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Chapter 8

Being Individually Together is Systems Intelligent: Lessons from Volunteerism Research

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This essay brings into dialogue the concept of systems intelligence and the scientific empirics of volunteering. The empirical section presents a phenomenological study that focused on individual-level volunteer motivation and the experience of volunteering. This study produced an octagon model of volunteer motivation – one that can be captured into the expression `individually together´. In the light of these findings the article proceeds to ponder the power and potential of the system called volunteer work from three perspectives: 1) what does the system generate, 2) how does the system a mould human beings, and 3) what kind of `in-between´ does the system endors. It is further suggested that the social system of volunteer work produces novel systemic intelligence by both promoting social interaction of individuals and by widening the other-centred as well as positive horizons of individuals. Concluding discussion focuses on further applications of the approach.

Introduction

With this essay[21] I aim to bring into dialogue the concept of systems intelligence and the scientific empirics of volunteering.[22] Research on volunteering takes as its point of departure the motivation to volunteer and the experience of volunteering, subjects that have

[21] The author wishes to warmly thank Professor E. Saarinen for the most insightful comments to previous versions of this text!

[22] The discussion on volunteering in this essay is based on my previous empirical phenomenological studies with Finnish church social work volunteers (see, particularly, Yeung 2004a). I define volunteering as a helping action by an individual that is conducted out of free will and without pay22 in an organizational context. Van Til (1988, p. 6), for example, has defined volunteering as the "helping action of an individual that is valued by him or her, and yet is not aimed directly at material gain or mandated or coerced by others". Three specifications are needed concerning my definition in relation to the van Til´s. First, I include the "helping action" but understand it broadly to include both social work and other activities that a person does for the benefit of others. It must also be noted that "others" might include the volunteer's own personal benefits. Second, I omit "valued by him or her" from the definition as being imprecise and, to a certain extent, already implicitly present in the formulation "helping action". Third, I add "in an organizational context" to the definition. This reflects both the Nordic societal context, and the fact that van Til´s definition includes even helping one´s relatives and family members.

attracted interest and been addressed in a number of empirical studies.[23] So far the interconnections of volunteering and systems intelligence have not been discussed in the literature. The aim of the present paper is to break into that fresh territory.

Systems intelligence combines human sensitivity and engineer thinking and aims to integrate the scientific and humanistic traditions. It concerns intelligent action that engages with situations and contexts considered as interactional wholenesses with subtle systemic feedback mechanisms. Human life and life world is considered from the point of view of various systemic, interactional wholenesses – and indeed in weft of wholenesses. Human beings are considered to have an instinctive, action-oriented, adaptive, holistic, relational capability to face their environment from the viewpoint of engagement. Such ability allows humans connect with complex feedback mechanism. (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2008, pp. vii–ix; Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2004, pp. 3–4; Saarinen et al. 2004, p.7) This fundamental ability is the focus of systems intelligence. Systems intelligence relates to the wider perspective of systemic thinking (e.g., motivational systems theory, MST, by Ford, on which more below). However, in relation to, for instance, the intersubjective systems theory (IST)[24] by Stolorow et al., systems intelligence approach allows us to further understand particularly how to act in intersubjective social situations.25 (Martela and Saarinen 2008, p. 204–205) Systems intelligence approach recognises the significance of first-person-related subjectivistic aspects of human endowment as fundamental to human systemic engagement (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2008, p. ix). Furthermore, this approach appreciates the "everyday subtleties which continually mould the system we are a part of" (Luoma 2007, p. 281).

One could perhaps say that systems intelligence allows us to bring two levels of human life – and of analysis – into dialogue. On the one hand, the approach emphasizes the construct of a "system" as fundamental. Thus the systems intelligence perspective emphasizes that (1) *systems* always need to be considered. But at the same time, the systems intelligence perspective wants to emphasize: (2) an *individual* (be it a human being, an institution, et cetera) must never be left out of focus. The point is to reflect these two dimensions at the same time. It is assumed, therefore, that the two can relate to one another productively and adaptively – intelligently. Thus, intelligence (be it social, cognitive, emotional, et cetera) must also be taken into the focus. The overall focus of the systems intelligence approach is both in the system and on individual(s).

[23] Previous empirical studies on volunteer motivation have shed light on a number of aspects, usually concentrating on a particular perspective or group, such as the motives of young volunteers (e.g., Avrahami and Dar 1993; Hustinx, 2001; Schondel and Boehm 2000; Serow 1991) or of elderly volunteers (e.g., Chappel and Prince 1997; Morrow-Howell and Mui 1989; Okun et al. 1998) or, e.g., social service volunteers (e.g., Omoto and Snyder 1993; Chambré 1995; Jakob, 1993). There are also a number of studies, often surveys, which have considered volunteer motives as one of their focus among others (e.g., Gaskin and Davis Smith 1995; Sokolowski 1996). For further examples of volunteer work studies, see Yeung 2004a; 2004b.

[24] E.g., Stolorow and Atwood 1992; Stolorow et al. 2002.

[25] The authors also note that, on the other hand, the IST then makes us more aware of the subtleties of the context which opens possibilitie to become more systems intelligent. It is, indeed, a positive, synergetic cycle of two approaches. Both approaches also underscore both human interpretation and intersubjectivity.

Possibilities to apply the systems intelligence framework to both conceptual and empirical studies are numerous; this is evident also in the various fascinating publications[26] based on the approach. Concerning volunteering, the approach of systems intelligence is indeed of great interest. Three particular points of departure (Saarinen et al. 2004, pp. 7–8) can be noted, based on the knowledge of previous studies on volunteer work and of the phenomenon of volunteering itself:[27]

- Holistic viewpoint
  - focus on human
  - focus also on whole, on an entirety

- Constructive, positive way of looking at phenomena
  - potentials rather than obstacles
  - individuals who wish to succeed together

- Emphasis also on individual responsibility.

