

THE SOCIAL AND PASTORAL POTENTIAL OF CATHOLIC VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE

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Introduction

2011 is the European Year of Volunteering, designated by the European Commission with the aim to call attention to the contribution given by volunteers to Europe's spiritual, social and economic growth and to the establishment of European citizenship, creating for civil society the conditions that favor volunteerism and increasing the visibility of its activities.

The European Union has always recognized the importance of volunteerism, for its ability to generate human and social capital, promote integration and employment and improve social cohesion. Most importantly, volunteerism is a concrete expression of the fundamental values upon which Europe is founded, namely justice, solidarity, inclusion and citizenship. However, there lacks a systematic and structured approach to volunteerism, also on account of the fact that in Europe there are different ways of understanding, defining and engaging in it (this is confirmed by the survey conducted, for instance even just in relation to the distinction made in French-speaking countries between *bénévolat* and *volontariat*).

Volunteerism includes all forms of activities, be they formal or informal, which are carried freely, for personal reasons, and not for profit.

Within such a context, and at a time when great changes are taking place both inside and outside of volunteerism, the meeting called by the Holy Father, which took place in Rome on 11 November 2011, was an important opportunity to take stock of the direction that the secular tradition of catholic charity activities is moving in.

Seeing as future challenges can best be tackled only if an analysis is made today of how we are preparing to address them, a survey was conducted which involved catholic volunteer organizations operating in various European countries.

This report offers a summary of its findings. It is not meant to be exhaustive or to provide a full picture of catholic volunteerism, but rather to identify the main criticalities that are being addressed at the European level.

The survey focused primarily on the three macro-areas that have proven to be most problematic in recent years: the structure and internal composition of volunteer organizations, their relationship with public entities and institutions and with the Church community.

A brief methodological note: the pastoral and social potential

How does catholic volunteerism contribute to the pastoral ministry of the local Church and to social cohesion? To what extent and in what way does it communicate its activities, ideas, world views – briefly, its culture? The survey was built around this question. While the relationship with the local Church may seem obvious, that with public institutions is not, for many feel that such a relationship is essential to the production and offering of services and makes the association dependent upon public funding and therefore upon political trends.

In the wake of these considerations, the decision was therefore made to adopt the concept of potential, which replaces that of capital, belonging to the sphere of economics, and is understood as the set of representations of oneself and of one's relationships potentially geared towards transmitting culture. The

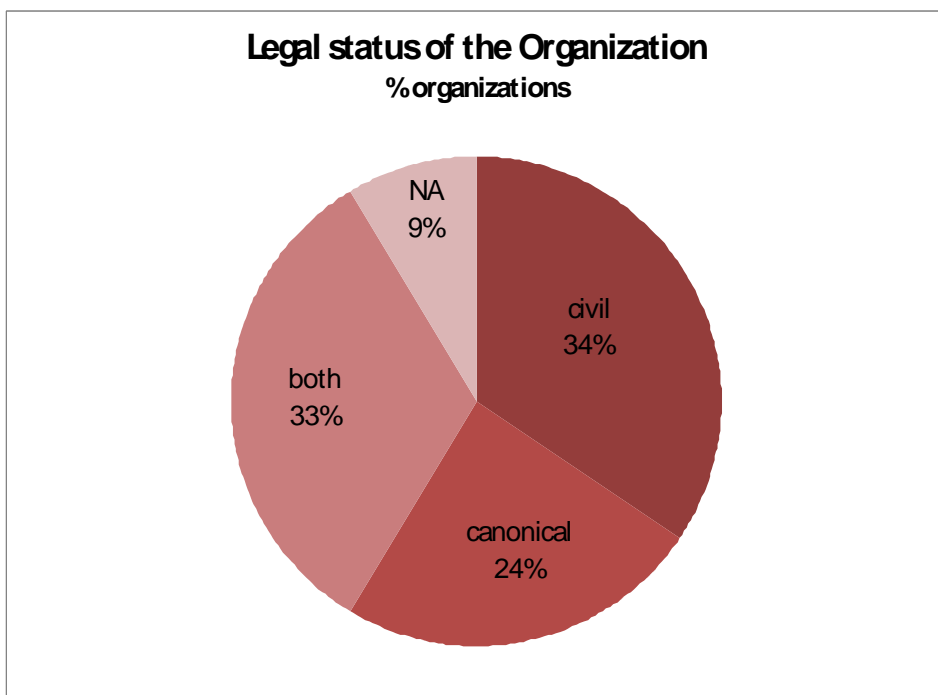
concept of potential refers directly to the idea whereby all relationships have a *generative* force; such a force, however, acquires value according to how it is used, depending on the meaning that the relationships themselves acquire.

Structure and internal composition. One figure says it all: 351 volunteers for each employed worker

58 organizations in total participated in the survey.

According to the information gathered, 34% of the legal entities involved are recognized only under civil law, 33% are recognized under both civil and canon law, 24% enjoy canonical legal status, while 9% do not provide information in this regard.

So, in most cases, these structures are not exclusively of a religious nature but are fully and formally inserted in the social context to which they belong.



19% of organizations were established recently, that is after 2000.

33% of associations have a longstanding tradition, inasmuch as they were created during the first half of the twentieth century or even in the nineteenth century.

The vast majority (48%), however, were established between 1960 and the end of the twentieth century.

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20 countries are represented in the survey, thanks to the participation of 54 organizations. 3 international entities and 1 belonging to Vatican City were also involved.

For the purpose of identifying the sector that the organizations are mainly involved in, the questionnaire allowed respondents to indicate two different areas.

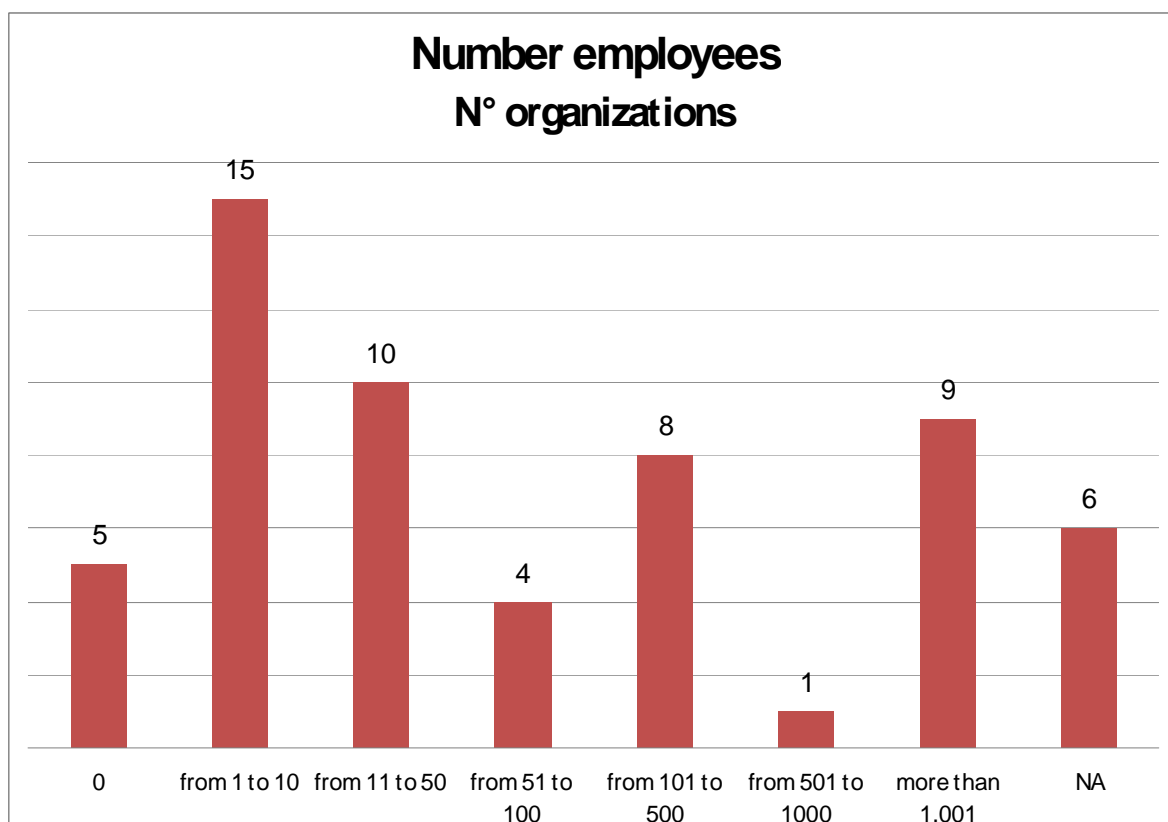
According to the results, the organizations are strongly engaged in the fight against poverty and social exclusion (29 out of 58), international development and education projects for young people and adults

