

# Cultural Roots of Voluntary Action in the different countries

by Liebje Hoekendijk \*

## General Remarks

The interest in Volunteers, in their position, incidents and prevalence are more and more the subject of research and policy.

The interest of policymakers is often geared at providing facilities to help volunteer work along. What escapes the attention of policy measures, is what is felt as the basis of the volunteer activity. The values implied are supposed to be something of the volunteer him/herself (the motivation) or a private responsibility of the volunteer association. Public policy however has a lot to do with these values.

In some countries voluntarism is still in the position of "invisibility". In Denmark recently the ministry of social affairs stated that there were hardly any volunteers in Denmark. But when surveys were carried out, it appeared that there are as many volunteers in Denmark and in the other Scandinavian countries, as in other countries of Europe (15% of the population). They are a force to be reckoned with, but how this should be done is unclear. What are they, what do they do? Are they a threat to the ideology that "the state should provide"? Are they a threat to professionalism? Are they a remnant of a time when we had too few provisions? Are they a critical group to question the existing state of affairs, or are they old fashioned do gooders?

Volunteers are in the vulnerable position of either being ignored, seen as a threat, or seen as a basis for reduction of public spending: "back to community care", with the pricetag of a past century attached to it.

So many preconceived ideas are around, that it is no wonder that volunteers themselves often feel insecure as to their value for society of their position in general: their identity.

This article will touch on the position volunteers have, related to their culture.

\* Secretary General, Volunteurope, Lindenlaan 20, 1405 AK Bussum, Netherlands. The author is also President of the European Documentation Centre.

## Preliminary Remarks

The definition of volunteer work by Volunteurope is used, viz.:

- Work done for other persons or for society,
- Work done in a (more or less) organised setting,
- Work done by free choice and with peaceful means,
- Work not done for financial interest (unpaid).

Voluntary action takes place in the field of social service, education, arts, sports, etc. Prof. Dasgupta, in Washington (1988), gave the following definition: "*Voluntary action is a personal response to a cultural need of society*".

The word "voluntary organisation" can best be avoided because it could be confusing. "Voluntary organisation" means: a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, also called NGO. NGOs can be totally professionalised, and statutory organisations (governed by the state) may have volunteers. Generally speaking, there are more volunteers involved in NGOs than in statutory organisations but "volunteer" and "voluntary" cannot be used as synonyms. The term "voluntary organisation" is also confusing in international company, as the boundaries between the two sectors (statutory/voluntary) differ greatly per country. The *volunteer* organisation, however, is run by volunteers.

Speaking about cultural trends one has to generalise. The subject is so broad that in a paper this is unavoidable. We are not looking at the exceptions — there are many — but at the validity of the analysis in general.

Some of the following observations are not limited to volunteers only. Sometimes paid people act in a "volunteer way", and we know that sometimes volunteers act in a very formal, institutionalised way. Trends will be described.

N.B. When something positive is said about volunteers, it is not meant as an implicit criticism of professionals. Both have a place and a value of their own. An English doctor said: "*We medicos add hours to life and the volunteers add life to hours*".

The sources for this article are visits to different countries, stories from people who attended conferences, and studies.

because their aims are pragmatic, dealing with problems of the moment. But this does not mean that the differences in the motivations, as they are, can be neglected!

### **Volunteers as Conciliators**

Volunteers are often conciliators. This is understandable. They do not have an interest in either side, there are no jobs involved, no money. I will mention one:

In Nazareth, Israel, there is a volunteer program, geared at the coexistence of Palestinians and Israelis. Everybody donates one day a week to work in the town to help it with its problems. This cooperation creates mutual respect and understanding. Examples where volunteers were involved in a reconciliation of a conflict can be found in many countries.

### **Volunteers Organised by Government**

Voluntarism is in itself not oppositional, which is illustrated by the fact that sometimes volunteers are organised by government.

