

Securing funds and developing activities: How do public policies, rationalization and managerialism influence volunteers' world in the French context?

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#### Abstract

This paper, in analyzing the French context where voluntary organizations must secure their funding, and consequently have to develop or vary their activities, questions how rationalization and the logic of growth influence the involvement of volunteers and the French volunteering world as a whole. Based upon multiple evidences, we isolated two groups of constraints upon the voluntary world: a) pressures from the institutions providing support to the associations; b) unquestioned myths as regards the recruitment of volunteers. A model is proposed in an attempt to synthesize how both groups of constraints influence the way small voluntary associations develop, and how this development impacts the very nature and quality of the involvement of volunteers.

#### Key-Words

Voluntary associations - associations' development – volunteering – motivation - managerialism.

This paper addresses the following question: Within a context where voluntary organizations must secure their funding and to this end have to develop or vary their activities, in what ways do rationalization and the logic of growth modify the involvement of volunteers and the French volunteering world as a whole? Our reasoning is an attempt to synthesize multiple evidences: a survey of the needs of small-sized voluntary associations, qualitative analyses of the histories of associations and the stories of volunteers, interviews of volunteers and paid staff members, participative debates with association members including questions about their representation of the ideal voluntary association, and analyses of the associative sector media (websites and newsletters).

Altogether, these data showed out that the voluntary associative sector is negatively impacted by two groups of interacting phenomena. The first group is linked to pressure from the institutions providing support to the associations. The second group relates to unquestioned myths that suffuse the voluntary sector as regards the recruitment and the retention of volunteers. To conclude, we will propose a model to synthesize how these constraints influence the way small-sized voluntary associations develop, and how this development in turn impacts the involvement of volunteers. This model describes four steps in the life of voluntary associations, their birth, the maturation phase, the phase when they enter in the managerial drift, and finally what we posit as the death of the association's initial *raison d'être*.

### **THE FRENCH ASSOCIATIVE WORLD**

In France, the status of associations is defined by the law of July 1, 1901 that establishes the framework for nonprofit associations. Under this status, various types of associations have developed: from the small association (club) of students who want to organize parties to the large association that runs several subsidiary organizations of the health care sector (cf. British charities); from the association composed only of members and volunteers to the one that has very few subscribers and a large number of paid staff; from the very local one to the nation-wide organization. The associative status is often used as a way to test the viability of an economic activity because: i) associations may receive subsidies from local authorities or by the State; ii) associations are not liable to commercial taxes (except when their activity is explicitly commercial).

Under the same legal framework, local grassroots voluntary associations coexist with huge federations whose subscribers are local associations (for instance the "*Comité National*

*Olympique et Sportif Français*” which includes all federations of associations dedicated to sport). The main federations are represented in the “*Conférence Permanente des Coordinations Associatives (CPCA)*” which is a lobbying association dedicated to defending the interests of the associative world. The associative world has attained such legitimacy as to be represented to the prime minister by the “*Conseil National de la Vie Associative (CNVA)*”. It is also present within the government through the “*Ministère des Sports, de la Jeunesse, de l’Éducation Populaire, et de la Vie Associative*” (Ministry of Sports, Youth, Non-Formal Education and Associative Life.)

In France as in many modern democratic countries, the associative sector plays an important role within the economic system accounting for approximately 10 per cent of the private sector employment (Recherches et Solidarités, 2011). About sixteen million volunteers contribute to its activity, providing almost as much labor time as the million paid workers of the sector (Tchernonog, 2007). But while the sector grew as regards its activity from 1999 and 2006, government funding (either direct or through social agencies) decreased without being compensated by local authority funding (Tchernonog, 2007). Tchernonog & Vercamer (2006)’s survey of the fragility factors demonstrated that decrease in public funding and increase in administrative complexity are the major concerns for voluntary associations board members along with the changes in volunteer involvement (Ion, 2001).

The literature published by the associative community echoes these concerns: the CPCA’s newsletter and that of FONDA (a think-tank on association-related issues) frequently address the themes of funding, legislation complexity, and volunteering. A significant part of the training sessions designed for the board members of French associations are related to these questions.

### **PHENOMENA INFLUENCING VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS**

From our studies it appears that the voluntary associative sector is impacted by two groups of interacting phenomena. The first group is linked to pressure from the institutions providing support to the associations. The second group relates to unquestioned myths that suffuse the voluntary sector as regards the recruitment and the retention of volunteers.

#### **External Pressure upon Voluntary Associations**

First, the associative world is submitted to pressures from its environment. One kind of pressure is related to accountability and competition for public funds. Recent reforms have

burdened French voluntary associations which must account for the funding they get through complicating procedures (Morange, 2008). Increased red tape and administrative complexity augment the need for a workforce dedicated to administrative and accounting tasks, increasing the bureaucratic culture, and thus managerialism (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Kreutzer & Jager, 2010) and sometimes changing the very nature of the associative action (Eliasoph, 2009). The volunteer's commitment to an association is rarely motivated by a desire to ensure administrative tasks. In the interviews we collected, we found that this need for administrative competencies exerts a pressure on volunteers. They feel that the very nature of their associative activity is affected by the growing importance of bureaucracy which diverts them from the tasks that they were initially motivated by.

