

## THE POSSIBILITIES AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE'S VOLUNTEERS ON INBOUND VOLUNTEER TOURISM IN SLOVAKIA

### PRÍCHODOVÝ DOBROVOLEŇICKÝ CESTOVNÝ RUCH NA SLOVENSKU NA PŘÍKLADE EURÓPSKEJ DOBROVOLEŇICKEJ SLUŽBY

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#### **Annotation**

*Volunteer tourism, which is also known as travel that makes difference, allows visitors to devote part of their free time, energy, knowledge and skills for the benefit of activities, for these they do not get financial rewards, but gain personal and professional growth, new friendships and life experiences. The added value of voluntary service is also aware of the European Union, which promotes volunteerism at the national and international level. European Voluntary Service (EVS) is one of the activities of the European Union, which gives young people the opportunity to volunteer abroad and participate in cultural, humanitarian or environmental projects in one of the European or other countries in the world. The aim of the paper is to explore the possibilities and the involvement of EVS volunteers on inbound volunteer tourism in Slovakia. Secondary data from databases of accredited organizations and volunteer projects show, that Slovakia does not belong to the countries with the great amount of accredited organizations compared to other European countries. Nevertheless, there is a relatively large number of volunteer projects implemented and the results of initial survey among receiving organizations show that for the foreign volunteers Slovakia is one of the sought for country where they can show their potential and make the world a better place.*

#### **Key words**

*international volunteering, Volunteer tourism, European volunteering service*

#### **Anotácia**

*Dobrovoľnícky cestovný ruch, ktorý nosí tiež prívlastok cestovanie, ktoré má zmysel, umožňuje návštevníkom venovať časť svojho času, energie, vedomostí a schopností v prospech činností zameraných na zlepšovanie prostredia alebo zvyšovanie blahobytu komún po celom svete. Za tieto aktivity nedostanú finančnú odmenu, no získavajú osobnostný a profesionálny rast, dobrý pocit, nové priateľstvá a životné skúsenosti. Pridanú hodnotu dobrovoľníckej služby si uvedomuje aj Európska únia, ktorá sa v poslednom období snaží podporiť dobrovoľníctvo na národnej či medzinárodnej úrovni. Jednou z jej aktivít je aj program Európska dobrovoľnícka služba, ktorý umožňuje mladým ľuďom vycestovať do zahraničia a podieľať sa kultúrnych, humanitárnych alebo environmentálnych projektoch ako dobrovoľník v niektorej z členských krajín Európskej únie, prípadne v ostatných krajinách sveta. Cieľom príspevku bolo preskúmať možnosti a zapojenie dobrovoľníkov zo zahraničia do dobrovoľníckych projektov na Slovensku prostredníctvom programu Európska dobrovoľnícka služba. Na základe analýzy sekundárnych údajov databáz akreditovaných organizácií a dobrovoľníckych projektov môžeme povedať, že Slovensko nepatrí ku krajinám, ktoré by mali veľké zastúpenie akreditovaných organizácií oproti iným Európskym krajinám. Napriek tomu sa na Slovensku realizuje pomerne veľký počet dobrovoľníckych projektov a výsledky primárneho prieskumu*

*u prijímajúcich organizácií ukazujú, že pre zahraničných dobrovoľníkov sme jednou z vyhľadávaných krajín, v ktorej môžu ukázať svoj potenciál a zároveň urobiť svet lepším.*

**Kľúčové slová**

*medzinárodné dobrovoľníctvo, dobrovoľnícky cestovný ruch, Európska dobrovoľnícka služba*

**JEL classification:** Z32, L83

## 1. Introduction

The history of volunteering is different across Europe. While some countries have a long tradition of volunteering, in others it has been developing still very slowly. According to the results of a Eurobarometer survey for the year 2007, three out of ten Europeans declare that they take part in voluntary activities. Attitudes of young people to volunteering have been changing gradually and over the last ten years, there was not just a general increase in the number of active volunteers but also in voluntary organizations in the EU (European Youth Portal, 2015).

## 2. Volunteerism and tourism

Volunteering is a multidimensional concept (Cnaan et al., 1996 In Holmes, Smith, Lockstone-Binney, Baum, 2010). It promotes solidarity and social inclusion, gives people the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, skills and social contacts, and thereby encourages the personal, social and professional development. According to The Universal Declaration on Volunteering, endorsed by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in 2001, volunteering is seen as encouraging public participation and interest in the development of society; It takes the form of group activities carried out mostly by a certain organization; It is based on personal motivation and free decision; It increases human potential and quality of everyday life, strengthens the human solidarity, contributes to respect for the rights, dignity and culture of other countries, promotes equal opportunities and also contributes to job creation and new professions (Linderová, 2011). Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010 In Kotíková, 2013) characterize volunteering by three basic features: (1) the volunteers carry out their work on the basis of free will, (2) usually without financial compensation, or the compensation provides reimbursement of costs or is symbolic and (3) the work is intended for the benefit of others, usually in advance of the intended recipients, who benefit from volunteering or receiving assistance.

