



1. The concept of international voluntary service

1.1 Words and their meaning

“Volunteering” or “voluntary service”: is there a difference? Knowing that every concept has different national and local connotations, we wanted to clarify the distinction we make between these words and the main issues underlining these concepts.

1.1.1 Volunteering?

We may as well start from the beginning and look at the original Latin word *voluntas*, which is synonymous with free will, personal choice or option. “Volunteering” implies a wish to offer one’s time, effort, skills and goodwill for the accomplishment of various tasks, such as collecting litter in a park or helping young children with their homework. Voluntary activities performed on an individual or non-structured basis are also called “informal volunteering”.

1.1.2 Service?

Let us look at “service”. The word is again an original Latin word, *servitium*, and synonyms often used to describe it are words such as duty, work, employment or labour. Intrinsic to this expression is thus the notion of providing something to someone and doing so within a certain period of time and in view of a previously agreed outcome, mostly of mutual benefit for those involved in this arrangement. This type of structured and organised volunteering is sometimes also labelled “formal volunteering”.

1.1.3 Voluntary service!

So, like “volunteering”, “voluntary service” is also spontaneous, based on individual free will and unpaid (although, sometimes, some form of financial compensation may be offered for costs incurred). However, besides this, voluntary service is also a structured activity during a fixed period of time, based on an agreement that provides all the parties involved with an appropriate framework of rules and procedures that inform all the partners about their duties and rights. Voluntary service implies a more formal definition of objectives and means, and is thus usually implemented by specialised voluntary service organisations that people can join in order to respond to their personal wish for volunteering.

Therefore we will be talking about “voluntary service” in this T-Kit.

1.2 Different dimensions of voluntary service

1.2.1 International or European

In this T-Kit we will be talking about international voluntary service (IVS). So one dimension determining voluntary service is the geographical scope. The challenge in involving participants from different countries is an intercultural one. IVS can be a valuable learning experience, but equally a disaster if not well prepared. The intercultural dimension can, however, also be present in a project at a national or local level where different (religious, ethnic, sexual, etc.) groups from the same country are involved. Travel costs or visa problems can make you opt to bring people together around a cause at a national or regional level.

Since this T-Kit is a co-operation between two different European institutions, you could ask yourself why we do not talk about European voluntary service? That is because we do not want to create confusion between this T-Kit and the activities of the European Commission’s Youth in Action programme called European Voluntary Service (EVS). The ideas in this T-Kit

are valid for any type of international voluntary service, thus also for EVS. We look at EVS in more detail in Chapter 2.4.2.

1.2.2 Short or long term

Voluntary service projects vary greatly in their nature and duration. In terms of their duration we can distinguish between short-term projects, generally called “work camps”, lasting between a few days and one month. Some organisations even organise weekend work camps aimed at local volunteers who are not available during the week. The second and third categories in terms of duration are “medium-term projects”, lasting between one and six months, and “long-term projects”, exceeding this length of time.

Voluntary service projects can be group projects, where individuals or small groups from different backgrounds work together as a larger mixed group. This is usually the case in work camps. Medium- and long-term projects more often work with individual placements of one or a few volunteers for a longer period of time. These volunteers are sometimes called MTV or LTV respectively (medium- or long-term volunteer).

1.2.3 For young people

In the framework of the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth, we will mainly be talking about IVS programmes for young people. The age definition of “youth” varies from one organisation and country to another. Usually 18 years is the lower age limit, because of the legal responsibility of the project organisers for younger participants, but some specific volunteering projects are open to teenagers below this age. The upper limit lies generally between 25 and 30 years of age, referring to the period of transition between the completion of secondary education, the period of professional orientation and the stabilisation of life patterns.

