

# Chapter 4

## The Concept of Giving in Mexico

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### Introduction

The preceding chapter considered the motivations and reasons why most of those interviewed engage in volunteer work and solidarity activities, many of them without receiving any remuneration for this work. It explains in detail the processes that people involved in volunteer groups have followed and explores their life histories so as to develop an analysis of the thoughts expressed by these subjects.

The purpose of this chapter is to go more deeply into the data and informational cross references obtained from the interviews for the qualitative part of the study, and in particular examines the semantic expression most often mentioned by them: giving.

Social investigation delving into the subject of citizen participation, solidarity, altruism, prosocial behavior, social responsibility, and related themes is the point of reference for examining these activities. A description of the semantic links in the discourse of those interviewed is developed here, and their work is analyzed from the standpoint of different theoretical and conceptual frameworks, based on the perceptions of the actors themselves and the way they understand and conceptualize their own actions.

### Giving in the Conceptual Map of Volunteer Actions and Acts of Solidarity<sup>1</sup>

In 65 of the 66 interviews completed for this study 98.48% of the subjects interviewed most frequently mentioned “giving.” This is the semantic category that recurs most often in the perception of those interviewed in our universe, together

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with the semantic categories of “support and help” (96.97%), “I think” (96.97%), “what is needed” (87.88%), “deficiencies” (86.36%), “what should be done” (84.85%), “satisfaction/like it” (80.30%), and “I feel” (75.75%), which represent the central core of the expressions analyzed in the preceding chapter. It should be remembered here that 74.2% of the people interviewed (49 individuals) were considered to be committed volunteers, i.e., they did not receive remuneration for their work. The remaining 25.8% (17 individuals) were paid personnel or lived from what the organization paid them (including the directors and staff members). All of those interviewed participate in either formal or informal civil society groups in Mexico. We reiterate here that the position held by the different actors interviewed in the organizations does not have any impact on the semantic composition, so their responses are not compared.

The conceptual map of acts of solidarity/volunteer action presented in Chap. 3 indicates that the eight semantic categories are interlinked and represent a concentration of the greatest number of verbal expressions regarding the logic of volunteer action. The set of volunteer actions is conceptually identified here with volunteerism. This means that those interviewed share a sociocultural representation of all volunteer actions, i.e., of volunteerism.

Figure 4.1 is a conceptual map of volunteer actions and acts of solidarity that complements the one presented previously. It is the result of the comments made by the informants during the interviews performed as part of the 15 case studies, and it shows the 22 most common expressions used by the people interviewed.<sup>2</sup> The semantic networks allow us to observe how the plexus of meaning is constructed in regards to the qualitative information. In order to identify this network, a matrix was developed – with the help of the *NVivo* program – of the intersections of all the codes used. Each intersection is the equivalent of how one concept is related to another. When a network of relationships is constructed by using this method, the result is a conceptual map that in itself demonstrates a hierarchy among these relationships, as the product of selection and identification.

The network of blue lines linking the categories indicated in red represents the most relevant relationships, defining what the associations studied conceive to be volunteer actions. The code “giving” articulates all of the codified documents (65 out of 66), while the categories “conflict,” “pay,” and “solidarity,” among others, play a marginal role, as can be seen in the diagram. That is to say, volunteer action and acts of solidarity are defined by the Mexican people as the act of giving to others in an unselfish way, without receiving anything in return (see Fig. 4.1).

Based on the data obtained, in summary, we can affirm that:

- Giving to others is an unselfish act from which “satisfaction” is obtained.
- The “need” to “support and help” others is observed not only as a “duty/what should be done” but as a “satisfaction/like it.”

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<sup>2</sup>See Chap. 5 of this volume, which refers to the organizational structure aspects of the associations and groups having volunteers and explains the different roles played in them by volunteers.

