Mapping essential competences of culture volunteers in sparsely populated areas

Research Report

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I.   Applied Methodology

The Research Report foresaw the essential conditions for the success of cultural volunteering in the amateur arts, voluntary culture and heritage areas in sparsely populated areas to provide local communities with multidisciplinary artistic and cultural opportunities with added value for civic participation, the connection with the community and the local identity. The report foreseen that the field surveys will include the following respondents:

A. Learning providers;

B. Learners;

C. Other stakeholders.

The Municipality of Lousada identified the local actors to be involved in each of these groups:

A. Learning providers:

Volunteers from the following cultural associations:

- o Jangada Teatro;
- o Instintos Filmes;
- o Letras Sem Cessar;
- o Vidas em Cena;
- o Grupo de Teatro de Meinedo;
- o Rancho de Romariz;
- o Grupo de Teatro de Caíde.

B. Learners:

- o All employees of the Municipal Library of Lousada.

C. Other interested parties:

- o All employees of the Education and Culture Department of the Municipality of Lousada.

Firstly, a detailed explanation of the project was presented to the respondents. After that it was agreed with them to respond the field surveys until the end of February. The materials for the field surveys were translated during January.

In February the data collection began. The deadline for submitting the completed surveys was February 24. The interviews were conducted in February, on different days for each respondent from each group.

II.   Results of the questionnaires

Group A – Learning providers

Group A, Learning Providers, was constituted by 25 participants, all with Portuguese nationality and most of them female. Most respondents were between 60-69 years old and were retired (Appendix 1).

For most Learning Providers, culture volunteers in sparsely populated areas should have the following key competencies:

→ Social and communication skills;

→ Planning and management skills of cultural activities and events;

→ Have knowledge of working with local media and internet communication.

Learning Providers considered the possession of the abovementioned competences of very high importance. On the other hand, they attributed only some importance to the fact that the volunteer knows the influence of cultural activities in sparsely populated areas.

The remaining competences mentioned in the survey were classified, by most of the respondents of this group, as having a high importance (ex.: knowledge of the activities of local civil society, knowledge of the cultural sector of amateur arts, voluntary culture and heritage, skills to find funding, etc.).

For most Learning Providers, the best and most important forms of dissemination to engage active citizens as volunteers are:

→ Emphasize that the volunteer tasks is important for the local community and the common good (idealistic appeal);

→ Mention a personal contact of the organization (telephone or email) that interested volunteers can contact.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents in this group considered the involvement of other local NGOs in the recruitment of volunteers of very low importance.

Regarding the training programs, most of the Learning Providers considered it extremely important that the volunteers:

→ Have a clear and well-argued opinion on the main challenges in sparsely populated areas;

→ Have a clear well-argued opinion on why the voluntary culture associations and their volunteers can make a difference;

→ Know the main activities of the voluntary culture associations and their interactions with other main stakeholders in the local communities.

For the most part, they considered it very important that volunteers are trained to:

→ Learn to recognize and assess their key competence profile as culture volunteer (their strength and weaknesses);

→ learn to articulate their possible needs and priorities;

→ Know the positive relations between improved culture activities and promotion of civic participation, community bonding and local identity;

→ Know the other sectors of voluntary work in the municipality and have good skills in finding funding;

→ Have enhanced skills in working with social media and internet communication;

→ Have enhanced skills as project leaders in planning and managing cross-culture activities and events.

As regards forms of support for volunteers, most of the members of group A considered support to be of very high importance:

→ Complete fundraising to get support to cost demanding activities and help to secure payments and accountant of the activities;

→ Contact local authorities and get the wanted agreements.

Most respondents also gave high importance to supporting volunteers to address more practical tasks (ex.: making and distributing materials), contacting local business and commerce associations, the tourist bureau, local media and local cultural institutions, etc.

Finally, the Learning Providers stated that to be a good volunteer of culture in sparsely populated areas, it is necessary to have key competences such as:

• Be dynamic and creative;

• Have availability and motivation;

• Be sociable and fun;

• Be supportive;

• Have confidence in work and be compliant.

