Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies
An International Multidisciplinary Series

Andrea Bassi
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Carolyn Cordery *Editors*

The Future of Third Sector Research

From Theory to Definitions, Classifications and Aggregation Towards New Research Paths

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Contents

Chapter 1
Third Sector Research: The Construction of a Field of Study

Carolyn Cordery, Andrea Bassi, and Mario Aquino Alves

More than 30 years ago, the ground-breaking work by Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier launched global interest in research into the Third Sector. Their *Voluntas* articles from 1990 remain the most highly cited in that Journal, essential Third Sector reading. The *Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project* (CNP) studied the scope, structure, financing and role of the nonprofit sector in more than 45 countries in the world and involved a network of over 150 researchers, 90 funding organizations and several hundred nonprofit and philanthropic leaders in six continents.

Nevertheless, the world is changing—Third Sector organizations and movements remain vitally relevant and yet, the changing environment and definitions of Third Sector organizations, availability of new data sets, gaps in the countries and topics studied, point to the need to take stock and ensure that future Third Sector research is relevant and impactful. Furthermore, the relevance of the Social Origins Theory developed from the CNP is now questioned.

This book was birthed from the Plenary Session "Mapping the Nonprofit World: The Global Comparative Project" at the 15th International Conference of ISTR held in Montreal—Canada, in July 2022 in Tribute to Lester Salamon, with a keynote speech from Helmut Anheier and comments from several participants of the

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CNP—Edith Archambault, Leilah Landim, Jacob Mati, Naoto Yamauchi and Dennis Young—and moderated by ISTR first president Benjamin Gidron.

As a result of this panel, a webinar series was promoted by ISTR and held from March to June, 2023 to further explore the challenges laid down in Montreal. We agreed there was a need to open a discussion within the community of scholars and researchers of Third Sector research on the current state of health and on the future development prospects of studies on the Third Sector worldwide. Further, we wanted to introduce Third Sector research to scholars who have not previously considered it by providing insight into the research process and possibilities for future research into the fascinating Third Sector where research can have great impact.

The aim of this book is not to set up a "research agenda" but to illustrate, comment and criticize the state of the art and to highlight future possible pathways in which Third Sector research could progress. We seek an inclusive dialogue that, through encouraging diverse voices, shapes our collective understanding of the sector, its potentialities and thus to ameliorate prior difficulties. To our knowledge, there are few works that have attempted to move beyond last century's definitions by Anheier and Salamon (except to say that they are outdated), and this book seeks to spur further research drawing on up-to-date databases and frameworks.

As expanded on in Section II, we take a broad approach to defining the Third Sector as a research space to include civil society in all its forms, i.e. non-profit organizations and NGOs, voluntary associations, social economy organizations, community organizations, self-help and mutual support organizations, foundations, endowments, as well as other manifestations of civil society globally and locally, such as social movements, formal and informal networks and social forums, unions, faith-based organizations, co-operatives, philanthropic practices and volunteering. Some of these forms are more prone to contention and values conflict than others. Hence organizations within the "Third Sector" will also encompass the shadow side and uncivil origins that are not part of prior theorizations.

Defining the Third Sector is doubtless a wicked problem and is widely recognized as the first "big issue" in Third Sector research, with strong dependence on the seminal work by Salamon and Anheier from the 1990s. It is evident that we need to revise our knowledge and comprehension of the Third Sector in the twenty-first century. This is crucial to ensure that further research in this field remains relevant and has a positive impact. The changing nature of nation-states, as well as the way in which the Third Sector interacts with the State, corporates, and the wider civil society, makes it necessary to update our understanding. Third Sector research is inter-disciplinary with researchers from sociology, public policy, strategic management, business generally (accounting/ economics/ marketing/ etc), all of the areas where Third Sector entities operate (such as health, and social work), and for those interested in research methods.

In his keynote speech at the Montreal conference, Anheier identified four main areas (or domains) posing challenges for developing research on the Third Sector in the coming years. These domains are *theory, definition, classification and aggregation* (data). Engaging with the ISTR community, we developed a cycle of webinars organized in six appointments, each dedicated to dealing with one of these areas,

plus one dedicated to faith and the role that the religious dimension plays in relation to civil society. A final meeting aimed to summarize the debates and explore new research opportunities. These are reflected on in this book. The series of webinars met with significant success in qualitative terms (richness of the debate/scientific comparison) and quantitative terms (over 120 scholars and researchers worldwide participated in the sessions through debate and discussion).

Webinar presenters were selected for their expertise, and each panel was diverse in terms of geography and research career stage. Following the webinars, the speakers were invited to write chapters enriched by their initial presentation and the reflections that emerged during the debate. Additional scholars were selected to comment on these chapters, further expanding the diversity of input. Hence, this volume offers the international scientific community the results of this process with the hope that it will form the basis for a new generation of scholars and researchers in the Third Sector to continue the path traced so far "on the shoulders of giants" and to open up new avenues of research. By providing updates on the debates this book is a way forward to empower future relevant and impactful international comparative research.

Therefore, the book aims to gather the international scientific community to collaborate in establishing an agenda for future research concerning the Third Sector worldwide. By moving from the abstract level of theory to more empirical Sections—through definition, classification and aggregation, we range from macro to micro approaches (throughout the meso dimension) as show in Fig. 1.1 below. Following the themes of the seminars (and domains introduced by Anheier), the book is articulated in five Sections that are organized to move from "theory" to "definition" and "classification" towards "aggregation" (measurement, counting), plus one Section dedicated to the relationship between Third Sector and faith/religion. The sixth and final Section aims to synthesize the scientific conversation developed in the five previous ones and open up new research paths for the future.

The book addresses fundamental questions about the Third Sector, including why it exists (*ontological*), what it is (*epistemological*), and how it operates

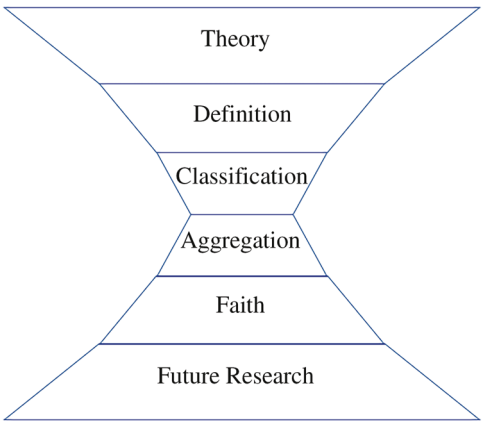

Fig. 1.1 Progression of the book sections

(*methodological*). The chapters draw on multiple disciplines, such as sociology, political science, economics, management, political economy, and public administration. They examine the complex features of civil society organizations, considering their cultural, historical, political, and social aspects, as well as the institutional environment where they operate.

Contemporaneously, the book attempts to consider a variety of points of view. It comes from different geo-political areas and cultural traditions along the axes: North/South and East/West. Considering the remarkable diversity among our authors hailing from various corners of the world, we are deeply committed to addressing concerns against Western-centric discourse. Our primary objective is to amplify and embrace the rich array of approaches, points of view, and perspectives from the Global South, ensuring that a significant number of our authors come from these countries. Through this deliberate emphasis on inclusion, we strive to foster a truly global dialogue that honors and celebrates the diverse voices shaping our collective understanding.

Overviews of Third Sector research are provided by Hoelscher et al. (2022) and Biekart and Fowler (2022). The former speaks to the past with the latter providing a future of civil society research building also on webinars. However, it specifically focuses on civil society—in effect an overarching term of which the Third Sector is a sub-set.

Other books considering research in the Third Sector present research into aspects of the Third Sector—for example, Powell and Bromley (2020) and Taylor (2010), which consider different types of Third Sector entities (e.g. schools, environmental entities, social enterprises), governance and fundraising etc. Other books consider specific issues such as management of organizations (e.g. Coule & Brain, 2021), or how to research the Third Sector itself (e.g. Dean & Hogg, 2022).

Hence this book stands as a valuable contribution to the scholarly discourse on the Third Sector and civil society, distinguishing itself by its forward-looking perspective and emphasis on the future rather than dwelling on the past. While Hoelscher et al.'s "Civil Society: Concepts, Challenges, Contexts" and Biekart & Fowler's "A Future Civil Society Research Agenda" provide insightful analyses and research agendas, our work complements them by delving into contemporary issues and anticipating the evolving landscape of civil society. In contrast to books like Powell and Bromley's "The Nonprofit Sector" and Taylor's "Third Sector Research," which focus on various aspects of the Third Sector, including governance, fundraising, and diverse entity types, our book addresses unique market and competition considerations within civil society, offering a specialized perspective that extends beyond typical research boundaries. Moreover, while other works explore specific facets like organizational management or research methodologies, our book broadens the scope by integrating these aspects into a comprehensive narrative that guides readers in understanding and navigating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for civil society studies.

We now provide a summary of the different sections developed by the invited authors and commentators. Commentators have been added to each section to bring in the richness of different contexts. First, we are grateful to Steven Rathgeb Smith,

Patricia Mendonca, Taco Brandsen for commenting on theory in Third Sector research and to Dennis Young for his commentary (**Part I**).

To enable international research requires suitable comparators and theories of the nonprofit sector play a central role in shaping the research agenda for scholars. The *International Classification Nonprofit Organization* (ICNPO) project and the social origins theory developed through the *Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project* (CNP) by Salamon and Anheier were influential in our understanding of the differential cross-national role of the Third Sector and its relationship to government. This section captures the first panel in the ISTR with prominent scholars of the Third Sector to discuss the relevance of current theories of the Third Sector, given recent scholarship and ongoing organizational and policy changes affecting the sector. While these presenters provocatively suggested that the Social Origins theory must be completely replaced, there are numerous opportunities to explore those complex challenges in theorising for the next generation for the Third Sector.

Part II examines definitions. Here Caroline Andion, Andrea Bassi and Anna Domaradzka (along with commentary by Ingrid Srinath) explore definitions which are key elements of the scientific process. Definitions consist of the tracing boundaries in order to distinguish what is inside and what is outside a specific research field.

Definitions change during space and time. In this field many definitions have been developed around the world, such as: Independent Sector, Voluntary Sector, Nonprofit Sector (in USA); Charitable Sector (in UK); Intermediary Sector (in Netherland and Germany); Social Economy (in France, Belgium, Canada-Quebec). More recently, there has been a tendency to gather studies and research concerning the organized part of Civil Society under the label "Third Sector". That seems to be more neutral and recognisable worldwide.

There are many purposes for definitions: theoretical (to establish a field of study) and operational (aimed at carrying out empirical research). Moreover, definitions of the same phenomenon vary in relation to scientific disciplines (economics, sociology, political sciences, etc.), approaches and paradigms (functionalist, structuralist, phenomenology, hermeneutic), epistemology (realist, constructivist, etc.) and methodology (quantitative, qualitative). Hence, this section broadens its definitional list to compare and judge the principles and standards for definitions in this field and to recognize volunteering.

This Section therefore considers the "pros" and the "cons" of diverse Third Sector definitions worldwide, in order to take into consideration the historical institutional context of civil society organizations and, at the same time, to allow for aggregation (mapping the sector) and making comparisons possible. Finally, definitions must be open to the future, in order to consider the co-evolution of institutions and the appearance of new forms of Third Sector organizations. Thus, the authors critically reflect on how definitions are impacted by issues of power and knowledge production and the limitations or implications in this, in particular countries where civil society may be at odds to the nation state.

Part III provides contributions from Alasdair Rutherford, Megan LePere-Schloop and Nur Azam Anuarul Perai, with a commentary by Inés M. Pousadela on Classification. There is a long history of classifying the activities of Third Sector

organizations, and ongoing discussion around the conceptual and practical challenges of doing so at scale. The increased availability of machine-readable data and documentation, combined with technological advances, has increased the sophistication with which this can be done. As a developing area, much of the discussion in the field has focussed on the technical aspects of classification using computation approaches. This section critically discusses both how the theory and practice of nonprofit classification has developed, the opportunities for taking this forward, and the challenges which need to be tackled in future Third Sector research.

Standardised classification schemes (such as ICNPO) provide harmonization and consistency in the recording of nonprofit activity across countries. Nevertheless, challenges exist in ensuring that the rich diversity of nonprofit activity is adequately represented in a standard classification. Are social media mediated forms of self-organized nonprofit agency included? As well as cultural differences in activities, there are also institutional differences in how activities are recognized, understood and recorded. Further, it is unclear where uncivil actions and their nonprofit protagonists—January 6th insurrection, the Patriot Boys in the USA—fit into a classification system. How is organized resistance by nonprofits to foster democracy/counter abuse of rights to be classified, by whom through what process? Classifications should be able to include the "uncivil" and "self-organized" classifications along with others. While these drawbacks are acknowledged, there are also strong benefits for international comparative research from the implicit framing that comes from using a standard classification, as well as how and what is recorded in the source data. Technological advances, including machine-learning and automated content analysis, provide the opportunity to utilise ever greater data in the classification process.

In examining how our existing standard classifications capture the diversity of Third Sector activity across cultures including social media mediated forms of self-organized nonprofit agency this section considers the role of culture and tradition on datasets. The structured nature of these suggest that there is little room for uncivil actions and their nonprofit protagonists in any classification systems. Therefore national classifications often fail to include organized resistance by nonprofits to foster democracy/counter abuse of rights as it is difficult to classify or to find a process.

In the second chapter of this section the authors apply a critical lens to a number of questions, including how the increased availability of digital data can support more sophisticated classification systems. This enables an assessment of the opportunities and challenges that technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence bring to the process of classifying Third Sector organizations.

Thus, the prior two pillars combine with the advantages and limitations of developing methods to apply to the data to support classification: the theoretical and conceptual model of what to classify; and critical consideration of the data and data-generating process on which a classification is based.

Elizabeth Bloodgood, Ksenija Fonović, and Francisco Santamarina along with commentator Susan Appe present **Part IV** on Aggregation. It has been 20 years since the publication of the 2003 United Nations Handbook on the System of

National Accounts, which represented the first major recognition by the international statistical measurement systems architecture of the economic relevance of the nonprofit sector in national statistical accounting. Since its publication, this international standard setting approach for data collection, measurement, and reporting of national data has been joined by others managed by international bodies including the United Nations, World Bank, OECD, and Open Government Partnership. Collectively these international data projects have increasingly improved in their recognition and measurement of broad sets of Third Sector organizations, philanthropy, and volunteer work. These international organizations have provided important opportunities to produce foundational comparative data that bring new visibility and credibility to the Third Sector and volunteering. Closures of civic space and regime mistrust of Third Sector organizations seen in many countries can also be aided by aggregated research data.

However, the quality and accessibility of the administrative systems in place at the national level limit the potential for research to bring visibility. National statistics agencies need to be able to identify organizations in-scope for surveys, and rely heavily on existing registration, reporting, and tax systems for the collection of data. Low quality administrative systems can result in sub-optimal national data. Or, worse yet, these systems can undermine or even harm the organizations they were intended to serve. This Section discusses the aggregation of data at the national level in the context of international data systems and volunteering, as well as in respect of Third Sector research to consider what they offer and what they do not.

Part V includes chapters by Rupert Graf Strachwitz, Tania Haddad, Catarina Segatto and a commentary by Alison Elliot on the topic of faith. Among the issues put forward by Helmut Anheier and others as important to focus upon in further developing research on civil society and the Third Sector, faith has come to the fore in a global context. While faith-based organizations have always been considered part of the Third Sector, they have hardly received special attention in the field nor in research. Religious communities proper, were not touched upon in the ICNPO project in the 1990s, and yet they are increasingly redefining themselves as Third Sector organizations. Also, religious beliefs and ethical values are seen as highly relevant and influential in defining the mission and working principles of the sector, and their interplay with other societal actors. This includes in countries that are faith-averse and secular regimes. Through an examination of faith from a Christian point of view in Europe, this section also examines the Arab world and religion as well as how faith-based organizations shape policies in Brazil. These all combine with the commentary to enable the reader to reflect on what the inclusion of faith in Third Sector studies means in terms of a future civil society research agenda.

The final co-authored section is **Part VI** entitled 'Ways forward'. This section draws together the prior sections, with Helmut Anheier, Stefan Toepler and commentator Naoto Yamauchi presenting an agenda for relevant and impactful future research into the Third Sector. Thus, this section examines theory, definitions, the role of classification as to which entities are included and which not, and the extent of data that can be mobilized in future research. This section reflects on the prior

chapters and discusses the characteristics and limitations of the Third Sector research as well as the challenges and the way forward.

Finally, the book concludes with our reflections about how the past can inform our future research on Third Sector studies, but also the future trends that are likely to impact researchers' work. We trust that you enjoy this work and it will enthuse you to take forward Third Sector studies into the future.

Acknowledgements We are indebted to ISTR's Executive Director, Margery Daniels who encouraged the Montreal series and was an active member of the Working Group who organized the seminars during 2023.

We are also grateful to Prof. Helmut Anheier whose many years of research into the sector, including in collaboration with Prof Lester Salamon, has added much to our knowledge of the Third Sector. Through his plenary at the 15th International Conference of ISTR held in Montreal—Canada, in July 2022, he stimulated the debate that would result in this book.

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Part I
Theory

Chapter 2
Theory of the Third Sector

Taco Brandsen, Patricia Mendonca, and Steven Smith

Introduction

Research on the Third Sector has been informed by many theories of the development of the Third Sector and its relationship to government and the citizenry. This chapter will review the major theories of the Third Sector, but pay special attention to the major comparative conceptual framework of the Third Sector, the social origins theory, proposed by Salamon and Anheier (1998). Overall, the chapter will place the different theoretical frameworks in context and highlight key issues for scholars of the Third Sector to consider in their future research, especially given the hybridization of the Third Sector and major shifts in public policy towards the Third Sector.

Early Theoretical Development

Until the late twentieth century, research on the Third Sector was rarely focused on sectoral issues per se; instead, research tended to pertain to philanthropy, voluntarism, and voluntary organizations. Thus, the work of Burton Weisbrod (1977) on the origins of Third Sector organizations was pioneering conceptual scholarship.

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As an economist, he based his theory of the Third Sector in "market failure." Classic economic theory posits that the market responds to consumer demand for private goods. However, public goods such as defense, health care and foreign aid are more likely to be provided by government due to market failure, since these public goods will be insufficiently provided if left to the market. Weisbrod built upon this theory and suggested that public goods would only be provided by government to the level of the "median voter", leaving unmet demand for public goods by minority groups broadly defined including neighborhood associations, racial and ethnic groups, and religious organizations. Consequently, Third Sector organizations are created to satisfy the demand for public goods from these minority groups and individuals (Also, Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021). Block associations, Catholic Charities, Save the Children, and the American Political Science Association are just a few of the innumerable examples.

Considerations of market failure also informed the theoretical framework proposed by Henry Hansmann (1980) shortly after Weisbrod's initial work. In contrast to Weisbrod, Hansmann focused on "contract failure" as an explanation for the existence of Third Sector organizations. In brief, Hansmann argued markets function well in circumstances where buyers and sellers have full information to make informed decisions. In these circumstances, transactions are efficient and yield benefits for both parties. Markets function efficiently when the information is easily obtainable such as with groceries. But Third Sector organizations offer complex goods such as social services, health care, and international development. Thus, it can be very difficult for a donor—such as an individual philanthropist, a foundation, or a public funder—to assess the performance of the Third Sector organization. Consequently, the donor or funder is faced with a classic "principal-agent" problem of asymmetric information where the donor or funder has much less reliable information on performance than the leadership and staff of the Third Sector organization.

This information deficit is especially problematic for many nonprofit organizations that provide services that are very disconnected from the donor. For example, Save the Children provides poverty reduction and disaster relief, with services around the world, so it is virtually impossible for donors to personally evaluate the organization. Hansmann suggested Third Sector organizations offer a solution to this serious information dilemma because of the "non-distribution constraint". That is, a Third Sector organization is legally prevented from distributing surplus revenue to the owners. Thus, boards of directors cannot receive surplus revenue and executive directors are prohibited from obtaining excessive compensation. For-profit organizations do not face these constraints. Thus, Hansmann contended that Third Sector organizations provide reassurance to donors that their funds for the public goods mission will be used as intended and not diverted through inappropriate personal payments.

Dennis Young (1986) took a very different approach to understanding Third Sector organizations by focusing on entrepreneurial choice; thus, some people will sort themselves into Third Sector organizations while other entrepreneurs will land in a for-profit since it offers the potential for much higher personal remuneration.

His framework highlights the importance of leadership and entrepreneurs in the development of Third Sector organizations. It can also be employed to explain the increasing hybridization of the Third Sector with many organizations containing a mix of public, for-profit and community incentives (Skelcher and Smith, 2017). This idea of "worker sorting" also underscores the importance of the mission of a Third Sector organization for conveying the goals and objectives of the organization to potential and current employees. Indeed, a compelling mission can also be very helpful in retaining and recruiting employees for a Third Sector organization (Young, 1986; Oster, 1995; Steinberg, 2006).

Salamon (1987) proposed an alternative conceptual framework that was partly rooted in the market failure paradigm. His "government failure" theory is a contrast to Weisbrod who proposed government as the initial sector to provide public goods; instead, Salamon proposed that Third Sector organizations are the first sector to provide public goods. However, these organizations have deep structural problems in supplying adequate public goods because of insufficient revenues, amateurism, and narrow, particular interests. Consequently, government revenue and regulations are required to ensure the citizenry of the desired level of quality and available public goods (Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021). Government and Third Sector organizations thus form a partnership and are mutually dependent on each other: government needs Third Sector organizations to provide public goods but these organizations also need government funding. This mutual dependency also means that government overreach in terms of regulation will be checked since government needs Third Sector organizations for public service implementation. In this sense, Salamon's work is consistent with the comparative research of Ralph Kramer (1987) who investigated the government and Third Sector relationship in four countries and concluded that typically the two sectors were mutually dependent upon each other.

Comparative Third Sector Research

As Estelle James (1987) observed, the theories of Weisbrod, Hansmann, Young, and Salamon were developed within the American context and worked less well if applied to other countries. For example, tremendous variation exists around the world in the size and scope of the nonprofit sector. The then prevailing theories could not adequately explain this extensive diversity across countries. Moreover, Hansmann and Weisbrod presumed that the primary funding for Third Sector organizations is philanthropy, whereas in most other countries, the primary funders are governments.

As an alternative conceptual framework on the origins of Third Sector organizations, James (1987) observed that Third Sector organizations emerge through the efforts of religious groups and entrepreneurs who then are able to tap public funding to support their provision of public goods (Anheier, 2023). The Netherlands and Germany are two good illustrative examples of James' framework: each country has a Third Sector that was for decades dominated by religious organizations who

received extensive public subsidies. Over the last 30 years, though, more secular organizations have been founded, although these too rely heavily on public funds.

James' important research and theorizing called attention to the cross-country variation in the Third Sector. However, it still failed to explain the differences in the size and scope of the Third Sector across countries (Anheier, 2022). To fill this conceptual lacuna, Salamon and Anheier (1998) subsequently proposed the "social origins theory". In brief, their theory is rooted in institutional theory and path development. That is, the relationship between civil society and the state at the beginning of the modern welfare state in each country then creates a nexus of relationships and funding that then persists over many decades and continues to shape the Third Sector to the present day. In so doing, they also built upon the work of Richard Titmuss (1974), Barrington Moore (1966) and Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) and other scholars. Titmuss was a renowned scholar of social policy who characterized the United States as a "residual welfare state" because of its heavy reliance on markets and the Third Sector for social benefits (see also Salamon & Anheier, 1998, p. 224). Moore proposed that the historical records of several countries indicated "three distinct routes to the modern world": democratic, fascist, and communist. Each route could be attributed to a specific mix of relationships between elites, civil society, the state and the working class—hence the "social origins" of these three different routes. Esping-Andersen (1990) also suggested that particular paths were followed in different countries depending upon key developments in the early decades of state formation. However, he suggested that countries could be divided into three "welfare regimes": a "liberal" welfare state was characterized by comparatively low and often means-tested social benefits; a "corporatist" welfare state with substantial social benefits supported by the state and close relationships between the state and private employers and labor unions; and a "social democratic" welfare state common in Scandinavian countries with extensive, more universalistic social benefits and relatively little means tested programs (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp. 26–27; Anheier, 2022).

Salamon and Anheier (1998) adapted these frameworks and instead proposed four distinct regimes: liberal (US, UK), corporatist (France, Germany), Social Democratic (Sweden, Norway), and statist (Russia). The liberal regime had a sizable Third Sector, a reliance on philanthropy for funding, and relatively low public social benefits. The corporatist model has high government social spending and a large Third Sector. The social democratic model has a large government sector and extensive public social benefits. The fourth and final model is the statist model—typified by Russia—is characterized by low government spending and a relatively small nonprofit sector. More recently, Salamon et al. (2017) added a fifth model, the "traditional" one, associated with the dominance of elites who exercise profound influence and control over society (for example, in Kenya and Pakistan). In these countries, the Third Sector tends to be small but a sizable informal and volunteer workforce and low government benefits and spending (Benevolenski et al., 2023, p. 319).

The social origins framework was specifically informed by the extensive data collected by Salamon and Anheier as part of the Johns Hopkins Comparative

Nonprofit Sector Project during the 1990s. This multi-country study offered detailed portraits of the Third Sector and the relationship to government around the world, albeit primarily in advanced industrial countries (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). It is doubtful whether such an effort would be possible today, given the lag in many databases (Anheier, 2023). Many countries have by now simply stopped updating information on nonprofit satellite accounts. Brazil, for example, has produced four updates since 2002, the last being carried out in 2016. In the US, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has published statistics on nonprofit organizations on a periodic basis, most recently in 2023 using 2022 data (Gallagher, 2023). More generally, the difficulty of obtaining useful and reliable data suggests the need for Third Sector researchers to collaborate with other large scale international data research projects and to work with public and private funders on more targeted approaches to data collection (Anheier, 2023).

On political and practical implications of global comparative research on civil society, any mapping and definitions previously adopted, add meanings to civil society in the contexts that are applied. Producing photographs and scenarios about civil society at a given time influences governments, donors, regulation, and practices of civil society itself (Appe, 2013). Designing new ways to conceptualize, collect and process data about civil society, including initiatives led by or with participation from different civil society groups can help prevent distortions or produce contextual and targeted mappings, adding important information that would not otherwise be produced about the sector (LePere-Schloop et al., 2021).

Comparative Analysis Through Regimes: From Theoretical Innovation to Backdrop?

As the Third Sector field was taking shape as a distinct academic subfield, the conceptual contributions by Salamon and his collaborators were important and influential. At the same time, one could argue that the field has advanced to the point where overarching concepts and theories are more of value as common reference points to scholars, a shared ancestry, than as the academic foundation of current theoretical developments. For instance, social origins theory continues to represent a useful heuristic framework for comparative analysis, in the absence of fitting alternatives, but the theory is far from driving the theoretical debates in Third Sector research.

The reasons for this development are not only related to the evolution of the field of Third Sector research, but also to the foundations of social origins theory. As noted above, when originally developed, social origins theory integrated the leading theoretical traditions (the trendsetters) of that time, especially welfare regime theory and more generally what was then called ‘neo-institutional theory’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The regime approach offered a new advance from the purely descriptive comparisons of national systems towards one based on theoretically grounded ideal types. This gave an enormous boost to international comparison in the area of

social policy and beyond. Subsequent scholarship led to adaptation of the original concepts, for instance, through the addition of new types and new dimensions (Arts & Gelissen, 2002). However, insofar as there have been new theoretical developments, these have tended to lead away from the regime approach and move in altogether different directions. Welfare regimes have turned more and more into stage backgrounds against which studies of social policies are set, but not the theoretical core of the comparative analysis. To be sure, this intellectual impact is still a considerable achievement, but it means the theoretical action is elsewhere. Arguably, a similar development has occurred with social origins theory.

This result is partly because this type of theory inevitably chooses to focus on certain aspects of national systems at the exclusion of others. In hindsight, those choices seem less obvious when both the theoretical fashions and the politically salient issues change. The original welfare regime approach had a predominant focus on employment and income transfer as the heart of the welfare state, which was logical at a time when (un)employment was at the centre of policy debates. But in later times, when labour markets in most developed countries tightened, when new types of social risks came to the forefront, and the sustainability and quality of services (health care, elderly care, education, mental health) came severely under threat, it seemed less logical (Bonoli, 2005). In addition, institutional theory more generally has moved on, with more emphasis on logics, so Third Sector organizations may in fact have more than one logic such as a community and government goals and priorities (Skelcher & Smith, 2015). Together, these developments make the welfare regimes, and by implication Third Sector-based regimes, less relevant to current theoretical debates.

Importantly, state and welfare regimes typologies such as Esping-Andersen's have incurred several criticisms for their Euro-centrism and neglect of power relations of the Global South (Wehr, 2016). In the context of the Global South, we find precarious political and economic institutions, low state governance capacity, and small or non-existent labor markets. Many of these countries went through colonial periods, in addition to experiencing slave regimes, a point of profound impact on the historical formation of their social institutions. State formation and welfare regimes in these contexts have very different trajectories. The formation of social classes is also deeply marked by the slave-owning regime, as well as by the identity experiences of actors from the global south, such as diasporas and feminism. In Latin America, for example, the colonizing project arrives with the Church and Western forms of elite philanthropy. This narrative quickly overlaps with a diversity of self-organizing formats and solidarity relationships of original peoples that never fully considered as manifestations of civil society.

Also, the choice to anchor theoretical comparisons at the national level now seems more questionable. This focus was always debatable, since many of the policies and regulations determining the role of non-profit organizations are decided at the local and regional/state level. But it has become even more so over time. Though it is not a linear development, the long-term trend in governance is one of increasing fragmentation. Especially in the case of Europe, a fundamental shift has occurred towards the international level. Simultaneously, growing political polarization leads

to even more pronounced differences between policies at different levels of governance. Efforts to deal with climate change show evidence of both trends. It complicates comparisons, because similar developments occur at the subnational level regardless of national or political traditions. These developments then raise the question of the proper level of analysis when comparing the conditions in which non-profit organizations operate. Also, since many such organizations must operate within a complex, shifting mass of vertical and horizontal relationships, a multilevel approach is essential to understanding their institutional environment.

In this sense, there are emerging perspectives from the Global South that have offered new hypotheses to question the origin and development of local civil society, emphasizing how in recent years the financing architecture and relations between traditional donors from the north and recipients from the Global South have changed (Pallas & Bloodgood, 2022). There is now more voice from the Global South present in the transnational debates directly, concatenating in different ways local problems and their international repercussions. It is no longer possible to establish predetermined roles, and the literature touching on this theme often encompasses broader definitions of civil society organizations considering their diverse social and cultural contexts (Amoore & Langley, 2004; Biekart & Fowler 2022; Bloodgood & Pallas, 2022).

Indeed, another conceptual framework to inform our understanding of cross-national and sub-national variation is the policy fields approach (Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021). The concept of "field" is extensively addressed in the scholarly literature, especially institutional research (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In particular, Stone and Sandfort (2009) suggest that policy fields at the local level are comprised of dense networks of public, non-profit, and private organizations and groups in a particular policy area such as homelessness services, child welfare or home care. The actual characteristics of the network will vary depending upon the locality, region, and country. Great variation exists in the role of Third Sector organizations, depending upon the policy field as well as the country. For example, in the US, cultural organizations are mostly Third Sector organizations and often have close connections to other local public, philanthropic, and for-profit organizations. Social services typically have close connections to the informal sector. While in many Latin America Countries social services frequently are linked to multiple provisions and funding models among state, civil society and the market, and yet can still be heavily regulated by the state action, regardless of the weight of public funding in its activities.

Consistent with the social origins framework, the policy fields approach emphasizes the importance of government policy and funding in shaping the Third Sector and its relationship with other organizations and groups in the field (Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021). In some countries such as the UK, US, and Australia, contracting for social services is prevalent and thus profoundly influences the role of Third Sector organizations in these countries and their relationships with government, their local communities and other key public and private stakeholders. In the US, the arts policy field is heavily reliant on philanthropic support so Third Sector organizations have a much different role and set of national and community relationships than in

other countries such as France where public art institutions are central. In Brazil, the financing of the cultural sector is mostly through public resources, with a considerable share of these resources in the form of tax incentives, where the decision on which initiatives to support falls on the market. Overall, the policy fields framework highlights the cross-national differences in the role and prominence of Third Sector organizations. The policy field of health care will be very different in Germany than in the US.

In sum, many developments are apparent that a framework for the comparative analysis of Third Sector organizations needs to address. But the very nature of national types is that they are static in nature, taking account of the historical evolution of Third Sector organizations prior to formation of national types, as a path-dependent development, and thus less able to incorporate or explain subsequent developments.

The Distinctiveness of the Third Sector and Hybridization

Another fundamental issue that affected theoretical currents in Third Sector research concerned the distinctiveness of nonprofit organizations. In the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (1991–2017), still the largest comparative analysis of nonprofit organizations to date, and foundational to the Third Sector research field, the unit of analysis was partly defined on the basis of the non-distribution of profits (specifically: not returning profits generated to their owners or directors) (Hansmann, 2000). This criterion was later somewhat revised by Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) to allow "totally or significantly limited from distributing any surplus, or profit". However, initially the requirement of no profit distribution whatsoever led to the exclusion of cooperatives and social enterprises from the mainstream of Third Sector research (and to the emergence of bodies such as the EMES International Research Network, an alternative home for studying social enterprise). This omission has become more problematic, as over time the number of organizations of a hybrid nature has grown.

In addition, even if Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) have considered cooperatives, mutuals, and social enterprises in their extended definition, it does not fully encompass experiences in the Global South, such as solidarity economy. In Latin America, Solidarity Economy has been described as organizing economic activities with a social and environmental mission through voluntary membership, restricted profit distribution, and democratic and horizontal management (Tello-Rozas, 2016; Ferguson, 2018). It has often been analysed with a Marxist bias, as a way of opposing traditional capitalist relationships (Castelao Caruana & Srnec, 2013).

A recent Brazilian legislation considers cooperatives acting in social services or with vulnerable populations as civil society organizations. This will mean that part of this sector can be included in Third Sector research and mapping, as well as being able to receive public funds and engage in public service provision.

Hybridity refers to a condition in which organizations incorporate different norm and value frameworks, for instance, related to civil society and markets, or the state. This blend of norms usually occurs because shifts in governance lead them to resemble organizations in other spheres (Brandsen et al., 2005; Skelcher & Smith, 2015). Many organizations that are largely reliant on state funding tend to adopt bureaucratic characteristics from their main funder. Organizations that share the same types of legal structures can thus come to represent very different types of creatures. In the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, for instance, the Netherlands had one of the largest nonprofit sectors in the world, because most of the public service providers are private nonprofit entities. Since then, the increasing use of market-based mechanisms such as contracting-out have increased competition in service delivery, which has led many nonprofit organizations to become more business-like. It has propelled hybridity from a once rather obscure topic to one that is now mainstream in Third Sector research. In parts of Africa, new actors in global philanthropy—Foundations and Diaspora—have fostered new forms of social entrepreneurship on the continent, also highly dependent on specific sources of resources (Adelman, 2009; Atibil, 2014).

How does this reflect upon the assumptions of a large-scale comparative effort such as the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project? On the one hand, it is of course entirely unfair to expect a complex phenomenon such as hybridization to be incorporated in a large-scale survey: any large-scale statistical measure is necessarily broad and can only take account of organizational characteristics to a certain degree. Also, a large-scale comparative project depends on the availability of existing, imperfect data. On the other hand, the organizational landscape in the nonprofit field has since become more diverse and complex, amplifying the difficulties that already existed originally. At least, it means that a comparative indicator based on formal organizational characteristics is increasingly misleading if it suggests that these formal characteristics are closely linked to less tangible characteristics, such as the norms and values an organization pursues (Brandsen et al., 2010).

Importantly, hybridity is also reflected in the many informal nonprofit organizations. For example, the economies of many African and Latin American countries are characterized by a high level of informality resulting in a very sizable informal sector and a wide range of solidarity relationships not mapped by Third Sector research (Scherer-Warren, 2006; Fowler, 2013; Mati, 2016). The definition of the Third Sector in relation to the state and formal market is thus complicated and restricts forms of indigenous, informal, or non-secular religious organizations, in addition to other formats (Mendonça, 2022). Many nonprofits in social services and economic development have their roots in the informal sector and even after formal incorporation have continuing ties to the informal sector of neighborhoods, the church, and community. In the Global South, philanthropy has also evolved and expanded in recent years, divided into fostering social enterprises and and agendas for social justice. These resources have been important for local grassroots organizations, especially nonprofits focusing on women and the vulnerable. This was only possible because new forms of grantmaking were shaped considering more informal characters from local groups, either directing grants to individuals or using

intermediary organizations. The intermediaries frequently emphasize diverse funding strategies, highlighting the importance of collaborative funding models. It also supports empowering and recognizing local leaders through financial support, capacity-building programs, and providing platforms for visibility and networking (Lessa & Hopstein, 2014).

With regard to indigenous organizations, what has been considered by most of the literature are the formalized organizations, created and supported by external actors, such as NGOs, religious missionaries, and non-religious activists, with strong insertion in international networks. This allowed several communities to overcome the geographic dispersion of indigenous societies.

Many indigenous leaders in recent years have repeated that there is no longer any reason for individuals from another cultural world to continue considering themselves and being considered representatives of indigenous interests. The current configuration of indigenous organizations leads to some distortions, especially in the search for interlocutors for the intermediation of contacts, and the need to adapt to a format of association that has no expression in their cultural world. Due to a number of factors, some leaders are appointed to this position due to their sympathetic attitude to supporting organizations or even government entities linked to the indigenous cause. In this context, formal education, the fact of mastering the national languages, Portuguese in Brazil and Spanish in other Latin American countries, as well as the use of written texts, overcoming orality, knowledge of institutions, political relations, availability or ability to live for long periods away from their place of origin, which is not a simple process for most indigenous people, are factors that have relevance to the occupation of managerial positions in organizations (Ayres et al., 2023).

Adapting indigenous organizations to forms of the Third Sector or Westernized civil society also distorts the true nature of these organizations. Indigenous societies, for their own organization, do not need paper, and if modern form replaces traditional form, indigenous culture is being violated. If these groups lose their traditionality, they lose their unique form of organization (Souza Filho, 2019).

From the perspective that hybridization is increasingly the new normal, civil society should be understood less in terms of specific types of organizations, but as a set of mechanisms, or values, or logics, depending on the theory underlying the analysis. One effect of this development has been to bring research on the Third Sector and social enterprises closer together, a development that may lead to useful theoretical cross-fertilization. Social enterprise research has in some respects undergone developments similar to those in Third Sector research: the search for a common definition, the difficulty of finding one in the face of overwhelming variety, the growth of comparative research (recently, through the ICSEM project) and the search for new typologies (comp. Defourny & Nyssens, 2017; Defourny et al., 2021). Given the increasing overlap between the objects of these research traditions, more collaboration would make sense. In that sense, as the early theories shaped the different research fields, subsequent theoretical progress may again reshape them.

Theoretically, further progress is more likely through the simultaneous embrace of more small-scale and more diverse comparisons. For instance, hybridity and the

interconnections between Third Sector organizations and the market, informal sector and government again highlights the importance of "policy fields" in understanding the Third Sector (Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021). The policy field framework calls attention to the networks and relationships among different types of organizations. Thus, policy fields with very competitive markets are more likely to have hybrid organizations with market and nonprofit logics and values. Countries with laws supporting social enterprises and cooperatives may have also have more hybrid organizations, which in turn makes classification of the size and scope of the Third Sector challenging. Likewise, systematic comparisons at the level of organizations and communities will allow Third Sector research to draw more directly on recent developments in organizational theory, such as theories on organizational logics that are well-suited for analysing hybridity (comp. Stevenson et al., 2024). Such comparisons are likely to become theoretically richer when Third Sector research moves beyond the small subset of countries where traditionally it has been strongest.

Conclusion

Since 1990, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project and the social origins theory that frames the analysis of its main data have influenced the training of researchers and many of the publications on the Third Sector. The legacy of the project was to produce, with the participation of researchers from different countries, an operational structural definition, based on the UN System of National Accounts: The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations -ICNPO (Salamon & Anheier, 1996). This effort fomented the collection of comparable data from more than 40 countries, which provided feedback for subsequent uses of the theory. These data were very significant in providing the first scenarios about civil society in many countries. The Social Origins theory provided first attempts to formulate hypotheses to explain the size and form of influence and interaction of the Third Sector with the state. If we have in this chapter offered so many criticisms of the theory and developments in new directions, it is because they started from these works, in a genuine effort of scientific construction.

As a middle-range theory, it has made an invaluable contribution to the Third Sector research field. A community of researchers and academic/ professional associations developed, along with academic journals and research centres, and this legacy is still present today (Mirabella et al., 2007). In several courses on Third Sector or nonprofit studies, discussions begin with the understanding of the social origins and the classification framework. This type of comparative research is still fruitful in some contexts, particularly in domestic comparisons in countries whose system most closely resonates with this classification. Trends such as the welfare state crisis, overall government fiscal crisis, especially in emerging countries, the crisis of socialism and exhaustion of the centralized model of planning and the greater visibility of interest groups strengthened the argument of the "associative revolution" and interest in research on the subject (Salamon & Anheier, 1992).

Nevertheless, the theories that originally inspired Third Sector research have become less relevant to ongoing theoretical debates. In part, this evolution is a sign of a healthy academic debate, and empirical and theoretical progress: the dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants. If the theoretical approaches of the founders of the field were equally relevant today, that would be a cause for concern. Empirical changes in the institutional conditions within which Third Sector organizations operate have changed, the organizations have changed as a consequence, and scholars have moved with the trend.

Moreover, the breadth of theoretical approaches that Third Sector research draws upon has increased considerably. The disciplinary and thematic diversity of scholars associated with nonprofit research has grown substantially. Also, scholarship on the Global South has increased (even if less strongly and less swiftly than many had hoped). The content of journals like *Voluntas* is more diverse than ever (Simsa & Brandsen, 2021). The restructuring of the public services in many countries due to the influence of the New Public Management has created a demand for research and study programs on nonprofit and public management and an influence of scholars interested in governance and management of Third Sector organizations rather than the comparative research of the JHCNP initiative.

These developments raise serious questions as to whether any such widely shared theoretical approaches such as social origins theory are possible in contemporary and future Third Sector research, as the field has matured. On a field-level scale, the goal of Third Sector research is then to balance different imperfect approaches. In such a rich landscape, a place for broad large-scale comparisons certainly remains, despite their theoretical limits.

However, they must be complemented by comparisons of smaller sets of units, not only at the national, but also at the subnational and organizational levels. This will have several benefits. It will more easily allow an explanatory theoretical approach, beyond mere description and classification. It will also show a more comprehensive picture of the activities and autonomy of the Third Sector. It is urgent to expand the inclusion of researchers from the Global South, in order to enrich these narratives about the functioning and evolution of the Third Sector in regional contexts considering its diversity.

This approach is particularly timely and policy relevant given the widespread concern about the threats to democracy and civil society organizations around the world. Indeed, many scholars have argued that an active civil society can be an effective check against democratic backsliding (Bernhard et al., 2020). A thriving civil society characterized by engaged nonprofit organizations at the local, regional and national level can represent citizen interests and promote government accountability and responsiveness. Nonprofit community groups at the subnational level can help organize citizens and represent their interests in the policy process. Connecting Third Sector research to these broader political and social concerns will not only provide valuable insights on the Third Sector, but also contribute directly to the policy debate on the future of democracy.

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Chapter 3
Commentary on Part I - Theory of the Third Sector

Dennis R. Young

It is my privilege to review this chapter by my distinguished colleagues. They have taken on the daunting task of summarizing the development of theory of the Third Sector over the past half century and suggesting how this body of theory can usefully be extended and modified to address the changing character of the contemporary Third Sector.

In this review, I would like to make several points. First, there are a number of misconceptions about the early theory of the nonprofit sector that I would like to clarify. Second, there is a missing dimension to my colleague's intendedly comprehensive review, namely that the early theory dealt not only with the question of why nonprofits exist, but also how they behave. Third, I think that the limitations of early economic theory have been exaggerated, and that this theory continues to be relevant. Fourth, as the authors do suggest, I question the status of social origins theory as a useful theory going forward, because it does not generate hypotheses for future exploration, as any basic theory should do. Fifth, I agree with the authors that "social enterprise" has opened our eyes to the fact that classic definitions of nonprofit organizations are too limiting in today's world of "hybridization". This is problematic to further theory development along conventional lines but also points us in some new directions. In particular, national classification schemes may be a dead end but exploring the many variants of social enterprise at multiple jurisdictional levels may be more productive. Overall, I will counsel not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Theory to date has been helpful; we just need more and different theory going forward.

The chapter by Brandsen and colleagues begins with a description and critique of the early economic theories of the sector developed by Weisbrod, Hansmann, James, Young and Salamon. These are all described as theories attempting to explain the presence of nonprofit organizations in a market economy and democratic

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society. This is generally correct. Moreover, they are complementary theories that piece together an overall construct as recognized by Steinberg (2006). Weisbrod explains why democratic societies fail to provide sufficient public goods, leaving a niche for nonprofits; Hansmann shows why the business sector falls short in providing goods that may be private in character but also complex, requiring an element of trust between consumers and producers that private nonprofits can offer; and Salamon (1987) identifies the factors that limit the reach and effectiveness of the nonprofit sector. These three strands constitute "demand-side" theory because they explain how the respective sectors each fall short of consumer/citizen/donor expectations and preferences in their own ways. Steinberg et al. label the trio as "three failures" theory (TFT).

On the supply side, Young (1983, 2013) describes why the demands created for nonprofit goods of a public or private nature are met with supply by organizations led by entrepreneurs with various motivations; i.e., the supply side of the nonprofit marketplace. James (1989) also describes a supply side force in the form of religious entrepreneurs who seek to promote their faiths through the development of religiously-framed nonprofit services. Salamon (1987) probes the issue of government supply of public goods, demonstrating that government is often better at financing such goods than actually producing them, and is thus drawn to working with nonprofits on a contractual or partnership basis in what he called a "third party government" arrangement. If you think about it, these pieces fit together into a more holistic theoretical framework—which we might call TFT meets Supply (TFT&S). This framework is far from complete or comprehensive, but it remains a solid foundation on which to build. Steinberg et al. (2024) are involved in extending its reach to account for the role of the household/family sector in the economy, to a wider concept of governmental failure that could account for nondemocratic regimes, and to a broader conception of the notion of "failure" beyond the narrow terms of economic efficiency.

While Brandsen et al. give tribute to these complementary strands of theory, they also sell them short to some extent. In particular, these are not only theories of existence addressed to the question of why nonprofits emerge in market economies and democratic societies, but they are also in part, theories of how nonprofits behave in those contexts. James, for example, highlights the religious drive, while Young identifies a spectrum of motivations that are sorted into the nonprofit sector, given the opportunity set facing prospective entrepreneurs. These motivations play out in the operations of nonprofits and help explain a range of behaviours from selflessly charitable, to power seeking and indeed to profit seeking in some contexts. My point is not to overemphasize the success of these theories in explaining nonprofit behaviour so much as to highlight the lack of attention to early behavioural theories of the nonprofit sector in the Brandsen et al. chapter. (Indeed, this lacuna is surprising given that Steve Smith, one of the co-authors of the Brandsen chapter, long ago recognized the problematic behavioural implications of providing public goods via contracting with private, nonprofit organizations; see Smith and Lipsky (1993)). Scholars including James (1983), Niskanen (1971) and others consider a variety of models including budget, output and profit maximizing, and as well as the

circumstances under which nonprofits would behave no differently than for-profits when faced with narrow profit-margins in a tight market. Of special note, Estelle James (1983) developed a general model of nonprofit behaviour in which nonprofit leadership was seen to value various combinations of both profitmaking and loss generating activity so as to maximize a subjective utility function, Importantly, this model illuminated the cross-subsidizing strategies that nonprofits use to pursue their selected social missions. In all, early theorists wanted to understand why nonprofits behaved differently from businesses or government organizations, and often idiosyncratically. These scholars also wanted to gain insight into serious problems with nonprofit nursing homes, day care centers, dishonest fund-raising charities and even the "dark" nefarious (sometimes criminal and anti-social) side of the nonprofit world as Weisbrod often mentioned in scholarly forums. This side of nonprofit theory has been ignored in this chapter and elsewhere, but is no less relevant today.

Another misconception in the chapter is minor but concerning. Neither Hansmann's nor Weisbrod's theories are solely about "donors". They are largely about consumers of private and public services and citizens of government jurisdictions, respectively. The fact that donors are drawn into support of the work of nonprofits that offer private and public goods is testament to the social benefits associated with these goods, but Hansmann and Weisbrod certainly recognized that donations were often less important in the financing of these organizations than fees for service or tax-based support. Salamon (1987) made this even clearer with his "third party government" notion that nonprofits were largely supported by direct government financing.

A third misconception about the early theory is that it only applied to the United States. In fact, much of Estelle James's work was explicitly international. Her observations about religious entrepreneurship were based on her observations in a variety of countries including Sri Lanka, Japan, Sweden and Holland, as well as in the United States (James, 1989). Certainly, Salamon extended his notion of voluntary failure to embrace the Third Sector in countries across the globe. More fundamentally Weisbrod's (1975) theory led to an often-misunderstood hypothesis that the size of the nonprofit sector in a given jurisdiction would depend on the heterogeneity of the economic preferences of the resident population. This hypothesis was tested imperfectly by using demographic indicators of diversity as proxies for diverse economic preferences. While some researchers, including Anheier and Salamon, found this theory wanting, it was never effectively tested with international data. In my view, it retains an essential insight that has not been sufficiently appreciated by non-economists. Nor has "social origins theory" (SO) provided a viable alternative. I agree with the authors of the chapter that SO theory has been useful in classifying countries into different clusters in terms of their proportions of activity found in different (private, nonprofit and government) sectors of the economy, but it remains solely a descriptive theory with little predictive power. If countries are truly differentiated by the degree of heterogeneity in economic preferences and by their religiosity then Weisbrod's and James's theories still offer potentially powerful tools to understanding why the relative size of the nonprofit sector differs from one country to another. While these theories formally apply to countries with

market economies and democratic governance, it may well be that they can be extended to other contexts such as autocratic regimes (Steinberg et al., 2024).

Finally, the early theories have application at a variety of jurisdictional levels, another advantage over the social origins approach which appears to apply solely at the national level. The early theories only require a jurisdictional focus wherein the size and scope of the nonprofit sector can be assessed relative to that of business and government. Within a given country, this can apply to municipalities, states, or regions. One advantage of the subnational approach would be to magnify the size of the data sets that might be agglomerated for this purpose. The results could be quite interesting. For example, Lester Salamon worked at the regional level within Russia at a time when the national government was becoming more autocratic and repressive. Nonetheless, Salamon observed that civil society was able, at least for a time, to thrive at subnational levels. Similar situations might hold in other large nondemocratic countries such as China, allowing further application of the early theory.

As Brandsen et al. recognize, the phenomena of social enterprise and hybridity introduce a whole new scope to theorizing about the "Third Sector". Indeed, it raises the question "what is the Third Sector anyway?" Once the strict application of the non-distribution constraint is lifted, it becomes hard to specify what to count within this category. Researchers such as Defourny and Nyssens (2012) have tried to answer this question by theorizing some basic parameters describing an "ideal type" of social enterprise, in terms of profit-limitation, asset locks, democratic governance and other considerations, and then asking researchers worldwide to report on what constituted the social enterprise sector in their respective countries, as reflected in those parameters. This has been a productive empirical approach but rather than generating any modal model of social enterprise it simply underscored the variety of forms found under this label. This is why Young et al. (2016) characterized the social enterprise world as a "zoo" in which many legitimate and distinct forms coexist for different reasons ranging from corporate social responsibility initiatives to hybrid social businesses that combine profit and social benefit motives, to formal (legal) nonprofits that focus primarily on social objectives. If the zoo metaphor indeed characterizes the contemporary Third Sector, then developing a general theory will be a lot more complex than the early efforts assumed.

There is another consideration that makes this challenge even more complex. To oversimplify, received theories to date are static in nature. Except for the broad evolutionary argument of social origins theory, they do not incorporate time as a variable, or organizational change as a factor. This is important if only because, some would argue, theory should be useful in addressing how the Third Sector functions over time and how it might be improved, through public policy and managerial practice, to increase societal welfare. The significance of this perspective has been brought to the world's attention recently by the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, which took a serious toll on Third Sector organizations in the U.S. and elsewhere. While public policies (e.g., governmental bailouts) helped to buffer or rescue nonprofits and other social businesses from the existential threats many faced, the pandemic made clear how ill-prepared and vulnerable these organizations were to catastrophic events. Improved theory might help explain why. In the U.S.,

nonprofits faced a regulatory and funding environment that demanded operating with very thin margins, few reserve resources, and within a culture of (charitable) self-sacrifice and austerity. Their resulting behaviour undermined their long-term resilience and capacity to continue providing essential goods and services. Some have argued for a new approach to management of these organizations (see Young & Searing, 2022), but the efficacy of such reform depends on a better understanding of why nonprofits behave as they do in the first place. Yet another reason why development of behavioural theory of Third Sector organizations requires more attention.

In all, theory of the Third Sector appears to be a more complex challenge than researchers first thought. The early theories were a good starting point, but rich veins of exploration lie ahead for future researchers. Perhaps the field is a bit like twentieth century physics, which started out confidently with Newton's laws and Michael Faraday's and James Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism and wound up facing the complexities and paradoxes of relativity in the cosmos and quanta in the subatomic world (Rovelli, 2016). If so, there is much to look forward to from the theorizing of the next generation of Third Sector scholars.