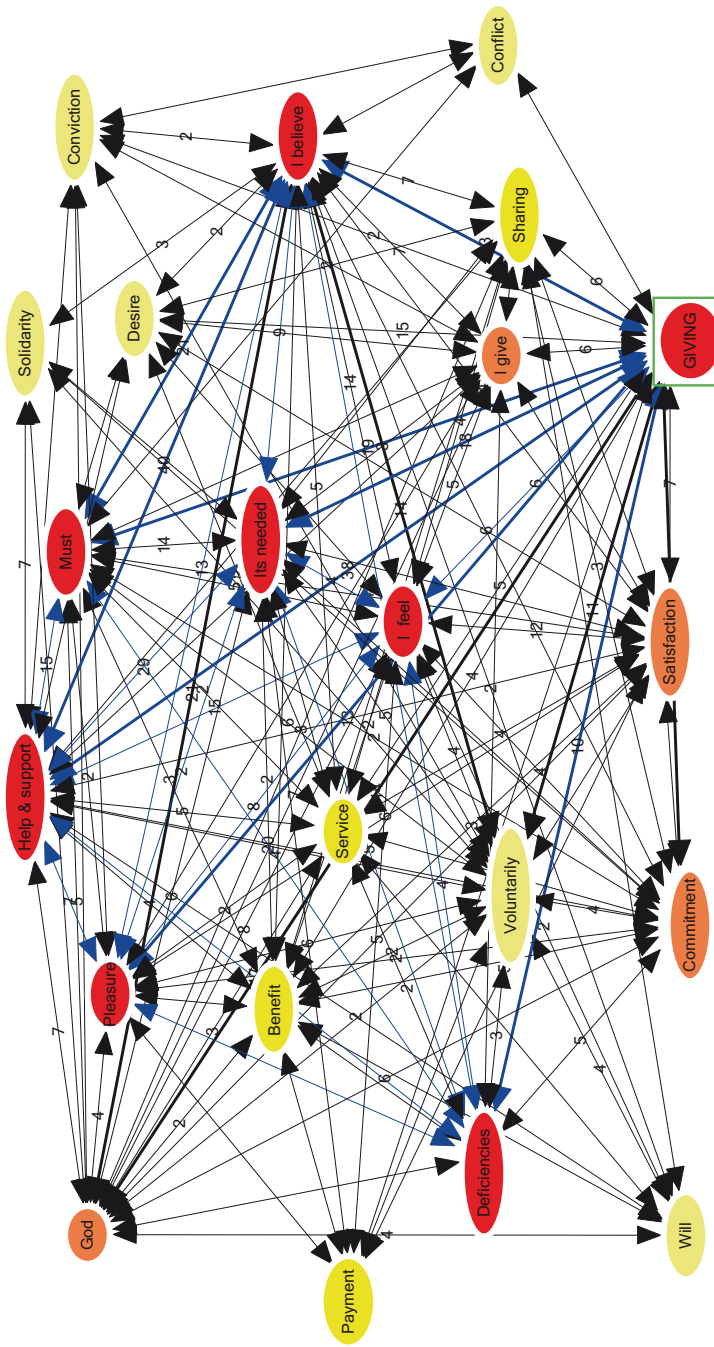


Fig. 4.1 "Giving" as the source of solidarity and volunteering

- Those who participate in the associations studied recognize that there are “deficiencies” and a need for more support to continue with their activities.
- The recurring use of “I think” is used by those interviewed for self-evaluation of their actions and also to evaluate needs and requirements, which are generally mentioned as demands for “support and/or help.”
- “I feel” is often used by women to express how they evaluate their participation in associations.

It is important to note that, as determined in the preceding chapter, the words used by these individuals to express their motivations are discursive elements that give meaning to their activities and build up their own sense of fulfillment in their daily lives.

It has been said that volunteer actions are defined by those participating in them as the act of giving, helping and supporting others, as well as believing in what they are doing and in what remains to be done. Different conceptual categories with a differential semantic weight are articulated around the act of giving time, resources, or sociocultural abilities to others: (a) cognitive, (b) symbolic-affective, (c) moral, and (d) pragmatic.

- Cognitive categories:* Giving cannot be reduced to an act with practical meaning. Also, “giving” demands knowledge of the needs it is based on. For this reason, “deficiencies” and “needs” are cognitive categories that make the giver an expert who recognizes what is needed and lacking, both on the part of those who participate in volunteer programs and those the programs are meant to serve.
- Symbolic categories:* Giving is a symbolic gesture in which the giver extends recognition to those who need it through his or her acts, rather than recognition being given to the giver. For this reason, giving is a “satisfaction” and a “feeling.” The dimension of these categories is symbolic, because it is intangible and depends on imagining the volunteer actions. The use of categories like “I think” expresses a system of ideas or beliefs regarding the relationship of the volunteer to those benefiting from acts of solidarity.
- Moral categories:* “Giving” is a duty, an ethical obligation. It does not demand any payment whatsoever, but, rather expresses an ethical principle of recognition in which “I give others what they do not have.” The logic of the gift corresponds in ethical terms to what we ourselves would like to have, develop, or learn, if we were in a situation of limited resources and sociocultural abilities.
- Pragmatic categories:* “supporting and/or helping” concentrate on the practical meaning of acts of solidarity. To support others, it is necessary to evaluate what is needed and take a position in regard to the subjects of volunteer actions and acts of solidarity.

