# PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE TEXTS OF EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS: ANALYSIS OF ASSOCIATIVE SYMBOLISM

**Modestas Grigaliūnas**
*Vilnius University*

## Introduction

On 27 November, 2009, the European Commission publishes an adopted decision 2010/37/EC regarding European Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011). (OJ 2010 L17, p. 43), which induced the decisions of the national governments of the European Union member states promoting volunteering and implementing the objectives of the aforementioned decision of the Commission. It should be noted that the aspiration of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania towards successful implementation of the EU policies in the field of volunteering, i.e. *encouraging more people to take this action*, will be inevitably linked with a change of the post-Soviet Lithuanian identity and positive reconstruction; theoretically it is subject to analysis from the perspective of *social engineering* and its means of communication, *social propaganda and social advertising*. Announcement of the *European Year of Volunteering* (2011) and creation of related political - legal decisions and conditions in EU member states, including Lithuania, commenting from the point of view of social engineering, refers to the objective of creating an identity of an *European-volunteer* (*Lithuanian-volunteer*) with accompanying related positive lifestyle, values, sociality, cooperation, attitudes, and even individuation processes.

Positive reconstruction of public identity in pursuance of creation of a socially responsible individual (in this case an individual supporting the idea of volunteering) is associated not only with creation of the required legal and economic environment, but also with the *organization of consistent, systematic campaigns of persuasion*. For the purposes of the paper *persuasion* is perceived according to the meaning formulated in the definition of P. Oržekauskas and S. Simanauskas, i.e. as "an intellectual – psychological functioning, transmitting (conveying) information containing an explicit and specific logical sequence in order to compel an individual or a group of them to accept voluntarily the conveyed information, which has to perform the role of stimulation (or activation) of an activity (or deed)" (2005, p. 104). The paper analyses how part of the institutionally created and advocated persuasive discourse for promotion of voluntary activities in 2011 expressed in visual texts, the video and still image symbols, creates the special associative images of a *volunteering phenomenon* and *volunteers as citizens,* which have to encourage the society to engage in voluntary activities and become volunteers. Upon raising the proposition that *the visual communication and conveyance of targeted messages and ideas are based on sending of the codes made of visual symbols* as a general premise of the paper, the focus here will be on the presentation of the meanings of these codes as a communicative tool of social engineering for the implementation of the European Union social policy and for relevant change of public attitudes and identity.

As it is pointed out by T. Bulut and A. Yurdaisik, *we live in the world, where electronic media dominates, so all the developers of visual messages (advertising professionals, film-makers, graphic artists, etc.) use signs and symbols in order to influence the process of our meaning recognition* (Bulut and Yurdaisik, 2005). However, it is important to note that this process is not completely universal and proceeds in the consciousness of each recipient individually, that is why every visual message can be and is perceived differently. The subjectivity of interpretation of the communication codes (decoding) is one of the main aspects that can create the assumptions of the comprehension, which is inadequate to the message received. Namely the perception of this subjectivity and providence of at least several possible ways of interpreting of the message is the base for effective communication. Hence, we may conclude that the visual symbols related to the voluntary activity must be adapted to the socio-cultural perception of a target public and complement it respectively.

**The subject of the paper** is the visual texts of EU institutions intended for promotion of volunteering as a part of this discourse and the associative symbols of volunteering therein as the codes of public persuasion. **The aim of the paper** is to identify the images of volunteering and a volunteer advocated in the visual texts of EU institutions as the associative symbols and to define the holistic image of volunteering in the aspect of a persuasion message content.

The paper presents a part of the results of the holistic discourse analysis of volunteering promotion in Lithuania.

## Visual Discourse Codes of Social Engineering and Purposeful Formation of Identities and Attitudes

The positive activities of social identity (re)construction in order to create a society capable of self-control, managing and resolving of public policy problems, living under the principles of freedom, responsibility, cooperation and sociality are related to *social engineering* and its communication tools, *social propaganda* and *social advertising* (see, for example, Mažeikis, 2006, 2010). The term of social engineering comes from the works of the philosopher of the middle of twentieth century K. R. Popper: in his works *Poverty of Historicism* (1944-1945) and *Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), when writing about the social and political reforms, Popper used the terms of *social engineering* and *social technologies.* In the first book, in pursuance of distinguishing between two different approaches to social reforms, Popper used the terms of *partial social engineering* and *utopian social engineering*, which he shortened to *partial engineering* and *utopian engineering* in the next book. Although Popper has not created the term *social engineering* himself, the terms *partial (social) engineering* and *utopian (social) engineering* and the distinction between them belong to this author. And in comparison, for example, with O. Neurath and K. Mannheim, K. Popper's theory of the moderate social engineering is the most coherently developed (Avery, 2003, Podgórecki, Alexander and Shields, 1996, Gedutis, 2003) that is why today Popper is mostly subject to association with the technological viewpoint towards performance of social reforms (see more on that issue in Grigaliūnas, 2011). Social engineering, although more related to political actions, decisions and creation of available legal and socio-cultural environment, which influence upon the lifestyle, values and further behaviour of society, herewith is an integral part of the massive *persuasion*, which creates preconditions for consolidation of the reality changeable by social engineering and its entrenchment in public consciousness. The public persuasion entrenching the results of the processes of social engineering, as already mentioned, is associated with the *social propaganda* (which is not analysed further in this paper), and *social advertising*.

