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Discovering the opportunities of EVS in Youth Work and Youths

**Master of Arts Youth Work with Games and Digital Media
Business and Humanities**

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Abstract

Erasmus+ Volunteering Activities help young people travel abroad to participate in volunteering projects. Erasmus+ is one of the EU funding. The volunteers commit to work as a temporary member of an organization abroad. Volunteering projects can involve many different kinds of activities in areas such as youth work, cultural activities, social care or environmental protection.

In this particular research the creation of our artefact is a video of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) activity, taking part under the Erasmus+ program during March - October 2018, hosted by the Association of Active Youths in Florina, (Greece). The video explores the stages, the activities and the role of the Voluntaries and their Mentors of the above mentioned. The aim of this video is to try to explain and promote youth activities during EVS project. Moreover how can be held in a youth work context with games and digital media and how they are interacting through this procedure. The dissertation categorizes, gather and present all used materials, timing and placement and how this can implemented in a wide context of multinational participants.

The formation and the management of the project deliver the perspective, opinions and difficulties on the implementation of the project taking into account the administrative aspects of the project.

Finally, there is a special focus on the socialization process of the participants and their integration in culturally different environment and the management of the project.

Methodology and research

The methodology contains basic Qualitative Research Characteristics. Qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis.

1. Design is generally based on a social constructivism perspective.
2. Research problems become research questions based on prior research or experience.
3. Sample sizes can be as small as one.
4. Data collection involves interview, observation and archival (content) data
5. Interpretation is based on a combination of researcher perspective and data collected.

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PART ONE

**STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF AN EVS
PROJECT**

Konstantinos Filippidis, M.Sc.

What does European Voluntary Service mean?

EVS (European Voluntary Service) is an international volunteer program funded by the European Commission. It enables all young people legally resident in Europe, aged between 18 and 30 years, to carry out an international volunteer service in an organization or in a public body in Europe, Africa, Asia or South America for a period ranging from 2 to 12 months. It provides the reimbursement of travel expenses and complete coverage of the costs of food and accommodation for the international volunteer.

Thanks to the intercultural dimension and its non-formal approach, European Voluntary Service is a unique opportunity to come into contact with cultures different from your own and to acquire new skills and abilities useful for your personal and professional growth.

The overview and the intercultural dimension

This program strongly supports and promotes the intercultural dimension of all the participants in activation through a variety of different initiatives and activities, which aims to reinforce the spirit of a European community. Each and every participant embraces the opportunity not only to present his own ethics and practices, but also to acquire knowledge of the other participants and characteristics. The main goal is a European-conscious culture that can be beyond any kind of racism or prejudices with a sensitive eye to cultural diversities. During the educational program, the participants are capable of acquiring intercultural experiences through some non-typical learning techniques in a very demographic framework of initiatives. The groups in which they should be separated, would be neither small nor large ones so that the diversity of them might become the main motive of their interaction. Thus, all the intercultural borders could be overcome and all the participants learn how to interact in a multicultural environment with intercultural stimuli. Furthermore, each country's representatives shall have to

present two different cultural dimensions of their nations. Firstly, a presentation of their team or association they belong to and also the status of youth among their culture. On the other hand, they could provide a tasty presentation of their local cuisine, drinks, music, dances providing that they make use of non-typical learning techniques. Considering all the above, the activation ends up with the evolution of the participants as a unit but also as part of the multicultural dimension of the program. Finally, the ultimate goal is to provide the values of solidarity and the comprehension of diversity against the racism and prejudices.

The initiative

The fundamental element of a successful project is the establishment of a stable and coherent cooperation. The experience gained through various projects within the Youth in Action program, mainly youth exchanges and trainings and with Erasmus+ is providing a special value on the cooperation. So the new idea and the need of an EVS project bring new opportunity and opening new ways for the organizations and the young volunteers. The idea of a project comes from the need of cooperation and involvement of youth people between both sides and especially the need for involving youths from European Union member states to share the European values and feel the European spirit with their friends of their age.

Working on this project the volunteers have to accomplish our preplanned objectives within the EVS project addressing all local issues. On this particular project (Bilateral EVS between Greece and Ireland), we proposed the involvement of 4 people, 2 from Ireland who will have their voluntary service in Florina and opposite 2 from Florina having an EVS service in Ireland.

The main role in the project was to volunteer in sectors as varied and diverse as education, youth, culture, sports, environment, health, social care, consumer protection, development policy, equal opportunities and external relations.

Volunteering is an active expression of civic participation which strengthens European values such as solidarity and social cohesion. Involvement in voluntary activities can provide people with new skills and competences that can improve their employability. The European Voluntary Service is a great opportunity for all youth in Europe to become part of this society. The main goal of the project is the cross-boarded cooperation and raising of the European values.

The main objectives of the project that is also the case of this study are initially the aim of clarifying the challenges of European Voluntary Service among EU countries regarding to content and methodology, non-formal and informal learning process, inter cultural learning and impact on local community and to raise awareness on key competences and develop different methods for using them in practice within EVS projects. Additionally, being able to experience being in position of volunteers and raise awareness on personal, social and professional development during EVS activity, to make an intercultural exchange of art, culture, tradition and customs between the regions, to raise awareness of healthy lifestyle through outdoor activities, to establish cooperation on educational level between universities in same studies of youth people and to promote the EU values of the local institutions and its citizens, the learning outcomes of the project and the values for the volunteers themselves.

During the project all participants were able to develop and acquire certain competencies:

- **Social and Civic competences:** Activities with interaction and exchange of new ideas increasing awareness of basic subjects related to individuals, groups, work organizations, gender equality, society and culture will help participants to understand how different cultures can collaborate for realizing European identity. Additionally, they will develop their ability to communicate in different environments and express interest in intercultural communication.

-**Digital Competence:** The project supported the usage of IT for the purpose of all of the conducted activities. For a successful dissemination and visibility, communication through online social-networks was established and so that reflections on the process of the project were able to take place before, during and after its completion.

- **Learning to Learn:** the development of the “*Learning to Learn*” competence was one of our top priorities in this project by offering to the volunteers enough time to plan their learning according to their needs. There were also activities based upon this competence with a movie-show, debriefing and a role-play. In this way we were assured that they would be more confident about their learning style and become motivated to proceed with.

-**Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship:** During the project the volunteers were assisted in finding several ways of turning ideas into action, thinking critically and foreseeing the

possible results. Moreover, they were able to have their capabilities enhanced, to develop innovative ideas and daring to take the risk of implementing their ideas.

-Communication in mother tongue: The volunteers were supported by using their mother tongue during communication within the mentors and as a result feeling more confident to express themselves as such. Also, volunteers were encouraged to speak and write in their language when completing their Youthpass. In this way, they were able to use terminology of Erasmus+ that they probably did not know before.

- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology: During the project, volunteers were involved in activities where they had to use mathematical and technological skills for solving different problems, realizing charts, and analyzing data. Usage of non-formal learning approaches was conducted in a way for the participants to be able to collaborate and provide results and reflections through logic and critical thinking.

Management of the project

Project Management

The volunteers supported by mentors and other members of the organization worked at organizing and executing the previewed activities in this project. Through them, there was a constant contact with the organization in Ireland, and they worked toward the implementation of synchronized and well-planned actions. The constant contact between the two partners, either physical or digital ensured the adaptability and execution of the activities that were planned. In Florina, there were two mentors for the volunteers who also worked with them during the NGO's office hours. The mentors were also responsible for supporting the volunteers in every issue and helping them to resolve any problems. Also, the EVS coordinator was responsible for contacting the Greek National Agency and also the partners in Florina in case of emergency and for any other important issue that might arise during the project.

The communication procedure

Different core-members of OENEF and TRYS have participated previously in many “Youth in Action” programs where they made good connections, created friendship and made collaborations for future partnerships with other participants and organizations. The partners were already informed about the aims of the projects and share the same vision on fulfilling the certain objectives. We have also discussed and exchanged ideas on how we will implement the project for the whole time framework. Each partner is the promoter of the new ideas in the organization and in his country.

During the project, a detailed plan was constructed providing in full detail all the steps of all the activities which were conducted such as building activities, energizers, reflection-debriefing, workshops, exhibitions, events, interviews and the creation of advertisements that promoted the youth work, designing of posters, and usage of social network and visits at youth centers and cultural-historical places. Each partner had certain responsibilities meaning that every volunteer received detailed information concerning their duties and also rights too. All communication procedures had been done within an adequate time period prior to the implementation of the activities in order to ensure that time was enough for both of the organization and the smooth implementation of the project itself.

The importance of communication in an efficient project

The impact for the participants was the acquisition of knowledge relevant to the youth work and the “Erasmus+” throughout the EU. The exchanging of ideas about the concept of European citizenship, the knowledge of new methods about the efficient work and youth work offered important skills and enhanced their effectiveness when they implemented these activities within the project. The project was designed to deliver the maximum results so in order to function as multiplier positively among the participants. It is certain that this project aimed to establish an ongoing multi-cooperation among Europeans.

The idea of electronic communication, both before and after the exchange, provided an easier and economical communication solution, which assisted in the further development of the

bilateral dialogues, and it also provided the practical instruments for the European dimension and information. The volunteers through this communication system were the most active part of the project and preserved the continuity and distribution of practice. These activities were facilitated by non-typical learning techniques and offered multiple interesting results in exchange.

The aim of the project was to develop a framework of skill-based qualifications on results of non-typical education and then use this tool to design methodological ones for implementation at European level, but also at the everyday lives of youths. The aim was to increase the positive outcomes of the project by identifying and meeting the needs of young people and social groups that need to be activated. At the same time, intercultural contacts contributed to the effective exchange of knowledge and enhanced participants with confidence and the sensation of social contribution.

The visibility of the project

The project planned to deliver wide dissemination and deliver knowledge. The instruments and the actions that took place during the project were press conferences, press releases, interviews at both local and regional radio stations, daily updates of the URL internet page, a final informational URL internet page and an exhibition-event in Florina, Greece.

The continuation of the project was ensured as it is intended for its framework to be used also in the near future for new EVS projects. The aim was to promote the best possible and most complete view of the actions that took place from the beginning of the project's implemented activities and after the completion of the EVS project itself.

Continuous communication with local and regional media in Western Macedonia and the usage of the visibility of the actions was a key parameter. Furthermore, the usage of the EVS program's logo in all publications and three press conferences that took place assisted additionally.

During the EVS, on a daily basis mentors and the coordinator evaluated these projected results during the self-assessment and evaluation of work groups. Through a well-managed dissemination and exploitation of project results, sustainable partnerships and the development of long-term strategies for successful voluntary initiatives to develop new projects were established.

Further actions were implemented for the dissemination and exploitation of results such as the providence of Youth Pass Certificates that were awarded to the volunteers who wanted to acquire them, optical audio from the project was created and posted on social networking pages and also on pages of partners.

Risk Management and prevention

The work and living environments of the volunteers are secure and safe ones. The main part of their work takes place in OENEF's office. Moreover, the house that was rented in order to host volunteers was in the center of the town where all the members of OENEF also live. This made communication between them and the volunteers very feasible and fast in cases of emergencies. Finally, the regular meeting between the volunteers and the OENEF members, once a week all together and at least once a month (according to the volunteers' needs) between the volunteers and their coordinator helped to prevent any problems or crisis whatsoever.

The activities and the results of the EVS

During the project, the mentors and the staff of OENEF worked really close with the volunteers. Most of the activities planned during the project were activities where critical and lateral thinking is required. Every day there is mentor meetings which were sharing opinions and reflecting on experiences gain during the day. The schedule was structured to follow the learning circle, where the volunteers could observe, create and promote culture among youth from Ireland and Greece, learn new ways of living and acting in a different community. On a personal level, the volunteers had the chance to develop their individual action plans and work on promoting the similarities between Greece and Ireland even on the higher level. All activities were divide into two modules. During the office work, participants had the opportunity to make a better network between the international organizations, to work on the further development of the web-page and contact future participants for projects and to work on project development. For fulfilling the objective, and in order to stimulate the volunteers, interest in different aspects of Office work,

the mentors were always at present in the office and were helping with all the necessary needs of the volunteers. Moreover, volunteers had an opportunity to share good practices from Greece concerning project initiatives and implementation. With this, there was a directly influence on raising awareness of the key elements of EVS, mobility projects and developing different methods that were used in practice in order to prepare youth to be more aware of the opportunities of European Projects with the EU and Balkan regions and offered the opportunity of meeting possible partner groups among the EU.

The main objectives at this part of the EVS project were closely connected with intercultural communication. All the events that took place established an intercultural communication management framework. The purpose was to create a bridge across cultures and the transmission of pattern of symbols, meanings, apprentices and rules between Irish and Greeks. With this part of the activities, the volunteers were given the chance to be more aware of their own cultural identity and how this had an influence on how they perceived others, learned different approaches in dealing with cultural differences and got to know about the importance of investing in relationships between the two countries and to develop a network. This type of main activities brought positive solutions, because the volunteers were able to understand the cultural potentials in both Florina and Tiperrary.

