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Article

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CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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Abstract: *Volunteering, as defined, is an activity carried out voluntarily by an individual, without expecting directly or implicitly a financial reward or goods. It plays an important role in democratic societies, often being a form of social inclusion and integration, contributing to the development and implementation of state policies, and being an instrument for promoting social cohesion. "Volunteering is the best example of democracy. We vote in elections, but when you volunteer, you vote every day for the community in which you want to live." - Marjorie Moore.*

Keywords: volunteerism, involvement, organizations, international law, war, society, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of volunteerism, in the modern form as we know it today, developed mainly in the 19th century. Its emergence was based on the social and economic changes of that period, as well as philanthropic and humanitarian movements. Essentially, volunteering has always existed because people all over the world have offered to help their fellow human beings. In other words, with the appearance of human communities, that altruistic spirit that exists within each of us also appeared and manifested itself, urging us to help our fellow human beings, selflessly, without expecting anything in return.

The term volunteering was first used in the 17th century in the military sphere. More precisely, it referred to individuals who were enlisted in emergency military service and were not paid for their services, these individuals were called volunteers.

Volunteering in its modern form emerged in the 20th century, when the first international volunteer organizations appeared, such as the Peace Corps in the USA (established in 1960) and Voluntary Services Overseas (established in 1958) in the UK. The role of these international organizations was to train members of national organizations on various issues related to organizational management, providing them with consultancy and advice. Relying on the support of these organizations, volunteer centers began to progress and develop. Since then and to this day, the Peace Corps plays a crucial role in the development of volunteering at a global level, being the largest provider of volunteers in the world.

Today, volunteering and international volunteer organizations play an essential role in achieving sustainable development goals, addressing issues such as poverty, education, and climate change.

In terms of regulations, international law recognizes volunteering through various instruments that emphasize its importance for social, economic, and cultural development.

These instruments include numerous documents and initiatives, conventions, resolutions, and declarations adopted by international organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union, promoting cooperation between states and international organizations to support and encourage volunteer activities.

Whether we are talking about interpersonal relationships or international cooperation between states, volunteer work helps strengthen social ties and build a more united and resilient community.

Considerations about volunteering and its importance

Volunteering has significant importance in a democratic society. It plays a decisive role in supporting and promoting democracy and in strengthening it. Starting from the statement of the American writer Marjorie Moore who said: "Volunteering is the best example of democracy.", we can say that volunteering breathes life into the noblest principles of democracy - freedom, peace, justice, security, advocating for their respect and enforcement.

Considering the social and economic aspects that the world is facing, volunteering represents an essential element of all societies, a status attributed also by the declaration of the United Nations adopted on December 10, 1948, which states that: "We, the people, have the power to change the world." To bring about change, one must take action, and volunteering is the best way to act and get involved, so that you can put your ideas into practice and produce change. Additionally, volunteering is the simplest way to offer your energy and knowledge for the benefit of others and the community to which you belong.

Today, volunteering has become an important element in democratic societies, and the famous statement from the United Nations (UN) declaration has transformed into concrete actions of volunteer associations, thus gaining a global character, an example in this sense being the international organization Greenpeace, present with volunteers in over 55 countries, advocating for resolving environmental issues and adopting policies that combat pollution, abuse of water, land, and at the center of their actions a message of peace.

Every year, on December 5th, International Volunteer Day is celebrated, a day that honors volunteers and their work; it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 17, 1985. This day is a recognition of the contribution volunteers make to achieving numerous development projects at the local, national, and international levels, and an opportunity to encourage more people to get involved in volunteering activities in a global effort to make the world a little better.

According to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) report from 2018, approximately 1 billion people worldwide were involved in volunteer activities, making volunteering one of the most widespread social activities. Volunteer activities contribute 2.4% to the global GDP, according to estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO), and also contribute to developing skills and increasing the employability of those involved, providing them with practical experience and networking opportunities. Another role that volunteer organizations play is providing social and economic services, often filling the gap left by government resources, especially in underdeveloped countries.

