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Senior Adults’ Participation in Volunteering

Research study

Vytautas Magnus University
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The authors
About the study

This study consists of two parts. The first part includes theoretical assumptions about volunteering. There have been conducted an analytical research of foreign authors sources, which have been analyzed and submitted some conclusions about the importance of volunteering in human existence. Considering the motivation for voluntaring, a human should ask WHY? and WHAT FOR? Human sees the meaning when he/she can contribute to creating common good in the society.

In the theoretical part there have been analyzed adult aging and demographic problematic questions. There have been discussed volunteer and volunteering conceptions and presented the characteristics of participation in the volunteering. There were provided the experience of volunteering in Lithuania and abroad.

Volunteering in the European union is highlighted as one of the key possibilities for people to participate and include themselves into the international society life, solving various problems, such as poverty, unemployment, public safety, organization of the meaningful leisure etc.

The second part of the study consists of accomplished various empirical studies, which have been executed by the meaning of project work. The main goal of the project “Communication, Empowering, Integration, Experience For Senior Age Volunteers (C.E.I.E.)” was – to promote communication and collaboration between international senior volunteers in two countries, to share the experience by acquiring new abilities and skills, needed for knowledge-based society in the action based environment. Executing international Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania) and Thessaly university (Greece) volunteer project, six senior volunteers from Greece visited Lithuania, who not only got known local cultural life, traditions, aistoms, and people, and they shared Mediterranean Sea states experience. Equally the same six senior volunteers from Lithuania visited Greece. In volunteering there have been developed bilateral collaboration, opening international environment for
successful process of life long learning (LLL). Elder members of society just because of the project could adapt to the changes of the modern life and acquire new skills: get to know the people and surrounding world, to discover new opportunities how to behave in society differently.

Therefore in the empirical part there was presented researches which was accomplished through the time of volunteering in both countries (Greece, Lithuania). There were analyzed diaries of both countries senior volunteers as well as interview – survey. Lithuanian seniors activities map was created while volunteering in Greece. The results of the research diversified with the pictures prepared by the authors. The main results of the analysis of the senior volunteers of cultural and social experience at national and international level were: the case of senior volunteers communication, empowering, integration and experience in Lithuania and in Greece; experience of volunteering by Greek and Lithuanian volunteers; reflection on voluntary activities by Greek and Lithuanian volunteers using portfolio method; reflection on voluntary activities by Greek and Lithuanian volunteers.

This accomplished, interrelated and presented research will serve for the student of all levels preparing for final theses or scientific publications.

The author of the study
Genutė Gedvilienė
Introduction

Volunteering is a way of empowering and integrating citizens into active communication and experience sharing between the generations. This activity helps develop values and makes influence on education, employment and citizenship. In the majority of cases, volunteering is practised in various social and environmental organizations and institutions of informal education. Successful volunteering needs a relevant legal environment to ensure safe and flexible volunteering acceptable to both, a volunteer and a hosting organization. In Lithuania, volunteering is defined by Volunteering Act, 2011 as a volunteer’s unpaid work for the benefit of the society stipulated by a volunteer and volunteering organization.

Volunteering is a way of human empowering, integration, occupation and an important factor in the process of creating social communication and cohesion. This activity helps implement the main social values with the influence on education, busyness and public life. It may also improve interrelations, communication and cooperation.

Volunteering became the subject of scientific research only in the 80s. Various aspects of volunteering have been researched by E. G. Clary, M. Snyder (1991), V. Molly (1998), S. J. Ellis (1985), W. Naidich, M. Chisholm (1996), J. Patterson, Ch. Tremper, P. Rypkema (1994) and B. B. Stallings (1998). The review of the works of foreign scholars reveals that Social Psychology, Sociology and History are among the most typical aspects of research in volunteering.

Nowadays volunteering has gained a significant national and international sense, as it is closely related to human expression, active citizenship, which is the essence of democracy. Volunteering is an opportunity for everyone, regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion, political belief, age or health, to use personal skills and experience, gain new knowledge, make friends, get involved in working and change the social life of the country. Volunteering promotes individual development, expands social benefits, general human capacities. It is time devoted for
the benefit of other activities and the opportunity to exercise, improve personal, professional and social competencies. Volunteering is one of the ways where people of different nationalities, religions, social and economic environment can be positively affected.

Volunteering is a person’s freewill activity with no payment but increasing common good and useful for other people. Volunteering based on public values coming from personal engagement and effort is much more worthwhile than that enforced by others or because of external necessity of the requirements of the organization.

Nowadays, volunteering is related to non-govermenthal (NGO), representing the group of narrow interests. So NGO is a basic mechanism letting different social groups be active in social life. Volunteering services, i.e. non-governmental organizations (NGO) encourage a person to communicate, take part in social life and get some educational experience. Non-governmental organizations (NGO) are the possiblity for people of different age groups to be empowered into learning through volunteering with the possibility of realizing different skills, ideas, values and creating positive communication.

Volunteering is an activity arising from a person’s altruistic intention to perform some work without being paid for it. A person who can act this way is called a volunteer. The main goal of such a person is to help others and be socially active. It is one of the natural human features – to be happy by helping others.