A second line of pressures comes from the growing scarcity of public funds. Due to this scarcity, the institutions accompanying voluntary associations encourage them a) to diversify their financial sources, leading them to change their activities, and b) to pool resources and integrate or constitute networks. However both kinds of development hinder the commitment of volunteers since they diminish either their feeling of control over the organization they belong to or the pride associated with their membership (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007, 2008).

The decentralization and devolution of powers to local authorities in the 1980s had complicated access to funding, compelling associations to request funds from authorities on as many as four different governmental levels (municipalities, "départements", regions, and State). Now the decrease in public funding makes it necessary to find other sources of funding, particularly through the systems of private foundations or corporate foundations. As a result, the number of stakeholder bodies in a position to demand accountability also increases. The resulting complexity requires a high level of technicality that cannot be undertaken without competent professionally trained staff. Often the association board members report that they do not understand the complex multi-layered financial plan and consequently, they abandon the full management of financial resources to paid staff.

Within small voluntary associations particularly, this need of higher technical ability highlights the role of paid staff, thus diminishing the volunteers' feeling of the importance of their contribution the pride that is associated with it, and thus their efficacy beliefs (Dansac, Vachée, & Gontier, 2011).

Finally, another type of pressure has recently appeared in the French associative system, particularly in the health care and welfare sectors: Associations are urged by state and local authorities to cluster in order to rationalize costs and with the objective of limiting the number of negotiators. For instance, small organizations experience difficulties in getting funds because they cannot meet the new standards imposed by the medical or social services (e.g. as regards hygiene) , sometimes leaving their board with sometimes no choice other than to close the facilities previously ran.

When clustering occurs which augments the size of the organization, or when new missions are undertaken by the association, the increasing complexity makes it difficult for board members to master the decision making process with the same efficiency, and strengthens the critical importance of paid staff competencies. In these situations, volunteers sometimes report that their commitment is lessened because they think the values they originally engaged for are not respected or have even become corrupted. Other reasons reported by volunteers are that they do not fully comprehend the organization's activities and that the kind of actions the association now undertakes are no longer in line with their motivations for their initial commitment to the association.

### **The availability of Tools as an Internal Constraint**

Voluntary associations board members point out the difficulty in recruiting volunteers, a view which is, according to some authors, one of the strongest myths of the associative sector (Allen, 2006). It must be signaled that in French, there are two translations for the English 'volunteer': '*bénévole*' which designates uncompensated volunteers and '*volontaire*' which is used for volunteers who sign a contract and receive a (modest) financial compensation. The difficulties in recruiting volunteers as are often depicted by the actors of the French associative sector are related to the first kind of volunteers, those who receive no compensation.

The most frequently envisaged solutions, posited as the natural means of fixing this problem are a) better communication about the association mission statement (its initial *raison d'être*); b) the formal recognition of volunteers; and c) resorting to volunteer agencies. The affordance of these three options is all the more important that they meet the needs and (economic) interests of several stakeholders in the voluntary sector.

As regards communication, it seems that voluntary associations are suffused with a myth feeding from the pervasive presence of mass communication, communication tools, and advertising in our modern society (although associations using advertising run the risk that their activity be qualified as commercial, and thus liable to taxation). Board members and even paid staff regularly explain that some activities fail to reach their goals (e.g. small audience for an event or lack of volunteers) through lack of communication (Vachée & Dansac, 2011). Easier access to communication artifacts (prints or websites) and to the tools that design them makes the artifact become a finality *per se*. For members and staff, the abilities to use these tools are easy to show off, which allows them to fulfill their needs for recognition within the organization. These communication competencies are often put forward in associations' job adverts as well as in the CVs and résumés of applicants.

At the same time, favoring voluntary association communication is perceived by private companies as an easy way to fulfill their Corporate Social Responsibility, or when the CSR notion is unknown, to simply achieve sponsorship. Indeed, private companies already have communication officers and communication departments, making the cost associated with providing communication services low. Voluntary associations are encouraged to appeal to companies on this point, and companies rationally accept since it contributes to building a positive image and moreover they can deduce these costs from taxes.

Within the global context of youth unemployment, formal recognition of volunteer experience fulfills young people's desire to capitalize on job-like experiences and to prove the competencies they have acquired. Turning to volunteer agencies alleviates the difficulty in eliciting and encouraging participation and avoids questioning why the projects do not mobilize volunteers.

Until recently, the voluntary sector was less structured in France than in the USA and Canada. There were very few volunteer agencies, and associations seldom turned to them. However, new nonprofit organizations have recently appeared, inspired by the ones that already exist in the USA (Simonet, 2010). They have benefited from recent government measures trying to promote volunteering, particularly by means of the Voluntary Civic Service.

These organizations lobbied for formal recognition of volunteer skills and competencies by the means of portfolios, volunteer passports or record books. Also voluntary (unpaid) activities are eligible to be counted as part of the three years experience necessary for the

certificate validation procedure. Recently, following associations' lobbying, a new bill has been formulated that would allow (unpaid) voluntary board presidents to capitalize on pension rights as compensation for their service (Bill n°3561, June 22, 2011).

