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EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING AS A FORM OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY OF AN ORGANIZATION – THE CASE OF AN OPEN-PIT MINE IN THE MAŁOPOLSKA VOIVODESHIP

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to evaluate the role of employee volunteering as a form of social activity of an organization and to determine to what extent the volunteering activities of the mine are noticed and assessed by its employees, former employees, and stakeholdrs of the local labour market.
Design/methodology/approach: A diagnostic survey method and a questionnaire technique were applied, covering five areas of social activity of an organization, including in detail the area of volunteering. The study involved 293 respondents, of whom 54% were men (N = 158), 38.2% were women (N = 112), and in 23 (7.8%) cases, respondents did not provide gender data. Regarding the respondents' relationship with the mine, the largest group consisted of its current employees (48.1%, N = 141), followed by individuals not professionally associated with the mine (26.6%, N = 78) and former retired employees of the organization (25.3%, N = 74).
Findings: The results indicate that employee volunteering is perceived both within the organization and by some external stakeholders. Volunteering activities are rated particularly highly by former employees, who confirm the organization's activity in this area in over 60% of cases. Significant differences are also observed regarding gender – men perceive the organization's volunteering activities more often than women.
Research limitations/implications: Volunteering activities, as an element of the broader construct of social activity of an organization, have a significant impact on the organization's image in the local labour market. For this reason, future research should focus on detailed communication channels promoting both the idea of volunteering and the implemented projects in which every member of the local community can actively participate.
Originality/value: In the literature, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research analyzing the differences in the perception of employee volunteering between various stakeholder groups (employees, former employees, and external stakeholders). In this context, the obtained research results emphasize the importance of volunteering as a tool for strengthening relationships with the local community, enhancing relationships with the environment, and shaping a pro-social image of the organization among different stakeholder groups.
Keywords: volunteering, social activity of an organization, employee volunteering, forms of volunteering.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Modern industrial organizations operate under conditions of increasing social pressure, which requires them to undertake actions going beyond their core operational activities. One of the significant areas of corporate social activity is employee volunteering, which serves as a tool for building relationships with the local community and strengthening the organization's social capital. Its importance is growing particularly in entities strongly embedded in the local environment, such as open-pit mines, whose operations naturally affect the living conditions of residents. The aim of this article is to evaluate the role of employee volunteering as a form of organizational social activity and to analyze how volunteering activities are perceived by employees, former employees, and external stakeholders. The conducted study allows for determining the extent to which volunteering constitutes an effective tool for shaping the organization's image in the local labour market and to what degree it supports the building of lasting relationships with the local community.

2. Volunteering as a component of social activity of an organization

Contemporary organizations function within an environment of rising social expectations, which verifies the transparency of their ethical actions. In this context, codes of ethics and internal regulations defining the principles of responsible conduct toward stakeholders become a point of reference for organizations (Porter, Kramer, 2003). An important test for a company's operations is the ability of its representatives to behave in problematic situations. Responsibility is manifested not only in appropriate attitudes but also in the ability to maintain social dialogue with the immediate environment, monitor social moods, and identify potential threats early (Nieć 2024; Nieć, Łukasiewicz, 2022). Given these challenges, the concept of organizational social activity takes on particular importance for modern organizations. This term refers to all purposeful, often long-term, initiatives and actions of an organization consisting of influencing its immediate environment, going beyond normal duties related to running a business. These efforts are expressed in undertaking activities for the benefit of both the individual and the group, aimed at realizing tasks that satisfy highly valued social values in the organization's immediate vicinity, even at the cost of additional financial outlays incurred by the organization through appropriate entities established over the years to conduct dialogue with its stakeholders (Nieć, 2024, p. 244).

According to the concept of corporate social responsibility, enterprises should demonstrate social trust and respond to the needs of the local environment. Participating in social development, ensuring better living conditions for the local community and supporting civic

initiatives are manifestations of a mature social strategy (Adkins, 1999, pp. 37-42). Organizational social activity, carried out toward both internal and external stakeholders, shapes a positive image of the enterprise in the local labour market, builds its reputation, and constitutes a lasting element of competitive advantage.

