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Vuur als gemeenschappelijke vijand

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SUMMARY

The heading of this dissertation is “Fire and society as mutual enemy”. The sub-heading is “voluntary fire fighting and calamities combating as expression of civilization and communal activity”. The above observation caused the formulation of the thesis of this dissertation. Why is it that the responsibilities of combating fires and calamities that may be considered as being a common good, have evolved themselves through volunteers who are prepared to be available, without compulsion or standard remuneration, 24 hours per day and 7 days per week, for risky activities and confrontations with life and death.

The development of fire fighting responsibilities proceeding from voluntariness

In the course of history the responsibility for fire fighting has evolved from an individual to a collective responsibility for fire fighting. The consequence of this evolution is that nowadays fires are not fought any more with the assistance of neighbours, family and acquaintances, but this task is performed by fire departments consisting of voluntary and career fire fighters. Age-long experiences with fire and calamity risks resulted in a close interest of citizens in public safety. Individual actions to fight fires proved mostly ineffective. Collective action and self-organisation were inescapable. However, instead of rendering assistance, people used to flee to safer locations and they left the (potential) victims to fend for themselves. This escape behaviour resulted in the effects of fires to grow. Because fires had to be fought in a communal manner, government coercion was needed for a rather long part of history. Gradually people were influenced by the progressive division of labour and yet were getting in touch with each other to fight fires jointly. Hereby self-command and self-steering (Selbstzwang) gradually replaced outside coercion. Increasingly the reciprocal trusts were entered into and on a voluntary basis assistance was rendered to others. Self-organisation and self-activation became important characteristics of fighting fire, alongside of government regularization.

In the Middle Ages people did not have the precise explanations how fires originate. Often fires were credited to causes that were beyond the human scope. The more people were able to find scientific explanation for the starting of fires, the more possibilities arose to prevent and fight fires. This also resulted in the combating of fires becoming safer for fire fighters and this in-

creased the willingness to undertake the responsibilities of fire fighting. Collective stress situations, such as a town or village fire, made people vehemently mutual dependent on each other. Neighbourly help and assistance from other citizens and villagers became dire necessity.

In West-Europe and in the United States the trust in fire fighting increased and citizens were willing to fight fires without compulsion. Mutual citizen initiatives were a protection against rulers and monopolistic providers. The participation of citizens with combating fires also increased the commitment of citizens in the sphere of communal safety. Especially municipalities have made a connection between the necessity of fighting fires and the actualization of possibilities for mutual relationships between citizens to enable fire fighting. Municipalities and citizens preferred to leave delicate affairs such as the protection of human lives and properties with citizens that were trusted. Another fact is that one could expect more efforts in difficult circumstances from people, who had direct interests like owners of properties, craftsmen, and citizens and villagers, than from relative outsiders. This is certainly the case when circumstances were risky and unpredictable. Benjamin Franklin was the first city councillor who founded a fire fighters association with the purpose of fighting fires with the aid of citizens.

An important function of voluntary interrelationships and associations is that people join with each other on a voluntary basis ('doing with' and 'doing for') with the aim of carrying through common goals, based on private initiative. These reciprocal connections between people effectuate an important function with regard to the devolution of traditions and values and these are able to protect people against anomy, private monopolies, and against the always present state power. Fire brigade volunteers set an example to other citizens to dedicate themselves to "a noble cause or noble purposes" and that makes it easier to set other citizens in motion to perform more self-activation in the area of safety. Giving core responsibilities of government to citizens are not simply matters of cost reduction and mistrust against state or private industry. The willingness of people to provide voluntary assistance to others, under dangerous circumstances, is at the same time a sign of civilization. They also provide for acceptable attendance times in rural areas. Moreover, emergency services have a large potential of trained reinforcements at their disposal, when calamities and crises occur. At the same time these volunteers are the eyes and ears of the local community in the sphere of safety.

Volunteer work

The proportion between the public and private sectors has continuously been subject to change in the course of western history. In Europe and in the United States the traditional society was turned into a modern society. In the traditional society people were directly dependent on their family and neighbours and they were forced to give their all to family and neighbours, under informal or social pressure, under penalty of being expelled. The modern open industrial society made everyone dependent of each other. Labour was translated into economic advantage or wage work. Proceedings that did not directly contribute to production and therefore did not achieve economic advantage were considered as volunteer work. As a result, in the modern industrial society the volunteer work came into existence, based on private and collective initiative.

