

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOLUNTEERING AS CO-PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SERVICES: CASE STUDY OF LATVIA

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Abstract. Active civic and social participation is considered to be significantly important for a country`s development in democratic societies. One of the popular forms of active citizenship is volunteering – the third economy sector that produces civic goods and/or services in which the public and private sectors are weak or inactive. In this aspect, volunteering is also a means for organized civil society to participate in the production of public services i.e. co-production.

The aim of this research is the exploration of social participation in Latvia through volunteering, including its legal regulation and organizational setup, and identification of the aspects and prospects of volunteering in Latvia within the concept of co-production of public services. The research is exploratory by design. The main methods of the study applied are analysis and synthesis.

Volunteering in Latvia is yet on its way to being considered a valuable part of general active citizenship and social participation, and admittedly even further from being a serious part of co-production. Compared to other European countries, volunteering in Latvia is a new way of social participation that mostly attracts youth and seniors. Volunteering is only a relatively recent recognized activity in Latvia, however this sector of economy is developing and has its achievements.

The current research has both theoretical and practical application. The study is organised within the framework of the EU program`s “Europe for Citizens” international project “Volunteering – Code of Active Citizenship” implemented in cooperation with six partners from different EU member states under the leadership of Kaunas University of Technology.

Key words: *Volunteering, Social participation, Active Citizenship, Co-production, Public good.*

JEL code: D71, O15

Introduction

Active civic and social participation is considered to be significantly important for a country`s development in democratic societies. One popular form of active citizenship is volunteering – the third economy sector that produces civic goods and/or services in which the public and private sectors are weak or inactive. In this aspect, volunteering is also a means for organized civil society to participate in the production of public services i.e. co-production.

Volunteering in Latvia is yet on its way to being considered a valuable part of general active citizenship and social participation, and admittedly even further from being a serious part of co-production (Alford J., 2013; Hansen G.V., 2015;

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Tuurnas S., 2015). Given that co-production is comparatively new term and also a newly recognized trend in public administration, it is still rather a topic in scientific research than a practice. However, there is growing number of good case examples both ongoing and recognized by the concept of co-production, as well as newly emerging from the concept. Comparing to other European countries, volunteering in Latvia is a new way of social participation that mostly attracts youth and seniors. Volunteering is only a relatively recent recognized activity in Latvia, however this sector of the economy is developing and has its achievements.

The aim of this research is to explore social participation in Latvia through volunteering, including its legal regulation and organizational setup, and in this regard to identify aspects and prospects of volunteering in Latvia within the concept of co-production of public services. The authors compare some aspects of volunteering as a part of social participation and co-production in Latvia to Croatia to identify common and different aspects and to make conclusions for perspectives and good case practices. In addition, the authors of the present paper summarize the definitions of volunteering, social participation and co-production concepts towards the scientific literature review and define the hypothesis for further studies to explore volunteering as a means of social participation and co-production in Latvia. The research is exploratory by design. The main methods of the study applied are analysis and synthesis. The research is a subject to some limitations. The main sources of information for the research are documents available in English and online as well as published on the WEB sources.

The current research has both a theoretical and practical application as it emphasizes the co-production application opportunities in the public sector, as well as provides the overview of volunteering in Latvia and Croatia as good cases to practice.

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Research results and discussion

The authors of the present paper begin with the overview of theoretical basis of volunteering, focusing on its administrative aspects, then continue with the case analysis and reflect on the research results analysing experience of the volunteering organisations in Latvia.

