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39 The future of volunteering and work

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Abstract

This chapter concludes the volume by considering the challenges facing volunteering in the events, sport and tourism (EST) sectors. This chapter begins by considering how general trends in work and employment impact on volunteering. Next, it draws on issues raised in the rest of volume to identify challenges specific to volunteering in the EST sectors. Finally, these challenges are placed into the context of COVID-19, within which this whole volume has been written, to consider what drawbacks and opportunities COVID has created for EST volunteering.

Introduction

This concluding chapter seeks to situate the future of volunteering relative to wider debates and general socio-economic, demographic and technological trends affecting the world of work.

Cognisant that this chapter is written very much in the COVID era, an initial debate about whether COVID-19 represents a seismic change or a blip on the graph for event, sport and tourism (EST) volunteering, and volunteering in general, is discussed. With its prominent focus in the EST volunteering literature (see Lis and Tomanek's chapter of this Handbook), and its inherent travel requirement, the future of volunteer tourism is also discussed.

This chapter references other chapters from the Handbook, linking key debates and topics where possible. It draws on generic and sector specific themes to support discussion about where volunteering lies in relation to paid work and unpaid work and briefly touches on its boundaries with leisure.

The chapter concludes that the EST sectors will continue post-COVID as essential to the physical and mental well-being of communities. The role of volunteers with respect to this significant transition is discussed and an associated research agenda is highlighted.

Volunteering, work and employment in the 21st century

Volunteering has been conceptualised in three forms: as unpaid work, activism and serious leisure (Rochester et al., 2010). Beginning with volunteering as unpaid work, we examine developments in the world of work and implications for volunteering. Drivers of debate about the future of work centre on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Rotatori et al., 2021), with its focus on technological developments in robotics, artificial intelligence and genetics and the implications such developments might have for the labour market. However, alongside this technological revolution, there are broader socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic drivers of change that might have even more significant and longer lasting influences on the world of work.

Changes in population structures in both the Global North (ageing populations and sustained inbound talent migration) and the Global South (continued growth in child and youth populations and outward talent leakage) require polar opposite responses in terms of job creation and automation. The consequences of sustained investment in education and skills development, while facilitating many of the technology-driven changes to work and society, also creates expectations of participation in new opportunities which, in reality, may not be deliverable to all those who are qualified.

To emphasise that we live in uncertain times where many forms of work and employment have been, and continue to face major change, is to highlight the obvious. The nature of work has always been in flux as societies have evolved over the centuries, driven by a combination of,

inter alia, economic, social, cultural and technological change. In recent years, much of the discussion about the future of work has focused on the increasing role that automation, robotisation and artificial intelligence have in the execution of routine and increasingly complex work functions. Some commentators such as Susskind (2020) go so far as to envisage a world where there will not be sufficient paid work for everyone to do as a result of technological change. In this dystopian scenario, the future is one of mass technological unemployment, precarious work, workers with little or no bargaining power and growing skills gaps as the population in the Global North ages (OECD, 2019). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) take, however, is to focus on the positive potential of technology to create new jobs on a globalised scale, to improve the quality of existing jobs and to bring previously underrepresented groups into the labour market. The reality is that the future probably holds a scenario somewhere between these extremes and the social and political challenge will be to manage the process of change in the best interests of all stakeholder groups across the globe. For volunteering, technology offers new ways in which people can both volunteer (online) (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020) and also organise volunteering through social media.

Susskind's take on volunteering, in this context, is to depict the encouragement of such action by governments as a subset of wider leisure policies to ensure that the adult population has challenging and engaging things to do in the potential absence of work. Other writers question the value of work that is on offer to many people in developed economies. Graeber (2018), for example, questions the social value of many contemporary 'bullshit jobs', in many respects echoing George Orwell's (1933) questioning of the social purpose of the work of the plongeur in Parisian restaurants.

Given the close association between voluntary work and government and its agencies, the rise of New Public Management (NPM) since the 1980s has already had significant impacts on the work expectations that third sector volunteer organisations, as well as publicly accountable major/ mega events, have of their volunteer workforces (Bartram et al., 2017; O'Rourke, 2020). NPM can be described as ways of reorganising public sector bodies to bring their management approaches closer to business methods. NPM includes the emergence of markets and quasi-markets within public services, the empowerment of accountable management along with active performance measurement and management. This cultural change places volunteer engagement in the delivery of services on a very different footing to that which might have attracted 'traditional' volunteers, seeking to contribute to areas of meaning to them at a personal level in a social, cultural or sporting sense. Our consideration of the future of volunteering, therefore, needs to be seen in the context of these macro-trends in relation to work and employment.

