

RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT IN VOLUNTARY WORK

Ynte GILLES

1 INTRODUCTION

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Imagine volunteers are batteries. To be more specific rechargeable batteries...
In Flanders more than 3 million people are involved in voluntary work. Are those people also subject to change? Yes, they are.

Is it important that we talk about it? Yes, we have to.

Several sociological studies have proven that voluntary work is imperative to a strong community in very many ways. Social cohesion, sense for citizenship, gross national happiness product are improved by this phenomenon. It's also a fact that a lot of organizations need more volunteers than they already have. For instance, in Flanders, there is a growing need of unpaid care to support the booming sector of elderly care or sport.

So how do we react on the raising need of more volunteers and different types of volunteers? How can we bring together the old school management (don't waste the good things) and new paradigms into a flexible, solid and foremost sustainable way.

In this paper I want to bring up these items:

New paradigms of the volunteer.

Sustainable policy of voluntary organizations. Some thoughts and suggestions.

2 DEFINITIONS SUSTAINABILITY – VOLUNTARY WORK

2.1 Definition of voluntary work

"Voluntary and unpaid commitment for the benefit of others and this in a more or less organized way."

This is a broad but at the same time a monolithic way to see at his definition as there are so many dimensions. Interpretation is for instance related to sector (sports, care, socio-cultural,...), gender, age, education level,...

2.2 Definition of sustainability

"Sustainability is the capacity to endure. It is the long-term maintenance of responsibility, which has environmental, economic, and social dimensions, and encompasses the concept of stewardship, the responsible management of resources."

Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which we can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.

Think also of voluntarism between the three pillars: economy, environment and people (people, profit, planet). As I compare volunteers with rechargeable batteries, we can see them as resources.

Planet: society, environment

Profit: Bruto National Happiness, added value, self realization, status

People: volunteers, clients, participants, organization

3 MICRO: THE VOLUNTEER

3.1 The volunteers profile

Literature and experience shows that there is an uprising type of volunteerism. We can see it as new types of batteries, new ways of energy. The following table summarizes the main differences between the old and the new volunteer together. Both types will then be discussed.

Important is that there is no absolute type. It's not black and white. It's a dynamic mix of different types. Not all batteries are assembled the same way.

	Traditional type	New type
Culture	Traditional Identification	Post Modernism - Individualism
Motivation	Duty - confirmation of identity	Quest for identity
Duration	Long engagement Regular engagement	Short engagement Periodical engagement
Involvement	Involvement based on needs of organization	Involvement based on mix of personal needs and organizational needs
Organization	Hierarchy Loyal	Network Less strong ties to the organization

Relation to professional work	Focus on professional work	Focus on experience and expertise of volunteer
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(Storms B, Beullens, K)

3.1.1 Culture

The traditional volunteer follows a standard biography. He or she is inspired by community and participates in a homogeneous group of mostly common thinking from the same socio-cultural class. The classic volunteer is in other words embedded in a group identity that confirms himself and strengthens him that way. Membership of an organization is strongly determined by kinship relationships, social class, ethnicity, religion, or gender. With the traditional volunteer community gets precedence over the individual. It is not his or her own choice to voluntarily, but it is evident that it does because it is an integral part of community life. For instance in some organizations we can see several generations of involvement because it's a family culture. It's expected somehow that the next generation takes over duties of the previous one. (Storms B, Beullens, K)

The new volunteer is not focused on collective identities but motivates its participations on personal taste and experiences. It leads to more freedom in its choices. However this can lead to 'choice-stress'. 'Did I make the right choice?'

Inconsistent choices therefore constitute a risk for frustration and discontinuity in voluntary episodes. Crucial in the choice of the new volunteer is that he or she combines own experiences or aspirations to voluntary work and the personal 'path of life' into a coherent whole. This dynamic interplay is called "biographical match '.

3.1.2 Motivation

New types of volunteers get their motivation out of self-realization. They search for answers and experiences to fulfill substantial 'life questions' is prominent. Their experiences in voluntary work lead to new paths and visions. The process and exploration, the construction of own identity is very important. The search for voluntary work which matches with their current expectations, vision, background and interests can be stressful. There are so many choices you have to make. There are so many possibilities. Within this path of choosing it is normal that you will eventually make a wrong choice. This also will give stress. But it will also give direction to other possibilities.

Traditional volunteers get their motivation mainly out of a confirmation of predestined identity. It can be stated that the common sense is more important than the individual. This

often comes with an idea of altruism. This doesn't mean that there are no individual needs or 'rewards'. Status and confirmation of self identity can be rewarding. There is a duty that has to be done and accomplishing this is satisfying. Relating to batteries this can mean that 'wrong' choices will lower the level of energy. The knowledge behind the 'wrong' choice can lead to better choices which can lead to increase your level of energy.

