

PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING AND RAISING AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING'S IMPORTANCE

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ABSTRACT: *In modern times, volunteering has become an important element of all societies. The famous United Nations declaration "We, the people, have the power to change the world" has turned into concrete actions of volunteers globally. Volunteering is a fundamental component of society, enlivening the noblest values of humanity, values such as peace, freedom or security. Volunteering existed before the state and the economy and can generate social capital. Voluntary activities are based on the principle of solidarity. This article has as main objective the revision of the specialized literature in the field of volunteering in order to understand the sources of the volunteer action and what characterizes it.*

Keywords: volunteering, management, social responsibility, motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is considered a noble activity, carried out of one's own free will, without constraints and without receiving any payment. Volunteering is defined as regular unpaid work that benefits other people outside the immediate family or social circle (Haeffliger & Hug, 2009, p. 3). Over the last few years, the number of studies and research on volunteering has increased and what can be seen in the scientific literature is that several theoretical models have been proposed in the fight to explain how this phenomenon has developed.

Volunteering makes a significant and positive contribution to improving people's lives and strengthening communities and civil society. Volunteer work is undertaken voluntarily by the volunteer, without financial gain. Volunteer support is a means of creating and supporting a network of people who are available to work and support organizations. Volunteers should be considered primarily for their individual contributions, enthusiasm and commitment, as well as for the experience and skills they can bring. Volunteering is a time commitment to improve the situation and capacity of young people, acting as a model for the behaviour and actions we hope young people will aspire to. Volunteering is a social activity necessary in the current context of extending the responsibility from the economic sphere to the social and environmental aspects (Ionescu, Coman, Paschia, Nicolau & Stanescu, 2020). In recent years,

the non-profit sector has grown and charities, also known as non-profits or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have become more important.

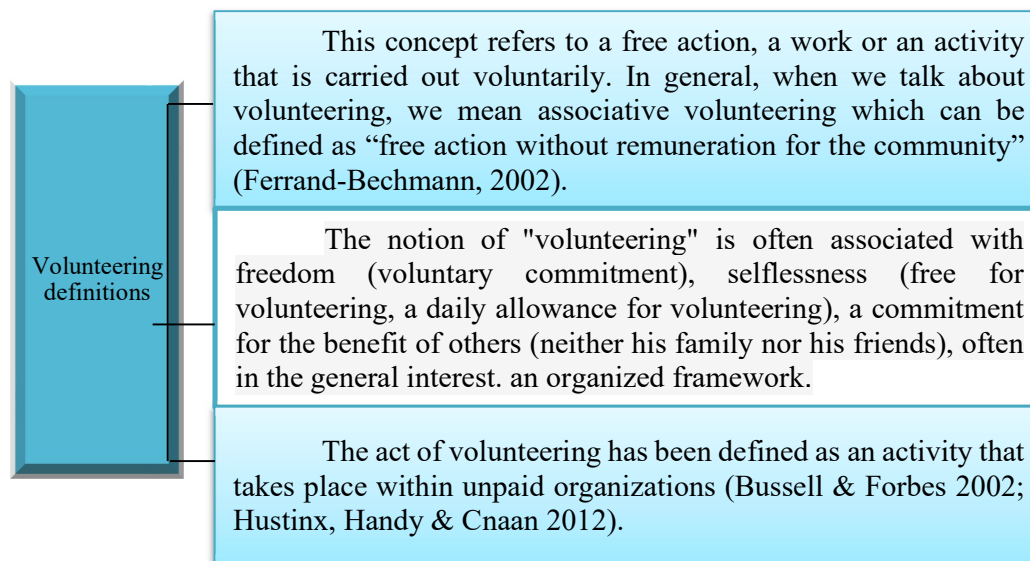
NGOs have existed for many years and have helped and saved the lives of people around the world for decades. These organizations not only save lives, each charity has a different purpose; some help people and fight for human rights, and others preserve our nature and environment. NGOs are an interesting type of organization. They operate in a different sector from many others and have specific characteristics. Charities are classified in the third sector (also called the non-profit sector); they belong neither to the public nor to the private sector (Foote, 2001). According to Fenwick (2005), they are not private because they are not for profit, nor are they public, because they are generally non-governmental. In the non-profit sector, the main goal is to focus on social rather than economic issues.

