

Gift relationships and their political-economy: of volunteering, community involvement and creating (a) civil society

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Introduction

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE partly originates from a research consultancy - "Strengthening Volunteering and Civic Participation" - commissioned by the (Melbourne) Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Management Forum through the City of Knox, funded by the (Victorian) Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD - Volunteer Support Grants) and implemented by the Borderlands Cooperative throughout 2007 and into 2008. The geographical area covered by the project includes the Cities of Boroondara, Whitehorse, Monash, Maroondah, Manningham, Knox and the Shire of Yarra Ranges, stretching from the inner- to the outer-eastern Melbourne Metropolitan municipalities, inhabited by almost one million citizens. Borderlands' researchers consulted with about 350 representatives of the many organisations, volunteering, community and civic society groups, networks, resourcing and support agencies, activist groupings, churches, sports and recreation clubs across the region with the purpose of developing a strategic framework aimed at strengthening and sustaining their presence, their impact, their processes and their cooperation locally and across the region. In addition, we held two Regional Workshops to which interviewees and other interested person were invited and which attracted over 70 and 50 participants respectively. The full report is accessible on the Borderlands website, www.borderlands.org.au Implementation across the region has started to take the shape intended by the project recommendations. We want to express our thanks to the Department for the funds, to the Project Team for critical support and conversations and to all participants who, in their various capacities, have made this a learning-rich endeavour.

The project was a rare instance where working on conceptual issues was part of the brief, as this was thought to potentially assist in developing a more relevant and contemporary strategic framework, able to inform and strengthen the practice of and support for (what we came to name) civil society work in the EMR. Readers will probably recall a 2006 NCQ issue (vol. 4(3)) devoted to volunteering and community development, where two of us (in Healey, Boulet & Boulet 2006) shared our growing conviction that existing conceptual and definitional boundaries unnecessarily narrowed and impoverished both thinking and practice

of 'volunteering' and we advocated for a progressively more inclusive understanding. The stated purposes of the EMR project - to broaden restricted conceptions of (formal) volunteering by linking it with 'civic participation' and to connect both with concepts associated with 'community' involvement and, indeed, with the roles of governments within their operating context - certainly confirmed our own conviction and offered the opportunity to do so in a 'real life' context and supported by systematic research.

The following conceptual elaborations - drawn from the second section of the Final Report of the project and considerably enlarged in the final sections - further develop the previously mentioned article, rest on several hundred publications, books, articles and reports - international, national and local - which are in addition to the works cited below in the Bibliography. For those interested, they are included in the final report previously mentioned.

Entering the conceptual field

The Outcomes' Framework for Volunteering and Civic Participation from the Project Brief included the following objective: [to develop] 'a broader understanding of what volunteering means, particularly that volunteering be seen as civic participation and community strengthening as well as a means for the delivery of services', offering rationale and starting point for the following conceptual explorations.

Volunteering and civic participation are two concepts which have not traditionally been thought to be in an obvious - let alone complementary - relationship, rather the contrary. Adding linkages with the notions of community strengthening and service delivery and, therewith, with the role of governments and other institutions and agencies involved in 'service delivery' complicates matters even further. The history of community involvement in government processes and decision making and the ambivalent appreciation of voluntary involvement in service delivery and its tension with expectations of professional and 'paid' delivery as part of the state's obligations to its citizens, both illustrate the tensions - if not contradictoriness - within the suggested linkages. The nomenclature used - such as 'voluntary sector', philanthropy, charity, community 'industry' - certainly serves to inflame the passions of those who believe in the necessity of a strong welfare state

and of the right of citizens (or consumers) to be 'served' by professionally delivered services to which they have a 'right.'

Further, within the 'community' theory and practice area, who could forget the – still lingering, albeit with shifting goalposts - disputes between those who adhere to the 'activist' conception of often adversarial 'community action' and those who, more sedately, see it as 'locality development', the former referring to the latter as 'conservative' if not reactionary, the latter naming the former anything from hippies to permanent malcontents or anarchists, but certainly as disturbing the 'proper order' of things.

In addition, practitioners and professionals, program coordinators, funding bodies, governments, beneficiaries, consumers or recipients of services and, not least, those who offer their energies and time - whatever name we give them: volunteers, activists, 'members', carers... – will attach very different perspectives and expectations onto all these concepts. Dialogue – if it happens – is often marked by misunderstandings and seemingly incompatible ideological positions and much of the literature since the 1970s – ever since community- and social services 'morphed' into an 'industry' and their several 'fields' institutionalised into a 'sector' – reflects the lack of consensus.

Whilst the project was not resourced to survey volunteers or those engaged in civic 'matters' themselves, those we did interview were – in their specific ways – 'expert witnesses' to what is meant with - and practiced as - volunteering and civic participation or civil society work (the 'umbrella' term we came to use as the project progressed). The following explorations represent our attempt at an integrative conceptual (and pictorial) representation of the 'sector' within which civil society work takes place; in this we attempt to link the 'personal' and the 'structural' dimensions of civil society work and community involvement of any kind.

The Conceptual Field:

Volunteering – Social Capital - Civic Participation – Community Strengthening – Government and Governance – the Gift- or Contributory economy.

Rather than 'cite' definitions of and within the several conceptual domains at stake in this discussion, it seems more useful to critically reflect on the changing nomenclature or semantics in civil society work areas and their evolving historical contexts. We hope to offer a satisfying picture of how they interrelate and overlap – sometimes harmoniously, sometimes with dissonances, utilising specific nuances in certain practice domains and for certain kinds of and motivations and purposes for civil society work, or to engage in specific relationships as established within those domains.

Volunteering

It would serve our purpose well to first refer to the 'official' definition of 'formal' volunteering, illustrating the confined conceptual space we attempt to open up in theory and practice (Volunteering Australia <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au>).

Formal volunteering is an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- To be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- For no financial payment; and
- In designated volunteer positions only.

Principles of Volunteering

- Volunteering (V.) benefits the community and the volunteer.
- Volunteer work is unpaid.
- V. is always a matter of choice.
- V. is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances.
- V. is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community.
- V. is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental & social needs.
- V. is an activity performed in the not for profit sector only.
- V. is not a substitute for paid work.
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.
- V. respects the rights, dignity and culture of others.
- V. promotes human rights and equality.

The above definition and principles obviously place volunteering in the same undefined 'space' where, in the common understanding of the 'sector,' the notion and practical realities constituting 'community' are customarily located. Volunteering 'happens' outside of the private sphere (therefore not 'tainted' by its commitments and obligations), outside the sphere of paid work (and its obligations and contractual or market exchange relationships), outside the area of (capitalist and) profit-making activities and engagements, outside the obligatory involvements associated with citizenship, like voting and paying taxes or even – normally - outside the receipt of government payments. Whilst many restrictions suggested by the definition can be seen as necessary to avoid misunderstandings or unhelpful overlap and, indeed, abuse, it is clear that, similar to 'community', volunteering seems more defined by the organisational-institutional and operational context within which it 'happens' and as depending mainly on the intentions and meanings of those adopting the concept, either as volunteers or as their 'users'.

1. The concept of volunteering derives from the Latin voluntarius (pertaining to (free) will (voluntas, from the verb velle, to will/want)), its meaning extending to notions of deliberate, intentional, wanted action and – much more recently – action/behaviour engaged in 'out of (individual) 'choice''. It is often juxtaposed to notions of 'obligation', actions one is 'forced to' or which one 'has to' engage in. As it is used now in a general environment of – quasi obligatory and ethically 'compulsory' - waged labour, on the one hand, and of – to a degree – having to account of what one does with one's (private) possessions (i.e. paying taxes, showing 'ownership' and engaging in other 'obligatory' transactions), volunteering refers to what one does unencumbered or not-expected by these 'obligations' or

'duties' – sometimes even in spite of them.

