Online volunteers: knowledge managers in nonprofits

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Abstract

Online volunteering[1] is as old as the World Wide Web… or as the Internet itself. It is, notwithstanding, with the growing use of the WWW circa end of 1994 that it starts to become popular. Nevertheless, we believe that neither the concept nor the tasks that can be carried along by online volunteers are clear at all or, in any case, are the result of a wide consensus.

The research we here present analyzed 17 websites devoted to fostering volunteering to find out (a) if there was a broadly accepted definition of the concept of online volunteering and (b) if there was a list of tasks thus designed as the core or ideal competences of online volunteers. According to our findings, in this paper we will, first of all, describe all the different denominations for online volunteers and, closely related to them, try and see what are the profiles and tasks that, tied to these denominations, are usually performed or asked for in those main 17 volunteering websites.

To end, we will take some distance from the object of research and, in a more theoretical level, we will then suggest what the online volunteer profile could be and the main tasks he or she could *really* carry on related to this profile, the nature of the Information Society[2] and the possibilities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

In this aspect, our thesis will be that, just like distance and/or online education changed formal education, ICTs are

opening volunteering to some people usually excluded from nonprofits because of personal and professional obligations. On the other hand, it seems that these newcoming people enrolled through and thanks to ICTs do come with a brand new profile, a profile whose main added value is knowledge. It will be stated, then, that the online volunteer is a perfect knowledge management[3] actor and that knowledge transmission seems to be is his or her main role in solidarity[4].

1. Introduction

There's a great tradition of volunteering worldwide and surely there's no need to describe it at all. Put it simple, volunteering deals with unselfish work done without any kind of material compensation – especially money – and focused on nonprofit goals, be it development or solidarity, or just other associations dealing with political, cultural… issues.

Notwithstanding, there is *not* a great tradition in *online* volunteering, not even a short tradition. The reason is simple: the World Wide Web was born in mid 1990s[5] and one of the first online volunteering projects, the Virtual Volunteering Project by Impact Online, dates from 1996 following the thoughts of Steve Glikbarg and Cindy

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[1] We will enter in depth later on the different names this same concept receives.
[2] For a brief introduction please see Castells (2003)

[3] For an overview to the field of knowledge management there is an excellent – and sometimes original – approach in Canals (2003)
[4] We fully agree, for instance, with Npower (2004) about the possibilities of technology in educational projects carried on by nonprofits. Under this light, see Peña-López, I. (2001), Peña-López, I. (2002) and Peña-López, I. (2004) for some reflections about online volunteering and online networking.
[5] Most consider the birth of the web the appearance of the first web browser in 1993 and/or its popularization in 1994.

Shove during the preceding two years[6]. In this aspect, there is few literature both defining what is an online volunteer and what can he do, even if quite a good bunch of Internet portals talk about the benefits of online volunteering by giving good – and real – examples, and while both supply and demand for online volunteers arises.

Thus said, the main questions that this paper would like to answer are the following:

- What is the taxonomy and typology of online volunteering?
- Is there a clearing-house for online volunteers?
- Are online volunteering offers catalogued in opposition to offline offers?
- Are online volunteering offers catalogued according to tasks to be performed?
- Is the online volunteer a perfect fit for knowledge transmission in nonprofits?

To do so, a research was carried on during Spring 2005 where, after a first review of the existing literature, 17 volunteering portals where analyzed and their main characteristics described. We want to stress that scholarly literature on online volunteering is almost non existent[7], so this paper is – for good and for bad –mostly grounded in direct observation of reality but also in personal reflections and somewhat speculative thinking.

2. Volunteering Matching Sites

As we have just said, our research is based in the analysis of the main relevant volunteering websites existing[8], specially those devoted to perform matching

activities, i.e. NGOs can post volunteering needs and individuals can apply to them.

Volunteering matching sites have been chosen following three steps:

1. First one is finding legitimated volunteering directories related to development and cooperation for development. We here include issues such as gender, environment, peace, etc.

2. Indeed, to avoid the risk of gathering only traditional volunteering positions through virtual means, the scope of the search was extended to virtual communities that are, in fact, communities of online volunteers that work for development and cooperation for development

3. Last, a final search was done to find independent sites out of the usual circles of action of nonprofits and volunteering

To select among the results of web searches, some indicators where defined to establish a criterion of choice. In the first place, **PageRank**[9] (PR) was used as a criterion for popularity: the higher the PageRank, the more popular the site. A second indicator was added to reinforce the popularity criterion: the total number of volunteering opportunities (# POSTS).

