

Volunteering, research and the test of experience

This book presents a milestone in volunteering research, offering rare and authentic insights. As an edited collection of short memoirs, it tracks the development of knowledge and understanding about volunteering during the lifetime of the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR). The memoirs written by those who were directly involved in IVR describe the growth of the body of knowledge on volunteering, the improvement of evidence to stimulate and underpin policy and practice, and theoretical and conceptual advances.

'An insightful read reflecting the ebbs and flows of volunteering policy and practice. It also highlights the resilience of an organisation and those connected to it who believe in volunteering and the power of research to extend our understanding about a phenomenon that is timeless and yet ever changing.'

— Wendy Osborne BA
OBE, Senior Consultant,
International Association
for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)

'What a joy to read. This book acts as a reminder of some of the seminal pieces of research in volunteering, still used by practitioners today and carried out by the biggest names in the field, all through the much-loved Institute for Volunteering Research. There is a steely edge though especially where essays look towards potential areas of research; often reflecting that these essential questions haven't changed even whilst policy positions have.'

— Ruth Leonard, Chair of the UK's
Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM)

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Volunteering, research and the test of experience

Edited by Michael Locke & Jurgen Grotz

A critical celebration for the 25th anniversary of the Institute for Volunteering Research

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“What seems ‘common sense’ today took years of power and knowledge to become so. If you want to understand what makes people give their time to others, you stand on the shoulders of giants. If you want to understand where giants come from, read on...”

— Michael Ashe, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteer Centre Kensington & Chelsea

“The volunteering community, policymakers, researchers and practitioners, across Europe in the CEV Network and beyond, has benefited hugely from the work of IVR. The contribution to the success of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 and its legacy through freely sharing its evidence-base for volunteering has contributed immeasurably to the development and understanding of quality volunteering across Europe.”

— Gabriella Civico, Director, Centre for European Volunteering (CEV)

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INSTITUTE FOR VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH
& UEA PUBLISHING PROJECT

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List of Abbreviations

ARVAC	Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector
AVM	Association of Volunteer Managers
CAF	Charities Aid Foundation
CIS	Centre for Institutional Studies
CSV	Community Service Volunteers
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
HOCS	Home Office Citizenship Survey
IAG	Institute Advisory Group
IVCO	International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations' Conference

IVR	Institute for Volunteering Research
LSE	London School of Economics
NAO	National Audit Office
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
NCCPE	National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement
NCSS	National Council of Social Service
NCV	National Centre for Volunteering
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
PPI	Patient and Public Involvement
RDS	Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
SSRG	Social Services Research Group
TSRC	Third Sector Research Centre

UCL	University College London
UEA	University of East Anglia
UEL	University of East London
VAHS	Voluntary Action History Society
VE	Volunteering England
VIAT	Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit
VSSN	Voluntary Sector Studies Network
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

Dedication

We dedicate this book to the pioneers of the Institute for Volunteering Research whom we lost and greatly miss, Duncan Scott and Pat Gay.

Making a difference: Addressing imbalances and inequalities in research on volunteering

CHRIS MILLORA

Dr Chris Millora is Senior Research Associate and Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow based within the UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia (UK).

I first heard that the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) made the University of East Anglia (UEA) its new home when I was just starting my doctoral research at UEA on local volunteering and learning in the Philippines. I thought this was perfect timing to be involved with a reputable institute that has been leading pathbreaking research in the area of volunteering. I was well aware of IVR's work in generating research

on the theory and practice on volunteer involvement for many years. A particular piece that helped shaped my thinking was a working paper that challenged dominant definitions of volunteering entitled *A rose by any other name... revisiting the question 'what exactly is volunteering?'* (Ellis Paine, 2010). Reflecting on this paper and reading through the memoirs in this volume, I was struck at how, over the years, IVR does not shy away from asking difficult questions about volunteering, questions such as “How does voluntary action facilitate wellbeing?”, “Does volunteering challenge or enhance inequalities?” or something as fundamental as “What exactly is volunteering?” as in the working paper cited above.

