Seton Hall University

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Civil Society Education: International Perspectives

Roseanne Mirabella
Johan Hvenmark
Ola Segnestam Larsson

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Editors' Notes

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Roseanne Mirabella (PhD), Professor

Seton Hall University

Roseanne.Mirabella@shu.edu

Johan Hvenmark (PhD), Associate Professor

Ersta Sköndal University College

johan.hvenmark@esh.se

Ola Segnestam Larsson (PhD), Assistant Professor

Ersta Sköndal University College and Stockholm University

Ola.Segnestam-Larsson@esh.se

Over the last few decades, the world has experienced an unprecedented growth in the size and scope of civil society organizations (Boli & Thomas, 1999; Kaldor, Moore, & Selchow, 2012).¹ On par with these developments is the ever increasing significance of what these organizations assumingly can and should do to mitigate and solve some of the more pressing social and environmental issues we currently face locally and globally. Yet despite the growing numbers and allotted importance of civil society organizations, relatively little is known globally about how we prepare, train, and educate present and future leaders and professionals in these organizations, nor have more normative issues been sufficiently addressed, such as how we should be preparing individuals for leading, managing, or administering these organizations.

Important steps toward more systematic knowledge regarding what we define as civil society education were taken in the United States in the early 1990s and have been updated regularly since then, providing a census of U.S. programs and creating a “cottage industry” or a new branch of inquiry within the field. Similar mapping exercises have also been conducted in Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Africa and were presented at the Benchmark Conference in 2006. Now almost 10 years down that road, it is time to take stock once again and, by doing so, also include more regions and countries as well as approaches to civil society education with a somewhat broader perspective to capture the multitude of programs and courses that assumingly exist today.

Thus, in three special issues in the *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, we will examine national and regional training and education programs for individuals with civil society leadership roles through a review of curricular offerings of credit-

¹The concepts of civil society and civil society organizations are used throughout this introduction to denote phenomena that otherwise could be referred to as nonprofit, voluntary, nongovernmental, or grassroots organizations and the third, the nonprofit, or the voluntary sector. The various contributors to the three special issues use their preferred terminology.

based civil society education programs located within universities and colleges. Our aim and hope is that the compilation of manuscripts focused on various countries and regions as well as topics in each special issue—as well as the three special issues together—will inform the future development of additional conceptual and theoretical approaches in this knowledge field. The gathering of these inquiries may also help us create a more holistic understanding of the field and make us better equipped for future comparisons and analyses of national and regional roles of civil society education and training programs around the world. Toward this end, we need to bring order to existing conceptual and methodological confusions in the field, such as how to term core phenomenon in diverse geographical contexts and academic disciplines, how to describe structural and cultural differences in different civil societies, and how to understand educational systems in various countries.

The contributors to these three special issues are research experts studying civil society in various regions of the world. It will be argued that the development of future civil society leaders and managers will require two curricular approaches as they face the dual demands of improving the effectiveness of civil society organizations while grappling with societal issues such as inequality, injustice, and violation of rights and fulfilling the important role that civil society actors play in democratization through increasing participation of underrepresented groups. With a focus on both sets of educational needs for those who will lead civil society organizations—management of organizations and advocacy for communities—new curricular forms may result from the synthesis of current approaches with this expanded understanding of the dual role of civil society leaders. Finally, through the study and exploration of civil society education around the world and the development of new analytical approaches, this work will move us closer to our ambition of implementing the first comparable census of civil society education and training programs and courses around the world.

In this first issue, the contributors examine the current curricular offerings of credit-based civil society education programs and courses in universities and colleges in Australia, China, Ecuador, Finland, and Lebanon and the corresponding educational models that have been developed to support future leaders of civil society organizations. In the first article, Malcolm, Onyx, Dalton, and Penetito explore the development of two programs: one in Australia and another in New Zealand. The two programs were developed with the assumption “that management and leadership skills and knowledge required for [the nonprofit context] would be different in several fundamental respects from those of the market or the state.” Thus, both programs were developed with consistency regarding the values of the nonprofit sector, and these values were used to guide curricular development. Although both programs were similar in guiding vision and in close proximity geographically, Malcolm et al. find that stakeholder influences on curriculum development, coupled with institutional home within the university, result in a different approach to curriculum development in the two programs examined. The authors close with the suggestion that conflicting and ambiguous stakeholder demands, whether coming from a mainstream business school or the more entrepreneurial environment of a community studies program, will continue to create challenges for these programs going forward.

Responding to a perception held by civil society educators in Ecuador that civil society education in university settings does not respond to the needs of the community,

Appel undertakes an in-depth analysis of one such program to determine the validity of this commonly held view. This case study was developed amid a backdrop of heightened tension between the Ecuadorean government and the civil society, particularly with regard to accountability and transparency. The author reports on a *social market* orientation within the course, encouraging civil society professionals to address social and community needs with resources that are self-financed by the organization rather than rely on government or foundation support. She also finds that the perception by civil society educators regarding community responsiveness may be well founded as little focus is given to issues of ethics, transparency, and accountability, the very issues at the heart of continued public debate regarding the efficacy of the sector. The author recommends further integration of these issues into the current skills and topics offered in these courses.