Besides popularity, two more indicators belonging to the field of online volunteering were used: whether there was a specific **online volunteering section** (OVS) and the total number of online volunteering opportunities (# OV POSTS). When this online volunteering section was not available, the presence of a search engine

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[6] Ellis and Cravens (2000).

[7] Though we might have overlooked some articles, we believe that Murray & Harrison (2002) and the four by the author referred in our bibliography are the only ones that strictly focus on online volunteering from an academic point of view. Cravens (2005, 2006), Daly (2003) and Ellis & Cravens (2000) are also the most relevant part of the scarce literature in the practitioner field.

[8] Late spring 2005

[9] Google "PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value […] Important, high-quality sites receive a higher PageRank" Google (2005). Alexa might have been another good candidate, but it has with no doubt a bigger bias due to the criteria it takes into account when valuing a site, especially when considering pages that are popular only in a determinate circle of activity and not within the whole World Wide Web framework.

VOLUNTEERING SITE	PROMOTER	URL	PR	# POSTS	OV SECT	# OV POSTS
Ciudad Bip-Bip	Fundación Bip-Bip	http://www.ciudadbipbip.org	4	NA	1	NA
Craiglist	Craiglist Inc.	http://www.craigslist.org/	8	NA	0	NA
Global Volunteer Network	Global Volunteer Network	http://www.volunteer.org.nz/	6	NA	0	NA
GoVolunteer	Volunteering Australia	http://www.govolunteer.com.au/	6	9134	0	NA
Hacesfalta.org	Fundación Chandra	http://www.hacesfalta.org	6	849	1	59
Idealist	Idealist	http://www.idealist.org/	8	10076	0	NA
InterConnection	Interconnection	http://www.interconnection.org/	5	NA	1	NA
JustVolunteers	Baou, Inc.	http://www.justvolunteers.org	NA	NA	1	NA
Nabuur	Nabuur	http://www.nabuur.com	6	NA	1	NA
OnlineVolunteering	United Nations	http://www.onlinevolunteering.org	7	146	1	146
ProHumana	Fundación ProHumana	http://www.prohumana.cl	NA	32	1	32
ServeNet	Youth Service America	http://www.servenet.org	6	51943397	1	17
Soluciones ONG	Fundación Chandra	http://www.solucionesong.org	6	869	1	869
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	http://www.uoc.edu/cooperation	7	NA	1	NA
V2V	Portal do Voluntàrio	http://www.portaldovoluntario.org.br/	4	807	1	807
Volunteer Abroad	GoAbroad	http://www.volunteerabroad.com/	6	2506	0	NA
Volunteermatch	Volunteermatch	http://www.volunteermatch.org/	7	2121	1	170

Table 1: Volunteering Sites

We have to note that two other – in appearance – powerful sites were evaluated: USA Freedom Corps (http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/) and Network for Good (http://www.networkforgood.org). After some navigation we found that the first one linked directly to the second one, and that one used – though with its own template – the database and tools from Volunteermatch. Surprisingly, Volunteermatch has PageRank 7 and both others have 8.

At hist turn, Volunteer International (http://www.volunteerinternational.org) was also taken off the list because it used Volunteer Abroad tools and data under own template. Volunteer Canada (http://www.volunteer.ca) was removed because it did not have volunteering opportunities but linked to volunteering institutions.

was evaluated to see whether it could find specific terms concerning online volunteering[10] and perform a filter to reduce the number of results.

Last, a rough categorization according to the **four types of online volunteering** – as it is later described in **¡Error! No se encuentra el origen de la referencia.**. This should help to see how the volunteering sector and, in concrete, the online volunteering sector, is prepared or has evolved to more complex – and more *pure* – forms of online volunteering.

A complete list of the sites under study can be seen in Table 1.

3. Taxonomy of online volunteering

One of the first conclusions that arose just visiting the sites is that there are different ways to name Online Volunteering and not always these different names are used to describe the same thing. Our main findings in this aspect are the following[11]:

Online Volunteer: maybe the most standardized term, it deals with volunteers working from home or work or wherever but not in place. An internet connected device is the main communication tool and his main added value is knowledge. He can do things but, over all, he *knows* how to do things. Thus, he's a good assistant, consultant, advisor, etc. And, of course, he can transfer his knowledge, so he can effectively work as trainer or teacher (e-trainer or e-teacher, of course).