Japan knows the Minsei Inn: the local government asks mostly middle-aged volunteers to look after people on its behalf. They visit the homes, ask people to tell them what is going on and they try to mediate between the provisions that are available and the people who need them. It is a honorary job, they are not paid. If asked to join this volunteer group, one cannot very well refuse. This is another illustration of Japanese society, which is based on consensus — not on polarity and conflict. In some western countries voluntary organisations would like to keep their independent position (but accepting subsidy) to be able to criticise government policy if necessary. This is true for instance in Germany. A peculiar fact here is that the Minsei Inn originated in Germany, in the 19th century, (as I learned from a German). The German term *ehrenamtlicher Mitarbeiter* for volunteer still points to the old situation: well-to-do people were asked to serve the community. Magistrates in England have the same position. The Netherlands have volunteers in child care who are appointed by the Ministry of Justice to act as patrons for children in trouble. Often these volunteers start their work blanco, not critically but by identifying with the people in trouble, and finding then that often government rules create or aggravate the problems, they become critical!

The fantastic story from the Philippines of NAMFREL (Never Ask Marcos for Free Elections) — a volunteer movement started by a business man Jake Marquis and joined by middle-aged women, motorcycling youngsters, retired teachers, etc., to guarantee honest elections in the Philippines — shows that volunteers can be independent of the government — even when serving the government's elections. They, and only they, saw to it that Marcos could not twist the elections. And they could do so because they had international moral support.

### **The End of Ideology and a Modern Approach to Voluntarism**

Thirty years ago, the American sociologist Daniel Bell published his book *"The End of Ideology"*. Today it is only too clear that his observation is valid in some cultures. In

the West, charitable, humane values have to some extent been replaced by "each one for himself". Survival of the fittest. The Declaration of Independence, with its *"right to the pursuit of happiness"*, has no longer the effect of consideration for the happiness of the fellow-person but of taking what you want. Marxism has lost its credibility for many followers. We have "no nonsense", Thatcherism, Reaganomics. It is the fundamental belief of many of us that it is wrong when some people do not have the first necessities for life while there are so many rich people around, that there is a right to a decent living for everyone; but the number of believers is declining. We see so many starving people on TV in our homes that we just "accept" the poor people living down the road. We have become callous out of sheer self-defence.

The increase of materialism is the complaint of many volunteer organisers. Some young people do not have the fundamental values, the mentality to be interested in doing volunteer work. They want material gain, "the fast buck". Their values are the riches they see on television: that is the heaven to strive for.

What can volunteerism do? It is true that in some countries it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers. On the other hand, basic social values are not dead and the greatest merit of volunteerism is that it shows this. People want to care, even need to care about each other. Volunteer movements always educate values, some implicitly by the work they do, some explicitly. I mention one example: the young farmer movement in the USA. Their symbol is fourfold: head, hands, heart and health. Plenty to do, working from those concepts.

But not only the old-standing volunteer associations build up values which are declining elsewhere. Volunteerism has some surprisingly modern concepts, like "giving is also gaining". Volunteer work is done for the other person, but it is pleasure: you do it also for yourself, and this is nothing to be ashamed of, it is healthy. The volunteer who is not "sacrificing" but actually likes doing it has a better, positive message: "I like it to be with you".

This modern approach keeps reality in volunteer projects. If you praise volunteers as sort of saints you cannot recruit any: that image is too unrealistic, nobody can meet its standard. Volunteers are no angels, they are no better than other people. The interesting thing about them is that they do a job which is rather unique: a service without the current countervalue of money being passed on to them. In this way they weaken the idea which is dominant in our society: "a good life is a life with goods".

Volunteerism weakens other standing ideas. I mention one: the power levels. You have influential and rich people mostly men, and lower levels in society, mostly women. In volunteerism many women are active, and they show initiative and leadership. I am thinking here of the project "Education to Democracy" (Conciencia, in Colombia), which is led mostly by women and which teaches the mechanics of the democratic structure, to enable people to protect their interests. Because so many women are involved, the project is not taken seriously, — which is an asset: the people in power will experience its influence only when it is too late. The fact that women do have a great influence — not much noticed yet — was one of the main outcomes of the Washington conference.

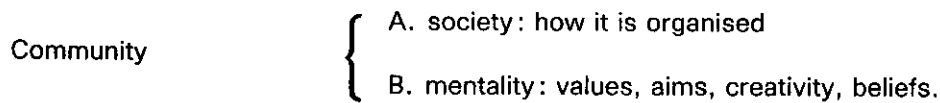
But let us be clear about this: the basic values of voluntarism are vulnerable. They need support and nourishment: discussion, analysis and clarification.