Organizational social activity should be conducted in a long-term and strategic manner so as to connect the expectations of stakeholders with business goals, without colliding with the company's development strategy. Within the framework of this activity, companies implement various forms of influence on the environment by realizing tasks that satisfy highly valued social values, including, among others, patronage, sponsorship, and volunteering (Fig. 1).

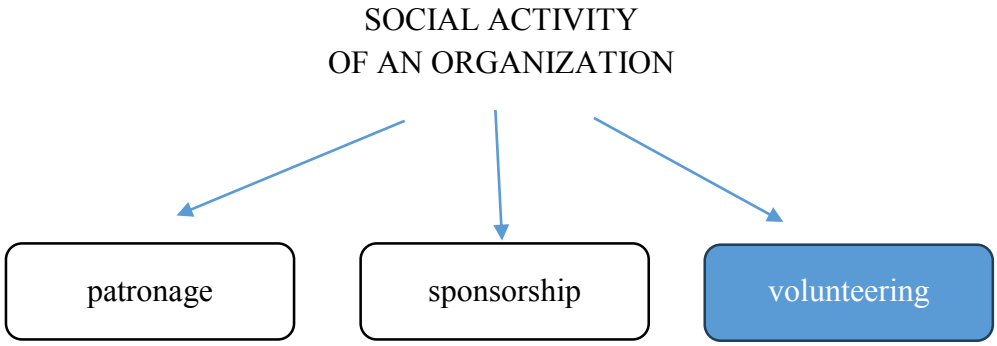


Figure 1. Volunteering as a component of social activity of an organization.
Source: own elaboration based on (Nieć, 2024, p. 236).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the institution of patronage, due to its popularity, was used by various social, economic, or religious entities (Czubała, Jonas, Wojnarowska, 2017, p. 81). After World War II, it developed in the direction of sponsorship, which eventually emerged as a separate form of cooperation between entities (Gołaszewska-Kaczan, 2009, p. 110). Patronage is identified with acts of charity, devoid of a commercial dimension (Kopeć, 2014, pp. 113-115), whereas sponsorship currently constitutes a partnership agreement in which the sponsor provides financial or material resources in exchange for image benefits (Mruk, 2012, p. 221).

Alongside patronage and sponsorship, volunteering is gaining increasing importance, which, in the context of social activity, can play a key role in many organizations (Schimanek, 2012). Employee volunteering is a specific form of it, supported by the company and involving employees in social actions. This type of activity strengthens employees' sense of belonging to the organization, shapes their social sensitivity, and integrates employee teams around shared values.

In the context of corporate social responsibility, employee volunteering is one of the most effective tools for building relationships with the local community. Such actions can take various forms — from helping those in need and supporting public institutions to environmental and educational projects. The measurable effect is not only an increase in social trust but also the strengthening of the company's reputation as a responsible and engaged organization.

3. Employee volunteering - basic assumptions

The beginnings of volunteering date back to 1920, when the Swiss Pierre Ceresole organized the camp *Service Civil Volontaire*, as a reaction to the aftermath of World War I. At the camp, he gathered volunteers from countries that had previously fought each other to rebuild a village near Verdun. At the same time, in the United States, the first pioneers arriving from across the ocean had to learn to cooperate, laying the foundations for local communities. Especially after World War II, many initiatives cultivating the idea of volunteering were created (e.g., UNESCO). The creation of the European Union also influenced the development of the idea of volunteering on the old continent. Currently, national volunteering institutions associate in cooperation networks, develop joint action programs, and conduct policies for the promotion and development of voluntary work[1].

The essence of volunteering is the voluntary nature of its provision (*voluntarius* – voluntary). The National Network of Volunteering Centers has developed the following definition of this term: *volunteering* is voluntary, unpaid, conscious work for the benefit of others or the entire society, going beyond family, friendship and acquaintance relationships (Schimanek, 2012, pp. 11-24). Within state legislation, since 2003, the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism has also defined a volunteer, stating that a *volunteer* is a natural person who voluntarily and without remuneration performs services specified in the Act (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1491).

