Trends
in Volunteering

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BACKGROUND

This report is one of a suite of reports commissioned by Volunteer Now as part of a legacy project for Building Change Trust. The reports provide an overview of academic and statistical research about volunteering in Northern Ireland from 1995 to date. They provide an evidence base for organisations involving volunteers to plan their work and for government in supporting volunteers.

INTRODUCTION

In their forthcoming book, *Continuity and Change in Voluntary Action* – the most recent and authoritative review of volunteering in England since 1979 – Rose Lindsey and John Mohan provide ample evidence that the 'headline rates' of volunteering activity have not changed significantly over the years:

> Beveridge's social researchers in the 1940s estimated that 'up to one-third of adults were giving unpaid voluntary help at least once a month.' This is strikingly similar to present day rates of engagement in regular formal volunteering and our work on survey datasets covering the period from the early 1980s onwards amply demonstrates the underlying stability in and scale of voluntary action. Although no individual social survey has been implemented at repeated intervals over the whole of the period in which we have been interested, there is consistency within individual surveys over time, so we feel justified in this claim (2018 forthcoming, p.72).

The only important 'change to note', they add, 'is the strong evidence of adverse effects on informal volunteering of the post 2008 recession, with recovery thereafter' (2018, forthcoming p.73). The impact of the recession on volunteering has been the subject of a detailed study by Lim and Laurence (2015) who highlighted the size of the decline in informal volunteering – 'dropping by ten percentage points over a two-year period' (p.339) – with its greatest impact on disadvantaged areas with their lack of organisational infrastructure and the weakness of their cultural norms. But they also point to the resilience of formal volunteering activity during the recession.

On the one hand, despite the striking changes in the economic and social environment since 1979 – 'the collapse of manufacturing, consequent mass unemployment, and periods of recession, contrasting with a long economic boom in the late 1990s, sustained in its later phases by high levels of immigration, ending in the crash of 2008' (Lindsey and Mohan, p72) – and frequent government initiatives aimed at promoting volunteering (reviewed by Zimmeck, 2010), changes in the levels of voluntary action during this period are insignificant.

Lindsey and Mohan suggest that the lack of movement in these headline figures is the result of a failure by governments to develop and sustain a long-term and consistent approach to volunteering policy. At the present time there is little sign that government is seeking to promote volunteering in a more effective way and no indication that such an important shift in policy and action would take place in the foreseeable future.

On the other hand there are some important changes in the environment in which volunteering takes place and in the ways in which people are engaging in voluntary activity that suggest that there are some current trends that will make a significant impact, if not on the headline figure, then on the changing pattern of voluntary action and on the future of volunteering over the next decade or two.

This paper will outline some of the changes that might help to shape the context in which volunteering will take place and some of the ways in which people are choosing to engage in voluntary action before considering how these might change the face of volunteering over the next few years.

CONTENTS

1. A Changing Environment for Volunteering

Changing institutions and the weakening of social ties

There have been some important changes to the ways in which our social institutions are constituted and how they are experienced. This is true of the basic building block of the family or household; involvement in our political institutions; and the changing role of the 'intermediate' institutions that tend to bridge the gap between these two poles.

In the case of the family the 'traditional' examples of the 'nuclear family' composed of a – usually married – couple and their children or the 'extended family' involving a number of members across two or three generations are less prevalent and have given way to what Evans and Saxton have termed the 'any way up' family: 'Half a century ago a child', they write, 'was typically a part of a broad family unit made up of grandparents and parents as well as a number of uncles, aunts, cousins and siblings.' Over time families have become 'taller' – children are less likely to know their grandparents – and 'narrower' – as they know fewer aunts, uncles and cousins. The growing tendency for divorce and separation between couples has led to increasing numbers of single-parent families: '[T]he widespread fracturing and restructuring of the family unit has resulted in some very complex and disjointed family arrangements' (2005, p.16).

While these trends are common across the UK, there are some important differences in family patterns. For example:

> Only five per cent of couples cohabit in Northern Ireland compared with up to 14 per cent in the South of England. First marriages last longer in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK and the divorce rate is the lowest in the UK but, in 2007 Northern Ireland had the second highest proportion of female single parent households after London (Centre for Policy on Ageing, 2014, p.15).