The definition given by the United Nations Volunteers is "[Online Volunteering] means tasks completed, in whole or in part, by a person via the Internet from a home, work, university, cyber cafe or telecenter computer" (UNV, 2004) and it surely is the most spread on and, due to the adoption of the term by the United Nations Volunteers, it has *de facto* become the "official" name.

According to UNV, we could think at Online Volunteers as telecommuters[12], but Nilles's definition of telecommuting and teleworking[13] is quite wider and we'll go back to it in the next section about the typology of Online Volunteering.

Virtual Volunteer: defined by Ellis and Cravens as "volunteer tasks completed, in whole or in part, via the Internet and a home or work computer" (Ellis & Cravens, 2000)[14] it is a complete synonymous of Online Volunteer, though it was maybe coined before this term during the study run by Impact Online, the Virtual Volunteering Project, back in 1996.

As synonymous of Online Volunteer we can also find **cyber service, telementoring** or **teletutoring** (Ellis & Cravens, 2000) but they are scarcely used. **e-Volunteer** is seldom used but it is neither a standard.

Cybervolunteer: this term uses the prefix cyber- that, if we have to believe the Wikipedia, "is a prefix stemming from cybernetics and loosely meaning through the use of a computer"[15]. It seems, thus, that its meaning should be the same as online volunteer. Nevertheless, there are some placers where cybervolunteers are thought to be ICT Volunteers. We will use it here as a synonymous of online volunteer and, indeed, propose it is used this way.

ICT Volunteer: a person who is working to foster the implementation and use of Information and Communication Technologies. He can install hardware, software or carry on with ICT training programs. There's no need to be an online volunteer to be an ICT volunteer: installing hardware is a good example. And there's no need to be an ICT volunteer to be an online volunteer: teaching a language through a virtual campus is not related with ICT fostering, at least in a direct way.

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[10] These terms were online volunteering, online, virtual volunteering, etc. Besides the fact that performing a search was usually a non-existent feature, the results were all but the desired.
[11] For this issues helped Cravens (2006), Daly (2003), Ellis & Cravens (2000), Nilles (1998), Murray & Harrison (2002) and UNV (2004).

[12] UNV (2004).
[13] Nilles (1998).
[14] Notice that the UN surely was inspired by Ellis & Cravens to adopt their defition.
[15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyber.

3.1. Proposals and conclusions on the Taxonomy of Online Volunteering

- As a matter of conclusion or as a matter of proposal for further research and analysis, we propose the adoption of the term *Online Volunteer* according to the previous definitions given. The results of our study show that this term is a total synonymous of **virtual volunteer** and **e-volunteer**, keeping in mind that virtual volunteer seems to be the older one, online volunteer the most official one (as adopted by the UN) and e-volunteer the most recent.

- We propose avoiding the use of both terms **telementor** and **teletutor** as they can be used in environments not related to nonprofits (i.e. the teletutor being the paid tutor in a virtual learning project, telementor being a personal coach within a corporation). Actually, we'd also like to avoid the term **televolunteer**, as it is related strictly with being away, not with being online. Same applies with other versions of these terms such as online mentor, online facilitator, online advocate or e-advocate.

- We strongly suggest avoiding the use of **cybervolunteer** and **cyber service** as, even though they are synonymous, they can lead to misunderstanding because of the use of the term also as a synonymous of ICT volunteer. Instead, we would recommend the use of **online volunteer**, **virtual volunteer** and **e-volunteer**, on one hand, and ICT volunteer on the other hand, to express on-line and on-site volunteering, respectively

- We recommend a proper use or the term **ICT Volunteer**, not as synonym of Online Volunteer.

4. Typology of the Online Volunteer[16]

In the websites analyzed, multiple and quite different tasks where assigned under the same online volunteering terms, tasks that, in general, can all be performed through the internet, but that only some of them might be considered volunteering, while some others might not. Staying with the definition or range of Online Volunteering, we've seen there are different approaches on how institutions deal with the concept of online volunteering, according to intensiveness or scope of online collaboration and the nature of the tasks run by these volunteers.

