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## **Volunteers and Volunteering in Leisure: Social Science Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

Leisure has been widely examined within the context of social science theory; however, little work has considered the range of social science disciplines and applied them to specific phenomena located within the leisure field. This paper adopts such an approach to conceptualise and examine volunteers and volunteering in leisure settings. In a disciplinary sense, therefore, the sociological view focuses upon the conceptualisation of volunteering as leisure, the psychological view seeks to understand motivations driving volunteering while the perspective of economists tends to complement these standpoints in terms of why people volunteer and further examines the value of volunteer contributions. Comparative analysis of the perspectives enunciated within these key disciplines provides a picture of the status of research relating to leisure volunteers and volunteering. The purposes of this paper are to identify gaps in current knowledge, drawing out conclusions and their implications for an improved understanding of this area as well as to enhance comprehension of disciplinary contributions to the study of leisure phenomena.

Keywords: leisure settings; social sciences; volunteers; volunteering

## **Introduction**

Discourse on the phenomenon of contemporary leisure is both applied and theoretical, frequently focused on defining leisure and the boundaries of leisure research (for example, Aitchison, 2006; Coalter, 1997; Henderson, Presley, & Bileschki, 2004; Pritchard, 2006; Shaw, 2007). An elaboration of this discussion has taken place over a number of decades, within the context of social science theory, grounded initially in sociological studies (Godbey, 2000) distinguishing between the concepts of leisure and work (Parker, 1971; Wilensky, 1960). This body of work endeavours to address the totality of leisure through the application of social science principles and methodological analysis. Further specificity is provided by research that approaches leisure from the perspective of a single social science discipline, represented in psychology by, for example, Tinsley (1997); in economics by Hunnicutt, (1988) and in anthropology through the work of Chick (1998).

Little of this consideration, however, has taken a particular phenomenon, located within leisure or with a clear link or application within leisure, and investigated it, in a comparative sense, across a range of social science disciplines. This is what we seek to undertake within this article. Volunteers and volunteering make an important contribution to communities across the spectrum of social endeavour in most countries and cultures. Volunteers and volunteering are also of widespread importance to leisure in so far as volunteers constitute a major component within the sector's workforce in a variety of roles and contexts.

The study of volunteers in leisure has, to date, been somewhat fragmented, focused around the various subfields in which leisure can take place: tourism, sports and events (Aitchison, 2006). Within these subfields, volunteering has been studied from a range of social science perspectives, each of which brings a different approach and understanding. We draw together conceptualisations from these various perspectives with particular focus on sociological, psychological and economic dimensions. Reflecting recent calls for more integrated reviews and approaches to leisure research (Godbey, 2000; Henderson et al., 2004; Mair, 2006), by drawing together the comparative theoretical perspectives that underpin the concept of volunteering and the contributions volunteers make in leisure settings, we identify gaps in current knowledge and provide a holistic research agenda to advance understanding of this complex and increasingly significant phenomenon.

## **Overview of research on leisure volunteers and volunteering**

The roots of volunteering vary across cultures, time and in different political, religious and social frameworks (Davis Smith, 1999; Burns, 2000). Accordingly, the concept of volunteering is situational and takes on different meanings in different settings (Handy et al., 2000; Merrill, 2006, Tuan, 2005). As a consequence, there is no agreed definition, or conceptualisation, of what volunteering is. Four core elements of volunteering have been identified: free will, availability of rewards, formal organisation, and proximity to the beneficiaries (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Handy et al., 2000). Ambiguity exists within each of these elements. For example, emanating from the leisure literature, Stebbins (2001) proposes ‘marginal volunteering’ to conceptualise types of volunteering, for example, student placements, where the extent of choice, coercion, and obligation are variable. Volunteering in leisure settings is further complicated by the reality that on the whole volunteers are engaged in the process of assisting the leisure experiences of others while simultaneously undertaking a recreational activity themselves. Recognising this level of involvement, volunteers have been equated with being visitors themselves in some leisure settings (Orr, 2006; Wallace, 2006).

Traditionally volunteering commitments were seen as sustained or continuous, with volunteers working for the same organization over an extended period of time, in this way mirroring traditional long-term working relationships between employer and employee in the mainstream remunerated economy. Demographic and social changes have increased competition for volunteers’ time and commitment (Burns, 2000; Merrill, 2006; Murphy, 2004; Nichols, Gratton, Shibli, & Taylor, 1998; Warburton & Cordingley, 2004) and contributed to the emergence of new forms of volunteering that emphasise flexibility, such as episodic, corporate and virtual opportunities (Brudney, 2005). Episodic volunteering, for example, offers temporal, demand driven opportunities where the commitment required of volunteers is on a one-off basis or for a specific time period, although they may return to the same organization over time (Bryen & Madden, 2006; Handy, Brodeur, & Cnaan, 2006; Macduff, 2005). Volunteering takes place across the spectrum of leisure settings including museums and heritage attractions, visitor information centres, parks, recreation, and conservation; volunteer tourism and volunteering at sporting and other types of events, ensuring that, subject to a volunteer’s needs, all forms of engagement, sustained and episodic, are on offer. In addition, the act of volunteering has also been considered as a form of leisure regardless of the organisation or setting.

