

VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY and the STATE
Commentary and Review of the Literature
Relating to the Role and Impact of Government Involvement
in Rural Communities in Canada

Joan Marshall, Adjunct Professor
Department of Agricultural Economics
Macdonald Campus
McGill University

E-mail: marshallj@agradm.lan.mcgill.ca

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PREFACE

This report was commissioned by the new Rural Economy research project as a review of the literature on voluntary activity in rural Canada. The initiative for it came from a contract under the Canadian Rural Partnership program, under which NRE undertook to explore the impact of government on voluntary activity in eight of the thirty two rural sites that constitute its research framework. The contract is an agreement to collect data in eight sites as a pilot project, related to all aspects of voluntary activity in terms of the organization and the impacts that governments may have on them. The methodology will be based on a survey directed to voluntary organizations, to be administered by personal interviews with representatives of the organizations in each of the eight communities.

This report is intended to provide NRE researchers with an understanding of the issues that have been raised in the literature on volunteerism. One of the most intransigent of these is simply a workable definition of what constitutes voluntary activity. Several definitions are described in this review. The one adopted by Statistics Canada is proposed for use by NRE, with the understanding that inevitable grey areas will have to be negotiated amongst the working group of the NRE.

The Smith and Freedman study quoted in this report points out that there has been very little theoretical development in the area of voluntary activity. For the NRE whose interest is specifically in rural Canada, the literature that is directly relevant is even more sparse. Apart from the brief discussion about definitions and the various typologies that have been developed by researchers, the theme I wish to highlight in this report is the nature of the relationship between

voluntary activity and a civil society. Many commentators have alluded to a link, but no one has suggested how we might explore this relationship as a basis for social cohesion and a vibrantly civil society.

I would suggest that the current interest in the voluntary sector by many scholars, government and institutions, is growing out of two responses to our changing world. One response is a distinct unease about the effects that breakdowns in our social safety net are having on communities; and the second response is the hope, like grasping at straws, that perhaps volunteerism can be seen as a solution to problems associated with high rates of mobility, alienation, downsizing and forced early retirements. On the one hand some people appear to focus on voluntary activity as a way to fill in the gaps left by government cutbacks; and on the other, we are hoping that volunteerism can help us retrieve a sense of community. Both of these responses support the idea that increased volunteerism can contribute to a civil society. The problem is, however, that any underlying sense that voluntary activity has been made necessary by other failures in society will be met in the long term by resistance. Whereas a sense of belonging evolves with participation in community, the nature of the participation needs to be one that is on balance truly altruistic .

I raise these issues in the report because I think that the NRE may have an opportunity to explore them in a systematic way at a future date. The present study is not designed to explore them because of the current focus on organizations rather than on the individual citizen. But certainly many interesting and potentially useful avenues for research will be opened up by the survey and the pilot study in the eight communities.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the millennium, voluntary organizations are facing a rapidly changing environment and fundamental restructuring of how they work. Changing government roles, increasingly diverse populations, and new economic and social realities facing both young and old among us are requiring the voluntary sector to broaden, deepen, and adapt its approaches and to do all of these at once.¹

Interest in voluntary activity and citizen participation has increased in the past decade for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are concerns for a civil society in our globalized, capitalist dominated world. The nexus of globalized markets, corporate restructuring and downsizing, the changing nature of work itself, and increased reliance upon government intervention as a mediator of change, has resulted in important changes in the dynamics of society.

There has been a questioning and a rearrangement of relationships between the different levels of government and the development of new and more complex relationships between the state and civil society, with businesses, voluntary organizations, local communities, clients, and citizens all being seen as needing to play an increasing role in what was previously perceived as pure public service delivery.²

This review of the literature on voluntary organizations is focused on the objectives of the New Rural Economy project in terms of its commitment to the Canadian Rural Partnership initiative (CRP), to gather information regarding the impact of government program funding on voluntary organizations operating in rural Canada. The CRP initiative (April 29, 1998) has as its defined purpose, field research, education and capacity-building in the rural sites that have been identified by the NRE project. This review has contributed to the formulation of the data gathering survey instrument developed by David Bruce³ in terms of the typology of volunteer activities corresponding to that of Statistics Canada⁴ and in contributing questions that seem to be emerging as important issues for many communities.

Its larger purpose is seen to underpin the field work in the research sites, by identifying

¹ Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector. *Helping Canadians Help Canadians*. A Discussion Paper. Ottawa. May 1998. 1.

² Burns, D., R. Hambleton & P. Hoggett, 1994: *The Politics of decentralisation: revitalising local democracy*. London: Macmillan. Quoted in Philip Goodwin, *Hired Hands or Local Voice: understandings and experience of local participation in conservation*, *Transactions. Institute of British Geographers, New Series*. 23 (4), 1998. 481.

³ Rural and Small Town Programme, Mt. Allison University.

⁴ National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) carried out by Statistics Canada as a supplement to the Labour Force Survey in November-December 1997. Reported in Cat. no.71-542-XPE, August 1998.

those issues that have been examined by researchers in the past, and suggesting questions that may provide a framework for subsequent research by the NRE teams. While the discussion of issues highlights those from the literature, a comprehensive bibliography is also included to provide researchers with a basis for subsequent investigation. The bibliography is focused on Canadian studies of voluntary activities and the concept of volunteerism, but also includes references that will provide a theoretical basis for discussion. Indeed, the literature is so vast that selection was essential based on some criteria, as follows:

1. Canadian studies from 1984 and later were all included;
2. Canadian, pre 1984 according to their importance in terms of their
 - * historical significance (*Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*);
 - * particular interest because of limited studies available in their topic field (*Jewish Social Service Quarterly*; *Womens Voluntary Associations/Changing Institutions*);
 - * or, the regional relevance (*British Columbia Communities in the Northwest*);
3. All countries that included analysis with respect to theoretical contribution and the linking of volunteerism to community development;
4. References that discuss training or education of volunteers, related to one of the objectives outlined in the CRP proposal, have also been included.

