LIMITS, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF VOLUNTEER-WORK

0. INTRODUCTION

I'm a volunteer of the International Association for Volunteer-Work, AIV; a singular association ran exclusively by volunteers. We are about one hundred volunteers. A member is somebody who does something from and for the entity. We do not have fees.

Our aims are:
- To proclaim and maintain clear concepts about volunteer-work.
- To spread the spirit of volunteer-work.
- To make people conscious, through education in moral values.
- To implicate people in volunteer action.

ALL our activities must tend to such aims. Otherwise, they cannot be realized on behalf of the AIV.

We export principles; we take action; we raise awareness.

In brief: we represent an indirect way of volunteer work – We help those who help – We sow concern. – We believe that every single person should surrender himself/herself in some way.

Limits and Future of Volunteer-Work is a suggesting title. I have dared to add the word “challenges”. Limits, Challenges and Future of Volunteer-Work.

I'll put out ideas and opinions; I'll confess my own convictions about the subject; we'll reflect upon them and afterwards we shall debate. All right?

To begin with, there are three established statements that come to my mind:

1. Volunteers must be protagonists of volunteer-work actions.

- Volunteer-work actions should be done in accordance to volunteer’s schedule, independently of their subsequent participation.
- Should the activities be carried on by hired personnel, by concerned and even expert people on the subject, or by retired or unemployed volunteers, it seems to me that this would be an erroneous way to approach full participation.
If today was a working day, how many volunteers would be able to attend to this act? Only retired, unemployed and/or hired by some ONG would come. On the other hand, volunteers engaged in school working hours would be prevented to attend.

2. Only volunteers should talk about volunteer-work.

Many a time, people who are not – and maybe, that have never been – volunteers, speak about volunteer work, and what is more, they address to an audience where the majority of listeners have never been volunteers themselves and do not aspire to be so.

The same as only politics should talk about politics and physicians about medicine, we want to emphasize the need that only volunteers should talk about volunteer-work. I am not saying that physicians or politicians cannot talk about volunteer-work. I am merely stating that whoever speak about volunteering work must have or have had an experience with such activities.

Otherwise, only theory would be transmitted but not experience, which is what, ought to be explained.

3. We are all responsible of the current chaos

Volunteers offer their time and capacity because they are aware to be a member of the big human family, and acknowledge they are responsible of the fact that so many people have to bear social injustices.

As an active movement of the country, we, volunteers, contribute with our small grain of sand to assuage social exclusion suffered by many citizens and to improve environment, but at the same time, we are conscious that responsibility of looking, finding and applying a solution belongs to society as a whole, with a heavier load on people, institutions and entities that, politically and economically, have assumed a higher degree of representation and possibilities.

My intention – upon presenting you what I understand by LIMITS, CHALLENGES and FUTURE OF VOLUNTEER-WORK – is to try to encourage at the utmost to get a personal and responsible answer from every single person about the serious situation regarding lack of solidarity and commitment the world is suffering in our times.

LIMITS, CHALLENGES and FUTURE is an appropriate, encouraging and stirring title if we are capable of attaining operative conclusions of its study, even more if we have the audacity to put them into practice.

With this enthusiasm then, let me portray briefly what I understand are LIMITS, CHALLENGES and FUTURE OF VOLUNTARY-WORK for the XXIst century.
CHALLENGES

FIRST CHALLENGE: OUR OWN SUBSISTENCE.

This is the first challenge and obstacle that we must overcome, because what is understood as volunteering-work is:
- a free and personal option
- for society’s improvement
- within our own capacity and time
- without any kind of payment or incentives

which may be disappearing or in danger of disappearing with the comparisons and mixtures, which, from different instances, are being done with actions that, to my modest understanding, have nothing to do with volunteer-work.

And, on the other hand, please, tell me:
Why objection of conscience is compared with volunteering work, when objection is not voluntary but the other one is?
Why are incentives offered to volunteering work, when we understand by volunteer-work a free donation in itself?
Why is volunteer-work offered as an special alternative for unemployed individuals when, as we understand it, volunteer-work has nothing to do with unoccupied people?
Why is the name volunteer-work applied for civil services offered in exchange of a reward, payment and/or other advantages, to anyone who wants to do a social act?