Particular Reference on Digital Competences of the project

The program promoted the creativity through a specified digital tool with the representation and recreation program of the city of Florina. Through this program the volunteers had the opportunity to come closer to knowing the rich Greek architectural, artistic culture and the lifestyle. The volunteers, though, they had the opportunity to add their own creations to a number of the city's cultural heritage. In this way, the cultural diversity was underlined in a creative way and through exhibitions had the opportunity to be exhibited to the citizens of Florina. The program was also communicated to Europe through the internet, the work of those volunteers was showcased in a particular URL internet page, which is daily promoting and informing about the work being done. A Google Earth three-dimensional representation of the city was also planned to be created for the town of Florina in order to be informing the visitor

about the particular town. In this way, the European Union is to become capable of getting to know the cultural information about the city and strengthening as well the idea of the European citizenship, bringing the people of Europe closer to each other.

The phases of the project

The first section contained walkrounds to the city of Florina. The main goal was to explore the local lifestyle as well as to get to know the urban context of the city. During this workarounds the volunteers had the opportunity to discuss with the locals, make sketches of things that intrigued them, and also take important notes in order to carry out the next projects.

The second section included the organisation and creation of a dimensional computer model of the sketches and comics-style pictures. Most of the city's sightseeing places, points of interest, were to be extensively designed and modelled.

The third section, which was connected to the second, was to create a physical dimensional model of the city made out of softwood in simple volumes. For this task the mentors were instructing the volunteers into each of the workshops. In this way they were included with and helped in this way the finalization of the project.

The fourth section was a study on the urban context of the city. The volunteers together with the mentor as well as other supportive personnel had chosen the points of interest and designed them in a way that would present the lifestyle again and add or even slightly alter the social life of the city.

The fifth section was about the publication of the project's process and results. During the last week the volunteers also created the final presentation site on the internet, uploaded the dimensional model and the City guide of Florina and create an exhibition in the city of Florina.

Dissemination and exploitation of results

The successful publication on local press and the visibility in local and regional printed and electronic media was an element which was the successful dissemination of these data in the

previous programs undertaken by the NGO. They successfully managed to spread in the society of Florina and the Region of Western Macedonia the values of participation and strengthening of the European cooperation. In this project they created from the beginning of the project the context of disclosure and dissemination of information and the principles of governing the general program Youth in Action, in cooperation with local radio stations they strengthened the voice of young people participating in the project and created live radio interviews. Through social networks and the blog of the Group they were informing the listeners of every stage of the progress of the projects and posted link with information on the project of the Foundation for Youth and Lifelong Learning. It is clear that young people in an area such as Florina face many economic difficulties and huge rates of unemployment and transportation isolation, such an action worked as an echo and attracted the interest of the media and society as a whole because it was a very important project with a European dimension and significance and deserved to be in an area such as Florina.

PART TWO
EUROPEAN IDEALISM OF VOLUNTEERING
Iason Tachou

Abstract

Volunteering is an altruistic initiative where an individual or group of people decides to offer their services for free. The service rendered should help another person or organization directly or indirectly. The aim of is to nurture skills as well as enhancing the quality of life. Modern volunteering is designed to help both the volunteer and the organization served. Volunteers are also in a better position to secure employment opportunities upon completing their service. Most volunteers provide services that are relevant to their areas of expertise such as medicine, education, emergency services, or legal aid. The contemporary Europe values the art of volunteering especially among the young people. The European Union has established the European Voluntary Service to promote volunteering initiatives across the continent. The EVS programme targets young people of between 17-30 years. The programme provides the young people with an opportunity to work and volunteer abroad. The selected participants are posted in foreign countries unless under special circumstances. The EVS programme explores areas such as environment, culture, children welfare, sports, arts, entertainment, public health, heritage, elder people welfare, and education. The volunteering period lasts for up to a maximum of 12 months. Travelling expenses and medical insurance of the participants is being covered by the programme itself.

The EVS is a nonprofit programme at which participants join a nonpaid project. The initiative is designed to help the participants albeit indirectly. The EVS programme has incorporated the popular ideologies in Europe such as democracy, securitization, value change, and individualization. Since volunteering in Europe has drastically decreased over the past century, the EVS program seeks to revamp the initiative. This paper explores the concept of volunteering in Europe as well as analyzing how EVS is shaping the culture of volunteering across the continent. The unpaid EVS programme seeks to create a pool of human resource in Europe by nurturing talent and developing skills.

This paper focus on how European idealism of volunteering has revolutionized the culture of volunteering in Europe. Since Europe is a highly industrialized continent, it seems that the region does not require free services. However, the industrial growth in Europe is not uniform thus the need to apply tailored policies to boost economic growth in some countries such as Turkey. The European Union has proposed some cultural integration measures that seek to promote cultural diffusion in Europe. The EVS programme promotes cultural integration since it provides the participants with an opportunity to volunteer and work abroad.

Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020¹. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion.

Fighting high levels of unemployment - particularly among young people - is one of the most urgent tasks for European governments. Too many young people leave school prematurely running a high risk of being unemployed and socially marginalized. The same risk threatens many adults with low skills. Technologies are changing the way in which society operates, and there is a need to ensure the best use is made of them. EU businesses need to become more competitive through talent and innovation.

Europe needs more cohesive and inclusive societies which allow citizens to play an active role in democratic life. Education, training, youth work and sport are key to promote common European values, foster social integration, enhance intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community, and to prevent violent radicalization. Erasmus+ is an effective instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants.

Another challenge relates to the development of social capital among young people, the empowerment of young people and their ability to participate actively in society, in line with the

¹ REGULATION (EU) No 1288/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0050:0073:EN:PDF>).

provisions of the Lisbon Treaty to "encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe". This issue can also be targeted through non-formal learning activities, which aim at enhancing the skills and competences of young people as well as their active citizenship. Moreover, there is a need to provide youth organisations and youth workers with training and cooperation opportunities, to develop their professionalism and the European dimension of youth work.

Well-performing education and training systems and youth policies provide people with the skills required by the labour market and the economy, while allowing them to play an active role in society and achieve personal fulfilment. Reforms in education, training and youth can strengthen progress towards these goals, on the basis of a shared vision between policy makers and stakeholders, sound evidence and cooperation across different fields and levels.

The Erasmus+ Programme is designed to support Programme Countries' efforts to efficiently use the potential of Europe's talent and social assets in a lifelong learning perspective, linking support to formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout the education, training and youth fields. The Programme also enhances the opportunities for cooperation and mobility with Partner Countries, notably in the fields of higher education and youth.

In accordance with one of the new elements introduced in the Lisbon Treaty, Erasmus+ also supports activities aiming at developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting cooperation between bodies responsible for sports. The Programme promotes the creation and development of European networks, providing opportunities for cooperation among stakeholders and the exchange and transfer of knowledge and know-how in different areas relating to sport and physical activity. This reinforced cooperation will notably have positive effects in developing the potential of Europe's human capital by helping reduce the social and economic costs of physical inactivity.

