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# **Institutionally Individualized Volunteering: Toward a Late Modern Re-Construction**

**ABSTRACT** *In this article, it is argued that the ongoing debate on new and more individualized forms of volunteering is too one-sidedly focused on processes of de-structuration and de-institutionalization. Individualization is a complex and ambivalent macro-structural process toward 'institutionally dependent individual situations'. To fully understand emerging forms of volunteering, we thus need to 'reconstruct beyond de-construction'. The concept of 'institutionally individualized volunteering', developed in this article, induces such a paradigm shift. It refers to the growing institutionalization of more individuated forms of volunteering, that is, to new forms of collective organization based on individual assignment and choice. It is argued that the institutionalization of individualized volunteering occurs through 'primary' and 'secondary' processes of re-structuring. Re-embedding in primary contexts is facilitated by voluntary associations that offer more attractive and flexible volunteering menus to (potential) volunteers. Secondary forms of institutionally individualized volunteering, on the other hand, are emerging as new spaces of fundamental ambivalence. They represent new forms of highly rationalized top-down production of volunteer opportunities in hybrid organizational settings.*

**KEY WORDS:** Theory, late modernity, individualization, volunteering, hybridity

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary debate on volunteering in Western societies, there is a widely held conviction that the nature of volunteering is undergoing dramatic changes as a result of the broader social and cultural transformations of recent decades (Dekker, 2002; Dekker & van den Broek, 2006; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Lorentzen & Hustinx, 2007; Wuthnow, 1998). In the wake of advanced processes of modernization and individualization, it has been argued that traditional, habitual and dedicated involvement is increasingly interchanged with more episodic, noncommittal, and self-oriented types of participation (for a discussion, see, among others, Anheier & Salamon, 1999; Beher, Liebig & Rauschenbach, 2000; Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Gaskin, 1998; Hacket & Mutz, 2002; Handy, Brodeur & Cnaan, 2006; Hustinx, 2001, 2005, 2010; Macduff, 2004; Rehberg, 2005; Voyé, 1995; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003; Wuthnow, 1998).

This transformation is usually described in problematic terms. 'Serious volunteering' (Putnam, 1995, p. 70) is declining, and the new generation of volunteers lacks the type and degree of involvement that the average organization needs. The core diagnosis holds that the *ethos* of the volunteers, that is, their *subjective* dispositions and preferences, have changed dramatically. As a consequence of profound value changes among the Western population at large, the willingness to volunteer is declining, and/or transforming in unfavourable terms. Present-day volunteers would demand a considerable amount of autonomy and freedom in their roles and responsibilities. The willingness to participate increasingly depends on personal interests and needs, instead of traditional values such as service to others and a sense of duty to the community. In their quest

for self-realization, volunteers demand a substantial freedom of choice and a clear set of tasks with tangible results. In addition, they tend to take a more instrumental view of volunteering, using it primarily to further their own interests. For example, young people would have an increasing propensity to volunteer for résumé-building motivations (Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010; Katz & Rosenberg, 2005).

As a result of these changes, volunteers would also prefer to perform more ephemeral roles, with easy entry and exit options. Due to their weaker organizational attachments, a *structural* process of *de-institutionalization* would be set in motion. Nowadays, volunteering increasingly represents a more transitory role, and organizations are seeking new ways to facilitate episodic and even one-off types of involvement, allowing volunteers to perform activities without formally belonging to the organization and without the need to establish enduring social ties to other volunteers. In particular in the North American context, where program-based forms of volunteer management are highly prevalent (as opposed to a strong membership tradition in Europe, see Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001), scholars have observed an increasing tendency to ‘volunteer alone’ (Eliasoph, 2008) and to see volunteering as providing ‘personal one-to-one service’ rather than an expression of community involvement (Putnam, 2000). Research by the Independent Sector in the US has indeed shown a significant rise in short-term volunteer participation. Between 1987 and 1998, the rate of volunteering increased by nearly 23%, from 45.3% to 55.5%, but the average weekly hours per volunteer dropped from 4.7 to 3.5 hours — a 25% drop (Brudney & Gazley, 2006). The 1998 Independent Sector survey furthermore revealed that 41.9% of respondents indicated that they had volunteered sporadically and considered it a one-time activity whereas 39% volunteered on a regular basis. The remaining respondents reported that they only volunteered at a specific time of year, such as during summer vacation (Cnaan & Handy, 2005).