In another article in our symposium, Haase and Haddad examine education programs developed in Lebanese universities, with an eye toward analyzing whether the curriculum being offered correlates to the educational needs of civil society leaders as they seek to bring about social change and fill the gaps created by the “absence of governmental authorities.” The entry by Haase and Haddad brings together three streams of literature: the history of civil society in Lebanon; current constraints, both structural and operational, that undermine the governance capacity of civil society organizations in Lebanon; and the relationship between university education and the development of civil society organizations. In this, the first comprehensive census of civil society education programs in universities in Lebanon, the authors find that 30% of the universities in Lebanon offer civil society–related courses, a little less than half at the undergraduate level and a little more than half in graduate programs, providing a “strong foundation” for civil society education in the country. In their review of the curricular elements, they find much of the curriculum is focused on the history of the sector and its context, with little emphasis on the specialized knowledge needs of future civil society leaders. Given the current constraints of the civil society in Lebanon, particularly with regard to particular skills deficits among current leaders, the authors find it surprising that little attention has been paid to these substantive areas. They are surprised to find that English is the dominant language used in these programs, in a country where Arabic is the official language, and worry that this may form a potential “language gap” between civil society leaders and the constituents they serve. The authors conclude with a call for further analysis of these course offerings and a second line of analysis to assess if what is currently being taught is addressing the knowledge needs of future civil society leaders.

Zhang and Guo provide us with the first in-depth analysis of university-based education programs in China and its development. Vocational civil society education has developed in China in three stages. During the “introduction stage,” educators introduced concepts and theories from other nations into training for civil society professionals. The “localization” or second stage consisted of grassroots organizations developing capacity building programs for local civil society professionals. Educators began to integrate support from government, corporations, and foundations to build organizational capacity of civil society organizations in the third or “incubation stage.” The authors provide a detailed list of the major organizations dedicated to these efforts over the past 20 years. Following this discussion of the initial Chinese efforts in

developing a civil society education curriculum, the authors report the results of their survey of civil society faculty in the top 100 Chinese universities in humanities and social sciences. The authors find that nearly two thirds of the universities responding offer a course or courses in civil society management, with about half of these courses developed during the peak years of 2003–2007. The growth of these courses corresponds generally to the growth of organizations within the Chinese civil society and thus was demand driven and faculty led. These “practice-oriented” courses are found primarily at the undergraduate level and located within schools of public administration and affairs. At the graduate level, there are far fewer courses or concentrations, and the authors report locating only one full degree program in civil society management. The authors attribute the slow growth of these programs in China to a large extent on the strict regulations imposed by government on civil society education curricular development.

In the case of Finland, Markus Ketola sets out to study the relationship between the current provision of civil society management education in Finnish higher education institutions and the relevance of this provision in relation to managerial training among Finnish civil society groups. In other words, the author asks if the current provision of tertiary management education reflects the needs of Finnish civil society groups. To answer that question, the author distinguishes between two ways of conceptualizing the role of the civil society in Finland: either as a function of service delivery (civil society in need of education) or as a function of democratization (civil society as education). Within the two perspectives of the societal role of civil society organizations, contrasting views regarding the relevant management skills for civil society management are also inherent. Based on an analysis using this distinction and a study of existing university-level programs across five universities, Ketola comes to the conclusion that Finnish civil society education tends to conceptualize and cater primarily to civil society and its role in democratization. This conclusion could in part be explained by the historically important institutional role of Finnish civil society groups and by the variety of organizational forms that inhabit the Finnish civil society space. However, the focus on the role of civil society in democratic processes leaves, at the same time, a gap between the needs of professionalizing civil society organizations and the current provision of higher education courses on civil society management in Finland.

A number of themes emerge from a review of these articles on Australia, China, Ecuador, Finland, Lebanon, and New Zealand in this special issue. These themes concern a variety of dimensions with significance for researchers interested in studying civil society education, educators wishing to better organize and implement programs and courses, and students selecting among educational offerings. An example of these themes is conceptual variations and their significance for research (e.g., Finland and Lebanon) as well as the hitherto less researched existence of noncredit-based education (e.g., Australia, Ecuador, Lebanon, and New Zealand). Another theme concerns civil society distinctiveness and the related tendency that civil society education increasingly seems to incorporate business ideas, models, and cases into the curriculum (e.g., Australia, Ecuador, Lebanon, and New Zealand). The institutional setting and its importance for civil society education is a third theme. For example, the political context seems to enable and regulate the orientation of programs and courses (e.g., Australia, China, Lebanon, and New Zealand). A related issue is that different organizations, de-

pending on, for example, the size or the role of the organization, have different educational needs (e.g., Australia, Finland, and New Zealand), needs that are not always met by current provisions of credit-based programs and courses (e.g., Ecuador, Finland, and Lebanon).

In addition to the significance of the individual articles and the number of emerging themes for the research field on civil society education, they also provide important empirical and analytical contributions to previous research. The most obvious contributions are national mappings of civil society education of more countries around the world (China, Finland, and Lebanon) as well as additional relevant and valuable case studies of particular programs and courses (Australia, Ecuador, Finland, and New Zealand). In addition, these articles have contributed to the development and application of novel or established analytical frameworks. In a research field marked by its need for normative discussions as well as conceptual and theoretical developments, such analytical attempts are indispensable. Among these analytical frameworks are distinctions among vocational, public, and professional education (China); external, internal, and boundary-spanning functions (Lebanon); civil society needs education versus as education (Finland); and credit-based and noncredit-based education (Australia and New Zealand).

This special issue, and the included articles, is but the first of three special issues on civil society education around the world in the *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*. The coming two special issues will include research on more countries (e.g., Canada, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States) and regions (e.g., Africa, Central Europe, Latin America, and the Nordic countries) as well as approaches to civil society education from additional analytical and theoretical perspectives. As argued, we still know relatively little about civil society education around the world, nor have we sufficiently addressed more normative questions. The coming two issues as well as the compilation of the research results emanating from all three issues will not only provide a better foundation for future comparisons and analysis of national and regional roles of civil society education and training programs, but also enable future implementation of a planned first comprehensive census of global civil society education.

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