

Volunteers for NPOs in Welfare Services in Iceland: A Diminishing Resource?

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Abstract The question of declining membership of non-profit organizations (NPOs) has been central in academic discussion and research has indicated changes in the way people volunteer. Less emphasis has been on the functions of volunteers as a resource for NPOs and how changes such as increased reliance on professionals in their operations can influence the volume and type of volunteering. This paper examines the value of volunteers as a resource for Icelandic NPOs in the field of welfare services. It is based on a study of the majority of active Icelandic NPOs in the welfare field, as well as an analysis of their respective websites. The findings show that volunteer contributions do not constitute a significant part of the activities of most Icelandic NPOs in welfare services. Apart from membership of boards, volunteers seem to be used primarily as a means of supplementing other resources, such as temporary fundraising efforts. However, the level of volunteering varies according to the size and operational type of organization.

Résumé La question du déclin de l'adhésion des membres aux organismes sans but lucratif est au cœur des discussions du milieu académique et la recherche suggère que le bénévolat change. Moins d'attention a été portée aux fonctions des bénévoles en tant que ressources desdits organismes et à la façon dont des changements, notamment le recours accru à des professionnels, peut influencer la population bénévole et le type de bénévolat. Cet article étudie la valeur des bénévoles comme

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ressources d'organismes sans but lucratif islandais dans le domaine de l'aide sociale. Il se fonde sur une étude ayant porté sur la majorité des organismes de bienfaisance du domaine de l'aide sociale, ainsi que sur une analyse de leur site Web respectif. Les découvertes démontrent que, dans le domaine de l'aide sociale, les contributions bénévoles ne constituent pas une part importante des activités de la plupart des organismes sans but lucratif islandais. En dehors des membres de conseils et comités, les bénévoles semblent être principalement utilisés dans le but d'obtenir d'autres ressources, dont des initiatives de financement temporaires. Le bénévolat varie cependant selon la taille de l'organisme et ses activités.

Zusammenfassung Das Thema rückläufige Mitgliedschaften in gemeinnützigen Organisationen steht in akademischen Diskussionen im Vordergrund. Studien weisen darauf hin, dass sich die Art und Weise, in der Menschen ehrenamtlich tätig sind, geändert hat. Mehr im Hintergrund standen bislang die Funktionen Ehrenamtlicher als eine Ressource für gemeinnützige Organisationen und wie Änderungen, beispielsweise eine vermehrte Abhängigkeit von Fachkräften in ihrem Geschäftsbetrieb, das Volumen und die Art der ehrenamtlichen Arbeit beeinflussen können. Diese Abhandlung untersucht den Wert Ehrenamtlicher als eine Ressource für isländische gemeinnützige Organisationen im Sozialdienstleistungsbereich. Sie beruht auf einer Studie der Mehrzahl aktiver isländischer gemeinnütziger Organisationen im Sozialdienstleistungsbereich sowie auf einer Analyse ihrer jeweiligen Websites. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die ehrenamtlichen Beiträge bei den Aktivitäten der meisten isländischen gemeinnützigen Organisationen im Sozialdienstleistungsbereich keinen großen Teil ausmachen. Abgesehen von Vorstandsmitgliedschaften scheinen Ehrenamtliche hauptsächlich als eine Ergänzung zu anderen Ressourcen eingesetzt zu werden, wie beispielsweise bei zeitlich begrenzten Spendenaktionen. Allerdings variiert der Umfang der ehrenamtlichen Tätigkeit entsprechend der Größe und Betriebsart der Organisation.

Resumen La cuestión de la decreciente afiliación a organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro (NPO, por sus siglas en inglés) ha sido central en el debate académico y la investigación ha indicado cambios en la forma en la que la gente realiza voluntariado. Menos énfasis se ha mostrado en las funciones de los voluntarios como recursos para las NPO y cómo los cambios tales como una creciente dependencia de profesionales en sus operaciones pueden influir en el volumen y tipo del voluntariado. El presente documento examina el valor de los voluntarios como recursos para las NPO islandesas en el campo de los servicios sociales. Se basa en un estudio de la mayoría de NPO islandesas activas en el campo del bienestar, así como también en un análisis de sus respectivos sitios web. Los hallazgos muestran que las contribuciones de los voluntarios no constituyen una parte significativa de las actividades de la mayoría de las NPO islandesas en los servicios sociales. Aparte de ser miembros de los consejos, los voluntarios parecen ser utilizados fundamentalmente como un medio de complementar otros recursos, tales como los esfuerzos temporales de recaudación de fondos. Sin embargo, el nivel de voluntariado varía según el tamaño y el tipo operativo de organización.

