

ART BASED VOLUNTEERING POSSIBILITIES: VIEWPOINT OF THE TRAINERS



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Abstract

The article presents the results based on the research performed according to the EU Grundtvig project Empowering volunteering in socially disadvantaged groups of adult learning (No. LLP-GRU-MP-2011_LT-00089) in 5 different European countries and Turkey as well. The role of volunteering is described as a two side activity having influence on trainers and volunteers expanding their social experience and knowledge of social inclusion of groups who are at social risk. The results prove that new kind of knowledge and relationship has changed significantly in the process of adult education. Increasing of two side personal motivation in education process has been set up as well.

Key words: *adult education, volunteering, art education.*

Introduction

During the last decades the necessity of life long learning and adult education has become obvious in the EU countries as well due to rapid changes in demographic, economic and cultural situation. It forms new societal attitudes, new methods and organization of this process in the aspects of life long learning. Volunteering could be one of effective activities solving problems of people who are at social risk involving them into active societal participation. Volunteering is a great way to use one's skills to help others, and at the same time learn something new which may lead to a qualification.

Volunteering based on art education is a relatively new human service profession in the field of social integration. Through participation in the creating art and reflecting on the art process people can experience increased awareness of self and others, can better cope with distressing symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences, enhance cognitive abilities and enjoy the life-enhancing process during making the art (Art Therapy – History & Philosophy, 2011). Social benefits of art based education helps to provide an opportunity for people to socialize as well as provide a safe outlet for self-expression and to recognize that their feelings and problems are not unique (Malchiodi, 2003). Volunteering facilitates exploration, observing and trying to understand an inner change, that is why in many cases specialists of

certain volunteering area use art based education as assessment and evaluation of emotional, cognitive, and developmental conditions, it also facilitates communication abilities, changes in interaction problems. Volunteering in adults' education as unenforced participation of both sides is determined by activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing new social role, self-perception that leads to the more active social participation. Volunteering is considered as an activity, intended to improve human life quality; to serve the society through one's own interests, personal skills or learning, which in return produces sense of personal self-realization and satisfaction. Volunteering as a phenomenon is described as a certain pattern of human behaviour that is closely connected with environment, personal characteristics and experience, empathy and goes as a two side process. Volunteers can use different tools to interpret behaviours and develop interventions and strategies. Many volunteers are specifically trained in the areas they work: education, medicine, rescue, and sports, prevention of abuse and domestic violence, etc.

It means that volunteering is a process that needs deep understanding of situation, perfect knowledge in special area and trainings to manage increasing movement toward volunteering professionalization. Volunteers often go through training, and this gives them the chance to gain knowledge and skills that can then be used to help find a job, or simply enjoy the pleasure of learning (Vassiliou, 2012).

The types of learning that occur in volunteer settings cross the spectrum of adult learning and include the following: instrumental learning, problem solving, experiential learning, empowerment, formal education and training, informal and incidental learning, and self-directed learning projects (Kerka, 1998). Because much of volunteers' learning occurs beyond managerial control, volunteer managers may need to focus on how their organizational culture supports learning. Volunteering holds great potential for adult learning, even if the connections are not always explicit and provide greater recognition and support for informal learning by increasing individuals' capacity for critical reflection, enabling them to recognize and document their volunteer activities as learning experiences.

Object of the research: trainers' viewpoint on the art based volunteering possibilities

Aims of the research:

1. To review theoretical issues on the volunteering process using art based education activities;
2. To describe subjective attitudes on the input on art based education in the volunteering process.
3. To reveal possible outcomes of practical implementation of art based education in volunteering process.

Participants of the research: International group – 11 persons from 4 EU and 1 Turkey institutions working in organizing volunteering activities for social risk persons directed to their social involvement and integration.

Methodology and methods of the research

The research based on the empowerment theory derived that refers to a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain power to master their problems and participate in the societal processes of their communities and employing institutions (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment theorists share an idea that the influence that powers relationships can have chance to resist and initiate structural change in social system, because changes occur when there are enough people to create a collective action only. It is recognized that collective action starts and is maintained through the development and change of individual awareness. Any collective action is growing out from living experiences shared and finally it is addressed to solve common social problem; in this case one can talk about raising critical consciousness (Konrath, Fuhrel-Forbis, Lou, & Brown, 2012). Volunteering activities based on the person's or

group's empowerment solve these goals with the sense of self-value and confidence of different societal groups that need outside support. Volunteering could be based and usually performed through non-formal education activities: it is any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of teachers to particular population groups (Fox & Goodheart, 2001). Non-formal education is common for lifelong learning process in which every person gains knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and produces it into the environment. In other words, art based education in volunteering is very close to what some people define as "experiential learning".