Nonetheless the broad picture of changes to the composition of families holds true for Northern Ireland, although these changes have been taking place less rapidly than elsewhere in the UK (Paris et al., 2014).

Across the UK there has been a marked decline in the involvement of citizens in the conventional political system at national and local level. Fewer people vote in general elections, and the membership of political parties – and active involvement in their activities – have fallen off sharply. And there has been an erosion of the role and status of elected members of local authorities. By contrast there has been an increase of participation in single-issue politics and new kinds of campaigning activities for new kinds of causes (Power Inquiry, 2006; Carnegie UK Trust, 2007). Recently, however, there has been an upsurge in membership of the Scottish National Party and the Labour Party which has gone some way to arresting the overall decline in party membership (House of Commons Library, 2017). The political parties in Northern Ireland do not publish membership figures.

And at the 'intermediate' level there has been a major shift in the nature of 'community': 'Even though more people than ever are physically packed together in cities, they are becoming

more rather less isolated socially' as the result of increased mobility (Zimmeck, 2007, p.7). In many countries there has been a major shift towards secularisation and a loss of shared activity in religious adherence (Torry, 2014; Olson and Beckworth, 2011). The trend to secularism in Northern Ireland has been slower than in the rest of the UK. Figures for the 2011 census showed that the proportion of people reporting that they were Christian was significantly higher in Northern Ireland (82.3%) than in England (59.4%), Scotland (53.8%) or Wales (57.6%), while those who professed no religious affiliation were correspondingly fewer – 16.9% of the population in contrast to the percentages for England (31.9%), Scotland (43.7%) or Wales (39.7%) (NISRA, 2011). There was nonetheless a movement towards a more secular society. In the case of the Protestant community there was a move away from membership of the churches and towards the expression of no formal religious attachment that tended to follow the trend in Great Britain. In the Catholic community, by contrast, levels of formal identification with the church remained high but attendance at mass had declined, a pattern that followed the trend in the Republic of Ireland (McAllister, 2005).

There was a similar decline in attendance at another – very different - British institution – the local public house. According to a report in the *Belfast Telegraph* for July 2016, 'a higher proportion of pubs were struggling in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK. Across the UK as a whole, 21% of bars were operating under significant distress, compared to 24% here' and 'the total number of pubs trading here had dropped from 298 to 268' (Martin, 19th July 2016).

Growth of consumerism and the impact of marketisation

The decline of traditional family, neighbourhood and community ties has been widely associated with a rising tide of individualism and increasing opportunities to exercise consumer choice. There is some evidence, however, that this has reached its apogee and that people are beginning to place more emphasis on seeking the kinds of well-being that cannot be achieved through consumption and are looking for better public spaces and better social connections with their communities (Carnegie UK Trust, 2007).

The extent to which these 'social' aspirations will be achieved is restricted by the extent to which our society has become 'marketised' – more than a society with a market economy but a 'market society'. The difference has been explained by Michael Sandel: 'A market economy is a tool – a valuable and effective tool – for organizing productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor. It's a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market' (2012, pp.10-11).

Sandel argues that market values have crowded out non-market norms in a whole series of arenas where public goods – 'the good things' in life - are corrupted or debased by being turned into commodities. While some commentators take the view that Sandel overstates his case, there can be little doubt that our society is becoming increasingly 'marketised' and that there is a real threat to the values of volunteering.

Inequality and poverty

While, overall, British society has become wealthier since the 1970s and has managed to continue to grow richer despite the financial crisis of 2008, this growing wealth has not been equally shared, and the gap between the richest and the poorest has widened and is continuing to widen (Equality Trust, 2017; and, for Northern Ireland, see, for example, Wallace, 2015). According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in its recent report on poverty in the UK: 'Almost 400,000 more children and 300,000 pensioners are now living in poverty than in 2012/13' and '[V]ery little progress has been made in reducing poverty among working-age adults'. Overall the Foundation calculates that '14 million people live in poverty in the UK – over one in five of the population' (2017, p4.).

