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Bridging the gap between academia and community:
The perceived impacts of participation in volunteering practices on students and alumni

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A few topics for our presentation

1 Volunteering and Social Responsibility & Higher Education

2 CASO – *Católica Solidária* (Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto)

3 Our study

4 Final and future considerations

Volunteering and Social Responsibility & HE

Communities as *learning spaces*

HEI must deliberately make efforts to interweave **teaching**, **learning**, & **research** happening in academia with **community engagement**, so that knowledge and resources are put forward, at the service of the common good.

This can be accomplished with methodologies such as *service learning*, but also through outreach activities and practices of **volunteering and social responsibility**.

(Bhagwan, 2020; Raykov & Taylor, 2021)

Volunteering and Social Responsibility & HE

The case of CASO

CASO – *Católica Solidária* ("Solidary Católica") is a volunteering center at University Católica Portuguesa (UCP). Volunteers are mostly **students**, but also **faculty**, **staff**, and **alumni**.

Occasional & regular volunteering opportunities are made available in 7 SER+ (*to be more*) areas:

- ✓ SER+ *Environment*
- ✓ SER+ *Shelter*
- ✓ SER+ *Special*
- ✓ SER+ *Example*
- ✓ SER+ *Professional*
- ✓ SER+ *Wisdom*
- ✓ SER+ *Life*

Volunteers participate in (1) meetings/gatherings to share volunteering experiences and its personal meanings, and in (2) specific & general training opportunities, to maximize the quality of the experience and its impact.

Our study on CASO

CASO celebrates its 20th anniversary this year!

Its sustainability is also proof of the relevance of its work in **bridging the gap between students (Academia) & the real outside world (Community)**.

Given the institutionally recognized relevance of the volunteering work conducted through CASO, and on the occasion of its 20th anniversary, our **research goal** was to examine…

**What is the perceived impact of volunteering with CASO
on students' & alumni's personal, social, and civic development?**

PARTICIPANTS:

Group 1 | **101 students** volunteering with CASO (1/+ years)

Group 2 | **113 short-term alumni** (UCP graduates up to 5 years)

Group 3 | **61 long-term alumni** (UCP graduates for 6/+ years)

PROCEDURES

Individuals who fit the inclusion criteria were contacted by e-mail and asked to respond to instruments and/or provide given information according to their research group.

INSTRUMENTS

- Sociodemographic and volunteering experience characterization questionnaire [Groups 1 & 2]

- *Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire* (Moely et al., 2002) [Groups 1 & 2]

- *Life Skills and Citizenship Education* framework (UNESCO/World Bank, 2019) [Groups 1 & 2]

- Information on current work situation [Groups 2 & 3]

- Sociodemographic information; 2 open-ended questions; take a photograph representing current involvement in volunteering (*photovoice technique*) [Group 3]

Our study

Mixed-methods approach:

- Quantitative data_SPSS software (descriptive & inferential analyses)

- Qualitative data_MAXQDA / photovoice (content analysis)

Our theoretical frame

Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ; Moely et al., 2002)

- **Civic Action** (8 items ask if students plan to engage in future civic action such as volunteering, being an active community member, or helping clean the environment)

- **Interpersonal** and **Problem-Solving Skills** (12 items ask about students' abilities to work with others and solve conflicts with them)

- **Political Awareness** (6 items ask about students' knowledge of current events facing their community, nation, and the world)

- **Leadership Skills** (5 items ask about students' identification as leaders)

- **Social Justice Attitudes** (8 items ask about students' attitudes toward poverty)

- **Diversity Attitudes** (5 items ask about students' attitudes toward people from different backgrounds)

(Díaz et al., 2019)

&

12 life skills of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education framework (UNICEF/World Bank, 2019)