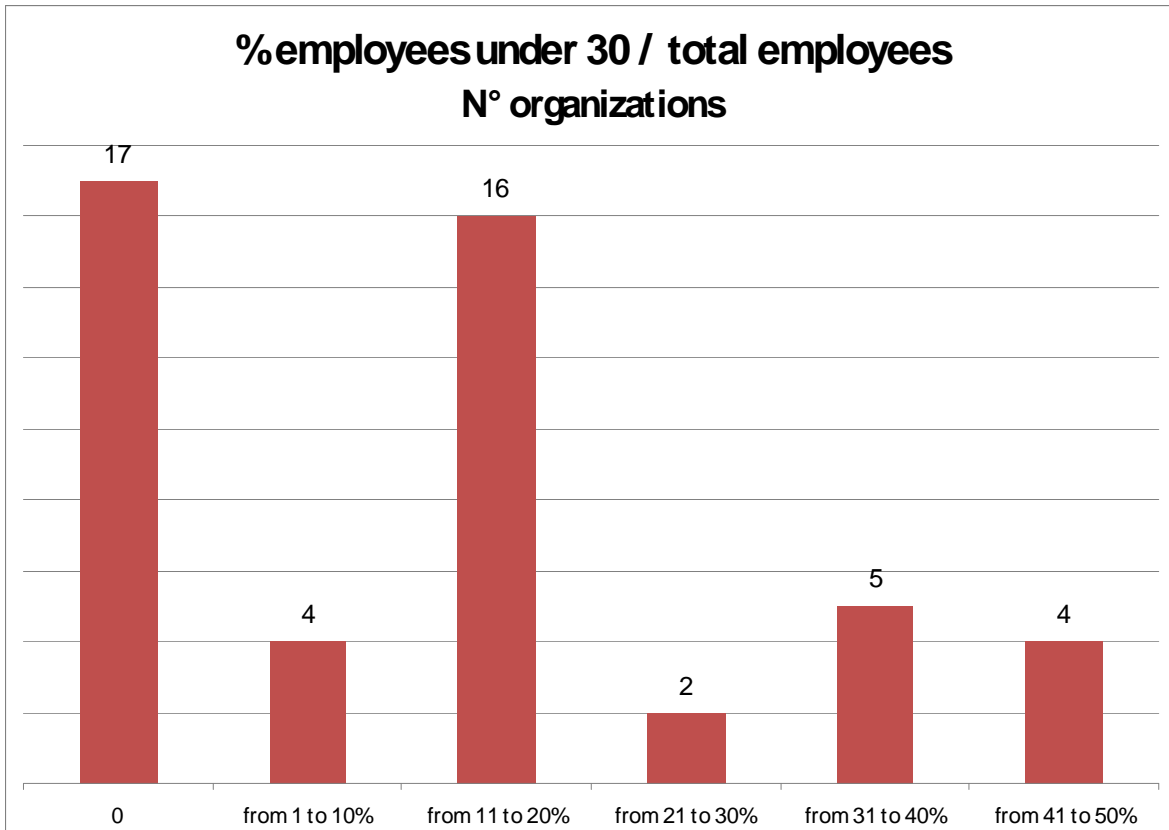
(14), healthcare and assistance services (9), education to charity (8), justice and social security (4), immigration and cultural integration (3), work and employment (2).

None of the organizations participating in the survey indicated as their main focus the protection of civil rights, sports, environmental protection and the protection of the artistic and cultural heritage.

As regards the number of employees, 43% of the organizations have less than 50 hired workers; in particular, entities with a number of employees ranging between 1 and 10 prevail.

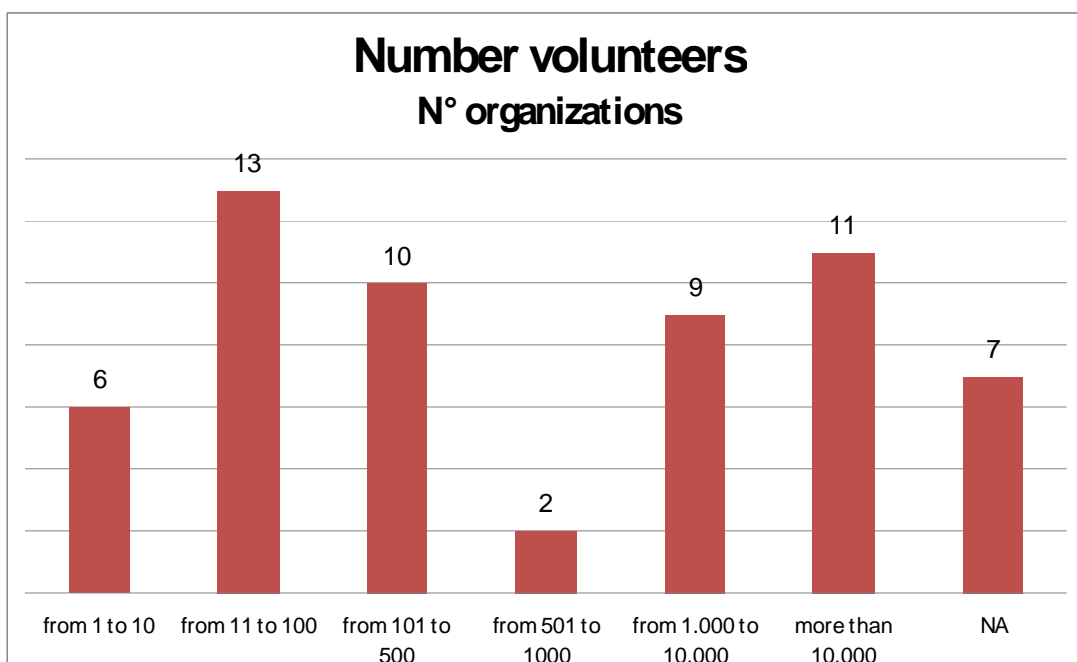
At the two ends of the spectrum there are very large entities with more than 1000 employees (9 organizations) and entities staffed only by volunteers and with no employees (5).





In relative terms, consistently with the fact that they are volunteer associations, volunteers outnumber by far employees: 568,442 employees as against 1,023,093 volunteers, that is 351 volunteers per worker.