We think we can set up the following classification, with four types of online volunteering[17]:

I. **Online Advocacy**: Online volunteering in advocacy consists in subscribing online campaigns to promote human rights[18] and, more specifically, to report some human rights violation and, thus, to force some change. Amnesty International Spain campaign against death penalty in Nigeria for women such as Safiya Hussaini[19] and Amina Lawal[20] is a very good example of this kind of volunteering where people were called to enter a site[21] and sign a manifesto against gender discrimination.

However, this kind of volunteering would never be called that way if it took place offline, i.e. if asked to sign for a campaign in the middle of the

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[16] See a first draft of this typology in Peña-López, I. (2005).

[17] There is an interesting parallelism between our four categories of online volunteering, with increasing mastering of ICTs and the several definitions and categories that some authors apply to digital literacy, ranging from technological literacy to fully functional literacy. Please see Ortoll (2005) for a general overview and Warschauer (2002 and 2003) for more details on technological vs. informational literacy.

[18] We can extend the field of action to environmental issues, animal rights, etc.

[19] www.amnistiaporsafiya.org.

[20] www.amnistiapornigeria.org.

[21] Both sites now point to http://www.es.amnesty.org/paises/nigeria/.

street, so it is really hard to consider it online volunteering when it happens in the Internet. But this kind of actions are labeled this way on most volunteering sites and are, in fact, the most frequent ones.

On the other hand, the major part of these sites – if not all – include a "send to a friend" option. Understanding advocacy as making people know about a situation or a debate on some issue, we could then think of this "send to a friend" options as a sort of very light online volunteering. Even with a very low level of commitment, (online) volunteering would take place this way.

II. **Online Assessment and consultancy**: Some portals include forums where people can ask for help and experts can bring it in exchange for nothing or in exchange for reputation and social recognition[22]. Some of these portals are cooperation for development focused or clearly a service for nonprofits. Most of these forums are not moderated nor directed for anyone: they are just tools at the reach of everyone.

Some NGOs[23] have started such a service under a coordinate design, where a registered online volunteer is asked for advice and he brings back some kind of helpdesk service in plenty of subjects, usually related to NGO management or development projects management. Let's make

clear that it is no proactive but reactive volunteering: the volunteer just brings feedback on questions, never leading any kind of advice on his own initiative. So, there is "little" to "some" level of commitment depending on what happens if the volunteer does not answer the request for help – it usually happens nothing as, being a volunteer, he cannot be punished as a paid worker would.

The counterpart is that, as with the previous type, it is a rather passive approach to online volunteering, not a proactive but a reactive one. The positive side is that it builds a network of experts, a knowledge network, which would rarely be found offline. Unlike online advocacy, that can easily go offline and pursue similar or same goals, such a network of experts, especially if international or covering a wide range of territory and/or expertise, is closely linked to the nature of the Internet itself and would disappear without – or, at least, lose most of its flexibility and immediacy[24].

III. *Onlined* **Offline Volunteers or Online volunteers for offline projects**: This is the natural evolution of the last level. It deals with increasing the commitment of the online volunteer and giving her or him a defined role in the development project the NGO is running or in the management of the NGO itself. It can be more comfortably looked at from another standpoint of view: sending the volunteers back home by means of virtualizing their jobs.

It turns helpdesk issues into responsibility: "this is *your* duty", "this is *your* task". **This modality usually converts offline volunteers into online volunteers**: volunteers that would exist anyway but that ICTs allow them not to travel abroad, not to be there in that precise place or then at that precise moment. It is full volunteering, but kind of a real

[22] See Himanen (2003), Castells (2002), Papathéodorou (2000), Gay (2002).
[23] Solucionesong.org (NGO Solutions), the Spanish online community born thanks to some retired enterprise managers that wanted to volunteer (and then enhanced into a portal by Fundación Chandra), is sort of a clearing house of questions and answers where needs (NGOs) and experts (online volunteers) meet. The online volunteer registers, defines his area of expertise and waits for mails to come in with the questions. Answering back or not is up to the volunteer. As there's more than one person by area of expertise, questions rarely remain unanswered. Nabuur.org or Ciudadbipbip.org are virtual communities that have a very similar way of working.

