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# The Social Responsibility among Higher Education Students

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to emphasize the importance of education for the philanthropic responsibilities of students. The basic term of the explanatory research is corporate social responsibility, adapted for higher education institutions—the philanthropic responsibilities of students, their implication on charity organization memberships or volunteering activities, and their motivation to help others. Special attention was given to the following questions: Are students involved in charity organization activities or voluntary work? Are there any differences between state and private universities regarding the philanthropic activities of students? How frequently, where, and why are they involved in volunteering? What is the latent structure of students' motivations? The quantitative international survey data were collected by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development from Debrecen University, Hungary, and the present examination focuses on the sample from Romania. Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software, first, through a longitudinal perspective, Romanian students' implications from state and private institutions were compared. Second, the paper analyzes the characteristics of volunteering and student's motivations. The conclusions present significant differences between state and private institutions. Students' traditional motivations, i.e. to help others, were very common and connected with relational and self-development intentions. This mixed motivational factor was different from the global motivational factor (to learn new languages and to discover new cultures).

**Keywords:** higher education students; social responsibility; private and state institutions; Romania

## 1. Introduction

The general term of corporate social responsibility has an under-researched dimension—the philanthropic responsibility, or the voluntary contribution to improve the quality of life of the community [1]. Adapting this term for an academic context, this paper proposes to study students' implication in charity organization memberships or volunteering activities. These responsibilities constitute an important part of their socialization, their integration into society. Formal education in universities, usually focusing on knowledge, learning performance, or success, neglects the role of out-of-university learning [2]. The education for social responsibilities is a rather new phenomenon in Romania, because it is a post-communist country, where in the last century all private individual or institutional initiatives were stopped for forty years. Today, it has become a necessity to study this topic focusing on the young generation.

The concept of this paper was presented at The European Conference on Educational Research—ECER 2019 Hamburg, Germany.

### 1.1. Social Responsibility Adapted for Academic Context

Romania is a Central-Eastern state where, since 1948–1949 till 1989, the communist regime quenched independent community activities, and philanthropic NGOs stopped functioning for 40 years. After the democratic change in 1989, the non-profit sector restarted legal activities especially with international support, decreasing after the European Union affiliation in 2007 [3]. Romania, with other post-communist states like Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, had a small not-for-profit sector. However, at the same time, Romania has the largest share of private support, measured as the share of non-profit revenues from private philanthropy [4]. The Romanian state neglected to finance the private sector, and internal philanthropic support was insufficient. For this reason, big international NGOs organized projects to bear the social responsibility of the communities [3].

In Romania, in 2010, there were a total of 66,804 NGOs, the biggest numbers functioning on social-charity activities [5]. The first volunteering law was adopted in 2001 and changed in 2014 through the promulgation of the law no. 78/2014. Volunteering is the participation of a volunteer person in activities of public interest carried out for the benefit of other persons or of the community, organized by legal entities of state or NGOs, without remuneration, individually or in groups. It is carried out in areas such as art and culture, sports and recreation, education and research, environmental protection, health, social assistance, religion, civic activism, human rights, humanitarian and/or philanthropic aid, community development, and social development. It is carried out on the basis of a voluntary contract and is the agreement concluded between a volunteer and the host organization, under which the first party commits itself to perform an activity of public interest, without being remunerated, and the second party obliges to offer an activity suitable for the volunteer application or preparation. Voluntary activity is considered professional and/or in the specialty experience, depending on the type of activity, if it is carried out in the field of graduate studies [6].