The initial impression is that in relation to volunteering systems intelligence offers a potentially fruitful view of the human being as a volunteering subject. In particular, from the point of view of volunteering research, it is natural to perceive individuals as having latent potentials and being more generous and enthusiastic than what is often expected − a view also emphasized in Saarinen's "positive philosophical practice" and "philosophy for managers" (see e.g. Saarinen 2008). I personally believe that the ability of individuals to inspire others – and to be inspired by others – is virtually limitless. As, for instance, great spiritual traditions emphasize and research demonstrates, human beings want to leave a meaningful life.

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What is particularly important to realize is that humans are relational beings (see e.g. Fogel 1993). They need connection to others for their growth and in particular in order to be fully inspired (Saarinen et al. 2004, pp. 9–10). We do it anyway but typically not to the full. As Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2007, p. 301) have concluded: "World will be a better place if more people become mindful of their systemic endowment and start to make more use of what they've got". This, as they note, refers us to consider our immediate everyday lives as well as the collective life of mankind.

The thread running through all my previous research has been the theme of *meaningful life of an individual in a social context*. In my earlier work (e.g., Pessi 2008) I have argued that social ties form the basis of human happiness and contentment; individuals are indeed interested in the welfare of others, not only their own; they are willing to invest time and money for common purposes; and possibilities for constructing deepening social solidarity

[26] E.g., Hämäläinen and Saarinen (eds.) 2008; Hämäläinen and Saarinen (eds.) 2007; Luoma 2009; Luoma et al. 2008.

[27] Further, e.g., review of previous literature, see Yeung 2004b.

truly exist. The key idea of the present article is to provide a meta-level analysis which seeks to study the extent to which the systems intelligence approach resonates to the empirics of volunteer work.

Empirical Approach: Phenomenology, Motivational Systems Theory and Systems Intelligence

The focus of this section is to present the approach of one particular study that focused on individual-level volunteer motivation and the experience of volunteering. This empirical study[28] in focus applied descriptive phenomenological analysis to volunteer motivation. Several modifications of philosophical phenomenology have emerged. Notwithstanding this, most phenomenological inquiries exhibit the following characteristics: 1) epoché – setting aside initial biases and prejudices, 2) description – the primary aim of describing, not explaining, and 3) equalization – the avoidance of hierarchies and considering items of description as initially of equal significance. (Ihde 1977; Grossmann 1984; Spinelli 1989) Descriptive phenomenology focuses on situations in which meanings and values are experienced as phenomena. Such phenomenology has a human function in that it can provide our existence with an extended sense of the world, "the discovery of the life world", as well as a deepened sense of ourselves. (Spiegelberg 1975, pp. 60–61) Such a goal – to deepen one's understanding of self and the world – resonates strongly with the systems intelligence approach. Furthermore, the view of human nature applied in the current research is in line with the view by Giorgi (1985, pp. 74–75): phenomenological psychology emphasizes that the nature of subjects as societal, historical beings includes the role of "relevant others" as well as "the personal past".

What is then the phenomenon of concern to the present study? Is it individual motives, experiences and the meaning of volunteering, or the phenomenon of volunteer motivation? The focus is on the phenomenon of volunteer motivation *an sich*. The interview data includes both descriptions of experiences of events as they had occurred as well as people's interpretations of those experiences. In order to conduct phenomenological data-determined analysis on volunteer motivation, a flexible and holistic concept of motivation[29] is needed. To that effect, I have used Ford's (1992) motivational systems theory (MST). This theory is designed to represent all three traditional human motivation phenomena: direction, energization, and regulation of behavior. Ford developed the MST stressing "the need to integrate separate but generally compatible ideas into a systematic understanding". The MST is based on a general theory of human development and functioning, D. Ford's (1987) living systems framework, a holistic theory and conceptualization of human beings as self-

[28] In detail, see Yeung 2004a.

[29] Early theories of motivation viewed humans as reactive organisms obeying their internal and external forces, such as needs (e.g., Maslow 1970), drives (e.g., Miller 1951), ad instincts (e.g., Freud 1926), theories emphasizing stability-maintaining mechanisms. The next stage in motivation theorizing included three new aspects. First, the theme of self-evaluation appeared in self-worth theories, such as those of Harter (1990). The second innovation was personal agency beliefs as in Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. The third new approach included concentration on cognitive factors in theories such as cognitive dissonance theory (e.g., Festinger 1957). McClelland (e.g., 1958; 1989) was the first to include the three main motivational components (direction, energization, and regulation of behavior) into a theoretical view of motivation.

constructing adaptive control systems. Such an overall perspective, naturally, fits very well also to the systems intelligence approach. The MST definition of motivation is as follows: motivation consists of the organized patterning of personal goals, emotional arousal processes (i.e., emotions), and personal agency beliefs (i.e., capability and context beliefs). (Ford 1992, pp. 3, 73–5, 78) From the point of view of system intelligence, four factors of MST seem particularly relevant: 1) the comprehensiveness and the width of the definition of motivation, 2) motivation is not considered a vacuous inner factor but a phenomenon including environment and individual reflection, 3) motivation is seen as interconnecting both motives and the elements of commitment, and 4) motivation is reflexive and changes over time.

My study aimed to develop a novel model in order to understand volunteer motivation in terms of the *experience* and its *meaning* for individual volunteers. The interviewees (14 men, 4 women, age range from 26 to 68) are volunteers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland or its church associations in three of the biggest towns in Finland. Their relation to the Church varies from active to passive. The topics of the interviews covered the past and present experiences and meanings of the subjects' voluntary work as well as views on the future of personal volunteering. The themes of motivation and commitment to volunteerism were not discussed in terms of "why" questions but were incorporated into other issues in all the three time-perspectives: past, present, future. All in all, the phenomenological analysis[30] progressed via four stages: 1) gaining a sense of the whole data, 2) distinction of meaning units, 3) analysis of the meaning units, and 4) from synthesis to a consistent description. The analysis gave rise to "the octagon model of volunteer motivation", which is presented in the following section.