Volunteering as unpaid work

Unpaid work, including volunteering, compared to paid forms, has received considerably less attention from researchers (Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2017). Volunteering is a productive activity, yet it is rarely studied as a form of non-paid labour (Taylor, 2004) or as a serious leisure pursuit (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). It is also rarely considered or included when discussing the changing nature of paid work.

Entrenched perceptions of volunteering as a lightweight leisure pursuit or feel-good activity of little real economic value persist despite increasing evidence to the contrary (Productivity Commission, 2010; UNV, 2018). Also, research evidence suggests that people view activities that cost the volunteer a lot of effort and give little in the way of personal benefits as being more akin to pure volunteering than easy activities that give ample benefits (Handy et al., 2000). The

net-cost perception threatens to trivialise EST volunteering, where much of the activity could be considered as a form of leisure or fun when contrasted with social services style volunteering. This view further embeds the traditional paradigm of work as only concerning paid work. As noted in Rochester's chapter (this volume), in recent decades, too, like paid work, volunteering has changed and diversified to encompass a range of flexible and temporal forms, such as episodic volunteering (Hyde et al., 2016), online volunteering and micro-volunteering, all enhanced by social media, new technologies and mobile lifestyles (Bimber et al., 2012). Volunteering has expanded beyond the not-for-profit sector to include third parties such as corporates, government and educational institutions (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). At the same time, this diversification has witnessed a shift from the traditional model of volunteering as a face-to-face service activity, undertaken in a designated location and at a designated time, through an organisation or group (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018). Wang (this volume) considers informal volunteering, which contributes enormously in many sectors but for which we have a limited understanding in the EST sectors.

Concurrently, a decline in volunteer participation rates has been noted in several countries (for example, ABS, 2020; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Grimm & Dietz, 2018). Combined with this, the roles and expectations of volunteers by governments has shifted, particularly in developed economies, where essential health and community services are increasingly delivered by volunteers through the contracting out of services (Casto, 2016; Oppenheimer et al., 2014), in response to the withdrawal of direct government involvement in core service delivery (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2016; Pick et al., 2011). The rise of neo-liberalism and economic rationalism, the winding back of the welfare state and ideas of smaller governments have contributed to the explosion of public/private partnerships between the voluntary sector and the

state (Davis Smith, 2003). Competition for volunteers, therefore, is fierce, with volunteer-involving organisations needing to adapt as individuals become more discretionary about where they volunteer, for how long and in what types of roles (Winterton et al., 2013).

Tomazos (in this volume) interprets EST volunteering in a very catholic and inclusive way, recognising that this does not necessarily match standard definitions of volunteering in these sectors or of volunteer tourism (or voluntourism). He rightly makes no apologies for this as this approach embraces emerging areas of work, notably with regard to the sharing economy, that do not generally feature under this classification. However, this does point to an increased blurring of the boundaries between paid employment, unpaid work and voluntary work. Paid employment should be, perhaps, the simplest of these three to comprehend although the emergence of the sharing economy, in particular its manifestations in tourism, sports and events in the accommodation and transport sectors raise questions about the contractual status of such work. The question of whether volunteering is always a free and unconstrained activity aligned to core volunteering definitions (Cnaan et al., 1996; Handy et al., 2000) is questionable for some forms of volunteering. For example, the requirement for youth to engage in voluntary community service as part of an educational credit is a case where volunteerism involves some element of obligation and control, similar to paid work. Chen and Qi (this volume) examines service learning for students at business events, where students may be required to volunteer in order to gain the experience needed to secure paid employment. The interpretation placed on the concept of voluntary work and volunteerism, and particularly on the extent of obligation or coercion, varies greatly across social, cultural and national contexts (Handy et al., 2000; Merrill, 2006). With some exceptions (Tuan, 2005; Qi, 2020), the preponderance of reference to these concepts

in the literature, however, appears to be located within a westernised, developed world context (Russell, 2016).

