

THE IMPACT OF LONG-TERM YOUTH VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN EUROPE

a review of published and
unpublished research studies

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The impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe: a review of published and unpublished research studies

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The impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe: a review of published and unpublished research studies. Steve Powell and Esad Bratović

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This review would not have been possible without the assistance of the many voluntary service organisations who responded to our request for evidence of the impact of voluntary service.

AVSO, The Association of Voluntary Service Organisations, is an international non-governmental organisation, forming a European platform of non-profit organisations offering opportunities of full-time international and/or national voluntary service.

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Name	Explanation
■ AVSO	The Association of Voluntary Service Organisations	The commissioners of this review.
■ FSJ	Voluntary Social Year	A youth voluntary service program supported by the German government
■ FÖJ	Voluntary Ecological Year	A youth voluntary service program supported by the German government
■ CSD	Center for Social Development	Part of the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis; and the major donor for this review. See page 9.
■ EU27	The 27 countries of the European Union	as of 01.01.2007
■ EVS	European Voluntary Service	The pan-European voluntary service program funded by the European Commission
■ IVR	Institute for Volunteering Research	Produced an impact assessment toolkit, which is partially adopted in this report

List of terms and concepts

	Name	Explanation
	National Agencies of the EVS	The Agencies in each EU Member State responsible for organising EVS
	Hosting organisation	Particularly in EVS, the organisation responsible for receiving volunteers
	Sending organisation	Particularly in EVS, the organisation responsible for sending volunteers
	Coordinating organisation	Matches sending and hosting organisations and deals with the administration EVS
	Service volunteer	A volunteer on a voluntary service program
	International service	Service in which the volunteer goes to another country to volunteer
	Transnational service	Service in which the volunteer also serves in their home country (McBride, Lombe et al. 2003 p. 18)

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1 Executive summary

This review aims to investigate whether there is evidence that long-term youth voluntary service in Europe has significant impact on volunteers, beneficiaries, organisations and society as a whole, and if so, what kind of impact.

The review is based on a categorisation and analysis of existing documents related to the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe.

The document search, detailed in an appendix, was based on a web search, a search of specialist databases, and a mail-out to voluntary service organisations and the 32 National Agencies for EVS. This search resulted in around 300 documents, of which 270 were initially classified as possibly relevant. Forty were finally classified as directly relevant (i.e. are studies on the impact of youth long-term voluntary service in Europe) and are analysed in the findings chapter.

The most important conclusion overall can be summed up as follows: **you get the impact you program for.**

This means that voluntary service *regularly* produces those kinds of impact for which voluntary service due to its very nature provides the input: personal growth, independence, and career orientation. The preconditions for these impacts – living away from home, taking on a difficult task out of one's accustomed context, and so on – are provided in just about all voluntary service placements. International voluntary service can often contribute to a basic sense of European identity.

In addition there is a whole collection of additional areas which voluntary service can impact *given the right kind of service, placements, pre-departure training and mentorship*. Examples from the area of social capital are:

- Social & communication skills and teamwork; networking; sense of belonging
- Active citizenship / civic values / social activism
- Tolerance / intercultural competence / bridging social capital
- A richer European identity; positive attitudes to Europe / EU
- Intention to continue to volunteer
- Improved discipline; decreased criminal and risk-taking behaviour

One piece of very good news is that everyone benefits from voluntary service equally: there are no major differences between impact according to socioeconomic categories of volunteers.

However, social groups are represented unequally in voluntary service. Service volunteers are most commonly female (whereas non-service volunteers in formal settings are slightly more likely to be male). Lower socio-economic background is a big barrier to volunteering and voluntary service.

Youth voluntary service has the potential to increase tolerance, active citizenship and a sense of being European. However, profound change in these areas requires additional and specific program elements.

Voluntary service probably has more impact on volunteers when they are given more freedom to influence the conditions and content of their service.

The stakeholder group for which there is the most evidence that youth voluntary service has a positive impact is the volunteers themselves. There is little direct evidence of impact on others or on communities or societies as a whole. However there are some encouraging indications that

voluntary service can positively impact understanding between regions and has the potential to contribute towards the integration of less advantaged young people.

Economic analyses are a promising way to get a feeling for the size of the impact which voluntary service can have. Preliminary analyses of EVS show that it probably does at the very least pay for itself in terms of the value of work done in relation to the cost of the program – and may produce substantial additional value.

The main methodological weakness of the studies taken together is that the vast majority are retrospective designs which are very subjective and give very weak evidence of impact. There are very few studies which use the kind of more valid designs which are standard in social science research, i.e. comparing changes amongst service volunteers with changes in non-volunteer groups, and/or comparing pre-service scores with post-service scores. This small collection of good studies is simply too modest to be able to provide really valid answers to questions about the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe. It also means that evidence for impact in the vast majority of studies is based on the highly subjective recollections of volunteers and program officers which certainly view programs through "rose-coloured spectacles."

Although the available evidence is very encouraging, the research conducted in Europe to date on the impact of voluntary service has had neither the methodological teeth nor the mandate to really test whether voluntary service works as advertised.

A range of recommendations for programming and for research are made at the end of this review, in particular:

- Stakeholders should be aware of the extraordinary impact and future potential of voluntary service as a toolbox for social change
- Voluntary service programs should be specific about the specific changes they are trying to bring about in their volunteers and beyond, and include specific, evidence-based components in their programs which are known to lead to those changes.
- Voluntary service in Europe has a tradition of crossing borders, and by doing so contributing to the intercultural development of volunteers and of communities. But the borders between EU member states are no longer challenging enough. Voluntary service should realign itself to the new hot borders: borders between the EU and states to its south and east; borders of potential and former conflict, for example in the Balkans; and borders inside states, for example inside mainstream and minority communities.
- Voluntary service needs to adopt a culture of evidence-based practice.
 - Stop wasting money on traditional evaluation approaches which provide at best anecdotal evidence of voluntary service impact
 - Develop approaches to assess the economic impact of voluntary service
 - Develop a Europe-wide impact measurement framework (questionnaires etc.) – simple, standard, freely available and widely applicable

2 Introduction

2.1 About this review

The aim of this review

This review aims to investigate whether there is evidence that long-term youth voluntary service in Europe has significant impact on volunteers, users, organisations and society as a whole, and if so, what kind of impact.

The method

The review is based on a categorisation and analysis of existing documents related to the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe.

The purpose of this review: short-term

- link voluntary service to topics of current EU policy interest
- investigate the potential value of voluntary service as a tool for social change
- make immediate policy-related recommendations
- improve recognition for volunteers and promote the image of volunteers and volunteering
- give AVSO's member organisations detailed knowledge about the value of voluntary service

The purpose of this review: long-term

- contribute to understanding of the possibilities and limitations of voluntary service
- contribute to development of related policies and programmes

This review was funded by

- CSD: Center for Social Development
- AGDF: Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden (Action Committee Service for Peace)
- The Remembrance and Future Fund, part of the "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" Foundation
- AVSO

The Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) is an international non-governmental organisation, forming a European platform of non-profit organisations offering opportunities of full-time international and/or national voluntary service. Through its member organisations AVSO represents more than 110 organisations across Europe.

AVSO aims to promote full-time, long-term voluntary service by lobbying governmental institutions and by networking with other non-governmental and public organisations. AVSO aims to enhance transnational voluntary service in quantity and quality by offering support services to volunteer organisations, e.g. policy monitoring, organising training and partnership-building events and by identifying best practice and imparting expertise.

2.2 Other outputs of this review

Alongside this report, the research team have produced a database of literature on the impact of voluntary service which will add a European perspective to a global database at GSI. The database will also be available to the general public in searchable form on the internet at www.promente.org/avsoreport.

2.3 Users of this review

This report is aimed at policy makers, lobbyists and activists on the one hand, and voluntary organisations on the other.

2.4 Why do we need research on the impact of youth voluntary service?

European citizenship
 Social capital
 Lifelong learning
Intercultural competence
 Should Big Government leave the voluntary sector alone?
Compulsory service?
Volunteers take away real jobs?
 Social cohesion

Reason 1: Voluntary service is increasing in popularity

All over Europe, voluntary service is increasing in popularity; the second phase of EVS (2000-6) had to be expanded to cope with the overwhelming number of applications in the previous phase. Legal frameworks for voluntary service at the national level are being adopted at an unprecedented rate. Newer models of voluntary national and international service are being developed and expanded. In contrast, voluntarism overall (i.e. including short-term non-service voluntarism) is probably relatively stable (Wilson 2000) though increasing in former socialist countries in Europe (Moskwiak 2005).

Reason 2: Research on impact can feed into the two of the hottest current debates on youth policy

Voluntary or compulsory service?

Enlarging the European voluntary service programme to cope with demand for placements invites comparisons with the very large national Civil Service programmes, which involve tens of thousands of volunteers every year. On the other hand, compulsory military service is being phased out in many countries. This conjunction of factors has given rise to suggestions to reintroduce compulsory service for all young people, females as well as males. In France, 44% of the population are in favour of creating compulsory civic service, whereas 46% favour a national voluntary service scheme (Ifop pour Valeurs Actuelles 2006). Research should be able to address the question of whether compulsory civic service would have the desired effects.

Should volunteers play a major role in provision of social services?

Volunteer input contributes a substantial part of the provision of social services all over Europe; the non-profit sector is one of Europe's biggest industries. Long-term service volunteers have a significant role to play in this industry. But are these developments positive in the long run or do they simultaneously threaten quality of service on the one hand and job security for professionals on the other (Amorim, Constanzo et al. 2002 p.13) ?

"Youth service is on the political and public agenda, and a debate is raging over whether civilian youth service should be voluntary or mandatory" (Unis-Cité 2007).

This tension between governmental versus private initiative and voluntary versus compulsory service is like a red line all the way through the history of youth service programmes up to today (Amorim, Constanzo et al. 2002).

Reason 3: Research on impact can help to improve quality

Learning more about the impact of voluntary service can help voluntary organisations and policy makers improve its quality and increase its scope. Improving quality of service is a goal which all stakeholders understand and respect.

Reason 4: Research on impact can check the many claims about the benefits of youth voluntary service

One commentator on the U.S. AmeriCorps service program described it as a "the public policy equivalent of a Swiss Army knife" (Waldman 1995). Similar claims are made in Europe.

If these claims are correct, then youth voluntary service could be a key to addressing many issues facing European society today. But is it?

Claim: voluntary service builds social capital

While many experts indicate that voluntary service can contribute to social trust and interconnectedness, Coleman (1988) actually defined social capital as people's ability to work voluntarily together with others for a common purpose in groups and organizations. Social capital is strongly bound to trust in others and in the political system, and is associated with general life satisfaction (European Commission 2005). Does voluntary service really build social capital?

Claim: voluntary service can improve the image and status of youth

A study of media reports on youth in the UK found that "the media presents young people at best as problems and at worst as criminals: 71 per cent of stories about them are negative and one in three focus on crime" (MORI for Young People Now magazine 2004). The U.K. Russell Commission (2005) sees youth voluntary action and service as one way to change this negative image of youth.

