Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1998

Editorial

INTRODUCTION

The year 1998 is the start of an important new phase in the development of *Voluntas*. This issue is the first to be produced from the journal's new editorial offices in Europe at the London School of Economics and Political Science. As the leading social science institution in the United Kingdom, and with a worldwide reputation for academic research, the School is uniquely well positioned to provide a base for the journal to approach the new millennium with confidence and optimism. I am delighted to have the opportunity to act as the journal's Editor, building on my three years' experience as Associate Editor. This issue is also the first to be published by our new publisher, Plenum Press, one of the world's best-known and largest academic publishing houses, based in the U.S. with offices in London and Moscow.

As it enters its ninth year on these new bases, *Voluntas* can both look back on the past eight years with considerable satisfaction and look to the future with high expectations. Since its founding editors, Helmut Anheier and Martin Knapp, established the journal at the start of this decade, *Voluntas* has published some 200 articles, primarily full-length academic articles, but also research notes (outlining research in progress) and conference reports. In addition, some 30 book reviews (both extended review essays and shorter notes) have been included. The published material has been rich and diverse, reflecting the lively multidisciplinary character of the field that makes it one of the most rewarding and exciting areas of social science research. *Voluntas* has also made major inroads into the task of systematic and scientific comparison between countries, and the interpretation of national evidence and experience, within the internationally developed and understood theoretical frameworks that must form the core of any attempt to build a new international research community.

This major contribution to voluntary and nonprofit sector scholarship provides far stronger foundations upon which to build than most would have dared hope for in 1990, and the journal has witnessed a steadily grow-

0957-8765/98/0300-0003$15.00/1 © 1998 International Society for Third-Sector Research and The Johns Hopkins University

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ing number of subscriptions at a time when many academic journals are struggling to stand still. Yet it is important to recognize that what has been achieved has only just begun to scratch the surface of what is still a remarkably poorly understood set of institutions and behaviors—in spite of its increasingly evident (and apparently growing) social, economic, and political significance.

GAPS IN THE DISCIPLINARY, GEOGRAPHICAL, AND INDUSTRIAL MAP

One way to see the extensiveness of the terrain that remains to be charted is to consider the balance of material that has been featured thus far in the journal in terms of disciplinary, geographical, and industrial composition. First, while most of the major traditional and composite disciplines of social science have been well represented in *Voluntas*—with encouragingly large numbers of articles by sociologists, policy analysts, and economists (on the latter, see especially Volume 8, Number 2) in particular (*Voluntas*, 1997)—there remain some major "blind spots" in which submissions, let alone acceptances, have been rare.

Regarding disciplinary gaps, perhaps three major groups of perspective are conspicuous by their absence (or near absence), ranging from those dealing in abstract ideas and theories of voluntarism to those with a strongly applied bent. At the former end of the spectrum, notwithstanding a recent foray into communitarian thinking (Volume 8, Number 1), little in the way of political theory, social theory, and philosophy has thus far been featured in the journal. Yet the development of our field must surely proceed in these directions in tandem with more applied work. Where do the voluntary sector and voluntary action feature in the worldviews, assumptive worlds, and systems of thought of leading social thinkers and politically influential figures?

Moving toward more applied science, social and other psychologists have a long tradition of interest in voluntarism and its institutional expressions, yet thus far these explanations and arguments have barely been featured in our journal. Numerous scholars have examined and continue to examine the motives for, and personal determinants of, altruism and empathy within this frame of reference, and it is therefore remarkable that these efforts have apparently made little impact thus far in our field. Finally, at the empirical end of the spectrum, contributions from within, or influenced by, some other applied fields, such as anthropology and development studies, have been all too rare to date.