## The Values of a Culture

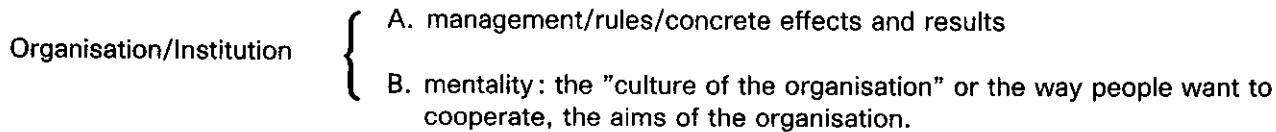
etc. of a *society*. It has a wider meaning than "the arts".

By "culture" are meant the values, the aims, the beliefs,

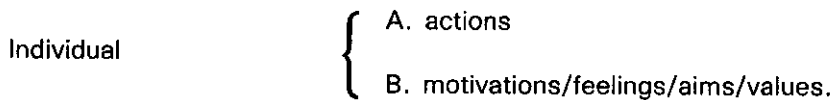
Shown in diagram, it is as follows :



At the level of an *organisation* there is the same kind of division :



At the level of the *individual* we see :



In a community (1), the way in which laws are made and power is distributed is an expression of its values, but in itself it also creates values. One can see that original humanitarian values, as expressed in the Bible or Koran, can be twisted and used to suppress groups (women, foreigners, children, animals). The groups in power add extra values to support their position but they claim this is based on the cultural roots of the community. In an organisation (2) the management is dedicated to realise the aims of that organisation, but it also creates aims of itself, like "to survive as an organisation", — which in itself is quite legitimate.

Aims and effects are two very different things. B is never fully realised in A. The individual sometimes thinks that his or her actions are spontaneous, but actions are in fact based on very deep-rooted convictions on how things should be and what the responsibility of the individual is towards his or her fellow-men/women. Maintaining the motivation of the individual volunteer (3) seems to be an individual thing, but this is not the case: the support of the volunteer group is necessary to be able to continue. This volunteer group also needs certain clear aims and a good organisation to be able to function. If the group wants to have continuity, it also needs a society which supports this group.

Volunteer policy, therefore, needs to concern itself not only with providing facilities A (money, organisation) but should also support the motivation and the cultures B. This is more subtle thing, but just as necessary, and it will come back.

### Do Volunteers Seek Conflict?

When exploring the relationship between volunteers and culture, it helps to start with the opposite question: are

they opposing the values of the culture of the country they are part of, or do they have different values. There are several answers to this question.

### Volunteers do not Seek Conflict

By nature, voluntarism is pragmatic. A need is seen, and something is done about it: the definition of Dasgupta.

Whether voluntarism is experienced as a conflicting force depends on the culture, not on the volunteers. They do not seek a confrontation. If a culture, with its power patterns, does not want changes for the better to be made, then the volunteers are in conflict. Volunteers are like fish: they do not want to be washed away like a piece of dead wood in a stream, but they want to swim against the current, as fish will. Does a society want those active, fish-like citizens who create a splash? Let me give some examples.

### Individuals in Battle to Save Lives

There are many inspiring stories of individuals who challenge the situation.

**Japan.** In the 13th century in Kyoto, a monk, Mr. Mara, started to help outcasts. He organised a network for aid. He wanted to show the example of Buddha, to display compassion. His symbol was a large teacup, a cup everybody could drink from. The "big teacup" is still a symbol for the volunteer attitude of sharing.

**India.** In the 19th century Mr. Vidyasagar, an educator, concentrated on the situation of women. The religion demanded that wives be burned when the husband died (sati), but he introduced remarriage for widows. Many times he had to protect them against violence or religious orthodox fanatics. He fought for the widow's right to live.

**Switzerland.** In the 19th century Mr. Henry Dunant started the Red Cross: taking care of the wounded on the battlefield. Until then only equipment was provided to fight war, but nothing was organised to take care of its casualties. He fought against this one-sidedness.