The Octagon Model of Volunteer Motivation

The study on volunteer motivation − holistically understood[31] − with 18 interviewees yielded as many as 767 elements of volunteer motivation (i.e., meaning units in the phenomenological analysis). The overall analysis − based on analysis of meaning units, toward synthesis and a consistent description − concluded four data-determined continuums to describe the phenomenon of volunteering experience and motivation for it. Together the four continuums form an octagonal map (see Figure 1.), the idea being that each motivational element (767 items) can be located somewhere in this map, either into one (e.g., giving) or two poles (along a dimension, e.g., getting and giving or between

[30] More in detail, see Yeung 2004a. Giorgi (1985) has developed a model for phenomenological empirical psychology, which the present study follows in general outline. Giorgi´s sketch has been criticized (Wertz 1985) for its outline character and lack of detailed reflection on procedure in each of its phases. The present researcher agrees, but views this as a merit of the model, since the outline character of the sketch permits various applications and prevents one from seeing this approach as mechanistic. The present article shares the view of Keen (1975, p. 41) that phenomenology is not reducible to a set of instructions – it is more a research posture.

[31] Motives, in this study, refer, generally speaking, to factors that make a person act. The interviews, however, did not concern only reasons to volunteer. Instead, the motivational elements were more versatile: such elements refer to cognitive/emotional/social processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of (voluntary) actions that are goal directed (on the concept of motivation, see Ford 1992).

dimensions, e.g., thought and action).[32] Thus, these eight poles, by no means, exclude each other.

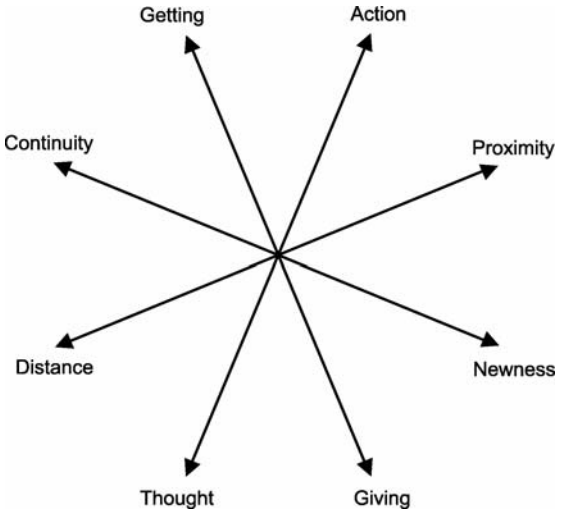

Figure 1. The octagon model of volunteer motivation.

Looking at the *eight poles* of the model, we can see that volunteer motivation includes various, also contradictory, elements at a particular point in time. Motivation can – and surely it will – also alter over time along the coordinates of the octagonal map. The model also has a *meta-dimension*: the model illustrates that volunteer motivation and experience lies in the interaction within the inward–outward dimension of a person; volunteer motivation may be more inward oriented − without being more egoistic − towards varieties of thought, distance, continuity, and getting (i.e., arrows pointing left). Also, the appeal of volunteering may concern the outward elements of an individual − without being necessarily more altruistic − in the numerous ways of action, proximity, newness, and giving (i.e., the arrows pointing right). All in all, late modern volunteer motivation appears a complex, versatile phenomenon.

In terms of late modernity,[33] individuals are today freer – and more compelled – to reflect on their relations with others, their position in (to use the concepts of the octagon model) getting and giving, continuity and change, thought and action, and to fulfil these

[32] As the 767 elements were located on the map − i.e., the data-determined model tested with its own data − the process was not content analysis or rigid grouping but rather interpretation; another researcher might have reached different conclusions. As a whole, this process was quite smooth, indicating that the four dimensions succeed in capturing the richness of the individual experiences and the meanings of the data. All in all, 532 motivational elements found a place along the four dimensions (either at the pole or in middle), and 235 at the intersection between two different dimensions. The latter particularly indicate the holistic and interlocking nature of the four dimensions, which together form a consistent description and synthesis of the volunteer motivation phenomena. The process of building them into one synthetic model (both contentual and visual) was heuristic. Numerous versions were tried, especially visually, before the final synthesis – an octagon model − was achieved.

[33] On late-modernity – and individualistic choices, emancipation, and self-fulfillment related to that – see, e.g., Giddens 1990; 1991, 1994; Fukuyama 1999, and on the risks of the late-modern choises, see e.g., Beck 1992; 1994.

standings either through social activities or more private contemplation − proximity or distance. I have suggested (Yeung 2004b) that the best way to capture the overall findings on volunteer motivation is under the concept of `*individually together´*: the idea being that individuality, independence and social ties, communality mingle in individual experiences. For instance, many people seem to long for even quite intimate social encounters and networks in volunteerism, even though such networks are generally restricted, by choice, to volunteering. Notice also that the meta-dimension of the octagon model exemplifies what Charles Taylor (1992) calls wavering between individualism and relativism − that is, culture of authenticity cannot be reduced to either hyper-individualism or soft relativism − and volunteering indeed is a fruitful empirical arena for such "wavering".[34] These results indicate that volunteering may play a role in both individualism and relativism as well as collectivism − and more particularly, in their mixtures. Volunteering includes moves along the late modernity processes, such as individualization, yet also indications of its countermoves. The way I see it, volunteering is a particular arena for change, personal search, and individuality − as well as continuity and communality. While it is true that the self today is presented with more choices regarding ways of being, one does not have to lose a sense of oneself and the others.

