



Volunteering – the making of communities?

Provisionally scheduled:
Wednesday 26th August: 9am – 12.50pm



Session Organisers:

Stuart Muirhead (University of Dundee, Forestry Commission Scotland)

Chair: session one

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Chair: session two

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Session abstract:

Against a background of concern at declining political participation, anxieties about welfare provision, and worries about the meaning of citizenship, increasing attention is being given to voluntary activity as a potential panacea to the problems of post-Fordism (Brown et al., 2000). Associated with this has been increased interest in social capital and norms of trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 1995) and claims for the relationship between volunteering and social capital, active citizenship, social inclusion and health and wellbeing significantly raising the profile of volunteering in political and academic discourse.

Research assessing geographical variations in the quantity of voluntary activity being undertaken at the international (Salamon et al. 2003, Dekker et al. 1998) and national (Low et al. 2007, Kitchen et al. 2006) scales is well established. Whilst variations in the amount of voluntary activity undertaken by individuals of particular socio-economic group (Williams 2003a, 2003b, 2002), ethnicity (Reilly 2004, Pankaj 2002) and age (Onyx and Leonard 2002), for example, is also increasingly well documented. The nature - that is - the motivations for, processes of and experiences and meanings generated through voluntary activity for both individuals and groups remains relatively under-researched, however.

These sessions use the above as a starting point, to facilitate discussion between academics, practitioners and policy makers.

Volunteering – the making of communities?

Session one

*Provisionally scheduled:
Wednesday 26th August 2009, 9am – 10.40am.*

Paper 1

Title: Losing their Place? (Re-)positioning volunteering within third sector organisations

Author(s):

Angela Ellis Paine (Institute for Volunteering Research)
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Presenter: Angela Ellis Paine (Institute for Volunteering Research)

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Abstract: Third sector organisations are under increasing pressure to formalise and professionalise the ways in which they work. As their role in public service delivery, for example, has increased they have tended to adopt the organisational norms and methods of the corporate and public sectors (see for example, Harris and Rochester, 2001). This has implications for the ways they involve, organize and support volunteers.

Drawing on research undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research, this paper will explore the implications of professionalization and formalisation for volunteers and the volunteering movement as a whole. It will explore the development of the 'volunteering industry' and associated move towards more formal ways of working with volunteers, including the increasing application of 'modern' (Zimmeck, 2001) or 'top-down' (Holmes, 2003) management practices. It will then explore the impacts of these developments, arguing that while they brings benefits they also poses a series of challenges to the experience and spirit of volunteering by making it more work-like and regulated, less inclusive, creative, sociable, and flexible for volunteers.

The final section of the paper will set out a research agenda to explore further implications for the positioning, voice and power of volunteers within organisations. Rather than suggesting that these developments are inevitable, this will include exploring ways in which organisations have sought to resist them by trying to balance informality with professionalism, involving volunteers in decision-making, and maintaining the position of volunteers as co-owners rather than as resources to be used.

References:

- Harris, M. and Rochester, C. (2001) (eds) *Voluntary Organisations and Social Policy in Britain*, Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Holmes, K (2003) 'Volunteers in the Heritage Sector: A neglected audience?' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 9(4), pp 341-355
- Zimmeck, M. (2001) *The Right Stuff: New ways of thinking about managing volunteers*, London: Institute for Volunteering Research.

Paper 2

Title: Exploring the nature and extent of informal volunteering in deprived Scottish communities across the lifecourse.

Author(s): Mike Woolvin (University of Dundee, Volunteer Development Scotland)

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Presenter: Mike Woolvin (University of Dundee, Volunteer Development Scotland)

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Abstract: Claims are increasingly made for the relationship between volunteering and social capital, active citizenship and social inclusion. In encouraging formal volunteering however it has been argued that we are focussing on a model of participation more characteristic of affluent communities. The distinctive nature of informal volunteering remains relatively under-researched. This paper reflects on researching the nature and extent of informal volunteering in socio-economically marginal communities in Scotland across the lifecourse, paying particular attention to potential relationship(s) between informal and formal volunteering and the implications the 'professionalisation' of certain aspects of formal volunteering has had.