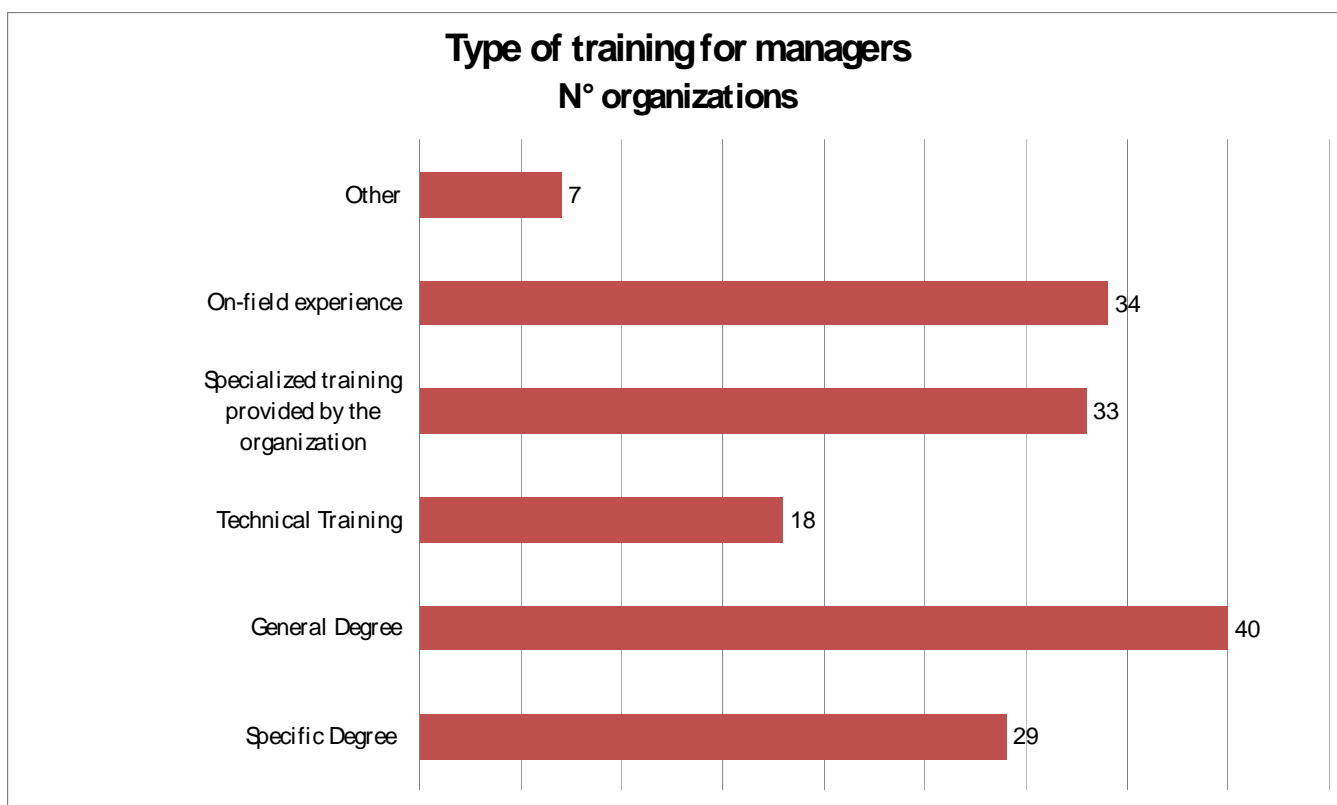
In fact, as regards the number of volunteers, according to the data collected, the size of the organizations varies substantially: at the ends of the spectrum there are 6 organizations with less than 10 volunteers and 11 with more than 10,000. The largest group – although the differences between it and other groups are not conspicuous – is made up of associations with a number of volunteers ranging between 11 and 100 (13).



The incidence of volunteers under 30 years of age varies substantially and fluctuates between 0 and 100%. 5 organizations have no young volunteers. The largest group is represented by organizations in which young people represent less than 10% of the total number of volunteers. There are more volunteers than employees under 30 years of age.

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As regards the training and education of the managers who are at the head of and run the volunteer organizations, the questionnaire provided several options and respondents were free to select various items. According to the findings, in 40 organizations managers have a general degree; in 34 organizations the skills required to run the structure are acquired in the field; 33 organizations provide specific training to their managers; in 29 associations managers have a specific degree consistent with the aims pursued by the entity; and finally, in 18 entities managers have received technical training. Several respondents selected the item “Other”, indicating specific training programs such as: studies in international development and cooperation, masters in Political Science and Human Resources. One association underlined that, in specific areas, partnerships are entered into with the University, which provides methodological support and assistance in analyzing issues.

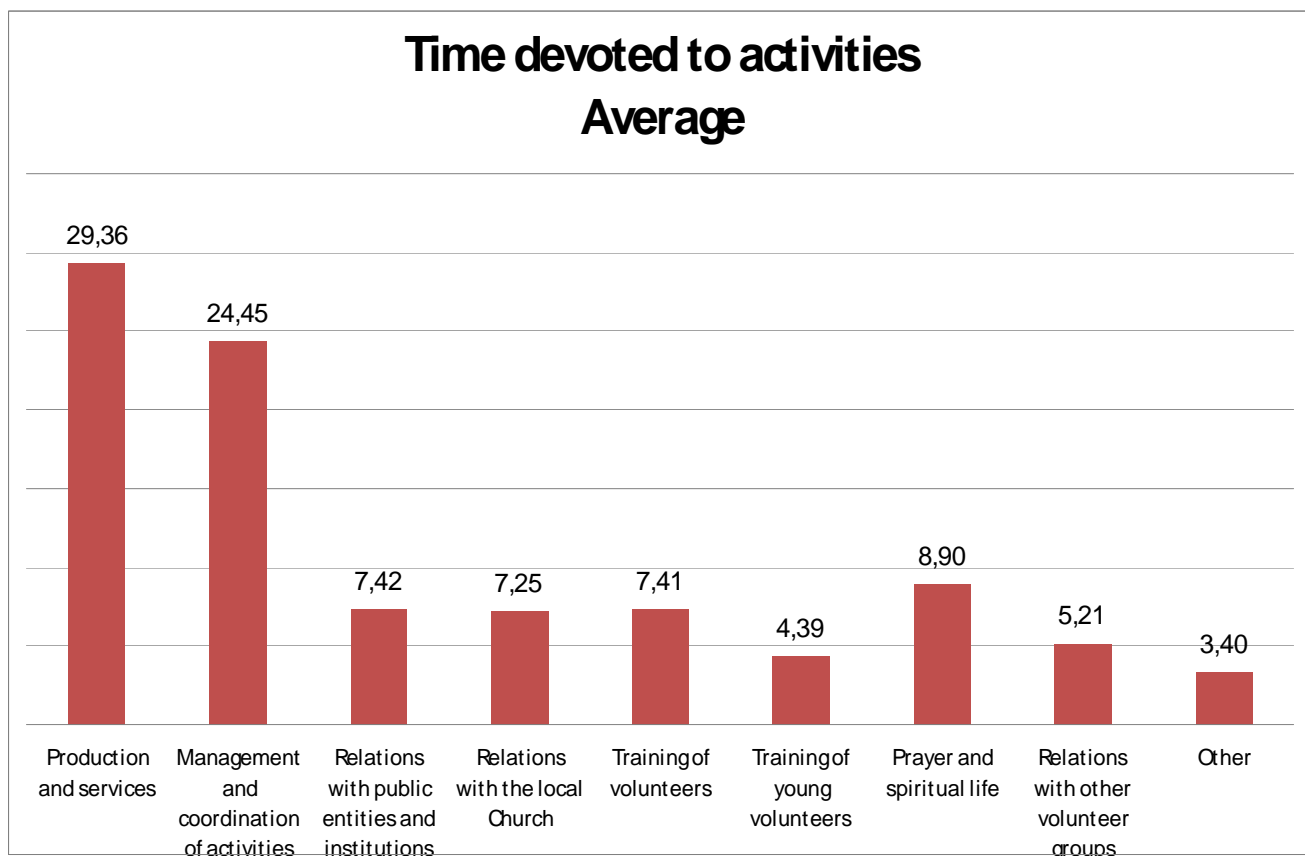


In terms of the amount of time dedicated, the engagement of volunteers varies depending on the organization they work for. On the whole, 53% of the entities require their volunteers to come in once a week, if not more (27%). These are obviously the more structured entities, which deliver services continuously and therefore require their volunteers to work on a regular basis.

In keeping with the famous *ora et labora* rule, which has always governed the work of religious organizations, the survey looked at how time is distributed on average in catholic volunteer organizations.

Most of the time - more than 50% overall - is dedicated to producing services and managing and coordinating activities. Some 9% of the time is dedicated to prayer and spiritual life, while a similar amount of time (roughly 7%) is dedicated to relations with public institutions, relations with the Church and the training of volunteers.

Significantly less time is dedicated to relations with other volunteer associations (just over 5%) and, lastly, to the training of young people (less than 4%).