Next, let us take a few concrete examples concerning the most typical motivations found in this study. First, *getting versus giving*. Volunteering is experienced rewarding in a number of different ways; the interviewees mentioned the meaningfulness, conviviality, or concreteness of their chosen form of activity. Voluntary work also offers possibilities to express one's individuality and self-fulfilment.[35] Volunteers had also derived well-being and emotional security from volunteering, including experiences of success and the feeling of being needed and having a personal place in society. Then, giving may be related to, for instance, altruism or personal crises, based on which a person feels s/he has something to offer via volunteering. It must be noted also that getting and giving relate to each other a lot − and more than with any other motivational poles. A chief feature of volunteering is that it is very much a matter of mutual giving and reciprocity: it is very much about gaining by giving. More than is apparent prima facie, volunteer work is about *mutual* help, and it can be a source of considerable personal growth through its specific kind of interaction. The results showed that often when volunteering is initiated with altruistic wishes, the volunteers have been surprised at how much they actually gain.[36]

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Second, *continuity versus newness*; continuity may relate to elements such as personal identity or life-span (such as teachings of the childhood motivating a person to volunteer

[34] Further, see Pessi and Nicolaysen 2009.

[35] This is in line with Wuthnow (1998, p. 218) reporting volunteers claiming to have grown as a result of their volunteering by learning and finding self-images, and reporting (1991) expressions of individuality through volunteering.

[36] The direction of typical motivation change in this data was particularly from altruism towards further gaining which is the reverse of Wuthnow (1995) who however studied young people particularly. Some of the interviewees of this study also explained their satisfaction that their values had "softened", became more social and altruistic.

even decades after), or seeing volunteering as an extension to paid work. Elements related to one's identity and the continuity of its manifestations such as being an active character, being empathetic, or maintaining one's skills also played a role. Newness then may relate to, for instance, personal change. The appeal of volunteering as novelty may also lay in its interesting new subject matter; it may represent a counter-balance to or extension of one's life milieux. It also provides opportunities for learning, meeting challenges, and personal growth – that is, gaining a new perspective on things.[37] Third, *thought versus action*; thought may be related to, for example, living through personal matters and crises via volunteering, and action to, for instance, filling up spare time, wanting to get involved in concrete activities of praxis.

Fourth, *distance versus proximity*. The social nature of the activities seems to be one of the central appeals of volunteering. Volunteer work is a context for meaningful cooperation, and its shared goals are stimulating to most of the interviewees of this study. In the longer run, social contacts (to other volunteers, to paid workers, to those being helped, et cetera) had deepened the commitment to volunteering in most cases. An integral part, more meaningful to some volunteers than others, is a sense of communal spirit. This spirit is often based on a sense of acceptance, joint experiences, a shared sense of humor and, more practically, chats and discussions. But the pole of distance, in the late-modernity perspective, is also fascinating; the interviewees included, for instance, a young lady who was very stressed by her work and still wished to become a friend to an elderly. She, however, never wanted to see other volunteers or participate in any group activities of the organisation. They ended up agreeing that she can only be reached via cell-phone. She gained, thus, both positive social distance and proximity in volunteering. Volunteering indeed was a flexible and fruitful choice, both for her and for this particular organisation. All in all, volunteering may also offer meaningful interaction while a person wishes to limit her/his social networks. The individual may experience being a member of a group even though s/he might actually volunteer only every now and then and never (wish to) meet a larger volunteer group.

Individually Together: Volunteering as a Social System

The starting point in this article was the assumption that the approach of systems intelligence is likely to resonate to the empirics of volunteer work. The previous section presenting the empirical findings illustrated such resonance *in meta-level*: the three elements of the systems intelligence approach (noted in Introduction) − holistic viewpoint, constructive way of looking at phenomena, and emphasis on individual responsibility – are indeed all necessary in aiming to capture the colourful grass-roots level experiences of volunteering. These viewpoints are clearly relevant to the social system of volunteering.

But we need to move along from the meta-level. Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2007, pp. 9–15) have captured in an illustrative manner the power and potential of systems. The three key aspects of systems, according to Hämäläinen and Saarinen, are: 1) what does the

[37] These results put more emphasis than several previous studies on informal gaining of fresh experiences and perspectives, not so much on actual learning per se. Also Marx (1999) has reported motivation element of getting fresh, new perspective in human services.

system generate, 2) how does the system mould human beings, and 3) what kind of `in-between´ does the system endorse (the way that people influence and are influenced by one another − in the most positive scenario there may be uplifting, stimulating in-between, to reach out towards the upscale register). Such three-fold perspective is useful in trying to understand dynamics of any social system, including volunteering. I will next aim to illustrate the nature of volunteering – based on the above presented empirical findings – in terms of the three aspects of systems as identified by Hämäläinen and Saarinen. In other words, what is the power and potential of the system called volunteer work?

First, *what does volunteering generate*? The fascinating essence of volunteering as a social system concerns its fundamental feature: free will. Unlike many of the social systems of everyday life volunteer work is activity that – by definition – can be based only on free-will choice, both when one starts to volunteer and when one continues to volunteer. The social system of volunteering is thus delicate like a love-affair that is based on subject's own choice: it may flourish and bring joy only in as much as the subject chooses it (just like lovers who know that only free will binds them together). Because volunteerism is voluntary, it can be discontinued at any time. There is an obvious, what could be called, a free-will-delicate-dilemma: the commitment to the system can only rise from an individual choice. Consequently, the mere *existence* of the social ties of volunteering is of intrinsic value. They are a value that the social system of volunteering has generated. But even more remarkably, the system of volunteerism generates the choices that make it emerge – it is a system of generating acts of choice (and whatever subjective correlates they will give rise to).

