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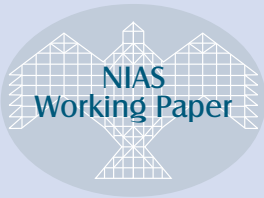
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UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEERISM IN CIVIL SAFETY AND SECURITY:

An international perspective

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

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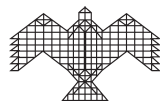
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Abstract

Volunteerism is of increasing importance in societies' attempts to improve on civil safety and security and, at the same time, faces specific challenges. The paper is a theoretical attempt towards an explanation of volunteering in an international perspective. It starts by comparing historical traditions of volunteer work in two quite different countries, namely India and Germany. This comparison leads to a critical assessment of some definitory problems of volunteering. In the main part of the paper we try to explain volunteerism by combining classical psychological approaches, based on values and motivation, with a Neo-Gandhian approach that puts the voluntary action into focus. Finally, we draw some speculative conclusions on how this theoretical perspective might be brought to bear in overcoming the challenges civil safety and security organizations face in these two countries.

Volunteer work is an important pillar of a society´s ability to cope with different kinds of threats and disasters. If societies want to strengthen this pillar or, in other words, preserve or increase their resilience and thus reduce their vulnerability to disasters, volunteerism becomes an important topic (Wilson 2012; Hälterlein et al. 2018). This is even more so as, due to technological and social developments, volunteerism is undergoing fundamental changes which take different directions in different societies. There are, therefore, numerous challenges in regard to volunteerism in the field of civil safety and security which cannot, most probably, be overcome by simple and universally applicable strategies. If societies (or, to be more specific, civil safety and security organizations) want to establish appropriate conditions for future voluntary engagement it becomes essential to understand the specific societal conditions for the development of volunteerism and, within this framework, the motivational forces that drive volunteering behaviour.

These assumptions formed the background of an Indo-German research project that looked into the sources and motivations of voluntary engagement in disaster management in selected German and Indian regions. The project aims at generating knowledge about why and in which ways people engage in voluntary work in the field of disaster management and at improving ways of integrating volunteers into established structures of professional disaster management organisations. The present paper is a result of this work. Since the project work is ongoing, the arguments presented in this paper are of a conceptual nature. Nevertheless, we believe that the international scope of this discussion might be a step towards a more complete understanding of volunteerism.

The paper is structured in the following way: It starts with a historical perspective and looks at the development of current patterns of voluntary action in civil safety and security in both countries. It then proceeds to discuss a possible definition of volunteerism that includes both Indian and Western perspectives. In a third step the paper looks at explanatory concepts, again trying to combine traditional western theories of values and motivation with a Neo-Gandhian focus on the voluntary action itself. Finally, some general remarks regarding the consequences of this analysis for both the integration of spontaneous forms of volunteering into structured civil defence organizations as well as the attraction, recruitment and training for such organizations conclude the paper.

1. Germany and India: Different traditions in volunteerism

Although voluntary actions helping others may be universal, volunteerism as a social phenomenon is deeply rooted in a society's historical and cultural context. Therefore, in order to understand different forms of volunteerism and to develop meaningful recommendations for civil safety and security organizations, it is important to start any analysis with a diachronic perspective. Especially in the two countries that are in the focus of this paper, current challenges to volunteerism in disaster management develop in historically different frameworks.

The German situation is prototypical for a society with a certain tradition of formalized and structured voluntary organizations. With the industrialisation in the 19th century – that initially was associated with migration to the cities and widespread poverty - conventional mechanisms of social security eroded and the social structure underwent significant changes. Families, village communities and guilds lost their status as social back-ups. Public infrastructures were no longer able to prevent poverty and the social policy of Bismarck formed the first step towards subsidiarity (Meerhaeghe 2006). The principle of subsidiarity was formed on the - at those

times widespread-ideas of the catholic social doctrine which obligated the big and rich to help the weak and poor. With the strengthening of the officialdom as a new form of profession, voluntary engagement developed a special role in Germany. It became the leisure activity of a constantly growing urban middle class. Mostly religious organisations of charity were founded in great number in the late 19th and early 20th century and started to engage in charity work in diverse fields that exceeded the traditional helping of the poor. Following these tendencies, a specific dual structure of the public welfare system developed which distributed responsibilities between governmental and non-governmental welfare associations which became, step by step, officially acknowledged (see Klöckner 2016; Anheimer and Salamon 1999). After World War II, welfare associations and the principle of subsidiarity were strengthened further. Until today, most charity organisations still rely on voluntary engagement (see BMFSFJ 2009).

