

The flickering faces of volunteerism

Following a decision of the Council of the European Union, the year 2011 was designated as the European Year of Voluntary Activities (or more precisely, the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship)¹. Poland, being one of the EU Member States, quite naturally also became involved in organizing a number of different initiatives emerging from this opportunity, as well as participating in them. This is an excellent opportunity to look more closely at voluntary service, both in theory and in practice, at the same time revealing a second and unofficial face of volunteerism.

Volunteerism in the context of the concept of social forces

Fashionable terms such as ‘human capital’ or ‘social capital’ are also applicable to the considerations of the issue of volunteering. If we assume a generalised understanding of these concepts by different authors and avoid any detailed analysis of their specific understanding of these concepts, we can conclude that their essence and their common denominator is highlighting the existence of certain social resources, such as knowledge, predispositions, abilities and skills and the positive effects of sustaining contacts with other people. Volunteerism, by means of building individual human capital of volunteers, promotes the multiplication of social capital².

¹ It should be noted here that due to an initiative of the United Nations, the year 2001 was celebrated as the International Year of Volunteering.

² This dependence was rightly emphasised for example by D. Moroń (D. Moroń, *Wolontariat w trzecim sektorze. Prawo i praktyka*, Wrocław 2009, pp. 70-71).

So wasn't it this human capital exactly that Helena Radlińska was thinking about in the 1930s, when she formulated her definition of social forces? She understood them then as 'currently appearing or hidden (potential) values of individuals and social groups, facilities and institutions that provide a social teacher with some support in their work, if they are activated and become leading factors in the reconstruction and assimilation of the values'³, also adding after some years that it must be understood as 'a system of specific factors and values operating in its context in the form of individual or collective and overt or hidden talents expressed through positive activity.'⁴ In the context of volunteering, you can venture to say that virtually in each local community one can identify overt social forces in the form of active volunteers who support the change or may initiate it; in each local community there are also latent social forces, undiscovered yet, in the form of potential that has not yet been recognised, inherent in the consciousness of individuals or groups, driven by that still subconscious desire.

Contemporary social forces, also referred to as 'human capital', 'endogenous factors of change' or 'subjective resources', are associated with human potential, resources that are worth being discovered, extracted, dynamised, directed somewhere and utilised.

When we take a closer look at people at each phase of the cycle of human life, it can be concluded that in each of them, in each of these phases, lies some potential for volunteering⁵:

- children, socialised properly, with the willingness and readiness to help other people instilled in them from an early age, are still relatively easy to model in the direction of strengthening their selflessness and are often characterised by curiosity, willingness to act, enthusiasm for taking up new activities and willingness to cooperate;
- young people are often the basis of volunteering (due to their desire to change the world and their openness to new things); their potential stems from the following characteristic traits of youth: a need for acceptance and a sense of belonging to a group, looking for their own identity and for the sense of life, creativity and energy for action, flexibility, eagerness to accept any meaningful fulfilment of their free time, willingness to make new friends, experience and learn something new, a need to stand out amongst their peers, to find something original, as well as their ability to adapt to changes easily;

³ H. Radlińska, *Stosunek wychowawcy do środowiska społecznego*, Warszawa 1935, pp. 16–17.

⁴ H. Radlińska, *Pedagogika społeczna*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1961, p. 33.

⁵ The author of the text is at the same time aware of the restrictions – the factors that hinder or even block the activation of the potential of human beings that could otherwise become a foundation for building the power of volunteering.

- adults, professionally active, willing to use their skills and life experience and professional training, tired with the barrenness of their everyday lives, longing to do something selfless and to be detached from daily routine, characterised by intellectual, emotional and social maturity;
- seniors, strong through their availability, life experience and their wish to still be needed.

The value of volunteerism

Voluntary activities fulfil a range of functions that make volunteerism valuable and legitimate. And so, first of all, volunteerism serves the function of predicting, associated with the skills of observing the phenomena developing in a given environment and infiltrating any recorded problems⁶. It also performs a supplemental function, which means complementarity between the activities of social services and volunteers⁷. Not only does it fill the gaps of institutional activities, it also underlines the need to undertake specific tasks by formal institutions⁸. Volunteers, due to an expanded scope of their tasks, are often called ‘ambassadors’ of their local environment, people of the first contact between an organization and the local community, or creators of activating ideas⁹. Attitudes represented by them, ‘associated with the preference of humanistic values, should encourage the treatment of this specific group as leaders jointly responsible for progressive social changes and building a better world. Therefore volunteer attitudes are like the better part of human nature.’¹⁰

A. Rogulska¹¹ put together the most important benefits stemming from volunteering, dividing them with respect to the four groups that benefit from its advantages:

- 1) the state / society:

⁶ J. Herman, 1982, quoting M. Donevska, *Praca socjalna jako profesja i rodzaj aktywności społecznej*, [in:] E. Marynowicz-Hetka, J. Piekarski, E. Cyrańska (ed.), *Pedagogika społeczna jako dyscyplina akademicka. Stan i perspektywy*, Łódź 1998, p. 485.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 486.

⁸ G. Bettin, quoting B. Matyjas, *Wolontariat jako działanie prospołeczne w obszarze pomocy społecznej i pracy socjalnej*, [in:] B. Matyjas (ed.), *Wolontariat jako działanie prospołeczne w obszarze pomocy społecznej i pracy socjalnej*, Kielce 2009, p. 187.

