

Framing the Field

Civil Society and Related Concepts

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This article considers how to frame the area of scholarship that deals with concepts such as third sector, nonprofit, voluntary sector, civil society, philanthropy, nongovernmental organizations, social economy, and public benefit organizations. In spite of more than 30 years' history of the field, which we refer to here broadly as civil society studies, there is not one single term that covers the whole sphere. This article focuses on the different concepts and evaluates their content and connotations. It suggests that attempts to use categorizations should be replaced with the Wittgensteinian idea of family resemblance.

Keywords: *civil society; nonprofit sector; voluntary sector; philanthropy; social economy*

Thirty years after the emergence of the scholarly field focusing on associations, foundations, and other similar organizations (referred to here broadly as civil society studies), there is still no international or interdisciplinary agreement on the name of the field or its overall research objectives. Instead, there is a host of concepts that are used either synonymously or differently. This article examines the concepts and argues that the many concepts in use in the field have in common the idea of a sector that exists between other established or basic institutions.

Concepts are not value free. They are based on the root metaphors with which people in different cultures and disciplines (e.g., economics, philosophy, sociology, theology) frame their world. The root metaphors of existing concepts (third sector/nonprofit/voluntary sector/civil society/philanthropy/nongovernmental organization/social economy/public benefit organization) draw boundaries that differently include and exclude various types of organizations. And cultural and disciplinary differences have their own historical roots. As Moulart and Ailenei (2005) have emphasized, "each epoch has its own socioeconomic conditions bringing subsequent opportunities and challenges to the *lien solidaire* (solidarity bond) which it produces" (p. 2038). As a consequence, organizations founded to deal with those conditions carry a heavy weight of *zeitgeist*. If we apply Geertz's (1973) theory on religion to science, we can see that, whereas definitions of organizations are models of them, they in turn become models for the frames used by scholars.

In the plurality of concepts used in our field, there are two potential dangers. First, there is always a possibility that scholars do not understand what their colleagues in other disciplines are talking about. A good example is the European

Sociological Association's Social Movement Research Network, which has "adopted" third sector students into their sessions over the past 10 years. What has become evident in these sessions is that, on one hand, both research traditions focus on civil society but, on the other hand, the concept is understood differently. To see the difference, one needs only to read the work of Salamon and Anheier (1992a, 1992b; Salamon et al., 1999) and compare it to thoughts of Marxist writers like Cohen and Arato (1994) and Keane (1988); to Eastern European scholars like historian Geremek (1992) and political philosopher Pelczynski (1988); or to Swedish scholars like Dahlkvist (1995).

The second potential danger of confusion in terminology occurs when concepts are transformed into legislation: They start to live their own life and the definitions have real practical consequences. When a definition is written into a law, it treats qualified organizations differently from those that do not qualify. Everyone who has wrestled with tax or social security officials knows what it means when your case does not happen to fit into a definition. Definitions are not value free, so scholars should pay attention to the content of concepts they use.

The purpose of this article, then, is to provide tools with which to frame the scholarly field that has been identified with concepts such as civil society, third sector, and nonprofit sector. I start with the example of the oldest of the concepts used in the field, namely, civil society, before focusing on other concepts. I then suggest a way to frame these different concepts as a whole.

Civil Society

The oldest of all concepts used in the field is *civil society*. In modern usage, it emphasizes, on one hand, the distinction between the official realm of the state and the grassroots activity of ordinary people and, on the other hand, the distinction between the market and the life world of ordinary people. The concept includes not only all kinds of autonomous associations, cooperatives, social movements, mutual aid, and other informal groups but also families and informal personal networks (Bush Zetterberg, 1996). During the past 30 years, the concept has been used frequently, but as one can see from historical evaluations (Cohen & Arato, 1994; Ehrenberg, 1999; Trägårdh, 2006), it has several different meanings, depending on how one frames the state, society, and the basic institutions of society.

There are two extreme ways to frame the state and these frames give different meanings to civil society as well. On one hand, the state can be "our business"—a citizens' cooperative that guards the rights of people. In this frame, the state *is* civil society. On the other hand, the state can be a social fact separate from and above the grassroots level: "The state—it's me!" as is attributed to the French King Louis XIV. Variations between these two extreme positions can be seen in the various usages of the civil society term.

The basic institutions of a society can be seen, as in economic nonprofit and third sector theories, as state and market—as, for example, in the Johns Hopkins University's Global Civil Society Project (Salamon et al., 1999). In this frame, the civil society is the third sector. Or, if we see the basic institutions of a society as state and family (like Hegel; see Ehrenberg, 1999), then civil society is equal to the market (or, if separated from it, the fourth sector). If we then add the realm of the sacred—organized religion—as the fourth basic institution of the society, then civil society is the fifth sector (Muukkonen, 2000). This is the case unless one or more of these basic institutions are included in civil society, which, in practice, it is in many definitions.

