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Specificity of the Training of Young Volunteers for Participation in Short-Term Multinational and Multicultural Projects

Abstract: In this article I present the concept and principles of training volunteers to work in international and multicultural projects in Bulgaria. I present the principles of training youth leaders who will work with people with various dysfunctions of functioning in Non-Governmental Organizations.

Keywords: volunteer, youth leader, NGO, nonprofit organization

According to data from the end of 2012 in the Republic of Bulgaria there are more than 35,000 NGOs¹. According to the Bulgarian law, in particular the “Law for Non-Profit Organizations” (LNPO)², non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are legal non-profit (NGO) – associations or foundations. According to the Law for Non-Profit Organizations, associations or foundations can register with two different status – private benefit or public benefit status. The decision of which of the two statuses the organization will begin operations shall be taken by the general meeting of the association in the actual establishment.

In the Republic of Bulgaria legal registration and the actual activity of associations and foundations becomes legally possible after 1989, so today’s experience

¹ *Information Portal for NGOs in Bulgaria* (2012) Statistics NGOs. 2012, pp. 2 Available at: http://www.bcnl.org/uploadfiles/documents/news_docs/2012/presentation_ngobg_november_2012_short.pdf (access: 03.12.2014).

² Law for non-profit organizations. last. amend. SG. br.42/5.06.2009 Available at: www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2134942720 (access: 03.12.2014).

in this sector in recent history is too short. However, for 25 years, active people from Bulgaria with own forces and using the help and experience of international NGOs, laid the foundations and confirmed the important role of associations and foundations in the social life of our country. With their efforts and efficient work the Bulgarian NGOs gradually join the “global associative revolution” described by American scholar Lester Solomon³.

Following global trends, associations and foundations gradually established themselves as indispensable and integral part of civil society activism. In the period after 2000, these processes become even more publicity, which led to the emergence of the first in modern times, voluntary associations. Along with the volunteer activity and gradually increasing interest in application of unpaid work for the benefit of the public cause, Bulgarian State prepares and submits for public discussion and draft volunteering. According to Art. 2, para. 1 of the proposed document “volunteer” means a person who is volunteering⁴. In the same document is presented the concept of the nature of “volunteering” as being “active outside labor relations, which is expressed in working hours and / or services of their choice without paying for that “.

For thousands of years human history the concept of “volunteer” and “volunteering” move in parallel characteristics of each historical epoch. In modern literature and official government documents we can find many different definitions in its focus and its volunteer activities. Increasingly, volunteers and their activities fall within the focus of teaching and research. Definition of the modern understanding of the volunteer and his work presents the educator N.V. Zarnichenko, stating that “volunteering is the foundation of civil society stimulating rush of people to achieve the world’s biggest achievements, freedom, security and justice. Volunteering gives space, creative initiative and social creativity in a broad spectrum of social life”⁵.

After the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union in January 2007, for all non-profit organizations in the country new opportunities was opened to many volunteers for their multinational and multicultural projects. In the short term the free inclusion of Bulgarian organizations in programs initiated and financially

³ Salamon 2001: Salamon LM, An “associational” revolution. UNESCO Courier Magazine, June 2001, pp. 36-37.

⁴ Draft Law on Volunteering: Draft law on volunteering. 2011, p. 1 Available at: mc.government.bg/files/1174_Dobrovolchestvo.doc (access: 3.12.2014).

⁵ N Zarnichenko, *Volunteer Project “Union of indifferent”*, Magazine „Effective Education”, 2013 p. 3.

supported by the European Community and other countries, have enabled hundreds of young Bulgarians to participate in projects as part of a multinational and multicultural team. The official statistics on the exact number of volunteers involved in such projects is unknown, but according to various experts and after exploring some published data in the official websites of leading voluntary organizations⁶, in the country in 2013 in various multinational projects participated more than 1,000 people. According to the European Commission, only one of the programs supporting multinational projects for young people, "Youth in Action" the total number of volunteers from all countries in 2012 is approaching 230,000 in more than 10700 project⁷.