There are many, many more *individual, charismatic initiators* who started a movement to help against obvious problems, initiatives that gained support and inspired others. Initiators were — and are — both men and women. They battle to save lives. They challenge the situation.

In this context a name can be mentioned of someone who points out the value of the individual volunteer, Ruth Arch, board member of IAVE, in the USA. She wants recognition for the individual volunteer, whose value is irreplaceable, — even in our highly developed society, with established institutions.

### **Volunteers in Battle to Save Nature**

A more recent development is the battle to save nature. Preservation of Nature movements have been active for a great number of years already, but lately the protection of the environment has been receiving extra attention. Many cases of threat to nature and citizens' livelihood have come to the surface. If mother's milk would be on the market, the government would ban its sale because it contains too much dioxine and PCBs. The first volunteer movement with world-wide activities was set up in order to protect the seas (Green Peace), then many others followed. The mentality has changed (B), we now wait for measures to be taken (A).

**U.S.S.R.** One example from the U.S.S.R. In December 1987, various nature and environmental protection movements created a platform in Moscow and they are quite influential now. Two results of the ecological movements are remarkable. The first: the government wanted to change the course of rivers in Siberia, now running north, to run to the south which has water shortage in summer. This would mean a dangerous change of ecological conditions and there was so much opposition that the plans were abandoned. Also the establishment of a cellulose factory was prevented: it could potentially cause the same type of disaster as occurred in Bhopal.

Concern for a healthy environment is global now, and volunteer initiatives were often instrumental to make it that way. Mentality must change — has in fact changed, to be followed by policy.

The recent changes in the Eastern European Countries are solely the result of the actions of citizens, of volunteers. A special conference will be held in Berlin about the role of volunteers in the social changes, a subject also of adult education organisations.

### **Volunteers to Save the Country**

Many countries have freedom movements. In their wake one sees relief movements, educational activities and initiatives inspired by these — preservation of cultural heritage and sports — and even body-building as a symbol of power (India).

When **India** had a foreign government in power, many volunteer movements had a more or less nationalistic basis. The struggle for independence went together with a

struggle for religious and social reform, and for increase of educational activities. The sad situation is, however, that after the goal was reached and India had its own independent state, the volunteer movement was discouraged. The government assumed the whole responsibility for solving all problems of society, and the large networks existing from the times that people had to do it themselves were seen as "*unwanted weed in the paths of government programmes*" (Dasgupta).

Volunteers are now openly criticising unrealistic programmes. In **Italy** the lay-army of the Red Jacks of Garibaldi (the French and English might have got a different opinion from their history books), when they were staying in a village, always started programmes about healthcare and education. The large volunteer association Federazione Nazionale Associazioni di Pubblica Assistenza, still considers itself to be based on the ideas of Garibaldi.

### **Democratic and Emancipatory Movements**

The recent changes in the *Eastern European Countries* are solely the result of the actions of citizens, of volunteers. In 1987 the Hungarian Democratic Forum was created by 180 intellectuals. After one year, they had 10 000 members, not only intellectuals. We all know now how important these groups have been in the different Eastern European countries in 1989. A special conference will be held in Berlin in 1990 organised by the adult education organisations, about the role of volunteers in the recent social changes.

There is a very interesting phenomenon here: *some regions are active, some are not*. This also has a historical background. If somewhere an organisational network of volunteers movements was created because of the struggle against problems, this network remained, and is there to serve in new problems and, even more interesting, new generations have the mentality to "fight" and to be active as volunteers.

The Indian story shows this clearly, and if I may mention my own country: *The Netherlands* have often been ruled by foreign powers, and have to fight against the water: this created a spirit of resistance, a need for freedom and free choice. Free choice ranks very high on the list of national values. Most freedom movements in the world have a support group in the Netherlands.

But this is not only a national thing: I have been recruiting volunteers with a television programme for three years, and our team was surprised to find that in some cities you would always find movements in a new field, and none in other. So there are just active cities and lethargic cities. This also seems to be a result of local history.

*Emancipation-movements* are all a result of the action of volunteers, although the latter would often not call themselves such. There is a discussion about the values involved for women and volunteer work: should the economic independence have prevalence over other goals (so women should not work for nothing), or the right to choose (paid or unpaid work).

