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Collective and Reflexive Styles of Volunteering: A Sociological Modernization Perspective

Lesley Hustinx^{1,2} and Frans Lammertyn¹

This paper presents a theory-guided examination of the (changing) nature of volunteering through the lens of sociological modernization theories. Existing accounts of qualitative changes in motivational bases and patterns of volunteering are interpreted against the background of broader, modernization-driven social-structural transformations. It is argued that volunteer involvement should be qualified as a biographically embedded reality, and a new analytical framework of collective and reflexive styles of volunteering is constructed along the lines of the ideal-typical biographical models that are delineated by modernization theorists. Styles of volunteering are understood as essentially multidimensional, multiform, and multilevel in nature. Both structural-behavioral and motivational-attitudinal volunteering features are explored along the lines of six different dimensions: the biographical frame of reference, the motivational structure, the course and intensity of commitment, the organizational environment, the choice of (field of) activity, and the relation to paid work.

KEY WORDS: modernization theory; biography; reflexivity; volunteerism; styles of volunteering.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a growing conviction that the nature of volunteering is undergoing radical change as a result of broader social transformations.³ Scholars speak of a transition from “traditional,” “classical,” and “old” to “modern” or “new” (Hustinx, 2001; Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998; Olk, 1989; Rommel

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³In this paper, we take formal volunteering as our analytical point of departure, which is strictly defined as “work for other people, organizations or society as a whole that is carried out in an unpaid, non-compulsory way and within an organizational context” (Van Daal, 1990, p. 7). Cnaan et al. (1996)

et al., 1997), from “collectivistic” to “individualistic” (Eckstein, 2001), from “membership-based” to “program-based” (Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001), or from “institutionalized” to “self-organized” (Beck, 1997; Brömme and Strasser, 2001) types of volunteer participation. In particular, individualization and secularization are assumed to restructure the motivational bases and patterns of volunteering (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, p. 46; Hackett and Mutz, 2002, p. 39). Compared with traditional volunteering as a lifelong and demanding commitment, present-day volunteer efforts appear to occur on a more sporadic, temporary, and non-committal basis. Nowadays, willingness to participate in volunteering seems to be more dependent on personal interests and needs than on service ethic and a sense of obligation to the community. Motivated by a search for self-realization, volunteers demand great freedom of choice and clearly limited assignments with tangible outcomes. Volunteer activities have to be spectacular and entertaining to keep volunteers involved. Instead of caring for older or disabled persons, volunteers nowadays opt for “trendy” problems such as HIV/AIDS, refugees, animal rights, and other modern “hot issues” (see, among others, Bennett, 1998; Gaskin, 1998; Klages, 1998; Safrit and Merrill, 2000; van Daal, 1994; Voyé, 1995; Wuthnow, 1998).

It is striking that although a dramatic change in the meaning and patterns of volunteering is widely heralded, accounts of the exact nature of this transformation process vary greatly and are often under-theorized. So far, few systematic attempts have been made to integrate existing characterizations in a consistent and comprehensive conceptual framework. Moreover, in the absence of historically comparative data, the idea of a transition from “old” to “new” types of volunteering remains based on empirically unsubstantiated assumptions (Jakob, 1993, pp. 17–18).

This paper aims to give an impetus to more fundamental research on this topic by providing a new analytical framework that looks at the current condition of volunteering through the lens of sociological modernization theory. This theory-guided investigation will be developed in two steps. First, we argue that recent social transformations fundamentally affect the social bases of volunteer action, and more specifically the biographical frame of reference of volunteers. Second, modernization theory is taken as a guideline for systematizing the many-faceted observations on changing patterns of involvement. Thus, based on an inventory of the main features mentioned in the literature, a typology is advanced

offer a more flexible approach to assessing volunteer activities. They distinguish four key dimensions, which are approached as a continuum from the purest to the broadest definition of volunteering. These key dimensions are: (1) free choice (free will versus obligation to volunteer), (2) the nature of the remuneration (no remuneration at all versus low pay), (3) the structure or context under which the volunteer activity is performed (formal versus informal), and (4) the intended beneficiaries (helping others versus benefiting oneself). Although people are more inclined to define someone as a volunteer who meets the rigorous definition (compare Handy et al., 2000), the wider-ranging criteria can apply to volunteer activities as well. In this paper, it will become clear that a more differentiated approach to volunteering is preferable with respect to (changing) styles of volunteering.

to reflect the multidimensional, multiform, and multilevel nature of contemporary volunteering.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL CONSEQUENCES OF LATE MODERNITY

The influence of the wider social context in which volunteerism occurs has been one of the least understood issues in existing theory and research on this theme (Wilson, 2000, p. 229). Nevertheless, the popular heralding of a shift from “old” to “new” types of volunteer participation echoes the logic of a broader time diagnosis, in terms of a modernization-driven erosion of the traditional axis and modes of living. Hence, we cannot fully comprehend prevailing images of volunteering without taking into account the way in which contemporary life has been affected by the broader social transformations of recent decades (cf. Wuthnow, 1998).

