Volunteer activity, as the seminal work by Putnam et al. (1993) claims, can be regarded as a sign of the social capital of a society. Volunteering is considered to have an impact on the sense of civic responsibility (Wollebaeck and Selle, 2003), public trust, confidence in institutions (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Wollebaeck and Selle, 2003), and also on the levels of tolerance and optimism (Stolle and Rochon, 1998), and the network of cooperative relations of each individual (Wollebaeck and Selle, 2003).

However, the effects of volunteer activity are not just noticeable in the short term. A number of surveys have concluded that young people's volunteer work also has consequences in the long term (Hanks, 1981; Jennings and Niemi, 1981; McFarland and Thomas, 2006). Stolle and Hooghe (2004) claim that behaviour patterns are already defined in teenagers and continue to evolve in adulthood. The lasting effects of social collaboration and of the social capital derived from volunteering among young people and teenagers is justified on two levels. Firstly, it is argued that integration in social networks when volunteers are young may lead them to volunteer their time in the future. Secondly, it is suggested that participation in any kind of association on the part of young people results in the development of civic attitudes as a permanent personal feature that remains in adulthood.

Volunteering and the social collaboration of young people and children constitutes an opportunity for any society and, at the same time, their increase also appears as a challenge. On the one hand, only by investigating trends among young people and children is it possible to analyse the stability of volunteer work throughout time and to tackle the issue of the actual strength of volunteering. On the other hand, several authors argue that experience in volunteer work in people’s youth is a very important aspect of future civic commitment (Johnson et al, 1998), and that individuals who were socially active when they were young are more likely to participate in civic associations when they become adults (Stolle and Hooghe, 2004). Finally, an analysis of volunteering in young people and children may shed light on the mechanisms to promote it across different generations.

Our research aims to explore the features and determining factors of volunteering in Spanish young people and children. Our data on volunteer work taken from the 2002-2003 “Empleo del Tiempo” Survey have allowed us to analyse volunteering in Spain in a representative manner and taking into account different types of organizations. Participation in volunteer activities and the amount of time volunteered by young people and children are the two dependent variables considered. In order to establish homogeneous groups, since the independent variables do not coincide, the volunteers are grouped together in four age groups: 10 to 14, 15 to 18, 19 to 24 and 25 to 29 years old. Our study is structured as follows. After an initial theoretical revision of the topic we will go on to articulate our hypothesis for research and to define the dependent and independent variables used. Next, data and results will be presented. In this section, we will carry out a descriptive analysis of child and young volunteers in Spain and will present and discuss the results of our statistical data. Finally, we will concentrate on the main conclusions reached from our study.

References:


