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**The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital  
development once a year?**

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## 1. Abstract

Volunteering is one of the strongest elements of shaping democratic change within the society. It is also an essential element in citizenship development and in re-establishing a sense of community. Volunteering empowers individuals, builds solidarity, encourages participation and protects vulnerable groups against social and economic marginalization. The frequency and intensity of citizens' involvement through volunteering engagement is considered to be a part of the social participation and one dimension of social capital measurement framework (Harper and Kelly, 2003). Volunteering has a long tradition in Croatia nevertheless due to different political, socio-cultural and economic circumstances through times; one can still question whether the public perceives it as a social value and whether it is a significant contributor to the social capital.

Croatia is considerably lagging behind regarding the research of the civil sector. Another obstacle is that the academic community has still not fully recognized research of civil society sector as an important one (Ledić, 2001). As a result, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Croatia have put additional efforts in the research field as a mean of enhancing its analytical capacities and responding to the key common policy issues and the urgent needs of the civil society sector. Particular emphasis was put on the development of the hands-on methodology which would enable fast, yet constructive engagement between researchers, interviewers and practitioners and would give results that are ably contributing to both theory and the practice of further develop interventions in the relevant aforementioned area.

The research presented in this paper was conducted during 2006 and presents research findings of citizen's participation in the community initiatives through volunteering during 2005 in one Croatian County (Primorsko-goranska County) and compares them with those researched in the same geographical area in 2000, 5 years before. The main goal was to examine the facts and figures on volunteering and shed the light on the particular problems regarding the status of volunteering in Croatia. The following dimensions were explored: general views on volunteering, views on volunteering in Croatia, the frequency and intensity of volunteering involvement, type of desirable activities, the nature of volunteering experience, the motivation for volunteering and suggestions for the improvement of volunteers' community status as well as volunteering promotion and development. A *Questionnaire on Volunteering* was created for the 2001 research and used again in 2006 with minor modifications. The questionnaire was submitted to 500 surveyed after which the data collected was processed with the SPSS statistical package. The attained conclusions have showed that the citizens in Primorsko-goranska County have generally a positive attitude towards volunteering. On the other hand the attitude's towards volunteering in Croatia, surveyed in 2006, were rather more

## The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

negative, highlighting key obstacles such as poor promotion in the families, misuse of volunteers and insufficient incentive measures provided by the government. During the 2005, 45.8 percent of citizens have participated in some form of the volunteering activity in the community initiatives and in 2000 the citizen's participation was 43.7 percent. When we compare the span of five years there is an evidence of a slight increase in citizens' participation in volunteering in Primorsko-goranska County. The frequency and intensity of participation in volunteering activities however has remained very low and there have even been declines reported. Out of 45.8 percent of citizens who have been engaged in some volunteering activities, only 5 percent have been volunteering on daily and 18 percent on weekly basis, which is even lower than in 2001 research. This is considered as one of the most important findings and to examine this further a more complex statistical analysis was used to point out the influential factors such as membership in association, educational level, and previous volunteering experience.

Generally there are two main benefits gained with this research. Firstly, the results contributed to the further development of the relevant synergetic action of all societal segments in the field of volunteering in Croatia and secondly the comprehensive recommendations for volunteer development in Croatia were developed and published.

## **2. Volunteering – contributing to democratic changes in society and social capital development**

Volunteering is one of the strongest elements in developing and shaping democratic changes in every contemporary society. Furthermore, it allows citizens to engage in various citizen initiatives and give their contribution in developing their community and society in general by offering their free time, knowledge and experiences, enthusiasm and energy empowering in that way the social trust between citizens and associational networks as well. More than 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities, live solidarity and through this make a difference in the society.

The most recent surveys (Euro barometer, 2007) revealed that 3 out of 10 Europeans claim to be active in a voluntary capacity and that close to 80 percent of respondents feel that voluntary activities are an important part of democratic life in Europe. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council's report, *“volunteering is both a habit of the heart and a civic virtue. It is an action deeply rooted in the human spirit with a far-reaching social and cultural impact. Listening to, being concerned with and responding to the needs of others is evidence of the highest human motivation. Human beings help each other out of love and compassion. Yet, in its deepest spiritual dimension and*

*symbolic meaning, volunteering is not simply something that we do for others. Our own values and humanity are at stake: we are what we give.”<sup>1</sup>*

The concept of volunteerism is a subject to different interpretations and understandings. These interpretations and understandings are tightly connected with tradition, cultural conditions and a social context of a particular country. According to a traditional understanding of volunteerism (unselfish service to others), Govaart and associates (2001) offer a contemporary understanding of volunteerism viewed through mutual support, delivering service and active social participation. In traditional societies mutual support is based on a natural human desire to survive or to live better, and is done inside a close circle of people. Volunteerism in the form of delivering service is mostly connected with organized, often institutional contexts while active social participation, on the other hand, represents a form of people’s self organization (based on participation principles) in solving problems. Volunteerism has recently started being connected with the concept of leisure. Certain authors define or describe it as a free activity of an individual. Stebbins (1996) connects volunteering with the concept of serious leisure stating clear differences between the following types of volunteering: career and casual, formal and informal and occupational and no occupational volunteering. The serious leisure model suits most those types of volunteering classified as formal and no occupational, i.e. those which enable volunteers to pursue their careers in.