Social advertising is a negligible, casual, desultory public persuasion to change the lifestyle or individual values and is related to advocacy and development of a social engineering discourse (see, for example, Mažeikis, 2006, 2010). One of the factors determining the effectiveness of social advertising, as well as of any communicative message, is an adequacy between the socio-cultural contexts of a sender and a recipient determining the content of a message (Research, Principles and Practices in Visual Communication, 2004). This is especially important in the case of the social advertising, which often speaks about sensitive cases of the change of public attitude. In other words, the communicative codes, which are placed in social advertising, must comply with the socio-cultural attitudes of the subject of such the advertisement, if efficient their decoding is expected. The *code*, by means of which the ideas and communicative messages are sent to the public spaces, is a set of agreements or sub-codes used for communication of meanings. The most effective communication occurs when both the sender and the recipient use the same coding system. Therefore it is very important that the sending party would have a clear understanding of the objective principles of the aforementioned coding and even more that they would know that their target audience, in this case the European society (including Lithuania) involved in volunteering activity, is also aware of these principles. This yields a theory that the code, as a process, is an *encoding* (coding) and a *decoding. The code is comprehended by the public or its part; the comprehension of the code means belonging to that public* (Budrevičius, 1998, p. 29-30). **Subjectivity** of the encoding and decoding (the situation, when a sender sends messages and ideas and a recipient interprets them based on their own individual understanding of the situation) is the cause of all possible communicative misunderstandings. That is why it is possible to raise an argument that the comprehension, evaluation and appropriate use of individual coding components, symbols, are the key tasks of the visual communication organizers (in the case of this paper EU institutions creating and advocating the texts of volunteering popularization) (the research results of such type are presented by Grigaliūnas, 2008).

**Creation and Interpretation of Visual Communication Codes.** It should be noted that every text conceals other latent texts. The observers freely associate their own direct experiences with the media images. Incorrect decoding occurs when the audience's comprehension differs from that what the sender aims to convey. According to D. Chandler, *the decoding involves not simply basic recognition and comprehension of what a text 'says' but also the interpretation and evaluation of its meaning with reference to relevant codes* (Chandler, accessed on 23-12-2007). Such spaces open for interpretation and decoding are specified by all the socio-cultural environment of a person as well as his/her psychological state or characteristics: our feelings, cultural environments, rules and values, personal features, our goals, needs, moods influence upon the men-

tioned interpretation process. It has been already mentioned that the same communicative code as well as the symbol contained in it can be decoded completely differently in different countries and cultures due to their collective historical, cultural and social perspectives and experiences, and in the same country or culture such difference can be determined by a particular person's psycho-emotional state or personal attitudes towards one or another issue. In any case, specialists of visual communication, however, argue that it is possible to understand signs without any linguistic mediation. Their perception of *comprehension* allows believing that visual information can be comprehended without language (Moriarty, 1996). The visual communication does not consist of linguistic codes, thus the recipient and the visual message are left alone. Studies show that in this situation observers better notice the iconic elements of a message rather than the symbolic or index ones, but the symbolic meanings are much more efficient than the iconic ones (Bulut and Yurdaisik, 2005). We should also remember S. Hall, who has offered three positions of the hypothetical relationship between a "reader" (observer) and a text (visual message):

- *Dominant reading*: the reader fully shares the text's codes and accepts and reproduces them.
- *Negotiated reading*: the reader partly shares the text's codes and sometimes accepts them, but sometimes resists and modifies them in a way which reflects their own position and experiences.
- *Oppositional reading*: the reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the text but does not accept the codes intruded (Chandler, accessed on 23-12-2007).