Keywords Volunteers · Non-profit organizations · Welfare services · Third sector

Introduction

The work of volunteers is considered one of the distinct features of non-profit organizations (NPOs; United Nations, 2003). In recent decades, research has indicated changes in the way people volunteer; it has also pointed to reduced interest in formal membership (Putnam 2000; Hustinx et al 2010). There have also been changes in how NPOs have been operated: particularly mature volunteer associations have evolved into professionally run organizations offering public services alongside those offered by public institutions (Skocpol 2003; Anheier 2009; Buckingham 2009; Wijkström 2011). Research has focused on the factors influencing dwindling membership (Hustinx et al 2010; Papakostas 2011). Less focus has been placed on the value of volunteer work as a resource for NPOs or on how changes in their operations, reflected in professionalization and public service operations, influence the volume and type of volunteering.

The paper responds to the lack of research on volunteering as an NPO resource by discussing the results of a case study on NPOs working in the field of welfare services in Iceland. This includes organizations providing social and health services, such as nursing homes, housing and rehabilitation, as well as philanthropic and charitable associations offering financial and social support to clients, self-help, and patient groups.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we briefly discuss the history and role of NPOs in Iceland to give a broad picture of the importance of NPOs in welfare services in a Nordic context. Then, we present a theoretical discussion on volunteers as a resource for NPOs, which will be followed by an overview of the methods of data collection. We then present our empirical findings concerning volunteers in NPOs in welfare services. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary and discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our research.

Non-profit Organizations in Welfare Services in Iceland in a Nordic and Historical Context

The Nordic welfare model, or social democratic model, is generally characterized by welfare services being largely provided and funded by the public sector and the existence of a well-developed social security system grounded on the principle of universalism (Esping-Andersen 1990). In academic discourse, this model is frequently associated with the five Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland, although Iceland has frequently been ignored in academic writings on the subject. Looking at the social democratic model in greater detail, it is expected that non-profit organizations will have a smaller share in welfare provision because this is predominantly the responsibility of the public sector.

This historically rather clear-cut division became blurred in the mid-1980s; this is reflected in welfare mix and hybrid systems. More complex models expressed in concepts such as mixed economy of welfare, new public governance, collaborative public management, and public–private partnership and networks have taken place. However, there is a lack of systematic comparative research on these changes between and within all five Nordic countries.

This generalized model of Nordic welfare provision does not take into account national divergence. A recent study describes the differences among the three Scandinavian countries (Sivesind 2013, 2016). Studies on Norway have shown the existence of public dominant welfare services, while Denmark has a long history of NPOs providing welfare services, although they are publically funded to a large extent. In Sweden, the share of for-profit organizations providing welfare services has increased rapidly in recent years (Sivesind 2013).

In the academic literature, it is generally agreed that the Icelandic welfare state belongs to the Nordic welfare model. However, Iceland has always deviated from the other Scandinavian countries in some aspects. It has been suggested that the Icelandic system is a hybrid of the Nordic welfare model and the liberal model (Ólafsson 2012; Hrafnadóttir and Kristmundsson 2012). This has been explained by late modernization and industrialization in Iceland compared to the other Nordic countries. Accordingly, Icelandic welfare agencies developed later than those in other Nordic countries. In addition, the political landscape has differed from that of other Nordic countries; the right-wing Independence Party has had the strongest political power since 1944, although the social democrats played an important role in passing legislation on public insurance and social security in the 1940s and 1950s. Others have proposed that the values of self-sufficiency and self-reliance are very strong in Icelandic culture, parallel with strong individualism, a high-profile work ethic, and a strong role of the family (Ólafsson 2012; Jónsson 2001; Júlíusdóttir 1993). Eydal (2000) has proposed that these “cultural obstacles” can explain, to some extent, the relatively low political interest in more comprehensive public support.

There is a long-established and deeply embedded tradition in Iceland of non-profit organizations volunteering in welfare services (Kristmundsson and Hrafnadóttir 2012; Hrafnadóttir 2008). Following industrialization and urbanization in the first part of the twentieth century, non-profits played a leading role both in establishing and in providing welfare services, with or without limited governmental support. They founded hospitals, poor-relief programs, and services for the elderly and the disabled. Initially, these organizations were almost entirely established and run by volunteers and financed by the associations and patients themselves. Despite the establishment of the social security system, non-profit organizations continued to remain essential providers of various welfare services and entrepreneurs of new welfare institutions. Patient organizations and member organizations were established for the first time, mainly to fight for the interests of their members but also to take initiatives in the formation of new welfare services (Hrafnadóttir and Kristmundsson 2012).