The same principles hold for civil safety and security. Responsibility for the organisation of disaster management in Germany is divided between federal states and the national government and acts in accordance with the nature of the disaster. While responsibility

to protect the society in the case of war lies with the national government, federal state institutions have the duty to act in cases of non-warlike crises for example in cases of natural disasters, industrial accidents, epidemics, terroristic acts etc. In all of these instances, non-governmental organizations are integral part of the disaster management process. The largest of these organizations are the German Red Cross, the Arbeiter Samariter Bund, the Johanniter, the Malteser, the (voluntary and professional) firefighters and the Technische Hilfswerk (Federal Agency for Technical Relief). All in all it can be estimated that these organizations can count on about 2 Million volunteers (BBK 2018). Ensuring protection and security for the population is therefore a common task which involves public administrations on all levels and also includes the operators of critical infrastructures (see Deutscher Landkreistag 2008; BMI 2015; BBK 2010; BBK and DST 2010).

Generally, it can be pointed out that most of the NGOs active in disaster relief are based on permanent, voluntary engagement. However, in recent years, the character of volunteer work in Germany is undergoing fundamental changes actuated by demographic change, the alteration of societal and individual norms and a more flexible working world (Beck 1997; Karle 2012). Long-term commitment to a particular organization or team is decreasing and, at the same time, more flexible forms of voluntary engagement are emerging. These new forms of volunteerism often respond to single urgent crises and quickly disperse again. New modes of communication and coordination foster this incident-related volunteerism. Furthermore, volunteer work attracts only particular segments of society, while others are underrepresented, particularly elderly people and migrants. These transformations of volunteerism and shortcomings of traditional modes of managing volunteers are a challenge to organizations that operate in the field of disaster management and ask for a rethinking of strategies (Weber and Ely 2015).

The Indian situation, in contrast, is characterized by a long tradition of spontaneous volunteering, framed in terms of religious concepts, and a relatively short tradition of organized and structured disaster management. The early forms of volunteerism in Indian Hinduism can be said to be influenced by notions of Dharma (religious obligation) and Karuna (compassion) which would lead to helping the poor and the needy through Dana (donations) in terms of offerings in kind or cash or Shramadana

(donating labor). Similarly, the acts of volunteerism in Islam in terms of charity are also obliged by religiosity through prescribed rituals of zakat whereby a certain share of the individual's income is offered as charity. Additionally, Islam also includes the notion of Sadaqat (divine encouragement to be charitable) whereby the Muslims offer alms freely of what they love. These early voluntary and charity activities were often based on religious belief and referred to concepts such as "shramdaan" (donating labor/efforts), "seva" (social service) or "Khidmat" (service, assistance, kindness) (see Elias 2016; Pio and Syed 2014; Beckerlegge 2015). Only around the mid-colonial period (about 1810) social and economic development demanded support by more organized voluntary efforts. In the early 1810s, Christian missionaries, supported by the colonial state, engaged in supporting social development under the greater goal to promote Christianity. Influenced by Western thoughts in missionary schools, the local bourgeoisie in the state of Bengal started to engage in similar projects since the mid-1820s under the leadership of the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. By the end of the 19th century this kind of volunteerism had become an integral part of the Indian society. Indigenous non-profit organisations (NPOs) had developed and

started to make demands on the state for issue-based social and religious reforms.

The next phase of voluntary engagement was fuelled by Gandhi and his belief that only voluntary engagement could contribute to India's development. This marked a shift in voluntary work from issue-based engagement towards empowerment and social as well as political change. In the early post-Independence period (1947 - late 1950s) there were mostly religious NPOs and Gandhian NPOs. After India had gained independence from the British, the government started to support NPOs to do social work. In the 1960s and the 1970s, new and differently orientated NPOs developed beside the existing ones. Some of them - founded by and shaped after international NGOs or by middle-class professionals - concentrated on welfare, others focused on political topics, the poor, or development. The emergence of welfare orientated NGOs which are also active in disaster relief was fuelled by two factors: First, a dire need for relief work because of the regular occurrence of disasters and second, the funding for relief work by Western countries. Sen (1992) argues that the emergence of NGOs in the late-1960s was an effect of a lack of jobs for educated youths and corresponded with social and political conditions in

India as well as with dissatisfaction with the state and the left parties. With the collapse of the government in 1980, this process was accelerated. In the following years, a kind of bifurcation took place. NGOs, based on donor agencies, focused mostly on development and NGOs, relying on members of the middle-class, worked in the field of empowerment. The governmental control of the sector became stricter, action groups became disintegrated due to aging members, support from parties was necessary to achieve some of the goals and the NPO sector became a source of employment (Sen 1992). This trend appears to continue until today. Informal and voluntary "action groups" which still are quite frequent are prone to quickly become government controlled and a source of formal employment. Given the size of the country and the frequency of (natural) disasters it is felt that there is an increasing need to improve the efficiency of disaster management organizations and social mechanisms leading to a more competent volunteer force.

