

The Sustainable Framework of the Hellenic Red Cross Volunteering

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Abstract: Lifelong learning includes non-formal education, informal knowledge and subconscious learning. Adult learning is also a significant part of lifelong learning. Hellenic Red Cross trains volunteers who offer their work in several fields which can be related to sustainability pillars. This paper attempts to approach the Hellenic Red Cross Volunteers' education and action within a framework of sustainable development, revealing the interdependence and harmonious relationship among social well-being, improvement of the environment quality and economic growth.

Key words: Hellenic Red Cross, adult volunteers, service areas, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Lifelong learning is the continuous, voluntary and self-pursuing pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. It is one of the top political priorities, at both European and international level. Its formal definition by the European Union is as follows: "Every learning activity, which is undertaken throughout life, in order to improve knowledge, skills and resources, within a personal, social perspective and/or an employment-related perspective" [1].

In other words it is about the development of competences, knowledge and skills which ensure the citizen's participation in learning processes. It extends beyond formal learning, including initial and further education and training through formal, non-formal and informal learning environments. It reveals the meaning of a natural learning process and highlights the fact that learning takes place in different contexts and in different ways each time. It underlines learning proposals and encourages all citizens to take part in them. This is not about an alternative form of education.

It is a methodological principle related to the provision and participation in the knowledge society. Therefore, in addition to formal qualifications that have been acquired (e.g., degree, technical expertise), we need to constantly develop new skills through lifelong learning processes, such as communication, professionalism, innovation, initiative, critical thinking, deductive skills, collaboration and ability to develop effective solutions [2].

Adult Education is embedded in the field of Lifelong Learning or Lifelong Education, as one of the most important tools not only for finding employment, in-service professional development and changes of profession, but also for personal development, behavioral modification and individual self-determination. The term Adult Learning actually means any kind of systematic learning, which contributes to the individual's personal development, either in the form of completing their compulsory education or in the form of further training [3].

As interest in knowledge changes over time and each subject can be re-taught through new perspectives in all phases of life, adult education is nowadays emerging as continuous and repetitive.

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1.1 Hellenic Red Cross (HRC)

Hellenic Red Cross was founded on June 10, 1877 upon the decision of Queen Olga. Recognised immediately after that by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, it thus became a member of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which is the largest humanitarian network all over the world. It includes the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and National Associations which are active in 186 countries.

The history of the Movement actually begins in 1859. At the Battle of Solferino, Henry Dunant helped the wounded of the battle, by mobilizing the women of the village which was close to the battlefield. He then wrote a book entitled “Un souvenir de Solférino” (“Memories from Solferino”). In this book he proposed the creation of an army made by Volunteers. These volunteers should be considered as neutral during military operations and according to his proposal they will be marked by a universal identity emblem. Dunant believed that the sick or the wounded of the war should no longer be treated as soldiers. These people should be considered as neutral due to their weak position and medical assistance should be provided to them. Such services must be integrated into the ranks of all armies.

Dunant’s suggestions found huge appeal among the European community and they were supported by the General Guillaume Henry Dufour, Dr. Théodore Maunoir, Dr. Louis Appia and the Swiss aristocrat Gustavo Mouanier. On October 29, 1863, they held a diplomatic conference in the presence of 16 countries, during which the Red Cross was founded. A year later, 12 countries signed the Geneva Convention, and so far the Red Cross Movement has won the Nobel Peace Prize for four times.

In Greece, the Hellenic Red Cross, the largest non-governmental organization in the country, takes action based on Red Cross Volunteers and on the citizens’ immediate response, following the basic

principles of the Movement: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, volunteerism, unity and universality. It focuses on vulnerable groups and populations such as refugees, the elderly, the sick, the injured and people with financial problems. In peacetime, it relieves the victims of natural disasters and epidemics, collaborating with government agencies to provide humanitarian work. At the same time, during the war, the HRC supports the work of the Military Health Service and also supports war victims, civilians and prisoners of war. The HRC also takes action abroad according to the circumstances. More specifically it cooperates with the National Associations of other countries to send international aid [4].

1.2 Red Cross Volunteers’ Training

The study is based on a content analysis of the Hellenic Red Cross website. First the specific sectors of the volunteers’ choice of training and offer were identified by developing key words categories according to the similar points presented in the data from the HRC webpage [5]. Then the frequency of each category was calculated. In other words, this is the quantification of qualitative research data. Some limitations to the study must be offered at this point. First, our search was limited to the Greek-language website of HRC and second we did not analyze webpages of other voluntary groups in Greece in which there may be references on HRC volunteers.

2. Nursing Volunteers

Many volunteers support the work of the Nursing Department. Their contribution is important, as they have attended a special nursing course of 124 hours of theory and 80 hours of clinical practice. The data indicate that 25,000 people have been trained since the founding of the Hellenic Red Cross, as 3,000 to 3,500 people become volunteers each year.

Nursing Volunteers have offered a lot for many years both during peacetime and wartime. They follow

the principles of the Red Cross Movement, showing the necessary consistency and rising above themselves most of the times. They support the work of the Primary Health Care Service of the Nursing Department. The voluntary service provided in hospitals, asylums, special camps and nursing homes are supervised by health professionals of the Nursing Department. Their action is inside and outside the borders [6].

