

## CHOSEN ASPECTS OF NON-PROFIT SECTOR AND VOLUNTEERING IN SLOVAKIA

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### Abstract

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The significance of voluntary activities in Slovakia constantly increases as it is one of the fundamental areas, which is of particular interest to chosen communities as well as the general public, with the scope of these activities exceeding religious or social groups and national character. The current situation of voluntary activities is not satisfactory and there is an absence of primary research studies that would provide a relevant and complex overview of the volunteering system. Further worsening the situation is the fact that volunteering actions were not even defined in the legal system until 2011. Evaluation of the existing situation and development of voluntary activities realized in Slovakia is carried out using a questionnaire survey, identifying the fundamental barriers of its development and evaluating the potential for implementing new challenges and trends. The most problematic issue is area of financing, closely related to non-governmental sector financing issues. A lack of understanding by the donors concerning the process of investing in volunteers, even in high quality programs, is also an important problem, along with the lack of legislation and mistrust. Organization and volunteer motivation was also investigated.

Keywords: non-profit organizations, volunteering, barriers to the development of volunteering, funding of non-profit organizations.

### INTRODUCTION

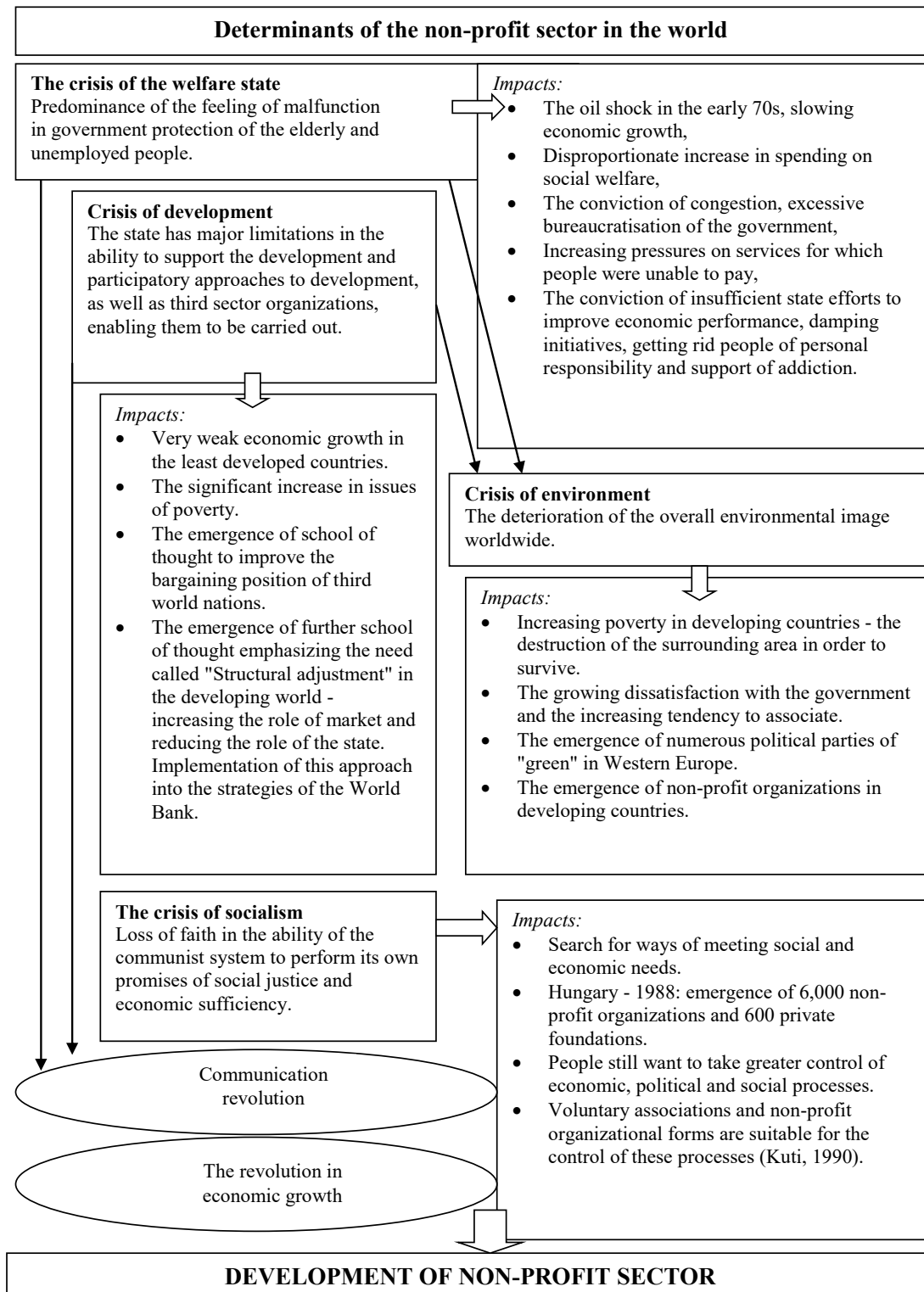
Globally, the development of non-profit organizations in 1970s and 1980s was mainly determined by crises and revolutions. These four crises are very important from a historical point of view: crisis of welfare state, development, environment and socialism. Similarly, it is necessary to provide significant development factors which contributed to the rise of voluntary activities in the world during the last decades: the communication revolution and the economic growth revolution. The communication revolution is connected to the discovery and use of computers, television and communication satellites, etc. Generally, the information transmission allowed a coordination international activities, literacy increase, education development, as well as