DEFINITIONS

Individual Volunteer Activity -

The idea of voluntary activity is fraught by a morass of overlapping concepts and definitions that relate to the evolving reality of Canadian life. Whereas volunteerism in the 19th century was associated with philanthropy often channelled through the churches and with working class self-help groups linked to class consciousness and ethnocultural groups, 100 years later the context is very different. In the earlier period, marked by paternalism and charity as the responsibility of the privileged, there was a sense that such activity would ultimately protect property and the fabric of the social order. The role of the state in these organizations was minimal, and in fact was seen as complementary to philanthropic activities.⁵ The development of the welfare state, in which centralized state-run programs provide social assistance and health coverage, has changed both the tangible supports available to the poor, and the ideological context. The notion of rights and entitlement to welfare benefits from the state have fundamentally altered the cultural meaning of citizenship, thereby changing the assumptions and behaviour guiding all voluntary activities. There is an inherent belief in the rightness of tangible government support of all human services.

In this extension ladder model of government/non-profit relations, voluntary agencies do not have statutory powers and cannot undertake the responsibility of governments to provide universal services; rather they merely add something extra to the framework of services provided by the government.⁶

The issue of the relationship to government is an important one that will be explored later. While the definition of voluntary activity in one sense seems to be fairly straightforward, it also has many elements of ambiguity and blurred lines of demarcation. Most simply, voluntary activity is defined as that which is undertaken

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By choice;
In service to individuals informally or through organizations;
Without salary or wage.⁷

For the 1997 Survey carried out by Statistics Canada⁸, the definition is as follows: Volunteers are those, *aged 15 and over, who willingly perform a service without pay, through a group or*

⁵ Browne, Paul. *Love in a Cold World?* 11.

⁶ *Ibid*, 13.

⁷ *Ibid*, Appendix, 91.

⁸ Reported in *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry. 1998. Cat.No. 71-542-XPE.

organization, and who volunteered at least once in the 12-month reference period preceding the survey.⁹ Excluded from this definition are those who volunteer their time as individuals, unconnected to group structures or activities. However, the survey did canvass for other forms of support, measuring the numbers of Canadians who provide help on an individual basis. The four categories of activity considered in the Survey as giving, volunteering and participating were:

- Giving to organizations (donors);
- Volunteering through an organization;
- Other forms of support (such as visiting the elderly);
- Civic Participation (including voting, attendance at meetings).

People required to do unpaid, mandatory service placements through such means as community service orders, coop placements, or workfare assignments are not volunteers. Volunteers are unpaid but not all unpaid workers are volunteers. People required to do unpaid, mandatory service placements through such means as community service orders, coop placements, or workfare assignments are not volunteers. Volunteers are unpaid but not all unpaid workers are volunteers.

In its 1977 report, the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action included consideration of the relative independence of groups from government intervention as one of the criteria defining genuine volunteerism.

- First, voluntary activity comprises both individual and collective action.
- Second, it occurs spontaneously and in organized forms throughout Canadian society.
- Third, it exists independently from, but has extensive relations with, major institutions in society especially government.¹⁰

The report pointed to the difficulty of defining volunteer activity clearly because so much of it is relatively invisible, noting that many forms of volunteer activity are not mentioned by the media and make no demands upon the government.¹¹ As noted above for the most recent 1997 Survey, there are many contributing volunteers who are not included in official data. From the volunteer who mows the lawn of an elderly neighbour, to the person who canvasses for the Heart Foundation, or contributes professional expertise as a doctor helping in a cardiac program, the type, form and level of commitment, both in time and in money, is extremely variable.

Voluntary Organizations -

The terms non-profit organization, charitable organization, volunteer organization, voluntary sector, non-profit sector and the third sector are often confused, having overlapping meanings and being used interchangeably. In the United States non-profit sector tends to prevail, while in Great Britain it is the volunteer sector that is commonly used. In Canada the literature usually refers to volunteer sector, including registered charities and the activities of volunteers.

⁹ **Ibid, 51.**

¹⁰ **NAC on Voluntary Action, 1977.3.**

¹¹ **Ibid, 5.**

In 1997 a panel on accountability and governance in the voluntary sector was established by the national Roundtable. In its analysis of accountability and governance contained in a report published in May 1998, the Panel commented on the lack of a clear, inclusive term for the sector, noting that nonprofit or not-for-profit encompassed the largest number of organizations, estimated at over 175,000.¹²

A subset of nonprofits, the charitable sector is the narrowest concept. It usually refers specifically to those organizations that are registered under the *Income Tax Act* as meeting a set of criteria, which exempts them from income taxes and permits them to provide receipts for donations that can be claimed as tax credits. In this sense, charities are subsidized by taxpayers through foregone revenue, as well as directly by governments and through private philanthropy. This category too, includes a huge range of organizations over 75,000 from small entirely volunteer-run initiatives that provide services to a specific or local population, through to institutions that are often considered to be part of government, rather than the voluntary sector. This latter group includes museums, universities and colleges, schools and hospitals, in all almost 10,000 organizations which are directly supervised and largely funded by governments.¹³

In its study, the Panel focused on organizations whose work had the following characteristics:

- Serving a public benefit;
- Depending upon volunteers, at least for their governance;
- Financial support from individuals;
- Limited direct control by governments, other than in relation to tax benefits.

This definition thereby excluded para-governmental organizations such as universities and hospitals that might nevertheless have large numbers of volunteers. The definition did include organizations that did not qualify for charitable status, including recreational associations, service clubs, advocacy groups and community development associations. In the final analysis, the Panel incorporated ambiguity into their definition of voluntary sector by allowing that not all their organizations relied upon volunteer labour, but rather all reflected the sectors essential spirit.

The difficulty of relying upon charitable status as a defining criterion was illustrated recently by the controversy over the foundation established to raise money for abused youth, the centre piece for which was a cross-Canada skate by Sheldon Kennedy. In this case, the establishment of a non-profit and charitable organization included within its formulation, payment of over \$7000

¹² **Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, *Helping Canadians Help Canadians*. May 1998. Ottawa. 5.**

¹³ **Ibid, 5.**

per month to Kennedy for his run, plus significant amounts as salaries to administer the foundation. The question becomes, is this voluntary activity? According to the definition above, the answer would be no. However, would the activities of a group in a community that organized as volunteers with the purpose of raising funds for this foundation, be considered volunteer? As individuals they are; the problem becomes one of separating the individuals from the organization, and clarifying the relationship between them when the non-profit group itself has charitable status despite significant salaried earnings within the organization.