[24] Think of running the network by telephone or *snail mail*.

volunteering virtualization. Most serious online volunteering programs work this way. This concept really fits with Jack Nilles concept of telecommuting: "moving the work to the workers instead of moving the workers to work; periodic work out of the principal office, one or more days per week either at home or in a telecenter. The emphasis here is on *reduction or elimination of the daily commute* to and from the workplace"[25].

IV. **Pure Online Volunteers or Online Volunteers teams for online projects**: But why virtualize when the Network could exist by itself? Why not think directly in online volunteers teams instead of thinking how to virtualize them? Why not think in *fully online* development projects instead of its online side?

Pure Online Volunteers – pure in the sense of they being born native online volunteers – have their prime example in the Free / Libre / Open Source Software community[26] (FLOSS) and we can think of them as the natural enhancement of both type II (online assessment volunteers) and type III (*onlined* offline volunteers). In the first case, naturally born online volunteers come and get more and more responsibilities and end up by leading projects on themselves whose nature is closely linked to this of the Internet (i.e. information and communication). Second case is the enhancement of onsite volunteers not by means of responsibilities, but of the nature of their collaboration, the nature of the means they use to volunteer.

Summing up, this can be portrayed as shown in **¡Error! No se encuentra el origen de la referencia.**.

4.1. Proposals and conclusions on the Typology of Online Volunteering

▪ While first and second steps in online volunteering can be a good approach to a newcomer to online cooperation for development, we guess steps three and four should be fostered in order to profit from the full potential of Information and Communication Technologies for Development[27] (ICT4D) and volunteering. As it can be seen in the analysis of the volunteering sites, we've seen very good examples of both, but mainly of the third type. Nevertheless, somehow somewhere a virtual community should rise and lead an exponential growth of the fourth type: the Free/Open Source Software community has already done it. The e-educators community – especially when talking about authoring and shared authoring tools in e-learning – is in the way and there're already new tools that start to make think of a possible and near future of a real virtual community of e-educators (or ICT assisted offline educators). We should think on how to replicate these experiences in the development field[28].

▪ It is interesting to think of **the online volunteer as a knowledge manager** whose work is catalyzed and empowered by ICTs. The main tasks of knowledge management[29] – knowledge audit, creation, localization, organization, storing, sorting, sharing, transferring,

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[25] Nilles (1998), italics in the original.
[26] See Stallman (2002) for an introduction to Free Software and Raymond (1999) and Himanen (2003) for a deeper analysis on how the FLOSS community works.

[27] ICT4D have been the object of intense debate almost since the concept "digital divide" was issued for the first time. At the international level, the blueprints for ICT4D have ben settled during the World Summit for the Information Society, the main documents being United Nations ICT Task Force (2003) and WSIS Executive Secretariat (2003a, 2003b, 2004).
[28] A good example of this is the V2V (volunteer to volunteer) project by the Brazilian Portal do Voluntàrio (http://www.portaldovoluntario.org.br/v2v.php), but it is quite new and it is yet in his first steps.
[29] ELIT Learning Innovation (2002).

informing, training, using, capitalizing – can be performed by online volunteers and/or by the means of ICTs.

- ▪ Further research should be focused on the definition of an online volunteer profile, especially under the approach of the knowledge manager. For him to be a good knowledge manager should have a good education/training and/or a deep (professional) expertise in a concrete area. As happens with some online students, online volunteers should be found

amongst people that have strong compromises with family and career – cannot volunteer onsite – but can make a difference by using intensively ICTs – are knowledge intensive workers or volunteers. Nonprofits could, then, bring in new talent – excluded from cooperation for development because of family and business compromises – or just stop losing talent for similar reasons. Nonprofits could, also, increase noteworthy their human capital and, over all, their capacity, by understanding knowledge as capital and thus capacity.

	Reactive	**Proactive**
Telecommuting	Type I: Online Advocacy	Type III: Onlined Offline Volunteers
Teleworking	Type II: Online Assessment	Type IV: Pure Online Volunteers

Table 2: Types of Online Volunteering

5. Matching Sites vs. Taxonomy and Typology

When combining the information found on volunteer matching websites and our preliminary conclusions, the first thing to consider is that, even if we have drawn a pretty good list of volunteering sites where some of them offer online volunteering opportunities, they are everything but homogeneous. After having made a proposal for an online volunteering taxonomy and typology, a new analysis of the websites of our study under the light of our proposed definitions seems to find that volunteering matching sites can be classified according to four very different categories:

I. On one hand we find the **traditional volunteering matching services** that have gone online as a means of reaching new volunteers through a

new communication channel. But even if they use the Internet to communicate with others, they still have to understand how it fully works and all its possibilities.