formation of activists' networks. Revolution of economic growth was also a very significant factor of the development of non-profit sector all over the world. Its particular influences on the development of voluntary organizations were recorded in for instance Latin America, South Africa, etc. It is possible to observe some common elements in more detailed analysis of the individual crises, such as growing poverty and its negative effects, growth of social needs, struggle to survive, disbelief in governing institutions to solve complex causal issues that are connected to social security, economic insufficiency of sources, etc.

These aspects were significant in the process of citizens' association in order to satisfy their economic and social needs and thus substitute the role of state in those areas, where the state

failed and which are crucial for inhabitants. Consequently, voluntary activities at the national, regional as well as local levels are highlighted. The main components and causalities of given crises and revolutions are illustrated in the Fig. 1.

The development of non-profit sector was a specific process in each country. The different development conditions also influenced the type and form of established organizations, as well as the preference of religious activities (Batsleer, 1991;



1: *Determinants of the non-profit sector in the world*  
Source: own processing

Mydlíková, 2002; Kuvíková, 2004; Brozmanová Gregorová *et al.*, 2012). The “bottom-up”, “top-down” and “outside” pressures were important for the expansion of the third sector (Duben, 1996; Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2010; Bútorová, Bútorová & Strečanský, 2012). The main driving force was the “bottom-up” pressures made by ordinary people who had decided to organize themselves and thus improve their living conditions, or to promote their fundamental rights. This factor had a significant influence on the formation of organized voluntary activities in the former Soviet Union and the Central Europe. The “top-down” pressures are especially visible in the development of organized non-profit activities in the Third World. Expansion of private organized non-profit activities was mainly supported by “outside” pressures via the Church, “Northern” private voluntary organizations and development agencies (Barát *et al.*, 2000).