⁹ R. Cichoń, *Działalność wolontariacka jako jedna z form wsparcia organizacji pozarządowych w środowisku lokalnym*, [in:] B. Matyjas (ed.), *Wolontariat jako działanie prospołeczne...*, op. cit, p. 64.

¹⁰ A. Olubiński, *Humanistyczno-edukacyjne wartości wolontariatu w przygotowaniu do pracy socjalnej*, [in:] B. Kromolicka (ed.), *Wolontariat w obszarze humanistycznych wyzwań opiekuńczych*, Toruń 2005, p. 51.

¹¹ A. Rogulska, *Wolontariat – działania na rzecz jednostki i społeczeństwa* [in:] M. Danielak-Chomać, B. Dobrowolska, A. Rogulska (ed.) *Wolontariat w teorii i praktyce*, Siedlce 2010, pp. 39–41.

- building a civil society in the sense of responsibility for legislative decisions and creating conditions for bottom-up community initiatives,
 - building an image of a welfare state, open and accountable, focused on individuals and their needs, open to public initiatives,
 - creating favourable conditions for development of various types of social support,
 - contributions to educational awareness, taking into account the social nature of individuals and the need to support them,
 - creating alternatives to government solutions;
- 2) in relation to institutions receiving assistance of volunteers:
- supporting their activities,
 - initiating new projects and expanding their activity,
 - enhancing the effectiveness of their operations,
 - strengthening the common public belief that a given outpost is necessary,
 - increasing public trust towards the outpost,
 - building an image of openness of the outpost for social initiatives,
 - a volunteer as a middleman between the outpost and the community,
 - advertising the activity of the outpost;
- 3) in relation to individuals receiving assistance from volunteers:
- experience of genuine desire to help,
 - contact with another human being, his/her motives, personality,
 - increasing faith in others and the selflessness of human activities,
 - personalised contacts as a greater chance of creating the possibility of thorough recognition of needs and possibilities to satisfy them,
 - building spiritual unity with a volunteer, associated with the human emotional side,
 - building compromises,
 - learning assertiveness;
- 4) in relation to volunteers themselves:
- exchange of experiences,
 - improving the existing skills and acquiring new ones, – acquiring new experiences in helping and other associated experiences,
 - learning the adequacy of help to the situation and to the needs of people using it,
 - a direct experience of the intricacies and complications of human fate and character,
 - increasing their attractiveness as potential employees,
 - raising self-esteem, building and / or enhancing self-acceptance,
 - achieving satisfaction from intangible goods,

- satisfaction with personal contribution to the development of care and social assistance or influence on the shape of social life,
- increasing the openness to new ideas and challenges.

According to the same author, volunteering is not only a form of aid, but also a component of education and a collection of certain types of values¹².

Volunteering in definitions and typologies

A concept that remained vague for a long time, 'volunteering' was eventually defined by the Association of Volunteer Centre (based on several years of experience in working with volunteers and numerous contacts with European and American organizations), and is now understood as free, voluntary and deliberate action on behalf of others, one that goes beyond the ties between family members and friends. This definition refers to the Latin word *voluntarius*, which means 'gratuitous, voluntary'¹³.

European Volunteer Centre and the *Association of Voluntary Service Organizations* agree that volunteerism refers to all forms of voluntary activity, formal or informal, full or part time, at home or abroad, undertaken selflessly, with free will, choice and motivation of given people¹⁴.

Based on the criterion of the degree of involvement into work, M. Załuska made a division of volunteers into 3 groups: occasional workers (working only once, 'one impulse activists' who join in an action on behalf of others under the influence of an impulse), average-distance activists (very active, but only until the completion of their task or goal), and permanent activists (people whose social activity is associated with the sense of their lives, and it gives them the sense and becomes their approach to life)¹⁵.

Volunteerism can be pursued by a person incidentally or systematically, thus we speak of permanent volunteerism (when volunteers cooperate with their organisation in a continuous, regular and long-term way), and action volunteerism (when volunteers are involved short term, in a single or cyclic action). The issue of determining the boundary between these two types of voluntary work is somewhat controversial; perhaps the best way to solve the problem is to adopt a one month censorship (modelled

¹² Ibid, p. 45.

¹³ Słownik łacińsko-polski i polsko-łaciński ed. E. Kubicka, M. Suwała, Warszawa, 2005, p. 161.

¹⁴ Definition taken from: Legal Status of Volunteers – Country Reports. United Kingdom, EVS, AVSO, 2003, p. 2; the official website of The European Volunteer Centre, http://www.cev.be/data/File/UK_legalstatus.pdf [last accessed 02/08/2011].

¹⁵ M. Załuska, Społeczne uwarunkowania angażowania się w działalność organizacji pozarządowych [in:] M. Załuska, J. Boczoń (ed.), Organizacje pozarządowe w społeczeństwie obywatelskim, Warszawa, 1996, p. 96.

after the statutory distinction between volunteers active for 30 days or more than 30 days and the associated obligation to sign an agreement on the performance of work)¹⁶.

With respect to the location of voluntary activities, we distinguish between national volunteering (run only on a given country's territory, involving its citizens) and foreign volunteering (carried out as an exchange of volunteers, for example in the form of work camps or missions)¹⁷.

