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Volunteer roles and the benefits of volunteering: An examination of nonprofit housing cooperatives

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ABSTRACT

This article explores if, and to what degree, being involved in different kinds of volunteer tasks in nonprofit housing cooperatives affects the development of one's capabilities, social ties, and ability to influence the housing in which one lives. A unique data-set based on an evaluation of cooperative housing programs was used, and data were analyzed using logistic regression. Serving on the board of directors, organizing social events, and assisting with operational tasks, all increased the likelihood of experiencing at least some outcomes. The odds of developing financial skills, organizational skills, experience in working with others, self-confidence, and an ability to influence one's housing were greatest if one served on the board. The odds of developing operational skills were highest if one helped with operational tasks, while the odds of gaining friends and personal support were greatest if one helped organize social events.

Individuals who volunteer take on diverse tasks in associations, including fundraising, providing front-line services, answering the phone, and offering leadership and fiduciary oversight (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Windsor, Anstey, & Rodgers, 2008). Cooperative organizations also rely on volunteerism, and the involvement of members is a defining feature of this organizational type, internationally (International Co-operative Alliance, 2013). The nature of volunteer involvement in cooperatives depends on factors such as the sector and country in which the volunteers are operating, their level of maturity, and their commercial versus community orientation. In some cooperatives, volunteerism is limited to member involvement in governance (e.g. board membership), while in others, members may also be engaged in operations. For example, in child care cooperatives, parents organize social events (Leviten-Reid, 2012), and in retail cooperatives, members have historically helped out by stocking shelves (Joyal, 2012). In housing cooperatives, operational tasks may consist of helping with member communications or building maintenance.

Beyond the fact that associations, including cooperatives, feature volunteerism, the question remains of how, if at all, such participation matters for those who engage in it. More specifically, what are the effects of being involved in particular and varying tasks?

An important body of empirical work has been developed over the past two decades and longer on the benefits of donating time. However, the particular roles played by volunteers in associations and the differing effects these roles may have on outcomes such as learning have largely remained unexplored. This research helps to fill this gap through an exploration of volunteerism within nonprofit housing cooperatives. It does so by asking both if and to what degree serving on the board, engaging in operational activities, and planning social events affect the likelihood of developing capabilities (Lanzi, 2007; Sen, 1997), strengthening social ties, and gaining an ability to influence decisions about the housing in which one lives.

Background

The housing cooperatives in this study are zero-equity cooperatives that are democratically run by their members. Located in Canada, they were formed during the 1970s to the early 1990s as part of the federal government's housing strategy and in response at least in part to tenant disengagement within public housing projects (Cole, 2008; Hellyer, 1969). Additionally, they were promoted by the cooperative sector as a way to extend this organizational form to other markets beyond those in which cooperatives were commonly found, such as financial services (Cole, 2008). Distinct from what was taking place in government-run housing, housing cooperatives offered residents the chance to manage their units and buildings. In practice, this meant that residents were given the opportunity to be involved in their housing by being on the board and on committees, doing maintenance work, reviewing new member applications, writing newsletters, and planning events and activities for themselves and their neighbors. Typically, residents of these cooperatives have had the choice to participate, although in the case of very small buildings with few tenants, residents have needed to get involved in their housing for the cooperative to function. Historically, in a small number of instances, individuals may have been required to participate in order to live in their cooperative, regardless of its size (Swail, personal communication, 2014). Beyond being uncommon, this practice is not supported by the national federation that links, supports, and speaks on behalf of these organizations to policy-makers. As a result, involvement in housing cooperatives can be understood to fit within the framework of volunteerism (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008), defined as altruistic behavior in which the "goal is to provide help to others, a group, an organization, a cause, or the community at large, without expectation of a material reward" (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 3).

Literature review

Reviewing the past two decades of research, three themes were identified that relate to our topic: the effects of volunteering on human capabilities and social connections, the extent to which individuals are involved in the ongoing oversight and care of their housing, and how this may contribute to a sense of control over their housing circumstances.

With respect to the development of capabilities, researchers commonly explore job-related skills development, employment status, or wage increases as outcomes. Interviews with volunteers in health and social care organizations in Ireland, a school garden and kitchen program in Australia, and housing cooperatives in Canada revealed that practical and career-enhancing experiences were gained (ellerby & Leviten-Reid, in press; Macneela,

2008; Townsend et al., 2014). In survey research, Krahn, Lowe, and Lehmann (2002) found that Canadian high school students reported gaining employment-related proficiencies including social and citizenship skills through volunteering, followed by "work attitudes and behavior" (p. 283) such as taking initiative, being organized, and managing time. With regard to securing work, paine, McKay, and Moro (2013) found conflicting evidence of whether volunteering led to employment in the uK. While individuals who volunteered once a month were more likely to find work, those who volunteered more often (at least once a week), or less often (about once a year), were less likely to experience the same result. Looking specifically at women using uS data, volunteering was not associated with labor market participation, although volunteering among those who were working, especially at earlier and multiple points in time, had a positive effect on occupational prestige (Wilson & Musick, 2000). Results are also mixed with respect to wage rates increases. positive evidence of a wage effect has been found using Canadian and French data (Day & Devlin, 1998; prouteau & Wolff, 2006), albeit only among public sector workers in this latter study. In contrast, paine et al. (2013) found that volunteering once a week, several times a year, or once a year had a negative effect on wages.