In this article, I argue that in the ongoing debate, there has been too much emphasis on the ‘de-construction’ of volunteering – that is, a growing de-institutionalization and subjectivization as a result of the changing ethos of the volunteers. Modernization-induced changes in volunteering are almost exclusively interpreted in terms of an increasing autonomy and volatility of volunteers. The debate on new forms of volunteering thus reflects the more general tendency to reduce modernization and individualization to a process of *dis-embedding*, without acknowledging a parallel process of *re-embedding* (Beck, 1992). To advance our understanding of recent changes in, and emerging forms of, volunteering, there is an urgent need to ‘re-construct’ our phenomenon of interest.

Indeed, new modes of organization and institutionalization of present-day volunteering have emerged that fundamentally affect the forms and meanings of volunteering. First, it should be recognized that organizations can change and have changed the way they structure their demand for volunteer labour in order to cope with the changes on the part of the individual volunteers. Organizations have sought to tailor volunteer activities more flexibly to the personal preferences and needs of the volunteers, and started to apply more explicit marketing and recruitment efforts (Meijs & Brudney, 2007). Paradoxically, to enable more individualized and noncommittal involvements requires a much more strict organization of volunteer activities, and involves considerable costs to the organization (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004).

Second, efforts to ‘re-construct’ contemporary forms of volunteering are not confined to the new management practices of classic voluntary associations, but also become manifest in new institutional strategies to ‘engineer’ (Locke, 2008), ‘harness’ (Williams, 2002), or ‘resuscitate’ (Eliasoph, 2008) volunteering. Recently, there has been an increasing involvement by ‘third parties’ such as governments, corporations, and institutions of higher education in the

mobilization of volunteers and the organization of their activities (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Hustinx, 2010). Such interventions typically manipulate the components of ‘free choice’ and ‘nonremuneration’ that are deeply ingrained in our conventional understanding of volunteering (Handy et al., 2000). Individuals are peremptorily invited and even required to participate (e.g., as part of their study curriculum), and get a more explicit return from their contribution (e.g., study credits, time off from paid work). In addition, as a consequence of new governance regimes in the provision of social welfare, a new kind of ‘hybrid organization’ is becoming prevalent in which different institutional logics blend into realities that are not only quasi-state and quasi-market, but also quasi-civic (Brandsen et al., 2005; Bode, 2006; Eliasoph, 2009, see further discussion below).

As a consequence, rather than interpreting modernization-induced changes in volunteering almost exclusively in terms of a *growing independence* of volunteers, it would be more accurate to interpret recent trends as a *changing interdependence* between volunteers and their organizational and institutional environment. As prominent social theorists have argued, individualized forms of living and acting remain strongly dependent on highly abstract and contingent social institutions (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Wagner, 1994). A re-embedding in new social forms and control structures indisputably complements the disembedding or removal from collective sources of authority and standard ways of living. As a consequence, a more accurate understanding of the new forms should take into account more explicitly and systematically the complex ways in which volunteering – among other forms of civic involvement – becomes re-embedded in the late modern context (Lorentzen & Hustinx, 2007). In this article, I advance the concept of *institutionally individualized volunteering* to further our understanding of how present-day volunteers become intertwined with their institutional environment in more complex and contingent ways.

### **Institutionalized Individualization**

In a recent article, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2007) goes back to the basic question of ‘What exactly constitutes individualization?’ to emphasize once more that in essence, it is a macro-sociological phenomenon affecting objective life situations. Individualization is often misunderstood as stemming from individual freedom and conscious choice, and wrongly equated with more individualistic dispositions and preferences. On the contrary, ‘the crucial idea is this: individualization really is imposed on the individual by modern institutions’. It is a macro-structural process ‘which possibly – but then again perhaps not – results in changes in attitude in individuals. That is the crux of contingency – how individuals deal with it remains an open question’ (Beck, 2007, p. 681).