There are two specific places where the impact of rising poverty will be felt on volunteering.

In the first place there are growing numbers of people whose position in the labour market has become more insecure. The use of 'zero hours' contracts, short-term employment contracts and the increasing use of the 'gig' economy have all contributed to large numbers of people whose hours of work and terms of employment make it difficult for them to commit to volunteering on any kind of regular basis (Wilson, 2017).

This has been exacerbated by the growing volatility of the housing market where the long-term security and stability provided by the provision of municipal and other social housing has become rarer and the growing gap in the need for housing has been filled by private landlords who increasingly deal in short-term tenancies. In these circumstances tenants will be reluctant to commit themselves to a specific neighbourhood or become involved in local voluntary activities. In Northern Ireland the percentage of homes that were privately rented rose between 2001 and 2011 from 7.6% to 16.5% while the proportion of homes in the public fell from 17.9% to 11.3% and owner occupation also fell from 67.0% to 61.7% (NIHE, 2015).

An ageing population

In common with other industrialised countries Britain has experienced and is expected to continue to experience a very significant increase in the proportion of older people in its population. This has been due to a combination of an increasing number of older people and a decreasing number of younger ones. Between 1981 and 2003, for example, the number of people aged 65 and over rose by 28% while the number of people under 16 fell by 18% (Hughes, 2009). The Carnegie Trust (2007) has calculated that there will be more over 60s than under 25s by 2025.

The population of Northern Ireland has been younger than that of the UK as a whole but the differences narrowed between 2001 and 2011 and the figures were expected to continue to converge in the period to 2021 (Paris et al., 2014). The latest population projections for Northern Ireland are:

> [T]he population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 65.1 per cent to 491,700 people from mid-2016 to mid-2041, with the result that almost one in four people (24.5 per cent) will be in this age category. The population aged 85 and over is projected to

increase by 127.2 per cent to reach 82,800 people over the same period, which will see their share of the population doubling from 2.0 per cent to 4.1 per cent.

As a result the proportion of those aged 65 and over will overtake the percentage of those aged between 0 and 15 years old by mid-2028. And, 'while our overall rate of population increase is lower than in the rest of the UK (7.6 per cent compared with 11.2 per cent), our population is projected to age faster' (NISRA, 2017).

While, arguably, people who are living longer and remain in good heath provide what is potentially, at least, a growing body of volunteers, the need for care and support for older people as they become frailer and more vulnerable will be a major concern as the population of older people increases.

A further area of concern is the impact on the numbers of potential volunteers on the growing numbers of carers required to meet the needs of older members of their own families. This will reduce the pool of volunteers available to meet the needs of older people outside the family circle.

Growing social isolation

A second important consequence of recent changes in the demography of the United Kingdom has been a major increase in the number of single-person households. This is an important contributory factor in the growth of problems of social isolation that volunteering has been seen as an important means of addressing (Ockenden, 2007), especially in the cases of older people (Low et al. 2007) and people experiencing mental health issues (Murray et al., 2008).

But the relationship between social isolation and volunteering is complex. Volunteering can play an important role in addressing and overcoming isolation (Volunteer Now, 2017), but there is also no shortage of evidence that people who are isolated are unlikely to look for opportunities for volunteering or to take up those that are offered to them: they lack the confidence and a shared culture of participation that encourages people into volunteering activities (Lim and Laurence, 2015).

The impact of the digital revolution

Perhaps the most significant set of changes in the current and future environment for volunteering involves the revolutionary impact of developments in internet technology and communications. The speed and scope of these developments are not easy to grasp – especially for the older generation which grew up before the arrival of the internet and does not have the facility of the later generation of 'digital natives' who are at home in this brave new world. For most of the older generation – and practically all of their juniors – the internet and its applications are part of their everyday life.

As well as the ability to access and process data, digital technology has increasingly become the means of producing and publishing material on the one hand and a way of establishing and maintaining social contacts with large numbers of people on the other (Rochester et al., 2010).

The younger generations

Arguably, the younger generations of 'Generation X' and 'Generation Y' not only have a significantly different experience of the electronic environment and use the new technology in a new ways but have also shaped their environment into a whole new set of social contacts and new ways of using them.