In the 1970s and 1980s, various patient organizations and member-oriented associations formed an umbrella group that became a powerful voice capable of

putting pressure on the welfare state to take responsibility for various problems and insisting on a role in the policymaking process.

It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that fundamental changes occurred in the relationship between non-profits and the government; these changes followed the establishment of the Icelandic welfare state, economic growth, and social changes (Kristmundsson 2009). The government gradually took over general hospitals and some other activities in the health sector. Some non-profits consequently became quasi-government agencies. However, the increasing public responsibility did not crowd out as many non-profits as could have been expected. Several welfare services were left to the responsibility of the third sector, albeit with government funding. Most notably, these were nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, residential services for the disabled, and alcohol and drug abuse treatment facilities. In these areas, non-profit organizations are still large or even dominant, as measured by their level of activity and number of staff.

The Icelandic third sector has always played an important role in providing welfare services—even after the establishment of the modern public welfare system. Iceland did not adapt a social democratic model with high public spending and a limited role of non-profits in providing welfare services, as measured in economic terms and employment. However, the ideology and framework have been similar to the other Nordic countries, but Iceland has lagged behind with regard to implementing and financing welfare services, meaning that the country has partly deviated from the other Nordic countries. However, more comparable data are needed to discuss whether this is changing.

Volunteers as NPO Resources

Organizations cannot function without resources. According to Barney (1991), Yuctman and Seashore (1967), and Grant (1991), resources are defined as everything that is specific to the organization while strengthening its status, such as property, specific attributes, and knowledge. Based on the general classification of resources (see Kraaijenbrink and Groen 2008), there are four categories: human capital; physical resources, such as equipment, buildings, and property; intangible assets, complementary assets, and reputational assets (e.g., reputation, goodwill, image, brand, and the structure of the organization); and financial resources, such as income from property and trade income in cases where organizations use their income to achieve their non-profit goals.

According to the definition above, volunteers can be categorized as human capital alongside paid employees, and they can participate indirectly in creating intangible assets, such as image and goodwill. The work of volunteers can be of two kinds. The first is work that pertains to the administration and governance of the organization, and the second is work that pertains to the management and implementation of projects (see Kristmundsson 2008).

The administration of a non-profit organization is conducted by an executive board elected by the organization's members, including volunteers, at the annual general meeting. The role of the executive board is similar to that of the board of a

corporation or institution. Democratic practices are ensured through open member meetings, such as the annual general meeting, where members have the final say in major decisions concerning the organization. However, this is not always the case, as a democratic deficit can sometimes occur when boards are passive, with their main duty being to accept the decisions of the director and other paid employees. In such cases, the role of the volunteer is merely a formality (Kristmundsson 2008). Nevertheless, these democratic formalities are important to distinguish non-profit organizations from public institutions and traditional corporations. It also serves the theoretical and practical purpose of human capital and social participation (see, e.g., Putnam 2000; Coleman 1988; Bordieu 2002).

In addition to sitting on the board of directors, volunteers can participate in other routine functions, such as standing committees and interim teams, and can help with the creation of organizational policies or monitor other projects. The importance of having volunteers participate at this level comes to light when one considers the influence that they may have on creating incentive for new projects. Volunteers can also participate in temporary projects, such as fundraising. The implementation of projects, such as offering services for clients, is conducted under the management of other volunteers or paid employees. In organizations with few or even no paid employees, project management is handled primarily by volunteers.

The same volunteer may have various roles within an organization. The same individual may implement projects (e.g., offering assistance to the homeless), participate in creating organizational policies (e.g., serving on a team analyzing the needs of a specific group), and sit on the executive board or participate in other jobs where major decisions for the organization are made (e.g., carrying out administration functions or serving on a representative body or the executive board). This is often the case with ‘young’ organizations. The varying roles played by volunteers can increase the levels of complexity in the organization’s structure (Anheier 2005).

It has been shown that specific characteristics within an organization influence volunteers’ roles (Hrafnisdóttir and Kristmundsson 2011). There are two main factors at work here: the first is the main function and the second is the administrative scope or size of the organization. A recognized and well-known categorization of function was proposed by Charles Handy (1988) and developed further by Mike Hudson (2002). According to this categorization, there are three types of organizations. Firstly, there are organizations that mainly offer direct services to clients. It is most common for services of these types to receive public funding through service contracts, with the work being done by paid employees. Volunteering is uncommon and mainly restricted to administrative duties. Secondly, there are member-oriented organizations. These organizations normally rely on a strong volunteer force with a small proportion of paid employees and have some public funding. Thirdly, there are activist organizations. The degree of volunteer involvement in such organizations varies from very little (mainly on the administrative level) to complete reliance on the work of volunteers. It is common for organizations to have more than one function; however, there is usually one main function.

