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## Background

The research findings presented here form part of a three year ESRC Case studentship entitled "Space, place and volunteers: the nature, meaning and impact of volunteering in Scotland"<sup>1</sup>. The studentship was based at the University of Dundee with Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) the non academic partner organisation. These findings are the final set in a series of three published by VDS. Previous publications focus on geographical differences in the nature of volunteering and the relationship between volunteering and social inclusion in different types of community.

The research uses both in depth interviews and self completion postal questionnaires to gather data from current, former and non volunteers in four case study sites in Scotland: Sandy Isle (a deprived rural community), Lochlands (an affluent rural community), Parkville (an affluent urban community) and Towerton (a deprived urban community)<sup>2</sup>. Fieldwork was carried out in the period June 2004 – June 2005 and the research was completed in late 2006.

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## Main Findings

- Motivations to volunteer are complex, may change over time and can be spatially distinct
- In affluent communities volunteers may be more likely and more able to carry out a "cost-benefit" analysis before choosing to volunteer and prefer to "buy" themselves out of volunteering
- In rural communities volunteers may be more likely to engage in "no choice" volunteering i.e. volunteering as the only means of accessing services available as standard in urban communities
- Volunteering can be a disempowering experience and this may be particularly the case for volunteers involved in democratic and political processes
- Volunteers experience lower levels of satisfaction with their local neighbourhood than non volunteers and this difference is statistically significant in rural and affluent communities
- It is unclear whether it is the less satisfied citizens who are motivated to volunteer or whether volunteering creates dissatisfied citizens

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<sup>2</sup> Place names are anonymised

## Findings

### Introduction

Alongside the focus on social capital, current political support for volunteering also centres on the extent to which it can contribute to creating or developing active citizens, and in doing so impact positively on civil society and civic renewal (Scottish Executive, 2004). The notion of empowering individuals is a fundamental part of this current focus (Clarke, 2005, Milliband, 2006). Despite the intensity of this political attention the capacity of volunteering to contribute to the active citizenship agenda remains unclear with some evidence to suggest both the nature of the volunteer engaging organisation (Turner, 2001, Fyfe and Milligan, 2003 and Milligan and Fyfe, 2005) and the nature of the volunteering activity itself can influence this (Chanan, 2003, Brannan et al, 2006). There are then continuing debates as to whether volunteering is always an expression of citizenship and whether the two concepts are inherently linked. The evidence presented here reflects on this relationship and highlights how the spatially distinct nature of volunteering may impact on this.

### ***“Cost-benefit” volunteering – an expression of active citizenship?***

Quantitative data shows that 94.2% of all volunteers identified helping others as a motivator for volunteering and for 76% a desire to improve a local service, facility or organisation was a motivator. Helping a particular organisation known to be short of volunteers was also a motivator for 67.6% of volunteers. There were no statistically significant differences between these motivators in different types of community. This data could be argued to be evidence of high levels of active citizenship as these motivations are clearly other-regarding. Analysis of the qualitative data reveals a more complex picture however with some volunteers engaging in a complex form of cost-benefit analysis prior to their engagement in volunteering.

*... in communities like Parkville... I think... there's definitely people who see it as... “Well I wish these services were available but they're not so I'm going to have to help out at the Mother and Toddlers or there won't be a Mother and Toddlers and I won't have anywhere to take my child but I can manage because I'm only going to be there for so long and then I'll be back at work”.... But then I wouldn't necessarily call that volunteering. It's a definite quid pro quo situation where somebody does the deal in their head and they don't necessarily want to do it but it's just literally a means to an end.*

(Karen, worker with voluntary sector infrastructure organisation, Parkville and Towerton)

For Karen volunteers who behave in this way are far from Handy et al's “pure” volunteer (2000:46-47) as in deciding to become active they have established that the benefits to them outweigh the costs. For Handy et al the public perception of whether someone is a volunteer relates directly to the perceived cost to them of their involvement in the activity. Costs include time spent on the activity, money spent supporting it, the opportunity cost and social pleasures foregone. The volunteers Karen describes have in fact employed an actuarial attitude (Young, 1999), a cost-benefit analysis based on potential personal gain rather than community benefit. Brannan et al highlight how a key issue emerging from civil renewal research funded by the Home Office in 2004/5 are the two broad themes governing why people get involved civically: as a result of a moral outlook or as a result of a set of private costs and benefits (2006:21). We see then that behind the motivations of improving/retaining services and helping an organisation short of volunteers may lay a

much more personal motivation and for some this form of “cost-benefit” voluntary activity is not actually volunteering at all.