From this moment in time two kinds of volunteer work originate, the charitable-humanitarian and the emancipatory volunteer work. The traditional or charitable-humanitarian voluntary work was mainly aimed at the care by the rich for the poor. The emancipatory volunteer work was aimed at self-care and self-organization. Because of this a society came into being that consisted of associations and religious communities. These associations were active in the intervening area between the private and the public domain of the state. In the Netherlands this is designated as social midfield. The social midfield consists of reciprocal connections between people. Collective action presumes trust in the usability of each other. Without this trust collective action will fall through. The state may be able, by using force, to be a solution for the dilemma of collective action. As soon as the dilemma of collective action is solved, people have gained more options. This means that citizens in modern societies have allocated an ever-larger role to the state. Nevertheless, the question remains if the state will be able to completely solve the dilemma of collective action. Nevertheless, the question remains if the state will be able to completely solve the dilemma of collective action. A state that takes over too many responsibilities from citizens creates expectations that, subsequently, will be reciprocated by "free-riders" behaviour. Citizens expect that the state will effectuate collective action and that they, themselves, should supply a contribution that is as scanty as possible. Solving the dilemma of collective action by the state will make high demands on the abilities of that same state, to motivate its citizens and set them in motion for collective action. Mutual co-operation between citizens and state will teach people to develop their moral and intellectual capacities and it teaches the state that she is a servant of her citizens.

There is a close fitting relation between government care and care provided by voluntary organisations. A small government care brings about a large volun-

tary care; however, if a group of people is deprived of this voluntary care, government care will grow again. A small government care brings about a large voluntary care; however, if a group of people is deprived of this voluntary care, government care will grow again. In both situations government care will grow. Only when voluntary care reaches all those who ask for help, the bottom layer of society included, and at the same time the government care activates and motivates to provide voluntary aid, the government care will not grow. Notwithstanding the importance of voluntary work for a participating democracy and the affordability of the public services, voluntary work is deficient and essentially unstable. Voluntary work often is not a suitable solution for social problems that may occur within a society. Voluntary work has some limitations. Voluntary care often is selective, because people are initially dependent on acquaintances and on people with whom they share social characteristics. In this case, care in the own set prevails the interests of those who are outside the set. Furthermore the total need for care in a society is many times larger than the supply offered by voluntary care. This indicates that voluntary care is at all times inadequate to solve all social problems. As a result of the lack of a power relationship, volunteers are more difficult to be directed and to be addressed than career professionals. This might lead to insufficient quality of care. Much voluntary work is based on reciprocity. However, the rule of reciprocity is not applicable to relationships with children, the elderly, and mental and physical disabled people (the vulnerable ones). The members of these groups are hardly able to show their thankfulness.

In addition to this, volunteers may abuse their powers with respect to those who are in need of help. Those who need help lack adequate facilities for correction. Nevertheless volunteer work is of great importance for society. Government is not able to single-handedly solve all wrongs in society. A continuous need for voluntary work remains as a complement to and correction of the state. Citizens have, through collective actions by volunteer organisations, an enhanced say in the way one is searching for solutions for collective problems. Collective action by volunteers is indispensable for the operations of a democratic society. It may function as emancipatory bulwark against too large concentrations of power of the state and the market. In the joint action people merge with each other and the result of this is that people express increased solidarity with each other. In addition voluntary associations promote a more stable balance between social environment and individual (social cohesion). Therefore the effective transfer of traditions, values and norms will be enhanced. Many new forms of engagement between people may prevent disintegration of society or anomie, caused by extreme individualism. For the citizens themselves voluntary work may entail social activation, discouraging social isolation, and enhancing participation in designing society. Voluntary work strengthens citizenship and cit-

izen culture. Voluntary associations and self-organisation offer opportunities to groups that were spontaneously born or through necessity, to bridge the gap between individual and state.

For the volunteers themselves the meanings and functions of voluntary work may vary from being inward looking to being aimed at society, such as:

- Functions that express values: Demonstrating social and humanitarian engagement, helping people in distress, expressing that one believes that a certain kind of voluntary work is important, meaningful and worthwhile, and bringing social flaws to notice;
- Functions of social adaptation: Obtain new or more social contacts, companionship with colleagues, joining in social events, being appreciated by others, gaining of experience for a paid job;
- Knowledge functions: Making use of own capabilities, learning new skills, self education and development;
- Ego-defensive functions: Compensation for lacking abilities for other activities, to spend leisure time in a meaningful and useful way, to introduce structure and regularity in daily life at moments that one has little obligations.