It is possible to measure the administrative scope of organizations by the number of man-years of work contributed by paid employees. The administrative scope of

an organization increases most frequently with an increase in the organization's age; the range of projects changes by becoming more service oriented. Consequently, an organization's income becomes more reliant on public funding. Thus, an increase in permanent paid staff, including specialized employees, can reduce the number of volunteers and restrict the range of tasks in which they become involved (Russel and Scott 1997; Papakostas 2011).

Despite the various benefits of having volunteers, certain flaws have been noted by academics (Anheier 2005). Voluntary failure describes a volunteer's limited ability to offer the necessary quantity and quality of service (Studer and von Schurbein 2013; Hustinx et al 2010). Therefore, it is only natural for organizations to rely more on paid, specialized labor as their functions become more extensive and complex. Reciprocity between the employee and employer regarding rights and obligations does not exist between an organization and a volunteer. An employer can hire an individual with the appropriate qualifications and can insist that employees do the job accordingly while rewarding them in the form of pay. An employee is bound to the employer through a contract. The work contribution of a volunteer is only a fraction of that of a paid employee; volunteers cannot be told to do work for which they have no enthusiasm and they can quit at a moment's notice. Volunteers cannot be made to do dangerous work as the volunteer's right to insurance is much less clear than it is for a paid employee.

It is difficult to tell whether organizations become more competitive by drawing on the services of volunteers. It can be argued that if they were selling a conventional product or service, they would be more competitive because part of their workforce is unpaid, leading to lower prices. However, in the case of non-profit organizations, the matter is more complicated. First, their products or services are frequently not sold or, if they are, then with minimal return. Second, there is an additional cost in the administration and management of volunteer work.

Volunteers are not necessarily active members of NPOs. During temporary projects, such as fundraising, a non-profit organization may solicit volunteer help from outside. It is likely that an increasing number of volunteers will not be active members. Furthermore, it is more common now than it used to be for an individual to contribute money to an organization without being a member (Hustinx et al 2010).

The discussion above views volunteers as a part of the NPO's human capital. However, volunteers can also contribute to the creation of intangible assets crucial for organizations. Thus, they can help assure an organization's market niche. Theories on population ecology explain how organizations find niches to ensure their competitiveness for resources (see, e.g., Hannan et al 2003). An organization's structure that assumes the use of volunteers can create a unique position along with its non-profit functions and core values. The focus on these characteristics can increase confidence in the organization and its goodwill. Accordingly, NPOs need to focus publicly on the role of volunteers through advertising, using volunteers for marketing purposes to increase other resources, such as private grants and public contracts. Here, volunteers help create the organization's image rather than simply being a part of its human capital to be utilized in daily tasks.

In addition to volunteers, organizational resources can include paid employees and revenues that help organizations perform their functions. NPO revenues can be

divided into three categories (Froelich 1999): public grants and funding for service contracts with the state and local authorities, private contributions (including contributions from corporations, individuals, or private grants), and the sale of goods and services.

The possible effects of these agreements on non-profit organizations and the role of volunteers have been well documented, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. The more funding that comes from the state or local authorities, the greater the demands that are made regarding accountability, volunteer skills, and role specialization; the pressure of work increases; thus, volunteer work increasingly resembles paid work (Lie and Baines 2007; Anheier 2009).

Private contributions can come in different forms: grants from corporations; grants from innovative funds in larger companies, such as financial institutions; or private funding, including regular contributions from sponsors. Membership fees can also be a significant source of funding. It is important to differentiate between the membership fees paid by members, which confer rights and obligations, and contributions from sponsors, which do not.

Income from the sale of goods and services can be an important independent source of revenue, particularly because it is not subject to conditions, such as those from public service contracts, and the income can therefore be used for general operational costs (Hrafnisdóttir and Kristmundsson 2012). Examples of this type of income are lotteries and slot machines, but only relatively few and well-established NPOs have access to this source of income.

Income can be unrelated to the goals of non-profit organizations and can even have a negative impact on their image (see Steinberg and Weisbrod 1998). Individual fundraising efforts can create considerable income for NPOs, and in special initiatives of this type the role of volunteers can be important. However, such fundraising efforts are usually run by specialists either inside or outside the organization.

In line with the information above, it is possible to identify three general characteristics associated with non-profit organizations that rely more on resources other than volunteers.

