

# VOLUNTEERING: FROM ALTRUISM TO OTHERNESS

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*Volunteering is no longer a marginal phenomenon. It has become a crucial issue since the beginning of the 1990s, with studies implemented at both the European and global levels to measure volunteer population and also to give a theoretical background to volunteering. The concept of volunteering includes altruism, charity, and solidarity. It is the touchstone of civil society. Being a volunteer implies creating and developing both social capital and human capital. Volunteers acquire personal, social, and professional skills. Being a volunteer also means being an active citizen; it has a specific meaning with regard to migration. The concept of "otherness" may be more significant from this perspective.*

*Keywords: volunteering, altruism, charity, solidarity, social capital, civil society, citizenship.*

*Prostovoljstvo ni več marginalen pojav. Že v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja je postalo osrednja tema, s katero se ukvarjajo tudi raziskave, s katerimi tako na evropski kot na svetovni ravni ugotavljajo, koliko ljudi se ukvarja s tovrstnimi dejavnostmi, sočasno pa skušajo določiti še teoretski okvir prostovoljstva. Koncept prostovoljstva sicer vključuje altruizem, dobrodelnost in solidarnost, mnogi pa ga opisujejo kot temelj civilne družbe. Biti prostovoljec namreč pomeni ustvarjati in razvijati tako socialni kot človeški kapital, poleg tega pa prostovoljci pridobivajo osebne, družbene in poklicne izkušnje. Prostovoljstvo se tesno prepleta še z aktivnim državljanstvom in ima poseben pomen v povezavi z migranti. S tega vidika je lahko zelo pomembno razumevanje koncept »drugosti«. Ključne besede: prostovoljstvo, altruizem, dobrodelnost, solidarnost, socialni kapital, civilna družba, državljanstvo.*

## INTRODUCTION

According to the Canadian sociologist Jacques Godbout, *altruism* is the modern term for charity. Nevertheless, he is skeptical about the "secular gift" provided by volunteering, which is not so different, according to him, from the "religious gift" provided by charity (Godbout 2000). The real modernity of volunteering is the freedom attached to it. Volunteers are free to give and also to leave. Freedom is also one of the human rights promoted by the European Union: "the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union" (European Commission 2000b).

Because the EU is a pluralistic society enriched by a variety of cultural and social traditions, which will become even more diverse in the future, the EU Charter of Fundamental

rights emphasizes respect for cultural and social differences (the diversity principle): “The Union contributes to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the member States” (European Commission 2000b).

The European Year of Active Citizenship 2013 was an occasion to enhance the concept of “volunteering for all.” Volunteer involvement includes both altruism and otherness, based on involving an “other” that is different from oneself, one’s family, or one’s friends. If altruism is opposed to selfishness, otherness is linked to the value of pluralism and diversity. Being a member of a society is based on a series of rights, but also brings with it a number of responsibilities for all of its members, whatever their status: nationals or migrants (the active citizenship principle).

I intend to show in this article that the theoretical background of volunteering together with its practical implementation deserve to be clarified. I first discuss some definitions of volunteering and its link with altruism, then I try to explain why so many Europeans are volunteers in the twenty-first century. Finally, I emphasize the need for opening volunteering up to new profiles of volunteers, which means combining altruism and otherness. Volunteering is not an easy concept, and it must be explained both theoretically and practically, through the findings of European projects meant to enhance volunteering and citizenship.

## A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO VOLUNTEERING, ALTRUISM, AND CHARITY

Before introducing the notion of altruism (and quasi-altruism) and its link with charity, I would like to first clarify the different definitions and meanings of the word *volunteering*.

### VOLUNTEERING: SOME DEFINITIONS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

Depending on the language, many different terms are used for volunteering. In English the term is relatively straightforward, but still there are quite different views of what volunteering encompasses and many different meanings connected with the word (Halba, Schumacher and Strümpel 2001; Halba 1997, 2003, 2006). Generally, five dimensions of volunteering are referred to in definitions (Halba 2003):

- The activity must be carried out of one’s own free choice (the idea of freedom);
- It is unremunerated (the idea of gratuity, disinterest);
- It must be not only for the benefit of the individual or his or her family; this is a “gift to a stranger” (the idea of altruism);
- It usually takes place in an organized or formal framework (in a nonprofit organization);
- The activity is for a general purpose and not for the interest of a small group of people (the idea of general good or general purpose).