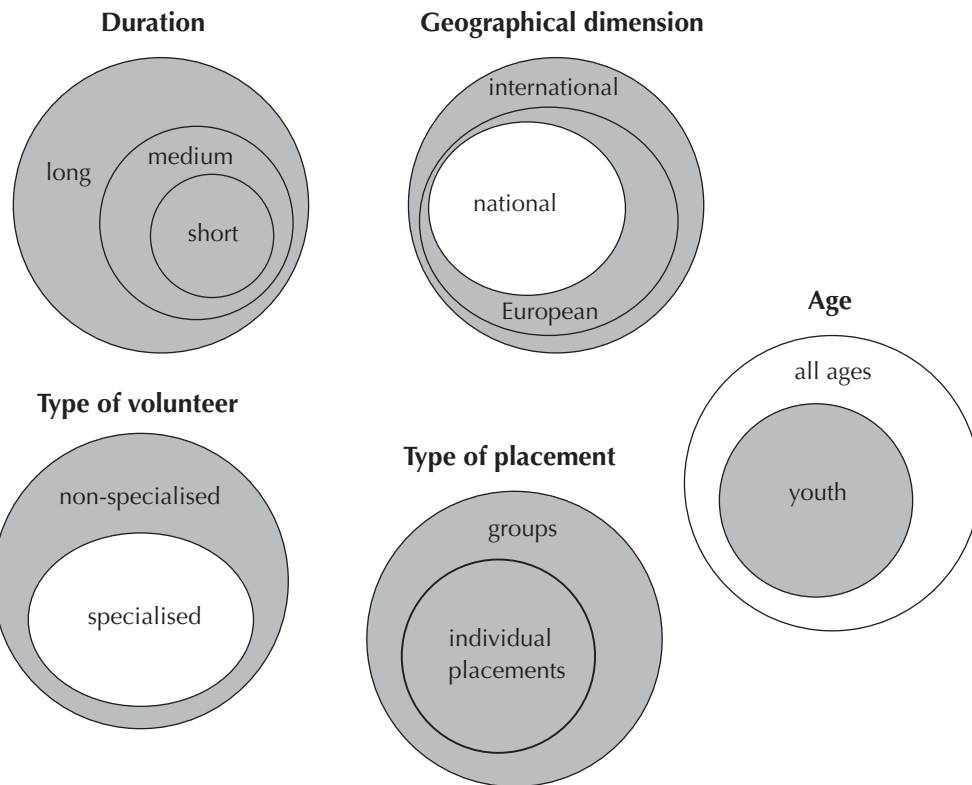
1.2.4 Non-specialised or professionals

Depending on their focus, voluntary service organisations can work with non-specialised volunteers or volunteers with specific required professional skills. Organisations working with volunteers with a certain professional experience tend to work with adults who are placed on long-term projects (for example, United Nations Volunteers). Organisations focusing on youth voluntary service are generally open to participants without specific professional skills. On the contrary, they use voluntary service as a tool for acquiring skills and experience in a certain field, at the same time as contributing to a project. Refer to Appendix 2 for a list of voluntary service organisations and their respective focus.

1.2.5 The focus of this T-Kit

To conclude: this T-Kit focuses on voluntary service projects of an international European nature of any duration, working with non-specialised, mainly young volunteers, starting at 18 years of age. The placements can be either individual or in groups. It only takes a bit of imagination to adapt the tools offered in this T-Kit to your type of voluntary service. In Chapter 1.5 “Fields of work: some examples”, you will find a number of specific examples to get a better understanding of the range of possible projects.

Dimensions of voluntary service



1.3 Background of international voluntary service

International voluntary service programmes do not exist in a vacuum. They usually have deep roots in history and are reactions to the needs of (young) people and of society in general. Therefore we will have a brief look at the historical development of IVS programmes and at the relation between such programmes and the social welfare system.

1.3.1 A bit of history

The beginning

Esne, France, 1920: a group of young people from different European countries came together to help rebuild some of the houses destroyed in the First World War. The initiative for this first international voluntary work camp came from the Swiss pacifist Pierre Cérésolle. He was convinced that a joint international group effort to help people in need would be a means of building human bridges across the deep trenches made by the war and a way of promoting peace and understanding. This work camp marked the beginning of the era of private organisations setting up international voluntary youth service programmes: programmes with strict voluntary participation, open to both sexes, in a co-operative atmosphere, with space for personal development.

At the same time some national governments in Europe – in Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Hungary – were trying to develop compulsory service programmes for young men, offering similar educational outcomes to those of military service. The reason for this was that the peace treaties after the First World War prohibited compulsory military service in the “defeated” countries while their governments still wanted to “educate” their young men according to national values and strengthen their national identity. However, due to international opposition none of these programmes was implemented. Up to this day there is a tension between voluntary service and compulsory civil service replacing conscription, in particular where it is related to the question of state investment in the latter.

1920 to 1945: youth service programmes in the context of military conflicts

The four horrific years of the First World War left Europe in ruins and its people in despair. Some believed that international encounters of young people who jointly engage in work for the community would lead to bonds and friendship across national boundaries and so could prevent future conflicts. Out of this belief several organisations (a majority of them with a religious background) started international voluntary service programmes. Three of these still exist today: Service Civil International, Youth Action for Peace (Deutschland) and the International Reconciliation Union (Internationaler Versöhnungsbund).

