

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING IN MODERN SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the role of volunteering in modern societies emphasizing its defining features. The first part of the paper explains the concept of volunteering and its role, focusing on its importance for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The second part of the paper highlights the barriers and challenges in using the potential of volunteering. The last part of the paper is dedicated to ways for motivating volunteers and measuring volunteering.

KEYWORDS: *challenges, involvement, motivation*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *L30, L31, L39, L44*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering. International and European reports and studies reinforce the idea that volunteering is a matter of individual choice, made without thought of remuneration, reward or other benefits.

The common objectives for voluntary activities among young people established by Council resolution 2002 focus on the following aspects (Mesogeiako Symvouleftiko Systema Sa, 2014):

- The voluntary activities represent all kinds of voluntary commitments. They are open to all, are unpaid and carried on the person's initiative. Moreover, the voluntary activities are educational (non-formal aspects of learning) providing social added value;
- The voluntary service is part of the voluntary activities and it is characterized by the following additional aspects: fixed period, objectives, contents, tasks, clear structure and framework, appropriate support as well as legal and social protection.

A common European definition of the concept "volunteering" refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal (Comisia Europeană, 2011; McAllum, 2014). Volunteers perform willingly the activities, according to their own choices and motivations and do not seek financial gain (Rehnberg et al., 2009; Doherty, 2009).

Volunteering is an activity which creates human and social capital (Boneham and Sixmith, 2003; Muthuri et al., 2006; Isham et al., 2006; Clark and James, 2016). It is a path towards integration and employment (McAllum, 2014) as well as a key factor for improving social cohesion (Salvini et al., 2012; United Nations Volunteers, 2013; Federația VOLUM, 2015). Above all, volunteering transforms into action the fundamental values of justice, solidarity, inclusion and citizenship, values on which Europe is built. The volunteers participate in shaping European society, and those working outside their home country participate actively in building a Europe of citizens (Comisia Europeană, 2011).

Volunteering has a positive impact both on the person who volunteers by developing social and

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practical skills and on community (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Newman et al, 2009) and society as a whole by strengthening social relations based on cooperation and mutual trust.

According to the strategic plans for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy set by the European institutions, the volunteering is an essential resource for reaching important goals related to employability, education, environmental protection and social inclusion (Volonteurop, 2010).

In order to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European institutions aim to create the best conditions for volunteering, provide adequate financial support for volunteering, facilitate the recognition of skills acquired through volunteering, stimulate mobility of young volunteers and their involvement in international cooperation and implement tools and methods for measuring the size and impact of voluntary movement (Federația VOLUM, 2011).

2. OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is a survey on the volunteering sector taking into account its role in creating and enriching social capital as well as in valuing interpersonal relationships and promoting individual affirmation.

In accomplishing this purpose, the following objectives have been established:

- Analysing the importance of volunteers in nongovernmental organizations;
- Identifying the barriers and challenges when using the potential of volunteering
- Describing the main characteristics of volunteers' motivation
- Presenting ways of measuring volunteer work

The contribution of this paper consists in providing an overview of volunteering sector and highlighting its importance in improving social cohesion. The data collection technique used for collecting data in this descriptive study was the document analysis technique. Therefore, the paper is focused on the study of many scientific papers, reports and other supplementary articles relating to the volunteering sector which give both theoretical and practical insights of relevance to researchers.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS IN NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The volunteer is a person who decides to do something on its own initiative. He/she acts consciously, freely, independently and in cooperation with other volunteers, organizations and stakeholders of society in order to solve people's problems, in other words to contribute to the common good. He/she is not paid for what he/she does and really believes in people and in their ability to change things for the better (Păceșilă, 2016).

Depending on his/her vocational training, the volunteer can help the organization in solving difficult problems (Balogh & Balogh, 2013). Each volunteer invests intelligence, talent and time without expecting to receive something in return. He/she has a great capacity to adapt, regardless of the difficulties encountered.

The volunteers reflect the diversity of society, involving people of all ages, men and women, employed or unemployed, people of different ethnicities, faiths and beliefs as well as citizens of all nationalities.

