

# *Change in Local Voluntary Associations*

Ph.D. Thesis

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2009

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## *Preface*

On February 6, 2006, thousands of furious demonstrators burned down the Norwegian Embassy in Damascus, Syria. The anger was directed towards ten cartoons published by Danish and Norwegian newspapers (as well as newspapers from countless other countries, among them many from the Arab world). Most of the caricatures were criticizing violent Islamism. They were borne out of rising concern over the increasingly frequent acts of violence and threats that tend to arise whenever the authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies within political Islam are criticized.

My family and I were living in the Embassy building at the time, and the first draft of this thesis was lost in the fire. That is, the backup hard drive I kept had survived the flames and soot, but the angry young men inside our building had pounded on its metal casing until the insides were destroyed beyond repair. By chance, we had left the house some twenty minutes before the mob appeared. A swimming excursion cost me a half-finished Ph.D. thesis, but probably saved our lives.

The Syrian government not only turned a blind eye, but facilitated and encouraged the attack in a hope to enhance their puny image in the Middle East by “giving it to” the Westerners, as well as to defuse rising tension against rising living costs, corruption and incompetence. They picked Norway and Denmark because these are small countries with little potential for serious retaliation. (The demonstrators went on to attack the French embassy, where the riot police were ready with their water cannons). As it turned out, they got their risk analysis right: The response of the Norwegian government was feeble, and one year after the incident, the new ambassador could proudly proclaim that the relationship with Syria was repaired – they were not angry with us anymore.

It is ironic that a thesis about civil society was destroyed precisely by the lack of the same. In an open, democratic society, the contents of and intentions behind the caricatures could have been explained, criticized and discussed. But Syria is anything but a liberal democracy. Free speech is non-existent and voluntary organizations are prohibited; any group of four people or more wanting to convene needs approval from the government. The ominous spies of the *Mukhabaraat*, one of the main employers in the dysfunctional Syrian economy, are ubiquitous in their white Peugeots with black



curtains drawn and pictures of the gangly president Bashar al-Assad adorning the rear window. Fear and distrust reigns.

It was the absence of social capital, critical discussion and civil structures that allowed Islamists fuelled by hatred towards modernity and free thought to manipulate the public into blind rage.

Thus, the incident was a timely reminder of the importance of my study object; voluntary associations may seem insignificant and trivial; exactly how crucial they are not only for civil society, but *civilized* society, becomes apparent only in their absence.

Therefore, I admire the people who took a courageous and principled stand for free speech with no little risk to themselves: In particular Kurt Westergaard, Flemming Rose, Vebjørn Selbekk and Per Edgar Kokkvold. I would also like to thank my brave Syrian friends, whose names cannot be mentioned for obvious reasons, for their support during the ordeal. You deserve so much better.

This thesis could not have been completed without the generous additional funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Research Council. The initial phase of my work was financed by a grant from the Norwegian Research Council. I have had excellent work conditions in all the three locations in which the thesis has been written: Oslo, Damascus and Moscow. In Oslo, the Institute for Social Research generously provided me with an office and the infrastructure needed to do research as well as the opportunity to discuss with and learn from colleagues. While living abroad, it would have been impossible to get anything done without the invaluable help of Sajee, Dhammika and Natasha.

The papers in this collection are all greatly inspired by the work of my supervisor, Per Selle, who also serves as co-author on three of the articles. I have had the privilege of learning from and collaborating with Per for more than ten years now. His consistent support – academic and otherwise - and belief in my abilities has on many occasions been the one thing that has stopped me from giving up. I can say with absolute certainty that without Per Selle, this thesis would not have been completed. For that, I am forever grateful.

My work has also benefited greatly from advice from journal editors and the anonymous reviewers that have assessed my papers. Roger Lohmann, Rupert Taylor and Helmut Anheier deserve particular mention. I have also received valuable comments on previous drafts from fellow students at the Department of Comparative Politics.

My greatest thanks go to my family: my patient, understanding, beloved Kari and my wonderful children Mina and Ola – my pride and endless source of joy and inspiration.

Moscow, January 2009

## *Status of the Articles*

This collection consists of an introductory chapter and seven articles. The first article, *A Social Democratic Model of Civil Society* (with Per Selle), appeared in the anthology “Changing Images of Civil Society: From Protest to Governance”, edited by Bruno Jobert and Beate Kohler-Koch (2008), London: Routledge. Article two, *Generations and Organisational Change*, was first published in Norwegian in *Tidsskrift for Ungdomsforskning* (Journal of Youth Research), and revised and reprinted in the book “The Values of Volunteering: Cross-Cultural Perspectives”, edited by Paul Dekker and Loek Halman, and published on Kluwer, 2003. The third and fifth articles, *A Configurational Approach to Change in Populations of Rural Associations* and *Age, Size and Change in Local Voluntary Associations*, are currently under review for publication in international journals. The fourth article, *Survival in Local Voluntary Associations*, is forthcoming in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. Article six, *The Decoupling of Voluntary Organizations: The Case of Norwegian Voluntary Organizations*, was published in *Voluntas* in 2008 (volume 19, issue 4). The seventh and final article, *The Origins of Social Capital: Institutionalisation and Socialisation Approaches Compared* (with Per Selle) appeared in *Journal of Civil Society* in 2007 (volume 3, issue 1).

Article two and seven follow the British English spelling norm, whereas the others are written in American English.

# 1. Introduction

## *Local Voluntary Associations: Why Should We Care?*

The present articles analyze change in local voluntary associations. What characterizes the development over the past decades? What do these trends tell us about social change? How well are the dynamics of the change captured by the leading approaches within organizational theory? And what are the theoretical and empirical implications of an organized civil society in flux?

The aim of the articles is to - in combination - give a comprehensive account as possible of the contents, dynamics and consequences of change in a population of voluntary associations in the period after 1980. The main empirical sources are censuses of all local level voluntary associations in Hordaland County, Norway (pop. approx. 400,000) undertaken in 1980, 1990 and 2000.

The associations under study are by and large minuscule in size; in most cases, they involve fewer than 30 members. Only one in ten employs any paid staff. Viewed in isolation, their ability to decisively shape their surroundings is marginal. How can these groups be of any interest to political science?

In fact, there are strong reasons for taking this organizational population more seriously: (1) Their *combined volume and impact*, their roles as (2) *reflectors of social change*, (3) *creators of social change* and (4) the *spinal cord of civil society*, and finally – in spite of all this - (5) the *knowledge deficit* concerning their structure, purpose and development over time.

First, if one views the groups in combination rather than isolation, they are anything but marginal and small. David Horton Smith (1997; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003a) estimated that 90 per cent of organizations and 50 per cent of all volunteer time in the US belonged to grassroots associations with a small number of members and tiny budgets. In Norway, where organizational participation is on par with the US and most national organizations have local chapters, these figures are likely to be even higher. In the 2000 wave of the Hordaland census, we found approximately one group for every 30 inhabitants. While small in isolation, the *combined* volume of the small voluntary groups at the local level is immense.

Second, changes in organizational society mirror changes in society at large. Every sphere of Norwegian society is permeated by voluntary organizations. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly after 1960, every conceivable interest or activity has become institutionalized into such structures. This result of this eagerness to organize is that voluntary associations can be studied as sediments of ideological and social currents. Information about the types of organizations that have been formed at various times gives an intake to understanding how interests, motivations and value systems change in a population. It is easy to form a voluntary association, and quite easy to disband, though many associations survive well beyond their “best before” date. Thus, the entire population does not change at once; the “old” is interwoven and coexists with the “new”. Many reorganize in the face of environmental pressure. In the absence of bureaucracy and complexity, institutional inertia and resistance are weaker than is the case in larger entities. Consequently, the relationship between ideological and organizational change is more direct among local voluntary organizations.

Third, voluntary organizations do more than merely reflect their environments. They also have the potential to influence and create social change. This is naturally the case to a greater extent in some fields than others. Unions, other economic organizations and political parties are obvious examples of organizations that have had, and continue to have, extensive direct power. But even in less politicized fields, organizations often serve as institutions that connect individual and society, and citizen and polity, as a source of identity, belonging or influence. A federated, democratic structure mimicking that of the political parties has been predominant in *all* segments of Norwegian organizational society, including stamp collectors and bird watchers. In this setup, members ideally belong to and take part in local chapters, which in turn furthers their concerns to the regional and national arena. Thus, the micro-macro connection on which civil society depends begins at the local level.

Fourth, the local level is the spinal cord of organized civil society. It is at the local level most members and volunteers spend their time and efforts, and it is here the bulk of communication between organizations and the public takes place. Therefore, understanding the local level is crucial to understanding organized civil society as a whole.

Fifth, despite these functions, local level associations have been subject to extensive research to such a limited extent that Smith (1997) have labeled them “the

dark matter” of the nonprofit sector. The research literature and the political rhetoric about voluntary associations are awash with assumptions about how local associations socialize, empower, democratize and counteract commercialization, trivialization, bureaucratization and social problems. However, there is less systematic knowledge about whether and how all this actually takes place. The considerable changes that are evident from the present study may serve as a cautionary note against a priori attributing such positively laden characteristics to local voluntary associations; some associations fulfill these roles and others do not. Their function in civil society has changed radically in the brief period under study here (since 1980). Knowledge about the local level is important to transcend romanticized perspectives on organized civil society and move towards a more empirically informed one.

The empirical literature is also scattered when it comes to local associations *as organizations*: their structures, their population dynamics, and their conditions of survival, growth and innovative capability.<sup>1</sup> While these are core issues in organizational research, local associations have been examined in only a handful of cases, often relating this to a historical analysis of the period under study (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Sandell, 2001; Selle & Øymyr, 1992; Skocpol, 2003; Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000). Thus, we have much less systematic knowledge concerning the operations of such organizations, than e.g. governmental institutions and forprofit industries.

The objectives of this thesis are both empirical and theoretical in nature. The *empirical* objective is to contribute to improving knowledge about local voluntary associations in the international literature. There are few, if any systematic, longitudinal studies dealing with this type of organizational population in the international literature. The present data allows us to document and analyze the changes in the local voluntary sector in Norway over a twenty year period with a higher level of detail and precision than any other data source within this field of study.