1. The concepts of Social Participation and Volunteering as Co-production of public services

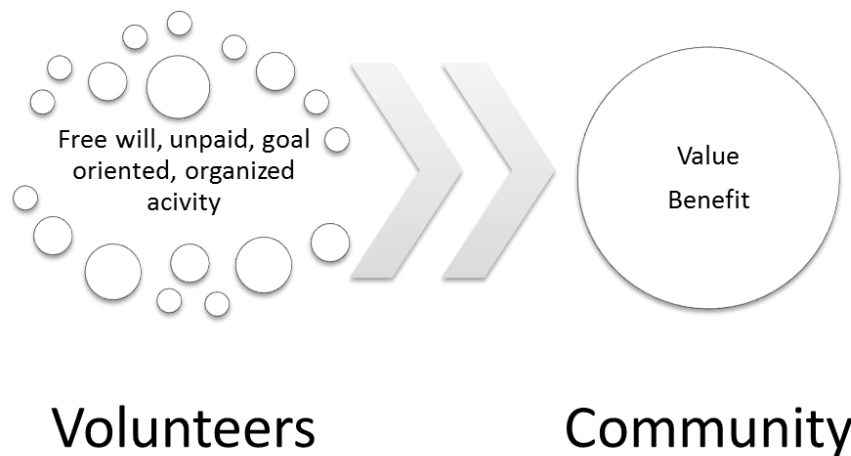
First of all, the authors of the present paper explored the definitions of the main concepts used starting with social participation. The last century's social participation definition and description emphasizes the individuals', citizens' initiative that is "generated by social participation" (Critto A., 1999). Here the social participation is discussed as "an integral part of decision making" as authorities need to involve citizens to make the right decision that will impact the whole community. The 21st-century authors, however, focus on the social aspect of the term rather than the citizenship. J. Huang (2010) defines that "social participation refers to people's social involvement and interaction with others". He also highlights that social participation presumes collective voluntary participation of the community people into the community living and welfare maintenance activities. A volunteering element is stressed as "social participation is a form of effective or value rational behaviour; it constitutes its own reward and is regarded as a type expressive action" (Huang J., 2010). Rational and mature behaviour of the community members in the form of social participation is also called "the essential community function" (Hardcastle D. A., 2011). This is something that defines a community's level of social

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health and competence (Hardcastle D. A., 2011), thus not every community is ready for social participation. However, if the community is mature enough to ensure social participation of its members, it develops social capital (Hardcastle D. A., 2011). Summing up, the authors of the present paper can define social participation as a form of active voluntary action of the community members that are involved in activities related to community life by their initiative.

The next concept that should be defined is volunteering. Social participation should be voluntarily driven, meaning the volunteering itself is free time given for other valuable activities' conduction for no pay, however, some side expenses could be covered to ensure active voluntarily social participation by people with limited financial resources (Dekker P. & Halman L., 2003). Four major characteristics of volunteering might be one's free will, organized activity, un-rewarded (remunerated) participation and its benefit to strangers as the output (Musick M. A. & Wilson J., 2008). As volunteering according to definitions should be "done outside one's family" (Smith et al., 2006), it should be an activity that contributes to the community, society, environmental maintenance or development (Fig. 1). Volunteering does not have any work obligations, however, it is structured and organized action, "unpaid productive work" (Stebbins R.A., 2015) of the volunteers i.e. it is goal oriented.



Source: authors' construction based on Dekker P. & Halman L., 2003; Smith et al., 2006; Musick M. A. & Wilson J., 2008; Stebbins R.A., 2015.

Fig. 1. Volunteering concept

Volunteering as an approach is described using the concept of co-production concept. One of the growing trends widely explored in scientific literature related to the relationships between public administration and social participation is the increasing impact of the different roles of citizens within public administration. The main observation is that organized civil society and its individuals are coming closer and closer to the processes of planning, designing, decision-making and implementing different public policies. One of the newest roles "assigned" to citizens are partners or *co-producers* of public services. John Alford, Australian public administration academics, in 2009 (Alford J., 2012; Pllit C., 2010) has widely explored this concept and invented the terms "*co-production*" or "*co-creation*" to define the process of this community-state partnership (Alford J., 2009; Fledderus J., et al, 2015; Pearson O., 2015), which in further scientific exploration is considered to be the next development phase in the evolution of the relationships between public governance and civic social participation (Koppe S. et al, 2015; Weaver B., 2011). The concept of co-production emphasizes the cooperation between producers (state and public institutions) and receivers or beneficiaries of public services where the latter is taking an increasing role participating in the creation of public good (Guarini S. M. et al., 2015; Alford J., 2014). Stephen P. Osborne from University of Edinburgh, UK, and Kirsty Strokosch from Cardiff Business

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School, UK, define this cooperation as *social co-production* (Osborne S. & Strokosch K., 2013), meaning the involvement of public service beneficiaries in the decision-making and provision of the very public services that take place mainly through organized civil society. Co-production is the mix of activities where both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or ‘regular producers’, while ‘citizen production’ is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use (Brandsen T. & Honingh M., 2015).