Group B – Learners

Group B - Learners was constituted by 25 participants of Portuguese nationality and most of them were male. Most of the members of this group were between 40 and 49 years old, were graduates and work in the public sector (Appendix 2).

The majority of learners emphasized as a key competency of very high importance that the volunteer have social and communication skills. They also highlighted as important competences:

→ Knowledge of the influence of cultural activities in sparsely populated areas;

→ Knowledge good practice on how culture volunteering in sparsely populated areas can promote civic participation, community bonding and local identity;

→ Knowledge of the local civil society activities as part of the overall activities in the municipality;

→ Knowledge of the cross-cultural sector of amateur arts, voluntary culture and heritage and their activities in the actual municipality;

→ Knowledge of the other sectors of voluntary work in the municipality;

→ Skills in planning and managing cross-culture activities and events;

→ Knowledge of working with local social media and internet communication;

→ Skills in finding funding;

→ Knowledge of other local stakeholders that may support and/or be part of the cross-culture activities in the local communities.

For most Learners, the best and most important forms of dissemination and recruitment of new culture volunteers are:

→ Emphasize that the tasks as volunteer brings personal competence development and an improved CV by offering training courses, mentoring, etc. (the personal career appeal);

→ Mention a personal contact of the organization, which interested volunteers can call by phone or mail.

On the other hand, most elements of the Group B considered only of some importance providing presentation materials where are described the possible tasks of culture volunteers.

Regarding the different training possibilities presented in the survey, most of the learners considered them very important, not highlighting any of them in particular. Concerning support for volunteers, most of the members of this group emphasized as forms of support of very high importance:

→ Support to complete fund-raising to get support to cost demanding activities and secure the payments and accountant of the activities;

→ Support to contact local authorities and get the wanted agreements;

→ Support to contact the local business and commerce associations, the tourist bureau, or local media;

→ Help to find and contact the appropriate nationwide experts, speakers and advisers in the field.

In open response questions, learners have highlighted as key skills to be a good volunteer culture in sparsely populated areas:

- Have self-motivation ("Things do not always go well and that's why you have to be motivated to do better");

- Be persistent and hardworking ("you must have willingness and availability to collaborate");

- Be a good leader ("You have to be able to lead in order to move forward with the projects and form a united team");

- Be dynamic ("Create diverse activities for different types of audience"), sociable, supportive and positive.

Group C – Other stakeholders

Group C - Other Stakeholders consisted of 25 participants, all of Portuguese nationality. Most of the participants were female, aged between 40 - 49 years and work in the public sector (Appendix 3).

For most of elements of the Group C, the need of the volunteer have working knowledge with the local media and internet communication is a skill only with some importance. Regarding the other key competences presented in the survey, the majority of the elements of the group C considered them to be of high importance (ex.: knowledge of the cultural sector, social skills, planning skills and activity management).

The majority of elements of the group C, has gived great importance to the reference, by cultural organizations trying to recruit volunteers, of a personal contact (email or telephone), to which interested volunteers can contact. On the other hand, most of the members of this group considered only of some importance the dissemination and recruitment of volunteers through more traditional advertisements (ex.: local media, notice boards in shops).

All the training programs presented in the survey are very important for most individuals in group C. Regarding the different forms of support for volunteers, it is of high importance to most of the constituents of this group:

→ Support to volunteers to ensure the accounting and payments;

→ Personal sparring or mentoring from more experienced culture volunteers or managers or consultants from voluntary associations.

The most part of members of the group C consider as main key competencies of a good volunteer of culture in sparsely populated areas:

- Be proactive and dynamic;
- Be sociable and have communicative skills;
- Be persistent ("Always believe") and have availability;
- Be an entrepreneur ("Do not be afraid to get involved in new projects");
- Know the population and the place where you will develop activities as a volunteer.