Leisure volunteering largely occurs in ‘formal’ settings as it takes place through organisations in the not-for-profit, public or corporate sectors. However, determining the scale of volunteering in leisure settings is difficult to ascertain with any precision as government statistics do not identify leisure and its various subfields of tourism, sports and events as a holistic category of voluntary activity. Differing definitions and methodologies also make measurement and international comparisons problematic. There is rather more detailed data on certain aspects of leisure volunteering; for example, volunteering in cultural organisations such as museums and sport organisations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, 2009; Howlett, Machin, & Malmersjo, 2005, SPARC, 2007).

Despite the lack of quantifiable data, it is evident that volunteers make important contributions to leisure. These contributions have been the focus of a burgeoning stream of volunteering research across the leisure discipline and its various subfields. Researchers have concentrated on separate leisure settings and activities, with little attempt at wider integration, as such it is beyond the scope of the current paper to document this growth in its entirety. To offer an example, however, Table 1 provides an overview of the coverage volunteering has received in the relatively new area of study, event management (Getz, 2000). A search of articles in the available journals in the field, using the identifiers ‘volunteer, volunteering, volunteerism’ yielded the following results.

### **Insert Table 1 here**

As this example suggests, there has been a great deal of research focused on the topic of volunteering as it applies to events and this attention has grown rapidly in the last decade. The earliest studies were largely descriptive; however, there has been some borrowing of theories from pertinent disciplines to shed light on the phenomenon. Countering this multidisciplinary push to an extent, a number of specialist instruments have been developed in the field, contextualised to ever greater degrees in order to assess the motivations for sport event volunteering, international sport event volunteering and Olympic volunteering in particular. Together with motivation, this body of work has concentrated on investigating volunteer commitment and satisfaction, set against the backdrop of sporting events, with limited attention paid to volunteering for cultural and arts festivals. We acknowledge the limits of this example. There are further relevant studies published in books and conference papers. There are also numerous studies of event volunteers in related leisure, tourism and sport journals, reflecting as Cushman and Gidlow (2008) note, the pragmatic push to find favourable rankings rather than publishing strictly in discipline specific journals. Accepting these caveats, however, we contend that there are communalities in this sample body of work that apply to the manner in which volunteering is explored in other leisure settings including tourism, sports and parks and recreation.

These communalities include a focus examining volunteer profiles, motivations and expectations (Bosserman, 1992; Brown & Lehto, 2005; Deery, Jago, & Shaw, 1997; Edwards, 2005; Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Holmes, 2003; Propst, Jackson, & McDonough, 2003; Ralston & Rhoden, 2005; Strigas & Newton Jackson Jr, 2003; Twynam, Farrell, & Johnston, 2002/03; Uriely, Schwartz, Cohen, & Reichel, 2002); experiences and satisfaction (Farrell et al., 1998; Silverberg, Marshall, & Ellis, 2001; Smith, 2002); aspects of commitment (Cuskelly, Auld, Harrington, & Coleman, 2004; Elstad, 2003; Green & Chalip, 2004); comparisons between paid staff and volunteers (Jago & Deery, 2002; Thibault et al., 2002); and trends and management issues in volunteering settings (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006; Edwards & Graham, 2006; Holmes, 1999). Mirroring the event studies documented in Table 1, most volunteer research conducted in leisure settings focuses on a single organisation or event (exceptions include Cuskelly et al., 2004, Handy et al., 2006; Holmes, 2003; Smith, 2002), limiting comparisons across multiple contexts.

Despite these communalities, certain aspects of volunteering garner special attention dependent upon whether the disciplinary focus is on leisure or one of its various subfields of study. An underlying theme in much of event focused research, for example, is how to manage volunteers, whether it is to motivate them, ensure they are satisfied or engender their commitment, given the extremely short-term, high adrenalin environment of events, which often works contrary to the ideal, sustained conditions for achieving such outcomes. Research examining recruitment and retention issues around event volunteering (Cuskelly et al., 2004; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Coyne & Coyne Sr, 2001; Smith & Lockstone, 2009) further brings this significant theme to the fore. Research in relation to sports has examined grassroots issues including the structure and working of voluntary sports organisations (Amis & Slack, 1996; Cuskelly, 1995; Sharpe, 2006), the characteristics of volunteers at club level (Coleman, 2002; Nichols & Shepherd, 2006) and the transference potential of sport event volunteers taking up volunteering in other sport settings (Downward & Ralston, 2006). Likewise there is a growing movement in the study of volunteers in tourism to recognise, explore and lessen the existing divide between research on tourists volunteering at their holiday destination (volunteer tourism), and members of resident communities volunteering with local tourism organisations (host volunteers) (Holmes, Smith, Lockstone & Baum, 2010). Both streams of research have attracted significant academic attention, however, most studies appear to focus on one element of voluntary activity in either setting (Holmes & Smith, 2009). As the “parent subject

field” (Aitchison, 2006, p. 420), leisure research has likely touched on most of the themes mentioned here. Special attention, however, was drawn in early works to justifying and defining volunteering as a form of leisure as opposed to work (Harrington, 2000/2001; Henderson, 1981, 1984; Parker, 1992; Stebbins, 1996). This contribution, with its roots in sociology, will be expanded upon in the following section considering leisure volunteering from various social science perspectives.