2. Challenges in defining volunteerism

In the literature, volunteerism is subject to ongoing controversies and there is no generally agreed upon definition. In part, this has to do with the fact that volunteering has to be regarded as a social construct whose definition is based on public perception: what is regarded as volunteerism and what not is related to the cultural background of both the volunteer and the observer. Some authors even question the possibility and necessity of formulating a universal definition of volunteerism (Wilson 2000; Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy 2010; Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth 1996). This cultural difference is understandably reflected in differences between Western and Indian perspectives, based primarily on written literature. Nevertheless, Cnaan et al. (1996) found in their study that (predominantly western) definitions of volunteerism usually refer to four dimensions, namely:

- No formal obligation; individuals have the choice to volunteer or not.
- No remuneration; volunteers are not paid for their work or only receive a remuneration the amount of which is smaller than the work's value on the labour market.
- Unrelatedness; the subject extends help to people who are no relatives or otherwise closely related.
- Beneficiary; someone benefits from the action, be it a stranger or the helping individual him/herself.

It becomes immediately clear that none of these criteria is sharp beyond doubt which means that there always will be room for interpretation. The authors furthermore claim that etymologically the term volunteer always carries the meaning of "willing to give" or "charitable donation" indicating a certain degree of altruism (see Cnaan et al. 1996). Wehner et al. (2017) elaborate two additional dimensions of volunteerism, namely:

- Unspecificity; the character of volunteer work is such that the activity could also be done by someone else, volunteers therefore are potentially replaceable.
- Visibility; at least some aspects of volunteer work are not private; the activity receives public attention without being under the control of the government.

Any concept of volunteerism is further dependent on the disciplinary perspective from which volunteerism is examined. Scholars from different backgrounds have studied volunteerism in quite distinct ways. Accordingly, research questions, methods, theories and concepts applied to the topic of volunteerism vary significantly. For example, while psychologists have mostly studied volunteerism as an individual decision based on particular personality traits or values, sociologists – while also interested in the question who volunteers and why – have considered volunteerism first and foremost as a social phenomenon and have inquired into the benefits volunteers receive from volunteerism (Hustinx et al. 2010). Political scientists consider volunteerism as a cornerstone for civic society and democratic participation and study the ways in which it establishes particular societal values among citizens.

The Indian version of volunteerism shares many of these features. As in the West, volunteerism is expected to have a beneficiary, even if that beneficiary is the individual herself. The criterion of unspecificity is also shared. It is, for instance, common for volunteers to offer services in religious places services which are potentially replaceable. Indian volunteers also care for visibility and gain social recognition for their actions.

There are, however, three critical differences between the German and Indian practices. Indian volunteerism is often not without an element of obligation built into it. This tendency cuts across several religions practiced in India. Concepts such as *al-Ithar* or the 'highest form of generosity' guide the majority of followers of Islam to volunteer primarily for two important reasons: to do something for the benefit of others based on one's free will and to perform an action for the sake of Allah (see

Sulaiman 2011). The volunteers of the Sikh communities, known as Sevakaras, are observed to be mostly influenced by their religion to help others both inside and outside of Sikh religion. Claimed as a 'volunteering religion' (see Kaur 2014) volunteerism among the Sikhs is greatly influenced by the religious teachings and obligations. Religious sup- port for charity, as a recent study found, is one of the most important cultural forces that influence volunteerism in India (Ghose and Kassam 2014).

The absence of remuneration is also not a requirement for volunteers in India. Those who are officially declared volunteers in India are typically paid. While there are sections that do not receive a direct payment, as with student volunteers, they tend to be rewarded in terms future benefits, such as better access to jobs or higher education. Studies have found that in most cases the Indian students volunteer mainly for two purposes: to secure educational opportunities and to secure employment (see Ghose and Kassam 2014).

It is on the criterion of relatedness where there is arguably the greatest difference between some of the practices in India and those in the West. It is true that formal volunteering in India would be consistent with the demands of unrelatedness. The same would hold for specific situations such as accidents.

But the condition of unrelatedness does not always hold for informal volunteers. People very often volunteer in support of their extended families and their caste groups. A study carried out by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) in a village of Uttarakhand state of India (unpublished) reveals that individuals related by a caste, territory or language affinities offer help to the fellow individuals more than individuals who belong to other caste, territory or language.