- *Advanced regulatory framework and standardization* The more resources that come from the state and/or local authority in the form of service contracts, the greater the demand for responsibility and competence of volunteers; functions become more specialized and paid staff provide professional services to a significant extent (Wilson et al 2001; Lie and Baines 2007; Hustinx et al 2010). Thus, NPOs may need to change their operations due to increased demands made by the government. This can lead to institutional isomorphism where non-profit organizations begin to resemble government institutions, where complicated operating rules apply, in addition to the standardization of services with measurable performance criteria (Russel and Scott 2007). It has been shown that NPOs have occasionally had more difficulty attracting volunteers to this formal structure (Buckingham 2009).
- *Increased marketing and commercialization* The focus on individual donations and the sale of goods and services have characterized the development of the

third sector around the world in the past decades (Young and Salamon 2002; Enjolras 2002; Brandsen, Trommel and Vershuere 2015). Changes to an organization's objectives are a risk associated with commercialization commonly referred to as a mission drift (Guo 2006).

- *Increased professionalization and specialization* Along with both increased regulation and commercialization, the ratio of paid staff can increase, including specialized employees. This can reduce the democratic tendencies of organizations, and they can instead feel more like institutions or companies with the characteristics of professionalization. Skocpol (2003) concludes that this development has characterized changes in the U.S. organizations. Similar signs can be identified among European NPOs in welfare services (Brandsen et al 2015).

Referring to the above, we can assume that the status of volunteers with respect to other resources can be described in four ways. Firstly, volunteers are an essential part of non-profit organizations, regardless of the other resources to which they have access. The role of volunteers can actually become more a matter of formality as NPOs develop dependency on other resources. Secondly, volunteers are essential to ensure the organization's niche, i.e., goodwill, thus assisting in the acquisition of other resources. They are an important intangible resource despite their limited role in the preparation and implementation of projects. Thirdly, volunteers may be necessary as a temporary resource alongside other resources. It has been stated above that while organizations simultaneously rely increasingly on other resources, the role of the volunteer is more of an auxiliary role: for example, volunteers are used for special tasks and/or temporary projects, such as fundraising efforts. Finally, volunteers are essential to non-profit organizations when other resources are not available. It is evident that if the organization does not receive resources in the form of financial grants, it must rely on volunteers to do the work needed. A considerable number of organizations operate within the sphere of welfare and therefore compete for limited resources in the form of public funding, individual and corporate donations, and membership fees. Over time, their resources will commonly become more varied, for example, with temporary grants and individual donations. This in turn creates the possibility of hiring paid employees who replace volunteers.

Method

A mixed-method approach was used to examine the subject of this case study: a questionnaire survey was conducted and a content analysis was performed. The survey, conducted in 2011, gathered data on NPOs in welfare services, including their operational activities. The ÍSAT system of occupation classification developed by Statistics Iceland was used to choose NPOs, and operating entities were classified according to the Company Registry of the Directorate of Internal Revenue. Only those organizations that were in active operation as defined by the authors were examined (for further details on the questionnaire and the sample, see Fræðasetur

þriðja geirans 2011). As defined within these limits, there were 104 NPOs in welfare services in operation in 2011.¹ Entities defined by the Company Registry as private institutions and operating in the same sphere are also included under the category of NPOs, accounting for approximately 25 % of their number. It has been found that the demarcation between the aims of NPOs and private institutions is often unclear in Iceland (for further discussion of the definitions, see Bragason and Kristmundsson 2011). In some cases, it seems that chance or historical circumstances determined the form in which these entities were established. The data include information on the principal role of the NPO, man-years of paid staff, type of income, and the number of active volunteers and their role within the organization.

The content analysis performed in 2013 focused on websites of the NPOs that took part in the 2011 survey. The internet is believed to be the most important medium used by NPOs in their publicity work to advertise their activities and make contact with future “customers” (Waters 2007). Consequently, an organization’s website can also indicate the sources of support that it regards as important in its work: volunteers, members, sponsors, or other types of supporters. It may also give an indication of how open an organization is to new members. Attention was given to whether organizations invited new members and, if so, for what type of work, and whether it was stated (e.g., in advertisements or news releases) that they had volunteers working for them. It was also noted whether they advertised for new members and, if so, whether it was possible to register as a member on the website. Finally, data on how support could be given to the organization were collected, e.g., in the form of one-off donations or by regular contributions from sponsors.

Altogether, 94 of the 104 non-profit organizations (93 %) were included in the present study. The sample is therefore highly representative of functioning NPOs in welfare services in Iceland in terms of the premises stated above. Statistical data software (SPSS) was used for analysis.

Findings

The findings reveal that although volunteers are active in most non-profit organizations, they do not constitute a significant part of the activities of most Icelandic NPOs in welfare services, with the exception of participation on their boards and in campaign projects.

