

Euracademy 13th Summer Academy, July 2014

**Volunteering –
the basis for collective self-help, local action,
participative democracy and civil society**

Michael Dower

Volunteering - a definition

Action taken by a person or group
on their own initiative,
in what they perceive to be the public interest,
without direct financial reward.

Ideas within this definition

Volunteering is active, not passive

People act

not because they are told to do it,

not because they're paid to do it

not for direct private gain

They act in the spirit of public interest,

- altruism rather than selfishness
- for the well-being of a group or a cause.



Motives for volunteering

- a sense of duty
- a religious faith
- empathy for other people
- respect for nature
- respect for past or future generations.

Action may be provoked by the collective needs of:

- communities of place
- communities of interest
- particularly if these needs are not met
- by public bodies or the commercial market.

A powerful third sector

Volunteering is a powerful force ...

... a third sector, alongside the public and commercial sectors

... meeting needs that not met by the state or the market

... often scorned by public authorities or capitalist tycoons

.. but contributing greatly to European life.

Originally, it was the first sector !

How people lived before state or market existed ...

Self-reliant families, clans or tribes

.. shared the essential tasks

- hunting, gathering, cultivating
- building shelters
- caring for children and the elderly

.. created traditions of communal or voluntary work
which survive today in modern form.

Volunteering and sustainable rural development

What, then, is the role of volunteering in sustainable rural development ?

Rural development - a definition

A deliberate process of sustained and sustainable economic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, designed to improve the quality of life of the local population of a rural region.

For our purpose here, the key words are

‘change’

‘local population’

‘sustainable’

Change

Change may be desired by rural communities or may be forced on them by :

- decision of public authorities
- collapse of industries
- cultural innovation or other factors.

The hope for change, or the threat of change
are often the stimulus for voluntary action
either to create a desired change
or to avert a threatened change

Realising a desired change

Monyash village in Derbyshire, England

Construction of a new village hall, and school dining room

County Council offered grant of 50% of the capital cost.
Normally, villages must pay their 50% in cash.

The villagers wanted to give their share 'in kind'
by voluntary labour in building the hall.

County Council agreed, and assessed the
money value of the time spent by the people.



Averting a threatened change

Village school in northern Sweden
threatened with closure for lack of children
County Council needed to save costs
equivalent to one and a half teachers.

Villagers provided a small team of volunteers
to act as assistant teachers.
The school was saved



Local population

Rural development is

*“designed to improve the quality of life
of the local population of a rural region”.*

In centralist or communist countries,
development was done by the government,
top-down, to or for the people.

Increasingly, as Europe becomes more democratic
.. as people become more assertive and
.. as governments are forced to make economies,
development can be done with and by the people.

This enlarges the need and the scope for voluntary action.

Sustainability

‘Change’ can sound like a short-term thing.

But rural communities know that their well-being is a long-term issue.

Farmers work to crop rotations over many years

Forest management regimes extend over decades.

So, rural development is focused on sustained and sustainable change.

Defining sustainability

Brundtland in 1987 defines sustainable development as:

Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

That definition alone cannot guide or motivate rural development.

Increasingly, people are aware of

- threats to security
- poverty and social exclusion
- fragility of national and local economies
- abuse of the environment
- climate change, with links to fossil fuel
- the need to use renewable energy.

The search for true sustainability has become a significant driving force behind the latest expression of volunteering, namely local action in many parts of both urban and rural Europe.

Local action

Ideas from the AEIDL Conference, November 2013
“Reinventing Europe through local initiative”.

The impulse for people to take action is often rooted in the needs of family, home and neighbourhood.

If the world does not give them a good life,
people take their life into their own hands.

Action may spring from three main motives
– social, economic and environmental.

Social impetus

Communities wishing to help themselves
out of poverty, exclusion or other disadvantage.



Roma project in Hungary

Cserehát region in northeast Hungary

Large Roma population, suffering severe social exclusion and poverty

UNDP launched programme of assistance, with skilled animators working patiently to encourage villagers to take initiative.

Fulókércs village, with leader Imre 'Zorro' Mata,
.. trained local people in farming and forestry
.. created a social cooperative, with funding from UNDP and EU
 towards the building, training and wage subsidy
.. set up a kindergarten

Now financially self-supporting
 with 12 full-time workers and more part-time
 and plans to start carpet and tapestry weaving.

Economic impetus

Action often prompted by frustration of SMES and small farmers, because of low bargaining power in the 'common market'.

But Europe is not a single market :
it contains a multiplicity of local markets,
which provide a focus for SMEs

The issue is not competitiveness, but viability,
which can be achieved by means such as
cooperatives, food chains, producer groups

Such actions draw on economic self-interest, but often need a strong element of volunteering and bring social and environmental benefits.

The Valley of the Carp, Poland

The Barycz Valley - long tradition of carp fisheries

2006 the Lower Silesian Foundation for

Sustainable Development organised a 'Carp Days' festival.

2007 the Barycz Valley Foundation joined in, and proposed a basis for regional branding of the valley's products, with the festival as the leading means of publicity.

This Foundation became a LEADER group and expanded the event and rebranding campaign.