The members of Generation X were born between 1966 and 1976 and have been referred to as the first generation of 'latchkey' kids, exposed to lots of daycare and divorce. Known to have the lowest voting participation rate of any generation, they were described by Newsweek as the generation that 'dropped out without ever turning on the news or tuning in to the social issues around them'. Gen X is often characterized by high levels of skepticism, and "what's in it for me" attitudes. They have formed families with a higher level of caution and pragmatism than their parents demonstrated.

Their successors – Generation Y or the 'Millennials' – were born 1977-94 and have been described as 'incredibly sophisticated, technology wise, immune to most traditional marketing and sales pitches … as they not only grew up with it all, they've seen it all and been exposed to it all since early childhood'. Generation Y are 'less brand loyal and the speed of the Internet has led the cohort to be similarly flexible and changing in its fashion, style consciousness and where and how it is communicated with' (Schroer, 2017).

Pressure on public services

Since 2010 the UK government has adopted a policy of 'austerity' based on a view that the economy cannot bear the costs of a range of public services formerly seen as an essential part of the contemporary state's activities. Reluctant to raise taxation and concerned about meeting the growing costs of health and social care for an increasing number of older people, they have made cuts to welfare benefits and tightened the budget for local authority expenditure which has led to knock-on effects on the provision of libraries and other amenities and cuts in the support for a range of voluntary organisations. Ministers take the view that any shortfalls in provision can be made good by an increase in voluntary effort and community support.

There is some evidence that the substitution by volunteers for paid staff in the library service in England has taken place; the number of volunteers involved in libraries in the UK rose by 45 per cent between 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 and the number of paid staff fell by 7 per cent during the same period (CIPFA, 2013).

A team from the King's Fund think tank offers two options for the future contribution of volunteering to health and care services (currently provided by an estimated three million volunteers across England):

> [I]n the best case scenario, volunteering would be an important part of new closer relationship between health service providers and the communities they serve. In the worst case scenario, service providers and commissioners face a loss of goodwill and growing tensions around the role of volunteers in service delivery (Naylor et al., 2013, p viii).

Another report from the same source focused on the 78,000 volunteers involved in the NHS acute trusts in England and found that the great majority of those they surveyed (87%) expected the number of volunteers to increase 'in many case by more than 25 per cent' while 'no one mentioned that it would decrease' (Galea et al., 2013, p. 2). A study of volunteers in long-term care settings in England also concluded that there was 'clearly great potential for volunteers and their work to enhance social care services' (Hussein, 2011, p.4). In Scotland a survey of older people's care in Tayside identified a need to increase the range and numbers of opportunities for volunteering, and its authors put their faith in the development of a strategic approach through which this could be achieved (Volunteer Development Scotland, 2013).

The need to promote volunteering in the NHS has recently led to the formation of a new national organisation called HelpForce which is 'working with pioneers in NHS Trusts and the voluntary sector to improve volunteering practice and perceptions across the UK' (HelpForce, 2017) and aims to double the number of volunteers working in the health service to 156,000 by 2021 (Lay, 2017). It will take its place alongside a plethora of initiatives with similar ambitions.

Similarly there is evidence to suggest that voluntary action in primary schools is unevenly distributed and that there is scope for increasing the numbers of volunteers in those schools that are less successful in involving volunteers (Body et al., 2017). And the police forces of England and Wales have launched a nationwide campaign to increase the numbers of volunteers who play an increasingly important role alongside their uniformed colleagues within local policing. Chief Constables have spent £600,000 on a campaign to fill thousands of policing vacancies with volunteers. According to the Police Federation of England and Wales, there are already more than 38,000 volunteers working in more than 200 different roles (The Times, 10 October 2017; Suffolk Constabulary, 2017).

By contrast, however, a survey of Scottish charities found that the leaders of charities were far from confident that the numbers of additional volunteers they needed to recruit would be achieved in the following year. Their pessimism was especially true of larger charities and those employing paid staff (Doyle, 2013).