Recently, there has been an exponential growth in sociological theories and concepts that pronounce the idea of a new, more advanced stage of social evolution within modernity (see, among others, Beck, 1992; Castells, 2000a; Crouch, 1999; Wagner, 1994). In highly varying terms, it is argued that, while the rise of industrial society marked the modernization of pre-modern feudal or peasant society (“first,” “simple,” or “classical” modernization), we are now facing a modernization of the industrial design itself (“second,” “late,” or “reflexive” modernization). Beck et al. (1994) introduce the twofold concept of reflexivity as the pivotal mechanism propelling this late modern shift. First, there is *structural* reflexivity, which refers to the “self-undermining” and “self-transforming” effects of the natural logic of industrial development (Beck, 1994, pp. 174–183). The industrial dynamic quasi-autonomously leads to a social stage in which the guiding ideas and core institutional responses of the first modernity (e.g., the gender-imbalanced nuclear family, the ideal of standardized full employment, the abundant exploitation of nature in the name of progress) no longer appear self-evident or infallible (Beck, 2001, pp. 23–24). Second, there is *self-reflexivity*, or the individual reflection of these changing institutional conditions, which involves a shift from former heteronomous or collective monitoring of agents to the autonomous, active, and permanent *self-monitoring* of individual life narratives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 35; Lash, 1994, pp. 115–116).

This continuing enhancement of “self-reflexivity,” usually referred to as “individualization,” however is not synonymous with a picture of fully autonomous “self-programmable individuals” (Castells, 2000b, p. 19). The biographical consequences of late modernity should on the contrary be understood in terms of growing ambiguity and precariousness. Increased individual freedom of choice intrinsically implies more uncertainty and risk. Moreover, reflexively organized life planning remains strongly dependent on highly abstract and contingent social institutions (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). Heelas (1996) argues in favor of a coexistence of traditional and (late) modern elements, and proposes to “see our

times as a mixture of various trajectories, from the more tradition-informed to the more individualized" (Heelas, 1996, p. 11). At issue in this coexistence thesis is not an epochal replacement of traditional or collective biographical forms by fully modern or self-reflexive ones, but a characterization of contemporary life in terms of a tension between other-informed and self-informed sources of determination (Heelas, 1996, p. 4).

It is our contention that current accounts of "traditional" and "modern" forms of volunteering pre-eminently reflect the fact that contemporary individuals are oscillating between collective and reflexive biographical sources of determination. In what follows we explore the nature of volunteering along the lines of both biographical models.

A NEW ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Guided by the theoretical perspective of coexistence between different sources of biographical determination, we construct a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding and investigating contemporary volunteering. We identify four central principles concerning form and content of present-day volunteering styles. First, with respect to content, styles of volunteering are qualified as biographically embedded patterns of behavior. Further, three formal criteria are formulated concerning the multilevel, multiform, and multidimensional nature of volunteering. These four characteristic properties provide the key materials for our analytical framework.

In essence, a collective and a reflexive volunteer ideal-type evolve from the biographical-analytical perspective elaborated above. These qualitative labels refer to the central premise that individual life must be situated in the field of tension between heteronomous and autonomous sources of determination, and that styles of volunteering consequently vary according to these distinct social roots (cf. Beher et al., 2000; Eckstein, 2001; Keupp, 2001).

To adequately assess the concrete nature of the two volunteer models, three critical formal criteria need to be taken into account. First, it is crucial to draw a distinction between a more objective-structural and a more subjective-motivational level of analysis when examining the present state of volunteering (Beher et al., 2000; Hacket and Mutz, 2002; Kühnlein, 1998). Current variations in volunteering patterns result from a complex interplay of changes in the constitutive environment of volunteering on the one hand, and changes at the level of the volunteer on the other hand. According to Beher et al. (2000, pp. 8–10), the structural context of volunteering consists both of the individual life situation or the "subject-relevant reflection of social structures and relations," and the institutional or organizational settings in which volunteer action takes place. Volunteering has to be interpreted in reference to both the individual biographical consequences of broader social-structural transformations and the organizational changes restructuring the

volunteer field. The subjective-biographical dimension refers to the (changing) relationship between volunteer and commitment, and pays attention to the volunteer's (changing) motivations, attitudes, and cultural value orientations. These two analytical levels consequently refer to the aforementioned "structural" and "individual" reflexivity in late modern life.

Furthermore, the typology developed here should not be interpreted as a rigid dichotomy between two clearly separated and stable categories, but as a flexible continuum reflecting a fundamentally pluriform and dynamic volunteer reality in between the theoretical ideal-types. Contrary to the *polarization* between "traditional" and "modern" volunteer types in the prevailing discourse, we start from the assumption of a radical *pluralization* of contemporary forms of volunteer commitment (Hackett and Mutz, 2002, p. 41). This multiformity thesis is consistent with the theoretical ambiguity of the current modernization phase: we are not confronting a complete rupture between two historically different social forms, but we increasingly come to live in a social environment that is characterized by a mixture of collective and reflexive features. We consequently do not assume that "new" volunteer forms are replacing "old" ones, but that "collective" and "reflexive" ingredients are blended together into a personal volunteer cocktail.

