

Volunteering for a Europe that listens and includes

Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida, ALDA Director

Abstract

Dialogue and participation at the base of a European value

In 2004, ALDA made a survey on the positive values that bind European citizens together: the participation and dialogue in local government emerged as a founder element. And not a negative element, defining us as that we are not like.

Therefore the proposal for founding values should be central to the process of European enlargement. Without this, the economic union will fight soon on unsolved common choices.

Public governance and decision-making process currently in Europe are complex and articulated as well as the system, economic and social, which it responds.

The joint presence of multiple instances addressed to the decision markers regarding the various segments of the community (schools, settlement, mobility, economic choices) is already visible and multilevel.

The representative political system has to deal with forces in the cultural, economic and communication fields, which constantly call into question the decisions and guide the facts. The presence of multi-actors and multilevel representatives is part of contemporary European decisions.

Information has to be understood, interpreted and managed. The European cultural melting pot is a challenge from this point of view. But there is no choice and it is already a fact.

The loss of participation has a very high cost. The lack of interest in politics requires citizens to take other roads to intervene. A society that does not participate is destined to decline and cannot support a widespread prosperity, as the current one in Europe:

- there are rich oligarchies but not with widespread resources;
- there are no democracies permanently poor or badly managed

****Donate one's own time to a common value***

The free "donation" of one's own time for a joint commitment is the cornerstone of the participation. Policy and commitment to the administration of the municipality as unique career choice or investment tout court, leads to those outright abuses that we know. It excludes the best subjects from the decision-making process.

We are in the North East of Italy, land of a

European Economic Miracle after poverty, based on a cohesive society

Definition of Social Capital:

a resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationship among actors

It is said that there are no leaders today! This is true for politics! But some other leaders exist: in the world of civil society, culture, journalism, in the company. But they never risk ruining their reputation starting in politics today.

Donations of one's own time / civic participation = volunteering = democratic society

There is a close correlation between a society with a relevant volunteering and a democratic society.

- Opposite experiences proves that, as the positive ones of the LDA, and the negative ones in the former CIS world that failed to develop any volunteering and civic engagement because the values were reversed;
- Or where there is a pseudo-private associative system - without credibility: there isn't a widespread development of participation.

Promoting forms of volunteering is not only a cultural and social support but it is a democratic commitment.

- This goes through the effective recognition of voluntarism (both as a valuation of shares);
- as part of the growth of a person and in his curriculum

**I spoke yesterday with a colleague from Azerbaijan
of the Civil Society Forum of the European Partnership**

**It is a country where human rights are not to the headlines because of
the strong interest of European countries.
They ask for ACTION ACTION ACTION**

ALDA and the LDAs promote projects on the participation of citizens (including also training activities and awareness program) to allow citizens to implement their rights.

The LDAs are local points of decentralized cooperation between local authorities and NGOs, and promote local governance and citizen participation actions. They are present in the Balkans and in the Caucasus. We work in Belarus and throughout the Eastern Europe and the Maghreb. With our European partners we work a lot with the program Europe for Citizens that is flywheel of many activities.

*** *Wind blows from the Maghreb***

Now is blowing the wind from the Maghreb and it doesn't carry the smell of jasmine or spring, but of years of extreme repression, backed up with the

excuse of a Europe that has signed agreements with all of these governments.

The Director of the League for Human Rights in Tunis said that the regime was totalitarian, and it had taken possession of everyone. The police controlled everything and everyone. Now they are free to choose and the choices are difficult and complex. At the next election of October 23 there will be 111 party lists. This is the revolution of the dignity and honor

One lesson came from the South (unexpectedly). Now from our domestic and foreign policy we should expect coherence and values.

Just as from the Eastern Partnership, which works on various times of democracy and participation. Or from the Black Sea Forum.

Proposals:

(Also developed during a recent European event in Poland, where we proposed our own document)

Volunteering allows a bottom-up viewing of the choices and allows the inclusion of certain groups excluded. It should be consistently supported in the European and national decisions as an irreplaceable value.

Volunteering is also a promoter of change and proposes innovative solutions to social and economic problems.

- Recommendations to promote and improve volunteering;
 - Recommendations to include volunteering on the activities of public programs.
1. **Support volunteering as free expression** of a significant and positive contribution improving the lives of people, and strengthening communities and civil society.
Volunteering should be a free individual choice not subject to specific obligations.
People should feel free to volunteer in a way that fits their own personal situation and possibilities. Information about the benefits and possibilities to participate and volunteer is an important aspect to improve and introduce people in the educational systems.
 2. **Promote institutional resolutions supporting volunteering development at local level** :- i.e. a body coordinating local activities of different stakeholders with relation to volunteering is needed, such as volunteering centre;
 3. **Stimulate volunteering** :
Local Authorities and others who want to encourage and support participation and volunteering need to investigate better which are the

incentives that make people interested in participating and volunteering. All citizens have that interest if they are triggered in a way or for something they are really interested in or concerned about.

4. Positively recognize and value volunteering :

A systematic approach to volunteers' involvement recognition and evaluation is needed on the side of local authorities as well as civil society organisations (including such activities as i.e. thank-giving days, diplomas for engagement, special awards, etc.);

5. Support the development of communities of interest and place :

Local authorities should be encouraged to support community at a small scale, both for people where they live and for people who share interests in certain topics.

6. Build a culture of volunteering educating youth on that issue in schools, but in a practical and attractive way, showing them that volunteering can be an fascinating way of spending time and getting interests development;

7. Support and develop a system of trainings for local civil society members (including volunteers) and civil servants dedicated to the interpersonal and managing skills development and presenting knowledge on legal rules and procedures related to the cooperation at the local level in common problem-solving processes (including participative democracy mechanisms) – including also practical activities aiming into experience development.

Special **practical trainings on volunteering** should be dedicated to **local leaders, but also to teachers and parents** (showing them the role and value of volunteering for their children, other people and whole local societies).