ABSTRACT

In Denmark, volunteerism is closely connected with a 150-year-old tradition of democracy and free association. This article describes its role in Denmark from the 19th century to the present. The challenge today is for Denmark's voluntary organizations to continue to be constructively critical of the welfare state and protect volunteerism while they embrace the challenge of a new collaborative partnership with the state.

Volunteerism in the Welfare State: The Case of Denmark

Ulla Habermann

The Kingdom of Denmark goes back 1000 years. It is a small and relatively wealthy nation with a population of 5.2 million and a GDP (gross domestic product or total output of goods and services) per person of $25,930 (US dollars). Its geography is characterized by its proximity to the sea. Much of the country consists of islands, approximately 100 of which are inhabited. Most of the population is Lutheran, the official state religion since 1536.

The Danish constitution was changed 150 years ago, turning an absolute monarchy into a monarchy within a parliamentary system. This has given Denmark a venerable tradition of democracy and free association. The political dream 150 years ago was that few would be rich and still fewer poor. This aspiration exists to this day and is supported by the Danish population and its political parties.

Denmark's government is built on the Scandinavian tradition of the welfare state dating to the 1930s that significantly influences the way volunteerism is practiced in Denmark today. Since social and health care services are to a large extent provided by the state, voluntary organizations working in these areas have become peripheral to the state in the provision of these services.

A HISTORY OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN DENMARK

Danish voluntary organizations can be divided into two large sectors: organizations in culture, sports, and adult education, and those concerned with health and social welfare. (Educational services for children and youth through the university level are mostly provided by the state.) A smaller sector deals with the environment, human and minority rights, and assistance to developing countries.

Organizations in the field of culture, sports, and adult education have a tradition of autonomy and have held, and continue to hold, a very strong position in Danish society. Some of these organizations date to the latter part of the 1800s and have played an important role in defining the democratic ideals of our society. A 1995 survey shows that approxi-

Ulla Habermann has directed the National Volunteer Center in Denmark and has written books and articles on volunteering and voluntary organizations. She has been vice president of the European Center for Volunteering and is a board member of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE). In 1987 she started the first network in Scandinavia of voluntary sector researchers who analyze public policy issues and organizational circumstances whether in the public or private voluntary sectors. Currently she is working on a project on volunteer motivation for the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs.

mately one-third of the Danish population volunteered that year. Of those who volunteered, 54 percent volunteered for organizations in the fields of culture, sports, and adult education (Gaskin and Smith, 1995).

The second group, organizations in the field of health and social welfare, have roots dating back to philanthropic societies formed before 1800. Their influence grew between 1860 and 1930 when the middle classes became concerned with the living standards of industrial workers. Along with popular movements such as the formation of trade unions, women's movements, and a new social democratic party, health and social service voluntary organizations pressed for state intervention in solving the problems of the poor. The dominant strategy for voluntary organizations in health and social welfare was, and to some extent still is, to pioneer and develop services that ultimately may be assumed by the state.

There are 350-400 voluntary organizations dealing with health and social issues (Haberman and Larsen, 1997). This number is imprecise because groups form and disband quickly and statistics on those that officially register are not readily available. Since 1950 these voluntary organizations and their volunteers have performed their work unobtrusively and persistently in the shadow of the welfare state. The Danish welfare state was conceived to be an ideal model that would provide universal coverage to benefit the entire community. Until recently, politicians, many ordinary citizens, and professionals such as social workers, psychologists, nurses, and doctors preferred developing programs within the welfare state rather than through voluntary sector organizations.

During the last 10 to 15 years, however, enormous economic changes have taken place in Denmark and the rest of Europe with an increase in unemployment and cuts in the public services citizens receive from the state. Denmark's membership in the European Union also has influenced how the welfare state has been reshaping itself and redefining its goals. Although research has shown that selective benefits are less effective than universal ones, the trend has been for them to take the place of those typically seen in universal systems (Espen-Anderson, 1990). New models of service delivery and new partnerships between the state and the voluntary sector are now actively being considered and implemented in Denmark and throughout Europe (Habermann, 1993).