Beyond this explicit tie with skills development and the labor market, some researchers have examined what volunteers learn during their time spent in associations. In the context of volunteering overseas, individuals were reported to have developed a greater understanding of the social and economic challenges faced by other countries (McBride, Lough, & Sherraden, 2012) and learned about other cultures (piercy, Cheek, & Teemant, 2011). Civic skills have also been examined. For example, being involved in one's place of worship or in nonpolitical associations was shown to provide many individuals with the opportunity to organize a meeting or make a presentation (verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Mündel and Shugurensky (2008) explored learning among volunteers in community organizations of different kinds, including a housing cooperative, and found that while acquiring instrumental skills and the capacity to work with others were most commonly reported by research participants, a small number also noted they developed civic skills and greater political awareness as a result of their involvement.

Much of the literature on volunteering and the development of one's social ties finds positive effects. In the qualitative literature, volunteering overseas, within environmental organizations, and in school kitchens and gardens has been shown to foster new relationships (o'Brien, Townsend, & ebden, 2010; piercy et al., 2011; Townsend et al., 2014). In quantitative studies, Wollebaek and Selle (2002) reported that involvement in associations impacted the number of friendships one develops and the different groups of people who are part of one's network, while Isham, Kolodinsky, and Kimberly (2006) identified a small but positive effect on social connections. Degli Antoni (2009) examined not only the number of friends one makes while volunteering, but also the number of individuals encountered that can be relied upon and trusted (for example, to provide advice and assistance). He found that volunteering with the express purpose of meeting people results in the former, while volunteering to make a difference predicts the latter.

For the most part, the literature suggests that volunteering benefits those who get involved, although there is greater consensus around its positive impact on social ties and less consistent evidence that it builds employment-related skills. What is noteworthy, however, is that the research reviewed above examines volunteerism by whether individuals simply engage in this activity or not. In quantitative studies, the activity is commonly

operationalized using a dichotomous, yes/no variable (e.g. Day & Devlin, 1998; verba et al., 1995; Wilson & Musick, 2000) or by the rate at which one volunteers, captured either by the number of hours or days, or by the number of organizations in which one is involved (e.g. Isham et al., 2006; paine et al., 2013; Wollebaek & Selle, 2002). Qualitative research, in turn, typically does not focus on specific volunteer roles within organizations (e.g. Macneela, 2008; piercy et al., 2011; Townsend et al., 2014). So, while there exists a rich and important literature on the effects of volunteering on those who volunteer, we do not know if or how taking on certain roles and responsibilities in organizations matters. This limitation has been noted elsewhere (Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999; paine et al., 2013), and we are left to make conjectures about the merits of different kinds of volunteer work (putnam, 2000). What also emerges from the literature review is that only two studies examine the effects of volunteerism within the context of cooperatives (ellerby & Leviten-Reid, in press; Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008). yet, both the academic and practitioner literatures state that participation in cooperatives is a defining feature of this organizational form and that individuals learn through their participation in this kind of association (e.g. Fairbairn, 2001; International Cooperative Alliance, 2013).

A small body of literature is available on involvement in one's housing. often this research identifies particular forms of rental housing which may facilitate resident participation, with housing cooperatives being noted as exemplary in this regard (Saegert & Winkel, 1998; Saegert, Winkel, & Swartz, 2002; Sousa & Quarter, 2003). Similar studies explore whether or not participation in housing relates to feeling in control over the place of residence in which one lives. Simmons and Birchall (2007) examined why individuals may become involved in tenant associations or tenant management organizations within their social housing in the uK. They asked residents about the benefits they may experience through their participation, and how these benefits may differ based on whether one is part of an association (which allows tenant representatives to voice their concerns and ideas to others who do not live in this housing) or a management organization (where tenants establish budgets and manage their buildings). Approximately 80% of all respondents reported that their participation allowed them to have a say in their housing. Additionally, almost 40% of those involved in tenant associations and 60% of those involved in management organizations reported developing self-confidence and feeling "more in control" (p. 584). Kruythoff (2008) carried out a mixed-method study of resident participation in a housing association for those in the private rental housing market in Rotterdam. She showed that involvement not only allowed tenants to learn how this structure functioned, but that it also provided an important mechanism for information sharing and discussion with property owners. While these papers provide evidence that participation contributes to feeling that one has a say in decision-making, two gaps remain. First, despite the fact that housing cooperatives have been identified as a model organizational form with respect to resident participation, none of the extant work focuses on this tenure type. Second, none of this research compares involvement in a decision-making structure in one's housing (such as a board or committee) to other forms of participation, despite the fact that residents may be engaged in other ways.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis emerges directly from the literature. Although there is limited research on the effects of engaging in specific volunteer tasks, the extant work is consistent in concluding

