

EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Impact of Youth Volunteering in Spain

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1 Overview of Volunteering in Spain

The last century in Spain is marked by a recent past of a dictatorial regime; the State controlled almost all forms of organization and social participation. In few cases volunteering did exist, but not as it is understood today. It was mainly a form of activities developed inside of organizations monopolized by the State. The launch of a “Law on Associations” in the mid-60s made possible the emergence of certain groups carrying out voluntary activities under the umbrella of the Catholic Church, like Caritas and Cruz Roja Española.

In the beginning of the 70s there was an effervescence of civic movements claiming and acting with a view to improve the quality of life of citizens. In late 70s, however, with the arrival of the democratic regime, many of these civic movements suffered an important crisis because of the creation of political parties and the confidence in the democratic institutions and the emerging Welfare State to provide social welfare (European Volunteer Centre, 2005). This thought, which remained dominant until the mid-80s, implied that generally social actors adopted an attitude not in favour of volunteering, since the State was seen as the responsible and capable actor to satisfy all social needs (Osorio García, 2003).

Today the historical elaborations and explanations about the political and cultural attitudes mentioned (in this and many other ways) do not actually carry weight or considerations in decision-making and project management with respect to volunteering organizations in Spanish society; sometimes it is very evident the feeling of a new beginning (again and again) that is still in contradiction with some success expectations in the long term that never happen. This out of sight history and the sensibility around the political past are the principal ways to redefine the social work for every organization in the country. Every “new beginning” that some researchers mention (principally in the political ambient) is a missed opportunity to build a solid process of transformation and consolidation of the collective. The involvement of the State in the organization, support and promotion of volunteering in Spain has progressively increased in the recent years.

Composition of Volunteering in Spain

The Platform of Volunteers in Spain (in Spanish PVE) brings together today 81 organizations, including 30 platforms and 51 Regional Entities nationwide. In turn, all entities of the platform comprise more than 800 associations. It is estimated that the Spanish population that develops voluntary action is a total of 4.2 million people, of which 873,000 people are working in the field of social action. This means that 9.5% of the Spanish population could be involved in volunteer activities in general. (Platform Volunteer Spain, 2010).

2 Action Research

Theoretical Resources and Methods

This part is a description of the way the research was conducted and the most important outcomes of assessing impact of volunteering in Spain.

Unravelling experiences of the organised volunteering movement from a "systematisation of experiences" perspective is a personal and collective opportunity to walk in new directions, which EVS supporters have permitted the participants of EVY 2011 - Volunteering Matters to undertake. Definitely, not only to help and to enrich has been its proposal, but also to address themes of democracy, development, organisational processes and political action for another perspective and worldview along with all the people involved in this experience.

In short, systematisation of experiences has to do with recovering the story itself, to get organised and classify information and finally analyse, synthesize and critically interpret the processes we interact with on a daily basis. Outlining a theory has been also an opportunity offered and increased the potential of utilizing this methodology. Describing, reconstructing, examining and interpreting; sharing, laughing and crying; savouring successes and exorcizing sufferings and failures – these have all been moments that have contributed to the learning inherent in this project, which aligns with the ideas of the "popular education" method on which systematisation is based. Particularly for the people who work daily to improve these objectives, the project EYV 2011 - Volunteering Matters marks little steps to define and even defy their own practices and policies toward a more just society.

Critical Assessment

The method used for this research is to get information closer to a real description and interpretation of the context. It incorporates feelings and the baggage that everyone brings from their practical experiences and the knowledge gained in the past. Tools and information given in the first moment and in the final informed document are provided as an intentional way to find out about the "researchers priorities" and at the same time begin a process of identifying the principal "knots" of the context without subjective neutrality or undecided political categories.

2.1 ANALYSIS OF HOST ORGANIZATIONS' INPUTS

The interviews with hosting organisations members have confirmed that today volunteers are a fundamental part for the functioning of the organisations. There are 2 situations emphasized by the staff persons:

Although international volunteers have difficulties at the time of their arrival, they are highly valued because of the knowledge they bring from their previous experiences. This also was reinforced from a cultural and disciplinary evaluation, because EVS is preferred to local voluntary work, which was a point of consensus between all the staff persons.

The vocation and appreciation of volunteer work on the part of the government authorities must be translated in keeping with the advances made during the last years and constructing on the bases (with major economic contributions) of this a more solid system. Though there exist critics who affirm that the budget for personnel in organisations is very large, which it is also necessary to debate.

On the other hand, assessment of the same processes in organisations is directly linked to "promotion work" to increase the participation of the population in existing programmes, and this part deserves a fundamental place in the research work analysis.