The Programme supports actions, cooperation and tools consistent with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives, such as Youth on the Move and the Agenda for new skills and jobs. The Programme also contributes to achieve the objectives of the Education and Training Strategic Framework for European cooperation in Education and Training and of the European Youth Strategy through the Open Methods of Coordination.

This investment in knowledge, skills and competences will benefit individuals, institutions, organizations and society as a whole by contributing to growth and ensuring equity, prosperity and social inclusion in Europe and beyond.

European Idealism of Volunteering

Introduction

Volunteering is regarded as an altruistic activity where a person or group decides to offer their services for no financial or social gain to benefit another individual, group, or institution. Volunteering is mainly strategized to enhance skill development with an intention of promoting goodness as well as positively impacting on the human's quality of life. Volunteering is a win-win situation since it may benefit the volunteer as well as the person or the organization served. It can also serve as an avenue for possible employment opportunity. Most volunteers provide the services within the scope of their specialization such as education, medicine, or emergency services. In the contemporary world, volunteering is a widespread activity especially in the European context. Europe is a highly developed region thus it is perceived that it does not require any volunteering services. After the end of the communist regime, volunteering in Eastern and Central Europe has drastically decreased. The culture of volunteering is highly developed in some countries such the Czech Republic while it is less organized in some nations like Bulgaria. European ideology of volunteering is highly influenced by factors such as democracy, individualization, secularization, and value change. The European Commission has established the European Voluntary Service (EVS) in a bid to promote youth work in the continent.

Volunteering in Europe

Volunteering in postmodern societies is a complex concept. Europe and especially the western part is a highly developed region. Initially, volunteering was considered as an activity of helping the disadvantaged. After years of industrialization, most families in Europe belonged to

the middle or upper-middle class. Employment opportunities became abundant and readily available thus resulting into a decline of voluntary services since most people could secure jobs easily. However, when the organizational volunteering was declining in Europe, the need to help the less developed countries arose. Natural disasters, famine, disease epidemics, social conflicts, and wars in poor countries required urgent humanitarian services. This influenced the European countries to develop their respective volunteering capacity to address the above challenges.

Civic activities have significantly declined in contemporary Europe compared to the 20th and 19th centuries. The current state of affairs is largely attributed to the aging population crisis currently experienced in Europe. The young people are not willing to participate in civic activities. This is due to the generational change and quality of life. Some experts argue that volunteering in Europe has not decreased; it is the nature of volunteering which has taken a radical transformation. Youths are willing to volunteer, but with improved terms. For instance, most young people prefer to volunteer in flexible organizations such as in sports institutions². Precisely, youths like spending their time where they can have fun and socialize.

There is still disagreement concerning the debate that the rise on economic development results into a decline on volunteering.³ Arguably though, that little interests in volunteering activities and other civic duties are directly linked to industrialization⁴. Industrialization has led to the creation of numerous secondary organizations that accommodate many people. When people are occupied, they find less time to engage in extra activities such as volunteering. For instance, industrialization has led to the development of the social media and other wireless communication infrastructures. Young people spend their time on these electronic communication platforms thus finding little time to engage on volunteering activities. This is the tragedy of industrialization which negatively impacted the traditional practice of volunteering.

Most young people in Europe view volunteering as an old tradition. They were raised by a generation which highly valued volunteering but due to cultural change, the practice is perceived as an old concept⁵. In the United Kingdom, younger birth cohorts show little interests while the older birth cohorts embrace volunteering. This development is viewed as a generational

² Nagel, S., “*Volunteering in sports clubs in Europe.*”, pp. 1-25.

³ “...economic prosperity affects the rate of volunteering since most people and organizations can afford to pay for the services they need.” Putnam, R. D., “*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.*”, pp. 1-55.

⁴ Inglehart, Ronald . Modernization and Volunteering . In: P . Dekker, L .Halman L . (eds), “*The Values of Volunteering. Cross-Cultural Perspectives.*” , p. 55–70.

⁵ Rochester, C., Paine, A.E., Howlett, S., Zimmeck, M., “*Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century.*”, pp. 33-65 .

change. The phenomenon is not only evident in the United Kingdom but also in other Western European countries such as Germany, France, Spain, and Italy.

Young people in Europe are likely to enroll in organizations other than voluntary entities. The rate at which young people join welfare association is very low. The older people have no problem with joining welfare organizations such as voluntary groups⁶. This generational gap is what prompted the European Commission to establish the European Voluntary Service in order to integrate and mentor young people into volunteering.

Volunteering Idealism

In the 20th century, Europe was primarily divided into two categories namely capitalist societies and communist societies. Capitalist societies that were majorly comprised of former Soviet Union demanded for compulsory volunteering during free time. After the collapse of the communist regime, people overlooked most of the communism ideologies thus resulting into the decline of volunteering. However, the concept of volunteering was repackaged according to the ideals of democracy and people started to embrace it again. Civil societies are fruits of civil liberties thus they are principally linked to democracy. This ideology spread across Europe and currently, volunteering in Europe is based on democracy.

Individualization is another factor which has shaped volunteering in Europe. With the rise of democratic space in Europe, participating in any activity boils down to an individual's decision⁷. People do whatever they like provided that it is legal. Engaging in volunteering activities depends on a personal choice. Most young people in Europe are very liberal and driven by self-persuasion. Therefore, individualism is part and parcel of volunteering idealism in Europe.

Secularization also contributes to volunteering in Europe. The European society is largely secular and liberal. Traditional societal norms have been disregarded in the modern Europe. In the past centuries, volunteering was considered as a communal factor and people would embrace

⁶ Inglehart, Ronald . Modernization and Volunteering . In: P . Dekker, L .Halman L . (eds), "*The Values of Volunteering. Cross-Cultural Perspectives.*" , p. 55–70.

⁷ Storm, I., "*Religion, inclusive individualism, and volunteering in Europe*", p. 213-229

it for good of the good of the community⁸. Securitization is now widespread and most people especially the young are embracing liberal policies. People prioritize their civil liberties than community interests.

Value change or capitalism is another factor which has influenced volunteering in Europe. Volunteering idealism corresponds to the capitalism ideologies of the society⁹. Although this concept is not prevalent in the ex-communist countries such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary, it is very widespread in Western Europe¹⁰. In the United Kingdom, France, and Spain, communism affects almost every aspect of the society. It is all about the value change and nothing else. If it is not making profit, then it is useless. Volunteering in Europe has been designed to offer some forms of benefits to the volunteer. Organization requiring volunteers promise stipends and other benefits to attract many people. In various cases, young people are promised employment opportunities at the end of their volunteering period.