In its classical meaning, civil society refers to the political sphere where independent citizens can arrange their own government. Both the Greek *koinonia politikhe* and Latin *societas civilis* mean civilized society as opposed to chaos and barbarism (Dahlkvist, 1995; Ehrenberg, 1999). Basically, all communal relations in the Greek world were *philia* relations. *Philo*i were all those things and people that were “my own.” Inside the household (*oikos*), it meant family, relatives, subordinates, and guests. Outside the family, the *philia* relations were reciprocal ones: mutual friendships, political alliances, or economic companies (Belfiore, 1998). *Polis* was basically a military alliance. It was not based on kin and tribe relations as in the Orient but on the alliance of free citizens. (On Greek reciprocity and *koinonia*, see, for example, Gill, Postlethwaite, & Seaford, 1998; Hands, 1968; Schmitt-Pantel, 1991). Thus, civil society in Greek and Roman antiquity meant the whole society, including the state (*polis*, *civitas*).

In the medieval city system, this pattern was somewhat changed. The basic institutions of the burg/borough/city were guilds and families. People were first and foremost members of them. However, life in cities required a mechanism that would enable members of different guilds and families to interact and organize the life of the town. Many cities were autonomous from states at that time and sometimes their alliances (like the Hanseatic League) were more powerful than any state. The fourth major institution was the church, which was also autonomous from the state. In some respects, monasteries and fraternities resembled guilds and families: Monks and nuns were members of these institutions and others were seen as outsiders.

According to Lehtonen (1988a, 1988b), *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (town society, bourgeois society) did not emerge on the basis of the community relations but the opposite. Because nonmembers of guilds, families, and fraternities were strangers, “civil society institutionalised and normalised these stranger-relationships and provided for the first time in Medieval Europe a mechanism that did not require communal relationships” (Lehtonen, 1988a, p. 9, author translation from Finnish). Civil society became a realm between families, guilds, church, and the state—the state being the king or emperor, not the city's own organs, like magistrates and officials, who were part of civil society. This meaning of civil society is used today, for example, in Nordic countries where *socielt samnhälle* (civil society or social

community) means the same as *medborgarsamhället* (citizen's community), that is, the whole society with its democratic organs (Dahlkvist, 1995; Micheletti, 1995).

In liberal theories of the 18th and 19th centuries, the medieval idea of civil society as a separate field from the sovereign state was established. For Locke (1960), civil society (or Commonwealth, as he called it) preceded the state and was based on a "Compact of all the Commoners." As in medieval cities, it was the independent realm between the state and families where one could pursue private interests. For Locke, the state was a protective organ of civil society: "The great and *chief end* therefore, of Men uniting into Common-wealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the *Preservation of their Property*" (p. 350f). This is the meaning that 18th-century liberal thinkers gave to the concept. For them, the core of civil society was based on individual property and, thus, their civil society was also the market (Ehrenberg, 1999).

In his *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville (1945/1988) wrote along similar lines: "In civil life every man can, at a stretch, imagine that he is in position to look after himself. In politics he could never fancy that" (p. 521). Thus, as for classical liberal theorists, civil society for de Tocqueville was a private sphere that was separate but interwoven with the political sphere, that is, the state which, in turn, was the arena of political associations.

According to Lehtonen (1988a), it was not until 19th-century classical sociology that community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*) came to be seen as opposites. When this distinction was added to the old meaning, civil society came to have a corporatist meaning—one that frames civil society as a separate sphere between state, market, and families. The kindred term *intermediary organizations* grew from the same roots and, as Defourny (1992) states, aimed "to fight against the isolation of the individual which was the taint of liberalism and against the absorption of the individual into the State, which was the Jacobinist trap" (p. 31).

Hegel's understanding resembled the liberal view of civil society. For him, as Trägårdh (2006) argues, civil society was "the sphere in which private interests, needs, and desires play themselves out" (p. 7). In this view, the family is the natural state of human organization and tends to suppress the differences between its members because of their common destiny. Civil society is the antithesis of the family and is marked by diversity and competition. Finally, the state reconciles these two as a synthesis (Cohen & Arato, 1994; Ehrenberg, 1999).

For Marx, the state was not an ideal final goal of history as it was for Hegel but an oppressive mechanism that served the interests of bourgeois civil society. In Marxist philosophy, bourgeois (civil) society is something to be eliminated. This explains why the Marxist tradition opposes both civil society and the state (Ehrenberg, 1999).

Dahlkvist (1995) states that in the 20th century, it was "the neo-Marxists and the neo-liberals, later the post-Marxists and the post-liberals, who introduced and advocated for the concept of civil society as a special sphere" (p. 216; author translation

from Swedish). He continues that the neo-Marxist negative attitude toward the bourgeois class state remained in post-Marxism, and the attitude toward the bourgeois life world changed. They found an alien ally, namely, neo-liberals who favored the concept from their own point of view. According to Dahlkvist, neo-liberals reformulated the old laissez-faire principle to justify their negative attitude toward the state. Thus, both found civil society to be a useful concept in their common opposition to the state.

