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SOLIDARITY AND VOLUNTEERING UNDER A REFLEXIVE-MODERN SIGN: TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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SOLIDARITY AND VOLUNTEERING UNDER A REFLEXIVE-MODERN SIGN: TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.

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Recently, there is a growing conviction that the nature of volunteering is undergoing radical transformation. The traditional way of volunteering is declining. Concurrently, a 'new style' of volunteering is developing. This transition is generally considered a threat to volunteerism. However, the 'crisis of today's volunteering' is rooted in fragmented and normative interpretations. The aim of this paper is to go beyond these narrow analyses by offering a general theoretical framework. The emergence of new styles of volunteering is rooted in a broader, structural transformation process: the altering condition of modernity itself. Firstly, the current conflict is observed through the lens of the reflexive modernization theory. Secondly, the differences between traditional and new volunteers are incorporated in a comprehensive typology of 'styles of volunteering'. This fundamental theory building offers new tools to grasp the nature of present-day volunteering. The authors argue that today's volunteers will combine classical and new features in a 'self-reflexive way'. This 'in between' position is conceptualized as 'the reflexive volunteer'. Empirical research has to point out in which way 'reflexive volunteering' combines classical and new styles into a class of its own.

Keywords: theory building, reflexive modernity, classical-new-reflexive styles of volunteering, biographical match

In society, volunteer work is situated in a twilight zone. On the one hand, it is overshadowed by the professional regime; on the other hand, it does not belong to the area of informal care, nor is it linked to the commercial worlds of consumption and leisure activities. Moreover, it is a very elusive and invisible phenomenon. It covers a chaotic diversity of activities which are integrated inconspicuously into many fields of society. This explains why volunteerism has been undervalued for a long period of time and why, until now, it has barely been studied as a (sociological) phenomenon. In fact, the empirical-scientific research about volunteerism is still in its early stages in Flandersⁱⁱ.

This research project is an attempt to highlight a relatively new research angle on volunteering. It explores the changing nature of volunteering within the sociological framework of general modernization theories.

1. About the problematic nature of volunteer work...

Recent literature on volunteering describes a profound change in volunteer activities (Lammertyn, 1996, Van Daal, 1993; Willems, 1993; Verstraete, 1996; Breda & Goyvaerts, 1996). The (quantitative) amount of volunteering has not changed, but its (qualitative) nature appears to be undergoing radical transformation. Today, people engage in a very typical way, different from past decades. This new generation volunteers is no longer as loyal as previous generations. One speaks of 'the decline of the classical volunteer': the very active community member who swears eternal fidelity to his or her commitment. Compared to classical styles of

volunteering, today's volunteer work has a temporary character. Volunteers no longer wish to commit themselves on a long-term, obligatory basis. They prefer flexible and concrete projects. They are fairly fastidious and expect something in return for their volunteer efforts. They opt for 'trendy' volunteer activities such as the 'buddy projects' for aids patients, tele-services, palliative care, and other 'hot issues'. Nowadays, willingness to participate in volunteer work is no longer dependent on social needs but on personal interests and experiences. As a result of these transformations, there is a growing conviction that, in addition to more 'traditional' volunteering, a 'new' type of volunteer work is developing. It seems that 'new styles of volunteering' are emerging. Rommel, Opdebeeck and Lammertyn (1997) have incorporated these 'pre-scientific impressions' into a brand-new theoretical typologyⁱⁱⁱ.

Except for this constructive and systematic scientific impetus to a comprehensive understanding of contemporary volunteering, it is striking to note that volunteer organizations evaluate the shifting quality of volunteering in a very negative way. Volunteer organizations experience great difficulties in keeping people involved and managing the new way of volunteering. It seems that they are confronted with a deep 'crisis' in volunteer work. Some volunteer organizations fear that these radical transformations may be a serious threat to their survival.

Two core reasons account for the current crisis. Firstly, in the literature on volunteer action, a one-sided negative interpretation of the socio-cultural individualization process dominates. Individualization is considered the most dangerous threat to volunteering eliminating the remaining solidarity among citizens. This explains why one often reacts with disbelief and distrust to the 'gratuitous' and thoroughly 'good' nature of voluntary commitment. Altruistic intentions are often trivialized to pure self-interest and cynically explained away: "Scratch an altruist and watch a hypocrite bleed" (M. Ghiselin quoted in B. Schwartz, 1993: 315). Moreover, it is often suggested that new styles of volunteering are rising in the wake of the individualization process. Today's volunteers appear to be displaying 'individualized traits', which transform their commitment into a typical, rather problematic style. Secondly, the concept of 'volunteering' is being used as a fixed 'container notion'. "Too often, the term is a catch-all for a wide range of non-salaried activities" (Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996: 365). Volunteering is defined in such a general way that it can easily incorporate a wide diversity of unpaid activities in a broad range of sectors^{iv}. At the same time, there is no further need for more substantial reflections on the nature of volunteer work. Fundamental changes in the nature of volunteering remain unnoticed within this generic discourse. Today's volunteering is still being judged according to deeply-rooted, old patterns of thinking, which originate from a bygone institutional context and are not adapted to recent socio-cultural changes. The social commitment of the contemporary 'Kinder der Freiheit' ('freedom's children': Beck, 1997a & 1998) seems to develop beyond the existing institutional frameworks as a 'self-organized concern for others' (Beck, 1998: 5). In these more autonomous ('individualized') forms of commitment, individuals use a new morale that

connects what has traditionally been considered mutually exclusive, i.e. “Selbstgenuss” (enjoying oneself and self-realization) on the one hand and “Dasein” (altruism, ‘being there for others’) on the other hand (Beck, 1997a: 14). These two (traditionally) opposing poles have come to belong together and even mutually strengthen and enrich each other.

A fundamental insight into contemporary volunteering is blocked by four dominant assumptions in the debate about (voluntary) commitment (Beck, 1997a: 14-15):

1. Commitment (voluntary action) is equated and interchanged with membership: if commitment presupposes membership of an organization, then non-members by definition must be egoists.
2. The assumption of self-sacrifice: only those who are self-sacrificing and self-effacing, who put themselves second, are able to be there for others.
3. The ‘silent help’ or ‘housewife’ syndrome: the value of the services provided is determined by the fact that these activities remain invisible, i.e. unpaid, unacknowledged and on the instructions of others, who control them.
4. A clear role division between help provider and recipient: it is not recognized that help providers devoting themselves to others are also in need of help which they receive from their provision of help. It is precisely this mutual helplessness which can render committing oneself a very enriching experience.

Taken together, these assumptions create an image of voluntary action as entirely self-less (‘selbstlos’), merely executive work. The individual is interwoven into a hierarchical relationship of dependency and complete self-abandonment to the organization. This kind of ‘sacrificial’ volunteering is decreasingly appealing to contemporary individuals.