Paradoxically, unpaid volunteers often insist on the importance of gratuitousness. Profit or benefit-seeking involvement seems to be regarded negatively, as being outside the scope of volunteering. For instance, in an engineering school, some of the students carried out voluntary extra-curricular humanitarian projects. When asked whether they would appreciate being granted course credits as an institutional recognition of their commitment, they answered that it would be damaging: they thought that it would bring volunteers into the projects for the 'wrong reasons', and pointed out that extrinsic motivation has not the same value. Despite this reluctance, the person in charge of coordinating the curriculum set up this compensation system on the grounds that work should always be rewarded as "The workman is worthy of his hire".

We assume that these measures contribute to strengthening the managerial culture, and set up a system favoring extrinsic motivations (Degli Antoni, 2009) wherein the very nature of volunteering will be modified (Stebbins, 2009).

Managing volunteers, in this context, demands that associations be able to account for the tasks undertaken by them, and this also contributes to reinforcing managerial culture.

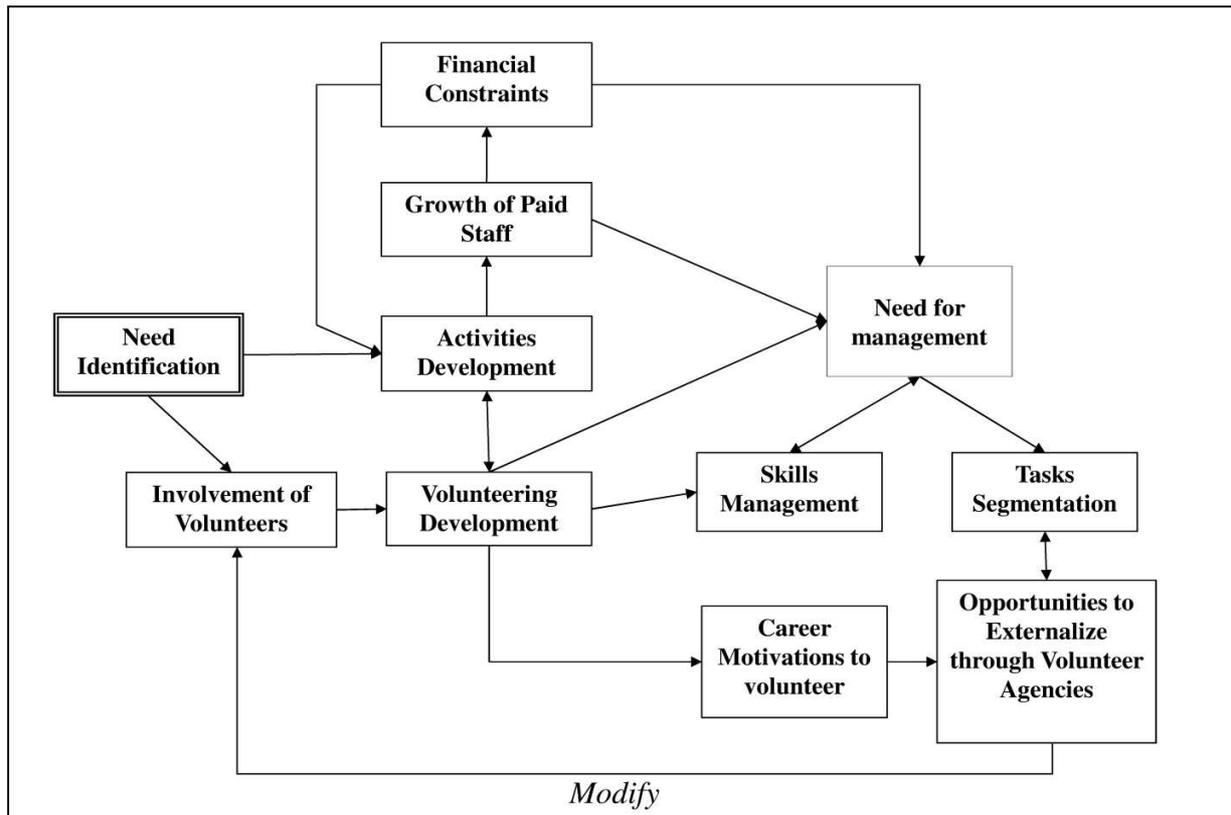


Figure 1: Incidence of voluntary association growth on human resources involvement

### HOW DOES GROWTH IMPACT ON VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT: AN ATTEMPT TO MODEL

Nonprofit organizations are such that they never have enough income, as long as they have positive account balance “there is a pressure to expand some of [their] activities and a consequent pressure to expand [their] resources to finance those desired activities” (James, 1983, p. 354). Most voluntary associations thus try to develop and grow, either by desire (i.e because the values they defend are important to them) or by constraint (because having more activities allows securing funding).