Volunteering can be stressful (Holmes & Lockstone-Binney, 2014), particularly when the commitment becomes onerous and work-like in nature. Thus, volunteering out of disagreeable obligation (Stebbins, 2000) may be seen as a misuse of the term 'volunteer' as the activity is not truly voluntary. Stebbins argues that this is especially true in the case of people who are volunteering for work experience and internships, and this type of activity has been particularly difficult to reconcile with volunteering definitions (Parker, 1997). Likewise, it is arguable that those taking unpaid or underpaid first jobs in sectors such as the creative industries are, de facto, volunteering part or all of their time (Alacovska, 2018; Shade & Jacobson, 2015). The effect of these contexts is to further blur the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary volunteering, acknowledging that individuals whilst volunteering in these more coerced forms may still benefit by gaining relevant work experience, together with additional personal, social and skills development (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018).

Voluntary work – a Global North luxury? The context of volunteer tourism

Hawksley and Georgeou (2019) argue that the neo-liberal turn inherent in much of the discourse on volunteering in Western societies negates the involvement of volunteers to the role of cheap labour in response to the withdrawal of government in the provision of core essential services. As such, volunteering is viewed less as a form of meaningful community empowerment. Howard and Burns (2015) share this view and further argue for a post-colonial approach to be taken to international volunteering, which would overcome the privileging of Northern perspectives of volunteering as a form of work.

It is a common but somewhat myopic and neo-colonial perspective on volunteering to see this as predominantly a North-South or North-North phenomenon, whereby the Global South is seen as the place that hosts volunteers from the Global North (Baillie Smith et al., 2018; Butcher & Einolf, 2016). Baillie Smith et al. (2018) highlight that alternative flows are well-established through the major role that South-South voluntary action plays in supporting regional development. They also make the strong case that non-Western volunteers are better prepared in cultural, linguistic and technical terms, to undertake the development work that is required. Further, engagement that mirrors volunteering in other contexts but is seen as part of wider responsibility to community is commonplace within many Global South contexts, especially in indigenous and other more traditional societies (Kerr et al., 2001; Warburton & Winterton, 2010).

The future of more expansive and inclusive conceptualisations of volunteering may lie in recognition of its global importance for realising the universal development agenda set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* (Agenda 2030) notes “volunteer groups” are one of the key stakeholder groups that governments must work with on SDG implementation, together with regional authorities, international institutions, academia and philanthropic organisations, amongst others (UNGA, 2015, p. 11). Volunteering has further been acknowledged as a means to

expand and mobilize constituencies, and to engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable solutions.

(UNGA, 2014, p. 36)

We acknowledge that COVID-19 has recently reversed progress towards achieving the SDGs (UN, 2020) but there remains a significant role for volunteers to play in realising this agenda.

COVID-19: seismic change or a blip on the graph?

This chapter has already raised a wide range of challenges impacting on EST volunteering. Yet at the time of writing, we must add COVID-19 to this list. Rochester, in this volume, grapples with the almost impossible task of assessing underlying trends in voluntary engagement while at the same time recognising the impact of context in the shape of a global pandemic. This has clearly accentuated trend changes while also, arguably, shifting the focus of volunteering or, indeed, offering a phase of pause to some forms. Rochester highlights the heterogeneity of volunteering and the challenges of generalising about phenomena that show such distinct diversity in terms of scale, context, agency and formalisation.

The pandemic has substantially put EST volunteering on hold in many countries as opportunities at all levels have disappeared. International tourism all but stalled from early 2020 (UNWTO, 2020), with only limited prospects for a global recovery in 2021, while domestic travel has not compensated for this loss in any significant measure. As a consequence, voluntary roles, whether in cultural institutions, as destination ambassadors or as voluntourists, have correspondingly disappeared. In the areas of sports and events, there was widespread cancellation or postponement of mega and major fixtures and, when they did take place, generally this occurred without spectators or with significantly reduced numbers. The Tokyo Olympics, for example, were postponed to 2021 (Tokyo 2020, 2020) and with that opportunities for thousands of Japanese and international volunteers to participate. At a local level, many countries saw the curtailment of junior and adult amateur sports and, with it, the volunteering contribution of coaches, referees and parents, among others. Other major and mega events suffered the same fate

in 2020, such as the Dubai Expo and the Edinburgh Festivals, as well as a myriad of community events and festivals, all of which also were planned to utilise volunteers to a significant degree.