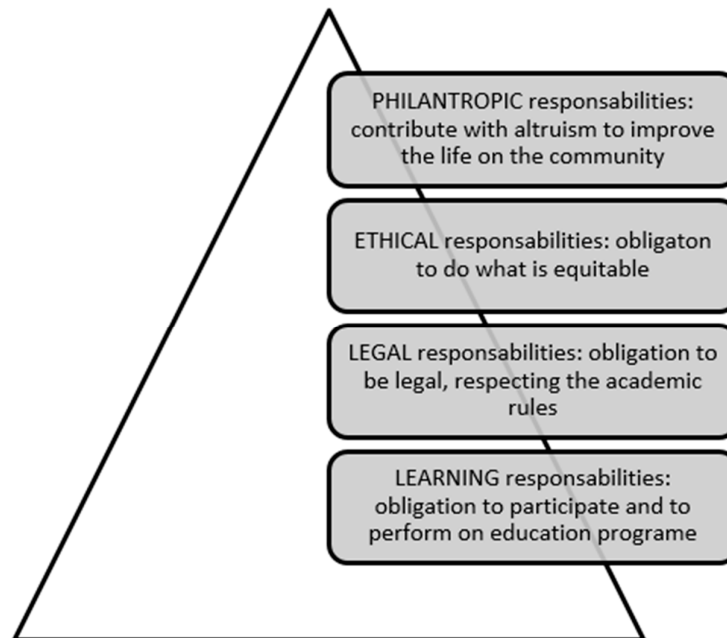
Charity organizations (philanthropic NGOs) are non-education profile institutions, parts of the non-profit sectors, independent from the state, and altruistic organizations that provide specific social assistance for disadvantaged groups on the community [7]. The social networks of private charity organizations point to the potential benefits of social capital resources in maximizing the positive effects of an educational environment for disadvantaged children [8]. These organizations can be supporting actors in the education of students. Socialization in different communities is a learning process and the norms and the values of these communities have individual and academic benefits [9]. By increasing the implication of students in voluntary activities, the prejudices of people decrease and the cooperation between different ethnically or cultural groups increase [10]. In our society, one negative effect of globalization is the social isolation of children and young people. At the individual level, social immaturity problems are connected with relational un-responsibilities [11,12]. On the other hand, students are not prepared professionals or citizens for the challenges of the technological society [13].

In this paper, the implication of students in charity organizations membership or volunteering activities was connected with the term social responsibility developed especially for a business context. Corporate social responsibility refers to environmental protection and renewable energy development, but on the same time, philanthropic support, social engagement or action too. These are for the benefit of greater society and it can be measured at individual or institutional level. In the social sciences, the external and internal institutional dimensions are more researched than the individual level [14–16].

The theory of corporate social responsibility is based on a Carroll pyramid with four levels: economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities are management's obligations, but philanthropic is more voluntary. Philanthropic responsibilities, at the top level of the pyramid, means a contribution to improve the life of the community. To play by the rules of the game, to be legal is an obligation, but to contribute with resources for the benefit of the community is a voluntary act [1]. Corporate volunteering or employee volunteering means the implication of a company with different activities to improve community life. Corporate volunteering allows workers to work as volunteers during

the program, provided with additional material or logistical assistance. This can be realized through the partnerships between companies and non-profit organizations [17].

Figure 1 represents the adaptation of the theory of corporate social responsibility for academic context. The basic student responsibility is the learning goal of the formal education—to participate and be successful in education process. Concerning ethical responsibilities, universities focus on the micro-ethics of students (the ethical issues of the profession and the research practice), neglecting the organizational, social, legal, and political context. In being taught social responsibility, students will learn the macro-ethical aspect of the work. In this learning process, the connection with external partners is an important step [12]. Students' philanthropic responsibility means volunteer contribution to improve the quality of the life of others belonging to the community.



**Figure 1.** The Carroll pyramid adapted for academic context.

### 1.2. Students Volunteering Motivations

Starting from the general differences between the formal and non-formal learning, the non-formal education of students take place in institutions out of classes on structured programs where the learning is not evaluated. Students' participation is usually voluntary, and their motivations are more intrinsic comparing with the formal learning motivations (typically extrinsic). The informal, spontaneous learning is present everywhere [2].

This paper also examines the students' volunteering motivations. Ferreira et al. in 2012 identified the following four different categories of volunteers' motivations:

1. Development and learning motivations include motivations connected with their ability to learn or increase self-esteem.
2. Altruism is a behavior for the benefit and welfare of the community, with altruistic motivations "to help others," even with sacrifices. The implication of students on charity organization activities or volunteering can be seen as altruistic behavior act with philanthropic responsibilities.
3. An important category of volunteer's motivations is connected with their need to belong and need to protection, their social and friendship network.
4. Regarding volunteering the less important motivations are related to career recognitions, to improve the CV or to get work experiences [18].

The traditional altruistic motivations constitute a special category and influence the volunteers' intrinsic satisfaction (task consequence) and not specifically the extrinsic satisfaction (action consequence). The intrinsic satisfaction is connected with the opportunity that organizations offer personal development to volunteering students [17].