The current ‘crisis of volunteering’ is rooted in a strong intermingling of the prevailing normative discourse on voluntary commitment and the one-sided, negative interpretation of the individualization process. The conviction that individualism and altruism are fundamentally at odds with each other, strikes at the core of the crisis. Wuthnow (1991) also explores this contradiction as a major tension field in volunteerism. Wuthnow’s ‘American paradox’ refers to the fact that Americans struggle to reconcile the paradoxical elements of individualism and altruism, of self-interest and generosity, of individual fulfillment and caring behavior, of commitment to personal freedom and concern about the needs of others. To explain this (American) ambivalence, Wuthnow reveals the symbolic meaning of ‘caring’ and ‘compassion’. These are symbols of a ‘good society’, a ‘good life’ and a ‘human face’ preventing American culture from totally being ‘contaminated’ by the ideology of individualism. To foster a ‘good society’, altruism and solidarity are indispensable cultural counterparts of the American doctrine of individualism. Rather than explaining the ‘American paradox’, Wuthnow implicitly makes an ideological statement. The desirability to combine individualism and collectivism is rooted in a communitarian line of thought in which American individualism is condemned (see Bellah et al, 1996). Although Wuthnow states that

both individualism and solidarity are fundamental elements of American cultural heritage and thus have to be connected in a paradoxical way, he fails to go beyond the traditional understanding of individualism and solidarity mutually excluding each other.

Instead of taking the traditional understanding of altruism and caring behavior for granted, a new approach is called for. Although the aforementioned tension between individualism and altruism and the conflict between old frameworks and new conditions of volunteer commitment are fundamental features of the current transformation process, they remain limited in scope. That is why they fail to grasp the recent changes thoroughly. The aim of this paper is to go beyond these fragmented, partial analyses by offering a general theoretical framework. We assume that the changes observed are rooted in a broader transformation process: the project of modernity itself. The altering condition of modernity is considered a driving force behind the changing nature of solidarity. The necessity of combining individualism and altruism is a consequence of a more general, structural transformation process that Western societies are undergoing. People are simply forced to fulfill personal freedom and solidarity at the same time (in a dialectical relation). Both are fundamental features of contemporary (late-modern) life.

The central aim of this paper is to go beyond the ‘container definition’ of volunteering and the dominating traditional prejudices by offering some new sociological concepts and tools to grasp contemporary volunteer action. We will look at the current impasse through the lens of the reflexive modernization theory. While presenting a theoretical classification of the two hypothetical styles of volunteering, we will also attempt to provide it with some empirical illustrations.

2. Theoretical framework: reflexive modernization

At present, the amount of sociological time diagnosis is growing exponentially. Current society is undergoing rapid, fundamental and global social changes. These radical transitions are described in several ways. Using highly varied terms, sociologists aim to understand the difference between past and present trying to grasp in a systematic way the multitude of social changes by identifying underlying mechanisms^v.

In this study, the basic theoretical elements will be taken from Ulrich Beck’s time diagnosis in terms of reflexive modernization. In his book “Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne” (1986), the German sociologist heralds a profound change in the nature of the modernization process itself. This change is characterized as a transition from ‘simple’ (or ‘first’) modernity to ‘reflexive’ (or ‘late’) modernity. ‘Simple’ modernity symbolizes the evolution from a traditional, feudal and agricultural society to a modern, industrial society. In this stage of modernization, rationality triumphs over tradition and superstition. Scientific rationality functions as an infallible source of genuine and objective knowledge. A strong

focus on progress goes hand in hand with the promise of abundant welfare for every member of society. The rise of the industrial society has brought about a new typical living pattern: the nuclear family which is based on paid work, with a clear gender role division. The social class distinction has substituted the former difference between the three feudal estates. According to Beck, however, this 'classical' modernity is a 'semi-modern condition'. The industrial setting inherently contains several 'counter-modern' elements which remain immune to further modernization. On the one hand, the 'modern' institutional patterns of social class and gender are causing new social inequalities. These 'modern' inequalities in fact replace the traditional-feudal hierarchy. The scientific obsession with progress, on the other hand, generates large-scale risks that are no longer manageable. Nevertheless, these uncontrollable risks remain hidden behind a 'modern' façade of rational superiority and perfect control mechanisms. Precisely because of their blind success, science and technology reach a self-confrontation with the as yet unmastered accumulation of life-threatening side-effects of their (Pyrrhic) victory.

Beck thus states that industrial society destabilizes itself through its defective architecture. Through the confrontation with its own (semi-modern) limits, industrial society becomes the driving force of its own transformation process. "Modernization *within* the paths of industrial society is being replaced by a modernization *of the principles* of industrial society" (Beck, 1992: 10). Reflexive modernization thus symbolizes a modernization of the industrial society itself: "when, in other words, modernization becomes reflexive and its principles – notably a critical attitude towards every starting point, universal rights and progress through the accumulation of knowledge – are critically applied to modernity itself, that is to industrial society as a partial realization of those principles" (Kunneman, 1996: 120). From the ruins of industrial society, a radicalized modernity arises. This radical modernization breaks through the half-modern character of the 'simple-modern' industrial phase. Beyond the outlines of industrial society, it generates a different (not necessarily better) institutional shape: risk society. This new institutional context is characterized by a fundamental insight into the destructive and continually expanding side-effects that are systematically produced together with the increasing availability of welfare. The vulnerability of all human beings begins to dominate the positive logic of progress.

According to Beck (1986, 1992) we have come to live in a 'risk society', in a situation of 'manufactured uncertainty' (Giddens, 1994: 78). In the first place, the term 'risk society' refers to the intermingling of continuity and discontinuity. While in classical industrial society the logic of wealth production dominates, modernization does not just mean wealth accumulation, but also the systematic production of intensifying and globalizing risks: nuclear, ecological, biological, ... These risks cannot be understood as easily controllable side-effects of an unproblematical modernization process. On the contrary, they increasingly appear as inherent products of further modernization. "The productive forces have lost their innocence in the reflexivity of modernization processes. The gain from techno-economic 'progress' is being increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks" (Beck, 1992: 13).

Secondly, ‘risk society’ refers to the radical social changes that are caused by the modernization process. These share as common feature the immanent contradictions between modernity and counter-modernity within industrial society and refer to the processes of individualization and globalization, to changing relationships between men and women and between parents and children, to developments in the field of economy, labor and politics, ... “The system of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity – the axes of gender, family and occupation, the belief in science and progress – begins to shake and a new twilight of opportunities and hazards comes into existence – the contours of the risk society” (Beck, 1992: 15). Subsequently, the process of reflexive modernization profoundly influences the social environment of individuals. The industrial dynamic of progress also undermines the notions of social class, professional work, nuclear family, gender roles, church, production, politics and so on, which are deeply rooted in human life. New, radicalized forms are taking shape against the background of the remaining but crumbling old lifestyles. In this incomplete and contradictory condition between past and future, human life acquires some new characteristic features: uncertainty, unpredictability, temporality, doubt, disorientation, loss of identity, etc... The influence of this new dawn of existence can follow different tracks.