The articles draw on several different sources, but one is present in all the papers but one: The *Organizations in Hordaland* project. This unique project is the result of a broad-scoped collaborative effort involving local associates from 32 municipalities, the Hordaland County Administration and historians and political scientists at the University of Bergen stretching over 20 years. The 2000 wave was carried out under my

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<sup>1</sup> These comments relate to a specific type of knowledge, namely the one produced by the literature geared towards an academic

supervision and resulted, among other publications, in the book *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet* ("The New Organizational Society", with Per Selle, Fagbokforlaget, 2002). It was also a core component in the data material for the last Power and Democracy Survey in Norway (Østerud, Selle, & Engelstad, 2003), as well as the Norwegian section of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Sivesind, Lorentzen, Selle, & Wollebæk, 2002 ; Sivesind, Lorentzen, Selle, & Wollebæk, 2004 ).

The data give almost exhaustive knowledge of the associations that existed in 1980, 1990 and 2000.<sup>2</sup> The censuses in 1980 and 2000 were supplemented by mailed questionnaires, to which 60 per cent of associations responded at both times. Thus, we are able to address questions with these data that have previously been left to guesswork.

How generalizable are data from an (in terms of population) small area on the outskirts of Europe? This study lays no claim to universality; its findings are extremely unlikely to hold true for all local level associations in all countries. Context needs to be taken into consideration, a task which is addressed in the first article of this collection ("A Social Democratic Model of Civil Society?"). Some cross-national data on local associations have started to emerge, and in this article, some core findings from the Hordaland survey are compared with these projects. The comparisons reveal considerable differences, both in structure and type.

Does this make the data idiosyncratic and irrelevant for an international audience? I would argue to the contrary. First of all, the underlying development traits that drive organizational change in our material, such as individualization, globalization, changing gender roles and changes in our conception of time, are not unique to the Norwegian experience. There are strong reasons to expect similar trends to be discernible in other organizational societies as well, although their concrete manifestations may differ.

Second, one could question the generalizability of any study focusing on a limited area, be it in the US, in Ghana, or in Norway. However, as we are accustomed to reading journals dominated by Anglo-Saxon scholars, the general value of, say; a study of a small rural community in the US is usually taken for granted. A case study of a similar

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<sup>2</sup> A new wave is currently being planned and will launch in spring 2009.

community in a more peripheral country such as Norway (or Ghana) would need to be legitimized to a greater extent.

Third, the longitudinal character and the large N of the data material make it probably the best available source of information on local voluntary associations today. It enables us not only to describe how different organization types and structures ascend and decline, but also directly follow the fate of singular organizations at three observation points over a twenty-year period. This adds a dimension that cross-sectional surveys, no matter how extensive in geographical coverage, just cannot match.

Finally, the articles are supplemented by other data sources where applicable. The first article in this volume (on the social democratic model (chapter 2)) draws on comparisons with organizational surveys from other European cities and regions as well as national and cross-national individual level surveys. In order to show the analogy between generational differences at the micro- and meso-level, the organizational data are supplemented by information from the in-depth individual-level *Survey on Giving and Volunteering*, which was conducted by me and colleagues within the Johns Hopkins Comparative Sector Project in 1998 (Wollebæk, Selle, & Lorentzen, 1998). The empirical probe into the social capital paradigm is based on yet another large-scale data set, namely the European Social Survey, and supplemented by additional Norwegian individual survey data.

The *theoretical* objectives are to challenge established theories in the field and to develop new conceptual tools to understand organizations and their role in society in light of these new data. The theories fall into two broad categories, namely theories of *organizations*, primarily organizational ecology, and theories of *democracy and civil society*.

*Organizational theory.* One of the leading paradigms within organizational theory, organizational ecology, is often portrayed as applicable to all types of organizations without exceptions (Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2003). It is of particular relevance in this context, because it is the only main direction within organizational theory that deals with the same analytical unit as the present work, namely *populations* of organizations.

Organizational ecologists usually study populations of forprofit firms. While some studies of social movements and nonprofit organizations exist (e.g. Baum, 1990; Hannan & Freeman, 1987; Minkoff, 1993, 1997, 1999), these theories have almost never been



applied to local voluntary associations.<sup>3</sup> Wilderom & Miner (1991, p. 366) noted on the status of voluntary organizations in mainstream organizational theory that “(...) extra-bureaucratic forms [i.e. small voluntary organizations] are important; they occur frequently in society. Our theories may neglect them, but that is a deficiency of the theories”. Almost 20 years later, these deficiencies are still very much apparent.

The present work represents a first step in trying to improve the relevance and applicability of a core approach within organizational theory to local voluntary associations. It does so by testing the extent to which core hypotheses in the organizational literature hold up when applied to this type of organizational population.

It is clear from my articles “Survival and Growth in Voluntary Associations” and “Age, Size, and Change in Local Associations” that organizational ecology only partly succeed in making the conceptual “travel” from forprofit organization to organization in general. The thrust of the argument in both papers is that selection (i.e. disbanding of organizations that are out of sync with their environments) is a less automatic process in voluntary organizations than in forprofit entities. While forprofit companies will usually die if they fail to generate profit over time, voluntary organizations appear to be more tenacious. This has profound consequences for core hypotheses concerning the dynamics of organizational populations. More on this below.

*Civil society theory.* While empirically grounded, systematic knowledge of how local voluntary associations operate is scarce, there is no lack of grand rhetoric about they affect their surroundings. Political leaders such as Gordon Brown (e.g. 2004) and George W. Bush (e.g. 2006) frequently extol on how voluntary associations represent values such as compassion and love, and by virtue of this, represent something uniquely British or American.<sup>4</sup> In political initiatives such as New Labour’s “Third Way” for British society, local voluntary associations are seen as a panacea to a plethora of problems, from shortcomings in welfare service provision to lack of social cohesion, dwindling

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<sup>3</sup> The only exceptions that I am aware of (apart from the present study) are the above cited studies of Sandell (2001) and Selle and Øymyr (1992).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Brown in a 2004 speech: “Britain - because there is such a thing as society - is a community of communities. Tens of thousands of local neighbourhood civic associations, unions, charities, voluntary organisations. Each one unique and each one very special, not inward looking or exclusive. A Britain energised by a million centres of neighbourliness and compassion that together embody that very British idea - civic society. It is an idea that best defines a Britain that has always rejected absolutism and crude selfish individualism and always wanted to expand that space between state and markets.” In a slightly different language, George W. Bush expresses the same warm sentiments: “I think one of the most important initiatives of this administration is to -- is the faith-based and community initiatives, which recognizes what de Tocqueville saw in the 1830s. He’s a French guy who came over here. (...) And he recognized that the great strength of America was the capacity for individualists -- or the willingness of individualists to work together in what he called voluntary associations to make the community in which they live a better place. And he saw that in the 1930s (sic). It’s a -- what he saw is still the strength of our country, if you really think about it. You know, government can hand out money, but government cannot put a hope in a person’s heart. A lot of people miss one of the basics ingredients of life, and that is love. And love happens when somebody puts an arm around a person and says, what can I do to help you, brother or sister.”

civic engagement and imperfect governance (Fyfe, 2007; Jones & Bull, 2006). “Strengthening civil society” has become the catchphrase for addressing social ills in emerging democracies, the developing world and advanced democracies alike.<sup>5</sup> As Michael Edwards observes, “(...) voluntary associations are expected to organize social services, govern local communities, solve the unemployment problem, save the environment, and still have time left over to rebuild the moral life of nations” (M. Edwards, 2004, p. 19).

The question is what we really mean when we talk about “civil society”. The concept opens up for wildly different interpretations, which sometimes are in direct conflict with each other. Robert Putnam (1993b), regard social activity within nonpolitical organizations, such as bird watching clubs, choral societies or bowling leagues, as the hallmark of a vibrant civil society. By contrast, Cohen (1998) sees civil society as a critical public sphere where different values, interests and ideologies are debated. In this perspective, Putnam’s bird watchers represent a withdrawal from politics that represents a threat to democracy (Eliasoph, 2003). In yet another perspective, Etzioni (1993) and other communitarianists see closely-knit neighborhoods with strong social integration as an ideal for civil society.

The variety of different understandings of the civil society concept in the current research literature and public discourse renders statements such as “strengthening” or “weakening” of civil society meaningless. The present work argues that the solution to this confusion is neither to adopt an essentialist strategy, in which only one understanding of the concept is considered legitimate (see e.g. Cohen (1998)), nor a defeatist strategy, in which the concept is deemed analytically useless and abandoned altogether. A more fruitful avenue of thought is to accept the coexistence of several different, but valid interpretations of the civil society concept. By doing so, we add depth and dynamism to the discussion, by developing typologies and analyzing transitions between different models of civil society instead of dichotomous concepts of “strengthening” or “weakening”. The outline of such a typology, which captures the main schisms in the contemporary literature both on civil society and voluntary organizations, is presented below (pages 37-43) and act as a point of reference in several of the articles in this collection.

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<sup>5</sup> A Google search for the exact phrase “strengthen civil society” or “strengthening civil society” results in more than 200,000 hits (October 2008).

It will also be clear that transitions between different models of civil society have implications for organizational theory. The historical developments from conflict towards consensus, from public benefit towards member benefit orientation and from national movements towards purely local activities all affect the population dynamics of local voluntary associations. The previously dominant ideological, outward-reaching organizations are more tenacious than the currently expanding activity oriented segment of organizational society. If organizations are ascribed inherent value to a lesser extent than before and become simply vehicles for activity, the population dynamics of the voluntary sector is likely to become more aligned with what we find in the marketplace and thereby the population dynamics outlined by organizational ecology.