We propose a synthetic model to account for how the very nature of volunteering is related to the voluntary association development process, but also to other factors such those we described in the former section. This model, describing the entire process from the birth of a voluntary association towards a bureaucratic nonprofit organization, is an attempt at integrating our observations at three levels: the individual level, the organizational level, and the societal and socioeconomic level.

### **The Birth: Identifying Needs**

According to Salamon & Sokolowsky(2001), the birth of a nonprofit organization results from the desire to create solidarity networks, but also often from the perception that something is missing “out there”. The histories of associations and the stories of volunteers we collected demonstrate that the second motive is very often evoked. For instance a group of young adults feel that there are too few street art events in their neighbourhood; Parents in a rural area can't find day-nursery care for their children; Social workers claim that the residential centers for disabled people they know do not adopt the good pedagogical principles... When they identify the need, the persons who engage in the creation of the association show great concern about the problem they try to solve. The resulting energy the volunteers are willing to devote is all the more important that the targeted activities meet their needs or match their values (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Shared interests and values, ‘coaction’, concerted choices and decisions and project design facilitate group dynamics, and by making sense in the minds of the participants, the whole process elicits strong commitment(Mintzberg, 1986). Some authors describe this stage as a fusing process of creation (Hoarau & Laville, 2008) during which the volunteers' activism and their sense of belonging to the organization contribute to their social identity(Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Grube & Piliavin, 2000).

When the association succeeds in establishing its activity, in a context where its creators believe there was nothing else being done to meet the identified needs, the outcomes generate social visibility that contributes positively to their identities. The pride related to the feeling of contributing to something important and useful is indeed one of the sources of volunteers' commitment (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). Achieving success contributes to higher efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2006; Wood & Bandura, 1989), and as the activity starts in a desert, perceiving the efficacy (either personal and collective) is particularly easy and satisfies the pragmatic idealism of volunteers pointed out by Ion (2001): Volunteers engage to express values but also need to perceive rapidly the concrete result and outcomes of their action.

At this stage, the resources that the association needs first are human ones, and the commitment of volunteers meets this requirement, provided that municipalities and local authorities give some support to their initiative. On the contrary, when significant investments or greater technicality are necessary, the association's mission statement often requires more partners and/or other funding sources, which leads the association into what we posited as the

Maturation phase. This maturation phase is triggered very early in sectors where the associative activity requires significant investments, as it is the case in the health care system for instance.