But even more is taking place. The social nature of the activities is actually one of the central appeals of volunteering, as indicated above in the findings. My work on volunteering underscored the fundamental role of social ties and interaction. One could argue that this is not very surprising finding at all, since volunteerism is in essence a social activity – something people do together. However, besides the free-will-delicate-dilemma also the late-modernity perspective complicates the matter. The fundamental question is then whether and why individuals long for social ties, networks, and interaction through participating in the collective action of volunteering – and why exactly there. This overall finding – the central role of social ties in volunteer motivation and commitment – is captured well by Habermann (2001, p. 378): "Voluntary work is, first and foremost, about being a fellow human being … meeting with "the other" in an attempt to understand our own life."

The social system of volunteering has the capacity of generating something quite remarkable: a strengthened sense of being a fellow human being and meeting with the other. It is a social system of being individually together.

As a result, the social system of volunteering indeed has the capacity of generating something quite remarkable: a strengthened sense of being a fellow human being and meeting with the other, and all that out of an individual free-will choice. It is a social system of *individually together*: people wanting to come together, to do something together, to do for others. It is a system that offers more individual choice and flexibility than, for instance, work life – yet at the same time a system that offers more and deeper meanings than, for instance, watching TV at home.

The system of volunteer work also generates *expanding social ties*. Volunteering offers an opportunity to come together with friends and acquaintances but also to meet new people. The findings above indicated that a wish for new, perhaps even close social networks might be highlighted during transitions of personal life, such as retirement, or becoming unemployed or a house-parent. Volunteer work offers experiences of communal spirit and personal meaningfulness for those who long for it, and may well guard against the "fundamental psychic problem in late-modernity". (Giddens 1991, p. 9) While volunteering offers multiple social ties, most people prefer these ties to be restricted to the context of volunteering (illustrating perhaps the fragmented nature of late-modernity). Thus, volunteering often offers meaningful connections with others: bonds, networks, even forms of dependence, in which an individual can experience being a member of a group even though s/he might actually volunteer only every now and then. Interestingly, volunteering may offer such experiences even if one practically never meets the entire volunteer group. The ties of the social system of volunteering still generate a point of reference for personal and societal identity construction.

Furthermore, my research concluded that volunteering is sometimes interestingly felt to be a channel for promoting social interaction – a volunteer as a mouthpiece of values, altruism, faith, and caring. This illustrates the fact that even though volunteerism does not necessarily contribute so much to solving the societal problems of a given context, it maintains and promotes hope to a world in which people still care for each other and respond to each others' needs. People indeed are capable of sympathy – and the system of volunteer work inspires, promotes, maintains, and expands that aspect of us. Volunteering may thus generate forces that might have life-changing influence for an individual (both the helper and the one being helped) and – via that in part also − to a society. Real influence may start from small.

Second, *how does volunteering (as a system) mould human beings*? We have already seen glimpses of the ways in which the social system of volunteering generates something truly significant. Many of these generative results of volunteerism as a system concern also the ways in which volunteering moulds and alters the volunteers as human beings. Examples include identity construction, expanding social ties, or acting as carriers of caring. Perhaps the strongest moulding power, however, concerns the *versatility* of the social system of volunteering. It is indeed a multifaceted, and sometimes complex, system which does not include only the fellow volunteers − with their large versatility − but also, for instance, possible `clients´ (that is, e.g., the people whom the volunteer assists) and the paid staff in the same organisations. It is more complex system than what one meets in, for instance, work places or hobbies. The range of social networks is captured in comments of the interview data, such as: "We as a group – sometimes have such a feeling of nearness and encounter that whew! But then also very gutsy individualism – very individualistic views" (a man in his thirties). The multifaceted social ties of volunteer work offer *multiple mirrors* for an individual; such power to mould is evident in the empirical findings in the ways in which volunteers experience, for instance, growing via volunteering, gaining by learning from others, or going through personal matters in volunteer work.

Perhaps more than anything else, volunteerism as a system molds the volunteer as a human being capable of doing good to another human being. Thus the volunteer has a chance of stepping beyond "systems of holding back" (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2004).

Third, *may volunteering endorse 'in-between'* − the way that people influence one another? The fundamental features of volunteer work – doing something together, doing something for others – are indeed *about* influencing one another. Even more importantly, they are also about being influenced by others; this indeed relates to the system's power to mould, such as the ability to learn from others in volunteering. In my view, however, the most central role of in-between in volunteering relates to its potential to promote *togetherness*. According to my findings, the social system of volunteer work establishes togetherness in a dual manner (reinforcing the systems nature of the set-up). On the one hand, like-mindedness advances solidarity; for example, some volunteers experience connection with people who are similarly action-orientated or altruistic as themselves. On the other hand, other individuals particularly wish to meet (or/and enjoy having met) people very different from themselves. Furthermore, a shared value-basis and religiosity may play a particular role in this experience of esprit de corps.[38]

Whether the co-volunteers are like-minded or not, a fundamental feature of volunteer networks is sharing - the sharing of deeds and thoughts. Sharing demands and promotes trust. *Trust* indeed is a central notion here: it signals a particularly valuable and subtle `in-between´ of togetherness in the social system of volunteering. Maintenance and promotion of societal trust is a particular challenge under porous social conditions of late-modernity. The abstract concept of trust is empty without the actual social circles in which it actualizes itself, in volunteering either in a practical way (such as co-operation, or mutual helping) or less directly (such as a positive atmosphere or shared values). The results of my empirical work indicate that one's drive towards trust might support and direct behavior towards volunteering – and in turn be maintained and strengthened by it. More specifically, volunteering is a particularly valuable source of societal trust in that the possibility of connecting with people representing various backgrounds and different values and norms. While this might result in conflict in many social systems, my research showed that such diversity among the nets of volunteers and (for instance) paid workers was felt to be a benefit, illustrating what Giddens[39] calls "active trust", a typical late-modern trust mechanism based on open confrontation with others.