According to Brozmanová Gregorová, Marček and Mračková (2009) in practice there are four forms of volunteering, such as (1) mutual assistance and self-help, (2) the provision of the services to others, (3) participation, (4) advocacy and leadership campaigns. Each of these forms of volunteering may include formal (organized, managed) or informal (unorganized) voluntary activities or a combination of both. Formal volunteering refers to voluntary activities carried out within and through various organizations. On the other hand, informal volunteering may be seen as the direct assistance provided to individuals outside the family and the people living in the home of volunteer or volunteers (Brozmanová Gregorová et. al., 2011).

In developed countries volunteering has a long tradition and is associated with art, culture, geography, history or leisure in the destination (Kraus, 2010 in Linderová, 2011). At the present, various types of volunteer activities exist, which largely reflect the impact of the current development of society. In addition to the so-called classical volunteering, also corporate volunteering, online volunteering, micro-volunteering and volunteer tourism are gradually developed.

Penetrating volunteering into the tourism industry has gained a new dimension of volunteering. It links to the need to travel in spare time outside residence for the purpose of learning, distraction and entertainment, carrying out cultural and sports activities. This connection has not only enriched the already existing alternative forms of tourism (Ecotourism, Responsible Tourism, Community Based Tourism), but has created a new independent form of travel, which pays attention to environmental and social aspects of tourism industry (Gray, Campbell, 2007; Butcher, Smith 2010; Wearing, McGehee, 2013). Thus, we could say that volunteer tourism is a result of a combination of individual

interests of visitors in the tourism industry with a positive direct impact on society as well as natural and economic environment (Wearing, 2001).

There are several forms of volunteer tourism, where people can get involved. Volunteers can participate in environmental, humanitarian and cultural projects in developing or developed countries. Most of these projects are usually organised by non-governmental organizations, local groups, clubs or associations and local authorities, which are also called the third, non-governmental, non-profit or voluntary sector (Chobotova, 2015). These organisations play an important role in specific areas of the tourism industry. They do not perceive it as the activities associated with the satisfaction of the needs of holidaymakers, instead they see tourism as an opportunity to create new, positive values and activities for tourists as well as local communities (Lyons, Wearing, 2008). At the same time non-governmental organisations better reflect the specific problems and requirements of the communities (Svidroňová, 2014) and help to create targeted activities and projects. The key connection is also a combination of volunteering and organized events, attractions and activities in tourism. Volunteer's commitment does support not only the success of the events, but increases the potential of a place as tourism destination, too.

The responsibility for policies and law concerning community engagement and volunteering lies with the national governments of the EU member states. This responsibility can also be passed down to regional and local governments. One of the aims of the European Union is to support the development of voluntary activities in Europe on a global level. Because of celebrating the efforts of the estimated 100 million Europeans who take part in voluntary activities, the European Commission launched the year 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering. This year was also aimed at making volunteering easier for people, helping EU member states to make improvements by suggesting new policies, conducting research, running projects, sharing good practice between the different countries and improving the quality of volunteering in Europe. One of the initiatives of European Union is also promoting volunteering among young people, particularly to encourage volunteering across borders. This initiative is done in cooperation with the member states through the EU Youth strategy, which has a specific section on voluntary activities at national and international levels. One of the most popular programmes organized to support the international volunteer networks is the European voluntary Service.

### 3. European Voluntary Service

European Voluntary Service (EVS) started as a pilot action in 1996. Due to its successful start, the European Commission launched the European Voluntary Service Community Action Programme, which operated during 1998-1999. After that period EVS became a part of the YOUTH programme (2000-2006), and continued as a key activity under the Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013). Currently it is a part of the Erasmus + programme (2014-2020) (European Youth Portal, 2015).

The aim of the programme is to provide young people with the opportunity to experience the volunteering abroad. The programme supports the development of solidarity and tolerance among young people and enables them to gain the experiences and skills to ensure their personal as well as professional growth through participation in projects in a wide range of fields, such as culture, youth, children, sports, social care for the elderly, people with disabilities and immigrants, cultural heritage, arts, leisure, animal welfare and communication, environmental protection and education, rural development and development cooperation.