The concept of co-production is still under development in both theory and practice (Buick F., 2016) and one of the most demonstrative practical examples of co-production is the involvement of the so called third economic sector – social participation through voluntary work (Pestoff V., 2012) Volunteering is the third economy sector that produces civic goods and/or services in which the public and private sector are weak or inactive in (Pestoff V., 2012; Brandsen T. et al., 2012). As defined by the Latvian Voluntary Work Law (Saeima, 2015) and the Associations and Foundations Law (Saeima, 2003), voluntary work is a form of social participation, which is done by a physical person's free will without payment. Volunteering is often underestimated based on myths in its scope of people's involvement and societal impact. Voluntary work is oriented towards an activity of public benefit and promotes the development of knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as the useful utilisation of leisure time. Some of the clearest examples are for instance the involvement of Red Cross volunteers driving ambulance cars or many local fire brigades and rescue teams basically consisting of volunteers in Austrian regional municipalities (Romano M., 2013). Another even more considerable example chosen by the authors that shows the involvement of citizens in public governance comes from the UK – in the anticipation of public expenditure cuts announced by the UK Government over the next three years (2016-2018), the Welsh Government and local councils sought the views of residents regarding proposed changes to Library services, Youth Engagement and Participation Services and Supported Bus Routes through an eight week targeted public consultation undertaken with anyone potentially affected by the change proposals (Welsh Government, 2015). In addition, health and social care public services are amongst the most innovative and populated with volunteers and voluntary sector organisations, undertaking roles ranging from fundraising to direct service provision (Buddery P., 2015).

The increasing role of co-production through volunteering is considered to be one of driving forces for the development of public services (Buddery P., 2015), particularly in local communities where the volunteering also contributes to the field of regional development (Bartenberger M. & Szescilo D., 2015; Schlappa H., 2015; Munoz S. A., 2014), that is a recognized trend by the scientific community (Calabro A., 2011; Riccucci N. M., 2016; Brandsen T. & Honingh M., 2015) as well as by international organizations such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011) and World Bank (Ngouo L. B., 2016). The involvement of organized civil society in the provisions of community good is a win-win situation for the public administration and for the communities since it ensures that these co-produced services are to a higher extent adjusted to the needs of state clients (Thomas J. C., 2012), thus increasing the satisfaction (Matthews J., 2015) of state clients according to public needs agendas (Eijck van K. H. J. & Lindermann B., 2016). It also allows the public administration to provide and the clients or beneficiaries to receive the expected public services of the higher quality that also consecutively ensures lower and/or more efficient “*production*” and provision costs of the respective services (Andrews R. & Entwistle T., 2014). Besides, it is considered that co-production through volunteering facilitates and improves the communities` civic social participation (Jakobsen M., 2013; Brandsen T. et al., 2015), which leads to better trust and understanding-based, relationships between the public and communities, and in its turn strengthens the legitimacy of state actions as a result of co-production (Johnston M. K. & McTavish D., 2013; Bartenberger M. & Szescilo D., 2015).

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Social participation is voluntary by nature and needs to be initiated by community members aiming to maintain its life and development. Volunteering is a form of social participation and is a free will organised unpaid activity that focuses on bringing value and benefit to some strangers or contributing to a community, society life maintenance or development. Volunteering could also be a tool for the delivery of public services since volunteer activity should be organized and goal oriented. Thus co-production takes place. Some countries already use benefits of volunteering, however, there are a lot of countries that still cannot implement the principles of volunteering through co-production of public services or other public/social areas as they are still not socially mature enough to be ready for it.

2. Administrative aspects of volunteering in Latvia and Croatia

As volunteering in Latvia and Croatia becoming popular since about 1998 (Jaunatnes lietas, 2012; Volonterski centar Zagreb, 2008), the authors decided to compare the volunteering experiences in Latvia with a European country such as Croatia. Volunteering in Latvia has been regulated by the Volunteering Law since January 1, 2016 (Saeima, 2015). For instance, in the case of Croatia, the Croatian Parliament had already adopted the Law on volunteering in 2007 (Horvat M., 2007, Volonterski centar Zagreb, 2008). For Latvia such a law is a great leap in developing volunteering culture in terms of its legislative regulation. The Law is concise and focused. According to the Law, volunteering is an individual from age of 13, who does not replace any employee, organized and based on free will physical or intellectual unpaid work that is beneficial to society (Saeima, 2015). The Law on Volunteering of Croatia provides detailed definition of volunteering i.e. “an investment of personal time, effort, knowledge and skills out of free will with which services and activities are executed for the well-being of another person or wider public, and are executed by persons in a way anticipated by this Law, without existence of any conditions of providing a financial reward or seeking any other material benefit for volunteering accomplished” (Zakon o volonterstvu, 2007, Volonterski centar Zagreb, 2008), however the definitions are quite the same by the idea.