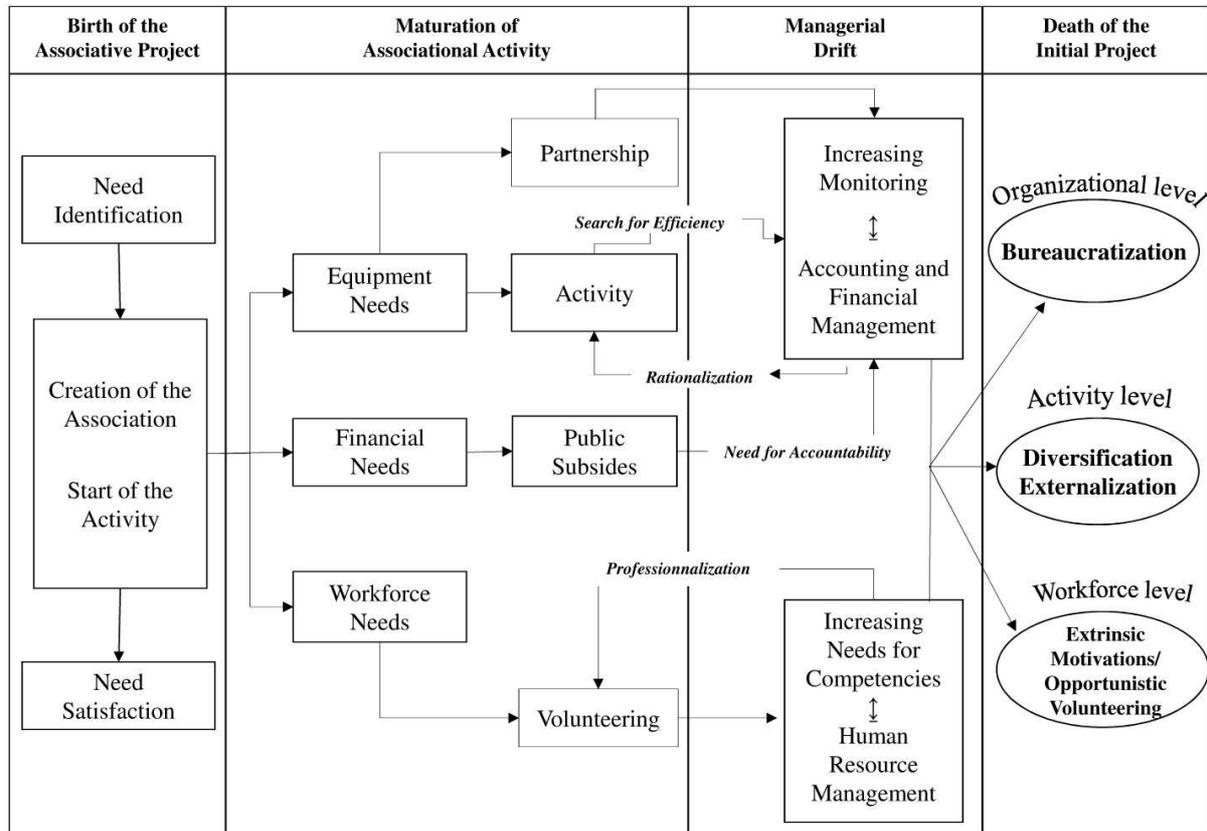


Figure 2: The phases of the development of associations

### The Maturation Phase: Becoming Professionals

When the energy and the benevolence of volunteers are fruitful, activities and projects can actually be carried out. However, voluntary associations often develop by taking on paid staff either because hiring professionals is sometimes necessary by law (e.g. in associative child care day-nurseries, French legislation imposes qualified workers to care for children) or because the already committed volunteers do not have enough time available despite wanting to develop the activities. In the histories of associations we collected, this phase is named ‘professionalization’. Professionalization can occur in three ways: outsourcing activities (for instance accounting), recruiting new paid staff, or hiring a volunteer member, e.g. one of the founders (a phenomenon we often observed in small-sized NPOs, and that we should better name ‘salarization’).

Recruiting new paid staff or hiring volunteers entails a transition from an association that relies totally upon the action of volunteers toward an organization wherein a waged worker dedicates his/her whole working time to developing the association's activity. In some cases this transition may be problematic: whereas the board members have little time to devote to the association, the professional worker rapidly ends up mastering the information better than those who are supposed to be her or his employers. This results in a situation of informational asymmetry provoking the conflicts that can be described by the agency theory (Olson, 2000).

When the development of new activity is not endorsed internally, outsourcing allows technical progress either through partnership with other competent associations or by contract with other nonprofit or for profit providers (e.g. volunteering agencies, fundraising specialists, communication agencies, audit firms...). However the flip side of this gain is that volunteer board members loose part of their control, and field volunteers experience the decreasing importance of their relative contribution to the association's activities. As an example, we can report the case of one small association which had decided to entrust its website to a volunteer (the niece of the board chairman) before it developed its activity. As a result of this growth, the association needed a more serious interface and the board contracted with a professional webmaster. The volunteering niece thereafter gave up her commitment to the association.

Thus the professionalization process influences volunteer participation, but it also reorganizes the way board members are involved in the association's governance, since becoming employers requires supplementary competencies. In particular, new juridical obligations (labour legislation...) have to be taken on, thus increasing the burden of their responsibility. This supplementary burden is often mentioned when volunteers talk about their reluctance to accept further responsibilities. Overcoming this difficulty imposes pressure on the individual to feel fairly confident and strong. That is one reason why the heads of associations are most frequently individuals having strong efficacy beliefs: i.e those that benefit from a high socioeconomic status (Wilson, 2012). Such reasoning could thus explain why women less frequently exert the highest responsibilities less frequently than men on association boards (Prouteau & Tabariés, 2010).

In France, voluntary associations are often enjoined to create partnerships by local or national authorities and agencies which provide them with financial support or counseling services. Partnerships allow the sharing of resources and reduce the needs and demands of each

partner. However, board members often express reluctance toward developing partnerships for fear of losing control over their association's own resources possibly leading to activities contradicting the values and initial mission or *raison d'être* of their organization. For instance, in one of the histories that we analyzed, when an association (dedicated to cultural activities) began to organize events far from the small city where the association was founded as a result of new partnership, some of the most long-standing volunteers quit because they felt they had lost too much of their control.

Finally, professionalization also involves greater financial constraints and reinforces the necessity to secure funding. In a system where the voluntary associations cannot obtain subsidies for their functioning *per se* but exclusively for the projects they carry out, they are compelled to design more and more projects, and thus increase their activity. Interestingly, this supplementary activity generated by the professionals is encouraged by the board members who often have concerns about securing the jobs for their staff. For instance, in one of the associations we studied, employees testified that whilst they agreed that their association should eventually lay them off, the board members were unwilling to do so, on the grounds of humanistic values. In parallel, increasing activity due to the employment of paid staff diminishes the visibility of the volunteers' activity. Consequently, building the efficacy belief and the pride that support commitment is more difficult for field volunteers whilst it may be the contrary for the board members whose missions become all the more important.

While transition between the first phase (creation) and the next may clearly be associated with the hiring of the first waged employee, the next boundary is fuzzier, since the processes that characterize the association as the victim of managerial drift are already operating in the Maturation phase. In one small association, the board chairwoman explicitly pointed out that being an employer was the main difficulty, and that the prioritizing of functional concerns sometimes entailed making decisions in conflict with her values.

### **The Managerial Drift: Becoming Efficient**

As already pointed out in the previous section, associations must account for the use of the funds toward a multiplicity of actors. According to a rapport to the French Parliament (Morange, 2008), these accounting constraints have increased in the last ten years. And as with small non-profit organizations in other countries, French associations have experienced "growing

pressure to do more for less to survive”(Milbourne & Murray, 2010). In addition a second phenomenon, quite recently evident in the French association system, comes from the fact that the acquisition of government subsidies depends on public procurement procedures that put associations into competition. These constraints lead associations to a search for efficiency as well as to a need for indicators that “objectivize” this efficiency, a process that we named rationalization, following Ogien (2007).