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Part II
Definition

Definitions are key elements of the scientific process. Definitions consist of the tracing boundaries in order to distinguish what is inside and what is outside a specific research field. But definitions are not fixed, they can and should change considering transformations in the fields of practice and their complexity, as well as the development of the research. Definitions are not only conceptual, they emerge from research and are embedded in history and social realities. So any definition contains a paradox that is linked with it universality and the capacity to make sense in each social reality. Therefore, definitions propose some kinds of demarcations, more or less delimited and recognized in the scientific and practical fields in which they are established.

So, definitions change during space and time. In this field many definitions have been developed around the world, such as: Independent Sector, Voluntary Sector, Nonprofit Sector (in USA); Charitable Sector (in UK); Intermediary Sector (in Netherland and Germany); Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Entreprises (in France, Belgium, Canada-Quebec), Popular Organizations and Participative Institutions (in the Global South).

The diversity of nomenclatures and definitions increases, as does the plurality of organizational and collective types that make up civil society in each country. In fact, definitions are not only conceptual constructs, they emerge from investigations and are embedded in history, institutional frames, political cultures and social realities. So any definition contains a paradox that is linked with its universality and the capacity to make sense in each social reality that it emerges from. In this sense we observe the importance of broadening the definitions, in order to consider the plurality of types and ecologies of civil society.

Thus, every definition contains within itself a paradox that is to enable some degree of universalization, capable of defining standards by which phenomena in the field should be compared and judged and at the same time not neglecting the particularities of each social reality. There are many avenues to conceive definitions: theoretical (to set up an abstract model or a concept) and pragmatical (linked with experience and practices) or both, considering one or more scales of analysis. Moreover, definitions of the same phenomenon vary in relation to scientific

disciplines (economics, sociology, political sciences, etc.), approaches and paradigms (functionalist, structuralist, phenomenology, hermeneutic), ontology (visions about reality), epistemology (realist, constructivist, pragmatist etc.) and methodology (quantitative, qualitative). They vary also depending on the social practices and the contexts where they emerge. So, it is important to take in account -issues of power, inequalities and epistemic justice in knowledge co-production, considering questions like: who defines? How? For What? What definition counts? Why?

This Section will treat some of these questions, discussing perspectives and challenges of Third Sector definitions worldwide, in order to take into consideration the historical trajectory and territorial inscription of civil society in different regions of the globe and, at the same time, to allow aggregation and collective learnings through compared and contrastive analysis. It means to consider that definitions are plural and have the function to promote reflection and critical capacity in the field, providing new questions and putting forward the research agenda. Finally, definitions must be open to the future, in order to consider the co-evolution of experiences and institutions and the appearance of new forms and ecologies of civil society worldwide.

Chapter 4
Third Sector: The Building of a Research Field

Andrea Bassi

Introduction

Definitions are key elements of the scientific undertaking (journey) (Swedberg, 2016). Tracing a boundary of meaning in order to distinguish what is inside and what is outside a specific research field, definitions change along space and time.

In the field of *civil society organizations* many definitions have been developed around the world, such as: (a) Independent Sector, Voluntary Sector, Nonprofit Sector (in USA); (b) Charitable Sector, Voluntary Sector (in UK); (c) Intermediary Sector (in Netherland and Germany); (d) Social Economy (in France, Belgium, Canada-Quebec). The recent tendency to gather the studies and research concerning the organized part of Civil Society under the label *Third Sector* seems to be more neutral and more easily recognizable worldwide.

The present chapter is organized as follows. The next section deals with epistemological issues arising when dealing with the tough question of definitions in social sciences. The third section analyses the terminologies used worldwide to indicate the sub-sector of the society encompassing what we can broadly refer to as civil society organizations. In the fourth section we illustrate and comment on four main approaches to definition in our research field. Finally, in the fifth and last section we present some concluding remarks.

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Epistemological Issues

When dealing with definitional or classificatory questions in the social science field once the examination of the literature on the subject has been completed, we may find ourselves faced with the dissolution or disappearance of the object of study. This *effect* should not be surprising, as when investigating phenomena of a "social nature", we become aware that society is comprised of a fabric, a web of social relations incessantly self-substituting (Luhmann, 1990), which are temporarily consolidated around *nodes*, which are also endowed with limited stability. Thus, the more deeply one cuts with the "scalpel" of scientific investigation, the more one contributes to decomposing and fragmenting the "matter" that is being studied. Hence, the conviction of the necessity-usefulness of the task undertaken also matures and is strengthened because, if it is true that something is lost from the point of view of the overall (macro) framework, much is obtained in terms of increasing knowledge on partial aspects and in terms of opening up new viewpoints and conceptual angles from which, and through which, we observe the object examined.

This is the approach advocated by the North American sociologist R. Merton[1] on the different levels of knowledge and "ignorance" of human thought. In particular, the concept of *tractable ignorance* sustains us in the face of the ever-present temptation to abandon the path we have begun. According to Merton, in fact, scientific knowledge operates through a process of sedimentation and accumulation of information endowed with meaning, albeit with numerous discontinuities and setbacks, which leads to approaching from time to time ever wider aspects of reality with increasingly refined tools. The level of "tractable" ignorance is the one in which one "knows" what one does not know, that is, one "knows" what one must ask, to whom, and in what directions, in order to continue the investigation (what questions to ask, how to formulate them, etc.). It is the stage of advancement of human knowledge, with respect to a given field of reference, in which one becomes aware of the things that are not known, in which there is an awareness (re-recognition) of what one wants to know and study further (Morin, 1988).

A second set of reflections concerns the always *spurious* character of social phenomena, which is why every definition in the field of social sciences is always based on a process of *abstraction*, *differentiation* and *generalization* with regard to its object of study. The greater or lesser visibility and social perception of a *field of action* therefore rests more on the relations of force and influence of the actors and social subjects acting in it, than on intrinsic characteristics of the object of study or on the degree of development of the scientific discipline (Crozier & Friedberg, 1978).

In summary, it is argued here that the greater or lesser sophistication of the definition of a social phenomenon depends on the degree of institutiona-lization at the

[1] R. Merton develops his gnoseological and epistemological approach throughout his scientific career. These reflections and insights have been published in a series of essays in numerous North American journals of sociology and social sciences. For a systematic compendium see Merton (1977, 1991, 1992).

societal level (of general society) of the relations and institutions that constitute it, and on the relative power of the social actors and forces that compose it.

Therefore, to move on to the theme of this chapter, it should not be surprising that the first two sectors, *the state* and *the market*, enjoy "clearer" and "distinguishable" definitions than in the case of the Third Sector whose boundaries, characteristics and peculiarities appear more "blurred" and "opaque". As evidenced by the terminological aspect, that is, the fact that it has not yet been socially possible to find a single, distinctive term for the *Third Sector* that connotes it positively, as has happened instead for the other two.

Obviously, it is not a question of a state of affairs that can be traced back to constitutive traits of the three sectors, nor inherent in their peculiar nature, but rather the result of the balance of power between the social actors operating in them and of the way in which these relationships have come to be configured in a given social order in the social formations at an advanced stage of development.

That the analyses advanced above have a high degree of plausibility is evidenced by the evident gap between the "purity" of the definition of what has *been* and what is the *market* and the multitude of mixed forms, improper relations, spurious exchanges, which characterize the phenomenology of the actions and practices that take place daily within it. If, for example, we use some conceptual dichotomies that are widespread both in the scientific literature and in the political-institutional debate, and finally in public opinion, such as: public/private, formal/informal, as keys to reading-interpreting the dynamics that act within the three sectors, we immediately realize the distance between the definitions and their empirical referents.

In the various branches of the Public Administration, for example, which should be characterized by the public/formal pair, how many practices and institutional subjects are there whose action can be explained more in terms of the private/informal couple. And this is not because of exceptional or marginal or peripheral aspects and dimensions with respect to the system, which is supposed to maintain its own homogeneity and internal coherence of action, but for central and ordinary issues. There is as much "private and informal" in the public sector as there is "public and formal" in the market and in the Third Sector.

Therefore, all the observations that criticize, denying it, the possibility of recognizing the existence of a unitary sphere of action, in advanced societies, which can be called the Third Sector, as well as the possibility of arriving at an unequivocal definition, on the basis of the argument that the subjects operating in this supposed "third" are so different from each other as to hardly allow a common denominator to be glimpsed, they come up against the evidence that although the same is true in the case of the state and the market, they nevertheless have stable definitions with a certain degree of agreement.

To what extent, in fact, are a state-owned enterprise or a municipal company attributable tout court to the market or to the state, on the basis of its legal status or institutional form alone? Or, again, where does the boundary between the state and the Third Sector run in the case of voluntary associations with a high degree of

formalization and institutionalization? Or how can we break down or recompose the concrete work of cooperative enterprises in general and social cooperatives, in particular, on the basis of the market/Third Sector distinction? To which of the three sectors can a consortium be attributed whose membership is made up of public bodies, market companies and non-profit organizations?

These questions lead us to the heart of the issue that we want to address in this chapter, concerning the definition and structural characteristics of the organized subjects operating in the Third Sector.

The research and reflection that we intend to carry out below is based on the critical reading of specialized scientific production, with particular attention to the Anglo-Saxon context.

The intent is to propose a conceptual framework to support the hypothesis of the *social foundations* of any *definition* and *classification*. The basic idea is that every social formation elaborates and institutionalizes a description of itself, a particular way of reading and representing itself, which emerges from the play of actors and social forces that, at different levels of intentionality, guide its evolution and development. In the advanced West, it is only in recent times that it has been possible to differentiate a "discourse on modernity" that describes the internal dynamics of society in terms of the action of three autonomous and interdependent spheres of social relations: the state, the market and the Third Sector.

The first impact and the first sensation that arise in those who take on the burden of dealing with the growing national and international specialized literature on what, for the moment, we will label the Third Sector, is to be faced with a great variety of terminological meanings and definitions, which induce a sense of confusion and bewilderment.

But the attentive researcher who intends to carry out a detailed analysis and an in-depth examination of the various "meanings", soon realizes how much there is in common, underlying, to the terminological diversities and how these are nothing more than the signal of historical and cultural peculiarities of the social formations in which they emerged and developed, rather than an indicator of original differences.

Another aspect that clearly emerges, after a detailed excavation and in-depth analysis, is that the various wordings, in reality, focus attention on one of the many facets and characteristics (properties) of organized subjects operating in the Third Sector. They are partial points of view on a complex social phenomenon and by their very nature they can only highlight some salient features, leaving them in the shadows or even ignoring (hiding) others (Morgan, 1989).

A definition appropriate to the object of investigation in highly contingency and complex societal contexts, at an advanced stage of development, can only derive, then, from the comparison and integration of the different perspectives assuming a sociological point of view. And this is what we propose to do in the following pages.

Third Sector Definitions' Approaches

In this section I will illustrate and critically analyze four main approaches aimed at elaborating a clear definition of the sector scientifically grounded.

Victor Pestoff: The Triangle of Welfare

The first theoretical framework I would like to comment on is the one elaborated by the US-Scandinavian scholar Victor Pestoff in the early nineties of the last century (1992). The framework went through several modifications and adjustments, until the final version published in a book of 1998, and it is to this version that I will refer in the proceeding of the section.

Pestoff adopt three main "guiding distinctions"[2] in order to illustrate the "space" of Third Sector organizations and activities in contemporary societies. Namely: (a) public/private; (b) nonprofit/for profit; (c) formal/informal.

The author utilizes the figure of a triangle to represent the configuration of a society in a specific time and space. The triangle is cut horizontally by the line "public/private" and diagonally from right to left by the line right "nonprofit/for profit", and from left to right by the line "formal/informal". In so doing the triangle is divided into three main areas: on the upper side there is the "public sphere", meaning the sector of the public agencies (government, regions, municipalities, health authorities, etc.). On bottom the right side is the "market sphere", that includes the entities that are private/for profit/formal: firms, corporations, enterprises, businesses, etc. On bottom the left side is the "community sphere", that includes the relationships that are private/nonprofit/informal: what the German scholar Jurgen Habermas called "life world" (1984, 1987). In the center of the triangle there is a circle that crosses the three above mentioned areas that encompass the entities belonging to the Third Sector. Some of them are hybrid forms that share some characteristics with the public sphere or with the market or with the community. At the center of the circle there is a small upside-down triangle that represents the core elements of the Third Sector, meaning: associations (voluntary nonprofit organizations).

The framework (and the figure) is structured in a way that can be used in both a static (synchronic) and a dynamic way (diachronic). For instance, we can adopt it in order to describe the dimensions of the Third Sector and its relationships with the State, the market and the community in a given society at a given time (such as UK in the eighties, or France in the nineties, etc.). But we can also utilize the framework in order to analyze the modification of the sectors' societal configurations for a

[2] The concept of "guiding distinctions" (Luhmann, 1995, 1998, 2002) pertains to distinctions that drive public discourses in general and shape theory-building and empirical research in particular.

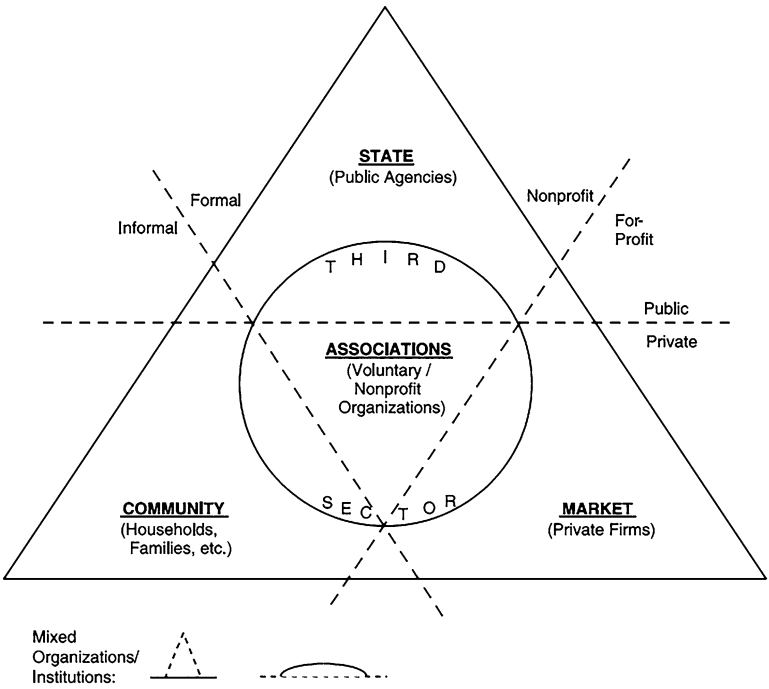

Fig. 4.1 The Third Sector in the welfare triangle (Source: Pestoff, 1998, 2005)

specific society in time (such as the situation of Italy in the nineties compared to the situation in the eighties, etc.).

In my personal opinion the theoretical framework elaborated by Pestoff is a very powerful tool both for a theoretical reflection and for the empirical research, even if it cannot be translated automatically in an operational definition able to guide the collection of data (Fig. 4.1).

It is in order to overcome this limitation that we will move on to analyze and comment the "structural/operational definition" elaborated by Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier, more or less in the same period.

Lester Salamon: Comparative International Definition

In the beginning of the nineties, Salamon and Anheier lunched the *Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project* (CNP) with the aim "to understand the scope, structure, and role of the nonprofit sector using a common framework and a

coherent, comparative approach" (1992a). The first phase involved 13 countries[3] (Salamon & Anheier, 1994, 1997), the second phase of project work, cover 22 countries (Salamon et al., 1999) and 35 countries the third phase (Salamon et al., 2003).

The authors highlight the overall fame of the project in Working Paper n. 1 (1992a), the definition issues in Working Paper n. 2 (1992b) and the classification issues in Working Paper n. 3 (1992c).

Concerning the definition topic moving forward from the "fist principles definition" elaborated by Knapp and Kendall (1990),[4] introduced the "structural/operational definition" of the Nonprofit Sector (1992b).

This definition is based on five key features: (a) *Formal/Organized*, institutionalized to some extent; (b) *Private*, institutionally separate from government; (c) *Nonprofit*-distributing, not returning any profits generated to their owners or directors; (d) *Self-governing*, equipped to control their own activities; (e) *Voluntary*, involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation.

The definition was very useful in order to establish a common framework in a comparative study at international level and it allowed the collection of a significant amount of data concerning the Nonprofit Sector around the world. But it showed also some limitations the most important being its "western cultural bias" based on the concept of nonprofit distribution that is typical of the Anglo-Saxon societal configuration.

Indeed, Salamon in the last part of his scientific career moved his interest to Europe and had to confront his framework with a cultural context that was quite different from the North American one.

That's why in 2016 he elaborated an updated version of the "structural/operational" definition in order to include a set of Third Sector organizations typical of the European context, namely "social cooperatives" and "social enterprises", that allowed a partial distribution of profit to their stakeholders (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016) (Fig. 4.2).

The new updated definition that has been published also in an edited book by Enjolras et al. (2018) in my opinion does not modify the core rational of the original framework and it restricts itself to integrating a set of organizations that adopt a soft

[3] These include seven developed countries (U.S., U.K. Japan, Germany, France, Sweden and Italy); five less developed countries (Brazil, Ghana, Egypt, India, and Thailand), and one Central or Eastern European country (Hungary).

[4] The principles are the following:

(a) it must be a formally constituted organization;
(b) it must be an organization capable of self-governance;
(c) must be independent from the State (public sector, government);
(d) must be subject to the prohibition on the redistribution of any operating profits;
(e) must benefit to some extent from volunteering and philanthropy;
(f) must produce external benefits.
(g) To these "first principles" usually in the international literature the following ones are added:
(h) it must be a non-sacramental (religious) organization;
(i) it must be a non-political organization (political party or trade union);
(j) it must be a non-discriminatory organization.

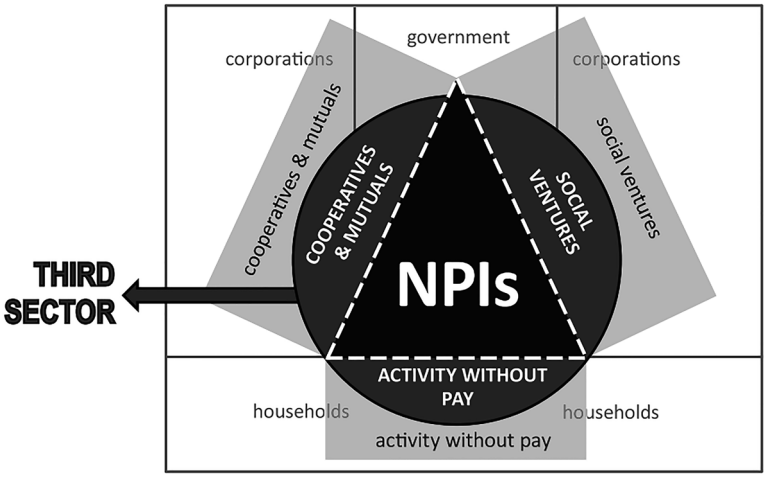

Fig. 4.2 Conceptualizing the Third Sector: a first cut. (Source: Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016, p. 1531)

version of the "non distributional constraint" in the previous frame. As we can see from the figure above the heart of the sector consists of nonprofit institutions (black triangle) at the periphery we can find cooperatives and mutuals (half circle on the left), based on the democratic participation of their members, and social enterprises (half circle on the right) meaning corporate entities with a social purpose with a partial (limited) distribution of profit.

Naoto Yamauchi: Multi Layers Definition

In a very interesting presentation *Challenges & Suggestions for Comparative Studies* Naoto Yamauchi[5] suggests the hypothesis that a single encompassing definition of the Third Sector is impossible and eventually not very useful (Yamauchi, 2022). He sustains the idea to adopt a "multiple definitions" approach, meaning to have different definitions in relation to different research purposes.

He proposes to utilize at least four main definitions:

TS0 = *Non-profit institutions serving households* (NPISH) as defined in the Systems of National Account (SNA);
TS1 = Nonprofit institutions (NPI) as defined by Johns Hopkins *Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project* CNP (including NPISH);
TS2 = TS1 + Economic value of volunteering;
TS3 = TS2 + a part of cooperatives & mutuals, Social Enterprises (Fig. 4.3).

[5] Given at the Plenary Session "Mapping the Nonprofit World. The Global Comparative Project" of the 15th ISTR International Conference in Montreal.

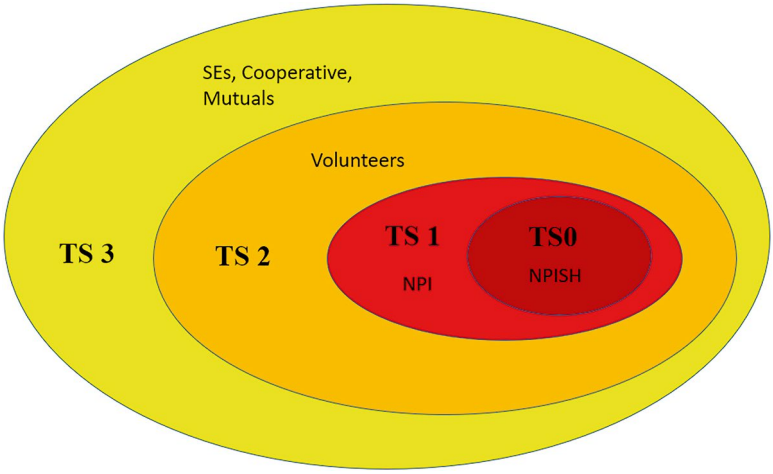

Fig. 4.3 Image of concentric circles for multiple definitions of the Third Sector (Yamauchi, 2022)

The basic idea is that at each definition the empirical reference is widening. For instance, the Third Sector definition n. 1 comprises the entities included in the Third Sector definition n. 0 plus other types of organizations. The TS2 definition encompasses the TS1 plus something else, and so forth.

I think that this proposal consists of a very flexible approach that can be adapted to different research purposes and institutional context around the world, given the different availability of data. Moreover, it is able to overcome several drawbacks of the previous definitions.

Helmut Anheier: In Search of a Synthesis

Recently Helmut Anheier in several writings reflects on comparative, cross-national research on the nonprofit sector (Anheier et al., 2020; Anheier, 2023). Based on the recognition of the institutional embeddedness of nonprofit organizations and their compelling relationship with the three institutional complexes of market, state, and civil society, Anheier suggest a reexamination of the definition and classification of nonprofit organizations.

The main aim of the effort is to elaborate "a comparative-historical research agenda informed by political science and sociology to complement the macroeconomic approach, largely based on national income accounting, that has characterized the field for nearly three decades" (Anheier et al., 2020, p. 648).

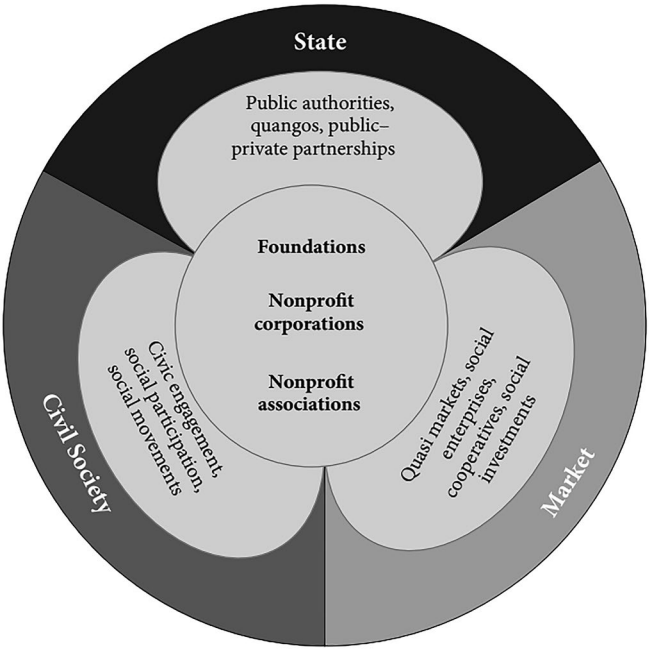

Fig. 4.4 Mapping nonprofit organizations and institutional proximities (Source: Anheier et al., 2020, p. 656)

Concerning the definitional issues Anheier recognizes the limits of the "structural/operational definitions", he underlines that "The advantage of that definition is that it allows for aggregation and makes comparisons possible. The disadvantage is that it takes nonprofit organizations and sectors out of their institutional context. It is ultimately an artificial statistical unit of analysis good for economic mapping but deficient for other concerns" (Anheier, 2023, p.1116).

In order to overcome the drawbacks of this definition, he admits, it is necessary to elaborate a broader institutional mapping of the embeddedness of the various nonprofit entities, since they do not exist in isolation from the three institutional spheres operating in the society: the state, the market, and the civil society (See the Fig. 4.4 above).

His approach is quite similar to the one of Pestoff and moves the focus of analysis from a static description of the sector to a more dynamic picture of an ever-changing complex of social institutions (meso and macro) emerging from the overwhelming generative process, created by the networks of social relationships (sociability) operating at the micro level of society (informal sphere).

Final Remarks: Open Questions and the Future of Third Sector Research

There is no doubt that the set of definitions and terminologies trying to understand the complex organizations and activities that could broadly be indicated as *civil society,* comprise part of a family of "highly contested concepts" (Gallie, 1956), since often they involve a "normative dimension".

This situation is not unusual in social sciences, given that the researcher (observer) and the object/subject of research (observed) share the same kind of knowledge, based on language. Human beings are sense-making and meaning-making subjects who try to interpret the world around them, to "explain" what they do not understand.

A scientific community's level of agreement around its basic concepts and definitions is a clear indicator of the level of its development/maturity, its degree of internal cohesion and external recognition (societal legitimacy).

When building a new research field it is necessary to start with a broad and often ill stated/specified definition, to allow for a study incorporating a high variety of unit of analysis of the phenomenon. Progression/advancement of the research/study make it possible to refine and clarify more precisely the definition we were starting with.

The reflections advanced in this chapter, in my opinion, show that the Third Sector research field has gained a satisfying level of institutionalization, establishing a scientific community worldwide characterized by a core set of shared meanings (internal identity).

There remains much to do with the work of establishing definitions being a never-ending endeavor since society changes over time and space, creating new institutional configurations.

The concept of "Third Sector", is neutral enough to allow a debate and a confrontation among different disciplines (differently from *civil society* that is a typical political science concept, or *social economy* that is clearly an economics concept) and different social, cultural and historical contests.

Its main limit is in being a "negative" definition, in the sense that is states what the sector is not (neither state/government not business/market entities) instead of affirming what the sector purposively is.

Nevertheless, its main strength is located in its mid-range position in the "abstraction ladder" neither at the very top (too theoretical to guide empirical research) nor at the very bottom (too empirical to allow generalizations and comparison).

I challenge the new generation of scholars and researchers to "take the baton" and continue the endless undertaking of refining and specifying terms, concepts and definitions related to Third Sector organizations around the world.

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Chapter 5
The Terminological Debate

Andrea Bassi

Introduction

From the analysis of the international literature, there is a significant variety of terminological statements, among which we have selected ten that, in our opinion, represent paradigmatic examples of the bi-directional link between the conceptual definition of a phenomenon and the socio-cultural context of reference.

These are: (1) nonprofit sector; (2) charitable sector; (3) philanthropic sector; (4) informal sector; (5) Third Sector; (6) independent sector; (7) voluntary sector; (8) private nongovernmental sector; (9) social economics; (10) intermediary system and private initiative.

Nonprofit Sector

It is a term used purely in the North American context. Recently formulated (it began to be used and found a certain degree of agreement by scholars and operators in the field around the mid-80s), it testifies to the coordinated effort, both at the academic and operational level, to institutionalize in North American society (concerning the political system and the economic system) a very vast and articulated set of organizations under a single common "label".

The term, clearly of economic origin, emphasizes the fact that the organizations that constitute it have not arisen and do not carry out their activity "primarily to generate profits for the benefit of their owners" (Salamon, 1993), specifically for the fact that such organizations do not have "owners" in the strict sense. The concept of *nonprofit*, which has also found numerous theoretical interpretations (Hansmann,

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1987), does not in itself imply that the above-mentioned organizational subjects do not have to obtain a "profit" or "operating profit", but more simply that any surplus that may result from the performance of their activity cannot be distributed to the members of the organization. (In some countries the term not-for-profit (NFP) may be used instead of nonprofit.)

Starting from the second half of the '80s and throughout the early '90s, the term, based on the predominance of North American studies and research in the field (Salamon & Anheier, 1996; Salamon et al., 1999), has progressively expanded into the scientific community of advanced countries (Europe and Japan), not without encountering numerous perplexities and some qualified criticisms.

Like all the terminologies we will analyze, it has strengths and weaknesses. Among the former, the high capacity for synthesis is worth mentioning, which makes it possible to group subjects and activities that present strong differences and specificities under a unifying "umbrella". Secondly, it provides a clear line of demarcation with respect to companies operating in the market, in the *business sector* emphasizing that the aim and ultimate purpose of these organizations must be identified in factors that go beyond achieving an economic profit (social, political, humanitarian objectives, etc.). On the other hand, the main negative element can be found in the attempt to account for the plurality of actors operating in this sector by resorting to a single factor or interpretative element. This results in a loss, not negligible, in terms of the richness and multidimensionality of the explanation.

A second problematic aspect concerns the strong territorial, not to say "national", connotation of the term (even if this is a remark that concerns almost all the terms examined here) which, if well suited to the Anglo-Saxon (and North American in particular) political-institutional context, has numerous gaps if applied tout court to countries of the European continent and East Asia.

From the point of view of political recognition, the degree of economic visibility, and social legitimacy, the term *nonprofit* makes a fundamental contribution. Drawing attention to the economic weight (in terms of share of GDP and employment levels) of the organizations that make up this sector, it highlights the centrality of the tasks and functions that this sphere performs in advanced Western democracies (Barbetta, 1996).

From an operational point of view, it also provides public institutions with an effective tool for defining the legal and fiscal status of *non-profit* organizations and putting measures in place to support and promote them. In particular, again in the North American context, the term *nonprofit* is often used as a synonym for *tax-exempt organizations*, to indicate that type of organization that, thanks to the activities they carry out, enjoy an exemption (partial or total) from taxes (property, income, stamp duty, VAT, etc.) and give the possibility of deducting (in part or in full) the amount donated to them, donors/taxpayers (individuals or businesses).

This has led some scholars to adopt the term *tax-exempt* even in scientific research and analysis. In our opinion, this attempt appears very problematic and in a nutshell misleading, as it uses an effect (the recognition of a special tax status) as a cause (the explanation of what this type of organization *is* and *what it does*). In fact, in the final analysis, it is not reflective, that is, it is not able to account for its

premises, and it is forced to postpone to another instance (the type of activity in which the organizations are engaged) the explanation of what it should have explained.

Charitable Sector

The term was born and developed in England (and is widespread, albeit with some differences in Wales and Scotland) and enjoys a strong historical tradition, cultural-symbolic roots and a high degree of institutionalization.[1] It designates a group of organizations (non-profit companies and foundations) established for the pursuit of certain specific purposes defined precisely as *charitable,* i.e. charitable,[2] which enjoy favorable tax treatment and must be subject to particular restrictions in terms of the activities they can undertake.

In this case, the distinctive features of the sector lie not so much in the characteristics of the organizations that are part of it, but, rather, in the "properties" of the activities (*purposes*, *mission*) they carry out. From this point of view (i.e., the distinctive-fundamental criterion), the term has strong similarities with the French term économie sociale, as we will see better later.

The focus here is on the recognition of the fact that in society, at a given stage of development, there are groups of people who find themselves in particularly disadvantaged conditions from a physical and economic point of view or in a situation of strong marginalization and/or social marginalization; as well as activities and services of public benefit that are left unfulfilled by the forces driving development. These types of activities, judged worthy of the collective conscience (civic, common) and now also recognized by law, can be carried out by organizations that position themselves alongside the public agencies of the welfare state and economic enterprises. These organizational entities are, therefore, recognized as having made a qualified contribution to the collective well-being of a local or national community.

Charity, charitable, therefore, indicates the orientation towards those in a state of need, the turning to the least; they emphasize the character of service (of putting oneself at the service of someone) of the intervention carried out.

[1] The Charity Commission of England and Wales was established in 1860 and, as a charity regulator, is governed by a Charities Act. Charity regulators are becoming more common, especially in ex-British colonies.

[2] In this regard, the English economist Martin Knapp (Knapp & Kendall, 1991) points out that to date there are no clear indications on what the activities with charitable purposes are. Cordery & Deguchi (2018, p.1339) note: "While the definition of a 'charitable organization' differs [by regulator] …in broad terms such organizations must be formed for public (not private) benefit, with their activities having to meet specifically defined (charitable) purposes. In addition, they must not be involved in substantive lobbying/political activity or exist for the pecuniary gain of their members."

Due to the entirely different moral and ethical connotations that the term assumes in national contexts with Catholic religious pre-eminence and Roman[3] law, it has not encountered a process of diffusion even remotely comparable to that from which the term nonprofit has benefited, remaining confined almost exclusively to *common law countries*.

Philanthropic Sector

This term is also used mainly in Anglo-Saxon linguistic-cultural contexts (particularly in the United States) and enjoys a strong tradition. Recently, it has taken on a well-defined ideological connotation.

Some scholars (Salamon, 1992; Wolch, 1990) have clarified that technically, the noun philanthropy designates that set of activities consisting in a voluntary transfer (donation) of money or real estate or valuables by individuals, families, and companies for purposes (objectives) of public utility. Historically, the recipients of these donations have been, first and foremost, organizations, entities, and congregations, which today we would call nonprofit or Third Sector. Therefore, in a strict sense, the term could not be used to refer to the entire sector, as it designates only a part, albeit an important one: the economic flows that are voluntarily directed from the outside to the sector.

The term *philanthropic sector* has been the subject of renewed interest and has experienced a season of notoriety during the Reagan administration and Mrs. Thatcher. In particular, the principles of liberal economics applied to the welfare state and social policies have led the two governments mentioned above to adopt and advocate a rhetoric of self-reliance towards local communities. Behind this ideology of responsibility and self-reliance, substantial cuts in public welfare and social security programs were perpetrated, with the justification that nonprofit, voluntary, charitable organizations, especially those linked to Churches, would be able to support the surplus of work resulting from such downsizing. Along these lines, measures were introduced to reduce the tax burden in favor of wealthier taxpayers and various deductions and exemptions for those who wanted to support nonprofits.

As is well known, these strategies were not only unsuccessful but, in many cases, contributed to a generalized worsening of the situation, as they were based on a grand illusion. The fact is, donations and legacies constituted the main item of income of organizations operating in the Third Sector. On the other hand, numerous studies (Abrahmson & Salamon, 1986) have shown that the North American nonprofit sector gets about 50% of its revenue from direct sales of services to users, for a third from public contributions, and finally for less than a quarter from contributions of private individuals (it should be noted, of course, even substantial variations

[3] For an in-depth discussion of the concept of charity and the different attitudes of religious faiths towards philanthropic behavior, see the essays collected in the volume *Faith and Philanthropy in America*, edited by Wuthnow and Hodgkinson (1990).

between sub-sectors: health, education, social assistance, art, culture, etc.). Moreover, within the share of private contributions, almost all (83%) is made up of small donations from millions of individual citizens belonging mainly to the middle and lower-middle strata of the population, and only 4/5% derives from companies' donations, while 7% from foundations' funding (Salamon, 1992). The term philanthropic sector may sometimes be applied to philanthropic foundations whose larger donations/grants are directed towards Third Sector activities.

In conclusion, the maneuvers of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations did nothing but restrict the total amount of funds available to nonprofit organizations for two reasons. On the one hand, cuts in public spending have further reduced the share of money deriving from these organizations' contracts with local authorities or direct support from public administrations. On the other hand, the tax concessions did not have a substantial impact on the total share of private contributions since the latter, as we have seen, is made up of donations from small taxpayers, who have been able to benefit only minimally from the tax reductions, which have been directed towards the highest incomes.

Returning to the strictly terminological issues, we can recall the observations made about the term illustrated above (*charity*), where it was pointed out that, due to certain conceptual connotations, the term had not had a significant diffusion in the countries of Roman law. Even in the case of "philanthropy," it can be noted that in the countries of Western Europe, starting from the French Revolution, and after the emergence of organized workers' movements and socialist ideology at the end of the last century, the term was definitively abandoned to describe collective behavior of an altruistic nature, in favor of the term "solidarity". The terms philanthropy, philanthropic, and philanthropist have not disappeared from the lexicon of the countries mentioned above but have been relegated to indicate the behavior and attitudes of individuals for the benefit of third parties in need. In other words, they have lost their collective or, better said, social dimension.

Informal Sector

The term "informal sector" is perhaps the most complex and rich in dimensions and conceptual references.

In the field of social sciences, the awareness of the informal dimension of relational life, even in contexts with a high degree of formalization, was born and developed starting from the analyses and reflections (which have now become canonical in the field of organization theory) that E. Mayo and the research team he directed carried out on the basis of the results of empirical investigations previously carried out at the Hawthorne[4] plant. Subsequently, the studies of the neo-functionalists (in

[4] Experimentation is widely illustrated in all textbooks on sociology of organizations, see for example Morgan (1989).

particular of Merton (1992) in the United States and Crozier (1978) in Europe) have strengthened this knowledge and have allowed a systematic treatment and theoretical consolidation. Starting from the considerations obtained thanks to the application *of M. Crozier's* strategic analysis and from the concepts he elaborated of *vicious circle of bureaucracy,* actor in relationship*,* power *(understood as the management of sources of uncertainty), as well as from the revisiting* of the concept of *role* and the recognition of its *ambivalent* dimension On the part of R. Merton, it is no longer possible today not to recognize the pervasive and inescapable presence *of informal aspects* in any context of social action.

All terms used in the social sciences refer to concepts whose nature is relational. That is, they need a reference to something *other than themselves* in order to be fully understood and operationalized. Specifically, the full definition-understanding of what is informal can only be obtained by comparison with what is not, that is, with reference to the formal dimension.

The semantic extension of the formal/informal pair has social bases and determinants. It varies historically (in time, concerning the same social formation in different eras) and culturally (in space, at a given historical moment in various social contexts). In the democracies of the advanced West, the distinction is currently used to denote a multiplicity of aspects and can assume, from time to time, a plurality of meanings.

As far as the specifics of this book are concerned, only a few of them seem relevant. In the first place, in the specialist literature and in the daily press, the distinction mentioned above equates the formal sector with the state/bureaucratic sector and makes everything outside it fall within the informal sector. This is especially true in the area of social and health policies. In this sense, the distinction is not very useful because it brings together very different typologies, from very structured organizations and entities (retirement homes, or hospitals managed by religious institutes, social cooperatives, etc.) to small groups with a low degree of stabilization (such as mutual and self-help groups, temporary associations of parents, family members, relatives, victims of the same mourning event, citizens' committees, religious, pacifist or ecological groups, etc.). If understood in a broad sense, it ends up no longer distinguishing anything. In reality, there is a lot that is "formal" in various *Third Sector organizations* and a lot that is "informal" in the practices of the operators of public bodies.

This specific use of the formal/informal pair also indicates the presence of a Manichean vision of the two terms in question, of an ideological reading that attributes a negative value to one pole (formal) and a purely positive value to the other (informal). The first type of organization would be characterized by a set of inadequacies: poor responsiveness to the environment, a tendency to indiscriminate expansion (growth), depersonalization of interventions, slowness in carrying out functions, low commitment and involvement of operators, etc. While the second would collect the set of characteristics opposite to the previous ones. This representation does not account for the state of affairs but is there for all to see.

Secondly, the two terms are used to indicate two *modes of action*. Rather than describing the organizational conditions under which interventions and services are

produced, they denote the *process* through which the latter are delivered. Also, in this case, it has a predominantly negative connotation of one term (formal) compared to the other (informal).

According to this perspective, Third Sector organizations would be qualified because they favor the second mode of providing services, mainly thanks to the fact that it allows for a higher involvement and participation of the recipients of the interventions. There is no need to mention (cite) the presence of striking cases moving in the opposite direction.

From the reflections carried out so far, the term "informal" is therefore insufficient to provide an adequate and comprehensive description of the Third Sector and, in the final analysis, proves to be misleading. In complex societies with a high degree of functional differentiation and systemic specialization, it is no longer possible to describe any sphere of social relations through the use of a single element or determining factor.

To conclude on this point, it should be mentioned that the term *informal sector* has been used mainly in the Anglo-Saxon context to indicate, at times, the entire set of nonprofit organizations, but more often a sub-system of them: the one that brings together the most unstructured and least "organized" forms of association (usually these are small grassroots groups operating at the local level).

Furthermore, it is necessary to remember that in the social sciences, a current of thought has developed (which brings together a group of authoritative scholars representing different disciplines[5]) that unites the three sectors mentioned so far: the state, the market, and the Third Sector, in a single sphere of social action, which it calls the "formal sector". Meanwhile, by "informal sector," we mean a fourth sphere that includes the relationships between primary groups: couples, family, friends, relatives, neighborhoods, etc.

Third Sector

It is the term we have used so far to indicate the sector without other attributes. The fact of emphasizing the "third" character of the phenomenon denoted, on the one hand, configures its empirical referent by negation, but, on the other, places it in a direct and inescapable relationship with the other two sectors of society: the State and the market. The loss of identity resulting from being connoted by what it is not, rather than by reference to positive characteristics, is offset by the advantages the term offers. First of all, it promotes the initiation of a process of social awareness and information that could lead, within a reasonable period of time, to the equalization of the three sectors at the level of society as a whole (in terms of visibility,

[5] See, for example, the classic works of Ivan Illich on the *sphere of conviviality*, but also Bauer (1993).

recognition of one's contribution to the well-being of the population, resources deployed/activated, responses provided to pressing social needs, etc.).

The term, therefore, expresses more of a "must be" rather than referring to a current state of affairs, and this propositional value has meant that it has been used above all by those (in the scientific, operational, and political fields) who are working for the recognition of the non-residual contribution that organizations and entities operating in the Third Sector provide to the whole of society. In their opinion, this contribution is in no way inferior to that of the State and the market, even if it is profoundly different.

The description of the set of activities and subjects that are situated in the social space between the state and the market as a "sector" with different levels of homogeneity and internal coherence has developed mainly in Europe since the mid-1970s. The attribution of its "third" character and the effort to positively define this attribute has led to a series of studies and research of both a theoretical and empirical nature towards this theme. In the developed West, this line of research has undergone considerable development since the spread of what has been called "the crisis of the *welfare state*".[6] By studying in depth the contribution made by the State and the market in terms of the well-being of society to reorganize them, it was realized that a substantial part of goods and services of public utility was produced and distributed outside them.

The use of the term in the Anglo-Saxon context, and North America in particular, took place sometime later (at the end of the 80s) and was always under the pressure of international conferences and debates (but predominantly European).[7]

There is no one who does not see the numerous limits and problematic aspects that this "meaning" brings with it (Bauer, 1993). First of all, there are ambiguities from the terminological point of view; in fact, beyond the narrow circle of specialists who deal with it, it can be identified (and therefore confused) with the third economic sector of production: that of services (in the terminology in use in our country: the *tertiary sector*). Secondly, from a conceptual point of view, it tends to "hide" the existence of the *informal sphere* of primary relations (of the "vital world"), which is subsumed "tout court" within it. Here, the problem arises of identifying another term to define this relational context. The language that uses the metaphor of sectors can only describe it as a "fourth sector". But then the suspicion arises that there may be a "fifth," and so on. The scholars of this critical strand towards the use of the term Third Sector prefer to speak of "system" and distinguish it based on the subjects that are part of it (organizations) and based on the functions it performs (intermediation between other relational spheres) therefore they use the wording: a system of intermediary organizations.

[6] In this regard, compare the seminal works of Rosanvallon (1979), who was the first to speak of a "*troisieme sector*", and Gorz (1980).

[7] In this regard, see the volume edited by Anheier and Seibel (1990) which collects the papers presented at a conference held in Europe but with the presence of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, which for the first time adopts the term *Third Sector* to indicate the sector of nonprofit organizations.

Independent Sector

The term, together with the two subsequent *voluntary* and *private nongovernmental*, connotes the subjects belonging to this field of action as opposed to (by difference towards) the state public sector.

It was born and spread mainly in the United States around the beginning of the 80s, in the period of maximum extension of the principles of *Reaganomics*. The term focuses on the independence and autonomy of Third Sector entities vis-à-vis state and local government agencies and bodies. It is the claim and affirmation: (a) of the right to democratically select one's own managerial class (directors, administrators, president, director, etc.), (b) of the ability to determine one's own *mission and one's own* target *population to* be served, (c) as well as the possibility of deciding how to use one's own resources. Independence, therefore, refers to all the central aspects of the life of the organization: political, social, and economic.

The fact that in the United States, the definition has played an important role in unifying the sector and that it has met with significant success is demonstrated by the fact that it has been used as a company name by a representative organization (*umbrella organization*) at the federal level: the Independent Sector. The institute, based in Washington D.C., is a second-level organization that brings together thousands of nonprofit organizations of different sizes and legal forms engaged in various fields and sectors of activity. The institute is divided into two main divisions: the research and development unit and the division of political pressure and social outreach. In just a few years, the former has become the point of reference for researchers and scholars in the field and has a leading role in the collection and systematization of statistical data on the many aspects of nonprofit organizations. The second plays a fundamental role in terms of political campaigns in order to bring issues that directly involve Third Sector organizations into the political debate and the agenda of Congress.[8]

In conclusion, it can be said that, even in the case of the concept of *independence* to which the term refers, we are faced with an analytical distinction since, in reality, the delimitation is ambiguous. For example, there is very often the presence of public officials on boards of directors, on management committees, of non-profit organizations, as well as the unusually high presence of wives of influential people in the community at the top positions of the organization (presidency, vice-presidency). Finally, the definition must be able to adequately represent the *trade-off* between economic-financial independence and managerial-decision-making independence. An issue that is becoming more and more topical as bargaining practices between public bodies and Third Sector organizations for the provision of services (*contracting out*) are spreading.

[8] It is a typically North American connotation that we have managed to organize *advocacy* and *lobbying* functions in a stable way also with respect to issues concerning the *Third Sector*.

Voluntary Sector

The term is systematically used in Anglo-Saxon countries and has obtained a certain degree of social legitimacy, especially in Great Britain, where it is regularly used in national and local legislative documents, by administrators and officials of the Public Administration, by public opinion (common sense) and also by scientific research. The level of institutionalization reached is evidenced by the presence of a second-level organization, semi-public (i.e., with both public and private funding) that has expressly adopted the term in its corporate name (it is the N.C.V.O.—National Council for Voluntary Organizations) and uses it to indicate the set of Third Sector organizations in its documents and publications.

From a conceptual point of view, the term emphasizes the voluntary and non-coercive (mandatory) character of the relationships that take place in this sphere. In particular, it implies at least three different meanings: (1) the organizations have been voluntarily established. They are the result and expression of the free choice of individuals or groups of people who "associate" with the pursuit of specific objectives. Voluntariness here refers to the bond that unites the members of the same organization. (2) Part of the work that takes place in the sector is free of charge. That is, it is provided voluntarily (without the request for any direct consideration) by people who have their primary source of employment (and income) in another activity (volunteers). (3) Finally, it highlights the fact that a proportion of the economic resources of these organizations are made up of *voluntary contributions* from private citizens and/or businesses. Voluntariness in these last two meanings refers to the act of giving: time in one case, money in the other.

The difference between the third and public sectors is emphasized in the first interpretation—the voluntariness of associating to constitute an organization. In this case, the guiding distinction operates in the sense of demarcating a sphere of social relations in which actions have the character of the expression of a choice, of "spontaneous" adherence,[9] with respect to another sphere in which the logic of action is that of obeying binding decisions. Where the State exercises its ownership (power), the courses of action of individuals or groups can only be expressed through the adoption of practices provided for by law and regulated by norms whose validity is universal.

At a macro level, this characteristic of Third Sector organizations highlights the contribution that these organizations provide to society in terms of guarantees of democracy, expression of participation, and vehicle for innovative ideas in areas of public utility. Numerous studies have shown that the degree of diffusion and differentiation of Third Sector organizations is one of the surest indicators for evaluating the openness or closure of the political system of that country. One of the first acts of a totalitarian regime is to prohibit free association among citizens, to declare existing associations illegal, and to create a parallel system of fictitious "private and

[9] On the different gradations that the concept of spontaneity (voluntariness) can assume, please refer to the following pages.

voluntary" organizations. The *Third Sector* is one of those institutions whose importance and centrality in the social life of Western democracies can never be emphasized enough. You realize its value when you can no longer use it.

On the other hand, at the micro level, this conception highlights the psychosocial aspects of individuals and groups who voluntarily decide to commit themselves to the achievement of an objective of general interest. To bind one another, to put oneself at the service *of a symbolic other*, which can be represented by the community in general or by individuals who express a concrete need and who are in a state of immediate need.

The *economic dimension* of voluntariness is revealed thanks to the other two meanings of the term: the one that understands it as work made available to the organization free of charge (by individuals) and the one that identifies it with the donation of sums of money to the organization (by individuals or other organizations).

It is a widespread and shared opinion that one of the qualifying characteristics of the Third Sector is that it provides a structured context in which the altruistic and solidarity impulses existing in a society at a given time can be fully expressed. If active volunteers are to be found in all the organizational and institutional forms that Western society has given itself to coordinate, it is, however, in Third Sector organizations that the highest concentration is found. It can, therefore, be said that this organizational subject constitutes the *supply* that allows demand to see a structured channel of expression. Paradoxically, it is the possibility of having "places" in which to "occupy" people for service actions, which "creates" the demand for such figures, which "produces" volunteers.

A mirror-image reasoning can be applied in the case of donations of goods or money. The Third Sector not only collects and capitalizes (uses in a fruitful way for society as a whole) the economic resources devolved for existing solidarity purposes but contributes decisively to creating them. It provides an institutionalized space for channeling economic and financial values that would otherwise remain untapped.

This apparently paradoxical or counterfactual observation is instead confirmed and reinforced by the results of many empirical investigations on the motivations, attitudes, and values of donors and volunteers at the international level. A substantial proportion of those who say they have not donated either time or money in the previous year, when asked why, respond by indicating the *item* "because I have never been asked" (or no one has asked me). And, at the same time, among those who answer in the affirmative to the question "if they intended to do so", the answers "yes, but I don't know where to go" prevail; "Yes, but I don't know how to do it"; "Yes, but I don't know who to send money to."

A further indirect confirmation of the validity of this interpretation is provided by reading the daily press and by the numerous news events that testify that it is enough to find the "right" communication methods to make known the existence of a problem (for example, a sick child who needs an expensive operation to live,

whose family is unable to support) and the ways to contribute to the resolution (paying a sum of money to a bank account) and massive amounts can be collected in a few weeks or even days.

That is, there is a potential demand in society to use sums of money or to donate real estate for solidarity purposes (charitable in the language illustrated above) that also reaches considerable dimensions but remains largely latent because there are no institutional contexts that allow it to express itself and realize itself. The Third Sector is one and perhaps the most qualified and efficient of these *settings*.

Nongovernmental Sector

The term emphasizes the legally private nature of Third Sector organizations and the fact that these subjects are beyond the plurality of agencies and entities that make up the apparatus of the Public Administration; they are not part of the public-state organizations. In the specialized literature and, for some years now, also in the common sense, the term has been used to indicate those international aid organizations operating in favor of the least developed countries (of the so-called third and fourth worlds), often financed to a large extent by the national governments to which they belong. The nomenclature was later extended to Third Sector organizations in the recipient countries. Therefore, it can be said that, outside the borders of Europe and North America, *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs) have become the most common term to indicate the set of subjects that lie beyond the state and the market. From a scientific point of view, of course, this solution is highly unsatisfactory as it is based on the use of a specific feature to identify the entire Third Sector. Moreover, it does not make it possible to distinguish between nonprofit organizations and market organizations, since they are both 'private' and 'non-state'. It must be said, however, that in developing countries it has played an important role, providing a "meaning" under which to collect, in a unitary way, the various forms of organized action, more or less formally constituted, operating on the territory.

In particular, a dialectic, sometimes even problematic, has opened up between international NGOs and local NGOs, about the way to understand the balance between aid, on the one hand, and autonomy/dependence, on the other. There are some fundamental differences between the two types of organizations in terms of size and structure of activities. Local NGOs are largely grassroots *organizations and are engaged in* community development programs, while international NGOs are generally large, with a *well-defined* organizational and administrative apparatus. In addition to distributing and managing funds, their main activity is carried out through providing support services, such as training local managers, educational and prevention programs, and coordination of activities and projects.

Social Economy

The term was born and developed in French-speaking countries (especially France and Belgium), where it has achieved high social recognition and institutionalization. Particularly in France, where there is a law determining the statute of the *Associations sans but lucratif* as well as a department at ministerial level dedicated to *social economics* (which supports a series of activities and initiatives in favour of the organizations belonging to this sub-universe of the economy: periodic conferences, seminars and moments of study, research and surveys, data collection and statistics).

The wording emphasizes the adjective "social" *rather than the noun* économie, to *emphasize the sui generis characteristics of the subjects who operate in it, which can be summarized in the priority given to the social purposes of the economic initiatives undertaken.*

Organizations that are included in this sector are supposed to have the following attributes:

1. the prevalence of the person over capital;
2. free association;
3. internal (mutuality) and external solidarity;
4. democratic management;
5. the indivisibility of reserves;
6. the devolution of assets at the time of liquidation.

The *social economy,* in turn, is divided into three main areas: (a) cooperation; (b) mutuality; (c) associations. The first sector includes all the enterprises that adopt the legal form of cooperative (production and work cooperatives, service cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, construction cooperatives, agricultural cooperatives, etc.) united by the fact that they unify the figures of entrepreneur and worker. In fact, the members of cooperatives are largely owners of the company and at the same time employees (with the exception of consumer cooperatives).

The second subset groups together the forms of collection and financial management that combine, also in this case, the use of services with membership of the organization. Examples include mutual funds, mutual insurance funds, social security and accident funds.