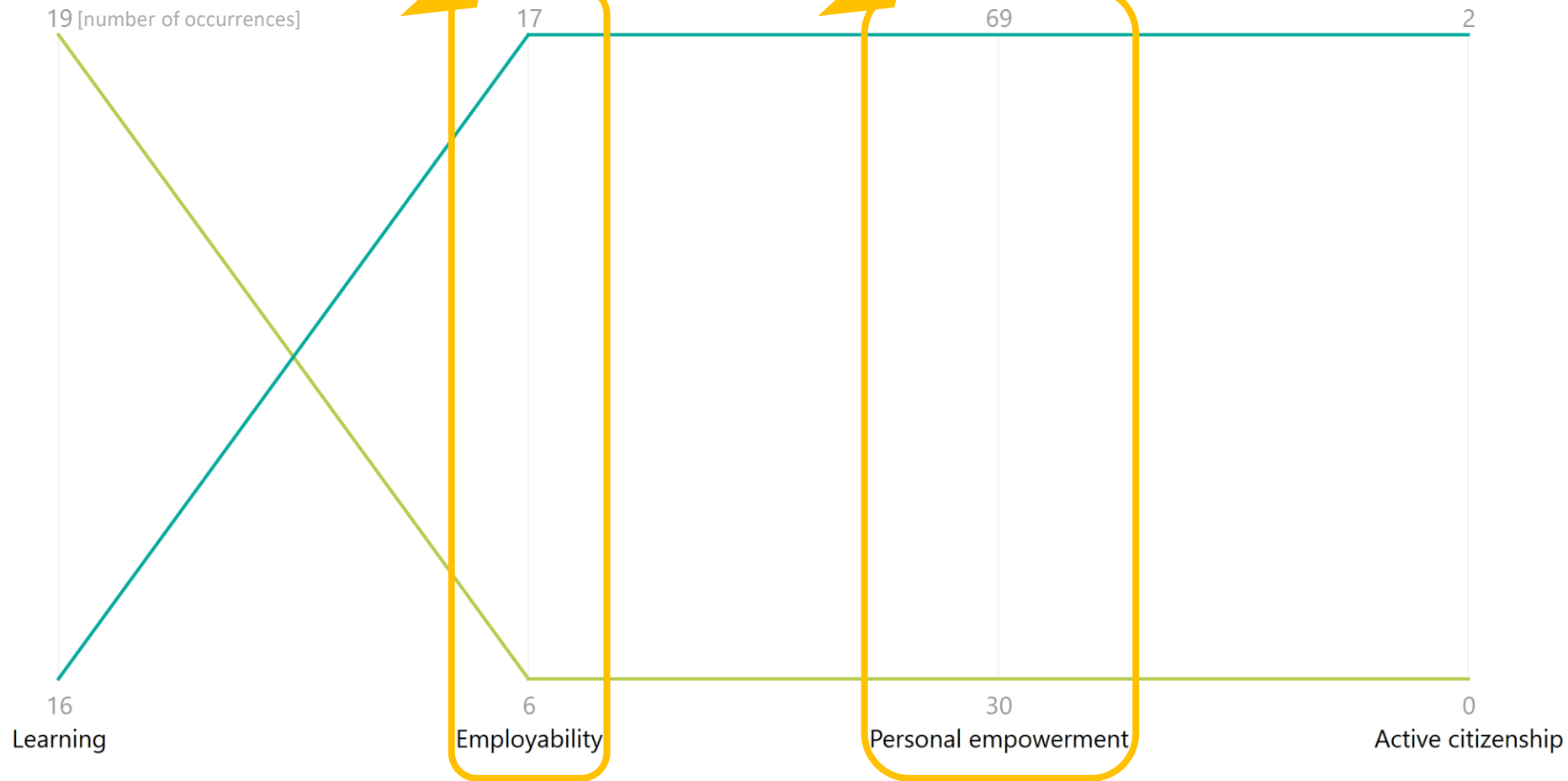Level of development of each life skill (Likert scale, 1-5 points)