Internationally, in different countries volunteering is understood differently, but the process of volunteering is similar. Volunteering is especially important for the country’s economy because at low expences national product is created together with intercultural education. The Declaration of Volunteering defines volunteering as informal education: „Volunteering creates opportunities for non-official and informal education, and in European Union it is an important instrument of lifelong learning (LLL)“ (Savanorystės Euroje deklaracija, 2005)

World Health Organization (WHO) says that ageing population raises many questions for policy makers. How do we help people remain
independent and active as they age? How can we strengthen health promotion and prevention policies, especially those directed to older people? As people live longer, how can the quality of life in old age be improved? These questions WHO direct for government decision-makers at all levels, the nongovernmental sector and the private sector, all of whom are responsible for the formulation of policies and programmes on ageing (World Health organization, 2002).

As the European Union workforce is aging, job opportunities for people aged 50 are declining as older workers were often the first in restructuring companies, and employers are not likely to hire older workers. This loss of human capital spent more money on social security, unemployment and health care. This challenge has led to an “active aging” concept. Active aging is growth in number of older workers in the labour market (European Social Fund: 50 years of investing in people, 2007). Active aging in the concept of the World Health Organization is presented as an implementation system of social policy, possible to optimize physical and functional health of the elderly, their participation in various social activities, as well as their safety, giving them equal rights, providing necessary and high-quality social services and ensuring equal opportunities of self-realization in the society. We can see the active aging necessity in European societies from two aspects: as causing vital need of the objective and inevitable demographic and economic factors and as opening new opportunities for older generations, as the result of general development of the essential human choice opportunities. One of the following choices – to live longer and healthier lives – is already available for many people across Europe, where life expectancy of people above 60 is significantly prolonged by the effectively functioning health system, and second – making a person’s life more meaningful and richer above sixty is one of the new opportunities, opening today to generations throughout Europe.

In 2011-2013 VMU Department of Education and the University of Thessaly (Greece) carried Senior Volunteering Project “Communication, Empowering, Integration, Experience For Senior Age Volunteers (C.E.I.E.). “The aim of the project was to promote international communication
and cooperation of both sides. Senior Volunteer is sharing experiences, gaining new abilities and skills for the knowledge society. The cooperation between Greece and Lithuania was established in order to draw public attention to the importance of volunteering in Lithuania and Greece. The project was developed through bilateral cooperation and opened international area for successful lifelong learning process.

*The object of the research:* experience of seniors participating in volunteering.

*The study goal:* to reveal communication, empowerment, integration and experience of senior participants in volunteering.

*The objectives of the research:*

1. Theoretically based volunteering.
2. Having conducted the research of experience of participants of Lithuanian and Greek seniors in volunteering to highlight the cultural and social expression of recent activity.

*Methodology and methods of the research*

A qualitative study was conducted in 2011-2013. This study aimed to highlight the cultural and social expression of the volunteering experience. It was based on the European Year of Volunteering basic objectives and other studies - adult needs to participate in volunteering at national and international level; content analysis of documents regulating volunteering, expert analysis and volunteering experience in organization performance.

- Semi-structured interview survey is used.
- Content analysis method is applied to the analysis of interview results.

The results are divided into five categories (Lifelong learning, volunteering experience, the ability to volunteering, volunteering benefits and volunteering expectations) and several subcategories (Participation in education, training professional or personal development, concept of Lifelong learning, volunteering experience, knowledge, relevant volunteering, general skills). Interview method was used to reveal the details of the informants views on volunteering at a later age.
1. Theoretical part
1.1. Active aging in a changing society

1.1.1. Demographic trends of aging

Transition to adult life is a successive process of movement through childhood and adolescence, taking on more responsibility in solving various problems in life, learning at school and taking over the senior experience. Some adult image formed after leaving school or university, and others became adults after acquiring a profession, starting to work or creating a family (Teresevičienė ir kt. 2004).

The experts, studying adult human development, adult life relatively divide into three main periods: young adult (approximately 20-40 years), middle age (older) adult (40-65 years) and old age (approximately 65 years) (Žukauskienė, 2002). Adult developmental stages of the individual effects of social and cognitive development has a special meaning and all the social experiences and the regulators actually last throughout a person’s life (Durkin, 2002).

The World Health Organisation has proposed to distribute a person’s age periods as follows: up to 44 years-young; from 45 to 59 years-average; from 60 to 74 year- elderly; from 75 to 90 year- old; more than 90 – durable (Krikščiūnas A., 1993; Kairys, 2002).

The definition of roles in life is commonly used to describe an adult age. Involvement in a wide variety of roles helps to develop personality and make the younger generation of the function of socialization. Even though the roles have already been learned in childhood, however, only a grown person is fully experiencing his role requirements (Beresnevičienė, 2003).

The main descriptive demographic ageing process indicator is the share of older people in society. According to the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging, the aging population describes the age of 60 and older (Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging, 1983). Ageing population refers to a decline in the proportion of children and young people and an increase in the proportion of people aged 60 and over.