European Voluntary Service

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a project by the European Union that targets young people of between 17-30 years to engage in voluntary services. The recruited youths are stationed in another country other than their country of origin unless in exceptional circumstances. The areas include environment, International Mobility; children welfare, social care for the elderly, the disabled and the immigrants culture, young people or the elderly, arts, sports, media and communications, environmental protection and education heritage, rural development and development cooperation, education, and public health. EVS project involves three partners namely the volunteer, sending organization, and the host organization¹¹. EVS is a non-profit programme offered by the European Union and the participants are expected not to expect direct benefits while undertaking their respective assignments. The volunteering period is

⁸ Plagnol, A.C. and Huppert, F.A., “*Happy to help? Exploring the factors associated with variations in rates of volunteering across Europe*”. p. 157-176.

⁹ De Wit, A., Mensink, W., Einarsson, T., & Bekkers, R. “*Beyond service production: Volunteering for social innovation*” pp.11-17.

¹⁰ Voicu, B. and Voicu, M., “*Volunteers and volunteering in Central and Eastern Europe*”. pp.539-563

¹¹ Badham, B. & Wade, H. “*Hear by Right: Standards Framework for the Active Involvement of Children and Young People*.” Leicester: National Youth Agency and Local Government Association. p. 17-35.

set at a maximum of 12 months. The design of the EVS project has integrated all the factors that influence volunteering ideologies in Europe. Democracy, individualization, secularization, and value change are the determinants that dictate how EVS is structured and implemented. The project seeks to revamp the culture of volunteerism which has been in the decline in the past decade.

Europe is a highly developed continent according to the world standards. The continent has got all the experts and professionals in nearly every field. Most countries in Europe can also afford to hire any services they need at the market price. European countries have got strong economies thanks to the industrialization. An overview of the European economic situation suggests that the region does not need volunteers. However, it is necessary to nurture and run volunteering services to secure the future of the continent¹². It is important to prepare young people to become responsible for smooth generational transition. In order to enhance skills and maintain a pool of experienced professionals, civil activities such as volunteering must be properly strategized.

The fact that Europe is a developed region does not mean that the continent has no poor people. There are still disadvantaged populations in almost all European countries. These people need services that they cannot afford to pay for. In case of emergencies such as fire outbreak, flood, and earthquakes, volunteering organizations are among the first teams to respond. Community based disaster organizations are mostly run by the volunteers. It is critical to build the human capacity by inviting the youth to hone their skills through volunteering.

European Voluntary Service provides a platform for the young people in Europe to volunteer their services in different capacities. EVS project has remodeled voluntarism according to the European ideologies. Participants travelling expenses are catered for by the European Commission. Since EVS gives the participants a chance to travel abroad, this has attracted many young people into the project. The project has been secularized to attract the liberal youths into the system. The European Commission has ensured that ideologies such as liberalism and individuals have been incorporated into the project to appeal to the young people.

¹² Miller, N., Bhowmik, S., Ezinwa, M., Yang, T., Schrock, S., Bitzel, D. and McGuire, M.J., “*The Relationship Between Safety Culture and Voluntary Event Reporting in a Large Regional Ambulatory Care Group*” p. 23-24.

Although the EVS is a non-profit initiative, the European capitalism ideologies have been integrated into the project. In the contemporary Europe, people look at the end value rather than the service to the community. Young people examine whether the project is going to benefit them or not. EVS provides benefits such as health insurance, housing facility, and some various stipends. The benefits are not competitive but they are attractive to the youth people. Capitalization of the volunteering services is a widespread practice across Europe especially in the Western parts. Participants are also promised of possible employment opportunities upon completion of the programme. The employment is not guaranteed but a high number of volunteers end up securing employment contracts with other organization.

Youth Work

The European Union and the Erasmus plus programme are some of the initiatives which seek to improve the quality of education and training among the young people in Europe. The Erasmus Plus programmes funds youth exchange programmes in different European countries¹³. Young people are given the opportunity to meet their colleagues from different countries as well as carrying out activities based on the themes that are relevant to them. The program also supports young workers initiatives by conducting seminars, training packages, networking events, study visits, and job shadowing abroad. This programme focuses at improving the quality of youth work force across the continent and is aiming at developing the skills and providing the youth with a platform where they can network with others including probable employers.

The EVS programme, in conjunction with the Erasmus Plus programme, provides the young people with a chance to nurture their talents and prepare them for future work experience.¹⁴ Through the exchange programmes abroad, youths are able to develop their skills according to their respective expertise. Young people get the chance to acquire the appropriate skills through mentorship and career guidance. Some get the chance to secure lucrative jobs abroad upon completion of the program.

¹³ Bohn I. and Stallmann L *The socioeconomic scope of youth work in Europe – Final report, a study commissioned by the Youth Partnership*. p. 25-42.

¹⁴ Coussée F. “*The relevance of youth work’s history*”, Verschelden G. et al. (eds), “*The history of youth work in Europe – Relevance for today’s youth work policy*” p. 55-74.

Youth work is a tradition which has been in practice in Europe for decades. The EVS programme and Erasmus plus programme provide the working opportunities for the youth through internships and volunteering. European youths are eligible to volunteer and work in any European nation provided that they meet the requirements. However, the future of the EVS programme and the Erasmus Plus programme is uncertain for the United Kingdom students thanks to the Brexit. Since Britain pooled out of the European Union, they are expected to withdraw from all the programmes and projects associated with the EU. It is not yet clear on how the withdrawal will affect the British youth work and volunteering activities.

EVS - From Theory to Practice

Introduction

The European Voluntary Service that was conducted in Greece elicited mixed reactions among the participants. According to the interviews that were carried out, participants are generally happy about the programme but some had reservations on things they would like to be reformed. The participants agree that youth work is a great initiative that seeks to revolutionize the European work force. Most European youths dream of working and integrating with their colleagues from other countries. The EVS and the Erasmus plus programme gives the young people a chance to volunteer their services abroad¹⁵. The unpaid program impacts the lives of the youth by enhancing their skills and giving them a platform to mingle with people from other cultures. The supervisors are friendly and motivative thus providing a conducive environment for skill development. Participants agree that the EVS programme has transformed their lives and they are looking forward for more challenging tasks. However, the participants are skeptical about the future of the EVS program. Following the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, some participants are worried that the future of the EVS programme is bleak. The United Kingdom and particularly England was a significant member of the European Union.

¹⁵ European Commission “*Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*”, http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf. pp. 5-25.

The EU would weaken in the absence of England thus causing a domino effect to all the EU funded programmes such as the EVS and the Erasmus plus programme.