The third grouping is made up of nongovernmental, nonprofit and solidarity organizations. It largely coincides with the terminologies used so far of *voluntary sector*, *nonprofit sector*. It can include: volunteering, social associations, professional and trade associations, sports and recreational associations, mutual and self-help groups.

In short, the specificity of the components of *the social economy* can be traced back to the aims they pursue, which must have a primarily social and secondary economic connotation. The emphasis here is therefore mainly on the type of activity in which these organizations are engaged and not so much on their internal characteristics (see in this regard what has been said about the term *charitable sector*).

From a scientific point of view, the discipline that has used this terminology the most has been, of course, economics. It can have at its disposal a substantial number of studies and research, both of a historical and comparative nature, as well as of an inter-sectoral type, on the economic behavior of this type of organization. The aim of this work is almost always to highlight the differences between companies operating in the *field of social economy* and those operating in the market. Emphasizing the potential of these organizations to promote different ways of organizing economic relations, which could lead to an overcoming of the well-known models of the *capitalist economy* and the *planned economy*.

The sector has also benefited from legal recognition at the European Union level (Bassi & Fabbri, 2020). There is a broad consensus among the countries of the Union concerning the main functions played by the various components of the *social economy*: (a) guaranteeing pluralism; (b) multiplier of economic actors; (c) giving a voice to the weakest groups; (d) to give human motivation to the quality of economic action; (e) to encourage the responsible participation of citizens.

Of all the terms analyzed so far, *social economics* is probably the most typically European, the one that most clearly expresses the historical and cultural connotations that differentiate the societies of the "continent" from the Anglo-Saxon ones and overseas in particular. It is the one that most distances itself from the others in terms of semantic extension and the empirical referents it designates. It is precisely on this broad and pervasive vision of the practices of the Third Sector and its political values that the scientific approaches and schools of thought of the two cultural contexts are also confronted to distance themselves inexorably. In particular*, the pragmatic and utilitarian North American* approach, based on the principles of methodological individualism, is contrasted with a *European approach*, which does not yet enjoy its own internal unity and univocity of positions, which places more emphasis on the macro dimensions of the phenomenon and its social, political and, secondly, economic implications.

This is one of the reasons why the Anglo-Saxon definitions are always aimed at operationally delimiting the Third Sector in order to collect quantitative data on its size (number of organizations, sectors of activity covered, number of employees, quantity and origin of sources of funding, quantity and use of funds, etc.), while the definitions developed in Europe have a more analytical character. They are more refined from a theoretical point of view and seek to highlight the characteristics of the Third Sector and the functions it performs for society in general.

In the final analysis, the term *économie sociale* (very common in Europe and almost entirely unknown in the Anglo-Saxon context) re-proposes at the center of the scientific debate the question of the culturally derived connotation of each definition and the influence that the theoretical-methodological tools chosen to observe have on the object observed.

Intermediary System (Germany) and Private Initiative (Netherlands)

Many scholars have paused to analyze the relationships between faith, religious beliefs, and Churches on the one hand and volunteerism and philanthropy on the other. The results of these empirical investigations and theoretical reflections all point in the direction of detecting a strong positive correlation between the two phenomena. This is probably one of the reasons why in European countries with a solid Christian tradition (Catholic and Protestant), the most common terms to indicate the complex of voluntary, non-profit, solidarity organizations that make up the Third Sector do not resort to economic language but rather to historical-political language.

In Germany and the Netherlands, in particular, the relationships between the state, non-profit organizations, and religious denominations have been based on the *principle of subsidiarity* and *pillarization*. The first states that the state, the government, and the public bodies are "subsidiaries" of the private initiative, which means that it does not have to provide a particular good or service until the private initiative proves capable of doing so. Public intervention is permitted only in the event of bankruptcy or the inability of voluntary agencies in the community to carry out these tasks. The principle is based on a bottom-up conception of responsibility: each person is responsible for taking care of himself; if he is not able, the family intervenes; if this is not able, an *intermediary body is used*. In the first instance, the state bodies must recognize and support the intermediate associations, and only in the event of a manifest inability or unwillingness to intervene by the latter, they must provide assistance directly as, in the last instance, they are responsible for it.

The second aspect, *pillarization,* recognizes that society is divided and fragmented based on different ideological-cultural and religious systems and assumes this division into compartments, this segmentation, as a guiding criterion for the construction of the *welfare* system. Thus, all sectors of activity must see the presence of similar organizations that represent different religious and political beliefs. On closer inspection, this principle leads to a multiplication of service providers, with losses in economies of scale, which can result in waste of public resources.

The moment when this way of organizing the distribution of wealth in society reached its peak was in Holland between the two world wars. At this stage, for each welfare sector (education, social assistance, health, housing, employment support, etc.), there was at least one agency from each denomination.

Both states referred to (Germany and, Holland) are known, in fact, for having a system of services for collective well-being characterized by a strong integration between the state and Third Sector organizations. A system of very structured relationships that, in the case of Germany, have given rise to a way of managing public affairs that we could define as *corporate.* While it is true that in the last two decades of the last century, these countries have also undergone profound transformations

that have diluted their differences from other European states, nevertheless, some basic characteristics and peculiarities remain. This is evidenced by the terminology used and the self-representation of the sector.

In Germany, scholars and researchers speak of an *intermediary system,* highlighting the macro-social function of integration and inter-sectoral exchange that the organizations that belong to it allow to be achieved. The public sector relations system is highly centralized, with the presence of six "umbrella" organizations that bring together at the federal level the tens of thousands of organizations present at the state and local levels.

The six federations are, in turn, centrally united in the *Bundes-arbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege* (Federal Association of Voluntary Care Service Organizations). This internal articulation of the system means that every decision in social policy is negotiated centrally between the representatives of the government and the representatives of the six organizations.

In the Netherlands, the structural characteristics of the social and health care system are profoundly different from those of the German system due to historical and cultural peculiarities, including:

(a) the *Dutch State* (public apparatus) has always been more of a coordinating body than a central authority;
(b) there is a long tradition of *tolerance* towards different views and ideological positions in Dutch society;
(c) the *religious* situation is characterized by a plurality of confessional traditions;
(d) The political system has five main political parties/aggregations, none of which can govern alone, so its functioning is based on a *coalition logic*.

This has meant that Dutch Third Sector organizations have a solid religious connotation and are widely present locally. Without a central solid body against which to make demands, there was no need to set up "umbrella" organizations.

From a terminological point of view, we speak *of particulier initiatief* (private initiatives): the focus here is on the original, non-public (in the sense of state) character of the action that is expressed in them. So, the term refers to a very broad set of organizational subjects.

In order to delimit the subgroup of organizations providing public utility services, the terms QUANGOs (quasi-non-governmental organizations) *and PGOs* (para-governmental organizations*) were later introduced (in the post-World* War II period) to emphasize the close interrelations between the two sectors (State and Third Sector).

In fact, in this area, there is a remarkable mixture of organizational forms and methods of government and management (a large part of the economic resources of these organizations come from public contributions).

Final Remarks

Every society at a given time operates several definitions of a specific social phenomenon:

(a) common sense definition ("average citizen");
(b) legal definition (and administrative);
(c) official statistics definition;
(d) national account definition.

In social sciences, there are different types of definitions depending on their position in the "ladder of abstraction" (Sartori, 1970): (a) theoretical (to establish a field of study); (b) operational (aimed at carrying out empirical research).

Moreover, definitions of the same phenomenon vary in relation to (a) scientific disciplines (economics, sociology, political sciences, etc.), (b) approaches and paradigms (functionalist, structuralist, phenomenology, hermeneutic), (c) epistemology (realist, constructivist, etc.) and (d) methodology (quantitative, qualitative).

Finally, definitions must be open to the future to consider the co-evolution of institutions and the appearance of new forms of Third Sector/Civil Society organizations.

In this chapter, I illustrated and commented on several worldwide terminologies to indicate the sphere of organizations operating outside the State (public sector) and the market (business-for-profit sector). I do not cover the types of organizations that may operate within those sectors; the terms used for these show even more variety due to local contextual factors, including regulation and historical use.

The main point emerging from that reflection is that each term underlies a deep semantic spectrum of concepts and meanings embedded in the social, political, cultural, and religious traditions of the societal configuration in which it was coined and developed.

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Chapter 6
In Search of a Positive, Historical and Experimentalist Definition of Civil Society

Carolina Andion

Introduction

Many authors discuss that the main pillars of liberal democracy, based on the vote, representation and legality are currently being redefined implying great transformations in the principles and practices of legitimization, establishment of norms and procedures (bureaucracy) and resolution of administrative and public problems. Despite presenting different interpretations of this phenomenon, many authors nowadays also denounce the process of democratic decline or regression and invite us to reflect on new possibilities to (re)signify and strengthen democracies in face of this scenario in countries of the North (Castells, 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Przeworski, 2020) and South (Souza Neto, 2020; Starling et al., 2022).

To handle these challenges and to reinforce the institutional and political dimensions of democracy the debate about governance emerges with force, making a counterpoint with the notion of government and (re) emphasizing the role of civil society in the public sphere and the relevance of socio-state interactions in public actions and public policies. As discussed by Ansell and Torfing (2016), the field of governance studies has largely expanded since its emergence in the 1980s and is nowadays permeated by multiple theoretical strands, paradigms, and lenses of analysis.

The emergence and development of the notion of governance gains force at the same time of the recognition of civil society actors as political agents, solving public problems, promoting social control of the State and even participating and deliberating about public policies. But its recognition and this consensus about the importance of civil society do not mean *per se* a democratic reinvention and reinforcement of public policies, nor the mere fragilization of the idea of State. More than a buzzword or a miracle concept that can solve the democracy regression or

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respond to State failure, it is important to consider "civil society" and its insertion in the public sphere as a phenomenon that requires further investigation and research.

A central issue in advancing this research agenda is about the different definitions of "civil society" and its delimitation. But it is important to consider that definitions are not only conceptual constructs, they emerge from research and are embedded in history, academic discourses, institutional frames, political cultures and social realities. So, to define civil society it is crucial to consider the plurality of civil societies and its particularities in different social realities and at the same time to produce sufficient generalization to compare/contrast these experiences and generate more robust theories about then and to contribute to the practice of civil society actors in reinforcing democracies, promoting social justice and sustainability.

However, when we discuss the conceptualization of civil society nowadays many questions arise. What civil society are we talking about? What demarcation and boundaries? Who is in and who is out? What interfaces with State and Market? What role and action in the public sphere? Can we talk about uncivil society? These questions are not easy to answer, although they are crucial for the interpretation of civil society and its conceptual delimitation.

This chapter aims to discuss some of these questions through the reconstruction of the historical process of "coproduction" of definitions of civil society over time in social and political sciences and its implications, aiming to problematize the concept and advance a research agenda that can support the development of less normative and idealized and more experimentalist theorizations about civil society. To do so, we begin by discussing the genealogy of the concept of civil society, showing the meanings historically attributed to this concept and emphasizing the transition from a negative to a positive interpretation of civil society, based especially on the work of Cohen and Arato (1994) in 1990 and examining the changes that have occurred since then in the debate about civil society, its developments and the challenges that it brings about.

Given this genealogy and the complexity of the phenomenon and is concept, we argue for definitions opened to the multiple organizational configurations, forms of action and patterns of social-state interactions that have been built up in civil societies historically and coexist in the fields of practice. To illustrate this argument, we approach the Brazilian reality and moments of the formation, strengthening, and legitimization of civil society as a political actor, highlighting the changes in de-demarcation of civil society interpretations in the country in time.

With this trajectory and lived experience in mind,[1] we argue in the third section for a research agenda that reinforces the construction of definitions about civil society that are less normative and "modelling" and more experimental, capable of supporting investigations and empirical research that help advance the

[1] The author has more than 30 years of experience acting with civil society actors in many regions in Brasil. She began her career as voluntary and project manager in civil society organizations, and acts as a consultant, manager, professor and researcher with many technical and academic productions in the field.

understanding of this complex, interdisciplinary and multifaceted phenomenon that is extremely relevant to strengthening democracy, social justice and sustainability.

A Genealogy of the Concept of Civil Society: From a Negative to a Positive Definition

The concept of civil society assumes various meanings throughout history, based in different theoretical streams and paradigms often contrasting with each other. So, the meaning of the term is better understood in relation to the corresponding historical, scientific, institutional and geographical realities where it is embedded. Despite these differences, for a long time, the concept of civil society in the social and political sciences has been linked to the dichotomy between civil society, market and the State. So, a classical definition is to conceive civil society as the sphere composed by the initiatives that did not compose the government nor Market.

If is true that this explanation is broader and "universally accepted" is also obvious that it contains a symbolic generalization and an "exemplary" form (Khun, 1987), i.e. a modeled way of defining civil society not by what characterizes it, but by what it complements or opposes, related to the State or market. Here we have a comprehension based in the separation of these three enclaves, emphasizing sometimes partnership (interdependence) and other times opposition (conflict) between then.

As Bobbio (1999) asserts, this "negative"[2] perspective of civil society has its roots in classical political science. It is common to interpret civil society in political science as: "the sphere of social relations not regulated by the State but arising from and against the formation of the modern state" (Habermas, 1984). In this sense, these definitions contrast the role of civil society with that of the State or the market and rarely establish the contours and particularities of this notion.

But if civil society is defined as a counterpoint or a complement of the State or market does that mean it is exclusively a modern phenomenon? If we consider a genealogy of the phenomenon and a historiography of the concept (Andion & Serva, 2004; Ehrenberg, 2011), it can be affirmed that civil society and its conceptualization has a long history that was not always considered in the debate about its definition.

If we think about political action in the Greek world, we can perceive that civil society (although not conceptualized in this way) was a determining sphere. There was then no such dichotomy between civil society and political society. We observe here the civil society linked with the political commonwealth (Ehrenberg, 2011), that will change with Romans and Modernity when the rationalization of the political sphere places the State (Mortal God) as a common power above men, which

[2] Here negative is referred not to a quality of the conceptualization, but the way as it is construct, based in the opposition and counterpoint with other spheres, i.e., market and State.

represents collective will, protects, and guarantees peace (Hobbes, 1979). The rule of law comes to oppose the state of nature (non-political sphere) and the political society, thus establishing a dichotomy which will be reinforced at the end of the seventeenth century with the birth of the bourgeois world and individual rights.

Indeed, the analysis of the sense attributed to the sphere of civil society changes in time. With Modernity, the State comes to be considered the main subject of universal history and the main actor in the construction of the common good. The position of civil society is then subordinate to the State, and political action only materializes from it. As Habermas states: "Until now, the idea that a part of a democratic society could act reflexively on that society as a whole could not be translated into practice except within the framework of the Nation-State" (2000, p. 46).

This phenomenon allows us to understand why, as Bobbio (1999) asserts, the idea of civil society was, for a long time, defined as a precursor to the State, with little interest from scholars in understanding its composition or giving it a positive translation. This scenario changes more recently. It is from the redefinition of the role of the Nation-State and against the backdrop of the "crisis of Modernity" that a new conception of civil society appears: a positive conception that originates with Gramsci and unfolds with the works of contemporary authors. Below, we briefly trace this trajectory (from classical to modern authors) showing as civil society designation was considered during a long time as a subsidiary of State and Market definitions (Table 6.1).

The notion of civil society does not assume in any of these definitions its own status; it is always referenced either in the actions of the State or the market. This "negative" conception of civil society is reinforced in the Modernity with the secularization and the naturalization of the disconnection between the social spheres. In

Table 6.1 A historiography of the concept of civil society: from classical to modern

The conception of civil society linked with state and political society comes from the Aristotelian tradition, where the *societas civilis* is placed as the privileged space of political action (community), thus contrasting with the family, natural society, or religion. In the Greek world, politics (as participation in public affairs) was an essential dimension of life; the very existence of the individual was conditioned by their participation in the community.
The conception of civil society as a pre-state stage is related to the position of the natural law theorists of the eighteenth century, especially Hobbes for whom before the creation of the state, the "state of nature" predominates, where various forms of association coexist, which individuals form among themselves for the satisfaction of their varied interests. In the state of nature, competition between individuals predominates, and the selfish man is the main subject.
The conception of civil society as anti-state, that is, as an independent sphere of the state, will appear with Hegel and Marx. For the former, civil society represented the first stage of the formation of the state, that is, the juridical-administrative state whose function was to regulate external relations, while the state proper represented the ethical-political moment, responsible for linking citizens to society. Civil society is then conceived by Hegel as a social space of regulation between the family and the state, being placed as a mediator between these two spheres. For Marx, civil society is constituted by the set of economic relations (bourgeois society) that forms the material base of society. This instance struggles for the emancipation of political power and therefore can be called a "counter-power".

Elaborated by the author inspired by Bobbio (1999)

Modernity, these extra-social sources responsible for rule construction are primarily expressed through the State (with rational law) or through the market (with economic laws). Thus, the construction of rules for the common good occurs outside and above civil society. This analysis may be an element of response to the marginal place that civil society assumed in Modernity.

This tripartite model was very influential and prevails in studies about collective actions of civil society, taken for granted in the main theoretical streams and paradigms in social sciences and political sciences until the second half of the twentieth century. It can be illustrated by the classical dichotomy between the theories of resources mobilization, in a side, and the theory of social movements in other side. The first took the field of civil society as an industry or a market, from a complementary perspective to the State, while in the second the focus was on social movements that were often against the State.

However, in the last half of the twentieth century, we observe an inflection point in the debate about civil society. To understand this turn it is necessary to refer to the work of Gramsci (1891–1937), one of the main authors contributing to this change. Although Gramsci maintains the distinction between civil society and the State, made by Hegel and Marx, he opposes them in a certain way, first by conceiving civil society as a moment superior to the State, and secondly, by redefining it not as synonymous of the economic sphere (structure), but as a set of ideological-cultural relations, of the spiritual and intellectual life of a society (Bobbio, 1994). Gramsci breaks with the natural law tradition and focuses on civil society rather than the State. For him, civil society represented a superior ethical-political moment:

> One can use the term 'catharsis' to indicate the passage from the merely economic moment (or passionate egoistic) to the ethical/political moment, that is, the higher elaboration of the structure in superstructure in the consciousness of men. This also means the passage from the objective to the subjective, from necessity to freedom (Gramsci, 1971, p.38).

It can be inferred that Gramsci's conception returns to civil society the capacity to solve its own issues, bringing back the possibility of ethical exercise to the sphere of civil society. For Gramsci, the man who is aware of his political role is a historical subject, being aware of the objective conditions that enable or limit his action. According to him: "only through the recognition of the objective conditions does the active subject become free and put itself in a position to transform reality" (1971, p. 38). Gramsci brings forth a "positive" conception of civil society, defining it no longer as a residue of the State or the market, but as an sphere (linked with the others) with a self-role. The focus shifts from the "cause and effect" relationship, based on coercion, advocated by the naturalists, to the "means-end" relationship, seeking the construction of public interest. The construction of possible futures passes through the action of the historical subject in transforming reality.

Gramsci's work has inspired many political scientists in the twentieth century who perceive civil society as a positive and essential moment for social and political transformation. One of the representative works of this reassessment is Cohen and Arato (1994), who draw inspiration not only from Gramsci but also from Habermas's work. For the latter, the heterogeneous groups that form between society and the

State constitute "autonomous spaces of public domain" and react to the forms of administrative and economic rationality that have made the evolution of the current social system possible. Habermas believes that such groups reinforce the "autonomy of the lifeworld" threatened in its vital bases, strengthening a third sphere of regulation (beyond the State and the market) that would be that of solidarity. In this sphere, the defense of singularity and the autonomy of "new grammars of life" (Habermas, 1987) is primarily at stake, as can be observed, for example, with the strengthening of feminist, ecological, alternative, citizen initiative or elderly people's movements, among others. According to the author, the "counter-institutions" that form civil society would constitute a second economic sector, not geared toward profit and opposing parties, constituting new forms of political action.

Inspired on Habermas work Cohen and Arato (1994) interpret the reinforcement of civil society as an alternative to the disenchantment of the world. For them, civil society emerges as a self-limiting utopia, which includes a series of complementary forms of democracy and a complex set of political, civil, and social rights compatible with modern social differentiation. These authors bring to the debate a reconceptualization of civil society. They seek to define the concept by its particularities and its interface with other social spheres, rather than by its opposition to such spheres. Civil society is then described as:

> The sphere of social interaction between economy and State, composed mainly of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created from forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, especially subjective rights, which stabilize social differentiation. Although the dimensions of self-creation and institutionalization may exist separately, in the long run, independent action and institutionalization are necessary for the reproduction of civil society (1994: ix).

The concept of civil society proposed here highlights the particularities of this social sphere, which is not seen as a unified whole but as a diversity of groups characterized by their variety, self-creation, self-mobilization, and institutionalization defined in interaction with other social spheres. Cohen and Arato (1994) propose a concept of civil society as the terrain where the plurality of democracies can emerge, and thus democracy becomes a debate that concerns not only the governmental and economic spheres, but above all the public spaces formed by civil society (participatory democracy). However, for this to occur in practice, civil society must not renounce its role or its particularities. As the authors emphasize: "it is equally easy for these actors [of civil society] to slip into fundamentalist postures or to identify the project of civil society with the goals of the economic elite or political parties, renouncing their autonomy and originality" (1994, p. 421).

In this perspective, civil society is defined as a particular social sphere, with a specific role, differentiated from the State and the market, but maintaining interface relationships with these two spheres. The concept of civil society then assumes specific dimensions raised by Cohen and Arato (1994), such as:

- Plurality: formed by a diversity of self-created and self-mobilized collectives, whose autonomy allows for a variety of organizational forms. For civil society to be plural, it must be a place where actors can engage in public spaces of discussion about and transformation of their reality;
- Publicity: it is a public sphere, a space where individuals can problematize their issues, also composed of public opinion, including cultural and communication institutions;
- Privacy: it contains a domain of personal development and moral choice;
- Legality and institutionalization: it also includes structures of general laws and basic rights necessary for its institutionalization and demarcation in relation to other social spheres: State and market.
- Interaction: civil society is defined through mediation relations with the State and the market.

The theoretical framework and this "positive" definition established by Gramscian and Habermasian authors about civil society in the second half of the twentieth century were crucial not only for understanding this phenomenon, its characteristics, and the effects of its actions but also for its recognition, significantly advancing the debate in its characterization not only through its differentiation but also through its particularities and interactions with other spheres. On the other hand, such conceptualizations, by focusing on a perspective of the autonomy of civil society in relation to the forms of regulation of the systemic world (power and economic relations) and by interpreting civil society as the quintessential space of "communicative action" and the exercise of participation and democracy, ended up constructing an idealized and naive view of civil society, its actions, and its dilemmas that are criticized nowadays expanding the debate on civil societies definitions in other directions as we will treat in the next section.

Civil Society Today: Plural Configurations, Ecologies, Roles and Challenges

The 1990s were a milestone in the development of empirical studies on civil society. Particularly noteworthy during this period is the international research conducted by professors Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier entitled "Defining the Nonprofit Sector: A Cross-National Analysis" (Salamon & Anheier, 1997). In this seminal study, the authors present, for the first time, a global overview of civil society organizations and their activities, based on global data from both Northern and Southern countries. This study was a watershed not only in defining but also in understanding civil society, inaugurating a new phase in the debate in this field of study.

The twenty-first century arrives bringing a myriad of theoretical currents emerging from the study of civil societies, whether in sociology, political science, economics, urban studies, management, or public administration. The field of civil society studies becomes interdisciplinary and multiparadigmatic, and research

relies on different qualitative and quantitative methods and their interaction to advance understanding of the phenomenon. This leads to a multitude of nomenclatures referring to both formal organizations and informal collectives that compose civil society, including social movements, Third Sector, social and solidarity economy, and more recently, social enterprises, only to cite some.

The development of the scientific debate on civil society, far from promoting unanimity, has led to the emergence of new questions. The recent discussions in the field raise new challenges and questions not previously addressed. Thus, a positive definition of the concept does not close the debate on civil society today; on the contrary, it ignites new questions that fuel it. In Latin America, we observe a critique that emerges about this "positive" view of civil society based on the Habermasian interpretation of civil society as a sphere mediated by communicative action and where reciprocity prevails. As stated by Gurza Lavalle (2003), studies about civil society in 1990s were largely conducted based on a broad consensus around the strengthening of the democratizing role of civil associations, addressed through normative theorizations about the (new) civil society:

> Various authors have noted the rise of new independent civil actors who engage in civic associativism, aiming to address societal issues publicly. These actors are seen as distinct from narrow political and economic interests, yet they can still influence the political sphere to address their legitimate concerns. The continuous and widespread actions of these actors have revitalized emancipatory discourses, advocating for the democratization of democracy and the broadening of the public sphere through autonomous social mobilization. (Lavalle, 2003, p. 91, 92)

This seminal text of Gurza Lavalle (2003) raises a critique about the normative and prescriptive nature of the literature about civil society, which ended up producing a stylized and idealized view of the phenomenon. In a similar vein, Burgos (2015) highlights that although studies based on works by Habermas and Cohen & Arato were extremely important in renewing interest in civil society, its application in a prescriptive manner had the effect of depoliticizing the debate, creating a "warm and fluffy" civil society and removing the centrality of conflict in the discourse about civil society, as well as excluding collectives and organizations that did not fit into this idealized version, such as parties, religious organizations, or even uncivil movements. In this sense, he denounces the process of "purifying civil society which removes the political (power relations) and the politics (institutional dynamics that process the political)" (Burgos, 2015, p. 192).

Arato (1995) herself entered the discussion, anticipating some particularities of civil society nowadays that assume new contours in a scenario of a digital society facing new global challenges. Considering it, we can highlight some emerging topics, such as the impact of technology on civil society, the global civil society, the relationship between civil society and human rights, or the influence of climate change on social dynamics. Updating this debate we can perceive nowadays: (1) a **new plurality** that goes far beyond face-to-face relations, considering the faster and broader mobilization through transnational networks and the role of internet and social media leading to new forms of connection, trust and distrust-building and also new identities and identititary dynamics in social groups; (2) a **new publicity**:

with the creation of a worldwide public opinion, the amplification of interactivity and greater capacity for communication and to reach/influence decision-making channels, the valuation of accountability and transparency and with much greater access to information but also the production and influence of fake news. (3) a **new privacy**: transformations in the domain of intimacy (family) and individual rights (legal personality becomes disconnected from state membership); and (4) a **new legality** and forms of representation: from government to governance and displacement of regulation from the Sate to other spheres.

The issue of the role of civil society and its interference in democracy and other domains previously exclusive to the State is other central theme in the discussions that needs further investigations. Although some authors such as Santos (2002) and Avritzer (2012), based in a Habermasian tradition, highlight the strength of the organized civil society movement at local and global levels others as Haubert (2000) will emphasize the liberal doctrine contained in this concept. This author highlights the atomization and individualization of current society, both in Northern and Southern countries, which, for him, is not synonymous with democratic development but rather with weakening politics.

Until now, international debate about the role of civil society in governance includes different and somewhat contradictory theoretical positions. On the one hand, there are enthusiasts who express a wide range of positive effects of civil society's collective actions such as the improvement of accountability and transparency, reinforcing participation and social control and enhancing public policies (Arko-Cobbah, 2008; Burlandy, 2011; Pereira & Nichiata, 2011). On the other hand, there are sceptics who criticise CSOs for entering the vacuum of social provision (Massey & Johnston-Miller, 2016). Instead of starting from extremes and a priori notion, we propose to understand the changes in soco-State interaction patterns and their consequences; that is, how it influences the conception of more (or less) democratic public policies and governance systems (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Frega, 2019).

All this discussion is linked with the relations about civil society market and State. In fact, the tripartite model discussed above has been criticized giving place to analytical perspectives that put emphasis in socio-State interactions and its influence in civil society (Lavalle & Szwako, 2015). As explained by Lavalle (2003, p. 92):

> The essence of the discussion today emphasizes the potential synergy in state-society relations, the relevance of new participation spaces, the role of civil society in shaping public policies, the emergence of new institutionalities, and the proliferation of unprecedented forms of representativeness – even if still in an embryonic state. Instead of focusing on actors, spaces are discussed, and the place of distinctions – sometimes manichean – between civil society and the state is occupied by empirical studies on the role of certain civil society actors in specific institutional environments.

Another important discussion concerns the relationship between civil society and the market, a debate that saw significant development starting from the 1990s with the deepening of theoretical and empirical studies on the social and solidarity economy in Europe, as well as in Latin America and other regions of the Global South. Here, the dimensions of production, consumption, and exchange raised by Keane

(1998) are valued. According to this author, civil society should not be interpreted as economically passive, as its organizations also participate in the market sphere, selling goods and services. As a consequence, civil society organizations would not be outside the economy and would constitute one of the spheres of a plural economy as discussed among others by Eme & Laville (1996), drawing inspiration from the pioneering works of Polanyi (1975).

All this debate will produce new reflections about the constitution of civil society and its definition. In accordance with Pouligny (2001) it is possible to affirm that civil society is configured as a plural and multifaceted space that can hardly assume a single definition. For this author, if there is currently an international civil society, this term designates an arena of struggles, an extremely fragmented and contested space. Arato (1995) also emphasizes the complexity of this concept and proposes, instead of using a single concept, to establish a distinction between civil society as a movement and as an institution: "The first would be a constituent civil society, creating the second, its constituted and institutionalized version" (1995, p. 20). However, this same author emphasizes that such a definition does not close the delimitation of the concept, which includes different types of associations such as informal groups, voluntary associations, expert organizations, among others, which are very different from each other and more recently also organize through networks. Given this diversity, it becomes more difficult to provide an exhaustive and unique definition of what civil society means.

So, it is important to take into account definitions that consider the richness and complexity of the phenomenon and its manifestations in lived experiences; what we would like to explore to conclude this chapter.

Final Considerations: Challenges and Perspectives on Definitions of Civil Society

Today, in each social reality, we can assume an specific ecology of civil society. To illustrate this, we recur to the example of Brazilian reality where the author has been acting with civil society initiatives and experiences for more than 30 years. If we take a look in Fig. 6.1 that presents a time-line with some milestones of civil society trajectory in Brazil, we can see that this trajectory is not linear, nor evolutive and that the configuration of civil society changes in time and it does not strictly follow the prescribed models, being influenced in great manner by the socio-state interactions co-constructed in time.

Taking in account the Brazilian reality, we can affirm that different definitions of civil society are historically coproduced upon the ground of a political culture of a fragile democracy that cannot be forgotten. In this sense, a "benevolent" and a "conservative" civil society coexists with a civil society of struggle and resistance that have always existed in Brazilian history and have been more or less valued, depending on the governance regime and the socio-state interactions in the social realities of the territories and regions of this continental country.

Fig. 6.1 Milestones of the trajectory of civil society in Brazil

As a result, it is possible to observe in the Brazilian reality a myriad of organizations and collectives, more or less popular, more or less organized, more or less democratic, more or less corporate, that fall under the umbrella of civil society. In Fig. 6.2 we try to exemplify this diversity of types showing that each one is linked with one or more forms of regulation and logic as market, volunteering, rights defense ans regulation. Understanding this plurality of formats, ways of acting, and especially the consequences produced by such "collective actions," particularly in the public sphere, seems to us the major question of the current research agenda in the field of civil society studies.

Therefore, after conducting a genealogy of the concept and observing the transformation of the very way of defining civil society over time and considering its

Fig. 6.2 Ecology of civil society in Brazil

spatial inscription, we advocate for a less normative and more open and experimentalist way of constructing definitions that can advance not only the understanding of civil society but also its effects in social realities.

This shift in the research agenda has new repercussions both for the debate on civil society and for its definition, which we would like to emphasize in the next points.

1. The importance of empirical studies that focus less on individual actors and organizations (and their sustainability) and more on the repercussions of civil society collective actions, whether in terms of fields of (public arenas), public policies, communities, or territories.
2. A transition from the tripartite model (state, market, and civil society) to an analysis more focused on interactions, intersections, and hybridity among these spheres and forms of regulation.
3. A concern in considering the plurality of formats and modes of existence of civil society, abandoning a priori models and constructing theories more focused on understanding the different political ecologies of civil society and comparing empirical realities, thus building deeper understandings of them.

In sum, as we discuss in this chapter, we can conclude that definitions are not only conceptual and theoretical constructs, they emerge from practice, investigations and academic discourses what are embedded in history, institutional frames, political cultures and social realities. So, our challenge is to constantly renew our definitions in other to promote critical reflection and put forward the research agenda not only

to produce new 'justifications' but rather giving place to see and understand news experimentations and changings in this long trajectory of civil societies and its effects on democracies.

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Chapter 7
Defining Civil Society in the Turbulent Times: Lessons from Poland

Anna Domaradzka

Introduction

This chapter develops some reflections presented at the ISTR webinar series The Future of Third Sector Research under the topic **"Changes and Challenges in Civil Society Definitions: Learnings from International Perspectives and Dialogue"** in April 2023. It reflects my perspective as an international civil society researcher based in Poland and some of my interests including social movements and their organizational platforms, leaders' motivations, and the impact of technologies on the civic life. As a result, I try to underline the importance of reflecting on the dominant definitions of civil society from the point of view of growing complexity of the field and the involved struggles between its actors. The starting point is the tension between civil society as an object of measurement (embodied in John Hopkins project or UN Handbook) and the concept of civil sphere as defined by Jeffrey Alexander and embodied by various collective practices observable around the globe. In the context of modern discussion on the shrinking of the civil sphere and the rise of new forms of (digital) activism, the boundaries of civil society are being questioned repeatedly (Hummel & Strachwitz, 2023).

The Power of Definition

At its core, a definition is a statement that explains the meaning of a term. First and foremost, definitions serve a practical purpose, providing clarity and precision in communication and measurement. Therefore, they are crucial to establish common ground for researchers, enabling them to effectively convey ideas and engage in

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meaningful discussions. Definitions delineate the boundaries of concepts and allow for construction of frameworks of understanding. However, beyond this basic function, definitions wield a power in shaping our understanding of concepts, objects, and even reality itself.

The power of definition extends to societal structures and power dynamics. Throughout history, the act of defining has been wielded as a tool of dominance and control, as those in positions of authority sought to impose their interpretations and shape collective meanings. As a result, definitions often turn into contested battlegrounds where struggles for power unfold. This makes definitions the dynamic constructs that evolve over time in response to changing social, cultural, and historical contexts. As societies progress and paradigms shift, so too do the meanings of terms and concepts that describe social, political, and economic processes. The power to redefine, to challenge existing definitions, and to imagine new possibilities can be a catalyst for social change and an important part of scientific endeavour.

Recognizing the power dimension of "defining act" is an important precondition of critical engagement with the meanings of concepts like democracy, civility, or participation. Therefore, opening the discussion concerning civil society and Third Sector definitions serves not only academics, but practitioners, as it allows to challenge the status quo and imagine a future grounded in new definitions.

Defining Civil Society: Lessons from Poland

Poland presents a good illustration of the many factors that complicate the matter of defining civil society. While nowadays, Polish civil society researchers tend to focus primarily on the collective action of citizens, including informal groups, formal organizations, and protest initiatives (Biloboka, 2023; Piechota, 2007; Boguszewski et al., 2018) this represents the shift from how civil society was defined and measured in the 1990 and 2000, when formal associations and foundations were the main focus (Klon/Jawor, 2019). This excluded from civil society statistics many grassroots activities and self-help groups trying to tackle social problems, perform watchdog activities and advocate for specific norms, values, and interests. That changed in recent years, with the new wave of street protests and grassroots movements and a growing number of activists who reject the formal constraints of legally registered organization (Moroska-Bonkiewicz & Domagała, 2023).

The deepening polarization of party politics in the last decade had not only sparked an unprecedented series of protests and watchdog activities, but it also increased public interest (CBOS, 2021) and involvement in street-level politics. The growing number of people mobilizing around petitions, anti-government protests and social media campaigns could no longer be ignored by those observing civil society in Poland, even if it was not covered in the official statistics. As Piotrowski (2020) points out "there is a dramatic need to redefine the borders of civil society, as current definitions seem to be far too exclusive, as a result of various pre- and misconceptions connected to the term. One particularly striking question is whether

the spontaneous grassroots mobilizations that can be observed in Poland should be included in the category of civil society or not?"

What makes the process of establishing the definition tricky is the politicization of the civil society sphere and right-wing parties' efforts to create new civil society elites, aligned with populist goals (Korolczuk, 2019, 2022; Bill, 2022; Domaradzka & Kołodziejczyk, 2023). The political pressure to redefine which groups or organizations should be treated as "proper" civil society, to be funded and supported, and which shouldn't, is a common phenomenon around the globe. As researchers we should seek to bring forward definitions that allow to avoid such modalities.

The roots of the problem reach the 1990s, when Western models were introduced into Polish civil society along with dedicated funding schemes. American and European donors introduced funding schemes connected to their vision of what civil society should look like. At the same time, Poles were used to self-organizing in different forms of dramatic protests (like strikes, uprisings or street demonstrations) or building underground civic structures in a hostile environment (during occupation or communism). Pre-war charity traditions mixed with newly gained freedom to associate led to mushrooming of many diverse forms of groups and organizations. Those based in big cities often followed the new founders' priorities, while those representing smaller settlements remained focused on tradition and local engagement (Domaradzka, 2015, 2016). This led to bifurcation between westernizing urban CSOs and traditional local forms of engagement, often ignored in the official statistics and dependent on public funding and local political networks. As Ślarzyński (2018) points out, those local structures were a fertile ground to breed the alternative version of civil society, that in time would strengthen the power of united right in Polish politics (Ślarzyński, 2022).

It can be said that Polish civil society mainstream has been struggling to fit into a Western definition of civil society (that is dominant in the field) and which was established through John Hopkins project, as well as other research programs or statistical efforts that have been going on internationally (like the UN handbook "Satellite Account on Nonprofit and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work", see Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019). As a result, civil society leaders in Poland operated under pressure to prove the sector's "maturity" and readiness to enter the group of the developed Western countries. It has been a point of ambition for many over the years that Poland develops numerous associations and foundations, which growing professionalization makes similar to those from more developed countries (Domaradzka, 2015, 2016). In the context of a right-wing shift during 2015–2023 government term this maturity was once again questioned. The record parliamentary election turnout in Autumn 2023 and the resulting return to pro-democratic and pro-European track shows not only the power, but also volatility of civic engagement on all sides of political spectrum.

Polish civil society and its complexity continues to grow, accompanied with the proliferation with GONGOs and BONGOs, which primarily serve partisan or business goals through organizational forms associated with civil society. This blurring of boundaries means the definition processes are even more difficult, but also increasingly important. They also bring new and diverse interests into the process of

defining civil society. In the case of Poland, this complexity results from several processes reshaping the public discourse around civil society—mainly related with turbulent transformation and the different phases of "colonization" of Polish civil society.

After the second world war social engagement was distorted and corrupted under the soviet framework, which radically squashed democratic institutions, but fostered organizations aligned and steered according to the party goals. After 1989, Polish civil society, which was flourishing on the wave of unexpected Solidarity movement success was strongly shaped by the US donors funding priorities which resulted in proliferation of organizations with pro-democratic goals. Another important stage of civil society redevelopment is related with Poland's accession to EU in 2004, accompanied with withdrawal of American donors and implementation of new legal and bureaucratic frameworks. EU funding mechanisms, coupled with Swiss and Norwegian grants became attractive but difficult to obtain sources of funding and enabled the establishment of civil society structures that remain at the core of the sector. Those include umbrella organizations as well as professionalized subcontractors of social services cooperating with public institutions. New deliberative or advisory bodies started to develop in line with EU requirements. As a result, in 2010s we could observe the growing Europeisation of the mainstream civil society actors, especially those based in big cities. However, the 2015's right-wing government accession to power brought about a set of important changes within Polish civil society ecosystem.

In the period of 2015–2023 civil society became part of the political game, with government actors inspiring and supporting pro-government fraction of Third Sector and grassroot organizations. This period witnessed an increase in the number of new pro-government groups and organizations and strengthening of the conservative wing of civil society (Ślarzyński, 2022). On the anti-government side, regular large-scale protest movements took to the streets and social media, reflecting citizens' and opposition concerns with the right-wing turn (Batko-Tołuć, 2022).

The growing tension between the liberal wing of civil society and the ruling government, led to the discussion about shrinking civic space in Poland (Ploszka, 2020, Korolczuk, 2022, Domaradzka & Kołodziejczyk, 2023). Civil society funding was redirected to organizations ideologically close to the government (Korolczuk, 2022), under the banner of more just redistribution. Organizations representing LGBTQ+ or women rights were considered ideologically corrupted, and therefore largely excluded from the sphere supported by the state (Strzelecki, 2020).

Undoubtedly, the permeation of digital technologies and rise of social media platforms have transformed civil society in that period as well. Online platforms enabled activists to organize multiple protest events, spread information, and raise awareness on the ongoing legal changes. While public media were dominated by the government narrative, the internet allowed to build alternative news sources (e.g. OKO Press). However, political actors and public institutions increased their online activity as well and started to strategically employ social media to spread certain information and propagate pro-government messages (Obolewicz et al., 2023; Winiewski et al., 2017).

Polish civil society is also being shaped by rather low levels of social trust and tendency to prioritize "hot ties" (family-like bonds) and emotional messages. This fosters the tendency to create nonformal groups rather than formalized civil society organizations. As a result, official statistics describing engagement in civil society organization has been always below European average, even if mass protests took place every week.

The picture was further muddled by right-wing populist government creating new civil society elites, directing funding to newly created GONGOs and prioritizing organizations aligned and often personally linked to the ruling party (Domaradzka & Kołodziejczyk, 2023; Korolczuk, 2017; Marczewski, 2018). Numerous private foundations emerged and secured generous public funding, despite lack of experience. The outcrop of new organizations used to channel the public money into governing party savings provoked a question about what can be called civil society organization and what is just a new front for government interests (Markowski, 2019). Finally, we can also observe the emergence of dark patterns of citizen engagement in Poland, related with nationalist movements, antifeminist or anti-LGBTQ initiatives (Platek & Plucienniczak, 2017). This type of actors continues to challenge the normative concept of civil society and the Third Sector.

Multiple complexities of socio-political changes are reflected in the changing nature and diversity of social engagement. In this context it becomes particularly important to rethink existing definitions to avoid oversimplification (putting everything in the same box) as well as hijacking of the "civil" by the antidemocratic actors (as in case of populist politicians or nationalist organizations).

Challenges of Redefining Civil Society

What needs to be underlined in this context is that whenever we encounter an effort to define or redefine civil society and the Third Sector it is the process of exercising power and setting boundaries, and as such it should be met by the radical doubt (Bourdieu, 1998). Therefore, civil society scholars, and their organizations should recognize that they are very much part of this process and acknowledge the resulting political responsibility. What we are doing when we define civil society is that we are defining borders and therefore saying who's in and who's out. This way we are excluding some actors from receiving funding and institutional support and including some other actors that maybe should not be considered in a given national context.

This process often discriminates against less formal and more grassroot forms of civic activism, which leads scholars and practitioners to proposing broader definitions. The risk is that when the definition becomes too universal, it becomes useless as it does not allow us to discern key distinctions important for policymaking, formulating recommendations and funding programs. Moreover, it can lead to lack of data compatibility, mixing the sectors and blurring some important boundaries.

It is important to recognize that the process of defining civil society may have different goals, which require specific—yet not universal—definitions. To avoid political manipulation in this process, we should take care to be very open about those goals to make sure that the definition is contextualised and fitting. For example, macro statistics requires simple definitions, dividing organizations that are working for a profit from those who are not-for-profit. This is an example of a simple division and definition that has been very useful in comparative projects. However, if we want to focus on something different, like the potential for civic engagement or level of democratization, we should look at different forms of engagement, going beyond the nonprofit organizations. This will paint a different picture, allowing us to better understand the local potentials and threats concerning civic engagement.

Another goal can be related to planning funding policies and programs and designing ways to evaluate or gatekeep the access to different funding streams. Usually, the funding institutions are interested in supporting the specific type of actors, to strengthen a certain activity or fill an important gap. If to include grassroots type of organizations, then a different definition is needed. Last, but not least, if we want to theorize and better understand the trajectories of change within civil society and Third Sector, we often use comparative analysis, which requires comparable datasets.

Still, there is a push to rethink and potentially broaden the definition of civil society, to better recognize the impact of history, local political cultures as well as legal frameworks in shaping civic engagement practices. Moreover, it became crucial, when we talk about comparative analysis, that we recognize stark differences between countries, both in terms of timing and trajectories of the civil society evolution.

This notion is fuelled by the criticism towards past efforts of civil society delimitation, which tended to rely heavily on the official government statistics. These datasets tend to have low quality or are just unavailable for low- and middle-income countries. As a result, macroeconomic approach established that some countries have a well-developed and vibrant civil society, while others score low on the same scale. Speaking from the position of country that for several years registered low levels of social engagement, we recognize the need to not mix the idea of institutionalized civil society with the civic sphere or even spirit.

Civil Society Definition for the Future

When discussing the future challenges of defining civil society, we cannot ignore the impact of digital transformation. New technologies are profoundly shaping civil society in various ways, enabling new repertoires of action, as well as new forms of collective engagement. Platforms like social media, messaging apps, and online forums facilitate communication and information sharing among civil society

actors. This enables faster organization, coordination of actions, and dissemination of important information, but also increases the fluidity of boundaries.

In theory, digital tools should empower civil society organizations and individuals to engage in activism and advocacy more effectively. As examples of Arab Spring, Orange Revolution or Women Strike show, online petitions, crowdfunding platforms, and social media campaigns have a potential to amplify voices and mobilize support for causes. Online platforms and mobile apps are making it easier for people to engage with social issues, and even participate in online decision-making processes in their communities. Useful tools include platforms for citizen journalism, online voting systems, and participatory budgeting tools.

However, huge differences in digital competences as well as unequal access to platforms remain an important factor shaping online engagement. Some studies also suggest that online mobilization is often restricted to "clicking" and does not necessarily translate into real volunteering or community work. The discussion on "slactivism" even suggests that the accessibility of online forms of engagement may deteriorate the democratic institutions and disempower members of virtual communities in the context of real political challenges. Still, it is worth discussing the new technologies' impact on civil society practices to be able to update some of the defining factors of civic engagement.

Apart from digital communication tools mentioned above, technologies such as blockchain are increasingly being used by civil society actors to enhance transparency and accountability of records of transactions and activities. This can help build trust among stakeholders and secure the interests of dissident actors in the non-democratic regimes. Moreover, big data analytics tools enable civil society organizations to gather insights from large datasets, identify trends, and visualize information in compelling ways. This helps in communicating the issues to wider public, making evidence-based decisions and building effective strategies. Anti-smog movement is one of the examples of such successful campaigns increasing public awareness and mobilization around air pollution prevention.

During crises and disasters, technologies such as mapping tools, social media monitoring, and crowdsourcing platforms play crucial roles in coordinating volunteering efforts, disseminating alerts, and mobilizing resources. As such they become important tools for citizen groups engaging in disaster response or different forms of crises that require fast reaction of volunteers and organizations. Recent mass mobilization in response to refugee crises showcases the importance of such online tools for coordinating and funding efforts in response to humanitarian crisis.

Last, but not least, the internet resources, like digital libraries, provide unprecedented access to information and educational material, allowing individuals and communities to learn, share knowledge, and advocate for their rights more effectively.

However, it's important to recognize that these technologies also present challenges such as strengthening socio-digital divides, raising privacy concerns, risk of misinformation and technological manipulation (e.g. fake news or deep fake videos), and algorithmic biases, which need to be addressed to ensure equitable and ethical use by civil society actors. With a multitude of digital rights activism

emerging in response to online censorship, surveillance, and privacy violations, there is hope for increased transparency and accountability of such actions. Civil society actors are increasingly advocating for policies and practices that protect digital rights and promote a free and open internet as a fundamental enabler of civil society.

Digital technologies are reshaping the definition of civil society by expanding the ways in which individuals and groups engage, organize, and advocate for social change. For example, platform technologies have the potential to break down barriers to participation in civil society by providing accessible online agoras. People who were previously marginalized or excluded from traditional civil society structures (including neurodivergent persons, people with disabilities or geographically distant) now have opportunities to voice their concerns, connect with like-minded individuals, and mobilize for collective action online. Those technologies also enable decentralized forms of organization and decision-making within civil society, which allows for more distributed and democratic governance structures within organizations. Through the internet and social media platforms active citizens and social movements can gain a truly global reach, allowing ideas, information, and campaigns to transcend geographic boundaries. This global connectivity facilitates collaboration and solidarity among activists and organizations working on similar issues across the world, enabling best practice sharing and know-how exchange.

One can also point out that technology facilitates collaborative problem-solving and mobilizes the collective intelligence within civil society networks. Online platforms and tools enable diverse stakeholders to contribute ideas, expertise, and resources to address complex social challenges in innovative ways, as long as the process is well grounded in real networks and reaches all the interested parties.

Undoubtedly, the online crowdfunding platforms allowed many civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives to access funding directly from a global audience. This helps reduce the dependence on traditional sources of funding and allows for more diverse and flexible financing models. The range of causes and amount of money that can be raised that way is dependent on the communication and networking skills as well as perceived legitimacy.

Given specific skill sets, advances in data collection, analysis, and visualization have a potential to empower civil society organizations to conduct more targeted advocacy efforts. By harnessing data, organizations can identify patterns, measure impact, and make evidence-based arguments to advance their causes more effectively. However, data accessibility, required analytical competences and software are main conditions to realise such activities.

Overall, even though those technologies were not designed for civil society needs, they are often used to expand the scope, reach, and impact of civil society, redefining it as a more connected, decentralized, and digitally enabled space for collective action and social change. However, it must be recognized that the existing affordances of online tools—often designed solely for commercial reasons—tend to prioritize specific content or form of engagement shaping online and offline activism in response. For example, activists may prioritize content that is promoted by

certain platforms to increase their reach and focus attention on actions that "sell better" on social media. This is why designing online spaces and tools dedicated for nonprofit activities and civic engagement is an important task for the coming years.

While identifying advantages and disadvantages of digitalization, it should be recognized as a valid factor shaping civil society nowadays. Examples of such non-traditional forms of engagement include digital activism, online petitions, social media campaigns, hacktivism and cyber protests, crowdsources advocacy, virtual protests and demonstrations as well as digital civil disobedience. Digital platforms such as Change.org and Avaaz provide accessible tools for individuals to create and sign petitions on a wide range of social and political issues. Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, or Instagram serve as channels for digital activism, allowing activists to reach broad audiences, amplify their messages, and mobilize support through hashtags, viral content, and targeted outreach strategies. Hacktivist groups like Anonymous engage in digital direct action, using website defacement, distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, and data leaks to protest against censorship, government surveillance, and corporate malfeasance. Projects like Ushahidi, which maps incidents of violence and human rights abuses, demonstrate the potential of crowdsourcing for civic engagement and accountability. Digital platforms enable crowdsourced advocacy efforts, where volunteers collaborate online to gather and analyse data, conduct research, and advocate for policy reforms.

Virtual gatherings also help activists to maintain momentum and visibility while adapting to changing circumstances. For example, in response to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing measures, activists have organized virtual protests and demonstrations using livestreaming platforms, virtual reality environments, and online forums. Finally, digital activists can engage in online acts of civil disobedience, such as website blockades, digital sit-ins, and online strikes, to protest against unjust laws, corporate practices, or government policies. While controversial, digital civil disobedience can draw attention to pressing issues and challenge power structures in innovative ways. Online tools fit the repertoires of action of modern grassroots movements, often decentralized and leaderless, such as aforementioned Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring protests. Such horizontal organizing becomes more and more often facilitated by social media and digital communication tools. Some cultural and artistic initiatives, which contribute to civil society by challenging dominant narratives, use online tools to disseminate the message, which thanks to internet becomes part of global struggles.

Overall, digital activism expands the toolkit of civil society actors, offering new avenues for participation, advocacy, and resistance in the digital age. However, it also raises ethical and legal questions regarding online privacy, freedom of expression, and the use of disruptive tactics in online spaces. Balancing the potential of digital activism with its risks requires ongoing dialogue, critical reflection, and strategic engagement within civil society and beyond. Redefining civil society measures to include digital activism means adapting existing frameworks and developing

new metrics that reflect the unique characteristics and impact of online activism. This can be done through:

1. Expanding the definition of civil society to encompass online communities, digital platforms, and virtual networks engaged in activism and advocacy. It should be recognized that digital activism takes various forms, including online petitions, social media campaigns, hacktivism, and virtual protests. Recently, even deepfake technology was embraced by some of the activists.
2. Developing indicators to measure digital engagement, such as the number of online supporters, reach and engagement on social media platforms, website traffic, and participation in online events or actions.
3. Defining criteria to assess the impact of digital activism, including changes in public awareness, policy outcomes, behaviour change, and shifts in power dynamics. Qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and content analysis can be used to understand the broader societal effects of online activism.
4. Recognizing the network effects of digital activism, where online actions catalyse offline mobilization and vice versa. The interconnectedness and synergies between digital and offline activism efforts should be recognized to capture the full spectrum of civil society engagement.
5. Considering the digital divide and access barriers when measuring digital activism participation. This means monitoring proxies for online participation among marginalized groups, such as mobile phone ownership, internet penetration rates, and digital literacy levels, to ensure inclusivity in civil society assessments.
6. Integrating ethical considerations into the measurement framework, including issues related to online privacy, data security, algorithmic bias, and digital rights. This involves ensuring that digital activism metrics uphold principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.
7. Engaging civil society organizations, digital rights advocates, researchers, and technological experts in the co-design and validation of new measurement tools and methodologies. Collaboration across sectors would help leverage diverse perspectives and expertise in assessing digital activism's contribution to civil society.

Undoubtedly, measuring civil engagement on the internet requires a multifaceted approach that considers various indicators of online participation, interaction, and impact. There are several methods that can come useful including web analytics, social media metrics, online surveys, content analysis and network analysis. Such metrics can provide insights into the reach and engagement of online platforms maintained by CSOs, the virality of its content, map connections and key nodes, follow the transfer of ideas, as well as explore themes and narratives patterns to understand the dynamics of public discourse.

