©LUMEN Proceedings

8th LUMEN International Scientific Conference Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice | RSACVP 2017 | 6-9 April 2017 | Suceava – Romania

Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice

Volunteering: Interest or Altruism?

Delia Elena RUSU

https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.68

How to cite: Rusu, D. E.(2017). Volunteering: Interest or Altruism?. In C. Ignatescu, A. Sandu, & T. Ciulei (eds.), *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice* (pp. 747-754). Suceava, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.68

© The Authors, LUMEN Conference Center & LUMEN Proceedings.
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

©LUMEN Proceedings

8th LUMEN International Scientific Conference
Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice |
RSACVP 2017 | 6-9 April 2017 | Suceava – Romania

Volunteering: Interest or Altruism?

Delia Elena RUSU[1]

Abstract

This paper focuses on how volunteering is seen by youth with ages between 18 and 26 years, from Iasi, Romania. Is volunteering 100% how its simple definition sustains (such as a non-mandatory type of work that comes into supporting a part of society's needs through helping organizations in their activities) or is it a mask of a most specific interest (such as gaining experience for ones field of study, making friends or developing abilities)? Either way, we may conclude that perhaps no matter the reasons why volunteering is practiced – it brings value to a society's endeavour to motivate its youth to persevere in its activities and for them to involve as much as possible in order for its demarche to be uphold to progress. A micro-research-study (with data collected and analyzed from 5 focus-groups) has been conducted for disclosure the main reasons of volunteering for youth from the present time. This micro-study is incorporated in a larger and more complex research that is still ongoing.

Keywords: Volunteering, interest, altruism, organization and society development.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on discovering the social-energy-boosters that drive youth to involve in volunteering stages and how this type of involvement affects their life, primarily, and the others (beneficiaries, employees and the organization in which they hold a part of their time for definitive spending but in a most useful way - hopefully), secondarily, but

[1] PhD Student Assistant of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania, E-mail: delia_elena_rusu@yahoo.com.

https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.68
Corresponding Author: Delia Elena RUSU
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

only from the volunteers point of view. A micro-study has been conducted in order to discover how youth in Iasi, Romania, sustain the importance of volunteering and why their motives are significantly vital to their involvement. Students with ages between 18 and 26 years old were gathered for discussions in 5 focus-groups, each focus group having 5-6 participants. The meetings were held in seminar rooms available at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iasi, Romania. This micro-study reveals youth's motives, purposes/aims and arguments significant for them. This micro-study is part of a larger research that is still in progress.

2. A General Literature Overview

Volunteering motivations are debatable and probably there isn't an organization which could benefit from a volunteer's altruism in a percentage of 100%. Although, „the number of Europeans who consider helping others an important part of their life is greater than the number of those actively involved in volunteering", [8 p1240] we cannot put an equal sign between volunteering and altruism, or between volunteering and acts of charity (since volunteering is a well-organized activity inside an organization [5] not randomly or spontaneously engaged in helping activities that one person decides to do at a certain moment. [7] There is a multitude of variations of purposes for involving in non-paying activities such as: proving solidarity, offering reciprocity and mutual trust, being part of a group with a common scope, [8] as well going towards: resume building, work experience or creating professional networks.

Students who volunteer for building resumes tend to volunteer less than those who have different reasons for participating in non-paid activities. [4] Findings propose two categories of motivations that most of the times we could notice them in a simultaneously space: utilitarian motivations and values-based or altruistic motives. [2] However, there is a third category, made out of social motives (to create connections such as friendships, expand ones network and other). [1]

3. Research Questions and Aim

The main aim of this micro-study is to clarify today's youth's reasons for volunteering, the motives that made them engage in non-mandatory activities and what made them continue after a certain initial personal objective was fulfilled. For achieving a most specific conclusion, questions such as the following ones were used: *Why have you chosen to volunteer? What are*

the reasons? Why have you chosen to volunteer in the present institution? What expectations do you have or what opportunities volunteering in this organization offers you? How does volunteering help development or the evolution of an organization or the society? Who are the beneficiaries of volunteerism? Who has more to gain? With the help of these questions the author of this paper could have enabled in arriving at most specific answers relevant for the proposed micro-study which shall be included in a larger one regarding the same topic.

4. Research Methods

The data collection has been gathered in the period November-December 2016, at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania, from 5 focus-groups of youth, ages between 18 and 26 years. This qualitative method is most fitting for this type of data disclosure because the nature of the desirable information is not geared towards quantity, but towards in-depth and experiential life acquirements.