Another way of demonstrating how little we still know comes from considering country coverage. First, most of the empirical articles in the

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

journal have had a geographic focus upon North America and Western Europe, particularly the U.K. and Germany. To an extent this is understandable, as it reflects *Voluntas*'s institutional origins and the relative availability of resources for research in those countries. While contributions focusing on Central and Eastern Europe have been featured with more frequency in recent years, reflecting the rapid expansion of research efforts in those countries as attempts are made to (re)discover "civil society" in the post-Communist world, we still see whole continents and cultures seemingly beyond our reach. Special issues on the Scandinavian countries and Latin America have provided useful collections of work in those locales. But it hardly needs to be said that recent initiatives to stimulate scholarship, involving the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) and others, in Africa, Australasia, the whole of Asia and Indonesia, and the Middle East have yet to be reflected in this journal's contents!

Finally, we should also reflect on the extent to which the contents of *Voluntas* have thus far been heavily focused on a small number of "industries"—primarily social welfare and grant-making fields—and given particular weight to its role as service provider in those domains. While these are major areas of nonprofit endeavor, we now have clear evidence that nonprofit organizations are also involved across the world in delivering other kinds of services—including culture and arts, recreation, education and research, and international development (Salamon *et al.*, 1996). We also know that vast amounts of volunteering and membership activities occur outside of traditional human services (for example, see Curtis *et al.*, 1992).

Moreover, it is also clear that the sector makes social and political contributions to the fabric of the societies in which it is embedded, which may be less easy to measure empirically but which are nevertheless essential to scrutinize if we are to understand the various logics and meanings that characterize voluntary action (Evers, 1995). While these fields and contributions have been featured in significant numbers of articles, *Voluntas* would particularly like to encourage more analyses that have these aspects of our field as subject matter.

NEW DISCIPLINE-SPANNING APPROACHES: FROM "IMPREGNABLE BULWARKS" TO "TRANSMISSION BELTS"?

At the start of the preceding section, the boundaries between the traditional social sciences were implicitly taken as given. But perhaps some of the most interesting aspects of working in a new field such as ours emerge as scholars attempt to operate *across* the traditional divides to generate genuine interdisciplinary innovation. This is an enormously challenging task and, from a theoretical point of view, Mouzelis (from whom the

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

quotes in the title of this section are also drawn) has set out the general nature of the problem clearly:

> There is little satisfaction with the present status quo where the boundaries between economics, political science, sociology and anthropology have become solid blinkers preventing interdisciplinary studies of social phenomena. But such compartmentalization will not be transcended by the mindless and facile abolition of the existing division of labour between disciplines. It can be overcome only by a painstaking process of theoretical labour that aims at building bridges between the various specializations. (Mouzelis, 1995, p. 54)

In fact, because scholarship dedicated to voluntary organizations and voluntary action is relatively new, it is probably the case that the "compartmentalization" that Mouzelis takes as given in social science in general is not yet well advanced in our field. This may actually make it relatively easy for the comparative advantages of different disciplines to be exploited to the benefit of the third-sector research community overall.

If we accept that painstaking interdisciplinary work is an important component of third-sector research, then international comparative studies that seek to apply ideas that have at least the potential to be regarded as good currency across disciplines must be especially welcomed. In this sense, *Voluntas* seems well positioned to make an important contribution to the debate this year with at least two of the featured contributions. First, Dekker and Van den Broek's article examining the connections between membership of and volunteering in voluntary associations and social capital is published in this issue. Because it seeks to combine an economic idea (*capital*) with the social, this concept has rapidly caught the imagination of researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds in many applied fields (Coleman, 1993). This not only includes the examination of the relative effectiveness of political structures between or within nations (Putnam, 1993, 1995) but also is now being applied in education and health research, and—as we see here—to voluntary-sector research *per se*. The article demonstrates that meaningful international comparative third-sector research on at least some topics can be undertaken without massive financial outlays by imaginative exploitation of an existing international data set (here, the World Values Survey) originally compiled for much broader purposes.