Claim: voluntary service can increase youth participation in political life

Youth interest in politics in Germany dropped from 55% to 39% between 1984 and 2006 (Hurrelmann and Fischer 2006). Yet on the other hand, the level of informal youth engagement on social issues in Europe is quite high: in the 2006 Shell Youth Study in Germany, three out of four said that they undertake activities on social issues at least some of the time (Hurrelmann and Fischer 2006). Young Europeans are also involved in voluntary activity (Eurobarometer 2001). Is voluntary service a route to rekindle young people's interest in the democratic process?

Claim: voluntary service can help young people learn social and intercultural skills and European active citizenship

In a recent Eurobarometer study, over 60% of Europeans said that foreign languages were important in working life but only about 40% felt that they themselves were proficient in them; this was the biggest gap between perceived importance and proficiency of all the skills investigated (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2003 p. 9). For young people, knowledge of languages is the most important of all qualities for finding a job (ibid, p. 10). Citizens also feel that social skills are nearly as important as basic skills such as reading and writing. For

example, about three-quarters feel that being able to get on with people from different cultures/countries is important in working life (ibid, p. 13). On the other hand, they feel that they learn dramatically better in informal than formal settings (ibid, p. 14). Against this background, virtually all sources claim that voluntary service increases social skills and that international voluntary service improves language skills. What is the evidence for these claims?

Claim: voluntary service has potential to build solidarity with disadvantaged social groups.

During the Irish Special Olympics thousands of Irish citizens and international volunteers lend a hand, and give their time, energy and commitment to work towards the social inclusion of disabled sportspeople. At the same time, through virtual and real volunteering, persons with disabilities can help others. How big is this potential really?

Claim: international voluntary service has the potential to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

In November 2005, following an unprecedented and violent uprising in France's working-class suburbs, French President Jacques Chirac announced the creation of a volunteer civilian service for youth (Unis-Cité 2007). But what evidence is there that voluntary service can really help to increase tolerance or break down hatred?

Claim: voluntary service leads to employability

Voluntary service gives volunteers on-the-job experience, contributes to the development of professional and soft skills, and thus has the potential to reduce unemployment. In Poland the youth unemployment rate is 40%. Could voluntary service be a cure?

Claim: voluntary service is a tool for change.

Not all is shiny in Europe; we still have problems with poverty, discrimination, and anti-social behaviour, and volunteers can make a big difference, no matter the scale of their contribution. We need immediate action to combat poverty and to halt climate change. In Germany each year around 2000 young people participate in the Voluntary Year of Ecological Services programme. Voluntary service projects can group those willing to make a change, and by giving them structure and purpose, can achieve results, little by little.

Claim: voluntary service can replace disappearing rites of passage into adulthood

Traditional routes to adulthood are withering away; education no longer leads directly to employment (Moskwiak 2005); compulsory national service is being abandoned. And yet young people now need more, not less, help to find their way into an increasingly instable and insecure adult world. Perhaps voluntary service can help by allowing young people to try out some of the otherwise bewildering array of career options (Hustinx 2001). It has been compared to traditional rites of passage (van Genneep 1960).

In the rest of this report we will examine the evidence for these claims.

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2.5 Eight dimensions which define youth voluntary service

Defining youth voluntary service clearly is important for this review because it is part of the criteria for including original research studies.

The present review focuses on research studies on, and other evidence for, the *impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe*. In order to clarify this focus, we will first define youth voluntary service.

The concept of youth voluntary service is relatively well understood and has a more or less clear translation in the different countries of the EU, partly thanks to the European Voluntary Service program which has been accessible across the Union since 1996.

On the other hand, each European culture and language has its own, older concepts and traditions of voluntary action which differ from one another. So when the European cultures define youth voluntary service in their own languages, each does it in a rather different way (Lyons, Wijkstrom et al. 1998)¹.

Defining youth voluntary service clearly is important for this review because it is part of the criteria for including original research studies.

In this section, youth voluntary service will be defined in terms of English-language concepts but in a step-by-step way which will hopefully make sense in any language.

What is voluntarism?

Cnaan and colleagues' (1996) study identified 11 definitions of voluntarism in the literature. From these 11 definitions, they identified four dimensions of volunteering which may be used to assess whether some activity is usually classified as volunteering:

1. **freely chosen** (rather than compulsory). This means that compulsory civic service such as the German Zivildienst, which is an alternative to military service for young men, is not considered to be voluntarism and is thus not in the focus of the present review, even though it resembles voluntary service in many other ways.
2. **unpaid or only for expenses** (rather than paid)
3. **structured** e.g. via or as part of an organisation (rather than unstructured)
4. **benefits strangers** (rather than friends/relatives or self).

The criteria are properly understood as dimensions, that is to say, many activities may *partially* fulfil some or all of the criteria and nevertheless be counted as voluntarism. But if an activity does not fulfil one dimension at all, it is usually not considered to be voluntarism (for example, looking after a family member, which does not fulfil the final criterion). An activity which fulfils all of the dimensions quite well is usually considered to be voluntarism.

¹ There is still no definitive EU-level definition of voluntary service, although the Council of Europe comes close to a definition of long-term transnational service Council of Europe (2003). European convention on the promotion of a transnational long-term voluntary service for young people Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Voluntary service = voluntarism + service

Perry and Imperial (Perry and Imperial 2001) add one more dimension to the above four. These five dimensions taken together define voluntary service.

5. intense (time-limited & full-time vs. occasional)².

This fifth dimension is a particularly important part of the definition of voluntary service³. In detail, this criterion means that voluntary service:

- is usually more structured than volunteering,
- takes place for a fixed period of time,
- is based on an agreement that provides all the parties involved with a framework of rules and procedures that inform all the partners about their duties and rights,
- implies a more formal definition of objectives and means,
- is usually implemented by specialised organisations that people can join in order to respond to their personal wish for volunteering⁴.

In this review we will use the term "non-service voluntarism" to mean all voluntarism which is **not** voluntary service⁵.

Voluntary Service is a special kind of voluntary activity which is particularly intensive: full time for a specific period.

Voluntary service contrasted with non-service voluntarism

Reviewing research on voluntary service can be difficult because it is sometimes "hidden behind" non-service voluntarism, in two ways.

- Firstly, voluntary service is much less common than non-service voluntarism. For example, a significant contribution to understanding voluntarism in general is made by national representative surveys of voluntarism. However as the number of people conducting voluntary service at any one time is always well under 1% of the population, voluntary service is almost invisible to these surveys.
- When research reports mention "volunteering" or "voluntarism" etc., it is often not clear if this includes voluntary service or not.

In this review we will use the term "non-service voluntarism" to mean all voluntarism which is **not** voluntary service.

Youth voluntary service = voluntarism + service + youth

Youth voluntary service, as a special kind of voluntary service, has some special defining features other than just age:

- 6. The volunteers are youths: older than 15 - 18 and younger than 25 - 30
- 7. non-skilled: the service does not depend on the volunteer's specialist skills (this distinguishes it from the kind of technical voluntary service such as VSO which now does not include

² These five elements correspond very well to the five key elements of voluntarism suggested by the United Nations Volunteers Expert Group.

³ Perry and Imperial also added a sixth dimension "depth of problem addressed (every-day vs. grave)" which is less relevant in the context of the present review.

⁴ Amorim, Constanzo et al. 2002

⁵ The words "volunteering" and "voluntary work" and even "voluntarism" or "volunteerism" are sometimes used to mean non-service voluntarism and sometimes to mean *all* kinds of voluntary activity including voluntary service. Because their meaning is unclear in this way, we will use the less familiar but more precise term "non-service voluntarism".

school leavers at all). While there are occasional forms of youth voluntary service in which the volunteers provide specific skills, they are not typical and are not a focus of this study.

- 8. personal growth:** a main focus of youth voluntary service is on volunteer personal growth. Although this criterion is rarely included in *definitions* of of voluntary service, it is virtually always mentioned in *descriptions* of projects and their aims and impact. It has even be claimed that youth voluntary service represents some kind of rite of passage (van Gennep 1960) for the volunteer between teenage years and the adult world. For this reason, service volunteers nearly always leave their ordinary, familiar worlds and perform their service in a new, out-of-the-ordinary environment, at a distance from what they have known, both in physical and social terms.

2.6 Three more criteria defining the focus of the present review

The present review intends to analyse research studies on the impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe. The first eight criteria above define youth voluntary service; in order to complete our explanation of the focus of this review, it only remains to define what we mean by *impact studies*, *long-term service*, and *Europe*.

9. Impact studies ...

When we refer to the "*impact* of voluntary service" we mean the extent and nature of the positive and negative changes it brings about. *Impact* is often used in contrast to words like *output* and *outcome* in order to indicate the most general kinds of change, not limited only to outcomes planned in project designs.

In other words, we are talking about

- changes which can be attributed to voluntary service
- all the changes due to service, not just changes which were planned or foreseen
- not just any changes, but in particular changes in something *we value*

10. ... on long-term service...

This review concentrates on long-term service, lasting **3-18 months** (this distinguishes it from short-term activities like youth work camps – see below – on the one hand and more permanent forms of service on the other). This means that *short-term work camps are not in the focus of the present review*.

11. ... in Europe

In this study, we focus on voluntary service taking place⁶ in Europe (i.e. Council of Europe countries). This means that we do include studies on programs which *also* include countries outside Europe but we do not include studies of programs which operate globally, or which operate primarily outside Europe, unless they provide a special breakdown for Europe.

⁶ In the case of international service, this is taken as meaning programs in which the majority of *sending and hosting* organisations are based in Europe.

The present review is not the place to give an overview of the history and current shape of voluntary service in Europe as excellent overviews are already available (Amorim, Constanzo et al. 2002; AVSO 2005). Suffice it to say that there is a multitude of histories and traditions. It should not be forgotten that the former socialist block also had its own traditions of voluntarism and semi-compulsory or compulsory service (Jungblut 2007) which are often but not always remembered bitterly (Kacapor 2002; Milošević 2002); often, newer words such as "volunteering" are introduced (AVSO 2005) to replace the bad memories associated with the old words.

A comprehensive study of the nature and extent of voluntary service in five European countries has already been published by AVSO (AVSO 2005).

3 The classification framework

3.1 Survey of theoretical frameworks

In order to classify and analyse the impact studies we gathered, it was necessary to adopt a classification framework. In order to do this, we surveyed theoretical work relevant to the impact of voluntary service as well as toolkits for measuring impact. The papers we surveyed are presented briefly in the appendices to this report.

Our theoretical framework for this review will be based loosely on the IVR toolkit with the addition of the dimension of research method

We concluded that the IVR (Institute for Volunteering Research) volunteering impact assessment toolkit (IVR 2004) and in particular the matrix it uses to conceptualise impact, although designed primarily for non-service voluntarism, provides an adequate framework for classifying and analysing the studies we collected.

The matrix combines five areas of impact answering the question "what kind of value is added?" (Physical Capital, Human Capital, Economic Capital, Social Capital and Cultural Capital) with four areas of impact answering the question "who benefits?" (Volunteers, Organisations, Users and Community).

The IVR matrix was adapted for the purposes of this review as follows:

- The "cultural capital" dimensions from the original matrix was excluded as it did not seem sufficiently distinct from the "social capital" dimension
- An additional dimension "outcome comparison" was added which was not only essential for analysing the studies collected, but also seems to us important in explaining how information in the matrix cells can be used to generate information on impact.