All three organisations were fairly revolutionary for their time – not so much regarding their aims but regarding their principles. Their activities were open to both sexes (in a time when women were still fighting for their basic rights) and they avoided all kinds of military drill in their work camps. They believed strongly in the principle that the young people should engage voluntarily in their activities, principles that have remained valid up to today.

However, at the beginning of the 1930s the big economic recession after the crisis in 1929 made national governments play with the idea of big youth service programmes as a remedy for (youth) unemployment. The best-known example of such a governmental youth service programme in those days was the *Freiwillige Arbeitsdienst* (Voluntary Work Service) in Germany. Introduced in 1931, the programme allowed young unemployed people under 25 to do voluntary service for up to 20 weeks, mainly in the field of youth and social work. Soon the programme was enlarged, the government got more and more involved and enforced stricter rules and regulations. Once the National Socialist Party came into power they introduced the compulsory *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Work Service) for all young people. The nature of the work often changed according to the specific needs resulting from the war. They provided services for civic and agricultural but also military construction projects.

After 1945: civil society slowly taking over

The situation in 1945 in western Europe was very similar to the one 27 years earlier, in terms of people in need, necessary rebuilding and the need for new bridges between nations. The difference was that civil society could draw on past experiences and thus could more quickly set up numerous IVS programmes. Right after the war the focus of most of the programmes was on reconstruction but towards the second half of the 1950s a lot of organisations were looking for new fields of work. It soon appeared that there was a huge demand for support in the social care sector – hospitals, homes for elderly or disabled people, children and youth centres. Later on, with the student protests and demonstrations in 1968, there was a strong movement to develop a political profile within most voluntary service non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Lectures and discussions were introduced in the work camps and they co-operated, for example, with anti-nuclear power movements or peace initiatives.

The situation in eastern Europe was quite different under socialist rule. Communist authorities tended to control any type of association, including volunteering, and people’s leisure time e.g. through mandatory unpaid supplementary work, sometimes called voluntary or patriotic

work. This caused most people to have negative associations with “voluntary work”, which explains why the involvement was not as high as could be expected.¹

After a few years of preoccupation with reconstruction in many western European countries the discussion of compulsory military service resumed again. By 1955 they introduced such a service again, especially in the light of the developing cold war (between the Soviet Union and the United States). Confronted with groups of young people strongly opposed to military service, most governments in western Europe developed the idea of alternative “civil service” for the good of the community. In most countries, however, service for the community took place under less favourable conditions – it was longer, involved more working hours or got less financial support. With the first post-war generation (after 1968) the number of “conscientious objectors” boomed, to the extent that the social care sector became gradually dependent on them. Hence the problems arising from terminating compulsory military service and establishing a professional army.

The role of supra-national institutions and organisations

UNESCO was the first supra-national institution to play an active role in the field of IVS. In 1948 UNESCO founded the Co-ordinating Committee of International Voluntary Service (CCIVS). From the very beginning CCIVS functioned as an umbrella organisation for all NGOs in this field. It aims to share experiences between member organisations, to lobby for better conditions for IVS programmes and to provide information about these opportunities.

The two major European institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, started to become active in this field in the 1990s. The main aim of the Council of Europe’s engagement is to push its member states to provide more favourable (legal) conditions for the mobility of young volunteers and to abolish barriers to mobility. In March 2000 the Council of Europe passed a European Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People, stating minimum quality standards in the field (see www.coe.int).

Since the early 1990s the European Commission has funded international voluntary service projects for young people within the framework of the Youth for Europe programme. In 1996 they established European Voluntary Service (EVS), which offers financial support for mainly long-term voluntary service projects for young people (18 to 30) in the European Union and EFTA member states and to a certain extent also with other regions in the world. Since 2000, EVS has become part of the European Commission’s programme for youth, currently called Youth in Action. A shorter version of EVS has been created for young people with fewer opportunities, who would not be able to go on an EVS experience otherwise (see also Chapter 2.4.2 “Funders and funding possibilities”).

Last but not least the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations and the European Volunteer Centre should be mentioned here as major umbrella organisations of international NGOs in this field. The Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) strives to achieve recognition of voluntary service as a powerful tool for social change, and for its non-formal educational value. AVSO carries out research and lobbies at European level to remove barriers to long-term volunteering and the mobility of volunteers. The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) from its side brings together national and regional volunteer centres from across Europe under one umbrella. CEV supports and promotes voluntary activities and speaks for volunteerism in the European Union. It provides a platform for exchange and networking among its members.

1. See “Volunteering in Eastern Europe: one of the missing links?” Paper for the Round Table on Globalization, Integration and Social Development in Central and Eastern Europe, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, 6-8 September 2003, online at: www.iccv.ro/oldiccv/romana/conf/conf.sibiu.2003/abstracts.htm (fourth link).