Later on, other investigations might explore the question of whether giving demands some type of reciprocity and how this takes place. This is not expressed in the information in this study and might become a mechanism for evaluating volunteer actions, where we could ask ourselves: How can the efficiency of giving be measured? What happens in the act of giving? What is the relationship

between the giver and the receiver? Theoretically speaking, we might say that reciprocity is found in receiving and returning the gesture in many ways, such as may be the case with learning, growth, and personal development. However, the relational structures between those interviewed and the beneficiaries are not established here, and no judgment is proffered, in and of itself, about whether the action of giving is positive or negative for the society the solidarity actors say they are serving. We consider that it is through the information provided by descriptive studies such as this one that elements for evaluating these activities may later be developed.

## **Intersections Among Codes: Conceptual Interrelations in Giving**

This section explores the interrelation between the concept of “giving” and the main codes articulating the bulk of the information provided by the investigation. As part of the study, those interviewed established priorities in terms of the order of importance they attach to their actions. The information emerges from the total conglomerate of interviews with volunteers, and individuals collaborating in different ways in the organizations studied. However, insofar as we are exploring connections among the categories in terms of meaning, and since the information is very homogeneous, it was not necessary to divide it into groups or by associations.

### ***Satisfaction and Giving***

Satisfaction due to volunteer actions is closely linked to giving to others, as this gives rise to feelings of happiness and satisfaction. It belongs to the conceptual symbolic category, because it reflects feelings on the part of the volunteers. They say that giving is something that they like and enjoy and that is pleasurable and satisfying. When analyzing the discourse of those interviewed, it is possible to detect that these individuals are oriented toward giving to others, that they feel capable of supporting and helping through their activities to serve others, and that they do so willingly, based on the conviction that their efforts will make a contribution to transforming their reality. In a parallel fashion, those who participate in the organizations studied mention different forms of compensation, satisfaction, and personal growth that they perceive when they carry out these activities. The fact that the majority of those interviewed in this study have declared that they experience satisfaction when giving to others, seems to be a primordial factor for understanding the phenomenon of volunteer actions and acts of solidarity.

Personal satisfaction during the act of giving is emphasized. This is an essential element, insofar as one of the characteristics of volunteer activities is precisely the feeling of pleasure, achievement, or satisfaction when performing

them (Luks 1988, 39).<sup>3</sup> At times, this sensation is perceived to be a personal benefit in some way. In fact, it is. When the participants observe that their acts have an impact on others and obtain a satisfactory response, the logic of “giving” is fulfilled: the only reciprocity is found in seeing the growth of the other (Godbout 1992).<sup>4</sup> The following statements are representative of this characteristic:

“First I came to do tasks, one, two, three, as a volunteer and then as an associate. I started to enjoy the work and saw that it was nice thing” (73 year-old man)

“...so that’s it, to me it’s giving a little of the time he dedicates to us. Then I feel satisfied doing it...” (49 year-old woman)

The expressions of people acting in the organizations draw our attention repeatedly with expressions and phrases like: “satisfaction,” “I like it,” “gratification,” “I felt useful,” “security,” “it gives me meaning.”

“...well, then, I like to, well, give my time, put in my hour and a half for what they probably need... listen to advice, help... listen, help me with this...” (23 year-old woman)

“... because it gives me confidence, it gives me security, it gives me love to give to the little ones, to give them the attention they deserve and should get, the care they should receive, see how they come and go...” (56 year-old woman)

There are different theoretical tools that are useful for understanding volunteer actions and acts of solidarity in terms of the subjective and collective process dimensions involved. Humanism,<sup>5</sup> for example, provides a basis for evaluating human action and behavior from its point of view and emphasizes the relevance of interpersonal relations,<sup>6</sup> life experience, and phenomenological experience.

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<sup>3</sup>This study, carried out with 1,700 volunteers (A), together with a survey of 1,500 more volunteers (B) reported that 68% of the women in study A and 88% in study B experienced a physical sensation of pleasure during volunteer action as well as greater peace of mind and sense of self-esteem, in addition to the sensation of pleasure. Luks calls this a *Helpers High*, since the biochemical result in the organism is the secretion of endorphins that help the organism to reduce stress and which are released in the same way as after intense physical exercise. What is interesting is that when the experience is remembered, this stimulates the secretion of endorphins once again. It produces a double effect, when giving and when it is remembered. This only occurs when the action is voluntary and there is personal interaction. It does not happen when making a donation, no matter what the amount or the importance of the cause.

<sup>4</sup>Godbout incorporates ideas like those of Mauss and Douglas and argues in his book, *La esencia del don*, that giving is considered to be a social relation in which giving cannot be considered to be “...a series of unilateral and discontinuous acts, but is rather a relationship.” Giving constitutes “a system of specifically social relationships, insofar as they are not reducible to economic interests or power.”