5. Behind Volunteerism - Motives for volunteering

5.1. Types of reasons for volunteering

There could be intrinsic, extrinsic or just social reasons for a person to volunteer, but most interesting is which type of these is stronger: is it because they need a purpose for spending their time in a useful way; is it because they need a certain practice with a social category that could help them unveil what to do in the close future; probably it's because they want affirmations from others or confirmations of doing something good for someone or for the society; or maybe just because they would like to enlarge their friendships. Moreover, what makes them continue spending their valuable and non-refundable resources (such as time, commitment, loyalty).

> *"The reasons [for volunteering] which determined me to volunteer were: involvement, because I want to implicate myself more and more, in order to work with children, to get to know their environment better, how things unfold, how they grow, what they prefer to do outside their class hours. I developed different activities with them, we tried to help them through discovering themselves, through discovering their abilities and what they can do on their own, and to manage themselves and that's all." (Focus Group 2)*

> *"I volunteered from the desire to help as many children as I can, in order for them to achieve a personality and to discover themselves in the society, and I did it for involvement and for helping." (Focus Group 2)*

"I loved it very much [the volunteering period] because I could have offered help and these were actually my expectations, to be able to offer something (...)."(Focus Group 3)

"The reason that I chose volunteering in the Special Moldavian High School from Targu Frumos city, is because I like to be close to children and I like this kind of activity. When I am with them, their joy contaminates me, it makes me forget my worries." (Focus Group 3)

Above we could observe the altruistic purposes, the ones that drive these youth to involve towards helping others and the society in which they activate so it could become more prosper and for it to offer more qualitative social services to its individuals in need. Also we could notice a few light utilitarian reasons such as getting accustomed to a specific social category's environment so the volunteer could learn how to communicate and behave with, therefore a desire to develop a certain ability that he/ she has and, also, for creating proper activities for that social category.

"I chose to volunteer in this students association [Philosophy Students League] because I volunteered before as well, in High School, and I considered it's good to make this transition from high school to faculty through volunteering and there is another reason, the one that because in our faculty we receive a very good and organized theoretical base and that I consider volunteering as the best opportunity to receive that practical base through the fact that it helps us to develop ourselves better for our specialization." (Focus Group 4)

"For example, this part of public speaking, for many students is a problem, but being part of a league we meet many persons, and by connecting with as many people as we can and being open-minded, this problem could disappear very quickly." (Focus Group 4)

"I chose to volunteer, firstly, for the idea that it is now, the one that volunteering is an equivalent to working experience, and then I was dedicated and I tried to use my time for some productive activities, and to give it [time] to other people, helping them." (Focus Group 2)

"Well, we do have opportunities, at least in my case, both personal and professional opportunities. When I say personal opportunities, I mean developing your abilities or discovering some abilities that you didn't know until then. On a professional plan you acquire certain information, you discover information, you acquire in the same time abilities and you interact, you make new friends, new acquaintances, in the same time you meet professionals from who you have what to learn." (Focus Group 1)

The youth above is fully aware of the fact that not involving will not help them adapt to the continuously evolving society, therefore combining what theoretical knowledge they have (from the university) with that practical part that volunteering offers, they have the best chances out there, in comparison with those who choose not to involve. Likewise we can espy that developing abilities is mostly desirable and achievable in such non-mandatory activities, thus the transformations of one's personality is concluded in time and it's a kind of evolution that youth require for their future. Many of the participants started to volunteer for gathering experiences in the field they study, but ended up participating for helping those that need him.

5.2. Volunteering – Work or Curiosity as sparks for outsets

On the labour market employers do make differences between the potential employees that come for a certain job if there are many contenders. [3][6] The employer is fully engaged in selecting the right person for the job his company offers in order to get the person most hard working who would like to increase productivity, to provide to the company the volunteering skills acquired or developed and to be part of the team without any problems in adapting to new environments and being flexible.

> *"Yes, I really do consider that it [volunteering] is useful for us, because I take volunteering as an experience and at the hiring moment volunteering will be very significant; being aware of the fact that after finishing studying, another experience besides volunteering we don't have. And it is better for us to know many people and to have direct contact with beneficiaries." (Focus Group 5)*

> *"In the centre where I volunteer, I have the occasion to participate at several social inquiries, in their realization and I consider that this helps me because it is closely tied with my faculty." (Focus Group 1)*

However, there could be other different reasons for volunteering apart from those categories expressed earlier, such as curiosity or other people suggesting they should involve in such non-mandatory activities in order to explore and discover new grounds and other side of one's self.