EVS includes a tripartite partnership between the volunteer, the sending organization and the host organization. The condition for organisations is that at least one of them should be from an EU member state or a candidate country. Anyone between 17 and 30 years can join EVS as a volunteer. EVS lasts from 2 to 12 months and can be carried out in all countries from the European Union or other world countries. Young people with fewer opportunities and young people with disabilities can take part in voluntary projects as well. The duration of the voluntary activities for them can be reduced from 2 weeks to 2 months. All volunteers receive a grant, which covers most of the costs associated

with travel, accommodation, food, insurance and pocket money. After EVS volunteers receive Youthpass certificate, which document the development of competencies, as well as to confirm participation and describe the respective project. All participating organizations involved in EVS activity (receiving, sending, and coordinating organisation) must hold a valid accreditation, which guarantees the application of the high standards set by the European Commission. A participating organisation can be (1) a non-profit organisation, association, non-governmental organization; (2) a European Youth non-governmental organization; (3) a social enterprise; (4) a public body at local level; (5) a public body at regional or national level; (6) an association of regions; (7) a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation or (8) a profit-making body active in Corporate Social Responsibility. All these organisations could have accreditation as a coordinator, a sending as well as a receiving organisation at the same time. The coordinating organisation is responsible for the whole project on behalf of all the partner organisations. In all cases, the coordinator cannot be an organisation from a Partner Country neighbouring the EU. The role of the sending organization is to help with the preparation of the project (organising practical arrangements) or contact the receiving organisation, which has already developed a project, and help with preparing participants before departure and providing support to participants during all the phases of the EVS project. The receiving organisation, in charge of hosting the activity, develops a programme of activities for volunteers in cooperation with partner organisations during the EVS project. It also provides support to volunteers from the moment of arrival in the host country (e.g. accommodation, languages courses, and mentoring support). All accredited organizations are listed in the international database of EVS-accredited organizations. On the European Youth Portal, there is also the database of volunteering opportunities available where accredited organizations can list their projects (Corrigendum to the 2017 Erasmus + Program Guide, 2017).

Currently, 5 232 organisations from 56 countries are registered in the database of accredited organisations. There are 3038 sending organisations, 4 492 receiving organisations and 3012 coordinating organisations. Most organisations come from Germany (513) and least from Greenland and New Caledonia (1). The total number of added volunteer opportunities is 330 (24.03.2017).

#### 4. Aim and methodology

The paper focuses on volunteer tourism as an alternative and an authentic form of tourism that combines volunteer work with travel. The aim of the paper is to explore the possibilities and the involvement of European Voluntary Service's volunteers on inbound volunteer tourism in Slovakia. The paper is based on the secondary data from databases of accredited organizations and volunteer projects availed on the European Commission's youth portal ([www.ec.europa.eu/youth](http://www.ec.europa.eu/youth)). The primary data were obtained by the method of sociological interview. We addressed all 10 accredited organizations, which published their projects in the database between the years 2015 and 2017. In the survey participated 8 of them. The collected primary and secondary data were finally processed by the method of analysis and synthesis, comparison and selected mathematical and statistical methods in Microsoft Excel Programme.

#### 5. Inbound volunteer tourism in Slovakia organized through the European Voluntary Service

In Slovakia, the opportunity to take part in EVS programme has been used by 86 non-governmental organisations and public bodies at regional or national level. 60 organisations are listed as sending organisations, 67 as coordinating organisations and 74 organisations are registered as receiving organisations. Many of them have accreditation for all three positions. For the development of volunteer tourism in Slovakia receiving organisations are significant, because they create projects and conditions for volunteers coming from abroad. In Slovakia, these are represented mainly by civic associations (59.5 %), non-profit organisations (24.3 %), educational institutions (5.4 %), centres (5.4 %). Also an association of churches and development agency is registered in the database. Most of these accredited receiving organisations come from western Slovakia (56.8 %), the second largest amount of organisations is from middle Slovakia (28.4 %) and the lowest number of organisations is



from eastern Slovakia (14.9 %). For the period 2015-2019, 25 projects are being implemented, including 1 project which is now completed, 10 projects which are currently in progress, 5 projects which have already closed the selection of volunteers and will begin in the coming months and 9 projects where it is still possible to get involved. The total number of volunteers required for all projects is 56, which is on average approximately 2 volunteers per project. The organisations are looking for volunteers mostly from Germany, the Czech republic, Hungary, Malta and Estonia, but also from Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, France, Spain, Poland, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Ukraine, Belgium and Slovenia. This depends on the focus and conditions of the specific project. In period 2015–2017 only 10 from all accredited receiving organisations have listed any project and looked for foreign volunteers. Despite the fact that most registered receiving organizations are located in western Slovakia, only 16 % of the submitted projects are proposed to be implemented here, the remaining 84 % of projects is taking place in central Slovakia. The Table 1 shows the number of accredited receiving organizations, planned and implemented projects and the planned number of volunteers required according to the regions.