2.1 Social Welfare Assistance

Since 1964 the main aim of the Department of Social Welfare Assistance has been to provide social and healthcare services in accordance with the principles and ethics of Community Service. Social Workers, skilled professionals of different areas, as well as Social Welfare Volunteers are involved in these projects. The main objectives of the Department are the Volunteers' training in the sector of Social Welfare Assistance and the best use of this voluntary network.

Trained Volunteers support the work of the Social Services established across the country. These services play the role of social policy makers in the Region. Their staff are Social Workers. The Regional Social Services are active in the areas of attracting, educating and mobilizing volunteer groups, as well as meeting social needs and psychosocial support for individuals and families. They offer help in crisis situations, such as natural disasters and massive arrivals of population groups, organize special events and develop special programs to support vulnerable groups [7].

2.2 Volunteers Samaritans

The largest volunteer force of First Aid and Rescue in Greece, which was established in 1932, is the Hellenic Red Cross Volunteer Samaritans, Rescuers and Lifeguards. They take action immediately in cases of natural or other disasters, as well as in any situation of emergency. They provide First Aid services, Pre-Hospital Life Support, Search and Rescue Services, Lifeguarding, Prevention and Disaster Management.

Today Hellenic Red Cross is daily present assisting people through the Sections of Rescuers and Lifeguards with all the rescue vehicles and lifeboats of the HRC. It is actually a network of 4,500 active volunteers with an average age of 23 years.

Certified instructors by the German Red Cross offer a full learning training program. At the same time this Section informs and educates population on first aid issues and issues of rescuing, lifeguarding and disaster management. They have vehicles, fully equipped with the necessary medical and technical equipment to provide first aid, always in close collaboration with the Fire Brigade, the National Emergency Center, the Greek Police, the Port Authorities, the General Secretariat for Civil Protection the Greek Army and other relevant government bodies [8].

3. Hellenic Red Cross Youth Directorate

Hellenic Red Cross Youth Directorate was established during World War I, as a result of the spontaneous offer of young people for supporting children victims of the war, both in terms of moral and material support. In 1930 the Brussels International Conference recognized the Directorate of Youth as an integral part of the Red Cross. The activities of the Hellenic Red Cross Youth Directorate are related to social benefits, such as moral and material support for low-income and large families, support for children with special needs, orphaned or abandoned children, visits to nursing homes and assistance to those in need, providing stationery and equipment for schools in remote areas, support for needy families with clothing and food, collecting basic necessities to support populations affected by war or natural disasters and visits to orphanages, hospitals and other institutions.

There are also actions to protect human health and environment with a number of training seminars on prevention and drug treatment, smoking and AIDS, blood donation programs and registration of new blood donors, reforestation and projects on protection and preservation of the coastline. Moreover there are

actions to promote culture, such as arranging seminars and lectures in order to spread the Red Cross idea, organizing cultural events aimed at promoting friendship between Youth members, organizing various competitions, sports and excursions to historical and archaeological sites.

You can find the monthly magazine ‘Youth News’ on the website of HRC in the special section of Youth, with various topics concerning both the activities of the Hellenic Red Cross Youth and international actions. There is also information on Cultural Centers of the Hellenic Red Cross which can host social and cultural activities of all members of HRC and news on international relations, such as participation in international meetings and camps, not only in order to exchange ideas and views for the development of new programs, but also to create a spirit of friendship among young people from different countries.

Hellenic Red Cross Youth was honored as a member of the Youth Commission of the Federation ‘Commission de la Jeunesse’ with a four-year mandate from 1993 to 1997 and participated in important meetings of the Youth Commission of the IFRC. The organization of the 12th European Youth Conference in Athens (October 15-20, 1994) was also a very important event held by the Hellenic Red Cross Youth, as well as the organization of international competitions in literature, drawing contests, etc. [9].

3.1 Adult Volunteers

According to the information mentioned above Hellenic Red Cross Adult Volunteers are trained and offer their service on the following sectors: 1) Emergency Medical Treatment, 2) Primary Health Care, 3) Lifeguard, 4) Social Welfare, 5) Search and Rescue, 6). Prevention and Management of Natural Disasters - Sustainable Environment, 7) Culture and Sports, 8) International Relations.

It appears that the first three of the above categories could be merged into the wider concept of Health. Specifically, we will have the following categories of

Adult Volunteer offering. The Table 1 shows how many of the four voluntary corps of the HRC correspond to each sector as well as the participation rates in the following six sectors, taking into account the overlaps, as all voluntary corps are related to more than one sectors.

3.2 Relating Sustainable Development to Hellenic Red Cross Volunteering

The concept of sustainability is highlighted in the 1990s. It intergrates the concept of environment, society, economy and development [10]. It even attempts to release the latter from the suffocating frame of economy and to closely connect it with society. Sustainability not only addresses environmental issues, but also pursues a model of production and consumption that will ensure a sustainable future for everyone. It does not demonize the concept of production, but tries to rationalize it, so that the planet resources are not undermined, thus justifying the demands of the environmental movements [11].