Another example, recently in the news, relates to the changing structures within the health care system. The combination of government funding cutbacks and growing numbers of the elderly are increasing the demands for at-home health care. Whereas in the past the not-for-profit sector through the Victorian Order of Nurses, has fulfilled the basic needs, contracts to provide care in the home are increasingly open to competition,¹⁴ thereby threatening the existence of the not-for-profit groups. The VON is an organization in which nurses are paid to perform services, but which is essentially run by local community volunteers through a Board of Directors who raise funds and help to identify areas of need. This is a non-profit organization that is dependent upon important input of community volunteers. Its direct relationship to the government is mainly through its charitable status at the moment. But changes in the health care system will obviously have a profound impact on it, particularly in relation to government policy and funding initiatives. These will be explored further in the next section.

Certainly one of the most ambiguous areas for defining volunteer activity has been the relationship with government programs. For example, the Childrens Aid Societies in Ontario serve almost as an arm of government when providing services required by legislative statute. The young persons who worked in communities for the Company of Young Canadians and in Opportunities for Youth projects often saw themselves as volunteers, even though they received some remuneration for their efforts. Similarly, in volunteer organizations that require particular skills such as accounting or translation, those who take on such responsibilities may be paid an honorarium that approaches or even exceeds the minimum wage rate, raising questions about paid work. In the process of undertaking the survey in the NRE sites, it will be important for the interviewers to be alert to these ambiguities.

David Horton Smith, who was instrumental in forming the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars in 1971, emphasized the crucial criterion of service as the defining characteristic of voluntary associations. His typologies begin with degree of commitment to service, and both individual (*volunteer*) and collective (*voluntary organizations*) activities must be focused on the service ideal according to Smith. Combining the individual and organizational levels into a more global level of analysis, the *voluntary sector* is defined as the sum total of the formal and official presence of the service ideal in a society.¹⁵ In another article in the same volume of readings, Palisi questions the voluntary nature of many groups that are described as formal voluntary organizations. He wonders whether in fact voluntariness is an objectively verifiable category, or simply a convenient label created around the American ideal of democracy and individualism. He explores four types of pressure or force that determine the degree of volunteerism that may be

¹⁴ **Globe & Mail, The home: health cares frontier. p.1.**

¹⁵ **David H.Smith, *Voluntary Action Research*. 1972, 27.**

ascribed to various organizations, including economic (such as labour unions), ascribed status (religious), physical and legal (military), and essential or not for society (such as educational institutions).¹⁶ Basically, he suggests that what we may define as voluntary activity in fact should be considered as being motivated by various degrees of self-interest that negate a truly altruistic volunteerism. Such concerns have been raised by others. It is generally agreed that motivations are highly variable, and that even though volunteerism is defined as freely given there is frequently a significant component of pressure that should not preclude inclusion as voluntary activity.

In the most comprehensive survey of the literature on voluntary organizations, written by Smith and Freedman in 1972, several definitions and typologies were described. The definition of voluntary organizations that they adopted was as follows: organizations that people belong to part time and without pay, such as clubs, lodges, good-works agencies and the like.¹⁷ The voluntary organization is a nonprofit, nongovernment, private group which an individual joins by choice. Members are not born into such associations (such as a church), nor are they drafted into them (as in the case of the military), nor are they required to become members for professional reasons (as in the case of unions). Business and trade associations do not precisely qualify as voluntary associations, according to Smith and Freedman, although they may have some of the features of such organizations. Political parties and clubs are also excluded from their definition. Finally, they distinguished between formal and informal groups, accepting only the first for consideration. Formal organizations are identified by the presence of offices which are filled through some established procedure; periodic, scheduled meetings; qualifying criteria for membership; and some formalized division and specialization of labour. But they agreed that not all organizations would exhibit all criteria to the same degree. They point out in their book that their definition is in accord with the dominant usage in the social sciences. Raymond Morris review highlighted a similar definition, as groups in which membership is in no sense obligatory, which have a formal constitution, and which do not have paid officials at the local level.¹⁸

Individuals and Organizations: the links -

To summarize, there is a distinction that needs to be recognized and accommodated between individuals and organizations. To define individuals as engaged in voluntary activity is not the same as defining the organization to which they are affiliated as a "volunteer organization". It is this problem of transferring the idea of voluntary activity from the individual to organizations that is most problematic. It must be clearly recognized that one cannot assume a transference of the definition of "voluntary" from the individual to an organization. Because the NRE research is focused on organizations rather than on individuals, the definition that is adopted must be applicable to organizations.

The basic criteria for determining inclusion of an organization as part of the voluntary sector are those accepted by the Panel on Accountability as described above:

¹⁶ **B.J.Palisi.1972. A Critical Analysis of the Voluntary Association Concept. Ch.3 in *Voluntary Action Research*. David Horton Smith.**

¹⁷ **Smith & Freedman, *Voluntary Associations: Perspectives on the Literature*.1972.p.viii. Quoting Berelson and Steiner. They note that a similar, widely used definition is that of David Sills: spare time, participatory associations.**

¹⁸ **R.Morris, 1965, British and American Research on Voluntary Associations, *Sociological Inquiry*, 35:186-200.**

- * Serving a public benefit;
- * Depending upon volunteers, at least for their governance;
- * Financial support from individuals;
- * Limited direct control by governments, other than in relation to tax benefits.

This definition thereby excludes para-governmental organizations such as universities and hospitals that might nevertheless have large numbers of volunteers, and would exclude cooperatives that do not have financial support from individuals. The definition does allow for organizations that do not qualify for charitable status, including recreational associations, service clubs, advocacy groups and community development associations. As the Roundtable finally concluded , despite inevitable ambiguity, an organization must reflect the sector's "essential spirit."

TYPOLOGIES

In their overview of the literature, Smith and Freedman point out that there has been very little theoretical development around the study of voluntary associations. Most of the work is concerned with classifications and the ways in which voluntary groups function in various societies or communities. Three main concerns have dominated the research agendas of social scientists. These include:

1. The functions of volunteer groups, usually the focus of sociologists;
2. Volunteer groups as a source of socialization or as an environment within which individuals relate to their communities, usually the interest of social psychologists;
3. The organizational processes of voluntary organizations, usually of interest to students of administration.

The various typologies that they identified can be summarized as follows:

Four types of formal organizations, according to the *beneficiary of the associations activities* - Blau and Scott ¹⁹:

- * mutual-benefit associations (membership)
- * service organizations (client)
- * common-wealth organizations (public-at-large)
- * business concerns (owners)

Functional approach such as developed by Sherwood Fox²⁰:

- * Majoral (business, professional, scientific, agricultural)
- * Minoral (ethnic, cultural, womens, church)
- * Medial (veterans groups, that mediate between segments of society)

¹⁹ Blau & Scott, 1962. *Formal Organizations*. San Francisco: Chandler.