Also, it is indispensable to conceptualize the nature of volunteering as a multi-dimensional reality. Research on volunteering usually takes a "monolithic" approach, deploying it as a "catch-all" term, or reducing it to one of its multiple dimensions (Cnaan and Amroffell, 1994; Cnaan et al., 1996). As a consequence, the volunteer picture remains fragmented. So far, few attempts have been made to systematize the heterogeneous and often isolated accounts into a coherent, multi-dimensional framework. To this end, in this paper we propose a sixfold classification based on the following dimensions (cf. Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998; Rommel et al., 1997): (1) the biographical frame of reference, (2) the motivational structure, (3) the course and intensity of commitment, (4) the organizational environment, (5) the choice of (field of) activity, and (6) the relation to paid work(er).

Below, these dimensions are considered in turn – so as to develop a new classification of collective and reflexive styles of volunteering that understands volunteerism as essentially multidimensional, multilevel, and multiform in nature. Although "collective" and "reflexive" volunteering styles will be outlined as clearly distinguishable ideal-types with distinct roots and characteristics, the analytical framework should be interpreted as a flexible continuum, incorporating multiple structures and motives between both volunteer poles.

Biographical Frame of Reference

Ideal-typically, collective volunteerism involves voluntary acts that are initiated, stipulated, and supervised by groups, regardless of the intentions or preferences of the individual group members (Eckstein, 2001, p. 829). According to

Eckstein (2001, pp. 843–845), this type of volunteer participation is strongly related to community and class homogeneity, with a low residential turnover and with shared needs and wants. In other words: she points at the importance of firm socio-cultural and locally anchored group embeddedness. These volunteers share a strong feeling of belonging to a collective “we.” Group membership is restricted by the rules of ascription (kinship, class, ethnicity, or gender).

In this paradigm, volunteering forms a natural and integral part of community life; it is an unquestioned aspect of the collectively prescribed code of conduct (Eckstein, 2001; Wuthnow, 1996). The individual biographical course only acquires meaning and direction through an all-embracing community involvement; personal aspirations are self-evidently subordinated to collective goal setting (Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998; Wuthnow, 1996). Volunteer service is consequently strongly intermingled with the construction and affirmation of group-based identity: it is an avowal of the volunteer’s community belonging (Jakob, 1993; Wuthnow, 1998) and a way of delineating community boundaries (Eckstein, 2001, p. 847). It is important to note that biographical continuity is an indispensable base for collective volunteerism. Socially predetermined and stable modes of living and thinking ensure a persistent community orientation (Jakob, 1993).

The reflexive volunteer model represents individuated forms of commitment, in which the focus shifts to the volunteer as an individual actor. The structural and individual reflexivity typical for the late modern volunteering context is reflected in the progressive weakening of collectively established identities and life courses. As a result, volunteering is no longer naturally inscribed in collective patterns of behavior. On the contrary, the individual world of experience becomes the principal frame of reference, and the decision to volunteer is dependent on personal considerations in the context of highly individualized situations and experiences. It is a self-induced and self-monitored event within a self-constructed biographical frame (Jakob, 1993, pp. 226–238; Kühnlein, 1998).

The idea of a “biographical match” (Jakob, 1993; Olk, 1990) or “functional match” (Clary et al., 1998; Snyder, 1993) refers to this intensified and dynamic interaction between individual biographical conditions and the volunteer experience: motivation, occasion, and opportunity have to match in a particular biographical stage or situation (Kühnlein and Mutz, 1999, p. 300).⁴ This biographical match presumably functions through two main mechanisms. On the one hand, it probably

⁴Snyder (1993) and Clary et al. (1998) speak of a “functional match” underlying the decision to volunteer. This term refers to a process through which individuals come to see volunteerism in terms of their personal motivations. Continued participation also depends on the “person–situation fit”: the ongoing nature of volunteering relies on the degree to which volunteer roles match the personal motivations of volunteers. We reconsider this functional approach from the broader social context of volunteering. Reflexive modernization theory suggests that motivations are biographically embedded, and thus fundamentally determined by a late modern life course. The individual functions that volunteering may serve should not only be understood in psychological terms of inner motivations, but also in the context of a broader reflexive biography construction.

puts new constraints on volunteer commitment. The increasing precariousness, discontinuity, and unpredictability of the self-established modes of living will unavoidably affect volunteer trajectories. On the other hand, it possibly opens new opportunities since volunteering may offer an important alternative biographical source for eroding collective identities and life courses (Hustinx, 2001).

Motivational Structure

Collective volunteer efforts are rooted in a communal orientation. The prime motivation is an obvious sense of duty or responsibility to a local community or more abstract collectivity. Very often, this prototype is embedded in a religious tradition of benevolence and altruism, or inspired by a coordinating ideology or meaning system (Beck, 1997; Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998; Voyé, 1995). Dedication to the common good is a highly esteemed asset to which deviating individual motivations are easily subordinated (Jakob, 1993, pp. 226–227).