Volunteers can be met not only in the fields of social work and social assistance (these are the spheres most commonly associated with volunteer activity), but also in many other areas of social life, such as ecology, culture, health, and many others.

Legal aspects of volunteering

Sources of volunteering can be found in the nineteenth-century Poland already and in the tradition of social work, whereas in the interwar and post-war Poland there were examples of people socially and truly voluntarily engaging in the affairs of others¹⁸. Certainly after 1989 with the development of non-governmental organizations (when old ones were reactivated and new ones were created) Polish involvement in social activities also began to flourish¹⁹. Still missing, however, was its regulation²⁰.

Legislative aspects of volunteering, in a limbo for many years, were finally codified as regulations in the bill on public benefit and voluntary work on April 24, 2003 (amended several times already)²¹. The mentioned bill (which will be referred to from now on in an abbreviated form as bpbvw), in its third section especially, created a legal framework for the issue of volunteering.

¹⁶ D. Moroń, *Wolontariat w trzecim sektorze...*, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁷ For example, in: B. Filipiak, *Drugi i trzeci sektor w realizacji zadań publicznych. Wybrane problemy teorii i praktyki*, Szczecin, 2004, p. 61.

¹⁸ As noted by D. Moroń, only the concept of volunteering in its current meaning is new, while the activity of this type itself has a long tradition and was formerly known as philanthropy, kindness, social or pro-social activity or social or voluntary work (D. Moroń, *Wolontariat w trzecim sektorze...*, op. cit., p. 35). In a study by the same author there can be found an account of the history of volunteering in Poland (*ibid.*, pp. 101–110).

¹⁹ Volunteering is identified with social work, but 'this term, due to the use of it by communist authorities to promote voluntary but pretended social work and social enterprises, has a pejorative tint today and is associated with the system from before 1989. (...) While in the People's Republic of Poland community service was commonly talked about, today we speak about social, civic, or political participation', *ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁰ Merits in the field of organising legislation on volunteering are attributed to particular people associated with a foundation called the Bureau of the Movement for Self-help Initiatives (Fundacja Biuro Obsługi Ruchu Inicjatyw Samopomocowych – BORIS), the Association of Volunteer Centre, the Forum for Non-Governmental Initiatives (Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych – FIP) and the Stefan Batory Foundation. More on the situation of the bill on public benefit and volunteer work of 24 April 2003 here: H. Izdebski, *Ustawa o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie. Komentarz*, Warszawa, 2003.

²¹ the bill on public benefit and volunteer work of 24 April 2003 (Common Gov. Act No 96, pos. 873).

In article 2, law 3 of this bill there appears in the statutory an interpretation of who is a volunteer, with an indication that it is any person who voluntarily and without compensation provides services under the terms of the bill.

In principle there are no special requirements for volunteer candidates, with the exception of certain voluntary services, the performance of which depends on the type and scope of assigned tasks, requires compliance with specific requirements and possession of specific qualifications (in the cases where such an obligation stems from separate regulations, e.g. applies to volunteers providing medical assistance); legislature indicates this need in art. 43 of the bill on public benefit. Although the bill does not mention that openly, potential and actual volunteers should be characterised by responsibility, regularity, enthusiasm, action, joy of life, openness, creativity, credibility and a number of other features that cannot all be mentioned here²². M. Ochman and P. Jordan added that a volunteer can be anyone who knowingly works for others, but this consciousness is understood as a good mental state that allows positive action for their environment²³.

Volunteer service can bring benefits to organizations, under the terms of the bill, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and entities mentioned in art. 3, law 3 in the terms of their statutory activities, in particular with regard to public benefit organisations, public administration, with the exception of their activities on economic and organizational units subordinated to public administration authorities or supervised by these authorities, except for those carried out by units of economic activity (art. 42 paragraph 1 bpbvw). This clearly makes it impossible for the private sector to profit from the activities, as well as the business sector (those considered here as volunteers should rather be called apprentices or trainees, although it should be noted that initially the term 'volunteers' denoted people learning a profession, e.g. working for free to get acquainted with a profession).

Polish law allows the use of the concept of volunteering on behalf of the loved ones, under the condition of retaining institutional mediation²⁴.

Although according to the Labour Code, a volunteer is not an employee and the party using their services is not an employer, a volunteer is entitled to certain rights

²² In various studies there are long lists of desired characteristics of volunteers and candidates; for a study of ideal personality traits of the ideal volunteer, with a distinction between directional and instrumental characteristics, see for example A.J. Sowinski, *W poszukiwaniu ideału osobowości wolontariusza* [in:] B. Kromolicka (ed.), *Wolontariat w obszarze humanistycznych...*, op. cit., Interesting are also the results of efforts to diagnose the range and to extract the types of social competence (of students) that is necessary in voluntary work and in a wide range of its conditions – see A. Kanios, *Spoleczne kompetencje do pracy w wolontariacie*, Lublin, 2008.

²³ M. Ochman, M., Jordan P., *pracować z wolontariuszami*, A website in Polish here: <http://www.wolontariat.org.pl/repository/Publikacje/TekstyJakprZwolZielonaKS.pdf> [last accessed 02/09/2011].