2. 'Voluntary action' started its conceptual 'career' in a social-historical environment in which most people – as individuals – did not even conceive that they could 'want' or would 'deserve' any choice about their social obligations and commitments to (and dependency on) the commons (rather than to their nuclear families). Increasingly, in certain (socio-political) environments (aristocracies, emerging urban settings), the tensions between (social) obligation and (individual) 'voluntary' pursuits became possible and morally/emotionally experienced as such (Michel Foucault spent the better part of his oeuvre to analyse this process). The loss of the 'commons' (around the 16th and 17th centuries in England – see the 'Enclosure Laws' and the commensurate and necessary updating of the 'Poor Laws') together with the emergence of the industrial 'revolution' represented the beginning of what the early social scientists and latter-day social philosophers witnessed and interpreted as profound changes in people's social commitment and solidarity (see Marks 2002). Durkheim talked referred to it as anomie and Tönnies discussed the shift from 'Gemeinschaft' (lit. being and doing in common or 'as commons', often rather imprecisely translated as 'community') to 'Gesellschaft' (lit. being and doing as 'associates', emphasising the 'deliberate' nature of belonging to a social 'construct' or entity and often inadequately translated as 'society', sometimes as 'association').

Mauss (2002) and Simmel (1908, 1950) described this shift as the erosion of the 'gift relationship,' of relationships based on reciprocity, on (lasting) duration and shared place, and on the 'sacrifice' of 'personal' interest in favour of the maintenance of the collective (see Papilloud (2004) and Godbout & Caillé (1998); also see Wikipedia entry for 'gift economy' and Anthony McCann in this issue). Early sociologists and (social) psychologists often would describe it – with Karl Marx – in terms of alienation, the early psychoanalysts about evenly split between those who saw the human predicaments they tried to deal with as emanating from 'individual-internal' processes and 'drives' and those who saw them as engendered by 'social' process, structures and predicaments.

3. Primary and Secondary Sociality: the emergent and combined influence of a capitalist economy and of nation states, the power relationships and processes which conditioned the 'shape' they adopted and the roles they assumed and the increasing need to regulate local and – indeed – personal lives and relationships through them (again, Michel Foucault and many others), led to the historical emergence of what we have come to call (with Godbout and Caillé) systems of secondary sociality (relations of market and state, institutionally characterised in terms of status and roles). Without going into detail, in order to replace or modify certain functions traditionally geared at responding to survival needs within systems of primary sociality (relations within family – extended and 'nuclear' – kin, neighbours, friends, communities), major institutional arrangements have emerged which are now expected to 'take care' of these functions, thus 'freeing up' human (labour) energy to be spent and 'sold' in the newly emerging ways and market-exchange modes of assuring our survival as individuals and 'nuclearising' families.

4. 'In between' spaces: it also created the 'in between' spaces

in which welfare states, educational, health and other systems came to be established and grow massively, modified under the operative influence (and interests) of professionals (social workers, teachers, doctors, lawyers...) and within programmatic and ideological frameworks called 'community development', 'school-parent councils', 'neighbourhood watch' and, indeed, volunteering and civic participation.

Much volunteering and 'civic engagement' indeed occurs in the spaces 'in-between' (the institutions of) primary and secondary sociality. Relationships in volunteering (and civic engagement) can be fraught, depending on the institutional context in (or 'against') which they occur, but they are typically weighted towards – if not measured by – those common in institutions of secondary sociality, i.e. of market and state and hence based on the idea of exchange. On the other hand, there is a growing sense – especially in the context of dire ecological and global-economic warnings – that we need to restore systems and processes of primary sociality if we're to nurture 'true' civic participation and engagement, as illustrated in further sections.

Meanwhile, 'volunteering' has come to cover an vast range of activities, from 'caring' and support work – including 'borderline' voluntary work (like foster care) and 'borderline' caring work (like 'meals on wheels' or transport) – to environmental and emergency work (SES and fire-fighting coming to mind), to international volunteering and civil service. Listings and discussions of the range and varieties of volunteering – including those where boundaries are transgressed – are available in the literature and on-line (<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au>), so we will refrain from detailing them here.

This short excursion into history and social theory has shown that the 'voluntary' aspect of civil society work is not to be understood in a simplistic operational-administrative and vaguely moralistic sense as 'not paid' human activity. Rather, it is part and parcel of past and ongoing/contingent processes of political-economic change and is undertaken, intended and 'embodied' by people who, out of 'free' will, commitment and a sense of responsibility to the 'commons' (however 'embodied' and/or distorted), seek to (re-)create, maintain and sustain ties and relationships of primary sociality.

In the course of our conversations with project participants across the region, we heard many times formulations circumscribing people's intention (or motivation) to volunteer in terms of 'giving back to the community'; we equally heard vigorous rejections of the volunteering 'label,' as many did not identify with the range of its suggested meanings, especially those who had become aware of its potentially 'exploitative' elements – or who perceived it as a threat to jobs and employment for 'properly qualified' people and as undermining the role of the welfare state. 'Political action' or activism were notions which were rather acceptable, or, in the words of an interviewee: 'This is not charity but solidarity.' And how to interpret the response of a younger participant, surprised at hearing her involvement with community radio being described as 'volunteering,' telling us that she and her friends thought about it more as 'just mucking around'...?

There were also certain areas of contest or mild disquiet about present-day developments in volunteering; several

interviewees occupying various roles in volunteer support and resourcing felt that the recent entry into the volunteering field by students (looking for placements) and of CentreLink clients (being 'mutually obligated' to look for 'voluntary' involvement) blurs the boundaries in less-than-desirable ways – with some rejecting their presence in 'true' volunteering outright.

One of the more 'traditional' areas of volunteering, 'care and support,' covers about all categories and groups of people, both receiving and giving these forms of voluntary 'help'. Even here, however, the voices are changing, with one respondent qualifying such relationships as being 'rather more than merely adding yet another individualistic engagement in the relatively impersonal society of the municipality.' Other – more urgent – voices can be added here; the biennial report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Welfare 2007, not only reviews Australia's perennial welfare concerns but equally notes that '...the unmet demand for disability and aged care services was placing great pressure on volunteers and family members.' (The Age, 8/12/2007) The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and the Australian Institute of Family Studies have equally added to the contextual landscape within which this discussion moves. The latter's Measuring the value of unpaid household, caring and voluntary work of older Australians (AIFS 2003a), whilst using some questionable valuations and certainly not contributing any social valuation of voluntary, caring and unpaid household work, offers useful arguments about our ageing society and possible consequences for higher service needs. As well, the higher supply of potential service 'deliverers' is mentioned, given that the amount of volunteering and caring/household work by those reaching the 60-64 age bracket increases dramatically.

As well, the report 'It's about time: women, men, work and family' (HREOC 2007) argues that Australia needs to balance paid work and unpaid care much better than it has in the past and does in the present. Research and arguments about 'downshifting' notwithstanding, editor John von Dousta thinks that 'in spite of economic prosperity, stress for all Australians is increasing...' and 'a much more holistic framework is needed to understand better the meaning and value of the different kinds of work – paid and unpaid – and the boundaries between the two need challenging.' (our emphasis; HREOC 2007: XI-XII)

The report makes it very clear that 'unpaid work subsidises paid work and that the economy depends on unpaid work' (HREOC 2007: 44); unless the real social value of unpaid labour – both household and beyond – is more appropriately valued and supported by government policy and resources, the overall economy and the sustainability of personal and collective prosperity will be endangered. Whilst the centrality of the 'regular' economy and of paid work is not challenged, 'Many public institutions, such as schools, rely on volunteer work to function effectively. Voluntary work, including various types of 'caring' work within the community, also creates broader social capital from which families and communities benefit. The social benefits of strong community networks of support are often undervalued and overlooked. A better balance of paid work and family/carer responsibilities among men and women must include a response to the need for neighbourhood wellbeing, including building local community capacity to care for its members.' (HREOC 2007: XVI)

It cannot be said more clearly, although one has to wonder what or who will bring about the necessary structural and cultural shifts to restore the distributional systems (and the commensurate ethic of justice) in societies undermined by two decades of economic rationalism. And how to enable communities to function again as 'communities', after having suffered for centuries from systematic erosion and – indeed – often violent destruction, dislocation and displacement, especially when the responsibility for this would – at best – be dealt with as 'collateral damage' by those co-responsible for this...