In modern conditions and because of the increased activity of Bulgarian volunteers, in many projects outside the country gradually arises the need for specific pre-preparing young volunteers for their participation in multinational and multicultural projects. According to the study "program Youth in Action": "The Effect of projects funded by the program" commissioned by the National Centre "European Youth Programs and Initiatives", the age profile of engaging in volunteer projects is as follows: "70% of the participants in projects are of age between 21 and 30, while at study in May 2011 half (52%) of all participants are of age from 15 to 23⁸.

According to the requirements of the lead partner organization in the implementation of the project the national team is consisting of a leader and group of participants. Depending on the rules of the specific program that supports projects, the age of leader and participants may be limited by a number of criteria and different levels (European Commission 2013). These conditions require the parties to send their representatives to their specially selected participants depending on the specifics of each youth project. These dynamics in the formation

⁶ They are the presented data on the participation of volunteers in multinational projects of non-governmental organizations "Bulgarian Youth Forum" with an official website - www.bulgarianyouthforum.eu, last seen on 03.12.2014 onwards; "Youth development center - Relief" - <http://www.ydcma.org>, last seen on 12.03.2014; Association "and I know" - <http://www.znamimoga.org>, last seen on 12.03.2014, and more (access: 03.12.2014).

⁷ European Commission (2013) Guidance on the application of the program "Youth in Action", valid from 01.01.2013.

⁸ National Centre "European Youth Programs and Initiatives". "Youth in Action": The Effect of projects funded by the program, "the report was prepared by the" Research & Bright Consult "Ltd. on behalf of the National Center, 2012, p. 86 / report is available <http://www.youthbg.info/bg/documents/161/file161.pdf> (access: 3.12.2014).

of the different groups of participants requires the application of specific methods for the selection and preparation of direct participants and their leaders.

Usually the majority of the projects for young volunteers abroad are short and implemented in a multinational, multicultural environment with strict rules and responsibilities of the group leaders and their teams. To avoid violating the stringent requirements and principles of tolerance and respect for organizations sending volunteers prepare their teams for participation in the project activities through special instruction or training. Training team is developing in two main directions – preparation of the group leader and preparation of participants.

Basic specifics in preparing managers / leaders of the group

Under the leadership of the “Youth in Action”, “group leader is an adult who accompanies the young people participating in youth exchanges, in order to ensure their effective learning, protection and safety”⁹. This guideline obligates the sending organization to require the elected leader of a group to possess specific knowledge and skills to be an effective leader and to ensure proper conduct of training, protection and safety of the group. Complementary thesis argument for mandatory training of volunteers before the actual start of work is concluded from years of research on the voluntary work of Cynthia L. published in 1996 concluding that without prior training or instructions, even in many individual cases, volunteers are not doing with tasks properly¹⁰. These mandatory requirements for the competence of leader presuppose a choice of modern methods in its preparation.

Appropriate and successful preparation of the volunteer leaders of the group is also necessary for their willingness to volunteer unpaid work, but there is little preparation and knowledge requirements of specific programs and projects. It is essential that the leader of the volunteers to be aware of their real competence in the specifics of the upcoming activities, their own leadership skills and the ability to attract to their side those with whom he/she work¹¹.

⁹ European Commission, Guidance on the application of the program “Youth in Action”, p. 120, valid from 01.01.2013.

¹⁰ C. L. Marcum, *The Motivation of Volunteers in Nonprofit Environmental Organizations*, Bowling Green State University, Los Angeles 1996, p. 9.

¹¹ A. Druzhinina, N. Bark, T. Seliverstova (2002), *Preparation nesovershennoletnih k volonter-skoy work but nervichnoy profilaktike narkoticheskoy and alkogolynoy dependencies: Metodicheskije Recommendations dlya pedagogov, psihologov, spetsialistov, rabotayushtih with dobrovolysami*. Blagoveshchensk ed st BGPU, p. 72.

Training must be flexible with a strong individual approach and a focus on practical skills. Especially important is the choice of teaching methods, “because essentially they are the mechanisms by which the application directly transforms into learning”¹². Groups preferred methods characteristic of such training are: interactive methods, gaming methods, role playing games. Ad hoc methods are used narrative discourse, outdoor activities icebreakers, energizers, work with specialized materials, demonstration, observation, practical work, exercise / teamwork / chosen for facilities and duration of specific training. “The level of effectiveness of training methods largely depends on the effectiveness of the training as a whole”¹³.

