers and students and the level of their scientific activity. The article is based on the materials of two surveys conducted in 2017 in the Universities of the Urals Federal District (Russia). The contribution of universities to the development of the local community and territory in the framework of the third mission is not large-scale. The results of the study show that the level of volunteer activity of students and teachers has the potential for growth. Among the students who regularly work as volunteers, the proportion of those who constantly participates in research activities is significantly higher. The inclusion of such an indicator as volunteer activities of university staff and students in major world rankings will contribute to the development of such activities.

Key words: volunteering, university, third mission, world university rankings

JEL Code: I23, L31, M14

Introduction

Universities play a crucial role in the innovative and socio-economic development of territories. In modern conditions the third mission of universities – the social mission of serving the community, focused on the social participation of universities in the life of the local community, the production of the public good, is of particular importance. However, researchers note that university development programs do not develop any special strategies for the local community, and the social function is implemented as a derivative of traditional functions – educational and research (Perfilova, 2011). The exceptional concentration of efforts and the focus of universities on educational and research functions, among others, are dictated by indicators of international university rankings, among which there are no indicators of the university's social mission. In

turn, students and teachers as progressive and resource-intensive communities have significant potential in the implementation of a social function. The indicated circumstances actualize the need to study the potential for the realization of the social mission by universities, as well as the possibilities of its activation.

1 Theoretical background

According to researchers, the concept of the third mission is based on two parameters: “the corporate social responsibility of the university, and, on the other hand, a commitment to transforming knowledge into economic value, contributing to the competitiveness and facilitating innovation, creativity and cultural, scientific and technological development” (García-Peñalvo, 2016). The main elements of the third mission are entrepreneurship, innovation and social commitment. Many authors mention that it is quite difficult to measure the third mission due to the variety of implemented practices, they note that approaches and indicators to its measurement have yet to be developed (Carrion, Bas & Garcia-Gutierrez, 2012; García-Peñalvo, 2016). Secundo, Perez, Martinaitis and Leitner note that “third mission activities include three dimensions performed by universities in relation to external environments: technology transfer and innovation, continuing education and social engagement” (Secundo et al., 2017). Reháková, Šipikal and Lešková state that “third mission activities of universities could be analysed in three main dimensions – education, research and community development” (Reháková, Šipikal & Lešková, 2019). A study by Berghaeuser and Hoelscher shows “that most universities mention the third mission in their mission statements, however, the focus is mainly limited to economic impact and (technical) knowledge transfer. Much less emphasis is put on civic engagement or further education issues” (Berghaeuser & Hoelscher, 2019). From our point of view, the emphasis on these parameters of the third mission is largely due to the influence of international university rankings. Universities around the world are making efforts to advance in these rankings, working on specific indicators. Based on a review of literature and content analysis of nine international rankings, researchers concluded that international rankings fail to measure the HEIs’ success in developing third mission activities (Urdari et al., 2017). The largest international rankings such as the academic ranking of world universities (ARWU), the QS World University Rankings (QS) and the Times higher education world university rankings (THE) do not actually evaluate the third mission of universities, “the weight of third mission activities in the main international rankings is marginal or non-existent, which means that these networks cannot be used to evaluate or

compare institutions or countries on the basis of this dimension” (Fronzizi et al., 2019). An attempt to evaluate all three university missions was made as part of the Moscow International University Ranking “The Three University Missions”, however, the indicators of the third mission in this rating do not fully reflect the essence of the third mission. At the Third University Mission in Moscow conference Director of International Rankings at the Center for Higher Education (Germany) admitted that the most poorly studied direction is precisely the social responsibility of universities. The participants in the discussion expressed their solidarity with the speaker that assessing the impact of the university on the social and cultural life of the country is a very ambitious non-trivial research task (Conference “third mission of the university”..., 2018).