The potential of volunteerism in finding solutions to various social problems has become evident in the last years and many countries came to appreciate volunteer contributions in both social and economic development. Volunteerism affects all levels, from education, environmental protection, social policy through the justice system by connecting the private domain of volunteers and a wider sphere of the public and business sector. It empowers individuals, builds a sense of solidarity, encourages participation, and safeguards vulnerable groups from economical, social and political marginalization. Numerous examples across the globe prove how volunteerism contributes to the development of human potential, raises citizen participation in social development and in turn strengthens social capital and social cohesion. Even though it is evident from Putnam’s arguments (Putnam 2000) that volunteering is not a part of the social capital definition and therefore, as a form of individual philanthropic activity should be clearly distinguished from social capital, the authors of this paper consider volunteering to be a phenomenon which surely contributes to establishing new contacts and social networks in the community and empowering the trust between community members, and defined in this way also contributes to the development of social capital.

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<sup>1</sup> From the United Nations Economic and Social Council's report: The Role of Volunteerism in the Promotion of Social Development; (<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/policy/international/reports/index.htm>).

## The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

A recent study (Institute for volunteering research and volunteering, 2007) of volunteer involving organizations across Europe demonstrated a high level of volunteering value: for every € 1 organization spent on supporting volunteers, they received an average return between € 3 and € 8. This fact clearly shows the added value of volunteering and subsequent importance of developing comprehensive volunteering strategies and actions at the national level as well as including volunteering in countries' national budgets. Taking as a whole, the governmental and business sectors have not fully recognized the added value of volunteering, particularly in terms of promoting local democracy development, creating social capital and contributing to social and economic cohesion at the both, regional and local level - just to name the few areas important both in terms of the active contributions of the civil society sector to (i) the promotion and monitoring of relevant national measures as well as to (ii) the overall process of building Croatian capacity for the efficient implementation of the EU *acquis communautaire*. There is a clear gap between, on one hand, the growing interest in volunteering (CSOs, local public institutions, citizens) and, on the other, relatively low level of the support by the local authorities, i.e. targeted local policies/measures and budgetary allocations for reimbursement of relevant costs/other financial incentives.

For example, if we focus only on the economic benefits of volunteering, we see that, according to the results of a research done by the Institute for Policy Studies at John Hopkins University<sup>2</sup> which included 22 countries, out of which 12 developed (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Holland, Spain, Great Britain, Australia, Israel, Japan and USA), five countries in transition (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and five countries from Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Mexico and Peru), a 10.6 million of volunteers added to the number of 19 million employees, makes 6.9 percent of the total number of employees in the before mentioned countries employed in the non-profit sector.

### 3. Conducting research on volunteerism in Croatia – issues and challenges

Croatia seriously lags behind in doing research of the civil sector, and especially in conducting research on the benefits of volunteer work, which is considered one of the stepping-stones of civil society development. A question thus arises: Why is it necessary to conduct research on volunteerism? Considering that volunteering affects the stability of society and generates additional value to social capital development, examining levels of citizen engagement in volunteer activities is an important source of information to the government, media and civil society organizations as well. Recent research studies on civil society in Croatia reveal numerous challenges for different social subjects to

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<sup>2</sup> Research was conducted in Baltimore, USA in 1995.

meet. In the report on *Civil Society Index in Croatia (2001, 2003-2005)* authors state a weak citizen concern for social and community problems and testify that citizens do not feel obligated and responsible for solving problems and that they are not interested in their immediate surroundings. The report says:

*“Civic engagement in social and community problems is not a citizen value recognized in Croatia. Citizens do not feel obligated or responsible for solving issues they are faced with. Furthermore, the government fails to recognize citizens as having a great role in civil society. Socio-cultural and political environment questions the legitimacy of civil society organizations. It is expected from the government to empower organizations and citizens for action.”* (Bežovan, G., Zrinščak, S., Vugec, M: 2005)

Furthermore, the concept of civic engagement is not a part of educational programs on any level and Croatian socio-cultural background is more inclined to encourage passivity than inventiveness and confidence in citizens. This is confirmed by results of a comparative study of values in which, among other things, it is stated how Croatia needs to make a substantial effort to overcome the existing level of solidarity and develop an effective system of social solidarity (Baloban (ed), 2005:204). The results show a need for permanent strengthening of civic engagement in solving social and community needs in Croatian citizens. Volunteerism surely represents one of the mechanisms of the previously mentioned civic engagement, which provides an additional value in the process of building trust in others and in their community.

Is volunteerism in Croatia recognized as having a social (and an economic) value? It is difficult to say because of the lack of empirical data and indicators on the development and perception of volunteering in Croatia on both the local and national level. Even though continuous research has not been conducted in Croatia to provide relevant information for volunteer development, there are individual efforts of local civil society organizations on one side, and certain international donor agencies on the other, aimed at designing and implementing research projects on volunteerism (frequency of volunteering, types of volunteer activities, public attitudes towards volunteering). As a result, in the last eighteen years there have been only six research projects on the issues of volunteering conducted in Croatia. All the projects were initiated and carried out by civil society organizations because of the fact that the Croatian academic community has still not become aware of the significance of conducting research on volunteerism<sup>3</sup>. These organizations invest additional efforts in

<sup>3</sup> It is important to mention a research conducted at the University of Zagreb as a part of a larger collaborative research project between twelve countries with the purpose of examining University of Zagreb students' attitudes on volunteering and their participation in volunteer activities in the community.