It is important to stress that volunteer activity that takes place in an isolated, sporadic,

or individual way, outside the framework of public or private nonprofit organizations, or motivated by family relations or friendship, is expressly excluded from the concept of volunteer work (Spanish National Law 6/1996 on Volunteering).

According to Helmut K. Anheier, volunteering is “the donation of time for a wide range of community and public benefit purposes, such as helping the needy, distributing food, serving on boards, visiting the sick or cleaning up local parks” (Anheier 2005: 75). His main reference is the United States.

In France, there are two words for volunteering: *bénévolat* and *volontariat* (Halba 1997, 2003, 2011a). They both include the five dimensions in the general definition above (freely performed activity, unpaid, for others, for the general good, usually in an NGO). The difference between *bénévolat* and *volontariat* relies on the full-time activity of the *volontariat* and the status attached to it, which allows some remuneration (which is not a salary). There are five kinds of volunteers: international volunteers (in international NGOs, Act of 2005), volunteer firemen (as opposed to professional ones, Act of 1996), volunteers abroad (generally in French firms or in embassies), volunteers in France (any age, since 2006), and civil service volunteers (18–25 years old, with a national agency created in 2006) very close in the spirit to the European Voluntary Service (EVS, since 1996 in the EU).

In Germany (GHK 2009), several different terms are currently used to describe volunteer activities, even though the most popular is *freiwillig*. There is a dual volunteer sector. On the one hand, there are traditional forms of civic engagement, predominantly carried out “for others” and connected to permanent memberships such as churches, unions, parties, welfare associations, and sports clubs. On the other hand, volunteer activities are exercised primarily for individuals themselves in order to develop personal competences and skills such as social movement organizations, citizen groups, ecological projects, and non-institutionalized political campaigns.

In Italy (GHK 2009), volunteerism (translated as *volontariato*) refers to all types of activities, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, or at home or abroad. It is undertaken out of a person’s own free will, choice, and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities, and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations (translated as *organizzazione non governativa*, *organizzazione no profit*, and *organizzazione senza scopo di lucro*) to address human, social, or environmental needs and concerns.

There is no statutory definition for volunteering in the UK (GHK 2009). However there is a definition of volunteers in the 1997 Police Act “‘volunteer’ means a person engaged in an activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative.” More recently the Volunteering Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England (a Code of Good Practice), defines volunteering as “an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that

aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives” (GHK, 2009).

In Spain, volunteering is one of the main components of the Spanish third sector and is regulated by National Law 6/1996, 15 January (*Ley Nacional 6/1996, del 5 de enero, sobre Voluntariado*). It defines volunteering (translated as *voluntariado*) as a group of activities of general interest that is developed by individuals and is not carried out on the grounds of a labor, public service, mercantile, or any other paid relationship. It must meet the following criteria: the activity must have an altruistic and solidarity character, it must be freely chosen and not subject to any personal duty or legal limitation, it must be carried out without economic gain and without prejudice to the right of the volunteer to be reimbursed for any expenses he or she may incur while fulfilling the tasks, and it must be developed through public or private nonprofit organizations as part of a concrete program or project.

In Poland (Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism of 23 April 2003), a volunteer is “a person who voluntarily and with no remuneration provides services based on regulations specified in the law.” The law further states that the person engaged in the volunteer activity must be duly qualified and meet the requirements of the benefit that he or she is providing if other legal provisions would include the need for such qualifications and requirements. Persons that decide to form or join an association as its members are not volunteers because they provide services for the association’s benefit. Other definitions are also used. The Volunteer Centres network defines a volunteer as “a natural person who voluntarily and without compensation provides benefits for organizations, institutions, and individuals beyond family and friendship ties.” The Klon/Jawor Association defines volunteering as “devoting one’s time to unpaid social activity done out of free will for non-governmental organisations, religious and social movements.” Whereas the terms “non-governmental organizations (NGOs)” and “nonprofit sector” or “nonprofit organizations” were recently “imported” from abroad, the term “social organizations” was used prior to 1989. Its use has dramatically declined due to its negative connotation with the communist era, but recently the term has started losing its pejorative meaning and it predominantly refers to public benefit.

In Slovenia (GHK 2009), there is no generally recognized definition for volunteering. However, the new draft law on volunteer work describes volunteer work as “an activity of an individual doing nonprofit activities, out of his own free and for the benefit of others or society and without expecting any material benefits” (Legal Information Centre for NGOs in Slovenia – PIC, and Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs – CNVOS 2008).

### VOLUNTEERING, ALTRUISM, AND QUASI-ALTRUISM

Volunteering is closely linked to the concept of altruism, which may be defined as “the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others as opposed to egoism” (Halba 2003, 2011a.). The term is of French origin (1850–1855).

