

For an independent, popular, active, sober and locally rooted volunteering

Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Dll, 24/03/2014 - 13:24

The current economical crisis is causing a significant suffering to many people and to many third sector organizations. Therefore, we should not trivialize neither the crisis nor its effects. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that we should not take the chance to review things that we have not been doing well enough. It is in this latter sense that I would venture to say that **the new context created by the current economical crisis can be a good opportunity to rethink the model of volunteering** that we have been practicing for the last several years.

In the same direction, I say that **a period of strong budgetary restraints for the public administration, without public subsidies, can bring purifying effects**, not for the entire third sector, but for concrete areas of the social fabric, and especially for voluntary work.

In the current context of austerity we can rediscover the virtues that shape- or that we aimed that would shape – the Catalan model of volunteering, distinguished by the following characteristics:

1. **Civic character and independence from public institutions:** We must avoid excessive supervision and protect the civil character and independence that some public institutions tried to abolish, sometimes over the pretext of support.
2. **Plural and popular:** Volunteering can only be a mass movement if it can be popular – inter-class, as we used to say – and by necessity, diverse and plural (socially, culturally, religiously and politically), but far from the anti-system mentality. Volunteering is constructive by its nature.
3. **Primacy of action and service over the discourse:** volunteering has to be a reflexive and critic movement, but its essence is its engagement, the action and the specific service that it provides in a specific field. Volunteering is focused in action, is a movement based on shared efforts, with clear goals and personal, social or cultural beneficiaries. The relationship and collaboration with social movements and other areas of the third sector can not obscure the identity of volunteering, which is altruistic action.
4. **Austerity and sobriety:** the primacy of action also implies a sobriety in the volunteering implementation. What matters most is the mission, and resources are to serve it. Volunteering organizations are lean and dynamic, orienting its resources towards the goals. On the other hand, volunteers need recognition for the work they do, but not false adulation, as we have seen in some events that have bordered the ridiculous.
5. **Locally rooted:** The volunteer attitude rises from the commitment to reality that is manifested in a plurality of causes from different areas, usually from the local context, but sometimes also from far away. But, even in the case of international cooperation, the volunteer cannot be confused with the adventurer, or with the one who looks for exotic experiences in order to escape from routine. Volunteers are not unconcerned about their country or their close reality, although they might be working in other places. A selective solidarity, unconcerned from the closest reality would be suspicious.

Certainly, I do not know if this model of volunteering has ever existed with such fullness, but for sure it has been part of the collective imaginary of many people about what we wanted to be. A collective imaginary that may have become blurred in the recent years, but still remains exiting and, I believe, more pertinent than ever.

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