The tolerable independence of the recipient in the process of code interpretation proposed by this viewpoint also shows that the communicative codes not necessarily manage the person's perception, but the very person also can take the position of acceptance, partial acceptance or rejection of the code. That provides us a real practice, when advertisements are created based on the ability of observers to comprehend the message, which is sent through the ads, and trying to guess the recipients' knowledge allowing comprehend the receivable information. Advertisers try to find the images that support a product's image and help selling it. Semiotic analysis of such images taking place in the recipient's mind must identify visual and linguistic signs in the message, reveal how these signs are arranged pragmatically and stress how the signs in question relate to each other through different coding systems (Bulut and Yurdaisik, 2005).

**Associative Symbolism of Volunteering as a Code of Social Engineering in Visual Texts of the European Union**

The images of *volunteering* as a social phenomenon and *volunteering promotion* as a communication process taking place in 2011 supported by the representation agencies of the whole European Union as a geopolitical structure and the European Commission in Lithuania are primarily characterized by the *commonness of visual symbolism*. This is expressed through the use of special logos in various EU programs and projects funded by these programs: Special rules for promotion of the year's idea and the visual symbols were created at the European Commission's level for promotion of the volunteering across the EU countries in 2011, which were linguistically adapted for all 27 EU member states, and became one of the required communication attributes for implementation of that year's idea. It is important to note that these special logos (see Figure 1) next to the individual implemented projects were mandatory only for those implementers of such the projects, which had institutional or financial links with the programs, funds and agencies of the EU.



a)          b)
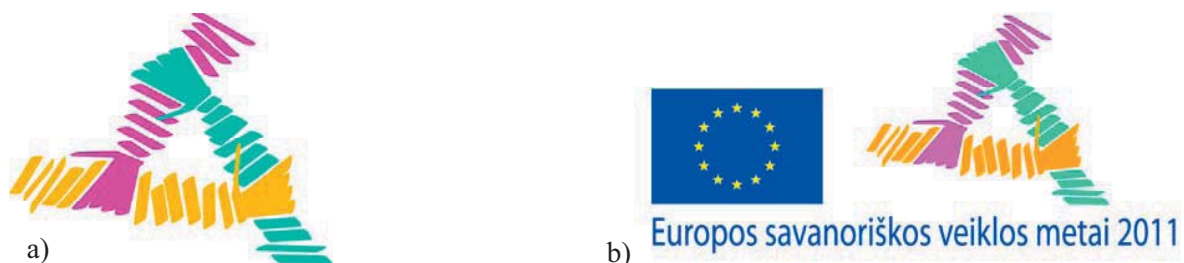
**Figure 1.** Special logotypes representing the European Year of Volunteering 2011 in EU: a) a partial logo representing the year and b) a full logo consisting of the EU flag, name of the celebrated event and the partial logo (http://europa.eu/volunteering/lt)

The interpretative analysis is relevant to the partial logo: the idea of volunteering importance is conveyed by the use of stylized *hands* as a symbol, different *colours* of hands and *joining of hands into a closed circle* as their arrangement position. The ex-

pression of volunteering by the symbol of *hands* is generally characteristic of the whole European Year of Volunteering 2011 visualization both at the level of the EU and Lithuania.

Table 1. *Typical narrative logic of EU video texts promoting volunteering*

| SITUATION BEFORE: | |
|---|---|
| **PEOPLE:** *bored, needy, waiting, grieving.* | **SITUATIONS:** *mess, chaos, sadness, dark, stagnation.* |
|  |  |
| TRANSFORMATION OF SITUATION: | |
| **APPEARANCE OF VOLUNTEERS,** who are *happy, smiling, joking, elated, working, offering a helping hand, arranging the situation, re-establishing balance and managing the chaos* | |
|  |  |
| SITUATION AFTER: | |
| **States of situations and people after the appearance of VOLUNTEERS:** *enlightenment, exhilaration, recovery and revival.* | |
|  |  |

The position of joined hands refers to the act of mutual assistance: *hand into hand, offering of a helping hand, holding hands*. The joining of hands

into a closed circle emphasizes sociality and volunteering as the provision of benefit to another person, and at the same time, as getting of benefit for one-

self. The hands of different colours highlight the diversity of society: every member of society is unique by his/her features, needs, lifestyle, etc.