In this study, we will confine ourselves to three ‘reflexive-modern’ conditions which we believe to have a fundamental impact on solidarity between people, i.e. the changing economic, affective and cultural ties between individuals (see: Lammertyn, 1995; Breda & Goyvaerts, 1996; Rommel, Opdebeeck & Lammertyn, 1997). Phenomena such as flexibility, unemployment, an increase in double income households, individualization, secularization, alternative lifestyles, an increasing number of divorces, aging, et cetera, undoubtedly have an enormous impact on individuals’ willingness and readiness to volunteer. In the next section, the altering ‘late-modern’ living conditions will be investigated following the main axes of economic, affective and cultural bonds. The degree of ‘(dis)embeddedness’ of individuals in the ‘reflexive-modern’ fields of economy, family and culture is assumed to be of central importance to the quality of their volunteer commitment. The process of reflexive modernization does not stop at the doors of the volunteer organizations: the nature of human solidarity is undergoing a transformation into a typical, contemporary mode or style of commitment. Consequently, theorizing reflexive modernization offers the opportunity to go beyond the rigid and normative conceptual framework that currently dominates volunteer work.

3. Exploring reflexive modernization: changing economic, affective and cultural bonds.

3.1. Changing economic bonds

“Even outside work, industrial society is a wage labor society through and through in the plan of its life, in its sorrows, in its concept of achievement, in its justification of inequality, in its

social welfare laws, in its balance of power and in its politics and culture. If it is facing a systemic transformation of wage labor then it is facing a social transformation.” (Beck, 1992: 140)

In industrial society, the work site has always been “a biotope in which a collective lifestyle could bloom: ways of expressing solidarity, of clothing and living, of raising children, of celebrating and sorrowing” (Huyse, 1994: 35). During the past decades, wage labor and occupation as central patterns of meaning and living have strongly weakened. As a consequence of a global economic revolution of finance, competition, technology and skill, today a profound restructuring of the labor market is taking place and labor is de-standardizing into various flexible and hybrid forms of employment. The expectation of a ‘job for life’ has disappeared, and employment insecurity affects us all.

“The employment system, which arose in the past century, is based on *high degrees of standardization* in all its essential dimensions: the labor *contract*, the work *site* and the *working hours*. Until well into the 1970s ‘*lifelong full-time work*’ was the temporal organizational standard for planning and utilizing labor power in the plant, as well as in biographical life context. In principle, this system permits clear delineations between work and non-work, between employment and non-employment.” (Beck, 1992: 142). Because of macro-economic developments into a information technology based system, ‘fordistic’ mass production is replaced by a system of flexible product-automation. This has important consequences for the labor market. Through successive waves of automation, the system of standardized, full employment is weakening. The three supporting pillars: labor law, work site and working hours are subjected to a process of flexibilization.

And so a central feature of this transition is *a destandardization of labor*. The fastest increasing category of employees are the temporary and the parttime workers. One speaks of *a temporalization of the labor market*. The norm of lifelong and fulltime employment is substituted for various forms of flexibilization of working hours. Instead of rigid ‘nine to five’ jobs, an endless diversity of individual programs emerges. And future careers will no longer be determined by *a model of ‘lifetime employment’* but by *a model of ‘lifetime employability’*. This refers to individual’s ‘ability’ to change successfully from one job to another and thus to the ease of getting employed (Bundervoet, 1997: 40). Temporal flexibility goes hand in hand with contractual and wage flexibility. There is not only ‘just-in-time production’ (production without a stock of materials), but also ‘just-in-time employment’ (Rifkin, 1995: 191). Castells (1996, 272) observes a fundamental transformation of labor, of employees and of labor organization everywhere in society. The dominating labor model in a new information economy is composed by on the one hand a core labor force (managers and Reich’s symbolic analysts, see Reich, 1992) and on the other hand a disposable labor force which can easily be automated and/or hired and/or dismissed depending on the demands of the market and the labor costs.

The extended variety of types of labor implies at the same time that many precarious and hybrid forms of work between employment and unemployment emerge. “Il commence à devenir clair que précarisation de l’emploi et chômage se sont inscrits dans la dynamique actuelle de la modernisation. Ils sont les conséquences nécessaires des nouveaux modes de structuration de l’emploi, l’ombre portée des restructurations industrielles et de la lutte pour la compétitivité” (Castel, 1995:402). This new kind of precarious work is not a peripheral phenomenon, but exists autonomously. A specific part of the working population, in particular young people, have ‘precariousness as destination’ and are condemned to temporary occupations. Castel even heralds a ‘new social question’ along the line of this dualization of the labor market. Beck observes a generalization of employment insecurity. The old system of lifelong, full employment with the radical alternative of unemployment, is replaced by a system of flexible ‘under’employment. “In this system, unemployment in the guise of various forms of underemployment is ‘integrated’ into the employment system, but in exchange for a *generalization of employment insecurity* that was not known in the ‘old’ uniform system of industrial society” (Beck, 1992: 143-144).

3.2. Changing affective bonds

“Whatever we consider - God, nature, truth, science, technology, morality, love, marriage - modern life is turning them all into ‘precarious freedoms’” (Beck & Beck, 1996:24).

Until the sixties, a compulsory coupling between occupation, marriage and family existed. At present, the situation is very different. Today, forms of living together begin to change radically and alternative possibilities are expanding. Moreover, a compulsion to actively choose a personal form of living exists. “It is no longer clear whether one should get married or live together, whether one should conceive and raise a child inside or outside the family, whether the father is the man one should live with or the man one loves who is living with someone else or whether one should do any of these things before, after or while concentrating on one’s career” (Beck, 1995: 15). A further decoupling and differentiation of marriage and family, of new living arrangements and relationship patterns occur. Consequently, traditionally unambiguous concepts such as family, marriage, parenthood, father, mother, ... conceal and cover an increasing diversity of individual situations.

Empirical indications of changing primary relationships are numerous. The number of marriages is decreasing significantly and divorce rates are increasing, fertility rates are low and the proportion of children born outside marriage is growing, cohabitation outside marriage is rising and more and more people are living alone. Younger generations are more tolerant with respect to relationships and sexuality. In most industrialized countries, growing female economic opportunities (although still unequal) have been accompanied by a rise in separation, divorce, cohabitation and lone parenthood. A shrinking minority of the population now lives in a traditional nuclear family – male breadwinner, female caregiver. “Faced with the alternative between family and no family, a growing number of people are ‘deciding’ on a

third possibility: a mixture of various forms, trying out what seems to fit the current situation” (Beck, 1995: 34).