As a result, Beck’s position differs from more subject-oriented accounts in terms of, for example, a cultural and institutional process of ‘human development’ that evolves as a consequence of material progress (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). According to Beck, the empirical proof of individualization is not to be found primarily in the changing and presumably diversifying values, attitudes, and modes of behaviour of individuals (or disproof if these value changes are not apparent), but rather in the historical institutionalization of the ‘principle of individual assignment of claims and contributions’ through legislation, welfare state and labour market (p. 682). The addressee of modern institutions is the individual and not the collective to which s/he traditionally belonged (ibid.). As such, individualization represents the most advanced but also the most historically contradictory form of societalization: rather than a process of individual liberation, it should be understood in terms of ‘*institutionally dependent individual situations*’

(Beck, 1992, p. 130) or the '*institution-dependent control structure of individual situations*' (ibid., p. 131).

Institutionalized individualization is characterized by a double ambivalence. First, the fact that it is imposed on the individual by modern institutions: 'The subjects of contemporary states are individuals by fate: the factors that constitute their individuality – confinement to individual resources and individual responsibility for the results of life choices – are not themselves matters of choice' (Bauman, 2001, p. 69 – quoted in Beck, 2007). Second, institutionalized individualization is ambivalent in its simultaneity of enablement and constraint. Individualized modes of action are simultaneously *favoured* and *enforced*. While in traditional society, individuals were simply expected to follow pre-structured lines of behaviour based on their ascribed group belongings (e.g. social class, religion), in modern society, they are essentially considered autonomous agents capable of undertaking their own course of action. As such, while traditional institutions imposed clear rules and restrictions, modern institutions rather offer 'incentives for action' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996, p. 25).

Nevertheless, while the individual is seen as the primary addressee, and it is basically accepted and desirable that s/he has the freedom and capability to make his/her own choices, there is a simultaneous tendency to influence and monitor individual actions. And this is what renders the process of individualization an inherently contradictory process: the greater individuals' autonomy and freedom of action, the more a society is in need of clear systems of coordination and even disciplinatio (Rose, 2000a; Wagner, 1992, 1994). As a result, there also exist tendencies towards 'de-individualization', that is, the 'limitation of de-limitations' (Beck, 2007). The notion of 'institutionalized individualization', consequently, shifts attention from the individual subject to the complex and highly ambivalent institutional environment in which these individuals are enabled *and* compelled to operate. It implies an investigation not only in terms of de-structuration, but also and primarily in terms of re-structuration.

The 'menu in society' (Korczynski & Ott, 2006) offers a useful metaphor for understanding how larger structures of coordination and power co-exist with people's sense of individual autonomy and choice. The restaurant menu serves as the basis for the metaphor:

This ritualized emphasis on autonomous choice can make the act of choosing as delicious as the actual food consumed. The customer here consumes the enchanting myth of sovereignty. For management, the genius of the menu is that it offers to the customer the image of sovereignty through autonomous choice, while at the same time constraining that choice. A menu not only offers choices but it necessarily constrains options. In this way it allows rationalized production of food to go on unconsidered in the kitchen (Korczynski & Ott, 2006, pp. 912-913).

The menu is a powerful mechanism in individualizing societies because it implies active agency on the part of the individual and offers him/her the 'pleasure of choice'. In this way, the menu glorifies the process of choice and appeals to the more hedonistic values of contemporary individuals. At the same time, it filters information and limits the available alternatives: 'The menu enables and constrains, and it can enable by constraining' (p. 913). Thus, the menu performs a mediating and facilitating role. It allows for a knowledgeable actor making a choice from a limited number of options, and is situated at the operational level of the various spheres of social life. In this respect, the menu is not necessarily at odds with the initial selection of a

restaurant of choice. It should be considered as one potential mechanism through which individual autonomy is enacted within a larger system of institutional and organizational opportunities and constraints. In what follows, I will seek to identify the contemporary ‘menus of volunteering’.

### **Institutionally Individualized Volunteering**

To account for the complex and varying ways in which volunteering becomes re-embedded in the late modern context, I put forward the concept of ‘*institutionally individualized volunteering*’, based on Beck’s general theory of individualization. This notion marks a paradigm shift, away from prevailing subjectivist notions of present-day involvement and toward a more explicit and systematic understanding of late modern processes of re-structuration, in terms of *the growing institutionalization of more individuated forms of volunteering*. With the concept of institutionally individualized volunteering, I seek to change, or at least, to refine and extend the existing grammar of volunteering. The focus lies on new organizational forms and control structures that have as their primary frame of reference no longer the collective but the individual: volunteers are no longer approached as members of a group, as traditionally has been the case, but as individuals with individualized conditions, preferences and needs.