A brief research report by Bettina Cass et al (2007: 7-8) puts it even stronger, initially claiming that 'much of the literature on care-giving tends to emphasise the concepts of 'stress' and 'burden', and fails to capture the complexity and worth of the diverse experiences of care... Much of the literature on paid and unpaid care – the latter provided usually by family members within households and kin networks – constructs dichotomies of formal/informal, paid/unpaid care. There is, however, a newer literature which rejects these dichotomies, developing a conceptualisation of social care in which the interconnections of paid and unpaid care are mapped through the life course. One influential contribution to this literature (Daly and Lewis, 2000) focuses on three interconnected aspects of care:

- Care is labour, requiring consideration of whether care is paid or unpaid, formal or informal and the social policy determination of these boundaries [which] are not fixed but blurred and changing ... framed by public policies... subject to significant ... shifts.
- Care is embedded within a normative framework of obligation and responsibility. Informal care tends to be provided under conditions of social, usually familial relations and responsibilities, making it inappropriate to consider the labour aspects of care alone.
- Care is an activity which incurs costs (financial, physical, mental health and emotional costs) which extend across the boundaries of the public/private.' (our emphasis)

We are, it should be said, not at all entering new conceptual/practical territory in this exploration; in the Foreword to the Proceedings of the 1966 (!) 4th National ACOSS Conference, 'The Voluntary Principle in Community Welfare', John Lawrence (1966: III) suggested that 'most of the papers presented at the conference fitted more appropriately under the title 'Citizens and Social Welfare Organisations' than under the Conference theme. 'Citizen' is a useful word in a democracy for it implies individual worth and individual rights and duties; and 'organisations' are now the characteristic way in which we achieve our social welfare objectives in our complex modern society. Citizens as organizers and providers and as clients of social welfare organizations is not a subject of peripheral interest; it is of central importance to our way of life.' An appropriate transition, indeed, to move this conceptual exploration towards notions associated with citizenship, entering this discourse via a more recent concept: social capital.

Social Capital

Our research revealed that the bulk of 'care and support' volunteering still very much occurs within a more 'traditional'

conceptual and pragmatic framework, as such also reinforced by the volunteering Clearing Houses and resourcing bodies (Wilkinson & Bittman 2002). Whilst the discussion and the intellectual debates (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Cox, 1995, 2002) have 'moved on', the pragmatic and organisational realisations of 'traditional' volunteering are still clearly located within the societal realm, which, until the mid-nineties was criticised by the 'Left' as the 'exploitation of free or cheap labour,' whilst being promoted by the 'Right' as benevolence or charity.

The authors of *Social Capital at Work* (AIFS 2003b:2) maintain that '[s]ince the mid-1990s, social capital has rapidly become the dominant framework in Australia within which volunteering has been interpreted,' [and the] 'increased interest in volunteering' [is said to be linked to growing interest in] 'debates surrounding social capital and civil society.' In *Social Audits*, Eva Cox (2002: 13 ff) proposes that 'Social capital is a contested but useful term...we can define it as that quality of the relationships within and between groups, which generate civil interactions such as mutual respect, ability to resolve conflict, shared values, networks and trust, which in turn facilitate collective action... In a range of areas, the evidence is mounting that high levels of social capital, linking diverse groups, correlate with better functioning social systems and higher standards of health and education. It appears that higher levels of trust create connections which make for better use of resources such as skills, money and knowledge. Low social capital appears to limit life chances and quality of life.'

She admits, however, that social capital, 'like most such ideas... has been claimed by multiple groups and defined in various ways. My preference is to use it as a shorthand term for describing how well we connect as social beings...we are assuming that social capital is useful for strengthening communities, for capacity building and other desirable outcomes... [but]...it cannot be owned by individuals, but is evident in the ways it works within and across groups and communities. Even then, the whole society does not as such own the social capital so much as express it.' Importantly for our exploration, she warns that '[d]efinitions of social capital that focus on volunteers and other forms of involvement in community activities are looking at only part of the story and this emphasis often creates problems. Trust-building is also very important for social cohesion, as well as the provision of necessary material resources, if the programs or policies are to be effective. Social capital can be defined as the processes through which we learn and practice the skills of being civil and sociable beings and this learning facilitates collective action and the sharing of customs and values... [further] it is the bridging functions [of social capital] that may be the most important in creating more civil societies and in managing the complexities and conflicts of post-modern societies... In recent years, many organisations have lost membership. There is decreasing trust in political systems and banks and loss of volunteer time. But this appears to have reversed in 2000, even excluding the Olympics. We have new manifestations of sociability: more meals out, more coffee shops, more multiplex cinemas, more reading groups, more people apparently going to public lectures. We have mass civic, social and cultural events such as communal fairs and festivals, the Reconciliation marches, Clean-Up Australia, land, coast and bush care, Mardi Gras, as well as people becoming increasingly involved in community activities through their workplaces. What we may be seeing are new forms of social interaction which bring people together for events, rather than for the support of organisations.' (our emphasis; Cox 2002)

Exploring the links between social capital and labour force status, an AIFS (2003b) study suggested that those with 'lots of' social capital are more likely to be employed, although the 'type' of social capital (informal, professional, etc...) seems more important in 'predicting' labour force status, which is especially relevant in those areas where volunteering is being 'used' to gain access or improve chances of getting access to paid work – indeed, a controversial area in the field as our interviews have shown.

Finally, critique of the notion of 'social capital' has been fast and furious (Mowbray 2004, Arneil 2006) and continues apace, mostly centring on areas of 'contention' already suggested by Eva Cox. The usefulness of this short conceptual excursion into social capital, however, consists in the confirmation of the importance of the nature and quality of relationships in the context of volunteering, civic participation, community strengthening, indeed, in all the areas in which either of these activities are to be deployed and which are central to this conceptual review.

Civic participation

The second conceptual focus of this project, 'civic participation,' is part of a wider discourse and it is worthwhile to explore its context and genesis. Civic participation and engagement relate back to the Roman interpretation – *civitas* – of the originally Greek concept of the polis, the city, around which the early notions of citizenship and the set of obligations and rights entwined with this 'civilised state of being' (often contrasted with 'barbarism'...) evolved. Via the medieval European cities, it morphed into the notion of 'modern' citizenship within a nation-state, affording certain rights to and demanding certain obligations from 'citizens' (however unequally allocated!) in the political/public ('*res publica*' in the Roman context) as well as the 'private' domain.

The loss of a sense of political participation in the present 'post-modern', globalisation and mass-displacement epoch, however, with decisions being made on an ever-larger and more remote scale, throw into doubt the relevance of the nation-state, its associated citizenship and the actions commensurate with it. Compensating for the loss of participation in the established political and economic spheres, a 'third sector' (and an associated 'third way') would open up opportunities for civic engagement/participation, filling the space 'between' the formal or 'public' sectors of government and the 'official' economy, a space in which also volunteering finds its main area of deployment. Notions of citizenship and of 'civil society' are now more frequently heard, notably in the context of 'global citizenship' or of 'Transnational Civil Society' (Batliwala & Brown 2006), especially in international volunteering and development, global predicaments to do with the environment, migration and displacement, war and conflict and the globalising capitalist economy and resistances against its effects.

