



Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century

Colin Rochester
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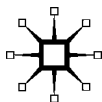
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Dedicated to the memory of Irene Rochester (1941–2007)

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Abbreviations

AVM	Association of Volunteer Managers
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CSV	Community Service Volunteers
HOovi	Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IiV	Investing in Volunteers
ILO	International Labour Organization
IVR	Institute for Volunteering Research
IYV	International Year of Volunteers
LEAP	Learning, Evaluation and Planning
LETS	Local Exchange Trading Schemes
LLI	Long-Term Limiting Illness
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MS	Muscular Dystrophy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PQASSO	Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations
PSA	Public Service Agreement
U3A	University of the Third Age
UN	United Nations
VE	Volunteering England
VFI	Volunteer Functions Index
VDS	Volunteer Development Scotland
VIAT	Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit
VIVA	Volunteer Investment and Value Audit
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WVS	World Value Survey

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1

Introduction

Great expectations

In the words of the Independent Commission on the Future of Volunteering (2008: p. 3) in England, 'volunteering has never had it so good'. While voluntary action has been a consistent feature of most societies (Hodgkinson, 2003) the current weight of expectation about the contribution it can make to individual development, social cohesion and addressing social need has never been greater, and it has a more prominent place on the agenda of public policy than ever before.

This is a global as well as a national phenomenon. The potential for voluntary action to contribute to the fight against key global issues was recognised by the United Nations' (UN) General Assembly in 1997 by the designation of 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) (UN General Assembly, 2005). Volunteering was seen (by the UN Commission for Social Development, quoted in Hodgkinson) to offer skills, energy, expertise and local knowledge. All of this was seen to have the potential to assist governments in delivering better public programmes and policies. According to the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to IYV, it was a powerful force for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (UN General Assembly, 2005).

At the European level, we have seen the launch of a *Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe* devised and promoted by a network of 38 volunteer development agencies and volunteer centres (European Volunteer Centre, 2006). This makes the claim that 'voluntary action is...an important component of the strategic objective of the European Union of becoming the most competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world' (p. 5).

Nationally, the promotion of volunteering is more firmly established than ever as a priority for government action. As a policy stream, it stretches back beyond the 'Make a Difference' initiative launched by John Major in 1992 (Davis Smith, 2001) to the establishment of the Volunteer Centre UK (now Volunteering England [VE]) in 1973 (Brenton, 1985). In May 2006, a more recent Prime Minister, Tony Blair, included in his list of key challenges for the government and for his new Minister for the Cabinet Office and Social Exclusion the need to 'increase overall levels of volunteering across all age ranges and backgrounds' (Blair, 2006). This followed the setting of targets in the Public Spending Rounds of 2002 and 2004. The first of these aimed at a 5 per cent increase in voluntary and community sector activity by 2006 while the second added a specific reference to greater involvement 'amongst those at risk of social exclusion including people with no qualifications, people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and people with disabilities or limiting long-term illnesses' (Harries, 2005). Volunteering is also seen as a means of delivering a whole range of government policies over and above social inclusion which include sustainable communities, health and social welfare, rural communities, education, criminal justice and anti-social behaviour.

The commitment of successive governments to the promotion of volunteering has led to significant funding for a series of initiatives aimed at specific groups and for measures aimed at strengthening the infrastructure of volunteering. The former have included projects and programmes aimed at the unemployed, older people, and the younger age group while the latter have included major investment aimed at rationalising the network of national and local bodies which promote and support volunteering and developing and disseminating expertise through the ChangeUp programme which represents a major investment in the effectiveness of the voluntary and community sector.