Because the traditional path doesn't include much choice of volunteering, this doesn't mean there is no stress. The feeling of being in a solid predestined structure can give stress. The significant others expect you to fulfill your duty and this for a long time. On long terms this can lead to depleting of the battery. More of this will be discussed in the second part, meso level.

3.1.3 Duration and involvement

The duration of the traditional volunteer is tended to be more long and steadfast. This can be consolidated by strong ties with the same socio- economic class. As traditional volunteers are more likely to have longer 'careers', they are more expected to be represented in the top of the organization.

The engagement of the new volunteer is less predictable because of the 'bricolage' of their voluntary path. This can imply shorter periods of involvement. The involvement is dependent of the individual situation and often this results in the demand of the volunteer to have a well-defined task in time and function. Flexibility and mobility are very important aspects in the commitment of the new volunteer.

3.1.5 Organization

Within the traditional order of volunteering there is one prominent type of organization, highly structured organizations that are based on membership. A strong leadership ensures the coordination of the work of the members. These organizations have a socializing function on the members and ensure the strengthening of the ties between members and between members and the organization. The new volunteer is less concerned with the social roots of the organizations and is less focused on membership, this for the benefit of the specific task that the volunteer wishes to perform. This is expressed inter alia by a stronger bond with the customers than with the organization itself. The new volunteer is consequently more market-oriented or functional. For the leadership of the organization means that the traditional parameters with which the organization is designed to be reviewed.

3.1.6 Relation to professionals

Professionals tend to give less important or supportive tasks in the traditional organization. Most of the work is done by professionals as they are seen as the experts. In traditional organizations where you have a legislative board which consists of experienced volunteers there is tension between them and the executive board of direction (which represents the professionals). As we see that life-long volunteers are diminishing, a lot of supportive tasks have to be done by professionals. Also volunteers who participate on higher levels of the organization are diminishing.

Unlike the situation at the classic volunteer, there is a tendency to blur for the type of new volunteer of voluntary and professional work to establish. The call for expertise and efficiency is present manifest, especially given the increasing complexity of social problems and service provision. Because of this increasing demand for skills, the status of the volunteer's sidekick changes to voluntary expert. These new volunteers are compelled to work in professional situations and therefore they are actively screened, trained and coached.

4 MESO: THE ORGANIZATION

In this chapter we want to dwell on the structures of voluntary organizations and how they can implement sustainability in their policy.

If you want your flashlight to be working, you have to put the right batteries in it. A car needs a different type of battery. The same we can say about the organization and their volunteers. Every organization needs volunteers who match. Vice versa: the volunteer needs the organization who matches most with their constitution. This doesn't imply that you can use only one type of battery, as there are many brands...

4.1 Aspects of policy in voluntary work

- A. Mission of the organization
- B. Vision on voluntary work (eg function and values)
- C. Course
- D. Tasks, functions of voluntary and professional workers
- E. Policy plan with measurable goals

4.2 Mission and vision

It's important to make movement with volunteers instead of for them.

Volunteers are on the one hand an organic resource for the organization but also the legitimation for the course the organization.

It's necessary that volunteers know what the organization they are working with stands for. What is the main goal of the organization? In which way will they reach this goal? In Flanders its obliged by law that organizations have to inform their volunteers. They have to be informed about their legal rights as a volunteer. It's also obliged that they are properly protected by insurance.

The vision must be transparent and backboned by the stakeholders. In which way do organizations include their volunteers to discuss this? Is it in an informal way (discussion groups) or in a formal, legal way (general meeting with legal aspects)? How is the organization organized? As a VZW (non-profit organization) or as an Factual Association? In Belgium there is a significant difference between those types relating to juridical protection, fundraising and employ professionals.

4.3 Course

- * Attract volunteers
- * Welcome and orientation
- * Education
- * Support
- *Evaluation
- *Exit

People can be voluntarily committed for various reasons. The challenge is therefore the right person in the right place. That's why not only recruitment of volunteers is important but also the orientation. Too many organizations are too focused on attracting volunteers. To maintain the energy level of the volunteer the screening and matching should be done sufficiently. It is critical to make negotiations between the needs of the organization and the needs of the volunteer. To keep a sustainable pool of volunteers, organizations have to care about needs and expectations of the volunteer. Mainstream policy is still only focused on 'what competences does our volunteer need to have?'. A view on potential and the willingness to stimulate and develop those skills can be a shared responsibility and a more sustainable view in my opinion. A volunteer today wants to know what task is involved and what is expected.

As the recruitment of new volunteers is done, welcome and orientation are often forgotten. This however has a major impact on the starting level of energy. Education and support are crucial factors on the generative (rechargeable) aspect of volunteers.

