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Volunteers in UK Mountain Rescue: responding to increasing demand for rescues and a changed relationship with the state.

Mountain rescue (MR) teams in the UK are run entirely by volunteers. The number of MR call-outs has increased, partly because teams are increasingly being used by the police in searches for missing people in non-mountainous areas. Most MR teams feel they are coping with the increased demand although some are becoming selective about which call-outs they respond to. A survey of MR team members and potential recruits reveals a mismatch between potential members' expectation of being engaged in mountain rescue and the reality of the increased work supporting non-mountain incidents. This illustrates a potential strain in the motivations of volunteers being used to deliver public services. The paper explores how this is particular to the type of volunteering involved in mountain rescue, how teams have coped with the increased demand and how the increased use of MR teams is partly a response to changed police management practices.

This paper is based on research conducted by Rohan Goel and Tom Nichols as part requirement of a Dr. of Medicine degree at University of Leeds

Introduction

This paper provides a particular example of a changing relationship between 'civil society' and the state. Civil society has been defined as the 'part of society which has a life of its own, which is distinctly different from the state, and which is largely in autonomy from it'. Shils, 2003, 292). Conceptualising civil society has been the topic of extensive debate in this journal (Wagner, 2012, responses in vol. 4, no.3, 2013). The important point here is that mountain rescue (MR) teams represent the type of voluntary action advocated by Beveridge as initiated by citizens for the public purpose of helping fellow citizens (Beveridge, 1948: 8). As described below, MR teams interact with the statutory emergency services of the police, fire brigade and ambulance. This paper explores the implications of MR teams being nudged a little towards the 'collectivised' end of an axis between individualised and collectivised provision of services (Wagner, 2012: 303), in that they are increasingly being asked to deliver searches in non-mountainous areas for the police and under police direction. It investigates how MR teams in the UK regard and cope with the extra demand on them. This is in the context of an increasing use of volunteers to deliver public services. The current UK government is looking for members of the public to compensate for the cuts in public spending by running services themselves (Kisby, 2010; Taylor, Mathers, Atfield & Parry, 2011).

Mountain Rescue teams as an example of civic society

Mountain rescue in the United Kingdom is a voluntary emergency service provided by 54 teams in England and Wales with 3,500 team members, and 28 teams in Scotland with over 1000 volunteers (Mountain Rescue committee of Scotland, n.d.). MR teams vary considerably in size — the average is 40 members. They may include specialist roles such as search dog handlers and be supported by others acting in roles such as fundraisers, and child minders to enable other members to attend rescues. The teams are entirely made up of volunteers. They conduct search-and-rescue operations in mountainous environments that cannot be reached by statutory emergency services (ES) such as the police, ambulance and fire services, and deliver those rescued to locations that can be reached by ambulances or

helicopters. In England and Wales MR teams raise all their own income through fund raising and donations. In Scotland the government provides a grant of approximately £320,000 p.a. which is distributed between the 28 teams. The number of call-outs varies considerably between teams, with the busiest teams being in the most popular mountaineering areas such as the Peak District and Lake District.

The traditional role of the MR has been as a service by mountaineers for mountaineers; in the manner of voluntary action envisaged by Beveridge in 1948 (Wagner, 2012). The culture of MR teams may owe something to their formation at around that time. They originated when few people engaged in mountaineering, when there was a strong tradition of self-reliance, and when lack of helicopters meant that an accident in the mountains required evacuation by human effort alone. What remains unchanged is that team members can be 'called-up' at any time of day or night, and often in adverse weather. Rescues can involve extensive searches of large areas or technically difficult evacuations from cliffs. The need for expertise in mountaineering skills and emergency first aid, and for team members to be completely reliant on each other's ability, means that a training period of a year is normally required before a volunteer can become a full team member. There is no charge for MR services, although those rescued often make a donation. In most other countries, for example in the European Alps, mountain rescue is provided by professionals and mountaineers pay for rescue services, normally through private insurance (Donelan, 2004).