The non-profit organization has presently no valid legal regulation in Slovakia. It is a notion, which is used in its general meaning, because it comprises many organizations in different areas. However, internationally it is very often defined as “non-governmental non-profit organizations”. It is possible to use the so-called “structural operational definition” by Salamon and Anheier (1992) in defining which organizations are labeled as “non-profit organization”. According to this definition, these are organizations that are institutionalized (formally organized), private (institutionally separated from the government), or non-profit (they do not divide their profit among the owners or administrators), self-governing (these are able to govern themselves), and voluntary (voluntary participation in their activities in a form of volunteering or finances). The European Commission had emphasized five characteristics that are interconnected in the notion of “non-governmental organizations” in the documents from 1997–2000: non-profit, voluntary, organized, independent, publicly beneficial (Kuvíková, 2004). Historically, the development of foundations and non-profit organizations in Slovakia was characterized by many different levels of their quantitative development, changes of their aims, functions, legal status, as well as by intensity of internal and nation-wide democratization. The form of political establishment played a crucial role in this process. Establishment of the first organizations of the third sector in Slovakia is significantly related to activities of the Church (in socially and health area, education area) and to formations of towns and bourgeoisie (Mannová, 1990, 1992). In the 1990s, change of the social and economic system had brought significant changes that influenced all areas of the economy (Rochester, 2010; Phellas, 2013; Pavelek, 2014). The non-profit sector has constantly undergone changes as well. As a consequence of yielding state support and reduction in funding by capital-intensive foreign

organizations, it was necessary to find new sources, which could be used as funding for the non-profit organizations and their activities. On the other hand, new possibilities for non-profit organizations to obtain sufficient financial resources are available in the form of structural funds of the European Union. The transformation period persisting until the present may be characterized as a process of change when non-profit organizations had to adapt to new conditions and via their own activities, they were forced to develop sustainable models of financing for their activities (Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2010; Bútorová *et al.*, 2012; Michalski, 2016). In Slovakia, the non-profit sector as a whole will mainly face serious financial issues in the coming decade. These organizations are aware of the fact that they operate in a market economy environment and without any stable financial background. The public non-profit sector primarily financed by public budgets is also in a dire situation.

Consequently, our research is focused on analyzing chosen determinants of Slovak volunteering with an emphasis on purpose, scope and obstacles of volunteering organizations in Slovakia. The partial results of this analysis are proposed in the next chapters.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research focused on volunteering was realized in 2014. We contacted all 300 non-governmental organizations (NGO) registered and available at the [www.dobrovolnictvo.sk](http://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk) portal formed by the National Voluntary Center C.A.R.D.O. This organization was established in 2004 and its primary mission has been the development of volunteering in Slovakia and abroad. It provides services and information for volunteers and organizations, it publicly promotes volunteering in order to engage as many people as possible. It also supports the networking of voluntary organizations, realization of seminars and conferences, researches and many other activities concerning volunteering in Slovakia and abroad.

Almost one third of respondents ( $n = 95$ ) out of all contacted organizations, had participated in the research, although we were not able to obtain complex responses on some questions from all participated respondents and four respondents had to be excluded. The research questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part contained profiling questions to obtain the basic information about the non-profit organizations (location, its legal form, area of activity, number of employees and members, target group, activities). In the second part, there were 21 questions, which focused on other specific information concerning theoretical and practical aspects of voluntary activities, e.g., type and difficulty of voluntary activity, opinions on its appraisal, contributions of voluntary activities, promotion forms, causes of lower participation of public in volunteering, motives

I: Frequency of non-governmental organizations by higher territorial self-governing units (NUTS II)

Regions	Number	% ratio
Bratislava	46	48.4
West	17	17.9
Center	18	18.9
East	12	12.6
SR	2	2.1
Total	95	100.0

Source: own calculations

of public participation in volunteering, and forms of cooperation with the business sector. We used standard methods to analyze the questionnaire data (basic descriptive statistics, pair t-tests, analysis of variance). The outputs and graphs were produced in The R Project for Statistical Computing.

The largest analyzed group were the NGOs in Bratislava Region  $N = 46$  (48.4). On the other hand, NGOs in Nitra Region were the least willing to participate in the research. Due to low participation in some regions we had to aggregate the data into four major regions: Bratislava, West, Center and East Slovakia (this aggregation is in accordance with NUTS II aggregation by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic). The organizations of nationwide impact are proposed in the fifth group ( $N = 2$ ) (Tab. I).