Where we might place activities as diverse as 'community action', 'community consultation', 'helping out', 'formal volunteering' and 'time banking' to name but a few along a 'spectrum' of voluntary activity is outlined. This is employed as a research framework allowing biographic interviews, semi-structured key informant interviews and focus group studies in a number of marginal Scottish communities to be undertaken. Emerging themes at the conclusion of the primary data collection phase in a number of deprived Scottish communities are discussed. These include the norms of trust, reciprocity, giving and receiving which help shape the nature of informal voluntary activity, the key lifecourse events which facilitate and constrain its development, the (multiple) pathways between different types of voluntary activity and the barriers faced at different stages in the voluntary activity 'journey'.

Paper 3

Title: Study Abroad and Volunteering as engaging with Global Citizenship

Author(s): Jill Fenton (University of Connecticut)

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Presenter: Jill Fenton (University of Connecticut)

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Abstract: A handful of North American study abroad programmes are currently involved in a cultural turn. Rejected is a curriculum offering students commercial travel masquerading as academic experience¹. As an alternative, these new North American programmes emphasize *effective citizenship* and participation in civil society through internship experiences within the voluntary sector. Such citizenship is founded on democracy. It is moral and post-national, taking seriously citizens' relationships to human rights and global obligations with respect to international law and global institutions; a moral and political global citizenship. For University of Connecticut undergraduate students, London is the *local* context for this effective citizenship wherein they participate in one-day-a-week volunteering either at a primary or secondary school, or within an NGO (such as those concerned with young offenders or drug rehabilitation), or community art projects. Such projects develop volunteers' sense of place and identity as global citizens, while relations are fostered between education institutions, voluntary organisations and communities collectively motivated to work in a participatory context that encourages individuals to be critical and questioning, even as they help to improve the lives of the people they meet.

In this paper, I will discuss volunteering in the context of UConn's aim to nurture students as global citizens. In conveying the experience of student volunteers, organisations, and communities, I will unfold the multiple senses and scales of community that are engaged in evolving a collective agenda of citizenship. In delivering this paper to British geographers, I enquire if the UConn model can offer students in British universities more *meaningful* engagement with the *human* in humanistic geography? Indeed, can higher education institutions learn from UConn's *volunteering* agenda?

¹ Lewin, R., (May, 2009), 'Introduction: The quest for Global Citizenship through Study Abroad,' in Lewin, R. (ed), *Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad*, London and New York: Routledge)

Paper 4

Title: Can civil engineers be 'radical' too? A perspective on emerging voluntary activity in the area of Flood Management.

Author(s): Jonathan Simm (HR Wallingford, University of Nottingham)

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Presenter: Jonathan Simm (HR Wallingford, University of Nottingham)

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Abstract: In Flood Risk Management, stakeholder engagement or "citizen participation" has been recognised at the European Level (UNECE, 1998, European Communities, 2003) and is part of UK national policy (HM Government, 2005; 2008) However, the forms of participation now emerging in flood management go well beyond consultation and engagement to local funding and participation, a trend which was supported by Sir Michael Pitt's report on the Summer 2007 floods (Cabinet Office, 2008).

Alongside these changes, the pressures on limited budgets within organisations like the Environment Agency and prioritisation of maintenance work has meant that the service that smaller (often rural) communities have come to expect is unlikely to continue. Many citizens now feel that reduced levels of maintenance are contributing to an increased risk of flooding and consequently, local Flood Action Groups are starting to form to organise maintenance work or construct flood defences.

Based on semi-structured interview data, the paper will provide some reflections on groups within the Thames Region and on the South Coast and will contrast this with comparable experience in parts of the USA. The discussion will cover the activities (weed cutting, dredging, defence repair/raising, etc.) and motivations (desire to mitigate loss and reduce insurance premiums, active citizenship, physical fitness, etc) of these groups. The paper will also identify some barriers to voluntary activity, including legal and insurance issues and riparian ownership and will conclude with some reflections on the extent to which such activities have helped to build a sense of community and/or sense of place.

References

Cabinet Office, 2008. *The Pitt review: leaning lessons from the Summer 2007 floods*. London, Cabinet Office.