Management culture is pervasive (Kreutzer & Jager, 2010; Milbourne & Murray, 2010) and this pervasiveness is reinforced by the size of organizations. As the associations' activities become more important (either as regards the quantity or variety of their activities, or the territory they cover, or the number of beneficiaries, or the number of paid staff...), it appears that management competencies prevail over field related competencies when recruiting an executive . In most cases, the managers who are hired have very little awareness of the work on the ground or even of its ethical foundation. Managers of large associations are supposed to master financial issues as well as juridical ones (associated notably to the status of employer) that are more complex. Pure management profiles are favored to this end. As a result, in some associations we studied, these managers were criticized, by the employees or volunteers for their lack of knowledge of the sector or field (for instance the ‘values and shared cultural background’ of social work or of the health care system).

The culture of management facilitates the search for efficiency at the expense of the association's *raison d'être*. For instance, in a small residential home for disabled adults, the executive board of the association (a huge one that employs hundreds of social workers) got rid of the kitchen to deliver prepared meals that were cheaper, thus saving the cost of expensive hygiene norms. Costs were actually reduced but at the expense of the possibility to use meaningful cookery activities for an educational purpose. This search for efficiency, sometimes in contradiction with the core values and missions of the organization can also be found in smaller associations although they do not employ paid staff. For instance, in a community café, the association mission statement underlined the necessity to have the customers and the volunteers involved into the decision-making process. However, since participation is very time-consuming, the board members and the employees often decide without consulting anyone.

In this search for efficiency, voluntary associations often turn to the federations in the belief that being affiliated will make them more robust and give them greater impact. However,

we observed that small associations not only become accountable to the federation as soon as they join, they also have to comply with new standards and new modes of functioning which are defined externally. These modifications are sometimes difficult to accept for volunteers who actually lose part of their control. In the cases we studied, this resulted not only in board members quitting the association but also in volunteers diminishing their contribution.

The rationalizing process entails establishing indicators that in turn facilitate the search for efficiency. Moreover, as many authors have pointed out, measuring is always incomplete and biases the search for efficiency (Mintzberg, 1982). The rationalization process depends partly on the pressure that is exerted on the organization by its environment. In an association working for social integration through economic activity the manager was compelled to assess qualitatively and quantitatively the difficulties of its beneficiaries because the organization's funding resources hinge on the clients' capacity to find a job. However, once the indicators are established and with efficiency as a priority, there is a strong temptation to give preference to the people who have greater probability of success. When the very existence of the association is threatened, this drift may appear as the only solution to survive.

In our opinion, the rationalization of volunteer activities is one of the phenomena that will most influence the French associative world. The more the association grows the greater the need for organizing and rationalizing the activity. And since the activities carried out are sometimes technically demanding, and because there are external pressures to produce high quality services, the associations need to organize volunteering and to optimize the way competencies are used. This leads to defining profiles and to partitioning tasks in the same way as in the salaried labour force. For instance, in an association that offers language tutoring sessions for foreign children, the managers began to inventory volunteers' competencies, thereby constituting a real database allowing the most efficient possible use of the volunteer taskforce. Even in a community grocery (where social cohesion is a core value and volunteering is acknowledged as a good way to create social bonds), the board members refuse new volunteers "because it would not be sound since there is no efficient way to ensure their inclusion and their participation". Indeed, increasing the use of volunteer labour force is not as simple as one could think, and the potential volunteering labor force is never totally exploited (Gontier & Dansac, 2012) in part because this would require supplementary management abilities within the associations.

This way of using the volunteer labor force results in task definition and labour division, that create a gap between thinkers (i.e designers) and doers (i.e executants), which factors are likely to diminish the commitment of volunteers. It also facilitates the recruitment of plug-in volunteers (Eliasoph, 2009) who may not embrace the values of the association and so do not commit themselves in the long term.

In the past, French associations did not include the monetary value of volunteer participation in their budget plans, and although this practice has been advised by the UNO International Labor Office (Archambault & Prouteau, 2009), it is only just starting to spread in France (Morange, 2008; Murat, 2005). Most small/local associations are still either unaware of it or unwilling to adopt it. Integrating the volunteer taskforce value in budget plans also contributes to the rationalization culture, and thus to the necessity of management competencies. Another aspect of valorizing volunteer work is the validation of the competencies that a volunteer has acquired through experience, was also very marginal in French associative practices. In the last five years, an effort has been made to establish portfolios like the '*passport bénévole*' (literally "volunteer passport") but the validation process also requires that the association be able to certify what the volunteers have done and the related competencies that have supposedly been acquired. This also contributes to the managerial culture of the sector.