According to David A. Kennett (1980), “pure altruism” refers to a gift of time or money

without any reward of any kind (material, immaterial, etc.). In practice, there is always a reward and so one can speak of quasi-altruism. As far as volunteering is concerned, Kennett proposes six different types of quasi-altruism that correspond to immaterial goals:

- Quasi-altruism with intangible compensation: you give your time to obtain respect from the person who benefits from your gift or from the people that witness this gift;
- Quasi-altruism in the Game Theory perspective: you give to impress a third person or to make things positive for yourself in the future;
- Quasi-altruism in the sociobiological context: you give because your parents or your family have shown you the way; you have received some kind of “altruistic gene” or biological predestination;
- Quasi-altruism and the Rotten Kid Theorem: in a group, there is a social income that is bigger than all the incomes together, and if you want to benefit from this synergy you had better act as a volunteer;
- Quasi-altruism and social pressure: to avoid social costs and psychological guilt, you prefer being a volunteer;
- Quasi-altruism and sponsorship: you give to promote a positive image of yourself and so there is a complementary profit in the near future in your professional or social life.

There is no material compensation for volunteer work. Volunteers are not paid for it (in money or in kind). However, there is an immaterial reward or an expectation of such a reward; this is the Latin motto *do ut des*, which means ‘I give to make you (or someone else) give.’ The theory of gift has been defined as an exchange of “gift” (*don*) and “return gift” (*contre-don*) (Mauss 1950).

In traditional economic theories, whatever the chosen perspective, liberal or Marxist, the focus is on the state or the market; the nonprofit sector is forgotten. In addition, many economic, social, or political activities are implemented outside the public or private sector. The nonprofit sector or third sector would have been developed because of the “failure” of the state and the market. Needs expressed by some groups of the population were ignored both by public authorities because they were still too marginal to offer a public policy, and by firms because these populations were not solvent and so they could not afford to pay. The population in need or in a vulnerable situation cannot clearly express its demands. As a result, through associations the nonprofit sector plays the role of a go-between with this population and the state (Etzioni 1999), sometimes with the private sector in order for firms to be able to offer more appropriate services (and negotiate fair prices).

The main characteristic of the third sector is to depend on individual initiatives, most of the time through an association or an NGO, on a volunteer basis. Volunteers freely dedicate their time to defend a cause and/or to be involved in a specific activity. To understand how the third sector is run, it is necessary to forget the traditional paradigm of selfishness, which assumes that any individual wants to maximize his or her own utility within a defined budget. The new paradigm is altruism: looking out for the welfare and wellbeing of others.

On the associations’ side, there are two ways to justify the legitimacy of the third sector.

Associations are the result of social evolution, an expression of civil society, an original way to solve social problems different from the public way and the private way. Associations can also be explained as the extension of institutional powers such as church, state, and local authorities; in this sense, their associative vitality can be seen as part of a strategy of social control. In both senses, the associations representing the nonprofit or third sector are an expression of solidarity at both the local and human levels.

Volunteers' motivations are often mixed and unconscious. Some of them are linked to religious beliefs: the more religious you are, the more likely you are to become a volunteer, according to statistical data (LES, Paris 1991, 1993, 1997; INSEE, Paris, 2004). Others are more neutral: social awareness and responsibility. Some motivations are private: personal events usually linked to a change or a failure in one's life. Others are more social or public-oriented: defense of rights and active citizenship. From a historical perspective, volunteering has been rooted in religious charity.

#### VOLUNTEERING, ALTRUISM, AND CHARITY

Traditionally, volunteering is associated with charitable organizations, usually linked to the church. The word *charity* originally meant 'preciousness, dearness, high price' in Latin (*caritas*). From this, in Christian theology, *caritas* became the standard Latin translation for the Greek word *agape*, meaning an unlimited loving kindness to all others, such as the love of God. Charity can be seen as giving time, work, goods, or money to the unfortunate, either directly or by means of a charitable trust or other worthy cause. The poor, the sick, and the disabled are generally regarded as the proper objects of charity (*almsgiving*; Kassabova, 2008). Helmut K. Anheier (2005) defines charity as "individual benevolence and caring, a value and practice found in all major world cultures and religions. It is one of the 'five pillars' of Islam, and central to Christian and Jewish religious teaching and practice as well."