The institutional video narratives representing EU volunteering collected for the research can be divided into two parts: a) common EU-wide video texts about the Year of Volunteering b) analogous texts initiated by EU representation offices and agencies of EU member states (in this case of Lithuania). At this point, the texts that have been developed by individual members or organizations of society in response to one or another volunteering promotion competition published by the EU are not ascribed to the EU video texts - such texts are ascribed to the appropriate civic or non-governmental sector. From the viewpoint of syntagmatic approach the common EU-wide video narratives promoting volunteering or providing an attractive image of volunteering are created under the same screenplay idea: *transformation of a grey daily routine, bleak environment and chaos into an order, harmony, joy*

*and solution of problems after appearance of volunteers in any situation (see Table 1, Volunteer - Make a Difference! European Commission Report...).* The image of volunteers as rescue workers: mostly white young people of both sexes *happy, smiling, joking, elated, working, offering a helping hand, arranging the situation, re-establishing balance and managing the chaos.* It is interesting to note a certain, probably unconscious, though stereotypic racial and age divide: the people of non-Europid race and elder age are generally (though this is not a rule) a subject of volunteering, rather than the very volunteers. From the viewpoint of syntagmatic approach, the videos are characterized by the transition from *darkness* to *light*, from *sadness* to *joy*, from *disorder* to *harmony,* etc. The typical symbols of the videos are *smiles and joined hands* (see Fig. 2). The diegetic sounds of the films help creating an effect of naturalness of the situation; the non-diegetic sounds - a special easy, relaxed, playful, and in some sense - uplifting, joyful mood of the audience.



**Figure 2**. Typical visual symbols of EU video texts promoting volunteering

The situations, in which the mentioned transformation takes place, refer to the typical fields of volunteering: protection of health, environment, sports, food banks and so on; these situations are not somehow specifically expressed in cultural terms, on the contrary - formulation of the situations most likely refers to typical and universal situations of everyday life in Western Europe.

The analogous texts initiated by the EU representation offices and agencies in Lithuania are attributable to the visual texts promoting volunteering developed by EU - the symbols of visual expression of such narratives will be presented during the analysis of the films of the competition "Do not Waste Your Time - Volunteer!" initiated by the Representation Agency of the European Commission in Lithuania (e.g. *Do not Waste Your Time - Volunteer! Ineta*

*Stasiulyte.* **European Commission Report**...) and the video „Hymn of Volunteering" (*Hymn of Volunteering - We Are on the Same Way.* **European Commission Report...**). Although the authors of these films have no relationships of employment or similar with that institution in Lithuania, these films are attributable to the visual discourse of the EU because it was namely the Representation Agency in Lithuania which had formulated the detailed task of film-making, which virtually had delineated the main structure of the films' screenplay (see http://ec.europa.eu/lietuva). Syntagmatically such the structure of the screenplay refers to the transformation of the situation (see Fig. 3): the situation „before" is *non-volunteering* (which is structurally shown as *pickling, wasting, vain spending of time and boring)*; the situation „after" is *volunteering* (structurally – *the time spent*

*usefully*, *giving sense to the film hero's day*). There is no specific narrative distinction between these situations; the situation simply changes and thats it. Based on the task formulated by the Representation Agency of the European Commission in Lithuania, the humour, absurdity and the factor of surprise are

used as the genre and technical means of effect in the films; well-known people play the roles in them. It is prescribed to invoke such measures in order to achieve a "viral" effect, i.e., to make the films sufficiently attractive for people to share them on-line.



**Figure 3.** Video texts of the EU Representation Agencies in Lithuania  promoting volunteering: creative task visualization solutions

Syntagmatically, in the video "Hymn of Volunteering", the narrative is developed without transformational and missionary distinctions – *after getting up in the morning*, *people go to clean up a city park - to collect trash, and after doing the job they are just getting pleasure of being together.* This is the typical *situation "after"* of the films analysed before, which had normally formed after the occurrence of transformation and appearance of VOLUNTEERS in any situation or after the Hero had experienced the joy of volunteering. While in the video of the Hymn the volunteering is already triumphing, the heroes no longer need to undergo any transformations of individuation, they are already "touched

by volunteering" and know its effects on the daily well-being. Thus, the clip simply shows happy people: volunteers and and a chorus singing the Hymn (see Fig.4). Wide, elevated, emotional smiles along with the melody of the Hymn create that respectively elevated mood of a listener. Structurally, the video clip is edited by a technical comparison of two different filmed situations: the activity of volunteers in the park and other places and the activity of singers in a sound recording studio. It is interesting to note that the elderly people in this video clip are not volunteers as well, rather the subject of the volunteer work. The sounds of the video clip are only non-diegetic: a transmission of the hymn record.
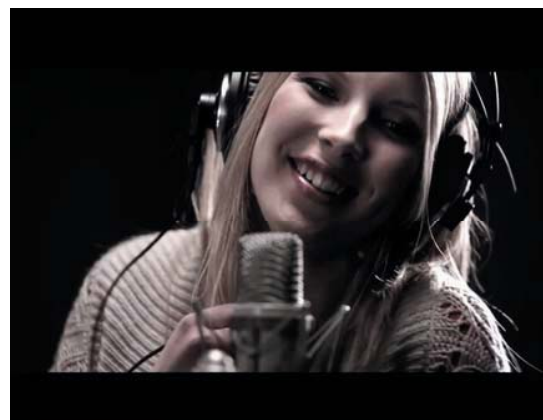