### **Volunteers and volunteering in leisure settings: Social science perspectives**

This paper builds on the communalities and themes identified in the overview of research on leisure volunteers and volunteering, with specific consideration afforded to key social science perspectives. We consider the scope of research with regard to volunteers, volunteering and leisure from a sociological, psychological and economic perspective, allowing for differing comparative interpretations of common concerns to emerge. Consequently, gaps in current understanding are identified.

#### ***Sociological perspectives on leisure volunteers and volunteering***

A focus of sociological research has been on how volunteering fits between paid work and leisure, emerging out of broader debates on the relationship between work and leisure (Parker, 1971; Rousseau, 1978; Wilensky, 1960, 1961; Zuzanek & Mannell, 1983) and the bearing of work generally on society. Various researchers have noted that volunteering is a leisure activity (Parker, 1997; Holmes, 2003; Smith, 2002). This approach was expounded by Henderson (1981; 1984), who sought to find out what motivates people for leisure and, therefore, what might motivate them to volunteer. Leisure researchers “concerned with the social problem of the use of free time” (Godbey, 2000, p. 38) frequently divide time into categories; for example: employment/paid work; work-related time (e.g. travel, lunch breaks); obligatory time (e.g. sleeping, washing); and unobligated free time. Henderson (1984) placed both volunteering and leisure in the final category of unobligated free time in recognition that “volunteering is freely chosen just as leisure is. Further leisure is generally associated with enjoyment and it is particularly important that elements of enjoyment are manifested in volunteering” (p. 61). In both the work and leisure literatures, it has been suggested that a spillover effect occurs (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Wilensky, 1960) in that satisfaction experienced in one aspect of life such as work, may have a positive or negative effect on other domains such as leisure participation and vice-versa. Little research has explored whether peoples’ paid jobs have an extension, opposition or neutral effect (Parker, 1983) on their choice of volunteering role and setting.

The concept of volunteering as a form of leisure has been further developed by Stebbins’ theorisation of casual and serious leisure (1992, 1996, 2000), with serious leisure involving activities, including volunteering, which demand considerable effort on the part of the participant. Stebbins (1996) notes that serious leisure volunteering is inspired by self-interest on the part of the volunteer, rather than altruism, the possibility of which was raised by Henderson (1984). This introduces the instrumental versus altruism debate around volunteer motivation, which is taken further in the section on psychological perspectives below. Stebbins (1996) contends that serious leisure volunteering is career volunteering in that it is the participant’s commitment, perseverance, and the development of a career, which helps to distinguish it from casual leisure (such as watching television). More recently, Stebbins has proposed a third type of leisure: project-based leisure, which is “a short term, reasonably complicated, one-off, or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time” (2005, p. 2). This mirrors the move to more disparate forms of commitment and volunteering (Brudney, 2005; Merrill, 2006) and fills a gap in describing temporally bound, episodic leisure volunteers, for example, volunteer tourists and volunteers assisting with a sports event, both of which involve a deep commitment not unlike serious leisure but inevitably have a finite timescale. Stebbins (1996) makes an early observation

lamenting the lack of crossover between the disciplinary boundaries of leisure and volunteer research in suggesting that “neither field has been inclined to view its own subject matter through the eyes of the other” (p. 212). This observation still largely holds true today and is something that the current paper seeks to redress.

Researchers have generally accepted the tenets of Stebbins theory and used serious leisure to frame studies of volunteering in a range of organisations and volunteer situations (Arai, 1997; Bendle & Patterson, 2008; Harrington, Cuskelly & Auld, 2000; Nichols & King, 1999; Orr, 2006; Parker, 1997). As it is the volunteer activity that is theorised as leisure, it is clear that not all leisure volunteering takes place in leisure contexts; for example, Arai (1997) examined the concept of serious leisure in relation to volunteer firefighters. A paradoxical element of considering volunteering as leisure is that volunteers within leisure settings are contributing to other people’s leisure as well as engaging in their own recreation (Henderson, 1981). From a sociological perspective, this paradox presents conceptual and organisational challenges that impact on the management of volunteers, in terms of their recruitment and retention; training and development; and motivation and commitment.