In turn, from our point of view, the third mission should be aimed primarily at the social activity of teachers, students and employees within the framework of the concept of corporate social responsibility, volunteering and interaction with non-profit organizations (Kola & Krzysztof, 2015), since the other dimensions of the third mission considered by the authors are actually derivatives of educational and research missions. In this regard, we examined some of the author's approaches to measuring precisely the social component of the third mission. Secundo, Perez, Martinaitis and Leitner as indicators of social engagement indicate talent attraction and incubation, social engagement with the community (including volunteering), internationalization (Secundo et al., 2017). Reháč, Šipikal, Leškováthe in their study of community development dimension are measured through indicators such as increasing civil participation in the region, improving facilities for cultural and sports infrastructure in the region, demonstration activities. Berghaeuser and Hoelscher within the framework of the societal engagement dimension of third mission mean activities such as civic engagement, community outreach / community service, service learning, social entrepreneurship, widening participation, open science / science literacy / science education, citizen science and public engagement (integration of the public into the research process) (Berghaeuser & Hoelscher, 2019).

From our point of view, the most correct indicator of the social dimension of the third mission of universities should be the volunteering of students and teachers. However, despite the proposed methodological approaches and specific indicators for measuring the social dimension of the third mission, they are not reflected in international university rankings, the activity of teachers and students is not considered as an indicator. At the same time, inclusion of indicators on social engagement, including volunteer work, in international rankings can intensify this kind of activity at universities.

2 Data and methods

In order to assess the current state of volunteer activity at universities the survey of students and teachers of large universities of the Ural Federal District was implemented in 2017. In the course of the study, a quota sample was implemented; it was formed on the basis of statistical data on the educational communities of the regions of the Ural Federal District. Within each region, quotas were made in the areas of training (engineering, technical, natural science, humanitarian, socio-economic). The sample of teachers was 810 people, the sample of students was 1860 people (3-4 year students and undergraduates were interviewed). During the study respondents were asked questions about the experience of volunteering, participation in scientific activities. The authors formulated a hypothesis that participation in volunteering contributes to the intensification of the scientific activities of teachers and students. To test the hypothesis, the contingency table method was used.

3 Results

3.1 Volunteering of teachers

Respondents were asked if they had to volunteer in the past year. Only 3.7% of university professors reported such an experience (tab. 1). The level of volunteer activity in the teaching environment seems quite low.

Tab. 1: The participation of university professors in volunteering

Which of the following have you done in the past year?	%
Participate in the activities of public councils, expert groups under the authorities	14,7
Participate in the activities of socially oriented NGOs	6,8
Volunteer	3,7

Source: authors' calculations.

However, the participants were also asked questions about whether they had to participate in the activities of expert groups under the authorities or to provide assistance to NGOs. From our point of view, the indicated types of activity can be attributed to volunteer work, since they do not imply a reward for the time spent and, of course, have a labor contribution. 6.8% of teachers participated in the activities of socially oriented NGOs and 14.7% participated in the activities of public councils, expert groups under government bodies.

According to the results of the study, among those teachers who had experience in various forms of volunteering, the percentage of those who were actively involved in scientific activity was higher - they wrote applications for research grants and published articles (tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Participation in the scientific activities of teachers with and without volunteering experience

Have you written applications for grants, research projects, articles over the past year?	Participated in the activities of public councils, expert groups under the authorities		Participated in the activities of socially oriented NGOs		Volunteered	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Yes	71,2%	59,3%	66,7%	60,7%	65,4%	60,9%
No	28,8%	40,7%	33,3%	39,3%	34,6%	39,1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: authors' calculations.

Thus, stimulating the volunteer activity of teachers (by including such indicators in the international university rankings) can help to intensify research activity and its rating indicators.

3.2 Student volunteering

University students were asked to answer the question of whether they had to volunteer in the last three years. 52.6% of respondents said that they had experience of volunteering with varying degrees of regularity (tab. 3). The results obtained indicate a sufficiently high volunteer activity, however, only 7.2% of students volunteer regularly.