Besides this pluralization of living arrangements, a radicalization of the individual female biography is a second important feature of reflexive modernization of affective bonds between people. This biographical liberation frees women from their traditional domestic duties. Industrial society has always been a semi-modern and a semi-feudal society. Nineteenth century industrial mode of production was modern because spheres and forms of production and family were separated and a nuclear family emerged. The distinction between male wage labor and female domestic chores, however was based on *gender ascription by birth*. A new kind of *feudal estates* came into being. Doing lifelong domestic work without financial autonomy or having an independent living based on participation in the labor market was no matter of choice but of being born a man or a woman (‘gender-fate’).

In welfare state modernization after the Second World War, a double movement took place. On the one hand, women’s biography changed by entering the labor market. The principles of developed market societies were applied beyond the gender division. On the other hand, totally new situations within the family and between men and women arose, partly as a result of the changing female biography. As a consequence of these transitions, the feudal cement of industrial society has continuously been crumbling. Nevertheless, the reflexive-modern liberation of the female biography has not been fully realized yet. In current society, a potentially explosive mixture of ‘old conditions’ and ‘new consciousness’ has come into being. “Through more equal educational opportunities and an increased awareness of their position, young women have developed expectations of more equality and partnership in their professional and family life which encounter contrary developments in the labor market and in male behavior. Conversely, men have practiced a ‘rethoric of equality’, without matching their words with deeds. [...] Thus we are situated at the very beginning of a liberation from the ‘feudally’ ascribed roles for the sexes – with all the associated antagonisms, opportunities and contradictions. Consciousness has rushed ahead of conditions” (Beck, 1992: 103-104).

3.3. Changing cultural bonds

As the collectively prescribed patterns of thinking and acting slowly crumble away, people have more and more freedom to write their life story independently. The traditionally standardized life course has been replaced by a ‘do-it-yourself biography’ which individuals have to construct themselves (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 25). The concept ‘individualization’ pronounces this process of biographical liberation. At an even more fundamental level, it furthermore creates room for autonomous forms of identity constitution. The decisions individuals have to take in everyday life inevitably have far-reaching existential consequences. The ‘self’ has become a ‘reflexive project’ in this stage of high modernity: “A person’s identity has in large part to be discovered, constructed, actively sustained. (...) Our

day-to-day lives have become experimental in a manner which parallels the ‘grand experiment’ of modernity as a whole” (Giddens, 1994: 82-83)^{vi}.

This theoretical limitless freedom represents the welcome dimension of individualization. However, it also has a more obscure side. In the individualization discourse it is often forgotten that a ‘do-it-yourself-biography’ intrinsically is a ‘risk-biography’. A condition of expanding individual freedom implies a growing individual insecurity, “a state of permanent endangerment” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 25). Whereas traditionally imposed modes of life could be obeyed implicitly, late-modern life no longer offers evident life courses. Clear or right answers to central life questions are no longer available. Consequently the newly gained freedom is of a dubious nature. Free choices are unavoidably risky and unpredictable choices. Moreover, individuals are also fully responsible for wrong decisions. Therefore, Fitoussi and Rosanvallon (1996: 32-34) speak of a ‘positive individualism’ and a ‘negative individualism’: “Du même coup, l’individualisation-émancipation se double d’une individualisation-fragilisation. Tout devient plus indéterminé et chacun doit organiser sa vie de façon plus précaire et plus solitaire.”

The ambiguity of the individualization process is further intensified by the coercive character of ‘modernized’ freedom. Contradictorily enough, late-modern ‘freedom project’ is based on a ‘non-choice’. Structural transformations have forced people to break away from their traditional fortresses and have condemned them to a ‘lawless’ life. When prescriptions of tradition lose much of their strength, contemporary individuals are compelled to fill up the ‘existential emptiness’ actively. Moreover, in the light of an incessant information flow, every decision is temporary and can be revoked. Temporality and doubt have become essential qualities of life: “Nowadays, everything seems to conspire against... lifelong projects, permanent bonds, eternal alliances, immutable identities” (Bauman, 1993).

In addition to the ‘risky’ nature of the late-modern ‘gain’ of freedom, two other important observations must be mentioned. Firstly, ‘individualized society’ does not exist. ‘Positive individualism’ applies more to certain social groups than to others, and so does negative individualism. Not everyone has equal abilities for developing a personal course of life successfully. Level of education and level of income play a decisive role. “Individual preferences still remain dependent on social abilities, material and educational possibilities” (Laermans, 1990-1991: 215). Those who do not possess these social-cultural skills and material possibilities experience serious impediments to an individualized use of freedom. Together, these obstacles to freedom can be considered as a new form of social inequality. Secondly, individualization does not mean a completely unlimited freedom. After a process of ‘dis-embedding’ from traditional ties, comes a ‘re-embedding’ in new coercive structures. The ‘free’ individual becomes entangled in a new network of regulations and patterns of behavior which are prescribed by the labor market, the educational system, the professional regime, the legislation, the mass media, the overwhelming consumer markets, et cetera. They regulate the space in which life must be planned from then on, “a work of art of labyrinthine complexity,

which accompanies us literally from the cradle to the grave” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 25).

3.4. Reflexive modernization: a route to opportunities for volunteering?

It has to be clear that the reflexive modernization process affects individual life profoundly. Consequently, volunteering (as a part of the leisure activities within this life-world) does not escape from this broader transition. Volunteering is unavoidably embedded in a more general development towards a reflexive-modern society and life-world. In this process of ‘dis-embedding’, inherited ‘simple-modern’ traditions (social class, occupation, gender, family, church, ...) are losing their meaning and credibility with respect to the individual biography. Under the banner of reflexive modernity, individual biographies are differentiating into a plurality of living conditions and lifestyles. In the wake of this biographical liberation, it is very likely that ‘reflexive-modern’ individuals also organize their volunteer commitment autonomously and reflexively.

In general, the reflexive modernization process will become manifest as an ambivalent mixture of new freedoms and risks, of emancipation and uncertainty. Both the ‘releasing dimension’ and the ‘risk character’ of the late-modern ‘do-it-yourself biography’ have to be taken into consideration. Free choices are always made under conditions of uncertainty. If individuals aim to reduce the uncertainty and unpredictability in everything they do, then the ‘doubt’ accompanying the reflexive modernization process (the rise of the risk society in general) will run as a leitmotiv through their volunteering as well. As a result, a ‘*biographical match*’ (Jakob, 1993; Olk, 1990) between ‘reflexive-modern’ biographies and volunteering has become a decisive factor. Present-day volunteering has to suit individual biographies.

4. Rethinking volunteering

On the basis of the socio-cultural developments that determine the late-modern life-world, our central hypothesis can be formulated. Reflexive modernization processes put their stamp on the quality of volunteer commitment. Nowadays, it is much more likely that people are committed in a typical way, different from volunteering in past decades. In the introduction, we stated that ‘new styles of volunteerism’ are emerging.