While there has been little attempt to critique the concept of serious leisure (Orr, 2006), Stebbins himself notes some limitations. In his own research, he found that career volunteers often define their activity as much as a form of work as a form of leisure (Stebbins, 2000). In addition, some forms of leisure volunteering have been described as too complex, for the concept of serious leisure to adequately explain (Wallace, 2006) in terms of commitment, the meaning to participants and the benefits to the organisation. Nonetheless, this conceptualisation broadens our understanding of why people volunteer within leisure settings. Sociologists have debated, however, whether all volunteering can be classed as leisure. Parker (1997) identifies leisure volunteering, which subsumes the serious leisure concept (Harrington, 2000/2001), as one of four types of volunteering based on the individual’s motivation; the others being altruistic, cause-serving and market volunteering. The requirement for youth to engage in voluntary community service as part of their learning programs is an example of the latter category. The development of motivation-based classifications of volunteering is considered in more detail following from a psychological perspective.

The service learning example given above raises the question of whether volunteering is always a free and unconstrained activity. There are many similar examples where volunteerism involves some element of obligation or even coercion. The interpretation placed on the concept of voluntary work and volunteerism, and particularly on the extent of obligation or coercion, varies greatly across social, cultural and national contexts (Davis Smith, 1999; Handy et al., 2000; Merrill, 2006). With some exceptions (Tuan, 2005), the preponderance of reference to these concepts in the literature, however, appears to be located within a westernised, developed world context. As established by Stebbins (2000), leisure can involve an element of obligation that can be either agreeable or disagreeable. It is the presence of disagreeable obligation that is more likely to result in a non-leisure experience, called semi-leisure by Dumazedier (1967). When the obligation is forced, this is no longer a leisure activity and the individual may be encouraged to abandon the activity (Stebbins, 2000), although this may not always be an option (Tuan, 2005).

There is a gap in knowledge around whether volunteers’ sense of obligation to their roles and host organisations can change over time. Indeed, it may be the case that an initially agreeable volunteering role becomes onerous over time. Research generally supportive of this contention includes the finding that older adults, volunteering at high levels (more than 15 hours per week), reported lower levels of wellbeing compared to volunteers with moderate involvements. Whilst these high involvement volunteers were more likely to engage in management and committee-based work, the cross-sectional study by Windsor, Anstey and Rogers (2008) was unable to confirm whether any specific activity types were to blame. Research on the problems faced by committee volunteers at voluntary sports clubs, who

report increasing negative pressures associated with their roles (Nichols et al., 2005) also lends support to the notion that volunteering itself can be stressful (Li & Ferraro, 2006; Van Willigen, 2000), potentially when the commitment becomes excessive and more obligatory, possibly even work-like in nature. Thus, volunteering out of disagreeable obligation may be seen as a misuse of the term 'volunteer' as the activity is not truly voluntary. Stebbins argues that this is especially true in the case of people who are volunteering for work experience, and this type of activity has been particularly difficult to reconcile with leisure volunteering (Parker, 1997). Complicating the issue further, studies of individuals volunteering within leisure contexts reveal that while they may gain useful work experience, they also gain additional personal, social and skills development (Halpenny & Caissie, 2003; Holmes, 2003; Kemp, 2002; Wearing, 2001).

Distinct from sociological perspectives framing the discourse on volunteering, work and leisure, a great deal of research has been devoted to examining the social resources associated with volunteering in general (Brown & Ferris, 2007; Handy & Cnaan, 2007; Tang, 2006; Wilson & Musick, 1998). Level of education has been found to be a stable predictor of volunteering (Miller McPherson & Rotolo, 1996). Janoski and Wilson (1995) tested support for different pathways to voluntarism dependent upon the type of voluntary participation. Pathways to volunteering in self-oriented organisations (occupational and professional) were found to come indirectly from familial roots and were made possible by income and education. In contrast, pathways to community-oriented volunteering (service, community and neighbourhood) were derived from family socialisation practices. Parker, Hamilton-Smith and Davidson (1993, cited in Harrington, 2000/2001), found that middle class subjects in their Australian study engaged in volunteering as a form of serious leisure, as opposed to working class participants who more likely to undertake informal volunteering activities. The unemployed and other groups at risk of social exclusion (e.g. those with no qualifications, long-term illnesses) are generally underrepresented in terms of volunteer participation in national volunteering surveys (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Low, Butt, Ellis Payne & Davis Smith, 2007). This is a concern for government and policy makers who wish to encourage volunteering as a pathway to positive, inclusive outcomes for socially disadvantaged groups.

More broadly speaking, volunteering has been viewed as a key generator of social capital (Putnam, 2000). The concept has been associated with a number of collective benefits, including economic growth, improved crime rates, better education and higher turn out in elections. Aldridge and Halpern (2002) argue that there is a clear case for government intervention in both maintaining and increasing social capital and in facilitating its distribution more evenly. In saying that, as Holmes (2009, p. 266) notes, the "empirical evidence for volunteering contributing to social capital and thus increasing a sense of citizenship is mixed". The mechanisms of how volunteering translates into social capital are also unclear. Further research in all aspects of voluntary activity, including leisure, would contribute to an improved understanding of how and to what extent volunteering can engender and leverage the benefits associated with social capital for society as a whole and individual volunteers. It is to social science perspective that sheds the greatest light on individual behaviour, psychology, which our discussion of leisure volunteering now turns.