that the general act of volunteering leads to the development of social connections. Much of the available research also demonstrates that individuals develop skills when volunteering and although the research on cooperatives is limited, the prevailing expectation is that involvement leads to learning. Lastly, the literature on involvement in housing organizations suggests that it provides tenants with a voice in what takes place in the buildings and units in which they live. As such, and in response to the first research question, the following hypothesis is put forward: being on the board of directors, organizing social events, and engaging in operational tasks will all have significant and positive effects on the development of capabilities, social ties, and the ability to influence decisions over the housing in which one lives.

With respect to the second research question, it is hypothesized that being on the board of directors will have the strongest effect on the development of capabilities, social ties, and the ability to influence decisions over housing. organizing social events and assisting with operational tasks will not differ in their effects on these three types of outcomes. This hypothesis is not based on the literature, as researchers have yet to explore whether different kinds of volunteer tasks may matter. Instead, it is based on our knowledge of what is involved in governing nonprofit organizations. Serving as the director of an association involves working with others to plan, communicate, review financial statements, and develop policy. While elements of these tasks would be engaged in as part of other activities (for example, organizing a social event), it would not be to the same degree.

Methods

Data

The data used in this study were taken from the Cooperative Housing programs evaluation that was conducted in 2001 and 2002 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2003). This original study compared nonprofit housing cooperatives to other third-sector rental housing, to market-based rentals, and to condominiums, and survey data were collected from residents living in these different tenure forms. For the present study, observations were dropped from the data-set if they did not pertain to individuals living in cooperative housing, or if individuals were living in cooperatives but no one in the household volunteered. Finally, a small number of observations were dropped if the survey response quality was low. Five cases were dropped because individuals did not respond to at least half of the total survey questions, and 10 cases were dropped because individuals indicated that they, or someone in their household, participated in their cooperative but then did not respond to any of the seven questions related to how they did so (American Association for public opinion Research, 2009). The data-set used for the study presented here consisted of 2410 observations.

Although this data-set was created over a decade ago, more current data that capture both different types of involvement in associations and the benefits that may accrue to volunteers are not available. one factor to consider in the relevancy of secondary data is what else is available for analysis (Smith & Smith, 2008), and based on a review of existing data-sets, more current data are not at hand. For example, the 2012 and 2014 General Social Surveys in the uSA and the 2013 counterpart in Canada include questions on whether or not

respondents are involved in different types of associations, but not on which tasks volunteers assume or how they may benefit from this volunteer work (Smith, Marsden, Hout, & Jibum, Smith, Marsden, Hout, & Kim, 1972–2014; Statistics Canada, 2015). Surveys that ask more specific questions related to what volunteers actually do in associations, such as volunteering and Civic Life in America (u.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015) and the 2006 Social Capital Community Survey (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard university, 2006), do not include questions related to different benefits that volunteers may experience related to their contributions of time.

Additionally, data-sets on cooperative organizations are very limited and focus on economic indicators when they do exist (Carini, el-youssef, & Sparreboom, 2015). Tellingly, a need has been identified by the international cooperative movement for household-level data to be gathered on how individuals are involved in this specific type of organization (Carini et al., 2015), and the literature review identified only two qualitative studies on how cooperatives may benefit volunteers (ellerby & Leviten-Reid, in press; Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008). It is also important to note that the study on which this data-set is based has not been replicated since 2001/2002. Finally, there was nothing that occurred during the 2001/2002 period among Canadian housing cooperatives (such as a stronger emphasis on the housing model by policy-makers or an increased emphasis on participation or skills development by those involved in the cooperative housing sector) which would suggest that the results would be any different were they to be based on data collected today (Cole, 2008; Smith & Smith, 2008).