However, this pervasive emphasis on community commitment does not reflect the traditional stereotype of the totally self-sacrificing volunteer (Beck, 1997, pp. 14–15). Through devoted community service, biographical stability is guaranteed and collective identity is reinforced. Embedded in predefined “normal” role behavior, the collective volunteer is relieved from the inevitable “reflexive” alternative of autonomous identity and biography construction (Jakob, 1993, p. 229). Wuthnow (1998, pp. 32–33) for example portrays how male involvement in community organizations in the 1950s is a matter of professional pride and prestige, a symbol of decency and reliability. Volunteerism is a favorable instrument for career and status enhancement within the community of reference (Jakob, 1993, pp. 116–117). On the other hand, women’s participation in community life is motivated by their search for a public definition beyond their ordinary life as a housewife (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 34). These rather self-oriented motivations however are inextricably bound up with clearly defined positions and roles in a (relatively) closed community of relevance.

In a reflexive volunteering framework, the interaction between individualized biography and volunteer experience intensifies. The self-reflexive biographical quest becomes the driving force for primarily self-centered volunteer attitudes. The motivations of reflexive volunteers chiefly arise from experiences of biographical discontinuity, both caused by unintended life crises and by actively chosen biographical re-orientations (Hustinx, 2001; Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998). On the one hand, volunteering is used as a tool to cope with biographical uncertainties and personal problems; on the other hand, the volunteering field is seen as a “market of possibilities” (Evers, 1999, p. 55) for self-realization and the setting of personal goals.

The explicit self-orientation of reflexive volunteers however does not support the popular image of the individualistic volunteer using solidarity as a smart way

of pursuing self-interest (Evers, 1999, p. 54). Several authors observe stronger support for self-directed or instrumental motives among more “modernized” and younger categories of citizens (Barker, 1993; Dekker and Van den Broek, 1998; Jakob, 1993). But this surprisingly does not temper their sense of compassion or duty compared with less modernized citizen groups. A pluralization of motives occurs (Hacket and Mutz, 2002, p. 44) in which other- and self-directed impulses are not necessarily at odds, but come to strengthen and enrich each other (Beck, 1997; Dekker and Van den Broek, 1998; Hustinx, 2001; Klages, 1998; Wuthnow, 1991). A “solidary” (Berking, 1996, p. 189) or “altruistic” (Beck, 1997, p. 19) individualism symbolizes the seemingly contradictory motivational basis of the reflexive type of volunteering.⁵

The Course and Intensity of Commitment

In a collective frame, strong group-based identities and behavioral imperatives ensure a continuous and predictable life course. This socially uniform, “normal” biography provides solid ground for a long-term, unconditional, and regular volunteer commitment (Jakob, 1993, pp. 231–232). Collective volunteers act from a strong and obvious sense of duty toward community or group of reference. The close association between service, group affiliation, and identity affirmation further reinforces the quasi-lifelong efforts of collective volunteers.

The self-evident subordination to collective prescriptions furthermore results in an all-embracing, very intensive involvement that is relatively independent of specific problems or beneficiaries. There is a general and deeply ingrained propensity to strive for the common good of the community or group to which one belongs, reaching beyond the singularity of particular volunteer initiatives or organizations (Jakob, 1993, p. 229). As a result of this natural and total devotion, collective volunteers are likely to represent the core members of volunteer organizations (Pearce, 1993, pp. 47–50).

In a reflexive-modern social environment, the time structure of volunteer involvement radically changes. The unpredictability and discontinuity of the individualized biography are reflected in the rise of irregular and incidental volunteer commitments (Dekker and Hooghe, 2003; Erlinghagen, 2000; Hacket and Mutz, 2002; Heinze and Olk, 1999; Klages, 1998; Safrit and Merrill, 2000). In contrast to the enduring involvement of the collective volunteer, reflexive volunteerism is phased in separate and limited sequences with a specific, highly individualized biographical relevance. It represents a dynamic involvement with frequent

⁵It should be noted that some scholars draw attention to the fact that there are no historically comparable data available to demonstrate that the widely assumed shift from other- to self-orientated motivations has actually taken place. Kühnlein and Böhle (2003) suggest that this idea more likely originates from the fact that there recently has been an increased social and academic awareness of the multi-layered nature of motivations to volunteer than from an actual conversion in the attitudes of volunteers.

entries and withdrawals depending on individual biographical needs and conditions (Hacket and Mutz, 2002; Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein and Mutz, 1999).

Since longevity of service results from active considerations about the “goodness of fit” between volunteer experiences and biographical circumstances, reflexive volunteers demand a considerable amount of flexibility and mobility allowing them to continually shift between activities and organizations according to their own “biographical whims.” They prefer successive *ad hoc* or project-based arrangements with volunteer assignments that are clearly limited in time and space (Behr et al., 2000; Safrit and Merrill, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). In this formula, duration and intensity of involvement are fully adaptable to the preferences and possibilities of the volunteers. The crumbling time horizon of reflexive volunteers thus results in rather ephemeral (Pearce, 1993) or loose (Wuthnow, 1998) involvements.