Volunteering is a trust-promoting social system – and indeed social systems intelligence can only be built on (certain degree of) trust.

Overall, my results picture volunteering as double-edged in relation to the construction of societal trust: volunteering promotes societal trust but it also demands particularly firm trust.[40] This brings us back to what was noted earlier concerning the centrality of free will in volunteering. As Wuthnow (1998, pp. 198, 200–201) states, while volunteering and civic associations cultivate trust, their success depends upon even more subtle factors such as common courtesy.[41] This resonates to the inductive logic of the systems intelligence

[38] Several religious small group cases reported in Wuthnow (ed.) (1994) also indicate the power of small groups in renewing individual faith and ties with larger denominations and networks.

[39] Caccamo 1998, 126, an interview with Giddens.

[40] Volunteering, e.g., demands firmer trust than paid-work, which relies less on voluntariness and flexibility.

[41] Wuthnow (1998) also felicitously notes that civil organizations "provide opportunities for people to come together to define the conditions under which behavior will take place *as if* trust were present".

approach: the systems intelligence notes exactly the power of such small subtle factors. Micro behavior indeed matters; for instance, even if buying roses to each other is an every-day possibility to most – or all – of us, we seldom do it. A non-rose-buying system (unfortunately) dominates. (Saarinen and Hämäläinen 2004, pp. 30) It was noted already earlier in this article: real influence may start from small.

All in all, these two aspects of trust (to promote versus to demand) in volunteering affirm and nourish each other. Volunteering is a trust-promoting social system – and indeed social systems intelligence can only be built on (certain degree of) trust. Sharing and trust are also about *reciprocity*. A fundamental feature of the social systems of volunteering is the cycle of giving and getting. Volunteering is generally felt by volunteers to be an area of reciprocity – involving mutual help, and personal growth in social interaction. Reciprocity includes emotional rewards such as dispelling a sense of emptiness, earning people's gratitude, and getting a feeling of being needed and having a place in society. My results indicated, to give an example, that often when volunteering is initiated with altruistic wishes, the volunteers have been surprised at how much they actually gain.[42] Reciprocity in volunteering significantly establishes individual motivation and commitment and, in part thus further, societal solidarity formation.

Reciprocity of the social system of volunteering also indicates the interrelatedness of the three notions tackled here; the ability to generate, to mould, to inspire a trust-rich `in-between´. They each promote the other two, and are being promoted by them. All in all, analytically it would be impossible to draw clear black-and-white distinctions. What is important, however, is to conclude that we have now seen some examples of *the power and potential of the system called volunteer work*. The systemic perspective seems to truly offer novel light on volunteer work.

Individually Together: Volunteering as Systems Intelligence

The previous section indicated that systemic viewpoint indeed resonates and offers illuminating perspective to the empirics of volunteer work. But what about systems *intelligence*? The core finding above was that volunteer motivation may be captured in the concept of 'individually together', and now I would like to ponder whether being individually together in volunteerism *is* systems intelligent.

My empirical findings discussed in this article have indicated that volunteering takes place in a unique context of a system that the giver and the receiver together (and also, for instance, volunteers themselves together) constitute. The receiver is not only a receiver but an active component, as shown in the results. S/he is a component that participates and takes part in creating the generating, moulding, `in-between´ power of the social system of volunteering. Something novel and unique is being created, together – and more particularly individually together.

Systems are being created together, and these systems influence each of its part (what they get, gain, whom they become, et cetera) as well as the whole, also in volunteering. An

[42] The direction of typical motivation change in my data was particularly from altruism towards further gaining which is the reverse of Wuthnow (1995) who however studied young people particularly. Some of my interviewees also explained their satisfaction that their values had "softened", became more social and altruistic.

intelligent way to act is to bear such a systems perspective clearly in mind. The key point is that the system that is being constituted together – in a deeply reciprocal manner – can be beneficial to the subjects in unexpected ways, in a number of respects and in a number of dimensions. Thus, it is intelligent for a subject to reach out to the beneficial aspects provided by the volunteer work system. In that sense, volunteerism indeed involves systems intelligence. Being individually together in volunteerism *is* systems intelligent.

But what does this mean in concrete terms? I would like to suggest that we can note two particular ways in which the social system of volunteer work enhances systems intelligence: first, '*social interaction promotion' by volunteering*, and second, '*widening the horizons' by volunteering.* In other words, the social system of volunteer work produces novel systemic intelligence by both promoting social interaction of individuals and of whole society, and by widening the horizons of individual volunteers. I argue that this is unique intelligence that no other institution or phenomena in our society can in a similar − and in such vast − manner generate. Let us next look at these two notions in detail, and particularly in dialogue with some recent studies in positive psychology.

First, *social interaction promotion*. As we saw above, the role of social interaction in volunteer motivation – and in the commitment to volunteer in the longer run − cannot be exaggerated; it provides immense benefits for the individual.[43] For an individual, such networks play a central role also in the construction of personal (social) identity. From the point of view of the whole society, volunteering promotes such beneficial virtues as sharing, trust, and reciprocity. At best, volunteer work generates considerable positive cycles. Systems intelligence as social intelligence, and as related to social skills,[44] can be lived out, practiced and developed in volunteer work. Systems intelligence approach, however, is also able to underscore the fact that volunteering may simply be enjoyable – having pleasurable time together with others. Gaining experiences, becoming braver, having fun!