Key results per research group
[qualitative results]

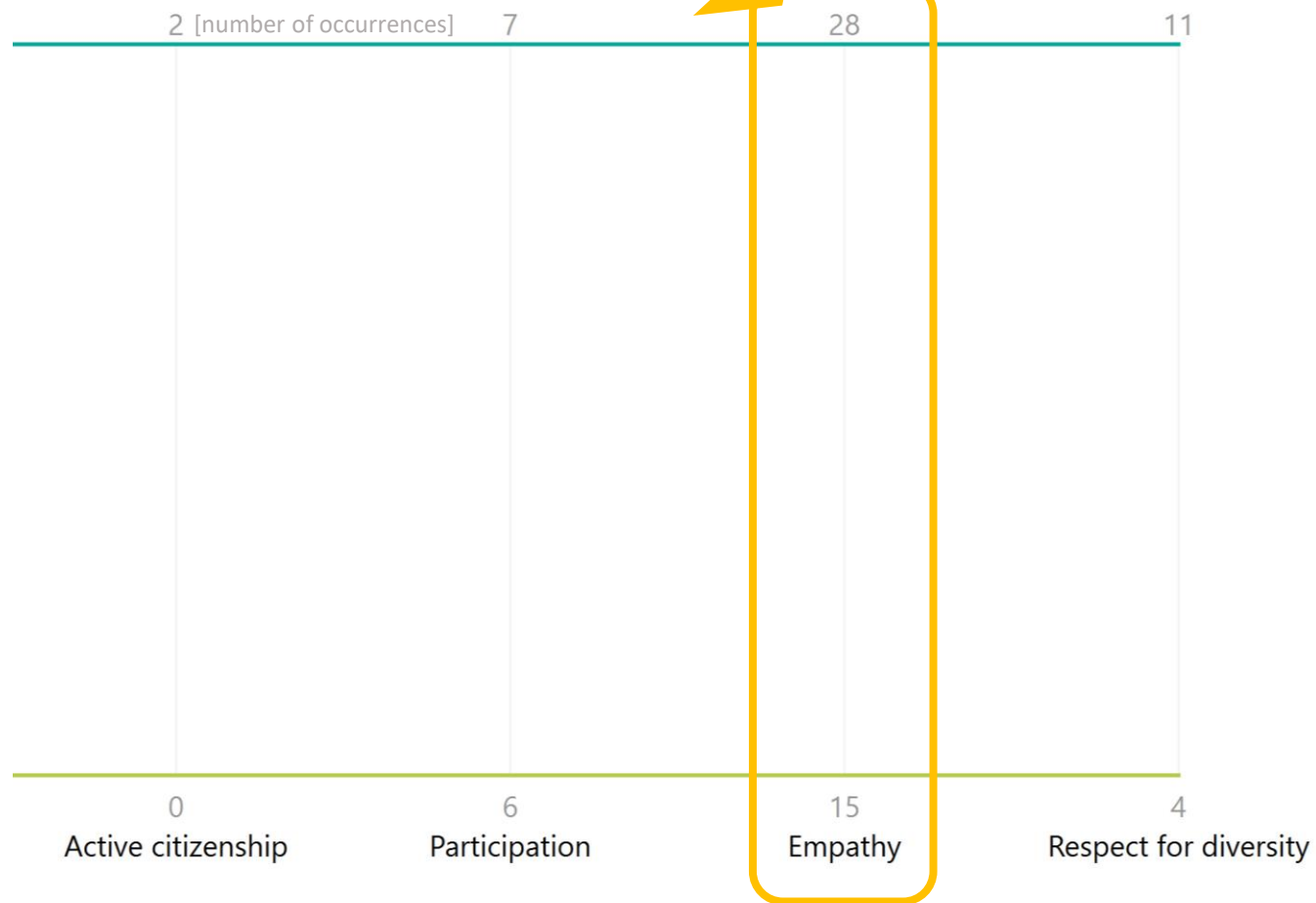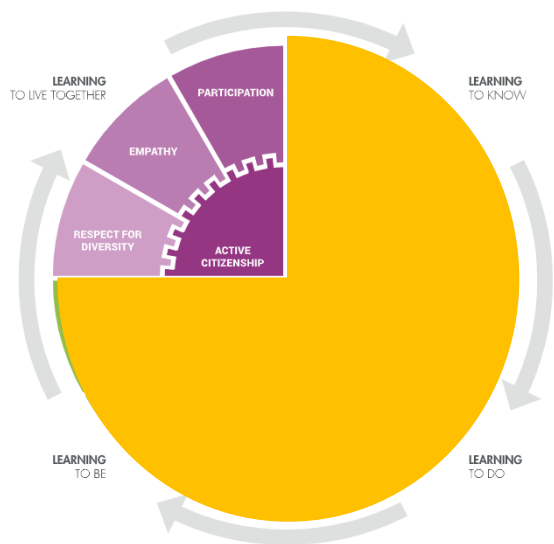# Group 1 (**students**) & Group 2 (**short-term alumni**)