In 1997, Sue Kenny wrote "One of the notions that seems to have crept up on us in recent times is the concept of citizenship," conceiving it as an antidote to the (perceived) ongoing erosion of rights, the explosive nature of the spread of 'economic rationalism' and as intimately linked with the participatory notions inherent in more politicised understandings of community action, development and participation (Farrar &

Inglis 1996). A raft of new initiatives – equally evolving from universities and funded research projects – attempted to develop ‘measures’ and ‘indicators’ of citizenship and citizen involvement, to be used as counterweight to the narrow focus on ‘economic’ indicators, to appropriately ‘measure’ and represent the wealth, health and wellbeing of a society and, by implication, of communities (Salvaris 1997; Eckersley 1998).

The Centre for Civil Society provides a ‘textbook’ definition of civil society: ‘Civil society refers to the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development nongovernmental organisations, community groups, women’s organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.’ (LSE 2004)

Here, civil society becomes an ‘arena’ or a socio-political space, ‘populated’ by formal and/or informal organisations and ‘civic participation,’ at its largest conceptual reach, entirely fits into this space. Four elements can be distilled from this definition: the notion of ‘collective action’ (or, of individual action being part of a broader realm of interaction); the absence of coercion, people enacting their own free will; theoretically, at least, being distinct from the ‘arenas’ of government, family and the ‘market’ (private firms and enterprises); but characterised by blurred boundaries between itself and either or all of the three other ‘arenas’ or ‘spaces’. Gotham (2005:98) summarises it as ‘a realm of social life outside the spheres of the state and economy’. Giddens (1998) and Putnam (2000) equally locate their ‘carriers’ of civic society, institutions and voluntary associations, in that sphere. Jeffrey Alexander (1993 and especially in his massive *The Civil Sphere*, 2006) excludes religion, family and ‘community’ – somehow cutting the line along the ‘public/private’ divide – and defines the civil sphere as the ‘space’ in which solidarity and justice are created and nurtured, however much they are in creative tension. Part of the civil sphere’s function is to detect and address the inequalities which emerge from the economic, the political, the family and religious spheres and to exercise influence to address them based on its own evolving and contingent sense of the vital balance between justice and solidarity.

Kivisto (2007) and Kivisto & Faist (2007) see the lacunae in Alexander’s opus mainly residing in the arbitrariness of the public/private distinction, the lack of attention to the relationships and demarcations between the spheres and to the issues associated with globalisation and the transnational (see also Keene 2003). Finally, with Sciortino (2007), one can applaud the return of solidarity to the fold of useful social theoretical concepts, but also lament the absence in Alexander’s work of identifying the interactional or micro-level constitution of the civil sphere – a major omission, we think, for a better understanding of processes and relationships central to the interests of this project.

Michael Edwards (2004) adds two additional meanings,

stating that civil society should be understood and projected as the good society, providing for the material needs and security of its citizens and offering space for social and political participation; and it represents the public sphere, the home of all our collective interaction, including individual acts, (inter)actions by and between business, government and other organisations – the ‘...venue for our day-to-day political interactions – voting, discussion, debates, demonstrations. A healthy public sphere is characterised by strong information flows, opportunities for participation of all citizens and deliberation – as opposed to conflict and polarisation’ (Edwards 2004:34 ff).

Meanwhile, the Carnegie Trust UK (2007), whilst recognising ‘civil society’ as a ‘contested’ concept, also refers to it as ‘...a goal to aim for (a ‘good’ society), a means to achieve it (associational life), and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means (arenas for deliberation).’ In turn, Terence Wood (2007) refers to the roles of Civil Society as a ‘Countervailing Force’ to the impositions of political and economic power by private interests; as a ‘Watchdog’ on Government itself; and the strengthening of ‘Associational Life’, very much to be seen in the above discussed understanding of social capital and, according to Putnam (2000), instilling ‘habits of cooperation and public spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in public life.’ Wood also mentions possible ‘complicating factors’, such as instances of ‘un-civil’ society (the KKK in Putnam’s example), the power of the State (including their power to define what constitutes ‘civil’ and what deserves support) and the cultural context, referring to CIVICUS’ Civil Society Watch, monitoring threats to Civil Society Organisations worldwide (<http://www.civicus.org>).

To illustrate the considerable overlap between certain understandings of volunteering and all that we have thus far gathered under the umbrella of ‘civil society’, Michael Edwards (2005, 2007a: 4-5), talks about the former as ‘the commitment we all share to approach life in a spirit of equality, solidarity, love respect and constant, unceasing, self-questioning and mutual support, the spirit of critical friendship: the loving but forceful encounters between equals who journey together towards the land of the true and the beautiful. Volunteering is really a way of concretising our embrace of a radically different way of being, living and acting in the world, wherever we live and work, and whatever position we occupy in society. And that’s why it’s so important for our collective future – it’s the very foundation for making progress in every other area, the heart and the basis of what I would call “global civil society” in the deepest and most meaningful sense of those words.’

Such ‘spatial’ and conceptual widening of the notions associated with ‘citizenship’ and ‘civil society’ is certainly confirmed by Preston (2006) – who links them with a new global ethics, necessary in the face of the ecological and social crises facing humankind – and by the volume *Transnational Civil Society* (Batliwala & Brown, 2006). It was equally supported by many of our project participants, who would – sometimes strongly – assert this integrative ‘overlap.’ In Jupp & Nieuwenhuysen (2007), finally, several authors argue the importance of civic participation for national and social cohesion and several contributions argue the negative impact of its absence, again echoed by several of our interviewees, who said that ‘It is

important to broaden the concept of volunteering to include a deeper understanding of what it means, in order that those in the community who do it are recognised, valued and given the sense of importance they deserve.'

Yet another use of the notion of 'civic' entered the discourse of participation and volunteering via the concept of 'civic service;' two recent publications (Moore McBride & Sherraden 2007 and Center for Social Development 2003) explicate its present shape and spread across the world. One of the earlier contributors to the discourses about 'civic participation', Amitai Etzioni, authored in 1993 *The Spirit of Community*, a rather unbalanced attempt at trying to integrate elements of the 'Right's' critique of the welfare state (said to make people 'dependent') with elements of the 'Left's' interest in participation, civic and community action and activism. He followed this up in 1996 with *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in Democratic Society*, appearing at the same time as the more empirical social capital approaches were turned into 'practical' interventions and policy 'visions' (see above). The discussions about communitarianism were equally occurring during that time, in the UK eventually finding their way into Tony Blair's Third Way formulations (via Anthony Giddens 1998) and subsequent policies and funding programs, and from there into Victorian programs, dating back to the early 2000s, after the election of the Labor Government.

Etzioni's foreword in Moore McBride and Sherraden (2007: IX-X) is worth quoting, as it integrates several elements of all discourses in his 'circumscription' of Civil Service: 'It constitutes a highly communitarian line of action by serving both the person and the community...I refer here to those who see the essence of a good society as a carefully crafted balance between autonomy and social order, in which the social order is based as much as possible on moral suasion. Many other activities enrich individuals or corporations at the expense of the community – for instance, environmental exploitation. Others require personal sacrifices or risks to serve the common good – liver donation by live donors, for example. Civic service makes people and communities better for it...People who serve lead more meaningful lives and are more socially and politically aware than others. They are less isolated, better informed and more connected than many others. Civic engagement promotes democratic values and political participation. Individuals who are aware of and involved in social issues have a greater sense of human sympathy and responsibility and are more minded toward diverse interests and collective action. Moreover, the societies they serve are the richer for it. Civic service allows societies to pursue many goals that otherwise would be left unattended or poorly attended. Furthermore, it reduces divisiveness among people of divergent social backgrounds. Civic service enables people to find common ground that bridges cultural and political differences because it focuses on community strengthening.'