There is no such thing as “unique” volunteer work or the “unique” volunteer. Volunteering is inherently a collective noun for a plurality of tasks within civil society. Volunteers come from the most diverse groups in our society and their motivations can be very different and highly complex. Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, a more global transition appears is taking place. In present-day society, two distinct types of volunteering can be outlined, i.e. ‘classical’ (‘simple-modern’) and ‘new’ (‘late-modern’) volunteer action. Rommel, Opdebeeck and Lammertyn (1997) have integrated the supposed differences into a volunteer typology. It is an

ideal typical description: real volunteer action will correspond more to one constructed type than to another, but will not fully coincide with the theoretical structure. This typology therefore is best approached as a (multi-dimensional) continuum between two extreme poles of hypothetical styles^{vii}.

In the following paragraphs, both ideal types will be elaborated according to different sub-themes. They will be compared according to the following categories: culture, choice of organization, choice of action field and activity, the length and frequency of the commitment and the relationship with the beneficiary (according to Rommel, Opdebeeck and Lammertyn, 1997: 50-55). Whereas the commitment of the classical volunteer is coherent and stable, the new type of involvement has become rather unpredictable, fragmented and changeable. The organization can no longer prescribe an appropriate commitment because the new volunteer wants to decide freely what kind of commitment he or she undertakes. Throughout the discussion of the different style dimensions, we will give some illustrations that were collected in our field research. A qualitative exploration of new styles of volunteering has been carried out among youth volunteers within a Flemish volunteer organization^{viii}.

4.1. The culture of the volunteers

The culture of the classical volunteer is strongly linked to social class, gender, religion or local community. These features are the undeniable providers of collective identities and fixed patterns of behavior. These traditional modes of thought and conduct also penetrate the field of volunteer action.

Within the group of new volunteers, such a strong identification with these fixed cultural frameworks can scarcely be found. The individualization process leads to a generalized freedom of choice in all spheres of life, consequently including the sector of volunteer work. Personal preferences and interests have come to dictate whether an individual becomes involved as well as in which kind of work. If new volunteers consider all possible options consciously before choosing one particular kind of voluntary work, a 'reflexive consciousness' is present. Whereas the classical volunteer is subordinated to a coordinating ideological system, the new volunteer embraces a post-materialistic value pattern. This is in accordance with Inglehart's research results (1990). Inglehart states that post-war generations are significantly more likely to support post-materialistic values such as solidarity, self-development, democracy, participation, freedom, the environment, et cetera, than older cohorts.

Volunteering can be considered as a significant driving force for the process of individualization (Hustinx, 1998). Volunteering is embedded in a more general development towards an individualized consciousness. On the one hand, the normal biographical course is losing significance through new volunteer experiences. The volunteer is stimulated to reflect on the personal way of life. The sphere of volunteerism strongly contrasts with more

commercial and materialistic lifestyles. Volunteer work offers new perspectives, it broadens the life horizons of volunteers. While performing diverse volunteer activities, volunteers very often realize that their own ways of thinking, perceiving and living have changed. Through their volunteering, volunteers are growing towards a more conscious way of dealing with their personal 'do-it-yourself biography'. This demonstrates that volunteering stimulates a certain degree of 'reflexive consciousness': it means that volunteers are designing their lives in a more conscious and active way. Through volunteering, the process of becoming more individualized is thus accelerated.

"Yes indeed, on those work camps I also learned a lot about myself, about my personality and things like that. Really... The fact that you have to get there on your own. The language, 'cause if you're on your own, you have to express yourself in another language. I think that's very important for who you are and for your personality. (...) You know, when you come back from your first work camp, it's like 'I want to live like that too, that's just fabulous'. And then you start looking around a bit. I've made certain choices in my own life too. Like where to buy my food for example. I try to buy as many fair, biological products as possible. (...) Just because, if you didn't do it, you wouldn't have the first idea about other ways of living. And just by taking part in a work camp, even if it's only for two or three weeks, you get a picture of how those people live. And then you start reflecting about your own life here. And yes, of course, it had a very strong effect on me."

On the other hand, young people use volunteer experiences to curb the risky nature of their life choices. Volunteering is an opportunity for reducing the 'risk element' of the 'self-made biography'. While volunteering, people can try out important life choices before putting them into practice in 'real life'. Volunteering increases the degree of certainty about significant decisions to be made (although it is no guarantee for a 'right' choice). If, in the actual stage of modernization, the risky nature of contemporary life is still to be enhanced, we can expect this experimenting opportunity to become a very important motivation.

"But in the future too, I want to lead projects abroad, like with 'Peace Islands'^{ix} for example, and I think this is a very good start, a way of testing things out now. (...) By leading that work camp, I get the feeling that later on, I also want to be involved in various projects and the coordinating thing in particular. And coaching a work camp is a very good start. It's like, if you get the feeling that it's within your capabilities, because it's still a very easy thing, this kind of work camp. (...) In a way, I'm also using VIA. Being confronted with my own limits, and being able to see if I will actually be able to do what I would like to do in the future."

4.2. The choice of organization

Classical volunteers choose a volunteer organization according to cultural traditions to which they belong. Their commitment is generally associated with religious and ideological beliefs. A catholic woman is involved in church-related activities, her husband is an active member of the catholic workers, the children of a socialist couple are involved in the 'Red Falcons', et cetera. This type of person displays great loyalty towards the organization. This can be

explained by a strong identification and cultural affinity with this particular organization. On the basis of this cultural connection, classical volunteers accept a hierarchical structure in which they are represented by leaders who make independent decisions. Power is delegated. Prototypes of organizations in which classical volunteers can be found are the well-established associations within the 'pillars' (the traditional socio-political divisions). These 'clubs' are integrated into a solid structure which occupies an entire societal field. Hence, these volunteers are mostly member of different organizations within the same 'pillar'. They are deeply rooted within the 'pillar-bound' segment of the volunteer sector.

The traditionally existing organizational settings have little appeal for new volunteers. These volunteers no longer identify with the organization for which they volunteer. Instead, they prefer loose networks and are rather loyal to a concrete cause. Personal interests determine which organization the volunteer will choose. If these interests change, the choice of organization will change too. It is a rather contradictory situation of 'detached attachment', a conditional and occasional commitment. The new volunteers demand basic democracy rather than tolerating delegated and uncontrolled leadership. "A lot of volunteers like to discuss their work. They like to have a say in the matters in which they are involved" (Verstraete, 1996: 49). For this reason, they prefer organizations with a decentralized structure. They avoid being bound by bureaucratic organizational structures. The currently individualizing environment increasingly puts pressure on volunteer organizations. Rather than ideological affiliation, the activities offered will be a decisive factor in choosing an appropriate organization. Being a volunteer increasingly resembles being a 'customer' (Verstraete, 1996: 50). New volunteers dare asking for a 'made-to-measure commitment'. If the activities offered by a particular organization do not have a strong attraction for new volunteers, they will not hesitate to go 'shopping' elsewhere.