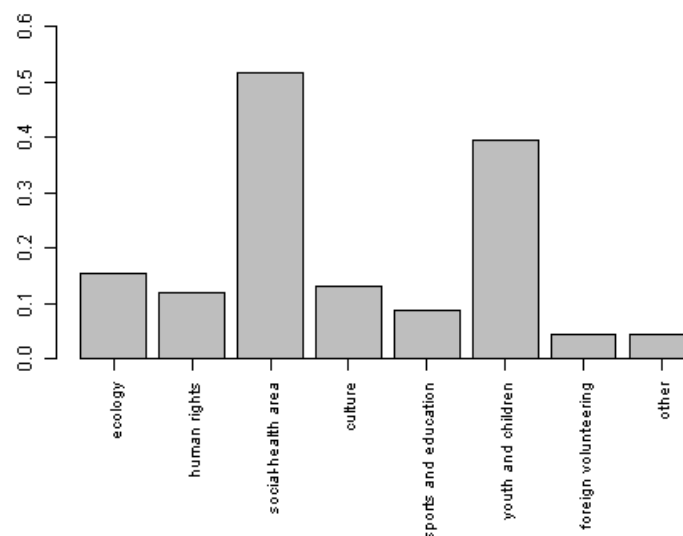
## RESULTS

As for legal form, civic association or movement (64.2 %) appears the most frequently, followed by non-profit organizations providing public services (17.9 %), with the Church or religious organizations (5.3 %) least prevalent. The Bratislava Region ( $N = 46$ ; 48.4 %) is represented the most. The Eastern Slovakia ( $N = 12$ ; 12.6 %) is the least represented. The field of

activity of the analyzed organizations was another important factor in analyzing the volunteering in Slovakia. Respondents had eight possibilities to choose (selecting multiple answers was allowed): Ecology and protection of environment, Humanitarian aid and protection of human rights, Social and health area, Cultural organization, Sport and education activity, Work with children and youth, Foreign voluntary activity, Other (Fig. 2).

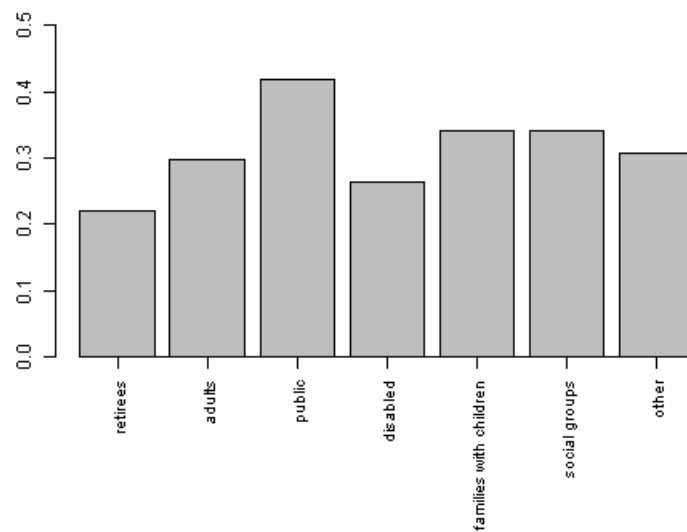
Social and health area (51.6 %) was the most common answer, with foreign voluntary activity represented the least (4.4 %). One of the reasons for choosing the response forms was the existing legal and administrative framework of volunteering in the EU. A clear definition of a volunteers' position has been absent at the national and European level. The analysis proposes a statistically significant difference ( $p$ -value 0.045) between number of non-profit organizations and number of civil associations that focus on work with children and youth: almost a half of civil associations is devoted to these activities (48.3 %) and almost a third of non-profit organizations (29.4 %).