Therefore, the problems in defining volunteerism comprehensively and universally are multifold. They include the need to take the many different forms of voluntary engagement into account and consider institutional, non-institutional as well as spontaneous forms of volunteering (see McAllum 2014). Other challenges include the differentiation between long-term and short-term volunteers, the question of payments made, the exclusion of terrorists (who might consider themselves very much as volunteers) and the focus on the volunteering individual as opposed to focus on the voluntary action as described in the Neo-Gandhian approach. Let's take a closer look at some of these variations of volunteerism.

Long-term volunteerism is an activity undertaken regularly and during a longer period, and irrespective of

specific events or disasters (see Ferreira, Proenca and Rocha 2016). Long-term volunteers are usually part of one or several organizations and have received specialized training. Permanent disaster volunteers, as described by Britton (1991) can be characterized by three aspects: First, they are active in a field which is stress-generating. Second, the organizations in which they are active usually have a rigid formalized behaviour and bureaucratic regulations and trainings are mandatory. Third, the degree of organizational involvement and commitment is usually high and there is a chance of physical and psychological injuries (Britton 1991).

In contrast to long-term volunteers, spontaneous or unbound volunteers only become active at specific events, intermitted and during a restricted time (see Ferreira et al. 2016). They usually recognize a need for immediate action, which is not provided by disaster relief organizations or the state. Spontaneous volunteers often show up when they have the impression that the existing emergency structures are not able to deal with the disaster or its aftermath. They often take up tasks that do not need any training and are easily performed, like providing water or undertaking search and rescue practices. By performing these tasks, unbound volunteers enable disaster relief organizations to carry out

more specialized and skilled tasks. The problematic point is that most of these volunteers never had a special training for their engagement and do not possess specific knowledge and experiences regarding special on-site operations. Besides, the probability of spontaneous volunteers showing up in case of a disaster is dependent on the incident and its social, economic, cultural and political context. Furthermore, one needs to distinguish between spontaneous volunteers, who want to integrate their work into the work of an organization and those who want to do something on their own or together with other spontaneous volunteers (Twigg and Mosel 2017; Harris et al. 2017).

Another issue that is relevant in our context is the question of remuneration. Cnaan et al. (1996) as well as Mesch et al. (1998) maintain that people who receive a (relatively) small payment can also be regarded as engaged in voluntary work. Whether someone is volunteering or not depends on the relation between costs and benefits. A person will usually be regarded as a volunteer only if the payment received is smaller than his/her costs.

Finally, a notorious problem with definitions of volunteerism is terrorism. Many terrorist activities would satisfy the criteria mentioned so far and in fact many terrorists consider themselves volunteers

working for a greater cause with a future society being the beneficiary (Aran 2018). In the context of civil resilience and disaster management, however, we would like to stress that voluntary engagement is supposed to help other people (there are direct beneficiaries) and is not designed to do any harm to others. In order to further distinguish between volunteerism and ideologically fuelled actions we consider it necessary that the (positive) consequences of volunteer action can be felt immediately – or at least in a short time frame. Therefore, although voluntary actions can be interpreted as to be supposed to influence the immediate and local social circumstances, they are based on voluntary decisions intended not primarily generate economic profit but have beneficial consequences.

Consequently, our working definition of volunteerism represents the result of an attempt to circumscribe the phenomenon in a very open and inclusive manner. In the context of civil safety and security, we consider volunteerism as actions taken up by people as a consequence of a voluntary decision, which do not primarily aim at generating economic profit and which are supposed to influence particular as well as vaguely defined social circumstances.

3. Explaining volunteerism

In order to be able to reflect the differences between Indian and German structures and traditions on the theoretical level, this paper presents two different perspectives on volunteerism. A first model uses psychological theory and is designed to understand the motivations underlying volunteer action in the field of disaster management. Since theories of motivation tend to claim structural universality, our model should be able to explain volunteer motivation in different societal contexts. Still, the psychological focus on the individual might, from an Indian perspective, be supplemented by a second perspective seeks that to identify a method that sees individual motivations as a part of social behaviour. This method is largely drawn from the writings of the Indian political philosopher and practioner, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It however does not require a subscription to all his judgments. It is thus better regarded as a neo-Gandhian method and forms a part of a larger revisiting of Gandhi in recent years (Pani 2002). We thus set out to develop an understanding of volunteerism that takes the interaction between individual motives and the perceived norms of society into account.