R (2.3.): "First of all the work, the fact that you really know why you're working. That's also the big difference with the 'Building Order' ^x. There, you just have to restore a church, most of the time it's very Catholic too. But with VIA, you get to know precisely what you're doing, why you're doing it, what kind of organization you're working with. You know the viewpoints of VIA very well, you can find them in every publication, and you really have to subscribe to them, I think. And there's not one statement by VIA that irritates me."

4.3. Choice of field of activity and target group

The field of activity in which classical volunteers are involved is again connected to traditional socio-economic, political and religious codes. The traditional gender roles, for example, are transferred to volunteer sectors in which the idea of 'maternal care' is also of central importance: women are much more likely to be involved in caring tasks than men. Believers are committed within the church community, workers choose volunteering within the trade-union. According to Voyé (1995: 325) traditional volunteerism is embedded in the idea of the universalization of a particular culture and way of living (the idea of the 'good

mother' or the 'good worker', the image of the 'model family'). "Le bénévolat reposait sur des identités fortes, globales et fières, telles celles de l'appartenance au christianisme, à la bourgeoisie ou à la classe ouvrière, qui supposaient l'existence de standards nouveaux emblématiques." These strong identities form a guiding principle for choosing an action field: identification with the beneficiary is based on 'inclusion' ("Nous sommes tous frères en Jésus-Christ") or 'exclusion' ("Il a été mal éduqué", "Il est handicapé").

New volunteer action no longer benefits target groups 'sheltering' under collective identities. Voyé (1995: 325-329) explains this transition as an "universalisation des particularismes". Collective identities are fragmenting and are replaced by a new commonality: that of various identical (problematical) situations and uncertainties. The 'we' with whom one identifies is constructed on the basis of daily experiences of 'similarity', 'resemblance' or 'sameness'. A restructuring of social relationships around these different 'we'-groups takes place. These new social configurations completely cutting through traditional identities are an appropriate basis for new solidarity networks and action fields. A good example can be found in AIDS assistance (Willems, 1993: 13). Volunteers ('buddies') often are homosexual men. Solidarity and emotional involvement, frequently through confrontation with AIDS within the personal social circle, are the main motives for undertaking this kind of volunteer activity. Nevertheless, these new modes of 'inclusion' are of a very precarious nature. The field of activity or the volunteer's target group can change abruptly as a result of new, striking similarities between life stories.

"'Cause in the end, the work is just a means, a mean of bringing a group of people together. I think a 'work' camp is the wrong name. It's not exactly a 'work' camp. I would rather call it a 'living place'. And the work is just a means."

Beyond the traditional solidarity networks, interaction between 'local' and 'global' citizens is intensifying (Renooy, 1996: 78-80; Petrella, 1994: 33-38). Local action and participation go hand in hand with global challenges and universal solidarity beyond all social differences. 'Think globally, act locally'. Consequently, new volunteers do not get involved for the sake of abstract values. They choose (or reject) their action field according to its concrete and practical nature. They avoid work which is too vague or too long-lasting. "People are committed to a cause and not to some kind of ideal. The concrete is of overriding importance" (Verstraete, 1996: 45). Idealistic aims are replaced with more tangible goals. In the case of the student movement, very personal commitments from one student towards another student are far more successful than the traditional collective action in favor of the general student population. In a late-modern context, individual ('personalized') commitments seem to be the most preferable formula: "Many students still want to get involved if this involvement is based on clear-cut, concrete engagements and not appeals to a vague ideological understanding" (De Vuyst, 1995: 16).

“Greenpeace is a real world-wide organization that tackles world-wide matters. VIA is a world-wide organization with a world-wide objective, that works very locally. Those work camps are the ideal way of working locally, it’s almost impossible to get more local than that. And that’s what I really like about it.”

The new volunteer is also guided by the media. This sensitivity to topical matters and ‘cyclical problems’ contributes to the transitory nature of current volunteerism. The various social problems have to compete for public attention and the goodwill of volunteers. At present, ‘hot issues’ such as ‘buddy projects’ for AIDS patients or palliative care are far more popular than rather ‘trivial’ volunteer action benefiting the elderly, the sick or people with a disability. ‘Trendy’ volunteerism, however, is of a very transient nature. The appeal of given fields of activity can disappear as quickly as it arose.

4.4. Choice of activities

The content of classical volunteer activities is again inspired by traditional role patterns. Women and church-going people often perform assisting, facilitating tasks; men are involved in management and executive functions. In addition, organization’s survival plays an important role. This type of volunteer is very dedicated to organization’s main goals: volunteer activities have to be profitable for the organization itself. The set of tasks is compiled in favor of organization’s needs.

When choosing a task, new volunteers will look for a balance between the functional needs of the organization on the one hand and their personal desires and points of view on the other hand. This is a consequence of the supposed post-materialistic attitude of new volunteers: solidarity is valued as important as self-development. Besides this solidarity dimension, volunteer work always has to offer possibilities for further developing the volunteer’s personality. Therefore, new volunteers demand a high degree of participation in outlining the set of tasks. The volunteer activities have to be in accordance with the personal interests and capacities and they must enable a volunteer’s personal creativity and autonomy. As a result, some speak of a ‘cost/benefit’ analysis (Breda & Goyvaerts, 1996: 5, Verstraete, 1996: 49). Personal benefits such as self-realization, social contacts, work experience and personal interests influence the kind of volunteer activities. Present-day volunteers calculate before choosing a particular task. Finally, new volunteers like to do something different each time, they like to experiment. In order to have as many different experiences as possible and to develop themselves in as many ways as possible, new volunteers turn broad range of activities offered by volunteer organizations to their own advantage.

“And I’ve always clearly chosen work camps that greatly interest me. Don’t ask me, for example, to work in a home for people with a mental disability for three weeks, ‘cause that’s not my thing. It always has to involve subjects such as the third world, ecology, peace, anti-racism, etc.”

4.5. Duration and frequency of the volunteer commitment

Classical volunteers are involved for a very long period. These volunteers are truly committed for life to one particular organization. They volunteer for an indefinite period, their commitment is unconditional. They volunteer on a regular basis.

New volunteers are more likely to choose various successive short-term, clearly limited commitments which are free from obligations and can easily be terminated. Trendy issues, personal interests and everyday 'we' feelings cause a continuing shift in activities and organizations. If a volunteer no longer receives something back from volunteering, he or she will terminate the volunteer commitment. New volunteers demand more flexibility and want to keep some distance towards the volunteer organization. It is no longer possible or desirable to take up a demanding commitment nor to become a 'member for life'. "People are still prepared to be active, but do not want to be exclusively absorbed into one commitment within one organization for years" (Verstraete, 1996: 50). For this reason, new volunteers are attracted to projects and assignments which are clearly limited in time and space. Hence, they can change their focus of action frequently.