### ***Psychological perspectives on leisure volunteers and volunteering***

Research on volunteering, from a psychological perspective, has focused on seeking to understand the motivations of volunteers. Researchers and practitioners alike agree that little is definitely understood about what motivates volunteers (Deery et al., 1997; Lapham, 1990; Pearce, 1993), despite a substantial body of research on the topic. Volunteers are not paid and thus, it can be argued, that there is a different psychological contract between volunteers and the organisation where they work in comparison with formally remunerated staff (Handy, 1988; Kim, Trail, Lim & Kim, 2009). Researchers have noted a weakness in studies of

volunteer motivation in that they generally provide lists of *reasons for volunteering*, where volunteers are prompted to provide standard answers (Rochester, 2006), with little attempt at analysis and without attempting to relate these reasons to the extensive literature on motivation theory (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Pearce, 1993). Moreover, there are questions about how reliable volunteers responses are to these surveys (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Previous research has concentrated on devising mechanisms to identify potential volunteers' motives (usually by means of questionnaire checklists) rather than seeking to advance our conceptual or theoretical understanding (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Farrell et al., 1998). Moreover, while Smith (2002) comments on the dangers of relying on any one theory, management psychologists argue that volunteer motivation cannot be viewed in isolation of the existing body of literature on work motivation. This approach clearly distinguishes such work from the sociological view of volunteering as a form of leisure.

Research on volunteer motivation has focused on a series of dichotomies. Are volunteers altruistic or instrumental? Is their motivation intrinsic or extrinsic? Is volunteer motivation static or changeable? Researchers have found that volunteers are rarely altruistic, that is, willing to offer their services for no personal gain (Schram, 1985). Rather, volunteers expect to benefit in some way from their activities (Moore, 1985; Stebbins, 1996). Supporting this assumption, selfish motives for volunteering have been reported in several studies by social psychologists (Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995) and in leisure related literature (Downward, Lumsdon & Ralston, 2005; Graham & Foley, 1998). Indeed the term *pro-social* is used in preference to altruism as it suggests that volunteers are socially minded but also expect to gain from their activities (Pearce, 1993). Mixed motives for volunteering are evident in a number of leisure settings. For example, while volunteer tourists may engage in worthwhile and beneficial projects, studies show that they also receive a number of benefits from their efforts, not least self development (Broad, 2003; Halfpenny & Caissie, 2003; Wearing, 2001). In contrast, volunteers at museums and heritage attractions have been described as self-interested, rather than pro-social (Smith, 2003).

Studies within leisure are inconclusive as to whether volunteers are primarily intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Osborne (1999) applied the need theories of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1966) and McClelland (1961) to a sample of retired volunteers in museums in South-west England. Her findings showed that volunteers were primarily affiliation seekers and that their network of volunteering relationships was able to meet their social needs as defined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These findings were replicated in Edwards' study of museum volunteers in Australia (2005) and place primary emphasis on extrinsic motivation. The results of surveys of heritage volunteers in the UK (British Association of Friends of Museums, 1998; National Trust, 1997) suggest that intrinsic motivators are of the greatest importance in attracting volunteers, but extrinsic factors may be equally important in retaining volunteers.

A number of researchers have used motivations to develop classifications of leisure volunteers. Smith (2002) offers a basic twofold categorisation of museum volunteers, differentiating between younger work experience-seeking volunteers and older volunteers, whom she contends are primarily seeking social opportunities. Graham's more complex typology (2000) builds on Parker's sociological work (1997) to identify five groups of museum volunteers with differing motivations and commitments. Based on research in an American zoological society, Caldwell and Andereck (1994) offer the most developed theorisation of volunteer motivation and propose a combination of three groups of motives: purposive/normative motives, which are altruistic; material motives, which are based on self-interest (such as free entry into the attraction); and solidary and affective motives, where opportunities for social interaction and acceptance as part of a group are the primary motives. This model has been developed further by Johnston, Twynam and Farrell (1999/2000) in their studies of sports event volunteers.

While there have been criticisms that the predominantly quantitative methods for measuring volunteer motivation are too simplistic (Rochester, 2006), a further problem in seeking to measure motivation is that it can change over time (Pearce, 1993). Therefore it is unclear exactly what form of the motivation construct is being measured in such surveys. While psychologists understand motivation to form a trigger that leads to voluntary action, sociologists seek to understand the meanings volunteers give to their activities (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Combining these two social science perspectives provides a means for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the complex circumstances leading to volunteer participation. Volunteer motivation has also been examined within the economics literature, which is reviewed in the following section.

### ***Economic perspectives on leisure volunteers and volunteering***

Both sociological and psychological approaches to volunteering provide theoretical insights as to why people volunteer. In addition, economic theory has been used to explain rational, market based reasons for volunteering (Freeman, 1997; Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Knox, 1999). For example, it has been questioned why volunteers offer their time when monetary donations may be a more efficient use of resources (Knox, 1999) and why those with a higher human capital and higher opportunity cost on their time (higher incomes, professionals, highly educated) appear more willing to volunteer when it might be reasonable to expect that they are least able to afford these extra time demands (Freeman, 1997).