Earlier country-comparative research results show that, in 2012 and later in 2015, in the cross border region between Hungary and Romania, just a small proportion of students were members on NGOs, volunteering groups, charity organizations or churches. On the other hand, Romanian higher education students were significantly more engaged in volunteering activities than Hungarian or Slovakian peers [19–21]. Analyzing the latent structure of students' civic engagement (memberships on NGOs, volunteering groups, churches, cultural, sport or political commitment), the results of statistical analysis revealed a connection between sport or political organizational affiliation, different from NGOs, volunteering, or faith-based engagements. This result tends either to increase or to decrease the competitive or equitable attitudes of them [22]. Examining the differences between teacher and non-teacher education students' volunteering in Hungarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian higher education institutions, the conclusion was that the type of the education does not significantly influence student's implication [23]. Combining the students' work values and the different types of volunteering, five cluster groups were identified (careerists with postmodern features, unmotivated, highly motivated, volunteers in an anti-volunteering climate and helping new type volunteers) and it has been found that work values and volunteering are significantly connected [21].

This paper aims to create the scientific environment of adapting the theory of corporate responsibility in higher education, where all responsibilities of the students' education: learning, legal, ethical and philanthropic, could be studied in the same context. The universities are competitive institutions with special ethical and legal rules, where the basis of the education is to teach students to perform, and at the same time act legally and ethically within university programs. In the same time, social responsibilities include philanthropic responsibilities, and education in this regard contributes to altruism and improves the life of the community. Non-formal learning through volunteering in charity organizations, and out-of-university responsibilities, are significantly influencing students' socialization and integration in the community, but also contribute to social cohesion, as well.

Starting from the theoretical framework outlined above, the research focus was on the philanthropic dimension of the general concept of corporate social responsibility. Adapting to academic context, the aim of the paper was to study the implication of higher education students in charity membership and volunteering. The research questions were: Are Romanian students involved in charity organization activities or voluntary work? Is there any difference regarding implication of students from state and private universities? How frequently, where, and why are students involved in these activities? What can we conclude about their motivations?

## 2. Methodological Approach and Student Group Characteristics

The quantitative international survey data used in this analysis was collected and made available by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development from Debrecen University, Hungary (CHERD-H). This research center leads international projects in the field of higher education in the border regions of Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine (<http://cherd.unideb.hu/eng/>). The big data bases was collected in 2012 and 2015 by international projects HERD (Higher Education for Social Cohesion Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-Border Area Project HURO/0901/253/2.2.2.) with case number N = 2728, and by IESA (Institutional Effects on Students' Achievement 2015—Research Application of the University of Debrecen RH/885/2013), N=2017. The characteristics of these data bases is described officially in [24]. The CHERD-H formulates almost the same questions for students regarding civic engagement, starting from 2008, and has partnerships with universities in the cross-border regions [20]. The present research uses the study sample from five Romanian higher education institutions, presented through Table 1, making distinction between state and private sectors.

The researched area included the Carpathian Basin, where the language-instruction of institutions was Romanian (University of Oradea and Emanuel University Oradea), Hungarian (Partium Christian University Oradea and Sapientia University of Transylvania) and Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj, which has mixes language-instruction. In 2012, in the subsample were included 714 students from state institutions and 543 from private higher education institutions. In 2015 the number of students from state universities was 153 and from private institutions 166.

**Table 1.** Higher education institutions from Romania included in examination.

Institutions and Locations	Type of the Institution	HERD 2012	IESA 2015
		N	N
University of Oradea (Oradea)	state	714	15
Partium Christian University (Oradea)	private	407	40
Emanuel University (Oradea)	private	136	–
Babes - Bolyai University (Cluj & Satu Mare & Odorheiu Secuiesc)	state	66	138
Sapientia University of Transylvania (Cluj & Targu Mures & Miercurea Ciuc)	private	–	126
<b>Totally number of students from Romania</b>		<b>1323</b>	<b>323</b>

Table 2 presents the demographic and academic characteristics of students included in examinations. The investigated population of HERD project in 2012 and IESA project in 2015 were mostly females (the score of males was 37.3% in 2012 and 16.4% in 2015). Most of the respondents were entry year students at the Bachelor of Science (BSc) level of study, learning in full-time program, financed by the state, and their average age of was approximatively 22 years.

