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VOLUNTEERING: THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract: *Theories on volunteering are various in origin (they come from sociology, social assistance, psycho-sociology, political science), reflecting the diversity of forms of manifestation of this type of prosocial behavior. Malina Voicu and Bogdan Voicu (2003, 2004) conducted a synthesis of these theoretical explanations, which I will refer to in the first part of this section. I will also present the five theoretical models of volunteering described by Peggy A. Thoits and Lyndi N. Hewitt (2001) and at the end of the article I will refer to the interpretation of volunteering in terms of the sociology of emotions.*

Keywords: *volunteering, motivation, social emotions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Malina Voicu and Bogdan Voicu (2003) conducted a synthesis of different theoretical approaches of volunteering, considering that they can be classified into two major categories:

- A first category of explanations focuses on the different types of resources or characteristics (social capital, human capital, income, gender affiliation and age, urban / rural environment) and their contribution in the production of voluntary behavior. After the identification of these resources we can create a "perfect profile" of the volunteer in a certain culture, beginning with the identified sociodemographic characteristics;
- A second category of explanations is based on the beliefs and values of the volunteers and

states that the cultural dimension of volunteering is more important than the presence of a particular type of resource. Also, this includes the research on the motivations of individuals who become volunteers.

2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEERS

The social capital (particularly the *bridging* type) is important for volunteering, because volunteering activities involve participation, cooperation and trust in people. The organizations that recruit volunteers frequently use the social networks of their own members (Pearce, 1993 apud Voicu and Voicu, 2004). John Wilson and Marc A. Musick (1997) show that people with a large social network have a higher probability to contact and work as

volunteers, and participation as a volunteer contributes to a further increase of the social network: "organized volunteering is in its essence, a form of sociability, and increases the frequency of social contacts " (Voicu, 2005, 122).

The human capital has been related to volunteering, especially in terms of "dominant status model " developed by David Horton Smith (1994), under which volunteers are people who have high-level features related to human capital.

The frequency of voluntary acts is directly related to the income of potential volunteers (Smith, 1994). The persons who are not "concerned for tomorrow" find more easily the necessary time to involve as volunteers. At the society level the economic development tends to produce high levels of volunteering, hence a possible explanation for the increased interest in volunteering in Romania in the last years.

With regard to gender affiliation, theoretically, there are points of view that say that women should be voluntary rather than men, given the fact that they possess some qualities required by volunteering (higher scores on the various tests aiming to measure empathy or altruism), and they are also less involved in the labor market (Wilson, 2000). Other authors state that men should rather be volunteers given the fact that they have more features of the "dominant status model" compared to the female population.

At a distance of ten years, two studies that sought to identify the ideal profile of the volunteer in Romania have conflicting results in terms of gender affiliation: in 1997 it was more male (Saulean, 1999, 24) and in 2007 nearly two-thirds were women (Rigman, 2008, 4).

From a theoretical perspective, the volunteers come from the ages where free time is more available, compared to the working population: teenagers and people in early retirement. Regarding adolescents and young people, for them, the probability to become volunteers is lower for those who work - compared to those who study - or if they have children compared with those who do not. For the other ages, the presence of children is not an impediment "Older parents tend to be better

prepared to raise children. They have more time to become volunteer" (Oesterle, 2004 apud Voicu and Voicu, 2004, 4). Volunteering in older people has many positive effects "probably because the services brought to the community become a substitute for employment when retirement occurs" (Thoits and Hewitt 2001, 117).

Typically, volunteers are recruited from urban areas. This can be explained on one hand by the abundance of social networks that intersect here (used by organizations to recruit volunteers and to increase its capital), but also because non-profit organizations, those who recruit volunteers (especially public ones) are more present in urban areas than in rural areas. The controversy exists theoretically only related to the size of cities that promote volunteering and it is far from being resolved, thanks to the intervention of other factors that may promote volunteering (for example, if a city is or not a university center in Romania, particularly with regard to social-human faculties).

3. INDIVIDUAL VALUES AND MOTIVATIONS

The involvement as a volunteer has an expressive function for the individual, which can so express the values that drive his existence (eg religious ones - Wilson and Musick, 1997). Regarding individual motivation leading to volunteering, the works consulted specifically insist on the awareness of opportunities for expanding the social network, acquiring new skills and qualifications or pursuing a form of social recognition . Thus, volunteering seems rather generated by motivations that have nothing to do with altruism . Susan Eckstein (2001, 230) insists that in becoming a volunteer " unequal exchanges contribute to strengthening the reputation , prestige and authority " , hence the conclusion reached by Malina Voicu and Bogdan Voicu (2005, 5) : " Excluding the purely altruistic factors, the determinants of volunteering can be reduced to a set of resources or socio-economic indicators of status" .