How and in what form volunteering returns after the global pandemic remains to be seen.

Kostas Tomazos, in his chapter in this volume, provides critical perspectives on volunteer tourism with, perhaps, rather more balance than some critics of the growth of this industry sector, who advocate a ban on most commercial practices in this regard (Guttentag, 2009). Prior to March 2020, volunteer tourism was a growing form of alternative travel with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and, increasingly, commercial interests as the primary institutions placing volunteers abroad (Barbieri et al., 2012; Keese, 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a temporary hold on international travel and perhaps this is an opportunity to pause that can also enable some level of reflection on the ethical and practical concerns that Tomazos raises in relation to volunteer tourism. Huish (2021), indeed, is rather less circumspect in his argument, taking the definitive line that the combination of increased youth awareness of the environmental consequences of long-haul travel with the shock of COVID-19 will significantly reduce, if not eliminate, both international study and international volunteering. Others are suggesting that countries in the Global South need to seek alternative childcare models for orphaned children within communities rather than looking to external support through volunteering (Ladaphongphatthana, 2021). However, there is some emerging evidence that the loss of income and support derived from volunteer tourism programmes in countries such as Cambodia is having a direct and negative impact on key service providers such as orphanages (Khadka & Sem, 2020).

In addition, the travel disruption and closed borders have refocused tourism on local and domestic markets. A long term limitation of international volunteer tourism has been the inability

of domestic organisations to partner with volunteer tourism providers to harness the volunteer energy of returning tourists (Coghlan, 2015). Ong's chapter (this volume) considers how to turn global volunteer tourism into glocal support.

Resilience and reinvention for EST volunteering

The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted two key areas where volunteering can facilitate critical societal roles in future years, most notably within the broad leisure industry encompassing sectors ranging from sport and tourism to events, hospitality and entertainment. These are (i) the importance of volunteering in times of crisis and how volunteering can foster and address community needs whilst contributing towards societal *well-being*, and (ii) the central role of volunteering in both supporting and enhancing social/community *resilience*. However, the pandemic has also exposed vulnerabilities within the volunteer ecosystem in some countries, albeit possibly as a temporary phenomenon as older volunteers withdrew their services because of their health vulnerabilities to the effects of the virus (Roche, 2020). This, however, locates the decline as part of a general trend in some countries (e.g. the UK) towards a younger volunteer profile, exacerbated, perhaps, by the crisis and highlighting the perceived value of volunteering as a means of enhancing employability to access a career ladder (Paine et al., 2013).

The pandemic further illustrated how volunteering can provide an effective mechanism for addressing broad community needs, and how volunteering can also contribute towards health and well-being for both volunteers and the leisure sector more generally. During times of crises, volunteers play an important social role in both supporting community recovery, and also sharing a sense of belonging and identity amongst volunteer group members who are often operating in affected communities (Miles & Shipway, 2020). This was increasingly evident during 2020–2021 by boosting community morale and mobilising resources within affected communities. For

example, in the UK, the mass vaccination programme, that started in December 2020, highlighted the contribution of the voluntary sector to assist with supporting government policy and mass vaccination implementation. Similarly, Miao, Schwarz and Schwarz (2021) report how, in China, large numbers of volunteers were mobilised through the country's leading digital volunteering platform to augment public health services in the early stages of the pandemic. Interestingly, those recruited were experienced volunteers who were, in practice, co-producers of local community responses to the crisis.

Organisations, for example in the travel sector, took the lead in encouraging employees who normally work in customer-facing roles, to volunteer to support local healthcare and community services as airline routes were rapidly shut down in 2020 (CNA, 2020; Jones, 2020). At the same time, the global crisis has also exposed some of the challenges that formal bureaucracies have in responding to and accommodating large-scale volunteer responses. As an example, this was highlighted during the early stages of the pandemic in the UK when the National Health Service (NHS) was initially unable to deploy the large numbers who offered their services on a voluntary basis (Marsh & Sabbagh, 2020).

Ironically, a volunteering paradox exists in sport, events and tourism management. On the one hand, volunteers clearly play a vital component part in the 'bounce-back-ability' of the broader leisure sector. However, during times of crises the primary aim of many EST organisations and clubs will initially be one of basic survival through the crises. These organisations must primarily ensure they remain as viable functioning operations that are actually able to effectively embrace and support volunteers, and thus be in a position to 'bounce back better' (Shipway & Miles, 2020).