These individual functions have a high degree of reciprocity with social functions. Important social functions are the showing of solidarity with people who are in distress, and campaigning against social flaws. Gaining knowledge and experience for a (new) job is a positive contribution to the labour market and to the economic development of a country. This reciprocity between social value and individual satisfaction of needs is an important explanation for the social relevance of voluntary work. The social appreciation that results from the above mentioned factors creates in turn a motivating cause for voluntary workers to give their very best. Next to individual functions, voluntary effort may yield personal advantages (selective incentives).

Furthermore the desire to propagate own values and to assist in determining in which direction society is heading, may play a mobilizing role. Voluntary work is aimed at the alleviation of social needs and this aspect is even to a larger extent valid for voluntary work in the fire brigade. Fire brigade volunteers receive a high degree of appreciation and respect from their fellow citizens. Voluntary work in the fire brigade is characterized by goal-oriented and instrumental activities aimed at safeguarding physical safety. Combating fires and calamities and providing technical assistance are tangible activities in which the individual contribution has a clear relationship with the common need for the safeguarding of public safety. This is valid, to a lesser degree, for general voluntary work. In addition, the activities of voluntary firemen are special. These special characteristics are permanent availability, risky activi-

ties, and confrontations with life and death. That is why society makes heavy demands on those who are entrusted with these important duties of assistance. Citizens trust fire fighting organisations that are composed of interrelationships of citizens.

**The significance of the voluntary fire brigade for
the West European and North American societies and
its importance for the volunteers themselves**

The significance of voluntary fire brigades for society is that an essential element as having command of life and death is left to interrelationships of citizens. The reciprocal trust of people towards each other is the basis for this fundamental relationship of dependence of people towards each other. Vertical relationships between people and external compulsion are in this case being replaced by more horizontal relationships between people arising from self-coercion. This implies that people not only dedicate themselves to primary connections, but they also accept responsibility for the safety of the overall society.

Although voluntary work in the fire brigade is of great importance for society, the crux is to what extent a fire brigade is able to adequately safeguard the public safety. The very moment that fire fighting organisations are not able (any more) to safeguard public safety, the staff structure must be modified. Fire fighting organisations staffed with volunteers are most appropriate in areas that have limited risks and small concentrations of people. The social functions of voluntariness in the fire brigade in a modern welfare state are the delivery of an active contribution to public safety, increasing the engagement of citizens with collective safety, consciousness-raising of safety risks that may threaten society, the complementation of public services, provision of a contribution to the national budget, and the opportunity for the education and the development of the personalities of people. Progressive increase of the concentrations of people and dangerous goods meant for fire fighters that the extent of fire risks has increased considerable.

Before the industrial revolution the maximal geographical scale of fire risks used to be the boundary of the municipality. After the industrial revolution and the technological development of society, the scale of fire risks increased. Fire risks could be compared with the risks of natural disasters. From that moment on fires constitute an important part of the “man-made disasters” or technological disasters. Due to this the distinction between fire and disaster risks has diminished. The similarity between fires and disasters is the powerlessness and impotence of people who are met by disaster. The distinction be-

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tween fires and disasters is the magnitude. Small scale fires are threats that may be considered as a misfortune that only strikes a certain entity. Other entities that were not visited at that very moment in time are hardly affected. During a disaster the lives of many people are under threat. That is why feelings of collective stress are less evident after fires than after disasters.

The specific significance of the voluntary fire brigades for the West European and North American societies is the unobtrusive rendering of assistance to people in distress. People trust voluntary fire fighters because it is all about aspects of life and death. In situations like that acquaintances are being trusted more than outsiders. At the same time the much needed help is often known and near at hand, which enables delicate and quick rendering of assistance. Increasing concentrations of people and dangerous goods demand for greater expertise in the areas of organisation for the fighting of fires. This resulted in the appointment of experts to provide for an increasing quality of fire safety in these risk areas. For the originally voluntary organisations, this entails the admission of professional groups. Gradually these professional groups have increased their influence on the organisation of the fire fighting and in the course of time more and more important positions within fire organisations are occupied by experts. These professional groups have made an important contribution to the addition of tasks for fire fighting organisations. Organisations with voluntary staff are increasingly brought into action to solve social problems in the broad area of public safety (doing for). Recapitulatory, it is about the following tasks: Fire fighting, prevention of fires, technical assistance, rescue services, and emergency services. One may add to these tasks the rendering of emergency relief, medical aid, and the care for injured people and victims.