By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, leveraging diverse data sources, and adopting interdisciplinary methodologies, comprehensive measures of civil engagement on the internet can be developed that reflect the complexity and diversity of online civic dynamics.

Conclusions

The landscape of civic engagement is constantly evolving, with new forms of activism, advocacy, and social mobilization emerging over time. Updated definition of civil society must take into account these dynamic changes and adapt to evolving patterns of civic participation and organizational practices. In some cases it would be worth including not only existing organizations or groups of activists, but estimate the potential for mobilization which protests movements (like Women Strike, or Climate Strike) or Syrian and Ukrainian refugee crises brought to the light (Roszczyńska-Kurasińska et al., 2023). This should be done with caution, because civil society is not homogeneous, and power dynamics within Third Sector can marginalize certain voices and perspectives. Distinguishing what part of collective action should fall into what category will therefore entail grappling with questions of representation, inclusivity, and the ability of marginalized groups to participate in decision-making processes.

When we are defining civil society, we need to recognize that the inequality of power among engaged actors continues to exist. Specific colonizing power of the definition is related to foreign aid programs, global philanthropy as well as political opportunity structures on the ground. Those processes become visible when observing global shifts in how the civil societies are evolving in response to the global phenomena including pandemics, refugee crises or climate emergency. New goals and meanings are being attached to civil society in that context and narrative leaders propose specific roles and definitions to sustain them.

One can therefore start with a question: What should be the starting point of our definition? Are we interested in a macro perspective that is allowing us to discern sectors from each other and feed useful data into the macro political or economic processes? Or maybe we're more interested in the meso perspective, which means looking at organizations as main actors and observing the field or the sphere in which they interact with each other. Another interesting perspective is the micro one, when we focus on individual or small group engagement, including nonformal organizing and are able to discern the "dark and light" patterns.

The building blocks approach seems to be a good direction, because it allows us to focus on different forms of organizations or civic engagement and see them as precisely defined pieces that can be used to build wider categories according to goals. Another issue to have in mind is the audience and end users of the definition: Who are we creating the definition for? Mainly policymakers, other researchers or civil society leaders? Are we looking to local or maybe international audience? What are we going to do with the definition? Are we going to count the organizations? Do we want to compare them? Do we want to make sure that we are funding the right organizations? Do we want to plan policies or just be able to define and discern one type of organization from the other?

If we want to investigate the past, and are interested in the temporal trajectories, then we should keep the old definition to allow for data comparability. However, this should be done more critically then before, recognizing the oversimplification

and blind spots entailed by such process. Thinking about the future, we should put our imagination to work and think about new, more virtual, metaverse connected, digital forms of activism. This is something that is not yet on our table but can very quickly become a relevant topic for civil society researchers, because traditional conceptions of civil society focus on formal organizations and institutions, overlooking non-traditional forms of civic engagement facilitated by digital technologies, social media, and grassroots movements. Incorporating these new forms of activism challenges conventional definitions and measurement frameworks. By redefining civil society measures to encompass digital activism, we can better capture the evolving dynamics of civic engagement in the digital age and ensure that efforts to promote social change online are recognized, valued, and supported.

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Chapter 8
Commentary on Part II - Definition

Ingrid Srinath

The need for clarity, precision, and shared understanding of what we mean by the term civil society is self-evident. Without clear, commonly held, well-defined boundaries, comparisons over time and geography, and even meaningful discussion on the scale, role, impact, or evolution of the sector would be impossible as each of the chapters in this section points out.

On the one hand, most traditional definitions are negative, based on characteristics these organizations do not display i.e. the absence of state control or profit incentives, rather than any shared positive traits. On the other, the growing trend of including all forms of collective action by citizens and communities also blurs boundaries, making measurement, analysis, and comparison near impossible. The quest for a positive definition, rather than one based on negation, on the lines of Gramsci, as highlighted by Carolina Andion, is a highly laudable one. Andion, in fact, envisages civil society as the domain of 'counter-institutions', constituting new forms of economic and political action. Multiple labels and definitions have been proposed over time. Some of these have been dismissed as idealised or naïve, or as aiming to depoliticise the field. Yet, as badges of identity, aspirational goals, even sources of legitimacy, the continuous search for definitions remains a goal worthy of pursuit. Andrea Bassi's analysis of the constructs defined by Pestoff, Salomon and Anheier, Yamauchi, and Anheier's synthesis of approaches helps illuminate the challenges, and advantages, of multiple approaches to the question.

Critically, however, what specific definition is applied in each case is often determined by the intent of the exercise and its intended target audience. The basic classification of organizations as for-profit, nonprofit, or governmental might suffice for broad, macro statistics and international comparisons. Complexities arise when one seeks more nuanced analysis of civic action or assessment of capacity to perform the entire range of functions expected of civil society. Further, as pointed out by Anna Domaradzka, the very process of arriving at agreed definitions is itself subject

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to power dynamics determining inclusion, exclusion, legitimacy and credibility, processes in which civil society organizations and researchers may find themselves advertently or inadvertently complicit. These concerns are, of course, intensified by ever-changing forms of citizen engagement and by the technologies that enable them. And they are often specific to contexts.

The pursuit of "private (collective) action for public good" today encompasses a large variety of forms, a broad range of activities, employing multiple channels of engagement, by entities of varied affiliations, operating at scales ranging from the very local to the truly global. Seeking to either identify an inclusive label, or to frame a comprehensive typology may appear futile or, at least, exhausting. That process also, however, elaborates a map of emerging innovation and a potential source of solidarity, especially in times of adversity.

The evolution of civil society in each context often determines which organizations are perceived to be legitimate by state institutions, funders, and the public. This may be gradual and incremental or present a radical disjuncture in the trajectory of civil society as in in post-Communist countries like Poland, highlighted by Anna Domaradzka, where rigid, narrow, state-driven definitions and forms were replaced first by the influence of international donors, then by adaptation to membership of the European Union and concomitant changes to legal, bureaucratic, and funding frameworks. Carolina Andion maps the trajectory of civil society in Brazil from the early days of colonization through dictatorship, the return to democracy, as well as sharply polarized political contexts. In other contexts, eligibility criteria are the product of power dynamics with both state and market now exerting considerable influence in determining what legitimate civil society action is, and which organizations may receive funding from domestic and international sources. This is exacerbated by the global trend towards shrinking civil society space. In multiple countries, organizations are sought to be legitimized or delegitimized based on the source of their financial support, the range of activities they seek to pursue or the antecedents of their leaders. Further, as Anna Domaradzka describes, we have the phenomenon of "dark patterns of citizen engagement", what some have termed "astroturf" movements which, unlike their grassroots counterparts, are concocted by interest groups to resemble movements. Or, what has been labelled "uncivil society" to encompass groups and organizations who often espouse violence and whose aims are antithetical to justice, freedom, fraternity, and democracy. This complicates measurement, analysis, and comparison both, over time and across geographies and argues for broader rather than narrower definitions and for multiple, independent sources of data.

Even greater challenges to traditional definitions are posed by the widespread adoption of digital technologies by civil society organizations on the one hand, and by states and business on the other. Anna Domaradzka advocates for the inclusion of online communities, digital platforms, and virtual networks engaged in activism and advocacy recognising that digital activism takes various forms, including online petitions, social media campaigns, hacktivism, and virtual protests, even deepfake

technology, among others. As states move to constrain online civic freedoms, and to deploy sophisticated surveillance technology even as corporate ownership of major platforms is highly concentrated, and emerging technologies pose new hazards to civic actors, the imperative to define, understand, and track impact is growing rapidly.

Mapping the continuum of entities and forms from traditional community-based, mutual aid groups, through formal, structured NGOs, to mobilizations whether at the grassroots or in the cloud, as well as the hybrid forms operating at the intersections with state and market—from QUANGOs, GONGOs and BONGOs to a spectrum of social enterprises positioned at different points on the financial versus social return spectrum—is itself both increasingly needed and challenging. Further, many studies exclude the wide range of faith-based entities and forms despite the evidence that religious belief can be a strong driver of individual and community action, even extending its influence in the realm of politics. Each choice increases or decreases the risk of excluding from measurement, from funding as well as from study, domains where some of the most vibrant, and vital, forms of civic action are taking shape.

As desirable as it may seem to achieve well-defined boundaries, a clear typology of entities, and clear definitions enabling measurement, comparison, and analysis, we must also factor in the potential hazards of such clarity. In contexts where civil society faces the gravest threats, amorphous, fluid forms and definitions might provide a degree of protection from surveillance, control, and persecution. Conversely, simplification for its own sake may mask intent. Governments and funders may require formal registration ostensibly to mitigate the risk of resources being diverted or misapplied. This risk mitigation may, in fact, be illusory or a covert way of excluding those entities that pose a challenge to power structures.

Each of these essays examines frameworks for definition based on a combination of these considerations. From the criteria proposed by Carolina Andion of new forms of plurality, publicity, privacy, legality/institutionalisation, and interaction, as criteria toward a positive rather than negative definition, to evolutions of the conventional trichotomy of state, market, community, as well as their intersections, versus the contextual multi-layered approach linking definition to purpose, to synthesis based on proximity to state and market institutions described by Andrea Bassi, and Anna Domaradzka's more inclusive definition, especially with regard to the digital realm.

Given these multiple, sometimes conflicting, considerations, the constant evolution of forms, and the relative merits of each framework it would be fair to conclude that a continually evolving, layered scheme of definition that permits varying levels of aggregation based on intent seems inevitable if the understanding of what Andion describes as this "complex, interdisciplinary and multi-faceted phenomenon that is extremely relevant to strengthening democracy, social justice and sustainability" is to be advanced.

Part III
Classification

Chapter 9
Part I: The Classification of Civil Society, Nonprofit and Third Sector Organizations

A. C. Rutherford, M. Lepere-Schloop, and N. A. A. Perai

Introduction

Classification of civil society organizations is the grouping of similar organizations by their characteristics. Most commonly this is done by activities, or beneficiaries, but it could in principle be based on any set of characteristics. On the face of it, this seems quite straightforward. But in practice there are real challenges in both agreeing and applying a classification system consistently, particularly if the process needs to be automated.

In this chapter we explore what is meant by the classification of civil society organizations, describe its history, and then set out some of the opportunities and challenges that advances in theory and methods might pose for developing classification in the coming years. We follow from the previous section by assuming that the boundaries of which organizations are included in the sector (whether "civil society", "nonprofit", "Third Sector" or some other grouping) have been resolved, and classification is then taking place within those boundaries. But we also acknowledge grey areas, and that issues of which organizations to include may well be bound up with issues of classification.

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Setting the Context

The fundamental challenge for any system of classification is to tradeoff creating groups that allow meaningful patterns to be described and understood, while not losing sight of the diversity of civil society organization which makes the sector so rich. This is a zero-sum game: having only one category of "civil society organization" is to treat a whole sector as being essentially similar, while having such a sophisticated classification system that only one or two organizations fall into each category is just as useless. But a middle-ground, where we show patterns of similarity whilst also representing diversity, can add real value. And, of course, this middle-ground will be contested.

The focus of much work in classification to date has been on what might be described as an organization 'industry' or 'activity'. As such, we will stick to this focus in much of our discussion. But the points we make, the opportunities, and the challenges, will similarly apply to attempts to classify by beneficiary group, geography, aims, or other characteristics.

The purpose of classification also provides important context: by whom, and for whom? (Appe, 2012; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016; LePere-Schloop et al., 2022). Classification is often carried out by academic researchers as a tool to make large quantities of data more tractable, and to analyze systematic patterns within the diverse nonprofit sector (Litofcenko et al., 2020; Ma, 2021; Anheier, 1997; Salamon & Anheier, 1998; Sokolowski & Salamon, 2005; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016; Heinrich, 2005; Finn et al., 2008). Classification is also commonly employed by government, regulators (including nonprofit infrastructure organizations) and statistical agencies (Appe, 2011; Grønbjerg, 1994; Lampkin et al., 2001; NCVO, 2021). These could be for the purposes of organizing, segmenting or counting organizations within the sector. Classifications may be useful to other organizations: grant makers focusing on particular types of activity, or private sector companies looking to supply nonprofit organizations with goods or services (Never, 2011). And finally, classifications may be used by the general public, as a method of transparency or accountability, or in making decisions about organizations to support, through services such as Charity Navigator[1] or GuideStar.[2] Different actors with different priorities may want to design and use a classification system for many different purposes, and a general system of classification needs to recognize this. But actors using such a classification system also need to consider the aims of the creator of the classification, and what the implications of decisions made by them in classification might be for them and the organizations being classified (Appe, 2012; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016; LePere-Schloop, 2022).

Given this history, why should we re-examine classification now? Two parallel and related developments make this timely. Firstly, the availability of data about civil society (as well as society more generally) is increasing exponentially. In many

[1] https://www.charitynavigator.org/

[2] https://www.guidestar.org/

countries registers of organizations are being published, or surveys of civil society organizations conducted. With this comes a desire to do more quantitative analysis of the sector, and also more comparative research on international differences between sectors. Secondly, the most recent revolution in artificial intelligence (AI), combined with increases in computing power, have created opportunities to work with the large volumes of data that have not been possible before. These each pose both opportunities and challenges for classification, and the researcher embarking on a study of this sort of data needs to think carefully about these in their work.

These opportunities present researchers (as well as policy makers and practitioners) with new opportunities to tackle head-on some of the hard classification problems. But we argue strongly that we must also take a critical social science lens to these opportunities, and to the ways in which they might be implemented. In particular, we consider issues of equity in access to data and methods across international contexts. We recognize the power implicit in who conducts and controls a system of classification, as well as in how that classification might then be applied. We highlight the potential lack of transparency in how newer methods (and particularly AI) carry out their classification. And we echo wider concerns about the potential for AI to simply re-produce the inherent biases that are present in their training data.

A Brief History of Nonprofit Classification

While standardized classification approaches have played an important role in the development, regulation, and study of nonprofit organizations and the Third Sector (Salamon & Anheier, 1992; Salamon, 2010), we focus this discussion on the history of classification in Third Sector research.

Arguably beginning in the United States, interest in voluntary, Third Sector organizations quickly spread to the UK and around the globe in the late 1970's and early 1980's (Barman, 2013; Hall, 1992; Hodgkinson & Painter, 2003; Smith, 1999, 2016). This growing interest in the Third Sector led scholars and practitioners to compile nonprofit almanacs in Europe (Knapp, 1993) and to develop the National Taxonomy of Exemt Entities (NTEE) in the United States. The NTEE emerged in the 1980's to classify organizations by purpose and was refined in the late 1990's to incorporate the Nonprofit Program Classification (NPC) System, which classifies organizations by programs, services, and activities (Lampkin et al., 2001; Sumariwalla, 1986). Salamon and Anheier (1992, 1994) published what became known as the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations (ICNPO) codes in the early 1990's to enable cross-national comparative research on the size and scope of the Third Sector. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index, a cross-national effort to classify the openness of civil society spaces (Heinrich, 2005), also began in the early 1990's (CIVICUS, 2023). The CIVICUS Civil Society Index sought to compare civil society spaces across countries while reflecting the diversity of actors and understandings of civil society based on national context (Heinrich, 2005).

Although these standardized classification systems greatly facilitated research on the Third Sector, scholars recognized their shortcomings early on, illustrating the tradeoffs inherent to nonprofit classification described earlier. For example, Grønbjerg (1994, p. 303) notes:

> Non-profit purposes are a function of specific political economies – the interaction between economic scope and structure, demographic composition, and the scope and design of public policies. Non-profit purposes, therefore, will vary from one type of political economy to the next, and no single classification system is likely to adequately capture the full variety.

Critiques of nonprofit classification approaches also intertwine with broader criticisms of efforts to map the Third Sector. For example, Third sector mapping initiatives have been criticized for: inadequate or faulty operationalization of the entities or concepts being mapped (Abzug, 1999; Fioramonti & Kononykhina, 2015; Grønbjerg, 2002; Knutsen, 2016; Lampkin & Boris, 2002; Morris, 2000; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016; Roudebush & Brudney, 2012; Smith, 1997; Soteri-Proctor & Alcock, 2012; Taylor, 2002; Vakil, 2018; Van Til, 1988); reflecting Western academic and/or development interests morehei than local realities in the Global South[3] (Anheier, 1997; Bereketeab, 2009; Biekart, 2008; Fioramonti & Kononykhina, 2015; Fowler, 2012; Wickramasinghe, 2005); and failing to critically reflect upon, and account for the ways in which classification is generative and shaped by power (Appe, 2012, 2013; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016; LePere-Schloop et al., 2022).

Features of Classification Systems

A classification system must consider a range of features. These are decisions to be taken when designing a classification system, or characteristics to consider when selecting or critiquing an existing classification system.

Resolution

A system must decide on the number of categories. Too few and it's a blunt instrument, too many and it's unwieldy. This will determine both how rich the classification is at capturing detail as well as how easy it is to apply in practice. A common approach is to establish a hierarchy of nested classifications, which means that the categorization can be used at different resolutions as appropriate for the task in hand. For example categories and sub-categories of activity, such as "D14 Family services" nested within "D10 Individual and family services", itself nested within "D Social Services" (ICNPO).

[3] Global South is broadly defined as "less developed economies" generally found in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America.

Exclusivity

Must an organization fit into just one category, or can multiple categories be assigned to the same organization as attributes? Again, the former is simpler and unambiguous, but at the cost of detail. Multiple categories on the other hand provides nuance but makes analysis much harder and risks double-counting of organizations that span categories. Standard classification systems such as ICNPO usually require that only one category be allocated, although in practice researchers may apply more than one. Self-classified categories often take a "tick all that apply" approach to allow organizations to self-define broadly.

Generality Versus Specificity

Does the classification cover all types of organizations in all places, or is it tailored to a specific sub-sector, country or time. A general approach makes comparative work easier (though not necessarily better) while a tailored classification can capture local richness.

Distinctiveness

How clear are the boundaries between categories? A classification system ideally needs these to be clear and unambiguous. One approach is to have a hierarchy of categories. But the more general the classification, the harder it will be to define categories that are distinct in all contexts.

Consistency

Are the boundaries of classification categories agreed upon and shared? If the classification system is applied to the same data by two different people will organizations be classified in the same way? A classification with too much room for subjectivity or ambiguity will not be very effective. This can be a language challenge when a classification system is used internationally, and where meaning can vary across cultures and contexts. This can be helped by involving multiple coders, and comparing intercoder reliability.

Stability

Longitudinal analysis is easier when classifications stay the same over time. But societies, and nonprofits, change over time. So, a classification system that does not adapt will become increasingly out-of-date. There needs to be a mechanism to avoid unnecessary changes but allow for some development over time. When classifications are out of date, there is a trade-off with change to keep them contemporary against breaking a consistent time series for longitudinal analysis.

Deductive Versus Inductive

Classification systems can be implemented by establishing a scheme of classification and then applying it to organizations in a sector. Or the scheme can be developed from the data, emerging from natural groupings of organizations within the data. The former is more rigid, but more suited to being re-applied in different contexts, while the latter will be more sophisticated but also more specific to the time and place in which it is applied.

Practicality

Classification is undertaken for a purpose, and so a system needs to support its intended purpose. It may be used more widely, and care must be taken if it is used in domains outside of what is intended in its design, as it may then produce a misleading picture of the sector. So a classification system must be clear in what it is trying to achieve by classifying organizations, and then deliver on that aim in a way which is feasible to implement.

Power

Classifying and organizing the sector carries power, as classification may well be a factor in decision-making, whether about inclusion or exclusion, about funding, about policy coverage and about what is counted. So it matters who controls the classification, how they will decide on both the method and how it is implemented, and how that classification might be used. Those considering developing a classification system, or applying an existing one in a new context, need to be aware of what the implications might be for organizations in that context of being classified in that way.

Methods of Classification

Having established a classification scheme, one must then consider how to apply it (or how it has been applied by others).

Manual Coding

The most thorough, but labor-intensive coding process is manual coding. This involves the researcher considering each organization in turn, and applying the coding scheme rules to allocate the appropriate category to that organization. Ideally this would be conducted with multiple coders, and some overlap, in order that the consistency (intercoder reliability) of coding can be estimated. This approach would have a high reliability but would only be practical for relatively small numbers of organizations unless significant time and resources are available. Examples include manual coding to develop training data for automated classifications (Ma, 2021) and to test automated approaches to textual classification (Litofcenko et al., 2020).

Self-Report

Organizations can be asked to self-report a classification. This distributes the work of classification across all of the organizations concerned and has the potential for greater accuracy as each organization is classified by someone very familiar withs its work. However, in order to be successful, the organizations involved would need to have a good understanding of the classification scheme, and without further work it would be challenging to ensure reliability across the individual classifiers. This method also requires a way to collect primary data from organizations, which may not be feasible in many contexts. This is commonly used by regulators as a method of classification, such as the Charity Commission for England & Wales (Damm & Kane, 2022), and in Ghana (LePere-Schloop et al., 2022).

Rule-Based Classification

If structured data is available about organizations, either primary data collected directly or secondary data (e.g. derived from administrative records), then an automated rule-based classification can be applied. This is particularly suited to classifications based on financial data, or on organizational characteristics (such as legal form). For example, organizations could be classified by the proportion of their

expenditure made on specific types of expense. This approach is scalable, and has high transparency, but does demand detailed consistent data and leaves little room for gray areas or edge-cases.

Keyword Based Classification

Richer data, including unstructured textual data such as an organization description or mission statement, can be used for classification with a keyword search approach This allocates organizations to a classification based on the presence (or absence) of keywords in name, description, or broader textual data. This approach provides more flexibility, and potential for a richer classification, but does require significant work to assemble and organize combinations of keywords. These keywords must be structured into rules which allocate a classification based on combinations of words. But the same word can mean very different things in different contexts, and so the resulting set of classification rules can be very complex to cover edge cases. Examples of this approach includes Litofcenko, Karner and Maier (2020); Damm and Kane (2022); Fyall et al. (2018); Jones et al. (2023).

Machine-Learning and AI Classification

Recent developments in machine learning (and other AI-based approaches) provide opportunities to classify large quantities of unstructured data in a more sophisticated way than one which is rule-based or keyword-based (Friedman et al., 2001; James et al., 2013). Supervised machine learning requires the classification algorithm to be trained on a set of pre-classified data, but can then be applied to novel data to apply classification at scale. Unsupervised machine learning is data-driven, creating groupings from clusters or associations between organizations that emerge from the data. Supervised learning suits the application of an existing classification system, while unsupervised learning has the potential to create classifications and groupings that are not imposed by the researcher. Moving beyond keyword-based approaches, natural language processing (NLP) algorithms attempt to represent words as numerical vectors which capture the meaning or context of the word, and allow similarity between text to go beyond mechanical similarity in the actual characters used. This ‘embedding’ supports a deeper classification algorithm when using unstructured textual data as it allows meaning to be compared. These methods are attractive in their data-driven approach and potential to detect nuance, but they can be less transparent (with the classification ‘rules’ being more of a black box), and are susceptible to repeating existing structural biases in their classifications. Examples include Ma (2021) using machine learning to map activity classifications in the US nonprofit sector, and LePere-Schloop et al. (2022) using supervised machine learning with mission descriptions for United Ways organizations to classify nonprofit roles.

Conclusion

We have shown that classification has a long history of both theoretical development and methodological application. We describe the features of nonprofit classification systems, and introduce both the traditional and emerging methods used in classification.

This provides a sound foundation on which to build, and we go on in the next chapter to consider the emerging opportunities for classification and how nonprofit scholars might engage with them.

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Chapter 10
Part II: Turning a Critical Lens on Nonprofit Classification: Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Age

A. C. Rutherford, M. LePere-Schloop, and N. A. A. Perai

Introduction

While the classification of nonprofits has a long and distinguished history, it is not without controversy. Defining who is in the sector, and where they sit within that sector, is a powerful task. And any attempt to do it at an international scale must recognize the diversity of voluntary activity and civil society across cultures and contexts. Differences in cultures, language, contexts and institutions pose challenges for nonprofit scholars wishing to conduct comparative research internationally (Searing et al., 2023). In this chapter, we consider the challenges of applying classifications in different cultures, before going on to explore both the opportunities and challenges that new data and technologies offer for complex classification at scale. We conclude with some reflections on how the theory and application of classification might proceed in the future.

Critique of the Generalizability of Nonprofit Classification

Standardized classification of Third Sector organizations (TSO) provides a practical framework to understand and compare the sector across countries but they often fail to take into consideration the complex variations that are present across various

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cultural contexts. Despite various discussions on the development of the nonprofit or Third Sector, particularly its growing economic role in service delivery and policy development over the past thirty or so years, there are still significant variations between the sectors in different regions of the world (Casey, 2016).

Third Sector taxonomies identify both organizational type and activity, enabling actors, researchers and policymakers to develop a complete understanding of the sector's layout and components. A common standard enhances the sector's legitimacy by giving it a universal identity. Taxonomies are developed based on the analysis of the sector's characteristics, particularly its actors. The question is, what is the basis for the universal standard?

Societies evolve over time by accumulating and developing cultural knowledge over generations, built upon their experiences and worldviews. These can be indigenous but much of it may be adapted from foreign cultures through trade or conquest. European empires had conquered most of Asia and Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, changes brought by them shaped the lives of those countries. Religion also shapes societal development in the individual and their routines, life goals and ideals. Culture is manifested in material forms such as art as well as intangibles such as language and customs and how people socialize and interact with each other.

In psychology, the "universality assumption" is where observed uniformity is taken as evidence of inherent or natural universality. Tweaking this to fit into the context of cross-cultural classification, the sample for observing Third Sector characteristics may not be sufficient to detect culturally derived differences. In the case of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, the sample is limited to fewer than 50 countries while other studies such as the CIVICUS Civil Society Index and the NGO Law Monitor, despite their wider coverage, focus only on specific areas of the sector. Like psychologists, the effort to standardize global Third Sector classification should expand the sample base beyond the WEIRD (Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic) group.

Culture and Traditions

The activities, strategies and objectives of Third Sector organizations in different parts of the world are influenced by the unique historical, cultural, social and political context of the nation they operate within. Standard classification may not consider the different organizational structures and operational practices across cultures. There could be activities or services that are unique to a certain culture or nation which are unknown or not common in the Western setting and hence not seen as crucial to be included in the classification system. This is why standard classification which is designed based on the Western perspective fails to capture the diversity of the Third Sector in different cultural settings due to restricted understanding of Third Sector operations in various cultural contexts.

Taking the definition of organizational culture from the organizational behavior perspective, we can postulate that an organization within a given society is built upon a system of shared beliefs, values and assumptions. These elements would strongly define its existence. Studies in the relationship between culture and institutions have resulted in the development of cultural taxonomies which provided insights into the association between culture and social groups and how society's behavior and interaction are shaped (Zelenkova, 2020). Cultural taxonomies classify cultures from multiple angles, including, national characteristics, life attitudes, worldview and patterns of behaviour. Hall (1966, quoted in Zelenkova, 2020) separate cultures into high and low contextual dimensions. High-context cultures are less direct and often rely on non-verbal communication and implicit messages. Such characteristic simplies that a Third Sector organization or activity in these communities could be less formal or less organized where community assistance or the act of providing social support is seen as a personal obligation rather than an organized activity. In a low-context culture, where communication and interaction tend to be more explicit, strict and organized, its Third Sector activities would be in a more formal and structured manner. Both high and low-context cultures would require different, distinct way of sending out charity appeals and messages, a method this is suitable for one most likely would not be suitable for the other due to the different cultural habits.

Individuals' perceptions of their social environment and responsibilities also plays a role in deciding the appropriate behavior or action. In individualistic cultures where personal ties are loose, society would be more independent, and everyone is expected to be responsible for themselves. In collectivist cultures, societies are organized into unified groups where decisions and obligations are made collectively. In both instances, differences can be observed in charity and philanthropic attitudes and decisions. Social status, gender, age, and religious backgrounds would influence giving or volunteering behaviors.

Autocratic regimes tend to keep a closer hold on their Third Sector compared to liberal, democratic market-oriented systems. State policies drive societal behavior which is translated into how societies conduct Third Sector activities and the size of the sector in general. Salamon and Anheier's social origins theory posits that the emergence of the Third Sector, like that of welfare state or democracy is due to the multifaceted relations between society and its institutions, its politics and history. They identified the liberal model as one that has a large Third Sector due to low government social welfare spending. A social democratic model has a small Third Sector because high social welfare provision by the State leaves very little need for non-governmental providers of social welfare services.

In democratic or liberal economics, relationships between the Third Sector and the State come in many forms. In Salamon and Anheier's corporatist model, the State has little choice but to work together with the Third Sector, while in the statist model, the State controls social welfare policies leading to constrained social services. These differences present challenges to classification as it defines the sector differently, depending on its relationship with the State.

Another limitation of the standard classification system is in the categorization of Third Sector organization (TSO). The present classification system categorizes TSOs based on either the legal structure or activities of the organizations, such as charities or associations. While these may be broad and all encompassing, it may not align with or capture the different organizational forms or practices of different cultures. In places where formality is not practiced or the legal structure is less developed or not as far reaching, Third Sector activities may operate through less formal networks, or based on religious institutions. It could also be based on ad-hoc community driven initiatives, without a structured form or governance and these types would not neatly fit into pre-determined, Western-based categorization.

The terminology used to describe Third Sector activities may also pose additional challenges. Misrepresentation could arise when certain terms are wrongly translated or interpreted especially when it fails to take into consideration the nuances and cultural implications of a particular terminology or concept. Interpretation of values, customs, and practices that shape Third Sector activity in diverse cultural contexts may not be adequately understood and captured by Western-centric language and notions.

The concept of a defined and structured Third Sector may be alien to certain communities where mutual help or community assistance is done informally, such as the Malay "gotong royong" practice (Thompson, 2004). This is where individuals, often community leaders take the initiative to organize a community program, including fund raising, without a formal platform or organization. Traditionally, the expectation among the Malay community is that assistance in times of need should come from family or close neighbors (Raybeck & De Munck, 2010).

In societies where the idea of a defined and structured Third Sector is widespread; another potential problem could arise—the consensus on what should be included or excluded from the sector. Salamon and Anheier's early version of the social origins theory was criticized by Evers and Laville (2004) for not including mutuals and cooperatives, which were traditionally part of the European social economy and Third Sector, into their proposition. Hybrid organizations would represent another grey area, where they fit within the economy may not easily be agreed upon. This demonstrates that each community has their peculiarities, and an agreement is needed to identify what is in and what is out, and why.

Given the structural and functional diversity of the Third Sector, it is defined differently in different parts of the world. The American definition is based on the tax status while the European conceptualization of the sector include social economy elements. Religion also plays a role in shaping the sector's definition where in some cultures they are an active participant. In South East Asia, many Third Sector organizations are born out of immigration, they assist newly arrived migrants, helping them settle in their new countries. The formal and regulated Third Sector was also introduced in some countries by their former colonial masters where the concept is formalized by adding written rules to regulate the sector.

It is, therefore, crucial, to recognize and include indigenous knowledge into the effort to understand nonprofit behavior and Third Sector activity. Different cultures may have distinctive community support systems that may not align with the

Western based framework, and some are the result of historical events, political structures or foreign influences. To understand Third Sector diversity is through understanding their practices and methods and often this involves a mixture of politics, the market and the community.

Data Availability

Another cross-culture classification challenge is data availability, quality, and comparability. Present classification system such as the International Classification of Non Profit Organizations (ICNPO) rely on organizational data which may not be available or accessible in some nations. Different organizational definitions, reporting requirements, and data presentation formats make it difficult to produce meaningful cross-country comparisons and as a result, restricts the understanding of Third Sector activities.

In developed industrialized nations with a longer and documented history of associational life, the Third Sector has amassed records and data on the provision of social welfare goods and services. In the developed world including those governed by autocratic or one-party systems, reliable information on Third Sector activities is not only scarce but is challenging to obtain.

Local or regional distinctiveness can be identified through the process of cultural mapping which involves documenting, describing and comprehending the distinctive cultural elements of communities, places and nations. Identifying the values, traditions and social structures that influence the emergence, development and operations of Third Sector organizations would enable us to come up with a [model] that reflects the peculiarities of a given society or nation. Methods such as "interactive community mapping" where individuals create maps of their community, comprising of infrastructure and services for the purposes of building knowledge to assist development activities can also be used to understand the peculiar characteristic of the community.

Salamon et al. (2000) found the nonprofit/Third Sector to be a major economic force in the 22 countries covered in their study. Most of the 22 however are made up of developing nations of the North plus Australia and Japan. Only 5 are from Latin America, 4 from Eastern Europe and none from Asia or Africa. While the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) eventually covered more than 40 countries with more from the developing world, however, recent research on the Southern Third Sector still had to go through the raw data collection and management process (LePere-Schloop et al., 2022; Perai, 2019).

Data, both organizational and operational, are no doubt present in almost, if not all jurisdictions. This data, however, may not always be organized or stored in an accessible database. In some cases, data custodians may be reluctant to share the data for many different reasons. In the case of Malaysia, the sector is regulated by multiple regulators resulting in inconsistent databases caused by differing reporting requirements and standards. In some countries, nonprofits and Third Sector

organizations are allowed to operate without the need to register with the government which further complicates data collection.

In some countries, especially those yet to fully computerize their databases, it would be challenging to gather and organize data on non-profits and Third Sector activities. The information would presumably be recorded on paper, identifying relevant material would be difficult especially when dealing with the older, handwritten documents. Logistical problems would also be present where large space is required to process the documents, as well as requiring more manpower compared to managing electronic data.

Not all jurisdictions are equally efficient in data collection, there could be instances where enforcement is lax, records are not filed in full and/or on time. The result is a database with gaps in data. This would be made worse if contact information is not updated causing the organizations to disappear for the regulators radar and making it impossible to keep a complete and comprehensive database. When there are gaps in data, the sector will be misrepresented, its characteristics will not be fully recognized, and its identity will not be fully established. Incomplete financial and other administrative data would make it difficult to measure the size and output of the sector. Data collection would be made more difficult in the absence of cooperation from regulators or other data custodians, quality of data would be affected, classification would be incomplete, and incoherent. In autocratic regimes, where scrutiny of nonprofits and Third Sector organizations tend to be stricter, data may be available and probably extensive but may not be released to the public as these regimes tend to use the data to monitor and mold the shape the Third Sector.

Opportunities from New Data and New Technologies

In recognition of the limitations of standardized and static classification systems and leveraging the increasing availability of digital data, researchers have begun to develop alternative and adaptive classification approaches using traditional qualitative and computational methods. Several researchers have applied automated keyword search to classify organizations based on their names, mission statements, and other textual data. For example, Litofcenko et al. (2020) and Damm and Kane (2022) used multiple human coders and automated keyword search to respectively classify Austrian and UK organizations to ICNPO categories at scale. Fyall et al. (2018) applied keyword search to mission statements to identify nonprofits in the housing space in a more nuanced way than was possible based on the NTEE codes. Jones et al. (2023) illustrated how government might target disaster relief to "essential" nonprofits using keyword search.

Automated keyword search approaches show great promise for classification but also have important limitations. Their strengths include the fact that they are easy to explain and replicate, and that they can be built to reflect diverse research goals and the nuance of local contexts. However, like any rules-based computer system, automated keyword searches require a great deal a priori human understanding and are

not adaptive to contextual changes. For example, Fyall et al. (2018) possessed deep knowledge of the nonprofit housing space, which they used to develop and refine keywords used to develop their search algorithm. This algorithm worked well because it reflects the prevailing vocabulary of practice (Loewenstein et al., 2012), however it might not be effective outside of the historical and social context in which it was developed (LePere-Schloop et al., 2022).

Machine learning is increasingly being used to make existing classification systems like the NTEE somewhat more adaptive, and to illustrate alternative classification approaches. Ma (2021), for example, used human coders and supervised machine learning to reclassify nonprofit organizations to NTEE categories based on updated descriptions of organization activities. LePere-Schloop et al. (2022) illustrated a supervised machine learning approach to classifying nonprofits by the roles reflected in their mission statements. Leung (2020) experimented with an unsupervised approach to cluster arts, heritage and culture organizations in England and Wales. While to date, Third Sector scholars have not published work using large language models (LLMs) like OpenAI's Chat-GPT, they are currently using LLM-adjacent computational methods (e.g. Ma's (2021) use of embeddings). The rapid pace of LLM innovation suggests that it is only a matter of time before researchers begin to experiment with using LLMs to classify Third Sector actors and activities.

The flexibility of machine learning approaches has the potential to allow researchers to leverage both the power of standardized classification systems in an adaptive way and to use the digitized archival data and digital data generated through social media, smartphones, etc. To build alternative classification systems. For example, Ma's work builds on the strengths of the NTEE, using supervised machine learning to confirm or reclassify nonprofits based on the digitized mission and activity descriptions they submit annually to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). As LePere-Schloop et al. (2022) describe, machine leaning also holds promise for classification based on local understandings of the Third Sector when the social context in which data were generated is foregrounded in the algorithm training process.

Machine learning approaches, however, are not without their perils. As critical technology scholars argue, computer systems are not objective (Lepri et al., 2018; Friedman & Nissenbaum, 1996) and can exacerbate existing disparities when engaged with as such (Corbett-Davies et al., 2023; O'Neil, 2016). Critical Third Sector research has long underscored the import of classification goals (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016) and the positionality of those making important decisions about taxonomies and methodologies (Appe, 2011, 2012, 2013) in shaping classification systems, processes, and outcomes.

In the current context where Third Sector scholars are increasingly employing computational methods and digitized data, LePere-Schloop et al. (2022) argue for the additional need to critically consider algorithms and data. Machine learning algorithms may be more or less opaque (Burrell, 2016; Kitchen, 2017), with implications for the extent to which the classifications they produce can be examined and challenged by affected stakeholders. The expertise needed to train machine learning algorithms, particularly highly effective deep learning algorithms, also makes it easy to exclude affected stakeholders from important decisions (Burrell, 2016;

Kitchen, 2017; O'Neil, 2016). With the cost of operating Chat-GPT estimated at $700,000 USD per day (Elimian, 2023), it is cost prohibitive for most governments and higher education institutions to develop training sets and algorithmic architecture on par with the Big Tech companies.

LePere-Schloop et al. (2022) also raise important considerations regarding the data used to train machine learning algorithms. Data quality has a huge impact on the efficacy of machine learning algorithms. For example, after experimenting with a decision tree algorithm, Litofcenko et al. (2020) concluded that the results were unsatisfactory because their data set was limited to organization names and web scraped data. Because bias in data is 'trained into' machine learning algorithms, shaping their output, it is also essential to critically consider how social, economic, and political power shape data generation processes, including what data are available to whom and for what purposes (Burrell, 2016; Kitchen, 2017; O'Neil, 2016). For example, if certain social or religious groups have been systematically denied opportunities to self-organize because they are considered a threat to established power structures, their activities may be less likely to appear in official data sets and/or more likely to be classified as "deviant".

Looking to the Future of Nonprofit Classification: Implications and a Way to Proceed

There is no panacea for nonprofit classification. As we have shown, there are advantages and drawbacks to both rigid formal international classifications, and more nuanced bespoke classifications. We welcome the opportunities that new technologies and methods will bring to open up study of parts of the nonprofit sector internationally that has not been possible (at least at scale) before. But we also acknowledge the risks of broad-brush approaches, imposing standards from the outside, and unaccountable algorithms.

Future developments in classification need to be built on a sound theoretical and conceptual model of what to classify. There is a long history of this work, but developments in classification systems also need to consider innovations in civil society organization: new organizational forms; the increasing importance of less formal activity; so-called "under the radar" organizations that are not well-captured in traditional data; and new forms of activity, particularly driven by technology. Developments in the theory of classification also need to give more thought to what classification across cultural and institutional contexts means, and the extent to which it is desirable (and even possible) to have comprehensive standardized classifications that are universally applicable.

Future developments in classification need to consider carefully both the data and data-generating processes that provide the raw material for classification. The scope of what constitutes data for the purposes of classification has been

significantly broadened, as has the accessibility of more traditional organizational data. But the collection of data is usually not neutral, and is frequently undertaken as a method of regulation, monitoring or control. The cultural and institutional setting in which data is collected is important for both understanding its meaning, and understanding how it might be used. So classification needs to account for both what is, and what is not, observed.

Future developments in classification need to consider the emerging methods of classification. As we write this, artificial intelligence methods are fast-moving, opening up new possibilities for the sophisticated manipulation of large quantities of structure and un-structured data. Both the opportunities and dangers of this is an important discussion for society more broadly. But for classification, we should both recognize the potential to open up analyses in countries and contexts that have been previously excluded by the lack of traditional data, as well as consider that not all analyses that are now possible are in fact desirable. The potential for these methods to reproduce or amplify existing inequalities, or to be misused by bad actors to the detriment of civil society working in challenging contexts, means that a critical eye is as important as ever.

Bringing these three pillars (of theory, data and methods) together, we suggest a set of broad principles for classification to help researchers and practitioners in engaging with the tradeoffs that we have described, and both the opportunities and challenges that these developments provide.

Support Open Research and Transparency

Classification systems, and their application to a set of organizations should be as transparent as possible. This means being explicit about how a classification system has been derived, and the methods that have been used to assign organizations to those categories. Ideally, a process of classification should be replicable. That is, another research team should be able to follow the research protocol and methods used to achieve the same end result in classification. This is often harder than it sounds. But it embraces the principles of open science, where the detail is shared: raw data, software specifications, coding schemas, programming code and algorithms.

Striking a Balance Between standardization and Localization

Standardization is important for comparative research, and it supports a transparent open science approach. This means that where possible a standard classification system should be used, and there are several to choose from. However, as we have

discussed can be significant shortcomings in using a standard classification system in some applications or contexts. Researchers or practitioners can take a number of actions here. Firstly, any shortcomings of a system in the context at hand should be acknowledged and discussed openly. Any limitations introduced by the classification should be taken into account in the analysis and conclusion that are drawn from the data. Secondly, standard classifications can be customized, such as adding additional categories, or permitting multiple coding where one would be normally be required. This could be minor, or a more major localization of a schema, particularly to account for language or cultural differences. And finally, a tailored or bespoke classification system can be developed for the specific application. In all three cases, and anything in between, it is critical to remember the first principle, of transparency, and to clearly document any decisions taken in amending, developing or implementing a classification system. Researchers should consider the balance between the wider benefits of standardization and the local specificity of the development or customization of a classification system.

Applying a Critical Social science Lens

New technologies for data processing and automating classification might naturally be the domain of the data scientist. But the interplay of power and meaning in how classifications are operationalized and used require also the critical lens of the social scientist. This is true whether as a producer or consumer of organizational classifications. Nonprofit scholars from a range of disciplines and cultural contexts need to engage critically with the theory, data and methods of classification.

Conclusion

With the development of internationally-recognized systems of nonprofit classification, this research area could easily be seen as a relatively dry ‘solved problem’. But in these two chapters we have argued that on the contrary, classification is an area with both a solid foundation and fast-moving opportunities to innovate and develop the domain theoretically and methodologically.

We suggest that nonprofit scholars should recognize and embrace these opportunities. But in parallel, we need to continue to develop our theoretical and conceptual understanding of what we are classifying, and ensure that in any classification exercise there is a health critical perspective on how that classification is operationalized and interpreted. With this combination, we can use new data and methods to advance our understanding of our diverse and dynamic civil societies.

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Chapter 11
Commentary on Part III - Classification

Inés M. Pousadela

Rutherford, LePere-Schloop and Perai highlight the challenges of establishing a classification system for CSOs and applying it consistently even after reaching agreement around a definition of civil society as a sector and laying out criteria for determining which organizations are in and which are out. In countries in which the sector is regulated and where there are registries available, classification may be driven by existing online datasets, even though it is often the case that not all data is publicly available. Such information may be useful for policymakers, while posing additional challenges for researchers seeking comparability across countries and regions. Variety therefore suggests the need to strike a balance between standardization and localization. This resonates strongly when it comes to classifying CSOs in Latin America.

By way of explanation, Latin American civil society comprises a vast variety of heterogeneous groups of various sizes and degrees of formalization. Advocacy, research, and consultancy NGOs working on various issues coexist with social movements, trade unions, peasants' and students' organizations, and faith-based, cultural, recreation and service-providing organizations, along with countless informal and local groups engaged in a wide range of activities. The internet has added an extra layer of complexity to the sector, allowing for the existence of fluid groupings that exist simultaneously or episodically online and offline, and have been at the roots of very successful recent mobilization efforts, notably around violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights.

If defined as the sphere of voluntary association located outside of the family, the state and the market, the civil society space could be considered as roughly equivalent to that of the so-called "Third Sector", and "civil society organization" as just another name for a "nongovernmental" and "nonprofit" organization. However, the

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designation of CSOs as "nonprofits" is not all that common throughout Latin America, while that of 'charities' is even less so, as the Spanish word continues to carry strong connotations linked to the sector's first origins in Christian charity.

As for the "NGO" designation, it has itself become an object of contention. Particularly in Latin American countries where the dichotomy between NGOs and social movements has taken deepest hold, the "NGO" label is commonly reserved for a specific kind of CSO: legally recognized, formalized, structured, often generously funded, comprising technical experts and professionals, and carrying out programs and projects, usually aimed at promoting democratic governance and/or economic development and the social inclusion of least favored groups (Pousadela, 2019). Although they can resort to volunteers, NGOs are not structured around them, but are rather led by professional teams and made up of professional activists. As pointed out by Sorj (2007: 133), NGOs differ from previously existing organizations representing specific constituencies, such as trade unions, in that they "promote social causes without a mandate for those that they claim to represent", therefore building their legitimacy in the moral force of their arguments rather than their representative character. NGOs typically are not membership organizations and usually lack a stable and homogeneous social base; although this may have started to change in recent years, they normally don't exert direct pressure through mobilization and are more reliant more institutional channels to promote their agendas instead.

Academic concepts often diverge from the ways these are appropriated by social actors (Roitter, 2004). It is often the case in the region, and particularly in the Southern Cone, that the term "NGO" tends to be avoided, and organizations fitting the description would rather call themselves simply "CSOs". When the name is still used, it may entail a contentious meaning, denoting a critical stance towards the named object. Many organizations, and particularly grassroots ones, even if legally recognized, reject so-called "NGO culture" as mainstream, pro-establishment, technocratic, and not socially sensitive—if not as complicit with the neoliberal state's retreat from its social and regulatory obligations.

This may be linked to the fact that NGOs first emerged in the region during the "third wave" of transitions to democracy (Huntington, 1991), which largely overlapped with market reforms. At a time when the idea of a leaner state promoted by international financial institutions led to the delegation of basic service delivery functions on civil society, many in the region started viewing the top-down promotion of an institutionalized, malleable, "NGO-ized" civil society as a form of "controlled inclusion" aimed at isolating and taming the "movementist" segment of civil society.

A body of critical literature opposing a civil society centered on registered, professionalized, and well-funded NGOs, to a more confrontational and disruptive version of civil society centered on social movements, or "people's movements", subsequently developed. From this perspective, NGOs were seen as budding bureaucracies intent on continuing to exist regardless of their actual impact on the communities they work with or whose interests they claim to represent, and therefore prone to co-optation by whoever owns the resources that they need to survive.

In contrast with the budding NGOs of the 1960s, seen as playing a supporting role to popular politicization, the increasingly professionalized and depoliticized NGOs of the 1980s and 1990s came to be seen as growing at the expense of, and a replacement for, radical social movements. While NGO practitioners continued to view their activities as supplementary to those of social movement activists and might even see themselves as part of a movement, activists belonging to more radical social movements often criticized them as functional to the global, capitalist world order (Lopes de Souza, 2013). Over time, however, critiques on the complementarity of the various organizational forms that make up civil society also developed, including in the context of the study of the dynamics of feminist change in the region (Pousadela & Bohn, 2023).

To complicate matters further, the self-identification of organizations also often differs from bureaucratic designations. The Latin American region covers 19 countries (33 if non-Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking countries, mostly in the Caribbean, are also included), and registry classifications diverge widely from one country to the next. The same type of organization may bear different names in different countries, or very different organizations may come under a similar name. Some classification systems are more complex than others, and some registries are far more comprehensive. They range in public availability. Numbers of CSOs issued by competent agencies in various countries are often hardly comparable, not only because these diverge in their capacity to survey this complex and vast universe but also because they often do not even count the same kinds of objects.

The literature on civil society and social movements does, however, point towards some classification criteria that are particularly relevant to capturing the physiognomy and dynamics of civil society in the region. One of them is indeed CSOs' degree of formalization, allowing for the distinction between registered, stable and relatively hierarchical organizations and the more informal, fluid, horizontal and typically younger groups that have played such prominent roles in recent years, particularly in gender (women's and LGBTQI+) and environmental rights movements.

Another distinction that is also key, although not necessarily clean-cut, is that between advocacy and service-providing organizations. Partially overlapping with the democratization wave that produced Latin America's civil society sector as we know it, the region also experienced a transition towards market economies. Civil society then strived to fill in the gaps left by the state and market, particularly as multilateral banks—and the international community more generally—adopted the language of "citizen participation" and "state-civil society partnerships" to confer increasing roles in social policy implementation on CSOs as a condition for funding. If the flourishing of human rights CSOs characterized the 1980s, the 1990s saw a new wave of CSOs emerge to provide for social needs, largely supported, as its predecessors had been, by international cooperation funds.

As service-delivery NGOs mushroomed throughout the region, yet another wave of organizations addressing the social consequences of Washington Consensus policies emerged under the form of radical, ideological social movements using a wide

range of methods, but often leaning towards mass protest and confrontational tactics. But again, many of these became institutionalized as the political tide turned and left-wing governments reached power in several countries across the region in the early twenty-first century. While the distinctions between NGOs and social movements, on the one hand, and advocacy and service-delivery organizations, on the other, are far from rigid and static, at any given time, they can offer a revealing snapshot of the dynamics of civil society in the region.

Finally, CSOs in the region can be classified according to the amount and composition of their resources. Shifting funding sources and patterns are, after all, what largely accounts for the changing face of civil society in much of the region, particularly in those countries that are now categorized as middle- or high-income countries, where international cooperation funding has all but dried up, and whatever's left is being increasingly channeled through local and national governments, which in turn sub-contract with CSOs to deliver social programs (Pousadela & Cruz, 2016). This is not just about classifying CSOs according to their budget size but also about considering their resourcing patterns, including but not limited to funding and, ultimately, their sustainability—a concept that would be of much help if it were better operationalized.

Rutherford et al. rightly ask by whom, and for what, classification systems are developed and used. Latin America offers a whole range of situations in terms of the development of definitions, classifications and registries. Wherever these exist, they are based on national-level decisions at best, and they vary widely in terms of consistency, completeness and up-to-dateness. The region therefore provides a good illustration of some of the challenges Third Sector scholars face when seeking to undertake comparative research of civil society formats, dynamics, activities and patterns of change.

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Part IV
Aggregation

Chapter 12
Data Aggregation: An Overview of Opportunities and Obstacles from the National to the Global

Elizabeth Bloodgood

It has been more than two decades since the publication of the United Nations Handbook on the System of National Accounts (Salamon & Anheier, 1994; Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019), which represented the first major recognition by an international statistical agency of the economic relevance of the nonprofit sector in national accounting. Since its publication, this international standard setting approach for data collection, measurement, and reporting of national data has been joined by others including the United Nations, World Bank, OECD, and Open Government Partnership. Collectively these international data projects have increasingly improved their recognition and measurement of broad sets of Third Sector organizations, philanthropy, and volunteer work and provided important opportunities to produce foundational comparative data that bring new visibility and credibility to the Third Sector as well as enabling new research.

Future potential is limited, however, by the quality and accessibility of the administrative systems and data at the national level. National statistics agencies need to be able to identify organizations for surveys, and rely heavily on existing registration, reporting, and tax systems for the collection of data. Low quality or under resourced administrative systems result in sub-optimal national data and can harm the organizations they were intended to serve. Mapping the nonprofit sector can be a means for governments to control the Third Sector (Appe, 2013; LePere-Schloop et al., 2022). Data aggregation by researchers can also shape the contents of the Third Sector, as only that which can be measured can be included. Definitions of the sector, and the organizations it contains, which focus on formal organizations are even more problematic as we increase attention to the global South (Mendonça et al., 2016; Domaradzka, 2018) as the Third Sectors in these countries are more informal and diverse as well as at risk of repression.

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This section will discuss the aggregation of data at the national level in the context of international data systems, and consider both the current state of the art and future possibilities. Ksenija Fonovic examines how the international statistical infrastructure provided by the United Nations can produce a vastly improved picture of the nonprofit sector and volunteering in Italy which has helped strengthen the sector and inform academic theory. Francisco Santamarina discusses developing technologies which can aid data aggregation in the future.

This chapter provides an overview of current data aggregation efforts as well as the key issues that any data aggregation project must consider, including data quality, scope, commensurability, and durability. Open data principles are examined as potential tools to help produce higher quality, sustainable aggregation. Key considerations for successful future data aggregation are the development of data infrastructure and funding and explicitly addressing concerns that efforts to aggregate Third Sector data might have political consequences.

State of the Art: Approaches, Tools, and Techniques

As is discussed earlier in this edited volume, how government agencies and researchers define and categorize the Third Sector shapes what we seek to measure and has important implications for data aggregation. For this overview, I start with two definitions of key concepts: the Third Sector and data aggregation. The Third Sector (see Part II of this volume for a more complete discussion) includes the activities and organizations which are outside of control by the government and the market, including, but not limited to, volunteering and voluntary associations, nonprofit organizations, charities, social economy and social enterprises, social service provision, foundations and philanthropy, and civil society and social movements, with differing degrees of formalization and thus different challenges to observe and measure. The starting point of any data project, and thus a precursor to successful data aggregation, is the clear identification of what is to be measured. Data aggregation is in turn defined as the combination of data across levels, jurisdictions, and/or time in an *a priori* coordinated fashion or using technology or crosswalks after the fact to enable comparative research, including cross-sectoral, cross-national, and/or time series datasets. Many sources are administrative data, coming from official government agencies (statistical or other), but international organizations (governmental and NGO), standards agencies, and researchers (academic and NGO) are also engaged in data aggregation regarding the Third Sector.