The traditional type of volunteering in the framework of religious charities that was carried out in the nineteenth century is diminishing. Fewer people are willing to make long-term commitments to organizations in this form. Although there is evidence that modernization does not lead to a reduced willingness to volunteer, the pattern of volunteering is changing towards more activity-oriented types of volunteering and more self-guided tasks. The profile of volunteers is also changing because there are increasingly more high-skilled volunteers, and traditional hierarchies that depended on the length of time spent in an organization no longer function.

In past centuries, churches provided public services that have been taken over by the state or associations in the past thirty years (for instance, services for the elderly, the sick, and orphans). Some of these religious institutions still operate, but with increasingly more secular people (there are increasingly fewer priests and nuns involved). In more secular countries, such as France, "religious" associations are systematically combined with secular counterparts: for instance, Caritas France (Catholic) vs. Secours Populaire (secular). This is mainly due to the

1905 Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State (known as the Act of Concordat between the State and the Catholic Church).

In other countries such as Austria or Italy, volunteering is tied to the Catholic Church, and in other countries to a Protestant church, such as in the United Kingdom. In countries with a high level of state welfare, such as Sweden or Denmark, volunteering has become less important as the professionalization of social services has developed. It has started to become an issue when financial difficulties have caused state provisions to be cut (Halba, Schumacher and Strümpel 2001). In Romania and Bulgaria, two former communist countries that entered the EU in 2007, religion became a main issue in gathering communities together after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Orthodox Church is a powerful force that strengthens national and ethnic identity, and social ties within parishes, and promotes social cohesion, inclusion, and integration (Kassabova 2008).

In Slovenia and other countries in southeast Europe, religion is still a sensitive issue. On the one hand, it may have been a powerful force in maintaining ethnic and national boundaries. On the other hand, it may have exacerbated some nationalist sensitivities. After the collapse of the former Yugoslavia in 1992, the secular system implemented since 1945 was questioned and some citizens of the former republics linked their national identity to a religious affiliation. In a schematic way, Serbians were considered to be Orthodox (the majority of the country's population belonged to this religion), Croats to be Catholic, and Bosnians to be Muslims.

Nevertheless, following the general trend of secularization in European societies, in the twenty-first century volunteering has been more associated with the “modern” concepts of solidarity or philanthropy. According to Helmut K. Anheier (2005), *philanthropy* refers to “the practices of individuals reflecting a ‘love of humanity’ and the voluntary dedication of personal wealth and skills for the benefit of specific public causes . . . it refers to private efforts to solve common social problems such as poverty or ignorance.”

## VOLUNTEERING, ALTRUISM, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Volunteering is not a marginal phenomenon. One European out of four was involved in volunteer activity in 1990, according to the European Value Systems Study Group (EVSSG), a network of researchers in the social sciences, theology, and philosophy, founded in 1978 in the Netherlands. In 1981, the first survey included twenty-nine countries. In 1990, there were forty countries. The main idea behind the network was to study whether Europeans shared common values to study their impact on the European construct. The proportion has not changed much because in 2011 there were between ninety-two and ninety-four million adults involved in volunteering in the twenty-seven countries of the European Union. This in turn implies that around 22% to 23% of Europeans over fifteen years old are engaged in volunteer work (GHK 2009). What could explain such a huge number of volunteers in Europe?

## EUROPEANS' VALUES

There has been a change in Europeans' values since the 1970s, which might explain why volunteering has become a major trend in European societies. The European Values System Study Group (EVSSG) defines the concept of values as the "dispositions deeply rooted, orientations or motivations enhancing individuals to act or behave in a certain way." Cultural evolution and the adaptation of society to this change would be the results of eight main trends: a) secularization and individualism, b) materialism and post-materialism, c) liberty and equality, d) belief in institutions and protest movements, e) trust in others and tolerance, f) family life, g) religion, and h) private morality and civic responsibility.

The EVSSG researchers have observed a change in the general trend concerning Europeans' aspirations. Materialistic values (economic and physical security) have been replaced by post-materialistic values (personal expression and quality of life). The most post-materialistic Europeans are younger ones and those born before the Second World War; the most materialistic ones belong to the baby boom generation, born just after 1945.

Age is not the only criterion; religion and morals also play an important role in this post-materialist philosophy. People belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition tend to be more materialistic; post-materialistic people belong to the secularist trend. They would privilege individual autonomy, defense of rights, social justice, and care for the environment. This change in values has led increasingly more people to join volunteer organizations and protests.