Tab. 3: Volunteer experience of university students of the Ural Federal District

Have you volunteered in the last three years?	%
Yes, I constantly work as a volunteer (almost 1 time per month)	7,2
Yes, from time to time I participate in volunteer projects (3-5 times a year)	18,1
Yes, I participated by chance 1-2 times	27,3
No, never	47,4
Total	100

Source: authors' calculations.

Respondents were also asked if they were involved in research activities. The results obtained allow us to conclude that among students with experience of volunteering, the proportion of those who participate in research activities, including on an ongoing basis, is significantly higher (tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Participation in the scientific activities of students with and without volunteering experience

Do you participate in research activities?	Have you volunteered in the last three years?	
	Yes	No
I am constantly taking part	11,5%	5,0%
I participate situationally	39,0%	26,7%
I do not participate	49,5%	68,3%
Total	100%	100%

Source: authors' calculations.

Thus, volunteering has a positive impact not only on the research activities of teachers, but also on the scientific activity of students. The analyzed universities have a certain potential for the development of volunteering among students, more than half of the young people have already experienced volunteering. The inclusion of indicators of volunteer activity in international university rankings can become their competitive advantage, an additional reason for raising the rating position.

Discussion

In our study we found a rather low level of volunteer activity of teachers in the universities under consideration. Moreover, many teachers noted participation in various practices that can be attributed to volunteer activities, but did not indicate the experience of volunteering, which indicates the problem of self-identification of volunteer activity. This can be considered as a promising area of research. Among students, a higher level of volunteer activity was revealed, but the proportion of students who work as volunteers regularly is only 7.2%. Berei also recorded a low percentage of students participating in volunteer activities during their studies weekly – “just 11–15% of students volunteered every week” (Berei, 2020).

Researchers considered volunteering activity as one of the indicators for measuring the third mission of universities (Secundo et al., 2017). The authors established the relationship between volunteering and the scientific, innovative activity of students (Pevnaya & Pevnaya, 2019). However, the integration of research results in the institutional environment of universities around the world presents the certain practical interest – World University Rankings. Lee et al., comparing the positions of universities in world rankings with their focus on the third mission in strategic plans, found that “top globally ranked institutions are generally less explicit about their commitment to the third mission... Meanwhile, unranked institutions most consistently exhibit strategies in contributing to the local economy... working for the benefit of their local community”. These results indicate a significant impact of rankings on university strategies, and also confirm the relevance of the study.

It is worth noting that the implementation of volunteer activity as one of the indicators of the university third mission in rankings is associated with certain difficulties and limitations. Firstly, there are methodological limitations that are associated with different approaches to the identification of volunteering practices. It is important to develop a clear unified framework for classifying a practice as a volunteer activity. Secondly, the limitations connected with the methods of data collection, assessment of the scale of participation of students and teachers in

volunteer activities. It is extremely important to think over a technology for organizing data collection and control of its reliability. Thirdly, there are limitations regarding the volunteer identity of students and teachers. It is necessary to pay attention to the problem of self-identification of volunteer practices among teachers and students.

Conclusion

The contribution of universities to the development of the local community and territory within the framework of the third mission has significant growth potential in the region. At the moment the impact is not large-scale. The inclusion of such an indicator as the volunteer activities of university teachers and students in large international university rankings will contribute to the activation of such activities.

The results of the study show that the level of volunteer activity of students and teachers has potential for growth. Among students and teachers with experience in volunteering, the proportion of those who involved in research activities is significantly higher. The intensification of volunteering among teachers and students will contribute to the implementation of the third mission of universities, which at the moment is not given enough attention, as well as the development of the local community and territory.

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Contact

Anna Kuzminchuk

Ural Federal University

620002, Russia, Ekaterinburg, Mira st., 19

a.a.kuzminchuk@urfu.ru