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**Volunteering in Europe in the noughties –
what would Beveridge have thought?**

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Abstract

The value of volunteering is widely discussed on the national policy stage, and this debate is increasingly conscious of the European context. Jeremy Kendall speculates what William Beveridge would have made of this, and suggests that a small number of core concerns might have preoccupied the original architect of Britain’s welfare system.

Beveridge would have welcomed the greater policy recognition that volunteerism has had, both nationally and internationally. However, he may have been worried about the limited extent to which those at risk social exclusion have embraced volunteering. Through an imagined neo-Beveridgean agenda, this paper discusses implications for volunteering policy in Europe.

Volunteering in Europe in the noughties - what would Beveridge have thought?

The value of volunteering has probably never been more widely recognised on British shores than it is now. Just as the third sector itself has been 'mainstreamed', the volunteering commitments upon which it depends have moved from the shadows into the policy spotlight. This double recognition has been driven by favourable political conditions; cultural and social trends; the prominence of new forms of academic argument that such activities are productive in terms of 'social capital'; and effective policy activism, or 'coalition building' by the third sector itself, volunteer supporting agencies and their allies in the state and elsewhere (Kendall, 2003). This suggests a relatively upbeat context for the British domestic pro-volunteering policy community.

When we try to expand our horizons, and ask if there are any consequences of the fact that efforts to build policy in this sphere now necessarily take place within the framework of the membership of the EU and other trans-national public bodies - with ever greater explicitness, thanks to the efforts of TSEN and others¹ - do we have reason to modify this optimistic analysis? There are indeed parallels at trans-national level to each of the drivers of domestic policy noted above, with the promotion of volunteering now commanding international support:

An increasingly confident European Parliament and the European Council, especially through decisions taken since 1997², have affirmed the importance attached to European volunteer initiatives within the EU; and in recent years some parts of the European Commission has tried to broaden its agenda to link support for voluntarism to issues of citizenship³

- there are encouraging signs that EU policy effort is now being nurtured in a way that recognises the significance of the efforts of other trans-national bodies with relevance for Europe. This is important, because one of the success stories of multi-level third sector- and voluntarism-oriented initiatives in recent years originated in a broader arena than the EU - the United Nations International Year of Volunteering (IYV).⁴ Symbolically encouraging has been the emergence of informal relationships to ensure the co-planning of the EU Year of Volunteering with the 'UN + 10' Volunteering day (celebrating the IYV's global impact);
- increased mobility across national borders has increased social needs for the sorts of culturally sensitive services often delivered by the third sector using volunteer labour. These needs reflect both the demands of migrating groups wishing to perpetuate the celebration of their heritage in new places and, in the case of vulnerable people, involve imperatives to provide protection against social exclusion and enable the meeting of fundamental human needs for security, dignity and shelter;
- the notion of social capital – now so prominent in the British policy discourse - itself originates from overseas.⁵ The ideas have already been used to support policy claims about the advantages of volunteering and third sector-related activity trans-nationally, sometimes leading to real opportunities which might otherwise not have been forthcoming (as with the EU's global grants for social capital scheme);⁶

- there are tentative signs that the Brussels level ‘proto-policy community’ – those policy actors claiming expertise in relation to the design and processing of third sector issues at the Brussels level⁷ - is now finding more space for volunteering. Brussels-based volunteering groups like the European Volunteering Centre struggled to generate a stable position in the first part of the decade, but over the past two or three years have better bedded down in the ‘infrastructure’ of volunteering and third sector specialists.⁸

What does this mean for the co-evolution of British and European policy? Perhaps we should go back to basics in relation to welfare. William Beveridge’s ideas in relation to voluntarism may be a good anchor for any such effort. He is, of course, world famous as the architect of Britain’s ‘welfare state’ (Timmins, 2001). But he also laboured over the report *Voluntary Action*, referring to the importance for a democratic society of what he called the ‘mutual aid motive in action’ and the ‘philanthropic motive in action’⁹. As a New Liberal (as opposed to a neo-liberal), Beveridge was keen to recognise that the state could and should have a vital and proactive role in developing policy frameworks to nurture both solidaristic and sympathetic human motivations and their capacities for expression. It was important, he argued, both for the state to exercise self-restraint in the use of its own coercive power; and to actively counteract the undue domination of society by commercial market motivations. In other words, as a matter of principle, he wanted to ensure that British society found policy space to protect voluntarism, with its rich mixture of motivations and manifestations.¹⁰