Asking difficult questions is a vital aspect in pushing forward research in volunteering. Knowledge production in this field has been attracting scholars and practitioners for many decades. Volunteering has been viewed from several perspectives, from management and civic participation to education and public service. In my view, this field has been bridging the chasms between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ as much of this research is being used by policy makers and practitioners alike. It could also be argued that volunteering practices are embedded across many, if not all, communities around the globe. However, we know that volunteering is called by many different names, ensues different expectations and is framed by differing values. Therefore, putting strict parameters on what counts as volunteering, a highly complex and contextual social practice, tends to marginalise forms of volunteering that might not fit dominant ‘standards’. As others already pointed out, there are indeed

inequalities and imbalances in the way knowledge in volunteering is framed, produced and disseminated.

When tracing the inequalities in volunteering knowledge production, several have argued that much research in this area continues to be dominated by Global North frameworks. Lukka's contribution in this volume on the need to interrogate and challenge the persistence of the colonial legacies of volunteer work is a powerful starting point in understanding these disparities in knowledge production. I agree with Lukka that there is a need to step out of the so-called dominant frameworks, which while regarded as 'global' or 'international', are often imbued with Northern conceptions of volunteering (see also Hazeldine and Baillie Smith, 2015). This skewed understanding of a 'universal concept' of volunteerism may mean that certain forms of volunteering are privileged over others. What is more, research and experience tell us that these frameworks do not remain at the level of discourse or abstraction, but they have very real life, practical implications. How we understand volunteering influences how we 'do', 'design' and 'value' volunteer involvement. Therefore, imbalances in knowledge production in volunteering could translate to enhancing inequalities in real life.

To level this imbalance, the task seems to be beyond simply conducting more research in Global South contexts. Indeed, scholars have noted how even studies of volunteering in these communities tended to use frameworks developed elsewhere, often those from Northern scholarship. Perhaps a useful starting point is in understanding how diverse communities themselves understand and practise

‘volunteering’, or whatever term they use to describe these helping activities. In-depth accounts of local volunteering, for instance, reveal how in certain contexts, volunteering is less about providing services for free in or through volunteer organisations, but more about helping their local church, sharing resources, reaching out to neighbours or responding collectively to shared issues. In the Philippines, where I do most of my research, volunteering is associated with the pre-colonial concept of ‘pakikipagkapwa’ where a person helps another because he/she is an extension of one’s self, rather than being a different, less-privileged other needing help (see also memoir of Lukka).

In understanding volunteering in context, it might also be worth looking at the sorts of methods that we use to study volunteering. Cross-country comparisons, global surveys and measurements only tell us part of the story. Community-based research approaches such as ethnographies of volunteering (Chadwick et al, 20221) have the potential to generate valuable understanding on how volunteering is practised as part of everyday life of diverse communities. Such an in-depth approach could reveal the ways volunteering might be embedded in and shaped by relations of power. We also see the value of participatory and volunteer-led approaches to research where volunteers themselves take on the role of researchers not only to produce ‘new’ knowledge but also changing and improving their practices.

For many of us who are conducting research in this field, there are examples within IVR’s research portfolio that show the potential of intercultural, cross-country dialogue and

collaboration in addressing these knowledge imbalances. For instance, I was involved with the IVR more recently when we worked together on answering yet another difficult question: how can volunteer-state relationships facilitate equal and inclusive societies? This was the central enquiry addressed in the 2022 State of the World's Volunteerism (SWVR) of the UN Volunteers entitled *Building Equal and Inclusive Societies* (United Nations Volunteers Programme, 2021). IVR was part of an international consortium led by the UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation, also at UEA, alongside partners at the Center for Social Research at the University of Malawi and the Kathmandu University School of Education. With 15 case studies of volunteer organisations, mutual aid groups and local NGOs spanning Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Arab States and the Latin America and the Caribbean, the report investigated how volunteers worked with, or sometimes despite of, government institutions to bring about social change in their communities.

However, much can also be said about how we set out to conduct this research as a team working from various fields, such as education, international development, gender, youth studies and in various contexts in the UK, Philippines, Lebanon, Nepal, Malawi and Brazil. Despite the challenge of quick turnarounds and managing a cross-country research project, we were able to engage in meaningful dialogue, analysing data as collaboratively as possible and bringing in insights from our own fields and contexts to enhance the research. As the pieces in this collection demonstrate,

collaborative enquiry is indeed an important ethos that underlines IVR's work, a commitment that I was privileged to witness and experience.