It has been very interesting to start studying the reasons of why people do volunteering in Spain. In a workshop carried out at the beginning of the research on the importance of the voluntary work, one of the workers of an organisation said the following:

"For me, the voluntary work is a fundamental activity that I enjoy and that it helps me to improve as person for everything what I can learn, nevertheless many of my friends say that they would never approach to do anything as this without receiving money in exchange "

Thus, this exclusion or not doing voluntary work arises from this permanent contradiction between actual economic worries and ethical or moral backgrounds. It is, for example, one of the reasons why major traditional movements have moral weight like religious ones mobilising thousands of volunteers in a very short time for the Pope Benedict's visit to Madrid this year.

Exclusion has been variously defined as involving one or more of the following factors: deprivation of basic needs such as shelter, education, health and employment; discrimination; disempowerment (concerning civic participation, for example); rejection by mainstream society and lack of knowledge, skills and self-esteem on the part of the rejected; exclusion for physical reasons such as disability; exclusion by age (the very young and the elderly); by reason of geography (isolated rural people, urban ghettos); gender and sexuality-related exclusion; exclusion from the consumption and creation of culture and communication; ethnic and/or racial exclusion; exclusion for anti-social behaviour; and so on (Arthur Gillette, 2003).

Exclusion can be a consequence of many things. In Spain the emergence in this year of a social movement like 15-M is a reflection of the dissatisfaction of people coupled with their economic situation. This one is only the visible reason for this phenomenon, since the backdrop to these spontaneous movements is recent history and different social processes. It is therefore important to recover to analyse the dissatisfaction as a psychological manifestation, apart from politics. If one person, who is educated to help, finds himself/herself in exclusion conditions, how could we ask them to help? Evidently the answer comes from the possibility to create a different process to change this situation and reverse current conditions.

Feeling of exclusion and marginalisation within the current social system are challenged and thousands of persons try to find short, medium and long-term solutions to the economic worries that are heard day after day through the mass media. The attempt to solve a crisis of social identity, and simultaneously an economic mixed problem, makes one lose sight of "other underprivileged persons", whose woes have been added to as a result of budgets cuts to the projects that covered some of their principal needs.

One of the best ways to reflect on these considerations was mentioned in an interview during the XVI Autumn School of the Spanish Platform of Volunteering by the director of the Red Cross of Spain: For those who work in the administration of voluntary work organisations, it is indispensable to look at the experiences of the actors of major age or experience, to begin long processes with the persons inside and around, as it has been done in many directions by religious organisations or the Red Cross.

One of the initial questions of the investigation derived from the great lack (until today) of systematising information about the participation and real role of the population in the different projects of voluntary work is: What motivates people to be interested in voluntary work activities? In an interview to the media, during the opening of a volunteering project, a leader mentioned the following:

"Motivation to be a volunteer there are many, from the most solid to making friends or curriculum, and they all are valid to eradicate injustices " (La Opinión de Tenerife, 2011).

Though voluntary persons operate for altruistic reasons, in interviews with some investigators and members of organisations, the process of formation of a solid image of voluntary work emerged as a great and still difficult task. Investigations have indicated that behaviours can sometimes also be governed for instrumental reasons:

"The personal satisfaction, the feeling of moral or religious obligation, the desire to know the social reality or to know other persons combine with other motivations as acquiring experience and/or formation for a future professional life and to increase this way the professional expectations." (State Plan of Voluntary work, 2005).

The above statement is not a positive or negative valuation; the aim is rather to indicate the condition of this process. At first sight, the task of promotion is fundamental in order to be attractive and concrete, but in case of the voluntary work this way of integrating volunteers does not turn out to be solid, especially when expressed by organisations whose leaders, in interviews and declarations to the

mass media, reflect uncertainties and worries about what it will happen with the investment in social matters in the context of economic crisis and political transition as the present. All this, presents a challenge difficult to face, since on the one hand, individuals' worries lead to the prioritising of individualization and the search for material safety, and on another other, an increasing dependence and urgency for organisations.

2.1.1 Volunteering Characterization

In 1996 the Law of the Voluntary Work was approved. This law defines volunteering as: The set of activities of public interest, developed by natural persons, which are not carried out for labour relations, functionaries, mercantile or any other paid reasons. Between other requirements, the activity must be of altruistic and of solidarity character and his accomplishment must be free, without personal obligation or juridical duty. That developed across private or public organisations and in accordance with programs or concrete projects (Plataforma del Voluntariado de España, 2010). While the concept defined by law has not been reviewed or discussed in institutional spaces, documents and interviews draw some important views on "Volunteering in Spain".

In March 2011, the Centre of Sociological Investigations conducted a national survey with 2864 persons on the participation in activities of social good and their opinions with regard to this topic, with very interesting results:

About 93% had never done activities of voluntary work.

Two principal reasons were noted: Due to the lack of time or because they had never managed it.

From the 93% that had never done voluntary work, 65% said that they had never thought to interfere in projects or activities of volunteer work.

For most of the people, the 2 principal motives why someone volunteers are: To help others and to feel necessary and useful.

As for the skills and training to do voluntary work, 72% answered that with good will and the desire to work any person could be a volunteer.

