

# VOLUNTEERING - FROM PARTICULAR TO UNIVERSAL

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, volunteering is a visible phenomenon in all countries, manifesting in varying degrees of development. The pandemic situation which started in 2020, highlighted the fact that regardless of culture, religion or geographical area, people have mobilized and reacted similarly to manage the crisis, realizing the necessity for solidarity and social cohesion. Volunteering is a complex, multidimensional concept, and the activities conducted at individual or organizational level represents a suitable response to environmental, economic, social, educational, cultural, or health challenges in the context of a dynamic and constantly changing society. The aim of this research was to discover new meanings of volunteering, taking into consideration the importance, particularity, universality, and the mobilizing values of this activity, which have materialized in the form of a new definition. Volunteering is one of the factors that contributes to the personal development of individuals, by increasing self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as the development of solidarity between generations, stimulation of active citizenship and social change.

**Keywords:** volunteering, socially responsible behavior, social inclusion, social change, active citizenship, globalization

**J.E.L. Classification:** A130, L310, Y9

## 1. Introduction

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon that has drawn the attention of a large number of academic representatives, private and public organizations, as well as civil society. The degree of individuals involvement in volunteering activities varies from one country to another, depending on certain factors such as: material living conditions, values, religion and education (Butcher and Einolf, 2017).

Throughout history, volunteering has manifested in various forms, and it has been associated with multiple practices and experiences, but his presence was felt more significantly after the First World War, on the one hand as a response to the war horrors, and on the other hand, as an alternative to compulsory military service. The German sociologist and historian Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who supported the creation of the Voluntary Peace Service, is considered as the spiritual father of volunteering.

The Covid-19 pandemic which started in 2020, highlighted the fact that regardless of culture, religion or geographical area, people have mobilized and reacted similarly to manage the crisis, realizing the necessity for solidarity and social cohesion (Ganta, 2020). At the same time, it was emphasized that volunteering represents one of the ways in which people help each other in difficult situations, contributes to the interconnection of relevant actors from the civil society, private and public sectors, increase awareness and solving problems in the community (United Nations, 2021).

This paper presents an analysis of the volunteering specialized literature and explores the universal dimension of this concept. The result of this research was materialized in a new definition that includes the universal and spiritual side of volunteering, which contributes to the literature enrichment.

## 2. Literature review

### Volunteering

In the specialized literature there is no consensus regarding an unanimously accepted definition of volunteering, as researchers have differing views on the limits, factors and nature of this concept, and continue to identify new links with other concepts such as social responsibility (Toma, Stanciu and Irimia, 2011; Toma, 2013) or social entrepreneurship (Zainea et al., 2020). Some authors consider that social responsibility and/or corporate social responsibility encompass volunteering, irrespective of the domain of activity (Marinescu, Toma and Constantin, 2010; Imbrișcă and Toma, 2020) or the size of the organization (Toma, 2008; Toma and Marinescu, 2011; Toma, Burcea and Papuc, 2011; Toma and Hudea, 2012).

Volunteering is an activity of public interest that takes place in various fields such as social assistance, education, health, environmental protection, art, culture, human rights, community development, etc. (according to art. 3 lit. b) of Law no. 78/2014).

Volunteering has been defined as a free choice, not forced labor or slavery, which involves lack of remuneration, and is pursued for the benefit of another person or society in general (Cnaan,

et al.,1996; National Council for Voluntary Organizations, 2005; Butcher, 2010; International Labour Office, 2011)

Megan and Maryam (2015) point out that volunteer work is a key pillar in strengthening social relations, being a concept closely related to the meanings of kindness, humanity and feelings of others, which are no longer limited to charity or social development.

Volunteering has also been assimilated to spending free time constructively (Wilson, 2000; Hallmann & Rasciute, 2020), as new skills and abilities can be accumulated through the participation at this activity (Elkington and Stebbins, 2014; Zainea et al., 2019). Participation in volunteer activities contributes to the personal development of individuals by increasing self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as expanding the network of friends (Andronic, 2014; Aydinli et al. 2016; Shantz et al. 2019).

Peace, freedom, security and justice for all are unanimously accepted values mentioned in the Universal Declaration on Volunteering (IAVE, 2001), a document which emphasizes the complexity of interdependence between states, in an age of globalization marked by innovation, technological progress, and continuous change (Toma and Marinescu, 2015).

The above-mentioned definitions highlight the fact that volunteering is a complex and multidimensional concept, whose activity is conducted in various fields, as well as in the entire social spectrum. Volunteering is a free choice based on the people's desire to do good for others, which contributes to the social network expansion and represents a way to spend free time in a constructive manner, as through the implication in voluntary activities benefits can be obtained, at both levels, individually and socially. This activity promotes universal values, and the involvement in volunteer programs gives individuals an honorable position in the community.

### **The fundamental elements of the universe**

Over time, the four fundamental elements, namely water, air, fire and earth, have been approached differently. A first perspective was that these elements are the basis of matter and describe certain processes that take place in nature. Water indicates the processes that help things grow and is a life support. Air is the environment in which energy is transferred between the other elements. Fire generates heat, light and transforms matter, by returning it to its original stage. The earth represents matter and resources of physical nature. These elements represent the matter aggregation states, respectively water - liquid state, air - gaseous state, fire - plasma (weakly ionized), earth - solid state (Ciubotaru, 2020).

In the antiquity, the thinkers of the time divided the physical world, into the four basic elements,

and they believed that they had equal powers, different characteristics, and that their mixture generated or destroyed the forms in nature. Thus, there are four stages of life, four moments of the day and four seasons.