The Design of the EVS Programme

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a European Union funded programme that seeks to develop skills among the young people as well as providing them with a platform to encounter the real industrial experience. EVS is an unpaid programme although the program caters for travel and medical expenses of the participants during the course of the initiative. Any youth from the European Commission member states is eligible to take part in the program. The participants are provided with an opportunity to volunteer their services abroad. Although Europe is a highly industrialized continent according to the world standards, the rate of industrialization is not uniform across the region. Countries such as Greece are still struggling to stabilize their economies thus they require more voluntary work¹⁶. According to some of the participants, they were happy to take part in an EVS project in Greece since they believed that they will contribute in the country's development. The interviewees believe that Europe can further and maintain its status through programmes such as EVS and Erasmus plus programme.

EVS and Everyday Life

This year's EVS destination was in Greece, a country which has concrete historical significance not only in Europe but also to the whole world. When European history is being narrated, Greece features prominently. Many young people in Europe look forward to visit Greece some day and the EVS has handed them an opportunity to transfer their dreams to reality. The selected participants are hoping for a life changing experience in their ongoing mission. They already had a glimpse of Greece lifestyle thanks to the information available in the internet. The lifestyle in Greece is competently different from other European countries. The participants state that they anticipated to acquire some aspects of the Greek lifestyle. In Greece, people

¹⁶ De Wit, A., Mensink, W., Einarsson, T., & Bekkers, R. "*Beyond service production: Volunteering for social innovation*", pp. 11-17.

concentrate on positive things and give less attention to negativity. This is contrary to situation in the United Kingdom and some other European countries where people focus on negativity. The town which hosted the EVS programme has a small population that is well connected. The Greek culture dictates people to focus on the wellbeing of their families and the society at large. The environment is very friendly and welcoming to everyone irrespective of their cultural background. The EVS participants are expected to bond well with the hosting community as well learning about their lifestyle. The locals are always ready to help, thus the EVS participants are at a better position to enjoy their everyday life. Therefore, it is evident that the participant enjoyed their free time while in Greece.

Motto- EVS Changes Lives

To determine whether the motto “EVS changes lives” has lived up to its expectations, it is appropriate to ask people who have gone through the process. According to the interviews conducted on a cross section of participants, it is true to say that the EVS programme has transformed the participants’ lives. Going abroad to live there is an experience many young people look forward to encounter. The EVS programme has proven that it can provide a platform for the European youth to live abroad and volunteer their services for a specific period while being uninterrupted¹⁷. Due to the economic limitations, many young people are not able to afford international travel budgets. The EVS invite the youth to apply for this service and qualified are invited to take part in the programme. Apart from giving the youths a chance to travel and work abroad, their travelling costs and medical insurance is covered by the program. Many young people believe that they have high chances of becoming successful in foreign countries than in their respective nations. The EVS programme gives them an opportunity to explore that dream.

Miss Rachel Cooke confirmed that the EVS program has changed his life. He also acknowledged that his colleagues have shared the same sentiments. Change of environment is a very important factor for young people. They like trying and venturing into new things since they believe that it is only through testing the waters that you can learn about its depth. The EVS programme enables a participant to broaden their horizons and widening their perspective

¹⁷ Kalamata, G., 2018. *Organizational Culture, Justice, Equality and Change in Youth Organizations*: The success story of the non-governmental organization' System and G'. pp. 15-55.

concerning work. The participants are able to share ideas, learn about other peoples' cultures as well as learning about the significance of volunteering. The participant lives and work in another country for an extended duration of time. This is a rare experience that can come only once in a lifetime. The participants gather knowledge, share and gain critical life skills. They are guided and taught about how to become successful in their respective career. Since this a lifetime moment, the participants are urged to focus and prepare for future greatness. Upon the completion of the program, the EVS participants are able to think outside the box.

The two interviewees agree that the EVS programme's motto is consistent with the activities that are carried out during the project. The participant is of the opinion that the programme has made him to become independent since he is now able to do some things for himself. While undergoing the project, the participant is taught about critical life skills such as cooking, shopping and cleaning. Some of the participants join this program while completely dependent but they are transformed into independent, responsible and dependable individuals. When they have a project that they have to be working on or an ongoing one, they are offered the much-needed guidance and assistance to perfection. For many of them, the experience is more than developing youth work, it also touristic. Besides working and developing their skills, the participants are taken on tours during their free time. The experience is breathtaking that some participants wish to extend their stay.

The EVS programme enables the participants to meet new people and make new friends¹⁸. Interacting with new people is one of the ways one can learn about new things. Strangers can be a blessing to one's life. You get to learn about their backgrounds and what make their respective backgrounds. Through challenging one another, the participants are able to step out of their comfort zones and work towards their dreams. The participants are also taught about the value of free work. They got to know about the importance of investing for the future. Therefore, it is evident that the EVS is a life changing opportunity.

The project that was conducted in Greece was successful, transformative, and exemplary. The participants were able to learn about the host country and what makes it different from other European nations. Having a firsthand experience is an example of real transformation. The participants were motivated by how Greeks do things. The six months in Greece was enough for

¹⁸Coussée F. "The relevance of youth work's history", Verschelden G. et al. (eds), "The history of youth work in Europe – Relevance for today's youth work policy" pp. 55-74.

the participants to acquire the necessary skills that are critical in the job market. The experience and the knowledge gained was definitely valuable. During the program, the participants are empowered irrespective of race, ethnic, or gender biases¹⁹. They are all treated as equal partners and they encouraged to instill the same value in their future endeavors. The motto “EVS changes lives” is a true slogan owing to the reports from the participants. The EVS participants agree that the programme has transformed their lives and they are now looking forward to implement what they learnt during the volunteering tenure.

Volunteer-Mentor Relationship

All volunteering projects require mentors who are tasked with motivating, guiding, and supervising volunteers. Volunteers perform better when they have good and understanding mentors. The roles of the mentors include to work closely with volunteers in every task assigned. They are obligated to design the road map of the project as well as assessing the progress of the programme. They are also required to provide motivation and correct the mistakes by suggesting timely alternatives. The mentor is the link between the participants and the organizers of the program. In this case, the mentors are the bridge between the EVS management, the European Union, and the volunteers. The mentor should win the trust of the volunteer to facilitate seamless operations. For volunteers to work comfortably, they must have a friendly and an understanding volunteer. At the beginning of the EVS programme, each and every participant is assigned a mentor. One mentor can serve various volunteers at a given time. A good working relationship is required between the mentor and a volunteer.

The EVS participants agree that the mentors that were assigned were competent and up to the task throughout the programme. One volunteer says that his mentor was a blessing to his life. Since the first day of the project, the mentor was always available to guide him. The mentor would propose sound ideas that would always lead to the successful completion of every project. Although some projects were complex in nature, the mentor would simplify things in order to make them look so easy. The volunteer also acknowledges the contributions of other mentors. He

¹⁹ Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. pp. 5-50

says that the mentors had a formidable working plan and everything moved smoothly each time a new mentor took over the project.

