

Preface

Volunteering is one of those phenomena which, despite the limited number of people actually involved in it, is seen as highly important for the proper functioning of society. In fact, volunteering and active participation in voluntary associations are considered to be key components of civil society; it is felt that they generate social cohesion and societal self-regulation as well as strengthening political democracy by developing individual citizenship and organizing countervailing powers. Issues such as these have gained momentum in recent years, especially since Putnam's publications in the 1990s on civic community and democracy in Italy and on the decline of social capital in the United States. However, interest in these issues in fact dates back to the time of the Civic Culture project carried out in the 1950s and 1960s by Almond and Verba, and even much earlier to Tocqueville's famous study *Democracy in America* in the 1830s. All of these studies, and many more, stress the importance of voluntary civic engagement for the development and maintenance of civilized societal cohesion and political democracy. This research tradition addresses volunteering as just one form of voluntary social and political involvement that might well be linked with other forms, such as passive and active membership of voluntary associations, incidental political activism, or individual involvement in public discourse.

However, most studies on volunteering are written in another tradition that is more specifically directed toward direct helping behavior, service delivery, and unpaid work. Many articles, policy reports, and books have appeared on volunteering in diverse fields such as sports, faith-based organizations, human services, and schools; often they are quite practically oriented and focus on issues of recruitment and management. In general, they pay scant attention to the contributions made by volunteering to social cohesion and political democracy. Although those contributions are often gratefully acknowledged in introductory remarks, they are not the core issues of investigation in this tradition.

Thus, although volunteering as a topic of research is far from new, studies that specifically place volunteering in a civil society perspective are more rare. The

aim of this book is precisely to explore further and dig deeper into this perspective, using empirical data garnered from various sources for countries all over the globe.

The contributions in this book deal with a broad spectrum of questions, ranging from the diversity, social and cultural determinants, and organizational settings of volunteering to its possible individual, social, and political effects. Some chapters give a general outline of the diversity of and developments in volunteering, and discuss future trends; others examine more closely the relationships between volunteers and clients and organizations.

In order to do justice to the collective—and still primarily national—notions of civil society, such as civic culture, trust as a trait of social relations, pluralism, and democracy, international comparative studies involving countries representing a broad spectrum of national characteristics, democratic histories, and cultural contexts are necessary. To achieve this, several chapters draw on data from large-scale surveys, notably the European Values Study (Halman, 2001), and World Values Surveys (www.worldvaluessurvey.org), or on data gathered within the framework of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project (<http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp>). The availability of large-scale survey data that include details about volunteering and a number of indicators to reveal values enables interesting studies to be carried out to assess the impact of these values on volunteering at both the individual and macrolevels. The interrelationship of values or culture and volunteering at societal and individual levels is a recurring topic in the book.

However, this book deals not only with differences and similarities in volunteering between countries and the conditions that may be conducive to or hinder volunteering; other intriguing questions are also examined, such as why people volunteer, how they relate to each other and to the people they want to help, what ideals they wish to promote, and the life. Studies based on survey research may provide this kind of information, but a qualitative approach can produce better insights and provide a deeper understanding of people's drives, motives, and goals. Some of the chapters in this book discuss the results of in-depth interviews, group discussions, and participant observation.

We hope that the contributions in this volume will advance our understanding of the variety in volunteering, the differences between countries, the impact of the social settings and individual backgrounds of volunteering, and the social and political effects of volunteering. We also hope this book will contribute to the recognition of volunteering as an interesting topic for further social research. The idea of producing a book to raise the level of "academic" interest in volunteering developed in discussions with colleagues at the Netherlands Federation of Volunteer Organizations (NOV), during the preparations for the United Nations Year of Volunteers 2001. Another offshoot from these discussions, directed more toward practitioners and the general public, is Govaart, van Daal, Münz, & Keesom (2001),

which contains a comprehensive summary of voluntary activities and projects in 21 countries.

We wish to thank all those who have prepared a contribution to this volume, as well as those who facilitated the production of the book. We as editors deliberately invited scholars from several disciplines to prepare contributions, in order to obtain the broadest possible overview of the current status of knowledge and research activities in the field of volunteering. We believe that the resulting variation is very properly reflected in the volume. This approach meant that our editorial aims were confined to eliminating repetition and incompatibilities and stressing the commonalities and bridging features. We hope that we have done this accurately. We thank the authors not only for their contributions but also for their patience in the final phases of preparing the book.

We also would like to thank the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands (SCP) in The Hague, Globus, the Institute for Globalization and Sustainable Development, and the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Tilburg University, Netherlands, for making available the time for the editors to complete the book. Finally, we are grateful to Kluwer/Plenum for being so gracious when we failed to meet the various deadlines.

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