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A Market to Sell Experience:

How Neo-liberal Volunteering Policies
Trade on the Pressures of Being Young

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Theoretical Perspectives on Volunteering as Mutual Aid

- ▶ There is a role for biology, anarchist political theory, and especially mutual aid in volunteering from Darwin, to Kropotkin, to Dawkins
- ▶ The shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* (Tonnies, 1955)
- ▶ Tocqueville's individualism



Capitalism is detrimental to notions of community because 'there is history, but no shared narrative of difficulty or shared fate... [the requirement for flexibility] provide human beings no deep reasons to care about one another'
(Sennett, 1998: 147)



UK Volunteering Policy

- ▶ Huge investment since mid-1990s by central government; ‘hyper-active’ policy making (Kendall, 2005)
- ▶ The growth of volunteering as part of education qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate
- ▶ The importance of “putting an MV on your CV”
- ▶ Creating opportunities, *not* recruiting volunteers



“In schools you could always go in and get a good bunch for numbers but you often found the students did it more for themselves, to get into Uni or whatever...And so we sold it to them along different lines to get our targets met.”

(Beatrice, Youth Volunteering Worker)

“Because you have to pitch it, I say ‘So, you want to go to university and this will look great on your personal statement’.”

(Jill, Youth Volunteering Worker)



Alan: If people come looking for volunteering, we offer them the carrot of improving their CV or UCAS application.

Jon: And is there a stick involved?

Alan: Whilst the whole nature of volunteering is about free will, I suppose the stick is if you don't do it and someone else is going for the same job as you in the future, the chances are the person with more volunteering experience will get it. So there's implied, not threat, but loss in the future.



Conclusions

- ▶ While workers constantly reaffirmed that they don't feel it matters why someone volunteers, and that all volunteering was to be celebrated; but in practice they found that such programmes to encourage volunteering were reinforcing a short-term mentality toward commitment
- ▶ 'a threat to the resilience of the voluntary sector' (Hustinx and Meijs, 2011: 5)
- ▶ The flexible labour market encourages individuals to 'abandon commitments and loyalties without regret' (Bauman, 2007: 4-5)



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