Defining Sustainable Development is quite complex and there have been very many attempts to understand its meaning. The most common definition is that of the Brutland Report, according to which the development is sustainable when it meets modern needs without reducing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [12]. A different but also equally

Table 1 Sectors — Categories of volunteering.

Sectors — categories of volunteering	Frequency rate	Relative frequencies (%)
Health	3	30
Social welfare	2	20
Search and rescue	1	10
Environment	2	20
Culture and sports	1	10
International relations	1	10
Total	10	100

acceptable definition is the one stated by IUCN, UNEP and WWF, which says that development is sustainable when it improves the quality of life within the limits set by the life-sustaining capacity of ecosystems which

support life itself [13]. According to these definitions, economy, society and environment are the three pillars of Sustainable Development [14]. The relationship among these three elements is based on cooperation and harmony and it should not reflect a competitive relationship. Therefore, as in any organized group, there is a harmonious coexistence and operation of these three pillars in the voluntary organization of HRC. This indicates that this form of development which does not focus exclusively on numerical data is not a utopian theory, but a tangible reality that does not only aim at the well-being of numbers but also at the well-being of people.

3.3 Relating Sustainability to Hellenic Red Cross Sectors

The following Table 2 shows how many of the six sectors of HRC correspond to each of the three pillars of Sustainable Development as well as the participation rates of the HRC sectors concerning the three pillars of Sustainable Development, having taken into account the overlaps.

4. Conclusions

Having examined the training of the Hellenic Red Cross Adult volunteers specific conclusions are drawn for the sectors of their offer and for their contribution to the sustainable development of society. First of all, the data analysis demonstrates that Health is their main area of activity. Health, along with Social Welfare, constitute 50% of their activities. This means that the

Table 2 Sustainability and Hellenic Red Cross sectors.

Pillars	Frequency rate	Relative frequencies (%)
Economy	6	40
Society	6	40
Environment	3	20
Total	15	100

education they receive is mainly related to the subjects of Emergency Medical Treatment, Primary Health Care, Lifeguarding and Social Service. HRC volunteers focus on young children, the elderly, the

disabled, the socially excluded and the financially weak people. These volunteers work with orphanages, nursing homes, asylums and other institutions in an attempt to be more efficient and useful. The security forces of the country support their effort both in times of peace and in times of war.

Their work in the field of environment is also important. Their certified training helps them to support the work of the relevant government agencies in preventing and dealing with natural disasters. Along with these actions, they also demonstrate work in the field of environmental awareness. Seminars, workshops and partnerships with other organizations demonstrate their consistent pursuit of environmental protection, both from natural and technological disasters. In these difficult circumstances, during which nature shows its toughest face to humanity, the HRC Samaritans are constantly concerned with searching and rescuing our fellow human beings who are in great danger, due to extreme natural phenomena or man-made disasters. The two previously mentioned sectors account for a high percentage of 30% of their total support.

Among other things, adult volunteers focus on cultural and sports activities. The establishment of cultural centres, the circulation of press products, as well as the organization of events and excursions are only some of the examples which confirm their dynamic presence in these aspects of social life. The study shows that their participation rate reaches only 10% of their voluntary work, as their presence is mainly related to the field of Health and Social Welfare. In addition the international relations of the Hellenic Red Cross should also be mentioned. All HRC volunteers have the chance to broaden their horizons by exchanging experiences, knowledge and opinions with volunteers outside Greece. There is also a close collaboration with international partners in the field of education.

As stated in the study, the above sectors were matched with the pillars of Sustainable Development.

The percentages show that the more relief the trained volunteers offer to the members of society who need help, the more support they provide to the economy of the whole society. Their care for human health serves as a barrier against the loss of lives and it limits the extent of medical incidents, which would require greater and more expensive medical treatment without their volunteering work. Moreover the strategy of preventing natural disasters results in environmental resource-saving, which is absolutely necessary for the development of economy. Supporting culture and sports is an investment aimed at the international recognition of our country, which obviously affects its economy. International relations are a useful tool for achieving all the above goals. The presence and cooperation of HRC trained Volunteers forms the image of a reliable country of active citizens and indicates a stable and healthy democracy, within which a stable economic environment can be developed. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that some areas of the Volunteers' actions are closely connected with the environment. Of course as it is shown, the percentage of the environment activities is lower, since Hellenic Red Cross places more emphasis on Health and Social Welfare.

It becomes clear that the whole service of HRC supports Sustainable Development, reconciling the concepts of society, economy and environment, and disproves the theories of those who want these three to operate in a competitive context. Mutual assistance, which is one of the conditions for active citizenship, strengthens social cohesion, rationalizes the economic data and at the same time respects the environment [15].

It is therefore understandable that through these processes of lifelong learning and adult education active citizens with environmental ethos and a sense of environmental responsibility are being formed. These citizens are empowered with values in order to change their thinking and practice in an attempt to form new relationships between society and nature by adopting sustainable behaviour and lifestyle [16].

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