Consequently, rather than merely focusing on individual-level changes that allegedly find their reflection in new and more independent modes of involvement, the notion of institutionally individualized volunteering shifts the focus of analysis to changes that occur at the cross-section between individual and institutional forces. The notion of institutionally individualized volunteering should overcome the apparent contradiction between emerging forms of volunteering that allow for *collective organization* by addressing the activity as an *individual assignment and choice*.

To understand how volunteering becomes institutionalized as an individualized program, we should distinguish between *primary and secondary processes of re-structuration, or forms of institutionally individualized volunteering*. Primary processes refer to the institutionalization of individualized volunteering within the context of classical voluntary associations. It is at this level that much of the current debate is situated. A typical example of primary re-embedding is the attempt by many voluntary associations to offer a more attractive menu that suits the more individualized needs and preferences of the volunteers. Secondary processes refer to the institutionalization of individualized volunteering through mechanisms and agents that fall outside the strict boundaries of these primary contexts. They are characterized by more hybrid organizational forms in which different institutional logics blend. Table 1 summarizes the key dimensions and characteristics of both models.

\*\*\*Insert Table 1 about here\*\*\*

### **Primary Processes of Re-structuration**

Processes of institutional individualization of volunteering should first be located within the context of voluntary associations in the ‘classical’ or ‘pure’ sense, that is, within a civil society

paradigm. In such a paradigm, the distinction between ‘volunteers’ and ‘members’ is blurred, and participation is primarily considered a socially meaningful activity with positive impact on community, democracy, and social capital (Lyons, Wijkström, & Clary, 1998). It is the ideal-typical and almost immaculate world of spontaneous, uncoerced, informal, and community-based, grassroots association, with multipurpose types of volunteer involvement (Dekker, 2002; Eliasoph, 2008, 2009; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Milligan & Fyfe, 2005; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). Primary contexts have a low degree of institutionalization: ‘Volunteering ... is not directed from the top down, not funded, and therefore, does not need to justify itself to any public beyond itself’ (Eliasoph, 2009, p. 306).

It is within these primary associational settings that the popular story of the ‘new volunteer’ (Hustinx, 2001) should be situated. Here processes of re-embedding refer to new organizational strategies to better cope with biographical changes on the side of the individual volunteers. As a result of the changing willingness and availability of volunteers, organizations are changing their management approaches from the traditional membership model to program-based types of involvement. Rather than a natural celebration of community belonging and group identity, individuals need to be (re-)enchanted through attractive volunteer menus that glorify the process of choice (cf. Korczynski & Ott, 2006). Volunteer programs are deliberately tailored to the more individualized interests of (potential) volunteers, and a more limited and clearly defined contribution is demanded. Program volunteers are responsible for a particular task and are recruited to work towards a specific goal (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001). An illustration of this new management approach is the concept of ‘winning volunteer scenarios’, seeking to create an individual match between, on the one hand, the ‘availability’ and ‘assets’ of the volunteers, and particular ‘assignments’ on the other (Meijs & Brudney, 2007).

A study among the 50 largest volunteer organizations in the UK and the Netherlands (Ellis Paine, Malmersjo & Stubbe, 2007) revealed that organizations indeed have increased the number of short-term volunteer opportunities, and have offered more flexibility in relation to the time investment of the volunteers. In addition, there was an increase in the organization of one-off volunteer activities for specific groups (e.g., students, employees). The researchers estimated that about half of the investigated organizations have stimulated short-term and/or one-off volunteer opportunities. It however should be noted that in general, these new, more flexible and short-term programs were organized alongside the more regular types of volunteering, and were hence considered as a way of diversifying the management approaches taken (Ellis Paine, Malmersjo & Stubbe, 2007).

The metaphor of the menu is revealing because it shows the combined existence of a more strict and rational organization and management of volunteers on the one hand, and the simultaneous presentation of activities in a ‘volunteer-centred way’ on the other. So while volunteers experience more choice and self-determination, this flexibility stems from a deliberate restructuring of organizational settings and a more strict organization. Projects and activities are tuned to the preferences of the volunteers, instead of putting the organizational targets first. In this context, Beher and colleagues (2000, p. 95) speak of a ‘reevaluation of volunteerism’ within the organizational framework, whereas Selle and Oymyr (1995, quoted in Wollebaek & Selle, 2003) more sceptically refer to an ‘organized individualism’, expressing a general tendency to narrow down organizational objectives to the private interests and goals of the individual members or volunteers, driving a wedge between voluntary activity and organizational work.