Within the managerial drift, there is an interaction between external financial pressures and the availability of some tools which has a large influence in driving some associations to privilege the means over the values. We observed that lots of association actors criticized the Civic Service as being a means of engaging young people in low-grade employment conditions, which is often the case in reality (Simonet, 2010). However, Government support for Civic Service is such that it is very easy for associations to obtain agreement and funding from the State for these positions whereas it is very difficult to finance a real paid worker. For instance, the director of a social center (an organization notably engaged in fighting against the consequences of poverty) testified that he recruited a Civic Service volunteer since he would not otherwise be able to fulfill the missions assigned to the organization. While Civic Service contracts were designed to allow young people to develop competencies and acquire professional experience and thus reduce youth unemployment, some voluntary associations now use this opportunity to meet their need for human resources. As a result, offers for Civic Service

contracts often read like genuine job adverts, requiring from the volunteer already mastered competencies or knowledge.

Rationalization favors the culture of optimization and efficiency, which in turn requires rationalizing. The drift comes when everything becomes measurable and when the professionals that are subjected to the managerial culture acquire greater weight in the decision making process. When this happens, the worth (as proposed by Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999) of the Industrial or Market worlds takes precedence in the justification processes over the worth of the Domestic World, the Civic World or the World of Inspiration.

We assume that the importance of these phenomena increases within societies where the following factors combine and operate fully: Neo-liberal functioning (favoring market competition as a way to reduce the costs of public services); A high degree of service employment (favoring the creation of economic value through volunteer work, which is not possible in an industrial society); Unemployment problems (favoring pressure of the labour market over associations and individuals), and individualistic values (urging people to rely only on themselves in order to adapt to the world).

### **The Decline: Losing the Association's Initial *Raison d'Être***

The logic of growth and the ensuing development of the association has consequences on three levels: At the organizational level, the development favors the bureaucratization of the association and the hierarchical organization, leading to the departmentalization of activities ; At the activity level there is a tendency to diversify the activities and a natural inclination towards externalizing some of them; At the level of the workforce, the modification of motivations toward extrinsic motivations, and the emergence of opportunistic volunteering. All these phenomena participate in what we posit as the death of the initial association *raison d'être*.

At the organization level, we observed that the bigger an association the more important the role of its administrative staff. Thus, developing activities introduces not only quantitative changes but also qualitative ones: as the administrative part of the activity increases, the persons in charge are more likely to have purely administrative profiles with related cultural backgrounds. The resulting bureaucratization implies a hierarchical organization (Mintzberg, 1986). Whereas associations promote egalitarian values and interviewed volunteers often insist on these as being a core to the project, equality is very often violated by the way associations

organize when they grow. Pyramid-shaped structures are often observed in large associations or in federations, within groups of volunteers as well as paid staff. For instance in an association that organizes concerts in order to raise funds for children with cancer and their families, volunteers are organized into '*commissions*' (committees), each one lead by a head that may dismiss volunteers that do not respect the established volunteers' charter. The committees are independent of each other and each volunteer is compelled to choose the committee wherein she/he wishes to commit. Volunteers' wishes are not always satisfied, but once assigned to a committee, it is almost impossible to change and to participate in other ones. Hierarchy is also favored within paid staff when volunteer board members have to rationalize the activity. In the youth work sector, the board of a voluntary association dedicated to non-formal education was obliged to lay off four heads of sector amongst the seven that they employed because of financial difficulties. Whereas previously the seven heads had the same hierarchical status, one of the remaining three was then asked to supervise the other two.

Thus, these organizational changes that can be observed in several large associations lead to activities that become much departmentalized, allowing a concentration that is supposed to reduce costs in the same way as in for-profit organizations. But growing also sometimes involves changing the nature of the activity. In a cultural association we studied, the employees testified to having the feeling that they were always running after new funding sources. They claimed that funding had become an aim in itself, and that they felt turned into project managers with the loss of all sense of purposeful action. The history of the association showed that it had so much diversified its activity that some current missions no longer corresponded to the association's initial mission statement. This diversification process can be observed in the large associations within the health care sector or within social work: managers develop new programs as a response to external constraints (e.g. changes in policies or in funding rules...) even though the missions that are being carried out do not derive from the initial mission statement.

At the activity level, diversification and the managerial culture may also lead to externalizing some of the missions. This externalization process sometimes leads to contract out even the recruitment of volunteer labor force. When associations resort to volunteer agencies, the very nature of the motivations of those volunteers is different. In this case, the volunteers did not participate initially to the decision process within the association; they might not approve or even

know of the association's mission statement and its related values. It should indeed be noted that joining an existing project fundamentally differs from contributing to its elaboration.

The volunteer agencies system is propitious for extrinsic motivations. The social norms urge people to commit themselves into socially useful activities. Retired people may apply for volunteer positions in order to break their own isolation or simply to fill up their free time or else enjoy volunteer activity as leisure. Also the socioeconomic context of unemployment urges young people to enhance their résumés. They may be in search for new job-like experiences and since these agencies promote volunteers' portfolios, young people may turn to them with this objective. The long-time volunteers, who define themselves as associative activists, have sometimes qualified this as opportunistic volunteering: an expression of rational economic behavior rather than civic attitude.

