

POLITICS IN VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Today, in this day and age, in a world divided more than ever, we are facing crucial changes in our society and volunteering is more important than ever. Like it or not politics is everywhere. It is a part of our daily lives, we cannot escape it even if really want to. Especially these days. So what does that mean for voluntary service? It means a lot. It creates opportunities for dialogue, it creates discussions, exchange of ideas, bringing cultures closer together, expanding our knowledge and horizons, all of that and more while doing the simplest possible thing you can do, helping. Helping your civil society in creating better environment for everybody.

Maybe I sound a bit too enthusiastic or even, may I dare to say, dramatic (wait till you get to the second part), but it is really like that. It is a system that functions as a part of politics, good politics, peace building politics. The more imperfect the politics is the more work, motivation and importance volunteering has. Volunteering is in some way by definition politics as well; but I would like to add couple of things. I would like to say that volunteering by the definition of politics is the process of making decisions and impact that apply to members of society through giving back, while learning and gaining new skills.

For Aristotle, democracy is not the best form of government. Rule in a democracy is for and by the people named in the government type. In a democracy, rule is by and for the needy. Unfortunately we live in a society where what's left of democracy is put in question day by day. In some parts of the world it's disappearing or it's not there at all and it's really complicated to get a grip of the solution. That's why it is important to start from yourself. Changing yourself will help you change the world. I know this is harsher in reality than it is on the paper and, yes, I know it sounds like those cliché-quotes you read on your mother's facebook account about basic topics like gardening while trying to block her from ruining your internet reputation, but actually it is true.

Couple of years ago I started from myself. I started volunteering in organisation that deals with youth development in my hometown in Bosnia (name of the organisation is Svitac/Firefly, it's pretty cool check it out) and you can only imagine what kind of politics we were dealing with (and still do) on a daily basis but that only gave us more inspiration to rebel against injustice (for those who don't know where Bosnia is google it, we almost won Eurovi-

sion once, and if you want to know what kind of political structure do we have I suggest any kind of painkillers with alcohol before going any further. This commercial is sponsored by Xanax;). Throughout my work in Svitac I found about volunteering possibilities in Germany, I applied and I got a chance to be a part of an organisation that deals with so many political issues. Friedenskreis Halle e.V. is focused on peace-building and creating better opportunities for anybody who is marginalized in a civil society that tends to be cruel and unfair. Impact of Friedenskreis Halle e.V. is surtenly visible and so is the politics they promote. It is a politics of equality, acceptance, tolerance, unity, creativness, solidarity and most importantly peace. How peaceful the time we live in is that's up to you to debate. Volunteering and politics go together. They are part of each other. It is a way of maintaining peace through activities that include everyone. As a volunteer I am also part of the politics; volunteering politics, politics of organisation I volunteer for and politics of country that I live in. There are rules and regulations that everyone needs to follow. Societies share a common value of people helping each other. Not only do volunteer acts assist others, but they also benefit the volunteering individual on a personal level. Despite having similar objectives, tension can arise between volunteers and state-provided services. In order to reduce this tension, most countries develop policies and enact legislation to clarify the roles and relationships among governmental stakeholders and their voluntary counterparts. This regulation identifies and allocates the necessary legal, social, administrative, and financial support of each party. This is particularly necessary when some voluntary activities are seen as a challenge to the authority of the state. Volunteering that benefits society but challenges unfairness of authority is crucial in shaping future politics. Volunteer that challenges him/her-self is a benefit for society.

Of course like in every aspect of life there are positive and negative things. Politics of voluntary services is not exception at all. Some international volunteer organisations define their primary mission as being altruistic: to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. When these organisations work in partnership with governments results can be impressive. However, when some organisations or individual First World governments support the work of volunteer groups, there can be questions as to whether the organisations' or governments' real motives are help for poor (for example). Instead, a focus on creating wealth for some of the poor or developing policies intended to benefit the donor states is sometimes reported. Many low-income countries' economies suffer from industrialization without prosperity and investment without growth. One rea-

son for this is that development assistance guides many Third World governments to pursue development policies that have been unproductive; some of these policies have been so destructive that the economies could not have been sustained without outside support (Khm! Bosnia).

Indeed, some offers of aid have distorted the general spirit of volunteering, treating local voluntary action as contributions in kind, for example, existing conditions requiring the modification of local people's behavior in order for them to earn the right to donors' charity. This can be seen as patronizing and offensive to the recipients because the aid only serves the policy goals of the donors rather than the needs of the recipients (marginalized groups of civil society). Based on a case study in China, Xu and Ngai (2011) revealed that volunteerism can be able to work towards the development of civil society in the developing countries. The researchers developed a "Moral Resources and Political Capital" approach to examine the contributions of volunteerism in promoting the civil society. Moral resource means the available morals could be chosen by NGOs. Political capital means the capital that will improve or enhance the NGOs' status, possession or access in the existing political system. Like I stated before there are rules and regulations. When they stop functioning as they should or when they are being used and mistreated by privileged minority it's time to act in the best reasoning of our moral compass.

Couple of years ago I started from myself and my journey is far from over. So here I am, in this surprisingly good city of Halle, on a brink of writing yet another bad joke involving making fun of clichés, my essay was due to yesterday and I'm obviously late and I'm writing it hoping it'll at least get somebody thinking about possibilities volunteerism has to offer and how politics as a part of such system works.