More soberly, Moore McBride and Sherraden attempt to distinguish 'volunteering' from 'civic service' as they offer a conceptual structure within which both can be situated comparatively: 'Ongoing, occasional and episodic volunteering tends to be the focus of scholarship on volunteerism. These forms of volunteerism may result from individual initiative and may or may not require a program structure. There may be no defined endpoint: the individual may volunteer for the same organisation

for decades or only for a single day. Examples of these forms of volunteering include serving as a board member or committee chair for an organisation or engaging in a community service day on behalf of your employer. But what about more formal, intensive volunteering, which occurs through structured programs? We refer to this volunteerism as civic service' (2007: 3-4). Trying to detail several dimensions which comprise what they call 'the construct of civic service', they identify: 'Civic service is a complex phenomenon. It is comprised of multiple dimensions and, hence, many possible variables in research, which complicate inquiry. Key dimensions of volunteerism have been identified and these can help establish boundaries and specify the nature of civic service. Differences in forms of volunteerism can be distinguished by structure; auspices and organisational host; intended beneficiaries and activities; compulsory or voluntary nature; time commitment; and remuneration or recognition' (2007:4-5). Continuing to compare 'traditional' volunteering with civic service, it becomes gradually clear that the boundaries are very permeable and many of the book chapters – all based on international research on civic service – indeed confirm this point.

The Australian discussion on a Youth Corps (most recently in 2006 by then Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beasley) is probably the closest local example of what the authors have in mind, but Australian Volunteers International, Students Partnership Worldwide and other international or 'development aid' volunteering groups (as well as those who serve for years in local voluntary CFA or SES groups) should be carefully examined as to whether they conceptually and practically would equally 'belong' to this area of civil engagement, volunteering or 'service.' It also poses interesting questions around the sometimes 'mandatory' nature of the service – see the previously mentioned 'Centrelink volunteers' and students needing obligatory placements in the course of their studies – and the sometimes deliberate links with military service, cadetships and with rather authoritarian regimes come to mind...

Finally, a brief reference to the concept of service learning, which carries elements of all of the above, but adds the notion of (formal) learning onto its semantic field; it is a form of experiential learning adopted by – especially – universities in order to increase student engagement. 'It is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.' (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, *Service Learning at USP*)" (from <http://breeze.unisa.edu.au/servicelearning>) It is certainly to be expected that these formulations will not meet the approval of more purist understandings of volunteering and civic participation...

Anticipating the next conceptual domain, 'community,' it is useful to mention that most practical and theoretical contributions to community development of any kind (e.g. Jim Ife's (2001) and Sue Kenny's (2006) standard Australian texts) increasingly include references to citizenship, in the case of Ife, through his emphasis on Human Rights and the environment-community linkages, in the case of Kenny, through her emphasis on Political Sociology and (local) democracy. Indeed,

as the community 'concept' again re-entered the national and Victorian conversations, policy papers and declarations around 2000, the citizenship and community discourses seemed to partly merge – unwittingly reinforcing the 'top-down' sense many (former) activists and academics detected in the newly announced and implemented programs of community building/strengthening, capacity building, etc. in Victoria and other Australian states. The understanding of 'participation' as used in the relevant documents, including A Fairer Victoria, is rather more pitched at a 'consultative' level and is addressed mostly at correcting disadvantage and inviting/facilitating/enhancing the 'participation' or 'inclusion' of previously excluded/disadvantaged groups into the overall benefits of society, rather than at a more 'political' level as suggested in earlier quotes, leading to the labelling of this approach as 'therapeutic' or 'medicalising'.

Parenthetically, discussions about 'citizen involvement' in the 80s and 90s (e.g. Beresford and Croft 1993 and Munro-Clark 1992) did have a more 'direct' concern with people's participation in the decision-making of governments and authorities and were more central to an activist conception of community development as the writings of that period reveal (see Stuart White's (2003) *The Civic Minimum*). It could indeed be that the merging of the notions and practices associated with 'volunteering', 'social capital' and 'civic engagement' into one conceptual or semantic landscape signify a de-politicisation of all three... And that would – indeed – be a retrograde step given all that has been said before; one of our interviewees addressed this in a 'round about' manner: 'We're still trying too much to form the community around to do what the 'grant' wants it to do, rather than the other way around. The government should first of all look at where things are already happening organically and they should support this, rather than artificially 'initiate' projects and other things which then cannot be sustained because the people were never really interested or committed. There's a need for government to be "subservient" and to relinquish control and invite real participation.'

Community strengthening (development, building etc)

Many in Victoria will still remember how 'community' virtually 'disappeared' from the government's agenda (and funding priorities) during the 90s under the privatisation, economic rationalist and managerial policies then introduced or reinforced. Resistance to the systematic erosion of community was slow in coming, but when it happened, in Victoria it carried names like the "People Together Project" and the "Purple Sage Project," but as the new Labor Government gained power by 1999/2000, much of the memory of the Community Development tradition from the seventies onwards had gone dormant if not being entirely extinguished. The revival of 'community' as community building/strengthening and capacity building with generous sprinklings of social capital was hoped to be set in train with Government resources and rhetorical support – but somehow failed and continues to fail to reconnect with its more activist/participatory versions of a previous era.

Traditionally, many grassroots community-based activities

(especially in sports, recreation, churches, environmental 'maintenance', etc) often operated 'outside' of the purview of these approaches and, again, were dealt with according to the ideological 'divide', the Left condemning them as conservative, reactionary, adaptive, pacifying, etc; the Right adopting them as 'locality development' activities (to use a rather dated framework introduced by Jack Rothman in the early 60s in the US and already alluded to previously). The conceptual development of this approach has been rather minimally 'consummated,' because of the gradual disappearance of educational programs from academic institutions, the temporary disappearance of publications about it and, some would say, the 'top-down' and 'watered-down' way in which the associated programs have been (re-)introduced and their implementation has been micro-managed.

We were offered many examples in our project conversations, with participants illustrating how 'volunteering,' 'civic participation' and 'community strengthening' overlap and interpenetrate, whilst community activism – as it always has – keeps changing its 'face', its 'targets' and modalities. The meanwhile quite traditional continua of approaches continue to exist, ranging from

- 'Not-in-my-backyard' (NIMBY) via 'saving native forests and whales' to 'saving the world and its inhabitants from disaster' signifying the ecological-community linkages;
- 'Neighbourhood conflict resolution/restorative practices' via 'anti-war demonstrations' to internet-based international movements for peace;
- 'Sausage-sizzle and bake-sale-based fundraising and self-help/cooperative or membership-based' and 'resourced' activism via government-granted organising and funding to 'philanthropy-based' movements and projects (as in the Our Community approaches in Victoria) to collective attempts at 'resistance to the effects of globalisation';
- 'Place-based' activism and activities via co-ordination/connection-creating processes to international community-to-community solidarity.

They all still have their place, even if it sometimes feels and appears as if the old traditions have somehow disappeared and are overshadowed by newer and flashier 'stuff', including forms of activism and volunteering which don't require 'participants' to leave their favourite and personal lounge-chair (or computer screen) – and which are still 'world spanning,' 'global', 'collective' and 'out there'. The face of 'community development' indeed keeps transforming as we speak and 'do,' but, as previously indicated, the conceptual and practice fields and landscapes in and through which community 'happens' are almost identical to those examined for other forms of civil society work. Understandings and practical/pragmatic use of all these forms continue to evolve and are in an ongoing manner documented in this journal; for example, emerging formations include:

- eco-villages and other forms of co-housing or of cooperative housing in the context of attempts at social and ecological sustainability (see the journals *Communities* and *NCQ* and local initiatives like CERES and the Sustainable Living Foundation);

- Intentional communities experiencing a revival everywhere – equally offering an array of options of mutual care and support or reciprocity especially in the form of ‘elders co-housing’, caring communities for the disabled, modelled after the Arche-communities (again, see Communities and Vanier (1992));
- Forms of networking, using very different ways of assigning ‘value’ to the ‘work’ invested, thus diluting the boundaries between ‘paid’ and unpaid’ work, regulated or unregulated activities, the economic and the ‘civic’ and ‘private’ realms, formal or informal helping, support or care so seemingly central to our understanding of ‘volunteering’ (see, for example, the US-based journal *Yes! A Journal for Positive Futures* and the World Social Forum movement(s));
- Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS) groups, social enterprises (see, for example, Nyssens 2006); the re-creation of the (virtual) commons, as exemplified by the spread of IT freeware (Christian Siefkes, 2007 and www.peereconomy.org) and renewed attention for the ‘gift economy’ as already alluded to above (see Wikipedia’s entry) and global Internet activism.