S.T. Güntert, T. Wehner, and H.A. Mieg (2022) approach the issue of volunteering in a similar spirit. In their opinion, *volunteering* refers to non-profit activity, including unpaid, independent, or institutionally organized, socially oriented work; it means personal, non-profit-oriented engagement associated with regular, project- or event-related expenditure of time, which in principle could also be performed by another person and potentially could also be paid for.

There are many types of volunteering depending on the social need the volunteers are to be engaged in, the goal and time of its provision, and the dominant type of volunteers. Among the types of volunteering, one can mention:

- NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are all entities that are not units or bodies of public administration and whose activity is not aimed at achieving profit. A characteristic feature of non-governmental organizations is the lack of links with public authorities (non-governmental organizations). Most often, the term "non-governmental organization" is used in relation to foundations and associations[2].

[1] About the Corps, https://www.korpussolidarnosci.gov.pl/pl (access date: 10/02/2024).
[2] Non-governmental organizations - Definition - ngo.pl (access date: 10/02/2024); https://fakty.ngo.pl/slownik/organizacje-pozarzadowe#:~:text=Organizacje%20pozarz%C4%85dowe%20-%20Definicja%20-%20ngo.pl.

- employee volunteering is the voluntary participation of employees in work for the benefit of those in need, supported by the company through financial, material, and human support, offering the time and skills of employees (Czubała, Jonas, Wojnarowska, 2017, pp. 116-117). Employee volunteering can take various forms, including:
  - participation in social and charitable campaigns, most often carried out by NGOs,
  - the company's own social programs; the company designs and implements the programs itself, engaging willing employee-volunteers,
  - proprietary employee programs, within which employees themselves prepare projects to help others. The most frequently implemented form is grant competitions with the support of employee-volunteers. The granted support usually takes a financial form with a predetermined amount. In such projects, the cyclical nature of their conduct is important,
  - employee collection – employee volunteering can also take the form of a voluntary employee collection, e.g., a collection of gifts (clothes, food, office supplies), a one-time or cyclical contribution deducted from salary, or blood donation campaigns,
- senior volunteering, otherwise known as "silver volunteering"; sharing one's knowledge, time, and experience with those in need. This type of volunteering can be a tool for preventing many problems of people in senior age, especially loneliness, marginalization, or even social exclusion, as well as a way to utilize their great potential (Górecki, 2013).
- school volunteering is one of the most popular types of volunteering, mainly due to its accessibility for children. Volunteering circles are formed in schools, where students can develop their passions and act for the benefit of the school, but also support local institutions or organizations[3].
- sports volunteering is voluntary support in the organization of competitions, tournaments, and championships. This is most often mentioned during the organization of sports events, competitions, or recreational championships. Volunteers often help organizers in various ways, e.g., monitoring a marathon route, overseeing the course of the competition, supporting participants, etc.

One of the basic assumptions within the mission, vision, and strategy of every enterprise should be participation in social development, ensuring better living conditions for the local community, and generating profit, which should partially be allocated to the targeted needs of this community (Kwiecińska, 2014, pp. 52-53). Companies should demonstrate that they deserve the trust of local communities, as this type of stakeholder reacts very dynamically to any changes, threats, environmental degradation, or disturbances of spatial order (Kuciński, 2001, pp. 34-35). In turn, a socially active company can derive benefits from the local

[3] https://www.ceo.org.pl (access date: 10/02/2024).

community, which, thanks to properly conducted dialogue, makes it credible in the eyes of public opinion and shapes its positive image (Adkins, 1999, pp. 37-42).

The social activity of industrial organizations can include a wide range of initiatives — from patronage and sponsorship of cultural, sports, or scientific events to volunteering programs engaging employees in pro-social and pro-ecological actions. Particularly important are actions supporting the local community through cooperation with education, supporting charitable institutions, and initiatives for former employees (e.g., retirees and pensioners), which strengthens intergenerational bonds and the company's social capital.