Data aggregation efforts can be grouped into top-down projects, which seek to measure some aspect of the Third Sector as a whole, and bottom-up efforts, which focus on the characteristics of individual organizations. Berkhout et al. (2018) in their study of interest group data find that top-down and bottom-up data projects have rarely managed to agree on the basic composition of national populations of interest groups. It is thus important for researchers to consider the advantages and disadvantages of alternative approaches and make deliberate choices about how

data are collected, and thus what can be compared over what units. Additionally, Taco Bransen (this volume) adds that the challenge of comparative research, across countries or time, is the need to rely on crude measures given data availability. Quantitative comparative data is often unable to capture the historical or institutional context in which civil societies and Third Sector organizations are embedded. Put more directly, researchers must make tradeoffs between depth and breadth in data aggregation. For example, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project (Salamon et al., 2017), with its extensive material and expert resources, expanded from 14 to a maximum of 40 countries in different waves over 10 years between 1995 and 2005. Furthermore, political changes over the last three decades have moved policy and decision-making away from the nation-state both to higher level aggregations at the suprastate level, e.g. the European Union, and lower substate levels including municipalities (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005; Dellmuth & Bloodgood, 2019; Acuto, 2013; Scholte, 2016; Börzel & Risse, 2021). This raises the question of where the relevant data lives and increases the challenge of aggregating and comparing data. We also see a strong need for movement from examining the nonprofit sector as composed of formal, professionalized organizations to studying civil society as composed of diverse types of organizations of different levels of formality (Domaradzka, 2018; Kumi & Saharan, 2022; Mendonça et al., 2016).

Top Down (Sector)

From the top down, researchers can measure the Third Sector using macroeconomic categories, such as the sum total amount of volunteering or philanthropy, or the sector's contribution to the productivity or economic resources of a country (GNP). For example, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project in collaboration with the United Nations sought to measure the total economic contribution (GNP and volunteering) of the nonprofit sector on a national basis using a standard they developed (National Nonprofit Satellite Account) and implemented by national statistical agencies (Salamon & Anheier, 1994). The most recent UN Handbook on the Satellite Account on Nonprofit and Related Institutions from the UN Statistics Agency dates from 2018 (Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019). National labor or employment surveys can also provide estimates of volunteering as a measure of the size of the nonprofit sector across countries (Cappadozzi & Fonović, 2021). Ksenjia Fonović elaborates on this form of data aggregation in her chapter in this edited volume. In a third example, the Revolutionizing Philanthropy Research project led by Rene Bekkers, Ji Ma, Pamela Wiepking, Arjen de Wit, and Sasha Zarins uses a variety of data science tools to assess the amount of philanthropy by country as a different top down measure of the size of the sector (Ma & Bekkers, 2024).

The advantage of measuring the sector as a whole is that researchers can triangulate across data sources in different countries (e.g Salamon & Anheier, 1994) to fill in gaps in data, because they are using a large and relatively standard unit (sector, however this is defined). As long as researchers use the same definition for the unit

of analysis, and agree upon the method to combine data sources, they can compare across countries and time without needing explicit coordination or dedicated resources at the start of the project. With organization and resources, however, researchers can create a data and technical standard to be implemented globally increasing commensurability, reducing error, and making less cleaning necessary. The downsides of this approach are the limited number of available data points (country-year), its dependance on a number of assumptions to compile data, and the inability to have granularity on components of the sector. Using common classifications among types of organizations (see Part III of this edited volume) it can be possible to drill down into the sector, but not very far. The outcomes of the approach to the sector as an economic unit depend on the quality of the included data and thus requires having good relationships with umbrella organizations, statistical agencies, and researchers able and willing to participate. This approach also forces researchers to focus on formal characteristics that are measurable in economic terms, and thus they are likely to miss informal and small organizations and might even hinder this segment of the Third Sector if they seek to hide (Appe, 2013).

Researchers can, and have, also measured the Third Sector as a sector at the national level using text analysis, particularly coding keywords in documents from government agencies and foundations as well as news stories. This approach, often referred to by the tools used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), gives researchers the ability to quickly assess key features of the sector as well as code events and actions taken by or against the sector (Litofcenko et al., 2020; Santamarina et al., 2023; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2023). For example, the International Center of Not-for-Profit Law working with researchers in the DevLab at Duke University (now at UPenn) in the INSPIRES Machine Learning for Peace project have used text analysis of newspapers to monitor closure of civic space and government repression in 39 countries (Chen et al., 2022). In another example, the Revolutionizing Philanthropy project (https://osf.io/46e8x/) is working to develop a taxonomy of keywords to capture philanthropy cross-nationally.

The advantages of this approach include the ability to apply the same method across countries and time as long as documents are available, and this approach can be applied after the fact removing researchers' concerns about the ability to plan a large data project able to collect all of the data needed from the outset. The digitalization of documents (e.g. Parliamentary debates, Library of Congress reports, NGO annual reports and press releases) as well as the proactive efforts of the Rockefeller Archive Center, have increased the availability of documents online while simultaneously decreasing the costs. The challenges to the CAQDAS approach include translation costs and quality, the ability to find equivalency in terms across contexts, and the potential need to capture context for full meaning of terms (Daniel et al., 2023). Ngrams is one approach to address these concerns by looking at clusters of words (Chen & Zhang, 2023) as well as cognates and synonyms, and new technologies have made these challenges a bit easier since researchers can now rerun analysis on large corpuses of text quickly to seek to capture additional words, stems of words, and phrases. The sharing of code for text analysis makes it even easier to

share work and results (e.g. https://nonprofit-open-data-collective.github.io/machine_learning_mission_codes/).

Expert surveys have also been used by a large number of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and research centers to assess aspects of the Third Sector at the national level, including its legal context, health, and development over time. CIVICUS' Civil Society Index (Tiwana & Barreto, 2023; Heinrich et al., 2008) uses expert surveys as well as more than 7000 interviews with civil society members in 51 countries in order to assess the environment (legal context), values, composition, and impact of civil society as a whole. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (https://v-dem.net/about/v-dem-project/methodology/; Heiss, 2017) uses expert interviews (5 per measure per year) for over 100 countries between 1789 and 2020 to assess 10 measures of civil society organizations (CSO) entrance and exit, repression, structure, and participation per country-year (Coppedge, 2020). FHI 360's Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (https://www.fhi360.org/projects/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-csosi) assesses legal environment, funding, capacity and infrastructure, and CSO advocacy and service provision for 73 countries between 1998 and 2023.

Using expert surveys can enable researchers to capture more nuanced aspects of civil society, including perceptions, as well as context, for example resolving potential contradictions between de jure law and de facto behavior or enforcement. Public or expert perceptions also bring potential bias in understandings and interpretations. Expert surveys are more difficult to assess for commensurability across time and place and perceptions can be difficult to calibrate. V-Dem tackles this problem by providing statistical measures of variation in the experts' answers as a way to assess the amount of variability and potential error (Coppedge, 2020). Increasing the number of experts surveyed for each country, and the number of questions asked of each expert, can improve the accuracy and reliability of the measure (and the assessment of potential errors), but this also increases the time and money required to collect the information and might make it more difficult to recruit experts to take the surveys (especially as the number of survey projects also increases) (Kim & Daniel, 2020).

Sector level data aggregation might be easier than other approaches because researchers use fixed units of analysis—country, time—even while they debate how to define the sector and the best measure(s) to capture key features (economic, political/legal, or impact/effect). The growth of the availability of administrative data from government agencies, increasing public pressure for open data/transparency, as well as the development and propagation of new standards through the Open Government Partnership and the OECD have increased the availability and quality of data. It is important to add a caveat from Lecy and Grasse[1] that the further a researcher takes data from the original purpose for which it was collected or

[1] Elizabeth A. Bloodgood, Ksenija Fonovic, Nathan Grasse, and Jesse Lecy, "Data Aggregation Opportunities and Obstacles from the National to Global Level," Future of Third Sector Research Seminar Series, ISTR, May 4, 2023, https://www.istr.org/Login.aspx?returl=/news/news.asp?id=639651#comments.

generated the more problematic the analysis and conclusions are likely to be. For example, government grants and contracts amounts, which are directly reported by nonprofits, are higher quality data than attempts to intuit the gender composition of sector governance by using the names of board members reported on tax forms while efforts to use administrative data on service delivery to asses the impacts of NGO advocacy campaigns or nonprofit service delivery effectiveness are even more difficult.

Bottom Up (Individuals and Organizations)

Researchers have also examined the Third Sector from the ground up, focusing on individual organizations, or other actors within the sector, aggregating information across the individual units to build a composite picture of the sector in part or as a whole. Researchers have used government and other formal reporting requirements for organizations, including information collected as part of registration and taxation processes. The Open Nonprofit Data Collective, for example, compiles information from the United States Internal Revenue Service's Form 990 which most 501(c)3 organizations (generally nonprofits able to give tax benefits to donors, i.e. charities) are legally required to submit annually including information on their revenues, assets, staffing, governance, and activities (https://nonprofit-open-data-collective.github.io). Much of this information has been matched to similar taxation data reported by charities in Canada (Searing & Grasse, 2023). With collaboration between researchers, similar data sets of individual nonprofits from Brazil (Marchesini da Costa, 2016), Nepal (Dipendra, 2019), Ireland (Breen et al., 2018; https://benefactslegacy.ie/data/), Scotland (Pennerstorfer & Rutherford, 2019), Ecuador (Appe, 2013), Ghana (LePere-Schloop et al., 2022), and Korea (https://snuac.snu.ac.kr/eng/index.php/research/thematic-research/civil-society-and-ngos-program/) might be combined with this data as well. National interest group registers (Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2019; Berkhout et al., 2018) can also provide similar information for other groups of nonprofits, although the data has to be aggregated with caution (Searing et al., 2023).

Data sources based on formal government (or intergovernmental organization) reporting have the benefit of being authoritative and more complete than self-reported data which is not subject to verification or enforcement of reporting (Bloodgood 2019). However, the data is still subject to errors in submissions, including "fat fingers mistakes" or accountants' interpretation of what the nonprofit organization is doing, and a range of potential biases, as only some types of organizations (e.g. charities) fill out some forms while small organizations or less formally regulated organizations may not be required to submit any information (Lecy & Searing, 2015; Kim, 2017). Crosswalks between data sources, across countries but also organizational categories (e.g. nonprofit corporation versus association versus charity) and over time must be done with great care to ensure that the same characteristic is being measured the same way (Searing et al., 2023).

Surveys of individuals have also been used to examine the Third Sector from the bottom up by asking about individuals' behaviors regarding membership in associations, philanthropic giving, religiosity, and use of nonprofit services. National surveys which adopt this method of collecting data include election surveys (e.g. American Election Survey (AES) or Canadian Election Survey (CES)) as well as censuses. Regional surveys including the Eurobarometer (https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home), Afrobarometer (https://www.afrobarometer.org/data/), Asian Barometer (https://www.asianbarometer.org/datar?page=d10) are available as the Global Barometer Surveys with surveys from Latin America, Eurasia, and the Arab World (https://www.globalbarometer.net/survey_sc) which also include questions on civic engagement, participation, and social capital using samples of individuals in countries across the region and are repeated in one and 5 year waves. The World Values Survey (https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp) extends some of these same questions about individuals' behavior, preferences, and perceptions about the Third Sector in global samples administered every 5 years in 120 countries.

These popular opinion surveys can capture noneconomic measures of the Third Sector, such as values and perceptions about social capital and trust in organizations. They are very expensive to design and administer, however, and depend on different teams of researchers or institutes for different rounds of administration thus creating potential issues for continuity and comparability. Some questions are not asked consistently over time or across places. Furthermore, the primary purpose of these surveys is not to gauge popular perceptions of, or participation in, the Third Sector and so there may be bias induced when using these data for purposes too far from their initial intent or design.

Researchers can also examine the Third Sector from the bottom up using surveys of individual organizations. The EU Transparency Register (https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do) provides information for any organization wishing to work with European Union bodies (Greenwood & Halpin, 2007), while iCOS contains information on NGOs with consultative status with the United Nations (https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/login.do). The Union of International Associations has maintained information on international NGOs from 200 countries since 1907 based on organization surveys (https://uia.org/yearbook) and is one of the most cited sources on international NGOs (Smith & Wiest, 2005; Murdie & Davis, 2012; Hadden & Jasny, 2019; Boli & Thomas, 1997; Bromley et al., 2020; Longhofer et al., 2016; Stroup & Wong, 2017). Data nonprofits have also collected their own sets of information on organizations across countries, using surveys of organizations interested in their services combined with publicly available information (e.g. GlobalGiving Atlas https://www.globalgiving.org/atlas/features/ and the GivingTuesday Data Commons https://www.givingtuesday.org/data-commons/). These international organization and NGO sources capture information on individual organizations of a certain scale and those interested in policy influence at the supranational level, but do not provide data on the full set or even representative samples of organizations across countries, making them difficult to combine with other sources.

Administrative data is another bottom-up source of data to measure the activities and potential impact of the Third Sector. Many governments collect information about user experiences with nonprofit services, including students, patients, and the unhoused. This information can be vital for nonprofits to improve their programming and access new funding sources (Lenczner & Phillips, 2012). Administrative data comes with potential issues, however, including administrative errors, privacy concerns, and difficulty in matching administrative data to organizations (Kim & Daniel, 2020; Daniel et al., 2023).

Depending on the purpose or use of the data, bottom-up sources might provide better information on organizations that compose the Third Sector. In particular, bottom-up approaches enable closer research into subsectors or slices of the sector and its behaviors (e.g. membership, participation, giving). It is difficult for these alternative approaches to data collection and aggregation to meet in the middle, however (Berkhout et al., 2018; Searing et al., 2023). Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses making different approaches to data aggregation better fit for different purposes. All data aggregation projects must address similar challenges, however, which are examined briefly in the next section.

Challenges of Aggregation

Data aggregation projects face four primary challenges that each must address: scope conditions, commensurability, context, and costs. First, all data aggregation has its limits, and the best approach is to make these scope conditions clear from the outset of the design of the dataset. Researchers need to make explicit the bounds of the data collected and how it can and cannot be applied. This starts with a clear specification of the unit of analysis (organization, sector, country, and time period) and what is being measured. These scope conditions improve the usefulness of the data, and reduce the risk (or size) of errors in extending analysis beyond these parameters. Santamarina in this Section discusses how researchers collaborating closely can liberate data by making it more useful and interconnected but only with great care and investments of time and technology.

The issue of commensurability is a second challenge for data aggregation limiting what can and cannot be combined with or in the dataset. A measure of the size of the staff of nonprofits in Australia, for example, cannot be linked to a measure of the number of volunteers in Italy just as a measure of the assets of charities in England has to be carefully matched, or crosswalked, to a measure of assets for charities in Canada. Data which are not measured the same way over the same unit of analysis cannot be combined within or across datasets and so clear, precise definitions and measurements are crucial for making progress in aggregating datasets moving forward.

The context of data is also important in order to account for unmeasured background factors that shape data differently in different contexts. Reading or interpreting from the original purpose of the data to other purposes poses particular

challenges. For example, using registration data to assess the population of nonprofit organizations in a country is complicated where NGOs can select to register as charities, political associations, or nonprofit corporations and the allowable activities, reporting requirements, and tax implications of each category vary. As the the degree of government oversight in more authoritarian contexts increases across different types of registrations, more organizations may select to operate illegally or choose the least restrictive category (e.g. nonprofit corporation rather than charity). The resulting data on nonprofits in that country becomes increasingly unrepresentative and unreliable.

The costs of building the necessary infrastructure for data aggregation are also a considerable challenge for most research projects. Many of the data aggregation projects discussed above have government and private foundation funders which cover research costs in the multiple millions of US dollars. Costs include staff to collect and combine data (including cleaning data, writing data dictionaries, and maintaining the data), computer servers to store the data, and software programmers to enable access to the data. These costs are in addition to initial costs paid by governments to collect raw data. Researchers may need to begin in a limited set of countries and a single time period and only expand later. This creates difficulties in the ability to ensure comparability (as researchers learn from initial data collection issues) as well as the passage of time which might change contexts and the operationalization of key measures. Data aggregation projects which lack guaranteed resources at the beginning depend on having researchers willing and able to continue the project which might not always be the case, for example, gaps in the World Values Survey and Afrobarometer surveys and the pause of the JHU CNPS project following Lester Salamon's death (Anheier, 2023). Cost considerations are also likely to induce biases, particularly the omission of countries with reduced government capacity to collect initial data (or without access to data infrastructure or standards that make data commensurate) and where researchers have less access to grant funds. Economically induced selection bias reinforces Northern views of the Third Sector, particularly a focus on formal Third Sector organizations which are more easily captured by Northern definitions and measures (Henrich et al., 2010).

Future Pathways

While data aggregation challenges are considerable, recent developments suggest a positive future. New technologies for aggregating data, combined with increased digitalization of data at the point of collection, as well as deliberate collaboration among researchers and the spread of open science and open data principles have produced more data of consistently higher quality and built enthusiasm for data aggregation.

Open science principles, as enshrined in FAIR as well as the UNESCO Recommendations on Open Science, provide a useful set of guidelines for advancing data aggregation in the future. The FAIR principles—findability, accessibility,

interoperability, and reuse of digital assets—published in 2016 have been elaborated to make these easily actionable (https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/). In short, data should be indexed and clearly labeled so that they are useful for others (humans and computers), made openly available and easy to access, in a common format that can be combined with other data sources, and with sufficient information that the data can be authenticated, authorized (if necessary), and replicated with clear data usage licenses. UNESCO adds that open science should be inclusive and collaborative as well as transparent and tasks member states to develop infrastructure, education, training, and policy to advance open science (UNESCO, 2021).

One way that governments can meet these UNESCO standards is by improving data collection at the outset, including the digital collection of registration and taxation information from organizations and improved management and release of administrative data according to clear data standards (e.g. Open Government Partnership or the International Aid Transparency Initiative (Tierney et al., 2011)). E-reporting can reduce errors in entering data, lower administrative costs for the Third Sector and government, and allow the release of data in a timelier fashion. These efficiency gains have to be balanced against increasing concerns about individuals' privacy, establishing control over the use of individuals' data, and high-quality anonymization (Sandberg et al., 2023). Sharing data standards in the future will allow multiple government agencies, across countries, to adopt common data structures with privacy controls built in and enable the combination of data with fewer assumptions, errors, and limitations (Lampkin & Boris, 2002).

New technological tools to aggregate data and to evaluate the quality of aggregations also hold great promise for the future. Improvements in analytical tools, for example R and Python, to clean and collate data are just the beginning. More on the specifics of these tools and their application to Third Sector research is covered in the chapter by Santamarina. It is important to note that the open source nature of many of these tools, as well as the user communities that have developed online, makes them more accessible globally for the next generation of researchers.

The growth of collaboration between teams of researchers and practitioners is another positive development. Collaboration enables researchers to avoid duplicating efforts and accomplish projects with larger scope. The Revolutionizing Philanthropy Research and Nonprofit Open Data Collective projects are two examples. Increasing interest and involvement of Third Sector organizations themselves in gaining access to data to aggregate and share is another important development, including the GivingTuesday Data Commons, the GlobalGiving Atlas (https://globalgiving.readme.io/reference/atlas), the Global Register of Nonprofit Data Sources (GRNDS), and the Data Policy Coalition in Canada, https://poweredbydata.org/data-policy-coalition).

There are also future challenges for which we have few current solutions but hope for creative suggestions. In particular, researchers need to find ways to accurately capture and include more diverse and less formal organizations in ways that can be examined comparatively. This will likely require new investments in research capacity and collaboration between research centers and government agencies to achieve.

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Chapter 13
Capturing Data on Volunteering in a Global Dimension: A Window of Opportunity for Furthering Third Sector Research

Ksenija Fonović

In this chapter I address the state of the art and future potential for data aggregation on global level of volunteering (Wilson, 2000; Butcher Einolf, 2017; Guidi et al., 2021b), under the assumption that voluntary action (Fonović, 2023, pp. 21–42) of citizens for the common good is not merely a "renewable resource" of the nonprofits (Salamon et al., 2018) but the very "source" and the basic building block of civil society and of the Third Sector as such (UN, 2018). Therefore, the possibility to rely on "good" data on volunteering in globally comparable dimensions can contribute significantly to studying different facets of the Third Sector. Data on volunteering can be put to good use in a variety of disciplines, either as input, for example in approaches as diverse as development, democracy or management, or as output, for example in approaches as diverse as political history or psychology. The aim of the chapter is to clarify what comparable data can be generated by national statistical institutes following the ILO methodology on volunteer work (ILO, 2021) and to propose a method for a collaborative effort for refining and advancing this tool.

The Methodology Apt to Collect and Aggregate Data on Volunteers and Volunteer Work Globally

The ILO methodology (ILO, 2021) is the international standard (Ganta, 2021) for surveys on volunteer work. It collects data on volunteers, both organization-based and direct, and their activities, which are framed as "volunteer work", a specific and distinct form of unpaid work (ILO, 2013).

The methodology builds on the original ILO *Manual for the Measurement of volunteer work* (ILO, 2011) developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil

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Society Studies team led by Lester Salamon in partnership with United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and with the support of a Technical Experts Group (TEG) composed by prominent volunteering researchers from the ISTR community and expert statisticians from National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) from all continents. The ILO Manual TEG worked from the year 2007 to 2010 and included input from Joint UNECE/Eurostat Volunteer Standardization Task Force. A draft survey module was pre-tested in six countries: Brazil, Canada, France, Republic of Korea, Poland and South Africa. The draft of the original ILO *Manual* was reviewed and endorsed by the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians convened in Geneva in 2008 (ILO, 2011, pp. i–ii).

This process (Salamon, 2021) provides an example of the construction of an international standard for data gathering and aggregation that addresses a structural data gap by harnessing expertise and resources of different stakeholders with convergent interests: researchers to study nonprofit and civil society, statisticians to devise measurement of unpaid and non-market forms of work, policy makers to pin point an emergent societal force and deal with advocacy pressures, international institutions to compare across countries.

The ambition of the module was to complete the statistical machinery enabling international comparisons of the nonprofit sector (UN, 2003), because "*scarcity of volunteering data*" has grossly hampered the possibility to pursue global assessments of civil society (Salamon et al., 2012). The episteme of this standard-building process (Salamon, 2021, pp. 21–46) addressed explicitly the four milestone challenges of data aggregation outlined by Bloodgood in the initial chapter of this section: scope conditions, commensurability, context, and costs. The standard ILO core volunteering module is designed to be inserted as an add-on into the existing highly standardized statistical surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS), Time Use Survey (TUS) or an omnibus national social survey. As it is by no means mandatory, its implementation depends on the decision of national statistical institutes (NSIs), who in their turn respond to the priorities indicated by the national government—not a small challenge.

Progress towards this ambitious, but necessary, objective, can be synthesized in three phases. One, initial promotion phase (roughly 2010–2013); two, the decade of first implementations and refinement of the methodology and support infrastructure by the ILO; three, beginning now, a new window of opportunity to obtain solid internationally comparable data on volunteering. In a metaphor that Lester Salamon loved to present (by means of a particularly ugly slide), data are like the foundations of the house. The house represents research results. In Lester's vision, building this research-house has never been an end in itself, but a shelter for knowledge that can open its doors to the right recognition and support of the contributions of volunteering to public good. Without solid foundations, no house can last long. With the initial adoption of the ILO volunteering module, we made a down-payment for the land. The decade of under-the-radar developments was like paying the mortgage.

First efforts to promote the implementation of the Manual by NSIs concentrated on information, training and advocacy mainly in the European context with the

EVMP European Volunteer Measurement Project (Bosioc et al., 2012). These targeted different constituencies with high stakes in volunteering data—each of them sharply reluctant to take into consideration this new device, profoundly focused on the specificities of the exclusively national context, and with, by and large, no previous history of working as allies with reference to the national government. NSIs are structurally under stress and under-funded—but respond with enthusiasm and competence to innovation (Cappadozzi et al., 2021). Practitioners' communities, started from outright hostility to what was perceived as a reduction to bare economic indices that don't speak of the "real" values of volunteering, have in time matured a more confident culture of measurement that permits them to take a step ahead towards conceptualizing and standardizing indices of social values. Researchers have been diffident, and rightly so, of international standards and simplified measures—but the ISTR community has kept alive the drive for comparative studies (Roundtables in Stockholm in 2016 and in Amsterdam in 2018, Third Sector Impact project coordinated by Bernard Enjolras 2014–2018, and the Future of Third Sector Research webinar series in 2023).

The Window of Opportunity: International Policy and Research Interests Converge

Ten years after the original *Manual*, following a critical revision of existing data and methods and further tests, the International Labour Organization (ILO) issued the updated guidance documentation, *Volunteer work measurement guide* (ILO, 2021) and organized an online hub (https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/volunteer-work/) featuring data and an array of freely available support tools, including a self-learning course.

Now in 2024 the time seems to be ripe for a payoff, under the umbrella of global policy developments. Already in the wake of the definition of the Agenda 2030, the United Nations has recognized the value of volunteers (UNGA, 2018), further sanctioned under the Sustainable Development Goal 17 on partnerships. The United Nations has proclaimed 2026 as the International Year of the *Contribution of Volunteers to Sustainable Development* (UNGA, 2023) making an explicit call to invest in measurement and knowledge platforms:

> Appeals to Member States, as well as other participants in the observance of the International Year, to recognize and measure the contribution of formal and informal volunteers and volunteerism in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, integrate volunteerism into national development planning, introduce policies that remove all inequalities and risks in volunteering, and support the setting up of knowledge and information platforms to develop and promote new forms of volunteering; (UNGA, 2023, Art. 3)

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) have built a strategic partnership with the ILO which provides support to NSIs for the implementation of the volunteering module as part of the promotion of tools for measuring other forms of unpaid work, notably unpaid domestic care work, which has gained prominence in national

priorities. The State of the World Volunteerism Report, produced every 2 years by the UNV, is in preparation for release in 2025 on the theme of volunteer measurement and endorses the use of the ILO module as the principal instrument for generating comparable data that can offer a solid starting point for investigating the contribution of volunteers to public good. The most prominent global networks of volunteering agencies—IAVE (International Association for Volunteer Effort) and Forum (International Forum for Volunteering in Development) are developing interesting synergies for investing into research on volunteering in all its facets, looking into universal values of volunteering with particular care for the perspectives of the Global South, in close collaboration with numerous researchers of the ISTR community. As the "Italian model" of multi-stakeholder collaboration between statisticians, researchers and practitioners has demonstrated (Guidi et al., 2021a), such convergence of interests can permit the construction of a powerful alliance for good data on volunteering that can raise interest on the local level, generate significant new knowledge and build the case with national governments.

As a researcher and an activist, I have no doubt that public statistics make for the right home for globally comparable data on volunteering, not only because it is functionally best for aggregation purposes and not only because of the prodigious costs necessary for "building the necessary infrastructure" as Bloodgood correctly problematizes in the introductory chapter to this section. I think volunteering has the right to be able to count on a publicly supported structural solution. Basic data must be claimed as public duty in recognition of the role and indeed the existential societal value of the sector. Joint work on the adaptation of the core module to local culture engages the Third Sector and the national statistical institutes in a mutually enforcing relationship and enhances the fundamental democratic function of both. This contributes resources and perspectives to the research design and liberates academic resources for in-depth research, critical assessment and explorations of additional and emerging terrains.

Research Infrastructure: Sustainable and Globally Comparable Foundational Data on Volunteers and Volunteer Work

In order to stand a chance of success, such massive "crowd-advocacy" initiative claiming sustainable and globally comparable foundational data on volunteers and volunteer work ought, at the same time, keep the feet planted to the ground, which means building on the shared understanding of exactly what data the core ILO module can yield at present, and raise the eyes to the sky, which means investing into a common platform for progressively extending the core module and experimenting with additional questions, thus extending the scope or probing more deeply into social dimensions.

The first and foremost thing to this end is to circumscribe what these data are, to lay out transparently on the shared table the rigid boundaries—*conditio sine qua non*—for data aggregation, to prioritize the conceptualization of outstanding typologies in respect of cultural embeddedness of volunteering and to devise a collective mechanism for extending and refining the core standard module.

To start with, a few initial caveats about the nature of volunteering data are needed, because this text is meant to speak to an audience much wider than the committed, but still small, volunteering data community. The ILO module constitutes the minimum common denominator applicable globally, on which so far strong consensus has been built regarding what can be considered volunteering in any and all cultural contexts and at any stage of modernity: unpaid activity of free will for the benefit of others, of the community or for a cause. On these three binding conditions of what is considered in scope by the ILO module, researchers (Guidi et al., 2021b) and practitioners converge to a significant extent.

Global Comparability

The core statistical ILO volunteering module therefore yields to the community what Bloodgood defines as "*foundational comparative data*", the skeleton of global comparability.

The volunteering data concentrate on:

- how many people volunteer in a country, through collectively organized platforms, most typically, but not exclusively, nongovernmental nonprofit associations, or on their own, without any intermediation (rates of organization-based and direct volunteering);
- demographic characteristics of volunteers—gender, age, education, professional occupation, place of residence (profiles of volunteers);
- what volunteers do—voluntary activity, designed to be registered as volunteer work, in order to permit a cross-walk to the hyper-structured standard for professional work (ISCO—International Standard Classification of Occupations). Statistical weighing of time dedicated to voluntary activities, by typology, permits the translation in monetary terms of the unpaid work contributed annually by volunteers, organized and direct.

These are foundational data—meant to be of service to many and all, from different perspectives and for various purposes. They are not research results by themselves, but infrastructure for research—and also for policy making, including from citizens' science perspective. In order to represent a potential resource to this end, the data must be: freely accessible, self-intelligible, globally comparable and highly accredited. For these characteristics the official statistics is the best guarantor.

Local Relevance

Also another trait is essential: local embeddedness. The distinctive character of the institutional identity of NSIs is a rarely to be found duality of expertise: unrelenting adherence to international standards coupled with capillary capacity to capture local nuances. This capacity is of fundamental importance in rolling out volunteering statistics: while the core module must respect fully the ILO methodology, in order to preserve and contribute to building global comparability, it is of vital importance to fine-tune its transposition into the local culture and also, as much as possible, to extend and/or further classify domains most interesting for local circumstances. While only statisticians have the expertise to operationalize these concepts and goals, statisticians cannot, and by all means must not, do it on their own. The success of the "Italian model" (Guidi et al., 2021a) has demonstrated that the involvement of researchers and of practitioners in all phases of the data process, from the translation of the questionnaire and the local fine-tuning to the exploitation of data, is not only useful, but indeed necessary. This is an important aspect because the stakes are high: inadequate questionnaire design, even an apparently minute missed beat, can irrevocably compromise the commensurability of data.

Data as Infrastructure

In this phase, until the availability of data reaches a tipping point—when it becomes possible to use them to a certain reasonable extent in comparative perspective—every imperfect implementation represents an irrevocable loss. For this reason, it is important to cultivate an international platform for exchange, support and development of the tool. While with these foundational data we are certainly not able to provide answers to all research questions of the moment, they nonetheless serve two important functions for furthering the future research agenda about the Third Sector in general, and also beyond.

In the first place, beyond comparative indices and assessment of the economic value, as the exploitation of the Italian Istat-ILO data has shown, the ILO module data offer a well of input for studying the nature of the phenomenon and the interrelations of volunteering with other social aspects (Guidi et al., 2021a). This represents a potential resource for individual researchers and research teams at the national level and for unique mono-disciplinary in-depth studies.

The second function depends on a trans-national collaborative effort: the ILO core volunteering module can be used as the starting point and the magnet on which to attach further add-ons or in-depth probes jointly developed in respect of the aggregation requirements. Initial terrains have already opened up in this direction with first implementations of additional questions on motivations and on subjectively perceived consequences (impacts on individual level) of volunteering on volunteers themselves.

Complementarity

The ILO module data on volunteers and volunteer work complement nonprofit census data. The new edition of the Handbook (UN, 2018) sanctions the ILO module as the correct source of data on volunteers intended as human resources of the Third Sector, also for the generation of the Third Sector and social economy (TSE) satellite account. To this end, for the many non-specialists that will hopefully read and put to use this book, it is useful to clarify that the ILO volunteering module is based on a different—parallel and complementary—system of data generation, with respect to organization-based data, which constitutes the most important realms of comparative knowledge and aggregation potential. Large comparative assessments done by the Johns Hopkins team rely on data from the Nonprofit Census run by statistical institutions and national administrative data sources are organization-anchored. Translated in blunt everyday language: the questionnaire, or data form, asks information from an "institution".

The ILO volunteer work questionnaire, instead, retrieves information from an "individual". Persons—a statistical sample of the population—are asked directly to describe "what they did" in the reference period of past 4 weeks. Data are embedded in the systemic logic of "individuals", which complements and does not substitute the logic of "institutions" at the basis of comparative mapping of Third Sector dimensions. This calls for specific approaches, from questionnaire design and alliance-building to exploitation. To grasp this essence and to understand the logic of enhancive complementarity between data on "institutional" and "individual" components of the Third Sector, is the necessary starting point for conceptualizing a systemic framework that can order and sustain the possibility of concretely imagining a complex, multi-faceted mosaic of globally comparable and intelligible data.

Research Potential of the ILO Core Volunteer Work Methodology

In a way, the ILO methodology permits to meet in the middle, with respect to the challenge Bloodgood explains above. It is a top down view of the volunteering force of a country as a whole, but input is provided by the micro-component of the Third Sector, volunteers themselves. The mosaic of civic engagement for the common good is composed by the single pixels of individual behavior that constitute the practice of subsidiary democracy.

Emersion of Direct Volunteering

The ILO module generates data on organized and direct volunteers and their activities. Information on direct volunteers represents the most powerful innovation of the ILO methodology: there are almost no studies about the nature and specificities, scope and scale of direct volunteering, of marginal interest for both research and civil society traditions of the Global North and under-researched in the Global South. Knowledge about people who volunteer individually—characters and patterns, the choices they make—is barely anecdotal. The bulk of comparative data on this aspect could generate an important shift in perspectives and assessments, and possibly even shatter some ideas traditionally given for acquired certainties, for example the assumption that direct volunteering is predominant in the Global South and barely residual in the Global North, linking this practice exclusively to the robustness and capillarity of presence of associations, or Third Sector entities, or relative lack thereof.

Parallel examination of organization-based and direct volunteers and their activities can contribute significantly to better understanding the role and emergence of civil society and the time-and-space embeddedness of the dynamics of the creation of social capital. At the same time, better data on volunteering are bound to challenge the understanding of what is considered "Third Sector", and necessarily pose challenges to measurement, research and advocacy (Fig. 13.1).

The Concept of Volunteer Work

The operational statistical definition framing the ILO module situates volunteering as one of the forms of unpaid work (ILO, 2013). Three key characteristics—free will, unpaid, for the benefit of others outside family—define rigid external boundaries of what activities are considered in scope. Co-existence of all three criteria

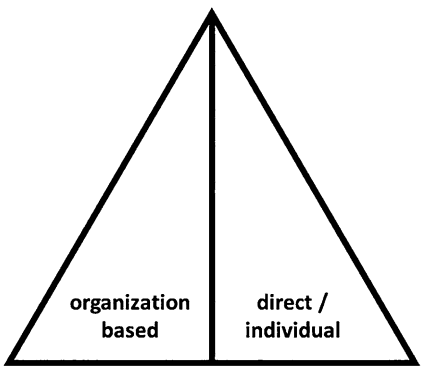

Fig. 13.1 Data on volunteers from the ILO volunteering module

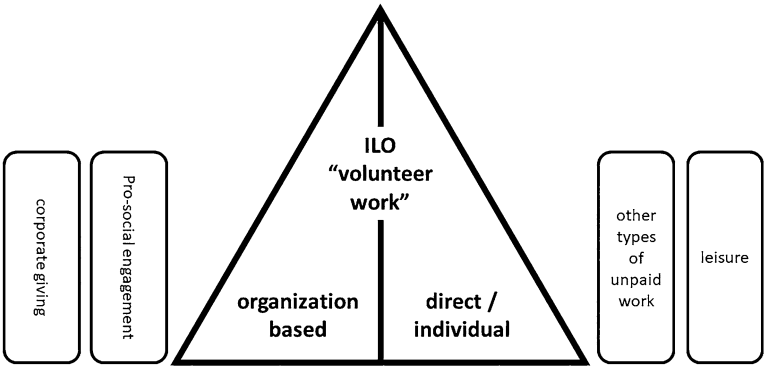

Fig. 13.2 External boundaries of the statistical perimeter of 'volunteer work' and out-of-scope spheres

differentiates, in the statistical system, voluntary work from other forms of unpaid work and from other forms of behavior (Fig. 13.2).

The ILO methodology provides conceptualizations and guidance on how in-scope and out-of-scope activities are to be distinguished and it is important, for commensurability purposes, to respect the standard.

The conceptualization of volunteer work provides a new lens to study volunteering. First attempts to delve into ILO module data on "voluntary professions" (Cappadozzi et al., 2021) have but opened a Pandora's box of data potential, most notably in the perspective of sociology of work.

Out of Scope Issues: Further Work Towards Expanding the Standard Methodology

Looking in the direction of exploiting the ILO module data for both expanding and deepening the studies in volunteering, it is necessary to return to the first criterion for aggregation, the scope conditions, in order to clarify, and problematize, in view of the future research agenda, the boundaries between what is in-scope and what is out-of-scope of the ILO core volunteering module.

At the same time as we walk the line, it is necessary to work on the problematic margins and invest into consensus building about neighboring spheres that in some constituencies, or in some cultural settings, are either considered "volunteering" or partly overlap with it, that makes it useful or necessary to include in the survey other components in addition to the core volunteering module. Here I propose a list of topics that have most frequently emerged in discussions in a variety of cultural settings with practitioners and in international research meetings. Each of these would deserve a dedicated stream of literature review and comparative conceptualization, so its purpose is to raise interest in the ISTR community to cluster around these

previously out of scope and boundary issues and promote platforms for international collaboration.

- The part of social engagement of businesses widely known as "corporate volunteering" does not fit with the unpaid criterion and struggles with the free will aspect. In the ILO core module, pro-social engagement during working hours cannot count as volunteer work, but there is considerable interest to account for it in view of aggregation possibility, notably in virtue of growing engagement of multi-national companies in this form of corporate social responsibility exercise and progressive standardization of ESG (environmental—social—governance) accountability tools.
- Activities of social support—for children, elderly, people living with disabilities… are heavily gender-biased, in both organized and direct volunteering (Fonović Cappadozzi, 2018; Cappadozzi Fonović, 2019). This shows the tip of an iceberg: in our (variedly, but un-mistakenly) patriarchal society, volunteer work may assume for women meanings very different than for men. This calls us to question the potentially osmotic boundary between volunteer work and other forms of unpaid work in domestic sphere, on the one hand, and with professional job market, on the other hand.
- The fact that volunteering is done for, in and with the wider community, and that it is outside the family sphere, is easily endorsed—but difficult to operationalize statistically. The concept of "family" is not only markedly culture-specific, but also fast-evolving. It is also important much beyond the volunteering module, as it is referred to in numerous international surveys on a variety of aspects. Following closely further implementations of the ILO core volunteering module in different cultural environments, especially in the countries of the Global South, can contribute not only to better aggregation of volunteering data, but also to social sciences in general.
- The distinction between leisure—activity for individual's own enjoyment—and volunteering, for others—calls for better refinement. This is important in particular in the cultural field, but also regarding health and lifestyles, because the differentiation between production and consumption, and between organization and fruition, is progressively fading (at least in some contexts and some social strata).

These aspects of volunteering, that provide further arenas for advancing the ILO methodology in a global comparative perspective, offer the most pressing definitory puzzles that could benefit from intercultural and interdisciplinary research groups aiming to generate specifically designed additional questions.

Boundary Issues of the ILO Voluntary Work Methodology

Setting the rigid boundaries of what is in scope of measurement represents the binding requirement, an essential *conditio sine qua non* that permits aggregation. But this necessarily leaves certain questions unanswered and raises novel knowledge

needs. All three boundary elements of the ILO operational statistical definition of voluntary work are necessary to preserving global comparability, but present problematic aspects that call for further explorations and, possibly, in time, standardization sufficient to permit the aggregation of wider sets of data (Fig. 13.3).

Outside Family

The boundary of what constitutes "family" in the ILO methodology at present leaves to local understanding to determine what is considered as family, in order to leave family help out of scope in the measurement of volunteer work. The generalized orientation though is that grandparents/grandchildren relations are considered as "family", even if they do not belong to the same household, which was set as the original boundary in the first edition of the ILO *Manual*. It would be reasonable to expect that new implementations—in particular in countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America—use the opportunity to adapt the volunteering module to add to the questionnaire the possibility to detect forms of direct help out of scope of voluntary work, but complementary to the core module. In order not to lose this opportunity to work in the direction of globally comparable data aggregation in a myriad of self-standing trials, it would be useful to imagine some sort of volunteering data observatory for countries to confront their needs and solutions in the phase of the survey adaptation and for researchers to contribute to building the comparable data infrastructure.

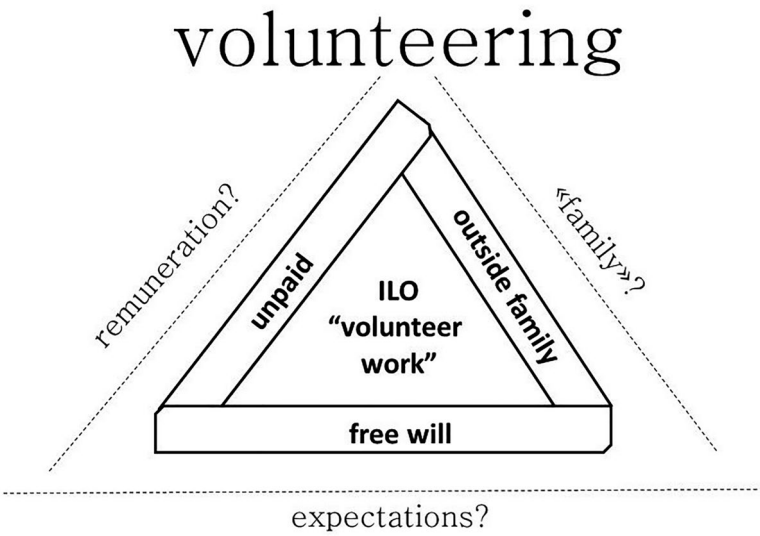

Fig. 13.3 ILO volunteering module definitory criteria: boundary issues

Unpaid

The current definition of "unpaid" in the ILO methodology allows for a remuneration that is not larger than one third of the monthly salary of the country. This represents a compromise, which probably leaves unsatisfied most of the possible users. In a great number of countries, unpaid means rigidly unpaid, except for the reimbursement of actual expenses. But, in all contexts, there are clusters of "quasi-volunteering"—most notably programs that involve persons in initiatives for general interest in or in partnership with Third Sector entities, who are not paid nor classified as professional workers. These individuals are often termed "volunteers" because they participate of their own free will and are engaged alongside or in same type of activities as volunteers—but are not volunteers, in statistical, normative or cultural terms. These types of hybrid pro-social engagements represent an additional so far uncharted terrain that could enormously benefit from a concerted international research effort. This could start from an initial comparative mapping of forms of engagement situated in the grey area between professional and voluntary work. To this end, specific expertise built through the development and follow up of the ILO volunteering module should join forces with the consolidated expertise of the nonprofit censuses. This could advance standardization, for comparative purposes, of typologies of human resources that Third Sector entities rely on.

Free Will

The criterion of "ree will" is circumscribed by negative boundaries: the methodology provides examples of activities managed by Third Sector entities widely applied across the world but considered out of scope because the element of free will is limited legally or by a substantial dose of institutional obligation. This form of exclusion regards curricular activities (for example volunteering experiences counting for educational credits in high school or service learning for undergraduates) and mandatory social work (for example as court penalty substitutive for confinement or fines). Such activities are out of scope of volunteer work measurement and pertain to other forms of work typical of the Third Sector, discussed above of. The boundary of "free will" leaves suspended issues around social norms, pressures and compliance. It is very difficult to understand through qualitative insight, let alone operationalize statistically, the intricate web that unites self-determination to engage for a certain cause to the personally perceived feelings of obligation or giving back, and also to the expectations regarding the social positioning. For the time being, the tools at our disposal are not refined enough to capture such nuances in transculturally comparative perspective. Nevertheless, as the Italian case has shown (Guidi Maraviglia, 2021), an interesting contribution to understanding this personal sphere

of meanings of volunteering can be derived from the additional questions to the ILO volunteering module on motivations and subjective meanings. Further work in this field is ripe to be put on the comparative agenda.

Not to Conclude, But to Continue

In conclusion—the operational statistical definition of the ILO module implemented by NSIs guarantees adequate aggregation in terms of key issues pointed out by Bloodgood: data quality, clearly defined scope, commensurability and durability. Issues remaining out of scope are open to further refinement, but call for a collaborative multi-stakeholder trans-cultural effort.

One issue of substance remains missing. For this reason, I distinguish "operational statistical definition of volunteer work" from a consensus definition of "volunteering"—an object of fierce arguments with Lester Salamon over the years of our collaboration. The ILO module provides no answers as to "what" volunteering is, what is its distinctive nature and its final purpose. This represents the one important boundary that has not been comprised by the definition and therefore the net takes in everything: pro-civic and un-civic practices, general and corporatist interests, pro-democracy and anti-democracy activities. Policy developments in the international arena and normative frameworks on the national level are making advancements, often in conflicting directions, in conceptualizing volunteering as a producer of public good. It would be useful if also the Third Sector research community put the reflection of what constitutes public good, in global terms, at the heart of the future Third Sector research agenda.

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Chapter 14
Technologies for Data Aggregation: An Overview of Technologies and Opportunities to Propel Third Sector Research

Francisco J. Santamarina

Some of the most impactful efforts to aggregate data around nonprofits, non-governmental organizations, and other participants of the Third Sector were undertaken by Anheier and Salamon through the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP). In reflecting on the project's shortcomings and opportunities for change and reinvigorated momentum, Anheier (2023) only briefly acknowledges the constellation of advances that have occurred since the CNP began. In particular, collective data aggregation efforts, open data initiatives and publicly available datasets, reductions in computing resource costs, and development and implementation of algorithms are among some of the innovations that can allow for the CNP's progress to continue and expand in ways unimaginable at its founding. This chapter discusses an effort to engage in data aggregation efforts as described by Bloodgood (see Chap. 12 in this volume). It follows with an exploration of how new technologies and methods expand sense-making in Third Sector research, in particular around generating, implementing, and exploring concepts. It ends with a call to action for greater adoption of these technologies and approaches.

Data Aggregation in Practice

Background of the IRS 990 Dataset

Around the time that the CNP began and produced the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO), a group in the United States developed the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) system of codes, which are applied to organizations when they receive 501(c) tax-exempt status (Barman, 2013; Herman, 1990; Salamon & Anheier, 1996). As compared to classification systems

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like the U.N.'s International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) or Eurostat's General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (NACE), NTEE codes are not intended to reflect the fundamental economic activities of all organizations, nor do they have the same application restrictions around revenue sources or market vs. non-market activities (Reimann, 2006; Salamon & Anheier, 1992). They were designed intentionally for nonprofits per U.S. tax code, reducing its generalizability to other, non-U.S. contexts—a sharp contrast to the ICNPO's purpose of facilitating cross-national comparative work (Salamon & Anheier, 1996). The use of NTEE codes has become synonymous with U.S. nonprofit research for multiple reasons,[1] including the release by the National Center on Charitable Statistics (NCCS) of digitized records of nonprofit annual tax filings, or Form 990s, beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Searing & Grasse, 2023).

While part of a trend over the last several decades of public release of datasets useful to nonprofit and Third Sector scholars were publicly available, the IRS Form 990 data was and still remains unique (Searing & Grasse, 2023). The form is a public record that acts as a nonprofit's annual tax return and is a required submission to remain tax exempt (Burke & Laidman, 2015). In response to a court ruling, *Public. Resource.org v. IRS* (2015), the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) began releasing digital copies of all Form 990s that had been filed electronically. On June 15, 2016, the IRS began releasing the data via Amazon Web Services (AWS) as machine readable XML files (Howard, 2016).

Data Liberation

The now-publicly available data was still inaccessible to most researchers and the general public. It had been released with limited to no documentation, explanation of variable names, or mapping of file structures to the actual Form 990 documents themselves. Each of the XML returns was located at a distinct AWS URL,[2] each variable was found by following a particular path in the XML file, and researchers soon realized that there were inconsistencies even within variable naming conventions. Figure 14.1 provides a basic example of XML paths for two separate nodes within a file (Lecy, 2016). Various different teams began tackling these issues,

[1] A nonprofit selects its NTEE code when submitting documentation for tax-exempt status and includes the code in its annual filings with the IRS.

[2] As of December 31, 2021, the IRS 990 e-Filings are no longer available via the AWS Registry of Open Data (Amazon, n.d.). The IRS has instead made the data available going back to 2017 and releases new datasets (Internal Revenue Service, 2024). There have been concerns raised by members of the NODC and affiliated partners about inconsistent releases of new e-filings since the data' storage transitioned from Amazon to the IRS (personal communications).

Raw XML Data

```
<MEMBERS>

   <CUSTOMER>
      <ID>178</ID>
      <FIRST.NAME>Alvaro</FIRST.NAME>
      <LAST.NAME>Juarez</LAST.NAME>
      <ADDRESS>123 Park Ave</ADDRESS>
      <ZIP>57701</ZIP>
   </CUSTOMER>

   <CUSTOMER>
      <ID>934</ID>
      <FIRST.NAME>Janette</FIRST.NAME>
      <LAST.NAME>Johnson</LAST.NAME>
      <ADDRESS>456 Candy Ln</ADDRESS>
      <ZIP>57701</ZIP>
   </CUSTOMER>

</MEMBERS>
```

Full Path Directory

```
##  [1] "/MEMBERS"                        "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]"
##  [3] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]/ID"         "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]/FIRST.NAME"
##  [5] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]/LAST.NAME"  "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]/ADDRESS"
##  [7] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[1]/ZIP"        "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]"
##  [9] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]/ID"         "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]/FIRST.NAME"
## [11] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]/LAST.NAME"  "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]/ADDRESS"
## [13] "/MEMBERS/CUSTOMER[2]/ZIP"
```

Fig. 14.1 Examples of raw XML data relational database and processed paths, outputted as a path directory in R. (Adapted from Lecy, 2016)

resulting in some overlapping solutions.[3] In response, the Nonprofit Open Data Collective (NODC) formed to coordinate and facilitate efforts. The NODC's website acts as a repository for many of the initial and current efforts to generate usable datasets from the raw data (https://nonprofit-open-data-collective.github.io/index).

The major output of the NODC during 2016 and 2017 was arguably the Master Concordance File (MCF; https://github.com/Nonprofit-Open-Data-Collective/irs-efile-master-concordance-file?tab=readme-ov-file). The file was an effort across multiple parties to create a shared, public mapping of file paths and variables to the different line items, check boxes, and tables within the distinct versions of the 990 forms. The MCF had to map to a single variable a multitude of potential XML paths and variable names across different schemas, or versions of XML file structures. As described in its GitHub repository, "the MCF is meant to serve as a Rosetta stone [*sic*] of sorts, allowing programmers to convert XML documents into a structured database by mapping 10,000 unique xpaths onto a consistent and well-documented data dictionary" (https://github.com/Nonprofit-Open-Data-Collective/irs-efile-master-concordance-file?tab=readme-ov-file).

The MCF progressed substantially during two events hosted by the Aspen Institute which consisted of NODC members and partners coming together. Each of the events was a two-day "hackathon"-styled event—or "datathon" and "validatathon," respectively—that brought together volunteers with a vested interest in this work to pool efforts, create communal goals, and make substantive progress towards the creation and validation of the MCF (Román, 2017; Schuman Ottinger,

[3] The author's work with this dataset began in Fall of 2016, working primarily alongside Dr. Jesse Lecy and later with Dr. Nathan Grasse, as well. These two scholars were founding members of the Nonprofit Open Data Collective and influential in establishing a community of interested researchers.

2018). The events provided a congenial atmosphere allowing many people to meet in person for the first time and pool knowledge gained over years of working with the IRS, 990 data, and related efforts. While short, the efforts were critical to successful liberation of the 990 data and future aggregation efforts, as noted by one participant (Borenstein, 2018).

Lessons for Future Liberation Efforts

A large part of this data aggregation effort focused on data liberation. That meant the creation of tools and building understanding to access data that was technically available but functionally barricaded behind design limitations, inconsistent version controls, and unstable data hosting. There were several activities that proved key to establishing the foundation for current and future 990 data liberation:

Coordinating efforts. It was critical to coordinate activities that would benefit multiple groups. While some groups were reluctant to share and consolidate 990 Filer data that they had digitized prior to the e-Filer release, everyone knew the benefit of producing the MCF. The NODC used a democratic approach focused on the principles of open data and open science. These are reflected in its use of open-source platforms such as R, inclusive approach to sharing resources and tools, and making all kinds of data publicly available, including similar but unaffiliated datasets and liberation efforts (as seen here: https://nonprofit-open-data-collective.github.io/overview/).

Facilitating individual goals. A common motivator to volunteer with the MCF was that everyone would progress in their individual goals as a result, and the understanding that data liberation was a means to an end: not data aggregation for its own sake but for furthering scientific questions, research, or even product offerings. MCF-related efforts made no assumptions about purposes beyond identifying the need to liberate the data.