²⁴ D. Moroń, *Wolontariat w trzecim sektorze...*, op. cit., p. 42.

and certain duties are imposed upon him, which may slightly resemble employment in its nature and scope²⁵.

The prerogatives of a volunteer (referred to in articles 45 and 46 of bpbvw) include: the right to receive information on their rights and obligations and the availability of this information, the right to have safe and hygienic conditions of service (including, depending on the type of benefits and risk related to them, appropriate personal protective equipment) and information about health and safety risk arising from the implementation of voluntary activities, insurance against accidents (when an organization uses the services of a volunteer for no longer than 30 days, the state assumes the cost of insurance). A volunteer is also entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses and subsistence allowances (unless it is waived in writing), and – optionally – other necessary costs associated with carrying out his or her activities (in particular training, liability insurance) – all of these rights are mentioned in article 45 of bpbvw. The entity for which a volunteer performs their work must sign an agreement with them (with its contents including as follows: information about the responsibilities of the volunteer, how and when they ought to perform their services and other issues relating to the agreement – art. 44, paragraphs 1 and 2 of bpbvw) – up to 30 days in an oral form (unless the volunteer requests a written version) and more than 30 days – in writing (article 44, paragraphs 2 and 4 of bpbvw). The volunteer has the right to receive a written certificate (article 44, paragraph 2 of bpbvw) and an opinion on the work performed by him/her as a volunteer (article 44, paragraph 3 of bpbvw).

Another duty of volunteers, not mentioned in bpbvw, but signalled by e.g. E. Wojnowska, is the requirement not to divulge any information gathered at work – volunteer work requires knowledge of information which is also subject to personal data protection²⁶. Wojnowska also makes it clear that many of the regulations are related to the place where volunteers provide their services²⁷.

In addition to the aforementioned bill on public benefit activity, the Volunteer Charter of Ethics²⁸ and the Volunteer Charter²⁹ are also a set of assurances regarding compliance with the obligations and rights of volunteers and organizations or institutions using their support.

²⁵ E. Wojnowska, Wybrane aspekty prawne wolontariatu [in:] B. Kromolicka (ed.), *Wolontariat w obszarze humanistycznych...*, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 151.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 153.

²⁸ Formulated by the Volunteer Centre in Warsaw, rules of conduct resulting from being a volunteer, see the Volunteer Charter of Ethics, the Foundation's website, 'Polish-German Reconciliation', <http://www.fpnpl/wolontariat/kodekswolontariusza.pdf> [last accessed: 31.01.2011].

²⁹ Developed by the Volunteer Centre, the Volunteer Charter refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, commonly known as the Charter of Human Rights, and it includes 15 points. See the whole charter here: http://www.angoc.webpark.pl/karta_wolontariusza.doc [last accessed: 31.01.2011].

What benefits follow from the statutory regulation of volunteering? It certainly rendered the volunteer commitment procedure clearer, and by formulating the rights and obligations of both parties, it facilitated the enforcing of discipline and obliging the parties to obey the statutory regulation (the situation of volunteers is set by standards, not just by good will of the engaged) and it also raised and strengthened the prestige of volunteering³⁰. Volunteers themselves confirm that they themselves and the organizations are becoming better versed in the rights and obligations of each party, although it is still not uncommon that the signing of voluntary agreements and voluntary insurance is neglected. In addition, the 'legality' of volunteering strengthens the records of it in other applicable legislation, laws and regulations.

Volunteering in the light of statistics

Following an initiative of the Klon / Jawor (Maple / Sycamore) Association, there are attempts to diagnose the tendency of Poles to provide selfless assistance (in the form of material assistance, or offering their own time), either directly to individuals or through institutions and organizations. The regularity of research based on similar methodology (almost every year some changes were introduced) allows to draw an overall picture of volunteering and to outline the dynamics of community involvement of Poles³¹.

Studies conducted in subsequent years³² (on a random representative sample of Poles) produced different results over the past decade. And so, in surveys from 2001 up to 90% of respondents were unable to name any institution or organization which in the year before they had sacrificed time for; of the remaining 10%, almost half of the

³⁰ G. Makowski, Wnioski i rekomendacje [in:] G. Makowski (red.), *U progu zmian. Pięć lat Ustawy o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie*, Warszawa 2008, p. 43; P. Sobiesiak, *Ustawowe regulacje wolontariatu w praktyce* [in:] G. Makowski (red.), *U progu zmian...*, op. cit., pp. 193–194; A. Krajewska, *Sprawozdanie z dyskusji eksperckiej* [in:] G. Makowski (ed.), *U progu zmian...*, op. cit., p. 210. This is confirmed by the results of monitoring conducted by the Klon / Jawor Association; the registrant implementation procedures for cooperation with volunteers, see: *Monitoring działania ustawy o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie. Raport z badań*, Warszawa, 2005.

³¹ D. Moroń indicates that the definition of voluntary activities adopted by Klon / Jawor Association is not entirely consistent with its statutory understanding, but it is the closest to it, D. Moroń, *Wolontariat w trzecim sektorze...*, op. cit., p. 134.