In 2011, approximately 84 % of NPOs in welfare services in Iceland had volunteers (see Table 1). The average (mean) number in each varied over time, but was generally 242. However, in view of the large numbers in a few organizations, the mean does not give a representative picture. The median was substantially lower, i.e., 12. The first quartile was only six, and the third was 30. Only nine organizations (just over one out of every ten) had more than 50 volunteers on average. Two stand out clearly from the rest in terms of the number of volunteers involved in routine tasks: ICE-SAR (the Icelandic Association for Search and

¹ There were 114 in the original sample, but in the course of revision, it was decided to omit operational units that were part of umbrella organizations and had only paid staff due to the nature of their work.

Table 1 Volunteer contributions to Icelandic NPOs in welfare services in 2011

	Number	Valid %
Do volunteers work?		
Volunteers work	81	83.5
Volunteers do not work	16	16.5
Total	97	100.0
How many volunteers are active on average?		
Average	242	–
First quartile	6	–
Median	12	–
Third quartile	30	–
Lowest value	3	–
Highest value	3700	–
Routine tasks handled by volunteers		
Volunteers only sit on the board	54	80.6
A small proportion of volunteers are involved in other routine tasks	7	10.4
A large proportion of volunteers are involved in other routine tasks	6	9.0
No data available	18	–
No active volunteers	12	–
Total	97	100.0
Campaign projects		
Exclusively	40	45.5
Largely	32	35.4
Slightly	9	10.2
Not at all	7	8.0
No data available/no active volunteers	28	–
Total	97	100.0

Rescue), with approximately 3500 volunteers in 2011, and the Icelandic Red Cross, with nearly 3700 volunteers that same year. These are also the two organizations that rely most on volunteer work in their operations.

The most common arrangement (in eight cases out of every ten) is that volunteers are only involved on the board. Relatively few volunteers attend to other routine tasks in the organizations. In 45 % of cases, volunteers were involved exclusively in campaign projects, and in 35 % they were involved in such projects to a substantial degree.

A survey of the organizations' websites in autumn 2013 revealed that in only 11 cases (i.e., one out of every ten) did they advertise specifically for volunteers (see Table 2). Volunteers were sought almost exclusively for fundraising and other campaign projects and not to sit on the board or to take part in other routine tasks. Fewer than four out of every ten organizations specifically sought new members on their websites. Two out of every ten advertised for sponsors, who normally have

Table 2 What resources do the organizations seek on their websites?

	Number	Valid %
Are new volunteers sought on the website?		
Yes	11	12.2
No	79	87.8
Total	90	100.0
No data available/no website	7	–
Are new members sought on the website?		
Yes	35	38.0
No	57	62.0
Total	92	100.0
No data available/no website	5	–
Are new sponsors sought (to make regular contributions)?		
Yes	19	21.3
No	70	78.7
Total	89	100.0
No data available/no website	8	–
Are one-off contributions sought on the website?		
Yes	46	51.9
No	43	48.1
Total	89	100.0
No data available/no website	8	–

none of the rights and obligations that are involved in full membership. Half of the websites included invitations to make one-off funding contributions.

As discussed in Sect. 3, it can be expected that factors such as the main function and the size or scope of the operation, measured in terms of the number of man-years of work done by paid employees, will affect the extent to which organizations rely on volunteers. Table 3 presents the principal conclusions of this examination. No significant difference is found in the degree of volunteer involvement according to the main functions of organizations. All member-oriented organizations had active volunteers, and the same was true of nine activist organizations and eight service organizations out of every ten. Service organizations tended to have higher numbers of volunteers (median value 20). For member-oriented organizations, the corresponding number was six, and for activist organizations, 11. These proportions are inverted in regards to the number of man-years of work done by paid employees. The median value then drops to just below four for service organizations, six for member-oriented organizations, and nine for activist organizations.

Almost all member-oriented and activist organizations have volunteers on their boards, either entirely or in part; the corresponding figure for service organizations is 2/3. (The difference is found to be significant by a X^2 test.) There is also an evident difference between these types of organizations as to whether volunteers are involved in routine tasks or only in campaign projects. The correlation between this