Ongoing relationships. Through the NODC and the MCF-related activities, scholars, researchers, and activists were able to interact, creating bonds through collective activity, shared knowledge, and ongoing conversations. One example is the Aspen Institute's continued administration of NODC meetings and email updates, including advocating to the IRS around missing 990 data and working to integrate additional data sources, such as data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (C. Schuman Ottinger, personal communication, February 8, 2024). Another example of ongoing coordination is the 990 Data Infrastructure Project, created by GivingTuesday in partnership with CitizenAudit, Candid, ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer, Urban Institute, and Charity Navigator—almost all of which were founding members of the NODC and involved in creating the MCF (GivingTuesday, n.d.; Olague & Bhola, 2023).

Looking towards the future. These efforts were not just to map variables and gather data from existing files, but to lay a foundation for future data releases. In the

years after the efforts by the Nonprofit Open Data Collective began, the number of e-filed Form 990s has only increased. A law passed in 2019 established that, for tax years ending July 31, 2021 and later, all tax-exempt organizations that file some version of Form 990 must do so electronically (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). In other words, scholars working with U.S. nonprofit data from Form 990s will no longer be working with samples of organizations but with entire populations. Every nonprofit in the United States will theoretically be included in future data releases. The MFC has served as the foundation of the ongoing liberation of that population-level data.

The United States is not the only North American country providing this data set at scale: digital filings of Canada's T3010, roughly equivalent to the U.S. Form 990, are already available and a dataset intended to rival what is available of the Form 990s is being compiled right now (Searing & Grasse, 2023). Among other differences between the two datasets, Searing and Grasse (2023) note that Canada is not going to discontinue paper filings and require electronic filing. Nonetheless, the availability of this dataset sets the stage for cross-country comparisons using both top-down and bottom-up approaches at a level of precision and scale of analysis only dreamt of when the CNP began.

Expanding Sense-Making

Anheier's (2023) reflections on the CNP and comparative nonprofit research identifies the need to revisit, refresh, and reframe many concepts propagated by the project, developed over time since its inception, and too often taken as truth—challenging the structural-operational definition, for example, or uncoupling civil society from civil society organizations. Part of this reflection calls for us to take stock of the landscape of methods and innovations around us: what new developments can enable these changes? The following section presents a selection of such developments, starting with how we generate concepts, to how we implement them, and to how we make sense of them at numerous levels of analysis.

Inductive and Deductive: Meet Predictive

The goal of data cleaning and aggregation is to analyze that data using tools that implement assumptions about how the world works, operationalized as models, statistical measures, research-supported relationships, and so on. At their core, these tools reflect and explore concepts that are derived either deductively or inductively. *Deductive* research is considered to be confirmatory and depends on defining *a priori* attributes and theories before grounding them in the study as variables, whereas *inductive* research is considered to be exploratory and derived from local

data: patterns are observed and used to abstract and generalize interpretable, observable components to the level of key concepts of variables to be tested (Bernard et al., 2017; Gerring, 2011; Thomas, 2020).

Through data aggregation, we can use a third approach. Lecy's Premise[4] identifies that there are three ways that research generates concepts for studies: *deductively*, *inductively*, and *predictively*. The rise of increasingly complex algorithms of both generative and discriminative natures as well as diminishing implementation costs mean that concept generation is no longer driven solely by researchers applying theory or exploring data, but also by a third category of approaches that incorporates elements from both to identify concepts hidden in data (e.g., inductively), apply pre-defined concepts at scale (e.g., deductively), or even generate new concepts from data that did not exist previously and are extrapolated or predicted from combinations of prior patterns and theoretical understandings. This last category reflects a classic example of the predictive category and demonstrates how it can simultaneously combine deductive and inductive elements as well as reject them.

Because the predictive approach is driven by user choices, some degree of "approach bias" will always be present with predictive approaches. Just as Gerring (2011) notes that "all deductive approaches to measurement contain an inductive component, and all inductive approaches to measurement contain a deductive component" (p. 174), so too do predictive approaches incorporate elements of one, the other, or even both.

Incorporating the predictive approach with the other two approaches allows us to harness big data while addressing critiques of the data science revolution in social science. In conversations with senior scholars, I have heard concerns that reliance solely on algorithms to select variables for use in models produces models with strong statistical performance and poor, if any, grounding in theory or previous understanding of real-world phenomena. The solution to this is simple: the cloudy box.

Black Box, White Box: Why Not Cloudy Box?

In computer science literature, machine learning models can be classified by the degree to which a researcher can understand and interpret how the implemented algorithm can transform inputs into outputs, differentiated as black box vs. white box models. As distinguished by Loyola-Gonzalez (2019), a black box model is one that cannot be easily understood or its outputs interpreted—neither the outputs nor the processes or "inner workings" to derive them are self-explanatory. A white box model is one with "inner workings" that can be understood, its outputs interpretable to applied experts, and is explainable without relying on additional models.

[4] Dr. Jesse Lecy first presented this premise during a panel at the 2021 Association for Research on Nonprofits and Voluntary Associations (ARNOVA) conference, where he was discussing drivers of and key factors shaping the future of nonprofit and NGO research.

For our purposes, we can consider the difference as how explainable model variables are. Models consisting solely of black box variables may have high performance but limited explanatory power, as variables are selected based on the performance metrics of the selection algorithm rather than based on any deductive theories or inductively observed patterns in data. In contrast, models consisting solely of white box variables can be easily understood and interpreted, but may not have as strong a performance, for example due to omitted variable bias or any number of influential but unaddressed patterns in the underlying data. Finding a middle path between the two extremes allows us to lean more towards a black or white box as needed, while taking advantage of strengths and mitigating weaknesses. Because the dominance of one approach vs. another may vary and this range of possible black box-white box combinations consists of shifting shades of grey, I refer to the approach collectively as the cloudy box.

Creating a "Cloudy" Performance Measure

In an ongoing research project (Santamarina, 2023b), I explore measuring rationalization as an alternative approach to nonprofit performance measurement and use a cloudy box approach.[5] Performance measurement for Third-Sector organizations is the extent to which they have achieved their mission or desired effects on intended communities (Santamarina, 2023a, b). There are two dominant methods for measuring performance among Third-Sector organizations, financial measures and subjective approaches. Using financial measures as proxies for performance is common, but inconsistent implementation, definitions, and calculations reduce their utility, and critics question their utility for determining performance (Coupet & Berrett, 2019; Kioko & Marlowe, 2016; Prentice, 2016). As Gordon et al. (2010) note, "even with a multidimensional approach to measuring a nonprofit organization's financial performance, financial accounting is unable to show whether the nonprofit organization's mission is being accomplished" (p. 221). Scholars have explored numerous approaches to going beyond financial measures and allowing Third-Sector organizations to subjectively defining performance from their own "frame of reference" (Maier et al., 2016, p. 75; Tsarenko & Simpson, 2017). Because of its subjective, bespoke, and likely idiosyncratic nature, such a performance measure loses validity when applied in another context. Both of these methods to capture Third-Sector organization performance face implementation issues that introduce construct validity and external validity concerns into research (Prentice, 2016). As an alternative, I measure rationalization, or the formalization of processes within a nonprofit, because it does a better job of capturing the ability of nonprofits to achieve their missions.[6]

[5] For additional detail on the methods described below, please refer to Santamarina (2023a).

[6] A full definition for rationalization and explanation for its appropriateness in this context are available in Santamarina (2023a, b).

Implementing rationalization measures at scale to capture performance is a perfect use case for the cloudy box approach. The dominant measure of rationalization uses principal component analysis (PCA) to transform four rationalization-related variables into a single score for a given organization, and has been implemented in both the U.S. and China (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Suárez & Hwang, 2013; Song & Yin, 2019). I adapted the previous researchers' methods to generate factor scores for a subset of 2019 e-Filed Form 990s, then used those scores to predict and assign scores to all other nonprofits in the dataset. The dominant measures' variables are not all present in the Form 990. Instead, I identified nine theory-derived or "anticipated" variables present in the Form 990 that capture formalization-related best practices established in 2002 in response to the Enron scandal and others (Nezhina & Brudney, 2012; Ostrower & Bobowick, 2006).

For the algorithm-derived or "predicted" variables, I needed to determine which of the 1704 variables from the Form 990 was most predictive of the score. I implemented the lasso dimensional reduction technique—a common (and perhaps white box) technique for automating feature (or variable) selection in machine learning: it consists of adding an l_1-norm penalty to an ordinary least squares model to minimize the sum of squares and constrain regressions (Hastie et al., 2009; Tibshirani, 2011).

In the combined set or cloudy box model, the four variables with largest explanatory power were anticipated variables (conflict of interest policy, document retention policy, production of audited financial statements, and compensation process policy for CEOs), and the anticipated variable with the lowest magnitude was 12th out of the 17 variables (Santamarina, 2023b). The predicted variable with the largest magnitude (financial statements auditing) was fifth, and only a total of four predicted variables had larger magnitudes than the least explanatory anticipated variable.

By using the cloudy box, I am able to speak with confidence as to where the most explanatory variables come from and interpret with minimal to no additional models (white box), while substantially increasing the performance of my model by incorporating variables that I may struggle to explain where they come from (black box). Navigating trade-offs between increasing performance vs. confidence in interpreting model outputs and deciding between predictive, inductive, and deductive approaches to variable selections are novel challenges resulting from increased access to big data and powerful algorithms.

Scholars can generate new predicted variables and adjust combined sets as needed to create measures that are bespoke and meaningful, at scale and appropriate for a particular context. Inclusion of geographic scales such as country, region, etc. or sectors and sub-sectors can allow increasingly better models rather than creatively removed using fixed effects models or other statistical techniques. The flexibility offered by cloudy box models shows how predictive methods at scale can be transformative for Third Sector research.

Reasoning at Scale

Data aggregation techniques and related innovations allow scholars to perform research on a broader scale, with less constraints, and potentially with a greater degree of fidelity or nuance. This is demonstrated by the potential expansion of one geographically bound study. In Lecy et al. (2019a), we used nonprofit mission statements as the basis for exploring how political ideologies can influence nonprofits' expressed purposes within two matched communities.[7] We created numerous different taxonomies, or operationalized a priori assumptions, to help us understand differences between nonprofits as indicated by their mission statements.

Recent advances in computational classification techniques allow for the application of those taxonomies to any and all Third-Sector organizations that contain a mission statement. This approach has matured in complexity and breadth of deployment since earlier applications by Fyall et al. (2018) (for example: Lecy et al., 2019b; Lee et al., 2023; LePere-Schloop, 2022; Ma, 2021; Ma et al., 2021; Santamarina et al., 2023).

Since Lecy et al. (2019a), there has been a rise in publicly available election data, such as MIT Election Data and Science Lab (n.d.) or the Global Elections Database (Brancati, 2024). By aggregating these data with nonprofit and NGO data, such as the annual data from the expanding 990 e-Filer dataset, and implementing computational classification techniques, it is now possible to do all kinds of expanded versions of Lecy et al.'s (2019a) study—and many others—to understand the relationship between changes in political ideology across time and space and the work of Third-Sector organizations in communities.

Opportunities to apply reasoning at scale are also emerging from scholars who are creating novel, previously unimaginable datasets. Dr. Paloma Raggo's work at Charity Insights Canada Project (CICP)—Projet Canada Perspectives des Organismes de Bienfaisance (PCPOB), or CICP-PCPOB, is a weekly survey sent to over one thousand registered Canadian charities, with the project intended to last for 5 years. Now in its second year, the project releases its data and insights across numerous topics of interest to the sector and to researchers. Assuming the maximum capacity of the project,[8] it would be collating data from 260,000 unique survey responses covering topics as diverse as policy concerns and advocacy work, uncompensated labor, donor relationships, and collaboration from multiple perspectives (CICP-PCPOB, 2023, n.d.). A survey of the Third Sector at this scale, in terms of total time, frequency, and total responses allows exploration of deductive concepts in such unprecedented ways that the research team is actively inviting people to

[7] The nonprofits were those located within two districts in Texas. The districts were matched together because they only varied by election voting results among the variables of interest (Lecy et al., 2019a).

[8] Where the project would run for 52 weeks per year × 5 complete years = 260 weeks total. If we assume that 1000 charities submit responses each week and count each response as unique, 260 weeks × 1000 responses = 260,000 unique responses.

reach out, use the data, and generate insights (P. Raggo, personal communication, n.d.).

This is the unintended side effect of publicly available big data: more than ever before, researchers are now being invited to use and leverage datasets rather than seek them out. Third Sector-specific datasets such as the one being developed by CICP-PCPOB can be paired with multi-state datasets, e.g., the national and regional datasets discussed by Bloodgood and approaches such as the ILO measurement of volunteering discussed by Fonović. These new aggregate datasets combine data in ways that facilitate mixed methods analyses to enhance sense making and provide context at various levels of analyses.

Sense-Making across Levels of Analysis

Through combinations of deductive, inductive, and predictive reasoning, researchers can operate across levels of analysis to better test and explore limits of the generalizability of results with minimal effort but high value for improved sense making. I refer to these levels as macro- (a collection of individuals or organizations), micro- (an individual, organization), and meso- (occupying the space between the two).

Macro. These insights have often benefitted from examples to put them into context and demonstrate their validity at the unit level, especially when the insights national, multi-national, or global in scope. How is a global trend appearing in the work of a local NGO? Unfortunately, without engaging in additional project or research arms and potentially expanding scope beyond funding limits, acquiring the necessary data has not always been possible.

Web scraping tools for capturing organizational social media content make that easier than ever thanks to open-source statistical and programming tools like R and Python, as well as educational materials; see, for example, "Social Media as Social Science Data" by Wilson (2022)—a textbook with all coursework and tools publicly available via GitHub: https://github.com/slwilson4/smassd. For a long time, Twitter (now "X") was considered to be the preeminent source of social media for social scientists, and researchers have spent considerable resources archiving data from that site using methods as described by Wilson (2022). The responses and beliefs expressed from an organization's tweets can allow researchers to understand what a macro-level finding means for on-the ground Third Sector participants.

Micro. Researchers can generate new concepts inductively, at scale, through micro-level data from social media and organizational websites through text analysis tools and machine learning methods. By increasing data at the individual or organizational level, novel aggregations are possible that allow researchers to understand the uniqueness versus universality of a particular social phenomenon. Wasif (2021) uses this approach to explore changes in portrayals of Islamic nonprofits as a result of the U.S. September 11th events ("9/11"). Specifically, his approach to exploring the influence of 9/11 aggregates newspaper data from Lexis Nexis with IRS Form 990 data and implements two machine learning approaches,

unsupervised via structural topic models (STM) and supervised via support vector machines (SVM). The resulting findings have implications for Muslim nonprofits operating in the U.S. as well as how nonprofit and NGO identities vis-à-vis their countries of origin may affect their operations in Global South contexts.

Predictive methods allow us to further explore concepts by providing additional, extrapolated data to populate missing fields for individual observations, further expanding the size and utility of the dataset and removing limits from cross-context comparison. As a result, micro-level data can now drive research at almost any level of analysis, even beyond its original context.

Meso. Intermediary levels of insights that affect a subset of the macro-level population can be extrapolated up, down, or even in both directions. In Santamarina (2022) and (2023a), I created a dataset of text containing concepts related to "impact evaluation" to identify potential interactions across multiple levels of isomorphic pressures. I started with Gugerty et al.'s (2021) set of evaluation standards documents and produced a dataset contained 205 quotations, reflecting 42 documents produced by 37 organizations. Each quotation contained some combination of concepts present in my proposed definition of impact evaluation, synthesized across literatures.

Using structural topic models[9] (STM; Roberts et al., 2019), I inductively identified six topics, or latent categories of isomorphic pressures, present in the standards' language related to impact evaluation: compliance, community benefit, establishing systems, developing understanding, creating change, and data engagement. A cross-sectional analysis of the topics compared across four domains (organizational type, regional focus, sectoral origin, and standard type), derived deductively from theory and literature, allowed me to explore the influence of each topic within certain sets of donors. This is indicated by a topic's expected prevalence, or the frequency with which a particular latent theme/topic appears in that slice of the data (for the full results see Santamarina, 2022, 2023a). From these results, we can explore implications across multiple levels.

- Macro: To what extent are these pressures felt or trends observed across international development? How do they relate to other ongoing conversations in the sector?
- Micro: How do these pressures inform or appear in implementations of programs and service delivery? How can, or should, they be informing ongoing efforts such as strides to be "closer to the ground" by Oxfam, the UN, and other groups?
- Meso: How might limitations in the dataset, e.g., that all documents were in English, reflect the ongoing effects of historical events, such as effects of colonization or hegemonic influences? What do differences within domains imply, for example for the relationships between donor, infrastructure, and national associational organizations?

[9] STMs can be cloudy box models, in that the researcher can use metadata variables to influence relationships between documents and topics, and thus the words that get clustered into topics (Roberts et al., 2019). Comparing TM and STM output demonstrated that including these metadata variables produced topics proved critical for generating topics with better performance, such as FREX scores (Airoldi & Bischof, 2012; Bischof & Airoldi, 2012).

Call to Action

The various examples presented here showcase just a portion of contemporary advancements in data aggregation, public data and communal efforts, and ease of access to increasingly powerful tools. I caution that a healthy skepticism must accompany these tools: widespread adoption of black box methods may not advance theory on its own, and applying novel tools to big data may produce more noise than meaningful insights.[10] Nonetheless, machine learning tools have been shown to perform well for classifying nonprofit mission statements (ex. Lecy et al., 2019b, as reported in Santamarina et al., 2023). Measures of model performance such as semantic coherence were explicitly designed to try and capture how well experts would be able to perform when faced with a similar task, ex. categorizing combinations of words, and have been found to be very strong proxies (Mimno et al., 2011).

Data aggregation used with caution and optimism allows us to revisit and expand the CNP in countless ways. We can validate and test previous research at scales unimaginable or inaccessible in the past. Why not have our own version of the "replication crisis"—as a community, we can seek to validate which findings hold across geographic and historical contexts, and which are truly context dependent? Why not test how our assumptions have made our world smaller or larger than it really is?

We can also take categories derived for a specific, single context and apply to them to virtually any dataset. For example, we could train algorithms to determine the probability that any nonprofit or NGO, based on their mission statement, would be classified under a particular NTEE code, ICNPO equivalent, etc., then compare classifications across a spectrum of contexts and situations by aggregating additional datasets. Training an algorithm to identify how an NGO from country A would be identified per Country B's classification system may seem like merely a fun experiment in testing how idiosyncratic or universal a given system is. But doing so would also allow us to understand various social phenomena. Consider the lasting effects of colonization—do former French colonies operate with an NGO classification system similar to that of France? If they did, then why would those countries choose to do so; is it merely a function of bureaucratic inertia, or could it be that implementing a system known to the French would make it easier for existing French donors to give to them? How might the diffusion of classification systems associated with a specific, historically colonizing country continue to perpetuate or even exacerbate power inequities in the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized?

Research projects to explore such complex questions are no longer multi-year projects. Because of improved data aggregation and advancements in methods,

[10] This concern is reflected in recent debates around the use of large language models and generative artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT. In particular, these models can "hallucinate" outputs or portions of responses, providing false information that is seemingly indistinguishable from the truth (IBM, n.d.). There have also been issues with these models demonstrating bias because of ingested data or, paradoxically, as a result of efforts to reduce bias (Barbaro, 2024; Drahl, 2023).

research projects can be done faster and with greater impact than ever before. This calls for us to challenge how we think about researching the Third Sector and respond intentionally to Anheier's (2023) agenda items:

I. In addition to "reframe[ing] the nonprofit sector concept" (p. 1117), we can simultaneously reject, reframe, and expand the concept of the nonprofit sector as needed to test boundaries.
II. We can "take values and ideologies seriously" (p. 1118) while making space to incorporate variations in what they are. The expressive nature of nonprofits and NGOs can be an active element of how they are understood, and incorporating in our research combinations of deductive and inductive definitions of values and ideologies will make it more meaningful.
III. Data aggregation allows Third Sector scholars to not only "link to related social science approaches" (p. 1118) but also lead and innovate findings that influence disciplines. Given the wealth of data and increased opportunities to bring a Third Sector approach to problems, the possibility of a CNP "school" may return.
IV. As we "revise and build sustainable core data infrastructure" (p. 1120), we need to reflect on recent data aggregation and data liberation efforts to incorporate those learnings into a broader, meaningful, and communal effort where all researchers can contribute and all can benefit.

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Chapter 15
Commentary on Part IV - Data Aggregation

Susan Appe

At first glance, some might find it odd that a qualitative researcher like me would be commenting on a section about data aggregation. However, data aggregation as it is called here, or elsewhere called "mapping" the Third Sector (Smith et al., 2006; Van Til, 1988) has emerged as an important component to my research. As a practice, mapping can georeference information (a literal map). As a metaphor, mapping can signal the gathering and collating of standardized information about the Third Sector. As an outcome, mapping can facilitate sampling frames and encourage comparative research. All of these are of relevance to me as a qualitative researcher.

I study civil society/nonprofit organizations and how they respond to their political, regulatory, and funding environments. As I recounted recently in an edited volume (Appe, 2022; *A Future Civil Society Research Agenda*), early in my career, I encountered research roadblocks that led me to question the definitions and boundaries of the data we use and analyze and how they inform what we study and our findings. I outlined how my intentions to use a government-produced database to determine a sampling frame for qualitative research led me down an unexpected path. Given this, it did not take long until data aggregation and its challenges became part of my research interests and something I tried not to take for granted.

My concerns are with academic and government communities and their attempt to "map" civil society, the nonprofit sector, and/or the Third Sector. In my research, I integrated ideas about "mapping", thought more about data availability in the "sector", and considered that what might seem like a simple administrative task, e.g., government registration, could have unintended consequences for civil society. I have argued for continued and further problematization of "mappings" that "intentionally or not, come to prioritize certain values" (Appe, 2022, p. 92).

Thus, it is with great pleasure I consider the section of "data aggregation" in this volume. As the editors and contributors agree, critical reflection is necessary,

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especially around the issues of definition/classification, power, and knowledge production. All three chapters in this section reflect on data aggregation and are not timid in observing the limitations and challenges. In fact, I have had conversations over the years, in person and in writing with my colleague Beth Bloodgood about most of what I lay out here. I hope these conversations are fruitful as we tackle the questions around data in our interdisciplinary field. I especially appreciate Fonović and Santamarina's additions to the conversation—considering global data on volunteering and new tools and technologies in the field to aggregate data, respectively.

First, I comment on the questions that I started to have in my early career about *who* maps civil society (Appe, 2012), and this led other critical nonprofit scholars to question *why* we are mapping to begin with (e.g., Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016). Second, as I continue to do qualitative research, I recognize a need for better comparative work in the field. Data aggregation can certainly play an important role here. And third, new technologies are unavoidable, and the authors draw on some of the important questions we should be considering.

The Basics: Who and Why of 'Data Aggregation'

As noted, I have not previously framed my concerns about mapping in terms of "data aggregation." Bloodgood states that data aggregation is "defined as the combination of data across levels, jurisdictions, and/or time in a prior coordinated fashion or using technology or crosswalks after the fact to enable comparative research, including cross-sectoral, cross-national, and/or time series datasets" (p. 134). She outlines examples and reflects on top-down and bottom-up data aggregation approaches, reviewing the advantages, potentials, and limitations of such projects.

Over the years I have reviewed the work of several initiatives emphasizing the *who* is doing the mapping, or data aggregation, and its implications. This has mainly included government, donor/multilateral institutions, academic communities, and organizations themselves (e.g., Appe, 2018). Bloodgood does not organize her questions specifically around the actors who map, but rather the approaches and data collected (top-down/bottom up; self-reported data versus government-required data, survey data and administrative data, etc.). Her review effectively explores the strengths and weakness of data and their collection but might not explicitly consider always the power of who is managing these initiatives, their strategies and the implications that they have.

Some colleagues have asked a rather simple question: Why are we even mapping? Why do we aggregate information on civil society? (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016). Bloodgood states upfront in her chapter that data aggregation "bring[s] new visibility and credibility to the Third Sector as well as enabling new research" (p. 133). However, there are concerns around the inclusion and exclusion criteria for data aggregation and the influence it has on what we research and our findings. The selection criteria come with risks as data aggregation tends to rely on "characteristics that are measurable in economic terms" and prioritize formal, larger

organizations (Bloodgood, p. 136). Bloodgood makes explicit note of this, as have other scholars in the field. Banks et al. (2020), for example, in their research on international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) outline that "… large-scale databases, … are likely to overlook the contributions of large numbers of smaller INGOs, thereby exacerbating the tendency of our knowledge and research to be concentrated among a relative minority of large and influential INGOs" (p. 698). Undoubtedly, our data collection choices have consequences.

Pushing beyond data aggregation, Santamarina discusses data *liberation*, a term I think could use some more fleshing out in this context. While never exactly defining it, data liberation suggests a practice for data that are made available but not all that user-friendly. Santamarina suggests data liberation as "the creation of tools and building understanding to access data that was technically available but functionally barricaded behind design limitations, inconsistent version controls, and unstable data hosting." (p. 166). Some of these trends, as Santamarina lays out, have resulted in innovative exchanges, collaborations, and data sharing (e.g., Nonprofit Open Data Collective). Even with my concerns around mapping, such efforts do suggest promising directions in the democratization of data in the field.

Data and Comparison

One of the major objectives of data aggregation is to compare. I find this to be quite persuasive. Fonovic underlines the field's engagement in comparative study, focusing on volunteering. For example, partnerships have been forged between the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), researchers from the International Third-Sector Research (ISTR), and National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) to contribute to comparative work on volunteering at a global scale.

Comparative work is further found on the pages of ISTR's journal, *Voluntas*. As one of the co-editor-in-chief, I have tried to encourage more comparative work as a recent virtual issue on the topic demonstrates (Holanda et al., 2023). Additionally, Anheier's (2023) published reflections on comparative nonprofit research first shared at ISTR's 2022 Montreal conference and now published open access as an editorial in *Voluntas* further underscores its importance.

Bloodgood credits the United Nations Handbook on the System of National Accounts (Salamon & Anheier, 1993) as kicking off the conversation and aiding the sector to be recognized and suited for comparative study. It was one of Lester Salamon's major contributions to the field—rooted in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. It brought for the first time country-level, comparative data to researchers and governments alike. Comparative initiatives on volunteering followed, as Fonovic shares with the International Labour Organization's Manual for the Measurement of Volunteer Work.

Recently colleagues and I summarized the early years of comparative Third Sector research and its debates in *Voluntas* which started in the 1990s (Holanda et al., 2023). We then assessed subsequent comparative work in the journal and

found a surprising disconnect. While early debates covered important topics related to data aggregation and which are still timely (definitional and classification questions; social origins theory; measurement; international versus global versus comparative, etc.), very few empirical, comparative articles in *Voluntas* observed or drew on these earlier comparative contributions. This comment is somewhat beyond the scope of my tasked commentary for this section, but I am compelled to entice some attention to it. Our field should be more conversational. The model of this volume—substantive and commentary chapters—facilitates this. For example, in the early years of *Voluntas* commentaries were more frequent (e.g., Steinberg & Young, 1998; Ragin, 1998). Included in the journal were "responses to" pieces (Fowler, 1998), and the editor-in-chiefs have chimed in about important topics, including comparative research (Brandsen & Simsa, 2016; Simsa & Brandsen, 2021). *Voluntas* has tried to re-ignite some of this in its December 2023 issue with Anheier (2023) and the virtual issue on comparative Third Sector research (Holanda et al., 2023).

New Technologies and Open Science

Bloodgood and Santamarina both observe the new technologies and open science as they relate to data aggregation. Additionally, Santamarina's work suggests pushing beyond *aggregating* and *liberating* data. He also makes claim to *evaluating* performance by nonprofits through aggregation and liberation. The author introduces his approach to use "rationalization measures at scale to capture performance" (p. 170). His research suggests interesting findings, identifying potential variables (e.g., presence of conflict-of-interest policy) that have explanatory power and can predict performance levels among nonprofits. Santamarina's audience is clearly the researcher/scholar. However, I have written about evaluating in the context of government data collection and aggregation (or mapping, in my terminology) (e.g., Appe, 2015).

Based on my analysis, government mappings are used to achieve several different policy goals. What seems to be a technical and benign government tool, can have clear implications and variations for civil society. Policy-goal tensions range and include: (1) To regulate versus to discipline, (2) to rationalize civil society versus to make legible, and (3) to foster collaboration versus to co-opt (Appe, Forthcoming). In the contexts where I have studied such policy tools, there is often greater mistrust of government in its ability to fairly achieve policy goals. My concerns remain and heighten with newer tools and technologies that make government registries, or any data collection and aggregation, more powerful. Further, I would take pause with such mapping efforts that have an eye to evaluate given the autocratization we are seeing globally (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). More so than in my earlier work about mapping, I now often contextualize mapping efforts in the realities of global autocratization. Under current autocratization trends, the clamping down on civil society is more likely to occur through legal and incremental strategies (e.g., government registration) that can challenge democratic norms.

Still, Santamarina's chapter audience is the nonprofit researcher who might be able to make use of new data sets and new applications and tools to answer nonprofit-relevant research questions. His work adds to important contributions to data aggregation and empirical research (e.g., Fyall et al., 2018; LePere-Schloop, 2022; LePere-Schloop et al., 2022; Litofcenko et al., 2020; Ma, 2021).

These discussions on new technologies and their implications on research and knowledge production are moving fast. In my 2018 chapter on mapping civil society in the textbook *Reframing Nonprofit Organizations: Democracy, Inclusion, and Social Change,* I made no mention of computational methods and artificial intelligence when discussing the topic. Five years later when preparing an updated chapter for the second edition, it was unavoidable. Drawing on concerns around statecraft and mapping, which I had for years reflected on, it seems that new digital technologies come with clear risks around state control and even manipulation for civil society (Appe, Forthcoming; see also LePere-Schloop et al., 2022).

Conclusion

In sum, I appreciate what Santamarina calls a "healthy skepticism" around some of the data aggregation trends. In fact, all three authors in the section recognize that aggregation leads to trade-offs regarding context-specific phenomena. This has always been at the forefront of data aggregation discussions—especially in the realm of comparative research but is perhaps even more heightened in times of expanding digital tools and computational methods. Incorporating into these conversations the perspectives of interdisciplinary and international scholars, as this volume does so deliberately, will aid to both widen and deepen the conversation. These authors bring interdisciplinary perspectives, from political science to computer science, to scrutinize and push forward major data projects in the field.

As I conclude, I will mention that in an earlier review of this book project's original proposal, I wanted to see more about the infrastructure for research on the Third Sector. Given this book was intended to take a thorough dive into considering the field's future, I find that infrastructure is a critical topic. This infrastructure includes the professional associations, membership in these associations, field journals, and the entire enterprise of the peer-review process, which is seeing major challenges. Simply put, the field needs continued investment. Bloodgood notes this regarding data aggregation by stating that such "projects which lack guaranteed resources at the beginning depend on having researchers willing and able to continue the project which might not always be the case" (p. 141). Having research and institutional infrastructure to support data aggregation is critical. Bloodgood notes gaps in World Values and Afrobarometer surveys as examples of the consequences of a lack of consistent support. The website NGO Knowledge Collective Data Portal (Schnable et al., 2019) is another example of the difficulty in sustaining data aggregation. In this case, data aggregation was cataloguing thousands of journal articles on the topic of NGOs. It started in 2015; first including publications from 1980–2014, with

the intention to expand beyond 2015 by adding articles. The website appears to have been disactivated now for at least a year. The need to support with infrastructure such data projects cannot be overstated.

Data aggregation and the other important topics in this volume are paramount for the health and sustainability of the field. I speak about this as a wrap up my last term as co-editor-in-chief of *Voluntas*. I am concerned about the future of research—not only about the challenges of definition, measurement and data aggregation and the constrained infrastructure but also the sometimes-limited conversations and building on each other's work in our writing and on the pages of our scholarship. This volume is responsive to these concerns by facilitating critical ideas, commentary, and written discussion. This allows us to build a diverse but cohesive research agenda that produces knowledge on civil society and the Third Sector.

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Part V
Faith

Chapter 16
The Relationship Between the Third Sector and Religion

Rupert Graf Strachwitz

Introduction

In Lester Salamon's seminal Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP), religious communities (as opposed to faith-based charities) were excluded on the grounds that the issue of whether they actually formed part of the Third Sector—or, as one began to say in the 1990s—civil society, had not yet been sufficiently explored. It was clear that while in some countries, e.g. France and the United States, the constitution provided for a strict separation of Church and State, in others, notably England and at that time Sweden, there existed a State Church with the head of State also acting as head of the Church. In other countries again, e.g. Germany, while Church and State are formally separated, established religious communities enjoy a very special constitutional position which has led constitutional experts to speak of a fake separation. In some Islamic countries, notably Morocco, Saudi-Arabia and Iran, religion and state are so closely intertwined that it would be difficult to draw a dividing line between them.

Given this complex situation, it seemed sensible to contend that while some religious communities were undoubtedly civil society organizations, and were recognized and saw themselves as such, others were not, and most would not be able to describe their position accurately in terms of empirical social sciences in general and the The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project in particular. Ralf Dahrendorf's famous narrative of a conversation he had with Pope John Paul II.,[1] whom he asked whether the (Roman Catholic) Church considered itself part of civil society, to which the Pope replied: "Oh no, the Church is sacred society!", captures

[1] Related orally to the author.

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the dilemma. For this reason, it would arguably not have been feasible to include this major problem in an empirical project that was complicated enough anyway. As a result of this decision, when reflecting on civil society, the civic space, and related subjects, religious communities to this day are not included in the debate and are not on people's minds. (Incidentally, the same applies to trade unions and to political parties, although in public lectures on civil society, the question whether Churches, trade unions, and political parties are part of it, will invariably be asked by someone in the audience.) In the case of religious communities, most social scientists tend not to be active members of such a community and view religion as such with some scepticism, while religious believers for centuries have been taught to think of their community as something distinct from and not explainable in ordinary social science categories. This may well have added to the general distancing.

Yet, the issue remains. In attempting to assess the width and depth of civil society, it most certainly seems necessary to devote some serious research to the question of whether, under what conditions, and to what extent there exists a relationship between religion and civil society that renders it possible or even mandatory to count "religion" in among the plethora of civil society organizations goals. In terms of tax benefits this is certainly the case. To this end, the first necessary step is to make a distinction between religion and religious communities, a distinction that was not altogether clear when Helmut Anheier, who was right in introducing it, raised this subject in his keynote address at the 2022 ISTR International Conference in Toronto, Canada. "Note that CNP cut out the religious component (other than in the field of education, health care and social services) and with this the central motivating forces for the establishment of nonprofit organizations" (Anheier, 2023, 1118). Obviously, Anheier was referring to more than one reading of "religion". The purpose of this paper is to tackle this uncertainty and ultimately concentrate on the one that has received less attention to date.

Religion and Religious Communities

Talking about religion, we commonly refer to a basic conviction that there exists a supernatural power (Jahwe, God, Allah, …) with whom we need to enter into and entertain a relationship. This relationship, commonly expressed as faith, comes with a number of implications, usually but not exclusively framed and expressed by organizations (e.g. "Churches"). These see their most important task in providing guidance on this central feature of human life, and more often than not attach a number of ethical principles to the basic rather more cosmological one. Not the least of these has to do with the relationship between human beings and the quality of this relationship. E.g., in the Christian New Testament, the wording for this reads: "... 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30–31). Similar statements may be found in the Jewish Bible and the Quran. This is what religion is

about, a deeply normative concept. It is extremely influential when it comes to why civil society organizations exist and operate, and even more when talking about volunteering, civic engagement, donating, philanthropy and other core aspects of civil society principles and action. There is significant evidence that religious beliefs influence decisions to volunteer or to donate and determine the choice of beneficiaries, the time allotted to volunteering etc. That religious people give more is a well established fact (Hummel et al., 2020).

Added to this line of argument, it may also be discussed whether or not religious beliefs and/or the power of religious communities have been instrumental in bringing about a welfare state, or on the contrary have resisted it (Manow, 2004). It is indeed not clear whether religious beliefs make political leaders think more about the welfare of their people, or whether they lead to a conviction that welfare belongs to the domain of religious communities and should remain so. This argument is particularly valid when looking at a period in history when the power and influence of established religious communities was or is threatened, which led to social and educational services being considered by these communities as part of their realm and an instrument to be used in fighting the secular State for power, while these secular powers were in a process of assuming more control over people's lives than ever before. It was underpinned by religious communities arguing that they posessed a monopoly on certain issues of ultimate truth which should lift them to a position above that of other players in the public sphere (D'Ambrosio, 2019). Clearly, the public sphere in most parts of the world is no longer buying this approach, and while recognizing every citizen's right to exercise his or her religion as a basic human right, will commonly consider organized religious communities to be non-governmental organizations that do not merit any preferential treatment. That religious traditions and the conviction of a large segment of citizens continue to render their position somewhat different from that of most civil society organizations, is a different matter, and a number of instances show that in times of extreme duress and hardship, their comforting and caring abilities are widely appreciated. "Amongst […] civil society actors, religious communities were viewed as being central actors that took on supporting refugees with shelter and answering other acute needs" (Lundgren, 2018, 11).

All this may indeed be a good reason to unpack the relationship between religion and civil society (or rather civil society's organized part, commonly referred to as the Third Sector), but it may be argued that this has been done for many years, in many countries, and in relation to many religious communities, faith-based organizations and the overall level of giving and volunteering. At the same time, the gap intentionally left open by Lester Salamon and his associates, has as yet not been closed. This gap concerns bodies commonly described as religious organizations or communities, frequently however called religions for short. While faith-based charities have always been counted in, these religious communities to mean organizations devoted to the quest for and practice of religion as such have not, when attempting to determine what type of organizations actually comprise civil society. Under this heading it is not the normative issues of religion that are being addressed but the organizational pecularities of regularly, but not necessarily quite large, more

often however extremely diverse collective bodies that may easily be understood as being very different from governmental as well as business organisms. This may well have been different in history, and there may well be exceptions to this rule, but as a principle, it is surely fair to argue that Mosque communities, Jewish communities and Christian Churches and other religious communities may be classified as communities, and more narrowly as communities of choice regardless of their mission in the same way as cultural and other organizations are. In this sense, religion (for short) does not refer to a normative but rather to an analytical category in that a certain type of organizations are analyzed in terms of their participation in public life, as contributors to the public good, as mission-driven organizations in a very general sense, as centres and enablers of community development, service providers, asset holders, and stakeholders, rather than as places of worship, by their theological implications, their effect as to volunteering and giving, etc. Naturally, this analysis should not keep members of any particular religious community from believing that theirs was special, not to be compared to any other, equipped with insights not attainable by others etc.

Whether this constitutes a viable approach is the subject of this chapter. It leans heavily on a research project named "Religious Communities and Civil Society in Europe", which I was honoured to conduct with a wide range of excellent scholars from 2015 to 2018 (viz. Strachwitz, 2019/2020). The key questions asked in this project, were these:

(a) Is the hypothesis that religious communities are part of civil society, supported by evidence?
(b) How do these communities see this?
(c) Might there be borderline cases, exceptions …?

Defining Civil Society

Although after a long and quite controversial debate it seems quite clear today what activities, movements, organizations, and institutions may be described as being part of civil society, it would seem necessary to point to some very crucial determining facts in order to be able to answer the question whether religious communities should be counted as belonging to civil society. This clearly goes beyond the type of definition rooted in the Hegelian tradition: "Civil society is the realm of economic relationships as it exists in the modern industrial capitalist society, for it had emerged at the particular period of capitalism and served its interests: individual rights and private property" (Dhanagare, 2001). Rather, they are rooted in CNP, which successfully attempted to find a definition that would differentiate civil society (originally termed the Third Sector in CNP) from the State and the market and determine a number of qualifications that would provide a reasonable argument for including or excluding organizations that at first sight would seem to be extraordinarily heterogeneous. This definition would have to fit organizations in different countries

and world regions, of very diverse size and organizational structure, and with widely diverse missions (Salamon & Anheier, 1992).

Recently, Helmut Anheier has suggested a more complex approach, arguing that associations, foundations, and nonprofit corporations (habitually seen as the classic organizational forms for organized civil society) should be regarded as possibly pertaining to the State and the market as well as to civil society (Anheier, 2023, 1116). While this helps to understand that these types of organization may indeed not be part of civil society if they fail to meet certain defining characteristics, this also has its limitations in distorting the chance to tick these characteristics and reach a conclusion regardless of mission, political circumstances, activities, history, size, and organizational form. These definitory characteristics may be described as follows:

1. In very general terms, civil society players may be described as voluntary to mean that nobody is forced to belong to a certain organization while anybody, possibly anybody who meets certain qualifications, may join and leave at his or her free will.
2. Civil society players do not engage in the core business of government, i.e. general administration, entertaining armed forces and a police force, passing and enforcing binding laws to be abided by etc.
3. Civil society players are not primarily engaged in reaping financial rewards for offering goods and services. They may achieve a surplus in conducting their business and may indeed collect fees, but this may not be their prime objective, and fees collected must primarily relate to the cost involved rather than the market value of the services or goods provided.
4. Civil society organizations may not distribute any profits or surplus made among members and owners. While they may employ paid staff and in turn pay for services rendered to them, payment must always be related to the service performed rather than to the overall performance.
5. Civil society players commonly (though by no means exclusively) rely on voluntary contributions, offered in cash, in kind, in the form of active voilunteerism, as well as in ideas and know-how, and, importantly, in empathy. Following François Perroux (1960), civil society may be described as the arena of giving, as opposed to the state as the arena of force and the market as the arena of swapping.
6. This leads to a more general statement that civil society is one of the three arenas in which collective societal action takes place, the other two being the state and the market (or private sector). Envisaging a society in which the individual human being and his immediate personal surroundings, most particularly his family, form the central focus and starting point from which society derives, the resulting image shows three circles around this central figure and imagines all women and men entering into any one of these circles depending on the kind of activity they wish to engage in. Compared to the State, entering and leaving is considerably easier to enter the civil society arena, while compared to the market, public benefit rather than personal gains constitute the prime objective.

7. However, public benefit will always carry a subjective definition, and there may well be—and is—fundamental disagreement as to whether a certain activity does in fact benefit the public. Also, the difference between public benefit and common benefit needs to be noted and may lead to considerable argument.

Civil society thus broadly described may assume a number of functions. Individual organizations may of course perform several of these simultaneously. Four of these functions first appeared in a Communication published by the European Commission in 1997, and have since been worked on and expanded (Strachwitz, 2021, 7). They may be described as:

1. service provision, as provided by faith-based and entirely secular organizations,
2. advocacy, visible in protest movements and others,
3. self help, to be realized in not-for-profit sports clubs,
4. watchdog, encompassing consumer protection organizations and others. Recently, Colin Crouch has singled out this function as the most important one to be taken on by civil society in the future, given that checks and balances within the state system are no longer capable of performing (viz. Crouch, 2011), while society retains an urgent need to watch over the preservation of its basic principles, eg. the rule of law.
5. intermediary, to describe grant making bodies and umbrella organizations,
6. community building, a wide range of players including amateur music and theatre, often derided as hobby or pass-time organizations, in actual fact vital contributors to social capital (viz. Putnam, 1993),
7. political participation, to mean taking an active part in deliberative democracy, since a few years back heavily contested by governments and political parties of both authoritarian and liberal denomination,
8. personal growth, to include personal charity as a means of achieving fulfilment, preparing for the afterlife etc.

Within this very fundamental classification, valid for all, civil society organizations may be classified in a number of other ways (viz. Strachwitz, 2021, 7–8):

1. according to their relationship with society, following Albert Hirschman (1970), which could be

   (a) loyal (e.g. complementing / replacing state action),
   (b) exit (e.g. associations of minority groups),
   (c) voice (e.g. human rights groups).

2. according to their relationship with the other arenas

   (a) corporatist (as part of an overarching system, often associated with financial and regulatory dependencies),
   (b) pluralistic (acting independently).

3. according to their form of organization

   (a) heterarchical (bottom-up) membership organizations (associations),

(b) hierarchical (top-down) foundations / trusts,
(c) organizations owned by external parties (that could be hierarchical or heterachical).

4. according to their aims, such as

(a) religion
(b) social welfare
(c) education
(d) research
(e) culture
(f) nature conservation and environmental protection
(g) sports
(h) human and civil rights

5. according to their degree of organization and consistency

(a) spontaneous civil society,
(b) movements,
(c) organizations,
(d) institutions.

Civil society in the sense described has gained world-wide acceptance over the last 30-odd years as an analytical and broad concept that has nothing to do with civility or other normative categories. It therefore also has a dark side. Furthermore, while many civil society actors believe that only those players who conform to positionings similar to their own belong to civil society, this is in fact incorrect. Only the basic set of characteristics (see above) serves to classify a body as a CSO; the classifications that follow serve to show the breadth and width of potential CSOs.

Do Religious Communities Belong?

In history, government and religion were closely intertwined. Early Christians were persecuted for not offering sacrifices to the pagan Roman Gods and to the Emperor in particular; later, pagans were persecuted for not having themselves baptized. Jews were persecuted for upholding their beliefs. The Kings of Sweden and England established protestant State Churches with themselves as supreme heads in the 1530s, and persecuted subjects who remained faithful to the Pope. In the Augsburg Peace in Germany (1555), the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* was established, to mean that the regional ruler determined the religion of his subjects. In France, and later in Germany, bitter wars were fought between Protestants and Catholics, over issues of doctrine proper as much as over issues to do with the power this doctrine gave to rulers. Since the late sixteenth century however, European philosophers like Jean Bodin (1576) began to realize that statehood and religion should not be as closely intertwined as they had been. The nation State, and later the State

based upon a constitution, were formed on principles that increasingly accorded the citizens the right to choose their own religious affiliation. In 1791, the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America expressly forbade the Congress to make any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. At the same time, the Holy Roman Empire still encompassed a plethora of Church dignitaries who were temporal as well as spiritual heads of their territories. The Pope remained Head of State of a sizeable political entity in Italy until 1870, equipped with an army, a police force and all paraphernalia of a nation State.

All through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European States were finding their own way of establishing freedom of religion and a separation of Church and State. The 1919 constitution abolished the (protestant) State Churches in Germany and deprived the princes of their status as supreme heads, which had become more and more complex. E.g., the King of Bavaria was supreme head of the Protestant Church in Bavaria, although he was a Roman Catholic. However, the established Churches were accorded a number of constitutional privileges over other religious and non-religious organizations. At the same time, the large faith-based charitable organizations (Catholic Caritas and Protestant Diakonisches Werk) were firmly put in the same bracket as comparable not faith-based organizations (while the principle of subsidiarity developed in the Catholic Church, was applied to all). In a sense, the differences between a religious community and a faith-based charity were planted from the outside and therefore bore little relation to basic idea of a Church leader as *pater pauperum*. In Sweden, Church and State were formally separated as of 1st January, 2000. Today, it is only the Church of England that remains a State Church with the King as its Supreme Head. However, since the King is constitutionally obliged to act upon advice of his Prime Minister, it is he or she who decides on the appointment of bishops. In this context, it is also interesting to note that the Roman Catholic Church which for centuries had adhered to two principles that salvation could only be attained inside the (Catholic) Church, and that the Catholic Church alone was in posession of the ultimate truth, officially dropped both at the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

Many countries in the Islamic cultural sphere, while recognizing the right to practice a different religion in principle, continue to entertain a much closer relationship between Islam and the political order. This has to do with Islamic doctrine whereby the community of the faithful (Islam) is not a community of choice as modern Europeans would contend, but a community of fate which noone may actually leave. This is not the place to discuss this notion, but it does need to be pointed out in order to better understand the differences in approach. Israel as political home of the Jews adopts a similar position. Systematically, in Europe alone, six variations of the relationship between Church and State may be named (van der Ploeg, 2019, 318):

1. a theocracy, like the Vatican;
2. a state church, like in England and Turkey;
3. one (or several) preferred religious organization(s), like in Austria, Belgium, and Scotland;

4. one (or several) individually recognized religious organization(s), like in Greece, Israel, and Ukraine;
5. generally recognized religious organizations, like in the Netherlands, in Germany, as far as minority communities are concerned;
6. no specific relationship between State and religious organizations.

In France, the peculiar situation exists that in Alsace-Lorraine, which belonged to Germany until 1919, the situation of the Church resembles the German, not the French one. Furthermore, outside Europe, countries exist (e.g. North Korea) that expressly forbid religious organizations. (Until 1990, this was the case in Albania). This classification may be applied in determing in which cases religious communities may be counted as governmental organizations. This is clearly the case in countries listed above under (1) and (2). In all other brackets, it seems clear that they are not governmental organizations. So, what are they then? If they are not governmental, are they non-governmental, are they NGOs? In the US, this question would be answered in the affirmative. In modern terminology, no community would raise serious doubts that it belonged to civil society. In Europe, the system is more complex. In Germany, those that were counted as state Churches in 1918 plus the Roman-Catholic Church which had been seen as a foreign community, were accorded a preferred status (see no. 2 above), which has made critics describe it as a limping separation of Church and State,[2] while the Muslim communities that only began to grow when Muslim immigration set in, and most nonconformist protestant religious communities are counted as private recognized communities (see no. 5 above). In England as elsewhere, the Roman Catholic Church and a number of Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish and other communities are accepted as religious communities. "In many fields, the Church of England today finds itself in competition with other denominations (Catholic, Evangelical, Presbyterian, Jewish, Muslim etc.), and cannot derive a privileged position from the fact that it is a State church. On the other hand, as regards relations with government at a political level, the Church of England does have advantages, e.g. seats in the House of Lords" (Evendon Kenyan, 2020).

Finally, it should be noted that some communities wish to entertain a very special relationship and indeed become part of government. There exists a wide divide between the Church of Scotland, privatized by its own will and Act of Parliament in 1922, whose former Elder Alison Eliot said: "The Church of Scotland sees itself as a civil society organization in every respect. The Church of Scotland feels very comfortable with this position and would not wish to be in any other", and some of the new evangelical movements, both in Latin America and in Europe, that are described like this: "New religious movements in Latin America seem to be going the opposite way in deliberately attempting to gain a power base within the State structure" (Roig, 2020, 57). Reinhard Cardinal Marx, Roman Catholic Archbishop

[2] The eminent Swiss historian Ulrich Stutz (1926, 54) first used this term ("… *eine hinkende Trennung von Kirche und Staat*…") to describe the constitutional position of the Churches as specified in Germany's 1919 Constitution (WRV, Art. 135–141). It has since become a standard formula.

of Munich and at the time Chairman of the German Conference of Catholic bishops, indicated a way forward: "A big challenge facing the Church today is to steer very clear of being used to support any governmental structure. If this makes the Church a civil society player, so much the better."

A Systematic Approach

It seems that in oder to disentangle this web it is necessary to apply the principles described above to religious communities.

1. Except in very exceptional cases that apply to non-Christian communities, membership in any community would generally be considered to be entirely voluntary. Indeed, over the past half-century, a sizeable proportion of members have decided to leave their Church, while an albeit much smaller number have decided to join by their own free will.
2. Unlike several centuries ago, religious communities, in a European understanding, do not engage in the core business of government. Their leaders do not appoint political leaders or have any say in their appointment, do not enact laws that bind everyone regardless of their professed faith, and restrict their activities to their own core business of cult, social services, and education. While they are not entirely distant from politics, and while both the Pope and the Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a religious body, are accorded the honours due to a head of State, their power remains extremely limited in relation to the power that governments enjoy. The semi-public legal status they enjoy in some countries (e.g. Germany) is grounded in history and not in systematic theoretical reasoning and does not and cannot prevent analysts from grouping them together with others whose legal status is definitely and totally private.
3. Religious communities are definitely not part of the private sector. While they naturally entertain constant relations of a business nature and may be players in that arena, they do not (or should not) operate in a way that lets business advantage come before their spiritual mission.
4. While religious communities are compelled to pay most of their staff, there is no doubt that they do not distribute any surplus made to shareholders or members, reinvesting it into activities to do with their mission proper.
5. Voluntary contributions, both in funds and in time, pay an important part in financing the organization and mission of the Churches. Details vary: In some country, a church tax is levied by the state which means members have to formally leave the Church in oder to avoid it, while in others payments and time given are entirely voluntary.
6. Generally speaking, if religious communities were not be considered civil society players, where would they be? Obviously not governmental nor belonging to the private sector, it would seem that civil society is the safe haven, where they will be considered equals and respected, huge differences in basic principles and mission notwithstanding.

To illustrate this theory, it seems worthwhile revisiting some of the points listed above to describe and differentiate various sub-sectors. In looking at functions, religious communities certainly qualify to assume the following:

1. Religious communities are traditionally engaged in the provision of services, both those of a religious nature (offering places and opportunities to worship) and others that have been connected with them for centuries, like educational and child care institutions.
2. Religious communities may well engage in advocacy, both defending the fundamental right to religious freedom, and clamouring for peace and reconciliation and other points they wish to draw attention to.
3. Self help is perhaps not easily imaginable as a function of a religious community, but
4. as many instances have shown, the Churches have assumed a watchdog role dedicated to preserving peace and other important societal goals, including a very basic trust in God as expressed in many constitutions of countries that do not accord religious communities any privileges.
5. While religious communities would hardly see themselves as intermediaries in an organizational sense (their mission related role as intermediaries between woman and man and God or Allah notwithstanding),
6. their community building role is outstanding, both within the congregations proper and in countless related activities like choirs, orchestras, young people's clubs, womens' clubs, senior citizens' clubs etc.
7. Although membership in religious communities is declining (The State of Church Membership: Trends and Statistics 2024), they remain highly important communities that demand to be and are heard in political debates.
8. Finally, personal growth is a highly relevant function performed by religious communities. In religious terminology, this would be phrased as performing acts of charity in order to gain eternal salvation.