Now, the Festival :

- attracts up to 500,000 people every year.
- has promoted networking of fishermen and fish farmers, restaurant owners, tourist operators, community associations and local authorities.
- provides platform to add value to products through direct sales
- has led to the development of new products, such as smoked carp.

The 'Barycz Valley Recommends' brand is the result of many years of work on the part of several NGOs seeking to preserve the region's unique environment and to stimulate locally based, environmentally friendly economic activities.



Environmental impetus

Growing realisation among European citizens that :

- we should take better care of our planet and our heritage
- EU and national governments are not truly grasping the severity of the environmental challenge.

Thinking globally, they want to act locally.

That conviction drives :

- .. Public support for, and voluntary actions through, CSOs such as Birdlife International, Europa Nostra, ECOVAST, Slow Food et al.
- .. Transition Towns, Ecovillages and similar initiatives
- .. an enormous range of projects focused on environmental conservation



National Trust

in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Established in 1895 as an 'association not for profit'

'to preserve ...lands and buildings of beauty or historic interest..'

Now owns :

- 200 great houses,
- over 100 historic gardens,
- over 250,000 hectares of land
- 1120 kilometres of beautiful coastline.

Most of this property is rural.

- The Trust makes a massive contribution to well-being of heritage and landscape and of rural economies and communities.
- It has over 4 million members, who make annual voluntary donations.
- Over 60,000 people give regular practical help as volunteers
 - .. guiding visitors, working in gardens and woodlands,
 - repairing footpaths, serving in shops etc.





Participative democracy

So, volunteering is at the root of local action projects throughout Europe.
It is also, increasingly, the basis for participative democracy.

The need for voluntary action depends partly on the structure of public authorities.
Where local authorities are truly local, as in France with a mayor in each village, they can lead local action. **This is elective democracy.**

But where municipalities are large, embracing many villages, they may fail to meet the needs of individual villages.

Example in Sweden.

In rural Sweden, many villages are far from central towns. They have to be personally and communally self-reliant. So, Sweden has over 5,000 village-level action groups, focused on sustaining communal services and enterprises.

They are federated in the organisation *HELA Sverige ska Leva*

This is participative democracy

The civil sector

This network in Sweden is simply one dramatic example of the scale of the voluntary, or civil, sector in 21st century Europe.

An increasingly powerful force in the life of the continent
.. increasingly recognized, and valued, by governments
.. increasingly structured to play its part in rural development.

To illustrate this point, I briefly open up themes which other speakers in the Summer Academy will elaborate - national rural movements, LEADER, participation, and mechanisms for volunteering.

National rural movements

Hela Sverige ska leva is a national rural movement.

It can speak for hundreds of thousands of rural people

.. tens of thousands of active volunteers.

It is one of a growing number of similar movements,

.. now existing in 20 European countries

.. working together in PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe
and European Rural Communities Association (ERCA)

Urszula Budzich Tabor and Vanessa Halhead

will speak more about this widening 'network of networks',
which can express the voice of rural people and of volunteers
at national and European level.

ERCA and PREPARE jointly sponsored the first **European Rural Parliament**,
in Brussels November 2013;
and are now planning the second European Rural Parliament for 2015.

LEADER

Launched by the European Commission in 1991.

Now part of all formal Rural Development Programmes .

Based on

- partnership between public, private and civil sectors
- production of a local development strategies
- involvement of local people and organisations.

This can be a powerful support to voluntary action.



Participation

LEADER, in 1991, by-passed national governments,
because many governments then operated top-down.

But attitudes of government and of citizens have evolved.

- EU insists on full consultations with general public and CSOs.
- Mechanisms at EU and national level assist this.

Governments and civil society are learning to climb the 'ladder of participation':

- Information (*we, the government, tell you what we intend to do*)
- Consultation (*we invite you to comment*)
- Participation (*we invite you to share in deciding what should be done*)
- Partnership (*we invite you to join us in the implementation*)
- Delegation (*we trust you to carry out the work*).

This participative climate helps voluntary bodies, and volunteering

Mechanisms for volunteering (1)

Self-confidence among volunteers, and willingness of governments to consult, are not alone enough.

Mechanisms are needed.

Local actors have created a wide range of techniques to enable good things to happen e.g.

- .. new forms of social enterprise, cooperatives,
- .. local food chains, local energy groups,
- .. eco-villages, transition towns, slow cities.





Mechanisms for volunteering (2)

Financial mechanisms have been created, to keep money in local economies or to apply local capital to meet local needs e.g.

- .. local currencies, local banks,
- .. time-banking, crowd funding,
- .. equity capital and regional branding.

Governments should set a legal etc. climate friendly to civil society, to volunteering and to the use of such mechanisms e.g.

- .. laws which help creation of associations, foundations or charities
- .. rules for voluntary contributions to be offset against tax
- .. acceptance of in-kind contributions (see the Monyash example)

Fiery spirits

But volunteering starts with people
... leaders ... fiery spirits ... then groups
and whole communities

Example Zlakusa village, southwest Serbia

A leader - Sasa Drndarevic

A tradition - Pottery

A village community

Dynamic development of village life, culture and economy

We can do it !