They all are emerging forms of ‘volunteering/civic participation/community strengthening/civil society work,’ continuously and contingently altering the landscape(s) we have been examining and which will remain part of an evolving picture – probably as vital as any other ‘policy’ developed to secure our survival in an increasingly uncertain global/local environment.

Government and governance

It would be remiss to omit reference to governance, a concept which has entered the debates, discussions and practices central to this investigation, if only to indicate the importance of more explicitly and reflectively addressing the relationship between the several levels of government and the more localised practices and activities included in the purview of ‘civil society work.’ Not unexpectedly, this aspect gained central importance in the consultancy project when discussing the suggested strategies and their implementation.

Ginsborg’s (2005: 195-6) conclusion offers a good entry point; having identified three negative reactions to the existence and utterances of ‘civil society’ by the State (hostility, suspicion and rhetorical acceptance but procedural harassment – how well do we all know it!), he detects ‘...on the far horizon like a life boat... appreciation... Civil society is encouraged rather than left to languish, and its members are considered valuable citizens rather than mere trouble makers... Civil society cannot substitute for the state nor take the place of more formal political organisation. Neither can it survive or prosper without the help of state institutions at all levels. On the other hand, democracy itself is a poor cow without the vitality and criticism of those associations which lie between the private sphere and the state and which harbour ambitions for democracy’s enrichment’.

Others warn against the dangers of a Backlash against Civil Society in the Wake of the Long War on Terror (Jude Howell et al. 2007: 22), as ‘...most worrying is that these tendencies are not just occurring in ‘managed’ democracies or authoritarian states, but that they are occurring in some of the developed democracies

as well, such as the UK and USA. Even a civil society haven such as the UN has begun to use the language of ‘disciplining’ and ‘regulating’ civil society. If civil society is to retain its emancipatory dimension and its role in deliberating on the values governing society, it will need to respond...’

Salutary words, indeed, and a strong reminder of several incidents and occurrences in Australia, where the previous Federal Government saw fit to withdraw funding from International Solidarity associations involved in ‘advocacy’ rather than ‘service delivery’. We also should refer here to organisations losing their tax deductibility status thanks to the work of another player in ‘civil society’, Australia’s leading free market think-tank, the Institute for Public Affairs. Whilst they certainly also belong to ‘civil society’ as we have come to understand it (i.e. not as an ideological monolith) and therewith having the ‘right’ to raise opinions and debates about other groups participating in it – given their influence with the Government, their restricted understanding of what the latter should ‘properly’ fund and what it should not may create rather dangerous precedents.

Hoping for further discussion about the future development of relationships between ‘community-based’ bodies, the different levels of government – and to therewith improve the relationship between institutions of primary and secondary ‘sociality’ - we propose subsidiarity as a potentially useful concept, which recently had increased airing in policy circles. The Subsidiarity Principle ‘...states that higher levels of government should only perform functions that cannot be effectively and efficiently undertaken by lower levels of government... [it] might involve a [constitutional] provision... that, unless amended by a referendum, decision making and administration is to be delegated to the most local practical level’ (Coghill cited in Lowell 2006:5). As a principle dividing responsibilities between state and ‘civil society’ (including churches, NGOs and levels of government), subsidiarity has a long history in continental Europe, especially since the 1801 ‘Concordat’ between the Roman-Catholic Pope Pius VII and French Emperor Napoleon. It was legally anchored in the French Constitution, which – in turn - became the prototype for most European constitutions and it still forms the basis for arrangements around service delivery in welfare, schools, recreational services, support for non-governmental organisations and initiatives. It posits that ‘super-imposed’ or ‘up-scaled’ government bodies or powers should not usurp the roles and functions better or sufficiently fulfilled by more localised or informal, non-governmental or ‘primary sociality’ institutions, groups and bodies (the German term ‘Bürgernah’ or ‘close-to-the-citizen’ decision making expresses it well).

The notions of ‘subside’ and ‘subsidise’ both derive from the Latin verb *subsidiere* (from which ‘subsidiarity’ stems), the first referring to the ‘holding back’ attitude governments should adopt when relating to the workings of institutions of primary sociality, whilst the second brings to the fore the continuing role of central and state governments and their institutions in resourcing the more primary ‘bodies’ who fulfil these functions. Indeed, central governments have the power to raise revenue and it is their role to distribute that revenue equitably and justly across their territory and the various

groups of citizens according to their needs (see Zucker, 2001); it stands to reason, though, that this does not necessarily imply that they would be the 'best' to deliver whatever is being 'distributed'.

The 1981 Webster's Third International Dictionary (Vol. III, p. 2279) calls subsidiarity a 'theory in sociology: functions which subordinate or local organizations perform effectively belong more properly to them than to a dominant central organisation'. Importantly also, Lowell points out that '[i]n a contemporary context, subsidiarity has a higher profile as a 'new political resource designed to protect local interests within the new internationalization of government' and features prominently in the European Union legislation' (2006:5 and quoting Fletcher 1999:23).

Indeed, present global developments and the geo-political as well as every-day relational changes they engender demand considerations of a new 'public ethics,' which asks for a reconsideration of the linkages between governments and governance, civic participation and activism, civil society and accountability – the very connectivities which put this review and the project from which it is derived potentially at the cusp of an emergent new reality. Ebrahim and Weisband (2007:317), for example, conclude their quite brilliant volume with a central argument for networking as follows:

- A postmodern public ethics linked to accountability requires the development of meaningful participatory practices (i.e. where participants have influence and not simply voice);
- The ethical implications of global interdependencies are realized in practical terms by means of accountability networking as an organizational form;
- Transaction-cost efficiencies gleaned from networking and accountability contribute to governance in ways appropriate to the dynamics of postmodern civil society;
- Participatory practices must reflect diverse cultures and divergent institutional settings appropriate to the problematics of accountability measured in terms of benefits of inter-subjective learning as well as benchmarked deficits.

To compensate for the deficits occasioned by inequalities in access and power and for the differences in benefits and costs experienced by groups of citizens given their relative distances from decision making centres, Ebrahim and Weisband (2007:321) quote David Held (2004), who proposes that a 'cosmopolitan multilateralism based on the principles of global subsidiarity must be developed. Held's vision of global accountability thus combines a kind of participatory praxis with a call for fluid concentric circles of governance to ensure inclusiveness, subsidiarity, and, by implication, greater accountability.' Further, with Kuper (2004), they assert that 'sovereignty can and should be dispersed horizontally and vertically, to multiple levels and loci of authority, each exercising distinct and determinate power over kinds of human practice and resources,' positing, however, that "plurarchic sovereignty is...limited on functional grounds by needs for efficacious coordinated action and democratic inclusion – needs that give rise to Principles of Distributive Subsidiarity and Democracy"... Such principles connect the lines between

citizen activism, networks, accountability, and postmodern public ethics.' (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007: 331).

Again, participants in the project had a great deal to say about the relationships between their own organisations, groups and the various levels of government they were relating with, largely confirming the 'spirit' of subsidiarity, if not using its vocabulary. Generally, the above considerations would give additional credence and urgency to the need for a new partnership between the 'state' (the several layers of government) and the 'community' and 'voluntary sector' (including – especially – those involved in 'volunteering' and 'civic participation'). Such partnership is about adequate forms of reciprocity, i.e. expressions of the democratic will of the people and of the enabling and distributive roles of (democratically elected) governments.

The great potential of the Strengthening Volunteering and Civic Participation project consisted in moving towards a renewed and vigorous relationship between state and community, the latter consisting of active citizens who understand their role to go well beyond the obligatory rituals of voting and paying their taxes and who would understand their 'volunteering' activities as those 'normal' things one does with, for and to co-citizens and as stewards of their immediate environments. By implication, it would also recast the role of local government, the level of government closest to where people 'live' their primary sociality, and emphasise the need to invest it with resources and power to play that role adequately.