Evaluation is a necessary tool to keep orientation and motivation alive. It's also a strategic key to adjust global policy. Demand-oriented survey is a very useful method not only for recruitment and orientation but also for evaluation and exit. It can be a sustainable (and time-consuming) method to increase shared responsibility and participation through the course of the volunteer. Face to face discourse is recommended for exit. It gives the opportunity to value your volunteer, ask for reasons and search for alternative ways in voluntary work.

During the course it is important to implement the next aspects who are crucial for sustainable management and thus keeping the energy level up:

- To inform your volunteers: about tasks, legal status, possibilities, mission,...
- To include your volunteers: participation in activities, leisure but also legitimization of the vision,...
- To value your volunteers: mostly forgotten in the course is the appreciation of volunteers, nevertheless a powerful tool
- To activate: this is traditionally the focus of most organizations. Get things done.

Flexivol (Gaskin 1998)

The FLEXIVOL wish list wants to offer a success formula to the youth culture of the current self-made generation compatible with the new styles of volunteering. This includes the following dimensions:

- ' Flexibility ': flexible work and flexible working hours are for young people a top priority. Unlike the pressure they encounter on other life domains, they cherish a certain degree of freedom and spontaneity in their volunteer work.
- ' Legitimacy ': volunteering is facing legitimacy problems. The old-fashioned atmosphere of charity which restrains many young people of volunteering. There are so many other, more trendy areas that are active.
- 'Ease of acces ': access to volunteering can be widened by as much information as possible, to provide extra incentives and low threshold activities. A noncommittal

acquaintance or 'getting to know each other game' can become an intense longer-term commitment.

- 'Xperience ': young people expect the (work) experience they acquire during their voluntary commitment is also useful for their personal development and career prospects. These instrumental motifs occur more frequently with young people.

- 'Incentives ': volunteering competes with other leisure activities. For the time and attention of youth volunteering, it is useful to ensure incentives and rewards in volunteering.

- 'Variety ': youth demand a large variety, both in the variety of activities as in the degree of involvement and responsibility.

- 'Organization ': volunteering must be efficient but informal organized. A bureaucratic setting, nanny and control are out of the question.

- 'Laughs ': volunteering should be fun. Social contact, relaxation and have fun volunteering attractive for young people.

4.4 Flexible management

Traditional organizations tend to have their focus on management of members: member management.

Societal changes have of course their implications for the organization of volunteering. The traditional image of the organization with president, treasurer and secretary who welcome the whole army of loyal volunteers weekly, is gradually becoming more and more less. It makes place for more volatile forms of volunteering.

The new volunteer is less concerned with the social roots of the organizations and is less focused on membership. This for the benefit of the specific task that the volunteer wishes to perform. This is expressed by a stronger bond with the customers or clients of the organization than with the organization itself. Therefore the program, project or activity is more important for the new volunteer rather than the members. This can result in program management.. For the leadership of the organization means that the traditional parameters with which the organization is designed to be reviewed. Every organization is different and thus management must be flexible adjusted. It's not a black - white story.

	Member management	Program management
Structure		
Flexibility	From volunteer to task	From task to volunteer
Integration of work	Integrated approach	Separate projects
Integration in organization	Horizontal	Vertical
Management	Group of managers	One manager
Executive board	Close	Distant
Culture		
Organization culture	Strong	Weak
Involvement	High	Low
Involvement with multiple organizations	Maybe	Probably
Homogeneity	High	Low
Relation	They know each other well	They don't know each other (well)
Motivation 1	Social focus	Focus on goal
Motivation 2	Intern status	Extern status
Process		
Entry fee	High social cost	Low social cost
Exit fee	High	Low
Expectations	Implicitly	Explicitly
Acknowledgement	Number of years	achievement
Hours spent	High	Low
Environment		
Need to adapt	Low	High
Ability to adapt	Low	High

Source: Meijs, L. (2001) New ways of managing volunteers: Combining membership management and program management. *Voluntary Action* 3(3), P. 50.

CONCLUSION

A quality policy plan with an integrated voluntary policy is mandatory. Parameters should be developed in negotiation with volunteers. Organizations must shift their focus from only recruiting for themselves. There must be a coherent course for volunteers which fits for

a broad series of organizations (this does not imply only sector related). Responsibility for deliberation across all sectors of volunteering is not only made by the government but foremost it has to be done by initiative of organizations themselves.

The aim is to treat volunteers as regenerative resources instead of dispensable products. See volunteers as renewable or rechargeable batteries instead of disposable batteries.

Organizations must not only focus on recruitment. A shift of vision and resources have to be made towards support and orientation for a more balanced course.

	traditional	sustainable
Offer of volunteering	Description of tasks, functions	Compromise: organization needs ⇔ needs of volunteer
Recruitment	Suitability	Negotiation
Strategic orientation	Quantity: needs of organization in competition to other organization	Quality answered on mutual needs focused on longer cooperation, also in relation to other organizations
Management	Rigid management and focus on recruitment or member management	Flexible management

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