### *Defining Voluntary Associations*

Before moving on to the whats, hows, and so whats of organizational change, a brief clarification of the use of the core concept in the present work – local voluntary associations - is in order. The articles use the voluntary “association” concept interchangeably with voluntary “organization” and “group”. These concepts refer to entities that:

1. operate within a defined geographical area smaller than the county,
2. do not distribute profits to owners and are not part of the public sector,
3. transcend the family sphere,
4. are based on voluntary membership or other forms of voluntary affiliation,
5. are formalized to the extent that they have been given a name.

The first condition applies to *local* voluntary associations, which is the main focus of the six first articles. The final article uses survey data on participation in voluntary organizations in general (defined by point 2-5 above), thus including membership and volunteering within regional and national organizations.

This is a negative (i.e. by exclusion; not belonging to the public sector, market, or family) and inclusive definition. The definition includes organizations within a wide range of fields; sports, language associations, alcohol abstention groups, Christian

mission organizations (not the State Church), organizations for children and youth, social and humanitarian organizations, leisure activities, neighborhood and area associations and so on. We also include some organization types that are sometimes excluded from definitions of voluntary associations, such as unions and political parties.

For the most part, this definition largely corresponds with other widely used structural definitions of voluntary associations. Knoke & Wood (1981, p. 8) defines associations as “formally organized, named collectivities in which the majority of participants do not derive their livelihood from their activities in the group”. In contrast to Knoke & Wood, the present definition does not in principle preclude associations or institutions that make extensive use of paid labor; the “voluntary” in our definition refers to “free will”, not “without remuneration”. In practice, however, very few entities in our material make use of paid labor, and none of them have more employees than members, which would be a cause for exclusion in Knoke & Wood’s scheme.

Other definitions, however, choose to emphasize perceived inherent characteristics of voluntary organizations. For example, David Horton Smith (1993) defines voluntary associations as “(...) formal or informal groups who have joined together for a common purpose that is nonprofit in nature and that usually has some element of the ‘voluntary spirit’ or altruism”. Similarly, the predominant understanding of voluntary organizations within Norwegian public reports was for a long time “common purpose and non-economic (non-profit) organizations, which are often referred to as ideal organizations. Business, professional and social organizations, including trade unions, fall outside the committee’s mandate” (NOU, 1988:17).<sup>6</sup>

The present work follows Smith in his emphasis that both formal and relatively informal entities should be included. However, his emphasis on altruism seems as misplaced as do the government reports’ specific interest in “ideal” organizations.<sup>7</sup> It is a common fallacy that associations are inherently “good” or altruistic; Ku Klux Klan and Hell’s Angels are just a couple of examples to the contrary. The voluntary sector is composed of the same people as other spheres of society – in Norway, 87 per cent of us are affiliated with one or more organizations (Wollebæk & Selle, 2008). These people do not leave behind narrow-mindedness, selfishness and bigotry as soon as they enter the context of the voluntary association. The idea that organizations are by necessity

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<sup>6</sup> My translation.

<sup>7</sup> Strangely, this definition contradicts much of Smith’s other work on voluntary associations, which stresses that focusing only on public benefit organizations gives a skewed picture of the nonprofit sector, ignoring the considerable activity taking place in organizations in some way (though not economically) benefiting those affiliated (Smith, 1997).

altruistic or “spirited” in some way encourages static and ideological perspectives on civil society and prevents empirically informed, historical and contextual perspectives.

The idea that unions, political parties and similar organizations belong to a separate, “non-ideal” segment of the voluntary sector misrepresents both their historical and current role in society. Few organizational types are as “common purpose” and as concerned with ideals that transcend narrow private interests as are the majority of political parties. And professional organizations are not alone in working primarily for the interests of their members rather than the “common good”. As will be shown later on, this characterizes an increasing majority of organizations within the Norwegian voluntary sector, from interest organizations for different diseases and disabilities to soccer clubs and skateboarders.

Rather than enforcing a criterion of being “ideal”, “altruistic” or working for the common good, the present work acknowledges the distinction between organizations primarily working for the benefit of their members (be it economic, political, leisure or otherwise) and those working for the benefit of society at large. This is one of the two dimensions in the classification scheme of voluntary organizations and visions of civil society that will be introduced below.

### *The “What”, “How” and “So What” of Organizational Change*

The articles in this collection raise three questions about organizational change. First, *what* has changed? Second, *how* do organizations and organizational populations change? And, third, *so what*?

The “what” of organizational change is addressed in the first two papers of this dissertation. The “how” is represented by three papers analyzing the preconditions of survival, growth and adaptation in voluntary associations and local organizational societies. The “so what” is represented by two papers addressing the implications of the changes we have observed for civil society, democracy and democratic theory.

A core theme in the present work focuses on how societal change affects voluntary associations and how this relationship may be observed. Some external changes (e.g. a war or an economic crisis) affect all individuals regardless of age, and influence their individual motivations, capacities and value orientations. Such processes are commonly referred to as period effects (e.g. Claggett, 1981; Mason, Winsborough,

Mason, & Poole, 1973). Period effects may also occur at the organizational level, e.g. in the form of new legislation which forces all organizations to adapt.

However, changes in the external environment are most directly reflected among newly founded organizations and young individuals. Such effects are commonly labeled cohort (or generational) effects, i.e. the effect of a generation entering a population with distinctive values on a variable which thereafter persists (Claggett, 1981; Mason et al., 1973). The same properties are carried on throughout the life cycle and over time change the overall distribution on the variable in the population as a whole. However, not all correlations between age and social phenomena represent cohort effects. They may be life cycle effects, which simply reflect properties characteristic of a stage in a development, e.g. childhood, youth or old age. In working with cross-sectional data, it is impossible to fully disentangle cohort and life cycle effects.

Theories of both individuals and organizations stress the importance of cohort effects. Socialization theory argues that an individual's fundamental value orientations are formed during childhood and adolescence and can remain fairly stable throughout the entire life course (Hanks, 1981; Inglehart, 1990). According to organizational ecology, an organization's fundamental characteristics change very little after the time of birth (Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Stinchcombe, 1965a).<sup>8</sup> This entails that organizations reflect their environment at birth, but that the match decreases over time. This increasing mismatch may lead to one of three outcomes: survival with change (a rare occurrence in the view of organizational ecology), disbanding or even survival without change for quite some time. An organization that changes or disbands contributes to change in organizational society and subsequently in society as a whole (assuming that organizations matter). An organization that survives without change contributes to inertia in organizational society as a whole.

Since individuals and organizations resist fundamental change, the contents of change are most clearly crystallized in what is happening in the margins of organizational society - what enters and what exits. On the individual level, this means young versus older people, on the organizational level new associations versus associations that die out. This is a central premise in the article "Generations and Organizational Change" in this collection.

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<sup>8</sup> This postulation is critically assessed in the paper "Age, Size, and Change in Grassroots Associations", which shows that older voluntary associations attempt fundamental change more frequently than organizational ecology assumes.

Such an approach provides a more dynamic image than the study of small offsets in a totality, where the absence of substantial changes may be misinterpreted as stability. For example, the present work shows that both the number of organizational affiliations in the Norwegian populations has been stable since 1980. However, when focusing on the margins, it becomes clear that the field is not primarily characterized by stability. The average number of memberships among 16-24 year olds dropped by 40 per cent from 1980 to 2004, while the same figure rose by 15 per cent among pensioners. The apparent stability is in this case the product of two countervailing processes, namely increasing mismatch between organizations and young people and increased participation among pensioners. If this proves to be generational phenomenon and persists, a dramatic decline in membership figures is imminent. Similarly, the statement that the number of associations has been stable in the Norwegian voluntary sector since 1980 also conceals the fact that the new generation of organizations differs considerably from those that have disappeared.

The downside of this argument is that we in many cases (but not all) only can offer qualified speculation on whether the variations we observe are life cycle or cohort effects. However, if similar trends surface on both the organizational and individual levels simultaneously, it is more likely that they express fundamental changes in surroundings which make up something more than just fleeting trends.

### *What? The Contents of Organizational Change*

The opening two articles comprise the analysis of the substance – the “what” - of organizational change. The purpose of this section is threefold: First, it places the Norwegian case into context by comparing with data from other Nordic and European countries. Second, they present the actual changes that have taken place in the Norwegian voluntary sector since 1980, with special emphasis on the local level. Third, they present the theoretical foundations for conceptualizing and assessing the consequences of change, by means of a typology of civil society models and the role of voluntary organizations. This typology is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

The opening article, “A Social Democratic Model of Civil Society” (Wollebæk & Selle, 2008), is comparative both in space and time. The international comparison of a “snapshot” of the main characteristics of the Norwegian organizational society exposes

traits that are commonly, but somewhat misleadingly associated with a social democratic model. With regard to volume, the Norwegian voluntary sector is, as is the case in other Nordic countries, very large in terms of members, volunteers and number of groups. With regard to type, “expressive” organizations, i.e. organizations that do not take directly part in the production of welfare services (L. M. Salamon & Anheier, 1998), comprise the bulk of both members and volunteers. With regard to structure, most organizations link the local and national levels by means of a geographical hierarchy and internal democratic institutions. The vast majority of active participants and volunteers are affiliated with the organizations as members, a role which ensures ownership of and democratic rights in the organization, but not all members are active or volunteer.

All of these traits can be traced back to the strong position that mass social movements – the labour, farmers’, language, mission, alcohol abstention and sports movements to name the most important - held in Scandinavia, since their emergence coinciding with and contributing to the establishment of mass suffrage and democracy in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these movements are still dominant actors in the Norwegian organizational society. Almost all organizations founded in the following century copied their organizational model and opted for a local-national structure with democratic decision-making procedures and members as owners of the organization. Thus, their importance for understanding the size, the type and the volume of the voluntary sectors of the Nordic countries cannot be overestimated. Hence the inappropriateness of the “social democratic” tag on this model; its defining traits emerged long before the first Labour party government and the gradual implementation of a comprehensive welfare state. At least partly, it was the other way around; the encompassing nature of the welfare state was a product of strong voluntary organizations pushing for increased state involvement in the delivery of welfare services (Selle & Berven, 2001).