Although we have to acknowledge that the explanation of volunteerism

calls for a multi-level theoretical model, combining psychological, sociological and cultural perspectives, we start with a discussion of the psychological perspective. In psychology, various authors have attempted to conceptualize volunteerism. Particularly the studies of Clary and his colleagues (Clary et al. 1998, Clary and Snyder 1999) and their model of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) have received attention for providing a useful theoretical framework to conceptualize motivations of volunteers. In the VFI, volunteerism is claimed to serve six main functions or motivations which are referred to as (altruistic and humanitarian) *values*, *understanding* (gaining knowledge and skills), (ego) *enhancement*, *career*, (developing and strengthening of) *social* (ties) and (ego) *protective*. *Value*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way of expressing and acting on important values like humanitarianism, *understanding*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way to learn more about the world or to exercise skills that are often unused and *enhancement*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way to grow and develop psychologically. These three are claimed to be of greater importance than *career*, *social* and *protective* (Clary and Snyder 1999). *Career*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way to gain career-related

experience, *social*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way to strengthen the volunteer´s social relationships and *protective*-driven volunteerism is defined as a way to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.

Although the VFI conceptualizes different motivations as separate entities, the authors stress the multi motivational nature of volunteering. This means that a person´s decision to take on volunteer work is driven by an amalgamation of motivations rather than a single one. Put differently, the VFI claims that volunteers pursue different goals with one and the same volunteer work.

Values and motivations

The VFI provides one way of conceptualizing volunteers´ motivations and is a useful starting point to think about why people volunteer in the first place. However, the model can also be criticized on various accounts: Its six dimensions seem to be generated inductively and lack a proper theoretical integration. They are formulated on quite different levels of abstraction and, more importantly, provide no clear definition of motivation and thus blur the distinction between "motives" and "values". In the remainder of this section we will argue that motives are the result of a distorted equilibrium, a difference

between the actual value of a need and its set value. Needs are innate although all processes related to their satisfaction are, of course, learned. Values, on the other hand, do not motivate behaviour but have the potential to provide direction for action in cases there is no societal routine or cultural norm available. Values are always learned within the context of one's reference group(s). Respondents, when asked about the reasons for their volunteer work are usually not aware of such distinctions and use concepts describing motivations, values and societal norms interchangeably. Justifications for volunteerism frequently used are, e.g., patriotism, religion, or fairness. We would suggest that such justifications are abbreviations that, upon closer inspection, point to a complex mixture of motivational processes. Taking these considerations into account, the following section introduces a model that builds upon the main insights of the VFI but integrates them into more general and encompassing psychological theories of motivation.

This model builds upon the work of Dörner (Schaub and Dörner 1997; Dörner 1998; Dörner et al. 2002), Bischof (1985; 1993) and Strohschneider (2002; 2003) to integrate a concept of motivation to volunteer in a general psychological theoretical framework for motivation. Based on these theories, the model we propose identifies three main needs that are addressed by voluntary engagement in disaster management. These are the need for affiliation, the need for certainty and the need for control. These needs are considered universal, their relative importance, however, varies between individuals as well as between cultural groups.

The need for affiliation connotes the need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) to a form of community ("Gemeinschaft"). It is satisfied by signals that indicate an individual´s membership to a group. These signals usually involve particularly meaningful gestures and symbols that communicate membership to outsiders as well as insiders, including types of clothing typical for the group or participation in seemingly banal rituals like communal gatherings and group meetings. In the context of disaster management, such signals can be found in uniforms that are typical for a certain group and widely known. Other nonverbal signals of affiliation involve touch and close spatial proximity to each other, which is why for example firefighters have been described as prototypical "touching cultures" (Dibiase and Gunnoe 2004). Coordinated group activities also work as important means to foster a strong bond among members and provide effective affiliation signals to members. Last but not least, affiliation

is of course also expressed verbally in everyday encounters between members. Taken together, these different ways of expressing group membership form an organisation's language of affiliation that is important for the smooth collaboration within the group and that works to integrate members in a subtle way.

The second need that drives people to volunteerism is the need for certainty. It is connected to an interest in understanding the world and a desire for predictability and order. This need is often experienced in (or sometimes even equated to) the form of pro-social values like fairness and reciprocity (Lerner and Miller 1978; Furnham 2003). This need is particularly triggered by unexpected, potentially dangerous and disturbing events that are typical for the context of disaster management. It is satisfied by actions (and information resulting from those actions) that re-establish a sense of order in afflicted individuals and render the world calculable again.

