

The Paradox of Spontaneous Volunteering in High Hazard Environments: Lessons from Winter Flood Episodes in England

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This Presentation is about Spontaneous Volunteers



- Spontaneous volunteers (SVs) are also called 'convergent' or 'unaffiliated' volunteers
- Individuals who, without extensive preparation, want to provide unpaid help and support at the time of an unplanned event, although they are not affiliated with the formal or 'official' organisations (third sector or governmental) responding to that event.
- They do not have specific training for responding to the situation in which they present themselves; and they may or may not have relevant specialist expertise
- Eg: people arriving with their own small boats to aid flood victims, and people presenting themselves to TSOs to give blood to help emergency victims.

Today We Will



- Share our developing ideas about the **paradox** of spontaneous volunteering – work in progress for an academic paper
- Present some of the findings from our research study (for which Duncan was PI)
- Share with you the strategies we identified for those who co-ordinate SVs and which underpins our thinking about the SV paradox

We focus in our developing *paper* on the **paradox** of spontaneous volunteers

- In emergency and disaster situations, there is often a need for personnel and other resources additional to those that can be provided by official responders (ORs) such as local and national governmental agencies, firefighters and rescue TSOs
- So SVs are apparently needed; they want to help; and there is encouragement from some quarters (politicians, media, community leaders) for them to do so.
- *Yet, paradoxically, there are also numerous pressures for them not to be involved or to be excluded.*
- ORs may not have the time or personnel to check the expertise of spontaneous potential helpers, to allocate tasks to them, to manage and supervise them, or to coordinate them.
- Especially in 'high hazard environments' (like floods) ORs may also wish to minimise health and safety risks to emergency victims and their own personnel.
- We refer to this as the **involvement/exclusion paradox of SVs**

We address the SV paradox in our developing paper

- Drawing on The English Winter Floods Response Study (WFRS)
- WFRS aimed to describe and analyse the issues surrounding SV by exploring the perspectives of spontaneous volunteers themselves as well as those who manage flood responses.



Literature Review for Paper

Looks at research and policy guidance relating to SV including:

- Spontaneous/convergent/unaffiliated volunteering
- Community and citizenship literatures
- Disasters, emergencies and crises

Research Approach of Study

- Interpretive approach looking at perspectives of spontaneous volunteers, representatives of voluntary organisations involved in the official response, and people who may manage SVs such as ‘official’ emergency responders
- Data analysed using cognitive mapping (similar to computer assisted mind mapping) and noting verbatim quotes
- The developing paper draws on some of the WFRS findings; from semi-structured interviews with 50 people of whom 13 were SVs and remainder were ‘official responders’

Findings Presented in Paper

Three broad themes

1. SVs in flood situations
2. Challenges of managing SVs
3. The scope for increasing SV involvement in flood situations

Findings -SVs in Flood Situations (1)

Motives and Aims

- Empathy

“I felt so awful with it being Christmas and everything; just thought that would be really, really horrible if it happened to us ...”

- Community commitment

“I wanted to put something back in the community”

- Normalisation

“just to try and make it as easy as possible to get the stuff out and then start rebuilding”

- Filling gaps left by official services and being more resilient

“If there are going to be problems with flooding in the future, which there are bound to be, that people are more resilient, more self-prepared, more aware ..”

Findings - SVs in Flood Situations (2)

Responses to SVs by ORs

- Varies between and within flood situations

“a lottery”

- Rapid absorption of known individuals

“... they were recognised people within the community who had particular roles with the community”.

- Examples of deflection away from area
- Involvement in low risk/unskilled tasks
- OR preference for SV involvement at recovery phase

“Drying out the homes, getting rid of their sodden furniture and alternative accommodation for themselves or their pets, all that kind of work.”

Findings – Management Challenges (1)

ORs' perspectives

- Risks to SVs themselves

“because if they do just get on and do it we’ll end up with more bodies to rescue”

- Risk of reputational damage

“... because if people turn up and then you’re doing nothing with them ... they’re going to get grumpy, they’re going to tweet about it ... then you’re managing a media problem ..”

- Risk of SV over-confidence

“We want volunteers to feel they are ...doing something worthwhile .. but we don’t want them to overstep the mark, to feel they can undertake more than their role actually allows them to do.”

- Communication with self-organising schismatic groupings

...continued



Findings – Management Challenges (2)

ORs' perspectives

- Lack of management resources or authority

“there was an inability to control them so we let them move the sand to keep them busy”.

- Lack of clarity about responsibility and accountability for management of SVs
- Dilemmas about rejection and freelancing

“If we turn someone away and they really do want to help, the likelihood is they are going to freelance and that is the last thing we want them doing”.

- Matching skills to tasks

“We were concerned about pressure of resources locally and how best people’s skills and experience that they had to offer could be used and matched.”



Findings – Management Challenges (3)

SVs' perspectives

- Some SVs happy to be incorporated into the broader or official flood response and managed accordingly
- Some SVs resentful about being given unskilled or uninteresting tasks.
- 'Tensions' between SVs and official volunteers deployed by local voluntary organisations.
- Close supervision by OR managers made SVs feel untrusted and not useful
- Rejection of being formalised or incorporated into the official flood response:

"I would actually rather be a volunteer rather than an official kind of thing because then nobody can say to me 'oh, you've broken our rules'"

Findings – Increasing the Scope for SV involvement? (1)

- ORs recognise USP of local SVs (knowledge, networks, resources)

“We could do a lot more with using people’s local knowledge of their neighbours and checking in on each other”

- Anticipate arrival of SVs when drawing up local emergency plans and prepare resources/training/equipment

“try and get ahead of the volunteers and give them something to volunteer for”.

