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Volunteering and Social Inclusion of Seniors: The Case of Canada and Selected European Countries

Abstract

Volunteering in Canada is governed by legislation – the Code in Partnership with the Canadian Administration of Volunteer Resources (CAVR). Canadian traditions and experience with the management and provision of volunteer activities as well as the perception and importance of volunteering could be beneficial for Europe and Slovakia. Volunteering could become a tool of the so called “silver inclusion,” which means a stronger participation of seniors in community activities and life together with the younger generation. The co-operation of younger and older people in volunteer activities could lead to the stronger social capital in a community, improvement of seniors’ quality of life and the implementation of seniors’ precious skills and knowledge in the community development.

This contribution defines and explains a specific conceptual basis of volunteering activities and their importance for society and individuals. Secondary research uses several examples from Canada and Slovakia, which demonstrate the participation of seniors in volunteer activities in both countries and the obstacles or motives in volunteering of seniors in both countries.

Résumé

Au Canada le bénévolat est régi par la loi – le Code en partenariat avec l’administration canadienne de ressources bénévoles (ACRB). Les traditions canadiennes et de l’expérience en gestion et prestation des activités bénévoles, ainsi que la perception de l’importance du bénévolat pourraient être bénéfiques pour l’Europe et pour la Slovaquie. Le bénévolat pourrait devenir un outil de ce qu’on appelle « l’inclusion d’argent » et qui signifie une plus grande participation des personnes âgées aux activités de la communauté et de cohabitation avec la jeune génération. Le résultat de la coopération des deux générations dans les activités de bénévolat pourrait déboucher au renforcement du capital social de la communauté, à l’amélioration de la qualité de vie des personnes âgées et la mise en oeuvre des compétences et des connaissances précieuses des personnes âgées pour le développement de la communauté.

Le présent article définit et explique les fondements conceptuels des activités de volontariat et de leur importance pour la société et pour les habitants. La recherche secondaire utilise plusieurs exemples du Canada et de la Slovaquie qui démontrent non seulement la participation des personnes âgées à des activités bénévoles, mais aussi les obstacles et les motivations du bénévolat des seniors dans les deux pays.

Variations sur la Communauté :

l’espace canadien



Introduction

Volunteering is based on social participation and co-operation of society motivated by altruistic behavior. Individuals seek to fulfill such goals as to be fully satisfied, recognized and involved in supportive and helpful activities for other individuals in need as well as the community and in the creation of social networks and contacts. The contribution's goal is to explain and analyze the differences in approaches to the motivation of seniors willing to participate in volunteer activities in Canada and selected European countries with a special focus on Slovakia. It draws on secondary research in Slovakia and Canada, especially the existing data in international and domestic literature, Internet sources and statistics. However, in Slovakia primary research has also been conducted by interviewing specific people dealing with the projects of inclusion of seniors and their volunteering with the younger generation.

Seniors are an important source of wisdom and experience in volunteer activities; however, there are obstacles which might hinder their participation in these activities. Seniors could be on both sides of the supply–demand structure of volunteer activities, which means they could be providers as well as customers of volunteering. Volunteering is a source of social capital and community development. Canada belongs to one of the most experienced countries in volunteer activities, which are governed by the Code in Partnership with the Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources (CAVR) granting legal protection to volunteer organizations and NGOs. The aim of this study is to discuss the importance of volunteering for society and define its main principles, which have been implemented in the European Union, and compare them to those in North America, especially in Canada with the focus on volunteer activities and their perception among different social groups of volunteers and predominately shedding light on a specific age group – seniors.

In order to examine the participation of seniors in volunteering in Canada and Slovakia, secondary research methods have been implemented, especially a thorough content analysis of existing legislation dealing with volunteer activities in Canada and the European Union, academic literature sources and websites with volunteering content and existing research into motivation online. Materials from the former research and publication activities of the author have also been used. Due to the fact that the existing statistical data have been collected from secondary sources available online (Stats Canada), this paper does not offer a full picture on the state of volunteering in Canada, but it gives information only on specific factors in volunteer activities. A different approach to the research (primary research) and different research questions and intent could possibly bring different results. This kind of research has been partially conducted in Slovakia. However, the research is based on the official statistics of Canada published in 2007 and probably some new information and data could be slightly different.