## Secondary Processes of Re-structuration

While primary forms of restructuring volunteering can be seen as more natural and bottom-up processes of seeking to establish a more flexible and individualized match between biographical and organizational conditions, secondary forms of volunteering are rather a matter of top-down interventions and external institutional logics. Secondary forms first should be situated in the context of public-private partnerships between states, markets, and nonprofit organizations in the provision of social welfare. Across Western Europe, such partnerships have existed for many decades. The classic welfare regime, commonly referred to as the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ (Powell, 2007), consisted of an institutionalized partnership between the state and intermediary non-profit organizations, which functioned as a structural interface between public policy and civil society. This classic public-private mix was characterized by cooperative relationships and a loyal constituency, and operated clearly separated from the principles of market competition (Bode, 2006; Evers & Laville, 2004).

More recently, international scholarship has been pointing to a historically new process of *institutional hybridization*. A basic observation relates to the increasing privatization of the public-private mix. There is a fundamental openness towards the market as a social service deliverer, and the state is more frequently involved in buying and regulating commercial services. Market principles also intrude into the public sector, and non-profit organizations are increasingly confronted with new public management approaches, which dictate greater competition and short-term contracting, cost efficiency, and performance measurement (Anheier, 2009; Bode, 2006; Evers & Laville, 2004; Freise, Hallmann & Zimmer, 2006; Perri 6 & Kendall, 1997). As a result, social services are increasingly delivered by a new type of service organizations, consisting of hybrid or compound arrangements that mingle elements of state, market, non-profit sector, and voluntary action (Brandsen, Donk & Putters, 2005).

While classic forms of volunteering have been an integral part of early mixed system of welfare provision, it seems that recent transformations of such partnerships toward a growing marketization are fundamentally affecting the nature of volunteer participation. Voluntary agencies are confronted with new patterns of resource management against the background of an increasing tendency towards short-term partnerships and ‘spot contracting’ (Bode, 2006, p. 351). As a result, volunteers are increasingly recruited for short-term and performance-based projects, and there is an increasing competition for volunteers and donors in ‘civil markets’ (ibid, p. 352).

While the changing welfare mix has an *indirect* effect on the nature of volunteering, more *direct* secondary processes of re-embedding can be identified as well. Direct secondary interventions by external parties are primarily focused on the instrumental value of volunteering as a tool for social (re-)integration and active citizenship. Here volunteering becomes the object of explicit involvement of ‘third parties’ (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Hustinx, 2010) – governments, corporations and educational institutions – to enhance and facilitate participation in volunteering. In this respect, Van Hal, Meijs, and Steenbergen (2004, p. 22) differentiated between volunteering policies that are ‘a deliberate strategy adapted by a government (or other “external” body) to influence and stimulate volunteering and volunteerism’ and the ‘traditional’ volunteer policy that is used to define the relations between an organization and its volunteers. The new forms that result from these (re-)engineering and resuscitating efforts are highly diverse, ranging from funded volunteer programs for disadvantaged or minority groups to corporate volunteering and civic education to new forms of collective orchestration of volunteering through mass events like Make a Difference Day.

That these new and secondary forms of volunteering are an important new phenomenon can be demonstrated by the following examples. First, in the Netherlands, government has recently decided that, as of 2011, all high school students must complete a 72-hour civic internship in order to graduate (Bekkers & Karr, 2008). Second, a recent population survey on giving and volunteering in the UK found that in 2006/07, three in ten employees worked for an employer that had both a volunteering and a giving scheme, while one-fifth worked for an employer with either a giving or volunteering scheme. Where an employer-supported volunteering scheme was available, 29% of employees had participated in the last year, and that 76% did so on an occasional or one-off basis (Low et al., 2007). Third, in the USA, in 2008, more than 3 million people took part in the Make a Difference Day, ‘the nation's largest single day of volunteerism’, created by *USA Weekend Magazine* (USA Weekend, 2009).