3.2 The matrix

Table 1: impact matrix (based on the IVR model)

		Dimension 2: the forms of capital (what kind of value is added?)			
		Physical Capital Value of access to and use of physical resources	Economic Capital Economic value of resources; reassessment of other kinds of Capital in monetary terms	Human Capital Value of access to and use of physical resources	Social Capital Value of interaction between & among volunteers, organisations, users & community
Dimension 1: Stakeholder (who benefits?)	Organisations ⁷	Physical resources (buildings, equipment) ...	Expenditure and income; (changes in) value of equipment, buildings etc ...	Staff skills, job satisfaction, organisational climate ...	Number of contacts between organisations ...
	Beneficiaries	Increased resources (or access to resources) e.g. playgrounds are built for children ...	Expenses and reimbursements; assessment of financial value of help given ...	User health, life quality, mobility ...	Volunteer-user interactions user support networks ...
	Volunteers	Access to physical resources ...	Expenses and reimbursements; assessment of financial value of training ...	Volunteer language skills, health, emotional health; numbers of volunteers ...	Acceptance of other cultures, "soft skills", intercultural competence, volunteer- volunteer networking ...
	Community		Overall cost of a state volunteer program ...	National labour, public health or education aspects ...	Intercultural dialogue ...
		Dimension 3: comparison: (what is the outcome compared with?)			
		Retrospective / Comparison group / Before-After / Quasi-experiment / Cohort			

The items in the white boxes are *examples* of things which might be positively impacted by voluntarism rather than exhaustive lists.

The three dimensions will be more fully explained in the following chapter.

Strengths of the impact matrix

- Including different stakeholders and forms of capital encourages the use of multiple sources and multiple methods and is in accordance with the principle of triangulation also recommended in Daniel, French et al (Daniel, French et al. 2006) as more likely to give valid information.

⁷ In the context of voluntary service, an additional distinction is usually made between sending and hosting organisations.

- This approach helps to present a better overall view of flows of value between stakeholders, particularly economic calculations. To take one example, if the organisations pay the volunteers a stipend and this is refunded by the government, then this can be considered as a cost (a reduction in economic capital) at the "society" level, perhaps neutral at the organisation level and perhaps only a small net benefit at the volunteer level (as they spend most of the money on living expenses). It is the overall change in value (in this example, a net cost) which would be considered part of the overall impact of the program.

Weaknesses

- In many cases the division into forms of capital (what kind of value is added?) as well as stakeholders (who benefits?) means that what might normally be considered to be a single benefit has to be "chopped up" and placed in many different boxes.
- Not every kind of impact fits well into the matrix. In some cases an arbitrary decision has to be made about where to place an impact.

4 Findings: how was impact measured in the studies reviewed?

In this chapter, the studies are analysed according to a set of formal research characteristics (publication type, etc.). In the following chapter, the studies will be analysed according to the evidence they provide for the impact of voluntary service.

The document search, detailed in an appendix, was based on a web search, a search of specialist databases, and a mail-out to voluntary service organisations and the 32⁸ National Agencies for EVS⁹. This search resulted in around 300 documents, of which 270 were initially classified as possibly relevant. 40 were finally classified as directly relevant (i.e. are studies on the impact of youth long-term voluntary service in Europe) and are analysed in the findings chapter.

This review analysed over 300 documents and found 40 to be directly relevant to the impact of youth long-term voluntary service in Europe.

4.1 Publication type

Six of the papers were reviews (systematic analyses of the results of a large number of other studies): (Hoppe and Huth 2002; Huth 2002; Gaskin 2004; Smith 2004; AVSO 2005; Williamson and Hoskins 2005).

An additional 34 of the papers were individual pieces of original research: (Structure of Operational Support 1999; Structure of Operational Support 1999; Becker, Brandes et al. 2000; ECOTEC 2000; Heddy 2000; Tapaninen 2000; Commission of the European Communities 2001; Corporate Citizenship Company 2001; ECOTEC 2001; Solidarités Jeunesses 2001; Les villages des jeunes 2002; Alternative-V 2003; Ecosfera 2003; Ecosfera 2003; Estonian Youth Institute 2003; Gouvernement de la Communauté française de Belgique 2003; Heddy 2003; Huth 2003; Mutz and Korfmacher 2003; Rolles 2003; Schröer 2003; Birnkraut, Hein et al. 2004; Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004; Ciężka and Ratajczak 2004; Commission of the European Communities 2004; Gelabert and Nisse 2004; Bottaro and Maggi 2005; Engels, Leucht et al. 2005; Gensicke, Picot et al. 2005; Moskwiak 2005; Prof. Dr. Alexander Thomas and Chang 2005; Kėžaitė and Špokevičiūtė 2006; Recknagel 2006; Schröer 2006).

These forty studies (6 reviews + 34 individual papers and reports) provide the main data for the present report. They are listed at www.promente.org/avsoreview. Of these, the majority are monitoring and evaluation studies directed at checking the quality of work and mainly intended for an internal audience.

We also referred to other reviews of voluntary service from outside Europe and of non-service volunteering in Europe such as (Perry and Imperial 2001; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Center for Social Development 2006; Powell, Bratović et al. 2007).

4.2 Type of voluntary activity

17 of these studies covered international and transnational service.

⁸ Some EU countries have more than one agency and some non-EU countries have National Agencies listed for EVS cooperation.

⁹ Five National Agencies sent studies, 14 gave some information but did not have studies, and 13 either could not be contacted in spite of repeated attempts or did not give any information at all.

4.3 Place

Table 2: impact studies by country

Country	Number of studies mentioning this country specifically
Austria	3
Belarus	1
Belgium	4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1
Bulgaria	1
Czech Republic	2
Cyprus	1
Denmark	8
Estonia	3
Finland	4
France	8
Germany	21
Greece	2
Hungary	1
Iceland	1
Ireland	3
Italy	11
Latvia	1
Liechtenstein	1
Lithuania	2
Luxembourg	2
Malta	1
Netherlands	3
Norway	2
Poland	7
Portugal	1
Romania	1
Slovakia	2
Slovenia	1

Spain	4
Sweden	1
UK	11
Ukraine	1

The total number of countries in the table is greater than the number of studies because some studies cover several countries.

4.4 Sources

Some evaluation studies use many different sources. All the original research studies included information from volunteers and/or from implementing organisations; however none included direct data from users.

4.5 Data

Twenty-five studies used qualitative data collection and analysis (in-depth interviews and case studies which are analysed qualitatively), whereas 30 used quantitative data and analysis, e.g. questionnaires and interviews given to volunteers or organisations which may include longer answers but where the analysis is primarily in the form of numbers, tables, charts etc¹⁰. Some studies used both kinds of data analysis.

4.6 Research design: outcome comparison

The missing dimension in assessing impact of voluntarism: dimension 3, outcome comparison

Impact is about change (increase or even decrease) in physical, human, economic and/or social capital. To demonstrate impact, a study or evaluation report should have at least some way of comparing the value of stakeholder capital after the voluntary service program (the "outcome") with the value which they would have had if the program had not taken place.

The following table presents some different ways of comparing service outcome with something else in order to demonstrate or measure the impact of the program. These different ways represent dimension 3 of our impact matrix. The numbers of studies covered in this review using each kind of comparison are also shown.

Table 3: dimension 3 of the impact matrix - "outcome comparison"¹¹

Design	Number of studies	Explanation and <i>examples</i>	Explanation & comments
Retrospective	Nearly all	Asking respondents how	Very subjective. General psychology research shows that this kind of information tends to be

¹⁰ Open questions which are subsequently categorised are classified as a quantitative, not qualitative method.

¹¹ These categories are only applied if the specific design used is likely to give information on impact. For instance, a survey might compare the volunteer motivation of volunteers before their placements in different countries; interesting data, but not providing evidence of program impact.

		<p>much they think value has increased.</p> <p>e.g. Hosting organisation officers talking about how they feel users benefited</p> <p>e.g. Volunteers saying on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they feel they benefited</p>	<p>unreliable. A review of research on AmeriCorps says that although 92% of program officers said they saw strong evidence that civic values were developed amongst program members, and volunteers concurred, a before/after study using questionnaire scores actually revealed a drop in levels of civic commitment. Similar results in Engels, Leucht et al. 2005 p. 173¹².</p>
Comparison group	5	<p>Comparing the outcome scores for volunteers with scores for a non-volunteer group.</p> <p>e.g. Civic values of ex-volunteers with the civic values of their peers who did not volunteer</p>	<p>May be used either to assess overall program impact (in which a stakeholder group which received the program is compared with a stakeholder group which did not) or to assess differential impact, in which stakeholder subgroups are compared with one another, e.g. volunteers on ecological and social projects are compared.</p>
Before/After	2	<p>Comparing the outcome scores for volunteers with scores for the same group before their placements.</p> <p>e.g. Comparing parents' ratings of how independent their children are, before and after</p>	<p>Probably more accurate in revealing change as the same method (questionnaire, rating, or other method) is used twice rather than asking the respondent about a remembered change. Somewhat more complicated to administer as the evaluator needs to apply the method before as well as after the program.</p> <p>However, even this method has weaknesses as changes might be due to changes occurring anyway (especially in young people) and not due to the voluntary service placements. For this reason, the method explained below is preferred.</p>
Quasi-experiment	0	<p>e.g. Comparing changes on volunteer scores on a tolerance questionnaire (before vs. after) with changes in non-volunteers</p>	<p>Essentially, the before/after method combined with the comparison group method. This is a reliable way of demonstrating program impact and is a standard method particularly in the quantitative social sciences; however, it has, to our knowledge, never been used to examine the impact of any form of voluntarism in Europe.</p>
Participatory observation	1	<p>Following volunteers at frequent intervals during their placements with substantial attempts (via repeated in-depth interviews and observation) to understand their worlds</p>	<p>Qualitative methods such as participatory observation are less useful to answer questions about impact with a simple yes or no or with a number. But they have the enormous advantage, when done by trained researchers, of being able to find out how the stakeholders themselves see their situations and to find words for unexpected phenomena as they emerge. When carried out over the whole period of volunteer placements they can also provide information on impact, i.e. on how stakeholders change (Schröer 2006).</p>

¹² Statistical before-after and another study of short-term work-camps from Powell, S., E. Bratović, et al. (2007). Pro-social values/behaviour and employability amongst young people in SEE and the impact of volunteer work camps, SEEYN: South-East European Youth Network.

Low points of research design

The main methodological weakness of the studies taken together is that the vast majority are retrospective designs which are very subjective and give very weak evidence of impact. There are very few studies which use the kind of more valid designs which are standard in social science research, i.e. comparing changes amongst service volunteers with changes in non-volunteer groups, and/or comparing pre-service scores with post-service scores. This small collection of good studies is simply too modest to be able to provide really valid answers to questions about the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe. It also means that evidence for impact in the vast majority of studies is based on the highly subjective recollections of volunteers and program officers which certainly view programs through "rose-coloured spectacles."

The most frequent evidence provided for impact is on the basis of checklists of possible effects provided to volunteers and/or officers of organisations, e.g. that a volunteer says he or she has learned a particular skill. The problem is with the interpretation (Moskwiak 2005 p. 151). If 20% say they have experienced that effect, is this really evidence of impact? After all 80% did not say that they had experienced that effect.