**Tab.1: The number of receiving organisations, projects and requested volunteers by region**

Region	The number of receiving organisations	The number of projects for period 2015-2019	The number of required volunteers
Western Slovakia	42	4	16
Central Slovakia	21	21	40
Eastern Slovakia	11	0	0
Total	74	25	56

Source: own processing

In terms of the categorization of the projects according to the EVS, volunteers from abroad can take part mainly in projects aimed at promoting the culture and development of creativity (48 %), youth support (40 %), education (28 %), the development of cooperation in the framework of the EU (24 %), rural development and environmental protection (16 %). Fewer projects are aimed at social care for people with disabilities, health and lifestyle, and ICT. Most volunteer positions are focused on the development of community, volunteers have the opportunity to participate in the creation of various kinds of workshops, activities, language courses for children and youth, preparation of voluntary events, administrative work for the organisation or engage in work with disabled and socially disadvantaged people. Other projects are aimed at organizing cultural or sports events or children's summer camps. Volunteers may be involved also in projects supporting tourism development, such as the restoration of the Calvary in Banská Štiavnica or participate in the preparation of exhibitions and cultural programs in synagogue in Žilina.

In the initial survey we have contacted all 10 receiving organizations with the aim to find out if young people from abroad are interested in voluntary service in Slovakia. 8 of them took part in the survey. Interest of volunteers has differentiated with respect to the focus of the project. However, in many cases, the total number of applications for individual projects significantly exceeded the number of available positions. As example, a project by a civic association from western Slovakia required only 2 volunteers regardless of the country and 96 volunteers applied. Volunteers are more interested in work with children and youth or creative volunteer positions. Table 2 compares the total number of required volunteers for the projects that have already closed the selection procedure with the number of applications that organisations have received according to the topic of the project. As we could see, the total number of young people who showed interest in Slovakia as the destination of their voluntary service was almost seven times higher than the required number of volunteers. Potential volunteers are mostly from Turkey, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark, Ukraine, Armenia, France, but also from Spain, Latvia, Russia, Italy, Romania, Greece and Portugal. However, not all candidates who express an interest meet the requirements of the organisations but most organisations have managed to get volunteers they were looking for.

**Tab.2: Comparison of required and available volunteers according to the project's topic**

Topic of the project		The number of required volunteers	The number of applications
community development	workshops, activities and summer camps for kids and youth	5	99
	work with disabled and socially disadvantaged people	11	11
	administrative work	2	2
events	cultural events	2	3
	creative and manual work	3	61
tourism development	restoration of the Calvary, exhibitions and cultural programs in synagogue	5	9
Total		28	185

Source: own processing

## Conclusion

New types of volunteerism reflect the current social processes that we perceive in the context of the modernization of society such as globalization, technological development, demographic changes and the rise of postmodern values. In combination with tourism, it manifests not only today's needs and lifestyles of visitors, but also a response to the current direction of tourism industry. Volunteer tourism, as a combination of individual interests of visitors in the tourism industry with a positive direct impact on society as well as natural and economic environment, supports the development of solidarity and tolerance among volunteers and community, enables volunteers to gain the experiences and skills to ensure their personal as well as professional growth. The promotion of volunteering among young people, particularly the encouragement of volunteering across borders, is also one of the aims of the European Union. The programme European Voluntary Service gives people aged 17 to 30 years the opportunity to participate in environmental, humanitarian and cultural development projects in one of the European or other countries in the world. The aim of this paper was to explore the possibilities and the involvement of European voluntary Service's volunteers on inbound volunteer tourism in Slovakia. During the period of 2015 to 2017, 25 projects were listed in the EVS database through which foreign volunteers could come and volunteer in Slovakia. Most of them will be carried out in central Slovakia. Volunteers can take part in projects focusing mainly in community development like in various workshops, activities, language courses for children and youths, administrative work for the organisation or engage in work with disabled and socially disadvantaged people. Some of projects are also aimed at organizing cultural or sports event, children summer camps or are supporting tourism. Despite that the opportunity to volunteer in Slovakia through EVS is lower than in Germany or France, the interest of foreign volunteers to take part in voluntary projects in Slovakia is almost seven times higher than the required number of volunteers. Volunteers are usually from Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands, France, the Czech republic, Estonia, Denmark, Ukraine, Armenia, Italy, Ukraine, Greece, Spain etc., but this depends on the conditions and topic of the project. For the future, it will be interesting to examine the motivation of volunteers who took part in EVS in Slovakia, their experiences or any experiences with projects abroad, which could be an asset for further development of volunteer tourism in Slovakia.

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