Organizational Environment

The development of formal voluntary organizations gained momentum in the wake of the transition from a peasant or feudal society to a modern industrial society (Gundelach, 1984; Smith, 1973). A central characteristic of this industrial-modern organizational form is a hierarchical division of labor in which authority is delegated to clearly defined, democratically elected leaders who can act and negotiate on behalf of the association (Gundelach, 1984, p. 1066). This form of voluntary organization is furthermore based on a segmented system with separate organizations for separate areas of life and with clear boundaries between different social classes or between religious or ideological groups. Being community- and/or social class-based, a collective action orientation prevails: each social group or category considers formal voluntary association as the ultimate method for furthering its joint interests (Gundelach, 1984, pp. 1058–1060; Gundelach and Torpe, 1997, p. 53; Smith, 1973, pp. 66–68).

Collective volunteerism ideal-typically thrives in this highly structured, membership-based, and socially or ideologically divided organizational environment. Collective volunteers are likely to operate through overlapping involvements within a dense, rather insular local network of organizations associated with their community or group of reference. A strong leadership core organizes group volunteerism and coordinates the involvement of individual group members (Eckstein, 2001, p. 846). Because of the static and closed nature of the strong, place-based social networks in which collective volunteers typically operate (cf. McPherson et al., 1992, p. 166), social involvement acquires a very specific symbolic meaning. It is a way of reaffirming shared group identity and tight integration in a stable community. As a result, the organization is an important locus for socialization and the strengthening of group ties, and a tight coupling between formal group memberships and volunteering exists. Being a member above all, collective volunteers

strongly identify with the values and goals of the organization, and they show a great sense of responsibility for the organization as a whole rather than purely for the work they undertake (Cameron, 1999, pp. 56–57). Service to the organization is primarily understood as loyalty, i.e., “more an implicit sense of obligation to fellow members than a deep inner commitment to a cause” (Wuthnow, 1998, pp. 33–34). Exclusive membership standards, an ostentatious distinction between members and nonmembers, and a self-reinforcing hierarchical system of rewards for long-term and particularly active members, are keys to strong enduring involvement (Wuthnow, 1998). This may slip into a cliquish atmosphere in which contributing to the good of the community receives the lowest priority (Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001, p. 53; Wuthnow, 1998, p. 46).

The present transition to a late-modern or post-industrial society has resulted in a new wave of voluntary association (Gundelach, 1984, p. 1050) that leads away from the democratically structured, membership-based organization. On the one hand, there has been a rapid growth of value based, non-democratically structured professional organizations (Selle and Stromsnes, 1998, 2001), usually referred to as tertiary organizations (Putnam, 1995). These organizations are highly centralized and market-oriented, with a structural tendency to reduce the membership role to a type of “vicarious commitment” by which individuals “*contract out* the participation task to organizations” (Maloney and Jordan, 1997, pp. 116–118). In addition, the steep growth in staff-led nonprofit organizations also means a break with the associational type of involvement by creating highly specialized roles that are focused on service provision to clients instead of personal contacts with fellow volunteers (cf. Wuthnow, 1998). On the other hand, there is an expanding field of rather informal, self-organized, and decentralized initiatives – with few institutional links transcending the local level, with no clear center of authority, and with limited, project-oriented objectives like self-help groups, parent involvement in schools, or local neighborhood initiatives (see, among others, Beher et al., 2000; Brömme and Strasser, 2001; Gundelach, 1984; Klages, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Selle and Stromsnes, 2001; Sivesind et al., 2002; Wuthnow, 1994, 1998).

Simultaneously with the emergence of new organizational structures, the position and meaning of the organization change: it is no longer a central venue for socialization and identity-creation (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002). A decoupling between membership and volunteering takes place (Goss, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). The archetypal reflexive volunteer does not participate for the sake of belonging to group-bounded organizations, but is more pragmatically focused on the services offered or activities undertaken. Kayal (1991, pp. 300–301), for instance, observes that AIDS volunteers are primarily aimed at a personal or emotional identification with the clients, independently of the organization or setting within which they operate.

In response to these functionally oriented and increasingly individualized volunteer dispositions, there recently has been a remarkable mushrooming of new

institutional structures, initiated by volunteer organizations and governments alike, that are directed at tailoring volunteer activities to the private interests and preferences of the volunteers – instead of putting the organizational targets first (Anheier and Salamon, 1999; Beher et al., 2000; Wollebaek and Selle, 2002). Exemplary is the steep growth of (regional and local) volunteer agencies that purposively search for the optimal tune between specific demands of volunteers and activities offered by organizations. These coordinating agencies embody a “program management model” (Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001) in which a limited and clearly defined contribution to a specific goal is demanded.⁶ In these new, volunteer-centered initiatives, the organizational role shifts from being the central focus of volunteer action to a kind of “enabling structure,” a mediator between a volunteer and a specific project. This implies that reflexive volunteers may become structurally detached from any one particular location or organization. Without strong organizational attachments, reflexive volunteers are a “moving target.”