The intranational comparison shows how organizational life has evolved over the past couple of decades. In a cross-national perspective, this process is best described as one of convergence; the development traits in this period point in the direction of the Norwegian model being brought more into alignment with what we find elsewhere in Europe.

With regard to volume, the trend is *stagnation with early signs of decline*. On the organizational level, the number of associations has been relatively stable over the past



couple of decades, following an extensive growth from the Second World War until 1980. But some signs of decline are apparent: The voluntary sector is graying as young people increasingly turn their backs on traditional organizational participation. Local associations for children and youth are among the organization types with the sharpest decline during the 1990s (Wollebæk & Selle, 2003a), but this decline now seems to be halted (Wollebæk, 2006). As previously noted, young people join organizations much less frequently today than in 1980, while the reverse is true among pensioners (Wollebæk & Selle, 2008). However, at the same time as associations and members disappear, *volunteering* (i.e. unpaid work for an organization that can be carried out with or without membership) seems to be on the rise, even among youths. This also signifies a consequential *structural* change (see below).

With regard to type, the main developments are *the rise of consensus and member oriented activities and the decline of social movements*. There are few examples of growing organizations that have a program for societal change that is not based on group interests. At the same time, organizations that are either member (as opposed to society) oriented or consensus (as opposed to conflict) oriented are thriving. The same tendency is manifest in other Nordic states as well (Ibsen, 2006; Jeppsson-Grassman & Svedberg, 1999; Siisiäinen, 2003; Vogel & Statistiska centralbyrån, 2003; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a).

With regard to structure, the membership based hierarchical-democratic model is being challenged by a *two-part organizational society*. New local initiatives are more often than not independent of national causes and the American style “volunteer” is increasingly replacing the Nordic “member” as the most common role taken on by individuals within organizations. Historically, participation outside the membership institution has been uncommon in the Norwegian context. This change implies an increased emphasis on the service-function of voluntary organizations and less focus on its democratic role, as well as weaker and more time-limited ties between participant and organization.

These recent changes are embellished on in the second article, “Generations and Organizational Change” (Wollebæk, 2001; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003a). The article argues that there exists an analogy between the characteristics of young organizations and young individuals. Young associations and individuals both express strong activity orientation, more specialized interests, less long-term commitment and a weak or

contained value basis for the engagement. The changes at the organizational level influence the experiences that young people today will do as adults, experiences which are bound to be very different from those of their grandparents and parents. At the same time, changing individual orientations force organizations to adapt. The two levels are mutually reinforcing; organizational change affects the attitudes of those taking part, and vice versa.

The article finds analogous developments at the individual and organizational levels, which increase the likelihood that they reflect similar, fundamental societal changes. Furthermore, similar changes both in structure and content have been observed in many countries simultaneously (Jeppsson-Grassman & Svedberg, 1999; Siisiäinen, 2003; Skocpol, 2003; Torpe & Ferrer-Fons, 2007; Wollebæk, Siisiäinen, & Ibsen, forthcoming). It seems reasonable to associate these developments with cross-national trends, specifically what Tranvik and Selle (2007) labels *neo-liberal globalization*. “Neo-liberal” expresses the direction of the ideological shift of the past decades, and “globalization” emphasizes that the development is not nation-specific, although it varies how different nations adapt. In sum, these changes cause processes of structural convergence which entail that national differences become less prevalent.

In this presentation, I emphasize five core developments that I believe can be directly observed as organizational change within the Norwegian voluntary sector since 1980. These are individualization, neo-liberalism, changing gender roles, technological changes and glocalization. They are all global in scope. While I concur with Tranvik and Selle’s assertion that neo-liberalism is a dominant ideology behind many of the changes we observe, the latter three processes (changing gender roles, technological changes and glocalization) are only indirectly related to neo-liberalism, but nonetheless highly consequential for the recent developments in the sector.

*Individualization* refers to a process in which hierarchical values are delegitimized and individuals are more loosely and less automatically connected to social communities. As grid-group theory (Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1999) argues, individualization includes the rejection of both hierarchical and collective values, which are two quite different things. While younger cohorts today are clearly more critical towards authorities than their predecessors, they are also much more skeptical towards broad-ranging social solidarities.

This is a point that one influential theory of cultural change over the past decades, postmaterialism, seems to miss (Inglehart, 1990). Inglehart's rather optimistic argument is that the satisfaction of material needs causes individuals to become less obsessed with earthly possessions and more concerned with ideals such as a clean environment, equality and democracy. But it does not follow automatically from the rejection of traditional authority, which is well documented by Inglehart, that materialist values are also discredited. In fact, according to Hellevik (1996), who has studied changing value patterns in the Norwegian population over two decades, the term "supermaterialists" better describes the younger cohorts than "postmaterialists".

Similarly, Tranvik and Selle (2005) argue that the increased affluence coupled with equal distribution of wealth has made Norway into a nation of "individualized egalitarians". Individualist egalitarians think that since most people are well off, associational participation should be individually rewarding rather than a means of achieving collective ends. These citizens reject large and bureaucratic organizations (too slow), long-term commitments (too demanding), administrative obligations (too boring), change oriented ideology (too political) and broad-ranging social solidarities (too collectivistic) (Tranvik & Selle, 2005, p. 859)

The articles in this volume show that increasing affluence and the subsequent rise of "individualist egalitarianism" is making its mark on organizational life in Norway. The increasing turnover of organizations and the decreasing attachment towards specific organizations (see chapter 3) expressed by young members and volunteers are indicative of this process. It is also reflected in the decline in "active membership" among young people over the past decade, while "volunteering", a looser and often more time limited form of attachment, is on the rise (chapter 2). However, the most obvious expression of individualization in the Norwegian voluntary sector is the rise of organizations that in some way or other cater to the interests of those affiliated, and the uniform decline of organizations that try to change society without advocating group interests (chapters 2 and 7). The Norwegian population's preparedness to enter into collectivities that are not individually rewarding has clearly waned during the period under study.

If anything has replaced the belief in collectivities and hierarchies, it is the faith in the market and its magical capabilities in improving output and productivity. The modes of behavior within the market are increasingly becoming the ideal within the public and

the voluntary sector alike. Within the public sector, *neo-liberal* ideas have gained influence. The main ideas within this area can be subsumed under the heading of New Public Management (NPM). This is a loose set of reform tools that aim at improving public sector efficiency by introducing models from market organizations.

NPM usually emphasizes factors such as increased competition, explicit standards of performance and private sector management techniques (Christensen & Lægneid, 2001). Individuals are seen more as consumers responding to public services than as citizens undertaking collective action to mold public policy (Tranvik & Selle, 2005).

This encourages the formation of institutions that provide feedback from citizen-consumers to the municipal authorities, in particular its administrative level. Norwegian examples of such organizations are youth councils, councils for the elderly and neighborhood groups which are all frequently created at the initiative of the municipality. Furthermore, since local welfare policies are subject to increasing national regulation and control and associations increasingly exist only locally without ties to the national level, the political role of voluntary associations is increasingly reduced to questions of strictly local significance. The majority of the communication between organizations and the municipality now revolve around very local and practical issues, such as community development, building and zoning and physical infrastructure (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a).

The shift from citizen to consumer represents an attenuated form of democracy; when consumers begin to act, the fundamental decisions have already been made (Box, Marshall, Reed, & Reed, 2001). Organizational society seems to be increasingly responding to municipal action, and decreasingly taking action on core political areas. Furthermore, the development from integrated hierarchy towards a two-part organizational society weakens the institutional ties between the citizen and the arena at which the most important political decisions are arguably still being made – the state. The decoupling of the national and local levels is first and foremost brought about by the weakening of change oriented organizations. The hierarchical model was political in origin, and designed to channel the demands of the citizenry into the political arena. When the purposes are increasingly to provide leisure activities or to communicate the practical needs of the local community to the local administration, there is less need for national federations.

Changes in gender roles represent one of the most powerful changes in social and cultural patterns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Blom, 1979). The unraveling of what we may label *complementary gender roles* has had a particularly strong and direct effect on Norwegian associational life, which was firmly based on male-female division of labor well into the post-war period. Complementary gender roles mean that the abilities of males and females were different in kind - some fields belonged to the female sphere and others to the male - but, arguably, not in importance (Blom 1979, Selle and Berven 2001). Women dominated within missionary activities, alcohol abstention organizations, social work, welfare and education while economic organizations, political activities, and recreational activities, were within the male realm. This division was reinforced during the first two decades after the Second World War, which was the most extensive growth period for the predominantly female welfare oriented organizations (Selle & Berven, 2001). After 1960, however, as women and men are increasingly taking part in all spheres of society on equal terms, mono-gendered organizations, particularly those that are purely female, have become increasingly at odds with the dominant values in their environment.

I have documented the considerable effect of the decline of complementary gender roles in a separate article not included in this collection (Wollebæk & Selle, 2004). Here, we show that purely female associations represented one third of all organizational deaths between 1980 and 2000, but only one tenth of newly founded organizations. Most new associations in the period are predominantly male at birth, while women eventually enter the realms of men (e.g. sports, leisure, politics and unions) and contribute to expansion within these fields. This is consequential since the decisive characteristics of an organization is arguably determined at its time of birth (Stinchcombe, 1965a). Furthermore, males are still overrepresented in leading positions of organizations (Wollebæk & Selle, 2004). Consequently, males are still and arguably to an increasing extent defining the direction which organizational society is taking.

The basic layout of the Norwegian civil society model is a product of sparsely populated areas, distances and extensive obstacles to communication. One of the main functions of the hierarchical model was to make the voice of peripheral areas heard in spite of these obstacles. The capital Oslo seemed distant both in a cultural and a geographical sense, and the institutional tie from member, via local chapter to national organization helped reduce this distance.

With improved infrastructure in local communities and the introduction of new and/or improved *communication technology*, these structures are no longer a structural necessity. Local organizations can cover a larger area, and there are no obstacles hindering them from addressing the central government on its own without going through a national federation.<sup>9</sup> That they only occasionally do so is another story; the point is that national organizations are not anymore perceived by citizens as the prerequisite intermediary between citizen and government that they used to be.