The fact that volunteering involves both individuality and communality is particularly relevant from the point of view of systems intelligence – it amounts to growing *individually* in the context of living *together*. Volunteering can provide meaningful social contacts and opportunities for activities also in situations in which a person wants to maintain her/his personal boundaries and distance − as seen above. One could of course donate money to charity, but the characteristics of volunteer work as a system of mutual uplift, and as a practice of face-to-face interactions and practical engagement, involve benefits not accessible in the more mechanical give-money-for-people alternative. As a result, the social system of volunteerism has its special appeal to many. As noted in the Introduction, the ability of individuals to inspire others – and to be inspired by others – is practically limitless. We have in this article seen little glimpses of such inspiration in the social context of the motivation to volunteer and the meaning of volunteer work.

Second, *widening the horizons by volunteering.* Volunteering widens individual horizons, and this takes places – and indicates systems intelligence − in two dimensions:

[43] For other studies on the role of social ties in volunteer motivation, see e.g., Clary et al. 1992; 1996; 1998, Chambré 1995; Jakob 1993.

[44] See, e.g., Vilén 2004.

both by widening *positive* horizons and emotions and by widening *social other-centred* (altruistic) horizons. Let us start with the latter. Above we saw the very central role of *wanting to give* in volunteer motivation. All the volunteers interviewed were – to certain, varied extent – motivated by their general desire to help: wanting to promote the well-being of others and to be useful to them. Some of them also emphasized their altruistic characteristics and experienced volunteering as natural, even as a calling, in the spiritual and other senses. Personal difficult experience had also motivated the volunteers to help, some wishing to help others through their own recovery from crisis. Altruism is intimately related to other motivational elements, in particular, 'giving' and 'thought'; volunteers intend to help, and their values and norms exist hand-in-hand with their altruistic wishes. All in all, volunteer work is able to widen – and often in a deeply meaningful manner – the social system (intelligence) of an individual. Being altruistic, kind, generous, giving makes indeed sense: it has indirect (and possibly also more direct) consequences in the systemic setting that is the life of a volunteer.[45] And not only the individual life but also life in a wider society; for instance, generative energy of an individual toward future generations and wider society (such as being a parent or professional know-how). Furthermore, it is particularly generative worry and perspective rather than generative actions per se that correlates with experienced well-being. (Morfein et al. 2004)[46]

Social bonds are not only valuable resources but also elicitors of positive emotions, and people in positive emotional states broaden their sense of self to include close others.

Furthermore, previous research has in a fascinating manner indicated in relation to widening social horizons that not only doing good deeds but also just witnessing them – which also takes place in volunteering – gives individuals pleasurable feeling (such as warm, pleasant feelings in the chest) that may further trigger desires of doing food deeds themselves (e.g., Haidt 2003). Such pleasurable physical feelings have recently been reported in relation to witnessing various kinds of good deeds and excellence: gratitude, admiration, and elevation (i.e., emotional response to moral exemplars); particularly the last one motivates individuals to be kind and caring to others. Furthermore, grateful individuals appear to focus on opportunities to give back to others; they may be cued in to social interaction and particularly giving qualities of potential interaction partners. (Algoe and Haidt 2009) Indeed, there is much of literature indicating that gratitude is central in reciprocal altruism. It motivates people to pay back favours. But moreover, gratitude is not just simple tit-for-tat; gratitude motivates people to get closer, to strengthen social ties, to move from exchange relations to more communal relations. (E.g., Algoe and Haidt 2009; Algoe et al. 2008; McCullough et al. 2001; Fredrickson 2004; Trivers 1971; Clark and Mills 1979) Volunteering indeed may be an arena for not only witnessing good deeds but also of gratitude.

[45] This does not, however, mean that we need to – or should − view volunteering as a tool or of intrumental value.

[46] Morfein and colleagues build here on the classical theory by Erik H.Erikson´s (1977) concerning eight-staged model of individual development. The core task of the seventh step, in middle adulthood, is ego development outcome, meaning generativity versus self absorption. The task in generativity is to perpetuate culture and transmit values through, e.g., the family and working. Strength comes through care of others and production of something meaningful that contributes to betterment of society.

Such consequences of 'widening the horizons' by volunteering towards others and altruism may even have interesting health dimensions: for instance, research has indicated connection between higher rates of volunteering and lower rates of heart conditions (Hyyppä 2001; 2002). Volunteers have wider horizons – and they may even live longer. In larger perspective this is in line with, for instance, the classical 'nun study' by Danner et al. (2001). This study on autobiographies of 180 Catholic nuns indicated a very strong association between positive emotional content in youth and risk of mortality in later life; there is a highly distict positive link between emotional content in early adulthood and longevity six decades later. Emotion-based constructs reflect patterns of coping with, for example, negative life events (Danner et al. 2001, 804). Positive emotions may have muting effects even on the bodily responses to negative emotions (Fredrickson and Levenson 1998).

These social other-centred horizons take place individually together: people gain by giving, give by gaining. Volunteer work is a field of reciprocity, in a complex manner. Also recent altruism research[47] shows that caring for others carries considerable benefits for individuals. This takes us towards our second dimension: widening not only of social other-centred but also particularly *positive* horizons by volunteering. Interestingly, previous research[48] has also indicated that caring for others and being happy are interrelated phenomena. Cohn and Fredrickson (2006; also Waugh and Fredrickson 2005) have shown that social bonds are not only valuable resources but also elicitors of (further) positive emotions, and people in positive emotional states broaden their sense of self to include close, and potentially close, others[49]. Positive emotions not only broaden one's perspective but also motivate one to do things that will build resources for the future (Fredrickson 1998). Also, people in positive emotional states form more inclusive social groups (Dovidio et al. 1998) and even perceive strangers in a more positive light (Forgas 2001).

