

The last and shortest chapter of the book includes some reflections on “The Economics of Nationalism and the Fate of the Jews in Twentieth-Century Europe”. Based on the works of diverse sociologists from Ber Borokhov to Ernest Gellner, Muller again explains that under conditions of legally free economic competition the cultural capital of minority groups, namely the Jews, makes them perform more successfully than the majority of their rivals. But it was precisely this relative success that made the Jews extremely vulnerable to the nationalism and racism which culminated in the Holocaust. Their business experience and cultural capital as well as their commitment to communism as a desired alternative to anti-Semitism made the Jews both desirable and hated. They were slandered as unscrupulous capitalists and simultaneously as fanatical communists and “the way in which modern, non-Jewish intellectuals thought about capitalism was often related to how they thought about Jews” (p. 5).

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Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe. Ed. by Graeme Morton, Boudien de Vries, and Robert John Morris. Ashgate, Aldershot [etc.]. 2006. xiv, 220 pp. £55.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000349

Social Capital and Associations in European Democracies: A comparative analysis. Ed. by William A. Maloney and Sigrid Roßteutscher. [Routledge Research in Comparative Politics.] Routledge, London [etc.] 2007. xvii, 308 pp. £70.00.

Associations in all aspects of their development and their role in civil society have become a hot topic in much recent social science research, with sociologists, political scientists, economists, anthropologists, and historians trying to explain why associations are so vital and important for society. Active theorizing has provoked an abundance of empirical investigations that have created a rather complicated picture, with debates circulating around the nature, functions, organizational traditions, merits, and problems of the associational world. Research methods and approaches vary from narrative surveys based on individual experience to massive macro-data analyses at the scale of a single or several countries. Nevertheless, the study of associations remains diverse, leaving many issues open to debate.

The process of aggregating local knowledge on associations has grown recently to the level of comparative international research projects. The results of two such projects were presented in two volumes published a few years ago. The first – *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places* – brings together a group of historians from the UK, US, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, Germany, and Canada. The second volume – *Social Capital and Associations in European Democracies* – includes specialists in the political and social sciences from Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, Germany, Norway, and Denmark. Both groups of researchers aim to offer a comparative analysis of the associational universe through case studies of associational experience in cities and its impact on civil society, although the chronology, geography, historiographic traditions, and research methods differ.

*Civil Society* concentrates on nineteenth-century associational urban culture in Europe and North America, based on various conventional sources. *Social Capital* focuses on

contemporary associations in six municipalities with rich and diverse associational life: Aalborg (Denmark), Aberdeen (Great Britain), Berne (Switzerland), Enschede (the Netherlands), Mannheim (West Germany), and Sabadell (Spain). The analysis of the associational social capital in these cities is based mainly on data extracted from a questionnaire, to which between 30 and 50 per cent of the sector organizations replied (*Social Capital*, p. 47). Unfortunately, the absence of the model questionnaire in the book prevents any serious criticism. Whereas *Civil Society* is a collection of articles written within the framework of national historiographies, *Social Capital* is more a collective monograph with a problem-oriented structure. As the contributors used different approaches and methods in their study of associations within the Western democratic tradition, what can we say about the comparative results of their research? Who has been more effective and cogent in understanding the associational universe?

The research paradigm of the historians, as formulated by R.J. Morris in his introduction to *Civil Society*, links the development of associations with the middle classes and the formation of identities, collective action coordination, gender, the political and legal environment, the urbanization process, and the economic situation in each nation. The contributors reconstruct the picture of associational evolution, sometimes in terms of its dynamics, and present and interpret the empirical data gathered.

In her contribution, Boudien de Vries studies the history of voluntary societies in the Netherlands over the longer period of 1750–1900. A detailed analysis of the number of associations, their aims, functions, membership conditions, national geographical distribution, the popularity over time of different types of association, their input to class formation, and their relationship with the state permits de Vries to assert that associations “functioned mainly as unifying element in Dutch society” (*Civil Society*, p. 104), furthering an open civil society with a public sphere, and the dissemination of enlightened ideas, democratic practices, and the development of a national identity. Membership was inclusive and based on egalitarian principles: aristocrats and non-aristocrats mixed freely.