During the pandemic, as cities locked down, IVR managed to cross boundaries and bring people together through convening online seminars and dialogues. For instance, the IVR website hosts a number of videos of volunteers and organisations talking about volunteer responses to the pandemic, from Mongolia, Hong Kong and India to Kenya, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. These videos became the springboard for an online conversation on this topic, drawing experiences from such diverse contexts and sharing best practice solutions to then an extremely disorienting issue.

Working collaboratively across context and engaging in intercultural discussions further emphasises that volunteering looks differently in different places. Often, I came out of these sessions with more questions than answers. However, it is in talking to and thinking with each other that we were able to see connections, patterns and, at times, shared solutions. Over the years, IVR has built a truly global network, and it is vital that the Institute taps into such a network to answer difficult questions on volunteering together, and perhaps come up with more. IVR is also well-positioned to 'test out' new approaches to volunteering research methods which could perhaps generate new insights to old problems. As IVR turns 25 years, I am confident that their commitment to intercultural dialogue, collaboration and innovation will continue for the next 25 years and many more years to come.

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JURGEN GROTZ PhD is the Director of the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). With three decades of experience in applied research across the academic, public, private and voluntary sectors, his mainly interdisciplinary work on volunteering and volunteer involvement focuses on participative approaches and public involvement. He co-edited the *Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations* (Smith et al, 2016) and co-authored *Patient and Public Involvement in Health and Social Care* (Grotz et al, 2020), co-edited *Mobilising Voluntary Action in the UK: Learning from the Pandemic* (Hardill et al, 2022) and is co-authoring *Volunteer Involvement: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Grotz and Leonard, 2022).

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MICHAEL LOCKE was joint founder of IVR in 1997, as Reader in the Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London, and with IVR as Associate Director (1997-2001), Senior Research Fellow (2001-2007) and Assistant Director (2007-2008), joining Volunteering England as Director of Public Affairs (2008-2011) and subsequently leading on volunteering policy for Volunteering England and NCVO (2011-2014).

PRIYA LUKKA was a Research Officer with IVR (1999-2003); she is a macroeconomist in international development working with government policy-makers to improve outcomes for groups of people most marginalised by economic systems, through understanding the impact of policies on debt, trade and tax. She writes on a range of issues, including on global economic governance and climate colonialism; she is also a Board Advisor for a number of organisations working for social justice.

CHRIS MILLORA PhD, is Senior Research Associate and Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow based within the UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia (UK). Chris' 3-year project 'Literacies of Dissent: youth activism, learning and social change explores the learning and literacy dimensions of youth social movements in the Philippines and Chile'. His first book, *Volunteering, Learning and Social Change: an ethnography of local volunteering in the Philippines*, will be published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2024.

NICK OCKENDEN worked at IVR from 2005 as a Research Officer and Research Manager before becoming its Director in 2010. Following the merger of Volunteering England and NCVO, he was Head of IVR and Head of Research at NCVO (2014-2017). He subsequently joined ActionAid Denmark (2018-2021) and currently works as a freelance research and evaluation consultant. He was Honorary Research Fellow,

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COLIN ROCHESTER is an author and researcher, formerly lecturer with the Centre for Voluntary Organisation, LSE (1987-2000) and Roehampton University (1999-2007). Since 2018 he has been an Honorary Research Fellow with the Centre for Philanthropy, University of Kent.

DANIEL STEVENS PhD was Head of Research with IVR (2010-2011), subsequently with World Vision (2011-2022) and currently Global Strategic Outcomes Manager with Open Doors International (2022+).

BARONESS SCOTT OF NEEDHAM MARKET is a member of the IVR Advisory Panel, has been a member of the House of Lords since May 2000 and has held a variety of front bench positions including Communities and Local Government, building on her membership of Suffolk County Council between 1993 and 2005. Her interest in the community and voluntary sector was born out of this

this work, and she has worked with Volunteering England and NCVO, as well as being a Trustee of Community Action Suffolk, the infrastructure body for the county.

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META ZIMMECK, after training as a social historian and carrying out research on the employment of women in clerical and professional occupations, including in the Civil Service, then specialised in research on volunteering, government-voluntary sector relations and organisational management and development. She has carried out quantitative, qualitative and policy-based research for a portfolio of clients in local and central government, academic institutions, voluntary organisations and businesses. She worked for both IVR and VE on a number of different research projects and for VE as policy strategist and head of secretariat on the Commission on the Future of Volunteering. Currently she and her partner, Colin Rochester, are working on a study of the production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by voluntary action during the pandemic.

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