Secondary contexts have a number of key characteristics in common. First, they are institutionally ambiguous or ‘hybrid’, characterized by an intermingling of different and potentially conflicting institutional logics (Brandsen, Donk & Putters, 2005). Second, volunteering is increasingly organized ‘top down’ and has to be transparent for multiple and distant audiences (Eliasoph, 2009). Based on a four-and-a-half year ethnographic study of various youth programs in a mid-sized American city, Eliasoph (2009) found that, as a baseline, there is a new pressure on volunteer organizations to arrange a ‘plug-in’ variety of volunteering opportunities that are quick and easy enough to muster evidence of the success of their volunteer programs, or at least keep the symbolic potency of the volunteer intact.

As both Eliasoph (2009) in the American context and Bode (2006) in the European context observed, secondary processes of re-embedding volunteering thus result in more short-term involvement that is more rationally planned in response to a changing institutional environment. Eliasoph for example documents the introduction of various ‘accounting devices’ within hybrid volunteer settings. The transparency that was required for multiple funding agencies and private donors translated into ‘constant documenting – hours spent volunteering, number of youth volunteers, number of adult volunteers helping the projects, number of youth served’ (Eliasoph, 2009, p.297). In their case study of older volunteers in the north of England, Lie and Baines (2007) described how as a result of the new ‘contract culture’, a mutual self-help organization for needy elderly changed its organizational strategies by expanding and marketing services focused on younger and less needy elderly – this mainly because funding agencies looked favourably upon innovation and enterprise. As practices within the organization became more managerial, volunteers were confronted with new demands (and even had to pass a test), and reported to feel stressed about making a mistake and to lose the spontaneity they used to enjoy.

The new secondary menus of volunteering are thus identified as new forms of highly rationalized top-down production of volunteer opportunities to meet a complex blend of institutional logics. The new forms of volunteering ‘on offer’ generally become institutionalized as short-term or one-off ‘plug-in’ activities for individual volunteers, that is, in the form of highly individualized programs. To an important extent, the menu of volunteering functions here as a buffer between the broader institutional forces and the individual volunteers. It filters the powerful influence of external institutional logics by ‘enacting the moral narrative of the “volunteer”’ (Eliasoph, 2008). These buffers do not always function successfully, as Eliasoph (2009) for example found that poor and minority youth volunteers, knowing that they were volunteering as members of prevention programs, started to speak publicly about themselves as members of categories and objects of crime and unemployment statistics; or youth volunteers in community service programs, during meetings, ended up devoting more time to the question of how to measure the hours they had spent volunteering than to any other question.

In addition, when secondary interventions by external parties are based on a normative rationale, structures of power and coercion are frequently involved. Here the aim is to counter the culture shift that individualization allegedly is bringing about, as reflected in a growing lack of civic-mindedness. To make these passive citizens participate, hence to revitalize the ethos of voluntarism and active citizenship, (re-)socialization through (mandatory) volunteer programs is increasingly put in place. For example, volunteer projects are increasingly utilized as an instrument of activation and empowerment for various categories of socially excluded (e.g., long-term unemployed, disadvantaged youth). Rather than a celebration of choice, the aim here is to limit (the negative consequences of) individualization through new forms of disciplination. Volunteering is reconstructed as part of a new ‘politics of behaviour’ that can be linked to the Foucauldian paradigm of governmentality, and more specifically the notion of ‘ethopolitics’, which concerns new technologies aimed at the ethical reconstruction and ‘responsible self-government’ of the individual (Rose, 2000a, 2000b).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article considers the current debate about volunteering in Western societies. It starts from the observation of a widespread concern about the consequences of ongoing processes of modernization and individualization for the nature of involvement. There is a core emphasis on the notion of a general ‘decline of volunteering’. On the one hand, the ‘ethos’ of the volunteers is said to be changing. Volunteers are no longer, or to a much lesser extent, willing to engage in ongoing involvement, and they volunteer mainly for self-oriented reasons. On the other hand, traditionally strong and durable organizational ties are interchanged with ‘loose connections’ (Wuthnow, 1998), that is, weak and fleeting organizational attachments.