According to this rule of three, a physician, who has studied medicine because he/she wanted to is also a volunteer, or the mechanic who likes his job, or even the bus-driver who could’nt find a better job and has “voluntarily” accepted the job that has been offered to him.

Danger of extinction
If all this circumstances go ahead, the pure volunteering work will be extinguished.

Considering volunteer movement as the most important citizen mobilization in decades, we believe that what should be done, by the politic and the economic world, as well as by society in general, would be to give it the maximum support of every kind: moral, logistic and material, and to redirect their creative ideas towards the improvement of today’s society.

We consider most convenient that different ways of citizen participation are being promoted; we even applaud the different types of compensation these actions receive, nonetheless we request that they should not be mixed or compared with volunteer-work and, thus, ask that none of them use the word “volunteer”.

SECOND CHALLENGE: OUR OWN FREEDOM

Once subsistence is assured, the volunteer-work entity should be able to act with full freedom.

Bearing in mind the ever quite true Catalan statement saying that “Whoever pays is the boss” (“Qui paga mana”), the entity has the challenge of keeping above all its own freedom over everything and do not allow to be “bought” by those who have money.
We, volunteers, long for a society where every person, corporation and institution are conscious of their personal responsibilities.

Today’s world does not work satisfactorily and it is quite true that people of my generation have a lot of work ahead. All the presents here, today, will agree with me that, it is doubtless unfair, inhuman and unworthy the fact that a society that considers itself civilized and sometimes Christian, in view of the fact that 80% of the world’s resources are in the hands of 20% of the world’s population, while the other 80% live badly and must fight to share between them the 20% left of natural resources.

Who is responsible for such a mishap? It could be that, if we made an in-depth study, we might conclude that, in some isolated cases, the first one to be responsible is the same excluded person. Moreover, parents may be accused of irresponsible parenthood. Besides, it is quite probable that politicians, especially first world politicians, are the ones who might be mostly accused. But, finally, all of us, society in general, have our share of responsibility. And we must give a personal answer to this responsibility.

**We should’nt sell ourselves out**

We cannot sell ourselves out under any circumstances. We all have to mobilize. That is why it is imperative to have a volunteer-work entity full of people who have a feeling inside them that awakens enthusiasm, liberation, commitment and responsibility to give in exchange to nothing, to bestow back to society what they feel they rightly owe.

And this donation, this bestowment, must be sincerely made, assisted, and encouraged. Nonetheless, it must be believed in, aided and encouraged, always with full regard for the person’s liberty, hearing what they have got to say and encouraging them on being protagonists of their own volunteer actions.

It was concerning these persons, that the President of the Catalan Government said: Better than asking what your country can do for you, ask: “What can I do for my country?”

**THIRD CHALLENGE: SUPRA-ASSOCIATIONISM**

Today’s world is rich on volunteer associations, each one having their aims, and well defined ways they must follow to accomplish their work.

But, nowadays, where everything tends to globalization, from economy to communications, we think volunteer action should also make a great effort to unit concepts and tasks, here and there, so that to make our common aims, with a great number of means, in order to make Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, Europe, the world and the Human race more solidary and fair.

**Joining concepts and tasks**

Let me then take advantage of this platform right now to call all volunteers and volunteer-work associations to join our efforts, experiences and aims, and also to other entities who, like us, in the same or different sectors, are working towards a common goal.
I have come all the way here with an ambition: could it be possible that, after today’s meeting, an idea will raise to join efforts, to create a common platform and to put together all actions of those who, in all Spain, agree with what is exposed here today?

FOURTH CHALLENGE: PRIORITIES OF THE XXIst CENTURY

On the one hand, Social volunteering work, devoted to the assistance of socially excluded individuals, must face the four most characteristic challenges derived from the new social troubles:

- Immigration
- Old age people
- People affected by AIDS
- Unemployment

They are exposed in alphabetical order as they all deserve a prioritary first place.

AIDS is a challenge that, according to recent agency news, will take 400 million human lives up to year 2050. Of course, volunteers must participate in the research and application of solutions.

Unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, is a serious and critical problem that threatens society all throughout the world. Without a job, no earnings; without a sufficient income, instability causes the loss of personal autonomy and, hence, social exclusion starts. Everybody including volunteers, have to put forward ideas and solutions to this problem.