The unprecedented level of interest in volunteering has been reflected by the appointment in 2006 – by the England Volunteering Development Council (a body established in 2004 to provide a high-level representative and advocacy mechanism for volunteering) – of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering whose remit was to develop a long-term vision for volunteering in England. Chaired by the Liberal Democrat peer, Julia Neuberger, the Commission collected 'a huge amount of written evidence' and 'travelled the country to hear hundreds of oral testimonies from those within the volunteering world' (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008: p. 7). It published its Manifesto in January 2008 (ibid.) and a report on the response to its

public consultation a little later in the same year (Gaskin et al., 2008). Many of the recommendations made by the Commission have been accepted and acted upon by the current government – including the agreed investment of £4 million in new training programmes for volunteers and volunteer managers and a further £2 million to create a new access to volunteering fund for disabled people. Gordon Brown's administration has also demonstrated their interest in volunteering by the appointment, in June 2007, of Baroness Neuberger as the Government's volunteering champion with a specific brief to look at 'how the public services can make better use of volunteers' (http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/volunteering/volunteering_champion.aspx).

The growing expectations of policy-makers has been matched by increasing aspirations on the part of practitioners working in agencies which promote and support volunteering and organisations which involve volunteers in their work. VE and its counterparts in other countries of the United Kingdom have provided volunteering with a national infrastructure which has both raised its profile and helped to develop a more 'professional' approach to recruiting and managing volunteers. The development of what is increasingly referred to as a 'volunteering industry' and the growing perception that volunteer management is a specialist profession has been underlined by the development of quality standards, training for those who manage the work of volunteers, and the establishment of a professional body for volunteer managers.

This growing interest has been accompanied by the development of a body of research both in the United Kingdom and across the world. Important data about participation in volunteering have been provided by the series of Citizenship Surveys conducted by the Home Office and the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) since 2001 (Attwood et al., 2003; CLG, 2008; Home Office, 2004), and a major new survey of volunteering and charitable giving was published in 2007 (Low et al., 2007). A key role has also been played by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR), a partnership between VE and the University of East London which was established in 1997. As well as undertaking a large body of its own research during more than ten years of its existence, IVR has also disseminated the work of other scholars through its journal, *Voluntary Action*, which was published between 1998 and 2008.

This book

This book attempts to meet this unprecedented level of interest in volunteering by gathering together in a single volume what is known

about the phenomenon of volunteering, the principles and practice of involving volunteers in a variety of organisational settings and the emerging and enduring challenges for voluntary action in the 21st century. The focus of the book is the United Kingdom but it is informed by and, in turn, is intended to inform international perspectives on voluntary action. As well as findings from the research undertaken by IVR and the wider British literature on volunteering, we will draw on wide range of literature from outside Britain to help us understand the nature of volunteering in the United Kingdom, patterns of participation in voluntary action, the kinds of challenges faced by volunteer-involving organisations and the dynamics of the interaction between volunteering and government. As well as a wealth of research-based and theoretical literature from the United States and Canada, our sources include evidence from Australia and the work of European scholars. We have tried to place the key features of UK volunteering in an international context to highlight what it has in common with voluntary action elsewhere in the world and identify the ways in which it is different and distinctive.

The book is aimed at three kinds of reader. In the first place, it is intended to provide a comprehensive and authoritative text for a number of academic audiences – not only the small but growing number of undergraduate and postgraduate students (and their teachers) who have a specific interest in voluntary action but also across the much broader spectrum of the curricula of public and social policy, government and community studies. Second, we have aimed it at the growing body of practitioners including those who manage volunteers, those who lead volunteer-involving organisations and the managers and staff of national and local volunteering infrastructure bodies. To this end, we have striven to make the contents accessible as well as authoritative. This aspiration is also important in terms of our third target audience, policy analysts and policy-makers across a wide range of areas of public policy and provision, not only the more obvious areas such as health and social welfare, community cohesion, social inclusion and public participation but also the environment, the arts, and sports and recreation.

The book consists of four main sections. In the first of these – which consists of Chapters 2 to 5 – we attempt to provide an overview of volunteering and delineate its salient features. Chapters 2 and 3 aim to create what we have called, following David Horton Smith (2000), a ‘round-earth’ map which captures the full extent of the phenomenon and the rich variety of the forms it can take. In Chapter 2, we explore

the scope and range of the subject and attempt to clarify discussion of the concept of volunteering by developing a conceptual map based on three different perspectives, examining the value base of volunteerism and identifying its core characteristics. Chapter 3 follows this analysis by looking at ways of categorising and classifying volunteering opportunities and volunteers to ensure that we capture the full range and variety of voluntary action and the different ways in which people engage in it. It will also enable us to identify the distinctive characteristics of specific kinds of volunteering activities and the ways in which people engage with them.