The rise of sociability between the 1750s and 1830s was closely connected with the propagation of enlightened ideas. The voluntary societies in this period functioned as an instrument of achievement by the middle classes of full citizenship. In theory, the associations were inclusive, but in practice they had rather high membership fees. Religion was not very important, but Jews were often excluded, and though female membership existed it was exceptional. New and various types of association appeared in the 1830s–1870s. The main social, political, and religious lines of demarcation paved the way for the pillarization of Dutch society that deeply influenced associational life. Due to that pillarization, as well as industrialization (1870–1900), the number of societies grew impressively.

Political participation was, naturally, an important activity of the associations, but the author argues that the main task of the associations was to show the lower classes how to achieve respectability by demonstrating bourgeois values. At the beginning of the twentieth century Dutch voluntary associations had become political and cultural organizations that articulated religious antagonisms within the social order. The lower-middle-class and lower-class people joined the associations, female membership and mixed associations became a common phenomenon, and associations spread from towns to the countryside. The state then assumed some of the tasks of philanthropic and benefit societies, which led to the decline of that type of voluntary association. In contrast, political organizations, trade unions, and leisure-time associations became mass movements (*Civil Society*, p. 116). The pillars and pillarized voluntary associations created

religious and political antagonisms in society, but they also stabilized it. That helped the Netherlands remain, right down to the 1960s, a society with “remarkable little class conflict”. Jan Hein Furnée adds a more detailed picture of Dutch associational life in his history of gentlemen’s clubs in The Hague.

Robert John Morris suggests that the formation of civil society in England and Scotland had several distinctive features: it developed independently, with the help of the state, family, and religion, without any external models; it was deeply rooted in religious history, debates, and associational experience; and it was closely linked with urban and middle-class formation. The practice and culture of the voluntary associations formed in the early nineteenth century when the process of establishing an association was highly formalized and included a definite purpose, written rules, free exit, and no administrative payments. The middle classes creatively influenced associational development. However, the associational culture by itself played an important role in creating the middle classes as a coherent and self-aware group. The middle classes used voluntary associations to “approach matters of their own sociability, education and self assertion” (*Civil Society*, p. 148). But the historical links between voluntary associations and an elite, male middle class were broken by the entry of external social groups – including women, the lower middle class, and labour. These groups simply adopted existing associational culture.

The considerable differences between the results of the various empirical analyses presented appear to have more in common than one might initially imagine. Associational culture in the Netherlands, the US, Italy, France, Austro-Hungary, and Great Britain developed in three main phases, as delineated by Morris. Proto-civil society included clubs and lodges that had a rather exclusive membership policy and ensured order behind closed doors. Within the association, middle-class male dominance in the public sphere led to openness, the publication of rules, public meetings, annual reports, subscription lists, transparency, and the liberty to join and leave at any time. The diffusion of the voluntary association in its open form, neighbourhood-based, sometimes semi-secret and illegal, lasted until the second part of the nineteenth century, when trade unions were legalized and women’s associations appeared.

Nevertheless, the different countries preserved some distinguishing features. The relative weakness of the American state created favourable conditions for the development of associations, but it also prevented the emergence of strong associations that would represent bourgeois interests against the state apparatus. Associational life in Italy in the nineteenth century was subject to strong aristocratic dominance. Associations in Austro-Hungary served to pursue the interests of social groups and strongly followed the national paths that were largely conditioned by the differing positions taken by nationally defined communities. Association members in France valued close contacts with the authorities and depicted themselves as vital auxiliaries in the business of government (*Civil Society*, p. 186).

So the authors of *Civil Society* affirm that the relationship between civil society and democracy remains rather problematic when seen in the light of the history of voluntary associations in the nineteenth century.