Management and organisational implications of the characteristics of MR

The strong sense of autonomy of MR teams and their strong internally imposed team discipline can be understood as a consequence of the characteristics of this type of volunteering. Yarwood's study of MR teams (2010) identified a strong sense of friendship, team working and loyalty to the unit although this was not the main focus of his research. Lois (1999) described the socialization practices of a mountain rescue team as new members adopted the discipline required in dealing with life-and-death situations. Understanding of the organisation and management of this type of volunteering was extended by O'Toole's (2013) recent qualitative study of lifeboats crews, based on 40 in-depth interviews. This understood the crew's sense of morally legitimised autonomy as arising from a combination of 'thick' and 'perilous' volunteering. 'Thick' volunteering was defined as 'a form of volunteering which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it, leading to a feeling of ownership over the volunteering role and/or the voluntary organization … '. 'Perilous volunteering' denotes 'volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, chooses to engage in dangerous voluntary activity which may result in serious and/or significant personal bodily or emotional harm or distress, up to and including loss of life' (O'Toole, 2013: 34). O'Toole concludes that 'thick volunteering was made especially thick when it consisted of perilous work' (O'Toole, 287). O'Toole attributes the concept of 'thick volunteering' to his PhD supervisor but it equates closely to Stebbins's concept of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007); modified with the critique that 'serious leisure' can move beyond description to explanation through its function of expressing a strong identity. Jones (2006) developed the concept in this way to understand football supporters. In the same way as it can explain lifeboat crew's sense of autonomy from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which actually own the boats and equipment. The notion of serious leisure has also been used to understand steam engine museum enthusiasts' legitimation of autonomy in resisting management by paid staff (Hagan, 2008). Thus the characteristics of volunteering in an organisation have implications for the

management of volunteers and relationships with other organisations, be they in the private, public or voluntary sectors.

In relation to MR teams, the important point is that their volunteering shares with lifeboat crews the combined characteristics of being 'thick' (or 'serious') and 'perilous', explaining a particularly strong sense of independence and autonomy. This is likely to be enhanced because MR teams (with the exception of a small grant to Scottish teams) raise all their own funds and own their equipment, in contrast to lifeboat crews. Motivations of this particular type of volunteer are suggested by a comparative study of RNLI volunteers and charity shop volunteers. This found that lifeboat crew had a higher sensation-seeking disposition overall, were significantly motivated by a desire and concern for interpersonal relationships, had less anxiety manifestations, were high risk takers and were motivated by egoistic orientations (Wood, 2006).

An increased demand for mountain rescue

MR teams are facing an increase in demand at the same time as national volunteering levels are static. The demand for rescues has increased across the country. Incidents in England and Wales have risen from less than 400 in 1982 to over 1,000 in 2011 (see Figure 1) (Feeney, 2012) apart from a sharp drop in 2001 corresponding to the foot and mouth disease epidemic which effectively closed much of the countryside. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland annual report (2011) concluded that the rise in incidents seen over the previous decade was continuing. An increase in the number of rescues may be an international trend: it was apparent in the European Alps between 1987 and 1997 (Lischke et al, 2001).

Insert figure 1 here
Figure 1: Trends in MR services in the past 30 years in England and Wales. (Feeney, 2012)

The most common causes of incidents are searches for lost persons and the most common injury is to lower limbs (Hearns, 2003; Mort & Godden, 2010; Rescue, 2011), hence requiring evacuation. A recent survey of Lake District teams found that team members believe that increased participation in outdoor activities is the major reason for increased incident rates (Sharp & Roy, 2012). This view is supported by data from national sports surveys and organisations (Gardner, n.d.; Sport England — Active People Surveys, n.d.). The same Lake District survey found that 44% of team members felt their team 'has difficulty resourcing call outs with its current complement of team members' (Sharp & Roy, 2012, 25). Yarwood's (2010) analysis of MR call-out records in England and Wales from 1994 to 2006 confirmed the increase in call-outs and showed that non-mountain incidents had risen at a faster rate than ones in the mountains. This was because teams were increasingly being asked to help police search for missing persons, both in mountainous and non-mountainous areas. This is most common for teams adjacent to urban areas and away from large mountains i.e. those in the South West, North East and Mid-Pennine areas. In these areas, between 1989 and 2006, teams dealt with more call-outs to non-mountainous areas than to mountainous ones. Yarwood attributed this trend to larger numbers of elderly people with Alzheimer's disease, more cases of mental illness, legislative changes and a changed perception of acceptable risk in society in general (Beck, 1992); which all contributed to more searches for missing persons. Specifically, Article 2 of the 1998 Human Rights Act, passed in the UK, gave police a statutory obligation to respond to all reports of missing persons and to minimise

the number of incidents that end in loss of life or harm to the person or others (Yarwood, 2010: 268).