The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

conducting research of the non-profit sector in order to improve their own analytical capacities and to offer answers to crucial public policy issues as well as urgent needs of the sector itself. Research studies conducted in other countries see volunteerism as a phenomenon worth researching in both the civil sector and the academic community. In the recent years we can notice efforts made, for example in the EU, to collect comparative data on volunteering (Hal and Mejs, 2005). Considerable contributions to this comparative dimension are offered by civil society organizations and networks on the European level that work in collaboration with relevant EU institutions in establishing a foundation for defining recommendations and measures for volunteer development.

#### **4. Examining the involvement of citizens in civic initiatives by volunteering in the Primorsko-goranska County**

##### *4.1. Research methodology*

The Association for Civil Society Development SMART conducted the research “Civil Participation in Community Initiatives through Volunteering” in 2001 – the international year of volunteers. The research was conducted in Primorsko-goranska County and at the time was only such research conducted in Croatia<sup>4</sup>. At the time of research, Croatian government had still not passed the Law on Volunteering.

An operational definition was therefore used which identifies volunteering as a non-compulsory activity, undertaken of one’s own free will, not undertaken for financial gain, and which brings benefits to a third party as well as to the people who volunteer.<sup>5</sup> It is important to emphasize that we analyzed only formal volunteering activities, organized in various civil society organizations and institutions in the county. Type and frequency of non-formal volunteer activities, meaning the traditional forms of offering help were not in the focus in any part of this research. However, when discussing about the issue of traditional volunteering, it’s very interesting to mention research results from the year 2005 according to which 91.7 percent of Croatian citizens offered various models of voluntary help to different members of the community, outside their families (e.g. babysitting, taking care of old people, shopping, housekeeping etc.).

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<sup>4</sup> The research was conducted only in Primorsko-goranska County, and with professional supervision of Jasminka Ledić, PhD from Department of Education, and University in Rijeka. The Association for Civil Society Development SMART was awarded by the Croatian government in 2001 for significant contribution in the field of volunteering promotion and development.

<sup>5</sup> This definition of volunteering was identified in a publication *Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit* which is a result of a collaborative project of an American organization Independent Sector and United Nations Volunteer, published as a part of the International Year of Volunteers. Croatia has a Law on Volunteering today, which was passed in May 2007. According to the Law, volunteering is free investment of one’s personal time, efforts, knowledge and skills to provide services and pursue activities for the benefit of others or the common good, and is conducted by persons in the way stipulated by the Law, without the possibility of financial gain or other compensation in terms of goods or property.

The research presented in this paper showed the existence of a positive attitude towards volunteering of the respondents but a general negative attitude in their surrounding. Furthermore, a positive attitude is not a guarantee for an actual involvement in volunteer activities. Citizens do not volunteer because of a difficult financial situation, value crisis and lack of information. According to the research results, 43.7 percent of respondents have participated in some form of volunteer activities in the year 2000. A similar situation was found in countries where volunteerism is more developed (e.g. Great Britain, Netherlands). The differences arise when we look at volunteer frequency. As research results indicate, the largest number of respondents with volunteer experience participates in some form of volunteer activity only once or twice a year. In Great Britain, on the other hand, volunteers in average participate in volunteer activities five to seven hours a week. This was one of the crucial research findings, which showed the importance of developing and promoting volunteering, especially because of the fact that the value of volunteering itself has been seriously put into question in Croatia.

In addition, research results showed the need for doing continuous research of the existing situation in order to enable a quality and effective volunteer development in the whole county (and beyond) with adequate programs and interventions. Five years later, SMART had decided to conduct the same research for two reasons: (I) so far comparative studies on volunteering have not been conducted in Croatia and (II) the repeated study will allow for further development of the infrastructure for volunteering in Primorsko-goranska County. A *Questionnaire on Volunteerism* was used for research purposes on a sample of 500 examinees<sup>6</sup>. The research was based on a hypothesis that there will be a slight increase in volunteer frequency and positive attitude about volunteering in Primorsko-goranska County in comparison with the first research. An additional hypothesis has been put forward which claimed that citizens would be willing to do volunteer work if there existed a certain level of infrastructure, reliable initiatives and organizations prepared to include volunteers successfully in their activities.

#### **4.2. Research results – are there any changes five years later?**

##### **4.2.1. General attitudes on volunteering**

The analysis of respondents' general attitudes on volunteering was based on 11 suggested statements in a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale to determine the respondents' degree of

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<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire was composed with the professional assistance of Jasminka Ledić, PhD, supervisor of SMART's survey research "Civil Participation in Community Initiatives through Volunteering" from 2001.



The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

agreement with the statements (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

The analysis of results obtained from the 2006 research in relation to 2001 results show positive general attitudes towards volunteering and volunteers. In 2006 the respondents indicated their strong agreement with the statement that *Engaging in voluntary activities helps meet interesting people* (2001 M=4.13; 2006 M=4.2). They also strongly agreed with a statement that *Volunteers can help solve problems in the local community* (2001 M=3.82; 2006 M=3.87). These results can have a positive effect when it comes to involving citizens in different initiatives and activities, which improve the quality of life in local communities and strengthen social capital. The arguments support that there exist positive attitudes about volunteering and volunteers, which confirms the conclusion from the 2001 research that general positive attitudes on volunteering and volunteers are a cause for optimism because they enable the development of a systematic concern for volunteerism and volunteer encouragement (Ledić, 2001).