4. Applied research methods

The research on attitudes toward volunteering was conducted in 2024. It covered employees of an open-pit mine (hereinafter referred to as „the mine") located in the Małopolska voivodeship and individuals representing the local labor market, and was part of a broader research project aimed at indicating the relationship between an organization's social activity and its image in the local labor market. The research method applied in this study was a diagnostic survey, and the technique was a questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire used covered a total of 5 areas: the organization's cooperation with education, sports activity, local traditions, volunteering, and the company's image in the local labor market. Volunteering, which is the subject of consideration in this article, was represented by 6 statements, the first of which concerned the respondents' knowledge of individual forms of volunteering supported by the organization; the remaining 5, along with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, are presented in Table 1. The aforementioned coefficient reached a very high value of 0.935, which means that the research tool used was characterized by high reliability. The statements presented in the table were assessed by respondents using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Table 1.
Cronbach's alpha parameter values for the volunteering area, calculations in SPSS

Statement	Cronbach's alpha parameter with 95% confidence interval
Full	**0,935 (0,915-0,951)**
2. The mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees.	**0,923 (0,901-0,942)**
3. The mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to members of the local community.	**0,915 (0,888-0,936)**
4. The mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market.	**0,921 (0,899-0,941)**
5. Through the mine's actions in recent years, volunteering has spread on the local labor market.	**0,914 (0,883-0,937)**
6. Volunteering actions popularized by the mine shape pro-social attitudes among the local community.	**0,929 (0,904-0,949)**

Source: own elaboration.

The study involved 293 respondents, of whom 54% were men (N = 158), 38.2% were women (N = 112), and in 23 (7.8%) cases, respondents did not provide gender data. The survey respondents were divided into three groups defined by their relationship with the studied organization:

- current employees,
- retired employees and pensioners,
- external stakeholders of the mine, represented, among others, by the Municipal Office, Labor Office, local education (schools, kindergartens), charitable institutions, rural housewives' circles, Volunteer Fire Departments, and sports clubs.

The largest group of respondents consisted of current mine employees (48.1%, N = 141), followed by individuals not professionally associated with the mine (26.6%, N = 78) and former retired employees of the organization (25.3%, N = 74). Among men (N = 158), 103 worked at the mine at the time of the study (65.2%), 48 were former employees (30.4%), and 7 men were not associated with the enterprise. Among women (N = 112), the largest group consisted of individuals not associated with the mine (N = 56, 50%), the next group in terms of size were women working at the mine (N = 30, 26.8%), while 26 women identified as former employees (23.2%).

5. Analysis of the obtained results

The following analysis will cover two statements from the volunteering area. They will allow for an assessment of the discussed activity from an intra- and extra-organizational perspective and from the point of view of selected demographic characteristics of the respondents. In the case of the first statement, the respondents assessed whether the mine provides volunteering opportunities for its employees. Out of a total of 293 surveys, 289 were accepted for the final analysis of this statement, as in the remaining four cases, the answer was not marked. The obtained answers are contained in Table 2. Its analysis shows that nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) agreed with this statement, 42.6% of respondents provided a neutral answer, and only 8.8% of the surveyed did not express approval. More information on this statement is provided by the analysis of the answers given regarding the respondents' relationship with the studied organization and gender. Demographic characteristics shown in the survey metric, such as the age of the respondents, their level of education, or the length of employment, did not show an influence on the analyzed statements.

Table 2.
Assessment of Statement 2 from the volunteering area

Statement	Answers (N = 289)	
The mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees.	Strongly disagree	3.1% (N = 9)
	Rather disagree	5.5% (N = 16)
	Hard to say	42.6% (N = 123)
	Rather agree	26.3% (N = 76)
	Strongly agree	22.5% (N = 65)

Source: own elaboration.

