

Interview

The promotion of the volunteering: an investment to promote social capital and values



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Gabriella Civico & Susana Szabo.

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Volunteer clown .

Why should we promote volunteering? How should we do it? Can we set a common European strategy? We have talked with two experts at the European level in order to address these issues: Susana Szabo (CEV) and Gabriela Civico (EYV 2011 Alliance).

Why should we promote volunteering?

Is volunteering more necessary than it used to be? We have talked with two experts that think so. They are Susana Szabo, from the Board of the European Volunteer Center, and Gabriella Civico, project manager of the European Alliance for Volunteering.

According to Szabo, "we are living in a society increasingly individualistic. Many values and institutions are being transformed, such as family, school, companies, labor... **The values of the consumer society don't make any sense to young people's life** (despite they are looking for it)". In response to this "volunteering proposes a new active way to give meaning to life, learn and connect with others".

Civico explains the importance that volunteering has in our society: "Volunteering is one of the most visible expressions of solidarity. It promotes and facilitates social inclusion and the creation of social capital, and produces a transformative effect on society". And she continues, "**Volunteering contributes to the development of a plural civil society** which can offer creative and innovative solutions to common challenges, and also help to boost economic growth".

In fact, different organizations have tried to quantify the social impact of volunteering. There are some relevant examples, such as the "[Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work](#)" (International Labour Organization) and the study "[Volunteering Works](#)", which quantifies the impact of volunteering in the UK. **According to this report, for each pound invested in volunteering, society receives in return between 3 and 8 pounds.**

It is important for our society to generate values

The two experts interviewed agree that volunteering across Europe shares the goal to generate values which go beyond market, individualism and consumerism. Values such as altruism and generosity.

Szabo points out that: "We believe in the same values, although sometimes there are different interpretations of them depending on the culture of each country". Civico adds that "volunteers promote values (...), in particular in terms of social cohesion, solidarity and active citizenship."

When asking about the priorities of the sector, Szabo explains that it is necessary "to affirm and strengthen the values of volunteering, such as generosity and altruism". She explains that volunteering allows "participating in the community, not through the market, but through collective and local participation"

How should we promote volunteering?

Civico explains that one of the main priorities is the recognition of volunteering: "recognition is fundamental in order to give incentives for all stakeholders, and thus increase the quality, quantity and impact of volunteering." This recognition should be given at the individual level (to the volunteer) and at the collective level. Szabo says that it is necessary "to strengthen the volunteer preparation, project a more positive and dynamic image, and diversify the volunteering community in order to include people who are less instructed or have some difficulties."

Differences among countries

Gabriella Civico explains that "there is a great variety of ideas, definitions and traditions related to volunteering across the 27 member states of the EU". Szabo and Civico point out that there are differences in the organization of volunteering. Szabo explains us that **"some countries have specific laws for volunteering, while others don't"** and **"some of them have public policies devoted to support volunteering, while others don't"**.

In fact, these differences also exist inside the Spanish State. Catalonia opted for a model in which civic organizations have a central role in the volunteer management, and consequently there is not any Catalan law on volunteering. However, there is a [Spanish law on volunteering](#) (1996) and multiple regional laws, such as the case of [Valencian Country](#), [Basque Country](#), [Andalusia](#) and [Aragon](#). At the same time, some regions decided to develop plans in order to support volunteering (Such as [Catalonia](#), [Basque Country](#) and [Andalusia](#)) while other regions did not consider it necessary.

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