General concepts of volunteer activities

Volunteering is based on several theoretical concepts, for example the human behavior theory, theory of conflict, phenomenology, theory of social exchange, etc. One of the needs stressed in Maslow's theory of human motivation is a desire to satisfy one's own internal needs, make



one's own decisions and participate in the improvement of one's own life and the life of others and society. These desires, especially the need to spend one's own time not only for ourselves, but also for the other people, can be satisfied through volunteering activities. Altruism and the desire to be needed are highly positive motives of volunteering. This desire is also common in most seniors.

Volunteering contributes to society economically, socially, ecologically, culturally, etc. For example, as an economic value creator, volunteering contributes to the additional economic surplus by creating that part of value which does not have to be paid for. Unpaid work definitely creates value, which has enormous importance that has been overlooked by many governments. However, the most crucial contribution of volunteering activities is in the social area.

Volunteering is a process influencing both sides: the providers of volunteer services as well as the clients who depend on volunteering. Susannah Morris underlined three perspectives, which form the base of the volunteering analysis. She considers volunteering as charity behaviour, citizen participation and productive activity for community and society. Each of these three perspectives requires a different approach to volunteering.

The ideas of volunteering and activities for civil and democratic society were introduced in the work of Bourdier, Coleman and Putnam. Putnam contributed in his work to the theory of volunteering and the role of volunteering in the creation of social capital in society and community. Social capital could be considered the exogenous factor influencing volunteering.

Brozmanová Gregorová et al. consider the contributions of volunteering positive for the whole society, local community, company and for the recipient of the assistance, but also for volunteers themselves (15). An important factor in participation is the age factor and culture. For this reason, there might be a totally different approach to volunteering among North American and European volunteers and obviously there will also be differences in the participation of volunteers based on the age and different culture in the framework of one continent, country or even region. Ethnic differences might also play an important role. These factors might be influential in the volunteering activities in Canada as well, especially in volunteering differences between juniors and seniors, but also among different cultures and ethnic groups.

Volunteer activities in Canada

Volunteering in Canada was, in the inception period, based on informal rules stemming from the European principles due to the fact that the first immigrants to Canada were citizens of Europe. Gradually, new rules for volunteering have been added. The European model of volunteering, the so called "community model," based on work for communities, which is rooted in the personal interests of volunteers and their motivation, merged with the American model of volunteering. The American model of volunteering could be described as a model grounded on the professional principles of management, where the co-operation of managers with volunteers requires professional skills and a particular level of emotional intelligence.

Canada is the crossroad of both models due to the geographical location and economic interface with Europe through Great Britain, France and others. This is a reason why community



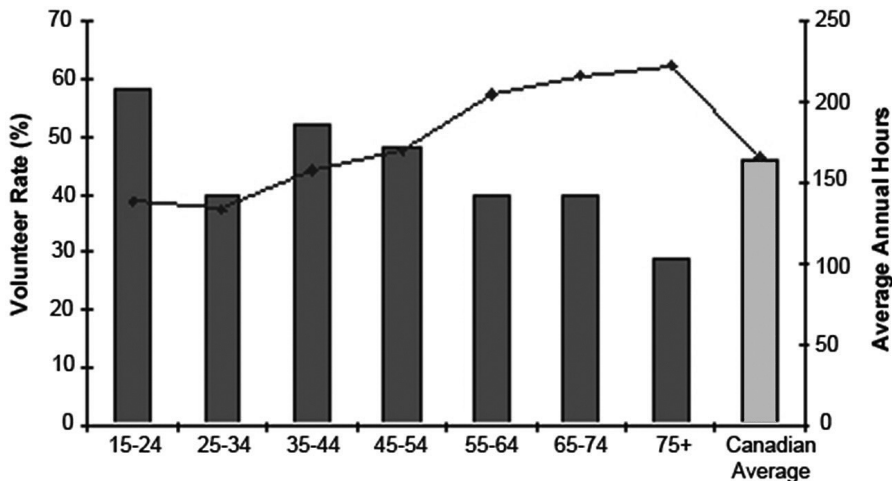
activity and volunteering in Canada are based more on the European model and principles rather than the managerial American model.

The national organization involved in volunteer activities is Volunteer Canada, which applies the partnership principle with more than 100 volunteer organizations in Canadian communities. The major topics related to the improvement of volunteer activities in Canada are: the promotion of volunteering, emphasis on the importance of volunteering, the development of the volunteer infrastructure and the creation of a knowledge database of volunteering in Canada. One of the important steps for the improvement of volunteer activities was the preparation and enactment of volunteer activities by CAVR.