There are differences between fire brigades staffed with volunteers and fully professional brigades. It is much easier to lead a fire fighting organisation predominantly consisting of career officers than an organisation that predominantly consists of volunteers. A fire brigade that has a majority of volunteer staff has a higher degree of commitment and the social composition is more heterogeneous. Aid organisations that have volunteers engage more people than fire brigades that only employ career professionals. This is why a larger number of potential of relief workers is available in emergency situations. Countries that have a large number of voluntary aid workers have a larger potential of aid workers in an organised setting than countries that mainly employ professional relief workers.

The meaning of the voluntary fire brigade for the volunteers themselves is the rendering of aid to people in distress. Subsequently this is connected with individual satisfaction of needs.

The willingness to join the voluntary fire brigade is based on the institutionalized aid behaviour of people and the incentives that result from performing voluntary work in the fire brigade. Individual “benefits” such as social appreciation, expansion of the social network, or identification with a social group, adventure and challenge, improvement of the social situation and self-fulfilment are important reasons for becoming a voluntary member of the fire brigade. For some people the interest in the fire brigade originated from the years of one’s youth and in many cases there is heart for the fire brigade from conveyed family tradition. The enthusiasm of many volunteers in the fire brigade can be explained by the camaraderie and sociability that they find within their fire brigade and the fact that they, together with friends, sometimes under great pressure, may offer substantial aid to people who are in need of help. This fits the image of volunteer fire fighters as a group of enthusiastic people that want to dedicate themselves to society (‘doing with’ and ‘doing for’). The automatic action that directs willingness of volunteer fire fighters to availability has changed because of a growing dependence of fire brigade volunteers with their external environment. This is caused by the fact that the willingness to voluntarily combating fires and disasters is probably greater than the opportunities to be practical available. Requirements for the fire brigade may conflict with the requirements of the employers in the main occupation of the volunteer and with the home situation. This results in the willingness of citizens to fight fires not directly leading to the action of being available when an alarm is called. This is above all the case during office hours. The willingness of volunteer fire fighters has become dependent with a number of factors such as the degree of suitability and the capability of being made responsible:

Degree of suitability

Willingness (intention) ———® Degree of availability ———® Degree of usability (action)

Degree of capability of being made responsible

The readiness of fire fighting organisations that employ volunteers during office hours is an increasing problem. The distances for commuter traffic are rising and the possibilities to act upon a called alarm decreases. At the same time the resistance of employers in the main occupation increases because of the large number of false alarms. Next to this the financial risks for employers in the main occupation rise because of changes in the social security legislation.

Voluntary work in the fire brigade despite of permanent availability, risky activities, and confrontations with life and death

Permanent availability

Being permanently available for combating fires and disasters, in combination with another main occupation, is physically and mentally demanding. In many cases one has to be, after a nightly turn out, at the normal time at work in the main occupation. Furthermore the 24-hours availability has quite some consequences in the social environment. Being continuously available is demanding for many employers in the main occupation, spouses, family members, customers, and colleagues.

Being available, 24 hours per day and 7 days per week, will become a problem when employers in the main occupation and the private situation do not further allow for being permanently available for the fire brigade. This means that not only the motivation of voluntary fire fighters is important, but at the same time also the support of the primary social surroundings. A consequence of this observation is an increasing interdependency between volunteers, fire department management, employers of the main profession, primary social surrounding, and local government.

Most fire fighter volunteers find their motivation in the nature of the work (hobby) and the social appreciation that they receive. Because of the 24 hours availability they are indispensable for a community and this results in receiving social standing for working as a fire brigade volunteer. This means that the permanent availability from a subjective perception of fire brigade volunteers is no additional burden. It may become a burden if employers in the main occupation do not offer facilities and if they lack support from the private situation or social appreciation from the local community and the local government.

High Risk circumstances

Despite of own risks for fire fighters have decreased; combating fires and disasters remains dangerous work. Sometimes dangerous actions are required to save others and to reduce damage. It is not self-evident that people voluntarily, without compulsion or normal compensation, will put themselves in dangerous and sometimes life-threatening situations. It is something special that people on a voluntary basis render aid and save people with the risk for the own well being. The very moment that citizens are prepared to voluntarily, without coercion, render aid to citizens in distress, they can expect much respect and appreciation from their fellow citizens. As a result of the improvements in the organisation, the employment of improved technical tools, and tougher fire safety regulations made by governments, the risks of fighting

fires for fire fighters have decreased. Despite of these changes, the high risk circumstances remain a substantial element of fire fighting. Volunteer work that aims for keeping an eye on and safeguard public safety may imply for volunteers themselves individual unsafety.