Statistical analysis shows a considerable impact of certain independent variables – age, gender, place of residence, educational qualification, financial status and membership in civil society organizations. The 2006 research confirmed the 2001 findings according to which women considerably more agree with positive statements in relation to men. The results from 2006 indicate that respondents with a lower and higher level of *educational qualifications* agree more with positive statements than the respondents from 2001. On the other hand, the respondents with a high level of educational qualification from 2006 disagree more with positive statements (contented with self and optimal leisure), which proves that the respondents of higher and high level of educational qualifications from the 2006 research are more skeptical when it comes to volunteering than the ones in 2001. In 2006 research, as opposed to the 2001 research, the variable *financial status* proved to be a significant factor in determining attitudes about volunteering. It is interesting that the respondents of a financial status below average from 2006 have a positive attitude towards volunteering (more agree with affirmative statements which show a statistically significant difference) than the respondents of a better financial status. *Membership in organizations*, as can be expected, has proven to be an important factor in forming opinions about volunteering as was in the 2001 research. The respondents, members of organizations, in both studies have a significantly more positive attitude about volunteering, in relation to the non-members.

#### 4.2.2. Attitudes about volunteering in Croatia

The examinees were offered 16 statements in the questionnaire using a five-point scale to determine their personal attitudes asking them to choose their degree of agreement with the statements about volunteerism in Croatia (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). In the final, seventeenth section the respondents had a possibility to give a comment and express their personal opinion.

Graph 1. Differences in attitudes on volunteering in Croatia between respondents from 2001 and 2006 research.<sup>7</sup>

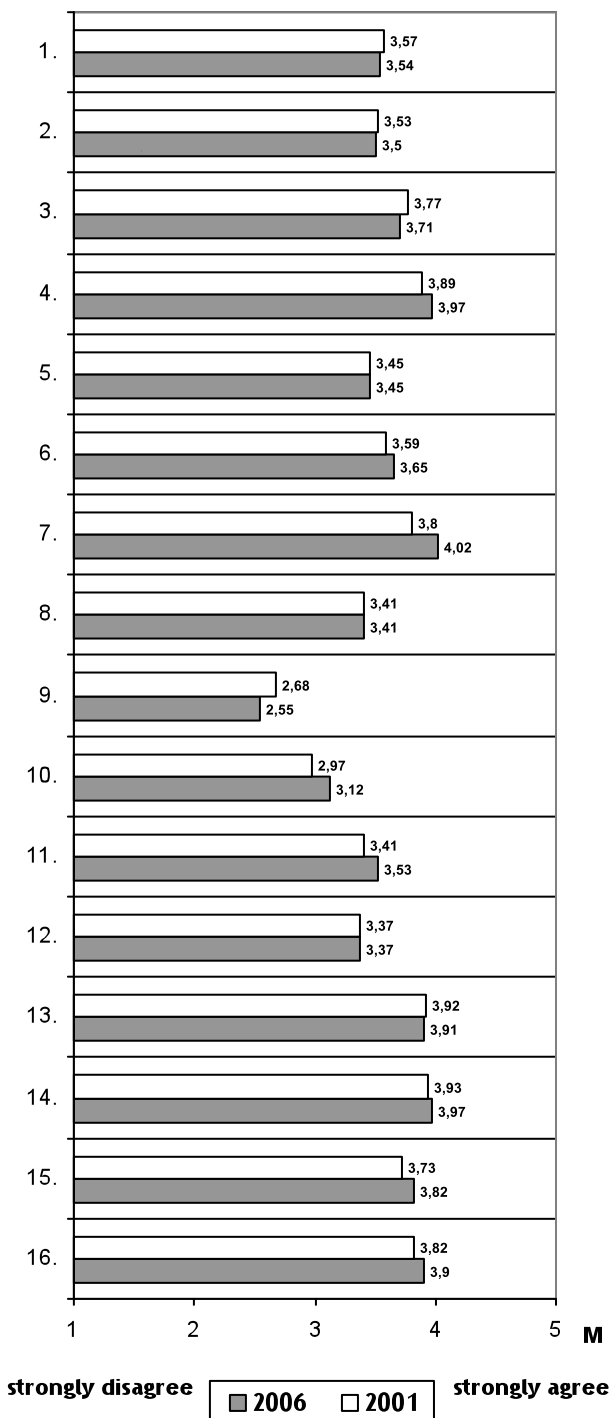
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<sup>7</sup> All statements in the Graph in which a statistically significant difference was determined in respondents from the 2001 and 2006 research are marked in bold.

The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

Attitudes about volunteering in Croatia

1. The social situation in Croatia has a negative effect on volunteering.
2. Upon completion of volunteer work, volunteers do not get certificates, credentials or recommendations, so people are not motivated to volunteer.
3. Nobody deals with volunteer promotion seriously.
4. Croatians know little about volunteer opportunities and its benefits.
5. Croatians do not volunteer because of a stereotype that volunteer work is less important.
6. People are passive and have no ambitions.
7. The state offers no stimulative measures on volunteerism.
8. People working with volunteers usually lack the necessary experience and knowledge so they treat their volunteers inappropriately.
9. There are no opportunities to volunteer.
10. We spend a lot of time helping our family members so there is no time to help others.
11. Volunteer exploitation has a negative effect on volunteer motivation.
12. Volunteering is sometimes associated with “shady” business so it is easy to doubt its integrity.
13. Volunteering does not get enough media attention (newspapers, TV, etc.).
14. Schools do not realize the benefits of volunteering, so the children and the youth have no opportunities to learn about it.
15. Families do not realize the benefits of volunteering so they do not encourage it.
16. People are not aware that volunteering offers opportunities for personal growth.