In Lochlands there was also evidence of volunteers preferring to “buy themselves out” of their volunteering or citizenship obligations:

*Laura: Yeah, I mean Ellen and I are both on the PTA: there will be a raffle at Christmas time and we will give all of the prizes, OK, we will then sell all the tickets to all our friends and family, like to most of them who I've said, “Can you give us a bottle of wine please”, so I'm asking all the people who I know for the prizes and then selling them all the tickets for them to buy back the prizes that they've just given me!*

*Adam: It would almost be quicker just giving a tenner as a donation*

*Laura: Yeah, sometimes, I mean I actually brought this up at one of the PTA meetings and everybody just freaked out and looked at me... And I said, “Would we not just be better writing a cheque at the beginning of the year and I'll give you fifty quid?” and they all went (sucks breath in horror), “That's dreadful”, you know, and I said “Yeah but sometimes it's a lot easier”. And they thought that was really terrible of me*

(Interview with Laura, Adam and Ellen, multiple volunteers, Lochlands)

Very similar views have been uncovered among volunteers in rural England and Wales (Ellis and Enticott, 2001) and it is apparent that in this case, having carried out a cost-benefit analysis, Laura and Adam feel their volunteering offers them more costs than benefits. Despite this, they continue as volunteers as the norms of their affluent, rural community expect it. Clear here is the tension between individual motivations and desires and collective, local norms. Ellis and Enticott have identified rural volunteers who undertake this form of participation, where involvement is considered a natural part of the “gemeinschaft” way of rural life, as “communitarianists”, arguing their involvement is related to a strong sense of place and personal identity and is considered the behaviour of a “proper” rural resident (2001:7-8). Interestingly then Parkville (as described by Karen in the quote above), although urban rather than rural, appears to have similar and equally strong participation norms that influence involvement. It should, of course, be noted that Lochlands, the community in which Laura and Adam are based, and Parkville, the community Karen describes above, are both affluent areas suggesting that affluence rather than rurality may be connected with this form of participation. The option to either buy yourself out of community obligations and the nature of the cost-benefit analysis carried out by individuals would perhaps not exist and could certainly be very different in some other locations or for less affluent volunteers. This form of “cost-benefit” citizenship activity identified in this research may, therefore, be more prevalent in affluent communities.

### ***“No choice” volunteering – an expression of active citizenship?***

In contrast to the volunteer experiences highlighted above Sandy Isle volunteers and volunteer coordinators were acutely aware that volunteer involvement in service provision was important to their community as there were no alternative means of provision:

*...it's just a shame that people have to do so much, you know, in areas like this, to be able to get the same level of service provision that they get, that they just take for granted with their council tax over (in other) areas where they don't have that many volunteers at all in fact to provide the same sort of service*

(Tony, Sports Centre Manager, Sandy Isle)

*A group like (the disabled and older people support centre) is a case in point. They're delivering a service that is delivered by Social Services in other areas, you know, and if that group hadn't come together and worked together... without that it wouldn't have happened and the services wouldn't be there.*

(Tess, Health Worker, Sandy Isle)

On Sandy Isle volunteers provide services that would otherwise not exist and volunteers and Volunteer Coordinators recognise that their situation is different to "other areas". This process is not, however, described as positive or empowering and instead the feeling is one of resentment. There is no reference to volunteers increasing the range of services available or having an opportunity to "buy" their way out of their volunteering roles. It is therefore difficult to see this as evidence of what Salamon et al describe as the "plus" (2000:25): the process through which voluntary involvement in service delivery can increase choice. Voluntary service delivery on Sandy Isle was quite clearly most

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### ***Volunteering and active citizenship as a route to empowerment?***

The extent to which involvement in volunteering facilitates the involvement of individuals in democratic and/or political processes is central to the discourse on relations between volunteering and active citizenship. This is considered important as policy makers see this form of involvement as leading to greater empowerment for individuals (Andrews et al 2006, Atherton et al, 2002). While there was considerable evidence of the way in which volunteers became involved in democratic and political processes as a consequence of volunteering there was also evidence to suggest that this experience was not always positive or empowering.

*It's like hitting your head off a brick wall. You're really, it's better not to get involved with politics. There's nothing you can do to mend the situation*

(Doris, volunteer with older persons project, Towerton)

*The frustration of it all, I think.... I think the new openness that the Councils are meant to have, they are when it suits them but then you come up against certain areas and you can't get anywhere with them, you know... You do know you're being fobbed off... and it's really frustrating that that happens. That with some things they are quite open and transparent, with other things they're not and that is annoying.*

(Beth, community development volunteer and Community Councillor, Towerton)

*Mandy: Yeah, I mean I've been involved in a few volunteer groups and as soon as the council come in the enthusiasm is not there*

*Netta: Aye*

*Mandy: You lose enthusiasm because this Councillor is sitting there going, "Na na na na na" and "That's not allowed and that's against this code and that's against that code". Where are all these codes coming from? All of a sudden these things have all sprung up out of nowhere and then when you find down the line that you probably could have done it in the first place the council just didn't like what was happening*

*Netta: The council get to the point where they say, "You're going to have to do this" and you say, "But it's not going to work for us", "Oh well there were all these meetings that you could have been at". But nobody tells you about that beforehand.*

(Netta and Mandy, community centre volunteers, Towerton)

These quotes show clearly that it was volunteers in Towerton who most frequently revealed evidence of this issue perhaps indicating that this is a particular issue in urban deprived communities. Further research would be required to full explore whether this is the case.