Lastly, the need for control denotes a need to actively shape the world, to be able to influence one´s surroundings and recognize the effects of one´s actions. People with a prominently developed need for control strive to acquire knowledge and skills in order to feel prepared for future possible challenges and can be expected to feel frustrated by circumstances in which

they are not able to recognize the immediate results of their work or in which they have to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. They strive to ´do things´ in a rather straightforward manner and prefer clear task designations and a short delay between action and outcomes. These outcomes are not restricted to the primary agenda of an organisation but can also be competences that the volunteer acquires during the course of his or her work.

These basic needs are more or less prominent in every human being, although developed to different degrees. They never occur in a singular manner, but people exhibit a mixture of needs that are hierarchized. Similar to the VFI, this model rests upon the claim that it is possible to identify different personal motivations without assuming that these exclude each other.

Furthermore, these needs have to be understood in a bipolar manner in the sense that there can be an abundance of a certain emotional stimulation which people experience as too much. For example, if a person feels bored by his or her daily work routine, this could be understood as an abundance of certainty that results in a need for uncertainty. Taking up volunteer work can provide that person with a means to achieve just that and satisfy a lust for adventure and excitement. Too much affiliation can

trigger a need for de-affiliation and as a result, a person might feel an urge to engage in voluntary work on their own or in a smaller group. Likewise, certain work can be experienced as too controlled which could result in a person losing motivation due to feeling unchallenged in their work. In this way, an overstimulation of particular needs can lead to new needs. This makes a careful balancing of volunteers´ needs important.

It is obvious that a dominance of each of the three motives is probably associated with specific forms of volunteering behaviour. For people with a strong need for affiliation that is not satisfied in other relevant contexts (e.g., family, caste group, other forms of Gemeinschaft) volunteering becomes a means of enacting this motivation; in the context of disaster management uniforms, joint rituals and frequent interpersonal interaction within a stable unit are important. People who are driven by a strong need for certainty can be expected to prefer individual, often short-term, event-related forms of voluntary engagement that do not - in contrast to volunteers who are predominantly driven by a need for affiliation - necessarily involve long-term commitment to a group or organisation. People who are driven by a need for control often prefer activities that involve technical equipment, require strength, and provide them with training, new skills and a sense of mastery. Their motivation will be sustained if they are able to recognize a particular effect of their engagement.

As we have already mentioned in passing, specific values (like patriotism, religion/humanitarianism, justice and fairness) do not motivate voluntary action per se. Rather, they can be understood as conceptual abbreviations of specific motive-combinations. Patriotism, for instance, expresses the need to be a legitimate member of a concrete (although large) collective (which is affiliation) combined with a need for control: As soon as I am part of a well-functioning collective, I participate in that larger power. In the case of religious and humanitarian values we assume a combination of the need for affiliation (being part of an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) of rightful believers or true human beings and the need for certainty which is in imbalance due to the occurrence of a disaster.

The Neo-Gandhian Approach to volunteerism

However, no person is an island and his or her motivations only work in a social context. The voluntary action could be based on a variety of contextual factors including learning from history and role models, religious prescriptions, societal

traditions of engagement, the extent of openness and formality of organizations, the degree of centrality, subsidiarity of state funding and control, beliefs of specific groups, social stratification, and past experiences. In building this link between individual motivations to volunteer and larger social contexts there are important insights to be gained from the Indian thinker, MK Gandhi. His mode of communication-scattered ideas spread over a hundred volumes-lends itself to multiple interpretations. His comments on volunteers too were largely in the nature of responses to specific socio-political situations in the first half of the twentieth century. It is possible, though, to use these ideas to put together a consistent method of understanding reality, a method that could be very useful in understanding twenty-first century challenges to volunteerism.

A central theme of Gandhi's method and thought that is particularly relevant to volunteerism is his view of the world as a series of interconnected actions. This involved taking a very broad view of actions, which Gandhi interpreted through the concept of Karma. He argued that "Karma means any action, any bodily activity or motion. […] karma includes even thought. Any motion, any sound, even breathing, are forms of karma. Some of them we cannot avoid performing. Some of them we perform

as a matter of necessity, some others are involuntary" (Gandhi 1926–1927, Vol. 37, p. 128). This view of actions involves not only intended actions, but also everything that happens. These broadly defined actions would invariably involve other persons, animals and/or things. The value of an action and its motivation would then be seen primarily in relation to others. As Gandhi saw it, "Love, kindness, generosity and other qualities can be manifested only in relation to others" (Gandhi 1906–1907, Vol. 6, p. 283). The individual and society were then closely interlinked. As the relations between individuals changed, so did society. A society where more individuals were motivated to volunteer would be quite different from one where individuals were less inclined to do so.