72% also answered that the work done by volunteers is hardly recognised by Spanish companies.

92% answered that it has never received help or benefited from volunteers' work.

83% said that it did not know that 2011 is the European Year of Volunteering.

On average, digital media coverage comprised 5 stories a day and follow-up actions undertaken by different stakeholders of volunteering in the country. This is a rather small proportion that could be maximized through a didactic and communication strategy using social networks and new tools to promote work done in this field.

2.1.2 The Volunteer's Profile

A volunteer in social action is one who is aware of the causes of social exclusion or sensitised to the situation of disadvantaged groups, the excluded or marginalized in their community, decide, selfless and supportive, to participate with others in different projects of a volunteer organisation, dedicating part of their time on behalf of a framed action on specific projects (Platform of Volunteers in Spain, 2010).

In some interviews and workshops, the following list of essential qualities of a person joining a volunteer project was drawn up:

Work in a group, respectful, responsible, initiative, solidarity, kind, cooperative, tolerant, optimist, assertive, curious, patient, dynamic, constant, committed, service-minded, on duty attention

In some interviews volunteers were asked to make a drawing to represent the word *volunteering*; the "half full, half empty glass" is the representation of Nick Clarken from England.



2.1.3 Impact of Volunteering - Framework for Analysis

Their own personal development	Organisational development (host coordinating organisation)	Local community development (host project(s) etc.)
<p>Challenges and learning points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The language barrier is the biggest challenge and most recognised by all volunteers. The feeling of communicating successfully and being able to speak fluently and accurately in all situations arrives at an average within 4 to 6 months of living in the country. 	<p>Challenges and learning points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In many cases the hosting organisations have small aptitude to incorporate the suggestions that volunteers made and were therefore not so open to listening to any important changes that they needed. So adaptation to this way of things was difficult in the first part of the experience. - There are many contributions and useful skills to hosting organisations. 	<p>Challenges and learning points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On arrival training and experiences of self-development in the local communities are the most important sources of learning for volunteers. - Volunteers gained a better understanding of the different Spanish communities where they worked. - Meeting new people, new customs, new ways of life are the best reasons to feel more open to different point of views.
<p>Recommendations for optimising volunteer's learning and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In future projects, volunteers should make a better selection of the projects they want to be involved with and hosting organisations should carefully screen what the volunteer has done in his life before the EVS and who he is and then invite him/her to volunteer at a project which matches his/her interests. 	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In some case, due to the distance of the projects from centres of population, volunteers have few possibilities to communicate about and find solutions for his needs or problems with the project. Forms of evaluation should be used in this respect and communication should be improved with sending organisations to solve these problems from different places. - In the first days of work, it is important that one lend substantial support to the new volunteers, as mistakes can be made and the volunteer may face many difficulties when alone at the project. In fact, being alone is also a technique of cultural learning and of learning the language, but not at the start of the service period. 	<p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are typical problems that people can find anywhere as a foreigner. There are language barriers that make things a little bit complicated. It could be useful if host organisations had more social spaces with local community members to facilitate the first contact of the new volunteers.

3 Conclusions

A fundamental fact of this and other studies with reference to the general analysis of every process is the lack of explanation, data and historical deliberations and the legacy of governing authoritative regimes. An ideological invisibility that induces contradictions can be said to exist possibly in the case of the voluntary recruitment and promotion, and application of certain work methods. In the end, this affects planning, execution, evaluation and systematisation processes of many tasks around volunteering in the country, which are regarded from an ethical perspective, simply as scarcity of time, without considering global social changes and other points of view on volunteering.

Volunteering is an expression of the practice of solidarity. As a form of social participation, it is critical and transformational. In this sense, depending on how programmes are structured and organised, the volunteer can weaken or strengthen models of social participation. Volunteers form the largest volume of a human resource budget, and as such have a great responsibility vis-à-vis the promotion of a democratic culture. At a micro level, volunteers often become the means to fill in gaps in internal staff, rather than directly participating with the social (Eva Del Amo, 2011).

Research has indicated that due to the lack of records of organisations and official investigations that measure the rate of participation of people in volunteer activities, it is difficult to define the material, financial and human, the actual volume of activity nationwide. For example, during the "Fall School" held in Madrid in September 2011, we discussed this criticism, and agreed that since it is not possible to estimate the actual volume of volunteerism in Spain, it is likewise difficult to make estimates about its economic impact or potential contribution to the gross domestic product.

More than half of the Spanish volunteer organisations (56% of them) get 50% or more of their total funding from public authorities. This percentage increases for small and medium-sized volunteer organisations, as 89% of them are mainly dependent on funding from public authorities (Corral in Osorio García, 2003). On the part of the leaders and organisation members, budget cuts are one of the principal worries. It is therefore necessary to restructure the management capabilities of organisations with a vision toward self-management and political strength, so that the work done over long years is not lost by a new market crisis or transition to a government cutting social spending aggressively.

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