³² These and more extensive studies were included in subsequent publications, the Klon / Jawor Association (which for many years has conducted suitable research and collected data); they are also available on the website <http://www.wolontariat.org.pl>. These studies are of two kinds: the first one was conducted on representative samples of non-governmental organizations, whose representatives provided data on the number and activity of volunteers, while the second source of information are studies on a nationwide representative sample of adult Poles, who assess their commitment to volunteering. Collected in this way, such data may cast some light on the issue of volunteering in Poland, nonetheless one must not be a slave to mere numbers and percentages, blindly believing in their absolute truthfulness.

respondents did provide some help directly to individuals (regardless of the form and relationship with the recipient), with financial donations and gift items definitely the most common method of support; it also turned out that about 40% of respondents did not understand the words 'voluntary' and 'volunteer' at all. In another study – in 2002 – 11.1% or 3.3 million adult Poles declared that in the preceding year they had worked as volunteers for non-governmental organizations or institutions; based on data reported by organisations themselves, the total number of volunteers was estimated to be at 1.6 million (those who at least once had engaged in volunteering the year before), while the group of permanently engaged volunteers was at about 331,000. In subsequent years, in 2003 (17.7% of respondents, which can be estimated to mean 5.3 million adult Poles) and 2004 (18.3% or approximately 5.4 million adult Poles) an increase was observed in the number of people declaring that previous year they had sacrificed their time for free to NGOs, social and religious movements. The year 2005 brought the most optimistic results – according to the research, 23.2% or 6.9 million adult Poles stated that they had devoted their time to voluntary work, thus completing a double increase compared with 2001; just like in the preceding years, they were most often engaged in activities on behalf of the poorest, organizations, religious movements and parish or rescue organizations. For the first time the number of adult Poles involved in voluntary action has decreased – as compared to previous years, in 2006, although this was not a drastic difference – to the value of 21.9% (i.e. 6.6 million). The effects of a research conducted in 2007 confirmed the conviction that the data obtained in the past year, indicating a slight decrease in the number of volunteers, had not meant a one-time reduction and that the downward trend had persisted, reaching the rate of 13.2%, i.e. about 4 million adult Poles identifying themselves as volunteers (but clearly so, with the number of hours devoted to volunteerism more than doubled). Test results from 2008 confirm the crisis of volunteerism, because only 11.3% of adult Poles declared that they had devoted their time through free work to others. And though the year 2009 showed a slight increase since the previous year in the number of people involved in voluntary activities – i.e. 12.9% – the rise should not be a reason for excessive optimism, because it seems that we are facing a general decrease of volunteer activity all the same.

What can be the reason of this state of affairs? Clearly, there are a few reasons. Decisions about participating in volunteer activities are not yet taken solely on the basis of individual value systems, but our choices, behaviour and life strategies are built in relation to objective circumstances, associated for example with the economic situation of the country and the conditions for building a sense of social security; just like the reasons for helpful behaviour are multi-motivational, the reasons for not engaging in volunteer activities are of the same complex nature too.

Perhaps the number of volunteers in Poland is decreasing because young people (the group that forms the basis of volunteerism) until recently used to see volunteering as an opportunity to gain professional experience and regarded it as a potential additional advantage on the labour market, but the reality turned out to be different, and it is possible that employers do not regard their candidates' volunteer experience so highly during the recruitment process after all.

Perhaps the reason is the awkwardness of organisations in recruiting volunteers, or their disregard for this necessity. Many volunteers feel disappointed as their eagerness to help gradually disappears due to a lack of interest in them of their organizations, which do not really know what their volunteers could do and how, and where little effort is put into preparing a meaningful plan for channelling and developing the enthusiasm of volunteers. The involvement of volunteers in the work of the organization is sometimes viewed as an additional obligation to its employees, who have their own responsibilities already. A commonly overlooked fact is that through proper organisation of volunteer work of such people, full-time employees can be relieved and that the operation of the entire organization can also be extended³³.

Another reason for this state of affairs was pointed out by A. Giza-Poleszczuk: "There is a common nineteenth-century understanding of volunteering as "selfless dedication to the little ones". Such narrow understanding results in a very narrow range of acquisition of new volunteers, promotion and communication strategy and the type of activities that are classified as voluntary. It also has two important consequences. First of all – it blocks the possibility of building a volunteer base through introducing it into university curriculum, linking with other initiatives, etc. Secondly – volunteering deters people who would like to do something for others, but not necessarily in an atmosphere of self-sacrifice, and not necessarily exclusively for victims of fate, but for those who simply want to do something."³⁴

Perhaps the reasons for the decrease in voluntary commitment should also be seen in the light of a general public distrust of NGOs (as well as associations, foundations).

Also, there may still be a lack of the awareness that a volunteer can be active not only within the framework of the third sector, but also in a government department, and volunteers could find some space for their activities there.

Compared to other countries, Polish volunteering has definitely got 'a face of a young man' (a remark of A. Giza-Poleszczuk). Only about 1/10 of all Polish volunteers are people over 50 and are rather seen as those who are recipients of volunteerism

³³ A. Lada, 2011: Światło na wolontariat, „Eulotka”, 2010, no 9 (32), in addition to bimonthly gazeta.ngo.pl.

³⁴ D. Mól, Wolontariat w Polsce A.D. 2008. Wolontariat. Skąd ten kryzys?, the website of hospice volunteering: <http://www.wolontariat.hospicja.pl/512.html> [last accessed: 27.01.2011].

more than donors, but people nearing their retirement age or at the retirement age may become a potentially active group of volunteers.