The propensity for a society to volunteer could also change over time, and not just because the individuals who constituted that society were not identical at different points of time. Gandhi was also very sensitive to the potential for the same individual to carry out very different, even contradictory, actions at different points of time. In developing the possibility of the same individual acting differently at different points of time he borrowed the concept of Gunas from the traditional Sankhya school of Indian philosophy (see Hiriyanna 2005). This school spoke of there being three

Gunas: Satva or the pure, Rajas or the active (usually associated with desire), and Tamas or offering resistance (usually associated with the dark). Individuals are believed to have all three Gunas within them in varying combinations. Some individuals would have a combination of Gunas that make them more prone to altruism, and hence to carry out voluntary acts, than others. These individuals with a higher propensity to volunteer would be more likely to be willing to commit themselves to long-term volunteering, especially if the additional motivations we have discussed earlier come into play.

An individual's propensity to volunteer need not, however, be constant over time. The combinations of the three Gunas vary not just between individuals but also within a person across time. It is quite possible for individuals who usually volunteer to be less inclined to do so at some particular point of times. Conversely, it is also possible for individuals who are not usually inclined to volunteer to choose to do so in some specific situations. The latter group of occasional volunteers would lend themselves to spontaneous volunteering. The focus on actions, rather than individuals, in Gandhi's method thus allows for spontaneous volunteering in addition to long-term volunteering.

In keeping with Gandhi's method the act of volunteering could itself be seen to consist of two broad elements: the motivation to volunteer and the carrying out of that voluntary action. The motivation to act would be moderated by the knowledge a person has; knowledge that would include not just what can be done but also the larger social values that would prompt her to do so. A doctor who volunteers to help an accident victim would need not just the knowledge of medical science but also some sense of social awareness. Her urge to volunteer at that point of time may also be influenced not just by her overall propensity to volunteer, but how inclined to volunteer she feels at that very moment. This inclination, for Gandhi, was influenced by a sense of proximity. He argued that there was a "spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote." (see Gandhi 1915-17, Vol.15, p. 159). Since Gandhi made this statement while addressing a group of Christian missionaries, the immediate surroundings he was referring to was not confined to geographical areas (to "mutual aid" in the context of civil safety and security, that is). The proximity could be felt in other spaces. A doctor volunteering to help in a refugee camp in a distant land is nevertheless operating within the immediate surroundings of her profession and her ethics.

The transformation of this motivation into an actual voluntary action would involve her interaction with the rest of society. She would need to have the means to volunteer. Much of the policy effort in volunteerism is designed to develop the means for volunteers to step in. This is relatively easy to conceptualise of in long-term volunteering, where there are relatively fewer volunteers. The repetition of their acts of volunteering also allows for them to be trained and to learn from experience. The greater challenge lies in dealing with spontaneous volunteering where the volunteers may not be trained or have the experience. Here again a focus on actions would help. It may be possible to split the actions that are required in a particular situation by the level of skill required. This would allow for the less skilled actions to be given to spontaneous volunteers.

A focus on actions can thus be beneficial both in the relationship between the individual and the act of volunteering as well as in the social processes involved in managing volunteerism. The shifting of the unit of analysis from the individual to actions allows for variations across individuals as well as within them at different points of time. And understanding volunteerism as a series of actions – more than the individuals involved in the actions – can

enable a strategy that is realistic enough to recognize the varying levels of skills, experience and even commitment across different volunteers.

4. Disasters and volunteers

Current sociological thinking maintains that crises (vulnerabilities) are social constructions and that there is no such thing as a crisis as such (von Vacano & Zaumseil 2013). Nevertheless, societies usually agree on what is a crisis and what not and prepare accordingly (resilience). In light of the foregoing discussion, we want to discuss the "applicability" of different forms of volunteerism both to the nature of the crises and to the societal needs (which sometimes differ greatly) and we need to address the problem of on-site-interaction between the two forms.

Disasters are irregular events, for which society cannot assign sufficient relevant resources. The resources available and their application are in many societies managed by a disaster-relevant organizational network (DRON) consistent of organizations on local, state and national level and relying on both technical equipment and human manpower. The people active in this field are not a uniform group and not all of them are part of a formally organized group (see Britton 1991). Volunteers who are members of disaster relief

organizations are formal volunteers and usually have received substantial levels of training. Spontaneous volunteers are those who are on site coincidentally and decide to help or people who arrive on site after they got knowledge of the situation (e.g. via social networks). Spontaneous volunteers are not directly affected by the disaster and they may or may not be on touch with formal organizations. No matter what kind of volunteers are on site, and how they are organized, they need to be involved in the DRON to fruitfully use their work power (Alexander 2010).