Chapter 4 focuses on levels of volunteering and patterns of participation in the United Kingdom. We discuss the number of people engaged in volunteering and who these volunteers tend to be – their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. We also discuss the areas of social life to which volunteers contribute and the roles and functions they perform. The chapter draws on the Citizenship Survey, which is a household survey of approximately 10,000 adults in England and Wales (plus BME boost sample of approximately 5,000). Initially conducted by the Home Office and subsequently by CLG, the Citizenship Survey has been run every other year since 2001. We supplement these data by drawing on several other smaller studies from each of the four home countries.

Chapter 5 attempts to set this information in an international context. Do other countries have a similar profile, or does the United Kingdom have a lot more, or a lot fewer, volunteers? What are the different ways in which volunteering is viewed by people and supported by policy? The chapter looks at some of the data available from a selection of surveys before examining theories scholars have used to attempt to explain differences. It is through the application of these theories that we begin to understand that participation is the result of complex historical contexts and that similar rates are not necessarily the result of comparable driving forces.

The second section of the book – Chapters 6 to 8 – focuses on the changing world in which volunteering takes place. Chapter 6 summarises the key societal changes which are likely to make an impact on voluntary action. We look in turn at demographic trends, the changing relationship between the individual and society, and contemporary values and mores. In the final part of the chapter, we draw out some of the key implications of these changes for the future of volunteering and the practices of volunteer-involving organisations. Chapter 7 has been contributed by Meta Zimmeck. She concentrates on the ways in

which successive governments have attempted to promote and encourage volunteering and reviews the impact of these actions and policies on volunteering and volunteer-involving organisations. The section is brought to a conclusion by Chapter 8 which discusses the ways in which volunteering itself is changing. It begins by looking at the phenomenon of short-term or episodic volunteering and the growing diversity of the activities undertaken by volunteers. It then reviews two areas in which the numbers of volunteers have been growing rapidly – employer supported and transnational volunteering. The chapter then looks at the challenges posed by the growth of virtual volunteering and trends in volunteering as activism before concluding by reviewing the rediscovery and repackaging of mutual aid under the banner of Timebanking.

The third section – Chapters 9 to 12 – is devoted to issues of organisation and management. Chapter 9 discusses motivation – why people choose to give freely of their time for voluntary action. It begins by outlining some of the methodological problems with researching motivations and looks at a selection of theories relating to volunteer motivation. Next, it looks at survey data, primarily from the United Kingdom, disaggregating motives across different demographic groups. After reviewing a selection of studies in an attempt to see how thinking about theoretical perspectives can add meaning to research, the chapter concludes by looking at how volunteer-involving organisations make use of these ideas.

This is followed by a look at retention – what makes people stay (or not) in organisations once they have taken the decision to become involved. Chapter 10 reviews the findings of studies into retention and ultimately finds that, while each of these attempts has some explanatory power, the research evidence is often contradictory when considered as a whole. However, it argues that, by engaging with different models and perspectives and recognising that while we will not find ‘the answer’, we may be in a better position to interpret what factors are more likely to be successful in helping retention.

Chapter 11 looks at how the work of volunteers can be organised and coordinated. It begins by tracing the development of volunteer management and highlighting the ways in which policy and practice have led to the increasing adoption of a formal approach based on the ways in which paid staff are managed. This model of management, it argues, is dominating the idea of best practice to the exclusion of less formal methods which are likely be more useful and appropriate for some volunteer-involving organisations. The chapter then looks at the ways in which values and organisational contexts influence the practice of

management before looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches.