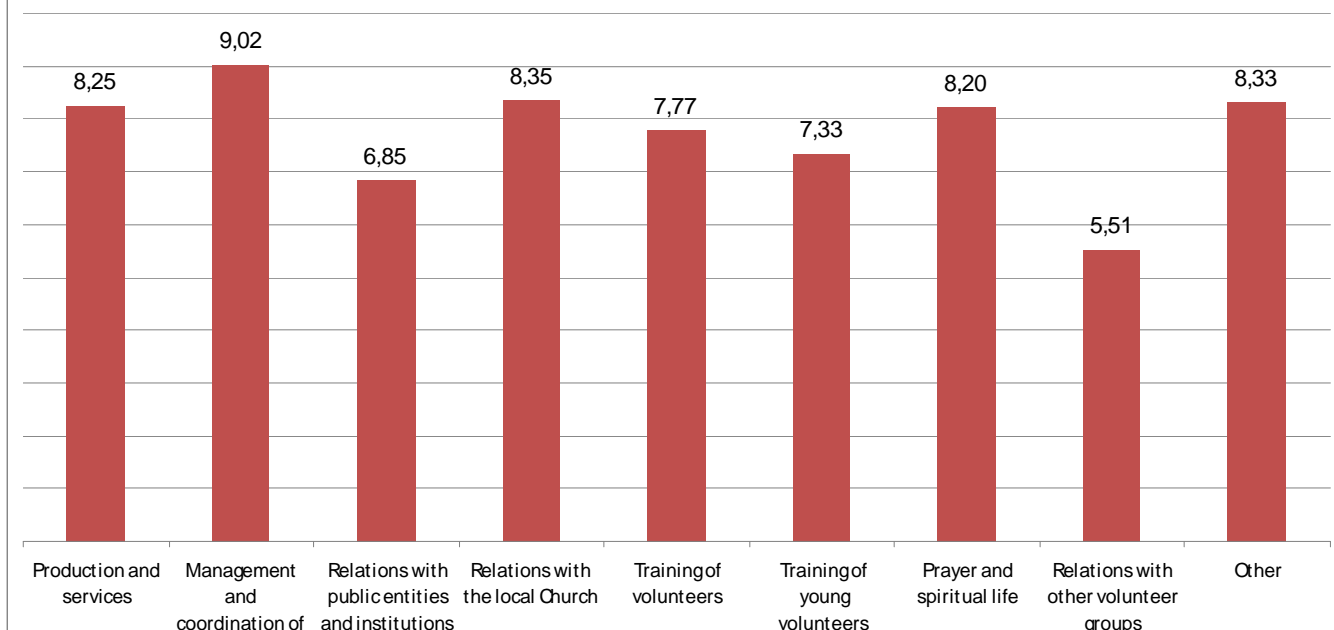


As for the importance attributed to the various activities, management and coordination received the highest mean score, followed closely by relations with public entities and institutions, production and delivery of services and prayer.

Less importance is attached to relations with the local Church and especially with other volunteer associations.

Level of importance within organization of activities

Average



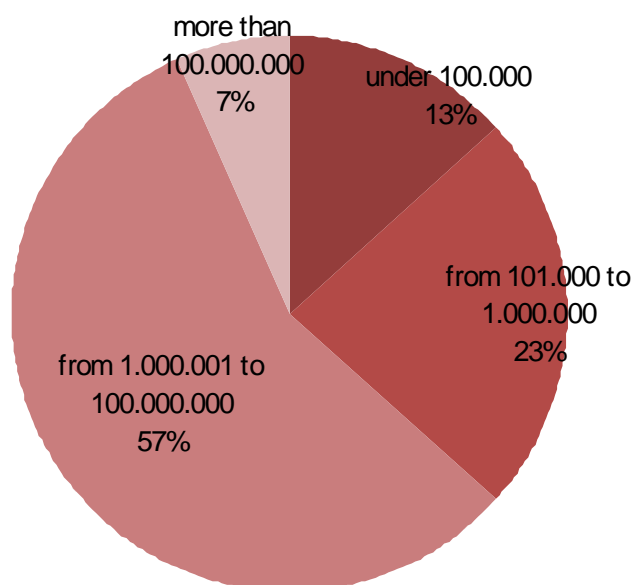
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Budget

If we consider the economic resources directly managed by the associations, 64% of the latter have a budget exceeding 1,000,000 euros; 7% of these budgets exceed 100,000,000 euros.

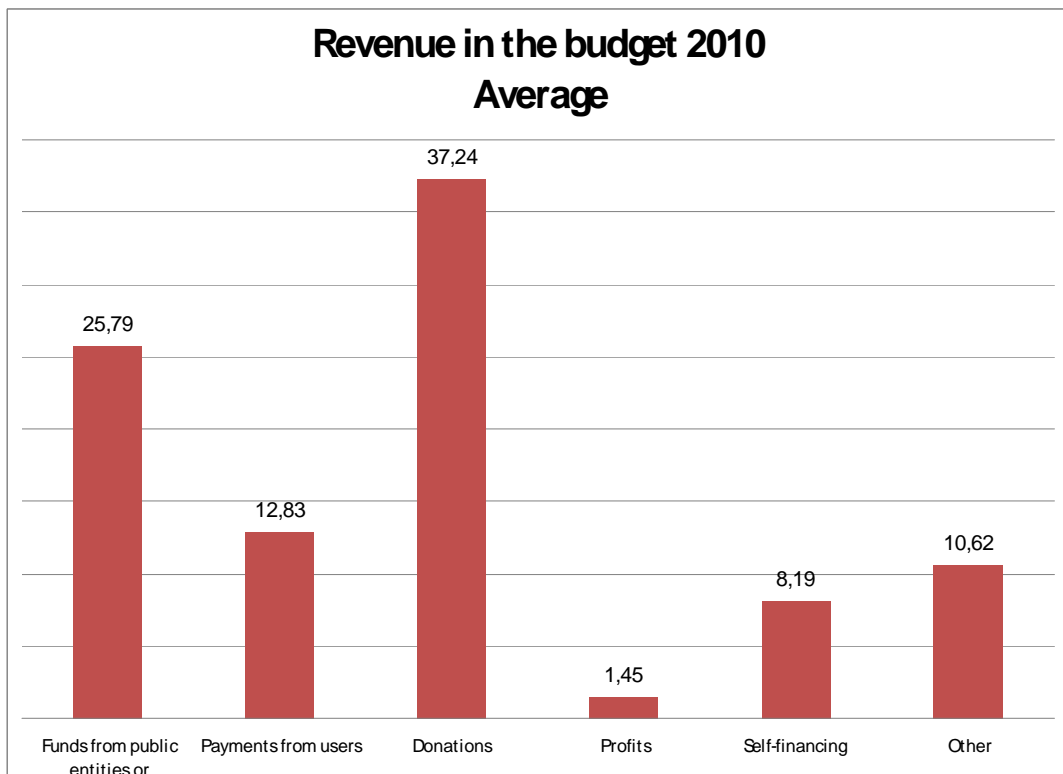
Budget 2010

% organizations



More than 37% of the budget comes from donations, 26% from public entities and 13% from fees paid by users of the services delivered.

Under the item "Other", some organizations further specified where the resources they rely upon come from: sale of fair trade products, lotteries, funds donated by foundations, cooperation and co-production.



Many organizations do not rely on self-financing, do not generate revenues and do not collect fees from the beneficiaries of their services.