While it has been possible to begin to analyze at least the membership and volunteering aspect of the voluntary sector's activities via available—anyway, international—surveys, other aspects of its scope and scale have traditionally not been so readily extractable from existing international or even national data sets. In particular, how the voluntary sector's profile in terms of financial and employment resources varies between countries was unknown. Meaningful data have only recently become available as a result of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project, an independently financed multimillion-dollar project led from the U.S.

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Salamon *et al.*, 1996). Although this evidence—demonstrating both cross-national variation and cross-national similarities in a sample of eight countries—has been important in its own right, the really interesting debate now emerging concerns how actually to *interpret* it (and the evidence that will be generated by phase 2 of the project, currently underway and embracing a larger sample). In a later issue of Volume 9, we will be running an important series of papers in which the instigators of this project, Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier, inspired by historically oriented social scientist Barrington Moore's "social origins" approach (Moore, 1966), offer a new framework for interpreting these findings. Leading U.S. nonprofit economists Rich Steinberg and Dennis Young, together with comparative historical sociologist Charles Ragin, provide fascinating responses to this study, confronting both methodological and theoretical issues.

Voluntas AS AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE JOURNAL

Another sense in which scholarship in our field may be "international" is that it can involve analysis of transnational not-for-profit activity and institution building, and this is clearly an increasingly important topic in the context of globalization. But only a small proportion of the papers in *Voluntas* emerge either from interdisciplinary and/or multiple-country research studies, or are concerned with transnational voluntary action. Founding editors Helmut Anheier and Martin Knapp, writing in their first editorial in 1990, recognized the importance of strengthening the interdisciplinary character of research in this field, but also stressed the need for single-country studies that achieve international relevance by being couched "in terms, theories or contexts which would be familiar to, or would usefully supplement, the perspectives of readers elsewhere." Thus, most studies will continue to refine our conceptual, theoretical, and empirical understanding of the third sector by developing arguments and evidence at national, regional, or local levels.

These studies have been, and will be, comparative and/or of international relevance in purpose and content in a number of senses. Most obviously they can involve comparative studies of the costs, outputs, or other aspects of institutional performance, including analyses of how the nonprofit sector compares with for-profit and public-sector counterparts in a given industry or field. As public and scholarly awareness of the special legal and fiscal privileges afforded to nonprofit organizations across the world grows, and as we discover more about the extensiveness of their involvement in publicly funded human service and other systems, the issue of comparative performance naturally comes quickly to the top of the agenda. What assumptions and expectations underpin the variety of ways

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in which the nonprofit sector is singled out as different from other institutional players by many societies? To what extent are the state and other policies that we observe toward this sector justified or undermined by empirical evidence? Why is this the case?

Studies can also be comparative in character by interpreting national, regional, or local evidence through one or more of the frameworks or paradigms that are now the building blocks of international third-sector research discourse. Such frameworks would include single-discipline approaches, such as those provided by economics (market failure, government failure, stakeholder theory, and so on). But we also have eclectic or interdisciplinary approaches, such as voluntary failure theory (Salamon, 1987), neo-Marxist theory (Wolch, 1990), welfare mix formulations (Evers, 1995), or theories that understand voluntary agencies fundamentally as multiple-stakeholder organizations (Herman and Renz, 1997).

Voluntas also aims to provide a vehicle for dialogue about completely new frameworks or paradigms for studying or conceptualizing the third sector—be they theories-in-use or more abstract constructs. This could potentially involve not only those disciplinary perspectives to whose suprisingly low profile thus far we drew attention earlier but also approaches that are culture bound and therefore have hitherto had difficulty in penetrating the predominantly "Anglo-Saxon" discourses to which we have referred. Finally, also particularly welcome are historical papers dealing in great detail with the actions of significant or influential individuals and organizations in the worlds of philanthropy or mutual aid and papers that examine the specific local contexts in which major historical events involving the third sector are played out.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 9 AND BEYOND

The papers planned for publication in Volume 9 and beyond already represent an extremely rich blend of most of these styles and contributions. The varied papers in this issue alone evidently present fascinating examples from across this very broad sweep, ranging from Dekker and Van den Broek's above-mentioned comparative study of the links between social capital and membership and volunteering; to the refinement of a multiple-stakeholder approach for understanding nonprofit evaluation using evidence from Canada (Tassie *et al.*); to a detailed case study of a particularly influential philanthropist in 18th-century Germany (Wilson); to a highly topical study of the role of Western philanthropy in shaping "civil society" in an ex-Communist state, Poland (Regulska). We also include a book review by historian and social policy analyst Jane Lewis in this issue.