Being part of a larger research project, *Social Capital and Associations in European Democracies: A Comparative Analysis*, edited by W.A. Maloney and S. Roßteutscher, brings together empirical data on voluntary associations in order to characterize the associational universe, and to examine the role, structure, and functions of associations in the context of generations, community size, and culture. The authors – political and social

scientists – investigate associations within the European democratic tradition in 1998–2003 and collaborate to develop cross-national research to determine how various modes of social involvement “contribute to a qualitative and quantitative improvement of contemporary democracies” (*Social Capital*, p. xv). The main research question addressed by this volume concerns how certain features of associations foster or inhibit the generation of social capital. In other words, how important are traits such as the vibrancy of associative life, the culture of volunteering, and active community involvement? Sociologists believe they are crucial to democratic health.

Given that the organizational universe plays an important role in associational development, the authors consecutively analyse the cultural, economic, social, and political context of the associations in the cities selected. In examining the sector’s penetration into the life of the community, they describe the demography of associational life, measure the participatory outputs, and distinguish between quantity and quality. The thematic focus of organizations is explored in three sectors – markets, politics, and leisure. Where the authors note that the substance of organizational activity mattered, they compile a typology of associational activities mirroring the public–private or political–social dimension in order to evaluate the dominance of the explicit policy orientation in the activity of the different associations.

The researchers investigate the internal institutional structure (hierarchy, formal representative rule, the degree of differentiation in the structure of management, size) of associations and relate this to activity and volunteering. They develop a measure of the professionalization, organizational autonomy, wealth, and public dependence of the local associational universe. In exploring the extent to which clubs, societies, and voluntary associations of all kinds create an inter-organizational network, they analyse the political role of associations and their reproductive capacity, and assess the impact of city size on the nature of associational ecologies. Finally, the authors focus on the impact of intra-national differences on the shape and structure of the associative sector and their relevance for patterns of participation.

The generators of volunteering and activism are diverse. Associational density and size can be important for democratic development, although a comparative analysis based only on density and number of associations would be injudicious. Each city has its own historic advantages and traditional weak points that define the essence of the associational sector. The authors mark out several measures in associational ecology – density and diversity, social and political connectedness, and activism and voluntarism within associations. The empirical results show that larger communities have a more diverse associational life than smaller ones. Social and political connectedness might be greater in smaller communities, but, in general, city size has no influence on associational activity.

Concentrating on the analysis of three main sectors of civil society – social/leisure, political, and economic – the authors drew up a list of thirty-seven areas. The top ten issues concerned children, education, sports, culture/music, charity, pensioners, health, hobbies, family, and disability. Each city shows interesting variations and a strong focus on welfare (Aberdeen, Aalborg) or leisure activities (Enschede and Sabadell), or on culture and music (Berne, for example). By analysing sectoral taxonomies, the contributors found that the three main sectors – leisure, politics, and the market – are internally differentiated. The results also show that political and cultural organizations are the most open and are significantly more likely to network, but sports, family, welfare, religious, economic, and community groups are among the least open and are significantly less

likely to network. The organizations concerned with mobilization are the best networked. Traditionally, groups establish contacts with the same sort of organization as themselves.

The authors present a typology of associational activities (what the associations do or what they say they do) and try to evaluate the correlation between organizational maintenance and instrumental activities (in fact, internal and external goals). The analysis demonstrates that “client-oriented” sectors contain more associations than “policy-oriented” ones. Policy orientation is more prevalent in politics, community affairs, and economic interests, while a client and member orientation is more dominant in sports, family, religion, and culture.

Many scholars traditionally emphasize the democratically beneficial role of political actors and new social movements because they mediate between politics and society, and influence political decision-making. The remarkable results of the analyses presented here are that new political associations are not as explicitly politically active as one would expect, and policy-oriented associations are especially keen on providing activities with a more individual-good nature (*Social Capital*, p. 91). The researchers register a remarkably high level of political contacts even in the largely non-political sector. The contact structure includes city authorities and local political parties. The main reason for political contact with local government is to secure financial support. The social and political participation of associations go hand-in-hand (*Social Capital*, p. 189).