Similarly, it is poor methodology to offer questionnaires with checklists of areas in which volunteers felt they have improved, without offering the opportunity to report that they actually got worse in the same area. An example would be a question about change in levels of self-confidence which can be answered on a scale from "no change" to "big improvement," with no possibility to report a drop in self-confidence.

Overall the kind of conclusions regularly drawn in reports on the impact of voluntary service such as "Back home, former EVS volunteers often think and act in a more open, tolerant and helpful way" (Commission of the European Communities 2004 p. 19) are often based on quite shaky evidence.

Implementing organisations paint without doubt the rosiest picture of the impact of voluntary service. For example, an evaluation of the Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr Kultur shows the hosting organisations giving higher scores than volunteers on all three aspects of increased volunteer skills (Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004).

Overall, the research tools in use today are very much "inward-looking," i.e. focussed on management of programs, rather than "outward-looking," i.e. focussed on providing generalisable data on the impact of volunteering which could be used to demonstrate that youth voluntary service as a whole is effective, and/or under what conditions it is effective. This is hardly surprising, as most of the available studies are just evaluation reports which are not designed to be "outward-looking."

It is also hardly surprising that the majority of research on voluntary service, including academic research, is on individual effects, usually on volunteers – this fits well with the reductionist paradigm adopted by many social researchers; it also tends to be cheaper and easier to research (Perry and Imperial 2001 p. 161 and p. 240).

Highlights of research design

Using existing questionnaires for which data already exists for comparison groups. In its retrospective study with EVS volunteers focussed primarily on how EVS volunteers learn, the Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000) used similar questionnaires to those used in previous studies on the German Voluntary Social Year and Voluntary Ecological Year. This very

There were a few studies which used methods more likely to produce valid results.

simple method exposed the data to comparison with previously published data on other forms of voluntary service without any additional workload for the researchers.

Comparing volunteers with non-participating applicants. The Katimavik evaluation (Étude Économique Conseil 2006) compared participants with applicants who did not actually participate in the program, a useful comparison as the non-participating applicants are likely to be similar to the participants in terms of relevant variables such as socio-economic categories. This means that differences in outcomes between participants and this comparison group can be attributed with more certainty to the program than to extraneous factors.

Participatory observation. Another qualitative study followed 38 volunteers on one trilateral and one bilateral project through their placements in order to follow how the ambitious aims of the ASF are realised in practice (Schröer 2003). While not strictly a before/after method, this kind of rich data collection and continuous contact allows deeper insights into the processes which volunteers undergo and is better able to understand and adapt to their world view.

Follow-up. (GHK 2005; Motiv8 2005) Assessing outcome scores such as employment, self-confidence or active citizenship is more reliable and meaningful when conducted at least six months after the end of voluntary service, instead of an assessment immediately after the end of the placement or in addition to it. Scores tend to be more reliable because any post-placement euphoria has probably worn off and because the volunteers are likely to feel less emotionally bound to the organisation.

5 Findings: the impact of voluntary service

5.1 Explanation of the forms of capital (what kind of value is added?): physical, human, economic and social

Impact research should demonstrate how one or more of these forms of value (physical, human, economic and social) have been added, i.e. how the program generates value which would not otherwise have existed.

The following table presents the number of studies dealing with each kind of capital.

Form of capital	Number of studies	Explanation
Physical	11	Value of access to and use of physical resources
Human	Nearly all studies	Knowledge, health, skills
Economic	6	Changes in economic value of resources; money spent; reassessment of other kinds of capital in monetary terms. "Economic capital" can be best understood as a different, monetary, way of measuring or expressing the other forms of "capital". To demonstrate positive program impact it is necessary to show "how the program generates additional value which would not have existed in the absence of the program" (Étude Économique Conseil 2006 p. 1)
Social	16	Value of networking, systems and interactions. Social capital (European Commission 2005) refers to those stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems.

The rest of this chapter deals with the actual impact reported in the studies.

5.2 Impact on volunteers: human capital

Personal growth (self-confidence and independence etc)

Perhaps the strongest result overall for the impact of voluntary service is contributing to volunteer personal growth (increased independence / confidence / self esteem; increases in creativity and maturity; positive impact on the personal, cultural development and maturity of individuals) with "independence" being most frequently mentioned (Structure of Operational Support 1999; ECOTEC 2000; Commission of the European Communities 2001; Evans, Clisby et al. 2002; Alternative-V 2003; Estonian Youth Institute 2003; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Schröer 2003; Birnkraut, Hein et al. 2004; Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004; Ciężka and Ratajczak 2004; Motiv8 2005; Kėžaitė and Špokevičiūtė 2006).

Personal growth is rated among the top three results in nearly all studies which enable comparison of personal growth with other areas (Rahrbach, Wüstendörfer et al. 1998; Engels, Leucht et al. 2005). A comparison of EVS with other Youth Program Actions in the context of the

Third Country Cooperation found that EVS programs had a specific strength in the area of personal development. Former service volunteers reported a stronger influence on their personal development than on their career development (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000; Gouvernement de la Communauté française de Belgique; Engels, Leucht et al. 2005)

This spotlight on personal growth corresponds to the strongest motivation for volunteering – for example, in a Solidarités Jeunesses study, the motive "alternative experience" was most frequently mentioned as a reason for joining international voluntary service, more frequently even than the motive to visit another country (2001).

The service volunteers responding to the German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation (one sample was around half-way through their placements and the other sample was around six months after their placements) (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005) are in overwhelming agreement that they benefited from the service, with about two thirds saying that it changed how they view the world and over 80% saying that they picked up technical skills.

Also falling under this heading is increased sense of meaning in life (McBride, Lombe et al. 2003 p. 8)

Career, skills and education

The recommended way to assess impact on career and education would be to look at volunteer employment and education profiles in long-term follow-up, comparing them with peers who did not volunteer as in a study on non-service volunteering. However this technique was only employed in one study (GHK 2005).

Lifelong learning

Citizens overwhelmingly see themselves as learning in informal settings

There seem to be some strong impacts on increasing interest in life-long learning (Commission of the European Communities 2004)

Data from one European population survey show that citizens overwhelmingly see themselves as learning in informal settings rather than formal settings, and perceive periods of "voluntary, social or military service" to be around half as important as formal education as a source of learning over the lifespan. This survey involved 17 EU countries, and was representative for national populations over 15 years old. When respondents were asked where they had learned something in the last 12 months, as many as 8.7% said "a period of voluntary, social or military service" as opposed to only 16.8% for "school, college or university" (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2003 p. 14).

Gaining skills

Many studies report that service increases general "technical" knowledge (e.g. computer literacy & language skills), either increasing existing skills, allowing volunteers to practice their skills in settings different from their own, or adding new skills (Structure of Operational Support 1999; ECOTEC 2000; ECOTEC 2001; Alternative-V 2003; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Schröder 2003; Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004).

Working experience

Voluntary service provides something approaching real working experience (Birnkraut, Hein et al. 2004) and increases capacity for leadership (Structure of Operational Support 1999).

Career orientation and reducing career indecision

One of the most frequently mentioned kinds of impact which youth voluntary service has is on career orientation and new career perspectives: (Rahrbach, Wüstendörfer et al. 1998; Hustinx 2001 ; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Commission of the European Communities 2004; GHK 2005; Moskwiak 2005).

Voluntary service offers a valuable opportunity to test possible careers to see if they "fit", or alternatively, for those who already have a career mapped out, to have a fling at something completely different before committing themselves (Schröer 2006 159).

Essentially, participation in voluntary service seems to reduce career indecision (Jones 1989) among a broad range of social groups: 89% of national volunteers saw their voluntary year as a good preparation for a job in the social sector and to get new career perspectives (83%); only 53% saw it as a kind of training (Rahrbach, Wüstendörfer et al. 1998)

Essentially, participation in voluntary service seems to reduce career indecision

Broadened horizons

The German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation reports that 97% of organisations agreed that voluntary service broadened the life/career perspectives ("Handlungsräume") of volunteers. Other evaluations come to similar conclusions, although on the basis of rather subjective data (Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004; Cieżka and Ratajczak 2004). However as young people do, by definition, develop rapidly it is a moot question whether voluntary service broadens perspectives more than some alternative activity.

Employment

Does voluntary service lead to young people finding jobs? Is a former volunteer more likely to find work than his or her peers who did something else rather than volunteering? Can it be seen as a weapon against youth unemployment? There is not much positive evidence. One study notes, "It cannot be said that EVS leads to employment" (Structure of Operational Support 1999). Another points out that "The influence of YVC is not, however, shown in terms of immediate outcome or in terms of hard outcomes in the six months after leaving the programme" (GHK 2005). Some studies present subjective, retrospective evidence from volunteers who believe that voluntary service increased their career chances (Moskwiak 2005); these studies, however, did not include comparison groups. Two studies, however, show positive effects on disadvantaged groups - disadvantaged young people (Motiv8 2005) and refugees (Stopforth 2001):

Can voluntary service be seen as a weapon against youth unemployment? There is not much positive evidence.

There are 300 young people involved in this programme per year, with 50% of them going on expeditions. Within one year of completing the programme, 73% have accessed work or training for work,¹³ over 96% of participants report increased levels of confidence and motivation. 100% of Motiv8 participants who previously had a conviction are diverted away from crime. (Motiv8 2005)

Employment-related motivation can differ not only by socio-economic situation but also according to outgoing country. Volunteers from countries with poor employment prospects are more

¹³ While certainly an encouraging result, this statement unfortunately suffers from a kind of "spin" typical of evaluation reports. What does "accessing work or training for work" mean? If "accessing training for work" means once turning up for a course at a job centre, it should not be put together with much more significant outcomes like actually finding a job, nor should it be offered as a proxy for them.

interested in gathering experience relevant for later employment (Hoskins 2005; Schröer 2006 p. 159; Powell, Bratović et al. 2007 p. 50)

Employability

Although it cannot be said that voluntary service leads to employment, there is some evidence that it makes young people more employable, mainly through contributing to their all-round personal growth.

Employability, the potential to be able to find employment, is a much more common outcome than employment. The main impact of voluntary service on employability is probably through personal growth, although key employment-related skills and attitudes (e.g. office skills, teamwork) are also learned (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000; Alternative-V 2003; Gouvernement de la Communauté française de Belgique 2003; Engels, Leucht et al. 2005).

Well over half of the former service volunteers in the German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation said in retrospect that the placement had increased their career prospects in general, although only just over half felt that they actually had better chances of getting a job.

Particular subgroups may experience voluntary service as more helpful in securing a job or pursuing a career than others. One report found that "refugees and asylum seekers placed particular value on gaining work experience and references, as well as confidence, social contact and language skills, through volunteering" (Gaskin 2004 p. 20).

5.3 Impact on volunteers: economic capital

Reducing career indecision

Career indecision has already been mentioned in the previous section. The Katimavik evaluation (Étude Économique Conseil 2006) calculated the value of fewer changes in career path as \$2,674,000 saved, one of the benefits of a program which cost \$11,600,000. The argument is likely to be valid for Europe too. (However, as with many calculations of economic capital, it is debatable how these very meaningful savings can be considered to represent added value or additional capital created.)