Table 3 Characteristics of NPOs and volunteer participation

Main function	Service role	Total No. %	Active volunteers (%)	Volunteers on board (%)	Volunteers involved in routine tasks (%)	Volunteers campaigning projects (%)	Average no. of volunteers (\bar{X} /Md)	No. of volunteers per man-year of paid work (\bar{X} /Md)
	Service role	55	78.3	67.3	47.1	56.9	439/20	45.6/3.7
	Member-oriented	19	100.0	94.7	84.2	88.9	10/6	7.4/6.0
	Activist	22	88.9	95.5	68.2	85.7	17/11	13.8/9.0
	χ^2 /Eta	–	7.767	11.049	8.795	9.719	0.261	0.154
	Df	–	2	2	2	2	–	–
	Sig.	–	0.051	0.004*	0.062	0.008*	0.109	0.486
	One or less	21	100.0	95.2	85.7	90.0	16/8	20.6/10.0
Man-yrs.								
\bar{X} = 28.8	1.5–5	33	93.1	90.9	59.4	80.6	159/16	37.0/5.0
Md = 3.5	5.5–10	13	70.0	69.2	33.3	33.3	523/11	65.1/2.0
	11–50	15	53.8	53.3	60.0	60.0	606/50	22/3.9
	51 or more	11	88.9	54.5	33.3	44.4	469/10	4.4/0.1
	χ^2 / r_s	–	12.121	16.525	11.962	16.32	0.196	–0.479
	Df	–	3	3	3	3	–	–
	Sig.	–	0.019*	0.001*	0.016*	0.001*	0.621	0.001*
Income base								
Public funding	Little/none	37	86.5	83.8	73.0	81.1	296/16	47.0/7.3
	Large part	60	81.7	76.7	51.8	63.0	206/11	20.1/5.0
	χ^2 /Eta	–	0.386	0.708	4.175	3.454	0.054	0.119

Table 3 continued

	Total	No.	Active	Volunteers	Volunteers	Volunteers	Volunteers involved in	Average no. of	No. of volunteers per
		%	volunteers	on board	involved in routine	campaigning projects	volunteers	man-year of paid work	
		(%)	(%)	(%)	tasks (%)	(%)	(\bar{X}/Md)	(\bar{X}/Md)	
Df	–	–	1	1	1	1	–	–	
Sig.	–	–	0.534	0.400	0.041*	0.063	0.661	0.348	
Private contributions	52	53.6	76.9	67.3	51.0	61.7	277/8	26.5/2.5	
Large part	45	46.4	91.1	93.3	70.5	79.5	211/19	34.2/8.0	
χ^2/Eta	–	–	3.526	9.983	3.655	3.467	0.041	0.035	
Df	–	–	1	1	1	1	–	–	
Sig.	–	–	0.060	0.002*	0.056	0.063	0.741	0.784	
Sale of goods/services	62	63.9	82.3	75.8	60.3	75.0	168/20	31.5/6.0	
Large part	35	36.1	85.7	85.7	60.0	62.9	353/8	29.4/8.0	
χ^2/Eta	–	–	0.194	1.342	0.001	1.522	0.112	0.009	
Df	–	–	1	1	1	1	–	–	
Sig.	–	–	0.66	0.247	0.974	0.217	0.365	0.944	

The first two columns present the spread, in numbers and percentages (to a total of 100 %); the next four columns show, in percentages, the proportion of each value and the last two present the averages of each value. χ^2 , eta-squared, and Spearman’s rho tests are used, the last of these for the mean variables. The relationship between man-years worked and the dependent variables was tested on the basis of four values, not five as presented in the table (the categories “11–50” and “51 and more” were combined so as to ensure sufficient numbers in each cell). More than 20 % of cell positions have an expected value of less than 5

* Indicates a significant difference based on 0.05

last-named variable and the main function of the organizations is significant. A detectable, but non-significant, correlation is found between organizations' main functions and their average volunteer numbers as revealed by the eta test.

The mean number of man-years of work done in NPOs was 29, although the median was only 3.5. All organizations with the lowest figures had volunteers, the proportion of volunteers declining as the number of man-years of work increases, until we come to the largest NPOs with more than 50 man-years. Once again, the few largest organizations that attach great importance to volunteer work but also have many man-years by paid employees affect the figure.

The number of volunteers per man-year of paid work falls steeply based on the size of the organization (measured in man-years of paid work), from ten in the smallest to 0.1 in the largest (median values). In accordance with these figures, there is a significant negative correlation (r_s) between the variables. Similar figures emerge regarding the proportions of volunteers on boards, in routine tasks and campaign projects: here, the ratio drops from almost 100 % to approximately half in the largest organizations.

Public funding is an important income base for 62 % of organizations. Organizations that depend on public funding have fewer volunteers per man-year of paid work and make use of them less frequently for routine tasks. Nevertheless, the difference is not significant. Private grants are an important source of income in the case of approximately half of the organizations. Here, the reverse situation is found: organizations that rely substantially on private funding have a larger proportion of volunteers than those that are dependent on public funding. The sale of goods and services is an important source of income for 36 % of the organizations. In terms of how volunteer contributions are used, no correlation is found between these organizations and those that do not make use of this income source.