The section is completed by Chapter 12 which addresses the growing need for volunteer-involving organisations to be able to demonstrate the impact of the work of their volunteers. It discusses the ways in which the assessment of the impacts of volunteering have been conceptualised and undertaken. It considers who is impacted upon by volunteering and what those impacts are. It explores methodological issues faced in assessing these impacts; alongside, some of the tools created help meet the challenge. In particular, it draws on the work by the IVR in the development of its *Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit* (VIAT) (involving two of the authors of this book), which aims to assist organisations in a 'D-I-Y' assessment of the impact of volunteering across a range of stakeholders.

The final section of the book – Chapters 13 to 16 – draws on the earlier material to discuss four enduring challenges for volunteering. The first of these – Chapter 13 – explores volunteering's continuing problem with narrow and stereotypical public perceptions and the enduring challenge of trying to overcome a negative and unhelpful image. It reviews the nature of those perceptions and looks at the implications of them for volunteer-involving organisations, distinguishes between the different perspectives represented by image, brand, culture and vision and reviews a number of different ways in which they might be deployed to change the perception of volunteering.

The challenge discussed in Chapter 14 is the problem of ensuring that those who volunteer reflect the diversity of the population at large. There are some key demographic groups whose involvement is comparatively rare. This chapter explores the reasons behind these uneven patterns of volunteering and identifies the steps that are needed to make volunteering more inclusive. It reviews what we know about the different kinds of barriers which prevent more people from volunteering and discusses what is being done and can be done to overcome them and meet the challenge of making volunteering truly inclusive.

Chapter 15 focuses on the concern that the autonomy of volunteering may be under threat from the encroachment of the state and its agencies. It reviews some general ideas about the relationship between the state, civil society and democracy before concentrating on four ways in which governments can undermine the independence of voluntary action – by introducing compulsion, by developing government-sponsored volunteering, by seeking to set the agenda for voluntary action and by creating the environment within which it takes place.

The chapter then discusses what governments should and should not do and the need for volunteering to develop institutions through which government can be challenged.

The section is completed by a discussion of the fourth of our challenges to the future health and vitality of volunteering – the challenge of formalisation. One of the key features of the growth of public and community interest in volunteering has been the development of what has been called a ‘volunteering industry’ with its national and local infrastructure organisations; an emerging body of professionally trained volunteer managers, quality standards and performance measures, all adopted to improve the quality of the volunteering experience. Chapter 16 discusses the impact of these changes and critically assesses the extent to which the advantages of this formalisation of volunteering should be balanced against the loss of flexibility, informality and spontaneity which accompanies them.

The book ends with Chapter 17 in which we attempt to draw together the key themes of the book and set an agenda for future action and the research which should underpin and inform it. The chapter highlights the impact of the ‘dominant paradigm’ on the ways in which volunteering is commonly understood and discussed, and it assesses the extent to which we have been able to sustain our ‘round-earth’ view of voluntary action in the face of a research literature which is largely bounded by the narrow perspective of ‘volunteering as service’. It discusses the extent to which we have been able to extend our analysis beyond this ‘flat-earth’ view of volunteering and bring a more nuanced approach to the discussion of key issues and topics. The chapter concludes by outlining an alternative vision of volunteering as a broad, heterogeneous and untidy field of human activity rather than simply the activities undertaken by the contemporary ‘volunteering industry’ and argues that securing a healthy future for voluntary action depends on understanding and promoting that complexity.

2

Making Sense of Volunteering: Perspectives, principles and definitions

Introduction: a 'round-earth map' of volunteering

This chapter and the one that immediately follows it represent an attempt to make sense of volunteering by capturing the full extent of the phenomenon and the rich variety of the forms it can take. We start from the premise that the general perception of volunteering is based on what David Horton Smith (2000) has called, in a different context, a 'flat-earth map'. In other words, the picture most people have of voluntary action is incomplete; while some of its features are clearly defined, many more of them are 'dark matter' (ibid.) which remains relatively unknown and largely unexplored.