Volunteering in Latvia does not aim to make profit. By definition volunteering activity should only be organized by three types of organisations namely associations and foundations, including the trade unions and their associations, the state and local authorities, and political parties and their unions. Therefore, there is no chance for a private sector organisation to be involved in the organising volunteering. All volunteers need to sign a contract with the volunteering organizer. (Saeima, 2015) Additional Laws that might be concerned dealing with volunteering in Latvia are the Youth Law (Saeima, 2008) and the Associations and Foundations Law (Saeima, 2003).

Besides the Law on volunteering (Hrvatski sabor, 2007), there are also some other documents that should be considered for organizing or performing volunteering in Croatia. These documents are the National strategy for the creation of enabling environment for civil society development including the operational plan (part of the strategy is devoted to volunteering development) and the Volunteer Ethics Code (Volonterski centar Zagreb, 2008). The Law on Volunteering of Croatia (Hrvatski sabor, 2007) regulates, in addition to other comments in the case of Latvia's aspects, code of ethics and volunteer certificates, and foresees the National Volunteer of the Year award (Volonterski centar Zagreb, 2008). This is an example of volunteering active administration that could lead to its co-production of public services and could be considered for implementation in Latvia.

Administrative regulation of volunteering differs in Latvia and Croatia. The certain Law on volunteering has already been applied for almost nine years in Croatia, while the Law on volunteering in Latvia has only entered into force in 2016. The law on volunteering in Latvia is concise and focused as there are also other laws that need to be considered when dealing with volunteering activities. The law on volunteering of Croatia is detailed and includes additional features

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containing administrative regulations such as a volunteer code of ethics and foresees the National Volunteer of the Year award that could be an additional driver/motivation for potential volunteers' active participation in volunteering activities.

3. Volunteering organisations in Latvia

Exploring volunteering organisations in Latvia, the authors of the present paper focused on certain criteria of the analysis, which are:

- Approximate age of member
- Area of activity
- Past achievements
- Purpose/ mission of the organisation
- Year of establishment.

A total of 40 volunteering organisations were analysed, and these organisations were active in Latvia by the beginning of 2016. The data were collected applying the organisations' WEB sites exploration. The authors used a convenience sample.

As some of the organisations are local chapters of the international organisations such as Latvian Red Cross and Latvian Red Cross Youth, their year of establishment was till 1990. There is an organisation in the sample that was established in 1975 in the territory of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic and is still active. Other organisations from the sample were established in the period from 1990 to 2011.

The members' approximate age range varies from 10 up to 70 years (Table 1). According to the Volunteering Law of the Republic of Latvia (as stated in the previous sub-section), the minimal age of the volunteers is 13, therefore some organisations will need to redefine the age of the volunteers involved or clarify the status of the organisation's member. There is an organisation that defines the age of its members as 5+ years, however, most probably these youngest members are involved in the organisation's activities more as service receivers rather than deliverers. There are three organisations that do not have their members' age limitations (Table 1). Two major target age groups of the organisations from the sample are people from 16 up to 25-year-old and people, who are 18 or older, i.e. young adults.

Table 1

Number of volunteering organisation in Latvia from the sample by the members' approximate age

Approximate age of members	Number of the organisations
No age limitations	3
5+	1
10+	3
10-25	1
12+	2
12-25	1
13+	1
13-70	1
14+	1

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14-25	1
14-70	5
15+	1
15-25	6
15-30	3
15-70	1
16+	1
16-30	1
18+	1
18-30	2
18-65	1
21-30	1
25-45	1

Source: authors' calculations based on the research data

Fourteen organisations from the sample are focusing on educational issues and activities, three more organisations are focusing on health education, and five more focus on religious education, i.e. the main area of activity for 22 – the majority of the organisation from the sample is education. Another large group of the organisations from the sample are working on various social service deliveries. Three more organisations' activity area is animal welfare, two more for LGBT, and one more for vehicle.