Volunteering of seniors in Canada

One of the most important factors influencing volunteer activities is age. In Canada as well as in other countries in Europe, the participation of volunteers in older age has a decreasing tendency. Another factor on the decline is also the number of hours spent on volunteering generally, but in the case of specific activities seniors display greater loyalty than younger volunteers.

In Canada, based on the secondary research conducted in 2007, the total number of volunteers was 36% among the younger seniors (65–74) and 33% among the older seniors (over 75). In the baby boomers' group, 32% of older baby boomers (55–64) were volunteers compared to 26% of younger baby boomers (45–54). Seniors were able to offer approx. 218 hours annually from their free time in comparison to 138 hours offered by younger volunteers (Graph 1).



Graph 1 Rate of volunteers based on the age and the amount of volunteer activities

Source: Statistics Canada, Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2007, Special Source Tabulation.



The share of volunteers in the age group 55 and more is significantly lower than in the age groups 35–44 years (55%) or 45–54 years (50%). The age categories 55–64 years (the youngest baby boomers) and younger seniors (65–74 years) are almost identical (40%) and the share of older seniors over 75 decreases (30%), which might be a result of the factors as health conditions or some other factors, which will be discussed later.

The next table indicates the share of different volunteer categories based on the age and demographic, economic and social characteristics. The share of seniors was 13%, which might be an important indicator of interest of older people in volunteering in Canada.

Table 1 The demographic, economic and social factors of volunteer activities in Canada (2007)

The demographic, economic and social factors	The share of the top volunteers – working more than o 171 hours annually (%)
Age	
15 – 24 years	11
25 – 34 years	8
35 – 44 years	12
45 – 54 years	13
55 – 64 years	13
65 and more years	12
Sex	
Men	11
Women	12
Education	
less than high school	6
high school graduate	10
university education	17
Employment	
Employed	11
Unemployed	13
Retired	13
Household income	
Less than \$20,000	8
\$20,000 – \$39,000	10
\$40,000 – \$59,000	11
\$60,000 – \$79,000	12
\$80,000 – \$99,000	13
\$100,000 and more	14

Source: Statistics Canada, Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participation, 2007.

The results indicate a higher share of older volunteers over 45 and more and a higher share of women (12%) in volunteering in comparison to men (11%) as well as a higher share of educated people with university degrees (17%). The category of employment is dominated by the unemployed (13%) and the retired (13%), which indicates that these groups have more time for volunteering in comparison to the employed (11%).

Concerning seniors, the research results revealed that the participation of seniors in volunteering was influenced by such factors as the ownership of a driving license and a car, which might be very important for the mobility of seniors to perform their duty. Other important factors included a good health of seniors and the length of stay in a particular community. The community affiliation has been important especially among the younger seniors, which was, in comparison with the group of older seniors who were visible, more open to work for a new community. For this reason, the younger seniors tend to work more intensively for the community, which has been their home for less than 1 year in comparison to the older seniors. This sociological characteristic could be useful for volunteering organizations in order to recognize their potential volunteers and avoid disappointment for not being able to find support in specific groups of volunteers.

In Canada, volunteering is regulated mainly by the requirements of society and the educational system, which expect especially young people to participate in volunteer activities and contribute to the community. Some volunteering activity is required for admission to universities and colleges and looks impressive on one's résumé. These are the main reasons why younger volunteers outnumber seniors.

Based on the research conducted by Stats Canada in 2007, seniors volunteered mainly in such types of organizations as religious organizations, hospitals and social institutions. In motivational aspect, the most common motivation factors were civic and personal reasons. 95% of seniors indicated that they were motivated by a desire to contribute to the community development and build a social network (56% of older seniors over 75). 52% of younger seniors (65–74) indicated that they had been inspired by their friends' decision to contribute to the community. 58% of older seniors and 55% of younger seniors participated in volunteer activities in order to establish their social network. 83% of older seniors (75 and more) and 77% of younger seniors (65–74) participated in volunteer activity in order to use the experience and skills they had acquired the year before.

Within the same research, volunteering seniors stated there were also barriers to participating in volunteer activities, which included a lack of time, health problems and limited moving abilities (70% of the older seniors over 75 and 57% of younger seniors between 65 and 74). Approximately 28% are dependent on the help of volunteers themselves for reasons such as housework (21%), consultation and psychological counseling (28%), educational services, coaching (11%), etc. One in every 12 volunteering seniors assists another senior requiring the help of volunteers.