Looking back, it is possible to divide the history of the voluntary sector into three periods: 1849 to 1930, the 1930s through the 1970s, and the 1980s to the present (Habermann and Ibsen, 1997).

1849 to 1930

The voluntary sector grew and developed during this period and citizen associations and voluntary initiatives spread quickly throughout the country after the adoption of the constitution of 1849. The sector was championed by the church, the bourgeoisie, and workers' movements. At the end of the 19th century, the number and variety of non-profit organizations was particularly evident. Many of them dealt with children's welfare, the plight of unmarried mothers, feeding and housing the poor, and alcoholism.

During this time there was relative harmony between the state and the voluntary sector. Some cultural and educational organizations, as well as those involved with social service and health care, received funding directly from the state. As funding increased, however, so did statutory control mechanisms imposed by the state such as oversight of finances, representation on boards of management, and prescribing how work should be carried out by these organizations.

1930-1979

In these decades the state slowly took responsibility for all social welfare and health needs. In the 1950s, the idea of universalism—equal social benefits for all citizens—became generally accepted.

Massive expansion of the welfare state and a decline of the voluntary sector took place at this time and continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Although the voluntary sector became marginalized and is not highly visible, particularly in the areas of social services and health care, many organizations continued their work and often took on new activities. In the fields of culture, adult education, and sports, however, voluntary initiatives were encouraged and to a large extent funded by the state. One exception was the public library system that was taken over entirely by the state.

1980 TO THE PRESENT

During these years there has been a steady increase in the numbers of associations and voluntary organizations formed. In fact, one-third of the organizations that exist in Denmark today were founded in the last 15 years. There is a growing public interest in the voluntary sector and citizen movements. Citizens have become more willing to solve local problems by taking action themselves. They no longer believe the state can solve everything. State funding of voluntary organizations has grown significantly. Redefining the welfare state and expanding the voluntary sector is taking place simultaneously. The flight from universal coverage under the welfare state may again turn certain charitable organizations within the voluntary sector into places of last resort for the most needy. In addition, people who feel uncomfortable complying with the requirements of the selective welfare model they think unfairly stigmatizes them, may prefer to look elsewhere for support and care (Sunesson, et al., 1988).

In 1983, the National Committee on Volunteer Effort was established under the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its mandate was to foster cooperation between the state, local government officials, and voluntary social service organizations to improve the financial condition and status of the voluntary social service organizations in the eyes of the law. Sixteen elected members of the committee represent voluntary organizations and four represent local government officials and members of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Nine members with expertise in the voluntary/non-profit sector are appointed to the committee by the Minister of Social Affairs.

In 1995 the Ministry of Social Affairs established a Commission on Voluntary Social Work whose task was completed in 1997. It was asked to formulate policies and write a report on the role of voluntary organizations and volunteering in Denmark. Two of the commission's 14 members were members of the National Committee on Volunteer Effort and there was frequent interaction between the two groups. On the commission's agenda were issues of collaboration, financing, training, and quality. The commission's report pointed out the value of volunteer effort—community cohesion, innovation, advocacy, networking—and the role of volunteers in a democracy. The report highlighted how important volunteerism is to the nation's overall welfare effort, a fact the rest of Europe has recognized as well.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR VOLUNTEERISM IN DENMARK

Since 1983 the National Committee on Volunteer Effort has worked hard to create an atmosphere of unity and mutual trust in the voluntary sector. For the last 10 years it has organized an annual meeting for all voluntary organizations in Denmark. The meeting includes a discussion of the report of the committee's work and workshops on volunteerism.

In 1992, a National Volunteer Center was formed to promote, inform, and support volunteerism, offer training, and provide research and documentation of volunteer effort. The center has a permanent staff of 10 and works closely with the National Committee on Volunteer Effort.