Figure 1 presents a very interesting distribution of answers to the analyzed statement classified according to the respondent's relationship with the mine. The obtained answers differ significantly depending on whether the respondent is a current mine employee, a former employee, or has never been professionally associated with it. In the case of former and current employees, the assessments confirming this statement (strongly agree, rather agree) are very similar, exceeding 60%. It turns out, however, that former employees are more certain that the mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees than current employees – 42.7% of "strongly agree" ratings versus 21.7%. At the same time, among respondents not professionally associated with the mine, the answer "hard to say" definitely prevailed – as many as 83.8% of respondents from this group chose this answer.

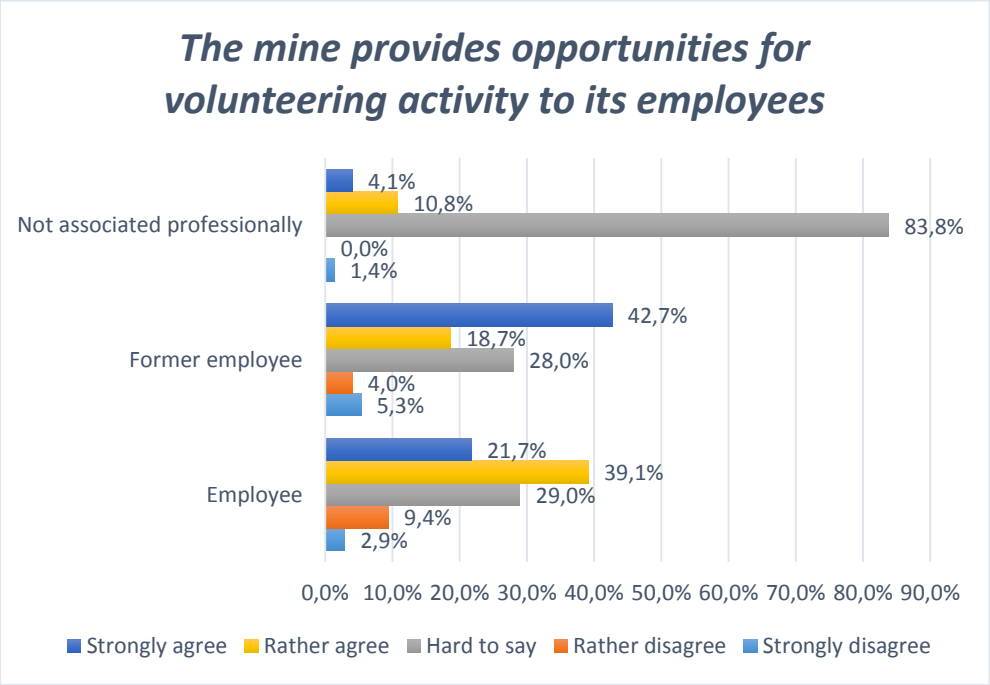


Figure 1. Assessment of the statement "the mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees" according to the respondent's relationship with the organization (in %).

Source: own elaboration.

The same statement was presented in Figure 2, this time divided by the gender of the respondents. In this case, a clear influence of this demographic characteristic on the answers is also visible. Over 56% of the answers given by men expressed approval for the discussed statement (strongly agree, rather agree); in the case of women, it was 38.5%. The scepticism

expressed by women is also visible in the case of the "hard to say" answer. Nearly 57% of women chose this answer, while among men, this percentage was 31.6%. The presented results indicate that men agree more often than women with the statement that the mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees.