Briefly, the conclusions presented above indicate that although volunteers are active in most Icelandic NPOs in welfare services, they are not an important resource in the great majority of cases. With the exception of some long-established organizations that prioritize the use of volunteers, the number of volunteers is usually very small. Defined as a proportion of the number of man-years of work done by paid employees in the larger organizations, the volunteer contribution is small, and it declines as the scale of operations (defined in terms of man-years of paid work done) increases; in other words, the larger the organization, the smaller the contribution made by volunteers in terms of the whole. In the majority of cases, volunteer involvement is mainly restricted to membership of the board and participation in special campaign projects, such as fundraising efforts. Member-oriented organizations also tend to use volunteers more often for regular tasks than service organizations. Organizations rarely advertise for volunteers for routine tasks on their websites; more often, they tend to advertise for members, including sponsors who do not have the same rights and obligations as ordinary members.

Except in terms of the man-years of work done by paid employees, no distinct correlation exists between volunteer contributions and other resources. Nevertheless, it can be seen that volunteer involvement tends to be greater in the case of organizations that rely largely on private support. No such pattern seems to exist

regarding public funding and income from service contracts, which are the most important sources of NPOs' income.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This study indicates that volunteer contributions do not constitute a significant part of the activities of most Icelandic NPOs in welfare services, with the exception of participation on their boards and in campaign projects. The conclusions here do not allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of boards or the extent to which they serve in a “rubber-stamp” capacity, merely approving decisions that have been taken by paid employees, or whether they owe their existence more to historical factors than to necessity. Apart from membership on boards, volunteers seem to be used as a means of supplementing other resources, such as temporary fundraising efforts. Organizations (particularly “young” organizations) without access to other resources obviously have to draw on volunteer contributions, but the scale of such contributions declines as other resources become available. This does not apply to organizations whose activities require only small input from other sources, as in the case of member-oriented NPOs. From the available evidence, it is difficult to assess the importance of volunteers for an NPO's image, the goodwill it enjoys and, consequently, its market niche. The connection between volunteer involvement and the scale of private contributions made to organizations, however, may indicate that it does have a positive effect.

These conclusions are in line with international academic discussion. The transformation of grass-roots movements based on volunteer work into professionally run companies in which volunteer involvement, whether in decision-making or other activities, is considered superfluous has been identified as a feature of the evolution of non-profit organizations all over the world (Skocpol 2003; Hwuang and Powell 2009; Hustinx et al 2010). Skocpol refers to the ideas of Putnam (2000) and many others regarding the declining role of social involvement in Western countries, which in turn reflects the negative changes that have taken place in social relations in Western society. Greater participation by non-profit organizations in public services has resulted in a welfare mix in which they are participants together with private enterprises and public institutions (Hustinx et al 2010). This trend can be identified in Anglo-Saxon countries, and it has also become more common in Nordic countries following changes in government reforms, such as New Public Management and an increased emphasis on service contracts, tenders, and monitoring (Russel and Scott 1997; Sivesind 2013; Wijkström and Zimmer 2011). In this new operating environment of professionalism, it is unclear how much demand there is for volunteer work and how important volunteers are for democratic processes within the organization. In this connection, it must be borne in mind that Icelandic NPOs have historically been a forum for democratic participation in the spirit of ideas that can be traced back to de Tocqueville (Hrafnadóttir and Kristmundsson 2011). A continuation of this trend may therefore result in a serious problem regarding the basis for the existence of non-profit organizations and a

question regarding what, in fact, distinguishes them from other operational structures.

Despite the trend outlined above, international studies do not demonstrate any declining interest in volunteer work over the past few decades (Wilson 2012). However, the basis for involvement has changed. Volunteers seem to “shop around” and choose organizations as a commodity on the grounds of personal interest, needs, and experience. It is more common to volunteer on the internet or be involved in volunteer tourism (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003; Hustinx et al 2010). Furthermore, volunteers’ interest seems to be focused more on short-term projects in the service of a particular cause rather than of a specific organization. This raises the question of whether the traditional structure of the non-profit organization has become obsolete. In this context, short-term, flexible communicative arrangements offering a forum for efforts in the service of a specific cause would seem to serve the needs of individuals better. Social networks seem to be used to mobilize people with shared values and aims. There is a need for further empirical and comparative research on the changed basis of volunteer work within non-profit organizations and the effects of a changed environment on the supply and demand for voluntary work in welfare services.

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