**Table 2.** The students' demographic and academic characteristics.

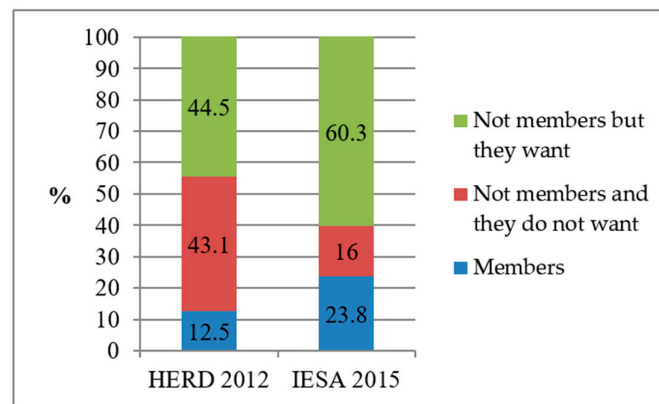
Variables	Items	HERD 2012	IESA 2015
		%	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	37.3	16.4
	Female	62.7	83.6
	Totally	100	100
<b>Nationality</b>	Romanian	61.4	5.7
	Hungarian	37.4	91.7
	Roma	0.1	–
	Others	1.1	6.4
	Totally	100	100
<b>Level of the study</b>	BSc	89.1	92.1
	MSc	10.9	7.9
	Totally	100	100
<b>Year of the study</b>	Entered years (1–2)	69.2	81.8
	Close to graduation (3–6)	30.8	18.2
	Totally	100	100
<b>Financed</b>	By the state	57	74.4
	Fee cost	43	25.6
	Totally	100	100
<b>Type of the study</b>	Full-time	99.7	98.5
	Part-time	0.3	1.5
	Totally	100	100

During the examination, it was first presumed that private institution students were much more engaged in volunteering activities and charity organization memberships than students from state institutions. In this part, the focus was on a longitudinal perspective on charity organizations

membership and volunteering, comparing state and private students' implication. Second, we examined students' motivations in volunteering using SPSS statistical program to compare the groups (statistical techniques—chi-square test and ANOVA test) and to explore relationships among variables (the techniques of factor analyses) [25].

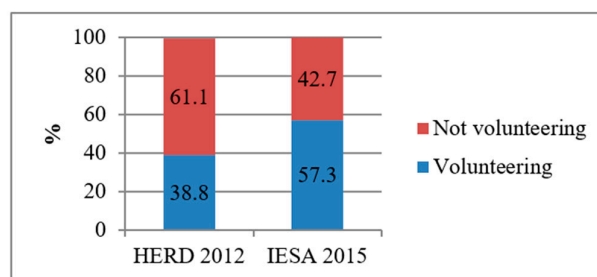
### 3. Results

Figure 2 depicts the participation of students' membership in charity groups or organizations in 2012 and 2015, presented as a percentage. We can observe that, in three years, the engagement of students was nearly doubled, and it is important to highlight the big score of students (nearly half of them in 2012 and more than half in 2015) who were not members of charity organizations, but they were willing to become members.



**Figure 2.** Score for students' engagement in charity membership (%). Source: HERD 2012 (N = 1252) and IESA 2015 (N = 307).

The bar graphs in Figure 3 also suggest an increased score of participation of students in volunteering activities from 2012 till 2015. These figures clearly demonstrate that only 38.8% of students have been involved in volunteering in 2012, but in 2015, the data shows an increased participation up to 57.3%.



**Figure 3.** Score of students' volunteering (%). Sources: HERD 2012 (N=1252) and IESA 2015 (N=307).

The Table 3 examines statistical significance comparing the charity memberships or volunteering of students from state and private higher education institutions. Using chi-test statistical examination, it can be concluded that the rate of the participation was significantly different in charity memberships in 2012, but not in 2015. Determining the odds ratio, it can be deduced that private institution students had one and a half times better chance to be involved than students from state institutions. The difference between state and private university student engagement was not significant in 2015. To compare the volunteering participation of state and private institution students, the research used the same logic and methodology. The data from Table 3 show that in 2012, students from private institutions were significantly more involved in

volunteering than students from state institutions, achieving a highest level of statistical significance ( $p$ —Pearson's chi square value is 0.000 and odds ratio is 1.6). Statistical data revealed also, that in 2015 was an increased score of participation in volunteering activities within students from state institutions (60.4%), where students had a significantly better chance for volunteering than students from private institutions ( $p$  value = 0.046 and odds ratio = 0.6).

**Table 3.** Students' charity memberships and their implication on volunteering from private and state higher education institutions'.

	State (%)	Private (%)	Odds Ratio	Pearson Chi-square $p$	N
Charity members in 2012	9.8	14.4*	1.5	0.013	1323
Charity members in 2015	23.9	20.5	—	—	321
Volunteering in 2012	32.6	48.7***	1.6	0.000	1257
Volunteering in 2015	60.4*	49	0.6	0.046	321

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Sources: HERD 2012 (N = 1252) and IESA 2015 (N = 307).