At the same time as MR teams are responding to more call-outs, the levels of formal volunteering in the UK have been broadly static.   The percentage of people volunteering formally at least once a year rose from 39% to 44% between 2010-11 and 2012-13, but this was a reversal of a steady downward trend from 44% in 2005 (Cabinet Office, 2013). This recent rise in formal volunteering is driven by full-time students, whose volunteering rate has increased from 47% to 60%, but who are an insignificant proportion of MR team members.

Thus the objectives of this research were:
- to confirm that MR teams are experiencing an increase in demand and examine teams' responses.
- to explore volunteers' explanations for an increase in demand.
- to examine MR volunteer's views of an increase in emergency service work
- to examine why calls to support the emergency services have increased in the context of volunteers being asked to provide or supplement a public service.
- to propose potential solutions to coping with the rising demand for the MR services.

Methods

Seventy-five MR teams in England, Scotland and Wales were invited to participate in the study via emails to team secretaries, distributed in December 2012. Team secretaries then forwarded the email to team members. Email addresses for MR teams were originally obtained from the Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MREW) website (Mountain Rescue England and Wales Teams in England and Wales, n.d.) and the Mountain Rescue Scotland website (Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland, n.d.). Where email addresses could not be found, team websites were used to source other contact details. Two weeks into the six-week data collection period it became apparent that not all email addresses on the official sites were kept up to date. All teams that had not responded or had only one respondent were then sent another email to a different email address found on their website or via an online contact form on their websites.

The questionnaire completed by team members was accessed via a web site. It asked about reasons for increased call-outs, how teams were coping with this increase, and the motivations of the volunteers. It included closed and open questions. Open questions within the survey were subjected to thematic analysis. The initial process involved familiarization of the data from each separate question. Examining these responses allowed themes to be developed. These themes were used to re-analyse the data and then re-assess the validity of the themes. This process was applied to each of the qualitative data sets (Corbetta, 2003; Flick, 2009). Overall,134 team members responded from 32 different teams. A limitation of the results is that it is unknown how representative these 32 teams are of the 82 in England, Wales and Scotland. A more complete sample could only have been obtained with official support for the research from the mountain rescue committees of the respective countries.

A second survey of potential team members was advertised on the forums of the popular outdoor website UKClimbing.com (UKC Forums — Personnel planning in UK Mountain Rescue, n.d.). This route ensured that the questionnaire was targeted at a specific population

who might be attracted to join the MR, for which, as its literature suggests, a love of the outdoors is a key part. The users of this website would be expected to be mountaineers or climbers. Again the questionnaire was accessed via a web site and used closed and open questions with open responses being analysed in the same manner as in the team member questionnaire. This elicited 383 respondents distributed across the UK. In this questionnaire as in the team members' one, respondents were asked for their subjective impressions — for example, of the reasons for an increase in the number of rescues or how well a team was coping with increased demand. This approach was consistent with that of the previous survey of teams in the Lake District (Sharp and Roy, 2012) but, for factual information, is not as accurate as Yarwood's (2010) use of MR incident reports, which were not available to this research project.

Results

The increased demand for rescues and *MR teams'* responses

Three quarters (74%) of current MR team respondents felt team call-outs had increased in the past 5 years, although 26% felt they had not. Thus the majority view is consistent with the trends reported in national statistics although this suggests an uneven pattern. Three quarters predicted an increase in call-outs in the next 5 years.

Eighty-five percent of members believed their team was coping with the current level of call-outs; 82% felt they had enough members at present; and 63% of MR members predicted they will have enough members for the next 5 years. The contrast with the 44% of members of Lake District teams reporting their team had difficulties resourcing call-outs (Roy and Sharp, 2012) may reflect regional differences. Yarwood's analysis of call out records (2010: 265) shows that the Lake District area as a whole has by far the largest number of call outs.

Of the 18% of members who felt they needed a larger team, on average they thought 10 more members were required to cope, and these would be most useful in technical searching and fundraising roles. Half of members thought an increase in the workload for the MR teams would not affect recruitment; and 31% believed it would actually aid recruitment. This is connected to media coverage, as 91% of members felt local media coverage of their work aided recruitment. Thus it is possible that more high-profile media work — assisting with large public searches or rescuing flood victims — could actually increase team recruitment because of the publicity.