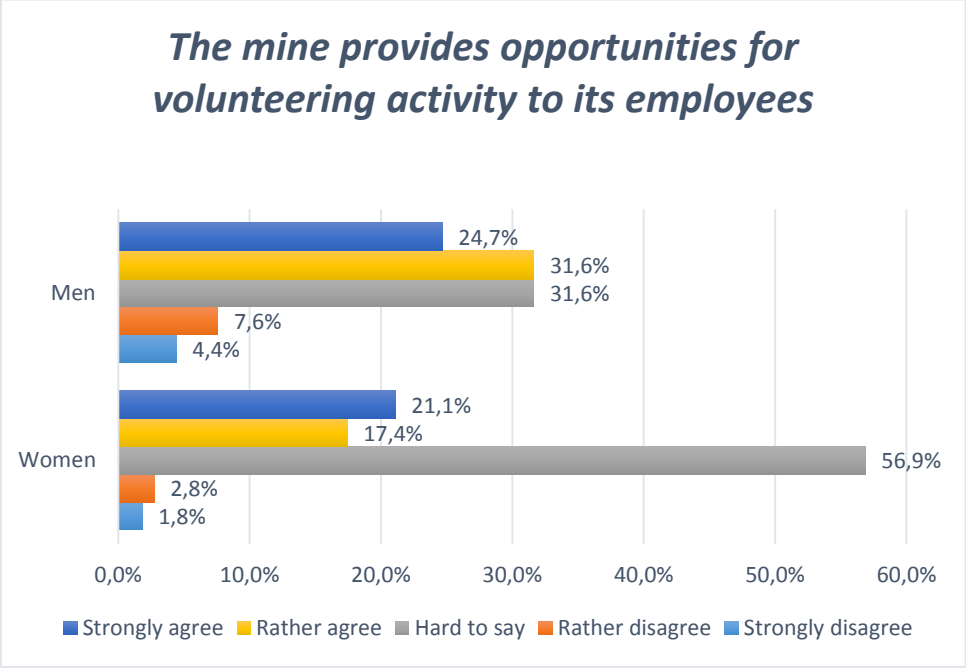


Figure 2. Assessment of the statement "the mine provides opportunities for volunteering activity to its employees" according to gender (in %).

Source: own elaboration.

The second analyzed statement examines the degree to which the mine's external volunteering activities, going beyond its formal structures, are noticed by respondents from the local labor market. The overall assessment of the statement "the mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market" is presented in Table 3. The obtained results are very similar to the assessment of Statement 2 presented in Table 2. 48.1% of respondents confirm the mine's involvement in volunteering activity on the local labor market. 42.6% have no opinion on this matter. Also, in the case of this statement, it is worth analyzing the distribution of the obtained answers according to the respondents' relationship with the mine and according to their gender.

Table 3.
Assessment of Statement 4 from the volunteering area

Statement	Answers (N = 289)	
The mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market	Strongly disagree	2.8% (N = 8)
	Rather disagree	6.2% (N = 18)
	Hard to say	42.6% (N = 124)
	Rather agree	27% (N = 78)
	Strongly agree	21.1% (N = 61)

Source: own elaboration.

Figure 3 presents the assessment of the analyzed statement according to the respondent's relationship with the studied organization. Also in this case, former employees agree with this statement to the greatest extent; in total, the answers "strongly agree" and "rather agree" exceeded 60% of all answers in this group, with "strongly agree" exceeding 43%. In the case of current employees, the answers confirmed Statement 4 to a lesser extent. 50.3% of respondents from this group agreed with this statement, 35.5% did not have a formed opinion on this matter, and 14.2% were against it. The group with the highest level of uncertainty regarding the analyzed statement consisted of individuals not professionally associated with the mine; as many as 67.5% of the obtained answers were the "hard to say" option.