There are approximately 60 local volunteer bureaus, some of which also func-

tion as clearinghouses for self-help groups that address problems all members have in common. The volunteer bureau helps set up groups and contributes space for their meetings. Most volunteer bureaus have one or two paid staff and rely on volunteers to perform the work of recruiting and placing volunteers locally in already well-established organizations.

DANISH VOLUNTEERS

Most volunteer work in Denmark is performed for hundreds of national and local non-profit organizations, associations, and community groups. Volunteers in Denmark fund raise, serve on boards, do office and committee work, campaign for their causes, and represent their organizations in the local community. They also provide counseling, organize self-help groups, staff telephone lines for, among others, young people and their parents, the elderly, the lonely, and the suicidal. They visit the sick and housebound, run bazaars and take groups on outings to recreational activities. Few people volunteer for state agencies. In the welfare state there is almost no precedent for that. Those who volunteer for state agencies make friendly visits to inmates and patients in prisons and psychiatric hospitals.

Between one-quarter and one-third of the Danish population volunteers an average of 14 hours a month. Of all European countries, only the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have higher percentages of volunteers: 38, 36 and 34 percent respectively. In Germany 18 percent of the population volunteers, in Bulgaria 19 percent, and in Slovakia, 12 percent.

Table I shows certain sectors in which volunteers work in some representative European countries. The table shows that compared with other European countries, volunteers in Denmark and Sweden are more active in culture and sports than in social services, health care, or education. These statistics reflect the high degree to which social services, health care, and education have been taken over by the welfare state in both countries.

In Denmark men and women are equally engaged in volunteering with more men in sports and more women in social services and health care. The typical volunteer is between 35-45 years of age, middle class, and in the middle of a career (Anker and Nielsen, 1995).

In spite of the government's positive attitude toward volunteering, there are limitations placed on those who volunteer if they receive statutory benefits from the state. Volunteers who receive unemployment benefits or an early retirement pension must report how many hours they volunteer and their benefits are reduced accordingly. As a result, some do not report their hours and others reluctantly refrain from volunteering. For years, the

TABLE I

Certain Sectors in Which Volunteers Serve in Some European Countries

	Social Service & Health	Culture & Sports	Education
Denmark	13%	48%	6%
Sweden	14	40	12
United Kingdom	35	20	27
Netherlands	24	34	18
Germany	34	29	24
Bulgaria	22	4	14
Slovakia	20	12	15

Note:The information cited here is taken from Gaskin, K., & Smith, J.D. (1995): *A new civic Europe? A study of the extent and role of volunteering.* London: The Volunteer Centre UK.

Committee on Volunteer Effort has lobbied on this issue, but has not succeeded in convincing enough politicians, trade union members, and civil servants that volunteering should be considered a basic civil right for all citizens whether they receive benefits from the state or not.

Of the several thousand voluntary organizations in Denmark, 350-400 operate in the field of health and social welfare. Their work is done in the following areas (Anker, 1995):

Sick and disabled	46%
Children, youth, and families	18%
Humanitarian and church-related social work	10%
Advocacy and counseling	9%
Drug and alcohol abuse	7%
Elderly	7%
Ethnic minorities	3%

LEGAL AND FUNDING ISSUES

Although the Danish constitution places no barriers on the formation of voluntary organizations, there are no specific statutes that ensure their legal existence. In addition, as was mentioned before, there are laws that place obstacles in the way of volunteering. Voluntary organizations in culture, sports, and adult education, however, have been assured financial support and are granted basic legal rights to continue their activities.

In 1998, a new law on social services *(den sociale servicelov)* was passed stating that local authorities should work harder at forming partnerships with voluntary organizations and community groups. Annually the state will set aside $14.3 million (US dollars) to encourage this in addition to providing funds from state-run lotteries to support the voluntary organizations in this sector. State funds can be applied for if the organization's volunteers are working with groups with special needs such as children in crisis, psychiatric patients, prostitutes, immigrants, and battered women.

