



VOLUNTEERING – DISCURSIVE DEVICES OF FRAMING A EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL COMMUNITY

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Abstract: *European Years have been considered a solution to the studies which framed Europeanization as a threat. The European Year of Volunteering (EYV) is a means of building a community at a macro and micro-level. The European community that this paper focuses on does not refer to the official entity formed by a contract between the member states, it rather pinpoints diverse discursive embodiments of a united Europe. The national community will be interpreted in terms of the virtual community created through the blog posts of the project Let's Do It, Romania! in 2011.*

Keywords: *European Years, discursive communities, visual communities, virtual communities*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1983, the European Parliament and the Council have provided a solution to the discourse of exclusion (Wodak, 2007) that these two central European institutions have been related to. The discursive solution found implied the choice of a common annual issue which should be dealt with by the European organizations, national governments and organizations. This shift from a discourse of exclusion to a discourse of inclusion has mainly focused on unity at the macro-level through a shared issue and on diversity at the micro-level through the national (non)verbal framings of the respective issue. Starting from the data provided by Eurobarometers and Eurostats, the selection of a theme has been closely related to the social agenda (for example, EY of intercultural dialogue – 2008, EY of creativity and innovation – 2009, EY for combating poverty and social exclusion – 2010, EY of volunteering – 2011). The macro and micro communities that the European organizations want to shape rely on four guiding principles (Eurostat, 2010: 5-6): (1) a recognition of rights for all people to live in dignity and take part in society; (2) a shared responsibility and participation, emphasizing both collective and

individual responsibilities; (3) promoting cohesion, emphasizing the benefits for all societies; (4) establishing commitment for concrete action at all levels of governance.

Among all the European issues, volunteering is the theme which best embodies this concept of macro/ European and micro/ national communities since it implies what Xavier de Souza Briggs (2003: 246) labels as “community building”, namely “a variety of intentional efforts to organize and strengthen social connections or to build common values and norms that promote collective goals (or both) – that is, to build more community (an interim goal) as a way of achieving some set of desired outcomes”.

2. CREATING DISCURSIVE COMMUNITIES

The concept of “community” has been approached as a shift, mainly caused by industrialization, from *Gemeinschaft*/ community based on personal interactions and kinships (Tönnies, 1887) to *Gesellschaft*/ association based in legalistic and impersonal relationships or from a mechanical solidarity to an organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). Despite this sense of alienation that community has

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been associated with, the sociologist Z. Bauman (2001:1-2) provides a positive perspective, highlighting the feelings of comfort and safety that a community offers to individuals: “warm place, a cosy and comfortable place... In a community, we all understand each other well, we may trust what we hear, we are safe most of the time...”. This positive connotation is also emphasized by Margo Gorman (2003: 256) in the *Encyclopedia of Community*: “In everyday English speech in northern Europe, community connotes locality, familiarity, and common binding interests”. The sharing of the same values actually foregrounds “a sense of collective identity” (Stürmer, 2003: 240) which involves a pronominal shift from “I-ness” to what Stefan Stürmer labels as “we-ness” which is the mental basis of community volunteerism. This feeling of “we-ness” that volunteering focuses on “(...) increases citizens’ willingness to engage on behalf of their local community” (Stürmer, 2003: 241).

The willing commitment in the benefit of one’s community should be discursively embedded at the verbal and visual level. Starting from G. Kress and Th. van Leeuwen’s (2006: 24) definition of discourses as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect) of reality”, I will analyse a double embodiment of volunteering:

- *volunteering as type/ the macro-level* (the European communication toolbox – official poster and leaflet);

- *volunteering as token/ the micro-level* (the 84 blog posts for the national campaign *Let’s Do It, Romania!* in 2011).

The two types of empirical data (communication toolbox and blogs) show that at a discursive level, the abstract concept of community takes the form of a visual community and of an online community. These discursive communities embody a virtual community whose main features are (van Dijk, 1999/ 2006: 166): a loose affiliation, dispersed space, heterogeneous identities and partial plural culture. Whereas the European communication toolbox provides the guidelines of an identification through a homogeneous visual inclusion thus shortening the distance

between member states, the blog posts and comments for the *Let’s Do It, Romania!* campaign shape the discursive devices for a virtual community having the following features (Herring, 2004:355): active, self-sustaining participation; shared history, purpose, culture, norms, and values; solidarity, reciprocity; means of conflict resolution; self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups; emergence of roles, governance, rituals.