<sup>5</sup>Authors representing this tendency go back to Aristotle, Plato, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine, Brentano, Heidegger, Wertheimer, Dilthey, Rousseau, Claparede, and J. Dewey, to mention the most relevant ones. Their contributions were later taken up by the phenomenological and existential tendencies and have provided basic principles for this tendency in psychology. Other authors considered to be humanists include: Allport, C. Rogers, A. Maslow, Angyal, Ash, Combs, Lecky, Kelly, Jourard, Buhler, Moustakas, Conrill, Horney, Goldstein, as well as Rollo May, Martin Buber, Erich Fromm, Victor Frankl, and A. Sutich, among others.

<sup>6</sup>Rogers’ theories (1980) center on the subjective quality of interrelations between two individuals and propose environments that facilitate the natural growth of man through interpersonal relations, which is what occurs with the act of giving.

An essential part of volunteer actions and acts of solidarity – based on our definition for this study – has to do with the individual’s capacity to decide to give based on choice and free will. With an emphasis on the meaning of life and responsibility, in which man possesses an innate power of self-determination in deciding his own destiny, this potential is renewed and grows based on freely chosen values. If people give, it is because they choose to do so, and if they do, it is because they consider it to represent a value to them. When choosing freely among these possibilities, man forges his existence: *Human existence is to be responsible because it is to be free* (Frankl 1992, 130.)

In regards to our analysis of the act of giving, this perspective proposes that the way of giving will depend both on the person’s circumstances and the level of intellectual, emotional, and cognitive development of the individual performing this action. In other words, the activity of giving itself has the potential to produce personal changes and it is possible that it may have an effect on the individuals’ emotional and cognitive maturity.<sup>7</sup>

The development of a person’s character is manifest to the degree to which we have these parts of our personality resolved. Thus, a person who has not developed their character beyond the merely receptive aspect, will interpret the act of giving as renouncing or being deprived of something. Alternatively, for a person with a productive character, giving acquires “the highest expression of strength. In the act of giving itself, I experience my force, my wealth, my power. This experience... fills me with happiness” (Fromm 1990, 32). Among the volunteers interviewed, many express their satisfaction about giving their time and energy and do not relate it to any economic benefit. On the contrary, they experience it as pleasure. The following expressions by volunteers talk about their perceptions related to the satisfaction they receive:

“The gratification or satisfaction, the pleasure, is something that isn’t in the salary; it’s in seeing, for example, a child’s smiling face” (53 year-old woman)

“Yes, in a certain way, but not economic payment. But yes, compensation...” (24 year-old woman)

Not in terms of money, but in terms of satisfaction, quite a lot, because I have become more and more well-known... (25 year-old man)

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<sup>7</sup>There have been advances since the decade of the 1980s in social psychology investigations in regards to altruism, prosocial behavior, social responsibility, and related subjects. See Piliavin and Charng (1990), researchers from the University of Wisconsin, regarding 183 studies and investigations that indicate changes in mentality regarding altruism. Other studies to be consulted include Batson (1991), who presents a theory of empathy-altruism, and Eisenberg (1986), who studies the cognitive development of individuals and help relations that occur in children and concludes that: “it seems that the cognition associated with prosocial actions in children becomes more internal and less related to external profit as they develop.” The studies of Staub (1978), Aronoff and Wilson (1984), Piliavin et al. (1981), and Rushton (1981) may also be consulted. Studies on voluntary donation of kidneys (Simmons et al. 1977) and blood (Condie et al. 1976; Heshka 1983; Reddy 1980; Drake et al. 1982), consider these actions to be altruistic, since the donors do not know who the receiver will be.

From a different theoretical viewpoint, we can also select the relational standpoint to analyze our subjects' commentaries, where it is observed that, in addition to the satisfaction of giving, an interchange of equivalents is not spoken of in relation to giving, but rather relations of reciprocity.

Giving has no commercial equivalent. The debt from giving is never paid. While results are what count in the market, in the case of giving, everything resides in the gesture, in the way in which something is given. Giving has no price. Price implies an unequivocal commercial equivalent for another object of the same value, while giving calls forth the counterpart of giving which depends on the relationship that has been established between the two people, the sequence, etc. The value of the relationship does not have any monetary equivalent (Mocchi and Girado 1999, 20).