Students ———
Alumni 1 ———

12 life skills of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education framework
(UNICEF/World Bank, 2019)

19 [number of occurrences]   17   69   2

16   6   30   0

Learning   Employability   Personal empowerment   Active citizenship

Group 1 (**students**) & Group 2 (**short-term alumni**)

📁 Students ———

📁 Alumni 1 ———

12 life skills of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education framework
(UNICEF/World Bank, 2019)

	2 [number of occurrences]	7	28	11
	0	6	15	4
	Active citizenship	Participation	Empathy	Respect for diversity

Group 1 (**students**) & Group 2 (**short-term alumni**)

Students

Alumni 1

CASQ

(Moely et al., 2002)

	Diversity Attitudes	Social Justice Attitudes	Leadership Skills	Political Awareness	Problem-Solving Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Civic Action
Students	10 [number of occurrences]	6		48	3	12	7
Alumni 1	4	1	0	39	0	7	6
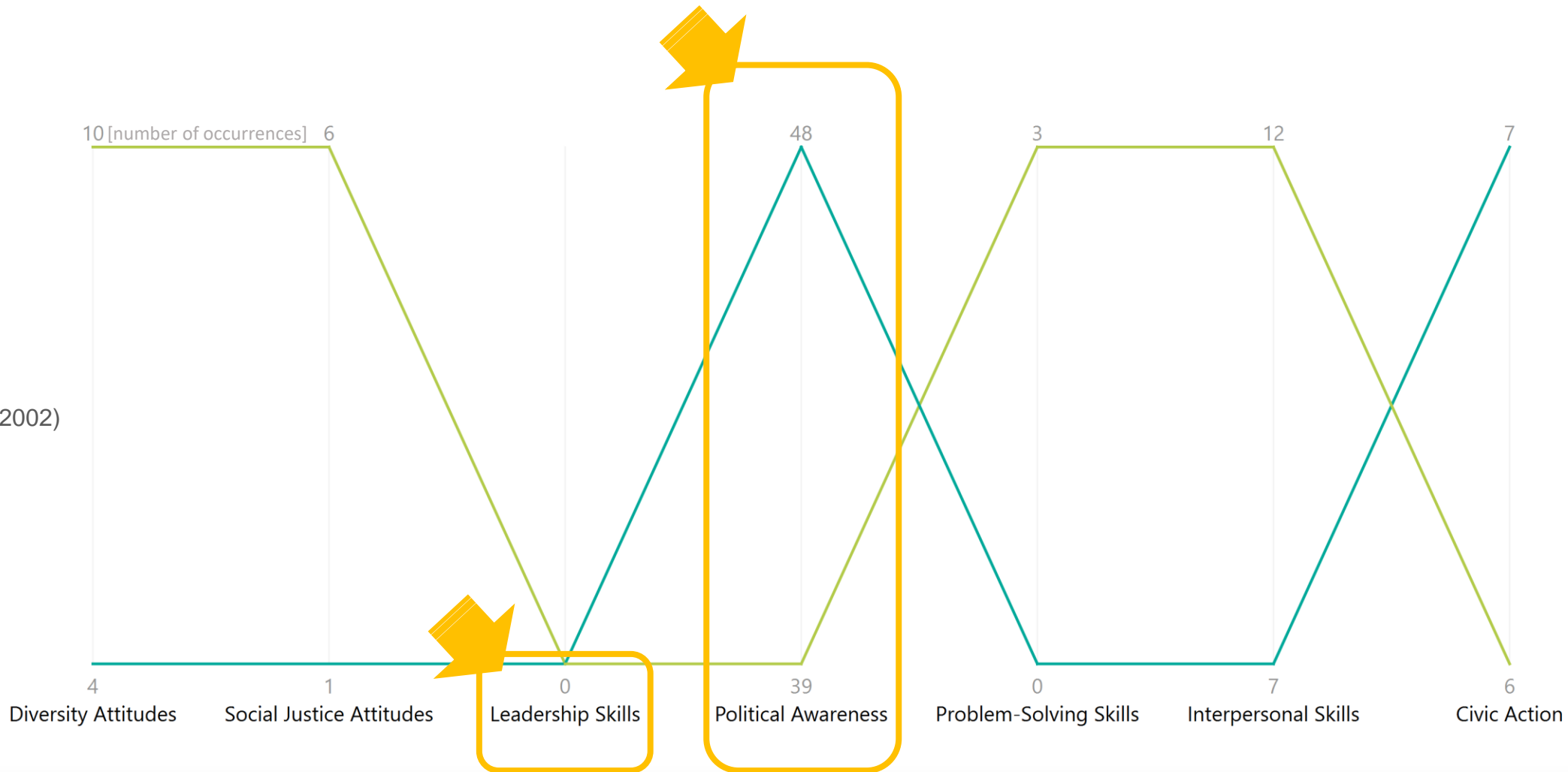
Group 3 | **Long-term Alumni who volunteered with CASO (6/+ y)**

N = 61   (2) What **impacts did/does that experience of volunteering at CASO have** on you & your life?

Development of civic attitudes & skills (CASQ):

Civic action [N = 11 occurrences]

- *Interpersonal skills* [N = 4]
- *Problem-solving skills*
- *Political awareness* [N = 29]
- *Leadership skills*
- *Social justice attitudes* [N = 2]
- *Diversity attitudes*

Development of competences (UNICEF/World Bank):

- *Active citizenship* [N = 1 occurrence]
  - Respect for diversity [N = 1 occurrence]
  - Empathy [N = 17 occurrences
  - Participation [N = 10 occurrences]
- *Personal empowerment* [N = 21 occurrences]
  - Self-regulation [N = 3 occurrences]
  - Resilience [N = 6 occurrences]
  - Communication
- Employability [N = 8 occurrences]
  - Cooperation [N = 6 occurrences]
  - Negotiation
  - Decision-making
- Learning
  - Creativity
  - Critical thinking [N = 1 occurrence]
  - Problem-solving

* MAXQDA software | content analysis | unity of analysis: sentence, not mutually exclusive | inter-rater agreement (2 judges).