Paradoxically high risk circumstances are an important part of the suspense, the exciting experience and the challenge. These characteristics are the most attractive elements of the duty for voluntary fire fighters. Performing high risk work is hardly a problem for voluntary fire fighters. The excitement and suspense of the fire fighting function is aimed at the satisfaction of individual needs and the rendering of assistance to citizens under duress is important for society. The excitement and the suspense in this work is for many a welcome change in the daily routines. Voluntary fire fighters become important for others because of the rendering of aid to people in distress. Voluntary fire fighters win esteem for the rendering of aid. This is what sets fire fighters apart from people who are looking for the excitement of unsafety, as a kind of individual satisfaction of needs, in their own time, in high risk sports like mountain climbing, paragliding, bungee jumping, etc. People who are running risks for themselves, without necessity, are considered being reckless. Conversely, people who are running risks for the benefit of others are considered being courageous and brave (hero).

Confrontations with life and death

Fires and disasters have a far-reaching impact on human existence; therefore they impact on aspects of life and death. These are overwhelming occurrences that often bring about desperation and much human sorrow. Because of the powerlessness and impotence in which people find themselves, special demands are being made upon relief workers.

Next to the relief worker's skilfulness, the trust in the discretion of the relief workers is at least as important. If people find themselves in life-threatening situations and are powerless and impotent, they will give priority to the personal qualities of the people that they are dependent on at that moment. People think that important personal qualities of relief workers are discrete behaviour, nerve, courage, and reliability. In aid situations voluntary fire fighters may be standing face to face with aspects of life and death. This encompasses that confrontations with life and death and the herewith connected assessment processes form a part of the most probing aspects of the function.

Summary

The meaning of the confrontations with life and death for fire fighters is that they may get in touch with stressful situations. The completely dependent victims in circumstances like these must be able to rely on them and trust them. This grants a special standing to the fire fighting work and it is an important reason for fire fighters to perform these duties. At the same time the confrontations with life and death may be important reasons for voluntary fire fighters to leave the fire brigade. This is about the traumatic experiences that may happen to fire fighters because of the pursuance of their profession.

The fact that fire fighting organisations still have volunteers at their disposal can be construed as the interrelation between individual motives, such as excitement, suspense, status and skills, and the social appreciation and respect that volunteers receive.

If one compares the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, in the area of specific characteristics of voluntary work, it turns out that there are no major differences. In broad lines the advantages and threats of this specific voluntary work are similar. One may recognise differences in the areas of intensity of some threats. In all the above mentioned countries one deducts the availability during office hours because of economic developments. The development that there is a decrease of the number of volunteers because of restricted leisure time occurs increasingly more in the United States than in the other countries. Another aspect is the liability of fire fighters in cases of setting off on the wrong foot. The legal discourse in the relief industry increases. There is a number of possibilities to prevent these threats, such as; analysing task and function requirements and the possibilities for fire fighting volunteers to satisfy these requirements; the active support of citizens to voluntary fire fighters, fire fighting management and administration; investing in the improvement of the management of relationships with the employers of the main profession; providing sufficient insurances for voluntary fire fighters and offering facilities to their employers of the main profession; adapting the fire brigade education to the regular education and other forms of education and training; organising sufficient support for the profession; promoting self-activation and ability to cope of citizens.

The meaning of voluntary work by the fire brigade as institution in West Europe and the United States

Fire fighting and calamity combating tasks are collective goods; because the external effects of fires and other calamities are as such that these cannot be withheld to anyone. These tasks have developed themselves through volun-

teers by a lengthy learning process of external coercion (Fremdzwang) to internal coercion (Selbstzwang). The division of labour furnished an important contribution to an increasing mutual dependency of people towards each other. The ever growing interdependence makes that people restrict their primitive behaviours and convert these into constructive activities for themselves and for others. For a long period in history people used to flee from a broken out fire and they had to be forced to fight fires or to render assistance to others.