The volunteer can be characterized by the following key terms (Nunzio, 2011):

1. *Time*. In a predominantly materialistic society, where time is money and profit, the volunteer helps people in need without receiving financial resources.
2. *Giving*. The volunteer gives time, intelligence, energy and talent without any material desire, but for a person to have a better future.
3. The person in need is not chosen by the volunteer, it is a person who needs help.
4. *Together*. The volunteer is actively promoting the change. He works not only, but also with other volunteers, beneficiaries, as well as other participants of public and private sector.

5. *Freedom*. The volunteer works freely; he/she decide himself/herself to assume responsibility.

6. *Autonomy*. The volunteer is not subordinated to politics; he/she is free in relation to other society actors. However, he/she does not depart from state institutions, but makes its own contribution to rebuilding relations between citizens, reducing the distance between the institutional sphere and society.

In most NGOs the volunteers' involvement is seen as a way to bring added value to the services provided, but also as a way to increase operational capacity and quality of work through the volunteers' contribution (Rigman et al., 2009).

The volunteers can help organizations to cope with difficulties that members or employees cannot overcome. The volunteers' involvement enables organizations to make financial savings because certain activities require a lot of money (Simmons and Emanuele, 2010; Nesbit et al., 2012; Knepper et al., 2015). The volunteers provide credibility and helps to improve the organization's image because they are not employees (Balogh and Balogh, 2013). Moreover, they are an additional resource that could bring new people and donors to the organizations.

The volunteers bring a breath of fresh air to the organizations which dedicate time and guide them (Boeck et al., 2009; Păceșilă, 2015). Therefore, the use of volunteers require efforts made by the organizations, such as planning the voluntary program and allocating a budget, setting the volunteer recruitment and selection, integrating and orienting the volunteers in the organizations as well as evaluating their activities (Beudean and Irimieș, 2013).

Given that they perform unpaid work, the organization should constantly meet the volunteers' expectations in order to avoid investing time and energy in vain. Furthermore, the benefits of volunteering (opportunity for professional development, participation in different courses and getting experience in a field, etc.) should be communicated consistently to volunteers.

4. BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED WHEN USING THE POTENTIAL OF VOLUNTEERING

According to a study developed by John Hopkins University, the potential of volunteering as a resource of society may be limited by certain barriers, mostly occurring across borders (Federația VOLUM, 2011; Comisia Europeană, 2011):

- The lack of national strategies regarding volunteering programs and activities. These should address the following issues: development of volunteering infrastructure, volunteers training, accommodation and reimbursement of expenses incurred in volunteering, unemployment benefits for cross-border volunteering, recognition of qualifications acquired in the volunteering activities.
- The absence of a stable legal framework with clear rules for voluntary programs and their organizers which could allow the development of volunteering both locally and across borders.
- The financial constraints resulting from misunderstanding or ignorance of the voluntary activity costs. In this context, the organizations which often do not have adequate funding fight hard for them.
- The fiscal obstacles arising especially when the volunteers carry out a cross-border activity or when the expenses incurred by volunteering activities should be reimbursed to volunteers.
- The limited access and lack of understanding the information about volunteering, opportunities for involvement and its importance for the individual and the community.
- The lack of statistical data on volunteering, which does not allow tracking its evolution over time and identifying best practices.
- The mismatch between volunteering demand and offer because of the tendency to professionalize the voluntary sector. Therefore, there are significant differences between NGOs needs, opportunities and volunteers' aspirations. The organizations need specialized long-term dedicated volunteers, while volunteers look for flexible (short-term, practical) opportunities which they could harmonize with commitments to work and family.
- The lack of recognition or the underestimation of volunteering which occurs due to non-

recognition of skills acquired through volunteering and insufficient publicity on its role and importance for the society and the individuals.

In 2010 the European Commission has highlighted several challenges affecting volunteering in the European Union. These challenges are caused by demographic and climate change as well as by the change of values and lifestyles (Federația VOLUM, 2014):

- The need for credible organizations. It is built on transparent actions which demonstrate responsibility for the individuals and community.
- The collection of statistical data in order to determine the economic value of volunteer work. This could be a strong argument in highlighting the importance of volunteering for the welfare of society.
- The identification of a balance between volunteers' aspirations and organization's needs.
- The identification of appropriate tools for managing the demand and supply of volunteers and their mobility within and beyond the European area.
- The transformation of volunteering in an area of public policy, maintaining the main characteristics: absence of obligation and remuneration and the public benefit.
- The preservation of the inclusive nature of volunteering, amid demographic changes and public values modification.