EST environments, be they clubs or organisations, serve a vital role as leisure-based settings whereby volunteers can help rebuild a sense of well-being in the post-crises era. There is further scope for research that explores how these symbolic interactions help shape social behaviour, and how volunteers within the leisure-related sectors can respond to crises that might lead to broader well-being outcomes for both individual volunteers and also for the communities in which they volunteer. Moving the research agenda forward, there is a paucity of studies about how EST volunteers and voluntary organisations, during times of crises, can help shape volunteering, and the subsequent implications for both individual and community well-being. When considering the broader volunteer landscape, there is also potential for future research which takes a more macro approach and explores linkages between EST volunteering and the nuances and roles of social/community resilience. The global volunteer responses to the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the increasingly important role of social/community based, bottom-up approaches within the voluntary sector to dealing with global crises and in doing so, to foster greater resilience.

For the purpose of this chapter, volunteer resilience is the ability of volunteer communities to *absorb* and *recover* from these shocks, whilst positively *adapting* and *transforming* their volunteering structures and means for delivering volunteering activity in the face of uncertain impacts of stresses. It is also the ability of those volunteer communities to *manage change* by maintaining and transforming the provision of volunteering in the face of shocks and stresses (Shipway & Miles, 2020). At the heart of notions of community resilience for volunteering is the assumption that communities may become active in seeking to maintain the integrity, identity, livelihoods and resources of their respective communities when under challenge or threat

(Shipway et al., 2021). In the EST contexts, a more resilient volunteer community will be one that is both socially cohesive and connected.

Substantial research has found a positive link between volunteering and the volunteer's well-being, while being a member of a volunteer group can increase the group's social capital (Mellor et al., 2009). However, future studies are required which explore when and how being a volunteer, or having membership of an EST volunteering group, might affect personal and collective well-being. A core argument here is that being part of a volunteering community can contribute to the well-being of both the volunteer and the communities in which they are active, and help support recovery from times of crises.

Effective response to, and recovery from, a crisis will require a substantial amount of social support, which may come in either tangible, emotional or informational forms (Inoue & Havard, 2015). Volunteers fulfil these vital roles, either through the provision of services, affective assistance and comfort, or sharing information and advice. In summary, the global pandemic has shown that increasing not only the amount, but also the perceived availability of social support by volunteers was crucial for (i) promoting well-being, (ii) highlighting the underlying power of volunteering and (iii) fostering a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter and, indeed, this volume, we have sought to place volunteering in EST in the wider context of trends and developments in society, touching on aspects of social and demographic change, social policy and practice and the nature of work that we may see emerge in the future. Such discussion, of course, must always be fraught with dangers and footnoted with multiple caveats because of the diverse contexts within which EST volunteering is located, globally and because any speculative future view can never be more than, well, speculative! The

inherent challenges of informed future-gazing have been thrown into sharp relief by the global pandemic and we have tried to reflect some of the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in general and tourism, sports and events in particular in this chapter.

What appears inevitable is that, for the foreseeable future, volunteering roles will change from the past normal as a consequence of health-related social distancing, potentially discriminatory limitations to travel and the erosion of social confidence among key volunteer groups, notably older participants. There may well be less front-facing volunteer roles, as is likely during the Tokyo Olympics and the roles of volunteers may also further change (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2015), with a greater focus on specialist rather than general support roles. Models of ‘virtual volunteering’ as part of EST volunteering may gain greater prominence, whereby voluntary participation moves to remote roles away from sites and venues. Beyond COVID, changes to work itself, driven by technology, may also reduce demand for on-the-ground-volunteering. This all said, there is little doubt that the tourism, sports and events sectors as a whole would lose out hugely were the diverse contributions of volunteers to be lost for health, technological or wider societal reasons at a time when demographic change, especially in the Global North, will place increased pressure on communities and families to care for their own with limited state support and, therefore, increase demand for other forms of genuine or enforced ‘volunteering’ or unpaid social care. Tourism, sports and events are essential to the physical and mental well-being of all communities and much important activity in this regard will wither away without vital volunteer contributions.

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