The establishment of fire voluntary fighting organisations made people prepared to perform life-threatening duties for others without coercion. The significance of voluntary fire fighting organisations in modern societies is that they render in a discrete way help to citizens who are in an emergency situation. The very moment that citizens are themselves prepared to undertake these risky tasks the problem of “who is guarding the guards” decreases. The trust of citizens in fire fighting organisations consisting of citizens is in principle bigger than in a fire fighting organisation that has paid for or compelled fire fighters. However, next to the aspect of discretion also the aspect of professional skills is important. This means that the voluntary fire fighters have to satisfy ever increasing function standards.

The voluntariness within the fire brigade, because of her functioning over extended periods of time, has become an institution in the United States and in West Europe. Fire fighting organisations that employ volunteers are important in territories that have a low density of people and dangerous goods (rural areas and smaller towns). To guarantee a similar level of safety for the citizens in the whole of the Netherlands by employing career professionals is unnecessary and prohibitive for many municipalities because of limited need for action. Countries that cannot employ voluntary fire fighters, or only to a limited degree, have generally a slower response time in rural areas (Italy, Spain and Greece) or these countries spend a lot more money on combating fires (Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom). Arising from this is the importance of having volunteers at one's disposal in the fire brigade. In addition the Dutch emergency services have a large potential of trained relief workers at their disposal (22,000) in times of calamities and catastrophes. This group of 22,000 citizens are the eyes and ears in the safety area for the local community. Furthermore the voluntariness of the fire brigade is an example of citizen participation that stimulates other citizens in the fields of self-activation and the ability to cope in the area of safety.

Success factors and threats of voluntariness in the fire brigade

Success factors

Excitement and suspense as part of the job and the appreciation that voluntary fire fighters receive in return is an important part of the motivation of the fire fighters of West Europe and the United States.

Success factors

In addition to this also all kinds of other more individual motivations may play a role to perform fire fighter duties, such as successfully completing a job together with others, sociability and enjoyment. Fire fighting volunteers are prepared to render assistance in dangerous circumstances to people in distress where most people would run away.

It is pretty obvious that, in spite of the element of self-interest, society appreciates these efforts. Performing voluntary work in the fire brigade is a tangible example of active citizens dedicating themselves to the safety of fellow-citizens. This is an example for other citizens. A side effect of this is that the cohesion and solidarity within society will advance. The fire fighter organisation employing volunteers also is an important cornerstone for combating calamities and other critical stages. Because of this, a local community has a large group of trained citizens at her disposal that can render assistance to others in cases of emergencies. Together with their colleagues in career service and volunteers of police, Red Cross, emergency services, army reserve, etc. they are pivotal in the emergency services in the Netherlands.

From way back fire fighting is the core duty of the fire brigade. In the course of time this core duty was extended with aid rendering duties, emergency services, and medical duties. At the same time there is much attention for the so-called safety chain (prevention, pro-action, preparation, repression and after-care). Without putting more pressure onto the present volunteers, the extension of duties may be attractive for new volunteers. One may think of new tasks such as fire prevention, first response and AED operation tasks, but at the same time also supporting roles in the area of administration and information and communication technology. Often the fire brigade still has a homogeneous and closed culture. This culture is an impediment for a modern, open, and outward looking organisation. As far as personnel composition goes the fire brigade does not mirror society. In most cases the fire brigade uses recruitment and selection systems that, in practice, lead to the fact that the intake of new target groups such as young people, women, members of minority groups, and homosexuals, is only moderate. Whilst there is consid-

erable demand for voluntary fire fighters and there is also supply from these target groups. It is the challenge for the fire brigade to get people that would like to work as fire fighters into the organisation and retain them.

Threats

Employers in the main occupation and partners of voluntary fire fighters

The developments in society, the increasing large scale safety risks, and the tasks that fire fighter volunteers perform, are more and more interwoven. A result of this is that fire organisations as well as employers in the main occupation, make increasing demands on someone's competence. This makes that the availability of volunteers during office hours is put under pressure.

Indeed, voluntary work in the fire brigade not only makes an appeal to the volunteers themselves, but also to the employers in the main occupation and also to their primary social environment. In the case of an increasing resistance by employers in the main occupation, being permanently available will be an increasing pressure on the fire fighter volunteers during office hours. Moreover, an increase of time pressure during leisure time may cause resistance in their primary environment. This is the case for the West European countries as well as for the United States. The time pressure of fire brigade volunteers is the main reason to quit. Besides, this trend is stronger for female volunteers than for their male colleagues. Support by employers in the main occupation, partners, and government is indispensable for citizens to transfer preparedness for performing these specific forms of voluntary work into actual availability. Developments in the external environment, such as the degree of safety risks, the degree of urbanisation, availability of volunteers, and the requirement levels for volunteers, have resulted in the formulation of consistent competence requirements (education and training).