More generally, the crisis of political and religious institutions, and the need for autonomy and independence expressed within Europe, has favored volunteering since the 1970s. Volunteer activities are a way of becoming involved in political, religious, social, and economic life. This is a transverse approach, based on horizontal relations, which are more equitable. The bottom-up approach is of course enhanced together with social responsibility and the belief that individual, local activities may have a chance to be heard when they are collective and to make a difference for future generations.

The survey highlights a decrease in participation in religious, political, trade-union, and youth organizations. Volunteering in religious associations depends more on women. A higher proportion of religious volunteering has been seen in the Netherlands and Belgium. The link between volunteering and religious practice is high in northern countries as opposed to Latin countries. In Italy, Portugal, and Spain, where the Catholic tradition is still strong, volunteering is not as developed as in the northern countries. This is linked to the fact that services offered by associations in more secular countries are still provided by the family or the Church in Latin countries, such as support for the elderly, the disabled, or very young children.

The survey considers four categories of people: "active religious" (deeply involved in the activities of the church or the religious organization), "regular" (attending a religious celebration at least once a month), "marginal" (irregular religious practice), and "non-religious." The data emphasize that the more actively religious individuals are, the greater likelihood they have of being a volunteer even though religious motivations did not appear among the top ten reasons for becoming a volunteer.



The reason for the link between religious practice and volunteer involvement is due to the fact that at church (or at a mosque or synagogue) the congregation is directly asked by the priest, pastor, imam, or rabbi to volunteer for many social activities: fundraising for people facing material difficulties, school tutoring, administrative help for illiterate people or foreigners, and so on. People that do not attend any religious service are not so easily solicited to become volunteers.

Despite the general trend of secularization in Europe, the impact of Vatican II has to be taken into account in the new trend in European values. The motivations expressed by European volunteers, if not “religious” *stricto sensu*, are at least inspired by “spiritual” motivations. One of the main production of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1963) is the publication *Nostra Aetate*, which organizes the Catholic Church’s relations with non-Christian religions. It has to be combined with the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, which affirms the right to religious liberty, and also to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. The main idea behind the Vatican II philosophy is to enhance dialogue and cooperation to serve of all members of the human race, whatever their religious or political affiliation. It has slightly changed relations between Christians, especially Catholics, and the followers of other religions, and even non-religious people. It is important to note that in associations such as Caritas, with a Catholic background, anyone can be a volunteer, whether religious or not. Religious affiliation is not a criterion for joining, but volunteers without any religious affiliation declare they appreciate the “spiritual” background of the association (Lyet 1997).

#### VOLUNTEERING, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Volunteering and concern for others (altruism) are also key issues in discussions on social cohesion, democracy, and civil society. The Centre for Civil Society (CCS; London School of Economics 2004) adopted the following definition for civil society, which:

... refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women’s organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

Civil society is seen as a distinct model of social order after the community, market and state (Sivesind and Sell 2009). The guiding principle of civil society is its voluntariness, and associations are its dominant collective actors. According to Helmut K. Anheier, although many different definitions of civil society exist, most analysts would agree that “modern civil society is the sum of institutions, organizations, and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market, in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interest.

The nonprofit sector provides the organizational infrastructure of civil society” (Anheier 2005: 56–57).

The prerequisite for taking part in civil society is commitment; that is, the willingness to bind oneself to a common course and to take responsibility (Dekker and Van den Broek 1998). Distinctive traits of civil society are “social capital” and public discourse. Social capital refers to “features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995). Public discourse is the ability of a society to articulate collective values, to reflect on social problems, and to develop political goals (Wuthnow 1991). The increasing interest in volunteering and volunteer organizations is closely connected to the expectation of bridging the gap between the citizen and the state (Ferguson 1767; Mann 1984; Halba, Schumacher and Strümpel 2001).

Helmut K. Anheier defines social capital as:

an individual characteristic and [it] refers to the sum of actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in organizations and through personal networks. People differ in the size and span of their social networks and number of memberships. Social capital captures the norms of reciprocity and trust that are embodied in networks of civic associations, many of them in the nonprofit field, and other forms of socializing. (Anheier 2005: 58–60)

Volunteering contributes to social cohesion and is strongly linked with social inclusion, which is, by definition, based on social participation and civic engagement. Volunteers have been described as “little platoons” in society (Maurie 1998): the ones that see before the public authorities what should be improved or changed in society. They make hidden things visible. Volunteering is a way to act as an individual, in a collective activity, for the general purpose. At a collective level, volunteering is linked to the idea of active citizenship and social participation.