2. Trends in Volunteering Attitudes and Behaviour

A 'new model' of volunteering

There is a growing consensus that the ways in which people engage with volunteering have changed. Changes in sports volunteering were summarised by Gratton and colleagues, who 'concluded that a European trend towards more informal participation in health and fitness-related sports and a decline in more traditional team sports was replicated in England' (2011 quoted by Nicholls, 2017 p16).). Later work also showed similar trends in England in 2009/10 (Nichols, 2017).

This was seen as part of a 'change from a modernist society in which leisure is explained by structural factors such as occupation, ethnicity, sex and family roles to a post-modern one in which class and gender are replaced by more fluid identify politics and experiences are more individual than collective' (Nicholls, 2017).

This is the same distinction made by Hustinx (2007) in her classification of 'classic' and 'new' models of volunteerism or that made by Evans and Saxton' between the decreasing number of 'time-driven' volunteers and the growing number of those who are 'cause-driven' (2005). Rather than treating volunteering as a means of pursuing a cause, people are increasingly seeking specific experiences and rewards. This newer attitude to volunteering has been described by some Dutch organisations as a 'revolving door' approach (Dekker and Halman, 2003).

Episodic volunteering

In concrete terms this new model takes the form of 'episodic' volunteering which is widely reported to be a growing phenomenon (Handy et al., 2006). While the older-style volunteers were typically involved in high levels of time and commitment to a cause and an organisation and might adapt their volunteering to the changing long-term needs of an organisation, episodic volunteering was just one of the ways in which people used their time and was clearly limited in its scope and the amount of time involved and was expected to be intrinsically rewarding.

The ways in which people take part in episodic volunteering vary quite significantly. Some commit themselves to a time and a task on one specific occasion (for example, at major sporting or cultural events); others may be involved in a series of events over a period of time; and a third group combined their episodic volunteering with long-term involvement within the same or another organisation (Macduff, 2005; Handy et al., 2006).

The ultimate form of episodic volunteering has been the recent development of micro-volunteering (NCVO, 2013) which, as Charlotte Jones suggests in the *Guardian*

> takes a simple idea – that people are more likely to volunteer their time in short and convenient, bite-sized chunks – and turns it into a new approach to community action. It offers volunteers a series of easy tasks that can be done anytime, anywhere, on your own terms. Microvolunteering could involve anything from signing a petition or

retweeting a message to taking part in a flashmob or counting birds in your garden. The only requirements are that volunteers don't need to go through an application or training process, the tasks take only minutes to complete, and it doesn't require any ongoing commitment (13th April, 2017).

In 2016, 80% of micro-volunteering was carried out on line – usually on smart phones – mainly by young people and it has been most popular in the UK where more than half of all micro-volunteering actions took place in 2015.

Volunteering in a digital society

It is only very recently that we have begun to see just how radically the digital society has the capacity to change the way we go about volunteering. It has become fairly routine for the ways in which volunteering is organised to adapt to the new technology: it is an important tool for communicating news about opportunities for volunteering instantly and to large numbers of people; it enables people to volunteer without leaving their home and enables them to help specific causes or organisations.

But these are largely about adapting existing activities for remote use. More recently social media has enabled people to engage in collective activities: groups have been able to meet and organise collective activities by using their Facebook connections and have drawn on their collective resources to negotiate with local government agencies and other bodies.

Life-course volunteering

Our knowledge of volunteering behaviour has been developed in recent years by the increased recognition that volunteering needs to be understood as taking part in a lifelong process rather than studied at a single point in time (Brodie et al., 2011; Kamerade, 2012). In the first place, Davis Smith and Gay (2005) have identified three kinds of volunteer careers across people's life courses – those who have been *constant volunteers* involved for much of their adult lives; *serial volunteers* also involved for much of their lives but intermittently and for a variety of organisations; and *trigger volunteers* whose volunteering only began in old age. Hogg has followed the life experiences of three individuals of each type to tease out how a variety of factors – paid work, volunteering and family life – interact with one another over the course of their lives and provides 'a nuanced understanding of when and how people volunteer than previous work has been able to' (2006, p.186).

Understanding better how volunteers engage and disengage with voluntary action at different times of their life may also provide a useful context for the kinds of 'headline' figure that feature in surveys which provide a snapshot of volunteer numbers at the time when the study was conducted.