Paradigm of qualitative research was used in the collecting of empiric data. The method of structured interview was chosen to reveal trainers' viewpoint on the art based volunteering possibilities. The data was processed by logic analysis aiming to reveal completeness while revealing certain assessment criteria. Describing the criteria and understanding peculiarities of the analysed phenomenon were defined according to the theoretical analysis and grouped into the 3 semantic blocks: Subjective feelings while participating in volunteering activities; Subjective viewpoint on the art based volunteering; Outcomes of practical implementation of art based education in volunteering process.

Assurance of reliability of data

Bearing in mind that results of the qualitative research often leave some doubts concerning reliability of data and validity of conclusions, in order to validate research results, 5 experts were asked to evaluate the results of the research. They not only got acquainted with the results of a particular research, but they are active participants of volunteering in non-governmental organizations, leaders of volunteer groups. Remarks of experts and additional information provided by them were helpful in drawing final generalisations and conclusions.

Participants of the research: 11 participants from Šiauliai University (Lithuania), Fepamuc Guadalajara (Spain), Contempla Trilhos (Portugal), Tecnopras s.a.s (Italy) and Şişli Technical and Vocational High School (Turkey) took place in the research. All institutions have experience and are working in the preparation of volunteers for the work with the adults groups who are at social risk.

Proceedings of the research

The research took place in 2011 June to 2012 June during 2 meetings of project partners. During the workshops (art based activities – shooting short movies and decoupage) the participants were asked to express some everyday life situations. Specially trained volunteers (persons, who are preparing others for the volunteer work with socially disadvantaged groups and are active in volunteering using art based education methods) lead the sessions. Duration of one session was about 3 hours.

Results of the research on trainers' viewpoint on the art based volunteering possibilities

It is important to know for the trainers of volunteers how people feel themselves attending art based education volunteering activities. Some considerations on this point could be useful trying to understand environmental input and personal perception of ongoing activities that actually are directed to the raising of person's self-confidence through art based education. The trainees of volunteers were offered to take part in art based education session and to reflect their feelings and usefulness of such performances. The aim of the presented material is not to discuss applied methods of art based education (shooting short movies and decoupage), that is why the methods as possible forms of adult education have not been analyzed. The goal of this study is to reveal trainees' view point on activities that are applied during volunteering process.

Table 1
Subjective feelings participating in volunteering activities

Category	Affirmation	Number of affirmations
Novelty	<i>“very interesting and new thing”; “lots of ideas from different point of view”; “was very interesting and new thing for us”.</i>	3
Intercultural viewpoint	<i>“it was the point of all — not for the one country”; “succeed in involving all the participants”; “gives me message about cultural values and ethic” “this is very important for me and for international group”;</i>	4
Usefulness	<i>“very useful and we worked very purposefully”; “the activity was very very interesting”; “it was very productive”;</i>	3
Creativity	<i>“we quickly found the way how to do something”; “first of all we realized the idea”; “most difficult point was to crystallize the idea”; “different persons created different subjects”; “some experience that learners would do in a real learning situation”.</i>	5
Organization issues	<i>“we were given very clear instructions about the workshop”; “it was really team work”; “to teach how to work in a team”, “how to do group work which is very important for voluntary work”; “especially very useful to have the work groups”; activities were very dynamic and well structured”; “all details have been thought well”; “application of the method is the best way to learn a method”.</i>	8

Five categories reflecting experience of participants (see Table 1) have been revealed. The most of them indicated *organization issues* of the sessions (8 affirmations). It was mentioned that clearness of instructions, group work, teaching methods are important for successful volunteering. The largest number of indicators in this category reflects the subjective experience of the participants: most of them are working in the organizing and management of volunteering, so these aspects are important for them.

Category of *creativity* in art based education sessions was the second large group (5 statements) that was indicated by the participants of the research. Possibility to choose the mode of expression of their own problem/situation activates person to think more deeply and at the same time feel safe and indefeasible by environmental factors (social control, societal stereotypes, etc.). The participants mentioned that it is important to understand and realize ideas quickly and easily, because people are not going to feel pressure or tension during their voluntary participation.

As a special outcome of the research the category of *intercultural viewpoint* (4 statements) in volunteering based on art education could be mentioned. It is a result of international group that took place in the research activity. However, from the scientific point of view it is new possibilities in organizing volunteering in the field of social integration and tolerance development. Getting the world closer, the national, economic, cultural, and religious diversity press to search ways of helping understand and accept otherness, of enlarging the sense of truth, of developing empathy in wider context. These considerations are proved by saying: *“it was the point of all – not for the one country”; “gives me message about cultural values and ethic”*, etc.

