

Catalonia, a voluntary association

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Associationism and volunteering are two distinctive features of modern Catalonia. Lacking the protection of a state, civic society has been forced to **self-organize** and to assume first hand a wide array of tasks. Some of them are essential to the **proper functioning** of our country. It is not a new phenomenon of today. Although, in these challenging times, associationism and volunteering may be even **more necessary than ever** before.

Now that the political and economical situation threatens our welfare state, the task done by volunteers and by the organizations they form becomes, indeed, **indispensable**. Even irreplaceable, as it seems. But it is not the welfare state to be solely responsible for a series of actions. What kind of society would we be then? The volunteers' action soothes the effects of a society that changes ever faster day by day, filling with **altruism** the gaps left by uncertainty.

Because this, altruism, is what lies at the root of the social action carried out by **entities and associations**. Volunteering is based on these values. And volunteering is, in turn, **the best way** to promote them. Solidarity, cooperation, mutual aid... universal values that characterize our civic avantgarde and that must set an example for a society that is committed with everyone's rights.

A society –we, the Catalans- that fights without hesitation any risk of disruption. Real risks that have appeared recurrently in our recent history. But the convinced and enthusiastic action of our organized **civic society** has allowed us to keep this cohesion. And this is how it should be, against all odds and against any project that might want to selfishly undermine it.

In fact, we've been through this before. And that's why we're sure we shall overcome again. That we will overcome. Even in the darkest of Francoism, the systematic will to annihilate us as a people did not succeed, thanks to **associationism**. This movement became not only the **central pillar** of our country, but also the catalyst of many of our **collective aspirations**. In the hardest times Catalonia has been able to self-organize, assuming risks and costs in order to achieve collective aims that were as necessary as uncertain.

This is an **attitude** that is part of our DNA –it is not just by chance that Barcelona has been chosen **European Volunteering Capital** 2014. And this attitude expresses itself in all its magnitude, in one way or another, in times of emergency. What meant **civic participation** then, during the siege of Barcelona in 1714, but an act –as altruistic as risky- of defending the community, without expecting anything in return? Fortunately, **voluntary action** usually lacks this heroic component, and the tragic ending too. But, it is indeed a **constant action**, a daily, close one, sometimes with a fun side, others it is emotive. But it is always necessary. After all, how many heroes are born in each generation? Certainly, in Catalonia we can count many of them in several fields. But a country is not only built upon the task done by great people. This would be a titanic endeavour, unfeasible to be undertaken individually. A country is built upon the **supportive contribution** of all those who decide being a part of it. It is all citizenry who lays the foundations upon which our shared future rests.

The particularities of our history have brought us till here, for better or for worse. The restrictions we have had along the way explain to a great extent why we are a more **active, participative and cohesive society** than in other countries of our surroundings. The **importance** of volunteering and associationism is a legacy we cannot afford to loose in tomorrow's Catalonia.

A Catalonia that actually must continue being the voluntary association it is today. Nowadays there are more Catalans than ever before in history. Far from dissolving our identity, this has strengthened it, making it more **solid and wider**, grafting it with new energies that allow us to look confidently at the challenges we face as a country. And this **integration process** would not have been possible without the tireless and too often invisible task done by **volunteers, entities and associations**.

Thank you very much!

Miquel Calçada i Olivella

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Resum:

Volunteers and associations have always been of great importance in key moments that Catalonia has crossed during his history and this is a value that should not be lost in the future

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