The second perspective consisted in approaching the four astrological elements as factors that can explain how we live or react to environmental challenges, as they are reflected in the feelings, expectations and behaviors of individuals, as well as in their relationships.

Thus, the twelve zodiac signs, correspond to each month of the year and according to some beliefs, it might influence people's destiny and were associated with the fundamental elements, as follows: water signs (Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces), air signs (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius), fire signs (Aries, Leo, Reaper) and earth signs (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn).

According to the Greek thinkers the four fundamental elements influence human character, as they are found in people's temperament, namely choleric, sanguine, melancholic and phlegmatic (Ashton, 2018).

### **The reflection of the fundamental elements in the literature**

The fundamental elements of the universe have been mentioned in the literature, scientific, historical works of various authors to plastically describe the journey through life with its opportunities and obstacles, multiple events, rituals or to express some values, principles, moods, human behaviors, as well as the indissoluble relationship between human and nature.

Therefore, the Romanian poet, writer and essayist, Nichita Stănescu, in the poem Autumn Emotion (part of the volume *A Vision of Feelings*, 1964), fire is associated with the moon and suggests the romance of the relationship between the two lovers, as well as the intensity of love ("I whistle the moon and it rises and I turn it into a great love"), while the air makes its presence felt throughout the poem, being the conducive environment for the transmission of vibrations, emotions and message to the reader. The water is represented by the sea ("I take the words and drown them in the sea"), and the earth can be associated with the stones ("...and then I approach to the stones and cue"), the lyrics are suggesting the state of fear and loneliness on the one hand, the fact that love is a perennial feeling that can be transposed into an imaginary world and overcomes any obstacle, on the other hand.

The Romanian writer and Doctor in Philology, Ion Pachie - Tatomirescu (1999), highlighted in one of his aphorisms the strength of an element in relation to the others, stating that "water has the greatest power, extinguishes fire, gnaws the earth, rejuvenates the air". In another aphorism he emphasized the positive role of the human and the indestructible relationship with nature and argued that "the four elements are: water, air, fire, earth; and I, in their midst, reconciling them".

### **3. Research methodology**

The author used a descriptive research method to accomplish the scope of the paper. The literature review was done based on comprehensive research from multiple sources found in electronic data bases, such as international journals (e.g. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*), articles and books (e.g., Elsevier, Google Scholar, Springer), and in various Romanian libraries (e.g. Romanian National Library, The Central University Library from Bucharest „Carol I”). The data was thoroughly selected and grouped into categories. Then, the information was analyzed, correlated, and synthesized. Finally, the author designed the article.

#### 4. Results and discussions

Since education is the character culture, culture is the education of the mind (Eminescu, 1980), and we need above all to learn again to believe in the possibility of nobility of spirit in ourselves (O'Neill, 2007), also the sense of duty is the brightest proof of the health of a soul (Iorga), it can be said that volunteering encompasses three visions, as it provides a favorable framework for education and training of socially responsible people, as well as helping people in need and it creates spiritual fulfillment.

The author defines volunteering as the omnipresent reality reflected in the collective mind, which concentrates the purifying spring of national identity, the sacred, light-giving fire that burns brightly in each of us, as well as the hidden, but living cornerstone of universal culture, while vibrating in the space between sky and earth, the same for all inhabitants of the planet, giving a special meaning to the world in which we coexist.

From the definition presented above, it can be concluded that volunteering is a well-known concept, an activity often found around the globe, a fact reflected in the collective consciousness of each person, a psychological trait transmitted through education from one generation to another, from ancient times to the present.

This concept gathers the national identity, the creative enthusiasm of each person with the values, the unanimously recognized norms and represents a common language for all the inhabitants of the planet.

The national identity, respectively the set of life norms, values, beliefs, traditions, customs, specific interests of people, is assimilated to water, the symbol of purity, which purifies, heals society from bad morals and strengthens the feeling of national pride and loyalty to the community members.

The desire to do good for other individuals and the creative enthusiasm that exists in each of us, in different degrees of manifestation, are similar to fire, the symbol of light and warmth, as we evolve through the participation in volunteering activities, by bringing to the surface the best from the depths of our being.

The universal culture is represented by the earth, the symbol of the fertile land in which we sow seeds and harvest fruits, respectively ideas, opinions, beliefs, traditions that develop; universal culture is the cornerstone, the basic element of any construction, it is mysterious because it hides many unknown things, and it is alive because it is continuously enriched with each new experience.

The environment in which the communication between the inhabitants of the planet is made is assimilated with the air. In this space between sky and earth, the universal language of volunteering is transmitted from one generation to another, and it is based on unanimously recognized values, such as peace, freedom, non-discrimination, solidarity and social justice. This activity can be seen not only as service done for the benefit of other people or the community, but also as a proof of faith.

Volunteering is crucial in a globalized world, as it is an effective tool for gaining people's trust, developing skills or acquiring new abilities and stimulating creativity to identify innovative and sustainable solutions which contributes to solve the community existing problems and social change.

## 5. Conclusions

Currently, in the context of new challenges due to globalization, international competition, poverty, demographic aging, factors that have a major impact over the economic performance and states social policies, volunteering is a viable solution that promotes multiculturalism, social dialogue, partnerships, increase social inclusion and influences positive the active involvement of individuals in community life.

The holistic approach of volunteering, on the one hand, and the acceptance of the statement that motivation is the power that stimulates action, on the other hand, helps to understand that the people's desire to do good for others and the power of conscience are key factors that can shape reality and lead to the formation of socially responsible behavior of individuals.

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