3. FRAMING VOLUNTEERING

According to Robert Entman, to frame is “to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*” (Entman, 1993: 52, italics in original). Unlike agenda-setting theories which focus on the impact of mass media content on the public agenda, framing theories also highlight the role that other social actors except mass media plays in the selection and organization of the social reality according to their interests and/ or to others’ benefits. In the promoting process that framing implies, the social actors use different verbal and non-verbal discursive devices which, in the end, will shape some meaningful clusters which impose strong relations among central concepts and some other peripheral concepts (Hertog, McLeod, 2001:140). Shannon Bichard’s (2006) five-dimensional framework (time, space, tone, topic, mechanisms) to conceptualize frames will constitute the starting point of the framework that I will use in the discursive analysis of volunteering. Even if Bichard designated her framework to evaluate political blogs, the devices discursively embedded in her approach can be applied to any category of blogs and to any type of text. I consider that two adjustments should be made to these five frames:

- on the one hand, topics, as carriers of additional content meaning, should not be

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considered a frame in itself but rather as issues which are framed through space, time, and tone. Thus I consider that topics are actually what Hertog and McLeod (2001) identify as clusters formed of central and peripheral concepts.

- on the other hand, mechanisms are verbal and non-verbal discursive devices which frame both topics/ issues/ clusters and the other three frames identified by Bichard, namely space, time, tone.

The framework that I propose for the content analysis of volunteering is shaped on the identification of three topics (actions, participants, beneficiaries) related to volunteering which are framed at a twofold level:

- *the verbal mechanisms*: VeM – catchphrases (C) and depictions (D), these two frames belong to Gamson, Lasch, 1983) and *the visual mechanisms*: ViM – iconic images (Ic), indexical images (In) and symbolic images (S);

- two frames: time (past, present, future) and space (individual, community, regional, societal, and European).

The research questions that this study on volunteering addresses are the following:

RQ1: Which is the salience of the topics on volunteering as type and as token?

RQ2: Which mechanisms were used to frame volunteering at the macro and at the micro level?

RQ3: Which is the frequency of the time and space frames used for volunteering as type and for volunteering as token?

The coding procedure focused on dividing each verbal and visual text in units of analysis, identifying some statements, keywords or images related to volunteering. The coding was performed by two independent coders and the inter-coder reliability was 0.88 (pi value).

3.1. Framing volunteering as type.

Annually on the site of each European Year, there is a communication toolbox which includes the visual guidelines and the official promotional materials that each organization of the member states has to comply to if its activities embed the respective EY issue. The official poster and leaflet of the EYV shape the generic verbal and visual representation of volunteering.

Table 1 illustrates the way in which the three topics (actions, participants and beneficiaries) on volunteering as type are framed on a double level: a) through the time and space frames; b) through verbal and visual mechanisms.

Table 1. Framing topics on volunteering as type

Frames		Topics on volunteering as type															Total	
		Actions					Participants					Beneficiaries						
		Ve M		ViM			Ve M		ViM			Ve M		ViM				
	C	D	Ic	In	S	C	D	Ic	In	S	C	D	Ic	In	S			
Time	Past	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	99 (88%)
	Present	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	59	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	67	
	Future	4	12	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	
Space	Individual	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	14 (12%)
	Community	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	9	
	Regional	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Societal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	European	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Total		4	20	1	0	0	0	16	59	3	4		6	2		0		
		24		1			16		66			6		2				
		25 (22%)					82 (71%)					8 (7%)					N=113	N=113 (100%)
		N=115 (100%)																

The first research question (RQ1) focuses on the salience of the topics on volunteering as type, namely on the volunteering verbally and visually represented by the European

Commission. As it can be observed, participants (81%) are the most salient topic, followed by actions (25%) and by beneficiaries (8%). This dominance of participants is due to

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the salience of visual mechanisms, namely of the iconic images (59 visual instances framing volunteers). The official EYV poster and leaflet visually included the heads of possible volunteers. The different attributes (gender, age, race) may constitute identification traits for every European citizen and instances of diversity, equality and commitment (9 men + 9 women). The EYV poster and leaflet are available at <http://europa.eu/volunteering/en/press-media/campaign-toolbox>.