Design and sampling

The research design used to create the original data-set was cross-sectional, and a probability sampling strategy was adopted. Two hundred and twelve cooperative housing organizations from across Canada were selected randomly using a sampling frame generated from lists of these organizations held by the CMHC and where necessary, provincial government departments. At the outset, 433 cooperatives were selected randomly, but only 221 of these were able to provide lists of their residents to the researchers (CMHC, 2003). With respect to the generalizability of the housing cooperatives included in the study, the research team involved in the original project compared key characteristics of this sample of 221 organizations to the population of housing cooperatives, including the size of the buildings and their location, and found no differences. A sampling frame of residents living in this housing was generated by contacting representatives from the cooperatives selected to participate, and an equal number of surveys were distributed in each cooperative. Questionnaires were distributed by mail or in person and were followed up with postcards or, when phone numbers were known to the researchers, with phone calls. The response rate from residents of the cooperatives was 67%.

Variables

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The variables related to volunteering in cooperative housing were dichotomous. These included being on the board of directors, planning social events, and engaging in operational activities (encompassing maintenance work, office and clerical work, or both). Survey respondents were asked if they, or anyone else in their household, had been involved in these tasks.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

variable	percentage or mean	N_a
Capabilities		
Developed financial skills	19%	2274
Developed operational skills	18%	2275
Gained organizational experience	45%	2273
improved skills in working with others	57%	2274
improved self-confidence	44%	2266
Social ties		
Gained more friends and strengthened personal support	60%	2267
Influence over housing		
Gained ability to influence decisions over housing	53%	2263
Number of benefits reported by volunteers	2.94 (*SD* 2.26)	
Volunteer role		
Served on board of directors	52%	2218
Helped with operational tasks	66%	2257
organized social events	45%	2161
Average number of volunteer roles	1.14 (*SD* .97)	2038
Household characteristics		
length of time in housing		2357
less than two years	15%	
Between two and seven years	42%	
Greater than seven years living below	43%	
low-income cut-off member of a visible	52%	2215
minority in household	11%	2347
Community characteristics		
Size of community less		2410
than 99,999 people	32%	
100,000–499,999 people	21%	
more than 500,000 people	47%	

[a]the sample sizes reflect the missing data for each variable (mcKnight, mcKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). the data-set used for the study consisted of 2410 observations.

The variables related to human capabilities were single-item, dichotomous questions. The questions included whether or not respondents felt that they, or the member in their household who had volunteered: developed financial skills or operational skills (including clerical skills or trade skills, such as plumbing); gained organizational experience or experience working with others; and increased their self-confidence.

The variable related to the development of social ties asked whether or not the volunteers had gained more friends and strengthened personal support, and was also dichotomous. The final outcome variable explored in this study was whether volunteers gained an ability to influence decisions about their housing, which was also coded as a yes/no variable. With all dichotomous variables used in this study, 1 represented yes and 0 represented no. one of the control variables used in this study was the length of time living in the building, which was a categorical variable in the survey and binary coded for the analysis. Categories included less than two years (which was the reference group), between two and seven years, and more than seven years. A second control variable was the financial state of the household, which was operationalized by whether the household fell under the Government of Canada's low-income cut-off (LICo) at the time the survey was conducted (Statistics Canada, 2013a). The LICo is an income threshold under which households are considered to be spending a disproportionate percentage of their income on basic needs; this statistic is a function of household size, household income, and community size (Statistics Canada, 2013b), all of which were captured through survey questions. This variable was dichotomous, with 1

representing that the household fell below the LICo and 0 representing that it did not. The coding of this variable was somewhat imperfect for two reasons. First, the community sizes used to calculate the LICo did not overlap perfectly with the community sizes used in the survey instrument. This meant that for survey respondents indicating their population size was less than 50,000, the monthly threshold amount for individuals living in communities between 29,999 and 99,999 was used. Because a higher income is required to cover basic expenses in larger communities, this may have resulted in assigning a code of 1 to some individuals who were, in fact, not living below the threshold. Second, the income variable in the survey was categorical, while LICo thresholds are not. As a result, the decision to code a respondent as living below the LICo was based on where the threshold amount fell vis-à-vis the mid-point of the income ranges provided in the survey. To illustrate, if an individual living alone in a community of between 100,000 and 499,999 indicated that he or she earned between $1251 and $1500 per month, and the LICo cut-off was $1363.83 per month, the variable was coded as 0.
Other control variables included whether there was a member of the household who was a visible minority, which was a dichotomous variable, and community size, which was coded as a dummy variable. The reference category was fewer than 99,999 inhabitants. note that the smallest two community sizes (50,000–99,999 people and fewer than 50,000 people) were collapsed due to small cell sizes. variables that were considered but did not improve model fit were household size, number of children in the home, and province.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using logistic regression, and odds ratios were calculated. Logistic regression assumptions were tested as part of the preliminary analyses. All variables used in this study were examined to determine the extent of item nonresponse. no response and "don't know" were assigned the same value when coded by the original researchers. All data with these values were considered to be missing for the present study. This decision was based on the fact that research participants living alone, and thus reporting on their own volunteer work, had a high percentage of no response/"don't know" responses to questions about how they were involved in their housing cooperatives. An assumption was made by the authors that these individuals were able to recall what they did in their housing cooperatives but chose not to respond.