For many associations, particularly in the charitable sector, the inability to renew their volunteers or even their members remains an unquestioned difficulty. A general disaffection with commitment is evoked as the main cause (whereas statistics show that volunteers have never been so numerous), and the recourse to volunteer agencies is considered the only solution. The rarity (or the absence) of other 'associates' (either members or volunteers) within the association is hardly ever interpreted by the remaining ones as a clinical sign of their association's disease. In France, such a phenomenon can be found in most of the big federations dedicated to youth leisure and non-formal education wherein the adherents are only clients who do not participate in the association meetings and are almost never willing to volunteer.

Democracy and participation are always pointed out by the actors of the associative world as core values that are distinctive features of NPOs' governance procedures and governing bodies (Enjolras, 2009). However, we observed that very few democratic processes do actually exist in these associations at this phase of their lives. Annual meetings are celebrated as the moments of democratic expression for the association, whereas in fact almost no real choices or decisions are ever made on these occasions. The only things that are brought to a vote in accordance with the associative traditions are the annual report and the annual accounts that are usually unquestioned. Accounting constraints sometimes make it necessary to postpone the annual meeting to later in the year, leading the members to ratify the annual accounts of the previous year in April. The provisional budget is thus approved by vote, thereby validating activities that have already been undertaken.

Even as regards election of board members and their renewal (elections in the associative ideal being the warrant of associative democracy), we found that in many annual meetings, there was no call for candidates: often, prior to the meeting, the board members have recruited a list of new members that the meeting attendees merely have to ratify. Some associations even state in their bylaws that board members cannot be elected as chair without having been a member of the association for a given period of time. However, it also appears that incomplete boards are not so rare, since in many associations there are not enough candidates for the available board positions. Although interviewed volunteers stressed that the board should not be a rubber stamp for the organization's executive, this is often the case (even in small associations) because of the information asymmetry that results from the expertise of the paid staff.

All these phenomena interact, and together with the weight of the juridical liability of associations' board chairpersons, sometimes make it difficult to find candidates that are committed enough to ensure this function. As a result, board chairs are often re-elected without having potential successors, whereas treasurers and secretaries are quite easy to renew.

Lots of voluntary associations remain at this phase, being run by very few volunteers, or even run uniquely by their paid staff. It is not the death of the organization, since many so-called associations continue to pursue their activity. But they do not hold any new project wherein people could commit themselves, and rather maintain the services they offer, thus contradicting the third-sector associative approach to participatory governance. That is why we named this phase the Decline phase, because the initial mission statement or *raison d'être* of the association, which is considered as fundamental by most persons we interviewed, seems to have fallen into disuse or been transformed into a recurrent program that has no mobilizing power.

## CONCLUSION

We tried to understand how external constraints notably the financial ones, relate to the development of voluntary associations and the consequences of this development onto the organization as well as onto the involvement of individual members. Part of the phenomena depicted in the resulting model show the isomorphism that relates voluntary associations to for-profit corporations. As noted by others (Hély, 2009; Simonet, 2010) the associative world has partly adopted the values of the "new spirit of capitalism" :

*In the Project-oriented Cité, activity overcomes the oppositions between work and no-work, steady and unsteady, paid and unpaid, profit-sharing and volunteer work, and between that which can be measured in terms of productivity and that which cannot be assessed in terms of accountable performances. Life is conceived as a series of projects, all the more valuable when different from one another. What is relevant is to be always pursuing some sort of activity, never to be without a project, without ideas (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p.169).*

Interestingly, the isomorphism between nonprofit and for profit organizations finds its limit with the acceptance of the association's death. While corporate ideology includes acceptance of the deliberate stopping of operations when confronted with financial difficulties (or with insufficient profit), the data that we collected show that volunteers rarely envisage this possibility for their association. It is even less conceivable when the presence of employees seems to fuel survival concerns in a context of high unemployment. Hence, as the political and economic contexts influence strongly the organizational processes of associations and the way individuals function, studying the dynamics of the third sector makes it necessitates the adoption of multidisciplinary perspectives (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010). Indeed, the growth of associations can also be explained by how neo-liberalism uses the third sector (Hartman, 2005; Rose & Miller, 2010; Van Gramberg & Bassett, 2005) and volunteers' contributions have to be questioned within this context (Penner, 2004).

The work presented here intends to bring a modest contribution to a multidisciplinary approach whose necessity has been highlighted in this paper. The resulting model naturally needs to be refined, and needs to be fed by the means of qualitative studies notably by longitudinal follow-ups of developing associations. The whole picture that this model gives, despite pointing out some negative aspects resulting from the growth of associations, seeks not to negate the benefits that sometimes ensue from professionalism and organizational growth as regards the quality of services provided by the voluntary associations. We do not deny that positive motivation dynamics may also exist in large associations, the model being simply an attempt to explain part of the qualitative changes that we observed and that other French authors have already pointed out (Ion, 2001; Simonet, 2010). We assume that further studying small-sized voluntary associations will allow better understanding of how they may develop without losing the "spirit" and *raison d'être* of the association that has so great a value in the discourse of volunteers.

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