A European Year of Volunteering

The United Nations launched the International Year of Volunteers in 2001. This was a key initiative in raising awareness of the role and potential of volunteers worldwide. Some 10 years later, the European Commission declared 2011 the European Year of Volunteering (EYV). The EYV set out to celebrate the voluntary commitment of millions of people in Europe. Roughly a quarter of Europeans work in their communities in their free time without being paid. EYV recognised the contributions to society of numerous volunteering organisations and put many volunteering initiatives in the spotlight. At the same time, EYV challenged the three quarters of the European population who do not do any volunteering (yet).

The European Year of Volunteering was co-ordinated by the EYV2011 Alliance, which organised many events, exhibitions, live demonstrations and other activities. A number of key conferences laid the foundations for policy work and reform initiatives in the European Union member states, to create better conditions for volunteering in Europe.

There were also many other initiatives – of the UN, Red Cross and various international and other organisations – supporting further promotion and development of volunteering. It is fair to say that EYV created a long lasting legacy. See more at www.eyv2011.eu.

Suggestion for training

In the course of preparation for long-term voluntary service abroad, it is a valuable exercise for volunteers to do some historical research. They could have the task of gathering some information to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of voluntary service programmes for young people exist in your country? Since when have they been running?
- Who set up these programmes and why?
- What kind of programmes existed in the past but stopped?
- Why did they stop?
- What was the role of the government in former times and now in respect to IVS?

When the volunteers come together again for a preparatory weekend they should bring along a short summary of their findings in poster form (or using other creative means). In the group they should exchange their findings and discuss what they found surprising or interesting.

Through this exercise the volunteers can become aware of the role such programmes play in a broad political context. This awareness can help to develop the intercultural sensitivity of the volunteer while abroad.

1.3.2 Current discussions

There are several political discussions in European countries about voluntary work. Firstly, there is the discussion about the contribution of volunteers to the economy and society, and what governments should provide to the voluntary sector in return. Secondly, there is the delicate relation between voluntary work and the labour market: are volunteers looking for work experience, rather than contributing to society? Last but not least, if volunteering is a great learning experience, how do we then recognise what volunteers learn? In the limited space of this T-Kit we want to make representatives active in the field of international voluntary service aware of the political discussion and their potential role in it.

The economic weight of volunteering

According to the organisers of the European Year of Volunteering, approximately one quarter of Europeans carry out some tasks for the benefit of the community without getting paid for it. Millions of European citizens contribute voluntarily to the welfare of society, to leisure time provisions, to social networks, to environmental issues and so on. It is impossible to imagine what would happen if all volunteers stopped their unpaid activities. Society would probably suffer dearly.

The European Volunteer Centre lists in its Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe that “the time devoted to volunteering in associations in France is equivalent to 716 000 full-time jobs in 2002. Belgians devote five hours per week to non-paid voluntary activities ... equivalent to 200 000 full-time jobs. In the UK, 23 million people volunteer each year, providing a workforce equivalent to 180 000 full-time workers. In Poland around 5.4 million citizens volunteered in 2004, which is 18.3% of the population.” The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project in 37 countries across the world² revealed that 44% of the workforce of non-profit organisations in those countries is actually composed of volunteers.

This is a weighty argument to convince policy makers of the benefits of volunteering. Advocacy organisations, like the European Volunteer Centre, use economic data to ask for better framework conditions for volunteers, because it is clear that the contribution of the voluntary sector is vital for society, but also for the economy. An estimate puts the contribution of formal volunteering in the UK at 7.9% of GDP (about 65 billion euros).

Governments realise more and more that they need “active citizens” who give time, energy and resources to the community at large. They would not be able to finance all the contributions by volunteers to the social welfare system, to local communities, to the health sector or to associative life. Many countries have therefore improved the conditions for volunteering or launched national volunteering programmes.

The flip side of the coin is that trade unions argue that voluntary work replaces paid jobs, which brings us to the next hot issue.

The delicate relation between voluntary work and the labour market

Indeed, there is often strong competition between schemes supporting the integration of young people in the labour market on the one side, and voluntary service programmes on the other. Voluntary service programmes often lack recognition and face the difficulty that in hardly any country do “volunteers” exist in legal terms – either you are paid to work or you are in education. As a consequence the status of volunteers is very shaky (for example, for taxes or social security). Different organisations and countries are pushing for legislation on the status of volunteers. Germany for example, provides legal status to volunteers doing their *Freiwillige Soziale Jahr* (Voluntary Social Year) or European Voluntary Service.