The target group of voluntary activities is very heterogeneous. As with the field of activities, the respondents could choose multiple target groups. As Fig. 3 illustrates, the most numerous

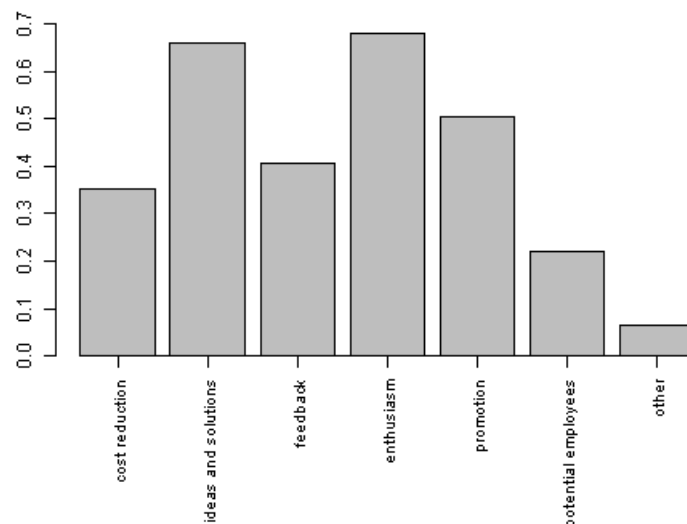


2: Areas of voluntary organizations activities

Source: Graphical output from R Project



3: Target group of voluntary activities focus  
Source: Graphical output from R Project



4: Contributions by volunteers that are most valued for organizations  
Source: Graphical output from R Project

target group of analyzed organizations' voluntary activities is the general public (41.8 %), subsequently, there are given social groups (34.1 %), families with children (34.1 %) and adults (29.7 %). Statistically significant difference (p-value 0.048) was found between the number of non-profit organizations and civil associations in case of target group of adults: 41.17 % of non-profit organizations present adults as recipients of voluntary services, with only 22.41 % of civil associations selecting this answer.

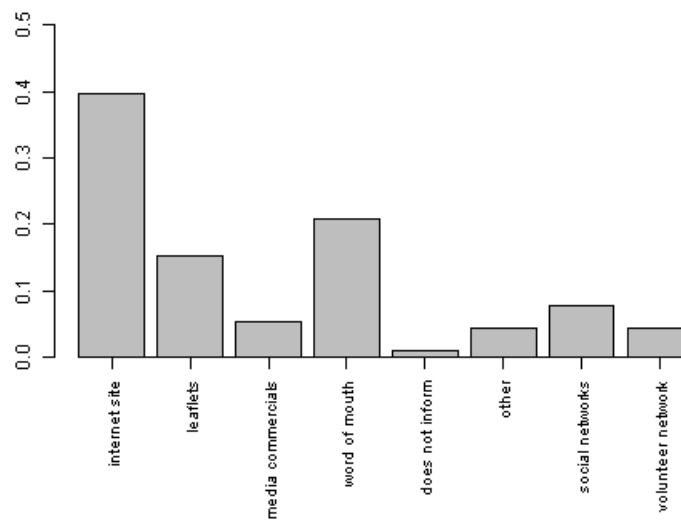
When asked the question: what type of work the volunteers perform in the organizations, the respondents answered heterogeneously, suggesting a very broad spectrum of activities performed by volunteers, such as work with youth and children, helping the elderly, firefighting, etc.

Furthermore, we were interested in what the best contributions by volunteers are for