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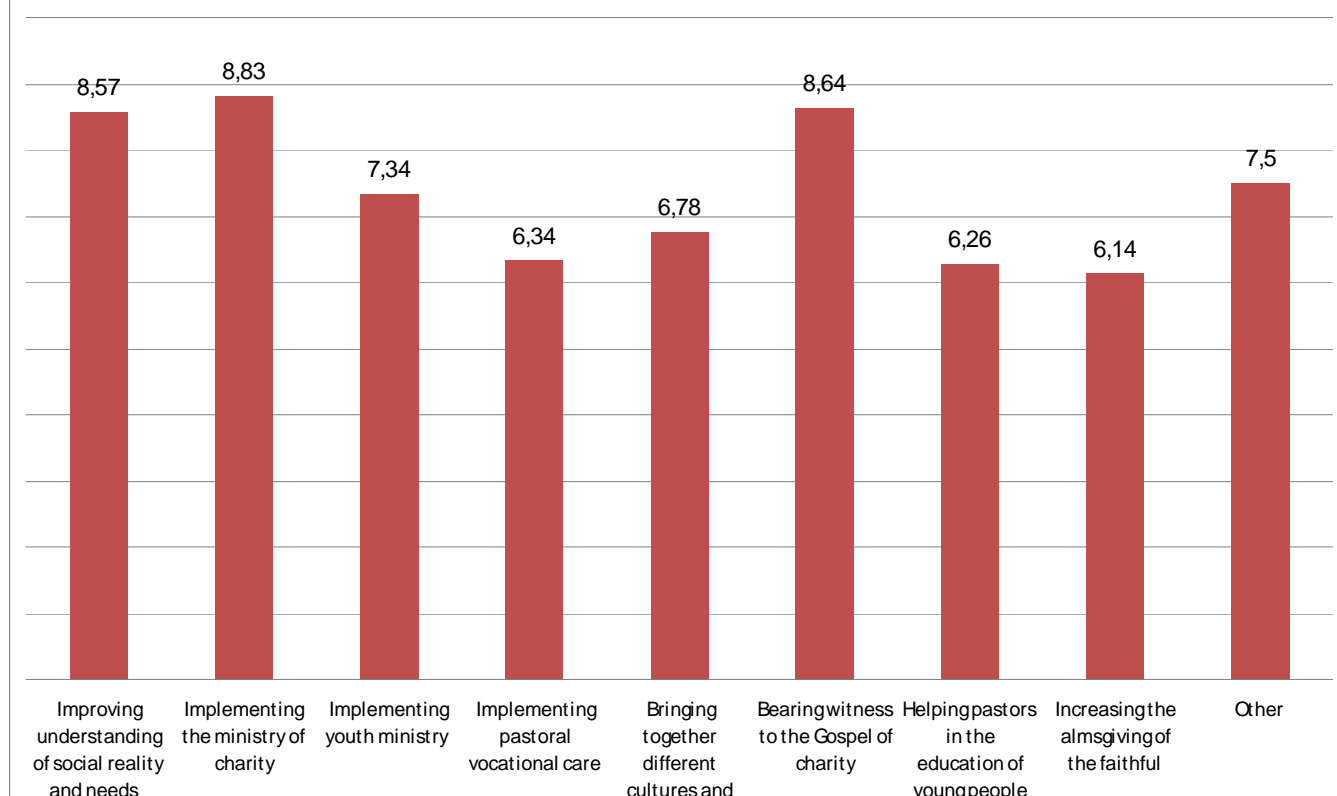
What drives catholic volunteerism: solidarity and faith, not much interest in political engagement

As regards the pastoral ministry, volunteerism helps the Church to carry out its ministry of charity (average score 8 out of 10), bear witness to the Gospel of charity (8/10) and gain a better knowledge of the social reality (8/10).

Less importance is attributed to increasing almsgiving (6/10), helping parish priests to educate young people (6/10), carrying out the vocational pastoral ministry (6/10).

Proposing the experience of volunteer work is useful for

Average



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Relations with public entities and institutions: pragmatic

Almost all respondents have dealt with public entities in the course of the past three years, mainly to carry out their activities (29%), obtain funding (24%), plan activities and do needs analysis (13%).

In addition to the areas of intervention indicated by the questionnaire, some organizations included other sources of public funding, such as the 5X1000 (prescribed by Italian law) and State grants.

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On average, the score given to the quality of relations with public entities was lower than that given to relations with the Church. In particular, such relations are regarded as sufficiently collaborative and stable (6/10), scarcely peer-based (4/10) or innovative (5/10).

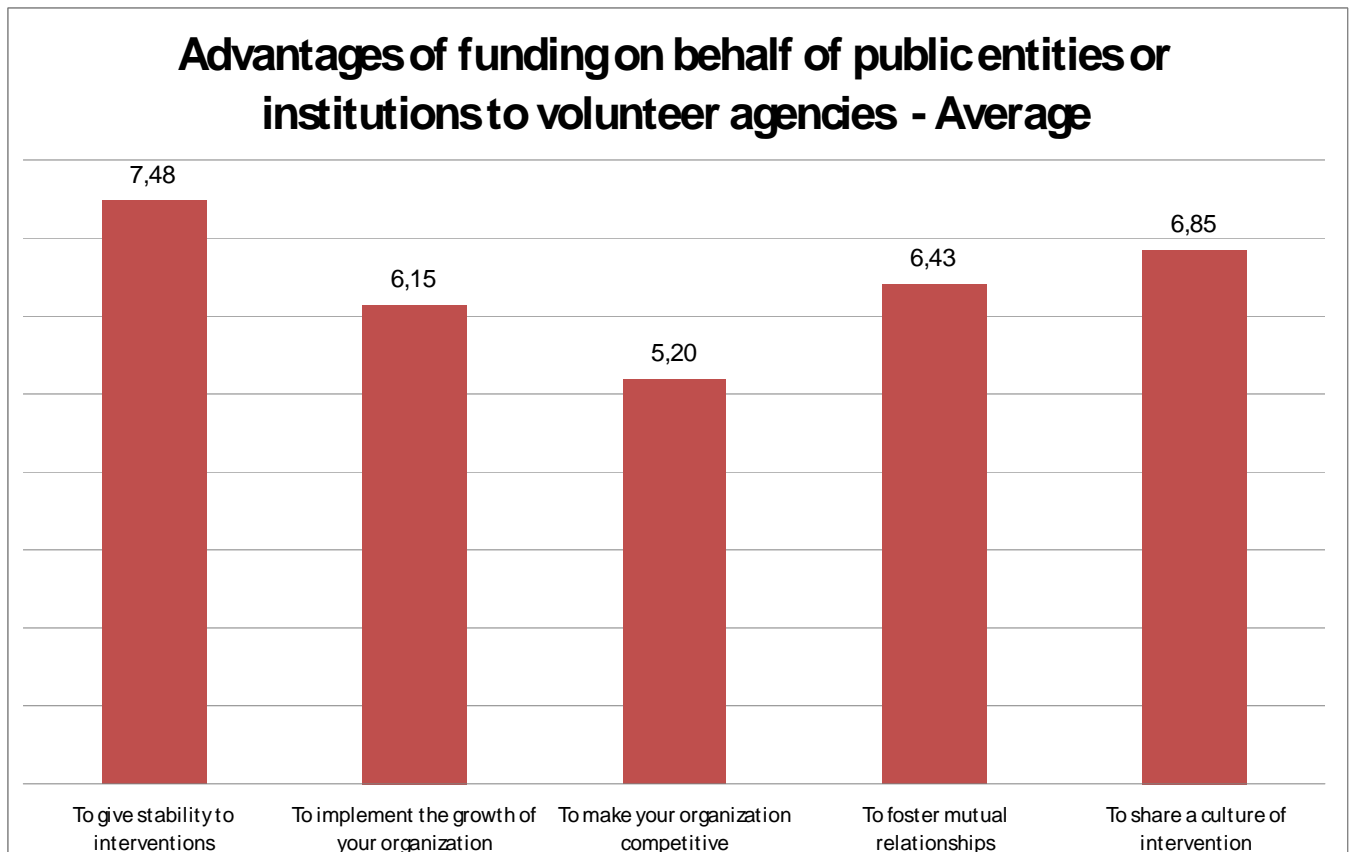
Comparing the score assigned to relations with the public sector with that assigned to relations with the local Church, the average score attributed to the criterion of instrumentality is slightly higher for the former, although the difference between the two is not significant. It is also worth noting that, while for the local Church the instrumental dimension received the lowest average score of all items proposed, for relations with the public sector this dimension is at an intermediate level.

As regards the lowest score that can be given, it was assigned primarily to the item "peer-based".

Volunteering helps public entities especially to achieve results in their work (7.69/10) and possibly to introduce greater flexibility in their activities (6.78/10). To a lesser extent, volunteer work can contribute towards increasing the level of integration in the services and to curb public spending (6/10).