Comparison of results between groups

Clarify key competence for currently successful culture volunteers:

For most participants in group A (Learning Providers) and group B (Learners) it is of high importance that a culture volunteer has social and communication skills. For those in Group C (Other Stakeholders), these competences are important, but they do not stand out from the other key competencies presented.

Most elements of the 3 groups indicated the high importance of the volunteer to know good practices on how cultural volunteering in sparsely populated areas can promote civic participation.

Most of the participants in Group A emphasized the ability to plan and manage cultural activities as a key competency of very high importance. On the other hand, most of the elements in groups B and C gave great importance to it, but do not stand out from the other competences presented.

Group A also emphasized as a key competency of high importance the volunteer to have knowledge of working with the local media and communication over the Internet. On the other hand, most of the participants in group C attributed this competence just some importance.

Clarify best ways of outreach and engaging of new culture volunteers:

Most members of the 3 groups agreed that the use of idealistic appeal by cultural organizations is of great importance. They also emphasized the need for cultural organizations to mention a personal contact (telephone or email) that interested volunteers can contact.

For most members of group B, it is of very high importance that cultural organizations appeal to the personal careers of volunteers. In turn, most of the members of group A gave only some importance to this form of recruitment.

Group B also emphasized the publication of more traditional advertisements (ex.: local media, store notice boards) as an important way of recruiting volunteers. Most of the elements of groups A and C, however, considered this form of recruitment to be of only some importance.

Most of the members of group A considered the involvement of local NGOs in the recruitment of volunteers to be very low importance. On the other hand, most members of groups B and C considered this form of recruitment of high importance.

Clarify best training program for culture volunteers:

Most members of groups A, B and C considered it very important that volunteers have a clear and well-argued view of the main challenges in sparsely populated areas and how voluntary culture associations and volunteers can make a difference. They also emphasized the importance of volunteers know the main activities of voluntary culture associations. A high level of agreement was found in the responses of the participants who constituted the 3 groups.

Clarify needed support from key stakeholders to the volunteers:

For most participants in groups A, B and C, it is of very high importance that volunteers receive support, especially to complete fund-raising, to ensure accountability and payments of activities and to contact the local authorities.

The majority of the members of group A attributed only some importance to the volunteer's need for help to ensure efficient promotion and dissemination of results. In turn, most of the elements of groups B and C considered this need for support to be of high importance.

III.   Results of the Interviews

In terms of the first question of the interview, where it was intended to **understand the key competencies of successful cultural volunteers,** the Learning Providers emphasized that volunteers:

- Must "know very well the cultural sector of the surrounding area where they will volunteer";
- Must have social and communication skills;
- Must be dynamic, available, and confident.

The Learners, faced with the same question, indicated that the volunteers:

- Must "know the cultural activities of the area where they will volunteer";
- Must "know existing cultural organizations and associations";
- Must be competent, organized, participatory, supportive, dynamic, persistent and good leaders.

The members of group C, on the other hand, have emphasized as key competences of the successful volunteers of the culture:

- Have motivation;
- Have "training in the area in which they will volunteer";
- Be dynamic, sociable, interested, entrepreneur and available.

In summary, all three groups agree on what they consider to be the key competencies of a culture volunteer. This emphasized the importance of volunteers having social skills, knowledge of the local cultural sector, being dynamic and available.

In question 2, **which characterizes good practices on how to engage culture volunteers in sparsely populated areas,** the Learning Providers have emphasized as best practices:

- The associations explain all the possible tasks of the volunteer;
- The establishment of voluntary agreements (between the association and the volunteer);
- The associations respond quickly to the needs and/or difficulties of their volunteers.

Faced with this second question, Learners advised that volunteering in sparsely populated areas is difficult, especially in the area of culture. That's why they consider as good practices:

- A good reception of the new volunteer by the association and its members;
- Encouraging interaction between the volunteer and the community;
- Recognition of the volunteer's work as a form of encouragement and motivation.