In both the 2001 and 2006 research a relation can be noticed between estimated attitudes about volunteering and actual attitudes about volunteering in Croatia. In the 2006 research the respondents rated volunteering and volunteers as positive. When it came to estimating attitudes about volunteering in Croatia, the reasons they found the strongest resulting in a low interests in volunteering were inadequate promotion, disregard for the importance of volunteering and no stimulative measures on volunteerism offered and implemented by various social subjects, especially the government.

The highest score was given to a statement *The state offers no stimulative measures on volunteerism* (M=4.2). The statements *Croatians know little about volunteer opportunities and its benefits* and *Schools do not realize the benefits of volunteering, so the children and the youth have no opportunities to learn about it* were also given a high score (M=3.97) and were mentioned as reasons influencing a low interest for volunteering in Croatia. These results once again show a need for introducing subject matters on volunteerism in educational institutions (volunteering activities, electives dealing with volunteerism, etc.)<sup>8</sup>.

The respondents in general recognized the importance of providing information on volunteer opportunities and volunteerism. They strongly agreed with the following statement: *Volunteering does not get enough media attention (newspapers, TV, radio)* (M=3.91). The respondents gave a high score to the following statements as well: *People are not aware that volunteering offers opportunities for personal growth* (M=3.9) and *Families do not realize the benefits of volunteering so they do not encourage it* (M=3.82), mentioning them as reasons people do not volunteer in Croatia. The analysis of the results obtained from the 2006 research shows that the respondents found as a crucial obstacle to volunteerism in Croatia a lack of promotion in the family and the environment, exploitation of volunteer work and no stimulative measures offered by the government.

As opposed to the 2001 research when the crucial obstacle for volunteerism development was the overall negative situation in Croatia, the 2006 results are more directed towards a better organization of volunteering which is easier to influence and change making it then easier to develop mechanisms to improve volunteering.

The seventeenth section gave the respondents an opportunity to add their own opinion on the reasons why people do not volunteer in Croatia if none of the offered statements applied to them. The questionnaires generated 87 comments, which mean that 17.4 percent of respondents gave comments on reasons they think why people in Croatia do not volunteer. The same approach to categorizing comments was used as in the 2001 research. Comments were categorized in clusters of similar comments in three basic groups: social circumstances, volunteer problems and other. Each group was divided into clusters so we got 10 clusters in total.

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<sup>8</sup> The National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development (2006-2011) was adopted by the Croatian government, which goes to show a new level of recognition of this issue. The Strategy, among other goals, states the development of the value system for the common good through the educational system and acquainting the youth with the values of volunteering. It is interesting to mention in this context also the National Program for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship Education adopted by the Croatian government in 1999. However, the practice shows great difficulties in implementing special programs for preschool, primary school and secondary school level because of the great volume of compulsory educational content leaving the informing, promoting and educating still up to the civil society organizations outside the system of formal education.

The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

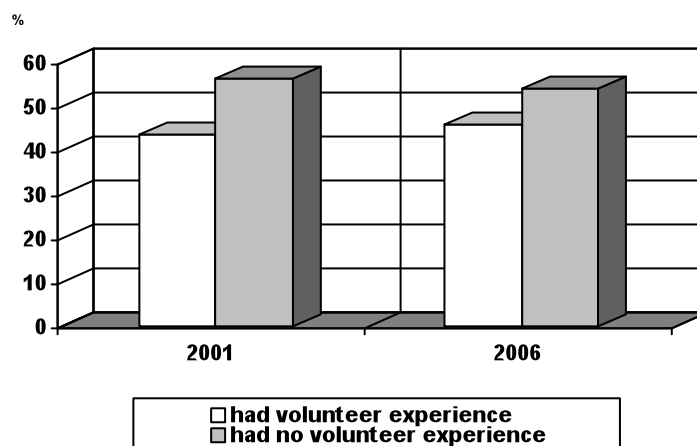
Table 1. Groups of comments on reasons influencing a low interest for volunteering in Croatia

GROUPS OF COMMENTS	CLUSTERS OF COMMENTS	2006 N=87 (17,4% of the total sample)		2001 N=309 (19,93% of the total sample)	
		N	%	N	%
SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES	Personal circumstances	17	19,54	55	17,8
	Value crisis	10	11,49	41	13,27
	Social context	15	17,24	40	12,94
<b>Total</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>48,27</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>44,01</b>
VOLUNTEER PROBLEMS	Lack of information, motivation and awareness on the benefits of volunteer work	9	10,34	63	20,39
	No cost reimbursements for volunteers	9	10,34	23	7,44
	Lack of interest for volunteering	3	3,44	20	6,47
	Negative attitude towards volunteer work	8	9,19	17	5,50
	Lack of volunteer regulation (organization)	6	6,89	14	4,53
	Inadequate supply of volunteer jobs	1	1,14	9	2,91
	Lack of corporate and institutional interest for volunteer engagement	1	1,14	3	0,97
<b>Total</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>41,37</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>48,21</b>
OTHER	Other	9	10,34	24	7,77
Total		<b>9</b>	<b>10,34</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7,77</b>

#### 4.2.3. Participating in volunteer activities – who for, which activities and how often?

One of the research objectives was to examine volunteer activities of Primorsko-goranska County residents which were then analyzed according to the following categories: types of volunteer activities, frequency of participation in volunteer activities, focus of volunteer activities and volunteer experiences.