The need to 're-conceptualise what we mean by volunteering without undermining its intrinsic value' was one of the key issues identified by Justin Davis Smith (now chief executive of VE) in the keynote speech he made at the launch of the Independent Commission on the Future of Volunteering (Davis Smith, 2006). The importance of devising an inclusive but robust concept of volunteering has been underlined by a number of studies which have found that one important barrier to participation in voluntary action is a general lack of knowledge or understanding of the diversity of the possible activities, organisational settings and the people involved (see, for example, Hankinson and Rochester, 2005; IVR, 2004a; Rochester and Hutchison, 2002).

Chapters 2 and 3 are therefore designed to provide a comprehensive and accurate 'round-earth map' of volunteering. In this chapter, we will

explore the scope and range of the subject and attempt to clarify discussion of the concept of volunteering by

- presenting three perspectives on voluntary action and bringing them together into a conceptual map of the territory;
- exploring the values base of voluntarism and drawing out some key principles and
- identifying its core characteristics and using them to explore the boundaries of volunteering.

In Chapter 3, we look at ways of categorising and classifying volunteering opportunities and volunteers. This is to ensure that we capture the full range and variety of voluntary action and the different ways in which people engage in it. It will also enable us to identify the distinctive characteristics of specific kinds of volunteering activities and ways of engaging with them in order to avoid treating volunteers and volunteering as if they were homogeneous.

Three perspectives

The dominant paradigm

In the United Kingdom, the United States and a number of other similar societies, a very high proportion of the discussion about volunteering – by practitioners, policy-makers and researchers alike – is concentrated on one very specific view of the phenomenon which we can describe as the ‘dominant paradigm’. There is evidence that this view of volunteering is no longer accepted as a comprehensive account of the field; the latest major text (Musick and Wilson, 2008) not only emphasises the activist strand in voluntary action (see below) but also notes that it had been largely neglected within the dominant paradigm. But the paradigm remains powerful; the report and recommendations of the Neuberger Commission (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2007, 2008) were framed by it. This approach involves a series of narrow definitions of volunteer motivation, the areas of social life in which volunteers are active, the organisational context within which volunteering takes place and the ways in which volunteering roles are defined.

Motivation. While it is increasingly acknowledged that there is a rich cocktail of explanations of why people become volunteers (these are discussed in Chapter 9), the dominant view of volunteering is that it

is essentially an altruistic act often seen as the 'gift' of one's time and thus analogous to the gift of money which defines philanthropy. In this view, people become volunteers in order to help others who are less fortunate than themselves.

Areas of activity. Volunteering is seen as taking place in the broad field of social welfare where it helps to provide care, support, advice and other activities for the benefit of people in need such as children, older people, people with disabilities or mental and physical health issues and people living in poverty or social exclusion.

Organisational context. From this perspective, opportunities for volunteering are provided by large, professionally staffed and formally structured organisations. While these are most likely to be charities or third sector organisations, they also include statutory agencies like hospitals and schools. Volunteers provide them with a significant additional resource in the form of unpaid labour and are increasingly treated as 'human resources' which need formal and skilled management of a similar kind to that provided for paid staff.

Volunteer roles. The work undertaken by volunteers is generally thought of as defined in advance by the volunteer-involving organisations. People are recruited for specific roles, and this may involve a process of selection, induction and, in some cases, training.

This view of volunteering has been described by Lyons and his colleagues (1998) as the 'non-profit paradigm'. It has been shaped in part by research carried out by academics in the fields of economics, law and management studies, largely in the United States, where the emphasis is on the comparatively large, well-staffed and bureaucratic non-profit organisations. In the United Kingdom, it has gained ground as a result of the drive by successive governments to give voluntary agencies a greater role in the delivery of public and social services and to invest in third sector infrastructure organisations. This has given greatest prominence to larger organisations in general and, in the specific case of volunteering, to those who deploy the largest numbers of volunteers.

In turn it has helped to shape what is now sometimes called the 'volunteering industry' and the emergence of a discrete new profession of volunteer management. This has involved the development by the Volunteering Hub (part of the government's strategy for building voluntary sector capacity) of a National Training Strategy for Volunteer Management and the drafting of National Occupational Standards for

Volunteer Managers (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2007) followed by the formation, in April 2007, of the Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM) (see also Chapter 16).