Volunteering is seen as an important factor for gathering people from different backgrounds (age, sex, education, culture) together. Volunteer involvement helps build up social connections and social ties. Volunteering is therefore an essential resource for social understanding and social cohesion, inclusion, and integration. The average profile of a volunteer reflects the close link between integrated people and involvement in volunteer activity: a male, employed, middle-aged, and educated. So there might be a form of “discrimination” in volunteer involvement.

The sociological discussion pointed out the importance of keeping different typologies of “social capital” (meant as production of “relational goods”) separate in the analysis because they do not lead to the same results and they are not the outcome of the same social policies. One can refer to the typology suggested by Donati, Colozzi, and the team working on this subject (Donati and Colozzi 2004), trying to overcome Coleman’s “individualist” hypothesis and Putnam’s “collective” hypothesis through the relational perspective. According to Donati and Colozzi’s perspective, “civic or widespread” social capital is the “totality of the associative relationships that, producing public spirit and widespread interpersonal confidence, become a social source because it brings benefits both to the individuals and to the social institutions” (Donati and Colozzi 2006).

The main critique in the discussion concerning “social capital” is that people with the same profile would join the same associations or clubs. As a result, the process of involvement would be more “exclusive” than “inclusive.” As an example, there tend to be few migrants in mainstream associations. Migrants and ethnic minorities are often described as “invisible.” Volunteering is no exception to the rule. Migrants are usually volunteers in migrants’ associations: created by migrants and defending the rights and cause of their community, which is useful for many newcomers to feel at home in the host country. Belonging to the same country is the usual common point of such associations, but religion may also play a key role. Therefore in the past years it has been a main issue for policymakers to enhance social inclusion through empowerment and active citizenship, volunteering being a meaningful vehicle. Involving various profiles of volunteers slightly changes the perspective: volunteering includes both altruism and otherness. This has been the main change observed in the past years in volunteer involvement, thanks to European projects.

## VOLUNTEERING, ALTRUISM, AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Being a volunteer means being concerned with others (altruism). Nevertheless, otherness is not so easy to understand and the relations people build with others usually depend on the prejudices they may have regarding their expectations, competences, and role in the association. Highlighting the example of migrants volunteering, I would like to insist on the key issue of volunteering to enhance the empowerment process. Migrants should not be considered as “just public” (a passive role) but as “main actors” (an active role).

### BEING A VOLUNTEER AS A MEANS TO ACQUIRE SKILLS AND COMPETENCES: THE LIFELONG LEARNING APPROACH

I have already highlighted the main concept of social capital studied by sociologists as a main impact on volunteer involvement. The concept of human capital is an economic concept focused on skills and competences (Riboud 1975). Volunteering is a way to act as an individual, through collective activity, for the general good. At a collective level, volunteering is linked to the idea of active citizenship and social participation (social capital). At an individual level, volunteers acquire and develop specific skills and competences (Halba 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2012).

A volunteer experience is an example of non-formal and informal learning (Halba 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2012), most valued in the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (especially the Copenhagen process). A very important issue in the lifelong learning process is the acquisition of competences: “key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation” (European Commission 2006).

As highlighted by the European Commission in 2011, at the end of the European Year

of Volunteering, “recognition of the competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal learning experiences is essential as a motivating factor for the volunteers and one that creates bridges between volunteering and education.”

A European project, under the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the VAEB project (carried out by iriv and others in 2003–2006) has been a pioneer in this spirit. It has designed a portfolio to identify and assess volunteer experience. A tool, method, portfolio, and guide have been implemented by a European team encompassing seven EU members (France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and the UK) to identify a volunteer’s experience, to express it in terms of competences in order for the volunteers to enhance a professional or educational future (Halba 2001, 2007 a, 2007b, 2011c).

On this basis, another European project in the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Migrapass project (carried out by Autremonde, iriv, and others in 2010–2012), designed a portfolio and companion for migrants. The innovation was to offer a holistic approach by combining professional, volunteer, and migratory experiences in order to express them in terms of skills and competences (Halba 2011b). It is important to stress that competences gained through volunteering were equally assessed. The learning outcomes gained through volunteer activity enhance the empowerment process among vulnerable or fragile publics such as migrants. Being aware of one’s ability reinforces self-esteem and self-confidence and thus facilitates an opening to others (altruism).

Combining both the innovations offered by the VAEB and Migrapass projects, a French project, implemented at a regional level with the support of the Regional Council for Île de France, the Tremplin Migrant(e)s (carried out by Autremonde and iriv in 2010–2011) designed a portfolio for female migrants in order for them to identify their volunteer experience and the obstacles they faced, to express them in terms of competences, and to thus build a future (in terms of volunteer activity, education, or employment).