Choice of (Field of) Activity

In a collective framework, “group-based politics” (Bennett, 1998) stipulate the volunteer’s choice of field of action and activity. The field in which one operates is determined by a self-evident affinity with shared ideologies, religious convictions, and collective identities. According to Voyé (1995, p. 325) this type of volunteerism is based on a universalization of a common culture and way of living (a “good mother,” a “good worker,” a “good life” following Jesus Christ). It is inspired by strong, universal identities that include rich symbols and moral standards (Christianity, the “bourgeoisie,” or the working class). Identification with these strong identities is based on inclusion (“We are all brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ”) or exclusion (“She has been poorly educated,” “He is less fortunate due to a disability”). Collective-grounded volunteerism is parochial and contained in scope, confined to people and groups associated with the community as socially constructed (Eckstein, 2001, p. 847). It typically reflects the idea of bonding, place-based social capital (Putnam, 2000). In this context, entry to a particular field of volunteer action is not dependent on individual decisions but is typically initiated and supervised by others: charismatic community leaders, influential representatives of local organizations, or churches (Eckstein, 2001; Jakob, 1993).

⁶It is important to emphasize that there are considerable cross-national differences in the position and role of volunteer agencies (Heinze and Olk, 1999, pp. 94–95). In the United States, volunteer agencies are institutionalized at the local, regional, and national level. They play a key role in market research and volunteer administration. In Western Europe, on the contrary, volunteer agencies are a relatively new phenomenon anticipating recent structural changes in the nature of volunteering. Meijs and Hoogstad (2001) also note that whereas program volunteering is very common in the United States, the introduction of a program management model is relatively new in the European context (in which volunteerism traditionally has been embedded in a membership paradigm).

Collective volunteers carry out activities that are directed to the community at large. They consequently operate in a multi-purposive set-up and are likely to perform an extensive, diffuse set of activities. The kinds of activities performed moreover correspond to collectively defined identities and roles. The most typical example is the gendered understanding and organization of community involvement. Traditionally complementary gender patterns are reproduced in gender-segregated organizations and types of activity (Barker, 1993; Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein, 1998; Metzendorf and Cnaan, 1992; Voyé, 1995; Wuthnow, 1998).

In a reflexive volunteering context, processes of individualization and globalization create a paradoxical relation between social closeness and geographical distance that crystallizes in a situation of local disintegration amid global integration (Beck, 2001, p. 29). Instead of being anchored in geographical proximity or standardized group cultures, feelings of belonging are increasingly self-selected on the basis of shared interests. These elective social configurations produce a more privatized and self-induced form of solidarity that is inspired by lifestyle and identity politics (Bennett, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Voyé announces a “universalization of particularities” (Voyé, 1995, pp. 325–329), a process in which pre-given collective identifications are replaced by daily feelings of solidarity that are based on individual perceptions of sameness or shared life experiences and problems (cf. Bennett, 1998; Keupp, 2001; Melucci, 1993; Zoll, 1992). These new modes of “inclusion” however are of a very precarious nature and can rapidly change as a result of new striking similarities between life stories. The voluntary response of the gay community or the “worried well” (Kayal, 1991, p. 295) to the AIDS epidemic is a clear example of the mobilizing and bonding power of shared life experiences beyond diverse social backgrounds. Kayal (1991, p. 299) moreover observes how the “heterosexualization” of AIDS and the volunteer corps has come to threaten this particular kind of gay volunteerism.

These “reflexive” connections through shared life experiences and everyday life concerns are an expression of a broader shift toward a “post-materialistic” value pattern, which marks “a shift from political cleavages based on social class conflict toward cleavages based on cultural issues and quality of life concerns” (Inglehart, 1997, p. 237). In addition to this increasing preference for new themes and fields of action, volunteering has entered the age of globalization (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, p. 46). The increasing globalization of social and ecological problems, the rapid expansion of international organizations with branches in countries worldwide, the creation of virtual volunteer communities over the Internet, and the increased volunteer mobility through the institutionalization of volunteer exchange programs, have widened the scope of volunteer efforts beyond place- and group-based boundaries and have led to an intensified interconnection between local volunteer action and global concerns.

The choice of activity is also affected by the volunteer’s detachment from collective frames of reference. Being a volunteering increasingly becomes a

specialized role with a narrow scope (Wuthnow, 1996, 1998). Instead of a coordinating ideology or shared goal, personal preferences and needs dictate what kind of volunteer activities are performed. The prevalence of self-centered volunteer attitudes consequently finds its reflection in a “focused activism” (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995; Voyé, 1995). Moreover, volunteer activities are chosen depending on their concrete and practical nature. Idealism is replaced by more tangible and pragmatic goals. In the case of the Flemish student movement, for instance, very personal one-to-one commitments between students are far more successful than traditional collective action in favor of the global student population (Hustinx et al., 2002).