> *"In my first year of faculty, under the information that we received from our professor, we were told that it would be an opportunity we mustn't lose and being full of curiosity I choose to go to this association [Alternative Sociale Association] and being attracted to its certain projects that I have been involved in and to the cohesion within the association, I remained further on." (Focus Group 1)*

"My class professor asked me if I could volunteer in that association ["Omenia" Foundation] because they didn't have enough personal. And they had a partnership with the high school and asked us (a few from my colleagues) to volunteer, and I accepted [now she isn't a volunteer there anymore]." (Focus Group 2)

Curiosity lead many youngster to practice other types of activities in which they usually went into, therefore, in this case, we could say curiosity is a good ability, if it's followed by bravery and smart choices - such as being part of an organization's framework. Why bravery? The author of this paper thinks these two abilities (curiosity and bravery) come together, but if these two are not designed and shaped by an intelligent choice (based on facts and arguments for a pro-active and useful way of living) then the youngster may find a nugatory way of spending time. Being "pushed" by a situation or a person, a young person could have the possibility to learn new things, things that he couldn't have learned on his own because of his limited resources (having an non-mature-experimental life yet); however if an older person offers an opportunity then the potential of that youngster could be exploited, therefore subjected to evolution. Or just maybe sometimes a person wants to know why they think they shouldn't work in a certain area:

"When I chose to come at DGASPC [The General Department of Social Work and Child Protection] (...) in this institution to volunteer, because when I first arrived at this faculty, my thought was that I would never work with children and that is why I came here, for experimenting this thing and this changed my perspective." (Focus Group 1)

6. Discussions

This paper provides starting points in analyzing the complex world of volunteering, and the one with most opportunities for eccentricity, development and evolution. As a limit of the study, could be the fact that only volunteer's point of view is enlighten and not other social parties (such as employee of the hosting organization or the employer), which could probably fence the faces of volunteerism – interest versus altruism. However at this stage only the volunteers point of view was required because of the nature of the subject that desires to unveil its main character. Another limit is probably the one provided by the chosen participants for the focus-groups. There were gathered only students from one university, perhaps if other youth either from other universities or from other types of

environment were invited the research might had had a different aspect; even though the literature in the field [4] proves that volunteerism is more practiced among youth from a period of an academic studies or other studies related to these. This micro-study is most useful for its qualitative data that provides different spectrums for future research in the field.

7. Conclusions

The reasons found could empower those with possibilities of providing volunteering places for others (such as organizations, institutions, companies), with new ideas for creating projects and programmes for involving them, but also to find the suitable activities in order for their inside demarche to be contributed at, therefore for the volunteer's work to have a meaning of self-help, creating relations, developing solidarity towards society, but also to work towards the organizations aims and objectives. There are motives that could strengthen one's involvement into an organization and the same reasons could draw another person towards not much involvement. This fact is only because of the variations of the reasons which is influenced directly by one's person's life and personality. For example, one person who decided to involve in volunteering activities in order to develop public speaking skills is motivated to be part of a specific league while another who has sufficiently developed that skill would participate for another reason (for example, to be a better leader) and if that same league's activities does not offer such opportunities then this person would be forced to decline his involvement or pursue to create a favourable context in order to get what he requires.

References

[1] Cappellari L, Turati G. Volunteer labour supply: The role of workers' motivations. Annals of Public Cooperative Economics. 2004; 75:619-643.

[2] Cnaan RA, Goldberg-Glen RS. Measuring motivation to volunteer in human services. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science. 1991; 27:269-284.

[3] Freeman RB. Working for nothing: The supply of volunteer labor. Journal of Labor Economics. 1997; 15: S140-S166.

[4] Handy F, Hustinx L, Kang C, Brudney JL, Haski-Leventhal D, Holmes K, et al. A Cross-Cultural Examination of Student Volunteering: Is it All About Resume Building?. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly Journal. 2010; 39(3):498-523.

[5] Porcaro G. (editor). Volunteering Charter – European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers. European Youth Forum. 2012.
[6] Prouteau L, Wolff FC. Does volunteer work pay off in the labor market?. Journal of Socio-Economics. 2006; 35:992-1013.
[7] Rusu DE. Volunteering and social interactions towards self-development. Conference Paper at The 4th International Virtual Conference on Advanced Scientific Results. 2016 June; 4(1):127-130.
[8] Sirca NT, Dermol V, Novak A, Trunk A. Volunteering as a vehicle for solidarity, social inclusion and active EU citizenship of youth. Conference Paper at Managing Innovation and Diversity in Knowledge Society Through Turbulent Time Conference. 2016 May; 1239-1244 p.