From the analytical angle of the relational perspective, it is observed that reciprocity,<sup>8</sup> which is postulated as an equilibrium between what is given and what is expected to be obtained, cannot be explained from the paradigms of self-interest (Mansbridge 1990), since this practice is based on motivational and relational aspects. In this sense, reciprocity constitutes a system of interpersonal relations and becomes a system of support, of reciprocal help.

## Giving and Believing

The commentaries analyzed reflect the current state of Mexican society, in which giving to others is not a generalized practice, although the people working in the non-profit organizations considered in this investigation think this should be the case. Belief establishes the decision to give something to the receiver of the action and, therefore, belongs to a symbolic category or dimension, because it represents the position of the one who gives, the way of giving. Those interviewed expressed that giving support to their fellow Mexicans is an urgent matter, especially to those who are in vulnerable circumstances. Similarly, they have assumed a responsibility when they offer and provide support for others in the belief that their contribution is important. Belief also expresses a potential, a possibility. In order to create a different culture with regard to giving, it is first essential to believe that this is possible. Structures begin to change when the mentalities of those sustaining them are changed first.

In the analysis in the preceding chapter, different ways of giving are evident when comparing the men and women who are part of our study. It is mentioned that men assume more of an attitude of social responsibility when giving, while an important section of women have motives of charity and assistance, expressing

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<sup>8</sup>Traditionally, the analysis of reciprocity has been delved into from different anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and psychological fields of knowledge and schools of thought. However, providing a complete panorama of the subject goes beyond the scope of this work.



greater moral concern. Those interviewed have assumed a commitment and a new responsibility even though they cannot guarantee – other than through their attitudes and actions – the results of their efforts. They do this because they are convinced that their action is valid and necessary. This leads them to assume a proactive role, where their attitude of commitment leads them away from dependency. When this does not happen, there is a risk of adopting attitudes of charity. Freire (1990, 50) warns about this with these words:

[T]he great danger of charity is in the violence of the anti-dialogue that imposes silence and passivity on man, does not offer him special conditions for development or “opening” of consciousness and, in authentic democracies, it must be a form to be ever more criticized... charity is a form of action that robs man of the conditions of achieving one of the fundamental needs of his soul: responsibility.

Those interviewed in this study expressed that the ways of “giving” should change, since everyone does not know how to do it:

“...we should help and, especially, give... I think that we often face a society that is not really used to giving, don’t we?” (47 year-old man)

“Well, in the first place, not everybody knows how to give. I think [that] giving is a value and that it’s more difficult for people as human beings...” (57 year-old woman)

For some individuals, giving comes to be a way of being, a “value,” as this volunteer expresses it. For some people, giving cannot be disconnected from receiving; for others, it is tiring activity. Others experience it as a continual source of energy and growth. Our volunteer also reminds us that “not everybody knows how to give.” We may indicate here that giving is something that is discovered and learned. If giving is something learned, this learning requires consciousness in order to have meaning for daily life.

If we were to go through the stages of giving in terms of an individual’s physiological, psychological, and spiritual development, we would see that there are stages in life when man is essentially egotistical, and that this attitude gradually evolves and changes to the degree he matures. Both in terms of moral development and the field of individuals’ cognitive evolution, Kohlberg (1984) and Piaget (1974), respectively, develop steps or facets that explain what happens in these terms as a human being grows and develops. Villanueva (1985) presents an informative table of different theoretical sources which includes the three psychological tendencies: psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanist existentialism. Each one of them expresses a theory of development, changes, and growth, but taken as a whole, they are complementary and allow us a glimpse of the enormous complexity of the process of human self-discovery.

For the purposes of our analysis, we can establish that in the first stages of life, children begin to discover who they are, to relate to the people surrounding them, forming a basis for their personalities in this way. In terms of giving, it could be said that it is the moment when a human being receives from others. In fact, the ability to give is not yet developed, but rather latent. In these early stages of life, children begin to realize that in order to be accepted and loved; they have to cede some of their independence and freedom of action. They imitate the examples they

have around them. And that is when the model of giving takes on importance. In many ways, adults have “given” them a lot: life, protection, food, and, in most cases, love and acceptance. If the actions of these adults benefit others, the child learns this.

In early adolescence, the scope of relations extends beyond the immediate family nucleus toward peer groups. Adolescents learn that they will not receive if they do not give. This is when they begin to leave aside their egotism in order to relate to others, although still harboring feelings of jealousy and envy. Development is still incomplete in this stage. Late adolescence corresponds to an attitude of rejecting society, accompanied by individual questioning and existential awakening. Adolescents have not yet achieved maturity, but little by little they realize, through encounters and interactions with other human beings, that they will have to take responsibility for their actions. To the degree to which they develop the ability to give, they continue along the path to complete maturity.