As a result of the increased call-outs, 45% of members feel that other team members are becoming 'selective' about which call-outs they respond to — although it is not known if 'selectivity' involves not responding to ES work, as opposed to other types of rescues, or if responses differ depending on the nature of the ES call-out. However, 37% think there is no change in members' response to call-outs, so the evidence for greater selectivity is not strong. If individual members were becoming more selective this would make the work of team coordinators more difficult.

Seventy-nine percent of team members felt funding should be provided for the work done supporting the emergency services. The implications of this potential change in relationship is discussed below.

***Volunteers' and potential volunteers' e*xplanations for the increase in demand.**

Figure 2 illustrates the reasons team members gave for this increase.

Insert figure 2 here
Figure 2: MR team members' explanations for MR increasing demand
(Note: Some respondents gave more than one response, so the percentages represent the
proportion of the total number of reasons given across the sample.)

Rescue team members regard increased demand from the emergency services of police, fire
and ambulance in non-mountain incidents as the greatest cause of increased call-outs. The
second most significant reason they cited was increased participation in mountaineering.
Another factor cited was 'use of technology', referring to mobile phones that make it easier
for people to call for help (rather than trying to help themselves); mobile phone 'aps' that
give people an unrealistic expectation of their ability to navigate in the mountains without the
required skills; and global positioning devices that give them the ability to navigate — but
not when the devices fail. As a team member noted:

'We do get more call-outs to people with a skill deficiency who are lost. However, technology
being what it is, we have had call-outs to people who know where they are to a 10 fig grid
reference [indicating a 1m x 1m square on the map], but no map to tell them where that is!'
(team member)

Yarwood's study (2010) also found that mobile phones had increased call-outs by people
who perceived themselves to be in trouble as it was easy for them to make a phone call. On
the other hand, mobile phones also allowed mountaineers to inform friends of an unexpected
delay and thus possibly avert a call out; and in some cases the use of a phone greatly reduced
the time a team took to get to a serious casualty and thereby reduced fatalities. This
illustrates the impact of technology on this type of volunteering; an under-researched topic,
but not the focus of this paper.

By contrast, members of the mountaineering public (i.e. potential MR volunteers) greatly
underestimated the role of the emergency services in generating extra demand, believing that
most of that extra demand was attributable to increased participation (see Figure 3). This is an
important finding because potential MR volunteers will expect to be volunteering mainly to
help mountaineers, but in practice will spend substantial time helping the emergency services.

Insert figure 3 here
Figure 3: Why members of the public feel that MR demand is increasing
(Note: Some respondents gave more than one response, so the percentages represent the
proportion of the total number of reasons given across the sample.)

The impact of increased demand on volunteers

Figure 4 illustrates the constraints team members have on their ability to respond to a call.

Insert figure 4 here

Figure 4: Constraints on MR team members' ability to respond to increased call-outs

Forty-three percent of respondents cite the type of paid job they do as constraining their ability to volunteer. Ninety percent of the respondents were employed, working an average of 36 hours a week. Volunteers retired from paid work are less represented in MR teams because of the very physical demands of the role. Pressures of family and work are common to volunteering in general, but pressures from MR volunteers' type of paid work is more specific than the common time pressures from work expressed in surveys of general and sports volunteers. This is because of the need to respond to MR call-outs at any time, and the considerable amount of time responses may take — both entirely unpredictable. This requires either a very flexible (thus enabling) employer, or for team members to be self-employed in a flexible occupation or not in paid employment.

Thirty-six percent of members felt it had become more difficult to balance personal life with MR commitments in the past 5 years, while 54% reported no difference. Similarly, 37% found balancing work commitments with MR commitments had become more difficult over the past 5 years; 46% reported no difference. Fewer members (23%) thought the pressure to catch up on work had increased over the past 5 years, with 34% stating no change. Over half (54%) of employed members currently do not feel pressure to catch up on work they have missed. Yet 60% felt it was difficult to leave work to attend a call-out. However 54% stated MR work does not affect their ability to do their job.

Fuel expenses are also a distinctive factor for this type of volunteering as team members in rural locations may have to travel some distance in their own vehicles to attend rescues.

A characteristic of this type of volunteering is the importance of employers and partners as 'secondary volunteers'. Employers have to give up team members' time, and the ability to do this will depend on business pressures. The identification of the rescue team with a local community might make employers take a more favourable attitude. Similarly, team members' partners have to give up more time to maintain a household and care for children. Voluntary sector research has tended to ignore these groups of volunteer enablers.