Some voluntary organizations are financially very strong. Usually older organizations are more financially secure than newer ones. Among the organizations established after 1980, nearly 45 percent have a yearly budget of less than $35,000 (US dollars). Of those established before 1920, more than 45 percent have yearly budgets exceeding $170,000 (US dollars). Although barely one-third of Denmark's voluntary organizations receive more than 50 percent of their income from central or local government grants, most do receive some in-kind government support in the use of free office space and photocopying services. The balance of the funding comes from the organization's own fees for service, privately run lotteries, private foundation grants, fund raising efforts, donations, legacies, and interest on invested funds. (Anker, 1995). In Denmark, corporate support for the voluntary sector is negligible.

CONCLUSION

The citizens as well as the government of Denmark are becoming more aware that:

- Volunteering is an important part of life in a civil society.
- All problems cannot be solved by the welfare state as had been hoped for from the 1930s through the middle of the 1970s.
- Volunteers represent enormous resources—and power—in society.
- Partnerships between voluntary organizations and the state need to be established and can succeed.

The government is planning further support and funding for voluntary initiatives. It is hoped voluntary organizations will be able to meet the expectations placed on them and also know when to say "No" to unreasonable demands. Despite the Danish government's new, enthusiastic support for volunteerism, if volunteers are asked to assume responsibility for services for which they are not suited or trained, there is concern the effort will be undermined.

If voluntary organizations in Denmark decide to work closely with local government, assuming functions previously delivered by professionals in state agencies, they will have to upgrade and expand their staffs, and provide more training for their volunteers. It is the author's belief that citizens engaged in voluntary activity should not be transformed by the state into mass producers of services the state no longer provides.

Voluntary organizations in social service and health care have a long history as pressure groups, as watchdogs advocating for the rights of interest groups, and as pioneers in starting new projects. It is not inconceivable that they may not want to take over services they once fought so hard to get the welfare state to assume. They may not want to give up their role as advocates for hitherto unknown needs or as lobbyists for public services for targeted groups using a combination of self-help organizing and pressure group tactics. The author believes the voluntary sector and its volunteers should supplement and enhance the work done by professional providers of service. What volunteers offer is the richness of their life experience and their compassion toward others, all of which make their contribution unique. The challenge to voluntary organizations and their volunteers is to maintain the delicate balance between preserving the best of the welfare state while supporting the time-honored activities and engagement of the voluntary sector and its volunteers.

REFERENCES

Anker, J. (1995). *De frivillige sociale organisationer* (Voluntary social organizations). Copenhagen: Socialforskingsinstituttet (Institute of Social Research).

Anker, J., & Nielsen, I.K. (1995). *Det frivillige arbejde* (Voluntary work). Copenhagen: Socialforskningsinstituttet (Institute of Social Research).

Espen-Andersen, G. (ed.) (1990). *Three worlds of welfare capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gaskin, K., & Smith, J.D. (1995): *A new civic Europe? A study of the extent and role of volunteering.* London: The Volunteer Centre UK.

Habermann, U. (1993). Volunteering in Denmark. In *Volunteering in Europe—Opportunities and challenges* (J. Davies Smith, Ed.). London: The Volunteer Centre UK.

Habermann, U., & Ibsen, B. (1997). Den frivillige sektor i Danmark: 150 ars historisk udvikling. In *Frivilligt Socialt Arbejde i Fremtidens Velfaerdssamfund.* (The volunteer sector in Denmark: 150 years of historical roots. In *Volunteering in the Future of the Welfare State.)* Copenhagen: Socialministeriet (Ministry of Social Affairs).

Habermann, U., & Larsen, T.H., Eds. (1997). *Social Vejviser, 1997* (a directory on national voluntary organizations). Odense: Center for Frivilligt Socialt Arbejde (The National Volunteer Center).

Sunesson, S., Blomberg, S., Edelbalk, P.G., Harrysson, L., Magnusson, J.A., Meeuwisse, A., Petersson, J., & Salonen, T. (1998): The flight from universalism. *European Journal of Social Work,* Vol. 1, No. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.