Human life-gets longer and longer, especially in the industrialized world. Although a benefit, this has also raised some problems. The attention to lonesome third age people, unable to take care of themselves, is a claim to all society to find solutions. Volunteers should also act in this sense.

Immigration, makes that million of human beings leave their homes and countries and have on top of them the sword of starvation and death. This phenomenon implies for our country a moral duty of humane attention and support, with respect for their cultures, by providing jobs, treating them as humans beings, with all this expression involves, ranging from daily living tolerance to affection. Volunteers must use their wisdom and creativeness to this purpose.

It is obvious that we, volunteers, do not always have the right solution to this challenge; however, our mobilization must claim the attention of those concerned, whose duty consists in assisting society and who have to bear in mind needed sectors and the urgency to search and find provisional or final solutions. They should'nt evade their responsibilities. We shan't let them.
FIFTH CHALLENGE: ADEQUATE TRAINING

We, volunteers, are fully aware that we have a serious task ahead of transcendent nature, since this situation affects third parties, and, therefore, we must perform it with proper preparation and training if we want to do it properly.

We know that a good deed wrongly done becomes a bad deed, and what we intent to perform as volunteers are good deeds without their turning wrong.

Therefore, our challenge consists in ensuring our proper training: - training for voluntary action, - satisfaction as volunteers – and integration in society.

**Training should keep in mind three concrete aims**
- Volunteer action must be effective.
- Every volunteer must feel satisfied with what he/she does, and therefore, never lose his/her motivation.
- Volunteers should feel integrated in an association which they deeply know and love, by assuming its convictions as their own.

We must get the necessary means that will make us able to provide every volunteer and volunteer-work entity the right training allowing thus to carry out competently the engagement they have voluntarily taken.

**A volunteer is not only that person who does what she/he can in his/her spare time and with good will. A volunteer is somebody who consciously adopts an attitude of service, responsibility and availability toward others and society.**

Nobody should act as a volunteer without previously receiving the required training.

**Training in Values:**
Deep changes in society and in moral values, mean a challenge for any volunteering-entity and compell us to react. Volunteering work entities are constituted by groups who live and transmit these values. Therefore, training on these values should be a priority on all volunteer associations.

How?
- Every volunteering entity, on their own account, must consider those values as a priority in all training courses, lectures or shops they perform.
- In a joint way, for a better strength, with the support of public institutions and means of communication, but it must be understood that they shan't organise it. Only volunteers must organise these activities.
- Making campaigns, organizing contests, creating prizes, designing formulas, realizing videos, and anything that the most imaginative creativity can append.
- The AIV, the entity on behalf of which I am here today, is offering you to coordinate a project in this sense, should we have the cooperation of volunteering work associations.
- Amongst our **ITINERARIES** (let us say, programs) we mainly have three of them that we offer to all volunteer-work entities:

**Expo Val – Exposition on values**
It consists on 73 laminated DIN A3 placards and a didactic guide for leaders and teachers. Through our Territorial Delegations, this program is available to all volunteer-work entities free of charge.
SECUNVOL – Secondary School and Volunteering
Program devoted to high school institutions. It is addressed to teachers and students and, this year, for the first time, to welcome immigrants.

QVT – What do you see around you?
This program intends that Secondary school students be concerned on solidarity. Please, ask us for more details. Furthermore, be sure to read a book that has the same title in which this is thoroughly explained. It can be found on bookstores. We can also offer you a number of books (entitled “Values to live”) published by the Catalan Federation for Volunteer-work, for association coordinators, professors, teachers, parents, etc.

SIXTH CHALLENGE: TO LEAVE A FINE HERITAGE

The number of volunteers that work in favor of ecology and the respect for nature is increasing more and more. The world, as well as volunteers, have as a challenge to convey and follow a policy so that not to destroy nature but, on the contrary, to try to improve it.

That is why we ask all associations of volunteer ecologists, friends of earth and sea, to increase their presence in our society so that their action may grow splendidly during the XXIst century; and we ask the economic and politic worlds to suport this action, in order to achieve the goal of leaving a better world to the following generations.

Respect and improvement policy
The world Conference on Global Earth Heating, held in Buenos Aires, has claimed an action from all states in order to solve the problem everybody see, but that most of those who are mainly responsible prefer to ignore.

We adhere from here to all statements of the Conference, and demand an urgent answer from all those concerned.