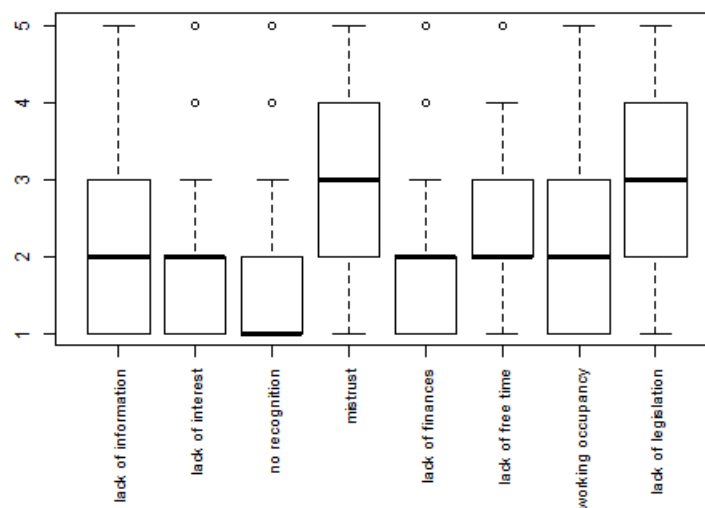
the organizations. As stated in Fig. 4, the most valued contributions by volunteers are the new ideas and enthusiasm they bring, while also helping promoting the organizations further. This means the inventiveness, activity and high impulsivity in efforts to help are important factors of the development of voluntary activities.

Volunteer activities are also significantly participating directly in the promotion of non-profit organizations (50.6%) and are also an important monitoring and control mechanism in the form of active feedback (40.7%).

The actual development and effective operation of volunteering, as well as the work of voluntary organizations is largely dependent on creating public awareness of the existence of volunteering, involvement opportunities and also of results



5: The most frequent forms of voluntary activities promotion  
Source: Graphical output from R Project



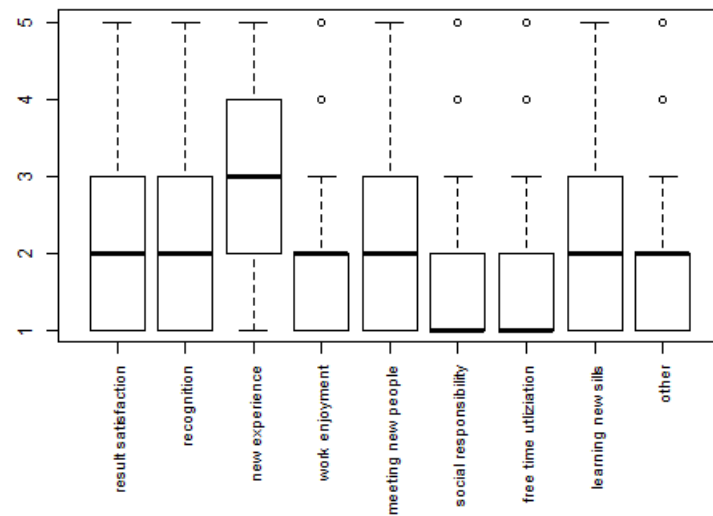
6: Reasons for the poor rate of public participation in voluntary activities  
Source: Graphical output from R Project

of these activities in order to attract potential volunteers.

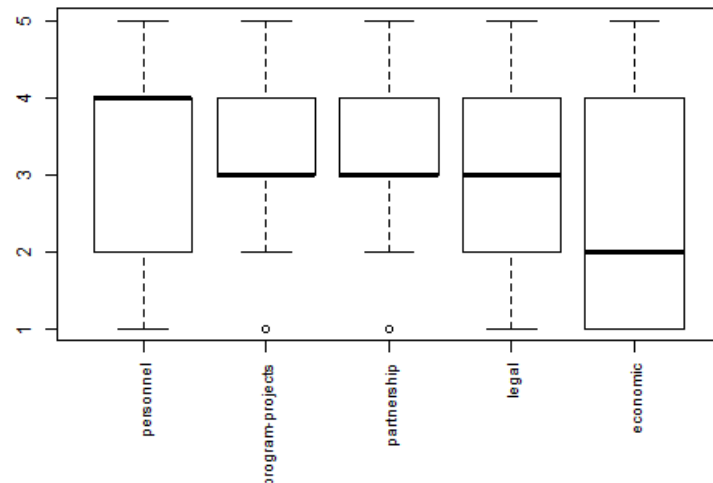
If we look at the most frequent form of voluntary activities promotion (Fig. 5), most respondents use their own web site set up on the internet. It is regarded as the best form of reaching and motivating volunteers, especially in a view of low cost, apart from the initial costs of setting up, regular operation and maintenance of the site. The second most commonly was that organizations rely on word of mouth passed on by the volunteers, followed by printed leaflets, flyers or brochures. Despite convincing advantages of internet communication, it has not always been a suitable form for elderly people who are also volunteers, mainly due to abundance of free time, and the enthusiasm. In most cases, retirees do not have sufficient computer literacy in order to be able to look for information

electronically, especially for whom and how they will provide their voluntary activities.