**Figure 4.** Visualization of the hymn: happy volunteers and happy performers of the hymn

Similarly like in the case of the EU-wide common video texts, the situations or symbols imaged

in the video clips of the Representation Agency of the European Commission in Lithuania were not

somehow specially expressed in the terms of culture: neither unique orientation towards any national, religious, ethnic or etc. social group, nor any specific articulation of Lithuanian or European features were recorded. Summing up the analysis of these videos it should be noted that all the moving view narratives are oriented towards young (18-35 years old) people, and the elder people are represented as volunteers almost nohow, the people who appear in the films as the volunteers are mostly young, healthy and vigorous, and the importance and result of their coming and works performed are shown through smiles, elevation, resolution of problems, suppression of sadness, and so on.

## Conclusions

1. The voluntary activity and the volunteers as people of the visual texts created and advocated by EU institutions are subject to association with the missionary expressions of positive images by contrasting them with allegedly negative situations and environments before the appearance of volunteers. Therefore, the idea of *change and transformation* providing the images of *dynamics and innovations* to the voluntary activities is especially important in the visual texts of EU (the grey daily routine, bleak environment and chaos are transformed into the order, harmony, joy and resolution of problems after the appearance of volunteers in any situation). The associative symbols, by means of which the pictures of the volunteer and volunteering are drawn, are exceptionally positive and associated with the motives of *assistance and sociality*: e.g., the volunteers are presented as *happy, smiling, joking, elated, working, offering a helping hand, arranging the situation, re-establishing balance and managing the chaos* mostly young white people of both sexes.

2. The situations of volunteering in the EU visual texts are perceived and represented quite stereotypically: the volunteers can initiate positive changes in the fields of health protection, environment, sports, food banks and so on.; these situations are not somehow specifically expressed in cultural terms, on the contrary, the formulation of the situations most likely refers to the typical and universal situations of everyday life in Western Europe. This most likely can be explained by the orientation of the EU texts towards the overall community of the EU consisting of quite different cultures, that is why special symbols of volunteering perception are not used in the texts, e.g., *volunteering in army,* an associative symbol typical for Lithuania.

3. From the point of view of social engineering strategy, there was taken the decision to create and advocate the identity of European (Lithuanian among them) volunteers in the EU visual communications by invoking the visual codes of *versatility* and *distinctive positivity*, which are not specific in the socio-cultural aspect, therefore, are likely to be close and consistent with the codes of acceptance and support typical for the overall European community. The content of persuasion messages is adequate too. In the visual communication promoting volunteering, the common motive of *smile* and *elation* is used as a code equally inspiring and influencing different cultures, suitable for popularization of other ideas as well, not just of volunteering. On the other hand, the versatility of the code has to be discussed 1) in the aspect of its efficiency level in comparison with a very esoteric code, and 2) in the aspect of its relationship with the unique associative symbols of national volunteering perceptions. The latter symbols can be analysed in the national texts promoting volunteering.

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## Summary

On 27 November, 2009, the European Commission publishes an adopted decision 2010/37/EC regarding European Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011). The announcement of the *European Year of Volunteering* (2011) and creation of related political - legal decisions and conditions in EU member states, including Lithuania, commenting from the point of view of social engineering, refers to the objective of creating an identity of an *European-volunteer* (*Lithuanian-volunteer*) with the accompanying related positive lifestyle, values, sociality, cooperation, attitudes, and even individuation processes. A part of these processes is being analyzed in the paper. The aim of the paper is to identify the images of volunteering and a volunteer advocated in the visual texts of EU institutions as the associative symbols and to define the holistic image of volunteering in the aspect of a persuasion message content. The subject of the article is the visual texts of EU institutions intended for promotion of volunteering as a part of this discourse and the associative symbols of volunteering therein as the codes of public persuasion. After analysis done in the paper, it is possible to say that the voluntary activity and the volunteers as people of the visual texts created and advocated by EU institutions are subject to association with the missionary expressions of positive images by contrasting them with allegedly negative situations and environments before the appearance of volunteers.

**Keywords**: volunteering, visual promotion, associative symbolism.