Related to this, the increased amount of information available and the speed at which this information can be accessed also influences our conception of time. Voluntary organizations, especially those with intricate structures stretching beyond the local community and tedious processes of decision-making, appear extremely inert in comparison with Internet petitions or local citizen initiatives. Changing conception of time also alters our propensity to enter long-term commitment to organizations – we are more likely to drift from one interest to another.

The shortening of time horizons is obviously also fueled by the global prevalence of neo-liberal economics and the weight it attaches to being flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances (Tranvik & Selle, 2007). Thus, we are back at the starting point of this discussion, the concept of neo-liberal globalization. It should be noted, however, that globalization does not necessarily mean a cognitive and organizational reorientation towards the international level. On the contrary, much of the globalization literature make the *opposite* argument, namely that we are in the midst of a *glocalization* process, which also entails revitalization of local identities and particularities (Beck, 2000; Robertson, 1995). For example, Beck (2000, p. 169) observes that “(...) various idylls – grandma’s apple cake, forget-me-nots and communitarianism – are experiencing a boom”. Similar observations have been made in the Norwegian case (Frønes & Brusdal, 2000).

It is perhaps a paradox that globalization processes are expressed through a vitalization of activities that are purely local. But this could be what we are witnessing;

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<sup>9</sup> I do not mean to imply that the weakening of the hierarchical model is caused only by technological innovations; as this model was designed to further political and ideological causes, the decline of organizations with political and ideological orientation is probably a much more pertinent explanation. However, technological developments have contributed to exposing the irrelevance and inertness of such structures for organizations that are primarily local and/or activity oriented. Until the 1960s, even non-political, local activities joined national federations almost without exception, because this was conceived as the only way to organize.

the present work documents a tremendous growth in neighborhood associations and in associations promoting local artifacts, history and culture. In most cases, these associations are without ties to national organizations. In a world in which many of the most serious problems are so complex and large-scale that even the nation state becomes ineffectual, it is perhaps comforting to spend one's energy on micro-scale problems that local institutions can easily fix or engage in activities that give a sense of permanency.

The above discussion is quite general and broad literatures are admittedly dealt with in a rather cursory manner in the limited format of this presentation.<sup>10</sup> These are all large debates with diverging opinions and contested concepts, and there are obviously many ways in which the organizational development could be interpreted within these frameworks. I believe, however, that two general points can safely be made: First, the general development, in organizational life and society at large alike, is characterized by the flattening of hierarchies, the rise of individual values over collective ones and the decline of encompassing ideologies. Second, it is likely that these changes are interrelated. The changes within organizational activity during the period under study are too profound to have happened by coincidence; in all probability they reflect deep-seated social and ideological change.

### *How? The Dynamics of Change*

The analytical unit in the first two articles is organizational society as a whole. In order to progress from the “what” to the “how” of organizational change, however, we need to extricate the constituents of this unit. This task is undertaken in the second section of the present work, which addresses the dynamics of change in populations of local associations.

The third paper of this collection (and the first paper of the “how” section) “A Configurational Approach to Change in Populations of Rural Associations”, delves into variations between organizational communities at the municipal level. Article four, “Survival in Local Voluntary Associations” and five, “Age, Size, and Change in Grassroots Associations” analyze differences between singular organizations. The fourth paper deals with preconditions of organizational survival, while the fifth and final paper in this

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<sup>10</sup> They are discussed in more detail in Wollebæk and Selle (2002a).

section focuses on the adaptation rather than turnover component of organizational change and analyzes the degree to which organizations with different characteristics are able to adapt to their environments.

The third paper of this collection, “A Configurational Approach to Change in Populations of Rural Associations” shows that we cannot speak of a uniform development within organizational society during the period under study. The intercommunity variations are enormous. Some communities have experienced substantial growth in their association populations, while the number of groups has declined in many other municipalities. However, the communities vary considerably on another dimension as well: while the number of organizational deaths amounted to one third of the associations that had survived between 1980 and 2000 in some communities, the corresponding proportion was four out of five in other municipalities. Some communities have experienced great continuity in organizational life. Elsewhere it has been much more volatile.

How can we account for these differences? The analyses show that demographic and sociocultural factors greatly influence the dynamics of organizational populations. Growth occurred in relatively secular communities with expanding populations, centralization in polycephalous (multi-centered) municipalities and a substantial increase in cultural spending.

High volatility was found in two radically different situations: First, the municipalities most affected by *metropolitan sprawl*, characterized by urban proximity and the influx of thousands of new inhabitants who spend their workdays in the city. The eight communities fitting this description underwent dramatic changes during the period under study – as the urban population increased and local communication improved, they went from being relatively rural areas to something resembling suburbs to the city of Bergen. As the population of these municipalities has changed fundamentally both in size and composition, the old organizational society in these municipalities has also been replaced by a new one. The second pathway to organizational volatility was *absence* of social change. The most culturally stagnant, peripheral municipalities in rural Hordaland also displayed extensive organizational disbanding.

The findings underline the importance of taking into account community characteristics when studying organizational populations. Crucially, furthermore, they



show that there are different ways of growing and different ways of dying; growth and volatility should be seen as two separate dimensions. We find examples of organizational communities that grow under conditions of high volatility (dynamic organizational societies), that shrink under high volatility (stagnation), that grow under stable conditions (expansion), and shrink in spite of low death risks (erosion).

*Table 1-1: Dynamics of Organizational Populations*

	<i>Stability</i>	<i>Volatility</i>
<i>Growth</i>	Expanding	Dynamic
<i>Decline</i>	Eroding	Deteriorating

The same logic applies to singular organizations. In a paper presented at the annual ARNOVA conference (with Per Selle), I show that the most effective strategies in order to ensure survival and stability in some cases inhibit growth and vice versa (Wollebæk & Selle, 2006). Associations that specialized on a narrow range of activities and were independent of national organizations were less likely to survive than the average group, but they were also more likely to increase their numbers of members if they did survive. Thus, specialization and independence are “make or break” factors characteristic of dynamic organizational populations – the risk of failure is high, but if premature disbanding is avoided, the growth potential is huge. By contrast, broad activity scope and affiliation with a “larger cause” in the form of a national organization may improve an organization’s odds of survival, but are negatively associated with membership growth. A few factors are positively related to both stability and growth, such as male leadership, a secular profile, economic self sufficiency and a centralized structure with weak demands of individual participation (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a).

The factors promoting dynamism and expansion among associations in many ways characterize the “new” organizational society; in varying combinations and in very broad terms they define the associations founded after 1980. As mentioned above, these are often specialized and independent of national federations (dynamic factors), or male dominated, secular in purpose and have weak participation cultures (expansive factors). By contrast, the opposite characteristics (broad, hierarchical, predominantly female,

religious, strong participation culture), which are related to erosion and decline, describe a larger proportion of the traditional voluntary organizations formed before 1960. The analogy to the community level is clear: the most traditional and unchanging local communities are eroding, while the most modern areas which have undergone substantial change due to the influx of new suburbanites are in most cases dynamic, i.e. growing in spite of volatility.

This implies that the dynamic and volatile segment of organizational society is growing, a fact which is apparent from the increasing turnover rate in the association population as a whole. Factors that contribute to the tenacity of voluntary associations, such as ideology, hierarchy and broad orientation, seem to have compatibility issues with individualized egalitarianism, neo-liberalism and shortened attention spans (see above).

This connects the dots between the “what” and the “how” of organizational change – the substance of organizational change observed in the first section of the present work interferes with the population dynamics studied in the second section. In fact, this observation challenges the main argument in the two papers included in the present work, “Survival in Local Voluntary Associations” (forthcoming in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*) and “Age, Size, and Change in Local Associations”.

In these articles, I strongly emphasize the tenacity of voluntary associations as a feature that clearly sets them apart from forprofit firms. If a firm experiences long-term decline and is turning out losses instead of profits, the inevitable thing to do is to shut it down. This is a tacit assumption in organizational ecology’s account of how organizational populations evolve. A voluntary association will, according to my argument, be less willing to give up even in the face of long-term decline. The reasons for this are two-fold: First, compared to a firm, maintaining a local voluntary association requires very little resources. It can subsist on limited resources for quite some time even in the face of serious decline, as most such groups do not employ any people or depend on expensive equipment. Second, in combination with the low cost of continued activity, the loyalty to the cause, emotional attachments, friendships that have been established etc. prevent organizational disbanding even in situations in which organizations are surpassed and outcompeted by their counterparts.

The implication of this is that organizational ecology’s account of the dynamics of organizational populations does not fit voluntary associations on all counts. With regard

to survival, organizational ecology states that high organizational density (i.e. a large number of organizations competing for the same resources) should elevate an organization's death risk because of detrimental effects of competition (Hannan & Freeman, 1988; Anthony J. Nownes & Daniel Lipinski, 2005). However, this is not the case among voluntary associations (competition does, however, curb membership growth (Wollebæk & Selle, 2006)). With regard to change, it should be extremely difficult to undertake fundamental change in an old and established organization (Amburgey, Kelly, & Barnett, 1993; Dobrev, Kim, & Carroll, 2003; Halliday, Powell, & Granfors, 1993; Kelly & Amburgey, 1991; Miller & Chen, 1994; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). But in our material, old organizations change more often than young groups. Specifically, the organizations most likely to undergo core change are the *pioneers* – the oldest organizations within fields with many new entrants. These organizations are put under pressure by new competitors, but rather than folding, they undergo fundamental change in an attempt to adjust to the new climate. Thus, the thrust of the argument of the two papers is that voluntary associations are different from market organizations. As long as organizational ecology does not incorporate this difference, it is not really organizational ecology, but forprofit organizational ecology.

However, the consequence of declining organizational attachments, specialization, deideologization and decline of hierarchical models is that voluntary associations become *less* different from market actors. While the argument of low costs of continued existence still holds, the emotional attachment and the loyalty members feel towards the organizations are almost certainly reduced within a more volatile organizational society. In a situation in which only the activity itself, not the institution organizing the activity (the voluntary association) is attributed inherent value, the rational thing to do is to disband if the activity fails.