As for the item that received the highest average score (achieving results in the activities carried out), only two entities assigned a score below 5.

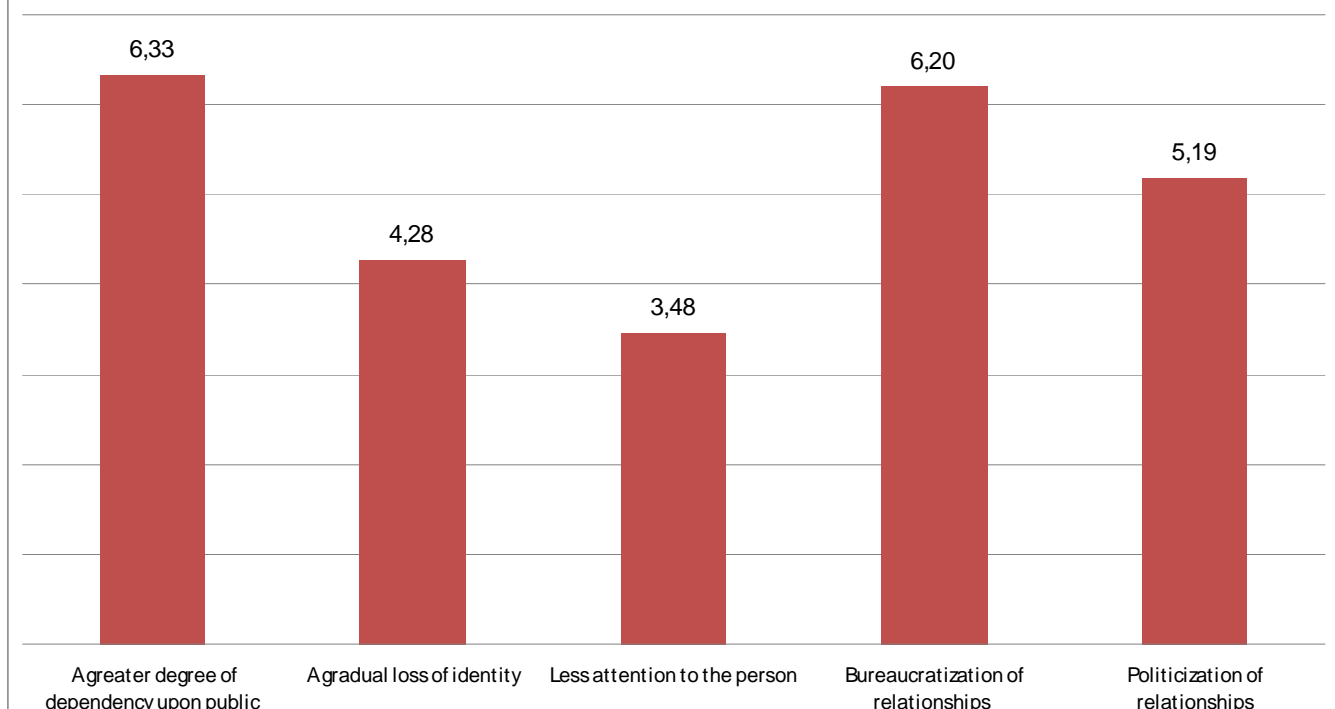
Respondents believe that public funding of volunteer associations helps lend stability to the interventions (7.48/10) and only to a lesser extent helps the organization grow (6.15/10) and become more competitive (5.20/10).



The idea that public funding gives greater stability to interventions is confirmed by the fact that 80% of respondents assign to this advantage a score above 6.

As regards the disadvantages of public funding (which on average received a lower score than the advantages), respondents pointed out in particular a higher degree of dependency (6.33/10) and the bureaucratization of relations (6.20/10). There is a lower risk of losing one's identity (4.28/10) and of devoting less attention to the individual, whose needs organizations such as these should naturally cater to (3.48/10).

Disadvantages of funding on behalf of public entities or institutions to volunteer agencies - Average



The average score registered for the disadvantages, as shown by the graph, is due primarily to the fact that many agencies assign to each criterion the lowest possible score, which goes to show that possible disadvantages are not regarded as a pressing and relevant issue. As for the gradual loss of identity on the part of the organization, no respondent gave this criterion the highest score.

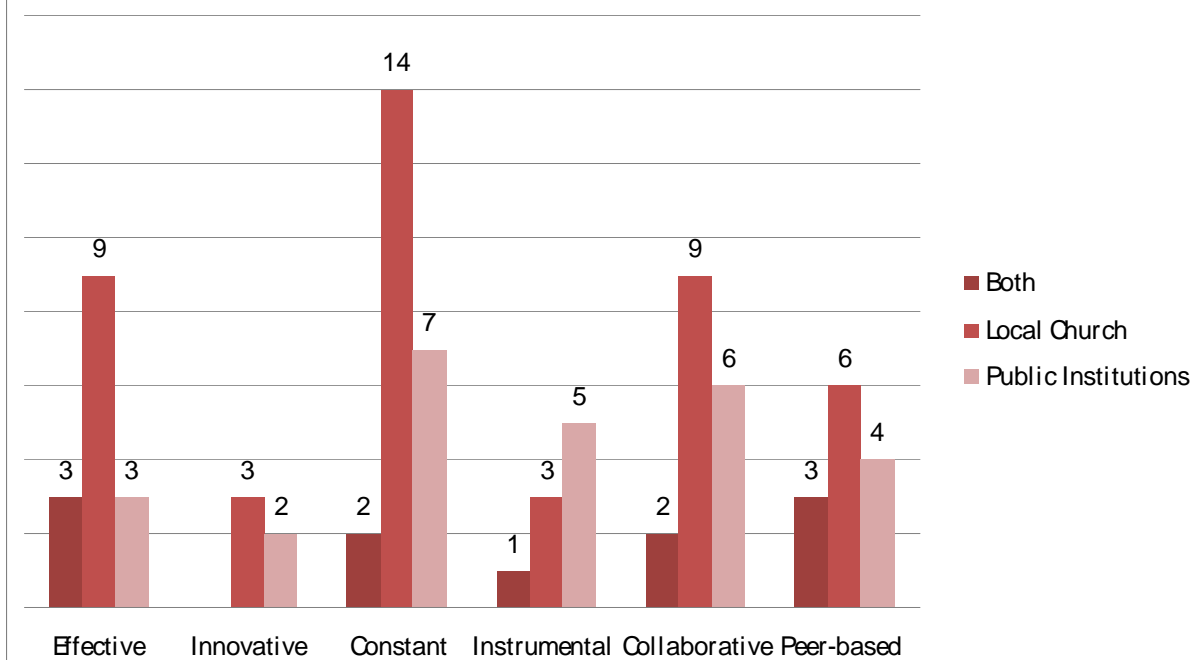
The analysis can be expanded comparing the answers given to different questions contained in the questionnaire.

In particular, it is interesting to focus attention on the organizations that state they have positive relations both with the local Church and with public entities, giving the highest score to each of the criteria used to measure the quality of relations with the two different spheres (efficacy, innovation, stability, instrumentality, collaboration, parity).

As shown by the graph, none of the organizations that regard their relationship with both the local Church and public entities as positive feel that such relations are innovative. If, in spite of this, relations are considered positive, respondents probably do not feel that innovation is a crucial element when it comes to determining the quality of relations.

For each criterion, relations with the Church are, on average, rated higher than relations with public institutions. The difference is particularly evident in relation to efficacy and stability. The only exception involves the criterion of instrumentality, which goes to show that according to respondents it is useful to collaborate with public institutions primarily for the advantages and usefulness such a collaboration can bring to the organization as well as to the public institution; this does not apply as much to the local Church, with which relations are evidently inspired by a sense of belonging and a common identity.