Three variables were found to have high levels of missing data: planning social events (almost 10% missing), participation on the board (7%), and whether or not individuals were living below the LICo (8%). High missing data on the LICo variable was due to nonresponse on the question pertaining to the household's total income before tax in the previous month. Bivariate analyses showed that data were not missing completely at random, and so missing data on these three variables were replaced using multiple imputation. Sensitivity analysis was also performed, where regression results using listwise deletion were compared to results using multiple imputation. The size and direction of the coefficients did not change in the models based on listwise deletion, although compared to the results presented in Tables 3 and 4, the odds of gaining friends, improving self-confidence, and improving skills in working with others became statistically significant ($p < .05$) when engaging in operations.

exploratory data analyses were also conducted to help understand how limitations of the data-set may have biased results. one limitation resulting from the original survey implementation was that individuals who completed the surveys on behalf of their households were not necessarily the individuals within these households who volunteered. As a result, some survey participants were potentially reporting on benefits they perceived someone with whom they were living to have gained or not. Bivariate analyses were done to compare outcome variables by household size. In other words, one-person households, where the survey respondents were necessarily the individuals who volunteered, were compared to households with more than one individual, where the survey respondents may or may not have been the individuals who volunteered. Results were similar with respect to improving skills in working with others, developing financial skills, and gaining more friends and strengthening personal support. For the remaining four outcome variables, however, the responses given were statistically different and all somewhat lower for individuals living alone. For operational skills, 14% of those living alone reported benefiting versus 19% of those living with others ($x_2 = 7.56$, $p < 0.01$); for influence over housing, results were 47% of those living alone versus 56% of those living with others ($x_2 = 13.23$, $p < 0.001$); for self-confidence, the frequencies were 40% of those living alone versus 45% of those living with others ($x_2 = 5.1622$, $p < 0.05$); and for organizational experience, the frequencies were 42% of those living alone versus 47% of those living with others ($x_2 = 5.3995$, $p < 0.05$). These differences could be explained by the fact that respondents in larger households were not reporting on their own volunteering and so had a slightly exaggerated sense of its benefits, which would mean that the positive effects reported for these four outcomes might be biased upwards in the regression results. However, there were also other differences between these two groups of households, including the length of time spent in the cooperatives and household size.

A second limitation is that it was not possible to control for gender, age, or level of education in the models. This is again caused by the fact that the individuals who completed the surveys on behalf of households were not necessarily the individuals who volunteered. However, sociodemographic information was asked of the survey respondents only. To explore the implications of this limitation, the multivariate analyses were conducted with a subset of respondents who lived alone ($N = 683$) to test the effects of these three omitted covariates. All other variables reported in Tables 3 and 4 were also included in these equations. of the three additional covariates, only age was significant in two of the models. Specifically, compared to being younger than 30, individuals 30 to 54 and individuals 55 and older were more likely to report gaining friends and strengthening personal support. Individuals in this middle age group were also more likely to report gaining an ability to influence decisions over their housing compared to individuals younger than 30. As far as the effects of volunteering reported by respondents in this subset, there were some differences compared to the results reported in Tables 3 and 4. Specifically, engaging in operational tasks no longer increased the odds of developing organizational skills or one's ability to influence decisions over housing, involvement in the board no longer increased the odds of gaining friends and strengthening personal support, and planning social events no longer affected operational skills.

Findings

Table 1 shows that approximately half of the sample reported that they, or someone else in their household, served on the board of directors (52%). A similar number organized social events (45%). A greater percentage of the sample was involved in operational tasks (66%), either doing secretarial or maintenance work, or both. Individuals, on average, were involved in 1.14 tasks in their housing cooperatives (*SD* .97).

With respect to sociodemographic characteristics, a substantial proportion of households were low income, with half living below the low-income cut-off. Most households had been living in their housing cooperative for long periods of time. About 40% indicated they had been living there for between two and seven years, with the same percentage having lived in their cooperative for over seven years. With regard to diversity, 11% of the sample reported that a member of a visible minority group was living in their household. Living in a large center of over 500,000 was the most common community size reported by participants (47%), followed by communities of fewer than 99,999 people (32%), and communities of between 100,000 and 499,999 people (21%).