- Hubs/clearing houses for SVs

“ ... provide them with venues to come to so that that hub becomes the visible rendezvous point that [SVs] recognise”

- Filter – use social and other media to call for specific skills/resources

Eg “ ... if you want to bring a boat, the sort of boat we need would be ...”.

Findings – Increasing the Scope for SV involvement? (2)

- ‘Convert’ SVs into regular volunteers under the auspices and control of the emergency services or formal voluntary organisations
- Pre-trained and checked ‘disaster volunteers’ (advocated by both ORs and SVs)

“...[we need a group of] people that are local to the areas, that know the buildings and they know the town, know people in the Council and they would be able to converge together ...” [SV]

- National and local guidelines for ORs

“to put some boundaries around expectations on volunteers [SVs] and expectations on organisations that need to work with [spontaneous] volunteers.”

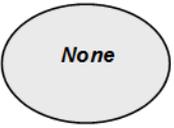
- Address the conundrums explicitly

“...they’re so important and so vital that we have to ... put in a lot of effort between events ... we cannot expect things to happen swimmingly.”

Our Study Report Strategies and Impact

1. General aspects for working with SVs

- **Build awareness in the response community of why SVs emerge**
 - Their motivation: survivor’s guilt, the returnees, the anxious, the curious, the supporters
 - Their aim: to help, build community spirit, make friends, fill unmet demand
 - Minority are exploiters motivated by private gain
- **Define the acceptable level of risk for SVs, how to measure that risk and how to reduce risk**
 - RISK is a major issue
 - What to protect: reputation, victims, SVs, rescuers
 - How to minimise risk: send SVs home, education, classify tasks, provide PPE, daylight working, management support, match SV to task
- **Clarify issues for emergency responders**
 - Are SVs insured? Who is liable? Who has responsibility?

	Official, trained operators	Unofficial, untrained operators
Hazardous operations	 <p><i>Emergency responders & partners</i></p>	 <p><i>None</i></p>
Non-hazardous operations	 <p><i>Voluntary sector partners</i></p>	 <p><i>Spontaneous volunteers</i></p>

2. Establishing partner responsibilities



- **Task an organisation to manage and coordinate SVs for the partnership.**
 - May decide that SVs are not desired, but SVs will come anyway so...
 - Someone should take responsibility, plan, establish a process, etc
- **Define the principles for recruiting SVs.**
 - Consider if, when and how SVs form part of a multi-faceted response/recovery
 - Principles should inform a plan:
 - Appropriate tasks? (e.g. physicality of the task, low-skilled tasks, at the frontline)
 - Organise SVs?
 - Using SVs' local knowledge, networks and social capital
 - Establish credentials for specialist skills?
 - Decline SV offers of help?
 - Consequences of SVs free-lancing?
 - OV for specialist skills are required or for higher risk tasks



REGISTER 1. Signup 2. Update profile

Things to know about registering with Emergency Volunteering CREW:

- This service matches volunteers with disaster and emergency management agencies (Organisations* - including all levels of government, well known charitable organisations and community groups)
- Responding to an emergency is complex and requires a high level of coordination
- By far the biggest need for volunteers occurs in the recovery period - in the weeks, months and years following a disaster
- Emergency Volunteering CREW refers potential volunteers like you to Organisations when they request volunteer support
- The Organisation then coordinates the volunteer opportunity, which can require varying levels of skills and experience, and flexibility in terms of location and availability
- Organisations provide orientation for each opportunity, and some have the capacity to provide training relevant to emergency response and recovery
- Emergency Volunteering CREW is an initiative of Volunteering Qld

3. Establish a strategy to work with SVs



- **Define the type of relationship that emergency responders should have with SVs and how this will affect how they work together**

- Working independently of responders (high risk, poor communication, low visibility)
- Working in their own structure, side-by-side with responders
- Giving added resources to responders (knowledge, manpower, fill budget gaps)
- Integrated into the emergency responders management structure

- **Define the principles for monitoring the tasks done by SVs.**

- Should SVs be supervised (team leaders, buddies, signing in/out)
- Responders don't monitor SVs: non-urgent work (PR exercise); simple tasks; we knew them



- **Establish a framework to manage SVs**

- SVs want to be immediately active, not stand about waiting, else free-lancing
- Consider: what tasks, how prioritise, point of contact, briefings, registration

- **Establish a communications plan relating to SVs**

- How, when, and using what channels to communicate with SVs
- Tell SVs what to expect, bring, do, the style of leadership
- Two-way communication with SVs, including social media





- **Establish what on-going training should be given**
 - Training SVs: H&S training, contamination, simple tasks e.g. lifting, building sandbag walls
 - Training emergency responders: tasking SVs, setting good examples

- **Build resilience for future flood events by converting SVs into organised volunteers.**
 - Maintaining the current levels of higher resilience (knowledge not lost between incidents)
 - How they want SVs to support longer-term recovery, and official assistance needed
 - Converting SVs into regular volunteers

5. Share good practice



- **Develop national guidance on the use of SVs in a flood event.**
 - Majority of emergency responders thought guidance was more appropriate
 - Case studies showing positive and negative SV experiences

- **Establish a working group to develop guidance**
 - With the support of key government departments
 - Guidance that is adaptable to a local context

Impact

– UK National Committee

- Organised by Cabinet Office, chaired by CLG
- Aims to develop national guidance



Cabinet Office



Department for
Communities and
Local Government



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

– International Standards Organization

- ISO 22319: Involving spontaneous volunteers: A guidance framework
- Japan (March 2015): Canada, France, Korea, Germany, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, ...
- First draft of international guidance



International
Organization for
Standardization



– Live exercises by Local Authorities

- A number of Local Authorities are planning exercises using our report & guidelines
- Workshops have been held with voluntary sector and other stakeholders

Thank you for listening!

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