Starting from the two major theoretical explanation of volunteering, Malina Voicu and



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Bogdan Voicu (2005, 5) form a portrait of the volunteer in Eastern Europe, which is similar to that of the volunteer in Western Europe: "a well-educated person, with an extensive social network that has a good financial situation and seek to fulfill necessities of higher order. Furthermore, we expect to find higher levels of volunteering among young people with a high level of religious practice and residing in urban areas. "

4. THEORETIC MODELS OF VOLUNTEERING

Peggy A. Thoits and Lyndi N. Hewitt (2001, 117-118) describe four models of volunteers that „in present, guide the literature "on this field and propose a specific model, that of" personal welfare "(" *the personal well -being model* ") :

a) "The volunteer motivations model" emphasizes the role of individual motivations in volunteering, the range being an extremely extended one "for example, to learn new skills, develop personality, increase self-esteem, career preparation, expressing personal values and commitment to community or even reducing intrapersonal conflicts or threats to their identity. " Volunteering serves different motivations both from one person to another and also for the same person, which leads to concluding that "the selection of volunteers can not be systematic or patented at a general level ", due to motivational poliformism (Thoits and Hewitt, , 2001, 117);

b) „*Values and attitudes model*” stresses the link between volunteering and individual belief on the importance of civic participation and responsibility felt to produce charitable behavior. Not surprisingly at all, the values and attitudes favorable to the voluntary civic involvement influences volunteering

c) „*The role-identity model*” show that past performance by a person of a voluntary action leads to the development of a "volunteer role identity" that motivates future involvement as a volunteer of the same person;

d) „*The volunteer personality model*” suggests there are personality or disposition variables that favor volunteering. In this context, Allen and Rushton (1983, cited in Thoits and Hewitt 2001, 117) conclude that "volunteer participation is higher for individuals with internal control, with high self-esteem and a high emotional stability. These results suggest that people who generally have higher personal coping resources [...] and have a better state of mental health would be more likely to volunteer. "

e) „*The personal well-being model*” combines personality characteristics (self confidence , sense of control over their own lives , self-esteem and self-esteem of a high level) and a good (physical and mental) health, as a list of their own personal resources to those who search / are being searched to volunteer . The relationship volunteering / personal welfare is a mutual one " studies suggest that people with a higher welfare (eg , greater psychosocial resources and physical or mental health) will become volunteers more often and people who are involved in community service may have a greater life satisfaction , self-esteem , awareness of the meaning of life , physical and mental health " (Thoits and Hewitt, 2001, 118)

5. VOLUNTEERING AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

In the last three decades the sociology of emotions crystalized as a new area of research (Chelcea, 2007) and in psycho-sociology, "the idea that emotions are social, that are rooted in

social relations is now widely accepted" (Chelcea and Zodieru, 2008, 369).

Septimiu Chelcea (2007, 161) states that "the theories of prosocial behavior have, if not entirely, at least partially, validity in the analysis of sympathy (and perhaps other emotions). Showing sympathy to someone, we give them support to overcome the critical situation, we encourage her, which is a genuine prosocial behavior if " the sympathy donor " - the term is mine - does not expect a material or moral reward ,and if the expression of sympathy isn't a work obligation, but a conscious act, freely decided." With this statement, I will try to interpret volunteering related to the theory of sympathy elaborated by Candace Clark (1987, 1997) cited Septimiu Chelcea (2007, 160-163).

Over a longer period of time " the sympathy donor " needs motivational support for the sustained effort to help he makes and we are no longer facing a "genuine prosocial behavior" but a volunteering act.

The volunteer (that I can name – by paraphrasing Septimiu Chelcea - "the chronic sympathy donor") acts within the "emotional economy", frequently described by Candace Clark as an "overinvestor" having a " credit line of sympathy "(defined by Clark as the amount of sympathy that the individual has) of superior level and being willing to reach a " limit of sympathy "as high as possible toward the people they help.

"The sympathy limit " is understood here as "the sympathy that the individual negotiates according to the actual situation of the other person, but also in relation to their own life history (past experience of being" a good man ") and the height of their moral standards "- Chelcea, 2007, 161). The sympathy - "the most social of emotions" - operates as a " protection value " that allows the one in difficulty to mobilize his resources to act according to the cultural norms, including the proper asking for help. If " sympathy is the life preserver that sometimes help those in distress" (Chelcea, 2007, 162), the volunteers would have the crew of the lifeboat: based on the relationship sympathy established with the person / people they help,

volunteers can give help and it will be accepted as such "sympathy mobilizes those who like each other to focus on the moral aspects, the cultural rules and thereby, sympathy has the function of social integration."

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