Thus, in a “snapshot” perspective of current voluntary associations, it is in my view correct to view these associations as more tenacious than forprofit firms. However, I hypothesize that the declining ties between organizations and individuals, the deideologization that is taking place within the voluntary sector and the decline of the hierarchical model is going to bring the population dynamics of voluntary associations more into alignment with what we find in the forprofit sector.

Thus, the population dynamics of voluntary associations cannot be accounted for by any grand theory which is valid for all types of organizations without exceptions

(Hannan et al., 2003). The mechanisms of change, survival and death in the Norwegian voluntary sector anno 2000 are very different from the dynamics pre 1960, and will in all likelihood differ sharply from the dynamics of the sector in 2040. As the present work shows, the population dynamics can be dramatically different even in relatively similar, neighbouring municipalities. The explanatory power of organizational ecology could be enhanced if the approach moved one step down Sartori's (1970) ladder of abstraction and turned towards midrange theories that incorporate differences between types of organizations and variations across time and space

### *So what? Theoretical and Practical Consequences*

The first two papers of this collection document the extensive changes that have taken place within Norwegian local voluntary associations in the period under study. The following three articles investigate how these changes have affected the dynamics of the sector. The question remains how we interpret what we have observed. Are we witnessing a less potent civil society or a civil society of impressive and possibly increasing vitality?

Strange as it seems, both statements are essentially correct, depending on how civil society is defined. "Civil society" has been one of the most contested concepts in the social science literature over the past decades. A lot of energy has gone into fruitless debates between advocates of different perspectives, each claiming to "own" the right interpretation. An alternative approach is to leave essentialism to one side, embrace intellectual pluralism and accept the fact that several legitimate interpretations of the concept coexist. There is no court of arbitration within social science that can ever decide which definitions represent "real" civil society. What we can do, however, is to strive for conceptual precision and clarity.

The typology of visions of civil society and the role of voluntary organizations, on which much of the present work (Table 1-2) rests, is an attempt to contribute to this. The four perspectives represented in the typology represent distinct and well-developed traditions in research on civil society and voluntary associations, each with deep roots in the history of sociological enquiry.

Table 1-2: Conceptions of Civil Society and the Role of Voluntary Organizations

	Member benefit	Public benefit
Conflict orientation	<p>(I) Civil society as competition between interests.</p> <p>Interest organizations</p> <p>Voluntary organizations mediate and represent interests (pluralism, corporatism)</p> <p>Examples: Unions, advocacy groups.</p>	<p>(II) Civil society as political sphere and ideological battleground.</p> <p>Critical organizations</p> <p>Voluntary organizations participate actively in the public and political sphere (social movement literature, Skocpol’s historical associationalism, public sphere theory)</p> <p>Examples: ‘Old’ and ‘new’ social movements, political parties</p>
Consensus orientation	<p>(III) Civil society as arena for socialization.</p> <p>Service organizations</p> <p>Voluntary organizations socialize members into values beneficial to social integration and democracy (Putnam’s social capital)</p> <p>Examples: Culture and leisure groups, cooperatives.</p>	<p>(IV) Civil society as locally based communities.</p> <p>Communitarian organizations</p> <p>Voluntary organizations build cohesive communities (communitarianism)</p> <p>Examples: Community associations, cultural heritage associations, social and humanitarian organizations (e.g. Red Cross).</p>

The two dimensions of the typology reflect the two most important schisms in the literature both on civil society and voluntary associations. On the horizontal axis, we distinguish between member and public benefit approaches (see also Smith, 1993). The former perspective focuses on organizations as vehicles for individual fulfilment and development, while the latter sees organizations are primarily of value as collectivities benefiting society at large. This distinction relates back to one of the most basic dichotomies in sociology, namely the schism between methodological individualism and collectivism (Collins, 1994).

The vertical axis distinguishes between perspectives that are conflict and consensus oriented. The former perspective sees the politicized elements of voluntary organizations and civil society as natural, useful and something to be encouraged, while the latter see conflict as disruptive and destructive (M. Edwards, 2004). These differences fall on different sides of another central dichotomy in sociology, namely between the conflict tradition of Marxist and Weberian approaches on the one hand and the Durkheimian harmony model on the other (Collins, 1994; Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1990).

Each cell of the typology is explained in the first and sixth paper of this collection, and we will not reiterate all the points in this introductory chapter.<sup>11</sup> In brief terms, our type (I) represents conflict and member oriented perspectives. In the literature on voluntary organizations, this captures the essence of pluralism and (neo-)corporatism - in many ways the classical approaches to the role of organizations in democracy within political science. In pluralism, continuously competing interest organizations genuinely express the interests of the population and act as intermediary institutions between organizational members and the political system (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). At the same time, conflicts are moderated by multiple, overlapping organizational memberships (Dahl, 1961; Ricci, 1971; Rokkan, 1967; Truman, 1951). Neo-corporatism differs from pluralism primarily in how it views the state, as a counterpart and active agent rather than a neutral arena, as is the case in pluralism (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). Both perspectives focus mainly on organizations within economic life. Organizations which do not directly represent individual interests but nonetheless play important political roles, such as social movements or humanitarian organizations, are not taken seriously as power brokers and are often excluded from works in this vein (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Selle, 1999).

Type III in Table 1-2 represents consensus and member oriented perspectives on voluntary associations. In this view, associations are the gene carriers of the good society by virtue of their capabilities for instilling values and beliefs that benefit civil society and democracy in the population. The focus is on indirect effects; democracy, social integration, and a host of other beneficial outcomes, arise as by-products of the

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<sup>11</sup> See the first and sixth paper in the present work (Wollebæk, 2008; Wollebæk & Selle, 2008) as well as Wollebæk & Selle (2002a) for a more extensive discussion of the typology. This typology is related to Edwards' (2004) account of three types of civil society. Type III in Table 1-2 largely corresponds to the first type in Edwards' scheme, civil society as associational life. Edwards' second type, "civil society as the good society" is represented by type IV in the table. Edwards' label "civil society as public sphere" corresponds with type II in Table 1-2. Type I in the table, civil society as competition between interests, is not discussed by Edwards.

values created in associational activity. Since the focus is on activity, what the associations do is of secondary importance. In the contemporary literature, this perspective is first and foremost advocated by Robert Putnam (1993b; 2000) and his followers in the social capital tradition, who see the creation of social trust, networks and civic engagement within voluntary associations as their primary contribution to democracy. It is also present in the view that organizations function as “schools in democracy” regardless of whether their purpose is manifestly political or not (Almond & Verba, 1963).<sup>12</sup>

Type IV in the table represents a normative ideal of a society characterized by service to society rather than self-interest. It is first and foremost represented by communitarianism (type IV in the table) (Bellah, Madsen, & Sullivan, 1985; Etzioni, 1993). The main role of organizations is to build cohesive local communities, by solving social problems and instil in citizens a sense of belonging. Voluntary organizations which work not only for the benefit of members, but also take responsibility for the good of society at large are necessary in order to achieve these aims. The perspective on civil society, and the role of voluntary organizations, is therefore more characterized by harmony than conflict.

Our type II consists of several perspectives which share pluralism’s emphasis on conflict, but argue that a vital civil society cannot only consist of conflict between individual interests. This includes, firstly, the literature on social movements and mass membership organizations (Della Porta & Diani, 2005; Skocpol, 2003). Institutional ties from the individual into the political system are decisive if organizations are to express and institutionalize value pluralism in society and create integration out of conflict, and nonpolitical, purely local initiatives are insufficient in order to fill this role (Skocpol, 1999a, 2003; Skocpol et al., 2000). Secondly, deliberative democracy and public sphere theory (Cohen & Arato, 1992) sees civil society as an arena for argument, deliberation, association and collaboration. Bringing out different, conflicting viewpoints is of crucial importance to democracy. The aim is, however, to develop a common or public interest out of conflicting views.<sup>13</sup> All these perspectives see civil society as a political sphere in itself, characterized by the conflicts and disagreements that are found in any society. The organizations of greatest value in this scheme are what we have labeled *critical*

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<sup>12</sup> This perspective is frequently found in Norwegian reports on voluntary associations, most recently the report on youth and organizational activity (NOU, 2006:13).

<sup>13</sup> This is a crucial difference to pluralism, which sees the institutionalization of conflict as a positive element of the political system (given equality in representation and an open system).

*organizations*, meaning organizations that try to influence society - be it in a radical or conservative direction without directly advocating group interests.

The first article of the present collection shows that we can trace the history of Norwegian voluntary associations as a movement within this typology. The historical development is graphically depicted in Figure 1-2, which shows the orientation of the associations on the two dimensions, by their year of founding. The placement of organizations within the typology is based on their responses to four ten-point scales (two items for each dimension) that are added up to an index.<sup>14</sup>

The line starts in the upper right quadrant, and gradually moves down the opposite diagonal of the figure towards the bottom left corner, which better describes the current point of gravitation in the voluntary sector. In other words, associational life has changed from being a political sphere towards an arena for socialization, self-fulfilment and leisure interests. There is a minor shift in the communitarian direction during the 1980's and 1990's due to the proliferation of cultural heritage and area associations in this period.

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<sup>14</sup> Individual-collective orientation is measured by relative agreement/disagreement with the following statements: (1) Most of the organization's activities are open to members only vs. most of the organization's activities are open to all. (2) The organization works primarily for the benefit of its members vs. the organization works primarily for the benefit of the local community. Agreement with the latter alternatives is interpreted as collective orientation. Conflict-consensus orientation is operationalized by the two statements: (1) It is not important for us to convince others of our values vs. it is very important to us to convince others of our values. (2) We are not in opposition to dominant attitudes in society vs. we are in opposition to dominant attitudes in society. Agreement with the latter alternatives is interpreted as conflict orientation.



