Voluntas, 4:2, 135-138

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Editorial

The *Editorial Statement* of the inaugural issue of this journal (Anheier and Knapp, 1990) expressed our intention to make *Voluntas* the central forum for international, comparative research on the non-profit sector. We were convinced that a proactive editorial policy would offer the best strategy to bring about a solid scholarly tradition as well as a thriving research community; and rather than 'wait' for this to happen by itself, we decided to provide the opportunities for researchers to address issues we as the editors regard as crucial for the development of the field. Symposia are one effective way of creating and focusing academic debate. In this respect, we convened the first *Voluntas* Symposium, based on our thinking that the lack of adequate data systems reporting on the non-profit sector constitutes one of the major problems for research both nationally and internationally.

As it happened we were not alone, and we found ourselves part of what looked almost like a sequence of meetings on similar topics and issues. The *Voluntas* Symposium on *The Dimensions of the US Nonprofit Sector* was in fact the third academic meeting to take place in Washington, D.C. in May 1992 to address issues relating to the methodology, collection, analysis and reporting of data on the non-profit sector in the United States. The very fact that three such meetings coincided signals the importance the research community attaches to the quality and quantity of information about the non-profit sector.

The first meeting, organised jointly by Harvey Dale (New York University School of Law; Program on Philanthropy and the Law), Dwight Burlingame (Center on Philanthropy, Indiana University), and Charles Clotfelter (Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism, Duke University), looked at a range of charitable statistics with a special emphasis on individual giving and data sources based on tax returns maintained at the Internal Revenue Service, the central tax authority in the United States. From this conference, we are pleased to include in this issue of *Voluntas* the contributions by

- Paul Schervish on the definitions and measurement of giving and volunteering,

https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01398424 Published online by Cambridge University Press

- Ralph Nelson, who reports on his newly-revised estimation procedure to approximate the amount to total individual donations, and by
- Hayden Smith on the validity and reliability of such estimates.

Together, the three papers constitute a state-of-the-art discussion of the measurement and estimation of two key components in data on the non-profit sector: personal giving and volunteering.

The second conference, an expert meeting on the definition and treatment of the non-profit sector in the US national income accounts, was organised by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council, and held at the National Academy of Sciences. The meeting examined what could be done and how, to improve data coverage of the non-profit sector in the US system of national accounts. The revised proceedings of this conference will be published later this year in a special issue of *Voluntas*.

By contrast, the *Voluntas* symposium differed from the other two in its particular emphasis. The central topic of the symposium was to assess, evaluate, and discuss one book, *The Nonprofit Almanac*, a statistical profile of the dimensions of the US non-profit sector. The *Almanac* presents a monumental effort on behalf of many, in particular Virginia Hodgkinson, Murray Weitzman, Chris Toppe, Steve Noga and others and the Center for Charitable Statistics of Independent Sector. The Almanac is the product of a multi-year effort, and it developed from humble booklet of some 80 pages to a respectable volume with virtually hundreds of tables and figures displayed on over 600 pages.

The Nonprofit Almanac

No doubt, the *Almanac* is a landmark in the continuing efforts to map the non-profit sector both in the United States and in other countries as well. It stands alone as the most comprehensive and detailed statistical compendium of data on the non-profit sector in any country. As such it will most likely influence the way and format in which similar profiles will be presented in and for other countries. While this alone would be reason enough to focus our attention to the *Almanac*, it was one most peculiar aspect about the way the compendium has developed over the years which prompted us to convene a symposium *and* to devote the better part on a *Voluntas* issue to it: the *Almanac* has been neglected by the research community. Not only did the *Almanac* develop largely outside academia, it was never fully reviewed nor critically examined, and never put under scrutiny of scholars in the field. While the *Almanac* became an important source of information for research, and an indispensable tool for many policy analysts, it was not part of regular academic

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debate. In a curious way, the *Nonprofit Almanac* and its predecessors, *Dimensions of the Independent Sector*, were too often taken as a given.

In some ways this is normal. As researchers, we often use (and sometimes misuse) data collected, compiled and presented by third parties like government departments, statistical offices or international agencies. With the *Almanac*, however, we believe that we had reached a critical mass of data, both in volume and in the methodologies used, that a broad assessment seemed necessary. So far the research community had not provided the constructive, critical input needed. Yet such input is necessary to make sure that future editions of the *Almanac* meet the expectations and standards of research. 'We are here to praise and to appraise,' Harvey P. Dale (see his chapter review) stated during the meeting, by taking a close and critical look at quality of the data reported in the *Almanac*. A dialogue between producers and users of data is necessary if the *Almanac*, and any other such effort in this field, is to improve continuously. To initiate such a dialogue among researchers was the primary objective of this *Voluntas* Symposium.

This *Thematic Issue* of *Voluntas* is organised in three parts. In Part I, Virginia Hodgkinson and Murray Weitzman (both from Independent Sector) provide, for the first time, a full presentation of the methodological background to the *Almanac*, including a discussion of the data sources and estimation procedures used. This is followed by a critical essay by Lester M Salamon (Johns Hopkins University) who outlines and develops some of the issues and decisions underlying the Hodgkinson/Weitzman approach. An essay by *Voluntas* co-editor Martin Knapp looks at what the *Almanac* means for the quantitative research on the non-profit sector in Europe, where the data situation is far more critical than in the United States.

This introductory part is followed by a set of six chapter-by-chapter reviews according to the sequence in which they are presented in the *Almanac* itself. Thus, Harvey P. Dale (New York University) looks at the estimation of the size of the non-profit sector, Charles Clotfelter (Duke University) examines private sources of income, Gabriel Rudney (Johns Hopkins University) takes a closer look at employment data, Richard Steinberg (Indiana University) explores the data sources and reporting for the financial structure of non-profit organisations, Julian Wolpert (Princeton University) looks at the use of geographical information and, finally, Bradford Gray analyses the data on health-related organisations, the most important component of the US non-profit sector in economic terms.

The contributions by Paul G. Schervish, Ralph Nelson, and Hayden W. Smith conclude the *Thematic Issue*.

https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01398424 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Future Symposia

The 1992 *Voluntas* Symposium on *The Dimensions of the US Nonprofit Sector* was the first in what we hope will become a series of events in the development of research on the non-profit sector. In the Fall of 1993, the second *Voluntas* Symposium will take place in Paris, France. Jointly organised with the Laboratoire d'Economie Sociale of the University of Paris I (Sorbonne), the Symposium will focus on comparative research on grant-making foundations. Future Symposia will address topics such as the role of non-governmental organisations, the measurement of non-profit sector output, and the role of women in philanthropy.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01398424 Published online by Cambridge University Press