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that with respect to capabilities, respondents reported that people and organizational skills were developed with greater frequency than more technical skills. While 45% reported a gain in organizational experience and 57% reported improved skills in working with others, only about 20% of the sample reported that either financial or operational skills were acquired through volunteering. Many respondents reported improved self-confidence as an outcome (44%), while about half the sample (53%) reported greater influence over decisions about their household's housing. The greatest percentage of respondents (60%) reported that they, or the individuals in their households who had volunteered, had established more friendships and strengthened personal support as an outcome. These patterns may also be observed in Table 2, where outcomes are reported by volunteer role. on average, respondents experienced almost three benefits resulting from involvement in their housing cooperative (*SD* 2.26).

Table 2. Capabilities, social ties, and the ability to influence decisions over housing by volunteer role (Cooperative Housing programs evaluation, 2001/2002).

	Served on board of directors (%)	n_a	Helped with operational tasks (%)	n_a	organized social events (%)	n_a
Capabilities						
Developed financial skills	30	2122	24	2155	27	2064
Developed operational skills	28	2123	24	2156	24	2065
Gained organizational experience improved skills in working with others improved self-confidence	64	2120	51	2154	64	2063
Social ties	67	2121	61	2155	67	2064
Gained more friends and strengthened personal support	56	2114	48	2147	55	2056
Influence over housing	67	2115	63	2148	71	2057
Gained ability to influence decisions over housing	68	2111	59	2144	66	2053

[a]the sample sizes reflect the missing data for the variables (mcKnight et al., 2007). the data-set used for the study consisted of 2410 observations.

Table 3 shows the results of the logistic regressions (odds ratios) and demonstrates the effects of volunteering in specific tasks on capabilities, while Table 4 shows the same for social ties and one's influence over housing. Serving on the board versus not being involved in leadership increased the odds of every outcome being reported, with the highest odds ratio related to organizational experience (3.61, $p < .001$), followed by financial and then operational skills (3.54 and 3.04, respectively, $p < .001$). Involvement in operational tasks versus not being involved in this activity increased the odds of developing financial, organizational, and operational skills, followed by the ability to influence decisions over one's housing. of these, learning operational skills had the highest odds of being experienced (5.21, $p < .001$), followed in magnitude by learning financial skills (2.10, $p < .001$). planning social events versus not being involved in this activity increased the odds of every outcome being reported,

Table 3. effects of volunteer roles on capabilities (odds ratios) (Cooperative Housing programs evaluation, 2001/2002).

	Developed financial skills	Developed operational skills	Gained organizational experience	Improved skills in working with others	Improved self-confidence
Volunteer role					
Served on the board of directors	3.54*** (2.65, 4.71)	3.04*** (2.27, 4.06)	3.61*** (2.92, 4.44)	1.97*** (1.61, 2.41)	2.07*** (1.68, 2.53)
Assisted with operational tasks	2.10*** (1.52, 2.90)	5.21*** (3.40, 7.99)	1.25* (.99, 1.56)	1.18 (.96, 1.45)	1.22 (.99, 1.51)
organized social events					
Household characteristics	1.46** (1.15, 1.90)	1.34* (1.03, 1.74)	2.49*** (2.04, 3.10)	1.64*** (1.35, 2.02)	1.66*** (1.37, 2.04)
length of time in housing[a]					
Between two and seven	1.02 (.68, 1.54)	.64* (.43, .93)	.93 (.69, 1.25)	.89 (.68. 1.17)	.82 (.62, 1.09)
years Greater than seven years	1.57* (1.05, 2.34)	.88 (.60, 1.28) 1.37*	1.12 (.88, 1.40)	1.12 (.85, 1.49)	.99 (.74, 1.32)
living below low-income	.97 (.77, 1.23)	(1.06, 1.75)	1.06 (.87, 1.30)	1.19 (.98, 1.46)	1.37** (1.13, 1.67)
cut-off member of a visible					
minority in household	1.18 (.81, 1.72)	1.19 (.81, 1.75)	.91 (.66, 1.25)	.89 (.66, 1.20)	1.06 (.79, 1.42)
Community characteristics					
population[b]					
100,000–499,999 people	1.25 (.91, 1.72)	.93 (.67, 1.29)	1.71*** (1.30, 2.24)	1.21 (.94, 1.57)	1.35* (1.05, 1.75)
more than 500,000 people	1.02 (.77, 1.35)	.97 (.74, 1.29)	1.11 (.88, 1.62)	1.00 (.80, 1.23)	1.25* (1.01, 1.56)
N Likelihood ratio x_2	2040 222.54***	2040 238.52***	2040 402.83***	2040 138.49***	2040 154.56***
Pseudo R_2	11.05	12.21	14.30	4.97	5.52

Confidence intervals are in parentheses.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
[a]Reference group is less than two years.
[b]Reference group is smaller than 100,000.