Group C elements emphasized the best practices are to involve volunteers of culture in sparsely populated areas:

- Good management by the associations of their voluntary programs;
- Encouraging continuous qualification of volunteers;

- Recognition of volunteers' contribution (ex.: "one day per year a volunteer work recognition ceremony").

In this question, although there are some divergences of opinion, it is emphasized as good practice for the involvement of volunteers to have a clear definition of their tasks and recognition for their work.

In the third question, about **what characterizes good practices on how to train volunteers from the culture in sparsely populated areas**, the members of group A, Learning Providers, highlighted:

- Making "awareness actions about the importance of voluntary work in sparsely populated areas";
- Making clarification sessions on the rights and duties of the volunteer;
- Training courses on communication and interpersonal skills.

Learners, on the other hand, emphasized that it is important to provide volunteers "enriching professional pathways", thereby defining good practices as:

- Training in expressive techniques and sociocultural animation;
- Training in the area of leadership, communication and entrepreneurship;
- Designation by the association of a reference person to accompany and assist volunteers.

The members of group C stated that the volunteers of the culture must have "a constant updating of knowledge and continuous training", emphasized therefore as good practices:

- Training actions conducted by community leaders to provide volunteers with knowledge of the community, its traditions, customs and social and cultural habits;
- The "organization of visits to the community";
- The possibility for volunteers to have a "experimental period" before actually committing themselves to the organization;
- Promotion of reflection about the role of cultural volunteers in sparsely populated areas;
- Technical and specific training with professionals in the field of culture.

In this question it was found that all members of the 3 groups considered important that the associations provide training to their volunteers. The importance of training in communication, leadership and entrepreneurship was particularly emphasized.

In relation to the fourth question of the interview, **which characterizes the good support of voluntary culture associations to culture volunteers,** Learning Providers emphasized:

- Support in the contact with the cultural institutions and main local authorities;
- Plan, along with the new volunteer, the activities that the volunteer will carry out;
- Help the volunteer to get funding.

In turn, learners pointed that good support from organizations to volunteers of culture involves:

- Support volunteers in the planning and organization of their tasks;

- Provide "adequate information so that the volunteer is able to perform his tasks without difficulty";
- Allowing volunteers to participate in training to improve their skills.

For members of group C, these are good ways of supporting volunteers:

- Provide them with training;
- Ensure the necessary conditions for the performance of their tasks;
- Recognize the work of the volunteer (ex.: "certifying voluntary work").

In this question, the volunteers' referred training and assistance in development and carrying out their tasks as good ways of supporting volunteers.

Concerning the fifth question of the interview, **which characterizes the good support of other stakeholders from local communities,** Learning Providers noted:

- Appreciating the work of culture volunteers;
- Meetings with volunteers from other institutions to promote debate and sharing of experiences;
- The provision of help in the efficient dissemination and promotion of organized activities.

Learners mentioned as good ways of supporting volunteers:

- Good communication between stakeholders and culture associations and their volunteers;
- Recognize the work of culture volunteers (ex.: "thank you ceremonies to volunteers");
- Give visibility to the volunteers' work (ex.: "local newspaper publications, disseminations activities").

For the members of group C, they reported as main forms of support for volunteers from other stakeholders:

- Involve volunteers in some decision-making concerning them;
- Organize informal meetings among volunteers from various areas so they can share experiences;
- Provide technical support to volunteers so they can organize the accounting and payment of activities.

In this question, the members of the 3 groups emphasized the importance of other stakeholders to recognize and make visible the work of volunteers and organize meetings between volunteers.

Finally, respondents from the 3 groups left some **recommendations that cultural associations should prioritize in the future to promote successful cultural volunteering in sparsely populated areas.** Learning Providers said that the associations should mention that "volunteering is a development of personal skills, which allows curriculum enrichment at all levels". On the other hand, Learners considered that the most important thing is that the associations promote awareness-raising actions about the importance of volunteering in sparsely

populated areas. The members of Group C emphasized that it is essential that the associations allow for the continuous training of their volunteers and promote their proximity to the community where they will volunteer.