This stage is not related to physical aging, but rather to maturity and both psychic and spiritual plenitude. Some individuals never mature, although they grow older, since they do not learn to give or to give of themselves. An indication of having reached the stage of adulthood is learning precisely this. Those people who have not had the experience of giving in the first stages of development have the option of experiencing it during the adult phase. Emotional maturity is reached when this ability to give is demonstrated in daily life, where this may go to the extreme, -to giving the most prized value – one’s life – for another, if the person considers this to be necessary.

Here those interviewed explain how their acts coincide with what they think and believe is important...

“I think that all that has been lost. That’s why there’s so much aggression, so much violence, because giving yourself to others doesn’t exist anymore” (49 year-old woman)

“...helping, because in the end, it benefits our children, and the act of helping, I think it comes back to the same thing, giving our children an example so that they turn out the same way...” (43 year-old woman)

“I think that realizing that you can work and do something for other people’s lives is very important...” (34 year-old woman)

A dynamic experience of giving to others within human relationships allows individuals to discover new aspects of others when the act of giving evolves as a process. In the last commentary above, the volunteer mentions that “realizing” that she can work for others has been important for her. Everyone has experienced giving, and giving of oneself at some time. If the experience has been significant, it is possible for this to become more conscious, and it may be incorporated into a system of personal values to then be repeated in the construction of a commitment. The action in and of itself, the “lived” experience is what leads to forging a commitment to a cause. It is at the individual level that change is experienced. However, mostly organized groups of individuals that commit to a cause obtain major social change.

### *Giving, Support, and Help*

It is relevant to mention that in the national sample for the ENSAV used in this investigation, the subjects' main motivation in acts of solidarity was to *assist those who need help*. It should be remembered that the survey is statistically valid, and that 309 Mexicans out of the sample of 1,497 (21%) mention help as the answer to the open question: "There are many reasons to do something to benefit others. What are yours?" The second most common response to the question, by 164 people (11%) was the *desire to help others*, followed by the comment that *it's necessary to repay the community*, in the case of 120 people (8%) who made this comment. It is interesting to observe that 6%, i.e., 93 people in the sample, mention that their reason for doing something for others are their *religious beliefs*. The numbers show us that among Mexicans, these are the most powerful reasons for engaging in acts of solidarity.

In the qualitative part of the investigation, when studying people who work in NPOs, the data was buttressed by means of in-depth interviews and analysis of their discourse. The words "support" and "help" are closely related to evaluations like "I think it's necessary" or "I think we do things well." They belong to the pragmatic conceptual category about the practical meaning of these actions and indicate that the problems for which a solution is offered have been differentiated. They also have to do with the original purposes that motivated the creation of the social organizations, generally speaking, to help people with limited resources or to respond to different community needs.

Another level of discourse shows us that occasionally they demand or ask help from others. Helping reinforces the logic of giving (Schrift 1997): the idea of giving is socialized through practice. From this viewpoint, in personal terms, "helping" is intrinsically related to what the people interviewed are in a position to offer the other, knowing that they have knowledge or resources to place at the disposal of others. That is to say, support is an act of generosity. As a consequence, the relation between "support" and "giving" defines the logic of volunteer actions: one supports someone who needs it, giving something of oneself. The following excerpts illustrate this analysis:

"This group of volunteers was founded in Mexico twenty years ago with the idea of helping people with limited resources to get ahead and give them the means, as we say between quotation marks, the means for them to be able to..." (42 year-old woman)

"The motto is: "A helping hand so the street isn't the only thing in their lives." And yes, it's like giving them a hand, just to help them, as well as to motivate and encourage them. And that was what meant the most for the children..." (33 year-old woman)

When people willingly devote themselves to this work, they make a commitment to volunteer work. Their willingness to do so is related to their commitment. Assagioli (1990) presents different forms in which the will manifests itself, examining the different facets of this concept. Certain strength is necessary to develop a commitment. This author calls a facet of the will that demands constant work, as well as conscious and adequate development, a "strong will," as this is the aspect

that provides the drive and energy to carry an action through to fulfillment. It becomes translated into not only realizing what we “are” and that we have a will but also to understanding that there is also “being able to do,” which indicates that we have the ability to achieve it. When the two women volunteers comment that they “have” to help, they are referring to the fact that they are committed to these activities and this is related to a commitment that they have established for themselves.

