

# Leisure Reflections, No. 63 by Robert A. Stebbins

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news / July 18, 2023

Leisure Reflections No. 63, July 2023

On “**Obligation and Volunteering in the Non-European Sense**”

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This is a reminder about the role of obligation in volunteering. Failure to recognize that some people volunteer out of a sense of responsibility, out of a sense of obligation that is, however, negatively felt. In other words, such volunteers would rather pass their free time in bona fide leisure activities, which are positive in nature. Negatively obligated volunteering has been conceptualized as a kind of non-work obligation (Stebbins 2015, p. 7, Stebbins 2000, Stebbins 2021).

If the word “volunteering” is to remain consistent with its French and Latin roots, then it can only be seen, as all leisure is, as un-coerced, activity. Moreover, as with all leisure, leisure volunteering can only be seen as either a basically satisfying or as a basically deeply rewarding experience. Otherwise, we are forced to posit that so-called volunteers of this kind are somehow pushed into performing their roles by circumstances they would prefer to avoid – a stark contradiction of terms.

This clarification should help sort out what true volunteering is in non-European societies. In other words, how much of non-work activity there is not coerced by custom, by negative obligations and the like. Note, too, that volunteering is conceptualized in volunteer studies as conducted only beyond the interests of the volunteer’s immediate family; obligation versus non-obligation being too difficult to separate conceptually at this intimate level.

## References

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Forthcoming:

Leisure Reflections No. 64, November 2023:

**'Communitarianism and Leisure'**