How teams are responding to increased demand

Teams appear to have limited options in responding to increasing ES-related call-outs. Although ES work was a major source of increased demand, 99% of members thought MR teams should continue to support ES work. There may be an inconsistency between this finding and the 45% of members who felt others were becoming more selective in responding to call-outs.

It is difficult to establish people's real motives for volunteering using closed questions in a questionnaire. In our surveys team members and potential members were asked an open question about their motives for team membership. This avoided the influence of prompts provided by closed questions, but required responses to be interpreted and coded. The most frequently coded motives of team members were: to help others (25%); giving back to society / outdoor activities (19%) and social aspects / team work (16%). For potential team members these were: to help others (32%0; put back into the community (22%); and using skills/developing skills (16%).

These responses reveal a general aspiration to help others, reflecting volunteering initiated by citizens for the public purpose of helping fellow citizens (Beveridge, 1948: 8), and they are consistent with supporting the emergency services. However, a more specific and stronger preference may be to help other mountaineers as an expression of solidarity in a 'serious leisure' activity. There may be a strong identity bound up with being a team member, and volunteering for 'perilous' work may reflect a strong element of egoism (Woods, 2006). These motives may account for few teams experiencing difficulties recruiting. Greater selectivity in some members attending call outs could just reflect a pragmatic response to the increasing number of rescues.

As teams are not obliged to support the emergency services one response would be to decline a request if it was felt to be inappropriate:

'A not unusual call for a controller is from the police — despondent missing person, known to *like walking. Can you search for him? The answer is no, as we'd need a little more of a* precise locality to begin our search — *so we send them away to do their homework…. Just* this week our team did get passed a job from the ambulance service to extricate a person from a high rise flat, who I believe had a medical problem. Our team leader just said no, call *the fire service. Teams always have the option of turning inappropriate jobs down. … the* police do not have as many officers at their disposal, so we are called in for man power. However, the usual rules apply — we can turn jobs down, but mostly we will do them'. (team member).

However there is not evidence that teams are becoming more selective in this way at present.

There were no practical responses to the increased call-outs arising from more participants — especially, more inexperienced participants. The increased call-outs are likely to be focused on novice outdoor enthusiasts, due to the unregulated and informal nature of outdoor activities, combined with the cost of training and need for experience.

'[There are] More people on the hills lacking the necessary experience and relying on mobile phones to get easy help, and GPS rather than map and compass for navigation.' (team member)

One option to resolve this situation would be to educate participants, but only 8% of MR members feel this would decrease call-outs. Incidents involve visitors from wide-ranging backgrounds, especially in areas with high accident rates such as the Lake District and Snowdonia National Parks. Therefore MR teams could struggle to effectively educate people before they entered the mountains. In fact, only half of MR members felt they should educate the public. The following comment illustrates the perception of some MR team members:

'The role of the team is to rescue people, not to educate people. The role of the ambulance service is not to educate people about driving or DIY or any of the other ways in which they hurt and kill themselves. The Mountain Rescue Teams of the UK are not funded by the government. Between training, rescues and raising the funds we need to operate, when exactly do we squeeze in the time to also act as an educational body?' (team member)

Thus it would be difficult for the MR to provide education to potential casualties, and such education would be unlikely to reduce their workload.

Another way some teams have responded to increased call-outs is to adopt new practices in the recruitment and management of volunteers. As already noted above, 82% of members felt their teams had enough members at the moment, implying no difficulties with recruitment. In fact, 59% of members felt their team does not need to actively recruit new members. However, although (as noted above) 63% of team members believe they have enough members to deal with call-outs in the next 5 years, this still means that 47% anticipate they will not have enough members. Twenty-five percent of member respondents stated their team had a recruitment officer but this response was inconsistent within individual teams, suggesting that it was not a precise enough question. Someone on the team might be performing this role, but not be designated formally as the 'recruitment officer' or volunteer co-ordinator. Eleven teams in the survey (32%) reported having written procedures for recruiting members, while others failed to comment on whether or not they have any written instructions in place. Again this finding is inconclusive and may reflect the difficulty of asking precise questions in this area. A more thorough approach would be to request teams send copies of their procedures.

A finding from the participant survey was that 36% would be more likely to join a team if they could apply for specific roles, and 18% if they could take on less physically demanding roles. This suggests that some teams might benefit from identifying roles such as fundraising, publicity officer and web site officer, and making them more apparent to prospective members.