The European projects (VAEB and Migrapass) together with the regional project (Tremplin Migrant(e)s) are the most important for understanding the bottom-up approach and the practical implementation of volunteering: how far volunteer involvement may be valued from a microeconomic perspective by being expressed in competences gained and thus in professional opportunities for the volunteers. This is concrete implementation of the human capital concept.

## BEING A VOLUNTEER AS A MEANS TO ENHANCING INTEGRATION IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

Volunteering as a means of integration (social, cultural, and on the labor market) and as a means of empowerment and development of civil society (Selle and Stromsnes 2001) has long been highly underestimated and disregarded among migrants and ethnic minorities.

This issue raises many questions such as the role of migrants in self-organizations, the attitude of migrants towards volunteering and barriers they perceive, the role of national and EU policies and programs to support migrant volunteer involvement, the role of the media, the role of local host communities, and the partnership models between stakeholders.

This issue has been tackled in the past ten years in two European projects: the Mem-Vol project (led by *Inbas Sozialforschung* and others in 2003) encompassing six EU countries, and the Involve project (led by the *Centre européen du volontariat* and others in 2005–2006) encompassing seven EU countries. The Mem-Vol project aimed to promote and facilitate volunteering and self-help for migrants and ethnic minorities as an objective to combat social exclusion and poverty. The Involve project aimed to increase awareness of all stakeholders concerning the value of volunteering for integration. Migrants' involvement in volunteer and civic activities as a means for better integration was the main issue of this two-year project (Halba 2011c).

Through volunteering, immigrants can interlink with more established immigrant groups and also with parts of the dominant society. The creation of skills and competencies and the development of social capital are helpful in the attempt to overcome informal and institutional barriers to integration and (political and civic) participation; for example, in combating discrimination, and especially in enhancing European citizenship (European Commission 2000b).

Volunteering may be seen as a strategy for migrants to be better integrated in multiple ways: within the migrant community (with the aim of mutual aid and self-help, as a network of information exchange, and norm integration), within the host society (bridged by migrant associations or ethnic communities but also via participation in mainstream organizations; e.g., in trade unions), and within the country of origin via transnational associative and network structures (European Commission 2000a).

Combining both the innovations offered by the Mem-Vol and Involve projects, a French project, Trans-Cité (carried out by Assfam and iriv in 2012–2013), offered a strategy based on educational sessions offered to young people and women living in disadvantaged areas and sharing a migration background to value volunteer experience, to identify the skills and competences gained, and to enhance their social and professional integration.

The European projects (MemVol and Involve) together with the regional project (TransCité) are most important for understanding another practical implementation of volunteering: how far volunteer involvement may enhance the empowerment process. The idea behind these three last projects enhancing volunteering among migrants is to help them become active citizens. This is a practical implementation of social capital and an example in favor of the “inclusive” process at stake in volunteering, under the condition that the volunteer involvement of migrants is not just for their own community.

In its final publication (CEV 2006), the Involve project emphasized several main recommendations that are still pioneering (even after the European Year of Volunteering in 2011 and the European Year of Citizenship in 2013): enhancing capacities of associations to provide both bonding and bridging social capital to empower migrants, using volunteering as a means of becoming an active citizen, including information about volunteering in “welcome packs” and integration training for migrants, recognizing volunteering as an instrument within integration policies and as an indicator of integration, and ensuring legal provisions that acknowledge volunteering to be a legal right for every migrant regardless of status.

## CONCLUSION

After the International Year of Volunteering, celebrated in 2001, the European Year of Volunteering in 2011 provided a new step in the recognition of volunteering. In its communication on EU Policies and Volunteering, the European Commission stated in September 2011 in its introduction that “[v]olunteering is a creator of human and social capital. It is a pathway to integration and employment and a key factor for improving social cohesion. Above all, volunteering translates the fundamental values of justice, solidarity, inclusion and citizenship upon which Europe is founded into action.”

I tried to show in my article that the theoretical background of volunteering together with its practical implementation had to be clarified. I first recalled some “institutional” definitions given to volunteering based on the legal background in several European countries. I then emphasized the link with altruism and quasi-altruism. Volunteering has long been linked to charity, and the freedom to join is the main character of modern involvement.

Then I highlighted the fact that volunteering is not a marginal phenomenon in Europe. Considering the general trend of secularization, religious belief or belonging is no longer the main reason for being a volunteer even though the spiritual motivation is still important. Different economic theories have explained the rise of associations as a result of volunteering. On the one hand, the concept of human capital focuses on skills and competences gained by volunteers; on the other hand, the concept of social capital highlights the empowerment process.