In terms of their relationship with society, and in using Albert Hirshman's classification (Hirschman, 1970), most religious communities would probably best be classified as 'loyal'—with some exceptions. The Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey for instance, headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, could well be described as 'exit'. Most communities, listed above under nos. (2), (3), (4), and (5) would most probably see themselves as corporatist, given a number of traditional ties with the State continue to exist. Some, listed in nos. (5) and (6), would rather think of themselves as pluralistic. And while some, the Roman Catholic Church in particular, are aptly described as hierarchical, others, including some Muslim communities, are more heterachical. That exercising one's religion as a fundamental civil right is included in the list of charitable purposes is obvious, and finally, the varying degree of organizational structure applies to all communities. While some may be termed institutions, others might prefer to be seen as organizations or, as in the case of evangelicals, as movements.

The flip-side to all this is that there is nothing in the various ways of defining religious communities that keeps them from being classified as civil society organizations, while the insistence on them being based as voluntary organizations would preclude governmental bodies to be thus classified and the priority given to public benefit rather than profit would not allow business corporations and ventures to be included.

Conclusion

Grouping collective bodies that operate in the public sphere as either 'state' or 'market' or 'civil society' necessarily entails the question to which of these spheres any collective body and thus religious communities should belong. The purpose of this chapter has been to show that there is no option but to group them as civil society organizations. This may come as a surprise to religious leaders who believe they enjoy a singular position in society not shared by anyone. This was so in the past and is still the case in countries like Iran, where the supreme religious leader ranks above the head of state (art. 5 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). Many other countries invoke God in their constitution, but this is not the same thing, and religious leaders cannot derive a special position in public life from the invocation, all the more so, since in practically every country, several denominations are active as communities and in a sense compete with each other for members and for doctrine. In most countries, religious leaders have long since realized that excessive competition distorts their position rather than enhancing it, and in recent years, dialogue and cooperation between them has increasingly replaced animosity. Pope Francis' repeated meetings with Muslim leaders is a case in point.

Nevertheless, many religious leaders still feel extraordinarily uncomfortable at being grouped with protest movements, alcoholics anonymous, and sports clubs, rather than with the high and mighty of this world. They find it difficult to realize that their legitimacy in a twenty-first century world order derives not from a quasi-governmental status, but from the strength of their mission, their membership and the benefit they bring to the general public. That this shift of mindset carries a range of advantages, has yet to be fully understood. Increasingly however, theological theorists and religious leaders are coming to terms with the realities of society as it exists in the twenty-first century.

Within civil society, religious communities will not only change the empirical pattern. When classifying CSOs by their mission, those with a religious mission will probably be shown at the top of the list. Their mission and message will also be heard in an arena that is infinitely more attentive to missions than modern governments and businesses are. To explore this further, and to see where what this novel approach will carry in the way of new openings, may well be seen as a rewarding research agenda.

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Chapter 17
Analyzing Civil Society in the Arab World: A Conceptual Review

Tania Haddad

Most Arab societies are built on religious institutions that remain separate from the State, providing alternative sources of power and independent spaces. Therefore, to study civil society in the region, it is essential to first define and evaluate the term in the context of the Arab world.

This chapter presents a review of the existing literature on civil society and philanthropy in the Arab world.

When discussing philanthropy and civil society in the region, four different themes appear in the literature: The first theme discusses Philanthropy and religion in the Arab world. The second theme concerns the different types of civil society organizations in the region. The third theme is the development of civil society in the Arab world. Finally, the fourth theme examines the impact of religion on volunteering in the region.

Part I: Philanthropy and Religion in the Arab World

The first body of literature examines the significance of philanthropy in religious contexts.

Organized religious giving and philanthropy in the Arab world is not as prevalent as in the Western world. Although the Arab world has a long history of philanthropy, the institutionalization of giving is a recent development. Indeed, philanthropic giving has been prevalent in Arab societies (Haddad, 2022b, 2021, 2015, 2013; El-Daly & Khalil, 2017). However, literature on philanthropy in the Arab world is scarce compared to the literature on development and civil society in the region (El-Daly & Khalil, 2017).

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Islam prescribes three primary philanthropic practices, *zakat, saddaqah*, and *waqf*, which are religious obligations to pay alms tax, voluntary alms-giving, and religious endowments for public goods. Christian communities also consider philanthropy a collective religious obligation, per the church's recommendation that Individuals donate a tenth of their wealth (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b). At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the first primitive forms of organizations funded by endowments or *Wwaqf* in Arabic were legalized. (El-Daly & Khalil, 2017).

Muslim and Christian endowments thrived for centuries thanks to secure and sustainable funding. They established hospitals and collected *zakat* (alms) from individuals. Parts of these funds were then used to help the poor and provide various public goods and services. These endowments established different religious educational organizations, such as mosques and schools. They carried out several economic initiatives, creating employment opportunities for thousands of individuals. The profits generated from these initiatives were reinvested in expanding their charitable and service activities (El-Daly & Khalil, 2017). El-Daly and Khalil (2017) argue that despite the weaknesses of civil society structures in Arab countries, philanthropy continues to thrive in societies where religion maintains a central role in shaping attitudes.

Faith-based organizations in the Middle East provide social and humanitarian services that should be provided by the government. In developing countries, the lack of legitimacy, weak State structures, and failed governance often lead citizens to seek alternative means to secure their daily needs. This gives rise to various actors who step in to provide welfare services to the citizens, effectively replacing the role of the State (Haddad et al., 2019; Haddad & Sakr, 2023; Haddad 2022a, 2013, 2015). The organizations were established to fulfill societal needs and replaced the role of the state by serving their communities. In this regard, it is important to analyze the development of civil society in the region.

Part II: Development of Civil Society in the Arab World

The second topic of literature pertains to the development of civil society in the region. Civil society in the Arab world has been molded by crucial historical events, including the Ottoman Empire, colonial rule, independence, State creation, authoritarian regimes, and the Arab Spring (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2018; 2020a, b). The institutionalization of civil society in the Arab world dates back to the eighteenth century when the Ottoman Empire introduced radical changes to modernize the region to counter the effect of Western interference in the area. This restructuring and modernization process led to the establishment of different civil society organizations, such as clubs and community-based organizations. The nature of these organizations mainly was religious, charitable, and educational, and they were funded by the *awqaf* (religious and Islamic endowment). With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the region came under colonial and postcolonial rules. In return, parallel to the religious and charitable *awqaf*, new types of civil society

organizations (CSOs) started appearing in the region, such as professional associations, secular charities, cultural clubs, and trade unions. A distinguishing feature of these new organizations was their heightened political engagement compared to the civil society organizations of the Ottoman era. They were instrumental in nationalist movements and were strong proponents of the pan-Arab movement (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b).

After the end of colonial rule, the development of civic society faced more significant problems across the Arab world. Several new military regimes have taken over various States, including Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Yemen. These regimes were considered radical. Thus, these regimes, in return, felt threatened by the pluralistic and civic associations that were flourishing at the time. Therefore, they started oppressing and controlling all types of associations. In this regard, associations in Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya were banned by the military regimes or forced to comply with the government's rules and regulations. This diminished the potential for the development of civil society. The regimes argued that a strong State presence would achieve Arab unity, economic growth, and social justice while facing common enemies. All these factors had a negative impact on the development of the culture of volunteerism and civic engagement in the region.

During the last three decades, different factors have led to the revitalization of civil society (Salam, 2002; Haddad, 2015, 2020a, b, 2023). The rapid process of urbanization has weakened traditional bonds and increased the socio-economic demands of the population; in return, many Arab countries were unable to provide essential socio-economic services to their citizens (Salam, 2002)

- The number of university graduates, particularly those from the West, increased. This, along with the general expansion of education, has led to heightened expectations and ambitions among the youth. Arab youth are organizing and becoming more aware of human rights and women's issues (2015).
- In recent years, development agencies have provided grants and loans directly to vulnerable social groups such as women, disabled individuals, and youth. This is due to demands and advice from Western allies, which led many Arab rulers to open up their regimes. It resulted in the emergence of NGOs and social groups while enabling freedom of expression. It should be noted that the reformation was not aimed at relinquishing power; instead, it was a means to maintain it. Notably, this recent reform primarily focused on the bureaucratic and legal aspects that enabled states to manage civic involvement through practical benefits (2015).
- Over the past two decades, there has been some political liberalization in Arab countries. However, this was often initiated by the rulers, who were advised by their Western allies. These leaders promoted reforms not because they accepted the possibility of giving up power but because they wanted to keep it. Despite these limitations, these reforms have allowed for certain outlets for free expression and the formation of interest groups, such as NGOs, clubs, syndicates, and associations.

- The Arab world is fast adopting new technologies like the internet and satellite TV. This makes it difficult for the State to control the flow of information and exposes people to new ideas and dissent, both successful and unsuccessful. As a result, people are becoming more aware and ambitious.
- Many factors led to the appearance of the right environment for civic organizations to flourish, mainly the Millennium Development Goals, the Arab Spring, and the democratization processes in different states in the Arab world. Moreover, Gulf States are increasingly encouraging the establishment of religious and philanthropic organizations and providing them with an environment where they can operate.

Part III: Defining Civil Society organizations in the Arab World

There is no single, universally accepted definition of civil society (Salam, 2002). Hegel had a different idea of civil society compared to Locke. Gramsci and Habermas had diverse interpretations of civil society that differed from each other and earlier versions (Salam, 2002). Contemporary scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the definition and elements of civil society (Salam, 2002; Haddad & El Hindi, 2019a, b, c; Haddad & Zalzal, 2019). However, there is a consensus among scholars as to the characteristics of civil society (Salam, 2002). These are: "The realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. It is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens collaborating in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. "Civil Society" is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state" (Diamond, 1994).

Several definitions of "civil society" have been presented in the Arab world (Haddad & El Hindi, 2019a). However, scholars argue that most of these definitions are based on Western theories and perspectives. Thus, Haddad (2012, 2014, 2015) argues that to understand better the term "civil society" in the Arab context, there is a need to go back to the origin of the world in the Arabic language. In Arabic, "civil society" is defined by three terms: *Al mujtama' Ahli* (referring to "family") and *Mujtama' Madani* (meaning "civil" (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b). The significant distinction between these three societies is the nature of the affiliation: *Al mujtama' Ahli* refers to "kinship" and has mainly family and tribal affiliations; while in *Mujtama' Madani* societies, there is an emphasis on a single civil community (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b).

Another difference between these two types is the Membership: "*Mujtama' Madani*" associations are civic in nature. They emerged as part of an active civil society in the region in response to political and economic reasons, and they are

successfully forging their credibility within the Arab communities, mainly the youth (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b). Indeed, membership in *al mujtama' Madani* is mainly based on voluntary participation and belief in the organization's mission. The mission of these associations targets the entire society and is not specific to any particular group (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b) On the other hand, membership in *al mujtama' ahli* associations is usually limited to one community but may include individuals from different sects and confessional backgrounds. These types of organizations participate in various social and medical activities. Membership is determined by place of birth, family, and tribal/village belonging. These associations typically provide humanitarian, social, medical, and educational services to their immediate community. They offer services to all group ages in the society (Haddad, 2012, 2015, 2020a, b).

Part IV: Volunteering and Religion in the Region

The fourth and last aspect of the literature links volunteering to civil society. Volunteering is affected by religion and the level of religiosity (Peucker, 2018). Literature on volunteering argues that both religiosity and the level of education positively affect volunteering (Wuthnow, 1994; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; McAndrew & Sobolewska, 2015; Wang & Handy, 2014; Von Essen et al., 2015; Peucker, 2018). In this regard, the literature argues that volunteering is affected by religion and the level of religiosity in two different ways (Peucker, 2018): religious belief systems call for altruistic values and for taking care of others (Von Essen et al., 2015, 1); this, in turn, creates the "culture of benevolence" (Wilson & Musick 1997, 696) which is defined by Peucker (2018, 2371) as "religious obligation to do good and contribute to the wellbeing of others." Moreover, literature on volunteering discusses the positive effect of attending religious services (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wang & Handy, 2014; Von Essen et al., 2015). Religious practices such as attending services can directly positively affect the level of volunteering. Wuthnow (1994, 253) argues, 'Religious organizations tell people of opportunities to serve, both within and beyond the congregation itself, and provide personal contacts, committees, phone numbers, meeting spaces, transportation, or whatever it may take to help turn good intentions into action.' Peucker (2018, 2371) argues: "This effect appears to be mainly due to expanded social networks among those who go to their local church, mosque or temple, and the organizational capacity of these places of worship to mobilize people. This has become widely recognized in the scholarship on volunteering".

While historically, organized volunteering has not been part of Arab culture (Haddad, 2022b, 2023), volunteerism has long existed even before the introduction of the term. It is highly altruistic and deeply rooted in the religious and humanitarian values of the societies. These values are based on compassion, sympathy, the ideals of helping others, social responsibility, and giving back to society (UNV, 2019a).

Indeed, when reviewing the historical development of volunteering in the Arab world, there is a need to understand the importance of religion in shaping the different types of volunteering (Kandil, 2004). Indeed, volunteering in the region is mainly rooted in the religious beliefs and traditions of the regime. Literature argues that Islam provides the foundation for voluntary action in the area, primarily the idea of charity through *zakat* (almsgiving to the poor; and mandatory) and *sadaka* (it is a voluntary donation). Kandil (2004) argues: "As one of Islam's five pillars, this practice is based on social responsibility, thereby reflecting the view that an individual is always a part of the community, and what belongs to them in the ultimate sense belongs to the community (Arab Information Center, 1999). Therefore, to have a right to what one has, the individual has to donate a proportion of his or her wealth". Thus, almsgiving is the basis of Islamic charity, as many organizations are mainly funded by *zakat*. These organizations, in return, provide social and welfare services for the community through recruiting volunteers. In the Arab world, volunteering is viewed as part of charity (Sahri et al., 2016) and applies to any action done to help others (Peucker & Kayikci, 2020; Sahri et al., 2016). However, wealthier Arab countries in the Gulf region are promoting the concept of volunteering and implementing policies to encourage this idea. Volunteering in the area is often informal and associated with religious and cultural traditions of community support. Most states should have prioritized civic service and volunteering due to the absence of formal policies (Haddad, 2015). "The current economic conditions in the Arab world have had a direct impact on the practice of volunteering.". The rise in poverty has reduced youth participation in volunteer work. However, recently, due to socio-economic factors, these trends started to change. Recently, governments began to understand the importance of volunteerism and introduced new legislation and policies.

States have recently been promoting this act in addition to international and local organizations (Haddad, 2015; Haddad, 2020a, b); indeed, states are providing the right legal and political environment for the development of volunteering and including it in the curriculums. These mainly encourage citizens to volunteer in organizations and protect their rights. In return, and through these policies, states are ensuring that no hidden political agendas are introduced (UNV, 2019b).

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the role of each of these factors on civil society in the region.

This chapter has reviewed the developing role of civil society in the region; it has argued that Civil society in the Arab world has been affected by many factors: the historical development of the states, the different types of associations, the long history of Philanthropy, and the institutionalization of giving and volunteering. All these factors directly affected the development of civil society that is unique to the region.

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Chapter 18
Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in Brazil's Social Policies

Catarina Ianni Segatto

Introduction

In Latin America, the prominence of the Catholic Church dates back to colonization in the 1500s. Most countries are still majoritarian Catholic, but there was a shift in its monopoly with the Evangelicals' growth. Only in Paraguay and Ecuador, Catholics are more than 80% of the population. In Chile, Evangelicals make up around 20% of the population, and in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, Evangelicals make up almost the same percentage as Catholics (Guadalupe & Grundberger, 2018). In Brazil, 50% of the population are Catholics, but Evangelicals have grown in the last decades, achieving approximately 30% of Brazilians (Balloussier, 2020).

There is no unique explanation for this growth. Some studies argue that it resulted from the spreading out of Churches across the countries, especially in vulnerable areas. In Brazil, the growth of Evangelical Churches was substantial: in 1922, the first Evangelical Church was created in the country; in 1970, there were 864 Evangelical Churches; in 1990, 17.033, and in 2019, 109.560 (Araújo, 2023). Other studies highlight that Evangelicals, especially Pentecostals, resonate with Latin American religious popular imagination through ideas of miracles, salvation, and war between God and the devil (related to criminality, drug and alcohol addiction, and others). Moreover, different Evangelical pastors are from the communities in which Churches are located, establishing a close connection between pastors and individuals, and Evangelical Churches and communities protect individuals from crime, violence, and vulnerabilities (Maldonado & Beraldo, 2024).

This change is also related to the intersections between Evangelical Churches, the criminal world, and politics, the increasing influence of Evangelicals in public opinion through the ownership of media channels, and the election of politicians

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linked to Evangelical Churches (Guadalupe, 2019; Maldonado & Beraldo, 2024; Manso, 2023). This shift resulted in disputes, but mostly in alliances between conservative politicians linked to Catholics and Pentecostal Churches in politics and policies (Segatto et al., 2022).

This chapter discusses the intersections between religious and social policies in Brazil and the centrality of faith-based organizations in the country. In 2020, 28.7% of civil society organizations (more than 245 thousand organizations) had religion as its primary activity, including Churches and faith-based organizations (IPEA, 2020). However, these organizations are very heterogeneous and have affected social policies differently. Catholic and Evangelical-based organizations have been more active in politics and policies. Catholic-based organizations have historically influenced both decision-making and social service provision, embedding specific ideas related to poverty, gender, and family that have shaped social policies. In contrast, Evangelical-based organizations have increased their importance in the last decades, disputing or reinforcing Catholic-based organizations' ideas.

Faith-Based organizations and Social policies in Brazil

Religion was a central pillar of the formation of Brazil's state. During the colonization period, the Catholic Church had an essential role in both decision and service provision, especially for the most vulnerable. The separation of the State and the Church in the 1890s did not significantly alter the influence of the Catholic Church in politics and policies, as both the State and Church maintained a close relationship (Carvalho, 2013; Landim, 1997).

This close relationship resulted in the influence of the Catholic Church and Catholic-based organizations in Brazil's social policy development, leading to a less redistributive and more market-conforming model of welfare state that rely on non-profit social provision, in which faith-based organizations have a crucial role (Burity, 2006; Landim, 1997; Segatto et al., 2022), as it happened in other countries (Andreotti et al., 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Huber et al., 1993; Leibfried, 1992; Pavolini et al., 2017). Catholic organizations were vital in implementing actions for the most vulnerable at national and sub-national levels, particularly social assistance, healthcare, and childcare services. Moreover, Brazil's welfare state expansion did not alter the non-governmental provision; on the contrary, different changes reinforced non-governmental organizations, including faith-based ones, as social service providers (Cohn, 2000; Leubolt, 2016; Segatto et al., 2022).

The Catholic Church was also involved in different political events over time. Catholic religious organizations were critical in highlighting specific issues, especially poverty and inequalities, that influence decision-making. They were also a fundamental force of opposition to the authoritarian governments that controlled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, even though the high levels in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church supported the coup (Carvalho, 2013).

The growth of Evangelicals shifted the prominence of the Catholic Church in politics and public policy. The increasing election of politicians affiliated with Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups happened in national and subnational Legislative and Executive bodies. At the national level, this led to the creation of the Evangelical Bench (Bancada Evangélica) in the National Congress (1987) (Nascimento, 2017; Lacerda, 2018; Lacerda & Brasiliense, 2018), the influence of these politicians in different national and subnational decisions (Dip, 2018), and, in 2019, Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups supported the right-wing populist coalition that elected President Bolsonaro (2019–2022) (Segatto et al., 2022).

Poor Relief

The Catholic Church has recognized the principle of poor relief—*caritas*—and rejected the repression of begging. Churches and faith-based organizations regulated poor relief and begging, establishing distinctions between "deserving" poor, including the "able-bodied" poor who could work and should be in the workhouse and the "impotent" poor (e.g. the aged, sick, and lunatic) who could not work and should be institutionalized in poorhouses, from the "undeserving" poor, the "able-bodied" poor unwilling to work, who should be punished (Kahl, 2005; Quigley, 1997).

In countries with Catholic majority populations, local Christian communities were responsible for poor relief. The Catholic Church opposed the transfer of poor relief actions to the state, resulting in the late introduction of welfare state programs and the coexistence of state and faith-based organizations as social service providers (Kahl, 2005; Manow, 2004; Ranci, 1994). In other countries, including countries with majority Protestant populations, such as the USA (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013), or others with Christian philanthropy (Petersen et al., 2014), faith-based organizations play an essential role in social welfare provision. Differently, in countries with Lutheran majority populations, particularly the Nordic countries, the State was understood as a critical actor in responding to poverty, as poor relief was perceived as a public issue (not a private matter), which influenced the institutionalization of "state poverty policy" in these countries (Markkola et al., 2011; Markkola & Naumann, 2014).

Brazil's social policies relied on Catholic organizations as social service providers over time. Considering the absence of social services provided by the State, religious organizations were central to providing poor relief and services to the most vulnerable (Gonçalves, 2011). Examples of this include mercy homes, founded in the sixteenth century, and the Holy Houses of Mercy (*Santas Casas da Misericórdia*), created in 1543, which provided hospital services, and foster care to children and young people in conditions of vulnerability until Brazil's independence in 1822 (Landim, 1997; Albuquerque, 2006).

Brazil's welfare state expansion happened only in the 1930s, during Getulio Vargas' government (1930–1945), when social policies, especially social benefits and healthcare services, were progressively expanded to different workers'

categories. Within this context, the welfare state model, inspired by the Bismarckian model of social insurance, only covered the working population and was financed from workers' and employers' contributions; in other words, social rights were linked to employment (Arretche, 2004; Draibe, 1994; Santos, 1998).

Only during the return to democracy in 1988 did the new Constitution universalize social policies, moving from a corporativistic model to a universalistic one. However, the provision kept nonprofit and private organizations providers of social services. In healthcare, for example, governments have purchased healthcare services from the nonprofit and private sectors, including services from private hospitals, individual medical assistance to vulnerable groups and patients with mental health disorders and infectious diseases (Arretche, 2004; Carvalho, 2013; Elias & Cohn, 2003). During the debate of the 1988 Constitution, nonprofit and private organizations were able to include a supplementary role for nonprofit and private sectors in healthcare provision, contrary to what the social movement wanted (Faleiros et al., 2006; Weyland, 1995). As a result, non-governmental organizations (including Catholic organizations) such as healthcare, education, and social assistance services continued to be critical social service providers (Souza, 2004).

Catholic organizations also influenced social policies in Brazil when the Catholic Church decided to expand its work by providing social and political services after the Second Vatican Council in 1963. This work included promoting rural unionization and popular education. It involved creating the "popular progressive Church" and Liberation Theology (*Teologia da Libertação*) that advocated for human rights in the 1970s and the Christian Basic Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base, CEBs*) (Löwy, 1996), expanding Paulo Freire's "liberating pedagogy", and providing settlement and integration services for political refugees and displaced people from other Latin American countries ruled by authoritarian governments (Souza, 2004; Haddad, 2019).

The presence of Catholic organizations as providers also shaped the relief of the poor in the country. Until 1988, the social assistance policy field was featured by paternalism, patrimonialism, punctual and fragmented actions, philanthropy, and charity-based programs, with a central role of first ladies as political leaders (Torres, 2002). The 1988 Constitution altered this path, recognizing social assistance as part of social rights (Sposati, 2015). Still, it was only institutionalized during Lula's government (2003–2010), with the creation of direct monetary benefits, such as the Bolsa Família Program (*Program Bolsa Família*, PBF) and the Continuous Cash Transfer Benefit (*Benefício de Prestação Continuada*, BPC, a constitutionally-protected minimum-income benefit for extremely low-income elderly and disabled people), and the Unified System of Social Assistance (*Sistema Único de Assistência Social,* SUAS), based on the provision of social services for vulnerable groups, which establishes national guidelines and standards, funding, monitoring and evaluating nationally-defined programs, and strategies for capacity-building at the subnational level (Jaccoud et al., 2017).

Features of religious values were reflected in the social assistance policy field. Charity challenges the idea of universality and, consequently, social assistance as a

social right, preventing poor people from being understood as citizens and categorizing divides between deserving and undeserving poor.

Moreover, the SUAS continued to contract the non-profit sector to provide services. Still, the prominence of organizations linked to the Catholic Church decreased as other organizations linked to Evangelical Churches are essential organizations in this policy field. While Catholic organizations are based on charity with some hierarchy, evangelical are more horizontal, working as networks of mutual help among brothers and sisters (Maldonado & Beraldo, 2024). Examples of this include the therapeutic communities that provide services for drug and alcohol users, some of them are linked to religious groups, but even the ones that are not use spirituality and religious practices, such as Bible-reading sessions, participation in services, worship and prayers, as a therapeutic methodology (Cortez & Barroso, 2023; Lotta et al., 2023).

Family Issues

Another significant influence of religion in social policy is the family's role in welfare states. In countries with Catholic majority populations, there is a high dependency on the family as a "provider" of care services (Andreotti et al., 2001). Moreover, the contentious relationship between church and state reinforced the traditional family values and social norms in social policies (Markkola et al., 2011; Markkola & Naumann, 2014; Pavolini et al., 2017).

The family occupied a role of an essential provider of social services, as well as some policies, such as education and social assistance, reinforced the idea of the family as a central unit in society (Andrade, 2023; Sátyro & Midaglia, 2021; Barbosa et al., 2023). In education policy, for instance, the "education chapter" of the 1988 Constitution determines that education is the State's and families' responsibility. Sharing responsibility for education was a response to lobbying by the Catholic Church to reinforce the centrality of the family in social policies, as well as its prevalence in relation to the State (Segatto et al., 2022).

In the last few decades, the Catholic Church and Catholic-based organizations lost prominence to Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups with the increasing election of politicians affiliated with Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups to executive and legislative bodies at both national and subnational levels (Nascimento, 2017; Dip, 2018). In 2018, Bolsonaro, a retired army captain who had served multiple terms in the National Congress, was elected supported by a coalition that combined conservative and moralistic, including conservative religious, with neoliberal groups.

Before Bolsonaro's election, the politicians affiliated with Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups, especially federal deputies, blocked progressive policies, such as the legalization of abortion and policies related to gender recognition (Dip, 2018). In 2011, they blocked the federal program Brazil without Homophobia

(*Brasil sem Homofobia*) that sought to distribute an information booklet to primary school students about eliminating homophobia, and, in 2014, these politicians, supported by the "No Party School" movement[1] and conservative religious groups, opposed the mention of "gender," "sexual diversity," and "sexual orientation" the executive's National Education Plan proposal, influencing the elimination of these terms from the National Education Plan and State and municipal education plans. Sexuality, gender, and homophobia were eliminated from the National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education (Alves et al., 2021; Segatto et al., 2022).

Within this context, these politicians and religious groups diffused the term "gender ideology," which gained visibility in the public debate, indicating that gender recognition was a leftist ideology, as the advancements in gender recognition and sexual and reproductive rights would be contradictory to the nature and the traditional family (Junqueira, 2018).

After Bolsonaro's election, they proposed conservative and moralistic bills related to the "No Partisan School" and homeschooling with the support of conservative Catholics. Still, they were not successful in approving them. Due to the challenge of approving bills at the National Congress, Bolsonaro's government promoted changes that did not require Legislative approval. First, Bolsonaro's government weakened or eliminated policies concerning gender and sexual and reproductive rights. LGBT and gender policies became less important on the national agenda as organizational changes weakened the importance of Secretaries and Departments responsible for them, national councils and conferences were eliminated or altered, and national plans approved in previous governments were not implemented (Alves et al., 2021).

By the same token, the Ministry of Women, Families, and Human Rights substituted the Ministry of Human Rights with the leadership of Damares Alves, a Neopentcostal Church Minister who had worked with a member of the National Congress linked to ultra-conservative Neopentecoal groups (Andrade, 2023; Martinez, 2022; Pereira et al., 2023). The Ministry of Women, Families, and Human Rights created family-centered policies with the approval of the National Strategy of Strengthening Families Linkages (Decree n. 10,570, 2020) to support and strengthen the role of the family as caring for children, elderly, and people with disabilities and three national programs—Strengthening Families Program, Reconnect Program, and Family Friend Business.

[1] The movement was created in 2004 by a conservative Catholic lawyer and "[…] mobilizes religious principles, particularly the idea of the traditional family, to oppose gender recognition and advocates for policies to "de-ideologize" teaching, denouncing the influences of Marx's and Paulo Freire's ideas" (Segatto et al., 2022, p. 8).

Final Remarks

In the Brazilian case, the Catholic Church's hegemony influenced the development of a welfare state model in which the non-profit sector, including faith-based organizations, has a fundamental role in service provision, as well as in policy-making—in both policy formulation and implementation—shaping policies over time. The Catholic Church's influence in Brazil's social policies has produced tensions between charity and philanthropy for relief of poverty and healthcare for the most vulnerable and healthcare and social assistance being understood as social rights. It also blurred the responsibilities regarding the education policy shared between the state and the family.

Nevertheless, in the last decades, the Catholic Church lost prominence to Evangelicals, particularly Pentecostal and Neopentecostal groups. New disputes arose, using spirituality and religious practices in service provision, reinforcing traditional family values, and eliminating policies that promote gender and sexual and reproductive rights. However, they were also able to influence both policy formulation and implementation.

Recent studies highlight new forms of intersection between religion and public policies in the country. This involves the influence of religious values in the decisions of street-level organizations and bureaucrats (Golan-Nadir, 2024), such as police forces (Cortez & Campos, 2023), as well as their institutionalization through the creation of new norms and policies, including the use of spiritually in healthcare policies (Cortez & Barroso, 2023; Lotta et al., 2023; Toniol, 2022).

Moreover, faith-based organizations and far-right groups supported Bolsonaro's government. This alliance is critical to understanding the influence of conservative ideas, such as the traditional notions of family and the role of women in society and the denial of the separation between gender and biological sex in the gender and reproductive rights field (Gideon et al., 2015; Alves et al., 2021), and the war between God and evil and the use of authoritarianism in its activities in public security (Cortez & Campos, 2023). These questions are not restricted to the Brazilian case but are necessary to comprehend other countries, especially Latin American ones, as Gideon et al. (2015) show in the case of Chile.

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Chapter 19
Commentary on Part V - Faith

Alison Elliot

Pinning down what civil society is and what it does is not easy. It is regarded differently in different countries, and it changes its composition and role over time, in response to external circumstances, such as the profound changes in Eastern Europe after 1989, or the current rise of social media and the globalized world of the Internet. It ranges from what might better be called civic society, the world of prestigious organizations and professional associations that process in splendour on important occasions, to local clubs and choirs. It is classically a fuzzy concept, with a core that is readily identified but other features that are present to a greater or lesser extent as other examples emerge, so that membership and function shade off into an indistinct boundary. Yet it is useful in filling in elements of human experience that sit between the individual and the state and so worth exploring further.

Definitions abound. In his 2004 book, *Church, State and Civil Society*, *CUP* David Fergusson characterises it as a "web of inter-related social groups, organizations and institutions that shape the lives of individual citizens". This includes both a description and a function, both of which are necessary as a base for further reflection. Even such a simple characterization is contentious, though, in its reference to citizens, a term which excludes some important groups, but which also points towards a political or constitutional role for civil society. The following reflections will betray my European base and be coloured by my Christian heritage and my role as a practitioner with the Church and the voluntary sector. But, with these caveats, let us proceed with that definition, to explore the particular aspect of civil society that this section of the book addresses, namely its relationship with faith communities. Are they part of civil society or not and how do they operate within that space?

Strachwitz analyses this question carefully. He quotes examples from various countries, drawing on his considerable experience of editing a book on the circumstances of faith communities across Europe. He then identifies a set of criteria for determining a community's membership of civil society. These include being

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voluntary organizations (so excluding governmental bodies) and putting an emphasis on public benefit rather than profit (which excludes business corporations). Setting the characteristics of religious communities against these criteria, he concludes that there is nothing that keeps them from being classified as civil society organizations.

Shaping the lives of individual citizens can cover everything from climate change to social media, but traditionally it refers to health, education and welfare. The individual person encounters the work of civil society both at the level of service provision and as a result of political lobbying to enhance that provision but also to address wider matters such as climate change, peace building and poverty. The role of spiritual wellbeing in delivering these functions is widely acknowledged today, so the contribution of the arts and religion can be included here. The Binks Hub in Edinburgh University (https://binks-hub.ed.ac.uk/) provides space for organizations that use arts-based methods to co-create work with vulnerable communities and it has uncovered a rich seam of arts and social development activities.

Historically, in many societies, and in those referred to in this section of the book, health, education and welfare were provided by faith communities. These were not an optional add-on to the belief systems of the Abrahamic faiths but intrinsic to them. Caring for others is part of the working out of these beliefs, as we can see in the chapters by Haddad and Segatto. With the advent of the welfare state, or its equivalent, it is natural that the faith communities should continue their caring work and to press politically for barriers to that work to be removed. Given the enormity of the task of providing health, education and welfare to the whole society, it is not surprising that civil society continues to take up the slack when Government provision fails, nor that Governments should, in many cases, welcome contributions from non-government actors in this area. Thus, in many societies, the mixed economy of health and social care has come into being, with services being provided by the state, the private sector and various voluntary or Third Sector organizations, as well as religious communities and families.

This plethora of organizations providing care could result in individuals being swamped by offers of help, but that is to ignore the interesting structure and dynamic that emerges within civil society. In some cases, organizations see themselves in competition with each other, leading to an active market in care provision. In other cases, organizations come together, identifying bodies that complement the service they provide and arranging to share the care of people who present to them. Thus, a charity that offers emergency accommodation for people who are homeless can work alongside one which offers skills training so that their people can move on to new employment opportunities that may lift them out of homelessness.

How the elements of civil society relate to each other and how that changes is as important a question as how its membership is constituted. If it is a web of interrelated groups, the dynamic within that is a key part of the story. This also opens up opportunities for religious organizations to engage with other civil society actors, irrespective of the status of religion within civil society.

These relationships become more complex when organizations arrange for another body to carry out their activity for them. For example, many international

aid organizations, which previously would have sent staff to work in another country, now work through local organizations, sharing the design of projects and their delivery with people on the ground who understand the society better. This raises the question of where credit should lie for the results of the activity. Although it should not matter who gets the credit, provided the work is done well, attracting funding from donors often requires that credit is claimed for the work done. Some faith organizations are suspicious when these lines of responsibility are not clear, as they see this outreach work as an important part of their mission and want it to be uniquely branded as such.

The situation becomes more sensitive when it is the state that commissions work from other organizations (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/14/the-guardian-view-on-the-voluntary-sector-and-the-state-this-crucial-relationship-needs-resetting). There is potential here for a creative and productive relationship that will provide a better service to individuals but it blurs the distinction between the State and civil society. Again, this is a red flag for many charities and faith communities, particularly in countries where the relationship between State and faith has been problematic in the past.

Conceptually, one can draw a distinction between service delivery and political advocacy but, in practice, the one often leads into the other. It is in these circumstances that civil society often comes together as a force in society, rather than simply being part of the landscape. Organizations that may have seen each other as competitors can sink their differences to campaign for social change. Once on the move, civil society dances nearer and further from government as circumstances dictate. Its porous boundary enables innovative relationships to emerge.

How is it paid for? Characteristically, the Third Sector receives philanthropic givings, either directly, via one-to-one fundraising, legacies or occasional donations. Haddad emphasises the religious basis of philanthropy, which explains its prevalence in the Arab world. Charitable trusts mediate donations, through a substantial investment portfolio; and specific projects are funded by government and large foundations, often on a competitive basis. Volunteering is a key characteristic of the Third Sector and, although governments cast an envious eye on the financial benefits of people working for nothing, the benefits of volunteering go much further than that. It connects people with each other, a key feature in combating loneliness, and contributes to personal growth. The Third Sector makes a significant economic contribution to society as well, by employing a large workforce, saving money from the public purse through its preventative action and providing training that enables people to enter employment who might otherwise be unable to work. The-economic-contribution-of-the-third-sector-in-scotland.

So, the picture that emerges is of a dynamic civil society, its parts moving continually, as circumstances change. It has several entry points and is characterised by an innovative culture. How, then, do faith communities relate to this kind of civil society?

Faith communities themselves have an internal structure, so that parts of them may be closer to some parts of civil society than to others. Strachwitz makes a distinction between faith-based charities, which slot in easily to civil society, and faith

communities. An important distinction here is the governance relationship between the charity and the faith community to which it relates. For example, L'Arche (https://larche.org.uk) is an example of an international charity that works with people with learning difficulties, set up by the inspirational Roman Catholic Jean Vanier, but constitutionally independent of any faith community. It is respected by and works smoothly alongside bodies with a similar purpose but without a faith commitment.

At the same time, there are social care organizations run by faith communities that report directly to the governing body of that community. CrossReach (https://crossreach.org.uk) is the social care arm of the Church of Scotland, providing services for children through to elderly people in areas such as substance use, residential care, counselling, dementia, mental wellbeing and prison support and they are accountable to the governing body of the Church of Scotland. In this case, the values of the charity conform to those of its governing body and shape any political interventions they may make.

Political engagement is seldom simply about tweaking administrative arrangements in society, though day-to-day political lobbying may fall into this category. Underlying the proposals and counter-proposals of debate are assumptions about the nature of society and its dynamics. Faith communities are likely to have strong views about this, and will be alert to the wider implications of any outcomes about social provision. Segatto outlines how the shape of welfare in Brazil varied according to assumptions about the nature of poor relief and the role of the family in providing it that were made by the Church that was dominant at the time. Her chapter demonstrates how the contribution of faith communities does not rest solely in service provision but can directly affect the direction of travel of the society. Of course, it is not only faith communities that bring their values into the public debate, although they may attract special attention when they do. The growing tendency of businesses and Third Sector organizations to draft mission statements ensures that social transactions are seen increasingly through a lens of values and principles.

Faith communities can also make an intangible, but more fundamental, contribution to civil society, by providing a language in which to address the glue that binds that society together. Segatto sees religion as influencing social cohesion and trust, "essential pillars of the welfare state". Whether in practice these are demonstrable features either of religion or of the welfare state, religion does give one permission to work for social cohesion and trust and to ask questions if they are missing.

Philanthropy and volunteering are features of civil society, but not of the market or the state. Haddad traces the strong grounding both of these have in Islam and a similar analysis could be made for Christianity and Judaism. Her analysis of volunteering demonstrates how a religious view of volunteering underpins various kinds of community support. This is not to claim that only people of faith understand about caring for other people or about being generous with time and money, but religion provides an explicit framework for exploring these qualities.

Religious faith may be flourishing in many parts of the world, but it is in retreat in Europe and so it is not the right time for faith communities to insist on privilege and to project themselves as powerful players in society, as used to be the case. Yet,

civil society offers a space wherein they can be effective players, alongside people of other faiths and none. It is a time for sharing experiences of the various ways that faith communities relate to their wider societies internationally and this opens up productive areas for further research.

Part VI
Ways Forward

Chapter 20
Third-Sector Research: Ubi eras, Quo vadis?

Stefan Toepler and Helmut K. Anheier

Introduction

Third Sector, or nonprofit, research[1] has made tremendous strides since the field's inception half a century ago in the context of developed liberal market economies. In the US, an interdisciplinary group of social scientists started to form in the early 1970s that was originally primarily concerned with local voluntary initiatives, self-help and other grassroots amateur groups, or what David Horton Smith (Smith, 2016) later referred to as voluntaristics. Subsequent economic theorizing (cf. Hansmann, 1987) pushed research agendas towards examinations of more formal nonprofit organizations. In Europe, related, yet different, research traditions at the time focused on associational life, cooperative and communal economics, and the social economy, encompassing a variety of cooperative and mutual enterprises. By contrast, in the countries of the Global South, where colonial legal frameworks were superimposed on indigenous legal systems, organizational forms and cultures, remained outside the focus of these initial efforts.

Broadly, the trajectory of general Third Sector research proceeded in three stages (Fig. 20.1). More than three decades ago, DiMaggio and Anheier (1990) outlined a basic research agenda which posited that Third Sector research successively addresses three questions—*why do these organizations exist*; *how do they behave*; and *what difference do they make*. The "why" question was addressed in basic, foundational "sector" theories, which provided a combined framework of demand and supply conditions that explain the need for Third Sector organizations (TSOs)

[1] Although fine, and important, distinctions are to be made between different terminologies to characterize the field (Anheier & Toepler, 2023: pp. 62–63), we will use the term Third Sector in this chapter treating it as interchangeable with the term nonprofit sector.

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Stages of Third Sector Research (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990)

1.	*Why* do TSOs exist?	Foundational "sector" theories
2.	*How* do TSOs behave?	Third Sector management research
3.	*So what* difference do they make?	Performance, outcomes, impacts; distinctiveness

Comparative Adaptation

1. Why do Third Sectors differ?
2. Are NGO/TSO management functions and tasks generic?
3. What are the broader functions of civil society?

Fig. 20.1 Third Sector research stages

and hence key rationales for the sector's existence.[2] These economic rationales soon became taken-for-granted, which, over time led, to a certain degree of "theoretical inertia" (Anheier & Ben-Ner, 1997) in this stage of research development. Instead, greater efforts went into researching managerial issues (i.e., the *how* question) at that time and, more recently, the third, *so what* question. This has involved probing performance, outcomes, and impacts, but also questions of distinctiveness in light of intermixing institutional logics (Skelcher & Smith, 2015), new alternatives, including social enterprise and new hybrid forms (Abramson & Billings, 2020; Kerlin, 2020), and growing marketization (Salamon, 1995), commercialization (Weisbrod, 1998), and business-likeness (Maier et al., 2016; Suykens et al., 2023) of TSOs. By and large, the overall research trajectory over the last three or four decades has indeed progressed along the lines predicted by DiMaggio and Anheier (1990), and nonprofit research has generally matured.

Comparative crossnational research, however, lacked behind the trajectory. Indeed, explicitly comparative research on the Third Sector remained an exception rather than the norm in the early stages of nonprofit research; what is more, *systematic* comparative research was largely non-existent until the seven-country pilot phase of the *Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project* (CNP) was launched in the late 1980s (see, Salamon & Anheier, 1996). The project was subsequently extended to over 40 countries during the 1990s and into the early 2000s (Salamon et al., 1999) and arguably became the measuring stick for cross-national comparative research in the field. This is so because of the amount of internationally-collaborative work that went into the project and its efforts to develop definitions and classifications (Salamon & Anheier, 1997) that would allow cross-national apple-to-apple comparisons of Third Sector organizations.

At its core, CNP was first and foremost an attempt to lay the basic groundwork by exploring the *what is the Third Sector* (i.e., definition and classification) and *is it noteworthy* questions (i.e., size, scope and structure) that precede the *why do we*

[2] See Anheier and Toepler (2023, Chap. 5) for an overview.

have it research stage. With the introduction of social origins theory (Salamon & Anheier, 1998), CNP then moved on to the *why* question stage, as neither the foundational "American" economic theories nor the "European" associational life and social economy thinking seemed adequate to explain fully the observable cross-national differences and similarities in size, scope and structure of the Third Sector. Significantly, though, transposed into a cross-national, comparative context, DiMaggio and Anheier's (1990) three questions hold, but require adaptation (Fig. 20.1). The *why* question becomes one that is less about the existence of TSOs per se, but rather *why differences exist* between Third Sectors, which is what the social origins theory (SOT) attempted to answer.

Systematic comparative nonprofit research, however, has arguably not yet progressed much beyond the *why* question; and as impactful as SOT has been, its inherent limitations still require significant additional work to specify it (Anheier et al., 2020) and develop alternate conceptual routes to explain cross-national differences. In a comparative context, the *how* question morphs into *whether* management tasks and functions are generic. This question has long been raised in international contexts. For example, there has been a long-running parallel evolution of international-development NGO and Western Third Sector management research (Lewis, 2003, 2015). Given isomorphic pressures coming from international funders and colonial legacies of legal frameworks that also foster a certain level of structural likeness, NGO and nonprofit management may not be as far apart as often thought, but systematic comparisons of differences in the discharge of managerial functions are still outstanding.

Similarly, the impact or outcome question also feels like largely driven by funding and contracting related discourses in the Global North that through donor-required logical framework analyses and other performance requirements get transmitted to the Global South. Yet whether there are significant cross-national variations in the way TSOs and NGOs or civil society organizations (CSOs) are managed, and what impacts (if any) they ought to be pursuing, is therefore an issue that still begs a firm answer. For example, for the TSOs that countries like Russia and China have been encouraging to participate in contracting for public service delivery, it is less a question of the impact of their service provision, but more about their contribution to improving the output legitimacy of the regime. Through increasing public service outputs, they are principally expected to have a positive impact on the output legitimacy of the political regime (Levy et al., 2023; Skokova & Krasnopolskaya, 2024). More broadly, rather than just seeking change at the service provision level (which is where most Western research locates the impact question), TSO impact comparatively involves much bigger issues like democratization and the pursuit of rights-based agendas.

This suggests the need to explore comparatively whether, and if so how, Third Sector management concepts as well as impact conceptualizations are generic and generally applicable or need cultural and context-specific adaptations. However, the *why do cross-national differences exist* question is still far from being definitively settled. Such differences in Third Sector size, scope and structure are of

course a multi-dimensional issue that involves several context factors, as Fig. 20.2 shows, which are

- The basic theoretical rationales to be applied to understand different national or regional contexts;
- The political and socio-economic regimes types that exist in different parts of the world;
- The policy and regulatory frameworks that are in place; and
- The existing philanthropic traditions.

All of these interact with each other of course. For example, Weisbrod's (1975) basic theoretical rationale is based on a simplified assumption of Western-style liberal democracy. As such, it is not suitable per se for application to illiberal and authoritarian regimes where the majoritarian constraint is either limited or does not exist: There is no median voter who determines what government does or doesn't do and hence what gaps are left for nonprofits. Similarly, Hansmann's (1987) contract failure argument presupposes a properly operating legal framework for the argument to hold. Regime type (democratic, hybrid, authoritarian) in turn also impacts the policy and regulatory framework which can be designed in more enabling or in more restrictive ways (Toepler & Anheier, 2021). These in turn influence to a degree the existing philanthropic traditions through channeling incentives. The comparative exploration of these context factors, however, remains somewhat uneven. Research on philanthropy is extensive, yet not always systematic; regulatory frameworks are partially explored (eg, DeMattee, 2019), especially with regard to the closing space phenomenon (eg, Glasius & de Lange, 2022). For the basic rationales, the social origin theory attempts to fill the void comparatively, but questions about it have also been raised that require further work. In the end, for exploring why Third Sectors differ cross-nationally and how the interplay of these context factors shapes them, the bedrock factor remains solid comparable data.

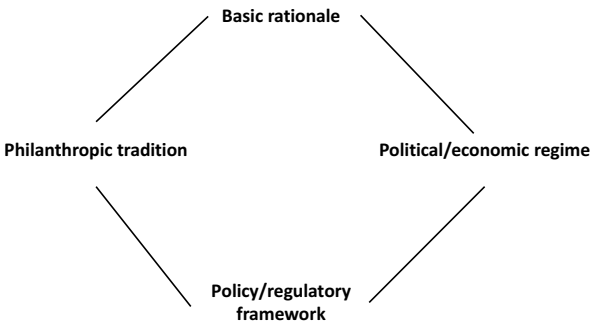

Fig. 20.2 Comparative context factors

Defining the Third Sector

As indicated above, the Johns Hopkins CNP was the most significant dedicated effort to generate comparative data on nonprofits globally to date. While this data gathering effort moved our comparative understanding of global civil society up considerably—and principally enabled official statistical agencies to carry the work forward in a sustainable way, the CNP data have become outdated by more than two decades. What is more, the continuation of the data gathering by statistical agencies has not progressed sufficiently, and the research field is in danger of losing the know-how and institutional knowledge that the project generated (Salamon et al., 2023).

Additionally, despite its achievements, CNP also had its conceptual and methodological limitations. For largely practical reasons, certain parts of civil society were not covered—religion in particular which, as Sect. V of this volume demonstrates is not only a crucial part of civil society but also significantly shapes philanthropic traditions and State-society relations. Some adjacent sets of institutions were likewise largely omitted: namely, the social economy of cooperatives and mutuals, which are of traditional importance not only in Europe but also in much of the Global South; as well as the new social enterprise phenomenon that only started to come to the fore long after CNP was launched.[3] The practical considerations that were made for purposes of strengthening research feasibility, however, are often conflated with the project's basic definition, given rise to several misconceptions about it, the most common of which are that:

- *The CNP definition is an universal definition of nonprofits*. However, it was not conceived as such and intentionally labeled as structural-operational to indicate its purpose of outlining those nonprofit organizations that CNP would attempt to cover.
- *The definition excludes informal (i.e., not legally recognized) grassroots organizations*. While data on these groups, their numbers, members, and revenues remain extremely hard to capture, the definition's formal criterion does not require legal status, just some level of organizational reality that lifts grassroots initiatives beyond the ad hoc.
- *Religion is excluded from the Third Sector*. CNP included faith-based service providers, including schools, hospitals, nursing homes, etc., but did not attempt to collect data on the faith communities themselves. Although the Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and similar institutions that faith communities operate for religious purposes often meet the criteria of the CNP definition, the practicalities of collecting data on them effectively precluded their inclusion. A generally very significant section of the Third Sector was thus not represented in the data.

[3] The justifications as well as criteria for inclusion/exclusion were discussed in detail in Salamon et al. (1999, Appendix A).

The CNP definition has served its primary purposes well, as it proved to be a useful tool for aggregation of data and to enable comparison. And that sets it apart from the "analytical hatstand" of civil society, on which everyone can hang their own definition (Rooy, 1999). While common criticisms based on misconceptions are not justifiable, there are a number of significant drawbacks or disadvantages that need to be acknowledged (Fig. 20.3). Specifically, it also strips the Third Sector of the comparative context factors and is therefore reductionist in its focus on economic mapping, which in turn favors some theoretical rationales over others. It also leaves little room for the exploration of hybridity and functional equivalents to TSOs that may co-evolve along the sector; and foregrounds service-provision at the expense of other roles, such as the advocacy, value-guardian, vanguard roles (Kramer, 1981) and the value base of TSOs. In effect, it therefore makes the Third Sector look very technocratic.

Given these constraints, the core definitional task going forward is to see whether the existing definitional criteria can sensibly be adjusted or whether additional criteria would need to be added. Some movement has come with an effort by the European TSI project (Third Sector Impact) to soften the most important criterion—the nondistribution constraint (NDS).

The NDS has been crucially important conceptually—it is the key building block of trust theories—and it is also the legal lynchpin for determining nonprofit status. Whether civil or common law, a version of the NDS is the gatepost to charitable or public benefit status globally. It is also the line in the sand that divides nonprofits from the market (Fig. 20.4).

But as the aphorism goes: if you draw a line in the sand, make sure it's not low tide. And indeed the rising tides of social enterprise and the new social impact economy, the efforts to develop hybrid organizational and legal forms, the commercialization of nonprofits and so on, have arguably been washing the line away.

As a consequence, the TSI project proposed and the UN satellite handbook adopted a softening of the NDS by allowing limited surplus distribution within narrow constraints that are nevertheless wide enough to open the definition up to social enterprise and the social economy on the boundary to the market (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016), as shown in Fig. 20.5.