Positive relationship both with Local Church and public institutions

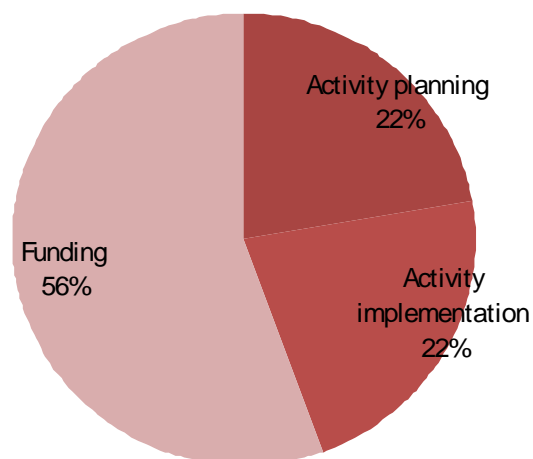


Focus: The profile of volunteer organizations whose budget is covered by more than 50% by public funds

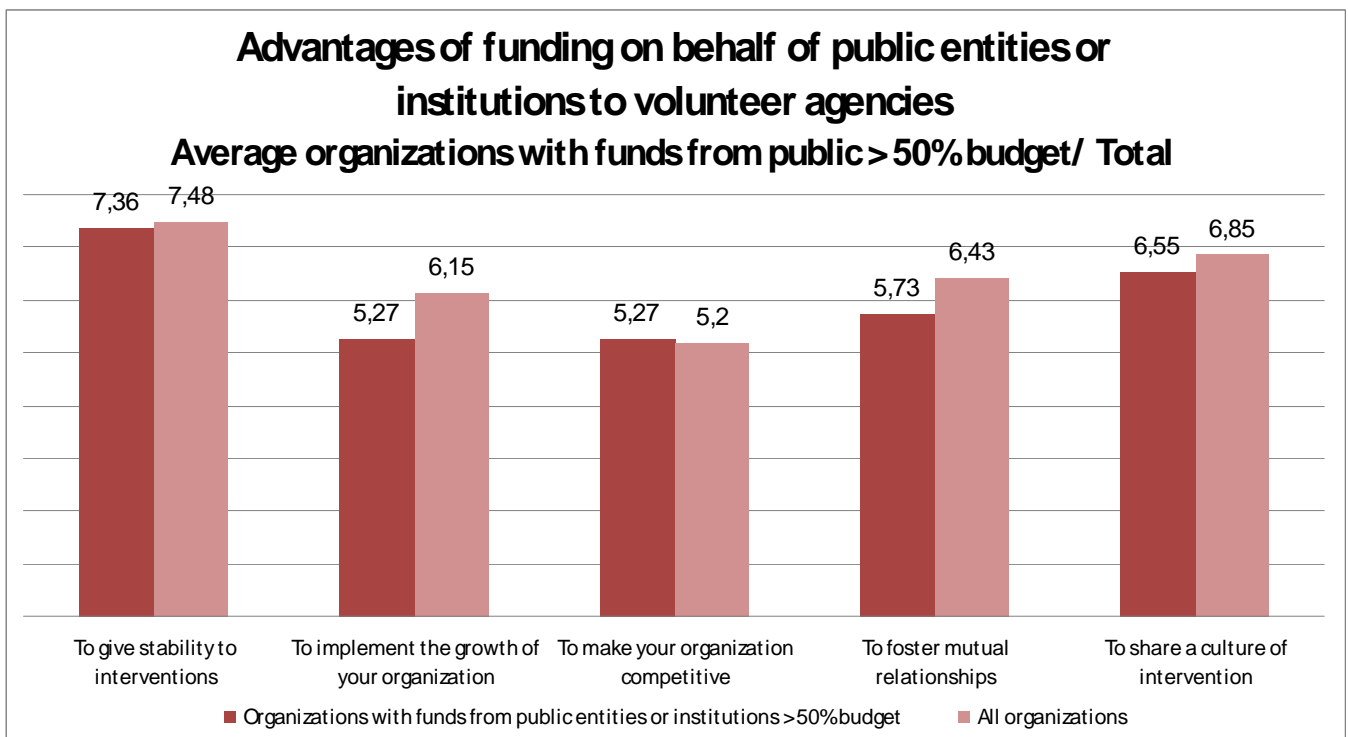
Another interesting focus involves organizations whose budget is covered by over 50% by public funds, as compared to the total number of organizations interviewed.

If we look at this restricted group, which includes 11 organizations, and focus on the type of relations they have with the public sector, we can see that 56% of these organizations simply receive financial resources, 22% collaborate in carrying out the activities and 22% in planning them.

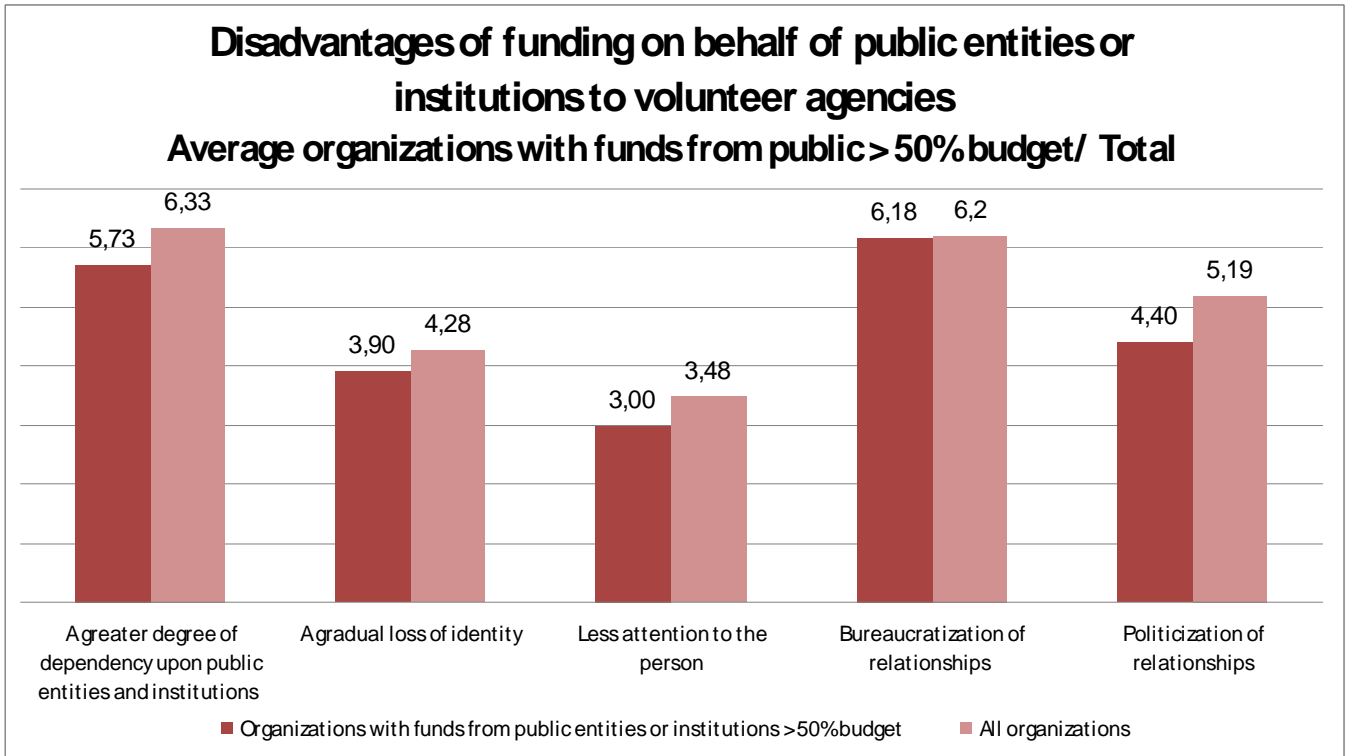
Main areas of activity with public entities and institutions - Funds from public entities or institutions > 50% budget