Various economic models have been posited to explain these apparent contradictions (Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Schiff, 1990). As a case in point, the collective goods model accounts for volunteering in terms of community demand and opportunity cost. Importantly, volunteering is considered against what has been forsaken (wages, related costs, satisfaction derived from next best alternative) as a result of undertaking the activity. However, it has been suggested that opportunity cost provides only partial explanation for volunteer participation and that volunteering itself is a “conscious good” (Freeman, 1997, p. 140), something people feel compelled to do when asked. This finding adds insight to the sociological discussion surrounding disagreeable obligation (Stebbins, 2000). Unlike the collective goods model, the private goods and the job skills models as economic bases for explaining volunteering assume individuals receive some benefit from the activity. In reference to the private goods model, Govekar and Govekar (2002, p. 39) cite the work of Andreoni (1990), which assumes that altruism is not pure. Indeed, the psychological perspectives of volunteering discussed in this paper supports this contention. One private motive for volunteering that has been investigated is whether volunteer work increases earning capacity. Day and Devlin (1998) found that the return from volunteering amounts to between 6% and 7% of annual earnings. Whilst the empirical model tested was unable to delineate between competing explanations for this positive return, aligned with the job skills model, it may be reasonable to assume that “volunteering leads to the acquisition of new skills that complement the individual’s existing stock of human capital” (Day & Devlin, 1998, p. 1190). Volunteering for occupational reasons has been called market volunteering (Parker, 1997) or marginal volunteering (Cuskelly & Harrington, 1997, Stebbins, 2001), raising sociologically framed questions about where volunteering for work experience lies on a continuum between leisure and work or indeed leisure and unpaid work.

Knowledge generated by the economic perspective has contributed on a more applied level to assessments of the monetary value of volunteers’ time contributions. While reports on total volunteer numbers and hours are increasingly commonplace as organisations attempt to quantify the scale of volunteering, more exceptional in leisure research are studies using economic theory to calculate the value of these contributions. The work of Jago and Deery (2002) provides some insight into the relative cost effectiveness of using volunteers in leisure organisations. More comprehensive still are a small number of studies that have assessed the value of volunteers’ work in the subfield of sport (Davies, 2004; Solberg, 2003).

It must be acknowledged that, as there is no one, accepted framework for determining the scope of volunteer contributions, different valuations will result dependent on the economic model used as the basis for the assessment and its inherent assumptions. Solberg's (2003) study highlighted the impact of such variations in the context of valuing volunteer's time devoted to a major sporting event. Findings suggest that the use of an opportunity cost model, based on volunteers' own reports of the wage they could attract for their diverted time, resulted in a considerably lower valuation of labour contribution. This is in comparison to a model where a market value was assigned, equivalent to what a paid worker would attract for the hours volunteered. Solberg (2003) suggests that the low value accorded to the opportunity cost model resulted from the majority of sport event volunteers undertaking the activity during their spare, non-obligated time rather than using designated working time to volunteer. This principle is likely to apply to all volunteering, especially in leisure settings, where non-wage active personnel, such as retirees and students, are major contributors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Holmes, 2003; Howlett et al., 2005). As a result, the assessment of volunteer contributions in such settings may be considerably undervalued. In totality, it may be questioned whether any assessment of the value of volunteering is worthwhile or reasonable given that an economic imperative is not the main reason driving volunteers to participate. Or perhaps valuations need to shift beyond volunteers and their time contributions to particular host organisations. In this respect, Brown's (1999) study, which explores standard measures for accounting for volunteer hours contributed and broadens the scope to account for the flow-on value volunteers generate for recipients of their services, may be a way forward.

It is worth noting in this review of the economics literature, that the phenomenon of volunteer tourism, specific to the tourism subfield of leisure, has not yet been tackled by rational economists in terms of querying why people would pay significant amounts of money upfront for the privilege of volunteering, effectively donating both money and time to their assignment of choice. Freeman's (1997) finding of a strong positive relationship between volunteering and family charitable giving offers some relevant theoretical insight and may provide the basis for further investigation. The cumulative value and associated costs of volunteering over time is also yet to be adequately assessed. This and other gaps in extant knowledge provide an agenda for future research that will be explored in the conclusion to this paper immediately following.

### **Conclusions: Towards a better understanding of leisure volunteers and volunteering**

The purpose of this article has been to view the phenomenon of leisure volunteers and volunteering through the lens of key social science disciplines as a first attempt to harvest the perspectives across these different research areas and to identify knowledge gaps that require consideration, either from uni, multi or inter-disciplinary points of view. The disciplines that have informed this enquiry include sociology, psychology and economics. Each discipline makes a partial contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon in question and sheds light on a holistic agenda to advance the study of leisure volunteering. This agenda focuses on the unresolved research questions highlighted by the comparative disciplinary investigation and the requisite methodological approaches needed to address them.