In an ever changing society, voluntary service is looked at to address new needs. In times of economic crisis, for instance, young people are the first victims of unemployment. Their lack of experience and skills makes it difficult for them to find a job and become economically independent. Worse even, they are at risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion. To avoid a lost generation drowning in the storm of a job market in crisis, national and European policy makers set out to combat youth unemployment. One way to do so is to make formal and vocational schooling more adapted to the labour market. Another way is to increase the employability of young people and give them “work experience”. Voluntary work can respond to this need and thus contribute to young people’s chances of finding a job.

But is it the role of youth work and voluntary service organisations to support employment?

Volunteering and competences

Maybe you never thought of it, but volunteers actually learn a lot in their voluntary activities. They learn and practise many practical competences, whether through activities with children, administration and paperwork for the non-profit organisation, working together with other volunteers, and so on. This list could go on forever.

2. See <http://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector>.

Leaving aside the question whether acquiring competences should be the main reason for volunteering, volunteers do gain valuable experiences through the roles and tasks they carry out. At some stage in life, a volunteer might want to use this experience to find a job, to get credits for school or to move up in the organisation. Then we inevitably come to the question: how can a volunteer or the organisation show the competences gained?

There have been many initiatives to deal with this question. Organisations (local or national) have created volunteer portfolios or volunteer passports documenting achievements and experiences. In some countries, centres have been set up to assess your prior learning and even give you a qualification (diploma) based on your experience (if you reach certain minimum standards).

Within the European Commission's Youth in Action programme, all participants (e.g. EVS volunteers) are entitled to a Youthpass certificate, describing not only the project the young person participated in, but also the key competences gained. The Council of Europe's Youth Directorate has developed a portfolio in which (voluntary) youth leaders and youth workers can identify, assess and describe their competences, based on European quality standards. Within the Europass framework, a European Skills Passport is being developed to document competences gained in informal learning, volunteering or other experiences.

Documenting the competences gained from volunteering is beneficial, not only for the volunteer but also for the organisation in which the volunteer is active. The organisation can show its contribution to developing people's potential. This, in turn, leads to more recognition of the good work done. The organisation can profile itself as a learning provider.

Questions for reflection

Any organiser of – national or international – voluntary service programmes for young people should be conscious of these discussions. Try to answer the following questions to find out what political situation you are in:

- Do your volunteers potentially replace paid workers? Have you any written agreements about this with your hosting organisations?
- Where do you draw the line as to what volunteers can provide and what only paid staff should provide?
- Does your programme aim at providing the volunteers with skills and/or professional qualifications? How do you follow up on that? What recognition tools do you use?
- Is voluntary service a means of supporting the integration of young people into the labour market? Why (not)?
- What is the role of governments vis-à-vis private voluntary service programmes?
- Are there any laws in your country about voluntary work in general or international voluntary service?

1.4 Reasons for international voluntary service

1.4.1 Are you an idealist or a pragmatist?

Different people and organisations will have diverse opinions on the benefits that international voluntary service brings to society as a whole and to volunteers in particular. Some organisations will see IVS as a way of fostering tolerance, intercultural learning, social and cultural progress and the overall development of local communities. Other organisations will see IVS as a great opportunity for young people coming from difficult backgrounds in terms of personal capacity building, training for skills and even social reintegration in some cases.

Knowing the reason that your organisation wishes to engage human and financial resources in implementing IVS is important not only because it relates directly to your overall mission, but also because a project without a fundamental reason for existence will not be easy to evaluate in terms of success. Therefore we invite you to answer the following questionnaire.

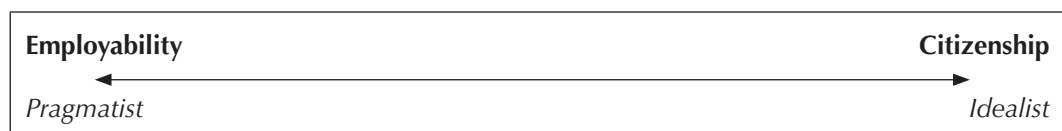
Questionnaire: Why do you do it?