- Organized, private, non-distributing, self-governing, voluntary
- Advantage: allows for aggregation, makes comparisons possible vs "analytical hatstand" of civil society (van Rooy, 1999)
- Disadvantage:
  - takes the thirdsector out of its historical-institutional context; creates artificial statistical unit of analysis good for economic mapping but deficient for other theoretical concerns
  - Makes it difficult to detect co-evolution of institutions (e.g., Mahoney and Thelen), hybridity and functional equivalents
  - Emphasis on structure and governance emphasizes service-provision at expense of other roles (advocacy, value-guardian, vanguard) and the value base of Third Sector organizations

Fig. 20.3 The structural-operational definition

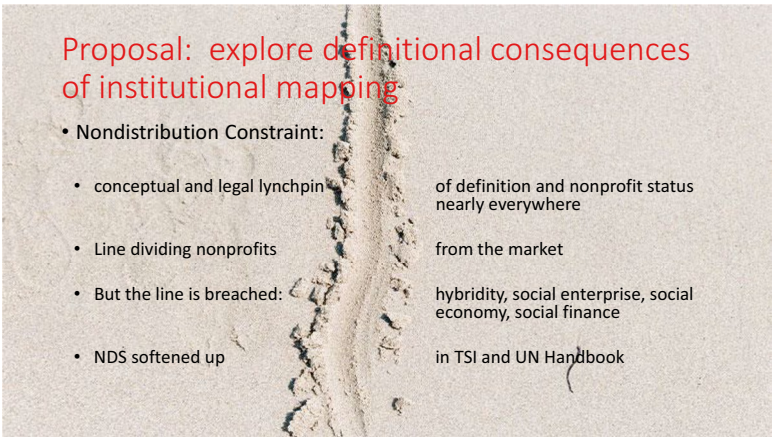

Fig. 20.4 The nondistribution constraint: the line in the sand

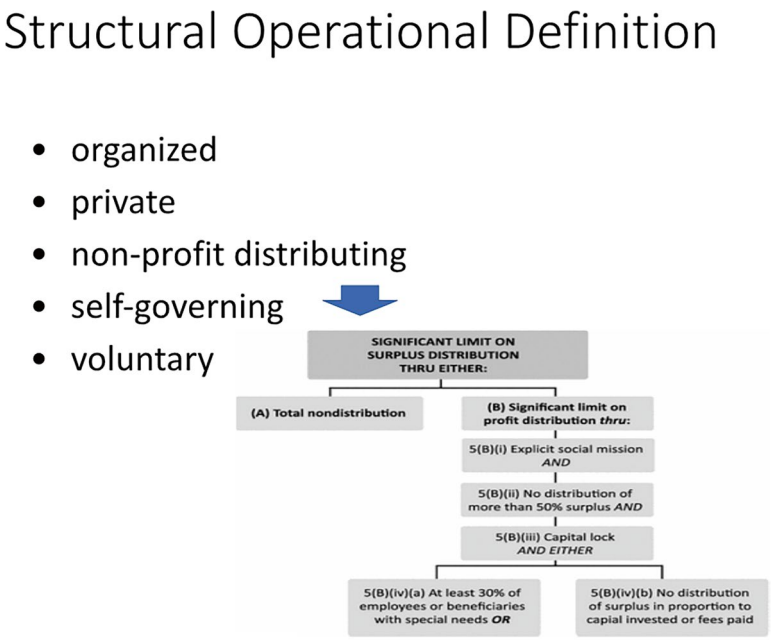

Fig. 20.5 TSI adaptation of the nonprofit distribution constraint. (Source: Adapted from Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016)

This was an important step towards addressing the embeddedness of the Third Sector on the market side. However, similar efforts are needed to capture the sector's embeddedness along both the state and civil society (Fig. 20.6). For the state, the private and self-governing criteria of the definition require a reevaluation

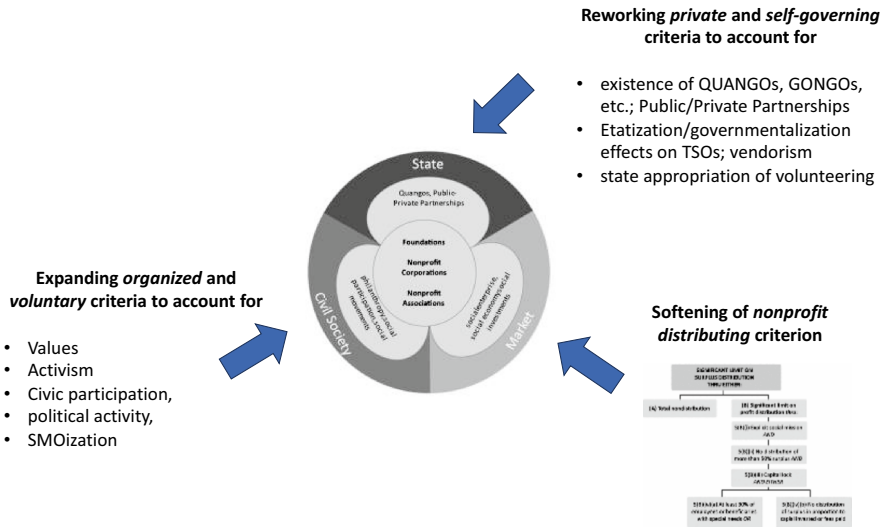

Fig. 20.6 Adapting the structural-operational definition criteria to show Third Sector embeddedness

to capture the etatization/governmentalization of nonprofits through contract dependency, or vendorism as Ralph Kramer (1981) has called it, and the use of QUANGOs and GONGOs by governments to semi-privatize public tasks and obligations or to secure official aid and private grants and donations. Although neither QUANGOs nor GONGOs are particularly new constructs (Greve et al., 1999; Naím, 2007), the growing utilization of the latter by authoritarian governments, including China, has reinvigorated interest in these organizations and the use they are put to. In authoritarian contexts, the existence of "regime loyal" NGOs (Toepler et al., 2020) is also observable, that is private TSOs that share the values of the political regime and support, rather than oppose, the State. Even in non-authoritarian contexts like Germany, efforts by the State to appropriate the organization of volunteering by having government agencies publicizing volunteer opportunities rather than leaving the recruitment of volunteers to the nonprofit welfare associations (Zimmer & Priller, 2023) is a potentially salient issue that needs to be captured within a more embedded definition.

On the civil society side, the voluntary and organized criteria require further operationalization to allow for an accounting of political activism, the promotion of values, civic participation, social movements and, as Donatella della Porta (Della Porta, 2020) suggested, a "SMOization" of nonprofits, that is, TSOs adding social movement tactics and values to their organizational repertoires beyond service provision. This leads directly to the classification issue, as a growing SMOization of nonprofits if it were to happen, would effectively go unnoticed in the current expenditure-based classifications.

Classifying TSOs and Aggregating Data

Expenditure-based classifications have their advantages, which include, significantly, consistency with the System of National Accounts (SNA). This not only facilitates proper comparisons of Third Sectors internationally but also of the Third Sector to the rest of the economy on a country-by-country basis. However, focusing on expenditures rather than actual activities can lead to distortions as the former are not necessarily mirroring the latter. Accordingly, the focus on expenditures blinds the classification to issues such as co-production, product-bundling, and values orientation, although Estelle James's early contributions had already pointed to these issues, while leaving the resulting data with little utility for probing and testing theories that foreground those over service provision (Anheier, 2023). Expenditure-based classification might be improved through tying them more explicitly to the functions of government account classification (see https://www.oecd.org/gov/48250728.pdf), which might also lead the way to incorporate other functions into Third Sector classifications like the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO)—again to shift the emphasis at least somewhat away from service provision.

In aggregating data, it has been proven difficult to make meaningful functional differentiations in the past. To get beyond a somewhat artificial picture of the Third Sector which largely strips it of its purpose-orientation and value bases that results from strictly economic data, it was necessary in the past to select certain fields of activity to serve as weak proxies for different functions, as CNP attempted (Fig. 20.7), by differentiating between service vs expressive fields. Of course, most TSOs are multifunctional. Placing social services among the service-oriented fields masks the considerable amount of (expressive) advocacy that social service organizations pursue and thus distorts the overall picture of the extent to which the Third Sector pursues various functions.

A better way to aggregate data would be to focus more on organizational form than field of activity or, at least, in addition to field of activity. Notwithstanding multifunctionality, this is so because basic organizational forms serve different basic functions:

- Membership *associations* embody grassroots-level democracy and as such carry and propagate the membership's solidarity values, and create social capital and trust; services best center around mutual help and assistance delivered by the membership.
- *Corporations* are best suited for the service delivery aspect, as this organizational form typically offers liability protections and faster and less cumbersome decision-making procedures, compared to associations. Finally,
- Asset-based *foundations* serve ideally best as financial intermediaries representing an important, if limited, source of independent support for TSOs.

Clearly, each of the basic forms can operate on different institutional logics and pursue various values (or not, as the case may be). But in terms of aggregation, the

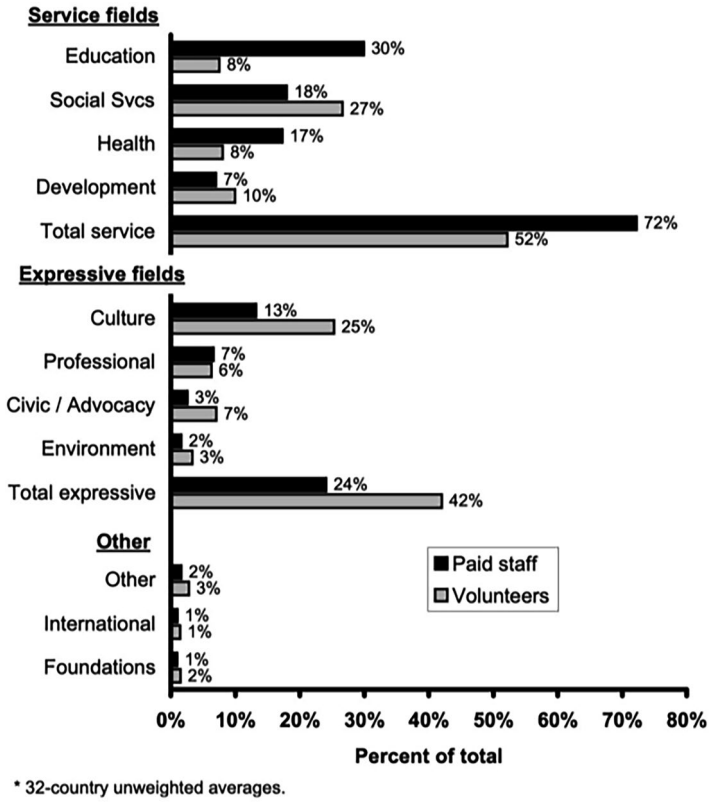

Fig. 20.7 CNP attempt to use field of activity as proxy for Third Sector functions. (Source: Salamon et al., 2003: 23)

consideration of these organizational forms seems like a useful intermediary step on the way to exploring hybridity and connect better to organizational theories of nonprofits.

Theorizing the Third Sector Comparatively

As pointed out above, the nature of the data limits in some way the theoretical lenses that can be applied to address the question *why Third Sectors differ cross-nationally*. Economic data on employment, revenues and expenditures of the sector favor the application of theories that primarily focus on service delivery, such as the demand-side oriented foundational theories, which explain the existence of TSOs largely without regard for historical and institutional context. Although, as noted, the

structural-operational definition also does not account for the institutional embeddedness of the sector, Salamon and Anheier (1998; Anheier, 2003; Anheier & Salamon, 2006; Salamon et al., 2017) proposed and further elaborated the Social Origins Theory (SOT), as a comparative-historical theory to explain cross-national variations in the size and composition of the Third Sector. SOT identified social factors that led to the development of sizeable, economically important Third Sectors in some parts of the world and smaller, less important sectors in others.[4]

The theory originally identified four models of nonprofit development in the form of four "nonprofit regime" types (Salamon & Anheier, 1998).[5] Each of these types is characterized not only by a particular State role, but also by a particular position for the Third Sector; and, most importantly, each reflecting a particular constellation of social forces. They suggest that nonprofit regime types as well as the policies and the policy-making style associated with them help account for cross-national differences in the nonprofit sector scale and structure. These regimes can be differentiated using two key dimensions— the extent of government social welfare spending and the scale of the nonprofit sector. At one extreme with low government social welfare spending and a relatively large nonprofit sector is the *liberal model*, represented by the US and the UK. Here the middle class, as opposed to traditional landed elites or the working class, is particularly strong; and voluntary approaches are preferred over government interference to solve social problems and ensure social welfare. Thus, government social welfare spending is limited and the nonprofit sector is expansive.

At the opposite extreme is the *social democratic model*, exemplified by Sweden and other Nordic countries. In this model, the State's role in financing and delivering social welfare services is significant, leaving little room for the type of service-providing nonprofit organizations so prominent in the US and the UK. Working class elements were relatively strong and were able to exercise political power vis-a-vis a weakened, state-dominated Church and a limited monarchy. This does not mean, however, that the nonprofit sector in such countries plays an insignificant role. Against the welfare State presence in service provision, the Third Sector performs a different function in social democratic regimes, more focused on advocacy and personal expression. In Sweden, a very substantial network of volunteer-based advocacy, recreational and hobby organizations exists.

In between these two models are two additional ones, both characterized by strong states. In one, the *statist model*, characteristic of Japan and many autocratic countries, a State bureaucracy controls social policies but provides only limited government welfare protection. Indeed, it exercises power on its own behalf, or on behalf of business and economic elites, but with a fair degree of autonomy. In such settings where the middle class is weaker and working classes are divided, a larger

[4] This section draws, in much condensed form, on our discussion of social origins theory in Anheier and Toepler (2023: 178–184).

[5] Salamon et al. (2017) later suggested a fifth, "traditional" regime type.

nonprofit sector does not emerge in the wake of lower government social welfare spending. Rather, both government social welfare spending and nonprofit activity remain limited.

In the other model characterized by a strong State, the *corporatist* model, the State has been either forced or induced to make common cause with nonprofit institutions. In this way, as in Germany and France, nonprofit organizations were among the pre-modern mechanisms that allowed the State, confronting radical demands from below, to forge alliances with the major Churches and the landed elites to create a system of State-sponsored welfare provision that over time included a substantial role for nonprofit groups.

However, while the theory continues to be a popular heuristic that has been applied to many countries and contexts, including the Covid pandemic (Benevolenski et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2024), it nevertheless yields inconclusive results overall (Anheier et al., 2020: Appendix A). One explanation is the complexity and relative amorphousness of the factors it identifies as important. This makes SOT more difficult to test empirically than the other Third Sector theories. It lacks the parsimony of economic theories and calls for difficult qualitative judgments about the relative power of broad social groupings such as the commercial middle class or landed elites that only establish certain propensities and likelihoods for specific regime types to emerge. In addition, the patterns identified by SOT are primarily archetypes, and actual cases tend to be hybrids showing patterns and features from more than one regime type (see Anheier et al. 2020).

Overall, SOT faces challenges that are not uncommon in comparative-historical research that has to rely on longer-term institutional developments to make causal inferences about the presence. Over the long run, co-evolutionary patterns can come into play in many instances (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), triggered or re-directed by critical junctures and events, or more gradual, albeit still influential developments. Wollebæk and Selle's (2008) critique, for example, questions the applicability of the social democratic model to Norway by referring to long-standing patterns unrelated to the core facets of social democracy, by pointing to co-evolution. Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) insight that institutions, once created, do not only change in often subtle, gradual ways over time, but influence adjacent institutions and organizational fields, applies to the nonprofit sector as well. Again, Wollebæk and Selle (2008) point to global trends such as individualization and marketization that have begun to reduce the uniqueness of the Scandinavian model in the subtle ways that Mahoney and Thelen (2010) suggest; Benevolenski et al. (2022) similarly suggest a gradual conversion of SOT's regime patterns.

In sum, these issues call for a major stocktaking of SOT and comparative research approaches in order to drive both social origins and alternative comparative theory building forward. This will require some reconceptualization and inevitably a coming to terms, and reconciliation, with civil society research in a new and broader research agenda.

Building a New Comparative Research Agenda

The Johns Hopkins CNP dominated comparative Third Sector research during the 1990s and the project's legacy continues to shape how researchers in this area delineate their research subject and the theoretical lenses they employ, as the contributions to this volume aptly demonstrate. CNP built a solid foundation for future comparative Third Sector research, which, however, does need to move beyond its approach both empirically and conceptually to overcome its current impasse. In order to do so, Anheier (2023) suggests a new four-pronged research agenda that calls for (a) a reframing of the Third Sector concept; (b) addressing the role of values and ideologies; (c) establishing a link to political economy; and (d) developing a data infrastructure for comparative research in the field.[6]

Reframing the Third Sector Conceptually

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent transformations of central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union fostered widespread enthusiasm for civil society and its role in it. Public and private funders wanting to support fledgling civil societies pumped support into the creation of TSOs, leading to a general conflation of TSOs with CSOs (civil society organizations). Conceptual distinctions fell largely by the wayside and Third/nonprofit Sector and civil society became too often terminologically interchangeable. More recently, in a countermove, distinctions are being made between the Third Sector, as an agglomeration of technocratic service providers, and civil society, as a set of organizations that channel political activism and promote values, especially in authoritarian contexts.

Reframing the Third Sector concept requires first and foremost treating it no longer as synonymous with the notion of civil society. Civil society is more than organizations; it includes cultural and political values and norms, notions of citizenship, civil engagement and caring. Most generally, it is about the capabilities of societies, communities and citizens for self-organization and self-governance. This typically takes the form of institutions and organizations, which are, however, just a means to an end, and establish themselves relative to the state. Key modern definitions of civil society support this view. Gellner (1994), for example, defined the organizational part of civil society as "that set of nongovernmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the State, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of peace and arbitrator between major interests, can, nevertheless, prevent the State from dominating and atomising the rest of society" (Gellner, 1994: 5). Similarly, Keane (1998: 461) sees organizational civil society as a "complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected nongovernmental institutions that tend to be nonviolent, self-organising, self-reflexive, and

[6] The following draws, significantly abridged, on Anheier (2023).

permanently in tension, both with each other and with the governmental institutions that 'frame', constrict and enable their activities."

What this suggests is that the Third Sector (and the various roles of TSOs) is best conceptualized as the organizational infrastructure for the governance capacity of civil society similar to the regulatory and administrative capacity of government. Tying this back to definitional issues, the structural operational definition remains useful for purposes of economic measures of scale and scope but requires adjustments in the context of the sector's institutional embeddedness when focussing on functional aspects such the capacity of civil society, as illustrated in Fig. 20.6 above. Civil society capacity is about self-organization and self-governance, whereas State capacity is the ability of a government to accomplish policy goals, either generally or in reference to specific aims. One can easily anticipate that with the conceptualization of the Third Sector as the organizational infrastructure of civil society relative to the capacities of governments and markets new questions quickly arise. For example, are Third Sector organizations strong enough to counterbalance the State and prevent it from dominating society, to follow Gellner, and are they non-violent, sufficiently self-organizing and self-reflexive to manage the tension with government, in reference to Keane?

Bringing Values and Ideologies Back in

Among the main foundational theories (Hansmann, 1987), James's moral entrepreneurship argument was the one that most clearly foregrounded the importance of values in the development of the Third Sector, as she argued that religious entrepreneurs start value-based TSOs in efforts to attract new followers to their faiths. As noted above, CNP forewent the collection of data on faith communities, thus blended out the religious component, and with it a central motivating force for the establishment of TSOs. Religious values—and more broadly ideologies—are key to why TSOs exist. Accordingly, this and how they operate should become central concerns for comparative research (see Part V of this volume). Religions differ by their tendency to proselytize and to create institutions and organizations. In James's terms, this means differences in the extent to which religious entrepreneurs and ideologues engage in product bundling and cross subsidization. It can also mean competitive relationships with other religions and ideologies. Moreover, religious values sometimes feed into other values, like nationalistic or militaristic ones, that feed TSOs supportive of even repressive regimes, like in Russia (Fröhlich & Skokova, 2020). It would be worthwhile to address the role of value-based TSOs in the context of social cohesion and ideological competition of increasingly heterogenous and secular societies. What this means for civil society capacity, also in relationship to the state? Other key questions are: Is the smaller size of Third Sectors in some countries related to different value systems and bases, even their relative absence? Do dominant State ideologies or dominant religions stifle value competition? Can predatory elite or technocratic autocracies mean less civil society

capacity and less of organizational infrastructure? What happens during regime transitions? What is the longer-term impact on civil society capacity through externally donor-funded TSOs that are not rooted in local value systems, with little or no institutional "moorings" in society and local communities?

Connecting with Related Social Science Approaches

Yet how does civil society come about and how can it be maintained? And how does the Third Sector infrastructure evolve? This is where political economy and comparative sociology and political science come in. Indeed, there is a renewed interest in a longer-term view that tries to understand how countries, including their civil societies, do, or fail to, develop. A significant recent entry in this literature is Acemoglu and Robinson's (2020) framework for the narrow corridor that countries must negotiate to advance towards a liberal order. Their core argument is that the key to sustainable development is for a country's civil society and State to advance more or less simultaneously without either one falling behind. The self-organizing power and resilience of civil society, and hence the organizational Third Sector infrastructure, must match the State's power to regulate and to support it. Out of this balancing act, a domestic liberal order with a sizable Third Sector can emerge over time and become sustainable.

While Acemoglu and Robinson's concern is primarily about liberty, we suggest that their institutional political economy perspective can be applied to civil society development as well. This means that negotiating the narrow corridor begins with better conditions for social self-organization and self-governance, and by implication the possibility to create and operate TSOs. Negotiating this corridor does not mean that all sustainable civil societies are constituted in a similar way or carry out similar functions. For example, Sweden has a strong State and a strong civil society, as do the United States and France, but their respective states and the civil societies are rather different in each case, including the institutional embeddedness of the Third Sector, as discussed above.

In general, sustainable civil societies and relatively large Third Sectors would, however, require the development of what Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) call a "shackled Leviathan", i.e., a State that exists in a cage of rules and regulations, respects civil society, and provides an enabling framework for capacity building. It means strong institutions and a developed Third Sector and citizens with a voice that demands as much and protests if the State becomes too dominant. Keane (2020) likewise suggests that State capacities and civil society capacities both enable and constrict each other. This is the case in many Western countries, but examples like the United States, Poland or Hungary show that such State-society relations cannot be taken for granted. Unless both State and society keep running, restrictiveness seems certainly possible even in highly developed democracies (Anheier et al., 2019; Strachwitz & Toepler, 2022).

There are other scenarios when countries veer off the narrow path. One is the "despotic" Leviathan, whereby State control is dominant and applies its capacity as it sees fit and without much input from, or regard to, the capacity of civil society for self-governance and self-organization. The State-dominant mode is very much a weak society syndrome at least from a Western perspective: unable or unwilling to allow for capacity build-up outside the State, the despotic Leviathan makes all major decisions, implements them accordingly, and can even allocate controlled space to TSOs. China and Russia are the best modern examples of this case. China and Russia are, however, no "paper" Leviathans. Paper Leviathans are despotic States with little or no implementation capacity, and with stunted civil societies without much potential for self-organizing and self-governance. Many Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries have in the past fallen into this category. Finally, there is the "absent" Leviathan, which is characteristic of countries without sustainable forms of government and with only a rudimentary civil society, and a weak Third Sector infrastructure.

In sum, the self-organizing power and resilience of civil society must match the State's power of both regulating and supporting it (see Keane, 1998, 2020; Gellner, 1994). Out of this balancing act, a Third Sector grounded on a civil society can emerge over time and become sustainable. This process, however, can involve important tradeoffs that Albert Hirschman warned about when he suggested a pattern called "sailing against the wind" as States and civil society navigate the narrow passage towards consolidated development:

> Given two highly desirable goals, such as a polity with consolidated democratic institutions and a more prosperous economy where wealth is more equally shared, it is conceivable that a given society can, at certain times, move in one of these desirable directions only at the cost of losing some ground in the other. Provided the movement is eventually reversed, progress can be achieved in both directions, but at any one time progress in one direction may be had only at the cost of retrogression in the other. (Hirschman, 1986)

The imagery for the overall advancement of a country Hirschman suggests is that of a zig-zag course. We suggest that the asynchronous patterns of development he describes for the democracy and the economy applies to State-civil society relations as well and are likely for some time to come, whereby civil society may be more or less settled, even challenged and indeed backsliding at times. We should recall that the United States had a lopsided civil society and did not become a full democracy until the 1960s with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, that Switzerland, among the world's most affluent countries with a highly developed civil society, allowed women to vote only in 1971, that Germany and Austria had highly developed regulatory State capacities and increasingly confident civil societies while being autocratic monarchies into the 1910s The point is that all countries mentioned followed sometimes arduous paths toward a greater State-civil society balance.

While these lines of argument can be related to the SOT, it also suggests different trajectories that might lead comparative Third Sector research out of the current theoretical impasse which was introduced more as a conceptual heuristic to account for the patterns that emerged from CNP's empirical results rather than as a fully developed explanation (Anheier, 2023; see also Part I of this volume).

Revise and Build Sustainable Core Data Infrastructure

Finally, there is the need to assess the current data infrastructure. As mentioned above, the data CNP generated are increasingly outdated and satellite accounts exist for a few countries only and even these do not necessarily get updated on a regular basis. For the foreseeable future, it seems unlikely that a CNP-like effort will provide regular updates, and it appears also unlikely that many more countries will implement the satellite account without a major push by interested stakeholders. In recognition of these realities, a multi-pronged approach might be appropriate that includes:

- Concentrating on a few core economic indicators: using the CNP approach to estimate Third Sector employment and volunteering, membership, expenditures, and revenue structure.
- Use organizational surveys to collect data on TSO roles to obtain estimates on values bases, product bundling and co-production.
- Establish explicit links to other major national and international social science data projects to explore potentials for cooperation in view of better coverage of civil society and the Third Sector. The utilization of Varieties of Democracy Project data, for example, has recently proven useful (Anheier et al., 2019, 2020).
- Collect data that allow us to ask fundamental broader questions that demonstrate the relevance of civil society and Third Sector research for major social science concerns.

Conclusion

The Johns Hopkins CNP developed a solid foundation for systematic comparative Third Sector research in the 1990s by crafting a working definition and classification system (ICNPO), creating a methodology that proved the feasibility of conducting systematic empirical research cross-nationally, and offering a new theoretical perspective (SOT). While the project's outcomes continue to benchmark and shape comparative Third Sector research, general research on the Third Sector and civil society has continued to progress over the past three decades as comparative research of this kind has lost some momentum. As a result, the conceptual and methodological issues and limitations of CNP now need to be addressed in order to reinvigorate the comparative research agenda and move the field ahead, both methodologically and theoretically. Third Sector researchers need to shift to different, much broader questions that look forward and connect with other larger social science projects. Overall, new coalitions of researchers are much needed who are interested in "pushing the envelope" of comparative Third Sector research and are hopefully as innovative as CNP was over 30 years ago.

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Chapter 21
Commentary on Part VI - Ways Forward

Naoto Yamauchi

Introduction

I am pleased to write a commentary on this excellent chapter on Third Sector research. While nonprofit or Third Sector research has a history of more than half a century, until the 1980s, it focused primarily on nonprofit organizations and philanthropy in the United States. Since the 1990s, however, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) has been launched, and the question has been raised as to whether research on U.S. nonprofits is equally applicable to the nonprofit sector outside the U.S. In this chapter, Stefan Toepler and Helmut K. Anheier, who have led CNP, address the definition, classification, and causes of international differences in the nonprofit sector based on the research findings of the CNP. They also suggest a set of research agendas for next-generation scholars. Based on my experience as one of the country experts of CNP, I would like to examine critically (1) how to define and explain the cross-national difference in the Third Sector and (2) how to build sustainable core data infrastructure.

Defining and Theorizing the Third Sector

Toepler and Anheier discuss key issues defining and classifying the Third Sector based on their experience leading the CNP team. Even in the early stage of CNP, there was a debate on whether mutuals and cooperatives should be included in the Third Sector or not. After a long debate, the team finally decided to exclude them since they did not meet the non-distribution constraint, which was believed to be the most crucial rule for dividing the nonprofit and for-profit worlds. Therefore, when

From the editors: Our esteemed colleague, Naoto Yamaguchi, passed away just weeks after penning these words. His unwavering dedication and invaluable contributions profoundly shaped and advanced our research field. We honor his legacy, which will continue to inspire and guide us.

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Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) proposed an alternative definition for the 'extended' Third Sector by loosening the definition by replacing 'non-profit distributing' with 'totally or significantly limited from distributing any surplus they earn to investors, members, or other stakeholders,' I thought the discussion had gone back to the beginning. While this amendment was designated mainly for developing the Third Sector or social economy in Europe, it is reasonable and realistic considering the recent development of the social enterprise sector in Asia, including Japan.

Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) also suggest that informal as well as formal organizations and individual components are important elements of the extended Third Sector. They are quite right because individual activities are essential elements in shaping the extended Third Sector. It is worth noting, however, that individual activities through organizations are already counted even in the conventional definition of the Third Sector. Thus, the net addition to the extended Third Sector is individual activities done directly, as Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) note. Since individual activities should be counted in the household sector in the SNA convention, it may be a little misleading to add informal and individual activities to the extended Third Sector.

As I proposed in Yamauchi (2016), there could be more than one definition of the Third Sector, from the narrowest to the broadest, depending on the divisions included. It is, in fact, difficult to choose the correct definition. My idea was to propose multiple definitions of the Third Sector, analogical to the definitions of money, namely, M1, M2, M3, etc. For example, TS0 would be the narrowest common core of the Third Sector. TS1 would be the common core plus value of volunteering. TS2 could be defined as TS1 plus cooperatives and mutuals operating under certain limitations on surplus distribution. TS3 could be TS2 plus social enterprises operating under conditions specified in the previous section. If data on each definition are available, users can choose suitable concepts and statistical data freely depending on their aims. If comparative data are available, it is also possible to make international comparisons on TS1, TS2, and TS3.

Toepler and Anheier revisit the social origins theory (SOT) proposed by Salamon and Anheier (1998) and others as a "theory" to answer the question of why Third Sectors differ cross-nationally. However, as Toepler and Anheier correctly put it, "SOT faces challenges that are not uncommon in comparative-historical research that has to rely on longer-term institutional developments to make causal inferences about the presence." In my view, the SOT should be called a kind of classification system rather than a solid theory compared to other theories with clear causal inferences, such as government failure theory (GFT). Advocates of SOT argue that the two dimensions of government social spending and the scale of the nonprofit sector divide the nonprofit sector into four basic regimes (namely liberal, democratic, statist, and corporatist) according to the government social spending and the scale of the nonprofit sector. However, of the 41 countries covered by the CNP, only 26 can be classified into one of these four categories, while seven are considered traditional, and eight are considered outliers (Anheier et al., 2020). Therefore, SOT is not necessarily a successful classification system.

Toepler and Anheier exclusively focus on SOT as a theory to explain international differences in the Third Sector, but this is not a fair treatment. While some literatures support SOT, quite a few literatures do not. For example, Einolf (2015) tested SOT using the cross-country data on charitable giving and concluded as follows: "Over all the general strategy of social origins theory is a powerful one, but Salamon and Ahheier's use of that strategy is theoretically incomplete and receives only modest support." Of the theories of the Third Sector, GFT has accumulated the most significant number of empirical studies to date. Using meta-analysis, Lu (2020) found that of the 37 papers that tested GFT, 22 studies used U.S. data, five studies used data from one country other than the U.S., and ten remaining analyses used cross-country data. On the other hand, only five analyses used longitudinal data, and only one study conducted a panel analysis using cross-country longitudinal data. He also found a statistically significant positive association between population heterogeneity and nonprofit sector size. CNP provides cross-sectional data for more than 40 countries, with no time series information, making it difficult to identify causal relationships by nature. However, Matsunaga et al. (2010) tested GFT using the CNP data and concluded that GFT should not have been rejected.

Towards Building Sustainable Data Infrastructure

The Johns Hopkins CNP began as a pilot study with seven countries and has grown to cover more than 40 countries. In the second phase, the nonprofit satellite account was produced, including estimates of the value-added by the Third Sector comparable to GDP. The legacy of CNP is very significant. Its primary contribution was creating and providing datasets covering more than 40 countries on employment, expenditures, income, etc., based on the TSO's uniform definitions and classification criteria. Another significant contribution was developing procedures for producing statistical data and giving training opportunities to nonprofit researchers from participating countries. However, as Toepler and Anheier pointed out, the data CNP generated are increasingly outdated. I perfectly agree with their idea of establishing links to other major national and international social science data projects.

The first candidate to succeed CNP is V-Dem. V-Dem is a dataset on democracy provided by the V-Dem Institute in Sweden. It offers more than 100 years of indices on CSOs in over 170 countries worldwide. V-Dem is not a statistical dataset but a collection of indexes on democracy, civil society, and related factors. Since several country and field experts rate the V-Dem civil society index series, it can be treated as reliable and robust. According to the V-Dem Code Book, "the core civil society index (CCSI) measures a robust civil society that enjoys autonomy from the State and in which citizens freely and actively pursue their political and civic goals." "The CCSI is formed by taking the point estimates from a statistical model of the three indicators: CSO entry and exit, CSO repression, and CSO participatory environment." The correlation between CCSI and the civil society workforce (paid and volunteer workforce as a percent of the economically active population from CNP)

shows a correlation coefficient of 0.48, which is positive, though not very strong. Since the V-Dem initially evaluates a set of indicators related to democracy, it is easy to see the relationship between the strength of civil society and democracy. In fact, as Fig. 21.1 shows, there has been a strong positive relationship between civil society (CCSI) and the liberal democracy index (LDI). The correlation coefficient is 0.83, which is fairly high, indicating a strong correlation between the two.

Lechterman and Reich (2020) said there are three ways to understand the relationship between civil society and democracy. Firstly, civil society plays a bulwark role against the State. Secondly, citizens form and transmit political preferences through civil society; thirdly, civil society organizations can be a training ground for democratic life. An active civil society plays a vital role in making democracy work. The relationship between civil society and liberal democracy is positive. These facts are precisely the cases in Asia. The reasoning behind our results is as follows. If liberal democracy becomes weak, civil society will face the authoritarian State's power directly, and civil society's advocacy roles might be damaged. If civil society becomes weak and cannot play a bulwark role against the State, the democratic State may shift to the authoritarian political system. Hence, once civil society weakens, democracy loses momentum, and vice versa. In this sense, civil society and democracy may fall into a vicious circle. At the same time, political initiatives could be a trigger to make a virtuous circle. Toepler & Anheier cite Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) "Narrow Corridor" to argue that for a sustainable civil society, a "shackled Leviathan" (i.e., a balanced power of the State and society) is necessary.

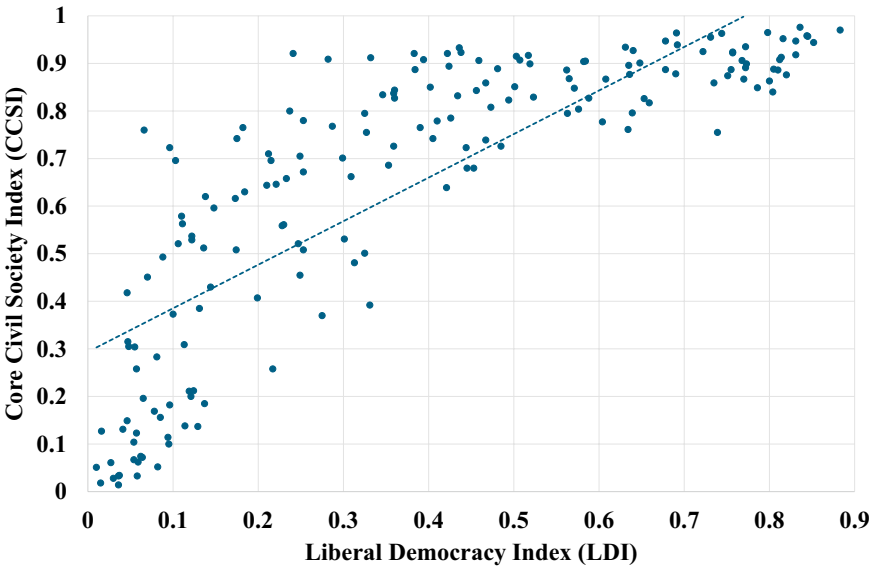

Fig. 21.1 Correlation between CCSI and LDI for 179 countries. (Data: V-Dem Institute, Country-Year: V-Dem Core (version 14))

Since the V-Dem was originally developed to quantify democracy, it also provides essential data for understanding the state's and civil society's relationship.

As such, V-Dem is a robust dataset on democracy and civil society, covering long-time series data for most countries worldwide. Another critical data source on CSOs is the Global Philanthropy Environment Index (GPEI) published by the Indiana University Lili Family School of Philanthropy. The 2022 index includes the ease of CSOs and philanthropy, tax advantages, and the political, economic, and cultural environment in 91 countries (twice as many as countries covered by CNP) from 2018 to 2022. The correlation between GPEI and the civil society workforce (paid and volunteer workforce as a percentage of the economically active population) is around 0.66, a higher correlation coefficient than CCSI.

Overall, the Johns Hopkins CNP was an indispensable comparative project, but it was not sustainable because it cost a lot in terms of research budget and staffing researchers, particularly for small developing countries with underdeveloped statistical infrastructure. More researchers from the Global South, which is not well covered by the Johns Hopkins CNP but covered by V-Dem and other datasets, can participate in the project.

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Chapter 22
Future Challenges Facing Third Sector Research

Mario Aquino Alves, Andrea Bassi, and Carolyn Cordery

The realm of societal advancement is multifaceted, involving a balance of public and private attention. Yet, nestled within this framework lies the Third Sector, a constantly evolving and dynamic entity. Comprising non-profit organizations, charities, voluntary groups, and social enterprises, the Third Sector is crucial in fostering social change, community empowerment, and humanitarian efforts. To comprehend the forthcoming hurdles that Third Sector research must overcome, it is essential to delve into its historical origins, scholarly underpinnings, research infrastructure, and emerging trends that shape its trajectory.

While we are editing (writing) this book, it is apparent that the scientific research field that could broadly be encompassed under the label "Third Sector" has reached a high level of academic recognition and scientific reputation. After more than 30 years of studies and research on that topic, several indicators show the visibility and the status achieved by the subject through the constitution of a research scholarship.

When Peter Dobkin Hall (1992) described the emergence of the research field of nonprofit management in the 1970s and 1980s, specifically in the US and UK, he observed that while there might have been some resistance to the teaching of nonprofit organization management, the field was relatively new and beginning to gain

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traction in academia. Despite this, Hall (1992) noted significant growth in the field's serious research work, as seen in the increase in journal articles, conferences, books, and other publications related to nonprofit management.

The development of any scholarly field requires a substantial amount of theoretical and empirical knowledge. In this regard, Ma and Konrath (2018) have emphasized that the emerging field of Third Sector studies we are currently exploring has been no exception. Therefore, we must devote ourselves to acquiring and building upon the necessary research infrastructure to advance this field to its full potential.

The Research Infrastructure

The research infrastructure for the nonprofit and civil society sectors is similar to that of the social sciences but also showcases some key differences. The infrastructure supporting research in these areas, much like in the social sciences, includes durable institutions, technical tools, and platforms that enable research as a public good (Farago, 2014). However, the research infrastructure for the nonprofit sector and civil society also encompasses intangible aspects such as networks, relationships, and partnerships. These elements are instrumental in empowering researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to delve into and enrich the nonprofit sector and civil society.

Critical components of this research infrastructure include *data and information repositories, academic research centers, technological tools and platforms, funding mechanisms, training and educational programs, the establishment of ethical and transparent research practices*, *interdisciplinary collaboration and public engagement and knowledge dissemination.*

Data and Information Repositories

Access to comprehensive and reliable data on nonprofit organizations and civil society initiatives is essential for conducting meaningful research (Appe, 2022). This includes the development of international "nonprofit data environments" (Bloodgood et al., 2023) that include databases, surveys, and datasets that provide insights into organizational structures, activities, funding sources, and community impact. Also, as we learned from Salamon and Sokolowski (2016), data repositories help legitimize the field.

Academic Research Centers

Dedicated research centers, think tanks, and academic departments focused on the nonprofit sector and civil society provide scholars with physical and intellectual space to collaborate, share resources, and conduct in-depth analyses. The structuring efforts of the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council, founded in 1991, have explicitly provided some knowledge of the activities of their existing membership, focusing mainly on US-based centers (Weber and Brunt, 2022), which were primarily created during the 1990s, when multiple private funders supported the creation of the field and also new educational programs (Mirabella & Wish, 2001).

Technological Tools and Platforms

Advanced technological resources, such as sophisticated data analysis software, interactive visualization tools, and online platforms for seamless data sharing and collaboration, significantly bolster researchers' capacity to gather, process, and interpret data pertinent to nonprofit organizations and civil society. These tools enable researchers to employ innovative methods, like computational mapping, as demonstrated in LePere-Schloop et al. (2022), who utilized computational maps to chart civil society organizations.

Additionally, platforms such as the "Mapa das OSCs in Brazil" (IPEA, n.d.) provide structured, interactive information hubs facilitating comprehensive insights into the landscape of civil society organizations. Moreover, integrating Artificial Intelligence presents opportunities and challenges in civil society research, offering the potential for enhanced analysis and understanding alongside considerations regarding ethical implications and biases (LePere-Schloop & Zook, 2023).

Funding Mechanisms and Support Structures

Sustainable funding models and grant programs are vital in supporting long-term research on Third Sector topics. These mechanisms enable researchers to access necessary resources and maintain the continuity of their work. However, examining critical aspects of civil society research sponsorship is essential, such as obtaining reliable funding data, identifying knowledge production patterns, and addressing resource allocation biases (Sogge, 2022). One significant challenge is that while research on civil society and the Third Sector received favorable funding in the 1990s with projects like the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, large-scale research projects with a global focus are unlikely to resurface unless they remain apolitical (Biekart and Fowler, 2022).

Ethical and Transparent Research Practices

Upholding ethical standards and transparency in nonprofit and civil society research is critical. This includes ensuring the integrity of data collection, analysis, and reporting and respecting the rights and dignity of research participants. Beyond the conventional ethical considerations of data integrity and participant rights, the field of Third Sector studies might assume decolonial ontologies and epistemologies that demand a deeper engagement with the ethical dimensions inherent in the colonial legacies that have shaped the field. This entails challenging and dismantling the colonial hierarchies, biases, and power dynamics that persist within academic research and knowledge production (Mendonça, 2022; Fleschenberg et al., 2024).

Training and Education Programs

A field of research needs to establish academic degrees to be institutionalized; many undergraduate (bachelor), graduate (Master), and postgraduate (PhD) programs on nonprofit organizations and social enterprises have been developed worldwide in recent years. Programs that provide training in nonprofit management, public administration, and civil society studies contribute to developing a skilled workforce equipped to conduct high-quality research and apply findings in practice. Civil society organizations globally surged in the late twentieth century, expanding the Third Sector. Hall (1992) pointed out an evident rise in interest in Third Sector studies, with more teaching programs focused on nonprofit management emerging on both sides of the Atlantic. This trend suggested that nonprofit scholarship was gradually gaining recognition and acceptance in higher education, marking the development and maturation of the field.

This proliferation of Third Sector organizations (nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, social enterprises, and so on) was paralleled by a rise in education and training initiatives aimed at preparing and supporting managers within these organizations (Mirabella et al., 2007). Although many programs were concentrated in the US, a worldwide structure was created and laid down the cornerstone of the living research field (Mirabella et al., 2007).

Public Engagement and Knowledge Dissemination

Research infrastructure should ensure that research findings are effectively communicated to various audiences, including policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Making research outputs freely accessible and engaging in public discussions can help translate academic insights into practical applications.

Additionally, the availability of reputable outlets such as international scientific journals like *Voluntas—International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, and the establishment of series in highly ranked publishers like the Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies—Springer Book Series, are essential to achieve this goal.

The creation of Voluntas should be attributed to the endless activity of Helmut Anheier, who, during his entire career, operated as a fundamental scientific/academic "entrepreneur" and as an "institutional innovator." His scholarly career made him a crucial "bridge" between two academic worlds—the US and European nonprofit research communities—through his research roles and teaching duties on both sides of the Atlantic. He worked at the London School of Economics, where he was appointed the new Director of the Centre for Voluntary Organization in 1998, refounding it as the Centre for Civil Society. Then, he moved to the University of Heidelberg, where he co-founded the Centre for Social Investment and remained until his retirement. In between, he served as founding director of the Center for Civil Society at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

The two editors' editorial of the first issue (Anheier & Knapp, 1990) states: "Through Voluntas, we hope to help advance the frontiers of social science knowledge on the voluntary or non-profit sector and to aid the international dissemination of the fruits of scholarship. (…) Voluntas will be the first journal in this area devoted to the international domain" (pp. 2–3). Moreover, they underline: "The study of the voluntary or non-profit sector has emerged as a truly interdisciplinary field of the social sciences. Through Voluntas, we wish to strengthen its interdisciplinary character." "(…) the journal will not confine itself to publishing papers which report international comparative research (…), but we will be looking for articles which have international relevance, and which are accessible to readers in most countries" (p. 3). They conclude the editorial with the following final statement: "The study of the voluntary sector has become an international field of research involving a worldwide academic community. Our substantive interests are catholic, and we invite papers that either have international relevance, deserve worldwide circulation, or deal with international issues concerning the voluntary sector. We are interested in both country-specific research and work which compares the voluntary sector in different countries at the national, sectoral, industrial, and organizational levels" (p. 10). "(…) We believe that Voluntas will serve as the central forum for international research on the voluntary or non-profit sector" (p. 12).

As the attentive reader would have noticed at the time, among the scholars and researchers, there was yet to be an agreement about the terminology to describe the sector. Indeed, the editors used two terms to refer to the journal topic: "nonprofit" and "voluntary" sectors. The first comes from economics and management disciplines, and the second was adopted mainly in sociology, political sciences, and history. As Andrea Bassi discussed in chapter 4 on the building of the research field, the term "Third Sector" emerged as a possible terminological solution, and undoubtedly, Voluntas served as a vehicle to advocate this new terminology. However, it would take a few more years before the term "Third Sector" became "normalized" in the field.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Research on nonprofit and civil society issues often spans multiple disciplines, such as sociology, economics, political science, and public policy. Collaborative networks and interdisciplinary partnerships enable researchers to approach complex challenges from diverse perspectives, leading to more comprehensive and impactful findings. Most of these networks are nested in the different academic societies created: ARNOVA (1971) and especially ISTR (1992), which has a more extensive international and multidisciplinary outreach.

Even though many actors are involved in this sector of society, more scientific research and debates are still necessary. The multidimensionality and variety of the field have been recognized since the beginning of the study and reflections on the topic. In the editorial of the first issue of Voluntas, Helmut Anheier and Martin Knapp stated, "We urge potential authors to make plain the nature of the beast they are describing" (1990, p. 6). Marylin Taylor also recognized the difficulty of determining the extent of the sector's research community and whether researchers in different countries were all studying the same animal (1992, p. 383). This plurality continues to characterize the sector, as recently recognized by Dennis Young et al. (2016) with the metaphor of the "Zoo."

Prolegomena of the Foundation of the ISTR

The first international scientific meeting was in June 1987, when researchers from 14 countries met in Bad Honnef, Germany, for a conference on "The non-profit sector and the welfare state." From that gathering, 3 years later, an edited book by Anheier and Seibel (1990) was published that, to our knowledge, is the first one to systematically adopt the term Third Sector and fully introduced it into scientific debate.

The Second International Conference of Researchers on the Nonprofit Sector. "Voluntarism, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), and Public Policy" was held in Jerusalem in May 1989, organized by Benjamin Gidron. From this symposium, in 1992 a well-known book was published on the relationship between the government and the Third Sector (Gidron et al., 1992).

Finally, the Third International Conference of Researchers on the Nonprofit Sector. "The Third Sector in International Perspective: Developmental, Organizational and Ethical Issues" was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, in March 1992. During this conference and in the months later, an "interim board" was established to conduct towards the birth of the ISTR, which was officialized in the first International Conference "Towards the Year 2000: ISTR Inaugural Conference"—held in 1994 in PECS—Hungary.

In light of its remarkable heritage, the impending pages shall delve into the challenges that the Third Sector research arena faces in the current era and beyond. It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of addressing said challenges as they are crucial in shaping the trajectory of research within the Third Sector. With a focus on clarity, concision, and accuracy, the following discourse shall endeavor to maintain a formal and professional tone that is befitting of scholarly and business settings.

Trends Likely to Impact Future Third Sector Research

As we noted in this book's introduction, the world is changing, leading us to use the word "construction" in the book's title. Third Sector studies began in earnest following the change termed by Lester Salamon (1994, p. 109) as a global "associational revolution" and his predictions of a burgeoning number of "self-governing private organizations, not dedicated to distributing profits to shareholders or directors, pursuing public purposes outside the formal apparatus of the State." As he expected (and noted by many authors in this volume), the Third Sector is diverse and this spurred research to define it, to theorize the rise of the sector and the organizations within it and generally make it an area of study. Bassi provides a historical analysis of the rise of different definitions and Part II shows us that the concepts forming the sections of this volume (theory, definition, classification aggregation) are interrelated—good theory cannot be developed if the definition is not generally accepted or there is no "definition" of the entity or group that one is working with.

Four decades ago, Salamon (1994, p. 110) also reflected on the corresponding decline in political participation by individuals and suggests the rise of Third Sector Organizations (TSOs) "closely resembles the 'third wave' of democratic political revolutions identified by Samuel Huntington, but that goes well beyond it, affecting democratic and authoritarian regimes, developed and developing countries alike." This was a time of the State in crisis, re-shaping and re-shuffling it through movements we have continued to observe.

As noted by Rathgeb Smith et al. and Young in Part I, attempts were made to theorize the rise of TSOs in the last years of the twentieth century in order to further understand them, their relationships with the State and market and to strengthen them in their work. But as noted by many of this volume's authors, starting in Part I, many of the older theories need updating (or overturning) and globalizing in order to deal with the challenges of today. Increasing numbers of hybrid organizations (particularly the 'zoo' of social enterprises noted by Young et al., 2016) challenge the TSO definitions used in the past. The authors in this section challenge us to develop relevant theories for countries other than the US and to befit future Third Sector research.

The aim of this book is to highlight future possible pathways in which Third Sector research could progress through illustrating, commenting and criticizing the state of the art and to lead to a more inclusive dialogue that, through encouraging diverse voices, shapes our collective understanding of the sector, its potentialities and to ameliorate difficulties. Hence, how might we perceive the future?

A number of trends or drivers are regularly predicted as being likely to affect the next generation. Futurologists often use scenario planning to both identify drivers and then to picture a world affected by those drivers (Cordery et al., 2017). In this short chapter we cannot present all the possibilities that might emerge from certain drivers, but we draw on those identified by some major publications in the last 5 years which can generate thinking about future possible pathways for Third Sector research.

The National Intelligence Council's (2021) 2040 report identifies four megatrends: *Technology, Climate, Demographics, and Politics*, developing five scenarios that could define futures in the United States. PwC (2022) analyse the last three and, rather than democracy, add "fracturing world" and "social instability" in looking forward to 2030. While, the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC) (2019) considers how democracy might develop by 2030, these themes of fracturing and instability are highly present in that analysis. Similar to 40 years ago, the OECD's (2021, p. 3) global scenarios for 2035 states that: "Social, technological, economic, environmental, political and geopolitical changes are occurring arguably faster than ever before, and our unprecedented interconnectedness means that a development in one part of the world can quickly go global. Faced with this reality, human societies and their governments cannot afford to be passive or complacent." Both the EPSC (2019) and OECD (2021) note that dire predictions may overwhelm people and result in inaction; nevertheless, they encourage us to take action and "change the game." How can we shape our own future and that of the world we are living in?

It is apparent that the effects of the drivers of change (*technology, climate, demographics, and politics*) are evident already and will continue to impact the future in which Third Sector organizations will operate and the way we research. This book has encouraged us to base our question of where the associative world might be in the future, on aspects of theory, definition, classification, and aggregation. In this chapter, we draw together those themes as well as considering how different trends or drivers of change could create future possible pathways for global Third Sector research and the contributions in this volume.

In terms of **technology and definitions**, Domaradzka analyses digital activism, to summarize the steps that could be taken to work towards a new definition for Third Sector organizations. While Part IV of this volume considers arguments for including faith within the Third Sector definition, and the challenges faced in this, defining social movements brings further challenges (Della Porta, 2020; Gaby, 2020). Macías Ruano et al. (2021) use technology to explore the development of the term "social economy" across the world. As noted by the authors in Part V, definition and classification of a particular entity (or entity type) as a Third Sector Organization may result in some organizations feeling uncomfortable.

With regards to **technology**, in Part III of this book, Rutherford et al. warn as to the challenges brought by digitalization of classification. The opportunities afforded by classification provide a way forward in aggregation, although Bloodgood notes that "Future potential is limited, however, by the quality and accessibility of the administrative systems and data at the national level." Nevertheless, Fonović provides an example from the ILO module of how volunteering data may be adaptable to aggregation to improve policy making and organizational choices. Hence Santamarina calls researchers to expand comparative Third Sector research and potentially expand the availability of Third Sector data (see also Santamarina et al., 2023). It is apparent that the future of Third Sector research depends on data and classification interoperability. Without a comprehensive understanding of such systems, rather than opening spaces in society, research could instead lead users astray. In line with the concerns noted in Parts III and IV regarding technology and

classification and aggregation, Sandberg et al. (2023) challenge researchers to address the fundamental ontological and epistemological issues big data presents for the Third Sector.

Different research methods—already prefigured in Part IV are being increasingly used to analyse aggregate data (Bloodgood et al., 2021, 2023; Chen & Zhang, 2023). This includes methods such as netnography and digital ethnography (Goncharenko, 2019; Oreg & Babis, 2023).

While the holistic concern for our planet's future saw the challenge of the Millenium Development Goals and now the *Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, 2015), in the 2020s, **climate** concerns have increased in urgency, catapulting it into a major environmental issue. With the incidence of a hotter world and more negative climate events increasing citizens' stress, sea-level rise exacerbating vulnerabilities, and escalating pressures on city planning, it is unsurprising that there are predictions of lower productivity levels, food & water insecurity and housing loss. An intensification of climate hazards will disrupt supply chains and negatively impact biodiversity. Coincident with regulation to reduce these negative impacts (e.g greenhouse gas emissions), the cost of living is likely to increase, leading to increased violence, business failure, and some predict, financial catastrophe. The Third Sector is a vocal mover in seeking global action, but this is a space beset by conflict and instability.

The foundational subjects this volume considers are also impacted by the other two trends—**politics and demographics**. These multipolar political issues—which no single State can resolve alone (EPSC, 2019)—repeat or continue the notion of a State in crisis (Salamon, 1994) and certainly prefigures changing roles for the Third Sector. Increased fragmentations & contestation over economic, cultural & political issues suggest that the Third Sector must work with nation States and with international actors to revitalise multilateral institutions and ameliorate these multipolar issues. Politically, increased societal disillusionment also is likely to place democracy under threat (as will technologically-spread disinformation) sparking a rise in *populism* that excludes rather than includes (EPSC, 2019). This is observed in many countries limiting freedoms in the Third Sector. Such an environment is also like to change the mix of government funding into the Third Sector and public service provision, independent of government funding that would increase nonprofit advocacy (Yanagi et al., 2021).

Politics will be impacted by **migration** and **societal ageing**. The world's population continues to increase (https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/population) and the population above the age of 65 years is expected to rise from 10% in 2022 to 16% in 2050 (it is growing more rapidly than the population below that age). By 2050, the number of individuals aged 65 years or above across the world is projected to be twice the number of children under age 5, and almost equivalent to the number of children under 12 years (https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing). Consequently, it will be important to re-examine the theory and findings of prior Third Sector research to assess how it applies in an older world. For example, in light of a significant increase in older people's civic engagement, Serrat et al. (2022) call for new

definitions of civic engagement in later life to develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of elders' activities, including their volunteering.

The Civicus Monitor (2023) report highlights a concerning trend: two-thirds of the world's population now live in areas where **civic space is restricted**. This poses significant challenges for Third Sector organizations. Despite these constraints, the Third Sector has continually demonstrated an innovative capacity to foster new forms of civic engagement by leveraging digital platforms and forming transnational networks. Looking to the future, focusing on the sector's transformative potential is crucial. The Third Sector can pioneer new methods of engagement that harnesses technology and mobilizes society from the grassroots to advocate for and support marginalized communities. This proactive approach can empower Third Sector organizations to continue their crucial work, even in the face of adversity, thereby enriching the field of Third Sector studies with fresh perspectives and innovative solutions.

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Index

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