Repertoires of positive emotions, all in all, build a variety of personal resources for individuals; they may be physical (such as skills, health; see, e.g., Danner et al. 2001) or social (e.g., support networks, see, e.g., Aron et al. 2000), intellectual (e.g., control, knowledge, intellectual complexity, see, e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Rahunde 1998) as well as psychological (such as optimism, creativity, see, e.g., Fredrickson et al. 2003)[50]. What is deeply significant is that such resources accrued by positive emotions are durable: they outlast the transient emotional states (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005, 315). Also, it has been indicated that positive emotions and broadened thinking influence each other

[47] This has also served evolutionary purposes; concerning evolutionary theory of altruism, see, e.g., Brown and Brown 2006; Flescher and Worthen 2007. For literature review concerning altruism, see, e.g. Pessi and Saari 2008; Pessi 2009; Yeung 2006.

[48] E.g., Post and Neimark 2007.

[49] See also, e.g., Fredrickson 1998; 2001; Fredrickson and Branigan 2005 concerning in more general Barbara L. Fredrickson´s `broaden-and-build´ theory of positive emotions which indicates that positive emotions are complex phenomena that help create adaptive behavior. The core hypothesis is that positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires of individuals. In contrast, negative emotions narrow thought-action repoertoires. All in all, this theory notes that positive emotions orient our pshyciology and cognition toward cumulative long-term benefits.

[50] Further, see, Fredrickson and Branigan 2005; Fredrickson 1998; 2001.

reciprocally. Together they may produce an upward spiral over time; people may experience true increases in their well-being. (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002; Burns et al. 2008) Volunteering is a possible arena of multifaceted positive emotions and well-being: it offers joy, contentment, even elements of happiness – and often particularly through the experiences of meaningfulness and of purpose, sometimes altruism. Volunteers thus all in all have both *wider* and more *positive* horizons − and they may live not only longer but happier.

These moments of widening horizons in the social system of volunteering may be small and quiet, yet deeply touching, moments of social encounter: a forcefield constituted from a human being to a human being. This again resonates to the earlier noted inductive logic of the systems intelligence approach; small in big. The ability to see the whole only begins from looking at the incremental and seemingly insignificant – what is close at hand. The ability to create larger effects begins from an ability to generate relevant small deeds. Volunteer work in its individually together sense is such activity: large in small, significant in incremental. Still it may have life-changing influence.

Concluding Discussion

This essay has focused on the inter-connections between the systems intelligence approach and individual volunteer experiences and motivation. It has indicated that not only is the systemic viewpoint fruitful for understanding volunteer work in a deeper manner but that volunteer work indeed promotes systems intelligence. The article suggested that the social system of volunteer work produces novel systemic intelligence by both promoting social interaction of individuals and by widening the other-centred as well as positive horizons of individuals. This concluding discussion will focus on further applications of the approach.

Individuals need connection to others and to greater meanings - to horizons of significance as Charles Taylor[51] puts it - in order to fulfil and maintain their authenticity. Volunteer work individually together offers such connection via the two ways of systems intelligence enhancement: both via social interaction promotion and by widening positive and other-centred horizons. Both ways are also virtues in human social interaction; Saarinen et al. (2004, p. 14) have noted both features and virtues of systems intelligence behavior. The former include, among others, humour, listening, encouragement, kindness, and the latter, for example, optimism, wisdom, courage, openness, and sympathy. (Saarinen et al. 2004, p. 18) Indeed, experiences in volunteer work may teach and support all noted elements. Volunteer work is an excellent example of not only social behavior but pro-social behavior; it is not always about helping and altruism but it is always about individual coming together, doing together, and particularly doing something for a shared purpose, often for the common good. Indeed, individually together.

Where next? Systems intelligence approach can be utilized for interventions, in two levels: in everyday life, and in organisations (e.g., at an educational institutions or a company) (Saarinen et al. 2004, p. 18). We similarly need interventions to further invest in

[51] Further on the connections between the empirics of volunteering and the philosophy of Charles Taylor, see Pessi and Nicolaysen (2009).

volunteer work and citizen participation; for example, it seems a rewarding way to study and learn ethics at schools would be to actually do volunteer work, together with others?[52] Another area of volunteer research – and praxis – that is still under-developed is the volunteer work projects in corporate business, as part of both corporate social responsibility and human resources development (both learning and recreation). These are just two examples in which the systems intelligence approach and the praxis of volunteering could - and should - be put into synergy in order to improve, and to conduct further research on, the everyday life and wellbeing of social systems.

Moreover, just looking at the overall phenomenon of volunteer work raises dozens of questions and viewpoints for the systems intelligence approach; what about the systems intelligence of volunteer work organisations? How would a systems intelligent institution develop their volunteerism activities? Definitely they would at least pay attention to the volunteers themselves; to learn from their viewpoint, to respect the individual-level and group-level systems intelligence. Furthermore, can we talk about the systems intelligence of the public sector in promoting – or not – volunteer work? And how about different kinds of volunteer groups in comparison, and in relation, to each other? What if we would look at third sector organisations and corporate business in cooperation – how would the systems intelligence then look like?

The questions, and possible applications, could continue and continue. A critic may say that systems intelligence approach looses something in its width and in its enormous application potential. It is a bit like the critics viewpoint on the loved-and-hated concept of social capital in sociology; it manages, at the end, in the critics' view, to illustrate nothing or everything concerning social interaction. I have, however, firm belief in the systems intelligence approach. The width of the approach opens indeed both inter-disciplinary *potential* and *challenge* for social sciences. Concerning the former, the core contribution, in my view, of the systems intelligence approach lies in its fantastic, holistic and indeed respectful view of (every single) human (social) being. Concerning the latter, challenges are always to be loved − and deeply − by the academia as well as all others wanting to learn and to develop.

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[52] Further on such an idea, and research on such projects abroad, see, e.g., Grönlund and Pessi (2008). Concerning systems intelligence in the school context, see also, e.g., Salaspuro-Selänne and Soini (2004).

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