Table 4. effects of volunteer roles on social ties and the ability to influence decisions over housing (odds ratios) (Cooperative Housing programs evaluation, 2001/2002).

	Gained more friends and strengthened personal support	Gained ability to influence decisions over housing
Volunteer role		
Served on the board of directors	1.48*** (1.20, 1.82)	2.71*** (2.19, 3.34)
Assisted with operational tasks	1.13 (.92, 1.39)	1.39** (1.13, 1.72)
organized social events	1.96*** (1.60, 2.40)	1.80*** (1.49, 2.23)
Household characteristics		
length of time in housing[a]		
Between two and seven years	.60*** (.45, .79)	.74* (.56, .98)
Greater than seven years	.68** (.51, .91)	.81 (.60, 1.07)
living below low-income cut-off	1.14 (.94, 1.39)	1.08 (.88, 1.32) .89
member of a visible minority in household	.63** (.47, .84)	(.66, 1.20)
Community characteristics		
population[b]		
100,000–499,999 people	1.34* (1.03, 1.73)	1.46** (1.12, 1.89)
more than 500,000 people	1.21 (.97, 1.49)	1.06 (.85, 1.32)
N	2040	2040
Likelihood ratio x_2	114.78***	236.45***
Pseudo R_2	4.18	8.41

Confidence intervals are in parentheses.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
[a]Reference group is less than two years.
[b]Reference group is smaller than 100,000.

with the development of organizational experience having the highest odds ratio (2.49, $p < .001$), followed by gaining friends and a strengthened support network (1.96, $p < .001$). Looking at the results by outcome and then by volunteer role, the odds of indicating that friends were gained and personal support was strengthened were highest if the volunteer organized social events, although being on the board also had a positive impact. The odds of stating that organizational experience, financial skills, self-confidence, and the ability to work with others were developed were highest when the volunteer task was serving on the board, with odds ratios ranging from approximately 2 to 3.61 ($p < 0.001$). The same pattern is observed for gaining an ability to influence decisions over one's housing. Lastly, the odds of learning operational skills were highest if the volunteer was involved in maintenance or secretarial tasks in their housing cooperative.

Discussion and conclusion

This study explored if, and to what degree, being on the board, planning social events, and engaging in operational activities affected capabilities, social ties, and the ability to influence decisions over one's housing. overall, findings provide evidence that volunteering in the context of housing cooperatives is beneficial for those who get involved, and the findings are consistent with the existing literature that reports positive effects on skills and

social connections (e.g. Degli Antoni, 2009; Krahn et al., 2002; Macneela, 2008; Townsend et al., 2014). The present study adds to this literature in that it disentangles the act of volunteering, exploring to what extent specific tasks lead to positive outcomes among those who contribute their time. overall, findings also provide evidence that being involved in one's housing contributes to having a voice in proceedings and decision-making, which is also consistent with the literature on housing and resident participation (Kruythoff, 2008; Simmons & Birchall, 2007). our first hypothesis is partially supported by the results. Being on the board of directors and organizing social events increased the odds of all outcomes in the study being reported. Assisting with operational tasks led to greater financial, operational, and organizational skills as well as an increased ability to influence decisions over one's housing. one possible explanation for why engaging in operational tasks did not affect social ties or increase the likelihood of improving skills in working with others is that maintenance and administrative tasks may be done, at least to a certain degree, working independently rather than alongside other volunteers. That this work may be done in isolation could also be the reason why it did not result in increased self-confidence; if these volunteers are not engaged in tasks that are executed or discussed with others, they may not receive immediate or regular feedback from their peers. Finally, while significant, gaining organizational experience through this type of volunteer work may have had lower odds of being reported because operational tasks are potentially discrete.

Although being involved in social events increased the odds of all outcomes being reported, it did so to varying degrees. Developing operational and financial skills could have lower odds and be less significant compared to organizational experience since this type of activity requires less extensive budgeting and record-keeping, with more time spent on planning and coordination. It is also not surprising that strengthening social ties emerged as the second-highest odds ratio for those who plan events. These volunteers are likely working with others to arrange activities, and are surely interacting with other residents as they attend these events.

Serving on the board of directors also had varying effects on the outcomes in this study. That developing financial and operational skills as well as organizational experience had the highest odds of being reported could reflect the instrumental roles that directors are expected to play in the associations they govern. It is interesting to note that of the five capabilities examined, improving skills in working with others was the least likely to be experienced, which could point towards, on the one hand, a greater emphasis during board training on how to fulfill fiduciary responsibilities, and on the other, the challenging circumstances which arise when discussing board business with other directors. The fact that serving on the board did not have a large impact on gaining friends and personal support may reflect the fact that directors are likely to have already established a certain level of social capital within their organizations prior to taking on this role. Alternately, it could also reflect deliberate social distancing between the membership and those charged with making decisions, some of which may prove to be unpopular.