5. MOTIVATION OF VOLUNTEERS

Many NGOs cannot operate without volunteers, especially when they run many charitable projects (Wisner et al., 2005). Taking into account that they do not receive financial compensation for the involvement, the volunteers' motivation and their different expectations could be a problem when identifying the activities appropriated to their needs and aspirations (Păceșilă, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the methods of keeping up the motivation of volunteers in nongovernmental organizations are different from those used by companies. The volunteers support a cause and get involved in community life. The organizations should exploit this motivation in the interest of their projects and their volunteers (Pană, 2010). According to Pro Vobis (2003a), volunteers motivation raises two questions:

- *What drives volunteers to perform an unpaid activity?*

The volunteer decides to take part in volunteering for various reasons (Binder and Freytag, 2013; Păceșilă, 2014a): to help others, to achieve personal goals, to meet the needs, to integrate into certain groups, to meet people with common ideas, due to the encouragement of others, for a new professional career, for entertainment, etc. Another reason could be the improvement of emotional state and physical health (Wilson and Musick, 2000). In some cases the volunteering is the only way to influence positively the community problems solving. Moreover, according to Meier and Stutzer (2004), people who volunteer are more content with their life than those who are not involved in voluntary activities.

In many cases, the volunteers are not driven by the desire to help. Depending on the scale of the project and the organization's possibilities, they could benefit from certain privileges. However, this does not mean they are incompatible with the status of volunteer. Therefore, the organization will engage them in appropriate activities and will not oblige them to perform demotivating tasks.

- *What undertakes the organization in order to provide the conditions for volunteering?*

Initially the organization will focus on analyzing and understanding the motivations of each volunteer. In this regard, the volunteers' coordinator will obtain information during and after the interview with the potential volunteers.

Taking into account the information gathered, the volunteers' coordinator (or manager if the organization does not have a volunteers' coordinator) will classify the volunteers on different motivational typologies (Portal HR, 2010): result-oriented, power-oriented, relationship-oriented, recognition-oriented, altruism-oriented.

However, negative situations can prove to be a challenge: people works as volunteers for material

profits or for having an audience where to express their ideas and abnormal behavior (Păceșilă, 2016). Such motivations do not bring benefits to the organization and, therefore, the selection of future volunteers should be done carefully.

An important element in retaining volunteers is the concern for their personal learning and professional development. Attention to their profile and specific needs is very important. Moreover, involving them in programs addressing these needs and offering them positions that are both professionally rewarding and personally satisfying, greatly stimulate people working on a voluntary basis.

The organization should constantly motivate volunteers, regardless of their motivational typology (Păceșilă, 2014b). Furthermore, it is necessary to consult the staff and members of the organization in order to create appropriate conditions for voluntary activities. According to Little (1999), motivation and retention of volunteers within the organization requires the following conditions:

- Establishing a well-defined time period for tasks;
- Performing tasks consistent with volunteers' interests and motivations;
- Presenting written instructions;
- Providing a reasonable period of time for achieving the tasks;
- Providing flexibility regarding the time and place for achieving the tasks;
- Providing appropriate training;
- Ensuring a pleasant and friendly working environment;
- Supervising the fulfillment of tasks;
- Providing feedback upon the fulfillment of each task;
- Assessing, recognizing and rewarding the volunteers in accordance with the reasons for the involvement.

Moreover, in order to keep volunteers, the organization should design a loyalty program that includes (Pană, 2010):

- Regular meetings for discussing volunteers' involvement in the organization, for taking initiatives and coming up with new ideas;
- Involvement not only in activities implementation, but also in their planning and organization.
- Creating the feeling of belonging to a group and a pleasant working atmosphere based on team spirit, mutual trust and respect.

Recognizing volunteers' merits is not just an event, a diploma or a prize offered as a reward for their contribution. It is a process, an attitude for attracting, inspiring and maintaining the volunteers' motivation. The key to success lies in the correct identification of motivation factors in order to find out the motivation that has the highest relevance for the volunteer. Moreover, an important role in motivating volunteers is the general attitude towards them and the atmosphere within the organization. Ongoing volunteers' motivation is an art that depends on the coordinator of volunteers and its constant creativity (Rigman et al., 2009).