Using the online tool *Wordcounter* (2016), the authors identified the most popular words amongst the organisations' purpose/mission definitions. These words' rating is:

1. People
2. Society
3. Promote
4. Social
5. Disabilities
6. Young people
7. Latvian
8. Participation
9. Culture
10. Development.

It is possible to conclude that the volunteering organisations in Latvia, both purely local and chapters of the international ones, are focusing on the development of social aspects of local people, especially people with disabilities and youth in Latvia, as well as involving participation into the society's activities e.g. cultural ones.

Among the organisations' past achievements mentioned are local and international awards, societal awareness on the certain subject towards specially developed informative sources (e.g. short films, newsletters etc.) or events (e.g.

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educational activities, conferences, forums, symposiums etc.), successful and recognized project implementation or particular help for the target audience/groups (people with vision disabilities, animals etc.).

All organisations from the sample are different, however the majority is focused on some areas' implementation of education activities or delivery of social services. People from all age groups can be involved into the observed voluntary organisations activities. The organisations put forward information on certain rising the certain social issues through their activities, rising awareness about them and volunteering opportunities in Latvia. The observed organisations are different in terms of their experiences in Latvia, some of them have already been active for 25 or more years, while some of them have just started their existence a few years ago. The organisations observed reflect a positive start of volunteering initiative in Latvia, however, it is impossible to conclude that volunteering through co-production of public services will even get started here. The majority of the observed organisations are independent NGOs; they provide their services and fulfil activities by their own initiative. To develop volunteering in Latvia to the next level, volunteering should become a usual social activity for people in Latvia as well as become a subject of various stakeholders' discussions for volunteering projects to bring together a social potential and all stakeholders' needs and interests.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

The authors of the present paper fulfilled all set tasks of the research and reached its aim, thus they were able to summarize the following conclusions and develop proposals for further subject studies.

1. Volunteering is a form of social participation based on one's free will that is, to some extent formed by the set of values of the respective community. An integral part of volunteering is the delivery of public good which in recent years in many cases has been advanced to so called co-production – a close cooperation between public administration and organized civil society in the provision of public services.

2. While the concept of co-production is still under development in both theory and practice, and for that matter also in modern volunteering labels, the volunteering itself as a form of social participation in many countries demonstrates a vivid example of the involvement of the third economic sector that produces a civic good and in many cases actual public services in which public administration and the private sector are weak or inactive.

3. By having direct administrative regulation of volunteering nine years ahead, Croatia (Law on Volunteering in 2007, including, volunteer code of ethics) in comparison to Latvia (Law on Voluntary work) shows wider enthusiasm for volunteering recognizing it also as an action of prestige (the title National Volunteer of the Year is being awarded annually).

4. The majority of the researched voluntary organizations, including those with of 25+ years of experience and those newly established, are focusing on areas of educational activities implementation or social services delivery attracting volunteers from all age groups. The majority of the observed organisations are independent NGOs providing their services and fulfilling activities on their own initiative. The main interaction with the public administration forms through compliance to NGOs' regulations and rare funding, but not in terms of both parties serving public good.

5. The next phase of volunteer development in Latvia is expected to involve more and more "ordinary" people as well as involving more various stakeholders that the phase will emphasize the social potential of volunteering and its ability to meet the needs and interests of all stakeholders being public or private.

The authors suggest several proposals aimed at social stakeholders, including NGOs, academic institutions, state institutions, municipalities, and employers:

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1. Given the nature of providing public good, volunteering might also be more widely recognized by employers with extra possible benefits e.g. in working hours on a given day or in number of days of vacation (a close example of this is blood donation).

2. Voluntary work should also be more widely recognized and accepted as working experience. One of the main obstacles for higher youth employment is lack of experience. Voluntary work is often underestimated as not real work experience by both the young people themselves and employers, although in many cases voluntary actions show a lot of youth responsibilities and stimulates skills development.

3. Also within an education system, in particular where there is a close university-business partnership model, the voluntary work should be recognized, and where possible also evaluated and in specific cases also awarded with the ECTS points.

Based on the conducted research and analysis about volunteering as social participation and its contribution to the provision of public services – the co-production concept – in Latvia, the authors define the following hypothesis for further exploration of volunteering as a means of social participation and co-production in Latvia: with the sufficient coordinated social impact on the concept of volunteering, volunteering itself can produce significant social impact with positive spill-over effects such as increased social participation in public policy management and increased trust in public institutions and their service provision.

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