HM Government, 2005. *Securing the Future - UK Government sustainable development strategy*. London, HMSO.

HM Government, 2008. *Communities in control: real people, real power*. London: HMSO.

European Communities, 2003. *Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). Guidance document No. 8: Public participation in relation to the Water Framework Directive*.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1998. Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. Aarhus, Denmark, June.

Paper 5

Title: Experiencing youth transitions and global community through international evangelical volunteering in Latin America

Author(s):

Matt Baillie-Smith, Centre for Public Policy (Northumbria University).
Peter Hopkins (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University).
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Presenter: Nina Laurie and Peter Hopkins (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University)

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Abstract: This paper explores what happens to the religious identities and spiritual understandings of young evangelical Christians when they participate in faith-based international volunteering. In particular it focuses on the life course and the ways in which young people's faith-based volunteering relates to their experiences of being a young person, their transitions to adulthood and what it means to be a religious adult. It examines the experiences of volunteers working with 'Latin Link', an evangelical Christian organisation which sends teams of young people on short term programs to Latin America. As a non-denominational organisation Latin Link attracts young people from a variety of UK churches including Anglicans, Church of Scotland, Baptists, Presbyterians and other nonconformist denominations to work with Latin American evangelical churches on a range of projects requiring basic building input. Even though the majority of Latin Link volunteers would identify as evangelical, the church contexts into which they are placed are often more conservative than their 'home churches'. With increasing engagement from British youth and British evangelical churches in wider social justice movements like Make Poverty History and Jubilee 2000, greater awareness of development questions can challenge the overall approach of faith-based volunteering and the value of the actual work carried out in specific projects. The negotiation of such tensions is a focus for exploring the ways in which faith-based volunteering influences how young people understand the relationship between global citizenship and religious identities and how young evangelical Christians' personal journeys through international volunteering shape their articulations of becoming or being a (global) citizen as part of and beyond their faith community.

Volunteering – the making of communities?

Session two

*Provisionally scheduled:
Wednesday 26th August 11.10am – 12.50pm.*

Paper 1

- Title:** For ever, for everyone? Property, community and volunteering at the National Trust.
- Author(s):** Mark Crosby (National Trust) mark.crosby@nationaltrust.org.uk
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- Presenter:** Mark Crosby (National Trust) mark.crosby@nationaltrust.org.uk
Helen Timbrell (National Trust) helen.timbrell@nationaltrust.org.uk
- Abstract:** In 2007/8 over 52,000 volunteered with the National Trust at properties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They donated time with an equivalent financial value in excess of £21m and enabled the organisation to continue to share the historic houses, coast, countryside it cares for on behalf of the nation.
- Recent surveys of Trust volunteers (IVR, 2004 and 2008) show them to be highly motivated and committed to the organisation with many having over 20 years service. These surveys do, however, also identify particular attachments between volunteers and the individual property where they most regularly volunteer and a potential lack of engagement with the organisation overall.
- We are interested in the implications of this for the organisation, our volunteers and the local communities in which our properties are based: what role do National Trust volunteers play in helping us engage with all members of our local community and making real our mission of caring for special places, "Forever, For everyone"? To what extent does volunteering at a National Trust property support the development of social capital, particularly bridging social capital? What role does this close attachment to a particular property and length of service play in generating negative social capital and what are the implications of this for our management of volunteering? With increasing evidence of geographical variations in the nature, meaning and impact of volunteering (Timbrell, 2006) should we develop more dynamic and spatially distinct approaches to volunteer involvement and what role does the current funding for volunteering development play in this?

Paper 2

Title: Breaking down the barriers through volunteering

Author(s): Iqbal M Mostafa (Centre for Study and Research)

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Presenter: Iqbal M Mostafa (Centre for Study and Research)

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Abstract: One of the most important social tools at the disposal of the individual, to assist in the breaking down of the barriers that clearly exist between certain segments of community and in the creation of harmony, integration and equal opportunities, is open dialogue on the subject of making truly vibrant and cohesive communities through volunteering.