Graph 2. The percentage of respondents who had volunteering experience and the ones who had no volunteer experience in the 2001 and 2006 research



In 2005 45.8 percent of respondents had participated in some form of volunteer activity. Comparing this result with the one from the 2001 research, when 43.7 percent of respondents participated in some form of volunteer activity, there is a slight increase.<sup>9</sup> In the 2006 the largest numbers of respondents (45.4 percent) were volunteering in various associations, which again confirmed the presumption that associations are the ones responsible for organizing volunteer activities and that, their activities have a beneficial effect on volunteer promotion. Comparing results from the 2001 and 2006 research, a statistically significant difference was noticed only in religion-based activities, where the respondents from 2001 were helping in the church more often than the 2006 respondents. Comparing data connected with *Working without compensation with the purpose of obtaining employment* with the 2001 results, a slightly larger percentage is identified (6.1 percent), but we can still claim that a relatively low percentage of people connect volunteer work with one of the ways of obtaining employment in the future. A more complex statistical analysis in relation to independent characteristics does not show a statistically significant difference in any of the activities of either research.

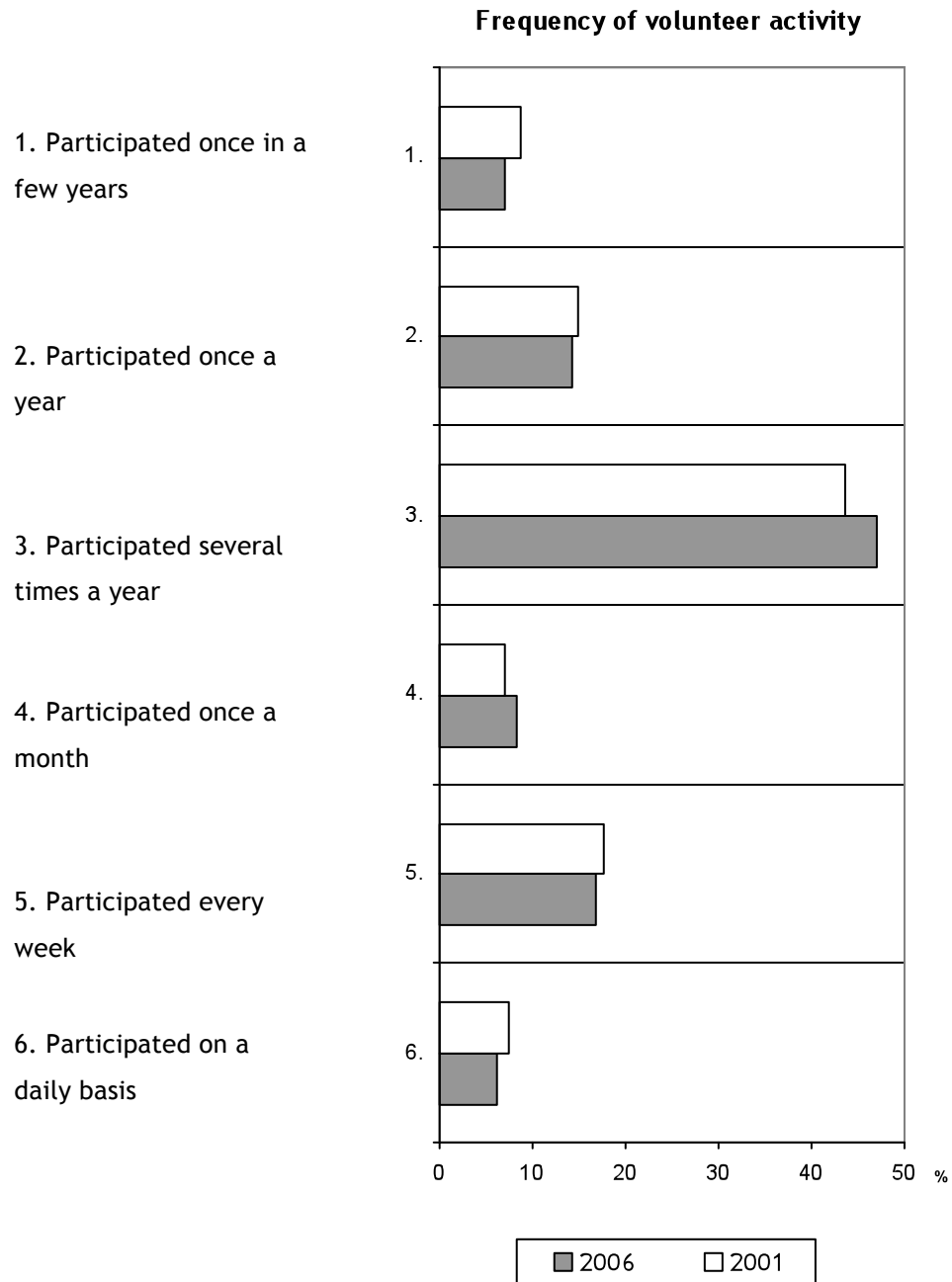
<sup>9</sup> The authors presume that this high percentage is in part a result of the research sample, which consisted of a large number of respondents who declared themselves as members of an association (24.6 percent).

