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Editorial

From a comparative, international point of view, few types of organisations have received less attention from scholars than trusts and foundations. In the last two decades, hardly any systematic cross-national work has been carried out on foundations and related organisational forms. This neglect stands in marked contrast to the increasingly international character of many foundations, and it is all the more surprising in the light of the contributions which foundations are making to the restructuring of Eastern and Central Europe, to developmental efforts in the Third World, or to policy formulation at the international level.

The purpose of this special issue is to present examples of current work on foundations in an effort to stimulate international, comparative research and policy debates. We believe that the special *Voluntas* issue is both *important* and *timely*.

It is important because it adds to the impressive research agenda that has been developed in recent years to examine the role which non-profit or voluntary organisations perform in modern society. There are numerous research efforts currently underway in a number of developed and developing societies. However, much of this work tends to focus on social service delivery, the health industry, alternatives to the welfare state, and civil society; in contrast, current work on non-profit organisations rarely emphasises the role and contributions of foundations. Thus, this special issue aims to provide a forum to help fill the gap between what we know about non-profit organisations and what we know about foundations cross-nationally. Moreover, research on the non-profit sector has generated several very interesting economic and political science theories. Exploring the role of foundations in the light of these theories would offer the opportunity for much-needed comparative input.

The volume is timely because of the significant growth of the foundation sector in many countries. This increase in size and scope seems to have led to greater interest among policy-makers and social scientists in the role foundations play in modern societies. For example, the large-scale Japanese foundations are increasingly operating at an international level. In France, the public recognition of foundations

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signals a major shift away from the century-old governmental policy to discourage the growth of organisations located between polity and citizens. In Germany, many medium-sized foundations have been created in the last decade, and the number of foundations increased from 4,500 to over 7,000, not including re-established foundations in former East Germany. In Hungary and other Eastern European countries, foundations are the preferred legal form for many local initiatives to fill the social, cultural and political territory left vacant by a retreating state sector. In the United Kingdom, as in most other European Union countries, there is considerable interest and some concern about the medium- and long-term implications of trade liberalisation, monetary union and social harmonisation.

These examples should suffice to demonstrate that, internationally, foundations have increased both in number and in importance. Yet research has not kept up with these developments. While over the last decade much useful work has been carried out by historians and social scientists in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in some European countries, comparative issues have not been explored in any serious way. For example, there are few basic comparative statistics on the numbers and types of foundations operating in different countries; there are certainly few attempts to examine more analytical problems concerning the effects and potentials of different legal and policy environments in which foundations operate.

The 1993 *Voluntas* Symposium

Most of the papers included in this issue were originally presented at the *Voluntas Symposium on Foundations*, held in Paris in October 1993. The Symposium brought together close to forty researchers and practitioners from over ten countries for a two-day meeting, jointly organised with Professor Edith Archambault and the Laboratoire d' économie sociale of the Université de Paris I (Sorbonne). We gratefully acknowledge support from the Ford Foundation (USA), the Foundation Library Center of Japan, the Fondation de France, the Thyssen Stiftung (Germany), the Fondazione Sanpaolo di Torino (Italy) and the Charities Aid Foundation (United Kingdom).

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