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Review of "Trustees of Culture: Power, Wealth, and Status on Elite Arts Boards" by Francie Ostrower

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Trustees of Culture: Power, Wealth, and Status on Elite Arts Boards
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religious communities generally share a strong normative commitment to civic involvement.

Chapters 8 through 10 present case studies of faith-based congregational action in particular locales. It is this portion of the book in which the stories of congregational life and community action shine through most clearly. Here is where we see, in a phrase, faith in action. Cnaan wisely adopts a flexible range of vision to explore these cases. Cnaan uses an open system approach to study Council Grove, Kansas, congregations in chapter 8. Here, ecological influences on congregational service delivery take center stage. This perspective is perfectly complemented by the closed-system approach he adopts later, in which the particularities of congregational life are scrutinized in detail. Thus, chapter 10 moves to more idiographic terrain to examine St. Gabriel’s Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and its Urban Bridges program. The stories told in this portion of the book are richly detailed and intriguing. Although those who prefer first-person narratives might wish there were more direct quotes of informants in this section, these accounts illustrate the complex dynamics that unfold in congregations as they respond to their changing local environments. Cnaan’s newest book should be required reading for anyone interested in American congregational life and faith-based social service provision in the wake of the welfare reform. It makes many valuable contributions and will be a sourcebook on congregational service provision for some time to come.


Reviewer: MARILYN RUESCHEMEYER, Rhode Island School of Design, Brown University

Artistic institutions are embedded in society and are shaped by changing economic, social, and political conditions. Boards play a critical role in mediating between artistic concerns and these forces. Their work therefore profoundly influences how artistic institutions function, how they are funded, and what the precise extent and context of public and private support is.

Ostrower focuses on the boards of four art institutions in two unnamed cities, an opera company and a museum in each city. All four are described to be among the largest and wealthiest institutions in their city and in the country. The book is based on interviews with 76 board members; the focus is on the board members themselves, their backgrounds, their attitudes and understanding of the function of the boards, and their actual role as board members.

Members of these elite boards are wealthy (the percentage of millionaires on the four boards ranged from 94 to 100), and they are chosen on the basis of their personal wealth or corporate affiliation. There are now fewer members
of the old social elite than there were in the past. More Jews and Catholics are invited onto the boards, chosen largely because of their potential financial contributions. The relatively few Hispanic and African Americans on the boards are millionaires. Sometimes, individuals with large art collections are invited to join the museum board; here the hope is to inherit the collection. Class in the narrow economic definition, then, has remained constant.

The selection pays scant attention to the education of the board members or their knowledge of the arts. Though some of the board members are enthusiastic, even passionate, about their art institution, many, though appreciative of the arts, are far less involved. Neither knowledge nor enthusiastic involvement is a prerequisite for board membership. One European member of a board believed that the degree of knowledge on the American board is lower than it would be in his country.

New members of elite art boards are chosen by the existing board. The established members try to recruit people who are similar in income, taste, and other preferences. They attract prospective members by responding to their preferences, giving them access to exhibitions and special performances that are often linked to social events or elaborate dinners with guests of high status.

A number of board members are chosen because of their business expertise, and several believe that their function on the board is to run a successful business. Ostrower suggests that in the past elites had attempted to insulate high cultural institutions and art from the “contaminating” influence of the market. That became more difficult because of the increased need for funds by cultural organizations. It would have been helpful to the overall discussion if Ostrower had spelled out these needs in greater detail. The prestige of some board members facilitates discussion between local government, an important source of financial help, and museums, which draw their audiences from much broader segments of the population than opera. The reduced funding for the arts generally by local governments and indeed reduced funding from private sources has increased pressures for artistic institutions to pay ever more attention to supplementing outside funding with additional revenues, through museum shops and other activities to attract people. Part of the increased funding need is due to the expansion of the art institution itself, part of an effort of the elites to join the ranks of world-class cities characterized by excellent fine arts institutions.

What effect does all this have on the artistic autonomy of the arts organization itself? Again, a larger discussion of this issue in the book, perhaps offering some comparative perspective, would have been helpful. It would have also been useful to include the views of art curators and members of the professional staff of the opera companies. But Ostrower does end with a very interesting discussion of some of the tensions between the board and the professionals, for example over the introduction of innovative works. Even with authority over hiring and firing, the boards tend to give in to professional
decisions on the opera's repertory and the museums' acquisitions: in the latter case, with the "rationalization" that great museums have great curators. This is an informative book on one of the core issues of the sociology of art.

The Limits of Convergence: Globalization and Organization Change in Argentina, South Korea, and Spain.


Reviewer: ROBERT K. SCHAEFFER, Kansas State University

Using a comparative institutional approach, Mauro Guillen examines how governments and industrial organizations respond to globalization in three countries. He finds that businesses adopted different organizational forms and pursued diverse economic strategies after states democratized in the 1970s and 1980s. The author concludes that, contrary to what many theorists predict, globalization did not lead to organizational convergence but instead to organizational and strategic diversity. There were not one but many paths to development under globalization.

The strength of this book is its comparative and historical approach to the study of organizational and institutional change. Guillen begins with a concise and informative theoretical discussion of globalization, development, and the comparative institutional approach. He then argues persuasively that these three countries can usefully be compared. They are of a similar size and for many years shared a "national-populist" approach to economic development. And because they have few trade or investment links, their individual and distinctive features can be put into relief. He then provides a careful summary of postwar economic developments in each country. This comparative history allows him to highlight their similarities and differences and develop a useful typology of their approaches to economic development over time. This sets the stage for his discussion in subsequent chapters of the changes associated with democratization and globalization during the last 20 years.

To analyze the kind of organizational and strategic changes in both states and firms, he looks first at the changing structure of large business groups — chaebols in South Korea, grupos in Argentina, and large cooperatives in Spain. Then he looks at how small and medium enterprises responded to the changing state policies associated with globalization. This is some of the most interesting material because he uses the manufacture of rolling stock for railways, the production of wine and alcoholic beverages, and the publication of celebrity-gossip magazines to illustrate how small businesses responded to challenges presented by globalization. He finds, for example, that some small and medium businesses, family firms, and even worker cooperatives fared unexpectedly well,