### **Frequency of participation in volunteer activities**

An important aspect that should be taken into account when examining volunteer activities is *the frequency of volunteering*. It is of no doubt that the volunteering frequency points out the economic value of volunteer work in one country. However, it is of great importance to emphasize the meaning in relation to social capital. If we consider social capital as a characteristic of a community established and sustained spontaneously, in everyday interactions and during a longer period of time, then we need to observe, in the context of this research paper, what influence documented weak and rare citizen interaction has on the development of social capital. A healthy community with developed social capital can be recognized, among other things, by the dimension of citizen participation, i.e. citizen interest and civic engagement in community service and the common good. Citizens' willingness to volunteer and the frequency of volunteer actions (as a measurable element) is certainly only one of an array of indicators for developing a healthy community, but an indicator which in our case warns about the questionable force of established social networks and the level of trust among citizens.

The next table shows data about the frequency of volunteering only concerning examinees who reported to have participated in volunteer activities, 2001 research N=667, 2006 research N=229.

Graph 3. The frequency of examinees' participation in volunteer activities in 2001 and 2006 research



The data obtained from the 2006 research that 45.8 percent of citizens volunteered in 2005 shows a slight increase in the number of citizens who volunteer, which is a reason to be optimistic. However, if we look back on the data on the frequency of volunteering which gives a more comprehensive picture of volunteering, we can see that it has not come to significant changes in relation to 2001. A slight progress can be seen in 2006 category *several times a year* (2001 - 43.7 percent, 2006 - 47.1 percent), and *once a month* (2001 - 7.1 percent, 2006 - 8.4 percent). In relation to independent variables from the 2006 research, a statistically significant difference was noticed between respondents who are members of associations and the ones who are not. Members of associations reported participating in the specified activities every week and every day, while the ones who are not



## The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

members of associations once in a few years or once a year. Analyzing certain independent variables (age, gender, place of residence, financial status, professional status, membership in associations) and comparing them in both researches had not resulted in significant differences in participation frequency.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.2.4. The volunteer improvement measures

With this group of questions we wanted to get respondents' opinions about activities, which could improve volunteering and motivate people to volunteer. The respondents were offered ten activities or stimulative measures, which could improve volunteering and motivate people to volunteer to grade on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=would not improve volunteering; 2=would improve volunteering slightly; 3=would neither improve nor worsen volunteering; 4=would improve volunteering; 5=would greatly improve volunteering). In the eleventh segment, the respondents could add their own comment or suggestion.

Graph 4. Differences in respondents' opinions on volunteer improvement measures from the 2001 and 2006 research<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Different researches on volunteering conducted in the past six years also show a difference in the extent of volunteering in Croatia. According to the research of civil society in Croatia based on the CIVICUS index, during 2004 at least 38.4 percent of Croatian citizens had done volunteer work for their immediate community or their neighbors and friends while 21.3 percent had done it within civil society organizations. The results obtained from the research "Public attitudes about non-governmental organizations" conducted in 2005 show twice as less percentage of Croatians or 10.7 percent who stated to have volunteered in the last twelve months, i.e. worked without compensation in an organization, club or association out of which only 3.8 percent had volunteered at least once a month or more than that. Research results on the topic of volunteering conducted in 2005 by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development show even lesser percentages. According to this research, only 5 percent of Croatian population volunteers, while more than half do not even think about volunteering. The before mentioned results on the extent of volunteer work vary greatly. In other words, the range of examinees that stated they volunteer is from 5 percent up to more than 40 percent. This range maybe demonstrates an inconsistency in defining and understanding volunteer work, from both the researchers and the examinees (Bagić, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> All statements in the Graph in which a statistically significant difference was determined in respondents from the 2001 and 2006 research are marked in bold.

### Attitudes

1. **Offering advantage to volunteers upon employment would motivate people to volunteer.**

2. Offering better information on volunteerism (acquainting the public with the concept and importance of volunteerism) would improve volunteering.

3. Establishing special organizations for volunteer promotion would improve volunteering.

4. **Media attention (media campaigns) would have a positive effect on volunteering.**

5. Adequate supply of volunteer jobs would improve volunteering.

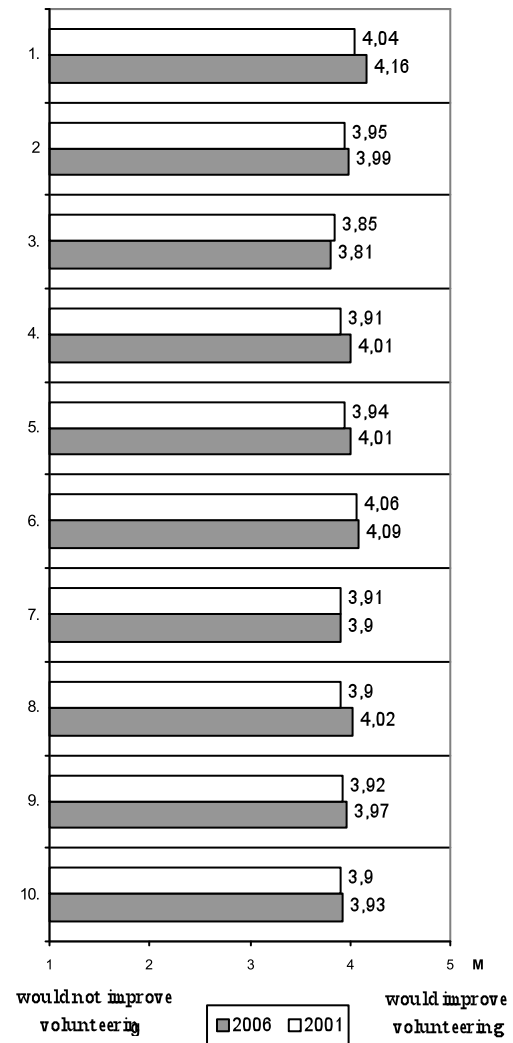
6. Reimbursing costs (of transportation, etc.) would motivate people to volunteer.