The 'stalwarts'

Our insights into volunteering have also been developed by another important distinction that has been made between different types of volunteer engagement. At the far end of the spectrum from the classic episodic volunteer we can locate the minority that makes up the

civic core (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012) or the stalwarts (Nicholls, 2017), a minority of volunteers who carry out the majority of the work that is undertaken by the volunteers as a whole. The broad picture is that the 20% of volunteers categorised as belonging to the core are responsible for 80% of the organisation's work.

A similar profile of volunteering was identified by an audit of Enniskillen's Neighbourhood Renewal Area: 'Whilst there are only a small number of volunteers in the NRA, the frequency of activity is surprisingly high with 69% of volunteers undertaking their chosen work at least once a week', although the authors' comment that this 'exceptionally high level of commitment offers organisations scope to use these volunteers to help recruit new people to the organisation' may be rather optimistic (VSB, 2009, p.38).

Formal and informal volunteering

Another recent development in the ways in which researchers have studied volunteers has been the blurring of the clear distinction between formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering has been regarded as taking place as part of the volunteer's involvement in an organisation while informal volunteering has been seen as 'helping' out a friend or a neighbour on an individual basis. Ellis Paine and colleagues have suggested that it would be more helpful to introduce a third category. Alongside 'organised' or formal volunteering and 'individual' or informal volunteering they would add 'collective' volunteering undertaken in groups which are not formally constituted but come together to address a common need or interest (2014, pp.18-19). A similar but more elaborate attempt to map a spectrum of volunteering participation to show how different types of individual, collective and organised activities can be seen as more or less 'formal' (Woolvin and Harper, 2014; Harper, 2015).

A study of volunteering in the Short Strand and Sion Mills neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland shared these views: 'The findings from this research suggest that volunteering and community participation needs to be understood as a "spectrum of formality" extending from clear roles and responsibilities in a registered organisation … through irregular or ad hoc involvement helping a local group with which you have a personal connection, to helping a neighbour with day to day tasks' (Hickman et al, 2014; p49).

The potential importance of these insights has been enhanced by some of the recent trends already noted above. Looser-knit forms of collective volunteering enable the involvement of the 'new model' of volunteering; are suitable for some forms of episodic volunteering; provide the framework for some virtual forms; and may well offer ways through which Generations X and Y can develop opportunities for voluntary action.

Change in the kinds of activity volunteers are involved in

Lindsey and Mohan's review of the data sources for the period 1979 to 2017, essentially reflects long-term continuity in the kinds of formal volunteering recorded in England; they refer to 'broad stability in the activities being carried out by volunteers'. And they go on to say that 'when it comes to the groups and organisations assisted by volunteers, there is consistency in the rankings: sport, hobbies and recreation, religious groups, children's education and youth activities have remained at the top of the list'.

On the one hand they find that there have been some important changes: '[O]ver time, however, the proportion of individuals who say they are giving help to groups working in the working in the health/education/disability fields or working with the elderly has slipped down the order'. The authors speculate that this might be the consequence of an increase in the paid workforce in these parts of the sector but, they do not have the data to test this idea. But 'it might also suggest', they go on to say, 'that meeting basic social needs through voluntary action will become more challenging, particularly within an ageing society'

On the other hand they find that there has been a growth in the number of volunteers engaged in environmental groups which reflects the greater public interest in the protecting the environment and a decrease in the number of volunteers involved in fund-raising activities which may be a consequence of the increasing use of digital technology rather than the traditional collecting tin (Lindsey and Mohan, 2018, forthcoming, pp.267-8).

Attitudes to the 'shrinking' state

Lindsey and Mohan use the data collected from the Mass Observation Archive to address attitudes to the state and volunteering as different ways of meeting need and the perceived need for volunteers to meet the pressure on overstretched services as the state shrinks. Their respondents were adamant that it was not appropriate for volunteers to support what should be essential services provided by the state. In any case few of them felt that they had the capacity to take on more than they were already doing.