The empirical data prove one evident case – the most intense interactions seem to take place between socially connected, subsidized, well-funded associations and local government. Such associations hire professionals, and their contacts with local officials relate to bargaining and negotiations on relevant public policies. As a consequence, an important element of the interaction between associations and local governments takes place within professionalized networks. The authors argue that associations are important political actors but also that the level of political participation differs and depends on the scale of involvement in public politics.

During the past two decades two new tendencies have appeared – an increase in the number of small associations organized around narrow issues, and a decline in traditional model associations. Large, business-like organizations require supporters and even consumers, but not active members. They hire professional staff and are managed as private companies. At the local level small, informal network-like associations with horizontal structures and informal structures of decision making tend to be characteristic. They obtain financial support from their members and engage in voluntary work. By examining the expenditure and income of associations, and their paid staff, the authors come to the striking conclusion that the resource base of local associations is largely unconnected with the level of activity deployed (*Social Capital*, p. 151). Essentially, what this means is that in the world of local associations small and traditional is not necessarily beautiful. Membership associations with limited resources are by no means more likely to promote volunteering and activism than the professional associations with large outside funding.

Associations constantly transform, and our authors try to analyse their fertility, ageing, and mortality using demographic concepts. The ageing process (for humanity) comprises three distinct concepts: biological ageing, life cycle, and generational exchange. The results show that the age distribution in the six cities studied shows some similarities as well as some differences. Berne has the oldest and Sabadell has the youngest associative

life. Aalborg, Aberdeen, Enschede, and Mannheim are average. But Mannheim and Aalborg possess the healthiest and densest or most fertile voluntary sectors. Simultaneously, they display average rates of associational mortality (*Social Capital*, p. 201). A low fertility rate in Berne is balanced by the longevity of associational lives.

The idea of generational change strongly links in with the notion of path dependency. These tendencies have strong roots in the history and organizational culture of each country. The survival rate shows that few associations manage to endure over the centuries. "The closer we come to the present, the higher the proportion of surviving associations" (*Social Capital*, p. 207). In contemporary conditions new associations have a greater chance of avoiding life-threatening moments. According to the three patterns of associative exchange, which result in three different scenarios of future development (decline, stagnation, and growth), the associational world in Aberdeen is declining, in Berne stagnating, and in Mannheim and Aalborg growing.

The ideal civil society should have many and diverse associations. The real picture is more complicated. In a healthy civil society the associational world develops in three independent and interrelated dimensions: sector size; the generation of members and activists (in terms of numbers); and the inner-organizational mobilization capacity (*Social Capital*, p. 284).

Finally, these are two books on voluntary associations in Western democracies devoted to different periods, with miscellaneous approaches and methods. But their interest in associational diversity and density, participation in politics, internal structure, membership, and organizational culture and traditions reconciles the specialists of the related disciplines. In *Civil Society* historians manage to present valuable interpretations within a middle-class and identities-formation paradigm, but for effective comparability it is worth having a well-founded methodological base. In *Social Capital* social and political scientists propose extremely sophisticated instruments for deep comparative analysis, but many aspects of contemporary associational and organizational culture may remain improperly understood without social and political path dependency, historical continuity, and dynamics. It goes without saying that historians face limitations in applying these sociological research methods, but utilizing even some of them might help expand our knowledge.

These two publications stress the chronological gap in the comparative study of voluntary associations – the eighteen and nineteenth centuries and recent decades have proved more fruitful for researchers than the discrepant twentieth century. In the final lines of *Social Capital* the volume's editors dream of combining the institutional and individual levels of investigation in future projects. It seems too, however, that the time has now come for *interdisciplinary* approaches to be taken to studying the associative universe.

There is much to comment on and argue about in both books. The authors succeed in collating an abundance of theories and hypotheses, and in interpreting, proving, or disproving them. They provide marvellously written overviews of the concepts and research methods employed by historians, political scientists, and sociologists in the field of voluntary associations and even of civil society. The invaluable bibliographies listing the most important publications in the field are further reasons to recommend these two books.

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