²⁰ Sherwood Fox, 1952: *Voluntary Associations and Social Structure*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University.

Functional, according to *collective values* Warriner and Prather²¹:

- * pleasure in the performance itself
- * sociability, activities are vehicle for communion between members
- * activities are symbols to reaffirm belief system
- * production of goods or services

Based on *special interests* - such as categories of Bell and Force²² :

- * general interest (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary)
- * special stratum, serving interests of a particular social group (war veterans)
- * special-individual, serving member interests that are not directly from shared social status .

Expressive / Instrumental - such as Gordon and Babchuk²³

This last differentiation has been of some interest to various researchers who have investigated the multidimensional role that voluntary associations perform. Organizations that exist to provide personal enjoyment through opportunities or activities that are perceived as being valuable in themselves are self-expressive, and include such groups as curling clubs and historical societies. Instrumental activities, on the other hand, are focused on meeting the needs of others, fundraising, or advocacy, such as fighting for legislative change. Obviously, many groups are engaged in both self-expressive and instrumental activity, one example being self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Although the typology used by Statistics Canada, and therefore recommended for use in the NRE Survey, does not make this distinction between self-expressive and instrumental activities, it may be useful to consider whether such a distinction has any relationship to the economic and social well-being of rural communities. The NRE survey includes questions about how organization representatives perceive their impact upon the community in terms of both economic and social benefits. It might be interesting to see whether any patterns emerge in this area.

For those interested in exploring the background of research related to voluntary associations, the Smith and Freedman book would be an excellent starting point. They describe the changing views of academics over time, and summarize the work of sociologists and anthropologists who have examined the role of voluntary associations in societies having different characteristics of technology, demographic structure and social organization.

²¹ Warriner and Prather,1965: *Four Types of Voluntary Associations. Sociological Inquiry. Spring 1965. 138-148.*

²² Bell and Force,1956: *Social Structure and Participation in Different Types of Formal Organizations, Social Forces.34.345-350.*

²³ Babchuk and Gordon,1962:*The Voluntary Association in the Slum. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.*

The typology of volunteer organizations adopted by Statistics Canada for its 1997 Survey included twelve types of associations as follows:

- Environment and wildlife;
- Multidomain (including Red Cross, service clubs, and the YM/WCA);
- Arts and culture;
- Health;
- Law and justice;
- Social services;
- Foreign and international organizations;
- Sports and recreation;
- Society and public benefit;
- Religious organizations;
- Education and youth development;
- Employment and economic interests.

The order in which these are listed reflects a ranking from highest to lowest according to changes in the numbers of volunteer events compared to the previous survey in 1987. In other words, this list indicates that the greatest increase in activity has been in areas of the environment and service clubs, while there has been a decrease in the last two categories, education and employment.

The 1998 report, summarizing the data from the survey, describes the demographic characteristics of who gives, in what form they give, the methods of solicitation, regional differences in volunteer activity and how much time people devote to various voluntary activities. One of the most interesting findings, linking donations and volunteer activity, was that donors are more likely than non-donors to engage in other supportive activities and the likelihood of involvement in these activities increases as the amount that individuals give increases.²⁴ It is significant that the evidence clearly showed the linkage between various forms of involvement as an important characteristic woven into our social fabric. Some of the survey findings will be enlarged upon in the next section.

²⁴ **Ibid, 24.**

REFLECTIONS on VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY and CIVIL SOCIETY

Through voluntary action, Canadians today continue to learn trust, to cooperate and to give of themselves a process that builds social capital and a sense of community. Through participation we acquire the basic skills of democratic life: how to find a voice and to use it.²⁵

Recent events in Canada have highlighted some of the cleavages that are emerging as indicators of problems in our civil society. The Federal Government has released several reports that acknowledge the importance of parenting skills for child development, the growing problem of child poverty, and the need for enhancing youth employment opportunities. The plight of the Saskatchewan farmers and the future of the family farm, the decline of fish stocks on both coasts, and the special problems associated with our aboriginal peoples all point to significant challenges for Canadians. Youth, rural communities, and resource dependent economies all seem to be particularly vulnerable. With these economic, social and environmental problems has come an erosion of a sense of solidarity amongst regions and communities across the country. Significantly, there is a loss of faith in the sense of participation in decision-making, and even in the fairness of the decision-making processes. In talking about multicultural communities, Kymlicka referred to the loss of trust, and the need for people to feel they are part of the larger Canadian conversation.²⁶

So it is with rural areas. Whether distinctive regional patterns emerge in the NRE research in relationships between community structures, civic participation and volunteerism is unknown. Indeed, it may not be a question that is explicitly explored by the NRE. But it remains an enticing research problem when we know that there is research at the level of national cultures that indicates there are differences in the amount, kind, and effects of voluntary participation in nations that are equally urban in character.²⁷ Similarly, a study in a small Italian village showed that cultural values are a crucial variable in determining the role of voluntary associations in a society.²⁸ While the question of regional differences in volunteerism was alluded to in the Statscan report, and the philanthropic side of altruistic behaviour has been explored by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, there are no systematic studies of the ways in which community structures might be related to different patterns of voluntary activity.

In his study of *The Voluntary Sector in an Age of Cuts*, Browne points out that the development of voluntary, charitable and cooperative organizations, parallel to state formation, is

²⁵ Panel on Accountability and Governance. *Helping Canadians*.1.

²⁶ Will Kymlicka.1998. *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. (177).

²⁷ Smith and Freedman, p.19: quoting Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture*, 1963. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁸ Smith & Freedman, p.20: quoting Edward Banfield, 1958. *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. New York: Free Press.

an essential part of nation-building.²⁹ He describes the historical relationship that has evolved in Canada between the state and non-profits, pointing out that in addition to their role in meeting basic needs such as clothing and health care, such organizations are also important for their role in promoting cultural identity, conviviality and community. In other words, they play a major role in establishing and maintaining social order, in shaping and preserving existing relationships between classes, nations, ethnic groups, and men and women and sometimes in challenging them.³⁰ But, he also underlines the fact that this relationship between the state and the voluntary sector is essentially political. In other words, it defines whose interests are paramount, and determines how wealth and power are to be distributed in society.³¹ The impact of government programmes and funding on the voluntary sector is clearly not inconsequential. The role of government in the voluntary sector, in defining who may be eligible for grants, the nature of the activities that qualify for support, and even the requirements for submitting reports, are all filters that determine a distribution of benefits. The impact of government on the voluntary sector, and by extension on our civil society, is profound.