The mentors would advise the participants on what needs to be done and the manner in which the task should be carried out. The volunteer says that his mentor would ask him about whether they are having enough food and all other necessities. The mentors ensured that the volunteers are hosted in good apartments and have adequate supply of food, water, and other useful resources. The mentors were also instrumental in ensuring that the volunteers cope up with the daily life. To be subjected into friendly conditions that exposed them to the Greek culture. Since one of the European Union objectives is to enhance cultural integration and diffusion, the mentors established strategies that suggested that every culture is appreciated. The mentors encouraged the volunteers to respect, appreciate, and embrace the cultures of one another. Therefore, it is evident that the mentors played a very crucial role in the EVS programme.

Cultural Perspective/ Interactions

There is a European culture and there is Greek culture, these two aspects are different yet dependent of each another. When the European history is documented, the Greek history deserves to be accorded as a whole chapter. The Greek contribution to the European culture and history is enormous²⁰. The ancient Greece is regarded as the genesis of the European civilization. When other European societies were still practicing stone-age cultures, the Greeks had already established organized communities which later transformed to a government system. The system of government would be replicated across Europe hundreds of centuries later. This season's EVS programme was conducted in Greece, the cradle of European civilization. The volunteers who participated in the interview are aware of the Greek culture and their contribution to the modernization of Europe.

Miss Cooke acknowledges the historical significance of Greece. She claimed that the Greek culture and history is intertwined to that of Europe. She said that the Greek culture is the

²⁰ Callens, M.S. and Meuleman, B., "*Do integration policies relate to economic and cultural threat perceptions? A comparative study in Europe*". pp.367-391

foundation of the European lifestyle. It is the pillar of the western civilization. The democratic system of governance that is currently practiced across Europe has its origin in ancient Greece. Fields such as architecture, music, philosophy, literature, poetry, art, and simple medicine were developed in the ancient Greece. She also recognizes that the European languages were influenced by the Greek linguistics. The Greeks value their history and culture. Although they are friendly and welcoming, they do not tolerate anyone who undermines their culture. The EVS participants are aware of this fact. They were ready to learn and embrace the Greek culture.

Miss Rachael Cooke is very knowledgeable about the historical and contemporary Greece. She is confident that the EVS programme is very crucial for integration purposes. She based her arguments on a research which was conducted in 2005 indicating that the Greeks feel more attached to their country than Europe. About 97% of Greek nationals are proud of being Greeks while on the other hand, only 44% of Greeks feel attached to Europe. These statistics can help to determine why Greeks do not want to be associated with Europe. Conducting the EVS programme in Greece has persuaded the Greeks that they are a core part of the European continent. In order to enhance cultural integration in Europe, people need to work together. Greek youths should be enrolled in the EVS programme and taken to other countries. Similarly, more EVS projects should be conducted in Greece to boost the Greek confidence. They need to feel that they are valued and respected. While Greeks are allowed to celebrate their Greek identity, they should also be persuaded to embrace other cultures.

She thinks that Greek unattachment with Europe was greatly fueled by the financial crisis. She argues that Greeks feel that the rest of Europe sidelined them and now it should be the time to correct those mistakes. Most Greeks still regard the European Union as a positive initiative thus the commission should take advantage of that. The interviewee proposes that the European Union can conduct several projects in Europe to facilitate integration processes. Programmes such as EVS can change the general perception of the Greeks and others.

European Integration Project

European integration project is an initiative that seeks to harmonize industrial, political, economic, legal, social and cultural practices across Europe²¹. The integration process is implemented through policies formulated by the European Union. The European Union is the body which is mandated with promoting the European interests in the global arena. The EU has initiated several projects in Europe since its inception. One of the projects that have gained momentum in Europe is youth work initiative. Youth work is a project which is run under the EVS programme. The nonprofit EVS projects bring European youths together thus enhancing cultural, economic, and political integration. The European Union is keen to utilize the EVS programme and Erasmus plus programme to spearhead European integration initiatives²². The conducted EVS project in Greece has shown positive impact towards integrating Europe.

Miss Cooke views the European integration project as a viable initiative that seeks to transform Europe as a single cultural, political, and economic federation. Although the integration plan seems vibrant, she is skeptical that there are some challenges that need to be addressed before the full integration is realized. She argues that all European are developed at the same rate thus uniform policies cannot be implemented across the continent. It is impossible to impose first world policies on middle income economies. For instance, Greece is a middle-class economy thus its needs some tailor-made policies for its economic growth. It is therefore prudent to propose different integration policies for some time now. However, the EVS programme can be applied across the board. It is one of the probable steps that can be used to integrate and revolutionize Europe.

The European governments need to prioritize the interests of their citizens. Most European countries have been strategizing liberal immigration policies that have only worked against their own citizens. EVS has nurtured many talents and skills thus it appropriate to ensure that the participants secure job opportunities upon completion. The EVS participants should be given first priority in any country and not be excluded as secondary option when there are employment opportunities. If the EVS participants are given the first priority, then the integration process will be seamless.

²¹ Molle, W., "*The economics of European integration: theory, practice, policy.*", pp. 1-25.

²² Tsoukalis, L., "*The politics and economics of European monetary integration*" pp. 5-34 .

Mr. Simon Ahearne believes that Europe is a continent with a solid cultural identity. However, he is upholding the need to preserve and celebrate individual cultures. The interviewee argues that it is wrong to threaten other people's cultural and thus people should learn to live in harmony. He is applauding the European Union integration project, especially the youth work programmes such as EVS and Erasmus plus. He believes that the EVS programme will facilitate the European integration objectives. When people from different cultures meet, they get a chance to interact thus promoting the European integration agenda.

The Future of the EVS Programme

The EVS programme has revolutionized the way youth work and volunteering initiatives are handled in Europe. The European member states have been effectively cooperating in recruiting the EVS participants. However, things are really changing and one cannot tell about the future of the EVS programme. Some people argue that the EVS is here to stay while some believe that the programme will collapse due to changing dynamics. Ireland is an example of a country which is currently embracing radical changes in almost all spheres of life. Mr. Ahearne thinks that the future of the EVS programme looks bleak. He acknowledges that the EVS programme has transformed him thus he would like for it to stay as such. However, he is sceptic about the future of the initiative. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union is likely to negatively impact the future of the EVS. On the other hand, Miss Rachael Cooke is optimistic that the EVS will stand the test time. She believes that the project is laid on strong foundation thus it will remain firm despite of the circumstances and challenges.