MR team members' views of emergency service work

The MR teams are aware of the constraints on the emergency services. This was highlighted by a team member when asked why the numbers of call-outs were increasing:

'We are called increasingly by cash-*strapped "professional" emergency services to assist.* This may be the Fire Service for flood and water rescue, the Ambulance service for our 4x4 *capability, or the Police for vulnerable persons missing from homes and hospitals ... the* police and ambulance services are running on empty.'

However, it was suggested that some teams who experienced few call-outs welcomed the opportunity to help the emergency services as it gave them an opportunity to practice their skills. This might particularly apply to areas such as the Mid-Pennines where there were few mountainous incidents (Yarwood, 2010: 265). A benefit of working with the emergency services, also noted in the literature, is that it promotes good working relationships between the rescue teams and these services (Feeney, 2004).

How and why is the relationship between MR teams and the police changing?

Yarwood (2010) and Fenney (2003) suggest that legislation and the targets set for police may have contributed to increased use of MR teams for searches for missing persons.

This issue has also been highlighted in MR reports in England and Wales. The 2002 MR incident report for England and Wales noted that the use of volunteer organisations helped the statutory emergency services meet response quotas and at the same time keep to financial

limits (Feeney, 2003). The corresponding report on incidents in the following year noted that some MR teams had expressed the view that the statutory services were using voluntary organisations as a way of achieving performance targets and some call-outs, particularly by the ambulance service, had been inappropriate (Feeney, 2004).

Yarwood cites Article 2 of the 1998 Human Rights Act as giving police forces additional responsibilities for the care of missing persons. Since then, within a regime of New Public Management, national league tables compare forces in a Police performance assessment Framework which clusters together similar forces (Golding and Savage, 2008). Home Office advice to police forces in 2002 stated that:

'With greater demands for efficiency and measurability, performance indicators are now commonplace. Missing Persons do not feature in these and therefore the time taken to investigate them detracts from the time available to tackle problems which do attract performance indicators. This can be seen as detrimental to a police forces performance' (emphasis added) (Hedges, 2002, v).

Thus even if performance in searching for missing persons is not measured, time searching for missing persons may adversely affect aspects of police work that are. The same advice states:

'there is a role here for volunteer search teams … that can search an area efficiently and effectively, reducing the impact on police resources. The existence of Mountain Rescue Teams is well known and is complemented by Lowland Search Teams that operate on identical principles' (emphasis added) (Hedges, 2002, 31).

Thus the introduction of new police management practices will have increased the police's use of MR teams for searches in non-mountainous areas. This will be further increased if police force resources are reduced in relation to their performance targets. As Yarwood (2010) noted, there may also be more missing persons, reflecting an aging population and one with more mental illness.

Further guidance from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 2013) refers to the ACPO (2010) Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons. This states that 'The Police Service is recognised as the authority which coordinates the response to an incident on land' and that 'The Police Service expects that all agencies will work together, … multi-agency partnerships should involve all relevant agencies, for example, police, social services, health, education and the voluntary sector..'(ACPO, 2010, 83). Those taking part in a search are under the direction of the police who have to be responsible for their safety. So once a MR team commits itself to a missing person's search the MR team is no longer acting independently but is under police control. Our research did not reveal this causing tension. It probably would if the police tried to exercise control in a mountainous area where the MR team felt their autonomy was justified by the combination of 'thick' and 'perilous' volunteering in their specialist environment.

Conclusions

Responding to increased demand

Despite static or declining trends in volunteering generally — and the common complaint of similar small volunteer organisations such as sports clubs led by their members that there are not enough volunteers (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2011; Nichols, 2013) — mountain rescue teams are not currently experiencing a shortage of volunteers. Some teams in our sample had to turn prospective members away or put them on waiting lists. This may be because the role has a particularly strong appeal to the motivations of potential volunteers (Wood, 2006) and because teams are embedded in local communities, as O'Toole found in his study of lifeboat crews (2013).

A changed relationship between civil society and the state

The state is now using MR teams to provide a service that might formerly have been provided by the police, partly as a consequence of new police management practices. It is nudging these voluntary associations towards the 'collectivised provision' end of Wagner's dimension between this and individualised provision (2012: 303).