### **Volunteers Warn Us**

The messages of **African** people at conferences are

always very impressive. They have a very clear messages of warning. They say: *"Beware that you do not reduce the value of the person you help. Don't patronize"*. Their culture shows the signs of *reciprocity*. This message has a historical background of which the West cannot be very proud: Mission and development aid have brutally denounced the existing culture. In its place came "civilization", which took away old values and replaced them by... by what? Industrial development and "civilization" create a cultural void, and a new set of values based on materialism.

African movements tell us that in voluntarism as well as in other organisations we should cherish the value of the small community, of hospitality, of reciprocity. In any initiative coming from outside, the proposition *"I have something to offer you"* should be changed into *"can we learn from each other?"*. It is a sentiment that is not new to the social professions everywhere, but it is one of those things which are accepted in theory but are not fully realised yet in practice. The institutions themselves create feelings of inferiority, dependence and isolation. The African message is not superfluous by a long time.

### ***Volunteer Work in itself is Reconciliation of Conflicting Values***

In her book, called: *"The neurotic personality of our time"*, Karen Horney (USA) described the two conflicting attitudes we are taught to have in our culture: Parents tell you that you should not strive for your own interest, but for the other person. Not to be an egoist, not *"number one"*, not *"I, I, I and the rest can die"*. The message is to become a social being, and it often has a so-called Christian foundation of *"think first of (God and) thy neighbour"*. The other directive is the clear necessity that if you do not fight for yourself, nobody else will do it and you will go under: the biological need to fight, to eat, to take your place under the sun. One trend is *"not me"*, the other is *"me"*.

The first reaction to this is: it is a misunderstanding of the christian concept. The Bible says: *"love thy neighbour as thyself"*, and not *"instead of yourself"*.

The one-sidedness is the result of the — mostly unconscious — practice of large systems to dominate people by stressing the value of humility, and not of self-assurance. So the original healthy and balanced ideology became a one-sided and neurotic one. Volunteerism has a positive combination. Volunteer work is done for certain other people or for society at large — see definition. But it is done by free choice; not because of family obligation, not because of any pressure but because you want to do it. If the work is not what you thought it to be, you can leave it. This has nothing to do with unaccountability. Volunteers usually are painfully aware that they have to do what they promised, but I mean that they can and will leave the work if it is not what it should be. Dedication and free choice. Some professional organisations get so nervous by this combination that they give volunteers "contracts" to get a grip on them. But this is not the way to keep your volunteers, as we know from experience.

Volunteerism has this conciliating aspect of conflicting values, and it is for this reason that some labour ideologists want the volunteer mentality to be brought into the paid sector: voluntarism.

This issue has an other aspect. There are large and fundamental differences between cultures of the West and those elsewhere, sometimes simply called the "we"-cultures and the "I"-cultures. At the moment, on the surface, the western cultures have the "I"-culture; other cultures are still very much based on the "we" concept — think of Japan or Africa. The latter think that the western attitude is a deteriorated condition. It has lost a most important thing: the family feeling, the community feeling, the dedication of the individual to the group, the warmth of it. In the West there is an other worry. They say that in the "we-culture" the individual is oppressed, that the family often is not a safe place — see the many incidents of incest. Social control is fine but it has an oppressing aspect: it creates outcasts. The individual can be crushed by society.

In both instances volunteer movements seek to find a balance. At the moment, young people in Japan are in some danger of becoming oppressed by the school system. They have to learn very, very hard, to forget leisure and to compete strongly to get through their exams, to be able to get a place at a university.

If you are not admitted you can forget about making a successful career. This pressure leads to pestering the weakest pupil in class, even to the point of suicide. Everyone is worried about this but puts the blame on someone else: parents say that teachers are old-fashioned and push the pupils, teachers say parents are too ambitious, and all say the government should do something about the situation. But the many volunteer youth organisations, who are not a party in this struggle, try to help the young people and plead for more leisure, more free time to learn from other things than from books alone. They identify with the young person in this whole situation. When I was talking to a representative of a youth organisation in Japan and asked: *"what is the most problematic aspect of your association?"* he said: *"the greatest problem is the situation of the young people themselves"*. In the West, volunteer movements create mini-"solidarities", small groups of people who listen to one another, self-help groups, groups for care and help — all of them movements which teach the "we"-spirit. Care for your fellow-men in Israel is based on the Hebrew word *tsedakah*, one word which has a combination of meanings. It is not the concept of the christian value of "charity" only, there is more. It means justice and righteousness: the community should be fair to all (justice) and it should be "right for God". The relationship with the fellow-person is identical to the relationship with God. Martin Buber wrote a whole book about this: *"Ich du = ich Du"*. The one without the other will not blossom.