The 1997 Survey found some interesting evidence of, on the one hand, increased numbers of people participating as volunteers, and on the other hand, of devoting less time to voluntary activity. While the participation rate of volunteers was up for all age groups, the numbers of hours being volunteered over a year declined by about 25 per cent.³² Similarly, while the amount of financial contributions has increased by 6% from 1996 to 1997, the numbers of people donating money has declined in the same period by 3%.³³ There was also a change with respect to the ages of volunteers. Increasing proportions of volunteers are being drawn from the 15-24 age group, increasing from 13% in 1987 to 18% in 1997. Despite the fact that the national age profile shows increased proportions of people in the older age categories, the increases in volunteerism are coming from the young adult age group. While older people (per capita) are volunteering less, young adults are volunteering more. This suggests that factors such as employment opportunities, education, and possibly changing values related to civic participation may be affecting the choices people are making about participating in volunteer activities.

The report showed that voluntary activity was linked to labour force status, with those employed full or part time contributing the same number of hours per year. The difference in the behaviour of full and part time workers relates not to the average hours given to volunteer activities but to their participation rates, with those who work part time being involved at a much higher rate of 44% as compared to 34% for those working full time. Significantly, the lowest participation rate (29%) is amongst those people who are unemployed, although even that figure is an increase from the 1987 rate of 23%. Therefore, interpreting the full versus part time differences in participation rates as a matter of having time is too simplistic. There are other factors contributing to peoples decision to become involved as volunteers.

John Ralston Sauls acclaimed book, *The Unconscious Civilization*, explored the changing

²⁹ Browne,17.

³⁰ Browne,17.

³¹ Browne,9.

³² 1998 Report, Cat.no.71-542-XPE.Table 2.2,p.29.

³³ Reported in the *Globe & Mail and Montreal Gazette*, December 4,1998.

relationships between the individual and our society. He expresses concern that there has been a discernible shift in how we are able to participate as citizens, from participation rooted in the individual to participation in which corporate or institutional structures bear the responsibility for engagement. Saul says that individualism is the obligation to act as a citizen³⁴, while at the same time he worries that there is great difficulty today exercising the power of legitimacy.³⁵ Indeed, he argues, there is even a gradual suffocation of citizen-based democracy.³⁶ These are strong words, relevant in our consideration of the role of government support in the voluntary sector. The question is how we perceive this relationship between government and volunteer activity, which has two sides to it.

The 1995 Throne Speech of the Ontario Conservative government announced a government initiative to promote and encourage volunteerism.³⁷ The problem is, how can we promote and encourage if we do not understand who is presently participating as volunteers and why? In the 1987 Survey of Voluntary Activity by Statistics Canada it was found that the majority of volunteers did so in order to help others (63%) or to help a cause in which one believed (60%). In 1997 the reasons for making financial donations were overwhelmingly related to feeling compassion for those in need (94%), and to help a cause (91%); and in terms of time committed, almost everyone (96%) did so because they believed in the cause. Only slightly more than 20% engaged in volunteer activities as a way to enhance job skills. This low relationship to job prospects is corroborated not only in the statistical data, but also in terms of what volunteers themselves say.³⁸ However, there is evidence that participating as a volunteer is associated with the need to be part of a community by working with others.³⁹ Volunteering is a way to meet people, develop relationships, and become integrated into a community. It provides a way for people to participate as citizens in their community. Saul recognizes this significant role of volunteer organizations for civil society when he decries the suffocation of citizen participation except through the isolated act of voting and through volunteer activities.⁴⁰

One area in which there has been significant growth of volunteerism, largely as a direct result of government restructuring, is in board memberships. While there has always been a tradition of having volunteer boards for agencies, clinics and services, in the past they were frequently seen as essentially for public image.⁴¹ In recent years these bodies have been given more power and greater responsibility, with the result that they have become more active in setting policy and ensuring accountability of both resources and services. In Quebec, examples are the boards established for the CLSCs and the schools. Accompanying this change of role for governing boards, there has been a change in the composition of boards more closely reflecting the composition of the clientele and communities served. Therefore, in the future we will see boards taking a much more proactive role in the operations of agencies.⁴²

³⁴ John Ralston Saul.1995. *The Unconscious Civilization*. Concord, Ont.: Anansi Press.165.

³⁵ Saul,111.

³⁶ Saul,177.

³⁷ Quoted in Browne,33.

³⁸ Browne,16.

³⁹ Lorraine Street,7; quoted in Browne,37.

⁴⁰ Saul,168.

⁴¹ Turner & Turner, 1995. *Canadian Social Welfare (3rd ed)*.618.

⁴² *Ibid*,618.

The concurrence of the growing corporatism described by Saul and an increased need for volunteer support in an age of cuts, may be posing a dilemma for the role that government may have in this larger relationship between the individual and society. Insofar as the state provides financial support to non-profit, charitable and volunteer groups, it can be seen to be promoting the public good through citizen-based initiatives. However, recent years have seen a new contracting regime arising between government and the volunteer sector in which non-profit organizations are increasingly pressured into adopting new managerial standards and strategies that diverge from their traditional organizational cultures.⁴³ If indeed the reliance upon government funding for local community-based volunteer activities increases, does this imply an increase in government control that may reflect a growing dominance of market-oriented goals and objectives?

Another aspect to the changing role of government relates to the health care sector as it has traditionally relied upon voluntary groups to provide community based services. In a recent front page story, the Globe and Mail examined the issue of increased demands for at-home health care.⁴⁴ It pointed out that severe funding cutbacks have created a need for increased care in the home, but that the shift to a reliance on home-care is not being adequately funded. A health-care economist at the University of Toronto was quoted in the article, calling the shift to home-care one of the most profound social changes of the decade, if not the century.⁴⁵ The impact and role of government policy and funding will be absolutely crucial in this area. As the article points out, few home services are governed by the Canada Health Act; while access in most provinces is restricted either by user fees or means tests. In terms of the focus of this report on the voluntary sector, the relevance bears upon groups such as the VON that have traditionally provided community-based services, identified by people in the community and funded in part through them. The Globe article points out that in Ontario the VON is increasingly having to compete through the marketplace with private companies for contracts to serve Community Care Access Centres. The VON director for Ontario who was quoted in the article, says that they will have to reduce the quality of care if they are to compete successfully with private companies. The bidding process has driven down the price of the service about ten percent according to the director.