Of course, the institutional landscape has changed fundamentally since Beveridge’s reports were penned. But we can at least speculate about how he might have reacted in principle to the current state of affairs. He would presumably have welcomed this sphere’s greater policy recognition at national and international levels. Yet, it seems reasonable to suggest that he would be very worried that comparative data on the scope and scale of volunteering in Europe and associated third sector endeavour shows only average levels of commitment in Britain. And he certainly would have been concerned by the extent to which many social groups at risk of social exclusion have embraced volunteering opportunities to a limited extent.¹¹

Because policy responsibility for voluntary action remains – and will remain in the foreseeable future – basically a matter for national public authorities (and in many countries in Europe with federal type constitutions, sub-national public institutions), no doubt Beveridge would have seen the role of European and international policy processes and institutions as relatively modest. But some aspects of how international policy discourses and institutions are co-evolving with our own national frameworks would have concerned him. Three issues which, taken together, can form the acronym **BEVERIDGE** might capture at least some elements of an imagined neo-Beveridgean agenda.

Promoting a **B**alanced policy **E**mphasis on **V**alue

Beveridge's principled worrying about the balance between motivations struck in modern societies within and across sectors is an important place to start. At national level, it might be suggested that three basic policy storylines have mixed and sometimes competed in recent years (Kendall, 2009b):

- a *consumerist* discourse, in which volunteering tends to enter the frame as conferring a competitive advantage for the third sector over other sectors in quasi-market environments, linking to an 'instrumental' reading of social capital;
- a *civil revivalist* discourse, underpinned by a relatively hierarchical world view, in which volunteers may evocatively be collectively valued as an actual or potential 'army' to be mobilised to help underscore civil order, going with the grain of traditional communitarian thinking;
- a *democratic renewal* discourse, typically with a more localist, less regimented flavour, putting an accent on voluntarism as part of citizens' schooling in democracy through the chances for deliberation and collective participation that it engenders.

All three strands have had a role to play in recent domestic policy debates. If we are to try to thinking *internationally* in the spirit of *Voluntary Action* we need to ask how the involvements of the sorts of trans-national institutions mentioned earlier may alter the balance struck between these components. Perhaps we would need to be sensitive to the extent to which the EU's constitutional emphasis on market-making could limit its ability to promote non-consumerist developmental models. Certainly, therefore, the UN and Council of Europe's pro-volunteer agendas, less constrained by pro-market imperatives, should also be explored as additional, valuable sources of ideas and arguments. And in terms of learning from specific countries with rich non-consumerist traditions, perhaps Sweden could be a particularly useful source for insights. Here a vibrant 'popular movement' tradition helps to sustain the sort of democratic, dual 'volunteer-member' led participation in society valued by those who emphasise the 'democratic renewal' strand of voluntary action (Olson et al, 2009).

Evaluating **R**ealistically the **I**nstitutional options

Evaluating institutional options for policy transfer or emulation across borders, and in the face of great organisational diversity, should be another concern in the spirit of *Voluntary Action*. That study took care to assemble aggregate statistical data, while at the same time showing respect for diversity at national level with its references to different motives and forms of organisation. Applying this sensitivity to the European stage would require us especially to recognise that different countries have fundamentally different institutional arrangements for recognising and channelling voluntarism, reflecting deeply ingrained differences in cultural approaches and the legacy of historical policy decisions. This would suggest that the challenges of lesson-drawing across national boundaries - for example, in looking to Sweden not just for inspiration but for concrete policy guidance - are likely to be

very significant. The exploration of internationally informed options for policy should, in the spirit of Beveridge, then, be measured and cautious.

Diagnosing and tackling Gaps between Expressions of rhetoric and the reality of policies and practices

Beveridge was ultimately concerned with enhancing citizens' lives, and promoting their life chances through efficient and fair policy implementation. Therefore, a final concern in the spirit of Beveridge could be to ensure that when pro-third sector European or international policy initiatives are actually adopted they are well implemented and evaluated in timely and rigorous fashion. References to the problem of gaps between rhetoric and reality in relation to policy in this sphere in Britain have to date been dominated by critiques of the implications of domestic public service reform for the third sector, and vice versa (Public Administration Select Committee, 2008).

However, several trans-European third sector policy initiatives have also been undertaken. We already mentioned the IYV and local social capital scheme - while the former was a marked success, the latter was to prove a major disappointment. Launched with great rhetorical flourish by the EC in the late 1990s, the local social capital scheme was ultimately to prove very ineffective in terms of tangible policy impact.¹² Such gaps between the rhetorical promise of policy and actual delivery in practice would surely have worried Beveridge. He would have wanted such initiatives to more openly and consistently subject to critical scrutiny - at both the European level, and at the national level in Britain and other European countries.