Defined categories of *novelty* and *usefulness* were the smallest ones (each has 3 affirmations). Participants indicated new things, ideas that they had experienced during art based education sessions. It means that novelty is an important aspect in volunteering activities, as well, because it motivates participants to attend sessions, to learn new things about already known types of activities, to apply them in everyday life. The category of novelty is closely

connected with the category of *usefulness* and this was proved by statements: *very useful, purposeful; interesting, productive*. It means that volunteering activities at the same time must be useful and meaningful for participants and especially talking about persons who are at social risk group.

Defined categories of subjective feeling during participation in art based volunteer activities show that it is a two side process involving target groups and volunteer in the common emotional area. The volunteers must recognize and reflect situation which forms new kind of knowledge, skills, or relationship.

Each person working as a volunteer in adult education has his/her subjective point of view to the responsibility, methods, forms, place, intensity of the process in which different types of people are involved.

Volunteering using art based education requires specific trainings and knowledge in order to solve problems in which target group appears. The attempt has been made to realize what is important for volunteers implementing educational process and what aspects in art based education could be improved. It is important for self-evaluation for further activities, and for designing final goals of volunteer work.

Table 2
Subjective view point on the art based volunteering

Category	Affirmation	Number of affirmations
Innovation	<i>“it is very innovative”; “very innovative”; “and this is an integration and implementation at the same time”; “it puts together both methods: movie and drama somehow”; “in volunteering I have never heard about such method”;</i>	5
Reflection	<i>“during the session I think all troubles, all problems go away”; “all your thoughts are to verify some decisions and at the same time find the decision”; “it looks like you got the solution but really the all team and all groups help you to do this”; “it is a tool that gives us a perception”; “the most precise and direct tool for explaining your thoughts”, “can use this in your personal life to find some solutions with the help of others”</i>	6
Attractiveness	<i>“it very attractive because it is not difficult to manage”; “it also make people work together easily”;</i>	2
Interaction	<i>“this is a kind of integration”; “in a very informal way we can get the message to the group and get some tools how to put in practice this so important thing”; “you have very creative environment”; “can use body language and go to somewhere even if we don’t speak the same language”</i>	4

Art based education is rather well known form in volunteering, but for the volunteers who are starting their work it could be a challenge. Even for specially trained volunteers work with adults requires experience. The most meaningful thing in subjective viewpoint on the art based volunteering among participants (see Table 2) of the research is possibility for *reflection* (6 statements). It was revealed that during activities participants really get more concentrated to their inner world, feel some relief, others indicate verification of decisions, sense of community. As an important experience perception has been mentioned. It means that proper methods in volunteering can support person’s inner changes and social maturity.

Innovations is the significant aspect in participants’ subjective viewpoint on the art based volunteering (5 statements). The moment of integrity in art based education let volunteers apply more flexible activities, choose and combine different theoretical and methodological

viewpoints *“this is an integration and implementation at the same time”*; *“it puts together both methods: movie and drama somehow”*. It shows that innovations must be constantly involved or renewed organizing volunteering with socially disadvantaged groups to motivate them and to keep interest in activities.

Interaction (4 statements) during volunteering is probably one of the most discussed values. In the current study the meaning of traditional interaction between participants was extended with new meanings. Participants say that interaction serves not only as a communication satisfying factor, but it could form new processes, as well. Interaction was named as a tool of integration; interaction as a mean of creativity; interaction as a practice, etc. It shows that interaction as one of the essential meanings in volunteering still plays a significant and multifunctional role. Subjective viewpoint on the input of art based volunteering include four categories (innovation, reflection, attractiveness, interaction) that reflect trainers' professional and social experience.

Discussing participants' subjective viewpoints on volunteering applying art based education it is important to reveal what possibilities they see for practical implementation of activity that needs special art trainings.