(3) A **photograph** that represents current involvement in volunteering? (26 pictures)

Theme represented: *Teamwork*

Theme represented: *Environment*

Theme represented: *Organized volunteering association*

Theme represented: *International volunteering*
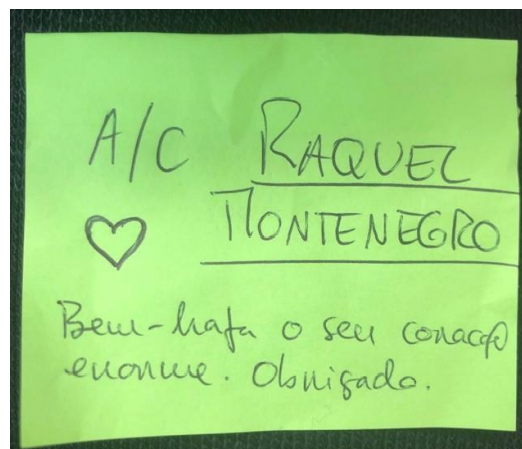
Theme represented: *Activism*

Theme represented: *Volunteering with animals*

Group 3 | **Long-term Alumni who volunteered with CASO (6/+ y)**
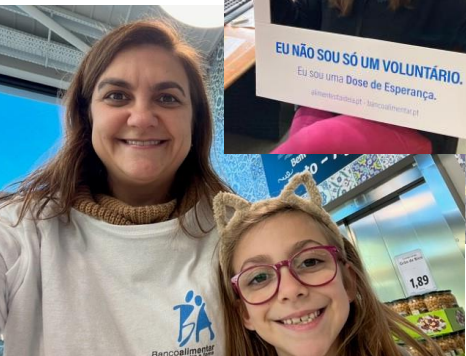
N = 61

(3) A **photograph** that represents current involvement in volunteering? (26 pictures)

Theme represented: *Creating impacts*

Theme represented: *Health*

Theme represented: *Education*

Theme represented: *Food and shelter*

The 3 research groups in perspective

What is the perceived impact of volunteering with CASO on students' & alumni's personal, social, & civic development?

STUDENTS

1

Political awareness

A very enrichening experience that connected me to realities that are very different from my place of privilege. [AST113]

Empathy

It helped me to gain new perspectives and to cultivate empathy for everyone. [AST104]

Personal empowerment

The experience of volunteering with CASO was mostly enrichening for my growth. [AST118]

ALUMNI (SHORT-TERM)

2

Employability

The place where I volunteered at made me be sure about the place where I wanted to do my internship and what I wanted to do as a professional. [AST106]

ALUMNI (LONG-TERM)

3

Civic action

It enables me to make my small contribution so that society may integrate disadvantaged people. [ALT14]

Participation

An incredible opportunity to have the possibility to help children who really need support in their learning. [ALT45]

4 take-aways from our study

1 The two frameworks (CASQ + UNESCO/World Bank LSCE) considered in this study proved relevant in grasping the perceived meanings of participation in volunteering.

2 Students and alumni (both short and long-term) perceive their participation in volunteering as **relevant** in terms of their personal (*personal empowerment*), social (*empathy*), and civic (*political awareness*) development.

3 The perceived impacts of volunteering **differ** according to group: (1) students are mostly focused on their personal, social, and civic development; short-term alumni on employability; long-term alumni on effective action.

4 Some perceived impacts of volunteering are **diversified and long-lasting**.

Through the work of CASO volunteers, both them and UCP come closer to the real world. Students are giving to the community, but also benefiting from this solidary relationship. It is crucial to continue this kind of initiative, to interlace **community engagement** practice with **teaching, learning, and research**.

Final considerations

Importance of offering a volunteering experience to students, given its **present & lasting personal meanings**.

In the future, it is relevant to **assess the impact of volunteering with CASO in the community** who benefitted from it.

It is also relevant to compare these results with data from **volunteering initiatives at other HEI** (in Portugal and internationally).

Future considerations

Boyer (1996) called on HEI to honor the historical alliance between HE & civil society, in favor of a greater good, proposing that pedagogy evolve into "**Scholarship of Engagement**".

To accomplish this, more deliberate and committed efforts are needed to **turn communities into effective learning spaces**, with benefits to both students & partners in the community, thus **bridging the gap between academia and community**.

Obrigada! | Thank you!

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