A different perspective – the civil society paradigm

Lyons et al. (1998) contrast this ‘non-profit paradigm’ with the approach to voluntary action which is predominant in other parts of the world including much of Europe and the developing countries of the South. This ‘civil society paradigm’ has its academic roots in political science and sociology and involves very different definitions of the volunteers’ motivations, the areas of activity in which they are involved, the organisational context for their activities and the kinds of roles they play.

Motivation. Rather than an altruistic or philanthropic desire to help other, less fortunate people, the motivation for those engaged with this kind of voluntary action is seen to be rooted in self-help and mutual aid. Their activities are based on the ability of people ‘to work together to meet shared needs and address common problems’ (Lyons et al., 1998: p. 52).

Areas of activity. There are two broad differences between the kinds of activity undertaken by ‘civil society’ volunteers and those who are thought of as working within the ‘non-profit paradigm’. In the first place, their involvement in social welfare is less likely to be focused on delivering care and other services than in offering mutual support in self-help groups or campaigning for improvements in provision. Second, their activities extend beyond social welfare to other areas of public policy such as transport, town planning and the environment.

Organisational context. The key organisational forms through which this kind of voluntary action is seen to be pursued are associations based entirely on the work of volunteers and self-help groups rather than non-profit agencies with paid managers and staff. Recently, there has been a growing interest in these organisations in both the United States where they are called ‘grass-roots associations’ and in Britain where they are seen as part of a ‘community sector’ (Rochester, 1997, 1998).

Volunteer roles. Within this paradigm, volunteers are not seen as helpers who are recruited to play specific roles within the organisation but members of the association who provide it with leadership and, between them, undertake all of its operational activities. The role to be played by

the member activist in this kind of organisation 'cannot be defined in advance' but 'will be developed over time in the light of experience, personal growth and reflection' (Rochester, 1999/2007: p. 9).

This kind of voluntary action is sometimes called 'horizontal' volunteering to distinguish it from the 'vertical' kind found in the 'non-profit paradigm' and can be characterised as activism rather than unpaid help. Its scale and importance are often underestimated, but the number of grass-roots associations, community groups and self-help groups and the contribution they make to the quality of life and living conditions (Rochester, 1997) are very large indeed. Their low profile may be due in part to the size of the individual organisations and the perception that, unlike staffed non-profit or voluntary agencies, they are seen as run for the benefit of their members rather than the public as a whole.

A third view – volunteering as serious leisure

We are indebted to Lyons et al. (1998) for rescuing 'volunteering as activism' from the shadow of the dominant paradigm of 'volunteering as unpaid work or service' but now need to add a third view of volunteering which is 'volunteering as serious leisure'. In a sense, it is simple common sense to view volunteering as a leisure time activity, and it has been identified as such by scholars for more than thirty years (Stebbins, 2004, for example, quotes studies by Bosserman and Gagan from 1972 and David Horton Smith from 1975). Until recently, however, this perspective has been largely neglected by scholarly writers on volunteering. This lack of interest may be explained by the association of leisure with ideas of fun and frivolity which are at odds with the serious business of much voluntary action and with terms like 'amateur' and 'hobbyist' which are often used pejoratively. Now, however, the idea of volunteering as leisure – and, most importantly, as 'serious leisure' – has been explored in a series of publications by Stebbins (see, for example, Stebbins, 1996; Stebbins and Graham, 2004).

This body of work has identified three kinds of leisure volunteering. Casual volunteering is exemplified by 'cooking hot dogs at a church picnic or taking tickets for a performance by the local community theatre' (Stebbins, 2004: p. 5) while project-based volunteering is 'a short-term, reasonable complicated, one-off or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking' (ibid.: p. 7). This might, for example, involve participation in the organisation of a sporting or cultural event. Finally, volunteering as *serious* leisure involves 'the systematic pursuit of...a



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