Team members did not 'sign up' expecting to support the statutory emergency services and while they are generally willing to do so and in some cases value this aspect of MR work, they are probably not fully aware of the reasons for this change. Potential new MR members are unaware of the expansion of the work of MR teams in supporting the ES but, as they have very similar motivations to the existing team members, they too are likely to accept this deviation from their expectations. The strong motivation to be a MR team member helps sustain recruitment, despite the change to more ES support work.   The greater difficulty arises from the increasing amount of rescue work that causes team members to be called out more often. This might lead to volunteers' greater selectivity as they are not obliged to respond to every call-out and it may strain the support of 'secondary volunteers', employers and partners.

The way MR teams have responded to changed demands of the state is specific to the nature of volunteering in the teams and the teams' financial autonomy. In other cases volunteers may be more dependent on the state. For example, Scottish MR receives some state funding and sports clubs run by volunteers have a similar tradition of independence but are being obliged to act as a mechanism for the delivery of government policies in exchange for financial support (Nichols, 2013). A general conclusion is that using volunteers to substitute or complement public provision of services has to be sensitive to volunteers' motivations.

Management implications for MR teams

For MR teams, one response to increasing demand for their services might be to adopt more formal volunteer management practices — as has been promoted to volunteer-led sports clubs, for whom recruiting volunteers is one of the most important challenges (Schulz, et al., 2011; Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2011). MR teams are similar to sports clubs in size and structure — both being small organisations managed entirely by volunteers (Nichols, 2013), so their management of volunteers will be similarly informal and could be expected to face the same problems. One practical way of reducing demand for rescues might be for MR teams to liaise with organised mountain users who have a particular impact, such as organisers of sponsored events, in order to disseminate educative/precautionary information to less experienced participants. Because MR teams are not statutorily obliged to support the emergency services, they could initiate a system of charges for the volunteer hours they provide, especially in non-mountain rescue instances. This might make the emergency

services think more carefully about calling on volunteers. However, initiating fees would be inconsistent with the tradition of team members freely assisting others in need. Putting a monetary value on this relationship might alter the way it is regarded, as has happened in many other social relationships (Sandel, 2012). Charging the ES might be the first step to charging those rescued – which is anathema to the UK tradition of altruistic volunteering in mountain rescue.

The efficacy of local publicity in assisting recruitment suggests it might be valuable for MR teams to have a publicity officer. The willingness (or preference) of the public to volunteer for specific roles suggests that some formalisation of roles — identifying what is required with simple job descriptions (Schulz, et al. 2011) — might make this easier. Less physically demanding roles, such as publicity officer, fundraiser, web site manager or child minder, could also be identified to widen the recruitment base.

Further research questions

Further research could explore the emergency services' perceptions of the MR teams to confirm the reasons for the increased use of teams in searches. It could clarify if the police now have a performance indicator relating to the treatment of missing persons and how it affects their work. Further work with the national mountain rescue committees could extend Yarwood's (2010) statistics on the type of rescues from 2006 to confirm the trends he identified in an increase in the proportion of non-mountainous rescues and their distribution between teams. This would be more reliable than the subjective impressions of MR members. It would be interesting to monitor the number of emergency service requests MR teams decline and to see if this varies between England and Wales on the one hand, and Scotland on the other, where teams receive state support. More detailed research could explore differences in attitudes towards searching for missing persons between the MR teams based on non-mountainous areas (where it may be regarded as valuable practice) and teams in mountainous areas (where it is more likely to be seen as a diversion from their main purpose).

Research is needed to understand the internal management of grassroots organisations led by volunteers to investigate how this can be made consistent with volunteers' motivations and experience, as illustrated by O'Toole's study (2013). An imposition of management systems developed in the private or public sectors may not be appropriate for volunteers. This issue has implications for volunteer organisations' relationships with the public and private sectors; for example, the potential for tension between volunteers' valued independence and formal partnership arrangements.

Case studies of MR rescue teams that have adopted innovative practices in recruiting and managing volunteers could be used to disseminate good practice. This could be replicated for lifeboat crews. In both these groups of volunteers research could explore the role of 'secondary volunteers' who allow their employees or partners to give extensive amounts of time at short notice. These are critical to allow this type of volunteering to continue and the goodwill of employers might be particularly strained in response to market conditions. This might vary between teams in mountainous areas, in which a high proportion of the population are involved in voluntary activity and tend to distribute their volunteering around a wide range of opportunities (Woolvin, 2012), and more urban areas. More generally, studies are required of other examples of the state increasingly using volunteer organisations to deliver public services and the implications for relationships with civic society.

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