One group of volunteers, which was explored, was the group of immigrants. The immigrants who immigrated before 1971 included more active volunteers (the average was 224 hours annually) than the younger immigrants who immigrated after 1971. For example, new immigrants to Canada, or relatively new immigrants (after 1999) contributed to the Canadian economy only by an average of 137 hours annually. This also indicates some potential among



senior volunteers; however, there might also be important different sociological, cultural and economic characteristics indicating the difference in participation in volunteer activities between the younger and the older wave of immigrants. The unused potential for volunteering in Canada is represented by the so-called baby boomers who were born in 1947–1966. This numerous group of considerably healthy and well off individuals participate in volunteer activities less than the younger generation. The reason for less interest, as they indicated, is a lack of time (77% in the age group of 45–54 and 68% in the age group of 55–64). Some are overloaded by care for their elderly parents, underage children or their adult children, stressed from work and especially from overtime work. In Canada, the age of retirement is 65; however, many people decide for early retirement due to different reasons such as health or other personal reasons.

Demographic, social and cultural factors have enormous influence on volunteering. Volunteering is more common in the economically highly developed countries with the market economy and high living standard where the tradition of volunteering exists (personal motives or community reasons, social expectations, weather conditions, etc.) Scandinavian countries display a similar development as Canada; volunteering is part of social life there. The attitude of other European countries to volunteering and especially the status of volunteering in Slovakia compared to Canadian results are explored in further discussion.

Volunteering activities in Europe

The European Commission prepared in 2010 the study called “Volunteering in the European Union,” which describes particular conditions for volunteering activities in the countries of the European Union. This study compares different conditions and experiences with volunteering in the member states of the European Union. This might be a challenging goal because member states of the EU have different economic, social and cultural conditions for these activities. Based on this fact, the member states could be divided into three groups. The first group are countries with official statistics on volunteering activities available, for example Germany, Great Britain, Austria and Ireland. This enables more accurate research into volunteering. The second group of countries offers scientific databases on volunteering; however, official statistics on volunteering does not exist. Such countries are, for instance, Belgium, Finland, France, Luxembourg and Latvia. The third group of countries does not have statistical or consistent data on volunteering and might be very difficult to research. This group includes countries like Bulgaria, Estonia, Cyprus, Greece and Romania.

In comparison with the results documented in the study “Volunteering in the European Union” (2012) and the results of the research conducted by Statistics Canada (2007), the share of volunteering activities among the adult population in Europe was 23%, which is less than the Canadian average (45%). Despite the different time of research the indicators might reveal a higher popularity of volunteering in Canada in comparison to the European Union. Economic, social and cultural factors also influence volunteering in the European Union. The economically strongest countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Denmark, Finland and Germany with a stronger cultural tendency



towards involvement in volunteering have a higher share of volunteers in comparison to the economically less developed countries with weaker traditions in volunteering, for instance the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Spain and Greece.

The attitude to volunteering is closely related to the social and historical context and development of the countries. For example, in the former communist countries volunteering was required as mandatory activity of every employee, citizen or student during some period of their lives. Students worked as volunteers during summer seasons and citizens regularly participated in cleaning their living environment. The important influence of the differences in participation of volunteer activities also has cultural and sociological aspects. For instance, in Slovak culture, the model of family is still based on the tradition of mutual cooperation and help between the younger and the older generation, which means that older people still participate in giving care to grandchildren or assisting the younger members of family in their duties. In return, the younger generation helps older family members with their work, medical visits, etc. Volunteering in Slovakia as a member state of the European Union can explain the differences between Canada and European countries.

Volunteering in Slovakia and other European countries focused on the volunteering of seniors

Slovakia is one of the countries which have a weaker tradition of volunteering than Canada; however, Slovakia is willing to make progress in this field in the future. The significant turn was the International Year of Volunteering in 2012 and the year 2011 was also crucial for volunteering as the year of enactment of Act on Volunteering No. 406/2011 of the Coll. In comparison, the Czech Republic enacted a law regulating volunteering (No. 198/2002 of the Coll.) 9 years earlier.