In general more and more demands are made with regard to the volunteer's availability, but also in terms of knowledge and skills. On the one hand to safeguard that a fire brigade is able, in a professional respect, to perform the duties properly at all times. On the other hand, because of the developments in the area of changing safety risks and government responsibility, this comprises that governments are in an increasing degree at risk if they do not adequately perform during fires and disasters. Under the influence of scaling-up, professionalization, and the herewith connected safety risks, increasingly higher demands are made with regard to competency requirements. The result is that the competency requirements for career fire fighters are equal to those of vol-

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unteers. In fact, during operational situations both groups have to be able to perform similar tasks. The requirements have to be aimed at the tasks and so they have to be functional.

This prevents organisational “dead wood”. Increasingly more are mistakes during the practise of duty by fire brigade officers subject to legal action and because of this object of the claim culture (the current trend to make legal claims for anything). The result is that increasingly fire fighters are being sued. This brings about much uneasiness for fire fighters. These situations occur, amongst others, whilst driving the emergency vehicles, driving in private cars to and from the barracks or place of calamity, making mistakes for rendering assistance and combating fires. This implies that relief workers run the risk of legal action being taken against them. To protect relief workers, proper indemnity insurances and legal assistance insurance will have to be concluded on behalf of fire fighters. A very personal lawsuit is also a reason for leaving.

Discrete behaviour, courage, bravery, and reliability are personal characteristics of aid workers. Aid workers have to be prepared to fight fires, to render assistance, and to save human lives, in difficult circumstances. In situations like these they may be confronted with considerations that decide on life or death and these aspects are the most penetrating of the function. The confrontations with victims are the least attractive part of the function and they may be reason for a fire fighter to leave the fire brigade. The provision of psycho-sociological guidance and aftercare to fire fighters that have experienced serious events is of great importance to prevent lasting psychological damage. The above mentioned developments may be a threat to still having voluntary fire fighters at one's disposal. However, it may be a challenge to develop new forms of commitment to voluntary work.

Final conclusion

Important driving forces behind the Western way of fighting fires are processes of collectivizing and civilization. Elements hereof are functional specialisation, social trust, collective action and self-organisation. Human motives of self-preservation and survival have supplied an important contribution to the functional specialisation. The result of the division of labour was that people became more and more dependent of each other and that is why primary human relationships were opened up for larger general connections between people. People have probably become more and more dependant of each other and the reciprocal trust increases. This is why the mutual connections between people and the relationships of trust become stronger. In such a socie-

ty people will be more prepared to voluntarily give their best to others and provide aid to people in distress. An increasingly mutual dependency supposes that people are more aware of each other and this resulted in an increase of the gearing of the behaviours of people towards one another and an immediate and continuous looking forward. Gradually self-control and self-steering (Selbstzwang) replaced external coercion (Fremdzwang).

In the volunteer work of the fire brigade, a connection grew between the necessity to help others and the satisfaction of individual needs such as exciting experiences, appreciation, and recognition. Fire brigade volunteers supply an essential contribution to the safety of the community and before this they receive exciting and adventurous work that is highly appreciated by the community. The incentives that relate to the performance of voluntary work in the fire brigade provide for the individual satisfaction of needs to be above the collective need for safety. This implies that performing volunteer work in the fire brigade is not only based on expectations that others will also make voluntary contributions. The balance of debts (revenue and expense) will be brought and remain in equilibrium because the individual benefits offset the burden of fighting fires. By helping someone else, you are in fact helping yourself. The result is that voluntary work with the fire brigade will be long-term continued, which makes voluntary work long lasting.

Leaving core functions of government to fire fighting organisations that employ volunteers is special. Generally fire fighter associations are not part of the hierarchy of government responsibility. This makes organisations that employ volunteers somewhat unstable because the foundation of a fire fighter organisation is governed by factors that cannot be controlled. These incalculable factors can be compensated by government legislation and the issuing of instructions, in which the fire organisations that employ volunteers are part of the government organisation and because of enduring elements in the function of combating fires and calamities. In the Netherlands most of the fire fighter associations are part of local government. These associations are relatively autonomous. The enduring elements are incentives that are felt as being important to fire fighters. Herewith the needs of a community became interwoven with the needs of volunteers. The rendering of aid to victims of fires and other calamities in life threatening situations is adventurous and is highly appreciated by society. Although a certain degree of self-sacrificing is asked from fire fighter volunteers, the incentives such as adventure, sensation, social standing, esteem, camaraderie and professional skills are more important. Voluntary work with the fire brigade is not founded on altruism, but on reciprocity. This explains why voluntariness in the fire brigade is durable and stabile.