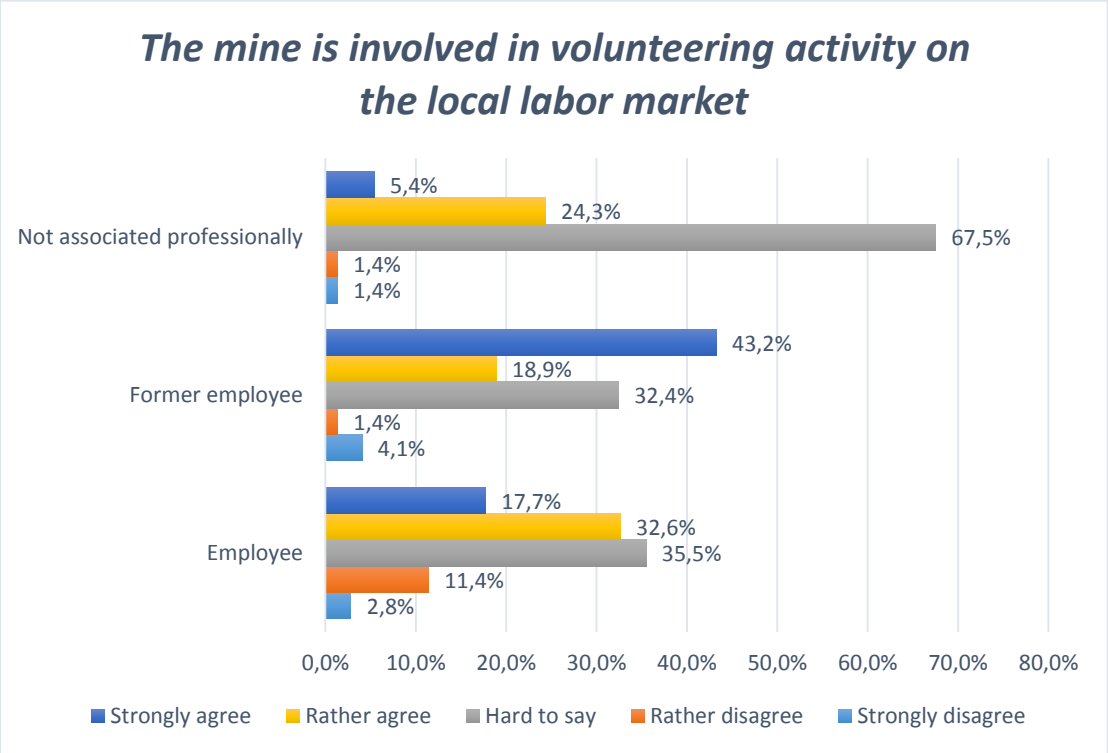


Figure 3. Assessment of the statement "the mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market" according to the respondent's relationship with the organization (in %).

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the assessments of the statement "the mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market" from the perspective of the respondents' gender also leads to very similar relationships as in the case of Statement 2 (Figure 2). Men agreed with it in over 53%, and 36% chose the "hard to say" answer (Figure 4). In the case of women, over 41% of the answers were approving of the discussed statement, while, what is worth emphasizing, as many as 52.3% of women did not take an unequivocal position for or against this statement.