The authors found three grounds for scepticism about the capacity of people to take on the commitments of the state:

- People would respond to growing social need by concentrating on 'strong' links with family and neighbours rather than engaging in wider community needs.

- There was a 'strong sense of where the boundary should lie between statutory responsibility and voluntary initiative'.

- Individuals and less affluent communities were unlikely to have the time and other resources to take on further commitments (2018, forthcoming, pp263-5).

The quality of the volunteering experience

Finally, there are significant trends that shape the quality of the ways in which volunteering can be experienced and the ways in which organisations may try to 'manage' volunteers' work. From the appointment of the first volunteer managers in the 1960s there has been a growing consensus that the work of volunteers needed to be better organised, supervised and supported. And there is a good deal of evidence to show that such lessons have been learned. A survey of volunteers published in 2007 by Low et al. found high levels of satisfaction; more than nine out of ten said they could cope with the tasks they had been asked to carry out; that their efforts were appreciated and that they had been given opportunities to do things they wanted to do. And less than a third or 31 per cent felt that their work could be better organised

in marked contrast to the 71 per cent of respondents from a 1997 survey (Davis Smith, 1998) who were dissatisfied with the way their work had been organised.

Nevertheless, many volunteers were critical of the extent to which organisations had introduced formal managerial and bureaucratic procedures and practices which they felt were inappropriate and unwelcome for the volunteering experience (Gaskin, 2003). Volunteering had become tied up with too much red tape and was becoming too much like paid work – to the point at which people were voting with their feet (Machin and Ellis Paine, 2008). But disaffection was not simply the product of too much paperwork and too many formal procedures; it was also the response to a feeling that the quality of the volunteering experience had been compromised and volunteers were missing the companionship and teamwork that had been a feature of their work together with the ability to contribute to developing and designing services and shaping the experience (Rochester et al., 2010, Rochester, 2013). Formal managerial procedures might be found appropriate for some organisations but more flexible, 'home-grown' and participatory ways of organising volunteering were more appropriate in other circumstances.

3. Some Implications and Conclusions

Thoughts about the 'supply' of volunteers

- Any significant growth in volunteering numbers seems extremely unlikely. The headline figures have remained static for decades and our understanding of the life-course approach to volunteering has helped to explain why or how this has happened – the number involved in volunteering at any one time fails to reflect the number of people who take part at various stages of their lives.

- Despite the optimism expressed by various people interested in specific areas of work, any attempt to recruit significant numbers of volunteers to substitute for hard-pressed state services is unlikely to succeed. The numbers of those who have been supporting work in the health/education/disability fields or working with the elderly have decreased. And there is strong resistance to this kind of substitution.

- There are likely to be fewer committed long-term volunteers. This is partly because of a less than helpful environment and partly because of a change in the way volunteers increasingly see themselves.

- Any reduction in the pool of committed long-term volunteers is likely to impact on the numbers of those involved in the 'civic core'.

Newer Types of Volunteering

- There will be more episodic volunteers, and this might mean that volunteer-involving-organisations will need to work harder to devise opportunities and secure placements for them.

- The impact of the digital revolution may exacerbate this trend by increasing the range of options for volunteering but may also help to overcome the problem by the use of social media.

- The use of social media might help to create a new generation of digital volunteers, although it is not entirely clear how that might play out.

A Strategic Approach to Volunteering

- The need for a strategic approach to volunteering is as important as it has ever been, but it needs to be based on issues of quality rather than quantity.

- And it needs to take a multi-pronged approach which would involve:

- The need to protect and support the 'stalwarts' and the committed long-term volunteers who could be seen as under threat.

- The need to gain the greatest benefit we can from the episodic and the 'revolving door' kind of volunteering.

- The need to address the 'big issues' involved in virtual volunteering – a threat and/or an opportunity?

- Overall there will be a growing need to pay more attention to the quality of the volunteer experience, and there is no simple 'one size fits all' approach to supporting or 'managing' volunteers based on the techniques of human resources management as developed in the for-profit sector.

- And who will drive the strategy: policy makers with vision who understand that the drive for volunteering is not just about what it can do for government and those who work in the volunteering 'industry' who believe that what matters is what volunteering can do for volunteers themselves as well as other people.

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