Nevertheless, the transition towards a new type of volunteer who is merely interested in short-term, loose commitments is currently rather a matter of discussion than an everyday reality in the volunteer behavior. The vast majority of volunteers still consider more intensive forms of commitment. Their short-lived action does not result from an explicit preference, but is an inevitable consequence of a set of identifiable external factors: lack of time, information, gatekeepers, peer group pressure, practical limitations, unsatisfactory volunteer activities, ... (Gaskin, 1996; Hustinx, 1998). By interpreting the individualization thesis in a straightforward way, one risks subjecting (individualized) social behavior to a 'dogma of conscious choices' (Hustinx, 1998). This can lead to incorrect diagnoses. Even volunteers with a 'firm' commitment, do not show a marked preference for this more active form of membership. Instead, their volunteer biography follows the scenario of a gradual socialization into the organization and a spontaneous growth into a more demanding form of commitment. The intensity progressively increases in a very natural way. The volunteer work has become part of the life of these volunteers without them noticing. They consider it more a 'lifestyle' than a 'demanding commitment'. It would be unfair to exclude these 'passionate' volunteers from the 'new' ones, just because their volunteerism has a long-lasting and frequent nature. After all, this 'outward appearance' cannot be understood directly on the basis of inner preferences.

"Yes, it has become a matter of course. (...) After a while, you have your own work to do and you just come and do it, yes, sometimes I just don't realize anymore that my tasks are self-imposed. Okay, you're doing it out of your own free will, but you just have your tasks to take care of and things you know you're responsible for. And you just do it. It's just part of your life. Maybe it sounds silly, but it's already totally integrated into my living pattern so I also carry more responsibility for it. So I can't

say that I really think like 'I'm volunteering'. It's really my... I don't know, you could call it a hobby, that's silly, isn't it?"

4.6. Relationship with the beneficiary

The classical volunteer acts according to the ideology of the organization. Classical volunteerism is embedded in a selfless, self-sacrificing, self-denying sphere. The relationship with the beneficiary is one-sided: the volunteer does not ask for anything in return for his or her devotion.

The new volunteer combines 'being there for others' with a personal search for identity and sense-giving. Solidarity and self-fulfillment are not mutually exclusive in a post-materialistic value pattern. Current volunteering has become a matter of giving and receiving (Verstraete, 1996: 45). The relationship between a new volunteer and a beneficiary is of a reciprocal nature. The volunteer is devoted to a person in need, but expects something in return. This shift requires a rethinking of the traditional contrast between egoism and altruism in terms of a continuum (Page, 1996: 14-15) and of the traditional 'marriage' between altruism and volunteer work. Volunteers are not 'born altruists'. In principle, they can adopt any position on the continuum between the extreme poles of pure altruism and pure egoism. This has already been discussed in the previous paragraph. Under the banner of individualization, individuals have to carry the 'yoke of (forced) reflexive identity and biography construction' while volunteering. If this search for existential answers is extending to the field of volunteer action, volunteering will increasingly fulfil a fundamentally new function. A paradigm shift is consequently necessary: personal benefits for the volunteers no longer have to be a taboo, but have to be fostered carefully. Reciprocity has become a 'conditio sine qua non'.

"You never volunteer for free. It's a kind of win-win relationship. 'Cause a lot of people think it's very generous, but I also get a great deal out of it for myself. You get some experience, you can put it on your CV, etc.."

4.7. *Styles of volunteering: a typology*

The above features of classical and new volunteerism will now be integrated into a typology of styles.

	CLASSICAL VOLUNTEERISM	NEW VOLUNTEERISM
CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional cultural identification schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualization: growth into a more individualized and reflexive consciousness • Volunteering as a ‘field of practice’: decrease in hazardous freedom of choice • Post-materialism: interaction between solidarity and self-development
CHOICE OF ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional cultural identification • Great loyalty • Delegated leadership • Solid structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interest • Individualized cultural identification • Weak ties (unattached) • Basis democracy • Loose networks
CHOICE OF FIELD OF ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional cultural identification • Inclusion and exclusion • Abstract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New commonality • Dialectic between local and global • Concrete • Following topical matters
CHOICE OF ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional cultural identification • Organization’s needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance between personal point of view and the organization’s needs • ‘Cost/benefit’ analysis • Variety (product diversification)
CONTINUITY (DURATION) OF COMMITMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term (unlimited in time) • Regular • Unconditional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term (clearly limited in time) • Irregular, erratic • Conditional
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BENEFICIARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unilateral, ‘altruistic’, ‘selfless’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocal: win-win relationship

* This outline is adapted from the analytical framework designed by Rommel, Opdebeeck and Lammertyn (1997: 55)

5. *Conclusion*

Approaching the field of volunteer action from the perspective of reflexive modernization (radical transformations in the fields of economy, primary relationships and culture) is a worthwhile and challenging theoretical option. It opens new perspectives and opportunities for a profound understanding of contemporary volunteering.

The schematic elaboration of the two ideal typical styles of volunteerism is assumed to be a good instrument for interpreting (qualitatively and quantitatively) this particular form of

social action. By providing the typology of a continuum between two extreme prototypes and by treating different dimensions separately, the different scales leave room for personalized commitment. This reduces the risk of falling into dogmatic classifications.

At first sight, there is nothing new about the current style of volunteering. For instance, the traditional religious discourse about volunteering as an altruistic, self-sacrificial activity has become an unrealistic and old-fashioned ideal since decades. Altruism is merely a rhetoric within religious/catholic traditions since long. It no longer corresponds with reality. Even classical volunteers no longer wish to be a 'martyr'. With respect to the duration of the commitment, even today, it still is a widespread practice among volunteers to develop a long-term, continuous and demanding commitment. Classical as well as new volunteers can take their commitment very serious. 'Erratic' or discontinuous volunteering is rather a result of the late-modern risk-biography than of an explicit inner preference. Although the content of a lot of volunteer activities is clearly not new and it is often hard to distinguish between traditional and new volunteers, a fundamental difference has occurred between volunteering today and in previous times. Volunteering has changed radically through the cultural process of individualization. Individualization does not announce a condition of complete egoism or individualism (as often suggested in literature on new volunteering), but the process causes a shift in the source of determination: an individual can increasingly decide freely about his or her life. Biography and identity are decreasingly imposed by tradition, but are becoming fully dependent of individual decisions (autonomous forms of biography and identity constitution)^{xi}.

