

Volunteering & Solidarity in the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

Introduction

For many people, “Brussels” and the EU are simply Institutions and buildings; politicians; bureaucrats; laws & legislation. It is important to recognise however that Europe is in fact not about these things, but about people. **Europe is a community, a community of people, with a shared and inter-connected cultural heritage, that has volunteers and volunteering at its heart.** It is a community based on solidarity and respect, compassion for others, and above all, a shared hope that, when we are all able to play our part, Europe can become the inclusive and tolerant society with equal opportunities for all that we strive for.

Output of the European Year of Volunteering 2011

There has not been such a large focus on active citizenship, solidarity and volunteering at the EU level since the European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV 2011) that produced a number of key policy documents in relation to volunteering, The Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (PAVE) and the so-called “Warsaw declaration” are two of them. The “Warsaw declaration for the Sustainability of Action on Voluntary Activities and Active Citizenship”, signed by all the EYV 2011 “National Coordinating Bodies” representing all the EU Member States, highlighted the need for:

- Working towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU
- Empowering organisers of voluntary activities to improve the quality of voluntary activities
- Raising awareness of the value and importance of volunteering
- Recognising voluntary activities in order to encourage appropriate incentives for individuals, companies and volunteer-development organisations.

The other important output of EYV 2011 came from the side of civil society organisations (CSOs) and this was the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe - PAVE. This document detailed the policy steps needed in order to reach the enabling environment for volunteering in Europe necessary for impactful volunteering.

Volunteers – living example of our cultural heritage

2018 sees the start of another European Year - that of Cultural Heritage. It is also the year when the European Solidarity Corps, announced by European Commission President Juncker

one year ago as a new flagship initiative for the EU, will become a reality. The connection between these two central elements of EU policy for 2018, whilst not at first obviously apparent, is in fact strong and compelling.

There is common agreement in Europe that to volunteer is a personal choice based on free will resulting in acts of kindness and expressions of solidarity that not only have the power to directly change people's lives in a tangible sense but that also have the power to change attitudes. Through volunteering, people contribute their time and expertise to respond to community need. In doing so, it is not just material needs of the community that are met, but, as a direct result of the increased social bonds that volunteering in a common spirit for a common cause creates, we also take a huge step forward towards greater freedom and unity for all. The cultural heritage of Europe is defined by the inter-relations between people and our ways of life, languages, food, artistic expression, design and innovation. Volunteers not only play a key and integral role in contributing with crucial support for the physical expressions of those elements, but perhaps even more importantly, they provide a change-making example to others through their actions.

These voluntary acts of kindness, by huge numbers of European citizens, have not only changed and saved lives and protected physical reminders of our cultural past, and contributed to current and future cultural expression and understanding. They have also changed the attitudes of others with regards to how they view and treat fellow citizens in their communities, particularly newcomers, or people with a different background. This reflects and restores the intrinsic sense of solidarity and respect for human rights that is the real basis of Europe, an aspect, that although policymakers sometimes neglect, volunteers demonstrate every day through their commitment and engagement. Volunteers are a living example of our cultural heritage and a living example of the sort of community we hope to build in Europe. 2018 will play an important part in showcasing across Europe, how volunteering in a properly supported policy framework can make a huge contribution to this shared ambition for a culturally diverse, but also a culturally inclusive and united Europe, bound together by a sense of solidarity and interconnectedness with one another.

How can it be ensured however that the engagement of volunteers brings real added value to a culturally focused initiative, rather than being simply a cost cutting measure for a cultural institution such as a museum, or a cultural event such as a theatre production or music festival?

How can the intrinsic value of volunteering for the common good be ensured when personal interests, self-interest or gain might be the main motivating factor for a volunteer in the cultural field such as the reward of free tickets or opportunity to be involved in a production of a style and topic they are personally passionate about?

CEV Capacity Building Conference "Volunteering in Culture"

The CEV Capacity Building Conference "Volunteering in Culture" will take place on the **19-20 April 2018 in Rijeka Croatia**. Held in the framework of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 participants will have the opportunity to explore these questions and examine more deeply the specificities of volunteering in culture, where the impact on the beneficiaries of the activities may not as visible as in other kinds of volunteering, for example in social service provision. Considering how these cultural projects promote intercultural dialogue, human rights, solidarity and social values will also be a focus. Participants will learn how the well-being of volunteers in culture can be protected and the question of their skills development, and validation of the competencies gained, be best approached. The conference will also be the opportunity to identify measures that can ensure that in culture-focussed initiatives involving volunteers:

- The ethics of volunteering are safeguarded
- The quality of the volunteering experience is ensured.
- Adherence to relevant legal frameworks is respected
- The added community value protecting the essential values on which volunteering is based is taken into account.

In this way, the "Volunteering in Culture" conference aims to contribute to even further increasing the immense value of volunteers and future volunteers contributing to promoting, protecting and developing Europe's cultural heritage.

Author

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BBE-Newsletter für Engagement und Partizipation in Europa

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