Table 3

Outcomes of practical implementation of art based education in volunteering process

Category	Affirmation	Number of affirmations
Identification of difficulties	<i>“I think it will be very difficult to do this”</i> ; <i>“we have no experience”</i> ; <i>“some ethic things just to involve them”</i> ; <i>“I’m not experienced in participating in this kind of workshops”</i> ; <i>“some technical issues are necessary for this kind of activities”</i> , <i>“just some basic information”</i> ;	6
Versatility of method	<i>“kind of education activities”</i> ; <i>“such activities and techniques have allowed us to participate no matter how much English we can speak”</i> ; <i>“it has been very interesting from educational point of view as well”</i> ; <i>“it is very interesting, useful in voluntary work”</i> ; <i>“we’ll use it definitely”</i> ; <i>“interesting tool to make them engaged and some different things”</i> ; <i>“this method is an attractive method”</i> ; <i>“this type of activity could be used in all phases of education not just for voluntary activities”</i> ; <i>“it can also be used for counselling in education”</i> ; <i>“so, as an educational tool, it can be used in our schools or anywhere else”</i> ; <i>“useful in teaching people”</i> ; <i>“these activities beyond the language”</i> ;	13
Social maturity and problem solving	<i>“art activities are very useful to improve transferable skills and soft skills”</i> ; <i>“at first we thought we don’t know how to do it, and the results were very beautiful and fashionable style”</i> ; <i>“it is really nice for them to have something that is productive”</i> ; <i>“it is really good”</i> ; <i>“good impression from these activities”</i> ; <i>“explaining behaviours or problem solving”</i> ; <i>“you show a problem and possible solutions”</i> ; <i>“using short movies that is like giving an example of real life, but not just explaining in words”</i> ; <i>“is more impressive than just listening to it”</i> ;	14
Social participation	<i>“people, who even do not know each other well, can participate”</i> , <i>“can allow these people integrate themselves in a common activity”</i> ; <i>“found them useful for the population we have”</i> ; <i>“feel closer, and it is a way to encourage, make a contact with people”</i> ; <i>“we develop a group and so in that way we can use it”</i> ; <i>“learners should learn by doing and experiencing them”</i> ; <i>“I’ve been motivated to start an activity in a group”</i> ;	7

Analyzing the results of the research data it could be mentioned that interview block concerning possible outcomes of volunteering based on art education, the activity of participants, was the highest one. Finally, four main categories were defined. The most significant outcome applying art based education in volunteering is *social maturity* of target group (14 statements). Organizing activities, volunteers point out the significance of learning to cope with conflicts, to solve behavioural problems, to find optimal solutions that are most motivating and encouraging a person. Transfer of soft and general skills of target group is indicated as a possible outcome of volunteering. It means that volunteering presents not only the continuous process but at the same time it is oriented toward person's socialization.

In the analysis of the research data concerning possibilities of practical implementation of art based education in volunteering process five categories were defined (see Table 3). *Versatility of methods* (13 statements) used in sessions was mentioned as one of important categories and as art based education outcome in volunteering. It means that art based education being not strongly defined as a didactic method, combines a lot of elements that are attractive for non-formal activity and at the same time effective in solving problems of people who are at social risk.

Identification of difficulties (6 statements) during the volunteering was mentioned. It may happen with members of target group and with volunteers, as well. In the first case, it could be a new suppressing activity for persons making them feel inadequate and the difficulties that could appear for volunteers might be provoked by the lack of experience in the work with adults or insufficient training. It presupposes the idea, that such situations sometimes occur and it could have negative influence realizing common goals in volunteering.

The category of *social participation* was defined as an outcome of volunteering (7 statements). The experience gained in art based education activities helps volunteers to assess a stimulus to be more active (through recognition of person's value and uniqueness), to make a new contacts, to express themselves and present themselves for the wider audience ("feel closer, and it is a way to encourage, make a contact with people"). Through volunteering activities problems of integration into community could be solved, as well ("allow these people to integrate themselves in a common activity"). The results show that volunteers are orientated to positive outcomes of their work and volunteering being the form of non-formal education implements wide range of socioeducational goals.

Generalizing the results of the research some **conclusions** could be drawn out:

1. Volunteering based on art education is a relatively new human service profession in the field of social integration. Through participation in the creating art and reflecting on the art process people can experience increased awareness of self and others, can better cope with distressing symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences, enhance cognitive abilities and enjoy the life-enhancing process during making the art.
2. Defined categories of subjective feeling (novelty, intercultural viewpoint, usefulness, creativity, organization issues) during participation in art based volunteer activities shows that it is a two side process involving target groups and volunteers in the common emotional area. The volunteers must recognize and reflect the situation which forms new kind of knowledge, skills, or relationship. It shows that interaction as one of the essential meanings in volunteering still plays a significant and multifunctional role. Subjective viewpoint on the input of art based volunteering include four categories (innovation, reflection, attractiveness, interaction) that reflect trainers' professional and social experience.

3. Analyzing the results of the research data it could be mentioned that interview block concerning possible outcomes of volunteering based on art education, the activity of participants, was the highest one. The results show that volunteers are orientated to positive outcomes of their work and volunteering being the form of non-formal education implements wide range of socioeducational goals.

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