



Evaluating the impact of environmental volunteering on behaviours and attitudes to the environment

Hine, R., Peacock, J., and Pretty, J., 2008, *Evaluating the impact of environment volunteering on behaviours and attitudes to the environment*, University of Essex

Overview

This study, written by Hine, Peacock and Pretty, evaluates the impact of environmental volunteering on behaviours and attitudes towards the environment. It seeks to determine whether environmental volunteering impacts ecological attitudes and behaviours.

Methods

In order to determine whether such a relationship exists, this study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved a survey of 251 BTCV volunteers, who were asked to respond to a composite questionnaire specifically designed to gather baseline data on demographic and social capital information, as well as three central determinants: level of connectedness to nature, environmental awareness and changes in environmental behaviour. The questions were designed to allow participants to rate on a numerical scale how far they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements pertaining to each element, which was then transformed into a set of scores to be compared. The second phase sought to provide a longitudinal dimension to the study. The same questionnaire was put to 252 BTCV volunteers again to determine any changes in environmental behaviours and attitudes after involvement in environmental volunteering. Furthermore, 18 participants gave their names on both questionnaires, which allowed a far more accurate comparison of any changes.

Results

An analysis of the data collected shows that there is a positive correlation overall between volunteering and the three central elements investigated in the study, with specific increases in environmental awareness and environmental actions and behaviour. This supports the hypothesis of the study that environmental volunteering stimulates connectedness to nature, which subsequently increases environmental awareness and good practice.

Limitations

However, the study does not investigate causality, and so it cannot be said that these increases are necessarily due to environmental volunteering, especially as many participants cited social motivations for activity. Furthermore, the participants were already environmental volunteers, and therefore likely had an interest in the dependents measured. Therefore, although the methodology is effective in measuring changes in the three dependent variables, it does not go as far as to explain these changes as a consequence of volunteering. Finally, the study does not specify if many of the same people were used in both phases of the questioning. If different individuals were used, it is impossible to prove any overall change was felt by the volunteers.