SEVENTH CHALLENGE: TO PASS FROM TRADITIONAL VOLUNTEERING TO MODERN VOLUNTEERING.

Volunteering's present challenge consists in keeping its organisaotion constantly up-to-date, so that their action meets today's needs, and using current means.

On the one hand, volunteers's shouldn't be limited to “taking the excluded persons by the hand and pulling him/her for their integration”, but instead, volunteers should walk beside them, helping and motivating their self-integration, so that everybody be its own protagonist. This involves a change from traditional volunteering action as, in some places, they still perform, a sort of paternalistic and charitable action.

On the other hand, volunteers should detect needs beforehand, feeling a prevention aspect.
To denounce and claim, to exact a solution to problems to the concerned ones: professionals, Administrations…

To offer cooperation to those who bring solutions, offering our services, providing people, ideas, etc.

To denounce those who, having the responsibility to find solutions, evade such duties, by putting forward complaints either by letters, the press, etc.

**LIMITS**

Volunteer action, as all human activities, has frontiers, and what we wish to point out here are a few of those limits that we consider could harm our work instead of enriching it. What are these limits?

**FIRST LIMIT: LABOUR, PROFESSIONAL AND PUBLIC WORLDS**

In any of these sectors, we, volunteers, may meet a number of limits to our task.

In the labour world and with professionals who work in our association:

- The volunteer’s task is always complementary to the one assigned to professionals with whom volunteers have to collaborate readily and willingly.
- Volunteers may never surpass the limits assigned to a given action. This would be to compete with salaried people and to occupy a paid job.

Concerning public institutions:

- A volunteer should never directly depend of a public organization. If so, volunteering would lose its characteristic of base citizenship movement, which, confers value to their work in a great extent.
- In one case or other, it would become “cheap labor”.

**SECOND LIMIT: OUR OWN POSSIBILITIES**

Nobody has to overpass limits of proper knowledge.

Nobody should act without knowledge.

Concerning the real range of work capabilities, every volunteer and volunteer-work association have to analyze their own capabilities to do well what they propose and never overpass such limit.

The fact that our action is voluntary in its nature, does not give us the right to realize it without full knowledge of the facts, especially when it involves third parties in case of social volunteering work.
THIRD LIMIT: LACK OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Even though we are many volunteers, we do not constitute a strong force. We provide our own capabilities and time, but we need external collaboration and support. From whom?

- Communication means assisting us to transmit our message to all citizens.
- From administrations at any level: local, regional, autonomic, state, European, world-wide, in order to make programs and actions possible. It is their obligation to cooperate with citizen’s initiatives, such as volunteering work.
- From public and private institutions, enterprises, universities, banks, show-business, and all other sectors.

We have to bring about their mobilization so that they participate in social action and acknowledge volunteering work as a feasible means for social improvement.

EIAS – Enterprise and Social Action

In order to initiate this program we have formed a promoting team with a group composed by retired and active people, businessmen and executives. The final aim is to make enterprises aware of human problems so that they participate in social actions and, while we achieve such goal, we promote campaigns with the participation of enterprises. The last campaign, recently finished, was the one concerned with the World Food Day. On this campaign we got the collaboration of 38 food enterprises that contributed with food and money up to a total value of over 15 million of the old pesetas. All this food and money was given to the Food Bank so they can be distributed to entities who assist underfed people.

A similar project is under way concerning books publishing, as well as in other sectors.

UNIVOL – Volunteering work and University

It consists in designing a current subject and its relation with active population (say, volunteers) with the purpose to treat it deeply and to put forward improvements.

First of all, we contact a university professor to coordinate this search with students; subsequently, a UNIVOL group is created (1 professor plus 10 students) in every participating university. Thirdly, an investigation design is concreted as well as the method to carry it out. Finally, a book is published with the conclusions, where participant’s names appear (professors and students). With such book, we suggest the corresponding governments to take the necessary steps for improvement and put them into practice.

We have already published a few studies on: University and Volunteering Work, Unemployment and Volunteering Work, Hospital Volunteering Work and Education and Volunteering Work.

Other publications are in progress on Immigration, Environment, Social Participation, and Volunteering Work in Latin-American Universities.