Crises that are better served by formal volunteering would include those that require substantial levels of training and where technical equipment is needed and needs to be operated. Some natural disasters, taking for example a flooding where large areas can only be entered with boats and people need to leave their houses, need response by professionals. Formal volunteers also serve better in a situation where there are mass casualties and in crises that demand for ongoing engagement and constant work.

In Western countries with very rigid and formalized organisations of disaster relief, spontaneous volunteers are often seen critically. What is regarded as problematic is that they demand emergency management resources, are exposed to the risk of getting injured,

are generally unequipped, often need support that is urgently needed to serve victims and lack a structure of command. While full-time members and formal volunteers of crisis management organizations receive specialized trainings to deal with situations of disasters, spontaneous volunteers usually lack this specific knowledge, although they often have diverse competences which might be beneficial in situations of crisis. Additionally, organizations and formal volunteers are often regarded as legitimate actors while spontaneous volunteers are seen as illegitimate.

Notwithstanding these problematic aspects of spontaneous volunteerism, crises that are better served by spontaneous volunteering include those where the numbers are more important than the training (Alexander 2010, Deutsches Rotes Kreuz 2015, 2016 and Whittaker et al. 2015). This would, for example, be the case where dykes need to be secured or where an earthquake with substantial demolitions requires large scale search operations. They can be also be appointed in situations where people have to stay in shelters and need to be taken care of. They can take up organisational tasks, take care for food and drinks, register people who are in need of help, build shelter homes, and remove debris (see Deutsches Rotes Kreuz 2015, 2016). They are especially

helpful when official disaster relief organisations need a long time to arrive on site, where human life is in immediate danger and there is no time to be lost.

5. Conclusion

The civil safety and security instances that require volunteers can vary a great deal calling for quite different acts of volunteering. There are situations where specialized training is of the essence (as in firefighting) while other situations (such as getting large numbers of victims of a flood to the safety) may be more dependent of the number of volunteers. It is important to stress that a mismatch between the situation and the type of volunteers needed can make the situation worse. It is not unknown in India for crowds of people, who want to help, to block the effective functioning of firefighters. At the same time a highly skilled volunteer may not be the best response to a flood where the priority is to take large numbers of the old and infirm to safer areas. The mechanisms of volunteering would thus need to be able to meet both these demands for volunteers. It would need to allow for long-term volunteering with its advantage of generating trained volunteers, even as it is able to absorb large numbers of spontaneous volunteers as and when needed. And the mechanism must allow for a shift from a reliance on trained volunteers to tapping larger numbers of untrained volunteers as the situation demands.

A major feature of such a mechanism would be its flexibility. It would have access to both trained volunteers and to spontaneous volunteers. The trained volunteers would be a part of a long-term programme where specific skills are taught and updated over time. Spontaneous volunteering may be a short-term action by the volunteers, but its effectiveness would require longer-term action by the overall mechanism of volunteerism. The overall mechanism would have to guard against large numbers of spontaneous volunteers creating near anarchic situations during a disaster. The mechanism should thus be able to clearly identify tasks that can be carried out by large numbers of untrained volunteers. The roles of spontaneous volunteers would also need to be clearly defined so that they do not come in the way of trained volunteers and professionals doing their specialised jobs. The mechanism must also help create an environment where volunteering in times of extreme vulnerability is socially recognized and individual acts of spontaneous volunteering are appreciated. While identifying these roles can be done in a training institution, getting society at large to accept them spontaneously at a time of crisis would require other

initiatives. The mechanism may have to identify individuals with the motivation to volunteer with a credible presence in the neighbourhood who they can tap at times of increased vulnerability.

Managing the different pieces involved in the mechanism of voluntarism would in turn require a leadership that is aware both of the intricate skills of the trained volunteer as well as the social and other behavioural norms that motivate ordinary citizens to spontaneously volunteer. This would require a deeper understanding of social processes, including those that do not appear at first sight to be related to vulnerability.

Potential conflicts of interest

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11. **Abstract:** Volunteerism is of increasing importance in societies' attempts to improve on civil safety and security and, at the same time, faces specific challenges. The paper is a theoretical attempt towards an explanation of volunteering in an international perspective. It starts by comparing historical traditions of volunteer work in two quite different countries, namely India and Germany. This comparison leads to a critical assessment of some definitory problems of volunteering. In the main part of the paper we try to explain volunteerism by combining classical psychological approaches, based on values and motivation, with a Neo-Gandhian approach that puts the voluntary action into focus. Finally, we draw some speculative conclusions on how this theoretical perspective might be brought to bear in overcoming the challenges civil safety and security organizations face in these two countries.

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