The Promotion of Volunteering With the Use of New Technologies in Environmental Education in the European Union

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Abstract: This paper aims to highlight the elements that show the evolution of volunteering over the years, but also the simultaneous development and dissemination of new technological media, such as social media, which can be used in the school environment through environmental education with the ultimate aim of promoting volunteering in new generations.

Key words: volunteering, environmental education, new technologies, social media

1. Introduction

Volunteering, particularly in recent years, has been a key part of European policy in various areas such as: social inclusion, employment, environment, human rights, education, culture and lifelong learning and citizenship. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 is the first clear indication of the intention of European States to develop volunteering in various areas of social policy [1]. However, the first time volunteering concerned the EU was at a meeting of the European Parliament in 1983, while the first "act" in this field was the establishment of the European Voluntary Service in 1996 [2]. In the EU there is no common framework for the implementation of volunteering. However, specific coordination moves of Member States are recorded in various areas, for example in youth policies with the adoption of the Open Method of Coordination (Open Method of Coordination).

2. Material and Methods

In October 2001, the European Commission published the White Paper on European Governance. This text highlights the crisis of confidence that European citizens have towards European Union's governance, but also the sense that the European Union is far from them [3]. In such a context, civil society has an important role to play in the communication between citizens and leadership, expressing citizens' concerns and at the same time actively participating in the decision-making process [3].

In the same year, the Commission of the European Communities publishes the White Paper on Youth, entitled "European Commission white paper — A new impetus for European youth". The text stresses, inter alia, the need to ensure greater participation of young people in society and political life, and volunteering is seen as a means of social participation of young people, a factor of education and employability, but also of social inclusion of young people. It is also noted that volunteering should be further extended in the coming years, at local, national and European level, and should

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be recognized as a non-formal learning and education experience at European level [4].

However, public opinion is often influenced by the media, to which citizens have direct access and which bear great responsibility for the messages they transmit. Moreover, the Media are not only considered to be channels of communication, but also means that have their own bias and agenda [5, 6]. The events of recent years highlight the important role played by the media in defining environmental conditions and presenting the problems that the environment faces [6, 7].

3. Study on Volunteering in the European Union (2010)

In 2010 the European Commission published a lengthy study on volunteering in the Member States of the European Union. This study presents more generally the concept of volunteering and in particular the situation of volunteering in the Member States, through research and statistical data in the reports for each State accompanying the text. This study is particularly important, as although the value of volunteering had long been recognized by the EU institutions, there was no extensive research data on volunteering, as had been pointed out by the European Economic and Social Committee.

In general, data can be divided into three categories: official/state statistics, academic studies and other data collected in the Member States. The most important data from this survey, both from national studies and from EU data, relate, inter alia, to the number of volunteers (some EU Member States have a long tradition of volunteering and well-growing voluntary sectors, such as Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, while the proportion in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania is below 10%), the trend towards volunteering (in the last 10 years there has been a general upward trend in the number of volunteers active in the EU due to increased awareness of social and environmental problems, recent public initiatives to promote volunteering), gender, age (in

many Eastern European countries and Spain the majority of volunteers are young), level of education, work profile, since national reports have shown that there is a clear, positive correlation between education levels and volunteering trend [8].

4. European Year of Voluntary Activities (2011)

EU countries after 2001, which was the International Year of Volunteers according to the United Nations, took important initiatives and developed actions on volunteering. Ten years later, the EU declared 2011 as the "European Year of Voluntary Activities" (Official Journal of the European Union 2009). An alliance of various Non Governmental Organizations (EYV Alliance 2011) fought to declare 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering, as the European Economic and Social Committee had recommended. This alliance was also involved in the planning and execution of the relevant processes. The leading organization of this alliance was the European Volunteer Centre CEV. The main reason for the 2011 campaign was the ten-year anniversary of the 2001 voluntary year, proclaimed by the United Nations, but implemented in both the EU and the Member States [2].