Summary

Nevertheless the institution of voluntariness in the fire brigade is under threat because of increasing demands of professional groups, especially those who legislate and regulate, stimulate legal discourse about the actions of aid workers, and external socio-economic factors. But the main threats are the demands of the primary profession and the home situation. A possible descent of the numbers of volunteers in fire brigades is not caused by a decline in the preparedness of volunteers or potential volunteers to supply this specific voluntary work in the fire brigade. Answer the question what's in it for me will be increasingly important.

One has to acknowledge that the circumstances under which the volunteers have to perform their duties have become increasingly difficult. One may tackle the removal of impediments in the area of availability of volunteers in the public safety best by offering material and immaterial compensation to primary employers for competitive disadvantages and for disruption of the production process. Competitive disadvantages are caused because some employers have engaged fire fighting volunteers and others have not. There are a number of possibilities that may compensate primary employers for making their employees available for the fire brigade or public safety purposes. In the first instance one may think about compensation of wages for lost hours. This has the disadvantage of higher administration costs and one may ask if this is what the primary employers will accommodate. It is more straightforward to offer certain tax advantages or a reduction on the premium for social security for employing volunteers who have to be available during their time of primary employment for rendering assistance. Another solution is broadening the fire fighters academy so that these academies receive general recognition. Safety education that is commonly recognised also has importance for employers in the primary position and the volunteers themselves. It enlarges the opportunities for voluntary fire fighters to be also appointed as safety experts and company aid officers and adding to the opportunities for other careers. The first step is improvement of the management of relations of employers in the primary occupation. Thereafter possible bottlenecks may be discussed with employers in the primary occupations; which solutions are preferred by the employers and which possibilities governments have to meet these.

What struck me whilst writing this dissertation is that the relative autonomy of the members within the European Union leads to the fact that each member state or even regions within a member state, often gathers its own research material, makes its own conclusions and does not share these with other countries. For this aspect the U.S. National Volunteer Fire Council and United States Fire Administration, Federal Management Agency, may be an example for Europe. These organisations perform standardized research at federal level, without losing sight of the socio-economic and cultural differences be-

tween the states. It is desirable that more European research is conducted in the area of safety and that national research will be made available to another European knowledge bank, so that not every country separately will conduct a similar research project without other countries knowing. I am hoping this dissertation will be a contribution to this.

Response to the phrasing of the core question

The core question of this dissertation is:

why fire fighting and emergency services, that may be regarded as a purely collective domain, have developed by means of volunteers who are prepared to be available for 7 days per week, to conduct proceedings that are full of risks and confrontations with life and death under life threatening situation, without coercion or normal reward?

That core business of the government is left to fire fighting organisation that employ volunteers is particular. Fire fighters associations are not part of the hierarchy of government responsibility. This causes organisations employing volunteers to be somewhat unstable, because the supporting foundation is governed by factors that cannot be controlled. These incalculable factors can be compensated by government legislation and the issuing of instructions, in which the fire organisations that employ volunteers are part of the government organisation and because of enduring elements in the function of combating fires and calamities. The enduring elements are incentives that are felt as being important to fire fighters. The needs of a society have become interwoven with the needs of the volunteers. The rendering of aid to victims of fires and other calamities in life threatening situations is adventurous and is highly appreciated by society. Although a certain degree of self-sacrificing is asked from fire fighter volunteers, the incentives such as adventure, sensation, social standing, esteem, camaraderie and professional skills are more important. Voluntary work with the fire brigade is not founded on altruism, but on reciprocity. This explains why voluntariness in the fire brigade is durable and stabile. Nevertheless the institution of voluntariness in the fire brigade is threatened by increasing demands of professional groups and because of demands made by the primary occupation and the private situation. The decline of preparedness of fire fighter volunteers or potential volunteers to perform this specific voluntary work is not the problem, but the acknowledgement that the circumstances under which this voluntary work has to be performed have become difficult. The challenge is to balance voluntary work in the fire brigade with the complete social context of fire fighting volunteers.