The second research question (RQ2) focused on a quantitative analysis of the mechanisms used to frame volunteering at the macro-level. The *verbal mechanisms* (N=46) included 24 instances for actions (52%), 16 instances for participants (35%), and 6 instances for beneficiaries (13%), whereas *the visual mechanisms* (N=69) included 1 instance for actions (1%), 66 instances for participants (96%), and 2 instances for beneficiaries (3%). As it can be observed, the visual mechanisms prevail and this is mainly due to the choice of two visual texts (poster and leaflet). The iconic images of possible volunteers (N=59) is based on an analogy with reality, thus using the discursive strategy of examples. Even if the symbolical images are not as salient as iconic images, they constitute those European visual markers (logo and color) which must be used on every promotional material issued by national organizations which carry on their activities under the auspices of a European Year. The iconic images of three differently colored holding arms and of four differently colored balloons rising up turn into symbolical images of unity (power of working together, of helping) and diversity (people belonging to different communities).

The last research question (RQ3) shows the frequency of the time and space frames used for volunteering as type. These two frames are important for the issue of volunteering since they discursively embed the different types of spaces where volunteers may get involved and at the same time, they set the directions for future actions. As it can be observed in Table 1, there is a dominance of time frames (88%)

and within this frame, a salience of present instances of volunteering verbally depicted as a celebration of the volunteers' commitment and as a challenge for the passive citizens. Despite this frequency, two main aspects should be highlighted: (1) the past instance is framed through iconic images relying on volunteers' experiences; (2) the European space is framed through three main actions (tour, stories, and conferences) that were to be taking place in all 27 EU member states. Thus volunteering as type was discursively framed as a bridge between past (verbal and visual testimonies of one's involvement) and future.

3.2. Framing volunteering as token. *Let's Do It, Romania!* is part of the community *Let's Do It, World!*, a project started in Estonia in 2008. Considered the greatest project of social involvement once achieved in Romania and having as main objective, the cleaning-up of the entire country in one day, *Let's Do It, Romania!* won the Golden Award for Excellence (for the non-governmental category) at the Romanian PR Awards in 2010 (<http://www.praward.ro/pr-award/editia-2010.html>).

The practices of informing, connecting, involving, and mobilizing that this project relies on are mainly due to the use of Web 1.0 (<http://www.letsdoitromania.ro>) and Web 2.0 (blogs, Facebook, Youtube etc.). The analysis of the volunteering as token will focus on the blog posts (N=84) in 2011 published on the website of *Let's Do It, Romania!* The choice for this social media tool lies on two main reasons that were found on the literature on blogging: a) the shift from Web 1.0, known as "The Read Only Web", to Web 2.0, known as "The Read Write Web" (O'Reilly, 2005), thus the citizens turning from passive consumers into active designers of web content; b) the advantages of blogging (Kent, 2008): the direct and intimate communication with publics, in-depth information, identification with publics, influencing individuals and publics, sharing personal experiences, knowledge management.

Table 2 illustrates the way in which volunteering as token (*Let's Do It, Romania!*) was framed.

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Table 2. Framing topics on volunteering as token

Frames		Topics on volunteering as token															Total	
		Actions					Participants					Beneficiaries						
		Ve M		ViM			Ve M		ViM			Ve M		ViM				
		C	D	Ic	In	S	C	D	Ic	In	S	C	D	Ic	In	S		
Time	Past	3	53	80	0	0	1	50	81	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	318	591 (64%)
	Present	6	0	0	0	0	4	13	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	32		
	Future	32	36	42	0	26	32	20	19	0	4	0	40	0	0	241		
Space	Individual	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	13	0	4	0	0	0	0	20	335 (36%)	
	Community	4	29	27	0	0	4	29	84	0	0	0	28	22	0	227		
	Regional	0	23	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	9	70		
	Societal	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15		
	European	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3		
Total		45	143	149	0	26	67	119	197	0	8	0	145	22	18	0		
		188		175			186		205			145		40				
		363 (38%)					391 (42%)					185 (20%)					N=926 (100%)	N=926 (100%)
		N=939 (100%)																

The hierarchy of the topics framing Romanian volunteering as token (RQ1) is the following: participants (42%), actions (38%), and beneficiaries (20%). As it can be observed there is not a great difference between participants and actions since actions always imply some explicit or implicit agents. The blog posts mainly framed either stories, volunteers' personal experiences during the cleaning-up processes or calls to action, mobilizing volunteers for future actions. The salience of past and future actions of cleaning Romania can also be observed at the level of the time frame (64%): the past is assigned 318 instances and the future is assigned 241 instances. One of the most important actions that are mentioned in the blog posts is the mapping of the garbage. At the visual level, this mapping was framed through maps with red points. These maps, as indexical images (N=9) of filthy Romanian counties/ regions, were coded as belonging to the topic of (present) beneficiaries.