Tick a circle on the continuum between “I do not agree” (on the left) and “I agree” (on the right)

<i>Spectrum citizenship–employability</i>	<i>I do not agree</i> <i>I agree</i>
Voluntary service, as the word says, is there to serve others in need	$O_1 - O_2 - O_3 - O_4 - O_5$
Doing voluntary service is making a political statement about society, showing what is lacking (social care, help to communities in need, etc.)	$O_1 - O_2 - O_3 - O_4 - O_5$
Voluntary service is a good preparation to get a better job	$O_5 - O_4 - O_3 - O_2 - O_1$
Voluntary service is an altruistic philosophy of life	$O_1 - O_2 - O_3 - O_4 - O_5$
Voluntary projects look good on your CV	$O_5 - O_4 - O_3 - O_2 - O_1$
<i>Spectrum organisational growth–personal growth</i>	<i>I do not agree</i> <i>I agree</i>
Volunteers are extra motivated hands for a project	$O_1 - O_2 - O_3 - O_4 - O_5$
It is important that volunteers learn something new during their voluntary service	$O_5 - O_4 - O_3 - O_2 - O_1$
Volunteers are the most important actors in a voluntary service	$O_5 - O_4 - O_3 - O_2 - O_1$
Even though they are volunteers, they still need to do a good and efficient job	$O_1 - O_2 - O_3 - O_4 - O_5$
Voluntary service has to provide the volunteer with enriching experiences	$O_5 - O_4 - O_3 - O_2 - O_1$
Total points:	
<i>Sum up the points associated with the circles of your answers. If your score is above 40, you are most likely an “idealist”; if you reach less than 20, you are probably a “pragmatist”. Read more about these profiles below.</i>	

The following profiles describe extremes of different dimensions. Most organisations represent a mix of these opposites. You can put your organisation to the test and see if everybody's perception of the reasons for doing it are similar.

Spectrum: employability–citizenship



• Idealists

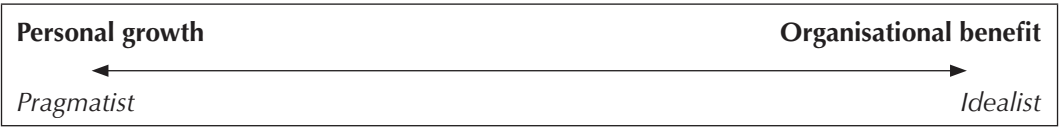
These organisations will put the accent on citizenship as the reason why they run international voluntary service. Citizenship in this sense is understood as the active participation of individuals in society, a form of commitment not only to others but also to the community in general. Organisations that look at volunteering from a specifically altruistic point of view would argue that the main reason for putting together international voluntary service projects

is to allow young people to give their free time for the benefit of other individuals and society in general, and in this way to promote citizenship.

- **Pragmatists**

On the other extreme of the spectrum there will be those who put the accent on employability, which refers to the individual’s potential to find work. It relates thus to the sum of qualifications and skills that people have and that make it possible for them to attain a certain career or job. Organisations that take the view that young people need to be made employable if they are to succeed in life will look at international voluntary service as an instrument to build their capacity to achieve that. They will recruit young people to join their international voluntary service, not so much for the benefit of the community, but to increase their skills, give them some work experience and make it easier for them to find jobs.

Spectrum: personal growth–organisational benefit



- **Idealists**

These organisations will run international voluntary service because they see volunteers as essential human resources to accomplish their tasks and provide their client groups with specific services. Their attention will be on the content and outcomes of their activities and the way volunteers can help to enrich and deliver things efficiently. In this case, if the organisation does not benefit directly from international voluntary service they will see no point in doing it.

- **Pragmatists**

In this case, organisations will consider volunteers to be the centre of their attention and the main purpose of their activities. They will dismiss the impact on the local community as a purely theoretical exercise and will thus decide to concentrate their efforts in helping the volunteers to be exposed to new personal experiences, to expand their horizons and in the process to learn more about themselves and to grow as human beings.

Organisations that put an emphasis on citizenship also tend to see international voluntary service as more related to the benefits that it can bring to the organisation. Those that see employability as one of their main guiding principles will emphasise more the personal gains of international voluntary service. These opposite concepts are a continuum and all positions between the two extremes are possible. In practice, every organisation needs to find the right balance between benefits for the community or the organisation and for the volunteer. None of these dimensions needs to exclude completely the other. In fact, only the combination of both renders a project potentially successful; the satisfaction of a volunteer about the experiences and skills acquired remains incomplete without the sense of having effectively contributed towards a useful project for the local community.

1.5 Fields of work: some examples

Go to people, live with them, love them, learn from them. Start with what they know, build with what they have, and work with the best leaders, so when the work is done, people can say “we did this ourselves”. (Lao Tzu, 700 BC)

The areas of work of international voluntary service projects can be very varied. We try in this chapter to give an overview of different fields of work. The various projects cannot easily be classified, because they are often working in different fields at the same time.