Perhaps young generations of Poles do not represent pro-social attitudes, they have a lack of sensitivity and willingness to help others, or maybe there is too little socialisation around aimed at the development of altruism and the value of 'being' over 'having'.

The European Year of Voluntary Activities in the European Union and Poland

As mentioned above, a decision of the Council of the European Union designated the year 2011 to be the European Year of Voluntary Activities³⁵. 'Become a volunteer! Change the world yourself' – is its leading slogan. This is a great chance to promote this form of activity along with changes in public awareness regarding its nature and importance, also in Poland (especially that the European Year celebrations coincide with Poland taking over the Presidency of the EU). To emphasise the importance of volunteer work, to encourage others to undertake voluntary activity and to respond to the upcoming challenges, four main goals were established for 2011 as the European Year of Voluntary Activities: 1) reducing barriers to volunteering in the EU, 2) mobilization of volunteer organizations and an improvement of the quality of volunteering, 3) granting rewards and recognition to voluntary activities, 4) raising awareness of the value and importance of volunteering. To achieve these objectives, the Commission will encourage an exchange of good practices between authorities and voluntary organizations in member states. Emphasis will be placed on training volunteers, accreditation and quality assurance, as well as efficient and effective matching of skills of potential volunteers to volunteer needs. Moreover, the Commission will encourage mergers in the new pan-European network to promote cross-border exchanges and synergies between volunteer organizations and other sectors, especially enterprises.

The European Year of Voluntary Activities was planned as a year of hundreds of activities and projects at the national and European level, e.g. meetings and events related to the objectives of EVC (including national meetings, associated with the initiation and promotion of the Year for creating a forum for a debate about specific initiatives), conferences and seminars (national, regional and local levels to facilitate mutual learning and exchange of good practices), information and research activities,

³⁵ The following information on the Year from the portal of NGOs: <http://wolontariat.ngo.pl/wiadomosc/605598.html> [last accessed 28/01/2011]; the official website of the European Year of Volunteering: <http://europa.eu/volunteering>.

as well as educational and promotional campaigns (at national, regional and local levels, including the organization of competitions), and finally – cooperation with the mass media.

In Poland, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was established as the national body to coordinate the celebration of the Year (by the virtue of being the ministry responsible for issues of public benefit and volunteer work), and it produced a document entitled *National Plan of Action for the European Year of Voluntary Activities in 2011 in Poland*³⁶ (its creation is valuable because Poland has never before created any comprehensive documents on strategic development dedicated entirely to volunteerism). Diagnosed in 2009, voluntary commitment of Poles at less than 13% does not reach the European Union average of 23%³⁷ and it is worth taking some action in order to mobilise Polish citizens to participate in this type of activity. Issues touched upon in the above-mentioned document on the national challenges of volunteering include:

- supplementing fragmentary knowledge about volunteering in Poland

In the justification, we read: ‘The big obstacle to accurate design of support for the development of volunteering in Poland is the lack of cross-sectional studies, which would create a portrait of a contemporary Polish volunteer, and thus a basis for identifying effective channels to reach potential volunteers. (...) Moreover, the functioning understanding of volunteering is narrow and does not cover all forms of volunteering and does not keep pace with the dynamic development of the areas of voluntary activity. On the other hand, exchange of knowledge and experience between volunteer coordinators in different areas (voluntary sport, youth, etc.) at national, regional and local levels, as well as on the European, is limited. NGOs often lack knowledge as to how to engage volunteers for voluntary work, how to manage them wisely, and how to effectively promote volunteering as such. At the same time central and local administration has limited understanding of issues related to volunteering, which results in both low support for initiatives related to the development of volunteering, as well as a moderate use of the support, which also for public administration may assume the form of the involvement of volunteers.’³⁸

- changing low prestige of volunteering in the social consciousness of Poles

The case for this challenge is argued this way: ‘In the Polish society a still popular stereotype of social work is that it is a top-down imposed form of activity, an aftermath

³⁶ Electronic version available in the Information Service Department of Public Utility http://www.pozytek.gov.pl/files/Biblioteka/PD_ERW_2011_KSE. Pdf [last accessed 28/01/2011].

³⁷ Quoted from: Report on Volunteering in the European Union, a study conducted by GHK for the European Commission, submitted in February 2010. It should however be noted here that the lack of common indicators, common methodology and exchange of information makes the research conducted by the European countries not comparable between countries.

³⁸ Krajowy Plan Działania dla Europejskiego Roku Wolontariatu 2011 w Polsce, Warszawa, 2010, p. 4.

of the political system in Poland before 1989. Low social prestige of volunteering negatively reflects the perception of this form of activity by the people who are potentially the main beneficiaries. (...) The challenge is the fact that information about possible involvement in voluntary activities as a form of full participation in the society and increasing labour market opportunities (e.g. via *e-volunteering*) are particularly poorly distributed among the groups which have potentially less chance of finding employment, including the disabled or those from smaller towns.³⁹