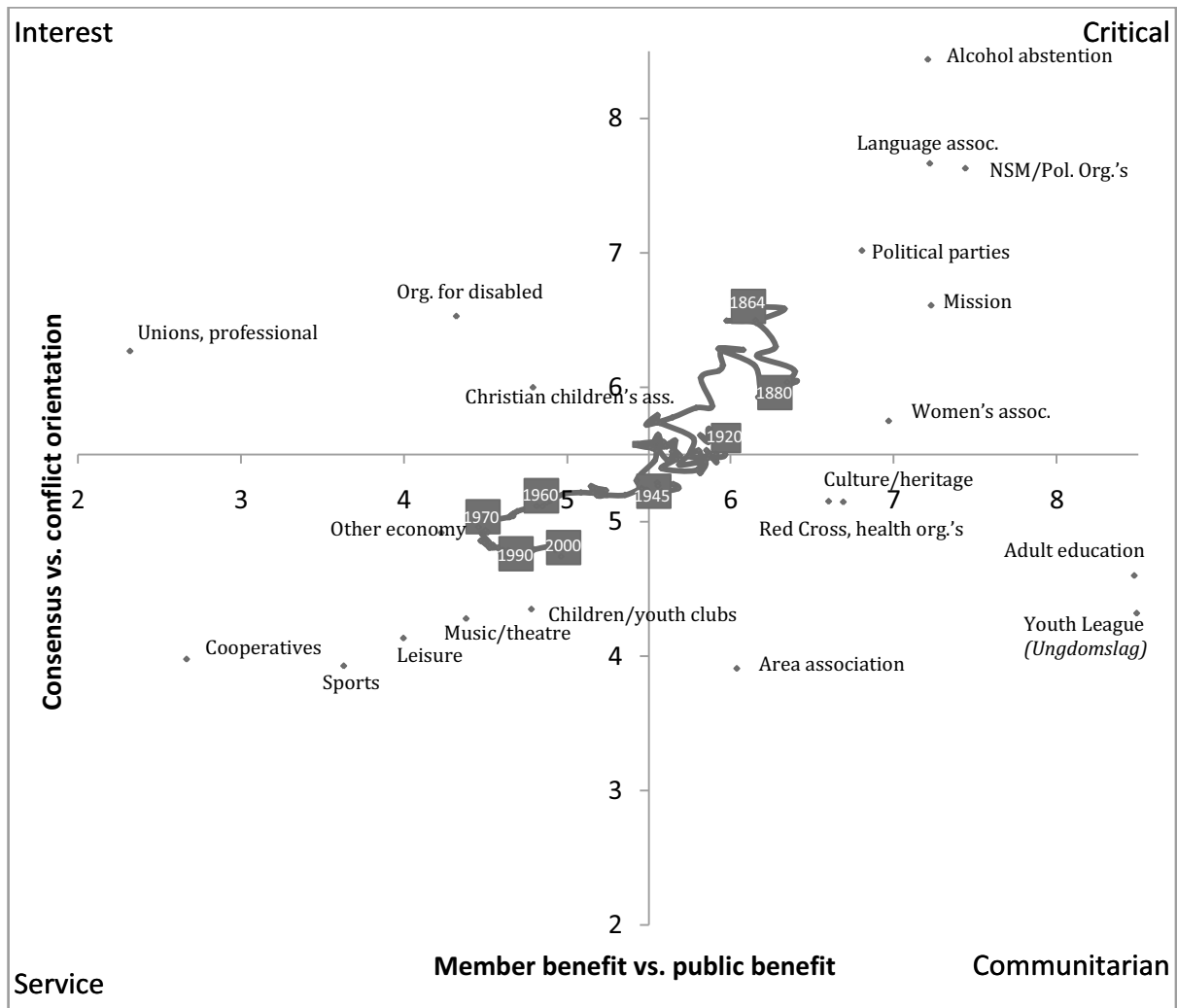


Figure 1-1: The Orientation of Local Voluntary Associations by Type and Year of Founding. Moving 15-year Averages (Founding Year) and Mean Scores (Type)

The figure also shows how organizations of various purposes see their role in society. Even though most types fall clearly into one of the four categories, there are examples of groups whose classification is ambiguous. For example, the degree of conflict orientation varies considerably among social and humanitarian associations – some are quite establishment-oriented and explicitly neutral (e.g. the Red Cross) while others take on a more political stance (e.g. The Women’s Public Health Association). The associations for homemakers may even be regarded as an interest organization akin to a union, although the local chapters do not regard themselves as such. There may also be considerable within-category variation that the figure undercommunicates.

In particular, the typology has previously been criticized for misclassifying organizations for sick and disabled people as “interest organizations”, when they are

really social movements (Andreassen, 2006). Such organizations also strive for recognition and to change public perception. This is not only an interest struggle, but also an identity struggle, argues Andreassen.

Andreassen's critique is an important reminder that classifications and labels represent simplifications of empirical reality, and whether "interest organizations" is the best label for organizations that are member benefit and conflict oriented is naturally a matter for discussion.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that organizations for the disabled have a broader political program than mere mediation of group interests. However, the fact that they try to change public perception as well as public policy does not change the fact that they do so on behalf of a group, which is connected to their organization through membership. In the survey responses summarized in the above figure, the associations for the disabled were unequivocal that their role in society was primarily to work on behalf of their members. I also disagree with her argument that the distinction between member and public benefit is unimportant. The present work shows that the older the organization, the higher the probability it claims to work for community interests rather than member benefits. I do not believe this development to be coincidental; rather, I see it as intimately linked with individualization processes in society at large.

How do we interpret this development? In the perspective of public sphere theory, historical associationalism and related approaches, this represents a weakening of civil society, as conflicts which are always present in any society are being subdued and remain unorganized. This is the conclusions of the last Power and Democracy Survey in Norway as well as the main contribution on voluntary associations in this research project (Østerud et al., 2003; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a). Communitarianists and pluralists would find some reasons to rejoice, as both local community associations and interest organizations are on the rise. Indeed, the Power and Democracy Survey was criticized both for failing to take sufficiently into account the increase in local community associations and the strengthening of local democracy this represents (Røiseland, 2006). However, most communitarianists would probably bemoan increasing individualization, while pluralists would be concerned about the withdrawal from politics reflected in the decreasing number of conflict-oriented organizations with political purposes.

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<sup>15</sup> I have, partly after seeing how the concept was construed in Andreassen's critique, revised the label for the conflict oriented and public benefit category from popular mass movement (*folkebevegelse*) to critical organizations, which is a concept which to a lesser extent is tied to a historical epoch long past.

In the perspective of social capital, however, *all is well*. Civil society is strengthened on all counts – the growing organizational types represent more of the apolitical, power- and conflict free, social interaction that Putnam and others see as the most productive source of trust and social networks. It is precisely the depletion of this type of associational life that Putnam worries about in the US (Putnam, 2000), and its continued growth in Norway should be a cause for celebration.

However, before concluding that all is well in Norway, we need to take a closer look at whether the reasoning of the social capital perspective actually holds water. Does face to face interaction in local voluntary associations really generate the resources Putnam claims? Are the new and growing organization types as productive sources of social capital as this literature assumes?

The two final papers in this collection, “The Decoupling of Organizational Society: The Case of Norwegian Voluntary Organizations” (Wollebæk, 2008) and “The Origins of Social Capital: Socialisation and Institutional Approaches Compared” (Wollebæk & Selle, 2007) address these issues. The first of the two articles approaches the question at the meso-level – how do the changes we observe affect the way in which organizations interact? Ties between organizations are important for a number of reasons; they are hypothesized to increase efficiency, stability, legitimacy, and access to resources such as political influence, funding, information sharing, referrals, and reduced transaction costs (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Oliver, 1990). But they play a particularly important role in social capital theory, as they extend the social networks that allows social trust to become transitive and spread (Putnam, 1993b) and connect individuals and institutions across power gradients in society, a feature recently referred to as “linking” social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004, 655).

The verdict is negative. Organizations that are member benefit cooperate less than organizations that are public benefit, and organizations that are consensus oriented cooperate less than organizations that are conflict oriented.<sup>16</sup> Conflict and public benefit orientation increase an organization’s motivation for cooperating on several counts. A conflict-oriented organization that wants to achieve political ends will have stronger reasons to forge strategic partnerships with other organizations than a consensus-oriented group without political ambitions. A public benefit organization that tries to

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<sup>16</sup> In addition, and unrelated to social capital theory, but strongly related to recent developments in the Norwegian voluntary sector, specialized organizations cooperate much less than organizations with broad activities (Wollebæk, 2008).

improve conditions in the community is more likely to be both more open towards and interested in the environment than are member benefit organizations, and it tend to find common ground with other organizations for cooperative arrangements more frequently. Further, organizations that are neither conflict nor public benefit oriented are likely to place less emphasis on legitimacy, stability and survival, which according to Oliver (1990) are other core reasons for cooperation. An activity-oriented service organization holds little inherent value beyond the activity it offers and can easily be replaced by another institution.

In sum, the non-political, leisure oriented service organizations seem more self-sufficient; cooperative ties with other groups than do critical, service, and interest organizations hold less utility for them than for organizations that are conflict or public benefit oriented.<sup>17</sup> As argued in the article in this collection, these ties represent social capital not only because they amplify the instrumental value of each membership by giving indirect access to broader networks, but also serve as important *linking* social capital across power gradients in society (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Hence, a further development towards consensus and member benefit orientation is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the ability of organizations to generate and institutionalize social capital.

What about the mechanisms at the individual level? The final paper in the present work examines the core hypothesis in the theory of social capital generation, namely that face to face interaction within non-political voluntary associations generates social trust. The findings in the paper (based on the European Social Survey) confirm the results of two of my other articles (not included here), using two other data sets (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002b; Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008): There is no such effect. Several other studies have also emerged that cast doubt upon whether active, non-political participation has any effects at all on social capital (Claibourn & Martin, 2000; Hyggen, 2006; Mayer, 2003; Ødegård, 2006; von Erlach, 2005). The reasons are manifold and discussed in more detail in the article included in the present work. The most important however, is that when it comes to face to face interaction, we spend much more time and emotional intensity in other institutions, such as families, schools and the

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<sup>17</sup> This does not preclude that such organizations establish ties that do hold utility for them, e.g. with municipal authorities or private companies that control financial resources. Indeed, in contrast to interorganizational ties, cooperation with private companies is uncorrelated with both conflict-consensus and private-public benefit orientation. Cooperation with municipal authorities is significantly correlated with public benefit orientation, but not with conflict orientation (my analyses, correlations not included in the present papers).

workplace. The privileged position given to social interaction in associations in Putnam's work is hard to fathom (M. Edwards, 2004).