5. Youthpass Certificate (2006)

The Youthpass Certificate was established for the first time under the Youth in Action programme (2006-2013). The establishment of such a pan-European certificate of recognition of voluntary work was one of the recommendations of the European Economic and Social Committee, as an action that would contribute to the recognition of the work of volunteers. The Youthpass certificate describes the learning outcomes in key competences in lifelong learning. These basic skills define a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that each person needs for personal integration and development, social inclusion and employment. Using this framework, Youthpass helps build abridge from informal learning to other forms of

education. At the same time, Youthpass is a tool for documenting and recognizing learning outcomes from youth activities. It is available for projects funded by Erasmus+: Youth in Action (2014-2020) and Youth in Action (2007-2013). It is part of the European Commission's strategy to promote the recognition of informal learning, policy implementation and policy making.

6. European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers (2012)

In 2012, the European Youth Forum, with the support of the European Commission, formulated the "European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers". The Charter contributes to a common approach to the definition of volunteers, voluntary activities and volunteer providers, at local and European level, while providing a common framework for the basic rights and obligations of volunteers and voluntary organizations (European Youth Forum, 2012).

7. The Use of New Technologies in Environmental Education to Promote Volunteering

The course of Environmental Education in the school environment contributes significantly to the development of environmental awareness, instills in young people the need to defend and protect the environment, while through participation in collective activities (recycling, tree planting, cleaning of public spaces, construction of objects from used materials) promotes volunteering and participation in decision-making processes. In recent years, environmental problems as a result of man-made activity, such as climate change, have been in line with the continued development and dissemination of new technologies, such as social media.

Millennials are the first generation to experience the rapid degradation of critical ecosystems on a global scale. Experiences around the deterioration of the quality of the natural environment during the years that shape their personality can shape how these young people think about nature, what they value and what they think should be done [9, 10]. Undoubtedly, exposure to global environmental issues leads to attitudes of global citizenship and actions for environmental reasons [10]. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, are the most used tools to facilitate fast and effective communication, as well as means of disseminating information to a wider audience [11-14].

The above social media feature to a large extent modern society, and they have the ability to travel to every part of the world. As far as the environment is concerned, they are used to promote environmental practices, to share ideas about the best practices, to increase public interest and awareness of environmental campaigns and more. Professionals, activists, environmentalists use social media to connect with companies, employees and organizations or to communicate their personal perceptions. The degree of effectiveness of these instruments maintains an interest in environmental problems in order to better understand user's behavior for the environment, but also in order to plan the necessary moves to develop sustainable solutions. Facebook is the number one priority for students as far as environmental interest is concerned followed by YouTube, Instagram and Twitter is in the fourth place [15].

It has been found that exposure to the media (mainly in television and advertising) positively affects the environmental values of adolescents by raising issues in their minds, presenting environmental values and environmental participation in a positive way and, ultimately, showing what is considered to be an acceptable environmental behavior in society [16, 17].

They [18, 19] confirm that environmental awareness campaigns play an important role in improving a person's environmental awareness and changing his attitude to environmental issues. Numerous environmental campaigns have been conducted using

social media, for example social media have been used to promote environmental behavior, collect signatures, provide news and motivation and improve awareness [19, 20]. Social media are effective at carrying out environmental campaigns because they have the ability to quickly distribute information and be cost effective. They [19, 21] confirm that, social media are able to support environmental initiatives because they are able to reach a wide range of audiences, are easily accessible, easy to use, allow users to receive direct responses and allow for immediate modification of responses through feedback.

8. Conclusions

This paper presented key aspects of volunteering in relation to environmental education through new technologies. The issue of volunteering is multi-layered and multifactorial, contains economic, political, cultural and social dimensions and its study is a complex process, as most researchers point out.

At European Union level, volunteering is now included in many of the European Union's texts, such as the White Papers, and there is an effort to develop the appropriate institutional framework to promote volunteering, by creating appropriate structures (European Voluntary Service), drawing up programs (New Generation in Action) and delimiting the rights and obligations of volunteers and voluntary organizations at pan-European level.

It is clear, of course, that the Union's environmental policy has in recent years formed a new legislative and political framework for environmental protection, in compliance with international declarations. Through this new approach with the effectiveness of social media for the environment and the way of life that European citizens are called upon to shape, voluntary offering is indirectly highlighted as a key parameter for tackling environmental problems.

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