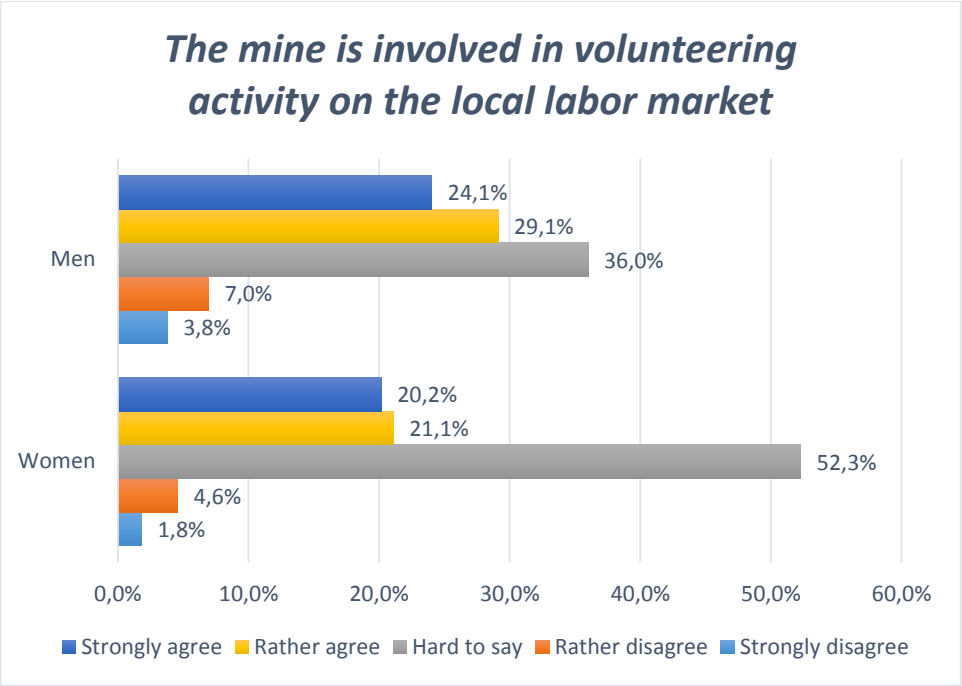


Figure 4. Assessment of the statement "the mine is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market" according to gender (in %).

Source: own elaboration.

6. Discussion

The conducted research indicates that employee volunteering is an important, although not fully clearly perceived, element of the social activity of the studied organization. About half of the respondents confirmed that the mine provides employees with opportunities to engage in volunteering actions and that it is involved in volunteering activity on the local labor market. At the same time, the high proportion of "hard to say" responses (over 40%) indicates that some stakeholders have limited awareness of the initiatives being undertaken.

The analysis of the results according to the respondent's relationship with the organization reveals a clear differentiation in the perception of employee volunteering. The highest level of approval toward statements concerning both the provision of opportunities to engage in volunteering and the organization's involvement in actions on the local labor market was recorded among former employees. Current employees also largely rated the measures positively, though they were less likely to express strong approval, tending instead to choose moderate or neutral responses. The highest level of uncertainty was recorded among external stakeholders, where the "hard to say" answer dominated. This points to a limited visibility of voluntary activities within the local community and an insufficient level of communication outside the organisation.

Possible causes for the differentiation of assessments include varying levels of access to information, varying degrees of direct participation in actions, and varying strength of identification with the organization. In a practical dimension, this means the need to intensify external communication (e.g., through cooperation with local institutions, reporting of actions, presence in local media), strengthen participatory mechanisms among current employees, and maintain relationships with former employees as ambassadors of the organization's image. Such actions can increase the coherence of the perception of volunteering and strengthen its impact on the organization's image in the local environment.

The analysis of the results also indicates a clear differentiation in the assessments of volunteering depending on the gender of the respondents. In both analyzed statements, men expressed approval more often toward the statements concerning both the provision of opportunities to engage in volunteering by employees and the mine's involvement in volunteering activity on the local labor market. At the same time, women were much more likely to choose the answer “hard to say”.

This differentiation can be interpreted on several levels. Firstly, people may have different experiences of direct involvement in voluntary initiatives, which affects their perception of the accessibility and significance of such initiatives. Secondly, the differences may result from different expectations toward the organization in the scope of social responsibility. Women may adopt a more critical perspective in assessing pro-social actions, expecting their greater intensity, systematicity, or better communication.

The obtained results therefore indicate a need for in-depth qualitative analysis, which would allow for identifying the causes of perceptual differences. From the point of view of management, this means the necessity of taking into account the gender perspective in designing and communicating employee volunteering programs, so that they are perceived as accessible, transparent, and adequate to the expectations of all groups of employees and stakeholders.

In conclusion, it is worth pointing out further directions for research on the role of volunteering in shaping the social activity of an organization. These include:

- Analysis of the effectiveness of employee volunteering communication channels – in-depth research on how different forms of communication (internal and external) influence the level of awareness and perception of volunteering actions among different stakeholder groups,
- Conducting qualitative research on the determinants of volunteering perception – application of qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups) in order to identify the causes of assessment differentiation, in particular due to gender, professional status, and the level of engagement in the organization,
- Comparative cross-sector and cross-organizational analyses – extending research to other industries and types of organizations in order to determine whether the observed relationships are universal or specific to industrial enterprises strongly embedded locally.

Acknowledgements

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