The core argument of this article is that the ongoing debate has focused too one-sidedly on the ‘de-institutionalization’ of volunteering – that is, the breakdown of its traditional organizational design – and failed to recognize that these old frameworks are being replaced with new organizational forms. To fully understand emerging forms of volunteering, we thus need to pay more systematic attention to new processes of re-structuring, that is, to ‘reconstruct beyond de-construction’. To induce such a paradigm shift, I have introduced the concept of ‘institutionally individualized volunteering’, which can be defined as the growing institutionalization of more individuated forms of volunteering. This occurs through new organizational forms and control structures that approach volunteers no longer as members of a group, as traditionally has been the case, but as individuals with individualized conditions, preferences and needs. It thus concerns new forms of organization that address the volunteer activity as an individual assignment and choice.

Within the framework of ‘institutionally individualized volunteering’, two main modes of ‘re-structuring’ –primary and secondary– have been identified. Primary processes relate to the common understanding of ‘new forms of volunteering’ in terms of involvement that is tailored to highly individualized preferences and needs, both in terms of a more objective biographical availability and a more subjective willingness on the part of the volunteers (cf. Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). Re-embedding in primary contexts is facilitated by voluntary associations that offer more attractive and flexible volunteering menus to (potential) volunteers. Secondary forms of institutionally individualized volunteering, on the other hand, are emerging as new spaces of fundamental ambivalence. They are situated in hybrid institutional constellations that reconstruct volunteer opportunities from the top down. The new forms of volunteering are

institutionalized as individualized ‘plug-in’ activities that mimic classic voluntary participation, but can also be institutionally enforced.

It leaves no doubt that the institutional individualization of volunteering fundamentally changes its forms and meanings. In the current debate, the process is perceived as a threat to our conventional understanding of volunteering. On the one hand, primary processes of change (structural and cultural) are generally seen to undermine volunteering ‘from within’. In the light of a common cross-cultural understanding of volunteering as an activity that implies a high net cost for the volunteer (Handy et al., 2000; Meijs et al., 2003), today’s unpaid workers will be considered ‘less of a volunteer’ by the general public given that the new modes of involvement typically imply a smaller ‘net cost’ for the volunteer. For example, if volunteers seek a more direct personal benefit, they thereby reduce the costs involved compared to volunteers who traditionally were considered to be highly altruistic. In addition, episodic volunteering requires less of an investment for the volunteer compared to those who volunteer on a regular and time-intensive basis. Moreover, while new forms of volunteering are structured at the convenience of the individual volunteers, they entail considerable costs to the organization. Participation in volunteering nowadays more likely is perceived to result from persistent marketing and recruitment efforts by the organization than from the intrinsic motivations of the volunteers.

Secondary processes of change, on the other hand, pose more fundamental threats in that they challenge the boundaries of what is generally perceived as volunteering. While the more individualized forms of volunteering seem to undermine volunteering ‘from within’, the new and more hybrid arrangements threaten to shrink volunteering ‘from the outside’. They represent new forms of involvement that no longer fall within the strict and narrow boundaries of volunteering and that, because of their hybrid nature, are not considered contemporary substitutes of the classic forms. For example, forms of activity that involve a level of coercion, such as some forms of employer-supported volunteering or service-learning by students in higher education, are put by some authors in a separate category of ‘non-voluntary unpaid work’ (Rochester, 2006). More of these hybrid activities, consequently, mean less volunteering in the ‘true’ sense. However, as Eliasoph concluded, hybrid organizations kept using the word “volunteer”, thus subtly changing the word’s everyday meaning and opening up ‘new moral puzzles’ (Eliasoph, 2008).

Emerging forms of volunteering thus face us with the challenge of ‘how to reconceptualize what we mean by volunteering without undermining its intrinsic value’ (Davis Smith, 2006, quoted in Rochester, 2006, p.3). In my view, this challenge does not simply imply that we need to relax our understanding of volunteering beyond the conventional and narrow definition of volunteering (Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996; Handy et al., 2000). Instead, a transformation of the grammar of volunteering is warranted, that is, an exercise in de- and re-conceptualization beyond a contained and uniform notion toward a more hybrid and diversified understanding. With the concepts of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ forms of ‘institutionally individualized volunteering’, I have sought to refine and extend the usual vocabulary and to offer a more detailed conceptual map to locate the various emerging forms of volunteering. More systematic research is needed to differentiate and better delineate these forms, as well as empirically investigate their prevalence and consequences. From this discussion, a basic tension and contradiction arises between on the one hand, more volatile and disorganized patterns of volunteering (or what Bode (2006) coined as ‘butterfly activism’); and, on the other hand, more calculated and negotiated forms of involvement within a more strict organizational frame (e.g., mandatory forms of service learning).