Just to give a taste of the range of papers to come in future issues, we can note here some other forthcoming highlights. We are set to include a new

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theoretical synthesis from U.S. economist James Ferris on the role of the third sector in the U.S. as a "self-governing society"; a detailed comparison of how the contrasting histories of the political economies of Italy and England have differently shaped the third sector's recent role in the delivery of social services in England and Italy by multidisciplinarians Marilyn Taylor and Andrea Bassi; and a series of papers examining the theory and applications of the francophone (and perhaps more broadly European) concept of *services de proximités* led by French sociologist Jean-Louis Laville. Furthermore, the forthcoming ISTR conference in Switzerland this year, the third for the Society, seems likely to yield a significant number of papers with potential for publication in *Voluntas* if this conference succeeds in generating the same high-quality material as was evident at previous ISTR conferences in Hungary and Mexico.

To end, I would first like to extend an invitation. Full-length articles of 5000 to 8000 words submitted during the course of each year, reinforced every two years by articles originating from papers presented at the biannual ISTR conference, provide the core body of material published in the journal. Special issues of the journal growing out of topic- or theme-based *Voluntas* symposia, conference reports, and book reviews will continue to be published. However, I would strongly encourage potential contributors also to consider another option: Submit shorter "research notes" of up to 3000 words reporting on important new issues emerging from work in progress or commenting on or critiquing papers already published in the journal or with impending publication. This can serve as an important route for keeping the third-sector research community abreast of the latest developments in this increasingly dynamic and growing field.

I would also like to express my gratitude to founding editors Helmut Anheier and Martin Knapp, production editor Jane Dennett, *Voluntas*'s previous publisher, Manchester University Press, and financial supporter Charities Aid Foundation for the instigation and development of the journal. I believe it has made a major contribution to comparative international third-sector research, and look forward with great enthusiasm to consolidating and building upon their achievements in partnership with ISTR.

Jeremy Kendall
Editor

REFERENCES

Coleman, J. S. (1993). A rational choice perspective on economic sociology. In N. J. Smelser and R. Swedberg (eds.), *Handbook of Economic Sociology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

Curtis, J. E., Grabb, E. G., and Baer, D. E. (1992). Voluntary association membership in fifteen countries: A comparative analysis. *American Sociology Review*, *57*, 139–152.

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Evers, A. (1995). Part of the welfare mix: The third sector as an intermediate area between market economy, state and community. *Voluntas*, *6*(2), 159–182.
Herman, R. D., and Renz, D. O. (1997). Multiple constituencies and the social construction of nonprofit organisational effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *19*(3), 293–306.
Moore, B. (1966). *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts.
Mouzelis, N. (1995). *Sociological Theory: What Went Wrong? Diagnosis and Remedies*, Routledge, London and New York.
Putnam, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
Putnam, R. (1995). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. *Political Science and Politics*, *XXVIII*(4), 664–683.
Salamon, L. (1987). Partners in public service: The scope and theory of government–nonprofit relations. In W. W. Powell (ed.), *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
Salamon, L., Anheier, H., Sokolowski, W., and Associates (1996). *The Emerging Sector: A Statistical Supplement*, The Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies, Baltimore, Maryland.
Voluntas (1997). *8*(2), Special issue on economic theory and the nonprofit sector.
Wolch, J. (1990). *The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition*, The Foundation Center, New York.

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021442611345 Published online by Cambridge University Press