Promoting and supporting volunteering have been and remain important objectives for national governments, international organizations, and communities around the world. One such initiative is the European Solidarity Corps, supported by the European Union since 2016,

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when it was announced by the then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker (President of the European Commission from 2014 to 2019), in his State of the European Union speech.

Officially launched in 2018, the European Solidarity Corps has become a strategic instrument for the European Union in engaging with the young generation. In 2021, it was allocated a budget of over 1 billion euros, available for the period 2021-2027. This budget is dedicated to volunteer projects aimed at young people aged between 18 and 30, providing opportunities for at least 270,000 volunteers.

Regarding Romania, in a study published by the European Solidarity Corps in 2019, it ranked 3rd, after France and the United Kingdom, old democracies, in terms of the number of participants in volunteer projects and it ranks 7th in terms of solidarity projects.

From a financial allocation perspective, in the period 2018-2020, over 11.5 million Euros were allocated and nearly 300 volunteer, solidarity and professional experience projects were funded, involving over 3500 Romanian young people.

In an increasingly tense international context against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, volunteering and volunteers play an important role in refugee camps and post-conflict reconstruction, contributing to the defense of human rights, international stability and security, as well as to reducing the effects caused by war. With the support of the United Nations (UN), which carries out the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program, thousands of volunteers are currently on humanitarian missions and in war camps around the world. Even if there is war in these regions, there are agreements and conventions that support the access of volunteers, these agreements and conventions make up International Humanitarian Law, an important part of Public International Law.

International humanitarian law encompasses rules that, during times of war, are intended to protect volunteers and individuals who are not taking part in the conflict, and to limit the means and methods of war used. The foundations of this branch of public international law are constituted by the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, and the Additional Protocols of 1977, to which a third additional protocol was added in 2005.

An explicit provision of International Humanitarian Law is that its norms apply to all types of conflicts and must be respected by all parties involved. Additionally, states have an obligation to sanction the violation of these norms and to criminally prosecute those who have violated them by committing serious violations, such as war crimes, and must also collaborate with other states for this purpose.

One of the bloodiest conflicts of the last century, the Battle of Solferino (June 24, 1859) in northern Italy, where the armies of France and Austria clashed, was an intense battle that lasted 16 hours and resulted in over 40,000 dead and wounded. This battle gave rise to one of the most important international volunteer organizations - the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The initiator of this movement was the Swiss businessman Henry Dunant (1828-1910), who drew international public attention to the necessity of establishing a society that would provide assistance and promote an international agreement regarding the care of the wounded and those who care for them.

Several decades have passed during which the movement has expanded to several states, and on May 5, 1919, the League of Red Cross Societies was formally established, headquartered in Paris, France, by the Red Cross Societies of France, Great Britain, Italy,

Japan, and the United States. Starting in 1939, it has had its permanent headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and has become the leading humanitarian organization providing humanitarian protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. Additionally, in the field of International Humanitarian Law, the Red Cross or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has become its main advocate, working for its strengthening and development.

In Romania, the Red Cross Society was established on July 4, 1874, being one of the oldest societies. It is the largest humanitarian organization in the country and also, the International Red Cross Federation is the largest humanitarian organization in the world, offering assistance to vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity.

Volunteering has been and will remain a fundamental pillar of social and economic development at the international level, recognized through various legal and institutional frameworks. The rights of volunteers and the encouragement of active participation are important components for a healthy and functioning democratic society, and their recognition plays an essential role in supporting democracy and promoting human rights.

CONCLUSIONS

Volunteering has played a significant role both in history and in the present, contributing to the development of communities and addressing important social problems.

Over time, volunteering has adapted to the needs of society, responding promptly and efficiently to contemporary challenges.

Through volunteering, people build strong connections within their communities, promoting solidarity, collaboration and respect for human rights. Today, volunteering not only supports local communities, but also has a global impact, contributing to solving global issues such as climate change, poverty, and global health.

The role of volunteering remains vital in modern, democratic society, continuing to promote positive change and support sustainable development, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. In this way, it promotes mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity - essential values in a democracy. Thus, through voluntary involvement, citizens exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities, contributing to building a fairer, more equitable and resilient society.

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