7. Professional training for organizations to accept and handle volunteers would improve volunteering.

8. **Offering and implementing stimulative measures on the national level to promote volunteer work would improve volunteering.**

9. Introducing subject matters on volunteerism and encouraging volunteering in schools would improve volunteering.

10. Corporate and public service openness to volunteer work would improve volunteering.



In accordance with the 2001 research, the respondents from the 2006 research also give high grades to all the recommended volunteer improvement measures, especially the ones that deal with finances. In 2006, the respondents gave the highest grade to *Offering advantage to volunteers upon employment would motivate people to volunteer* (M=4.16). A special emphasis was again put on measures dealing with volunteer cost reimbursements and offering advantage upon employment to volunteers. At the same time, 2006 respondents significantly more choose to rate *the need to implement stimulative measures on the national level to improve volunteering*, which serves as an additional confirmation of the previously identified finding on attitudes about volunteering in Croatia where, the respondents see the lack of government stimulative measures as a reason why people do not volunteer in Croatia.

The largest number of comments in the 2006 research was given in the *Encouraging volunteering through the educational system* section - almost twice as much than in 2001. This could be linked to the

## The challenge of volunteering frequency in Croatia – can volunteers contribute to the social capital development once a year?

previously identified finding on attitudes about volunteering in Croatia in which the respondents, according to most independent variables (age, gender, place of residence, professional qualification, professional status), saw the lack of attention given to volunteerism in families and educational institutions as reasons why people do not volunteer in Croatia. When offering volunteer improvement measures, the initiative and implementation should be done by all sectors (government, public, business and non-profit sector) with the emphasis on government stimulative measures and implementing volunteerism in the educational system. Volunteer management measures (better coordination of organizations to accept and handle volunteers and a better supply of volunteer jobs) were recognized by all respondents. This indicates the importance of a good and systematic approach to include volunteers in the work of organizations with a clear volunteer program as an essential prerequisite, which could motivate citizens to volunteer. Based on all these findings, it is evident that an additional hypothesis can be accepted - that citizens would be willing to volunteer if they were offered a certain level of infrastructure, credible initiatives and organizations willing to include volunteer in their activities.

## 6. Conclusions

Key research findings indicate an existence of a positive general attitude towards volunteering and volunteers among Primorsko-goranska county residents. Reasons why people do not volunteer in Croatia are a lack of promotion, inadequate recognition of the importance of volunteering and no stimulative measures offered by different subjects in the society (state, employer, educational institutions). The young still have a negative attitude towards volunteering even though results obtained in certain segments (attitudes about volunteering in Croatia, volunteer improvement measures) show that young people from the 2006 research have a slightly more positive attitude towards volunteering. Even though a slight increase in volunteering can be noticed in relation to 2001, a key challenge still remains – the frequency of volunteering has not significantly changed since the 2001. People who have been involved in various volunteer activities usually perform it once or twice a year making the sustainability of the concept of empowering citizens' participation through volunteering activities more than questionable.

Still burdened by the post-communist heritage, transition challenges and economic turbulences, Croatia is faced with a great challenge – increase citizens' civic engagement and moreover, propagates it as a virtue. In other words, the fabric of social capital is made from social norms and values of a cultural community. Citizens' civic engagement and volunteering are not acknowledged as civic virtues in Croatia and as long as the situation remains in reported status quo, our society is paralyzed for one mechanism of citizens' active participation, an element of creating networks between people

and organizations, a factor of development and building trust among people and institutions. In addition, volunteering unquestionably represents a means to support and empower community values, care and solidarity, and for individuals to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities as community members.

Civil society could be a crucial lever for the development of Croatian society. Nevertheless, this informal system of citizen connections and initiatives still does not show sufficient strength for the implementation of necessary changes. The civic scene in Croatia has almost 35.000 organizations which are dominated by three basic groups of organizations: religious, trade union-political and sports-recreational-cultural, which clearly shows that Croatia, alike other post-communist countries has a sector of with predominantly sports and recreational attributes (Zrinščak, 2005) that are primarily characterized by citizen associations of special interest, and less those for the common good or for the benefit of the community. A low degree of citizens' interest in social problems they encounter on a daily basis and even less (civic) engagement in the same area stifle the development of social capital in Croatia. This is a challenge which needs serious attending to from all sectors, and especially civil society organizations and universities in the domain of education for active citizenship and the promotion of volunteerism as a tool which enables this active participation in the community.

According to the before mentioned measures, all segments of society should continuously and simultaneously contribute to the development of volunteering in Croatia through activities in each of their domains on the following areas: acknowledging volunteer work (acknowledging its importance for the society or acknowledging volunteer service), promoting (volunteer values, its benefits and opportunities, as well as examples of good practice), organizing volunteering (developing the infrastructure for volunteer development), establishing networks (establishing connections between the volunteer community and different actors on different levels) and influencing public policy.

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