5.4 Impact on volunteers: social capital

"Ceiling effects"

It is not always easy to measure increases in pro-social values and behaviour among typical volunteers, who already tend to score highly in these areas before their placements begin. This could be purely a methodological artefact; research tools are not designed to measure improvement at already high levels of pro-social values and behaviour. It is also possible that these values and behavior cannot be increased beyond a certain level. Some studies do show better progress for people who start off with lower levels of pro-social values and behaviour (Perry, Thomson et al. 1999 p. 237; Powell, Bratović et al. 2007).

Social & communication skills and teamwork; networking; sense of belonging

Increases in social & communication skills are mentioned in quite a few studies (Structure of Operational Support 1999; Evans, Clisby et al. 2002; Estonian Youth Institute 2003; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003 p. 8; Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004; Kėžaitė and

Špokevičiūtė 2006). However, as with nearly all the other outcomes encountered in the present review, they were measured only by self-report and not in any more objective manner. It has not been demonstrated that voluntary service has any specific influence on these skills over and above alternative activity such as education or employment. One review concludes "The need was highlighted for further research to take place to define clearly indicators for the learning of citizenship so that volunteering programmes can orient their programmes more precisely towards these outcomes" (Hoskins 2005).

Active citizenship / civic values / social activism

This kind of impact is near the top of the "shopping list" for policy makers e.g. (Bundestag 2002 p. 9). Many studies report that volunteers express a belief that they became more active citizens due to service (McBride, Lombe et al. 2003).

There is only quite weak evidence for impact in the area of active citizenship

- EVS studies frequently mention that service leads to active participation of young people in social life (development of active citizenship) (ECOTEC 2000; Emanuele Alecci 2000).
- A Solidarités Jeunesses report (2001 p. 14) compares young former service volunteers with representative data for EU youth and reveals dramatically higher levels of active citizenship among the former volunteers; the volunteers' civic engagement, however, may have predated their volunteering and thus cannot be attributed to it.

Although it is one of the Common Objectives, there is only quite weak evidence for impact in the area of active citizenship (Rahrbach, Wüstendörfer et al. 1998).

Shift of study / career planning towards social issues

Youth voluntary service does seem to have an impact on attitudes towards future education and there is some evidence for a shift in interests in favour of social issues.

The volunteers in the Solidarités Jeunesses report (2001 p. 14) report in retrospect that their level of involvement in humanitarian and social activities increased after service. They also report an astounding change in education/career interest, with interest in social sciences increasing from 10% before service (the third most popular field) to 40% after service (the most popular field). Similarly, the substantial German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation found that 90% of volunteers believe that voluntary service encourages volunteers to consider careers in social and environmental action. This kind of impact was rated second highest by the organisations.

Tolerance / intercultural competence / bridging social capital¹⁴

There is quite a lot of evidence that voluntary service can break down prejudices and increase tolerance, intercultural competence and language skills. However this evidence is mostly based on subjective evidence (ECOTEC 2000; Tapaninen 2000; ECOTEC 2001; Evans, Clisby et al. 2002; Alternative-V 2003; McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Schröder 2003; Ciężka and Ratajczak 2004; Kėžaitė and Špokevičiūtė 2006). One report of our own (Powell, Bratović et al. 2007) that using a before/after research design found evidence that intercultural work-camps in the post-conflict West Balkans significantly reduced levels of interethnic mistrust among volunteers from

¹⁴ Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone. The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, Simon & Schuster.

the West Balkans but not among those from outside the area, who had lower levels of mistrust at the start of the work-camps.

One report on the German Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (ASF) points out a theme which we will return to later and which we will call "no magic bullets"

The ASF voluntary service program goals which formed the basis for the evaluation are directed at deep cognitive and emotional learning processes. (...) however the accompanying training documentation does not set out clearly enough a theoretical framework or step-by-step procedures for how to stimulate volunteers to develop these intercultural competences (Schröder 2006 p. 154 - translation proMENTE).

Nevertheless, the same study praises as very effective specific interventions in the ASF programs that encourage volunteers to examine their own family history, particularly in the light of national identity issues, and compare and contrast it with that of their peers.

Basic European identity; attitudes to Europe / EU

There is substantial evidence that international voluntary service can lead to an increased sense of what we might call basic European identity: feeling part of a wider Europe inside which one can travel and work easily.

One or two studies point out that this added sense of European identity may not go very deep. For example, in one study 128 out of 270 German EVS volunteers said that the placement had changed their attitude to European integration, mostly in a positive direction (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000 p. 83). However, the authors point out that many of these "changes" sound like clichés:

The idea that EVS delivers a kind of automatic political education bonus, especially in the area of European integration, is rejected by the study. On the contrary, the study shows up the big difference between the abstract, avoidant or fragmented clichés the volunteers produced on this topic with the quality and depth of their reflections on their own personal and career development. So this area is the only one which we have to give low marks. The quality and quantity of accompanying input in the program should be evaluated and improved (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000 p. 100) - translation proMENTE).

Learning to see Europe as easy to travel around is certainly not an insignificant impact but should not be confused with more challenging outcomes like European identity.

Intention to continue to volunteer amongst volunteers

The 1995 AmeriCorps study (Wang, Owens et al. 1995) argues strongly that if a program produces even a small increase in readiness to volunteer among participant volunteers, the impact could be enormous if volunteers retain this readiness throughout their lifetimes. From this point of view a small investment in programs to stimulate or increase readiness to volunteer can reap substantial benefits. On the other hand, this study makes the familiar mistake of using only retrospective measures of readiness to volunteer rather than measuring the change from the pre-placement baseline. The fact that 90% of volunteers continue to volunteer elsewhere after placement-end is not necessarily attributable to the program; these same volunteers might have gone on to volunteer in the future even without having taken part in the program. Studies not using baselines for multiplier factors only show that voluntarism can have a big financial impact and not that programs increase that impact.

The organisations responding to the German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation agreed overwhelmingly that voluntary service increases the readiness of volunteers to

volunteer in the future. However it is a very important result that in the same study, a comparison of the volunteers' assessment of their level of volunteering post-placement with their retrospective assessment of their level of volunteering before the placement does not reveal a significant increase (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005 p. 173). It should not be forgotten that service volunteers tend to be people who already volunteer even before service begins ("ceiling effect"), and that service volunteers often begin work or study after finishing their placement, which usually reduces the amount of time available to them for volunteering. A more interesting question is whether previous non-volunteers become more likely to volunteer after service, especially through programs which reach out to groups less likely to volunteer.

Improved discipline; decreased crime and risk taking

Some studies show evidence for improved discipline and reductions in risk-taking among at-risk groups who volunteered (McBride, Lombe et al. 2003; Motiv8 2005).

5.5 Impact on organisations

Human capital

All the evidence on increase in human capital in organisations available from European studies is more or less anecdotal, with no harder evidence in the form of reports from multiple sources, before/after comparison or comparison groups. Still, this kind of impact is mentioned positively in virtually every study.

Skills amongst staff

The interim evaluation of EVS report that organisations say their staff have improved their skills through participation in the program (Ecosfera 2003).

Changing organisational culture

A surprising number of studies found that the benefits to an organisation's human capital are conceptualised more in terms of changing organisational culture (bringing in fresh blood and new ideas) than in terms of overall service delivery or value of work produced (Birnkrant, Hein et al. 2004; Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung 2004; Engels, Leucht et al. 2005).

Volunteers stay in the organisations

Another side-effect of service volunteers and perhaps the most direct contribution is that as many as 13-15% (in the case of the FSJ/FSÖ) outgoing international volunteers continue to volunteer in the sending organisations (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005)

Economic capital

We found no studies of impact in terms of cost reduction or increased donations as a result of service.

5.6 Impact on users

Overall

Voluntary service generally has less clearly defined user groups than non-service voluntarism. In some cases there are no obvious user groups and in other cases the kinds of users are so heterogenous that it is difficult to collect data on user impact in a systematic way. Approaches like the IVR toolkit (IVR 2004) take some steps towards measuring user impact.

We didn't find a single European youth voluntary service study which systematically asked users themselves about the impact that service volunteers had on their lives. The 2001 evaluation of EVS (Emanuele Alecci 2000 p. 21) notes rather blandly that "The volunteer brought new ideas, practices and inspiration to the local host community and through his/her presence the intercultural awareness and the awareness of the European Union was increased."

Toolkits, e.g. Daniel, French et al. (2006) stress the importance of including users in the evaluation process. However in most cases, this seems to be done by interviewing officials of the hosting organisation who then give answers on behalf of users.

Human capital

The 1995 AmeriCorps study (Wang, Owens et al. 1995) mentions that remedial students who were helped by volunteers improved their academic performance.

Economic capital

A meta-analysis of AmeriCorps evaluations (Waldman 1995) finds a value of work done by volunteers of between \$1.50 and \$2.60 per Federal dollar invested – see section 5.8.

5.7 Impact on community: social capital

Some population surveys on volunteering include analyses of the level of volunteering among migrant groups, which is usually lower than in the mainstream population. There is a growing body of knowledge about the barriers to volunteering among non-mainstream groups (Huth 2003).

While levels of youth volunteering remain relatively stable in Western Europe, it is increasing dramatically in some countries of Eastern and Central Europe (Moskwiak 2005). It is plausible that this increase is partly due not only to high levels of youth unemployment but also to the increasing availability of volunteer placements.

Interculturalism via minority self-organisation?

Can encouraging voluntarism organisations amongst minority groups contribute to integration and interculturalism? One study (Hoppe and Huth 2002) found limited evidence but calls for more research. A U.S. review found that "the effects on a community, nation, or society overall may be an increased sense of integration among the citizens" (McBride, Lombe et al. 2003 p. 8).

Impact on policy

The impact of service *programs* on policy was not considered part of the focus of the present review. The EVS program itself, for example, is judged to have had a major impact on developing

voluntary service policy in Europe, especially in smaller countries (Commission of the European Communities 2004). We did not find evidence of impact of voluntary service *activities* on policy.

Understanding between regions

The Euromed program, which includes youth voluntary service as one component, was judged in an evaluation (Gelabert and Neisse 2004 p. 41) to have had some success in:

- "reinforcing mutual understanding and awareness as well as intercultural communication"
- "breaking down prejudices both in the EU and in Mediterranean countries and opening dialogue"
- "giving young people a voice and increasing their confidence"
- "showing young Mediterranean people that EU youth also face socio-economic problems such as exclusion and unemployment (Social Communication Centre in Lebanon, Algerian NC, Palestinian NGOs) and encouraging them to be active citizens in their countries."

The Third Country component of the Youth Program, of which EVS was the most popular strand, reported (Ecosfera 2003) that 44,8% of projects under this component have been realised with the Latin America region, 25,9% with South and Eastern Europe and 29,3% with the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Are programs to specifically include disadvantaged young people successful? How do standard programs affect those who usually volunteer less?

Overall there is some very positive evidence that well-designed programs can have good results with less advantaged young people and that in certain circumstances the less advantaged can benefit more than their more advantaged peers.