Volunteering is the highest form of social awareness, because it expresses the social responsibility of the active citizen towards his peers. The participation of volunteers and their contribution in society gives the necessary social character to strengthen the social cohesion of the citizens. There are also a number of personal benefits for those who practice volunteering, benefits that will translate into a major social gain. It is an experience of informal learning and personal development at any age. It contributes to the acquisition of knowledge, to an intercultural education but also to social inclusion, the fight against discrimination and employment. Volunteering is a catalyst for social solidarity and contributes to the consolidation of democracy.

1. DEFINITIONS IN THE FIELD OF VOLUNTEERING

There are a number of concepts and notions associated with the word "volunteering". Defining what volunteering is more complex than it seems. When talking about volunteering or volunteer activity, it is important to define the different approaches depending on the disciplines that have studied this type of activity. In addition, the cultural context in which volunteering takes place can also play an important role in defining and perceiving the population concerned.

Figure no.1. Definitions of volunteer activity



(Source: own processing)

Thus, voluntary activity is a work carried out free of charge, which should be distinguished from leisure activity. Indeed, there can often be confusion between voluntary participation for leisure and voluntary work.

The implementation of some models regarding the sustainability of the entity is meant to Volunteering in its true form is not results-oriented; rather, it is focused on the experience of volunteers (Kezar & Rhoads 2001). The development of global outcomes, including global citizenship and active civic responsibility, is embedded in the ideology of volunteering, as volunteering provides an attractive way for individuals to build their social and personal capital (Einfeld & Collins 2008). In general, three types of motivation in volunteering have been described in the literature: altruistic, utilitarian (Cnaan et al. 1991) and social (Cappellari and Turati 2004).

2. PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING

Promoting volunteering is a priority for all societies, especially for those who have no culture in this regard, especially if you start with a disability and here I refer to the obligation to practice volunteering in the form of patriotic work era in communism. Volunteering should be promoted in all backgrounds and in all age groups, highlighting the advantages and benefits of this practice. When I say advantages and benefits, I mean of course the acquired competencies and abilities, the spending of creative and constructive free time, the satisfaction obtained.

The increase of the living environment of the population requires the engagement of these people with potential in civic activities beneficial both to them, who are facing the crisis of retirement and to the society that needs volunteers. The way to promote volunteering can be done through public events information seminars, promotion, exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience in the field of volunteering, with members of organizations from countries with a culture in the field.

3. MODERNIZATION AND ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

Nowadays, more research related to volunteering focuses on volunteering as an organizational work. Following modernization and globalization, it seems that a new type of volunteering has emerged, which takes place in organizations and associations called volunteer organizations. Inglehart (2003) argues that belonging and volunteering go together.

Voluntary organizations are considered as bridges between citizens and the state. In this sense, individuals acquire social and civic skills and habits, such as collaboration, feelings of responsibility and solidarity, common goals and public spirit (Halman 2003). According to Newton (1999), voluntary organizations teach people trust, moderation, compromise, reciprocity, which is the civic virtue. Through volunteering, people also develop their skills of discussion and democratic organization (Newton 1999). At the aggregate level, volunteering reduces deviant behaviour, such as drug use, criminal activity, teenage pregnancy, and so on. and increases democratic and economic development (Halman 2003). It is certain that volunteering is linked to the democratic regime. Democracy as the best political system is the seed bed of civil society, but it is also true that strong civil society is the key to maintaining democracy. To achieve this, it is important that citizens not only take part as voters, but also be present in civic, political and organizational tasks (Halman 2003). This has made possible the emergence in modern society of three types of volunteering: volunteering in "green" associations, social assistance organizations and healthcare; volunteering for political and interest organizations; volunteering in religious organizations (Inglehart 2003). Halman (2003) argues that one of the main gears of a society that becomes and remains democratic is the participation of individuals in voluntary organizations (Halman 2003). In other words, civil society is a transition to democracy, which strengthens democratic consolidation and develops various achievements of established democracies (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014).

Another result of modernization is the change in values, which also affects volunteering. Inglehart (2000, 2003) examined how changing values shaped volunteering. According to the author, modernization gives rise to two distinct dimensions of cultural change. The first change is typical in industrial societies, where traditional values have changed into secular-rational values. This change brings a lower rate of civic activism. The second change is typical of knowledge societies, where

survival values have changed into values of self-expression, leading to a higher level of civic participation, especially volunteering (Inglehart 2003).

4. UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS AND TENDENCIES OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteering is multilateral. Not only do people serve a variety of reasons, today's volunteers serve in a variety of ways and with varying expectations for the return on their energy and time. In addition, not all people who serve without expectations of remuneration gravitate to the term "voluntary". Students can talk about internships or community service requirements.