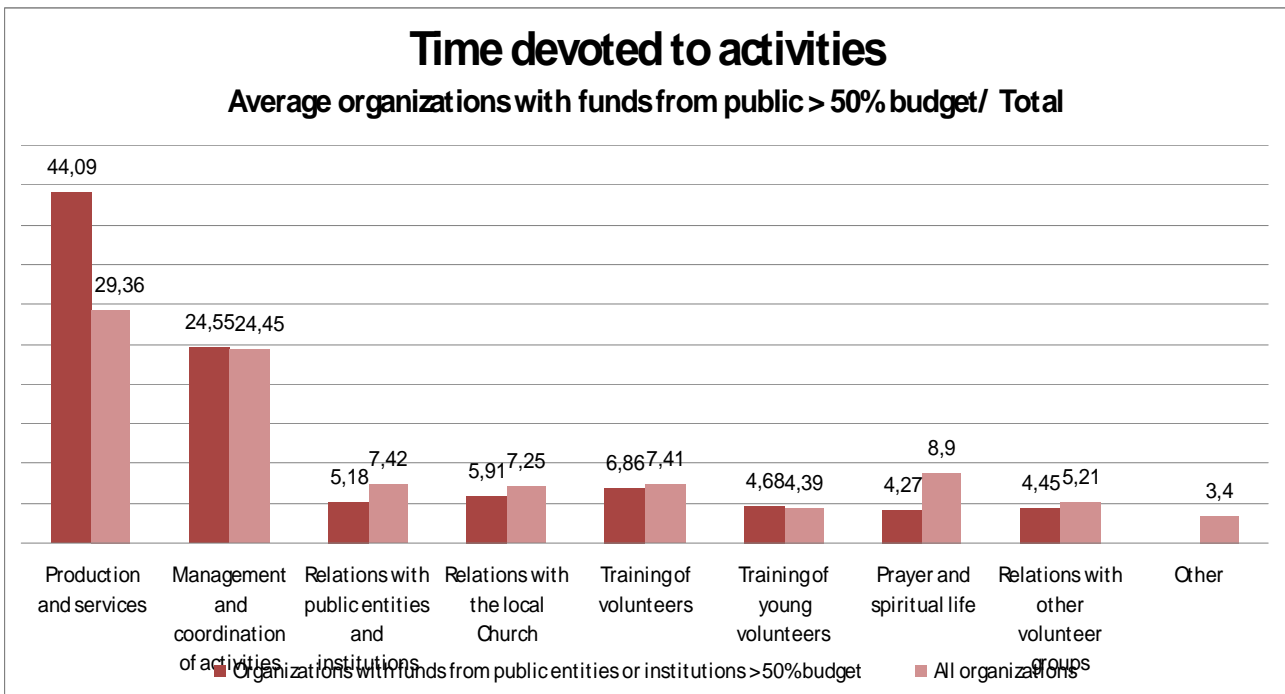
As regards the relationships with public institutions, the organizations with a budget covered by over 50% by public funds, with respect to the total sample, consider them on the one hand as more effective and on the other as less innovative and collaborative. With respect to the total number of respondents, such organizations believe that volunteers are less useful to local entities in terms of achieving objectives, increasing the flexibility of activities, curbing public spending. Furthermore, as compared to the total number of respondents, such organizations attribute less importance to the advantages that public funding can bring to volunteer associations, especially as regards the growth of their organization and the creation of relationships based on reciprocity. Slightly higher instead is the average score – and thus the importance – assigned to the contribution public funding gives in terms of making the organization more competitive.



As regards the disadvantages, on average they are given lower scores by this group than by the total number of respondents. The total of respondents and the restricted group are most aligned in relation to the risk of an excessive bureaucratization of relations.



If we consider the time dedicated to the various activities, we can see that the organizations with a budget covered by over 50% by public funds are more engaged in the production of services and devote less time to prayer and spiritual life, managing relations with public institutions, relations with the local Church and with other volunteer organizations.



Summary remarks: finding a new balance between *ora et labora*

By focusing attention on the profile of the world of catholic volunteerism, highlighting its structural features and the relational dimension, the survey conducted intends to contribute to the discourse under way at the European level on the topic of volunteerism.

Going over some of the most significant aspects that have emerged, it is interesting to pick out some criticalities, not to criticize the respondent organizations and their work, but rather to identify the areas that need to be improved and the efforts that need to be made in order to enhance volunteerism and help it grow. It goes without saying that the positive factors must be kept in place and perhaps even developed further in order to make the organization more steady and solid as it goes about implementing its mission.

First of all, in rating the importance of the various activities they carry out, the organizations tend to attribute less importance to the training of young volunteers and relations with the other associations. These are aspects that deserve to be reconsidered for various reasons.

As regards the first aspect, while on the one hand volunteerism is regarded as useful for youth pastoral ministry, on the other hand too little time is devoted to the training of young volunteers, who tend to outnumber young employees. People now tend to agree that volunteering experiences are very important for young people because, on the one hand, they contribute to shape their identity and develop their individual talents, and, on the other hand, they encourage collective actions in favor of the common good. In order for such experiences to be truly significant however a new culture of volunteerism is necessary, where volunteerism is understood not only in terms of activities carried out on the basis of some values that society considers worthy, but also, and perhaps especially, as a tool by means of which people can be educated to a relational lifestyle starting from basic questions involving faith. A second fundamental requirement consists in treating young people not just as the beneficiaries of activities and projects proposed by others but actually involving them actively, acknowledging their specific subjectivity, respecting their way of experiencing the culture of volunteerism.

The challenge for volunteer organizations consists in learning the new languages of youth participation and to discover the interests of young people; this should be pursued as an objective by volunteerism, regardless of the actual enrolment of young people in the individual existing associations. In this way, it should be easier to establish an effective dialogue among generations on belonging to the two cities and to allow for a generational turnover within the associations, thus ensuring continuity and sustainability to their work.

The second point that emerged, concerning relations with other voluntary associations, suggests the need to plan together and adopt new strategies based on collaboration among different entities, in order to address the needs at the local level more efficiently; this would also be a way of expressing the sense of belonging to the same community. Collaboration among associations is surely a complex matter, for it requires letting go of particular and consolidated approaches in order to build common visions in which different viewpoints enrich each other mutually, thus giving rise to a new, possibly unexpected point of view. However, such an approach is all the more crucial for the future and sustainability of organizations at a moment like this, when resources are dwindling.

In this regard, a third aspect was brought to the fore by the survey, namely the relationship between volunteerism and public institutions. It is an issue as yet unresolved, for both volunteerism and public

institutions, since oftentimes when discussing the role of volunteerism within the service management system and other key issues involving the third sector, the idea prevails that relations are established exclusively for reasons of convenience, and emphasis is placed on the advantages such a collaboration brings to the public sector in terms of savings and to volunteer associations in terms of funding. The role played by volunteerism and the cultural contribution it gives remain in the background, as is shown also by the scarce importance attributed to volunteerism as a form of political engagement. According to the results of this survey, respondents feel that, for their association as well as for the public sector, what matters is the achievement of results. They feel that this does not impact their identity and does not overshadow the dignity of individuals, those who work for the association and those who benefit from its services. Relations are mostly pragmatic (all the more so if we consider the need for an association to finance and give stability to its activities), and are regarded as sufficiently collaborative but scarcely innovative.

In this respect, it may be interesting to promote the creation of partnerships among volunteer organizations, public entities and firms, in order to address the local needs and fight social exclusion in an innovative way. Already widespread among firms, corporate volunteering – whereby employees who receive a regular salary can devote some hours of their working time to volunteer work – was recently tested in some local entities in Northern Europe, with positive results and significant participation on the part of personnel.

According to respondents, innovation does not characterize the relationship between the local Church and catholic volunteering. Such a criticality is consistent with the one presented previously in relation to the relevance given to the situation of young people.

If this is the true situation of catholic volunteering, which is a mirror of Christian communities, then the problem can be addressed by turning to the highly provoking evangelical image whereby if *a good tree bears good fruit*, then, in order to do good, one must *be good*. People with a new heart, that is people whose heart is renewed by the experience of redemption described by John Paul II in these terms: «*Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny.*» (CA n. 51). This then is the condition for renewing relations and the commitment towards social structures: «*It is from the conversion of hearts that there arises concern for others, loved as brothers or sisters. This concern helps us to understand the obligation and commitment to heal institutions, structures and conditions of life that are contrary to human dignity*» (CDSC n. 552). It is necessary to find a new balance between *ora et labora*.