The recent survey reports and statistical data about levels of significant disadvantage faced by some communities in the labour market have made it clear that some of the most important issues, challenges and debates surrounding 21st century life are yet to be dealt with. Equally worrying is there are not enough people from minority ethnic groups wanting to volunteer in community activities although their participation in community planning and processes can be an important element to a cohesive, dynamic and well-integrated community.

This paper enables an exploration of the dynamics of power, interdependence and integration of community groups and identification of barriers that prevent people from becoming involved actively in their communities. The paper offers different contexts for voluntary engagement in community activities in order to break down the barriers. It also suggests more effective practice in the field of community empowerment and participation of minority ethnic groups. At the same time it emphasises the urgent need for the creation of effective volunteering opportunities through which people will gain a set of specific skills, knowledge, tools and behaviours, become more confident about raising issues of concerns in their communities and are able to make effective plans for their future.

Paper 3

Title: Professional Volunteers and Pets that Work: The Changing Geographies of Mountain Rescue Teams in the UK and New Zealand

Author(s): Richard Yarwood (University of Plymouth)

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Abstract: The emergency services rely on volunteers to provide services in remote and rural places. Over time, close connections have arisen between specific places and voluntary teams that reflect both the wider organisational structures of the emergency services as well as local knowledge of the communities and environments that they serve. This paper explores these geographies with reference to a study of voluntary Search and Rescue (SAR) teams in the UK and NZ.

Although SAR teams have always operated within discourses that emphasise 'team-working' and providing a 'professional' service, recent legislation, as well as changes in the geographies of SAR incidents, has impacted on SAR teams and their relationships with the public, other emergency services and the places they serve. The paper examines these changes and examines their impact on the operation and performance of voluntary SAR teams, including what obstacles are removed and created for those wishing to volunteer for them. It concludes by questioning their future within current political frameworks.

Paper 4

Title: Nature and well-being: building social and emotional capital through environmental volunteering

Author(s): Stuart Muirhead (University of Dundee, Forestry Commission Scotland)

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Presenter: Stuart Muirhead (University of Dundee, Forestry Commission Scotland)

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the links between well-being, nature and environmental volunteering, with a focus on how social and emotional capital is engendered through active nature work. There is limited research on environmental volunteering and its impact on health and well-being and this project will fill that gap. While this research is sensitive to current theoretical interests in emotional and embodied geographies and contributes to emerging conceptual agendas about human-nature relations, the project will also provide policy relevant research that actively contributes to a volunteering strategy for the Forestry Commission Scotland and the Scottish Government.

The study has involved conducting research with four environmental volunteering groups across Scotland. These groups work in very diverse geographic locations and work in differing ways according to the types of task that they carry out. This paper will focus particularly on not only the individual well-being impacts of this specific type of volunteering, but also those of the wider community and the links and cohesion that this social and emotional capital may stimulate.

Paper 5

Title: Generating a sense of 'place', 'responsibility' and 'passion' for community citizenship through volunteering

Author(s): Alex Bone (The Campaign Company)

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Abstract: There are too many insufficient volunteering opportunities currently available to all ages. With many organisations primarily focused on service delivery, any sense of belonging is something the volunteer must obtain as a by-product. It is entirely the responsibility of the volunteer to develop a 'place' or 'role' for themselves in an organisation.

Indeed organisations sometimes demand a commitment of over ten years before any form of peer recognition is formally bestowed. The irony is that these volunteers do not need to establish a sense of place, often being older and having a rooted understanding of their self-worth.

Projects have been run to develop this community spirit and self-worth in a younger age too. Full feedback is currently being conducted but some simple principles have emerged:

- Volunteers are tasked with real responsibilities; their participation is key to the project's success.
- The project, although sometimes based within a set time frame is organic and can be adapted based upon feedback.
- It plays to a particular passion in the volunteer; people are willing to forego other activities/commitments to be a part of it.
- Time is given for volunteers to come together, separate from prescribed tasks to recognise others contributions.

Volunteers begin to feel comfortable challenging and sharing ideas and even contribute more informally to the development of the organisation. A 'community' can be generated through the volunteer feeling 'needed' as part of a team that is required to deliver a project benefiting a number of partners.