

Because more and more people were taking part in volunteering during the nineties and the first decade of this century (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2003), it is not surprising that researchers were fascinated about the reasons why people decided to volunteer and how they benefited from their experiences. Since then, many studies have been published and many variables have been studied to answer these questions (Penner, 2002; Wilson, 2012). As a result, we have a very complex panorama in which volunteerism has been related to many variables: empathy, altruism, prosocial attitudes, secure attachment, ego-centric and heterocentric motivations, positive emotions, satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, social identity, organizational support, burnout, and so forth (for a revision see Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2015).

Several correlational studies found that volunteerism is associated with higher psychological well-being such as increased happiness and self-esteem, and less loneliness (De Jong Giefveld & Dykstra, 2008; Dunn, Akinin, & Norton, 2008; Krause & Shaw, 2000). These findings were confirmed in longitudinal studies (Ironson, 2007; Schwartz & Sendor, 1999).

However, volunteering has also changed in line with global social changes. Changes in work patterns such as increasing working hours and job demands, more flexible working arrangements, and growth of alternative forms of work are all likely to have important implications that need to be addressed. As regards lifestyle, changing family trends, increasing expectations for living standards, and shifts in family size and living arrangements also require investigation. Similarly, issues such as “childlessness” and the increasing number of single parents will affect volunteerism in ways yet to be determined (Johnston, Green, Stephens, Syme, & Nancarrow, 2006).

The search for opportunities to take part in short-term, flexible (or “episodic”) voluntary work has increased as a result of this changing scenario that includes busier lifestyles, longer working hours, and a declining average number of hours of voluntary service per person (Alfieri et al., 2017; Macduff, 2005, 2011; Rehberg, 2005; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). People often feel that they lack the time and the skills to be involved in traditional volunteering (Ralston, Downward, & Lumsdon, 2004; Wilson & Musick, 1997). A further challenge that contemporary societies have to deal with concerns building a more inclusive society open to diversity, capable of promoting democratic values and social coexistence in a historical period characterized by growing social and cultural heterogeneity.

In the face of such evidence, it is useful to rethink volunteering in regard to its forms and to the volunteers. The aim of this special issue is to re-read the classic constructs of literature on volunteering, especially concerning the outcomes derived from commitment

in volunteerism, in light of the important current social changes and the new emerging frontiers regarding both the ways and the forms of volunteerism and the volunteers.

The special issue collects 10 contributions from various nationalities that attempt to respond in various ways to the aim outlined above. Some contributions focus on changes in civic engagement, of which volunteering is an expression, in a changing world. Others describe new volunteers and new ways of expressing protagonism and participation.

The first article by Albanesi, Guarino, Zani, Cicognani, and Tzankova, entitled “Civic engagement in a changing world: Does it contribute to the development of global citizenship?” addresses a new topic in the field of volunteerism linked to the concept of global citizenship. As the authors stated global citizenship refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. But it is more than a universalistic or superordinate identification. It emphasizes political, economic, social, and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness. Feeling like a global citizen means embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act, and being aware of people’s interconnection in the world (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). In the article the authors analyzed the role of organizational membership (associative experiences) and of civic and political engagement in fostering global citizenship.

The second contribution by Procentese, De Carlo, and Gatti, titled “Civic engagement within the local community and sense of responsible togetherness,” reflects on the perception of low individual and collective civic engagement and how it becomes difficult to think and act when creating contexts of responsible ways of togetherness. Indeed, civic engagement represents a key element in creating social relationships and developing a sense of responsible togetherness (SoRT), because it promotes prosocial values and increases active citizenship and sense of community (SoC). The study explores the role of local community engagement attitudes and behaviors in promoting collective actions and member representations about their interactions with the local community.

Also the article by Cunha, Ornelas, and Vargas-Moniz, entitled “Volunteering leadership and sense of community: A study within a scouting association,” focuses on the importance of the local community and particularly on the importance of supporting the sense of community. The aim of the study was to contribute to the conceptual development of “sense of community” studying it within a specific community such as that of the Scouts.

Regarding the impact of social changes on volunteering, the authors of the fourth article, Pozzi, Meneghini, and Marta, considered that social changes have contributed to a modification of the structure and the form of this phenomenon. As a consequence, a new perspective on the study of episodic volunteering is needed and social researchers should investigate why this new type of volunteerism is so attractive. In the article entitled “Does volunteering at events motivate repeat engagement in voluntary service? The case of young adult volunteers at EXPO Milan 2015” the topic of episodic volunteering is addressed. The study was conducted with a group of young people who volunteered at a cultural event, the EXPO Milan 2015, with the purpose of understanding the effects of this experience.