What the study does show, however, is an exceptionally strong relationship (a .87 correlation) between the strength of organizational society and generalized trust at the *aggregate*, regional level. This indicates that the Putnam-oriented parts of the social capital literature misconstrue rather than exaggerate the importance of organizations in the context of social capital. The article makes the argument for an institutional perspective on social capital formation through organizations. Experiences of how such associations function, be they personal or mediated, influence our view of the cooperative spirit of others. If organizations are successful and visible, they continually prove the rationality, normality and utility of cooperation for the common good. Furthermore, voluntary organizations that get involved in public affairs are a democratic infrastructure; intermediary structures linking individuals to society and citizens to the political system. Like other types of infrastructure, such as roads or telephone lines, they do not need to be used by everyone all the time in order to be useful; as the benefits of roads are not limited to the people who at a given time drive upon them, are the benefits of organizations not limited to those who at a given time are active. In a strong organizational society, non-members are aware of the opportunity to get involved in organizational activity, or to contact organizations for assistance, should the need arise. Thus, it is acknowledged that institutionalized collective action is not only rational, normal and useful, but also generally available. In sum, strong voluntary organizations *institutionalize* rather than *generate* social capital.

If this hypothesis should hold true, there should be an independent effect of holding a positive perception of the societal and democratic role of organizations. Even those who do not participate at all, but still see organizations as a useful democratic infrastructure, should display levels of social capital that are higher than those who participate a lot but hold more negative opinions of the efficacy of organizations. A regression analysis included in the paper shows that this is indeed the case.

The findings of the study neither discard the value of social capital as a concept, nor the important role ascribed to voluntary organizations within the theory. What it does say, is that one of the main mechanism it specifies for how social capital is generated, is probably wrong.

The implications of the two papers in the final section are that the main virtues of voluntary organizations when it comes to the generation of social capital is not local orientation, horizontality, absence of conflict and domination or plenty of face to face contact, but outward-reaching purposes and activities that make them visible to the general public and interested in mutual cooperation. On these dimensions, member benefit and consensus oriented organizations have less to offer than public benefit and conflict oriented organizations. Even social capital will suffer if people leave behind political organizations and follow Putnam's recommendation to go bowling together.

### *Conclusion*

The present work brings unique data to the fore and applies them to core debates in the literature on civil society and organizational theory. The ambition of the seven articles included in this volume is to contribute to both the empirical precision and theoretical reasoning in the literature on voluntary associations.

The first section has shown extensive substantial changes among local voluntary associations in Norway, both in terms of volume, type and structure. The changes point in the direction of convergence with models elsewhere in Europe. The three articles in the second section approached the dynamics of change within populations of voluntary associations, and emphasized how these dynamics currently differ from what is commonly assumed in a leading paradigm within organizational theory, namely organizational ecology. However, recent developments towards deideologization and declining attachments between participant and organization may make them less different in the future. The two papers in the final section raise the question of whether the changes really matter. It seems that, at least in terms of theory development, they do.

While historically important critical organizations are almost without exception in decline, we are not witnessing a uniform decay of organized civil society. I believe Andreassen (2006) is essentially right in pointing out that the growth within organizations for the disabled speaks against a general decline hypothesis, as does the growth of other interest organizations. Citizen participation in local democracy is also in some ways strengthened, as neighbourhood associations with tight links to the municipal administration are thriving (Nyseth, Ringholm, Røiseland, & Aarsæther,

2000). A third and important countertrend is the increase in direct action participation (Bjørklund & Saglie, 2000), more recently a surge in Internet activism.

However, we are witnessing a transition from one type of civil society to another – from civil society as a political sphere to civil society as an arena for socialization and leisure. The transition is brought on by the erosion of a core segment of the voluntary sector: The democratic-hierarchical membership organizations that for more than a century have sought and achieved social and political change. They are challenged by the emergence of a two-part organizational society, by institutions offering volunteering without membership affiliation, and by activity-oriented associations that have little other purpose than self-fulfilment and enjoyment.

Norwegian citizens are not helpless in coping with the new model of civil society. They are still capable of making their voice heard, partly through interest organizations and partly through new channels of communication and participation. If I was not sure before, spending five of the last six years in authoritarian states has convinced me that there is no imminent crisis of democracy in Norway, to put it carefully.

Still, it might be worthwhile to examine some less obvious consequences of this transition. The present articles show that the currently eroding segment of civil society has some qualities which the emerging organizational forms only partly match. They provide interconnectedness, not only between individuals within an organization, but between organizations, across localities and across power structures. They embed the belief in collective action in a population by continuously proving the rationality and utility of cooperating for common goals. Their orientation outwards, their visibility and their trans-local structure all contribute to making the broad membership-based organizations an important democratic infrastructure in Norwegian society.

The final paper of this collection concludes that a strong and visible organizational society is crucial to institutionalize social capital. We reason that the perception that organizations matter is more important than personal experiences of social contact within organizations, which is the main focus of much of the current social capital literature. However, one possible consequence of the development we have observed is that this positive perception may erode.

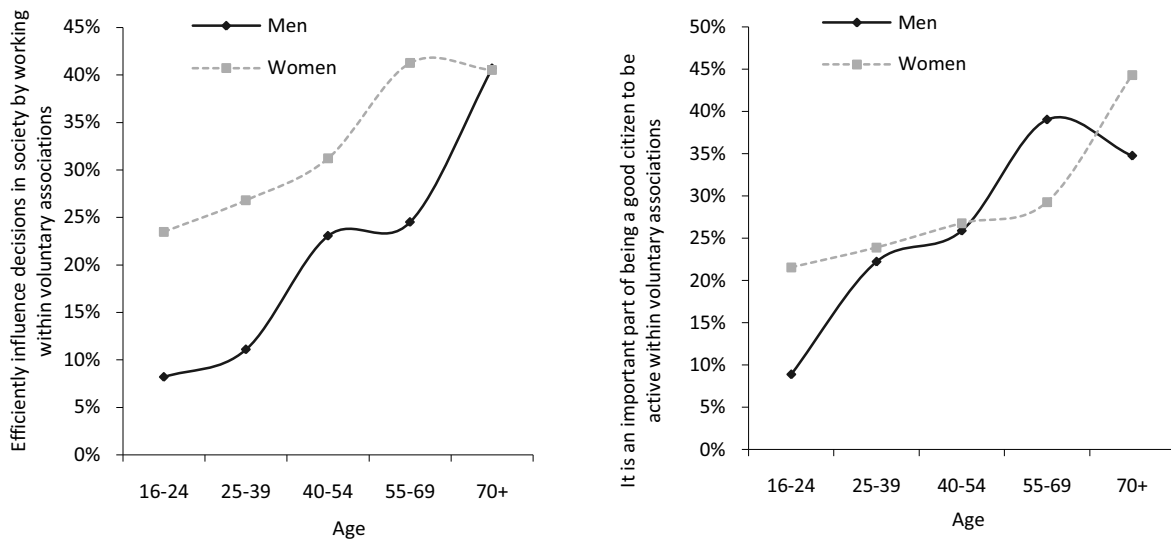


Figure 1-2: Public Perception of the Role of Voluntary Associations in Civil Society, by Age (Fellow Citizen Survey, 2002)

NOTE: Percentages show proportion of respondents who tick numbers from 7 to 10 on a ten-point scale in which 1 represents “not effective at all”/“not important at all” and 10 represents “very effective”/“very important”.

Figure 1-2 shows that this may already be happening. The proportion in different age groups that see participation in voluntary associations as an effective tool of influencing decisions in society (left) and as an important part of being a good citizen (right). The figure shows that only a small minority among young people regard voluntary associations as an effective means to influence decisions, whereas this conviction is quite strong among pensioners. It is reasonable to interpret this in relationship to developments at the organizational level, such as the shift from conflict to consensus within organized civil society, as well as a weakening of the hierarchical structures that tie individuals to the political system. Similarly, young people do not see organizational participation as an integral part of being a “good citizen”. This expresses how older generations regard organized civil society primarily as a collective, public benefit project, while younger generations see it as an arena for individual fulfilment.

If our reasoning with regard to social capital formation is correct, and these responses express a generational rather than a life cycle phenomenon, this is potentially a serious development. The implications are not only that voluntary organizations become less important in people’s lives and in democracy, but also that they may



become less effective in upholding core democratic values, such as social trust and civic engagement.

We do not know which types and structures of organizations will dominate in the future. Other institutions may partly take over the role that mass membership organizations played in the past. But the present work gives little reason to believe that a continuation of the recent development – from conflict to consensus, from public to private benefit and from hierarchy to networks – will revitalize civil society.

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The main data source in this collection of articles is based on one relatively small area in a country on the outskirts of Europe, but it is still the best data source on local voluntary associations currently available. In order to progress further, it seems clear that more and better data is needed. Several promising projects are underway, which indicate that this organizational population is finally being taken seriously. A follow-up of the Citizen, Involvement and Democracy survey of local voluntary association populations in several European cities (which I extensively cite in the first article of this collection) is currently being planned (Maloney & Rossteutscher, 2007). A new wave of the main data source of this thesis, the Hordaland project, is scheduled for 2009.

With those new data sources in place, we will be in an even better position to evaluate the findings of the present work: are the observed changes of some consequence, or merely fleeting trends? Is the Norwegian case representative for other organizational societies, or idiosyncratic?

For now, it is my hope that the efforts put into this doctoral dissertation represent a step forward in our knowledge and understanding of voluntary organizations and civil society.

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