“If they could just finish elementary or middle school. If not, there were also other things we had to help them with. Their health, providing some workshops, dealing with drug addiction, sexuality, for them to see some dentist, or get involved with sports...” (26 year-old woman)

“Right now, there isn’t anybody else who can help out, and since we have a shortage of volunteers, we have to choose where to focus our work other...” (42 year-old woman)

The collective leadership with whom we wish to invest time and commit our actions will imply “being able to do” together, solving something – in the best-case scenario – for the common good. Achieving a consensus of wills is not an easy task; here Assagioli reminds us that will, now a collective will, also needs to be “good” in a collective ethical sense.

### ***Giving and Deficiencies, What Is Needed, and What Should Be Done***

The last three semantic interrelations are also related to giving and to one another, because in some ways they go beyond individual action toward collective action. They are: “deficiencies,” “what is needed,” and “what should be done.”

The comments by those interviewed are related to what they see and think is needed or lacking in terms of evaluation within the cognitive category. These individuals are aware of their actions and of the needs that arise from the community around them. They try to develop a good understanding of the activities they have to undertake in order to see to the needs of others and evaluate the path to be followed in order to be able to get the necessary resources and support to guarantee the effective operation of their organizations. At the same time, they recognize not only what they themselves achieve, but also what is necessary to do together to produce an impact that would achieve the results desired for everyone. That is what those interviewed express:

“...from when you’re little it’s inculcated and from your experience, you evaluate what you have, what you lack, and what you can give” (39 year-old woman)

“...a bunch of things to do here, which we’ve already started to do, but we’re short of hands and we lack resources to give a course in this area. I don’t have anyone in fundraising now, and I don’t have people in administration...” (53 year-old woman)

Among the Mexicans interviewed, the idea persists that “we all need each other” to invite others to get involved in the efforts undertaken by volunteer organizations.

When they talk about “what should be done,” we should remember that conceptually this belongs to a moral category where the possibility of offering others what they do not have is recognized. At the same time, recognition of the needs of others becomes an inducement to make the greatest possible effort.

“Well, I imagine there are needy people and that the work we do is important... and that we can’t give up” (32 year-old man)

“...if you need something some day and if I have the means... right away, I’ll help you, because I like to give more...” (37 year-old woman)

“Well, look, for me it’s really important to give yourself to others. I always have said that we all need everybody else...” (61 year-old woman)

Abraham Maslow (1982), an expert on human motivation, emphasizes the importance of obtaining satisfaction through social interaction.

In fact, I can say more firmly than ever and for many empirical reasons, that basic human needs can only be satisfied by means of and through other human beings, i.e., society. The need for community (belonging, contact, association) is a basic need in and of itself (*Ibid.*, 333).

These comments point towards a collective consciousness of the act of giving, since a human being is a being-in-relation. Self-fulfillment and individual development are achieved through others.

For him [Fromm], man is a social and political being that can only develop through the collective and historical process of exchange with the environment. The self-fulfillment of human beings in their singularity is only imaginable, for Fromm, in the framework of a historical and collective process in which human beings are linked to their environment through activity and love (Quitman 1989, 292).

Those interviewed emphasize that giving to others is an ethical responsibility that Mexican society is losing or has not acquired. One should give to the needy as a question of duty and empathy, placing oneself in the others’ shoes. This leads to evaluating and understanding the importance the act of giving has for them:

“I think one should give of one’s time, place oneself in the other’s shoes, I mean, the needy person...” (46 year-old man)

“...because the answer they give is “I don’t have time”; and if not, one must look for the time to give to others. For example, I could tell you “Yes”, if you tell me, “You know what? I want you to help me sell some tickets...” (28 year-old woman)

This last interrelation underscores the solidarity that underlies the act of giving.<sup>9</sup> Those interviewed consider that it is necessary to develop opportunities for encounters and create more situations so that volunteer actions can increase in terms of the number and frequency of hours involved, “you should give of your time,” both individually and as a group. In terms of understanding social needs: “place oneself in the other’s shoes, I mean, the needy person...” It’s clear what “should” be done, since it is received to be given again: “it gives me love to give,” says one volunteer.

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<sup>9</sup>See Komter (2005).

The volunteers in this study comment that it is important for them not only to give to others but also to give of themselves in solidarity with others. This is what three of the people interviewed say:

“It was very nice; I like it like that... Since I saw a response from the people, and now I want to give the people a response from me” (42 year-old woman)

“Well, I think it’s being with people, knowing that you can give something of the little you know to someone else and see how they grow...” (34 year-old woman)

“I feel that, well, we should give a little, give of ourselves, you know, give some of our time to benefit others, it’s a great satisfaction” (35 year-old woman)

When giving, and giving of oneself to others, there can be a process of existential discovery. This means intentionally going outside oneself to find the other, as Buber says, or fulfilling oneself in others, as Coreth<sup>10</sup> indicates, where one’s own essence is affirmed when giving of oneself to others. Commitment is then achieved in a relationship of encounter that elicits full participation by the participants: “he who commits himself cannot set aside a portion of himself” (Buber 1970, 60).