From the AVE we offer our collaboration in helping to design what we consider should be done, in what we feel everyone should put to volunteering’s reach, so that, we might all, in a joint action, achieve our aims, putting together the creative ideas of some and the possibilities of others.
FOURTH LIMIT: SURROUNDING’S NECESSITIES

If we act to serve a community we must know its necessities, and we should never make up inexistent necessities.

Volunteer action should be a generous and efficient response to a real and proved necessity.

FIFTH LIMIT: Duplicity in parallel actions

This means that, even in our good intention to help as much as we can, we should never repeat actions that are already being carried out by other people or entities.

We have stated this in our challenges. We must join our efforts, not split them. We must stop and think before engaging in an activity which might be already made.

It is always advisable to study in depth the styles and areas that could differentiate us and, in any case, to try to explain them carefully to potential benefactors.

SIXTH LIMIT: Lack of conviction and absence of commitment

We all should be convinced that what we are doing is worthwhile, and even more the leaders. And we must inculcate it to all volunteers. Every volunteer has to be conscious of what he does, why is he doing it and for whom, and what would happen if he ceased to do it.

| It is important to be faithful in what we do And do it enthusiastically. What we do and do it enthusiastically. |

Commitment goes along with the responsible person, i.e., the volunteer.

The volunteer is already committed. Of course, I am referring on the volunteer who engages in such actions because of what he/she feels and believes, not because he/she awaits for a check or a reward, or simply because he has lots of spare time.

Commitment is so essential that, along with responsibility, makes volunteering work a positive and effective action.

Without commitment and responsibility, volunteering couldn't subsist.

If you ever encounter someone who claims he/she would like to become a volunteer but refuses any commitment, you better disregard the offer. It will turn out well.
SEVENTH LIMIT: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

In order to support welfare, volunteering work can contribute by bringing creative ideas and capability to develop them. Nonetheless, it is necessary that public organizations never duplicate actions undertaken by volunteering entities nor disturb what volunteering-entities are accomplishing.

Once usefulness of programs is ratified, they should limit themselves to support private initiatives (only in what concerns infrastructures, etc.) without interfering with the contents.

Sometimes, when a volunteer project is successful, some administrations want to claim it as their own. This, besides being unethical, should not be allowed. For instance, Conex brochures, among many others.

And, at the same time, to cover necessities and allege responsibilities.

The purpose of volunteering work is not to fill the gaps that governments leave behind on “their” intent to attain public’s welfare. We are not a “bandage” placed over where administrations do not reach. We are not born with such purpose.

Ours is a personal offer, because we are a school of moral values and a social need for a more human world.

Our function is double: to collaborate with those who participate and/or denounce those who don’t.

FUTURE

What we CANNOT accept:
- NO to rewarded volunteering work.
- NO to volunteering in exchange to PSS hours.
- NO to volunteering work associated to public organizations.

What we should sustain
- Yes to volunteering work based on gratuity (to give without receiving anything tangible in exchange), responsibility and commitment.
- Yes to volunteering work as a citizen movement that originates from private initiative and receive the support of governments, public and private institutions, and means of communication, enterprises, universities, and society in general.

If...

If we claim and obtain that only volunteers are protagonists of volunteering work...
If only volunteers are the ones who talk on volunteering work...
If all people and institutions that want to be active society acknowledge our own responsibility on present day problems...
If we overcome the challenge of our own permanence …
If we are able to maintain our own freedom…
If we understand that super-association is what is requested to us on this age of globalization...
If we understand that in the XXIst century special attention has to be paid to long-term unemployment, AIDS, old age citizens, and immigrants…
If we are willing to achieve the proper degree of training every volunteer need …
If we are conscious that we must leave to future generations a better world than the one we have found …
If we do every effort to take the definite step to pass from traditional volunteering work to modern volunteering work…
If we intent to be a complement, and never a replacement, for professionals who work in social action as engaged personnel …
If we realise our limits in our own capability at the time of performing and engaging into a volunteer action…
If we can discover actual necessities of our surroundings and respond with actions that may solve current problems…
If we avoid all kind of duplicities and parallel actions…

…Make no doubt!

… Volunteering will have no limit in developing its task to serve local and international community … And, as we are convinced that what we do is worth doing by our commitment and responsibility we shall make of the small grain of sand an important piece of the coexistence beach we shall achieve for the XXIst century.

Lluis Marti i Bosch
President of the International Volunteer Association

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