Overall there is some very positive evidence that well-designed programs can have good results with less advantaged young people

- In the German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation, volunteers with lower education who tend to volunteer less increased their level of volunteering after service to a level close to that of their better educated peers (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005).
- Civic service volunteers, mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds, reported much greater identification with voluntarism and readiness to volunteer (GHK 2005 p. 63).
- An evaluation of measures to increase inclusion in EVS is also on the whole positive (Leroux 2004) ; the share of young people with fewer opportunities in EVS (2005) is 18%.
- The ENVOL PLUS program aims specifically to involve less advantaged young people and is reported to be very successful overall (Rolles 2003). On the other hand, "some young people were too 'disadvantaged' in terms of personal maturity to be able to contribute as a volunteer which might have been an additional burden for the host project and a source of disappointment for the young person, although, opinions about this subject are different among partners" (Heddy 2000 p. 14).
- Two studies (Heddy 2000 p. 14; Schröder 2003) found more or less exactly the same set of benefits for disadvantaged groups (increased self-confidence, better career orientation, learning a language etc.) as studies on mainstream volunteers had found.

- Community Service Volunteers in Britain has good success in involving less advantaged volunteers. It offers 1000 placements a year, and with their non-rejection policy about one fifth of its recruits are socially excluded, including people with mental health problems or a criminal record.

5.8 Impact on community: economic capital

Preliminary analyses show that EVS probably does at the very least pay for itself in terms of the value of work done in relation to the cost of the program.

The attempt to measure the economic effects of voluntary service is in its infancy but offers some promising prospects for a simple and easy to understand way to demonstrate impact.

Preliminary analyses show that EVS probably does at the very least pay for itself in terms of the value of work done in relation to the cost of the program. The value of other kinds of impact probably tip this equation further but cannot be assessed at this point.

- As pointed out in (Wang, Owens et al. 1995), benefits tend to be harder to measure than cost; and costs to one group may be a benefit to another. Nevertheless, that study calculated an encouraging cost-benefit ratio for AmeriCorps of about 1:2.
- The evaluation of the first phase of EVS (ECOTEC 2000 p. 7) estimates a cost to the EU per volunteer week as 266 EUR, excluding co-financing, against a value of work done as 225 EUR. However this should not be interpreted as meaning that AmeriCorps is more effective than EVS, as the latter study used a less optimistic basis for calculating value of work done than the former. Namely, the American study allowed not only for the value of the voluntary work carried out during a program, but also the likely amount of voluntary work generated by an increased commitment to future volunteering stimulated by involvement in a program, and thirdly the value of the voluntary work likely to be done by persons not involved in the program who have been motivated by others who did take part. In fact these additions are quite realistic though hard to put a value on.

The organisations responding to the German social/ecological voluntary year program evaluation were relatively sceptical about the overall economic value of the work done by service volunteers, particularly in the case of the Voluntary Ecological Year organisations.

This kind of approach does leave a lot of gaps to fill in; cost to one stakeholder may be income for another. It also does somewhat turn a blind eye to the serious question of whether voluntary work may have a major economic cost in the sense of reducing available workplaces.

Increase in voluntarism amongst other persons

This kind of multiplier effect is sometimes mentioned in passing in the studies surveyed but we found no concrete evidence for it. However as mentioned above, the 1995 AmeriCorps survey (Wang, Owens et al. 1995) tries to put a monetary value on this kind of multiplier effect and finds it to be quite substantial.

Job creation

Job creation is the sister at the "community" level of increased employment at the "volunteer" level. The Euromed-Youth programme, which includes EVS as one implementing channel, had job creation as one of its aims; however, an evaluation concluded that activities "... carried out up to now do not seem to be contributing to the creation of new jobs" (Gelabert and Neisse 2004). We found no other evidence for significant levels of job creation.

Economic value of voluntary work

Table 4: value of volunteer work (including non-service voluntarism) in Europe by country

Adapted from: John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (M.Salamon, Anheier et al. 1999)¹⁵

Country	Value of volunteer work (millions US \$)	volunteers thousands	percent of adult pop.
Austria	\$1,380	550	8%
Belgium	\$4,197	809	10%
Czech Rep.	\$196	381	5%
Finland	\$2,657	326	8%
France	\$41,929	6,536	14%
Germany	\$48,433	7,071	10%
Hungary	\$49	277	3%
Ireland	\$715	293	11%
Italy	\$8,290	2,048	4%
Netherlands	\$16,991	1,962	16%
Norway	\$4,255	1,847	52%
Poland	\$150	3,614	12%
Romania	\$155	325	2%
Slovakia	\$7	149	4%
Spain	\$7,055	1,681	5%
United Kingdom	\$21,976	14,357	30%
Total	\$152,662	40,486	

Volunteer input contributes a substantial part of the provision of social services all over Europe; the non-profit sector is one of Europe's biggest industries. Long-term service volunteers have a significant role to play in this industry. The value of youth voluntary service can certainly not be directly derived from this table, but it does remind one how important voluntarism as a whole is in economic terms.

5.9 Crosscutting questions, differential results and mediating factors

A number of detailed differential results (for example, that volunteers with high altruistic motivation at placement begin reap higher instrumental benefits) are mentioned in a review of research on AmeriCorps (Perry, Thomson et al. 1999). However they are not reproduced here in

¹⁵ The amounts are in USD as the original publication uses that currency.

detail because the U.S. program differs so much from the reality of European voluntary service that these results may not be valid for the European context¹⁶.

Do organisational factors of placements (preparation, training / induction, support ...) affect impact?

There are several more or less anecdotal indications that organisational factors affect impact. An evaluation of the AmeriCorps program indicate that regular group discussion stimulated the development of communication skills among volunteers (Shumer and Cady 1997) – an example which supports our "no magic bullets" hypothesis.

There is also some evidence that longer placements are better: "The longer and more intense the engagement, the more sustainable the learning process" (Mutz and Schwimbeck 2005 p. 61).

On the other hand, a long-term follow-up of former volunteers reports that they attribute the effects they have experienced more to the service overall than to specific aspects of it (Prof. Dr. Alexander Thomas and Chang 2005).

However, a substantial piece of research on service and learning (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000) found no significant effect of placement parameters (nor of volunteer background) on impact in terms of volunteer learning.

Do different types of service affect impact?

There is some evidence that different types of placement have different effects

There is some evidence that different types of placement have different effects, with volunteers placed, for example, in development/aid organizations reporting that they learned much more than volunteers in, for example, cultural institutions.

- The Katimavik evaluation (Étude Économique Conseil 2006) found that volunteers in "creative" placements had significant benefits over those in "labour" placements; they were more likely to return to further or higher education and were more likely to report that the program had an effect on their career path.
- The German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation is exemplary in the way it compares Social Year volunteers with Ecological Year volunteers at all stages of the report. Thus it is possible to confirm the very plausible thesis that the more socially-oriented placements of the FSJ have a stronger effect on volunteer social capital (teamwork, conflict resolution) than the environmental placements of the FÖJ (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005 p. 170). Indeed, this study indicates that the overall impact of the Social Year was stronger than for the Ecological Year.
- A retrospective study reports no benefit for short-term workcamps as compared to other forms of international youth contact (Prof. Dr. Alexander Thomas and Chang 2005 p. 8) except in the sense of a slight advantage in terms of specific, placement-related factors such as technical skills.

¹⁶ On the other hand, Europe has a lot of *general* points to learn from the Americorps research

Do cultural factors influence impact?

It is of eminent relevance how the proximal social environment influences and reacts to the voluntary activities of young people and how societies transmit appreciation and recognition of voluntary activities (Mutz and Schwimmbeck 2005).

No magic bullets. Specific impact needs specific programming

There is a lot of evidence that specific impact needs specific programming (Gaskin, Smith et al. 1996 p. 162; Schröder 2006). If program planners desire strong impact on intercultural awareness, it is not always enough just to facilitate their placement in a foreign country (Shaheen 2004). Volunteers differ radically in the use they make of their placements, the potential learning experiences they are exposed to, and the way they process them.

Moderation effects of volunteer characteristics: which volunteers benefit the most?

Moderation effect of volunteer motivation

Since the beginning of the 1990's, Clary, Snyder and their colleagues have been applying the functional approach to the motivations underlying involvement in volunteer work. According to this approach, people engage in voluntary work in order to satisfy important social and psychological goals; different individuals may be involved in similar volunteer activities but do so in order to achieve different goals (Clary, Snyder et al. 1996). They also predict that motivation-placement fit is a good predictor of impact, and there is evidence to back this up (Clary, Snyder et al. 1994).

There is some very interesting statistical evidence that volunteers who have narrower motives for volunteering, such as wanting to learn a language, tend to benefit less in terms of general outcomes like intercultural learning than volunteers with broader motives (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000).

International versus national service

There are mixed answers to the question of whether international placements, which tend to be much more expensive than national placements, produce more impact overall.

- The German social/ecological voluntary year (FSJ/FÖJ) evaluation although it unfortunately does not directly compare international with national placements, does not report stronger impact for international placements, not even, for example, on the question "it changed my view of the world" (Engels, Leucht et al. 2005).
- Effects on life planning and social engagement were substantially stronger for international than for national volunteers in retrospective questionnaires (Rahrbach, Wüstendörfer et al. 1998).
- The German EVS study (Becker, Brandes et al. 2000) concludes that international service stimulates more impact on personal growth, whereas inland service has more effect on career factors.

Is it better if volunteers can influence the choice and nature of their placements?

There is some evidence that volunteers benefit more if they are given more responsibility and freedom in their placements. One study found that impact of participation on young people is greater when their participation is more than tokenistic (Evans, Clisby et al. 2002 p. 14)

Don't go in there thinking that we have to come out with adult finished products, young people have to be allowed to design their own product, and you have to take it whatever it looks like, and not to start fiddling about with it, and try to revamp it (Youth worker, cited in Evans, Clisby et al. 2002).

The German EVS study, which found no impact of organisational factors on impact, did find strong evidence that volunteers who were given more freedom and could adapt their placements to suit themselves reported more impact than their less free peers.

Do all social groups participate equally?

This final subheading in this chapter asks whether the impact of voluntary service is likely to apply to all social groups equally or whether participation is restricted to certain social groups.¹⁷ The overall conclusion is no.

Social groups are represented unequally in voluntary service. Service volunteers are most commonly female (whereas non-service volunteers are slightly more often male). Lower socio-economic background is a big barrier to volunteering and voluntary service.

- 75% of volunteers in EVS between 1996 and 1999 were female. Two possible explanations were given – that males in many countries are still subject to compulsory military service; and that many of the placements available, such as childcare, are presumed to be more attractive to females (Emanuele Alecci 2000 p. 17).
- Only 12% of Austrian young people mentioned EVS when asked to name forms of voluntary service (Österreichisches Institut für Jugendforschung 2004) – compared to 98% who mentioned the voluntary fire service. Socially excluded youth know little about voluntary service and, if they do, do not feel that it is "for them"; moreover, the practical obstacles to them participating are higher (Les villages des jeunes 2002).
- Young former service volunteers were three times as likely to have a university education as their peers in the EU as a whole (Solidarités Jeunesses 2001 p. 9). Better educated youth in Germany are substantially more involved in voluntarism than their peers (Hurrelmann and Fischer 2006 p. 9).

