

ERNOP Research Note



Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

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The civic action of volunteering through flexible forms of organising.

Authors: Cristine Dyhrberg Højgaard - Copenhagen Business School | Liv Egholm - Copenhagen Business School.

Volunteering is evolving and adapting to people's needs and preferences, and it is important to understand how these new forms of volunteering can contribute to community well-being and how different ways of organising volunteering can impact the community actions.

How do more flexible forms of organisation influence volunteering actions?

The experimental study argues that the new, more flexible forms of organising in volunteering, although while they may appear as individual actions, they actually contribute towards and promote the wider community to engage, as the individual actions generate new goals and new actions that ultimately improve society.

[#Volunteering](#) [#FlexibleFormsOfOrganising](#) [#CivicAction](#) [#Breakdance](#)

Background & Context



- Volunteering is in a constant state of change and **currently there are only studies on the traditional forms of volunteering**. There are almost no studies on the new ways of understanding volunteering, as their informal status makes it difficult to study them using traditional research approaches.
- Since the emergence of more independent volunteers with individual preferences, organisations often **choose to offer strict predefined options or 'Organise-It-Yourself'** opportunities where people volunteer **without the formal and rigid support/management structure** of the organisation. Authors have suggested that this type of volunteering **can undermine collective efforts and separate volunteer tasks** by limiting the freedom of volunteers.
- **Civic action** is the result of a group of people working together to improve some aspect of life in their community. It **appears in both formal and informal forms of organising volunteering, because they use continuous coordination and collaboration**, but the moment there is a problem the form of organising will influence the way it is solved.
- **A flexible form of organising means an informal way of working without rigid structures and fixed leaders that adapts as necessary to achieve its objectives**. As objectives and working methods are subject to constant change, the organisation must also change and adapt to these new circumstances. When problems arise, actions are implemented and they can change the objectives, which in turn makes it necessary to adapt the form of organising.

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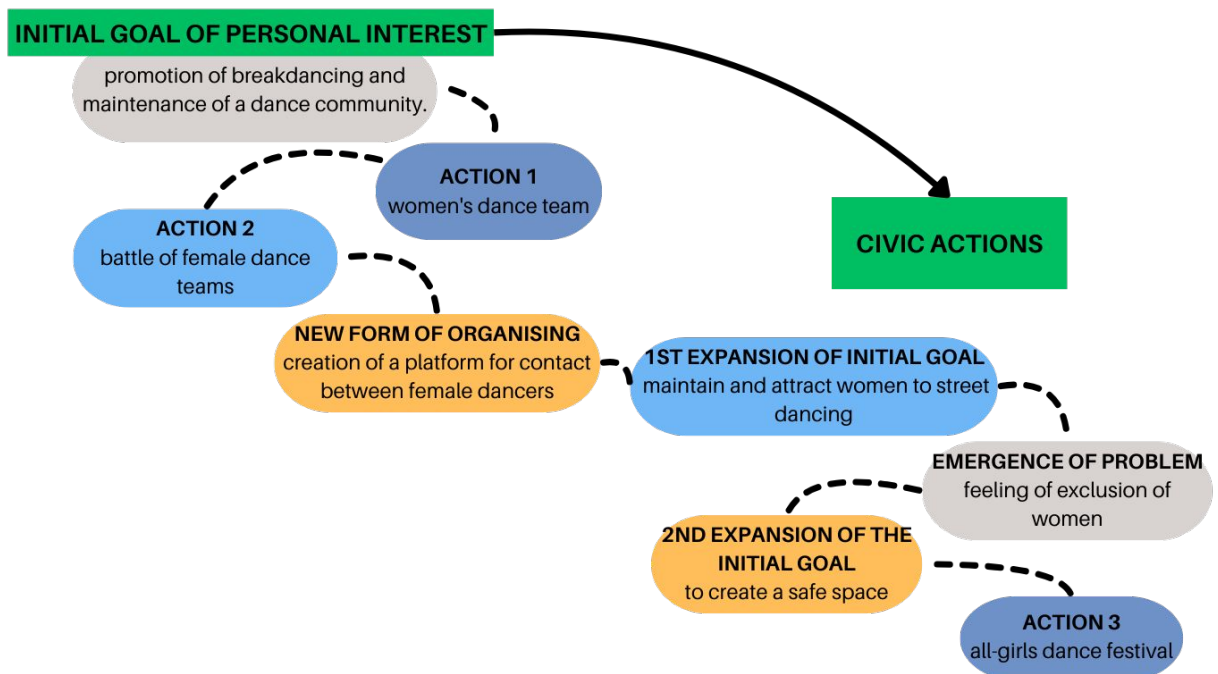
Take aways & Learnings



- In order to test the influence of a flexible form of organising on volunteering in civic action, an experimental study based on observation and interviews with 6 women breakdancers in Copenhagen, Denmark was conducted over 18 months. It concluded that efforts to incorporate women into the street dance community did not follow a clear path towards a fixed goal, but generated actions that brought about changes in the goals and also in the form of organising.
- Although at the beginning there may be a specific personal interest, flexible forms of organisation generate actions that lead to changes in objectives, which end up improving some aspect of life in the community. In other words, **flexible form of organising lead to initial self-interested goals eventually becoming civic actions.**
- **A flexible form of organising does not restrict volunteers' choices** since the tasks are already self-defined.
- There is a need for studies that are more adapted to the new trends in volunteering, moving away from traditional ways of understanding volunteering.

Explanation of the experimental study in visual form

From initial self-interested goals to civic actions in the breakdance community.



ERNOP Research Notes provide easy-to-read, practice-oriented summaries of academic articles on philanthropy and are written by practitioner experts. This ERNOP Research Note 2024/12 is published in June 2024 and has been written by Inés Sevilla Cabedo from Centre for European Volunteering. More information can be found at www.ernop.eu.