The View of the Mentor

The importance of EVS for the organization

The importance of the European Voluntary Service for the organization has been clear at all levels throughout the period of the programme's conduction. The organization had the opportunity to further highlight and further promote its actions in the local community. In

addition, the volunteer participation in European youth exchange programmes, local school's visits to the organization's premises, the planning and implementation of actions such as the "playhouse" were quite helpful for the organization and there were positive results to both the NGO and also to the volunteers themselves. The ideas of volunteers coming from a different cultural background assisted the organization by introducing innovative ways that can influence the way of working and the adoption of new methods and techniques. The volunteers contributed to the organization with their talents and ideas on practical issues, decorating the facilities of the organization and producing useful material for the organization's operation. New ideas are an inspiration for the organization and an incentive for further more and greater efforts.

The importance of EVS to the volunteers

The main aims of EVS is to contribute to the development of the volunteers' personalities, skills, capabilities and knowledge. By exposing them into new experiences and opportunities that are being offered through the programme they are able to develop supportive relationships with significant adults outside of their known environment. The contribution of EVS to the volunteers is the fact that they have the opportunity of being in a new working environment and living at a different country other than their own. They learn to collaborate for a common purpose with volunteers and youth workers from other countries who speak different languages, have different experiences, way of thinking and conduction of work. They are inspired by a different working environment, as they are facing a completely different work-system than they are used to with a different mentality too. Contact with city dwellers and the experience of living in another country are another important life experience as they get to learn and experience a new and completely different culture and a different lifestyle than their own.

Role of the mentor

The role of the mentor is considered to be an important part of the daily life of the volunteers. In particular, the role of a mentor is to work with the volunteers in whatever actions that have been organized, providing them with useful directions, assistance at any stages and of course motivation that is necessary for the successful implementation. The mentor is the

intermediary link between the volunteers and the organization. He is the person who has to win the trust of the volunteers so that they may feel and become fully comfortable and be able to express any problem or dissatisfaction, or even be able to do so with new idea or thought that they may have without restraining themselves. Another role is the integration of volunteers into the daily life of the city, local community and society. As mentioned before, it is important for them to spend enough time by walking around the city and getting acquainted with other people, visit different places of sightseeing and shopping, feel and experience what their new environment has to offer to them. In that way, volunteers are capable of becoming more independent in their movements in this new environment and they also eventually feel part of the local community, while at the same time widening their social circles.

Mentor's development

The mentor believes that the established relationship with the volunteers reached the point of being able to call as her new friends. The mentor's role has not stayed on typical level as the relationship that has been developed with the volunteers is that of true friendship. The mentor has become more confident about herself, becoming more productive, creative and active. In addition, her daily engagement with the volunteers has been providing with new insights as they discuss about new things, share thoughts, reflections and experiences. In addition, the mentor has acquired new working methods that she has developed herself and is more capable when interacting and coming into contact with everyone's interests and talents. Getting acquainted with their culture and culture has been proven to be an additional benefit for the mentor.

The intercultural dimension of EVS

The intercultural nature of EVS is one of the key features of the program. The integration of different cultures into another is an example of the intercultural dimension of the program. Volunteers must work with volunteers in the host country, as well as with the society of the city and the country in general. Collaborating with people with different cultural and social backgrounds is an important example of interculturalism and is something that happens most of

all in EVS programs. This project has proven that when different peoples join together for a common goal the results can be astonishingly unique.

Social Integration of volunteers

One of the primary goals was to integrate volunteers into the new social environment. This is why a lot of time has been spent, especially in the first days of walks and actions that would help volunteers to get to know new people, the city and the life in it. In addition to daily excursions to the city, nights of movie screenings were organized on the site, excursions outside the city, picnics, cycling in the town and the surrounding villages and mountain hiking. Important was the fact that volunteers participated in the organization and promotion of these actions. I judge my contribution to this piece, especially important as I was the one who had a daily relationship with volunteers, especially in the early months. I believe that their integration has been greatly accomplished since they can now move on their own in the city, visit shops, trade with other people, and have a social circle with which they can engage in the day.

Role of the Coordinator

The role of the coordinator in an EVS project is very crucial as it is the person who is responsible of organizing all of the bureaucratic and logistical procedures by submitting the application and consequentially bears the financial and administrative responsibility for the entire project towards the National Agency. He builds a bridge between the hosting and sending organization accordingly by coordinating the project in cooperation between them and has a role of opening a call of recruiting volunteers to join a project. Selecting volunteers is a very crucial and strict process thus, he is the person who is always in contact with the coordinator of the other part as there is always a hosting and sending organization. Moreover, the coordinator is in charge of the projects that are going to take place during an EVS's period, helping and supporting the volunteers and the mentors, distributing the roles and responsibilities and also in hierarchical terms is the one with the highest responsibility for the implementation and success of an EVS project. Additional responsibilities of the coordinator are the insurance of the volunteers' health

which is being done through the acquiring of the European Health Insurance Card and also the providence of support during the learning process, also called by its official name Youthpass process which is a recognition that during the completion of the programme that is being certified through the issuing of a Youthpass Certificate that is being provided to the volunteers.

Conclusions

The EVS programme has revolutionized the manner in which volunteering is conducted in Europe. Most young people in Europe dream of working abroad. The EVS programme fulfills that dream through its platform. Upon completion, participants have higher chances of securing employment opportunities with the EVS partners such as the European Union and other organizations. Although securing an opportunity upon completion of the project is not guaranteed, the participants become equipped with the necessary skills that make them dependable, responsible, independent, active European citizens.

The European Union has utilized the EVS programme to enhance cultural, political, and economic integration in Europe. When volunteers are in foreign countries they get an opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds. They also get a chance to learn about the cultures of the host country. For instance, the participants who took part in the EVS project in Greece learned about the country's culture. The EVS programme does not discriminate on cultural, national, or racial grounds. It has been proven that the participants are treated equally irrespective of their nationality or cultural backgrounds.

The EVS participants are assigned to mentors who are drawn from diverse professional backgrounds which proves that it assists the participants to develop their skills within the areas of their specializations but also beyond those too. Young people need mentorship and guidance and that is what the EVS programme provides them with as they are being taught about useful soft skills that will help them in today's daily life.

This paper has explained and proves how the EVS has transformed the lives of the participants in line with the programme's vision "*EVS Changes Lives*". Volunteers who participated in the EVS project in Greece have confirmed that it has changed their lives and

widely broaden their perspectives regarding work and professional life accordingly. The participants are able to venture into new fields that seemed impossible before. The EVS programme candidly broadens the volunteer's horizons as well as challenging them to think big. The EVS prepares the participants to tackle life challenges while chasing their dreams. Therefore, the EVS programme is a lifetime opportunity that transforms volunteers' lives for the better and is something that all young people today should consider of applying to.

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