However, all voluntary service projects are based on some common aspects: the exchange and encounter between people with different cultural backgrounds, living together and sharing everyday responsibilities. The aim is not to teach the persons they work with, but to develop skills together, to exchange experiences, to live together and to grow with each other. Even without specific knowledge in a given field, with the help of some experienced project leaders everybody together develops amazing results. The activity of the volunteers often adds an additional dimension to the daily work carried out by professional staff without replacing them in their chores.

1.5.1 Social projects

In social projects, volunteers work with people facing difficulties. Projects can centre around work with refugees, minorities, children, elderly people or disadvantaged youth – for example organising play schemes for children in poor urban areas or creative activities with elderly people. Art is often used as a tool to develop activities with the intended beneficiaries. Other projects focus more on a theme (like environment or cultural heritage) but include participants with special needs (see also 3.1.4 “Voluntary service for ‘disadvantaged young people’”).

Some inspiration from Raval Pluricultural

The Raval Pluricultural project of SCI-Catalunya aims to enable the different immigrant populations of a deprived area of the city of Barcelona, the Raval, to live together. Each year international volunteers work together in a work camp with youngsters coming from immigrant families, who spend their leisure time in special centres (*Casals*). The international environment helps to raise the youngsters’ awareness of their own identity while they learn to respect the difference of others and the richness of multiculturalism. Between the work camps, which take place in the summertime, a series of activities carried out with local volunteers crystallise the work. Activities have included an exhibition of paintings by the youngsters on the theme of immigration, which was shown in different places in Barcelona. The idea was to interest their parents and involve them, step by step, in the *convivència* (cohabitation) process through discussions and encounters with and between other parents and the local population. These activities also helped to create new links with various local institutions. The partnership between institutions and NGOs is seen as a way of dealing with conflicts in areas of cities where the classic method of police control is not appropriate any more.

1.5.2 Environmental projects

Many organisations are engaged in protecting the natural environment by creating biotopes, planting trees, cleaning rivers and the sea or constructing educational paths in a protected environment. Environmental projects may also focus on methods of waste reduction and creative ways of recycling. The projects raise awareness – among the participants, the local population and visitors – of the richness of the nature around them and the need to protect it.

Some inspiration from FUDEBIOL

FUDEBIOL is a non-profit organisation that aims to preserve the sources of drinkable water in the Perez Zeledon region in Costa Rica. Three volunteers (from Spain, Italy and Portugal) went to work in the organisation’s educational centre in the mountains near the Quebradas River. The centre raises awareness about rainforest preservation among the local community. The volunteers organised activities for young people to get involved in nature protection in the area; they also developed educational activities and new routes for ecotourism.

1.5.3 Educational projects and professional training

All projects include educational elements to some extent. Educational projects are explicitly aimed at disseminating a skill or raising awareness about certain issues (for example, health or racism) among a specific group of beneficiaries. Educational projects play an important role, especially in developing countries. Projects are often ongoing, with international volunteers supporting local volunteers who are familiar with the specific local needs, such as teachers of basic education in literacy and numeracy programmes. Volunteers establish libraries or produce teaching materials. Even though some of these educational projects require a more specialised volunteer profile, there are also projects based on the participatory approach of peer-to-peer education, on an equal level with the beneficiaries (such as pottery workshops or sharing agricultural skills). Products from such projects can add another source of income.

Some inspiration from ABC with Carlitos

This community-based educational project in Honduras aims at creating *ludotheques* (game libraries), given the absence of alternative methods of teaching and learning. The centres are set up with the help of European volunteers, who also engage in fund-raising activities for the centres. Some *ludotheques* are based at schools, others are linked to the municipality. Their activities and their success depend largely on the commitment and effort of the volunteers.

1.5.4 Emergency action, prevention and reconstruction

Some organisations specialise in intervention after human-made and natural disasters. They tend to work with local stand-by volunteers who know what action to take and get frequent training. Short-term international volunteers can contribute to activities related to prevention of disasters or after the immediate emergency relief of the experts, when the terrain is relatively safe and when many helpful hands are needed. Examples of such projects include forest-fire watches during the dry season, the reconstruction of public buildings after conflict situations, educational campaigns in endangered areas for natural disasters, helping to ensure the basic necessities of food or sanitation and the psychological care of the victims.

Some inspiration from L'Aquila

The earthquake of 6 April 2009 destroyed large parts of L'Aquila. The Abruzzo Support Network (Rete di Economia Solidale Abruzzese) was created to attract attention and solidarity to the region. Alongside the architectural and structural reconstruction, the network also focused on reconstruction of social relations in an area affected by such an unexpected event. International volunteers helped reinstate places of social interest: cleaning the local park, renovating playgrounds for the children, repairing drinking-water fountains, etc.