Not only is the quality of care an issue. Also affected are the nurses who, if the private system becomes the dominant form of care, will have to accept piece-work as compared to full time work. The decisions that governments are about to make in this area will have profound implications for health care in terms of quality, availability, and cost; as well as for community participation and input in the maintenance of health care, and for paid workers within the system who may or may not have the benefits and security associated with full time work. All of these consequences of change in how health care is organized, and the impacts upon the voluntary sector, contribute to new relationships in our civil society.

This recent period of significant cuts in all areas of human services, notably in health and education, but also in arts and culture, sports and other support services, has resulted in a perception that the voluntary sector will have to take up the slack. When patients are discharged

⁴³ **Browne,41.**

⁴⁴ **Globe & Mail, The Home: health cares frontier, December 14,1998,p.1.**

⁴⁵ **Roger Coyte**

from the hospital earlier than previously, it may be hoped that organizations such as Meals-on-Wheels can provide support through its volunteers. Or, when youth are sent home from a Rehabilitation Centre, there is an unspecified expectation that local youth programmes will help in the re-integration into society. But the voluntary sector is incapable of taking on such roles.

Most volunteer organizations operate with few assets (physical or financial) and with unpredictable personnel who may or may not have adequate training. Unfortunately, at the same time that cuts affect the state maintained welfare system, they also affect the voluntary sector. It becomes more and more difficult to secure funding to maintain programmes and activities, whether through government or private donations, or through local fundraising efforts. Therefore cuts to the public sector are no less significant within the volunteer sector.

One new element in the dynamics of social change, according to Browne, is the emergence of social movements as a countercultural response to neo-Conservatism and market-dominated structures. He suggests that this de-commodified zone has actually been borne out of the welfare state and is a form of resistance to the cutbacks of recent years. It is possible, he argues, that the volunteer sector may be a key player not in filling gaps left by government programme cuts, but rather in mobilizing collective initiatives that create new social relations of reciprocity.⁴⁶

In an unrelated discussion of the changing nature of work, Richard Sennett alludes to similarly fundamental changes in social relationships. His new book, *The Corrosion of Character*, explores the implications of new, flexible work regimes which are defining peoples lives. Cogently argued, he makes a case for the consequences of increasing insecurities experienced by workers, making it impossible for them to achieve a moral identity. These concerns expressed by Browne, Saul and Sennett relate to broad issues of social flux that touch all our lives, in settings that are both urban and rural. As we consider the ways in which *voluntary organizations* fit within these fluid environments, it is worthwhile to list some of the ways in which they have been seen to *impact upon their milieux*. David Horton Smith has described ten of these:⁴⁷

- 1) To provide society with a large variety of partially tested social innovations, from which business, government and other institutions can select and institutionalize those that seem most promising.
- 2) To provide countervailing definitions of reality and morality ideologies, perspectives and worldviews that frequently challenge the prevailing assumptions.
- 3) To provide the play element in society, which, far from being trivial, may allow for a window of variety and intrinsic satisfaction that is critical to the social health of a community.
- 4) To encourage social integration in society, partly through expressive groups whose aims are to provide sociability and companionship, and partly through fulfilling needs for affiliation and approval.

⁴⁶ Browne, 79.

⁴⁷ David Horton Smith, 1973: *Voluntary Action Research*. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books. Ch.14, The Impact of the Voluntary Sector on Society.

- 5) Preserving old ideas, beliefs, artifacts and values that represent a way of life and rooted traditions, affirming community and individual identities.
- 6) Embodiment and representation in society of a sense of mystery, wonder and the sacred.
- 7) Ability to liberate the individual and permit her/him to explore personal capacities that might otherwise be constrained.
- 8) A source of negative feedback for society as a whole, especially in terms of directions being taken by the major institutions of business and government, acting as a social critic. Organizations such as the environmental movement, womens groups and the civil rights movements would be examples.
- 9) Support given by the voluntary sector specifically to the economic system, providing social, intellectual and technical linkages amongst workers in numerous occupations.
- 10) An important latent resource for all kinds of goal attainment in the interests of society as a whole; a tremendous reservoir of potential energy.

Smith acknowledges that all of these may have a negative side, but that this only underlines the need for a thorough study of the impact of the voluntary sector and action at all system levels.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ D.H.Smith, p.398.

SOME ISSUES from the LITERATURE

The role of voluntary associations as agents of socialization has been an important theme in the research literature. Whether the concern is focused on civic participation, political engagement, or integration of marginalized groups, there is a common belief that voluntary groups may be important in the social cohesion of communities. Studies have shown that voluntary organizations are schools for learning, that they teach the imperfections, the hesitations, the halting progress of democracy.⁴⁹

The single most common focus of research published in the early literature was the relationship between *social class and participation rates*. Furthermore, all of the work pointed in a single direction, showing that low socio-economic status was directly related to low rates of participation.⁵⁰ Higher levels of education, income and occupational status contributed, the researchers said, to greater confidence and feelings of efficacy that resulted in more participation, both as members and in positions of leadership. In view of the strong consensus around this relationship, there is no reason to suppose that it will have changed today. When one analyzes the findings of the 1997 Survey from Statistics Canada, it is apparent that those who volunteer their time are most likely to have high levels of education and have the highest levels of household incomes. The meanings of these relationships for rural areas where educational and income levels are significantly lower than for urban Canada, may be important for the kinds of funding and support policies that the government puts into place.⁵¹

Studies that have explored *national differences* in volunteer organizations, and particularly in differences in rates of participation, have shown significant differences between the United States and the United Kingdom.⁵² The literature reviewed by Smith and Freedman point to a wealth of issues and questions that suggest interesting areas that should be explored today in a context of changed relationships and social dynamics.

In relation to *rural areas*, there are few studies that bear directly upon the interest of NRE in the impact of government on voluntary activity in Canada. Marginally relevant to the current focus of the NRE might be the studies by Donald Hay, who compared the *participation in volunteer groups in four rural communities*. Perhaps NRE researchers might wish to refer to Hays work in the context of broadening the scope of issues in future investigations.⁵³

One study that suggests that problems of *service delivery in rural areas* are qualitatively different than in metropolitan areas is a 1980 study from the United States. Exploring attributes of social work in nonmetropolitan America, it points to a growing body of literature that argues for a need to consider the

⁴⁹ Quoted in Smith and Freedman, 1972, p.95: Robert Lane, 1962: *Political Ideology*. New York: Free Press.; S.J. Sorace and M. Seeman. 1967. Some Correlates of Civil Rights Activism. *Social Forces*. 1958. 23:9-15.