Basic training leader for short-term projects should contain several key topics related to work in a foreign language, a multinational and multicultural environment. Recommended for country knowledge and skills become mandatory for the work of volunteers, leaders formed a team to participate in a multilateral project. The acquisition of additional knowledge about the specifics of multiculturalism and multiculturalism, and their basic concepts and definitions becomes a general obligation for each leader.

For proper and smooth functioning of multinational and multicultural project group leaders need to acquire basic knowledge and skills to work in a multicultural environment. In the context of linguistic diversity, we need volunteers - leaders who know the basic psychological characteristics of other ethnic groups and religions included in project, the main historical features of countries involved in the project and presented ways to prevent and resolve intercultural conflicts.

An important element of preparing young leaders is the formation of a strong sense of group responsibility and learning models to respond to the emergence of conflicts and crises. There are different possibilities to prepare leaders for dealing adequately with a problem or conflict in the group or in the group activities with other participants. The selection of specific methods or strategies for the preparation of leaders in conflict or crisis is the responsibility of the trainer directly involved in the preparation of young volunteers. In most cases the trainers prefer the individual approach in the choice of method or strategy depending on the profile of the specific learners. Thus volunteers prepare and secure themselves against major potential risks to the participants in the project. Main result of the

¹² S. Chavdarova-Kostova, V. Delibaltova, B. Gospodinov, *Pedagogy*, Sophia 2008, p. 202.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

preparation of the young volunteer for an adequate response to a problematic situation is to achieve responsible and foresighted behavior on his part to inspire confidence and sense of security among all team members.

Also, when preparing the leaders of the group and become acquainted with some of the leading strategies and methods to motivate and maintain high motivation of the team. Often working in a multinational environment is exhausting for young players and storage of high working efficiency and motivation is a priority for managers.

Training for group leaders to work in a multicultural, multinational team will allow participants to engage fully in project activities and to develop their professional competence. The special preparation, the further education and self-education of the volunteers is consistent with the understanding of the specifics of the multicultural team. All of the above prepares young volunteers for short multinational and multicultural projects.

Main peculiarities in the preparation of the team members

The preparation of members constituting a team of volunteers is as essential as preparation of group leaders. Essentially, their training does not differ significantly from the preparation of the leader, but focuses on the acquisition of some basic knowledge and skills necessary for the full and active involvement of the volunteer team. Complying with the procedures described in the preparation of leaders characteristics of multinational and multicultural environment volunteer team members are also aware of the specifics of the particular project, the characteristics of the host country and the peculiarities of the countries represented in the project. Elected by the teaching methods and learning principles also differ.

A difference in the preparation of the team members is the lack of topics related to the acquisition or improvement of skills in management and leadership. In preparing the participants without leadership trainers focus on the themes of personal responsibility, maintaining the spirit and organizational climate, maintenance of high motivation. If necessary, depending on the group focuses on improving skills for complete teamwork. The trainer's goal is to introduce young players to the types of communications in the one-nation, multinational and multicultural team, barriers and constraints to their effective operation. Young people get acquainted with basic rules of communication in the specific conditions of the project and the selection of creative solutions when problems arise.

An important element of the preparation of the volunteers is to familiarize them with their responsibilities to the group leader and project manager. Also they learn the basic types of leadership styles of governance and their impact on teamwork. They become familiar with the essence of the common conflicts in a project environment and how to deal with them.

Through the ongoing preparation of the participants in multinational, multicultural projects is developing, refining and enriching the personal and group knowledge for personal and team effectiveness. It is ensured the proper and safe inclusion of young volunteers in the upcoming project, which ensures the achievement of the beneficial effects of participation in such voluntary initiatives.

Peculiarities of non-standard conditions for Bulgarian environment of multinational and multicultural influence a new quality requirement for professionalism and preliminary preparation of leaders and members of the youth teams involved in multiple projects. Taking into account this specificity organizations sending volunteers who will have work in mixed teams, it is necessary to ensure their preparation so that it meets all modern requirements and to prevent conflicts or misunderstandings due to ignorance or misunderstanding of personal differences.

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