1.5.5 Rural development and renovation

Many rural communities, especially in less developed countries, suffer from a lack of infrastructure. Volunteers help to alleviate this situation by constructing simple latrines to prevent diseases, wells to provide clean drinking water or schools to foster education. Projects in rural areas are often accompanied by educational elements. Renovation projects, usually focusing on the renovation or improvement of run-down public buildings, are common in industrialised countries. Groups of international volunteers can work with school students to paint murals in schools, repair damaged furniture or create a sports field together.

Some inspiration from UNA Exchange

UNA Exchange has organised a series of over 100 work camps in Carmarthenshire, a rural area suffering from economic difficulty and depopulation in Wales, UK. These projects have reopened historic footpaths (used for access to work, pilgrimages, tourism or moving animals) to provide a footpath network along with information boards that recall the history of the area. This has multiple benefits: improving public access, encouraging tourism and the local economy, raising awareness of local heritage and conserving the built and natural environment.

1.5.6 Peace and reconciliation

International and intercultural voluntary service projects aim at promoting dialogue and the resolution of conflicts. Projects focusing on peace and reconciliation are often based on a mix of study and work projects. They bring together people from different backgrounds to discuss issues of human rights, a culture of peace or simply to share experiences from the realities of their different daily lives. As a work project they may reconstruct or renovate something together, as a gesture demonstrating the potential for co-operation. The simple fact of living together for some time and sharing the experience of dividing everyday chores can bring about important insights for the participants in such a project.

Some inspiration from the Mostar Intercultural Festival MIFOC

This project is run by a network of two French and nine local organisations. It began with the creation of an intercultural festival, but the project now has three pillars: European exchanges, the festival and local social action to build up civil society. The French organisations also run activities with volunteers in France to raise awareness there of the situation in Mostar.

1.5.7 Cultural heritage preservation

As in the projects related to emergencies, in projects dealing with cultural heritage preservation, volunteers often work alongside professional experts. The involvement of non-specialised volunteers in such projects fosters the development of simple preservation techniques. These projects raise awareness among the participants and the local population of the value and importance of the patrimony surrounding them. Cultural heritage refers to both the tangible heritage (renovation of historic buildings, archaeological projects, etc.) and intangible heritage (transmission of traditional knowledge and handcrafts).

Some inspiration from Union Rempart

The French organisation Union Rempart every year restores historic monuments with the help of volunteers from all over the world. The castle of Sémignan was restored in order to create a space for cultural and pedagogical activities, a conservatory for regional arts and traditions in order to pass on the ancient knowledge to young people. The volunteers cleaned the surroundings and were involved in restoring the foundations of the castle.

1.5.8 Support for youth work

Volunteers in youth organisations are an undeniable source of support and innovation. Many youth organisations are voluntary structures with no or few paid staff. Therefore youth organisations depend greatly on the contributions of motivated people who want to create leisure-time and non-formal learning opportunities for young people.

Some youth organisations are run 100% by volunteers, so the voluntary tasks are as diverse as in any organisation: running activities and events, creating promotion material, budgeting, motivating the young people, capacity-building administration, bookkeeping and cleaning.

Some inspiration from Arendonk

The 't Onkrooid youth club in Arendonk, Belgium, is a youth centre that is entirely run by volunteers. Young people with ideas can come to the meetings and propose their activities. If a majority approves the idea, the activity can be organised by the young people. Different volunteers are responsible for organisation, budgeting and bookkeeping, communication and promotion, actually running the activity and cleaning up after it. And if members of the youth club want to get better at organising, they can follow training from the Flemish federation of youth centres – voluntarily of course.

1.5.9 Virtual volunteering

In this day and age of the World Wide Web, virtual volunteering has become a reality. You no longer have to go out to dedicate time to a cause: you can do it from your computer, and many volunteers do carry out tasks “off-site”. Other terms used for it are micro-volunteering, crowd-sourcing and tele-mentoring. Bite-sized assignments are executed by a large group of volunteers who each chip in a bit of time.

Some examples of online volunteering are: forwarding information within social networks, rating or activating fellow profiles, taking part in online questionnaires, translating information on a multilingual website, posting an answer on a forum or contributing to information online; Wikipedia and SALTO's Toolbox for Training are the result of collective online volunteering.

Some inspiration from UNV

Maybe you know the United Nations Volunteers? They support development projects all over the world. They have now also created an online platform, www.onlinevolunteering.org, where you can contribute your talents for a better world – over the Internet. Organisations working for sustainable human development can post cyber-volunteering opportunities in the database and volunteers can contribute their talents whenever it suits them.