II. On the other hand we find portals that do understand the power of online volunteering. They provide a coherent discourse and means of reaching online volunteering opportunities, doing it from the point of view of this new reality that online volunteering and working in the World Wide Web implies. We can find here sites such as VolunteerMatch and, over all, the United Nations OnlineVolunteering Service. We would like to say that these are the pure **online volunteering matching sites**[30].

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[30] Even if VolunteerMatch is a volunteering matching site also intended for offline volunteers, it gives online volunteering its own

III. The **online volunteering tanks** are sites constructed as virtual communities where online volunteering takes place. Soluciones ONG, Ciudad Bip-Bip, Nabuur, V2V are places where a pool of experts is gathered and it is brought at the disposal of nonprofits so they can benefit from the knowledge of the people forming the virtual community

It is due to mention that V2V is a virtual community build exclusively by the initiative of the own volunteers. Whilst the other three – and surely many more – are powered and leaded by nonprofits or foundations, Portal do Voluntàrio just gave away the technology – and maintains the site – but the projects are built within the virtual community and due to popular demand, never leaded by the promoter of the site. V2V is maybe a hybrid of this kind of online volunteering portal and the next one.

IV. Other sites work as **online volunteering virtual nonprofits** where the portal itself works as a virtual nonprofit. Interconnection or UOC Cooperation recruit online volunteers to run their own projects, though the projects are built and run in an open way and also due to popular demand. The difference with the previous type of portal is that the organizer has a strong commitment with real projects besides the creation of a virtual community of experts and let them alone to rule themselves.

Thus, we can group the preceding kinds of portals in two very different groups: one group will be conformed by the traditional volunteering matching services and the online volunteering matching sites. They are **matching sites** though they are in different steps in the understanding of the online volunteering evolution. Because of their nature, they usually promote type I (Online Advocacy) and type III (Onlined Offline Volunteers) kinds of online volunteering, being the last more frequent in online volunteering matching sites.

Second group is formed by online volunteering tanks and online volunteering virtual nonprofits. Both are **virtual communities** where not only a matching of online volunteers takes place, but also the running of a project. The difference between them is easy to see if we go back to the four types of online volunteering: online volunteering tanks promote a type II online volunteering (Online Assessment Volunteers) while the online volunteering virtual nonprofits promote a type IV online volunteering (Pure Online Volunteers).

Of course, the lines that divide this classification are not that clear and blur when analyzing one by one the thousands of online volunteering opportunities, but they work quite well when aggregating and having a rough approach.

6. Conclusions and further research

The analysis of the 17 volunteering websites showed that there is not a common definition of what is an online volunteer, what does he do and, due to this lack of consensus, sites actually constitute – or are designed as – different kinds of presence models in the Internet, ranging from the portal to the virtual community.

Thus, and first of all, we think there's a strong need to revise the concepts of online volunteer, virtual volunteer, e-volunteer, telementor, teletutor, cybervolunteer, cyber service and ICT volunteer. Over all, the need is urgent in agreeing a consensus not to misguide both NGOs and potential volunteers. It is worth noticing that, even if the near 30,000 opportunities were not read one by one, the error of considering ICT volunteers as online volunteers was not found anywhere. So, is an error only found in academic circles or at speeches and conferences, but corrected in the communication media.

Once a taxonomy is established, we suggest starting to work, if not in the definition of a typology of online volunteering, at least in the implicit use of such a typology, to help the guiding of either future volunteers and volunteering

space within the site in a way that it becomes independent from the rest.

institutions in a correct matching of interests and profiles and, hence, in a better understanding, from all parts, of the possibilities and limitations of online volunteering.

While we would not suggest the definition of a typology of the different volunteering matching sites existing, yet we do invite the promoters of these sites to spare some time for themselves and think who their target is, how to address it and how to work with it – supposed their mission or aim is not only volunteering matching but running online volunteering projects, i.e. in the form of an online community of experts.