Relation to Paid Work(er)

Collective volunteerism, with its roots in churches and associational life, is usually associated with a rather amateurish type of involvement based on good intentions and common sense (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 32). The expansion of the modern welfare state has reinforced this “do-gooder” image, defining the volunteer’s role as “a marginal one at best, that is, to supplement professionally planned and delivered services” (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, p. 43). The advance of the professional regime has widened the gap between professional experts and unqualified volunteers. Whereas qualified paid workers provide the lion’s share of the services, volunteers are saddled with auxiliary tasks. This prevalence of professional authority fits into the “paid work centered” model of industrial society (Beck, 2001; Mutz, 2002; Mutz et al., 2000).

In a reflexive volunteering context, the relation between volunteer and professional is ambiguous. Sector blurring, or the increasing interdependence of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, has forced voluntary organizations to function in a manner similar to large public agencies or private companies and to face increasing demands for accountability and efficiency (Gundelach and Torpe, 1997, p. 51). Moreover, the growing complexity and scope of social problems have raised awareness that special expertise is required instead of former “second-rate ways of serving the community” (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 42). As a result, volunteer involvement is currently less seen in terms of membership and goodwill than in terms of effectiveness and accomplishments (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 46). Volunteers are increasingly likely to operate in a professional organizational setting and they face serious demands with regard to the acquisition of specific expertise and levels of performance (Cnaan and Amroffell, 1994, p. 346; Heinze and Olk, 1999, p. 94; Ilsley, 1990, pp. 77–89).

Theoretically, the condition of reflexive volunteering is closely related to the idea of a “new work society” in which the meaning of work extends beyond the contours of paid labor (Kühnlein and Mutz, 1999; Mutz, 2002). In this view, the ongoing restructuring of the labor market and the increasing

discontinuity of occupational biographies bring into perspective a “triad of work”-model, in which paid employment, volunteer work, and self-initiated activities (“Eigenarbeit”) are complementary fields of activity (Kühnlein and Mutz, 1999, pp. 296–301). Viewing volunteering as a valuable substitute for periods of unemployment, some authors (Beck, 1999; Rifkin, 1995) even propose to provide some form of social credit system assuring social benefits alongside monetary contributions to the social security system (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, p. 47). Also indicative for the increasing blurring of boundaries between paid and unpaid work is the rapid expansion of “corporate volunteering,” which explicitly aims at creating synergetic effects between existing expertise and the experiences of private and nonprofit sectors (Janowicz et al., 2000).

DISCUSSION

In this theory-guided exploration of how sociological modernization theory can illuminate our understanding of the meaning and nature of volunteering, an ideal-typical distinction has been made between collective and reflexive styles of volunteering. Table 1 presents the main features of both prototypes – integrated in a multilevel and multidimensional analytical framework.

In the absence of longitudinal data, the historical distinction underlying the prevailing discourse on “old” and “new” volunteerism cannot be substantiated. Instead of focusing on an epochal transition, our analytical framework departs from two different ideal-typical biographical sources of determination. The differences outlined between collective and reflexive volunteers consequently are not exclusively related to a specific time period. For instance, the meaning of volunteering for the individual self was already recognized at the beginning of the twentieth century, being a pre-eminent instrument for female self-development (Jakob, 1993; Voyé, 1995). And today’s accelerating individualization process does not prevent people from actively choosing to live according to a traditional model. On the contrary, a reflexive reevaluation and reproduction of collective values and modes of living is very plausible (cf. Heelas, 1996; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Thompson, 1996). A relevant example is the qualitative shift in the “traditional” religious bases of volunteerism. In contrast to secularization theories relating to a linear decline of organized religion, Wuthnow (1988) clearly demonstrates how American faith-based involvements have kept their vitality through the reorientation of religious practices and the proliferation of highly diverse special purpose groups.

Although we have hypothesized that contemporary dynamics in volunteering consist of a mixture of both collective and reflexive features, modernization theorists predict a progressive erosion of traditional group belongings, and thus a weakening of the collective roots of volunteering. In the absence of adequate

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Exploring Collective and Reflexive Styles of Volunteering

		Styles of volunteering		
		Collective volunteering	Reflexive volunteering	
Biographical frame of reference	Objective: structural-behavioral	Subjective: motivational-attitudinal	Objective: structural-behavioral	
	Subjective: motivational-attitudinal	Objective: structural-behavioral	Subjective: motivational-attitudinal	
Biographical frame of reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standard, collective biography - Biographical continuity - Ascribed group membership - Collectively prescribed code of conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collective identity - Self-evident subordination to collective goal-setting - Avowal of group belongings - Heteronomous monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-constructed biography - Biographical discontinuity - Elective group membership - Self-determined course of action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-identity - Self-reflexivity - Biographical match - Freedom and uncertainty - Self-monitoring
	Motivational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating religious and ideological meaning systems - Clearly defined positions and roles in community of relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obvious sense of duty or responsibility to community or collectivity - Tool for biographical stability and identity affirmation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensive interaction between biographical conditions and volunteer experience - Biographical discontinuities in terms of crises and active re-orientations
Course and intensity of commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predictable life course is basis for long term and regular involvement - Intensive participation - Core involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unconditional, self-evident commitment - All-embracing, total devotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unpredictable life course is basis for short term and irregular, incidental involvement - Dynamic involvement: frequent entries and withdrawals - Flexibility and mobility - Ephemeral or loose involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conditional commitment, depending on biographical needs and conditions - Preference for sequential, project-based arrangements