Teachers can look for learning opportunities through services in organizations in the area. Men tend to describe their services by the functions they perform (coach, administrator), while women have historically been more connected to the term volunteer. The theological interpretations of the service vary. Some religiously motivated volunteers feel called to serve, while others say they are forced to live their faith, while others try to promote social justice through service.

Another major factor for volunteers is affiliation with a system of causes or beliefs - such as the desire to make a difference, to support the work of a particular organization, a religious sense of obligation, or simply "wanting to give back." Others are motivated by external incentives of the affiliate relationship, such as the desire to meet others, to be part of a team, to meet a youth service requirement, or to meet the requirements of a club member services. Finally, the evidence suggests that an increasing number of volunteers are driven by an interest in learning a new skill, a desire to maintain their skills while temporarily leaving the labor market, and a desire to explore a new skill. Career opportunity or to use the skills they have developed over a lifetime (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

Each of these distinct reasons reflects the trends of society and volunteering in general. Volunteers continue to be better educated, more likely to have families and more socially connected than the general population.

5. THE SITUATION OF VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE

Many European countries have a long tradition of volunteering, mutual self-help and civic participation. In others, however, voluntary sectors are much less advanced. Part of this discrepancy can be explained by the country's history or the type of social assistance system. Also, the less economically developed a country is, the less developed the volunteer structures are, which leads to fewer volunteer activities.

There are an estimated 100 million volunteers in the European Union - if they lived in the same country, they would be the largest EU Member State. Three out of 10 Europeans participate in volunteer activities and 80% say that active participation in society is a crucial part of their lives. Although there is still a lack of data and statistical analysis, research suggests that there has been an upward trend in the number of volunteers active in the EU over the last ten years. This is due to the awareness of social and environmental issues, the more volunteers involved contribute to changing public perceptions of volunteering, especially in the new EU Member States.

However, statistics still tell us that seven out of ten Europeans do not volunteer. Common barriers to volunteering include lack of information, time pressure and limited economic resources. Other factors include the negative image volunteering that is still felt in countries where it was once "mandatory"; discouragement of legal provisions or absence of a legal status; lack of protection of volunteers; and restrictions or other barriers for non-EU citizens.

As part of its preparations for the European Year of Volunteering, the European Commission has carried out a study to gather facts and figures about volunteering in each EU Member State. International studies on volunteering have shown that the level of volunteering has been: very high in Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, where over 40% of adults are involved in voluntary activities. Large in Denmark, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg, where 30 to 39% of adults are involved in volunteering. High environment in Estonia, France and Latvia, where 20 to 29 percent

of adults are employed voluntarily. Relatively low in Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, where 10 to 19 percent of adults volunteer. Low in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania, where less than 10% of adults are involved in volunteering.

6. VOLUNTEERING DURING THE 2020 PANDEMIC

During the pandemic crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus, an impressive number of volunteers from all over the world enlisted.

Only in the U.K. 500,000 people have joined the NHS, the UK's state healthcare system.

In Romania they mobilized and acted either on their own, or as single structures or several NGOs joined forces coming to the aid of people in isolation, during the restrictions imposed by the pandemic with Covid 19.

People donated money to help others but also found impactful strategies, starting with online campaigns on social networks, food collection and distribution to people with disabilities, production of protective materials, volunteer activities in medical centers, call center nonstop, volunteering next to places of worship.

The crisis caused by the pandemic viewed with optimism and taken as a challenge was a good opportunity to learn, to know, to cultivate empathy and concrete expression of compassion, to re-evaluate the values of humanity. Even though military ordinances imposed restrictions, beauty was unity, solidarity, and mutual aid.

CONCLUSIONS

This article had as main objective the revision of the specialized literature in the field of volunteering in order to understand the sources of the volunteer action and what characterizes it.

Thus, in the first part of the present research, we focused our attention on the definitions brought to the volunteer activity by the specialists in the field, but also by expressing our own convictions.

According to their own opinions, volunteering is the activity carried out free of charge without expecting a certain financial benefit after performing this activity, but maybe only social, motivational, human benefits.

As we presented the volunteer activity has become more and more important in the society in which we live and social responsibility is a lever in promoting volunteer activity. The history of modern volunteering is associated with the beginning of the 19th century when the first charities were born.

After 1990, the number of non-governmental organizations and volunteers increased in most countries. In some European countries, the government itself promotes and initiates a series of actions in support of volunteering.

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