⁵⁰ Smith and Freedman, p.154.

⁵¹ Comparing urban and rural educational levels, the OECD found that amongst all OECD countries Canada has the greatest discrepancies. Compared to the United States, for example, which has a ratio of urban to rural education of 1.5, Canadas discrepancy has an index ratio of 2.1. The United Kingdom is almost equivalent, with a ratio of 1.1. In *Territorial Indicators of Employment: Focus on Rural Development*. 1996, p.170.

⁵² D. Miller, 1958. Industry and Community Power Structure. *American Sociological Review*, 23:9-15.

⁵³ D. Hay, 1950. The Social Participation of Households in Selected Rural Communities in the Northeast. *Rural Sociology*. 15:141-148.

cultural diversity of rural areas. While the article carries a somewhat romantic notion of the rugged individualism of rural residents, it nevertheless points to a reality of community relationships that are very different from those experienced in urban settings. It suggests that even the concept of volunteering is often foreign to the rural context since people see helping as a part of their life-style or their Christian duty.⁵⁴ For the NRE and government agencies, such an observation would have obvious implications for the design of programmes in rural areas. Similarly, in view of the NRE mandate to incorporate a training component in its CRP project, the conclusion of the study that this cultural diversity also impacts upon community acceptance of outside training is potentially important. The author says that rural communities may give many hours of time to volunteer support, but that they will resist efforts to organize or train volunteers.⁵⁵ She points to the need for the social worker to develop a wide repertoire of techniques and skills, and to understand the crucial role of linkage and networking.

A 1984 study by Martin and Wilkinson on local participation in the American Federal grant system points to the importance of structure and conduct as the prime determinants in acquisition of funding support for community groups. A significant statistical interaction, however, indicates that communities with high levels of both *activeness* and *need* receive more community and economic development funds per capita than do other communities.⁵⁶ Another study that suggests ways in which the NRE might examine the importance of volunteer organizations in rural communities is a 1984 study of Hierarchical Influence Structure in Rural Communities. One conclusion in that study was that location in the action network is derived from ones *level of participation* in locality-oriented programmes.⁵⁷ This implies that there may be important relationships between participation rates in voluntary organizations and linkages to government funding that ensures community based inputs into policy decisions. The study used network analysis to explore the effect of hierarchical positioning in the local community power structures on the action network. Because such relationships impact upon how funding is distributed and who defines the goals and objectives of volunteer organizations, these early studies indicate possible avenues of further research.

⁵⁴ Louise Johnson, 1980: Human Service Delivery Patterns in Nonmetropolitan Communities. Ch.12 in *Rural Human Services*. Itasca, Ill: Peacock Publs. 67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 67.

⁵⁶ Martin and Wilkinson, 1984: Local Participation in the Federal Grant System. *Rural Sociology*. 49(3) :374-388.

⁵⁷ L.J. Beaulieu and V.D. Ryan. 1984: Hierarchical Influence Structures in Rural Communities. *Rural Sociology*. 49(1): 106-116.

In a more recent study of social welfare in Canada, Turner and Turner explored the situation of *service delivery*, pointing out that the voluntary sector is a crucial part of it.

The voluntary sector is characterized by an ability to be flexible in Responding promptly to emerging social needs. This freedom results from not having to use what can be a cumbersome legislative process to develop a service or change a policy. In large measure, the efforts of the voluntary social service organizations supplement the more substantial and basic provision made by the governments. However, they also offer a sort of experimental social laboratory in which various approaches to meeting human needs can be tried and tested before society decides whether or not they should be supported through legislated services and government agencies. The child welfare agencies of Ontario provide an example of the process of transformation from voluntary to government auspices; originally they were totally supported by the voluntary sector, but now they are almost wholly funded by government, because they are perceived as necessary for the humane functioning of society.⁵⁸

In Quebec, a 1989 study in which 750 volunteers were contacted, of whom about one third were active, identified two types of volunteer service that seemed to be emerging. One is the traditional volunteerism based on moral religious and philanthropic grounds; and the second, more recently, is voluntary action in which the state and experts are combining their resources to address particular needs where social services are seen to be absent.⁵⁹ It described the increasing need for care of the elderly in an aging population. Two more recent studies that discuss the role of *changing demographics in defining new directions* for social programmes come out of Britain and the United States. One examines family-centered social services, arguing that such a basis for organizing social services would represent a fundamental change, being both community based and directly linked to youth. One of the contributors to the study also suggested that youth be seen as a new resource who could be drawn into the support system as volunteers.⁶⁰

A second study explores the ways in which the *elderly* could be integrated as volunteers in ways that would empower them and provide meaning and value in their lives.⁶¹ They need roles, it is suggested, that will serve as barriers against social breakdown caused by a culture that stigmatizes people who have been caught by downsizing and are no longer in the paid labour force. A third study that examines the changes within the human services acknowledges the *increased involvement of the state*, but also sees voluntary action as a potential force of good in society. Quoting Peter Drucker, the authors suggest that in fact voluntary activity may become a powerful new counterculture, an argument similar to that mentioned earlier put forward by Paul Browne. The authors point to the possibility that volunteer involvement may

⁵⁸ J.C.Turner and F.J. Turner.1994.*Canadian Social Welfare*. (3rd ed.) Scarborough, Ont: Allyn & Bacon. 400-401.

⁵⁹ Laforest and Redjeb,1989: *Lintervention sociale non-salariee*. Quebec: Universite Laval.

⁶⁰ P.Adams and K.Nelson (eds).1995: *Reinventing Human Services:Community and Family-Centered Practice*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter. Ch.5,Family Centered Social service K. Nelson & Marcia Allen; Ch.10, Young People as Community Resources, B. Checkoway, J. Finn and K. Pothukuchi.