Table 4 outlines the students' volunteering implications in profit or non-profit organizations or in a non-organized way using chi-test statistical examination. The score of volunteering in profit organizations was nearly the same among state and private institution students (11% of the students). The significant differences were shown in preferencing non-profit areas (foundations, associations or churches) and non-organized ways. Students from private institutions preferred to implicate rather in non-profit organization activities than students from state institutions, achieving a highest level of statistical significance ( $p$  value = 0.000 and odds ratio = 3.5). In the same time, data revealed the significant preference of volunteering in non-organized ways: students from private higher education institutions were involved in non-organized volunteering with nearly two times higher chance than students from state institutions.

**Table 4.** The comparison of state and private student's volunteering depending on the type of the organization where the activities were organized.

Where Are You Engaged in Voluntary Works?	State (%)	Private (%)	Odds Ratio	Pearson Chi-square	N
Profit organizations	11.8	11	—	NS	356
Non-profit organizations, foundations, associations, churches	20.3	47.1***	3.5	0.000	363
Non-organized way	17.2	28.2***	1.9	0.000	363

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , NS – non-significant. Sources: HERD 2012.

A few characteristics of the volunteering are shaped in Table 5. The survey questioned the involvement of students in volunteering during their studies, on a yearly, monthly, or weekly basis. The frequency of the weekly implication was low (just 11–15% of students volunteered every week). Generally, students preferred volunteering on a monthly or yearly basis. Nearly half of them made a connection between volunteering and their study fields, and just a small part of them planed not to volunteer in the future (8% from state institutions and 12% from private institutions).

**Table 5.** Characteristics of the volunteering and future plans.

Survey Questions	State (%)	Private (%)
<b>How Frequently Were You Engaged in Voluntary Work During Your Studies?</b>		
Never	16	20
Yearly	42	38
Monthly	28	31
Weekly	15	11
Totally	100	100

<b>Is it connected with your study?</b>		
Yes, all the time	11.5	4.3
Mostly	45.9	41.1
Never	42.6	54.6
Totally	100	100
<b>Do you plan to be engaged in voluntary work in future?</b>		
Never	7.9	12.3
Yearly	43.6	52.3
Monthly	38.6	30.3
Weekly	10	5.2
Totally	100	100

Source: IESA 2015 (N = 323).

The final part of the survey made possible the analyses of patterns of the volunteers' motivations. Table 6 lists the possible motivations of students, using traditional (i.e., helping others, protect traditional values), modern (i.e. improve CV, gain work experience), and global reasons (those related to globalization and mobility, see below). The traditional reason for volunteering—namely, to help others—was very common among students (more than 71% of them declared, that this philanthropic motive leads their implications) compared to modern, individual motivations like procuring new experiences, exercising skills or because of possible professional development. It is remarkable that 34% of students were involved because their faith. Modern motivations, such as having these activities in the CV or protecting the environment, were not very common (just 33% of the students choose these options). On volunteering, family patterns or the example of friends inspired just 23% of students.

**Table 6.** Motivation of Romanian students.

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>
Gaining new experiences, professional development	72.1	261
Exercising my skills	71.2	260
To Help others	71.2	261
Find new relationships, friends	68.1	262
Gaining work experience	68.1	258
For feeling better	63.2	261
Making work relationships	63.2	262
Spending free time usefully	62.2	264
Feeling usefully	59.7	254
To know and understand others	58.6	254
To change my vision about the word	52.0	252
To learn new language	49.2	254
To discover new culture	46.7	258
To change the word	42.4	255
To overcome my problems	38.7	255
To protect the traditional and cultural values	38.4	249
To be appreciated	36.8	253
Because of my faith	34.3	257
To improve my CV	33.5	258
To protect the environment	33.5	253
My friends and family also volunteer	22.9	258

Source: IESA 2015.

Table 7 presents the latent structure of the motivations. Through Varimax rotation, the variables were separated into two factors, showing connections between variables. According to this, the first



factor combines both the traditional motivation of helping others with modern motivations—to gain professional or work experiences or exercising skills or motivation for making new relationships and friends. In the second factor the connected variables were related to the globalization and mobility—learning new languages and discovering new cultures. Factors with eigenvalue less than 1.00 were ignored by the computer program. The variance of the first factor, named mixed motivational factor was 36% and the second, named global motivational factor was 22%.