In sum, these conceptual explorations as well as our conversations with so many people involved in activities covered by community strengthening, volunteering and civic participation have – again and again – emphasised the need to:

- Bring back notions of 'public service' by government to the community and the social ties that engender it (rather than imagining that relationship as a 'customer – provider' and, hence, a 'market exchange and economically abbreviated' one).
- Give greater credence to ties of primary sociality within organisations & community whilst recognising basic Human Rights and opening up to a more cooperative federalism rather than the usual coercive model, favouring 'top-and-centre' that – consequently – strengthens the power of systems of secondary sociality.
- Develop new forms of 'trust' (an important ingredient of social capital) between those living and operating (in) institutions and sites of primary sociality and the state/government.
- Integrate conceptually, programmatically and in practice the three 'embodiments' of – what we would now call – Civil Society Work, i.e. volunteering, civic participation and community building/strengthening/development.
- Such integration – whilst only possible here as the integration of three distinguishable 'typologies' – needs to include a 'personal' dimension, reflecting people's intentions and practices and a more structural/organisational dimension, reflecting the several types and kinds of relationships people engage in when they commit

to working as volunteers, as community members and/or as 'active citizens'.

In conclusion – and as an eloquent confirmation of the development of our thinking – we would like to quote John Ralston Saul (2001: 2 and 10). Having described a series of 'volunteering' activities he witnessed during the 2001 Canadian Week of Volunteering, he stated: '...what I have been describing is people participating in their society. This is the normal life of a responsible individual. The normal life of a conscientious citizen. And let me add a particular point: it's very, very important not to confuse volunteerism, volunteering, participating, ethical activity with what we used to call charity. As soon as you start talking about volunteering as a special sector, you are slipping towards something which would be confused with the traditional idea of charity. We have to be very careful about that. I know you know this better than I do. I always have printed in my mind the words of August Strindberg: "All charity is humiliation"...So let me just end with this idea. We have the opportunity for a social project which actually could take the concept of volunteerism right into the heart of the concept of democracy and citizenship. It would reassert the idea of citizens' rights and citizens' obligations as the real meaning of the balanced structure of democracy.'

The Gift- or Contributory economy

We have variously referred to the nature of the relationships underpinning the existing and newly emerging forms of volunteering, civic participation and civil society work as reflecting the 'gift' relationship. We have previously discussed in some detail what the 'ingredients' of such a relationship may be (see also Goodman, Healey and Boulet, 2007), but we would like to add to our conceptual excursion a final brief reference to work being developed in the context of the economic dimension of this alternative way of conceiving relationships; alternative, that is, to the market exchange foil usually imposed on relationship within the culture-structure of capitalism.

As the civil society discourse provides the beginning of another way of conceiving and 'practising' democracy and citizenship, the notions of 'gift economy' and 'contributory economy' offer a gradually firming structural platform from which to perceive the contours of an alternative to the market-exchange economy (and its other components like competition, profit making, growth imperative, etc). Siefkes (2007) introduces his ebook, *From Exchange to Contributions* as follows (from www.peereconomy.org) 'A new mode of production has emerged in the areas of software and content production. This mode, which is based on sharing and cooperation, has spawned whole mature operating systems such as GNU/Linux as well as innumerable other free software applications; giant knowledge bases such as the Wikipedia; a large free culture movement; and a new, wholly decentralized medium for spreading, analysing and discussing news and knowledge, the so-called blogosphere. So far, this new mode of production—peer production—has been limited to certain niches of production, such as information goods. This book discusses whether this limitation is necessary or whether the potential of peer production extends farther. In other words: Is a society possible in which peer production is the primary mode of production? If so, how could such a society be organized? Is a society possible where production is driven by demand and

not by profit? Where there is no need to sell anything and hence no unemployment? Where competition is more a game than a struggle for survival? Where there is no distinction between people with capital and those without? A society where it would be silly to keep your ideas and knowledge secret instead of sharing them; and where scarcity is no longer a precondition of economic success, but a problem to be worked around?'

His answer is well-elaborated in his book and the work complements neatly the already mentioned materials on the gift economy, whereby the associate understanding of the 'gift relationship' could rather easily be understood as not only the substitute for or complement to the relationships of market exchange, but also of those described by Marx as 'relations of production' – a line of thought which deserves further exploration and which has already been practically realised in initiatives like LETS, community currencies and others previously mentioned. But it would also provide a rather solid alternative economic foundation to our thinking and practicing of volunteering, civic participation and civil society work in general. Such thinking would additionally support the subsidiarity principle discussed earlier; indeed, the 'added value' contributed by voluntary and civil society work could be considered to be entitled to a 'tax income' for services delivered to the 'official' economy, indeed, for services delivered to the common good. It would reverse the 'need' to express the value of 'non-paid' efforts to sustain the social body and – indeed – our ecology in terms of their GDP-monetary value and instead demand calculations of the contributions of the 'official' economy to the common good...

And to conclude with this rather exciting train of thought, it could even start to offer a solid alternative platform to reflect on and practically re-assess the value or worth of the (volunteering?) 'work' famously characterised by Marilyn Waring as 'Counting for Nothing' (1988) within the (capitalist) accounting systems of countries: unpaid 'household-', birthing-, child rearing and caring work, mostly done by women. The entry 'gift economy' at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gift_economy, especially referring to the work by Lewis Hyde, Genevieve Vaughan and Godbout and Caillé, could indeed offer some initial avenues in this direction.

We will conclude these rambling explorations with a final pictorial review of the major thrust of our argument.

Integrative typology of volunteering and civic participation as civil society 'work'

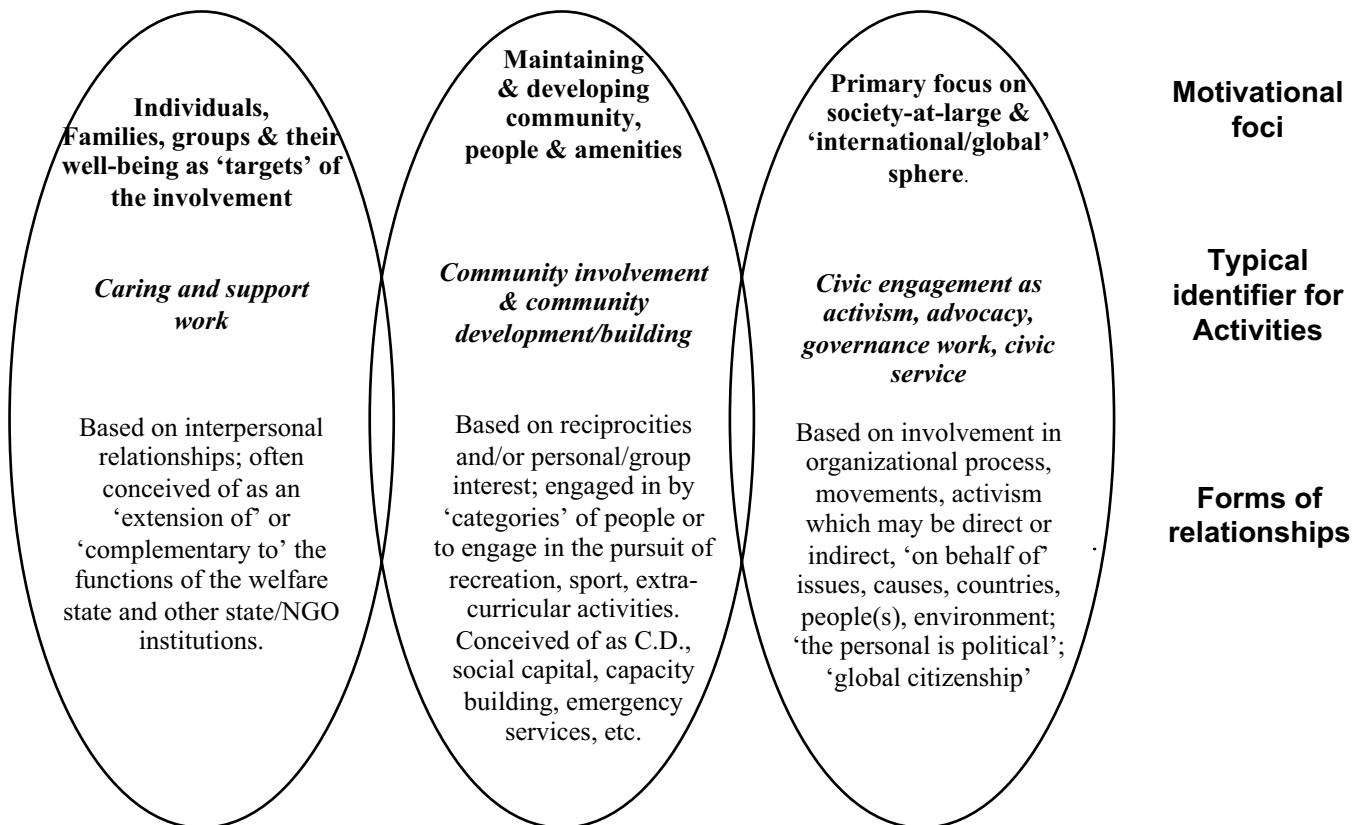
Early on in the project – and repeatedly amended and changed based on our ongoing discussions – we proposed a pictorial representation of this integrative typology, loosely built around the creative and mutually non-exclusive dynamic between