Employees and/or members should be consulted since the beginning of the voluntary program planning phase because they will support volunteers only if they consider that their involvement is useful. The consultation could be an opportunity to correct the unrealistic expectations of employees and/or volunteers. Moreover, it is recommended that the consultation process with the volunteers' coordinator and employees and/or members of the organization should run constantly in order to highlight the needs and problems of volunteers.

Volunteers' orientation towards concrete results contributes significantly to their level of motivation and performance (Ardelean, 2008):

- *The possibility of assuming the "ownership" of concrete results.* The volunteers should be involved in the whole activity not only in some parts of it. For example, instead of painting all the doors of a school, volunteers will be happy to be involved in the renovation of a single class.
- *The opportunity to participate in planning and developing the activities.* However, in some cases the members may object, especially if volunteers' fluctuation is high.
- *The responsibility for results.* The volunteers should be responsible not only for the project but

also for its successful fulfillment. It is important that volunteers are aware that the activity is valuable and worthy of their efforts. The volunteers' coordinator is tasked to quantify the expected results, to explain their importance to volunteers and to track their achieving. The results reflect the quality the volunteers' work.

Volunteers motivation requires taking into account the complexity and diversity of the reasons leading them to donate their time and skills in the service of organizations (Pro Vobis, 2003b). According to Pro Vobis (2003a), there are several theories on volunteers' motivation:

- ***The altruism theory.*** The involvement in voluntary activities is mainly due to the desire to help people without receiving anything in return. The altruism is considered one of the strongest motivators in determining the involvement of volunteers because human species lives in a unitary system in which individual welfare is strongly linked to the welfare of society.
- ***The instrumentalist theory.*** This theory is opposite to the theory of altruism and shows that the volunteer's desire of involvement is based on a certain motivation. The individual does not focus solely on the desire to give, but also to acquire. Regardless of knowing the advantages of involvement, the expectations should be understood and recognized by the organization in order to ensure cooperation between the two sides.
- ***The strengthening theory.*** The volunteer motivation can be influenced, shaped or changed by encouraging, supporting and even praising his behavior. In this regard, volunteer coordinator's mission is to identify appropriate ways to support and highlight his/her effort. Although in most cases there is no need to outline the voluntary contributions, his/her appreciation could be beneficial to the organization.
- ***Maslow's theory.*** Maslow says there are five different levels of human needs, individuals standing at distinct levels: physical needs (food, oxygen, etc.), security, networking, self-esteem, personal recognition and self-fulfillment. Therefore, volunteers' motivation differs from one person to another. The volunteer coordinator is tasked to identify unmet needs and find solutions in order to satisfy them.
- ***The acquired needs theory.*** This theory was developed by McClelland who stated that human behavior is based on three types of motivations: the need for self-realization, the need for affiliation, and need for power. Only one of these motivations prevails, depending on time and context. The volunteer coordinator should take into account these needs as well as the individual preference for one of them.
- ***The expectations theory.*** The theory was proposed by Victor Groom and shows that individuals become demotivated if their expectations are not confirmed. In this situation it is necessary that the organization and the volunteer exchange information in order to avoid possible conflicts.

Volunteers' motivation requires knowledge of some psychology aspects, such as motivation intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the development of relationships with volunteers should take into account their personality type. Some volunteers have a special interest regarding the society' problems while others focus more on personal development, accumulation of experience or certification of their contribution (Istrate and Baciu, 2015). Regardless of their reasons for volunteering, the organizations should constantly be concerned about motivating volunteers because they represent an indispensable resource contributing to the fulfillment of organizational objectives with fewer financial resources.

6. WAYS OF MEASURING VOLUNTEER WORK

The need for evaluating the volunteering programs implemented by organizations appeared in the context of increased demand for responsibility. In order to justify the activities undertaken or to benefit from public support for the initiation, continuation or support of the activities, measurable results are required to demonstrate the positive effects on the beneficiaries. Moreover, a program that has clear objectives as well as measurable indicators regarding its success will be easier to put into practice.

The organizations often talk about volunteers as a source of expenditure without having clear and quantifiable information on their contribution to the organizational objectives and to the economic efficiency (Federația VOLUM, 2016).