In times of dramatic cultural change, citizens' activities can be based on contradicting values. When the ideals of the French revolution developed: liberty, equality and brotherhood, there was great opposition against these in England, which held an other set of values: religion, family, tradition and continuity. The one type of ideals led to the formation of interest groups demanding equal rights, the other motivated an elite to feel the care for traditional heritage and care for future generations. Both movements have inspired volunteer activities, but the interesting point is that these more or less conflicting motivations didn't always lead to conflicting activities. A volunteer's motivation, to "fight for the rights of everybody", or "I feel responsible because my parents taught me so", can lead to the same kind of initiative. Interest groups and church-based groups can take opposite positions, but very often they do not

because their aims are pragmatic, dealing with problems of the moment. But this does not mean that the differences in the motivations, as they are, can be neglected!

### **Volunteers as Conciliators**

Volunteers are often conciliators. This is understandable. They do not have an interest in either side, there are no jobs involved, no money. I will mention one:

In Nazareth, Israel, there is a volunteer program, geared at the coexistence of Palestinians and Israelis. Everybody donates one day a week to work in the town to help it with its problems. This cooperation creates mutual respect and understanding. Examples where volunteers were involved in a reconciliation of a conflict can be found in many countries.

### **Volunteers Organised by Government**

Voluntarism is in itself not oppositional, which is illustrated by the fact that sometimes volunteers are organised by government.

Japan knows the Minsei Inn: the local government asks mostly middle-aged volunteers to look after people on its behalf. They visit the homes, ask people to tell them what is going on and they try to mediate between the provisions that are available and the people who need them. It is a honorary job, they are not paid. If asked to join this volunteer group, one cannot very well refuse. This is another illustration of Japanese society, which is based on consensus — not on polarity and conflict. In some western countries voluntary organisations would like to keep their independent position (but accepting subsidy) to be able to criticise government policy if necessary. This is true for instance in Germany. A peculiar fact here is that the Minsei Inn originated in Germany, in the 19th century, (as I learned from a German). The German term *ehrenamtlicher Mitarbeiter* for volunteer still points to the old situation: well-to-do people were asked to serve the community. Magistrates in England have the same position. The Netherlands have volunteers in child care who are appointed by the Ministry of Justice to act as patrons for children in trouble. Often these volunteers start their work *blanco*, not critically but by identifying with the people in trouble, and finding then that often government rules create or aggravate the problems, they become critical!

The fantastic story from the Philippines of NAMFREL (Never Ask Marcos for Free Elections) — a volunteer movement started by a business man Jake Marquis and joined by middle-aged women, motorcycling youngsters, retired teachers, etc., to guarantee honest elections in the Philippines —, shows that volunteers can be independent of the government — even when serving the government's elections. They, and only they, saw to it that Marcos could not twist the elections. And they could do so because they had international moral support.

### **The End of Ideology and a Modern Approach to Voluntarism**

Thirty years ago, the American sociologist Daniel Bell published his book *"The End of Ideology"*. Today it is only too clear that his observation is valid in some cultures. In

the West, charitable, humane values have to some extent been replaced by "each one for himself". Survival of the fittest. The Declaration of Independence, with its "right to the pursuit of happiness", has no longer the effect of consideration for the happiness of the fellow-person but of taking what you want. Marxism has lost its credibility for many followers. We have "no nonsense", Thatcherism, Reaganomics. It is the fundamental belief of many of us that it is wrong when some people do not have the first necessities for life while there are so many rich people around, that there is a right to a decent living for everyone; but the number of believers is declining. We see so many starving people on TV in our homes that we just "accept" the poor people living down the road. We have become callous out of sheer self-defence.