The salience of the mechanisms framing volunteering as token (*Let's Do It, Romania!*) is the following: verbal mechanisms (N=519 instances) and visual mechanisms (N=410 instances). The verbal resources prevail since blog posts are mainly designed as pages for sharing ideas and experiences. Within the verbal mechanisms, the most dominant

discursive device is depictions (N=407 instances), descriptions of the past and future actions of cleaning-up and garbage-mapping in Romania. As it can be observed in Table 2, there are some similarities in the framing of the three topics as depictions are concerned: the depictions of *actions* at the level of the past time frame (N=53) and at the level of community space (N=29) and of regional space (N=23) coincide, on the one hand, with the depictions of participants at the level of past time frame (N=50) and at the level of community space (N=29), and on the other hand, with the depictions of beneficiaries at the level of past time frame (N=50) and at the level of community space (N=28) and of regional space (N=27). One particular aspect should be mentioned related to the framing of community space: whereas for actions and beneficiaries this frame focused on the particular places where the cleaning-up and garbage-mapping were carried on, for beneficiaries this frame focused on different clusters of volunteers who took part in this project (schools, kindergarden, organizations, public figures etc.). Even if catchphrases (N=112) were not as numerous as depictions, they were framed as belonging to the official slogan (*Let's Do It, Romania!*) and to other slogans of different actions whose verbal content is based on intertextuality (*Let's*

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Bike It!, *Many hands make light mapping/ Unde-s mul i, cartarea cre te*). They belong either to the societal space (N=15, the mentioning of the word “Romania” in the slogan) or to the regional space (N=11, the mentioning of different Romanian towns and cities).

Within the visual mechanisms (N=410), iconic images (N=368) constitute the most salient resource, followed by symbolical images (N=34) and indexical images (N=18). Iconic images especially focused on the past time frame prevail since they depict volunteers’ experiences, namely denotative images which should not be interpreted as copies of reality but rather as the installing of the conscience of “l’avoir-été-là” (Barthes, 1964: 47). Whereas the garbage maps were coded as indexical images, the symbolical images mainly included the pictorial metaphors (Forceville, 1996) embedded in the advertisements for the future actions of *Let’s Do It, Romania!* For example, one March blog post and some April blog posts included what Ch. Forceville labels as MP1, namely pictorial metaphors with one pictorially present term, where the secondary subject (source concept) which should have been perceived in the visual composition is totally replaced by the primary subject (target concept) but it projects some qualities onto the perceived element. The April blog posts focused on a shift from the isotopy of a field full of garbage (source concept) into a field full of painted eggs (target concept), thus reminding of Easter. The same visual change can be noticed in the advertisement for the action (*Let’s Bike It is pedaling for Earth Hour*): the source concept (the filament of a light bulb) is changed with a bike (the target concept).

As I have mentioned above the time frame (64%) is more frequent in the framing of volunteering as token (RQ3) since the blog posts include stories (past time frame) and calls to action (future time frame). It is interesting to observe the salience of community (N=270 instances) and regional (N=70 instances) space frames. Whereas the latter frame refers to Romanian counties (beneficiaries) where actions of cleaning-up and garbage mapping

took place/ will take place, the former frame has a twofold embodiment: on the one hand, community as particular places (forests, streets etc.) where actions are carried on, and on the other hand, community as clusters of participants, the actions are carried on but by collectivities belonging to different social backgrounds.

4. TABOO-BREAKERS IN THE ENGLISH LITERARY MODERNISM

The “we-ness” beyond volunteering, the 2011 European Year issue, has been framed at the macro-level, as a type of a collection of faces to which each of us can identify, and at the micro-level, as a token of shared experiences and calls-to-action embedded in blog posts which may constitute signs of active participation. The visual and virtual communities discursively shaped can also be quantified by the 5,281 Facebook likes that the *Let’s Do It, Romania!* blog posts received in 2011.

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