An error to really avoid in the field of categories or typologies deals with considering online volunteering one more category amongst the fields where the volunteer wants to collaborate, i.e. "humanitarian aid, environment, health, …and online volunteering". This question is positively solved either by choosing online volunteering as a yes/no option (usually through a checkbox) or integrating it as a geographical category[31], which is quite obvious.

6.1. *Sourceforgization* of the online volunteer for development movement

After readings like Himanen (2003), Raymond (1999) and Papathéodorou (2000), or projects like Volunteer 2 Volunteer run by the Portal do Voluntàrio[32], our opinion is that, during these last years, online volunteering has been promoted in an individual point of view: "you're an NGO working here and there, you have some cooperation for development projects, I want to volunteer, I cannot go here and there, but I have a computer, what can I do?" This is a must, but it is also just phase I.

Phase II should benefit from the enhancement of personal communications to create real virtual communities such as the free software movement, where both the communities and the projects have their birth in the Internet itself, with no need to be born in the offline world, being not the Internet their means, but their sole nature.

The digital identities of volunteers in the Internet, boosted by social software, should be able to find or create a place the like of SourceForge.net[33] where cooperation projects based on online volunteering could take place.

This is strongly related with what we have stated before, explicitly and implicitly, about the online volunteer being a **knowledge manager** in the nonprofit sector. It seems evident to us as the only things that can be transferred through ICTs are data, information and knowledge: this is just what its nature is about.

Tacit knowledge, or the knowledge held by people in their brains[34], is fed mainly by two streams: training and experience. We guess it should be an interesting research to track the training and experience of the actual online volunteers to check if their background corresponds to the necessary profile of the knowledge holder and manager. Indeed, and besides training and experience, the profile should include socioeconomic variables, former experience as onsite volunteer, etc. so nonprofits could direct their efforts to the most adequate target for online volunteering.

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[31] Geographical categories usually showed a list of countries where to volunteer and, at the end of the list, it would appear a "anywhere" field, that gave no geographical filter, and followed by a "virtual" field that would filter the results for online volunteering.

[32] http://www.portaldovoluntario.org.br/v2v.php.

[33] See McGovern (2004) for a brief presentation on what SourceForge.net is and represents to the free software community. Raymond (1999) and Himanen (2003) can help in introducing the conceptual point of view behind free software and open source software volunteers or contributors. Monge (2003) states that the FLOSS model could be applied to open educational resources and, I add, these could be used in e-learning for development projects. For an introduction to the open access movement see Suber (2003 and 2005).

[34] We will stick to this informal definition and not enter a rigorous definition of tacit knowledge, which can be held by institutions, procedures, etc.

Nevertheless, while this knowledge manager (or online volunteer type IV) is the one that best benefits from the full potential of online volunteering, it is far from being the leading profile[35].

We have to admit that type I is not as important as we thought it would be before finishing our research, and it is found mainly in very generic sites – some of them, as Craiglist, not even specialized on volunteering – and fading as the portal becomes aware that online volunteering is of a different nature and more information on this new way of volunteering appears in the site around the matching tool. Speaking in numbers, types II and III are the most usual ones.

6.2. Closing words

We'd like to think that online volunteering has evolved dramatically since the birth of the web[36] in both ways:

- In its scope, as it now covers a wide range of areas and expertises and, most important, is in its way to create its own place on development and cooperation for development

- In its understanding and popularity as more and more people look for online volunteers or online volunteering opportunities

It is important to notice that there still is a good way to walk. We do not have to forget that the numbers figuring in Table 1 should not be added up together as they represent different types of volunteering and not always real opportunities. For example, numbers on virtual communities do relate to virtual citizens of these communities more than online volunteering opportunities. And

sometimes numbers mean projects where one or more volunteers can take part of it.

Besides all the mess on what is what and who is who, *eppur si muove*: either the nonprofit community and the volunteering community are ready for an enhanced online volunteering such as online volunteering for e-learning for development and the different online volunteering experiences show it even if the *really* good practices are scarce.

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[35] In most cases the problem is not about the role of online volunteers in nonprofits, but about the role of ICTs in nonprofits, whose penetration is far from being optimal: see Coordinadora de ONG para el Desarrollo - España (2005) and Franco (2002) for the case of Spain, or ISOPH (2004) and Npower (2001) for the US but with a more general scope, specially the last reference.

[36] See note 5.

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