The increase of materialism is the complaint of many volunteer organisers. Some young people do not have the fundamental values, the mentality to be interested in doing volunteer work. They want material gain, "the fast buck". Their values are the riches they see on television: that is the heaven to strive for.

What can volunteerism do? It is true that in some countries it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers. On the other hand, basic social values are not dead, and the greatest merit of volunteerism is that it shows this. People want to care, even need to care about each other. Volunteer movements always educate values, some implicitly by the work they do, some explicitly. I mention one example: the young farmer movement in the USA. Their symbol is fourfold: head, hands, heart and health. Plenty to do, working from those concepts.

But not only the old-standing volunteer associations build up values which are declining elsewhere. Volunteerism has some surprisingly modern concepts, like "giving is also gaining". Volunteer work is done for the other person, but it is pleasure: you do it also for yourself, and this is nothing to be ashamed of, it is healthy. The volunteer who is not "sacrificing" but actually likes doing it has a better, a positive message: "I like it to be with you".

This modern approach keeps reality in volunteer projects. If you praise volunteers as sort of saints you cannot recruit any: that image is too unrealistic, nobody can meet its standard. Volunteers are no angels, they are no better than other people. The interesting thing about them is that they do a job which is rather unique: a service without the current countervalue of money being passed on to them. In this way they weaken the idea which is dominant in our society: "a good life is a life with goods".

Volunteerism weakens other standing ideas. I mention one: the power levels. You have influential and rich people, mostly men, and lower levels in society, mostly women. In volunteerism many women are active, and they show initiative and leadership. I am thinking here of the project "Education to Democracy" (Conciencia, in Colombia), which is led mostly by women and which teaches the mechanics of the democratic structure, to enable people to protect their interests. Because so many women are involved, the project is not taken seriously, — which is an asset: the people in power will experience its influence only when it is too late. The fact that women do have a great influence — not much noticed yet — was one of the main outcomes of the Washington conference.

But let us be clear about this: the basic values of voluntarism are vulnerable. They need support and nourishment: discussion, analysis and clarification.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Government policy is usually aimed at the provision of facilities — in the diagrams at A. The B aspects, however, are just as important to be considered: the *values*, the motivation, the roots of volunteerism. It can already be important to refrain from quenching motivation by insensitive measures.

2. Most important is the *recognition* of the value of volunteers. When governments start to pay attention to this, it is mostly done by giving prizes and awards. There is nothing against awards, but if volunteers are not taken seriously in other ways, awards will not convince them. Recognition is shown by:

— involving also the volunteer organisations in policy-making concerning the fields they work in, not only the professional organisations;

— taking the signalling function of volunteers seriously. This means that their reports have to be collected and written up, and put on agendas;

— recognising the way the volunteer organisation operates and the mentality of the volunteer, and refraining from measures which would violate them;

— taking the contribution of volunteers seriously by valuating the work they do and the contribution they make to society, and not by valuing the wonderful people they are. Most volunteers find this rather condescending;

— enhance the status of voluntarism. The status of being a volunteer differs greatly in different cultures. In the U.S.A. it does have a high status to be a volunteer. In the Netherlands, being a volunteer as such does not have much status, — it is regarded as having a hobby. Governments do not have many instruments to change this, but ways can be explored. In all official policy documents concerning fields where volunteers are active they should be mentioned. Important policy recommendations should be made public at national meetings of volunteer organisations, so that they get press coverage, etc. Research about the facts can help: the number of volunteers, the countervalue in money for so many working hours, etc.

The International Volunteers Day, instituted by the United Nations, the 5th of December, is also an attempt to enhance the status of voluntarism.

However, this type of change will take a long time. It takes a positive intent and creativity to enhance the status of voluntarism.

3. The way *subsidies are channelled* should leave the autonomy and the identity of the volunteer organisation unimpaired. Governments have the tendency to channel funds for volunteers through the professional organisations, but this makes the volunteers totally dependent on those organisations, on their own priorities and ideologies. Money is more than just money: it is influence. Even when sound agreements are made with the professional organisation which acts on behalf of the volunteer field, sometimes the ideas, the ideology and the roots of volunteer work are not taken into consideration, can be neglected or just run over.