– development of activities supporting volunteering

The validity of this postulate is based on the fact that this weakness ‘refers to both agencies specialising in the promotion of volunteering as a form of social activity, as well as the recipients of volunteer work. Sometimes there are inadequate levels of knowledge and skills of coordinators and animators of voluntary activity. The structures of activation and support of volunteering are scattered, concentrated rather around sectorial activity (e.g. sports, hospice, student or labour volunteering). There is a lack of a comprehensive approach to the management of volunteers – both at the national level, as well as at regional and local levels. Relatively rarely such organisations are members of European networks, particularly those specialising in advocacy for volunteering. Thus they do not benefit from good practice in other countries, needlessly putting a lot of effort into finding solutions that already exists. (...) A barrier to effective support of the development of volunteering is also a weak flow of information between different subjects, the lack of a single communication platform, allowing for efficient exchange of experiences, connecting potential volunteers with organisations seeking their support, and finally the exchange of experiences at the supranational level.’⁴⁰

In this document there is also the information that in the Strategy for the Development of Civil Society for years 2009–2015 there were records of volunteering (one of the strategic targets set in this document is concerned with achieving optimal participation of citizens in public life and is a necessary condition for creating a firm foundation for subjective activities of citizens and their communities in the shaping of social development, economic growth and the growth of political culture)⁴¹. You can find here also the assertion that the upgrade of the existing approach to volunteering development policy in Poland finally began; it involves a reformulation of the programming of the existing system of strategic documents, and volunteer subjects will be included in the draft of the Strategy for the Development of Social Capital 2011⁴².

³⁹ Ibid, p. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 5-6.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴² Ibid, p. 6.

In the analyzed text there also appears a mention of hope that 'the activities undertaken in celebration of EYV in 2011 will result not only within the immediate horizon of 2011, but also in the long term. The widely understood potential generated as a result of events and initiatives around the EYV in 2011 will certainly be used in the years to come, as good practice or as a component of new projects. In this sense, the ideas of EYV 2011 will gain some continuity in the future, and the results themselves – at national, regional and local levels – will be visible long after the celebration of EYV 2011.'⁴³

It should be noted that for many years now December 5th of every year has marked the celebration of the Day of Volunteers, established in 1986 by the United Nations in recognition of many tireless volunteers who donated themselves, their time and skill to others.

The 'uglier' face of volunteering

It seems that the phenomenon of volunteering is commonly spoken about with the emphasis falling mostly on its positive aspects. No doubt the value of voluntary activity is rightly pointed out, emphasizing the dormant treasury of timeless values that it is, but you really should not exaggerate with that. Only after removing the pink glasses, which tend to be worn by uncritical eulogists of the idea of volunteering, one can clearly see the grey reality in which the volunteer works in Poland, one can see the shortcomings in the area of volunteering. Below we will indicate some of these weaknesses.

Many Poles have not coped well with the consequences of changing the state orientation from protectiveness towards the principle of subsidiarity, which is why so many of them need multi-dimensional support, for which an important link is a huge group of volunteers. The existence of a sizeable area for the activity of NGOs and the need for broad involvement of volunteers reflects the incompetence of our state in the area of aid and that it is actually still crawling as far as the construction of effective social infrastructure is concerned. The state happily transferred to the third sector a share of its duties, which the state itself had failed to fulfil. Deficiencies in this area are considerable, so volunteers fall into this gap as if into a bottomless pit.

Some people forget (or choose not to notice) that the work of volunteers is valuable also because of its economic aspect: the state saves money on their work, as they perform free work for which otherwise the state would have to pay to full-time employees. The importance of unpaid volunteer help is also associated with a relief for those involved in NGOs by providing a valuable backstage performing its statutory tasks.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 32.

In some circles (such as those preparing academic youth to various support activities) we can observe pressure directed at making students active in some area of volunteerism. Such incitement supported by the argument that only a person with voluntary experience will be a specialist in their field causes that the decision of engaging in volunteer work is taken under specific pressure, thus losing its fundamental aspect of being voluntary. It is even so sometimes that those who do not lend themselves to this suggestion actually meet with openly shown condemnation and criticism.

A number of faults can be spotted within volunteerism itself. There is some controversy over the competency of volunteers. Contrary to pronounced incentives, in fact, not everyone can be a volunteer, because in addition to free time and desire, you should also possess certain competencies and necessary predispositions character-wise (such as responsibility), so as to avoid situations that cause more harm than good. Often organizations that rely on volunteer work complain about the 'straw enthusiasm' of volunteers, lack of being systematic, rarity of commitment.

The weakness of volunteerism is also generated by people taking advantage of volunteer activity. Often they are not ready to work with volunteers, do not fulfil their obligations (incidentally, guaranteed by the bill on public safety), they do not 'invest' in themselves and sometimes, unfortunately, through some reprehensible practices they show their disrespect to those who would like to support them.

Another problematic issue is the danger that may lie in the consequences of permanent support, transforming with time into regular care. One should not ignore the fact that sometimes people who have been helped for a long time get used to constantly being supported, instead of working on their situation themselves, which inhibits their activity, in the process also weakening their ability to be independent and furthermore strengthening attitudes of passivity, helplessness and pretension⁴⁴.

Volunteers can also fall prey to various problems: compassion instead of charity, mercy instead of love, dependence instead of freedom, the need to be loved and not to love, misanthropy camouflaged perfectly with a guise of goodness and concern for others, linked with narcissism or love of people confused with the pleasure to deal with them⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ M. Czerepaniak-Walczak calls this 'traps of mercy' and mentions among them traps of pretension, traps of learned helplessness, a trap of dependency on aid and manipulating others, using the goodness of others; see M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, *Od pomocy państwa do samopomocy – procesy emancypacji w społeczeństwie obywatelskim (perspektywa pedagogiczna)* [w:] B. Kromolicka (ed), *Wolontariat w obszarze humanistycznych...*, op. cit, pp. 163–164.