The education level of the volunteers themselves is not a good indicator of socio-economic status or disadvantage because young volunteers may not in any case have completed their education. As the available data on service volunteers usually only includes¹⁸ volunteer education level as a

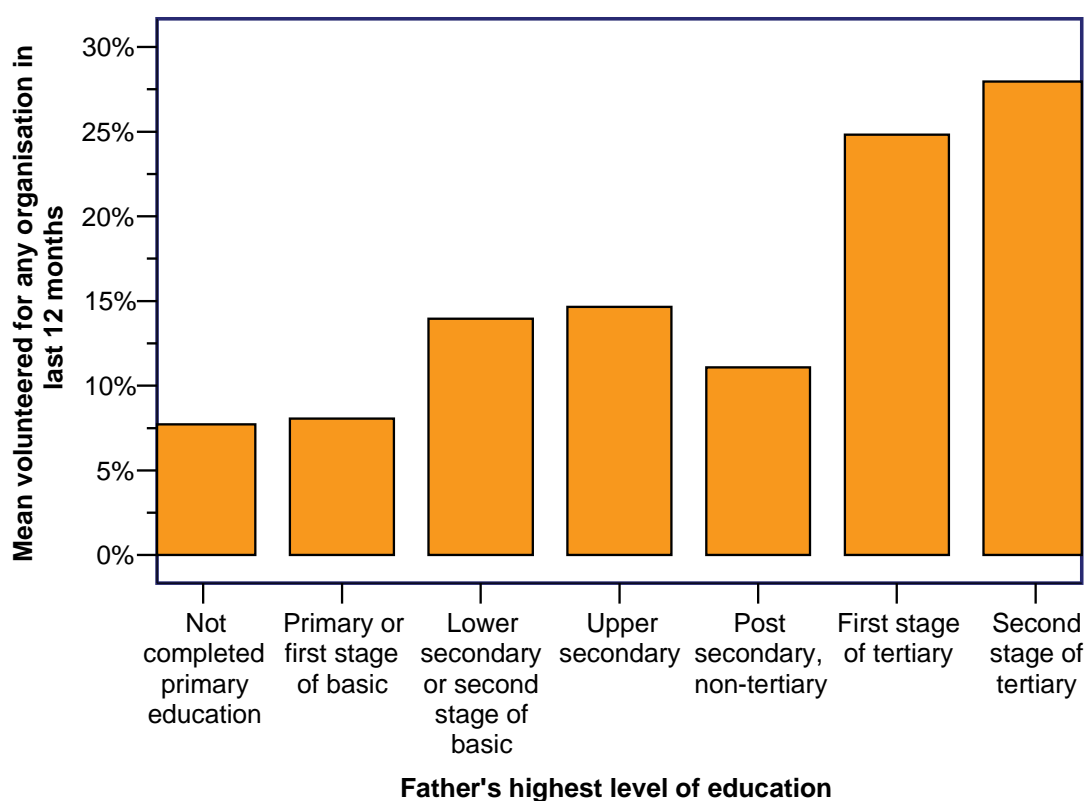
¹⁷ This is not directly a question about impact, and the studies primarily addressing this point are not included in the database of impact studies. It is relevant in terms of how impact is distributed and in terms of social inclusion as an indirect effect of voluntary service.

¹⁸ For example, the Ecotec report ECOTEC (2000). Evaluation of the European voluntary service programme. Brussels. on the pilot phase of EVS analyses by education level of volunteers.

measure of social background,¹⁹ and ethnic minority status is not usually recorded; published data on general (service and non-service) voluntarism from the European Social Survey 2002/3 dataset 2002/3²⁰ which is available for 22 European countries was reanalysed for this review.²¹ The results – which are presented with the caveat that they may or may not apply to voluntary service in particular – are as follows:

- The level of young people's volunteering stays more or less constant between the ages of 15 and 30 and is only slightly less than that of those over 30.
- The good news is that young people from ethnic minorities volunteer nearly as much as their peers; the 15-18 age group volunteer even more than their peers. Excluding volunteering in sports clubs, which is very popular with the ethnic mainstream, there is no significant difference in volunteering between the minority and majority groups.

Figure 1: percentage of population who volunteered for any organisation in last 12 months by father's highest level of education: representative samples in 20 EU countries (data reanalysed by proMENTE from the European Social Survey dataset 2002/3).



¹⁹ The 2001 EVS evaluation notes that data on socioeconomic background of volunteers is not available Emanuele Alecci, U. A., Luigi Bulleri, Antonio Cecconi, Maria Guidotti, Maria Eletta Martini (2000). Rapporto biennale sul volontariato in Italia.

²⁰ <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/webview/index.jsp>

²¹ Data for Norway and Israel were excluded, leaving Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia. The data are weighted by the design and population weights provided. Although a wave exists for 2006, data from 2002 are used because more variables on volunteering are available. The main dependent variable was constructed as follows: "yes" if and only if the respondent answered "yes" to any of 12 variables asking "did you do voluntary work in the last 12 months" for a list of 12 different kinds of organisation (sports/outdoor activity club, cultural/hobby organisation, etc.).

- The bad news is that young people with lower socio-economic backgrounds, as measured by parents' education level,²² volunteer dramatically less than their peers. People whose fathers completed the second stage of tertiary education *are over three times as likely to volunteer* as people whose parents did not complete primary education.

²² Parental education is considered rather than the education of the young people themselves as education level is confounded with age.

6 Conclusions on programming

The most important conclusion overall can be summed up as follows: **you get the impact you program for.**

This means that voluntary service *regularly* produces those kinds of impact for which voluntary service due to its very nature provides the input: personal growth, independence, and career orientation. The preconditions for these impacts – living away from home, taking on a difficult task out of one's accustomed context, and so on – are provided in just about all voluntary service placements.

In addition there is a whole collection of additional areas which voluntary service can impact *given the right kind of service, placements, pre-departure training and mentorship*. Examples from the area of social capital are:

- Social & communication skills and teamwork; networking; sense of belonging
- Active citizenship / civic values / social activism
- Tolerance / intercultural competence / bridging social capital
- Basic European identity; attitudes to Europe / EU
- Intention to continue to volunteer
- Improved discipline; decreased criminal and risk-taking behaviour

Table 5: summary of findings²³

		Dimension 2: the forms of capital (what kind of value is added?)			
		Physical Capital	Economic Capital	Human Capital	Social Capital
Dimension 1: Stakeholder (who benefits?)	Organisations		Reduced costs?	Improved staff skills?	Future volunteers
	Users			Improved organisational climate?	
	Volunteers		Value of services delivered employment? employability	generic skills and work experience Personal growth life-long learning broadened horizons better education & career choices	Social & communication skills Tolerance / intercultural competence / interest in social studies
	Community		less wasted time at schools job creation?	Decreased career indecision improvement discipline? Potential to involve disadvantaged groups	Basic European identity intention to continue to volunteer?

KEY: amount and quality of evidence – **substantial** **medium** **thin**

This table attempts to summarise the main findings from the previous chapter in terms of the impact matrix, i.e. according to the questions "who benefits" (organisations, users, volunteers and society) and "what kind of value is added" (physical, economic, human and social capital).

The stakeholder group for which there is the most evidence that youth voluntary service has a positive impact is the volunteers themselves.

The form of capital for which there is the most evidence that youth voluntary service has a positive impact is human capital.

There is little evidence of impact on users and in terms of physical capital (i.e. improved resources or improved access to resources); this impact presumably does exist but has simply not been measured well in the studies reviewed.

Youth voluntary service acts as an important and valued phase in the lives of young people, especially as an orientation for them between education and employment. They **learn to play a**

²³ The order of the forms of capital and of the stakeholders (columns and rows) has been changed in relation to the original matrix in order to better accommodate findings which bridge rows and columns.

useful role in an unfamiliar environment and this leads to substantial personal growth; they become more self-confident and independent. However, final confirmation is still lacking that these changes are more substantial than they would have been if they had stayed at home or done something else.

This personal growth amongst volunteers is accompanied by an increase in generic rather than specific employment-related skills and attitudes. Voluntary service may increase employability or employment potential but there is little evidence that it directly leads to employment.

One aspect of how voluntary service impacts young volunteers is that it gives them a chance to try out a career; either one they are considering taking up or perhaps one they want to experience before embarking on a different career. This orientation helps to reduce career indecision and probably leads to substantial savings in terms of time wasted in subsequent education. One perhaps unexpected effect for which there is some evidence is an increased interest in taking further studies in social sciences.

In terms of social capital, there is incontrovertible evidence that service volunteers have high levels of pro-social values and behaviour, though whether these levels are increased by voluntary service is not clear.

Youth voluntary service may lead to increased tolerance, active citizenship and an increased sense of being European, but probably not spontaneously and not without additional and specific program elements.

Voluntary service may have increased impact on volunteers when they are given more freedom to influence the conditions and content of their service.

There is not substantial evidence that international voluntary service, which is after all much more expensive per head, is overall more effective than service within the home country although it does produce a different *kind* of impact.

Voluntary service is at the moment, with some exceptions, the preserve of already advantaged social groups. Successfully including less advantaged social groups in youth voluntary service is difficult but some best-practice approaches show that it is not impossible. Targeting less advantaged social groups can contribute to social integration. These groups can also benefit more in terms of personal growth, pro-social behaviour etc.; "ceiling effects" present less of a problem.

6.1 Caveats

Rose-coloured spectacles

Apart from the "weaknesses of research design" (section 3) specific to the studies covered in this review, we should also not forget the fact that published results taken together are well known to have a strong positive bias, as follows:

- Program staff and researchers are either not looking for negative effects and/or their research tools are not designed to identify them (see section 4.6); usually both.
- Disappointing results might be suppressed in order not to put a program at risk.
- If the results are very positive, program staff and researchers are much more likely to go public. Positive results always seem "more interesting" than neutral results.

- Research does not usually consider program drop-outs.²⁴ It is likely that volunteers or organisations leaving a program early experience less positive impact than those who do not leave; thus reporting overall impact without taking drop-outs into account is likely to exaggerate impact (Perry, Thomson et al. 1999 p. 236).
- Respondents such as volunteers usually feel some loyalty towards the program and are unlikely to give negative evidence.

Perhaps for these reasons, academic research, which tends to use more valid methods and is more likely to be independent than evaluations commissioned by implementing agencies, tends to be much more sceptical regarding evidence for program impact.

For example, a review of research on one of the world's biggest service programs, AmeriCorp, concluded that "more fine-grained survey and field research raise questions about AmeriCorp's overall effects" (Perry, Thomson et al. 1999 p. 225).

Our own spectacles

The selection of studies included in this review is by no means exhaustive. We are sure to have missed some important papers for the following reasons: there is a strong bias towards English-language publications, we had limited access to subscription-based journals,²⁵ and we are missing results from smaller countries and languages which researchers do not know.

²⁴ Although we found some notable exceptions such as Bottaro, F. and G. Maggi (2005). *Una scelta di partecipazione: L'esperienza di servizio civile nazionale volontario*, Città di Torino

Settore Politiche Giovanili. and Schröer, R. (2006). *Erinnerungen, Identitäten und Engagement. Interkulturelle Erfahrungen junger Erwachsener in bi- und trilateralen Freiwilligendienstprogrammen der Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste in Frankreich und Großbritannien*, Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V.

²⁵ However, we do support strongly the recent recommendations from the [European Research Advisory Board](#) and the [statement of the European Research Council on Open Access](#): research should be published in a way which makes it freely available to all and is not hidden behind a subscription scheme, especially when it is funded with public money. The vision of evidence-based programming in voluntary service organisations depends on free access to that evidence.