4. The basic values of voluntarism should *not be abused*, for instance solidarity and care. *Solidarity* is one of the deepest roots of volunteer motivation, of both the traditional and the new movements. But when governments

use the word solidarity, it is often to explain why some people have to give up income or provisions. It seems solidarity in reverse: when one group has more income from benefits than the other, the former should give up this extra income for solidarity reasons.

Not that the poorer group will get more! It is solidarity in poverty, solidarity which does not help people but governments with their deficits.

A "*caring society*" is something many volunteers feel strongly about. It can lead to beautiful rhetorics, but can also mean that existing provisions are reduced and a stronger appeal has to be made on friends, family and volunteers. The past is romanticised and, displaying only the negative aspects of professionalism, given as an example to go back to. Result: the volunteers feel exploited, they object to being used in this way and do not feel happy and comfortable with their own ideals any longer.

The message to governments is: do not steal values from volunteers and do not abuse them for your own ends. What you lose is more than what you gain.

5. We have seen that the way in which services are organised has a strong influence on the values implied. Therefore the way volunteers want to work is more than an organisational matter. If they do not want to register "clients" by name, if they want to take time with people, if they want to give a service which — apart from "help" — is also friendship, to organise activities together and even actions — all those things about which professionals have other opinions for their own social work: be careful then that you do not turn volunteers into half-baked professionals by insisting on training and advice by professionals. Do not demand a bureaucracy which you want to oppose in other organisations. Governments have to change the rules to make them fit for volunteer work.

It can be done by giving subsidy without insisting that the volunteer association gets a professionalised setting. The Italians have a good model: the "*convenzione*". Money is given against the promise to provide a certain service. Demands are made only when these are in the public interest, like openness to people of an other religion or without a religion, no moralistic pressure, and a democratic structure. I must admit, for some people it is difficult to absorb this in their interpretation of the work they want to do, but mostly these conditions for obtaining public subsidy are considered fair. No other demands are made: not for training, not concerning the way the services are given. Volunteers have plenty of freedom to do it their way.

6. If voluntarism is going to be promoted, it is impossible to avoid any tension. There will be resistance from some professional organisations, who think they have to defend their territory. If one wants to have only docile, mum volunteers who promise never to offend any professional, then the number of volunteers who are prepared to work under such conditions will be minimal. Governments should not give in to this pressure but make it clear that volunteers do have a right to be active. Moral support is necessary, because in negotiations with professionals the volunteers have the weaker position.

Needless to say that many professional institutes enjoy having volunteers.

## Summary of the Basic Values

### Voluntarism

- **Religious and humanitarian values** are one of the main roots of voluntarism in all countries. Charity, tse-daka. To do something for someone else without expecting to be paid for it.
- **Liberation** movements. Movements against a variety of oppressions have been a source of volunteer energy throughout the history of our count.
- The traditional community sense, the **"we" culture**, the hospitality and family feeling invites a volunteer input also outside the family of the own group.
- Solidarity movements have been many and of many kinds: **solidarity with different categories in trouble**, for interest groups, for people abroad. The feeling that this aid "has" to be given comes from the motivation of 1 but also from the ideals of the French revolution with

its equality ideas, from the declaration of independence in America, from socialism.

5. From the Enlightenment comes the **importance of the individual**, the "I" culture, the right to choose. Volunteers have this "do it yourself" attitude, and the wish to develop themselves to their best potential. In this philosophy fits the motivation of volunteers to do volunteerwork because **they like it**.

### Personal Values

6. **Activity and self-respect** against apathy and discouragement.
7. **Emancipation** against oppressing ideologies.
8. **Defence of nature** and environment against exploitative technology.
9. **Dignity of the receiver** against (institutional and bureaucratic) paternalism.
10. **Fun**, do what you want to do against boredom.

**Volonteurope** is a European network, which has existed for ten years.

Its committee consists of 2 representatives per country, representing the social, the civil and the cultural field. Open membership. Activities: conferences, studies, exchange programmes, production of a journal.

New projects :

- A European Documentation Centre for Volunteer Work.
- Volonteurope-Youth : long term volunteer work abroad in East and West.
- A European Senior Volunteer Network. Also a network of National Resource Centres.