Furthermore, changing economic and affective bonds impose 'late-modern' conditions (and constraints) which are clearly different from traditional preconditions. Today's volunteers operate within a late-modern context, different from the social environment of traditional volunteers. Volunteering is no longer part of the standard biography of people, but of the 'do-it-yourself biography' (e.g. church volunteering: following a family tradition or making a conscious choice for this type of activity?).

The 'new' style does not necessarily refer to different behavior but to changing (socio-economic and cultural) preconditions. The current (popular) debate on new volunteers however has an explicit normative component. The traditional volunteering of the past is being idealized, whereas the present-day new volunteering is being cursed. This has resulted in two volunteer caricatures. Consequently, volunteers are classified as either 'good' (classical) or 'bad' (new). But present-day volunteering is always a combination of classical and new characteristics. This 'in between' volunteer condition can be conceptualized as the 'reflexive volunteer'. The term 'reflexive volunteering' points at the capability of contemporary volunteers to construct their own ('individualized') style of volunteering. Further research has to point out in which way 'reflexive volunteering' constitutes a class of its own. The challenge of this theory building is to map these 'reflexive combinations of

classical and new features' in an unprejudiced, neutral way. It has to be grounded in an objective interaction between theoretical considerations and empirical findings.

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ⁱⁱ Belgium is divided in three regions. The Dutch region is called Flanders, the French region is named Wallonia. Brussels region is bilingual.

ⁱⁱⁱ This typology will be discussed in detail under § 4: ‘Rethinking volunteering’.

^{iv} In the Dutch literature, volunteer work is defined as “Work for other people, organizations or society as a whole which is done in an unpaid, non-compulsory way and within an organizational context” (Van Daal, 1990: 7). Following this definition, volunteer work has to take place without compulsion and without cash benefits. More important, in the traditional paradigm, the ‘self-less’ or ‘altruistic’ nature of volunteering is cherished as an essential feature. This implies that the action is externally oriented and takes place on a totally unselfish basis. From the perspective of new styles of volunteering, this idea has become a relic from the charitable previous history of volunteer work. Present-day volunteering has liberated itself from the classical requirement of self-denial, it is shaking off its traditional altruistic straitjacket.

Cnaan, Handy & Wadworth (1996) offer a more differentiated approach to assessing volunteer activities. They distinguish four key dimensions, which are constituted by continuums from the broadest to the purest definition of volunteering. These key dimensions are: (1) free choice (from free will to obligation to volunteer), (2) the nature of the remuneration (from no remuneration at all to low pay), (3) the structure or context under which the volunteer activity is performed (from formal to informal) and (4) the intended beneficiaries (from helping others to benefiting oneself). Although people are more inclined to define someone as a volunteer who meets the strict criteria of the pure definition (free will, no remuneration, a formal context and no personal benefits), the wider-ranging criteria of broader definitions can be integrated in the conceptual framework as well. In this paper, it will become clear that a more flexible approach to volunteering is preferable with respect to the emergence of new styles of volunteering.

^v One speaks about a ‘postindustrial society’ (Bell, 1973), an ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ society, a ‘post-traditional’, a ‘postmodern’ society (Bauman, 1996), a ‘late’ or ‘high modern’ society (Giddens, 1990, 1994), a ‘network’ society (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998), a ‘postfordist’ society (Rifkin, 1995; Gorz, 1997), an ‘Erlebnisgesellschaft’ (Schultze, 1993), a ‘Multioptiongesellschaft’ (Gross, 1994), a ‘post-labor-capital accord’ society (Rubin, 1996). Our society is characterized by an ‘extended liberal modernity’ that is replacing the preceding ‘organized modernity’ (Wagner, 1994) or by a ‘reflexive’ or a second modernity that contrasts with a ‘simple’ or first modernity (Beck, 1986, 1992, 1997b).

^{vi} The notion of ‘reflexivity’ is interpreted differently by Giddens and by Beck. Beck uses the concept to indicate the quasi-autonomous nature of modernization. The ‘factors’ of progress lead unconsciously and unnoticed to self-destruction. This mechanism is an inherent part of modern society and is independent of potential conscious reflections on the level of the ‘actors’. In this way, however, Beck ignores the fact that a transforming modernity does not automatically go hand in hand with a modernized consciousness. Whether the traditional habits and concepts sustain or lose strength also depends on the choices of the individual actors. Hence, reflexive modernization also (partly) consists of a conscious process. Therefore, Giddens’ view on the notion of ‘reflexivity’ is an important supplementary interpretation to the ‘factor’-approach used by Beck. “First there is *structural* reflexivity in which agency, set free from the constraints of social structure, then reflects on the ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ of such structure; reflects on agency’s social conditions of existence. Second there is *self*-reflexivity in which the actor reflects on itself. In self-reflexivity previous heteronomous monitoring of agents is displaced by self-monitoring” (Lash, 1994: 115-116).

^{vii} The notions ‘classical’ and ‘new’ are inspired by the social movements that arose from 1965 onwards (Rommel et al, 1997). These movements are ‘new’, while the social movements that already existed before are referred to as ‘classical’ movements. These seem to be the most neutral terms, also making a distinction between a type of volunteer who already existed before the nineteen sixties and the new type that appeared around this period. As a result of his study of new social movements, Walgrave (1992: 83) notices that the recent character is merely a descriptive feature and not a demarcation standard or a substantial definition. The extension of the literature outlined above, concerning new social movements (here mainly Walgrave, 1992), to voluntary work in general, can be based on the civil society perspective (e.g. Dekker, 1994). Both are integrated into civil society; we can thus suppose that they both undergo the same influences from recent social developments. They are both essential parts of the same mechanism of voluntary association. Transitions within social movements can therefore be (carefully) linked to transformations in voluntary activities.

^{viii} We have carried out a more qualitative exploration of the new style of volunteering within VIA (Voluntary International Action – a voluntary organization which has its headquarters in Antwerp and which focuses on youth volunteering). We focused on a ‘new’ voluntary organization, which was relatively small and had a flat, decentralized structure. We assumed that this kind of ‘new’ social movement would enable ‘new styles of commitment’. The freedom and flexibility that comes with this smallness enhances new styles of commitment.

We carried out extensive qualitative interviewing with 20 active volunteers (selected on the basis of the intensity of their commitment: from very sporadic to very frequent). However, the scope of the empirical investigation was rather limited and therefore not sufficient to ‘prove’ the theoretical hypotheses. Consequently, we will use some empirical observations as a further explanation of our theoretical perspective (printed in *Italic*).

^{ix} ‘Peace Islands’ is a non-governmental organization that is involved in projects in developing countries.

^x The ‘Builing Order’ also organizes international work camps for young volunteers and can be considered as the Flemish and Catholic counterpart of VIA.

^{xi} We even can consider this evolution as a radicalization of the voluntary nature of volunteering: it is a matter of free will in the broadest sense of the word!