7 Conclusions on impact research

7.1 What kinds of things do we know?

Potential, not promises

Research on the impact of voluntarism, and voluntary service in particular, is in its infancy. What we do have is a reasonable number of demonstrations of what youth voluntary service *can* do. But we are very far from having anything like proof that youth voluntary service *always* or *regularly* leads to certain results.

Some of the key questions identified at the start of the present study are left unanswered by the studies reviewed: what is the real impact of voluntary service on employment; does compulsory service have the same impacts as voluntary service; how does youth voluntary service change the image of youth.

Moreover, important cross-cutting questions such as -- what conditions (training, support, length of service) are necessary to maximise the benefits of voluntary service -- cannot be answered at this point. There is almost no way of knowing which kinds of service and which particular interventions lead to which desired effect. There is a huge amount of guesswork and wishful thinking involved.

7.2 What kinds of tools and methods do we have?

We don't have a research paradigm

- It is not just results we are lacking. Each piece of research tends to adopt its own definitions, for example of voluntary service. Outcomes are defined and conceptualised in different ways. We don't have agreed and broadly adopted research methods and tools. In summary, we are lacking a research paradigm.
- There are almost no research papers which are particularly frequently cited and which could be said to be seminal or to have defined the research field.
- Most recent research is fragmented across disciplines and outcomes (Behr, Liebig et al. 1999; Perry and Imperial 2001 p.161 and p.240).

What we have is inward-looking research

Research on the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe has up to now been all about the management and funding of programs. Management wants to get hands-on information about what is working in their particular program and what is going wrong, as far as possible in real time. Public and private funding agencies want to know to a reasonable level of certainty that their money spent on some particular program is not being wasted. For this reason, program evaluations are "inward-looking", directed at an internal audience. The main approach in evaluation is to ask different stakeholders if they are satisfied with the program and if they see room for improvement, which is a "quick-and-dirty" way to monitor quality and to get a feel for whether standards are dropping overall or are worse in some particular sector.

Suppose we have a single study showing that, for example, 3-month service was less effective than 12-month service in affecting intercultural awareness amongst volunteers. This result might have been due to special characteristics of the particular program in the study, or of the particular group of volunteers in the study, or it might have been due to some major event in society such as a change of government. These kinds of one-off results need to be replicated with varying methods in varying circumstances before they can contribute to general knowledge about voluntary service.

In other words, the majority of studies are not even intended to really demonstrate that the programs under investigation (let alone voluntary service programs taken together) really have the impact they claim to have.

The fact that volunteers are satisfied and no one is complaining does not mean that the programs work as advertised. Nor does it help to find out which kinds of programs are most effective, which program elements are essential to ensure impact in particular areas and which kinds of benefits can be most surely expected.

What we lack is outward-looking information -- information which can be generalised out of the context of a specific program and which can contribute to answering basic questions about the impact of voluntary service.

The research conducted in Europe to date on the impact of voluntary service has had neither the methodological teeth nor the mandate to really test whether voluntary service works as advertised.

Of course it is not fair or appropriate to lambast under-funded service organisations for failing to answer questions which even the academic community has not managed to answer.

This lack of data, however, raises questions about how comfortable we are to continue to promote voluntary service programs without satisfactory information about their impact, and if not, how we might plan to gather this data.

An unusual comparison

Research on the impact of voluntary service is in the same state as research on the effects of psychotherapy fifty years ago. What encouragement can the venerable history of psychotherapy research give to research on voluntary service as it takes its first baby steps?

The similarities are striking. Just like voluntary service now, psychotherapy 50 years ago affected a substantial minority of the population and promised substantial benefits. But research evidence for its impact was restricted to the highly subjective, retrospective impressions of those who experienced it and those who implemented it. Mainstream attitudes to research could be summed up as "can't be done, shouldn't be done, isn't worth it". Many involved in psychotherapy feared that the cold light of research would somehow scare away its soul. Perhaps some secretly feared that research would show up ineffective practices.

Yet now, 50 years later, research on psychotherapy has helped to transform the discipline. All parties agree (albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm) that the impact of psychotherapy can and should be submitted to serious and independent empirical verification. A vast body of peer-reviewed evidence exists which is accepted and referred to by private and public health providers all over the world. It has long since been established that modern psychotherapy which follows established principles is in the majority of cases effective and is worth the money spent on it. Detailed evidence from research has played a major role in transforming both the overall development of psychotherapy and the details of its implementation. Research interest now focuses on finding out how specific programs can be fine-tuned to reach specific goals (Lambert 2003).

Europe needs to act

The European Union is perhaps a decade behind the U.S. in terms of research on voluntary service. U.S. research rose to the challenge presented by the unified, Federal AmeriCorps program. European research has not yet responded to the EVS program with the same quality or quantity of work, perhaps because of national fragmentation of programs and research coordination.

Considering that voluntarism is an industry with a GNP the size of hundreds of billions of euros (see Table 4, which presents measures of the value of volunteer work, including non-service voluntarism, in Europe), it is quite extraordinary that to our knowledge there has never been a

In our view it is no longer acceptable that evaluations of a program as large as EVS (costing around 25 million EUR per year 2000-2, now around 35 million) should rely on the subjective, retrospective impressions of volunteers and organisations to assess impact, without any kind of standardised measures, external sources of information before/after comparison, or control or comparison group (Commission of the European Communities 2004 p. 18).

major transnational academic research program on the impact of voluntarism, let alone voluntary service, in Europe, although the suggestion is not a new one (Bundestag 2002 p. 10; Williamson and Hoskins 2005).

The ex-ante study of the new Youth in Action program 2007 (Commission of the European communities 2004 p. 28) states that impact evaluation will be difficult because of the nature of the indicators (citizenship etc.) but that the effort should nevertheless be made and that the National Agencies should be responsible for measuring the indicators.

8 Recommendations for programming

8.1 Policy makers should be aware of voluntary service as a toolbox for social change

Youth voluntary service already has enormous impact and has equally enormous potential as a toolbox for social change. That potential can be realized more readily with more detailed knowledge about what kind of placements lead to what kind of impact, and under what circumstances.

8.2 Program for specific goals

There are no magic bullets. "You get the impact you program for."

The already significant impact of youth voluntary service on decreasing career indecision, for example, could be exploited by regularly including informal career orientation input into pre-departure training, on-placement mentoring, and post-placement counselling.

Equally, the potential of EVS to increase feelings of European citizenship could be exploited with additional specific program elements.

8.3 Crossing the new hot borders: more cost-effective, more challenging, more relevant

Intercultural placements from majority to minority communities in the home country might offer the potential for bigger impact on human and social capital and certainly promise more bang for one's Euro; the journey between minority and majority communities within European countries can be more exciting than the trip from, say, mainstream Berlin to mainstream Paris.

8.4 Exploit the potential of voluntary service to contribute to regional understanding

Voluntary service has quite a different character and substantial potential in new member countries and in non-EU Europe. There is also potential to help to forge links between countries in regions like the Balkans which are close to each other only on the map and where cross-border travel is surprisingly infrequent, especially for young people.

8.5 Involve disadvantaged groups

Targeting less advantaged social groups is a "no-brainer" because it can contribute to social integration but also because these groups can often benefit more than traditional volunteers in terms of personal growth, pro-social behaviour etc.; "ceiling effects" present less of a problem. However, involving disadvantaged groups is not easy and it is imperative to look to best-practice models and experience.

8.6 Increase youth participation

By and large, voluntary service is more successful when volunteers can participate more in the design of their own placements and have more autonomy and decision-making power in their day-to-day voluntary work.

8.7 Adapt best practice to include adults and senior citizens in voluntary service

This review was designed to focus on youth voluntary service. However there is also increasing interest in, and evidence for the effectiveness of, voluntary service for adults and especially for senior citizens.

9 Recommendations on impact research

9.1 Kick-start European research on voluntary service in Europe

A research framework to monitor and evaluate the impact of voluntary service should be instigated at the European level.

Specific research studies as a cooperation between the voluntary service sector and academia need to be commissioned to start to answer the many unanswered questions about impact.

9.2 Introduce a culture of evidence-based practice

Youth voluntary service organisations need to realise that they are at a watershed: if youth voluntary service is to be taken more seriously as a toolbox for social change, these organisations will have to embrace a culture of evidence-based practice.

9.3 Saving paper and saving breath: do not fund evaluations which do not include at least one comparison group.

Retrospective self-report data, although quite useful for "inward-looking" program monitoring, is not valuable for demonstrating impact.

Any evaluation of, or study on, the impact of voluntary service should always compare data from volunteers after their service with at least one comparison group: either the same volunteers before service, or from other young people who did something else rather than volunteer, or from other young people who did a different kind of volunteering; or, best of all, some combination of these.

9.4 Develop approaches to assess economic impact

Assessments should be relatively inexpensive to carry out and their results are in general easy to understand even by lay people.

9.5 Develop tools (questionnaires etc.) to measure impact which are simple, standard, freely available, and widely applicable

Better tools will be adopted if they make the lives of participating agencies easier, not harder.

Voluntary service is not just about numbers. There is no need to subject it to the kind of results-based monitoring systems which some see as overburdening health and education provision; too much evaluation is not a good thing. Our suggestion is about increasing the quality, not the quantity, of evaluation.

Partially standardised, web-based tools could help to decrease, not increase, the amount of paperwork which voluntary organisations have to complete.

Specific goals should be matched to specific indicators which if possible could be inspired by /compatible with existing datasets such as the Eurobarometers or the European Social Survey (2002, 2004, 2006) or recommended indicators for European citizenship (Hoskins 2006).

Killing two birds with one stone: combine monitoring and evaluation tools

The same core tools or gathering valid outward-looking evidence for analysis at national and international level can be used to gather inward-looking evidence for program management.

Core tools and all results should be open-sourced, i.e. made freely available for all to use and adapt to suit their needs, with the opportunity to return adaptations and improvements to the voluntarism community.

Speaking many tongues: adopt approaches from outside voluntary service in Europe

Existing paradigms, tools and results should be adopted from the academic community, voluntary service research outside Europe and the world of voluntarism outside voluntary service.

9.6 Potential benefits of an impact monitoring framework

Recognition and Certification

Better evidence on the impact of voluntary service can bring added value to recognition / certification of voluntary service. A certificate that a volunteer has completed service means more if it is accompanied up by evidence that volunteers from that specific program, and/or voluntary service in general, tend to be more employable in specific ways.

Better matchmaking: ensure that placements are sufficiently challenging for each individual

Working in a museum in another capital city could represent a developmental challenge for a shy young person, but might be no more than a subsidised holiday for a more confident person who would benefit more from a bigger challenge.

Soft Benchmarking

Voluntary service organisations could benefit from opting to engage in benchmarking with their peer organisations to compare methods and approaches, cost efficiency, and impact.

Include youth

Research and practice both gain when young people are involved in various stages of research design. However, this is the exception rather than the rule. For example, it cannot always be assumed that adults, whether they are practitioners or academics, have an understanding of the young people's needs that the program is designed to meet (Evans, Clisby et al. 2002 p. 12).

10 Appendices

The appendices to this study are available at www.proMENTE.org/avsoreview.

11 Bibliography

This bibliography contains all and only the works referred to in this report. The 40 documents classified as containing research results on the impact of long-term youth voluntary service in Europe are listed in an appendix available at www.proMENTE.org/avsoreview.

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