Resulting from the melding of social science perspectives undertaken within this paper it appears a complete understanding of why people initiate and continue to volunteer remains elusive. Whether this understanding can ever fully be achieved is debatable, however, it is a worthwhile focus for research as to means of promoting volunteer participation to which each of the social sciences reviewed can contribute. From the psychological perspective, studies of volunteer motivation to date have been largely quantitative and cross-sectional; which has led to several lists of motives to volunteer, contextualised with increasing specificity, but very little theoretical understanding of volunteer motivation. There is scope to study volunteer motivation, within leisure, in far greater depth. Phenomenological methodologies may elicit a quality of information on this theme that previous work has failed to address. There is also

ample opportunity to extend quantitative research beyond single capture incidents, by employing longitudinal designs to assess the volatility and change within the motivation construct over time. This line of enquiry complements the sociological discussion of aspects of obligation associated with volunteering. Once again it was noted that there is poor understanding of the volunteering experience as to if, and how, it alters over time, with the suggestion that a volunteer's sense of obligation to their roles and host organisations may transform from agreeable obligation to more disagreeable, bound involvement over the course of their engagement. Some indicative factors were associated with such a shift, for example, excessive number of hours spent volunteering and engaging in management or committee based volunteer work (Nichols et al., 2005; Windsor et al., 2008). It is also likely that relational networks play a part in the obligation people assign to their volunteer roles, particularly if as highlighted by sociological and economic perspectives (Freeman, 1997; Janoski & Wilson, 1995), these roles are sourced from direct approaches of family and friends. Systematic empirical research in leisure and more generally other volunteering settings has yet to adequately track and explain the causes and consequences of volunteer behaviour over time.

In-depth studies of volunteer motivation may also provide the key to unlocking the sociologically framed question of whether a person's paid employment has a spillover effect (Wilensky, 1960) to their choice of volunteering assignment and setting. Complementary to this line of enquiry, comparative research examining the volunteer experience across a range of leisure and non-leisure (e.g. emergency services, hospice volunteering) settings would assist in determining what attracts people to leisure volunteering and whether all volunteering, based on the activity taking place during un-obligated free time and accruing an element of enjoyment to it (Henderson, 1984), can be equally classed as a form of leisure despite the diversity of settings in which it takes place. Framing volunteering against other leisure theories, in particular Stebbins' concept of serious leisure, has been widely undertaken and in various different settings. However, in seeking to locate volunteering within Stebbins' continuum, the recent categorisation project-based leisure provides considerable scope for future research, particularly, its application to episodic leisure volunteers in the sub-field of events.

Drawn from the review of economic perspective, adding a dimension to the psychological view of volunteer motivation, the question of why rational economic man pays to volunteer has yet to be adequately addressed. The most apparent and therefore easy to assess example of this occurs in the context of volunteer tourism, where people make large upfront payments to a host organisation in order to volunteer for a defined period of time. This occurrence, unique to the tourism subfield, is one that demands detailed analysis using economic modelling techniques. It may be that volunteers in ongoing commitments over time expend substantially more on incremental costs associated with volunteering (e.g. travel costs, meals, etc.). Holmes, et al. (2010) in their study of tourism volunteers, found initial support for this contention and went on to suggest that "these hidden costs may not be as significant in the short-term, but they can build up over time and may contribute to eventual dissatisfaction or disagreeable obligation for the volunteer" (p. 265). Longitudinal research would lend itself to this line of enquiry.

Future research into the economic value of leisure volunteering can proceed in a number of directions. This can include replicating what little work has been done on formal valuations of volunteering in the sub-field of sport and broadening this research to take into account other leisure based organisations using volunteers. In undertaking these studies, a further research outcome that would be of value to academics and practitioners would be the development of a standardised approach to formal valuations, in order to minimise methodological inconsistencies (Davies, 2004), effectively enabling comparisons to be made across studies. This approach might adopt a broader view of volunteer value akin to Brown's (1999) work that measured the flow-on value of volunteering to its recipients.

This research agenda pinpoints a range of areas that require consideration and study. Whilst there has been a burgeoning body of research in the leisure discipline and its various subfields of tourism, events and sports, it is clear that future research into volunteering and volunteers in leisure must call upon the theoretical perspectives and practical skills of all of the social science disciplines that have been examined within this paper. Such approaches may be either uni-disciplinary or may draw upon the contributions of two or more of the social sciences, working towards higher level, more integrated interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary understandings (Mair, 2006). Given this escalating research agenda, it would be timely to undertake a secondary analysis, akin to that initiated in this article (see Table 1), into the status of volunteering research in leisure and all of its subfields. Henderson et al's. (2004) review of the state-of-play in leisure research generally, could serve as a guide to undertaking this analysis in order to further elaborate topics of interest, areas of duplication and any areas of methodological bias.

A final reflection from this article is that, beyond the specific themes of volunteers and volunteering that are addressed, the discussion also points to the value of comparative disciplinary analysis of key concepts and phenomena within leisure, using the specific perspectives that individual social sciences can provide to aid the understanding of them. The analytical model has the potential for replication in a range of areas within leisure that have, historically, been considered in isolation or without reference to a full range of tools within the disciplinary armoury of the social sciences.