Table 1. (Continued)

	Styles of volunteering			
	Collective volunteering		Reflexive volunteering	
	Objective: structural-behavioral	Subjective: motivational-attitudinal	Objective: structural-behavioral	Subjective: motivational-attitudinal
Organizational environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hierarchical, socially or ideologically segmented organizational society - Strong leadership core - Tight coupling between formal group membership and volunteering - Associational volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong organizational attachment - Overlapping involvements - Socialization and integration through involvement - Service is understood as loyalty - Strong dedication to organization's values and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tertiary and nonprofit organizations, decentralized initiatives - Decoupling of membership and volunteering - New volunteer-centered institutional structures and forms of recruitment - Program volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak organizational attachment - Vicarious commitment - De-localized commitment - Functionally oriented attitudes: focus on activities offered, not on organization within which they are performed
Choice of (field of) activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion/exclusion based on universalization of a common culture and way of living - Initiated and supervised by others - Reproduction of traditional gender patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group-based politics - Bounding, parochial solidarity - Idealism - Wide-ranging, multi-purpose community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local disintegration amid global integration: globalized elective networks - Interaction between local action and global concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifestyle and identity politics - Daily feelings of solidarity - Pragmatism, focused activism - Preference for personal, one-to-one service - Post-materialistic value pattern - Professional volunteers
Relation to paid work(er)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paid work centered society - Professional authority - Ancillary volunteer position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Well-meaning amateur": good intentions and common sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extended meaning of work: volunteering part of "triad of work" - Professionalization of voluntary sector and volunteerism - Corporate volunteerism 	

empirical research materials, the exact consequences for the nature of volunteering however remain unclear. Based on this theory-guided analysis, some tentative conclusions nevertheless can be drawn.

First, studying volunteering through the lens of (reflexive) modernization theory reveals that we must pay close attention to the (changing) context in which volunteering occurs. Depending on the type of social-structural embeddedness of the volunteers, a radically different meaning and pattern of involvement can be discerned. In contrast to the usual lament about the increased individualism of the “new” volunteer generation, it is important to recognize that a number of social-structural forces are pushing volunteers in a certain direction. Organizations must be attentive to both external pressures (e.g., unpredictable life courses) and internal pressures (e.g., increasing pursuit of professionalism and efficiency) reshaping volunteer’s behavior.

Second, this theoretical analysis suggests that major changes occur in the relationship between volunteer and organization. Volunteer involvement loses its self-evident character; it decreasingly corresponds to strong identifications and long-lasting memberships. A shift toward more reflexive, self-directed forms of volunteering may result in a widening gap between the priorities of the volunteer and the organizational work that has to be done. Another source of conflict lies in the intermittent course of reflexive volunteer involvement. Chances of organizational survival will depend on structural adaptations that can accommodate more self-interested, flexible, and detached forms of involvement.

The third, and maybe most alarming implication of this theoretical investigation is the apparently growing exclusion of less privileged population groups from contemporary volunteer action. The ideal-typical construct of reflexive volunteerism creates a universe of “clever volunteers” (Giddens, 1994, p. 94), who are fully capable of matching individual biographical conditions with appropriate volunteer opportunities, who actively pursue personal interests, and who dispose of substantial educational, professional, and organizational qualifications to meet the standards of highly specialized and self-organized volunteer activities. Ellison (1997) is right to plead for a more constrained sense of reflexivity placing “greater emphasis on the role of contemporary citizenship as a defensive strategy – involving attempts to retain a sense of integration – in a complex and potentially hostile social and political environment” (Ellison, 1997, p. 712). The idea of a defensive engagement should prevent us from being deluded by the image of the completely self-reflexive and self-monitoring volunteer. It may be more appropriate instead to gear recruitment and management practices to the increasing vulnerability and biographical disorientation of a growing number of people in a (relatively) detraditionalized social environment.

Wuthnow (1998, pp. 29–30) sets the cat among the pigeons with the provocative question as to whether volunteering itself may be anachronistic in a time of “loose connections.” Current trends toward more transitory, detached, and

self-centered involvements indeed seem to contradict our intuitive understanding of “who is a volunteer” (cf. Handy et al., 2000). It certainly appears that, if we continue to look to the present state of volunteering with the familiar formal (and often normative – see Beck, 1997, pp. 14–15) categories, we will soon be confronted with the demise of the last volunteer crusader. In this paper, we however have taken up the challenge to refine our understanding of the complex nature and meaning of volunteering. We hope that this theorization of variations and transformations in contemporary styles of volunteering, and the concomitant construction of an analytical framework of “collective and reflexive styles of volunteering” will inform, and better organize, further theoretical and empirical research into present day volunteering.

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