⁴⁵ J. J. Wýgnański, „Robię to, bo Pan tego nie robi...”, „Znak”, 2000, no 12.

Often in discussions about volunteering there are allegations that the motivation of volunteers⁴⁶ is often only endogenous⁴⁷, and that their generosity is sometimes false, illusory. Indeed, complete selflessness becomes questionable and probably it is better accepted that it may be partial, characterised by only some signs of altruism, because it is difficult to give examples of activities that would not be connected with some business (although, for example, does a man who saves a drowning child think that this will bring him recognition?). In fact, however, ‘purity’ can be challenged, noting that it in fact has a ‘second bottom’ – a kind of ‘business’, a prize that assumes the form of positive experiences that follow from providing assistance. Such gratification can stem from experienced satisfaction and contentment from contributing to the improved well-being of some other person. A kind of a reward may also be the fact of being aware of your positive image in the eyes of other people and in self-esteem (although sometimes that perception of being needed, useful, effective, or simply a better person changes smoothly into a sense of superiority and pride). Yet another profit from volunteer activity can be the discovery of a different perspective on your daily life and your ordinary affairs, applying emotional distance to your problems (separation from them or looking at them in a different light). A form of benefit may also be satisfying a number of one’s needs (acceptance, recognition, affiliation, membership, etc.). Volunteering is also sometimes an experience that gives profound sense to things, giving volunteers an opportunity to find their place in the world, confirm their own sense of existence. One cannot also challenge the fact that for some people volunteering is just another opportunity to gain knowledge, practical skills, experience and know their potential or some professional environment and gain measurable profit in the form of documented volunteer activity, treated as an asset when applying for a job or to university. It also happens that the decision to engage in volunteer work is based on internalised social norms, ‘one must help

⁴⁶ Motives for being a volunteer are fairly well diagnosed and named. The results of such studies see, among others.: reports developed by the Klon / Jawor Association, K. Kossek., Anioły, które dają i biorą – o motywach bycia wolontariuszem [in:] B. Matyjas (ed.), *Wolontariat jako działanie prospołeczne...*, op. cit.; B. Filipiak, *Drugi i trzeci sektor...*, op. cit., pp. 57–58; K. Błońska, *Osobowość wolontariusza. Dlaczego ludzie pomagają* [in:] D. Widelak, S. Śliwa (ed.sc), *Idea wolontariatu w kształtowaniu społeczności lokalnych*, Opole 2009; I. E. Dąbrowska, *Motywy działania wolontariuszy, „Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze”*, 2007, no 9.

⁴⁷ Analysing the causes of helping others, quoting Jerzy Karyłowski (see J. Karyłowski, *O dwóch typach altruizmu*, Wrocław 1982, pp. 13, 132) we may point to regulating pro-social behavior by dual mechanisms: endocentric and exocentric, or two types of motivation underlying altruistic behaviour: endogenous – a person motivated by the internal reward of maintaining or enhancing a good opinion of themselves (as a motivating factor in anticipation of the desired changes or to avoid unwanted changes in the image of themselves) and exogenous – if the person is oriented to others and directs their desire to improve the situation of another person or to prevent its deterioration (as a motivating factor in anticipation of the desired changes – improvements or to avoid unwanted changes in the situation of other people).

those in need', a sense of duty and – following as a consequence of not complying to these norms – remorse and guilt. People work socially also due to other forms of motivation: because volunteering is in fashion, because of their desire to meet new people, to return a favour⁴⁸ – i.e. wanting to repay some aid they obtained when they needed it, because of their need to fill the excess of free time or even finding those arguments in ethically low justifications – by treating instrumentally their commitment to volunteering, just as a means to achieve their goals. Voluntary activities can sometimes be an attempt to secure some personal benefit⁴⁹.

Does it mean then that we are dealing here with some kind of 'commercialisation' of volunteering⁵⁰, which ceases to be service, and becomes just a stage on the way to personal success or an instrument to satisfy one's own needs? This state of affairs distorts the very idea of voluntary work, which instead of being heartfelt, begins to be taken as utilitarian.⁵¹

In conclusion we might say then that all we can do is hope that, all in all, for many people volunteering is still a space to promote being good and to expose the good in the human nature, a sphere in which humanity can flourish.

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⁴⁸ M. Łobocki calls such situations 'reciprocated altruism', understood as an anticipation of reciprocity and a favour that will shortly be returned, see M. Łobocki, M. Łobocki, *Altruizm a działalność pracowników socjalnych i wolontariuszy* [in:] K. Marzec-Holka (ed.), *Pracownicy socjalni i wolontariusze a możliwości reformy pomocy społecznej*, Bydgoszcz 1998, p. 68.

⁴⁹ M. Łobocki, *Altruizm a działalność pracowników socjalnych...*, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵⁰ P. Sobiesiak, *Ustawowe regulacje wolontariatu...*, op. cit, p. 192.

⁵¹ A. Krajewska, *Sprawozdanie z dyskusji eksperckiej...*, op. cit., s. 210.

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