### ***Volunteering and active citizenship as a route to satisfaction?***

Blunkett has argued that only when individuals are active citizens are they really "free" and able to "take hold of their own destiny" (2003:1-2). Similarly the Active Citizenship Centre highlights how the benefits to individuals involved include increased skills and confidence and the strengthening of community ties and cohesion (2006). While individuals clearly do receive some benefits as a result of being involved in voluntary activity - this is well evidenced in the volunteering literature (Davis-Smith, 1998, Davies, 2001, Begum, 2003) - the policy assumption appears to be that such active citizenship will lead to more satisfied citizens. Quantitative evidence from this research may suggest the opposite however.

**Table 1: Percentage of respondents satisfied with neighbourhood by current volunteer status and location**

	<i>All</i> n=497		<i>Rural</i> n=238		<i>Urban</i> n=259		<i>Deprived</i> n=190		<i>Affluent</i> n=307	
	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>
Satisfied	85.2	90.6	<b>83.1</b>	<b>90.7</b>	89.5	90.5	79.5	84.8	<b>88.2</b>	<b>94.4</b>
Not sat.	14.8	9.4	<b>16.9</b>	<b>9.3</b>	10.5	9.5	20.5	15.2	<b>11.8</b>	<b>5.6</b>
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**Bold** = statistically significant difference between locations

In all locations and overall volunteers were less likely to be satisfied with their neighbourhood than those not volunteering (Table 1). This difference was statistically significant in rural locations (p=0.090) and affluent locations (p=0.068).

**Table 2: Percentage of respondents satisfied with neighbourhood by current volunteer status and individual site**

	<i>All</i> n=497		<i>Sandy Isle</i> n=101		<i>Lochlands</i> n=137		<i>Parkville</i> n=170		<i>Towerton</i> n=89	
	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>	<i>Vol</i>	<i>Not Vol</i>
Satisfied	85.2	90.6	77.4	91.4	87.0	90.1	90.0	97.1	87.5	79.0
Not sat.	14.8	9.4	22.6	8.6	13.0	9.9	10.0	2.9	12.5	21.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**Bold** = statistically significant difference between locations

*Italics* = valid test not possible

At the level of individual site (Table 2) we see how only in Towerton were current volunteers more satisfied than non volunteers and how, in contrast, on Sandy Isle current volunteers were the group least likely, by location or volunteer status, to be satisfied with their neighbourhood. It is notable that none of these differences were statistically significant however.

Relying solely on this quantitative data makes it difficult to establish whether involvement in volunteering itself causes the increased levels of dissatisfaction or whether it is those residents who are most dissatisfied who move into volunteering. Certainly the qualitative data offers examples of individuals becoming volunteers because of their dissatisfaction with the local area:

*Because like when I was like younger and that there was nothing to do at all. Like there was no dances or anything for young people... It seems like a good thing, like cos all the young people now are benefiting from it... We hold dances and there's Jam sessions and it's really to provide something for people to do, I suppose, and like I wanted to do that for young people because I never had that*

(Dan, Youth Project volunteer, Sandy Isle)

But qualitative data also offered examples of satisfaction with the neighbourhood increasing as a result of volunteering:

*I think because volunteering can be very rewarding and because you're, what, you're not expecting anything back from it and quite often you get a lot back from it, in terms of sort of the feel good factor, you know, I think it is very important if... It gives you a sense of ... reassurance that you know, this is a good place to be*

(Pam, Manager of Advice Service delivered by volunteers, Sandy Isle)

Returning to the experience of Laura and Adam described above we saw clearly how their dissatisfaction grew as they volunteered over time. By comparing quantitative data on motivations to *continue* volunteering with motivations to *start* volunteering we see that improving the local area becomes slightly more important over time (rising from 65.3% to 71.3%) as does helping a particular organisation short of volunteers (from 76% to 78.1%) and establishing a new service/facility or organisation (from 45.6% to 48.3%). This could indicate that over time volunteers become more aware of the need to improve their local area and perhaps, therefore, less satisfied with its current state. Volunteers appear to move from active (or even passive) citizens into critical citizens.

## Conclusions

This review of data relating to key aspects of citizenship shows clearly that the relationship between volunteering and citizenship is both complex and spatially diverse. We have seen that to consider motivations for volunteering as either for "citizenship" or "personal gain" purposes is too simplistic as motivations for volunteering are themselves both complex and dynamic. Qualitative evidence suggests participation primarily based around a "cost-benefit" analysis was more commonly found in the affluent locations while the "no-choice" but participate involvement was found to be more common in the remote rural community of Sandy Isle. This is a particular form of cost-benefit participation specific to their remote island community but with the need intensified by its deprived status that makes buying their way out of involvement simply not an option.

Perhaps most notable is the evidence that suggests that few of these forms of voluntary participation offered a *necessarily* empowering experience and that in some cases it led to a feeling of wanting to disengage from volunteering. This, together with evidence suggesting that participating citizens actually may become critical rather than satisfied citizens as a result of their involvement, offers some evidence to challenge the continuing policy assumptions about the positive and unproblematic relationship between citizenship and volunteering.

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