**Table 7.** The pattern of students' motivations.

Variables	Mixed Motivational Factor	Global Motivational Factor
Professional experiences	0.758	
For new relationships, friends	0.727	
Gaining work experiences	0.714	
Exercising skills	0.653	
To help others	0.594	
To learn new language		0.990
To discover new culture		0.595

Factor analysis: maximum likelihood, Varimax rotation, cumulative explication 58%. Source: IESA 2015.

Finally, analyzing the variance between motivational factors and the type of the study institutions, the independent variable was the type of the institutions (state or private) and dependent variables were the motivational factors. The research question was whether the type of the institution influenced the students' motivations. The difference between the average of the mixed motivational factor and the type of institution (state or private) was significant ( $F=7.3$  and  $p=0.007$ ), and also between the global motivational factor and the type of the institutions ( $F=7.8$  and  $p=0.005$ ). The mean of global motivational factor was higher in private institutions ( $M=0.168$  and  $SD=0.995$ ). The mean of mixed motivational factor was higher in private institutions ( $M=0.16$ ,  $SD=0.872$ ). However, because the sum of squares was lower than 10 in both situations (6 and 7), the conclusion was that the difference between institution types does not imply a significant difference in the averages.

#### 4. Discussion

This paper examined the philanthropic responsibilities of Romanian students from private and state institutions, comparing their implication in charity memberships and volunteering. The motors of volunteering in 2012 were students from private higher education institutions; the statistical analysis shows significant differences between state and private institutions regarding charity memberships and volunteering activities. On the other hand, the longitudinally data revealed the score of increased philanthropic responsibilities in state institutions in 2015. Concerning implication of students from private institutions in 2012 and later, in 2015, there were no remarkable changes, but in the same period, in state institutions, the score was nearly doubled. The explanation should be connected with the amendment of the volunteering legislation in 2014. Adapting to law no. 78/2014, state higher education institutions became potential sources for volunteering and charity activities in the Romanian society.

The hosting organizations of the volunteers were especially NGOs, foundations, associations or churches, but Romanian students preferred also non-organized forms of volunteering. In nearly half of the students, the chosen volunteering area was unrelated to their higher education study fields. Most of them volunteered yearly, and the weekly regular implication was not very common among Romanian students. Most of them plan to undertake voluntary activities in the future.

When analyzing students' motivations, the traditional reason—to help other—was very common. Romania is a country with traditional norms, where the young generation is characterized by closed and rational thinking [26] which reflects in their volunteering motivations as well. These results show a same situation as it is in Hungary, where helping others as motivation was more common among students. Their volunteer implication should be increased through offices, where students can get information about and help finding existing volunteering possibilities [23]. The

model of family members regarding volunteering inspired just a quarter part of the students, because the older generation grew up under communist regime and was not used to, even was punished for private initiatives.

The structure analysis of the motivational variables revealed that the initiative to help others was connected with individual and relational motivations (mixed motivational factor) presented in Figure 4. The global motivational factor (related with the global society such as learning new languages or discovering new culture) had a lower explanatory power on motivation than the mixed motivational factor.



**Figure 4.** Connections between motivations on volunteering of Romanian students

## 5. Conclusions

This paper provides a contextualization of the theory of corporate social responsibility in academic institutions. Learning, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities should be the direction and content of educating students for social responsibility, in which, besides the competitive nature of learning, the altruism to improve the life of the community is equally present.

The quantitative analysis of this paper focused on the philanthropic responsibilities of Romanian higher education students from private and state institutions, comparing longitudinally their charity organizational memberships and volunteering. First, it was presumed that private institution's students were much more engaged in volunteering activities and charity organization memberships than students from state institutions. This hypothesis proved to be true in 2012, but in 2015, participation in volunteering activities had a significantly increased score at students from state universities. The explanation should be connected with the amendment of the law on Volunteering Activity in Romania in 2014.

The characteristics of volunteering shaped out that Romanian students preferred volunteering on a monthly or yearly basis, especially in NGOs, foundations, associations, or churches, but they preferred non-organized ways. Volunteering was not connected with their study fields for nearly half of the students, and just a small proportion of them did not plan volunteer activities in the future.

Traditional motivation for volunteering, i.e. to help others, was more common among students than learning new language, discovering new culture or protecting the environment as motivation. This willingness could be the basis for universities to facilitate involvement of the young generation in volunteering and charity organization activities for the benefit of the whole community.

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