Always within the social and structural changes of volunteering, it is important to remember how volunteering has changed since the third sector associations have had the opportunity to carry out profit and nonprofit actions in a complementary way. The management of third sector organizations is recognized as being more complex than that of other organizations. Being neither governmental nor for-profit, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) strive to find the right balance between social functions and financial constraints (Toepler & Anheier, 2013). In addition, they are accountable to a variety of stakeholders, such as paid workers, suppliers, donators, end users, and beneficiaries of their services, as well as volunteers (Balsler & McClusky, 2005; Benevene, Kong, Barbieri, Lucchesi, & Cortini, 2017; Benevene, Kong, Lucchesi, & Cortini, 2019; Kearns, 1996). Within this complexity, Dal Corso, Carluccio, Buonomo, Benevene, Vecina, and West, in their contribution, entitled “‘I that is we, we that is I’: The mediating role of work engagement between key leadership behaviors and volunteer satisfaction,” claim that volunteer work engagement appears to have a central role in the relationship between leadership characteristics and volunteer satisfaction. In their work, they intend to verify the effect of some specific dimensions of leadership on job satisfaction and to verify the effect of volunteer work engagement as a mediator of this relationship.

Turning next to the contributions that have focused on the changes in the volunteers, the first is a study that explores the theme of volunteer motivation by addressing an important methodological issue. Vecina and Marzana, in the article entitled “Motivations for volunteering: Do motivation questionnaires measure what actually drives volunteers?” underscore how most of the research conducted in recent decades involving what motivates volunteers has relied on the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI; Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary et al. 1998) as the evaluation instrument. In the study, they consider whether the six motivations evaluated by this instrument are present in the volunteers. If they matter most to them, according to the functional theory of motivations, it is perfectly conceivable for there to be others, especially in new fields. The authors analyze the correspondence between the motivations evaluated with open-ended questions and those evaluated using the VFI in a large sample of active volunteers at various Spanish organizations.

The next contribution focuses on young people and highlights the role of identity in engagement paths. Loreto Martínez and Cumsille in the article entitled “Differences in profiles of identity and purpose between civically engaged and not engaged youth,” hypothesized that profiles of identity would differ between youths participating and not participating in civic and political issues. They modeled identity configurations in a sample of late Chilean adolescents and young adults that differed in their involvement in civic and political organizations. The results highlighted that highly coherent, committed, and purposeful youths are more likely to be engaged in civic and political activities and present higher levels of critical thinking about society.

Another contribution offers a perspective on a new and emerging volunteerism carried out by young immigrants. Alfieri, Marzana, and Cipresso present an article entitled “Immigrants’ community engagement and well-being.” It is known that the immigration

experience often involves the loss of reference points as well as a certain cultural and relational disorientation. Once in the new country, people may face multiple challenges with integration, the reconstruction of their lives, and merging their previous identity with the experience of the new context (Giuliani, Olivari, & Alfieri, 2017; Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo, 2011). It is also true, however, that in the new context, people can find new opportunities for participation and new resources to live their lives. In their work the authors propose investigating, in explorative terms, whether community engagement may be a way to promote well-being in young engaged immigrants.

Another group of emerging volunteers is represented by separated or divorced parents. Parise, Pagani, Bertoni, and Iafrate present an article entitled “Volunteering and social ties after marital separation: An exploratory study on a sample of separated parents in Italy.” Their study focuses on the role of volunteering for the ex-partner’s well-being. In a sample of separated parents, they explored whether differences existed between volunteers and nonvolunteers in their social ties and characteristics (network size, frequency of contacts, and social support), and whether these characteristics mediated the association of volunteering with different dimensions of well-being (satisfaction with life, symptoms of depression, generativity).

The final article by Ferguson and Lawrence is focused on a specific group of volunteers, namely blood donors and is entitled “Altruistic and warm-glow motivations: Differentiating first time from repeat donors.” The blood donor gives a gift of blood in a voluntary and planned fashion at a personal cost to the donor, to the benefit of both the immediate and potentially long-term health of the recipient. The voluntary and planned nature of blood donation links it to the wider literature of volunteer behavior (Ferguson & Chandler, 2005). The authors examine how work on blood donation fits within the wider literature on volunteerism and motivations.

We hope that the articles included in this special issue will not only expand readers’ knowledge of volunteerism and civic engagement, but also offer ideas for new works on these issues of great social importance while offering guidance to associations and nonprofit organizations.

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