End notes

¹ TSEN and CSV have been very important in recent years in keeping the UK connected to the EU and Europe more broadly. A recent study which I led has pointed to its important role as an actor in policy and practice – for example, through *Volonteuropa* in pioneering from the 1980s the exchange of information and experiences in relation to nationally situated volunteering programmes, and through championing the involvements of the third sector – as a provider of training for socially excluded people - in the governance of structural fund programmes since the 1990s (Kendall, 2009a).

² The European Parliament acted as the *avant garde* in relation to European public policy on volunteering – proposing policy activism as early as 1983, although this at the time fell on deaf ears, in part because at this time the Parliament had little power, in part because credible international data on the phenomenon was not available to quantify and exemplify the phenomenon, and in part because there was at this time no critical mass of European or internationally oriented volunteering specialist organisations with the resources to promote this agenda in a sustained way. Since the late 1990s, this situation has changed (Kendall et al, 2009).

³ In so doing, the Commission has moved away from a previously rather inward looking focus on programme implementation to the stimulation of a wider agenda on the meaning of volunteering as

an expression of educative, active citizenship, and the possibilities of proactive policy learning between countries

⁴ The most dramatic contribution of the IYV to volunteering in Europe was probably its role in catalysing a new legal framework in the Czech Republic. However, amongst its other demonstrable impacts were its affirmation of the epistemic leadership role of Dutch and British volunteering actors and institutions; and its impact on the breadth and content of the third sector policy agenda in Germany (Ellis Paine et al, 2009).

⁵ See Putnam and Pharr, 2002; Field, 2008.

⁶ This new emphasis has gone hand in hand in the academic sphere with a more general burgeoning international literature, allowing us to recognise that social capital arguments form but one strand of rationales for and explanations for voluntarism, while also allowing us to rethink the strengths and weaknesses of the British tradition by placing it in a wider context (Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995; Dekker and Halman, 2003; Leete, 2006; Maloney and Rossteutscher, 2007).

⁷ While several European countries, like Britain, have quite well established specialist 'policy communities' whereby actors with expertise in the third sector and volunteering contribute to policy design and implementation nationally, at the EU level formations have only really begun to achieve a significant level of institutionalisation since the late 1990s. See Kendall (2009b).

⁸ This has become politically possible not least because of the support of some very powerful nationally-based third sector groupings and their allies in the State – such as the German Free Welfare Associations (Zimmer et al, 2009). Volunteering has now found a much firmer place on the agendas of European groupings trying to develop a cross cutting or horizontal policy agenda. For example, the Social Platform of European NGOs and the Civil Society Liaison Group from within the sector, as well as in arenas in which the sector and public bodies come together (the Parliamentary Intergroup and the EESC liaison group, for example)

⁹ Beveridge, W. (1948) *Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance*, George Allen and Unwin, London.

¹⁰ It is worth quoting from Beveridge to get a sense of his thinking about the relationship between motivations and what we now call 'sectors'. "We must continue to use to the full the spirit that made our great organisations for full Mutual Aid and that fired the philanthropists of the past...the State is or can be master of money, but in a free society it is master of little else. The making of a good society depends not on the State but on citizens, acting individually or in free association with one another, acting on motives of various kinds the business motive is seen in continual or repeated conflict with the Philanthropic motive, and has too often been successful...[it] is a good servant but a bad master, and a society which gives itself up to the dominance of the business motive is a bad society. We do not put first things first in putting ourselves first (Beveridge, 1948, Part 4 Conclusions and Recommendations, chapter XII, *First Things First*, pp. 320 and 322)

¹¹ See the results of European Values Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, European Social Survey, and the Eurobarometer social capital survey (most of these are sourced and discussed in Dekker, 2005). The data on the relationship between social categories at risk of social

exclusion and patterns of volunteering I have in mind is the Citizenship Survey: see *Communities and Local Government* (2008).

¹² Inter alia, this was demonstrably due to a combination of semantic confusion in relation to the meaning of 'social capital'; excessive bureaucracy, inadequate leadership at both EU and national levels; communication breakdown within and across levels; and a concomitant lack of policy coherence and co-ordination *within* the Commission, and *between* the Commission and Member States (Crowhurst and Kendall, 2009).

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About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The third sector research centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

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Theory and Policy

It is essential that the Centre's research is informed by a strong theoretical and conceptual analysis of the sector and the policy environment within which it is situated. Theoretical analysis of the sector is not well developed in the UK, in part because of the applied focus of much existing research. TSRC will contribute to ensuring that difficult theoretical issues are articulated and explored. Critical understanding of the policy environment is also essential, for it determines much of what happens within the sector. TSRC is co-funded by the Office of the Third Sector which is responsible for developing and delivering policy in England. The Centre's research will help inform this policy development, but will also make that policy process itself the subject of critical review. We need to know 'what works', but we also need to understand who decides 'what matters'.

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