The volunteering generates considerable economic value to a country's economy because volunteers represent a significant percentage of the national workforce. However, nowadays, the identification of appropriate ways for measuring the work done by volunteers represents an important issue. There are several ways of measuring the economic value of volunteers' work (Voicu, 2012; Păceșilă, 2016):

- *The minimum wage method.* It uses a formula proposed by Barnados organization in Ireland. The economic value of volunteering is calculated as the product between the number of hours worked by volunteers and the monthly minimum wage for the work period.

- *The average salary method.* It is calculated based on a formula proposed by the nongovernmental organization VDS in Scotland. The economic value of volunteering work is related to the number of hours worked by volunteers/ number of volunteering days, the average salary per volunteering hour/day, the hourly/daily costs added by the employer, the employer's share of overheads.

- *The VIVA method.* It is applied in England and establishes the economic value of volunteering activity starting from an equivalent activity from the labor market that allows taking into account the average market salary.

- *The method of measuring the value of volunteer time.* This has several variants:

- The opportunity costs of working (How much would win the volunteer if he/she worked overtime instead of volunteering?). If the volunteer is employed, the variant equates the value of the volunteering hour with the real wages received by the volunteer at his/her current job. If he/she is not employed, the variant equates the value of the volunteering hour with a reasonable compensation.

- The opportunity cost of leisure time (How much would cost the reasonable compensation for a volunteering activity if it was paid?). The variant equates the value of the volunteering hour with the reasonable compensation asked by the volunteer.

- The replacement cost (How many people should hire an organization to perform the volunteers' work and how much would he pay for it?). The variant equates the value of the volunteering hour with the amount that the organization should pay the staff hired to carry out the work done by volunteers.

- The wages in industry (If a volunteer performed maintenance activities, how much would be paid the hour of maintenance activities on the market?). The variant equates the value of the volunteering hour with the average pay in the industry.

Each of these methods has both positive and negative effects. The choice of method should be based on the purpose of the calculation and the target group. The information needed for each of the four methods is similar. The basic data takes into account number of volunteers, number of volunteering hours, type of work, current profession and volunteer salary, number of volunteering hours per activity per volunteer. If these data are available, one can use all four methods to highlight various aspects of measuring the economic value of volunteering.

However, according to Nunzio (2011) the volunteering should not be measured only in economic terms because the economic value does not reflect the qualitative and innovative contributions as well as the social trials which the volunteering generates.

The measurement of volunteering activity should exceed the limits of a purely economic vision. It should also take into account the contributions to enriching social capital, valuing interpersonal relationships and generating new relationships, helping and mutual understanding, promoting relationships between generations, supporting people in difficulty, drawing attention to delicate situations, rapid intervention in certain social situations, etc.

Moreover, building a methodology for measuring the impact of volunteering activity requires distinguishing between three elements (Federația VOLUM, 2016):

- Results or products: are most visible and easy to quantify and evaluate.

- Effects: represent the medium-term consequences of the results. They are more difficult to quantify and require distinct approaches as well as both quantitative and qualitative data analyses.
- Impact: positive or negative, direct or indirect, generalized and/or long-term changes generated by volunteering activities. Generally, these changes occur months or years after completing the intervention/the program and pose a logistical challenge because the organization should initiate a separate process for measuring the impact after months or years, providing the necessary resources for measurement which are often nonexistent. At this level, the measurement requires a distinction between the contribution of the intervention/the program and the influence of the context or of other societal actors.

According to Nunzio (2011), when volunteering is seen as an instrument of evolution and development of civil society, it cannot be considered a surrogate for failure and bankruptcy of the economy and state, an aid with very low cost, for solving problems when the system is overwhelmed. Such reasoning leads to the idea that in an economic system based on free market economy and in a state whose institutions operate perfectly, the volunteering is no longer justified. However, the concept of volunteering has appeared before the state and economy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The role of volunteering in modern societies has been investigated in this paper by studying various publications in the field.

The paper highlights the benefits of volunteering activity, both for volunteers and for society in general. The volunteer work provides training to young people looking for a job and it is also a way for improving employability. The volunteering strengthens social solidarity, social capital and quality of life in society. It gives people a sense of self-satisfaction that can contribute to social progress.

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