Fig. 6 shows the answers of respondents to the question whether the reason for the poor rate of public participation in volunteer activities is the lack of information on volunteering, lack of interest of the population, absence respectively inadequate recognition of volunteer work, mistrust of volunteering organizations, lack of financial resources, free time and with it related working occupancy or inadequate legislation governing the activity of volunteering in our country. Respondents had assigned the values in a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – most important, 5 – least important) to each of these parameters noting the significance of the factor in relation to the number and range of volunteers. Most respondents stated that one of the key problems of insufficient public participation



7: Motives of citizen engagement in voluntary activities



8: Main problems faced by organizations concerning volunteering  
Source: Graphical output from R Project

in volunteer activities is the lack of recognition for volunteering (mean of 1.86), general lack of interest in the matter (mean of 1.91) as well as lack of finances (mean of 1.95) leading to unwillingness to work without pay.

We were interested in motives of citizen engagement in voluntary activities (Fig. 7). Respondents evaluated proposed options on a scale from 1 – most important to 5 – least important. The analyzed organizations consider the free time utilization (mean of 1.79) as the most important motive of citizens involvement in volunteering along with the feeling of social responsibility (mean 1.79). Looking for new work experiences seems to be the least important factor (mean of 3.02).

Main problems faced by the organizations are presented in Fig. 8. Respondents reported that they face the biggest problems in the economic and finance area (mean of 2.52) and the legal area

(mean of 3.08). On the other hand, they reported the least serious problems in the personnel area (mean of 3.40). Financial and legal characteristics of the volunteering development problems in Slovakia are highlighted here, which is a sign of problematic interactions between system segments and its absenting feedback.

Listed facts clearly point to the need of solving the issue of non-profit organization financing related to the development of volunteering and creation of supporting legislative platform that would reflect these facts and allow simpler and easier access to financial resources and support their effective allocation. We can state that in Slovakia there is still a lack of systematic and transparent funding of non-profit organizations from state resources, partnerships with other sectors of the economy are at inadequate levels, as well as evident lack of opportunities for obtaining the necessary funds



from the activities of the volunteering companies themselves.

## DISCUSSION

Our results suggest that key problems of insufficient public participation in volunteer activities are the lack of recognition, free time and finances. According to the findings originating from the United Kingdom or Canada, the main problem of low engagement in voluntary activities is also the lack of free time, surprisingly not only among workers, even the elderly. Volunteers should be people who are active, disposing sufficient energy, skills and good time-management, and are able to find an interdependence between their work and volunteering (Musick, A. & Wilson, M., 2008, p. 161 – 163). It is necessary to take into consideration that volunteering does not only include the performance of classic voluntary activities in the form of work with youth or children, help the sick and people in need, help with the various community services, firefighting, flood aid, waste collection, but also the realization of leisure activities for children in orphanages, crisis centers and re-education facilities. In some organizations, the volunteers help with basic administrative works or organizational works during conferences or workshops, organize social activities, participate in actual projects, lead courses or trainings, help in creation of education tools, provide consultations with unemployed people, participate in archeological researches and many other activities contributing to better running of the society. If we look at the results of some research studies, the authors incline to the emphasizing the individualism in volunteering performance (e.g., Duben, 1996; Wilson, 2000; Dekker, 2003; Oesterle, Kirkpatrick & Mortimer, 2004; Brozmanová Gregorová *et al.*, 2011, 2012), which is supported by a free will and a will to work. On the other hand, the question of benefit quantification of these activities for an individual very often arises (Dingle, 2001; Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011). In many research studies based on sociological theories (Radková, 2011; Repková, 2012; Van Oorschot, Arts & Gelissen, 2005; Lester Salamon, Sokolowski & Haddock, 2012, and others), the issue of voluntary activities “benefit” is brought up. Even if a volunteer is not financially rewarded, his work brings other benefits – knowledge, skills, social contacts and professional development.