Finally, as a practical implementation, I focused on a new dimension of volunteering in the past years: one that involves new profiles of volunteers. This is still within the concept of altruism, but with a view to otherness. I took into account the results of European projects (Migrapass, MemVol, and Involve) and their regional follow-ups in France (Tremplin Migrants and TransCité).

Volunteering is “something for nothing,” (Gouldner 1975) for the other (altruism) that may be very different in many ways (otherness). It implies that volunteers build their own identities, at both personal and collective levels. This is part of the process of European citizenship: being aware that being member of a society is based on a series of rights, but also brings with it a number of responsibilities for all of its members, for many and diverse other “citizens.”

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## PROSTOVOLJSTVO – OD ALTRUIZMA DO DRUGOSTI

Prostovoljstvo ni več marginalni pojav. Od začetka devetdesetih let 20. stoletja je postalo ključna tema, ki jo obravnavajo tako evropske kot druge mednarodne raziskave, v katerih skušajo ugotoviti, kakšno je število prostovoljcev in podatki teoretske razlage prostovoljstva.



Od Mednarodnega leta prostovoljstva (2001) in Evropskega leta prostovoljstva (2011) so bili izvedeni mnogi novi koraki pri uveljavljanju prostovoljstva na evropski ravni, še posebej v kontekstu neformalnega učenja.

V mnogih evropskih državah in tudi v mednarodni perspektivi (npr. v ZDA) so »institucionalne« definicije prostovoljstva pogosto utemeljene na zakonodaji. Koncept prostovoljstva, kot ga predstavi prispevek, vključuje še pojme, kot so altruizem, dobrotelost in solidarnost, pojav pa izpostavlja kot temelj civilne družbe. Pomembna je še povezava med altruizmom in kvazialtruizmom, ki se prav tako spreminja. Če je bilo prostovoljstvo dolgo povezano z dobrotelostjo, je bistvo sodobnih razlag v posameznikovi možnosti, da se samostojno odloči za udeležbo v prostovoljskih dejavnostih. Poleg tega se v novih razlagah vse bolj izpostavljata solidarnost in vzajemnost.

Zaradi splošnih težej po sekularizaciji tudi verska prepričanja in pripadnosti niso več glavni razlog za prostovoljstvo, čeprav je duhovna motiviranost še vedno pomembna. Nove ekonomske teorije pojasnjujejo, zakaj nastaja vse več društev in drugih organizacij, ki se ukvarjajo s prostovoljstvom. Po eni strani se koncept socialnega kapitala osredotoča na veščine in kompetence, ki jih pridobimo pri prostovoljstvu; po drugi strani pa je ta koncept povezan s procesom opolnomočenja. Biti prostovoljec pomeni tudi ustvarjati in negovati socialni in človeški kapital, in sicer s pridobivanjem osebnih, družbenih in poklicnih veščin.

V praksi so se v zadnjih letih uveljavili nekateri novi vidiki prostovoljstva: opolnomočenje in vključevanje novih profilov prostovoljcev (denimo takšnih iz raznolikih družbenih, verskih, etničnih in drugih okolij). Četudi se prostovoljstvo tesno povezuje predvsem z altruizmom, se v zadnjem času pri njej obravnavi uveljavlja še koncept *drugosti*. V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati različnih evropskih projektov (npr. *Migrapass*, *MemVol*, *Involve*) ter sorodnih poskusov na nacionalnih ravneh (*Tremplin Migrants in TransCité* v francoski regiji Île-de-France), pri čemer je prikazana nova perspektiva integracije drugačnih profilov prostovoljcev. Biti prostovoljec pomeni tudi biti aktiven državljan, to pa je še posebej pomembno na področju sodelovanja z migranti.

Prispevek pojasni, da je prostovoljstvo izvajanje »nečesa zastoj«, je dejavnost, namenjena drugim (*altruizem*), ki so mnogokrat v marsičem drugačni (*drugost*). Pri tem je pomembno, da prostovoljci vzpostavijo lastno identiteto, in sicer tako na ravni posameznika kot tudi skupnosti. To je pomemben del nastajanja evropskega državljanstva. V njegovih temeljih je namreč zavest, da pomeni »članstvo« v skupnosti številne pravice, hkrati pa tudi vzajemno odgovornost njenih članov ter raznolikih »državljanov«.

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