⁶¹ Daniel Thursz.1995: *Empowering Older People: An International Approach*. Westport, Conn., London: Auburn House.

grow in the future, forging new bonds of community and creating meaningful citizenry.⁶²

Finally, the most recent literature is beginning to move away from a focus on social class and participation, and to explore ideas of how different groups in society are having their needs met, and to what extent the voluntary sector may have a role in addressing these needs. The book by Paul Browne has already been extensively quoted in this report. Two others, both out of Britain, are worth mentioning, not because they relate directly to government impact in Canada, but because they are relevant to questions of equity and a civil society. One study, titled *The Shape of Things to Come?*, looks at the problem of groups who have been *marginalized* in the provision of services. Like Turner and Turner, the author notes that even the best of intentions do not necessarily result in adequate service provision if there has not been sufficient consultation with the user or client base. She describes the growth of self-help groups amongst people with severe disabilities, and argues that there is a need to recognize the value of *user-led services*.⁶³ Morris gives examples such as women with learning disabilities who have suffered from abuse whose needs have not been adequately addressed within the existing social services. She describes their initiatives in setting up services and seeking funding in areas that are identified as specific needs.

The importance of this user-led philosophy was underlined in an earlier Canadian case study that described the process of *change in service provision* in a small Ontario community.⁶⁴ The author describes the problem of apathy in the community, interpreting it as a symptom of social disorganization that needed to be overcome for the delivery of organized services. He argues that agencies controlled outside the community expect their workers to carry out the specific, narrow mandate of the agency.⁶⁵ The more successful services, he says, are those that are integrated at the community level, where needs are identified and addressed in the context of community structures.

Finally, a recent study that is noted more for its broader relevance to social services in general, and to a possible framework for the NRE research in the long term, is by an ethicist from the Netherlands. She focuses on *feminist issues of justice and morality*, and argues that the politics of health care should be seen in terms of a moral orientation. She systematically takes apart the rhetoric of caring about, caring for, taking care of, and care-receiving, and shows how these represent phases in the moral dimensions of care. Sevenhuijsen argues that there is no such thing as an objective situation of need for which politicians can then seek a solution.⁶⁶

How we come to know peoples needs and the situations in which they occur depend on our willingness to see things from a care perspective and to bring into practice the epistemological virtues of care when talking and deliberating about needs. The question of how a social situation can best be known thus forms an indispensable part of moral and normative deliberation. If care is

⁶² Nicholas Richie and Diane Alperin, 1992: *Innovation and Change in the Human Services*. Springfield, Ill: Charles C. Thomas Publ. 17.

⁶³ Morris, 1994.

⁶⁴ Art Stinson, 1979: North Frontenac Community Services, Ch.4 in *Community Work in Canada*. Brian Wharf (ed). 87 -126.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 117.

⁶⁶ Selma Sevenhuijsen, 1998: *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*. New York & London: Routledge. 137.

defined as an activity or practice, we can look in an integrated manner at such phenomena as acting, thinking and judging in relation to care we are invited to think about the way social practices give rise to certain attitudes and moral frameworks, and vice versa.

Such a political approach to care also makes it possible to perceive and address issues of power, and to adapt our judgements about care politics to the fact that power and conflict are involved in every phase of the caring process, as well as in our collective discussions about the way social institutions should care about and for human beings.⁶⁷

The National Rural Workshop in October 1998, attended by Professor Bill Reimer, explored ideas for government action that would address the problems in rural areas. Attended by 250 people, representing participants in the process of Rural Dialogue and members of the government, the workshop was intended as a forum that would contribute to improving rural communities, as better places to do business, to live and to raise your families.⁶⁸ Reimer reported that many groups identified barriers to their ability to access government programmes and funding initiatives. The most important of these included (1) the lack of long-term contracts; (2) too many over-lapping programmes; and (3) information that is not easily available.⁶⁹ Other problems identified were that information was not widely disseminated within the communities, so that certain people were perceived as information brokers; that criteria are too rigid for rural needs; that programmes are not flexible enough; that they are of too short duration; and that there are too many steps to be followed in the process.

⁶⁷ Sevenhuijsen, 1998.137-138.

⁶⁸ Lyle Vanclief, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, quoted in *Agri-vision*, November 1998.

⁶⁹ Internal NRE e-mail, October 4, 1998.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

As NRE researchers embark upon the data collection in the eight rural sites there will inevitably be problems of definition and classification that will require decisions on the basis of context. That is the nature of the social sciences. As this report has made clear, there are no unequivocal definitions or categories that can be applied in all cases. However, some distinctions and criteria can provide guidance:

A. For individuals, their activities are voluntary if they are engaged

- * by choice;
- * in service;
- * without salary or wage.

B. For organizations and associations, they are included in the voluntary sector if they

- * serve a public benefit;
- * depend upon volunteers, at least for governance;
- * have support from individuals;
- * experience limited direct control by governments, other than in relation to tax benefits.

With respect to typologies described in the report, the one recommended for the NRE project is the one used by Statistics Canada, which has the added advantage of allowing comparability to the national profile at a later date. On the other hand, some of the other typologies that have been used by scholars were briefly mentioned here in order to suggest various avenues for further research. In particular, the distinction between expressive and instrumental organizations seems to offer an interesting direction insofar as there may be historical shifts in the choices people make about participation. There might be, for example, evidence that as major changes in Canadian society related to restructuring of the economy impact upon communities, the nature of voluntary activity will change. This is speculation on my part, but it would seem to offer an interesting possibility for research.

The large issue of the relationships between changes in Canadian society, the nature of civil society, and voluntary activity offers enormous scope for investigation at both the micro level of the community and at the macro level of Canadian society. It would seem to me that in the long term the NRE would have an opportunity to explore these relationships. These relationships may or may not be

important, and they may or may not be changing. Some of the specific issues that might be investigated include.⁷⁰

1. What are the specific environmental forces in rural communities that are changing the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state?
2. Is it true that the changing nature of government activities contributes to changing the character of our "civil society"?
3. Is voluntary activity becoming more narrowly defined? Does the changing character of the market have a role in defining voluntary activity?
4. How do changes specific to rural areas, such as the demise of the family farm, impact upon voluntary activity?
5. What is the nature of new roles for the rural church in the delivery of volunteer services?

There are many, many interesting questions that can be fruitfully explored in a second phase of this project. With the changing nature of work, new demographic trends, the dominant influence of globalized forces of change, and recent severe cutbacks in all areas of social services, the entire voluntary sector is being affected. That the rural communities may be experiencing these cutbacks in a more profound way than urban areas, and that the design of government programmes may need to take the special characteristics of rural communities into account, are two factors that need to be considered in the NRE research. The social cohesion of Canadas rural communities is threatened by these changing relationships. It is to be hoped that this report will begin the process of improving our understanding of the importance of voluntary activities, and suggest ways in which the NRE can further contribute to this understanding.

⁷⁰ Alan Steeves, E-mail correspondence, January 11,1999.

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