

ALTRUISM, TRUST AND VOLUNTEERING

Răzvan-Lucian ANDRONIC

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences Brasov, Spiru Haret University
(pp.bv.razvan.andronic@spiruharet.ro)

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Abstract: *The paper presents an exploration of the relationships that exist between the concepts of altruism (as a form of a rather deviant behavior in Western societies), trust (concept which is closely related to the concept of "social capital") and volunteering (social practice by which altruism is promoted and contributes to the development of trust).*

Keywords: *altruism, volunteering, trust.*

1. ALTRUISM WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL DIMENSION

Nowadays, the concept of altruism rises keenly in the Western society 'based on the individual interest and priority', with a image of everyday behaviors outlined in selfish shades (Moscovici, 1994/1998, 61-62). Under these circumstances, the relationships between two people - between parents and children, teachers and students, so among people who care for each other – are marked by the uncertainty that falls upon the selfish or altruistic aspect of the other person's feelings or actions. Sometimes it gets so far as to question the nature of their actions and feelings.

In the European cultural dimension, where selfishness is accepted and altruism is rather being seen as deviance, the debate on the origins of altruism has already become an ancient one in the field of sciences on man. Auguste Comte described (in 1875) two types of helping behaviour based on different motivations: the selfish type ('the form of helping behaviour where the ultimate goal of those who offer it is to increase their own welfare') and the altruistic type ('the form of helping behaviour where the ultimate goal of those who offer it is to enhance the welfare of the other without getting anything in return') (Franzoi 1996, 476).

Starting from this, Serge Moscovici (1994/1998, 65-70) distinguishes three forms of altruism:

1) participatory altruism ('altruism without the other'), which doesn't address a specific individual, but the community as a whole. In this case 'the self and the other are not really distinct' but replace each other, and constantly change position;

2) fiduciary altruism - intended to support the relationship between people and to reduce the distance between them. The emergence of this form of altruism is correlated with the degree of trust or distrust that individuals perceive or want to establish in their relationship;

3) normative altruism - based on the social representations of helping behaviours (classifications of help that has to be offered or the sacrifices that we have to consent to).

However, the existence of altruism has been challenged by both philosophers (under the 'hedonic paradox', which states that even the least selfish acts of an individual can produce a form of reward for that matter) and psychologists (especially those of behaviorist orientation, who categorically reject the idea that there is a behavior that can occur repeatedly without any form of reward).

2. EMOTIONS AND HELP

In general, people who experience positive emotions show an accentuated trend of helping others, a trend that has multiple explanations: the positive emotional state leads to a more generous evaluation of personal resources (which may be involved in the intervention itself), correlates with a high level of attention to social factors, increases the confidence of the person concerned, including in terms of their ability to help others.

There are also negative emotions that may favor the emergence of pro-social behaviours, which in this case are motivated by the need to improve the emotional state of the person who offers help ('selfish' altruism) - according to the model of eliminating the emotional state (Cialdini, 1981). In this context, Wilhemina Wosinska (2004/2005, 262) stated that this model only works with negative emotions whose impact on their provisions lies in our power to change.

3. SOCIAL CAPITAL, TRUST AND VOLUNTEERING

Petre Ilut (2009, 120) describes the relations of the 'social capital' concept with a number of other concepts it is strongly associated with: 'sociability', 'cohesion', 'solidarity', 'collective action', 'social networking', 'social efficiency' ('with some of them it intersects and almost overlaps'), focusing on the relationship with the concept of 'trust': 'Of all, however, more obvious seems to be the concept of «trust», which received multiple theoretical developments and it was very closely linked, in addition to «social capital», to concepts such as «love», «friendship», «social networking», «self», «social structure», «power», «time», «information», «forgiveness», «reconciliation»' (Ilut 2009, 120).

In a reference work dedicated to the concept of trust, Barbara A. Misztal (1996, 2) emphasized that 'the notion of trust ' is used increasingly more often by researchers in an attempt to explain the differences in levels of cooperation achieved in different social and political backgrounds. "

Regardless of the type of social capital, volunteering contributes to building trust in people (without which it wouldn't be possible to give and receive help disinterestedly), trust is seen as an essential form of social capital that contributes decisively to community development on long term closely related to the functioning of the democratic system.

Eleanor Brown and James M. Ferris (2007, 95) see social capital as an explanatory factor of individual generosity: when social capital is included in the 'equation of giving' direct influences of human capital (education) and religiosity decrease, suggesting that this factor has been underestimated so far and the investigation of social capital should be part of any approach of volunteering.

CONCLUSIONS

For the reasons described above, it can be said that the skills and abilities developed by volunteers prepare them for an active social and political life, providing them with information and valuable resources on active participation, access to networks to mobilize

community resources, trust, tolerance and skills for building consensus with others and especially the acquisition of a state of *empowerment* ('the capacity of a social actor to self-sustain, to control their living environment' - Sandu, 2005, 215). The absence of this state makes most people not to engage in civic and political life. As such, between volunteering and democratic behavior/ active citizenship there is a positive relationship, and volunteering represents a social practice that should be promoted in societies with a low level of trust between the different categories of social partners, such as the Romanian society.

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