Evans and Saxton indicate nine key trends in volunteer activities in the future. Some of these trends include factors like the growth in the number of volunteers as a source of knowledge capital, stress on motivation and stimulation in volunteering activities (qtd. in Brozmanová Gregorová et al.). In North America, there is a demand for more professional managers involved in volunteering programs. Volunteering activity could become part of the co-operation of local companies, public sector and community in order to provide community services and public services.

Similar trends also occurred in Canada where more additional work is required from professional managers organizing volunteer activities and looking for volunteers. In comparison to Slovakia, Canada is influenced more by the North American model of volunteering. Similar trends in volunteering of seniors as in Canada were found in economically stronger countries, for example in Germany, Belgium, Denmark and Spain. Brozmanová Gregorová et al. state that in Germany there was an increase of almost 30% in the participation of seniors over 50 years of age between 1985 and 2005. In the Netherlands there has been an increase to 41% in the participation of seniors in the age group of 65–74 and every fifth senior in the age of 75 and more takes part in volunteering. Brozmanová Gregorová et al. state in their research that an average of 25% of the seniors of Austria also participate in volunteering activities.



The European countries with the so called classic approach to volunteering, for example the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, implement structures and forms of volunteering of seniors. For instance, in the Netherlands there exists the so called platform “Zilveren Kracht,” which compiles information on volunteering of seniors in the country. In Great Britain exists “IT Trainer Project.” In Poland and Spain, special volunteering centres were created for seniors. These examples are useful for other countries willing to improve their volunteer activities and involve more seniors in volunteering work. Centres for senior volunteers offer consulting and information services.

Brozmanová Gregorová et al. mention in their research on volunteering some interesting facts concerning motivation of volunteers in Europe and in Slovakia. The highest share of volunteers (28.9%) participated in volunteer activities in social care, in religious institutions (13.3%), in the activities for the community (11.1%), in cultural sphere, in art, sport and education (8.9%). The most significant barriers to participation in volunteer activities included the following: people were not asked to help (37.7%), did not have sufficient information available (33.5%), had a lack of time (31.6%) and experienced some health problems (24.1%). Like in Canada, some respondents mentioned that also transportation difficulties create a barrier to participation (10.1%), especially among seniors.

When the European Union declared 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, some specific new activities and projects were commenced and prepared for the improvement of the inclusion of seniors in the active life in Europe. The projects do not specifically focus on volunteering of seniors, but deal with volunteering in general; however, seniors and their inclusion are part of these projects. One example is the GRUNDTVIG project. It focuses on the support of bilateral partnerships and exchange of seniors and stimulates the European countries and their governments, their communities and entities to prepare and implement new projects and calls for the improvement of life of seniors in the European Union and the inclusion of seniors also in volunteering activities (silver inclusion).

In 2010, the Central Office of Public Health Care in Slovakia organized research dealing with the possible participation of seniors in volunteering activities. It revealed that almost 36.7% of volunteers would be willing to participate in volunteering and almost 23.2% of them were seniors. Seniors expressed their interest in working with children and other seniors. For this reason, a new project was proposed – *Every Age Can Help*, which will be implemented in co-operation with the Czech Republic. The aim of this project is to increase the participation of seniors in volunteer activities in both countries. The project will be focused on the provision of volunteer activities for social services providers and will be ruled by the requirements of the European Union. Its evaluation will be done in 2013 and its goal is to increase the participation of seniors in volunteer activities and to improve volunteering services for seniors – clients and recipients of these. It comprises mutual provision of services and the inclusion of a higher number of seniors in volunteer activities in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.



Conclusion

Volunteering is still underrated in some countries, which cannot fully use its potential for the improvement in the quality of life of their citizens. In the last two decades, however, the importance of volunteering activities has become more appreciated in the world as well as in Slovakia. For example, Slovakia enacted the legislation on volunteering, Act No. 406/2011, which concisely specifies the definition of volunteering and its character. This legal regulation is not specifically focused on the segment of seniors, but it offers a general definition of volunteering activities and rights and duties of volunteers. Volunteering of seniors has been identified as an important step for the improvement of life of communities, seniors and mutually beneficial activity for society and seniors. The inclusion of seniors (silver inclusion) in volunteer activities is the next step to making progress in this area in Slovakia. Especially some recent events caused by the crisis of the social state, the economic and the living environment, empowerment ambitions in society and a pressure to strengthen civil society paved the way for the growth of these activities in countries where volunteering has not become yet fully incorporated into the social and economic life. For this reason, examples of good practice from other European countries and from Canada might be an excellent source of inspiration for Slovakia.

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