The second hypothesis is also partially supported by the results since serving on the board of directors had the strongest effect on five out of the seven outcomes explored in this study. Serving as a director requires regular attendance at meetings during which financial information is reviewed and during which priorities, problems, and opportunities are deliberated. In order to be effective, volunteers are required to consider issues carefully and independently and share their opinions with others. Because of the range of duties directors are expected to fulfill, and

because being a director necessitates acting with others, it is not surprising that the greatest likelihood of developing financial skills, organizational experience, skills in working with others, and self-confidence occurred when serving on the board. In addition, given the primacy of the board of directors in organizational decision-making and oversight compared to other volunteer responsibilities, it is understandable that it is through this role that respondents reported the highest odds of gaining an ability to influence decisions over their housing. The only outcomes for which serving on the board of directors did not result in the highest odds ratios were those that were integral to the other types of volunteer work explored in this study. In other words, developing operational skills had the greatest odds of being reported if one engaged in operational tasks, while social ties were most likely to be enhanced if one planned events.

These findings have several implications. Most broadly, they provide additional evidence that people do learn, grow, and make friends when they lend their time. Second, and importantly, they provide evidence that the kind of volunteer work in which one engages has an impact on the benefits accrued. These point to the importance of disaggregating the act of volunteering in future research, and in using these emergent findings to design volunteer placement and service learning programs. If results consistently identify the role of board work in fostering capabilities, for example, then future programs may want to emphasize participation in governance.

With respect to housing cooperatives more specifically, those involved in this movement or who are living in cooperative residences may find it noteworthy that individuals benefit when they participate in their housing, particularly as directors. Housing cooperatives that are considering merging with like associations should take note: although mergers expand the membership base and the pool of potential directors, they reduce the opportunity for residents to serve on the board and, as this research shows, learn financial, operational, and organizational skills. It is also worth noting that different kinds of volunteer tasks result in meaningful outcomes. In other words, although serving on the board resulted in the highest odds of experiencing many outcomes in the study, it is not only through acting as a director that a volunteer may have the opportunity to develop professionally or personally. volunteers who are somewhat intrinsically motivated and who desire to learn or make connections through their commitments of time may also note the same. equally, opportunities for learning may be lost when associations are not able to involve individuals in the day-today aspects of their organizations. For example, housing cooperatives may hire property management firms to take care of many of the tasks required to manage buildings. This practice may occur if the organization decides it would be better served by individuals with more technical expertise in property management, or if it is able to make a financial case for using outside services. Results suggest that maintaining resident involvement in some operational activities preserves the opportunity for individuals to gain skills and organizational experience through this kind of engagement. As a second example, from another sector, most food cooperatives in the uSA have had to eliminate volunteerism from the operational aspects of their stores in response to labor law (such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets minimum compensation levels for workers, including potentially those who volunteer by stocking shelves or packing groceries) and health regulations (Joyal, 2012). These findings suggest that opportunities for learning may have been affected through this change. Lastly, findings are also noteworthy in the context of involving individuals who may prefer to engage in operational or discrete activities instead of governance. Donkervoort (2013), for example, described a social enterprise in which to the initial disappointment of organizers, members participated in the organization's social activities but not in decision-making.

The findings reported here suggest that there may still be opportunities for individuals to develop skills and self-confidence if they help organize the events to which they are drawn. Results also show that involvement in housing cooperatives fosters an ability to influence decisions about the units and buildings in which residents live. This is an important finding since, as described earlier, housing cooperatives were established following what many viewed as a failure on the part of public projects to provide empowering and adequate living spaces for those in housing need (Hellyer, 1969). Cooperatives facilitated resident involvement by design, and findings from this study provide evidence that being on the board of directors, doing repairs, taking care of administrative tasks, and organizing social activities, all enhance individuals' capacity to affect the decisions made about their own homes. For the cooperative literature more generally, this provides evidence that beyond the learning, self-esteem, and social ties that may develop through volunteerism, being involved, particularly at the board level, is associated with shaping the association to which one belongs.

As mentioned earlier, this study has limitations. Survey respondents may not have been directly engaged in volunteer work and were instead reporting on others in their household. This limitation may have resulted in responses that overestimated the benefits of involvement and also prevented us from including certain sociodemographic covariates in the final models. Furthermore, the outcomes in this study were subjective. Going forward, we recommend that future researchers correct for these limitations as they pursue studies that capture both the specific tasks volunteers take on in associations as well as different outcomes that result from such activity. In this way, we can increase our understanding of how different kinds of involvement in associational life matter for those who volunteer.

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