We can refer the commentaries of people expressing solidarity through Mexican volunteer groups to the words of the American philosopher Rorty (1991), who presents the idea of human solidarity considering, in his judgment, what should be done: take into account the suffering of others and the importance of expressing solidarity in the future. Expressed a different way, it is a matter of giving fundamental importance to the perception of the needs of the other, since some of us have what others lack. He defines it in these terms:

The conception of what I am presenting sustains the existence of something like moral progress, and that that progress is oriented in reality in the direction of greater human solidarity. But it does not consider that solidarity to consist of the recognition of a nuclear self – the human essence – in all human beings. Instead of that, it is conceived as the ability to perceive with ever greater clarity that traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and other similar ones) lack importance when compared with the similarities having to do with pain and humiliation; it is conceived, then, as the ability to consider people who are very different from us as included in the category of “us” (*Ibid*, 210).

Finally, to complete these comments that I have provided by way of analysis, we come to an investigator of volunteer and solidarity activities, Robert Wuthnow (1991, 83–85), a professor of sociology at Princeton University, who presents his ideas about actions by volunteers through what he calls “acts of compassion.” He has interviewed a large number of volunteers and has invited them to tell their stories. What these histories end up revealing, the same as our universe of 66 interviews, is that although the intention of this investigation is to encounter the explicit motivations that would explain why a person does one thing and not another, we

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<sup>10</sup>Coreth (1985, 178) explains it as transcendence: Man is transcendence. Only when overcoming himself or going outside himself, in giving of himself to the other, does man realize his own authentic self. The more he transcends himself, the more he fulfills his own essence. The more he gives of himself, without looking for himself, the better he finds himself in the realization of his supreme possibility.

find that in reality we cannot talk about a single motivation, since there is a complex mix of motivations underlying what we do.

Our research task is to try to delve into and find in the narrative of our interviewees the particularities that give us a way to both understand the general tendencies involved in these activities in Mexico and to discover in them universal concepts. We find simple stories that express personal values in the explanations given by our interviewees, which do not provide a hierarchy of motivations, with some being more pertinent or relevant than others. However, on the table for discussion in future studies, it will be necessary to find out in greater depth what are ideally the values that should be promoted in Mexican society, as well as the motivations – like those that have been considered in the case of giving – that are found behind them.

This author explains that, in general, volunteers are not naïve people. They do not even believe, as some of their critics suggest, that all society's problems will be solved with all the time they dedicate to volunteer work. It simply seems to be that “there is a value to one person helping another,” as one of the people interviewed comments. Professor Wuthnow (*Ibid.*, 234) provides this evaluation of this activity:

Volunteer work will not, like a vaccination against polio, save us from evil. We will not have a better society because all the homeless people will eventually be housed and all the illiterate people taught to read. No. Volunteer work will save us because it implies hope. It gives a sense of efficacy, of being able to make a difference. It inspires confidence in the human condition in the goodness of those who are truly needy and deserve our help. To participate in voluntary organizations means we are making a choice for the better, siding with the good, doing something, rather than sitting idly by while the specter of chaos and corruption advances...

This, as I say, is a hope that lies in the realm of symbolism and myth. But it is no different than many of our other dreams as a society... It is not really the belief that a cure for cancer will give us eternal life that inspires our hope. It is the image of people like us that inspires us. The one person who learns to read may in the larger scheme of things make very little difference to the health of our society... But teaching that person to read does have a demonstration effect. It reminds us – those who hear about it – of the importance of reading... So it is with volunteer work. Helping others may not lead to a better society, but it allows us to envision a better society.<sup>11</sup>

By way of a conclusion, in this chapter – which has reflected upon the different ways in which giving is shown to be the main expression of the Mexican people interviewed – it can be observed that in the same way individuals verbalize their belief systems, it is through concrete and committed action that they express their interest toward their fellow Mexicans in conditions generally more precarious than their own. It is necessary to find more paths to understanding the “logic of giving” and expand the comments expressed. Here we have tried to analyze this phenomenon, adding some theoretical-conceptual perspectives, with full awareness that other conceptual angles still remain to be considered and that there is much yet to be done to come to understand this phenomenon in order to construct theories concerning

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<sup>11</sup> The author of this chapter changed the order of the paragraphs in this quotation to make the idea clearer.

solidarity activities. These comments may serve to stimulate investigation and the search for new motivations that affect and stimulate volunteer actions and acts of solidarity by the Mexican people.

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