Respondents report that most organizations are unable to pay financial compensation for their own employees and consequently, they are forced to use volunteers’ services. The lack of payments for the volunteers’ work can be problematic in the context of the fact that many volunteers receive only symbolic rewards in the form of various kinds of donations for their assistance. Although

volunteering is perceived as unpaid work, volunteer can have certain costs connected with performing which should be compensated.

In the case of corporate volunteering, a staff takes part in the volunteering mostly in its free time. Organizations can use various forms of “thanking”, such as publication of the summary of worked hours by volunteers, issuing a certificate, rewarding by the management of organization, organizing various parties, Christmas parties and so on. Some organizations give their volunteers symbolic gifts, letters of thanks, thanking on the staff meetings, or invite to spiritual renewal, trips, cultural events, others provide tax relief, discount travel, discount on medications or vitamins. They are trying to provide opportunities for personal and professional development, send volunteers for training abroad, realize training, and provide a space for social contact, when a person comes into contact with a lot of new people in this field.

Volunteering plays a significant role in the activities of many people, organizations or whole societies. In recent years, volunteering has gained importance in Slovakia and the issue of development is included in many professional and scientific discussions. In Slovakia, it is necessary to involve more people in voluntary activities and thus raise its status. This requires the development of adequate volunteering infrastructure related to the networking of cooperating volunteer centers. Many voluntary organizations are not yet effective and well-coordinated, what emphasizes the issue of quality management of volunteers. It is also important to seek active instruments how to engage the younger together with older generations of potential volunteers and formulate new programs in which they could be involved. One of the most extensively discussed issues of voluntary organizations is also the lack of a legal framework for volunteering, which should be designed with the aim to support voluntary organizations, not regulate them. In Slovakia, there is also a lack of comprehensive, in-depth qualitative and quantitative research studies about volunteering, therefore it remains a major challenge for scientific communities to find resources and research opportunities for volunteering, both at national and regional level. These should specifically observe not only motivation of volunteers, but also the quality of voluntary organization management and highlight the current problem areas following the creation of targeted volunteer development programs. These programs would be an effective platform in procedural and subsequent legislative settings of volunteering system in Slovakia. The most problematic issue is still the area of financing. We often encounter a lack of understanding by the donors concerning the process of investing in volunteers, even in the case of high quality volunteer programs. It is necessary to constantly convince Slovak donors that volunteering is an activity realized without compensation and



requires investments. In Slovakia, development of volunteering is very closely linked to the comprehensive questions of non-governmental sector financing. This is a complex issue which combines economic-financial as well as

social-community elements. Accordingly, the issue of financial relations consolidation between the non-government and public sector is still highly actual in society.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the aim of our analysis was to analyze volunteering in Slovakia, its scope, challenges and barriers. Our results of questionnaire survey revealed following: (1) the most frequently legal form of volunteering organizations was a civic association or movement; (2) social and health area was the most referred fields of voluntary organizations' activities; (3) general public and families with children demonstrated the most common target groups of voluntary activities; (4) the questioned volunteering organizations appreciated on volunteers mainly their enthusiasm and new ideas; (5) the volunteering activities were spread by web sites and word of mouth; (6) the main barriers for the poor rate of public participation in voluntary activities were lack of recognition as well as finances; (7) the main motives for volunteers to engage were social responsibility and free time utilization; and (8) the volunteering organizations faced a biggest problem of economic and legal area. Our results should prompt further studies to monitor possibilities of volunteering and to interest in law enforcement volunteer programs.

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