In relation to the theme of this special section of *Journal of Civil Society*, ‘Volunteering and social activism: Moving beyond the traditional divide’, the transformed sites of volunteering that

are emergent risk reducing the space for social activism. The overall trend towards short-term involvement may lead to a further de-politicization of volunteering (cf. Eliasoph, 1998). As Lichterman (2006, p. 545) has shown, the ‘plug-in style of volunteering’ functions through ‘a loose, contingent group of self-sufficient volunteers’ in which volunteers are ‘doing alongside, not doing together collaboratively’. ‘Plug-in volunteers’ maintained brief and impersonal relationships with other volunteers as well as with the beneficiaries. This fragmentation of activities at the grassroots presumably results in a reduced capacity for participatory democracy and change-oriented action.

Furthermore, it has been argued that as volunteering becomes the subject of deliberate government intervention, it is defined mainly in terms of service work that supports the status quo. In Western societies, governments have

with varying degrees of emphasis, adopted the position that volunteer work, *properly defined and regulated*, should be supported and encouraged. The consequences of this new ‘partnership’ are not yet fully apparent, but it will likely encourage safe, non-controversial, and ‘non-political’ volunteering at the expense of advocacy and social activism’ (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 521 – author’s emphasis; see also Goss in this issue).

On the other hand, in comparison to classic voluntary association, the emergent hybrid organization may offer new opportunities for social activism too. Eliasoph (2009) notes that in general, classic volunteer groups do not have to be accountable to a broader public, do not need to be socially inclusive, and often – for the sake of efficacy – narrow their concern to issues that are ‘do-able’ and ‘non-political’ (Eliasoph, 1998, 2009; see also Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005). Hybrid organizations, on the other hand, need to be highly transparent: ‘In contrast to classic volunteer groups’ relative ease in avoiding politics, members of hybrid organizations have to discuss the policies that fund their organizations, much as they, too, wish they could avoid the topic’ (Eliasoph, 2009, p. 297). So here the connection to policy and politics becomes institutionalized because of the need to provide clear evidence vis-à-vis the various stakeholders.

On a final note, a word of caution is in place. It should be emphasized that the theoretical framework advanced in this article refers to current dynamics in advanced capitalist and highly individualized Western societies. I do not claim that it is also generalizable to volunteering in non-Western countries, although similar processes may be observed. For example, in China, in recent decades, enormous efforts have been made by the Chinese government to promote volunteering among its citizens, and most volunteer efforts are government initiated or government funded (Yuanzhu, 2005; Wong and Jun, 2006). Given the strongly government-led nature of volunteering in China, a parallel could be drawn to the secondary processes of re-structuring described above. However, unlike the West, China is a collectivist society in which the population is used to taking instruction from government on many aspects of its social life. Thus, the Chinese government is using volunteering activities to promote its agenda of a harmonious society and discourage dissent. The aim is not to facilitate individual autonomy and voluntary action, but rather to concert action on a collective base and for collective purposes. Chinese NGOs see their mission primarily as collaborating with the government to promote a stable, harmonious, and common value-sharing society (Ma, 2002; Xu & Ngai, 2009). Indeed, in a recent study of volunteering among university students in Canada and China, Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan (2010) found that Chinese students’ volunteering was not influenced by individual characteristics, but a direct response to institutional factors – opportunity structures and cultural framing; that is, government-sponsored

volunteer projects and the collective spirit expressed by the State. In contrast, in Canada, voluntary action was undertaken in response to students' private opportunities, be it in conjunction with institutional factors, such as the signalling value of volunteering in the labour market.

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Table 1. Institutionally Individualized Volunteering: A New Conceptual Framework

	<b>Primary re-structuring</b>	<b>Secondary re-structuring</b>
<b>Organisational form</b>	Classic voluntary association	Hybrid organisation
<b>Context</b>	Biographical change	Changing welfare-mix  Ethopolitics
<b>Volunteer image</b>	The new volunteer	The plug-in volunteer  The passive citizen
<b>Type of intervention</b>	Internal organisational logic  Bottom-up  New management approaches	External institutional logics  Top-down  Third party involvement
<b>Dominant logic</b>	Celebration of choice	Accountability  Disciplination