- Three broad, 'typical' motivational foci or 'targets' of persons intending to engage in volunteering/civic participation/community strengthening activities, ranging from individuals and families, to local or interest communities, to foci on a civil society/global level.
- Sets of 'typical' practices, ranging from 'caring and

support' work, to 'community building/strengthening/development' involvements of various nomenclature, to 'activism/advocacy/governance volunteering/civic participation or service'.

- Typical forms of relationships engaged in, ranging from the direct interpersonal, to group reciprocities, networking and organisational or indirect relationships.

Typology of Volunteering & Civic Participation as Civil Society 'work'



The overlap in the above figure is obviously deliberate; the categorisations are not meant to be rigid and mutually exclusive but are intended to be seen to overlap and dynamically relate. They do, however, provide a possibility to reflect on the role civil society work may play in the larger context of societies (and in their political and economic 'dimensions') and on how it could relate to other institutional and policy processes and structures with an eye on developing more meaningful strategies to support the former.

It bears repetition that the descriptive fragments of the 'types' within the 'ovals' (i.e. describing motivations, practices and relationships) are not meant to be mutually exclusive; they certainly can and will overlap or converge in the intentions or motivations of individual civil society workers and of the organisations/agencies/groups/movements they are involved with. Thinking of them as 'types' rather than 'areas' or any other 'concrete' agency/organisation or site, they intend to 'suggestively' link a predominant, 'typical' or major motivation and practices with the (predominant, 'typical', major) social or

civic 'use' or 'role' they are fulfilling or are meant to play within interpersonal relationships, community relationships and (global) society relationships.

For example:

- Environmental protection or enhancement and bush-care work could 'typically' or predominantly exemplify the descriptions in type #2 and/or #3, depending on the aims of the group and the individual motivation for involvement.
- Voluntary working and civic participation in the different spheres of activity represented by Local Government or Neighbourhood Houses – meals on wheels, tutoring, cleaning-up of creek beds, mentoring, etc – potentially locates them within either or several of the three types, as could doing the same activities in NGOs or in informal/unregulated neighbouring.
- But knitting socks for 'sponsored' children to be sent to Africa via World Vision should – indeed – be looked at as

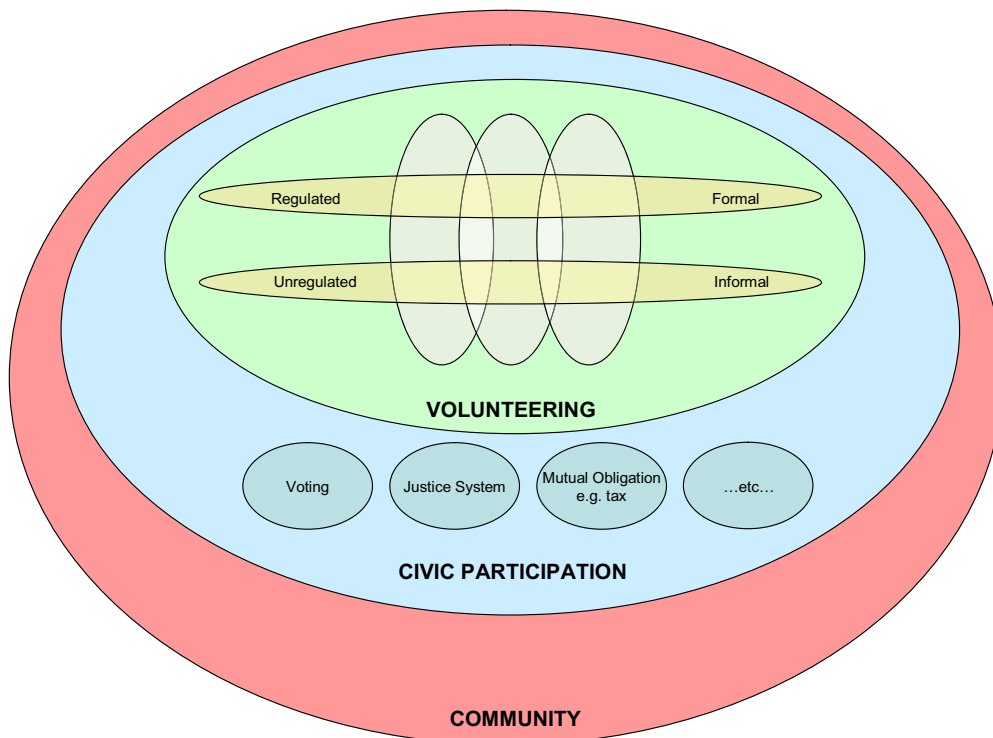
a different 'type' of volunteering/civic participation, when compared with – say – involvement in the World Social Forum, aiming at creating awareness about social and structural injustice (which could render the knitting of socks either (seemingly) necessary or not and, for the first type of 'volunteer,' probably even sufficient...).

Defining civil society work is, therefore, a problem and we hope that the above explorations have gone some way towards clarifying concepts and, hopefully, reducing the need for a stringent definition. The discussions in Regional Workshops, the interviews and in the Project Team in this project certainly failed to produce a consensus on what is meant by 'volunteering' and/or 'civic participation,' let alone on what they may mean when 'taken together' as in 'civil society work'.

Certain participants accepted 'volunteering' as one possible expression among many of people's participation in (civil) society (i.e. 'volunteering' as 'civic participation,' next to – say – voting or paying taxes); others wanted to stay with the distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' volunteering

or between 'regulated' and 'unregulated' activities within a developing conceptual framework; yet others wanted a simpler definition of 'care and support volunteering,' but there was no consensus on the distinction between 'private' and 'public' forms of caring (e.g. are grandparents who provide childcare engaged in a private matter or is raising their grandchildren not just a 'private matter,' but also a contribution to civil society?) and yet others preferred 'care and support volunteering' to be described in terms of reciprocity and giving, in order to avoid the present tendency toward paternalism/maternalism in some forms of voluntary care work, with some suggesting to add the word 'empowerment' to a description of 'care and support volunteering'

In conclusion, the discussion will go on and we hope that, at the least, this project will have contributed to its increasing depth and usefulness for practice and every-day living. We include a reproduction of an enlarged understanding of the above figure as elaborated by a group of participants in the first Regional Workshop.



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