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**Table 1 Event management journals: Coverage of volunteering**

| <b>Journal &amp; Year</b> | <b>Authors</b>   | <b>Keywords (where applicable) or title</b>  | <b>Method</b> | <b>Key constructs/theory tested or developed</b>  |
|---------------------------|--|--|---------------|---|
| FMET<br>1995              | Williams, P.,<br>Dossa, K., &<br>Tompkins, L.                  | Volunteer commitment,<br>volunteer motivations,<br>community involvement                       | S & I         |   |
| FMET<br>1996              | Elstad, B.   | Mega-event, Olympics,<br>volunteer satisfaction,<br>volunteer learning                         | S             |   |
| FMET<br>1998              | Saleh, F., & Wood,<br>C.                                       | Volunteers, volunteer motives,<br>multicultural festivals, ethno-<br>cultural, cultural events | S             | Volunteer Function<br>Inventory (Clary &<br>Snyder, 1991)   |
| ET<br>2003                | Elstad, B.   | Volunteers, continuance<br>commitment, motivational<br>factors                                 | S & I         | Volunteer Function<br>Inventory (Clary &<br>Snyder, 1991)   |
| ET<br>2004                | Ralston, R.,<br>Downward, P., &<br>Lumsdon, L.                 | Volunteering, volunteer<br>expectations, sport event,<br>Commonwealth Games, focus<br>group    | FG            |   |
| ET<br>2004                | Cuskelly, G.;<br>Auld, C.;<br>Harrington, M., &<br>Coleman, D. | Behavioral dependability,<br>volunteers, sports events,<br>predictors                          | S             | Theory of Planned<br>Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)   |
| ET<br>2006                | Monga, M.  | Special events, pulsating<br>organisations, volunteer,<br>motivation                           | S             | Motivation to Volunteer<br>(MTV) scale  |
| IJEMR<br>2007             | Baum, T, &<br>Lockstone, L.                                    | Mega events, sports<br>employment, volunteering  | LR            |   |
| IJEMR<br>2008             | Bendle, L., &<br>Patterson, I.                                 | Serious leisure, volunteers,<br>arts events  | I             | Serious leisure<br>(Stebbins, 1982)   |
| ET<br>2008                | Giannoulakis, C.,<br>Wang, C-H., &<br>Gray, D.                 | Sport volunteer management,<br>volunteer motivation, Olympic<br>Games                          | S             | Olympic Volunteer<br>Motivation Scale<br>(OVMS)   |
| ET<br>2009                | Bang, H., Won, D.,<br>& Kim, Y.                                | Volunteers, motivation,<br>commitment, intention,<br>sporting events                           | S             | Framed by social<br>exchange theory<br>(Thibault & Kelly,<br>1959), used Volunteer<br>Motivations Scale for<br>International Sporting<br>Events (VMS-ISE) &<br>Organisational<br>Commitment<br>Questionnaire (Mowday<br>et al., 1982) |
| ET<br>2009                | Bang, H.,<br>Alexandris, K., &<br>Ross, S. D.                  | Volunteers, motivation,<br>international sporting events,<br>2004 Athens Olympic Games         | S             | VMS-ISE   |
| ET<br>2009                | Bang, H.   | Volunteerism, commitment,<br>organizational reputation,<br>sporting event                      | S             | Framed by discrepancy<br>theory (Locke, 1969),<br>used OCQ (Mowday et<br>al., 1982)   |
| JVEM<br>2009              | Bang, H., & Ross,<br>S.  | Title: Volunteer motivation<br>and satisfaction  | S             | VMS-ISE   |

|                |             |  |    |  |
|----------------|-------------|--|----|--|
| JPRTLS<br>2009 | Doherty, A. | Event management,<br>community development,<br>volunteerism  | S  | Framed by social<br>exchange theory<br>(Thibault & Kelly,<br>1959), used modified<br>version of Sport Event<br>Volunteer Motivation<br>Scale (SEVMS) (Farrell<br>et al., 1998) |
| JPRTLS<br>2009 | Nichols, G. | Title: Inequality and<br>positional consumption: A<br>fresh insight into debates in<br>leisure studies on time<br>pressures on leisure and<br>volunteering, choosing a<br>work/life balance and the<br>nature of a 'leisure' society | LR |  |
| JPRTLS<br>2009 | Holmes, K.  | Volunteering, citizenship and<br>social capital: A review of UK<br>government policy   | LR |  |

**Journal Key:**

FMET = Festival Management  
& Event Tourism (renamed ET  
in 1999)

ET = Event Management

IJEMR = International Journal  
of Event Management  
Research (launched 2005)

JVEM = Journal of Venue and  
Event Management (launched  
2009)

JPRTLS = Journal of Policy  
Research in Tourism, Leisure  
and Events (launched 2009)

**Method Key:**

S = Survey

I = Interviews

FG = Focus groups

LR = Literature review