Alongside Marxists and liberals, the third discussant in framing civil society was the Catholic Church, which has always fought for its independence from the state. In the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), the church launched the *principle of subsidiarity*. *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) said, "The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly" (p. 80). These and other encyclicals set a hierarchy of responsibilities and rights from individuals via families and subsidiary organizations to the state. The higher level has the responsibility to make sure that the lower level can take care of its duties, and the lower level has the responsibility to take care of its duties. Higher level intervention is permitted only if the lower level cannot perform its tasks (Kelly, 1998; Mulchany, 1967).

In the West, the corporatist meaning of civil society was grounded not only in ideas from Hegel and from Catholic social ethics but also from three other roots. First, long before Marx, the American Founding Fathers had felt the oppression of the state, an idea that has persisted to some extent in the United States to this day. In this frame, the state is seen as outside and above civil society, just as the medieval king was outside the autonomous sphere of the city. Second, the British liberal tradition has emphasized the separation of state and civil society. Third, U.S. scholars have identified civil society with nonprofit organizations, the latter being defined as (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990)

those falling under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code (a category including most nonprofit hospitals, cultural organizations, traditional charities, foundations, schools, day-care centres and foundations, among others), or the smaller, related 501(c)4 category (civic leagues and social welfare organizations, which are denied tax-deductible contributions but which may engage in some political or commercial activities from which (c)3s are barred); these do *not* include such mutual-benefit associations as labor unions, workers or consumers cooperatives, veterans organizations, or political parties, which the law treats separately. (p. 138)

Similar frames, but from other roots, arose in post-WWII Eastern Europe. Ehrenberg (1999) notes that the "intense anti-statism that marked the early literature on civil society was a perfectly understandable reaction to the routinized and bureaucratic character of 'actual existing socialism'" (p. 186). Contrary to the situation in Nordic social democracies, Eastern European communist states were neither social

nor democratic much less communist (in the sense of being classless societies). Geremek (1992) summarizes the usage of the concept of civil society in Eastern Europe as follows:

The magic of the word “citizen,” in Poland or in Czechoslovakia, came from the widespread sense that referred less to one’s subordination to the state and its laws than to one’s membership in an authentic community, a community whose essence was summed in the term “civil society.” (p. 15)

Thus, the focus was on civil rights, and civil society was seen as an existing realm where rights were manifested.

Thus, even the one concept, civil society, has a range of meanings. In like manner, the frames used to understand religion differ from culture to culture. In some countries, churches are part of the state organization. In others, it is vice versa; states are just branches of the religious sphere. Still other countries have a “free church” system. In general, established religions (or “universal churches” in Troeltsch’s, 1992, terms) are state-like entities and, in many respects, are more enduring than states. Nevertheless, the relation of civil society to religions is almost terra incognita in civil society studies.

Other Concepts

As with civil society, other concepts widely used in civil society studies have a range of meanings. Another old concept, *philanthropy*, has its roots in ancient Mesopotamia where the temples took care of the impoverished segments of the population. Mesopotamian cities were households of their patron gods, and like any paterfamilias, the city-god had a responsibility to “clothe and feed” his subjects (van der Toorn, 1996, pp. 15, 45). In this frame, the king was just a vizier of this patron god. This idea later spread via Judaism and Christianity to Byzantium, where the emperor, as “the shepherd of his people” and as the earthly “image of Christ,” supported numerous philanthropic projects (Constantelos, 1991; Kazhdan, 1994). From the royal family, the practice was diffused to the nobility and to wealthy merchants; philanthropy was expected from all who had earthly blessings. From Byzantium, the idea spread and was adapted to new contexts in Western Europe. In the Middle Ages, the guilds took care of their impoverished peers, whereas the church took care of the most poor (Geremek, 1991). It is really only since the rise of the “welfare state” that philanthropy has been framed as a private matter in a European context.

The concepts of *voluntary sector* and *voluntary organizations* also have histories that color their meanings, although today, *voluntary* primarily refers to independence from the state as well as freedom of association and participation (Smith, 1993; van

Til & Williamson, 2001). Karl (1984) has argued that the etymon *voluntary* referred originally to religious concerns of free will and service to church. From there, it spread to military service and agriculture. As a religious term, it was a call for, and was linked to, brotherhoods and sisterhoods. In military terminology, it meant those who offered their service freely without coercion or payment. Karl's point reminds us that voluntary activity is not limited to associations but exists in the state and church sectors as well.

The concept of *third sector*, like the concept of *nonprofit sector*, has its roots in U.S. tax legislation. Hall (1987) has argued that at the beginning of the 1970s, the leaders of American philanthropy "realized that both the nature of the tax-exempt universe and public policies toward it had fundamentally changed" (p. 7) because of the 1969 Tax Reform Act. They knew that the new tax policy influenced philanthropic giving but there was no scientific evidence of it, so "they decided to locate and commission 'reliable' scholars to study the subject." These "reliable" scholars were economists like Feldstein (1974) and Weisbrod (1977), as well as economic sociologists like Etzioni (1973), whose definitions effectively "locked" the frame of the nonprofit world.

In the case of both the third sector and nonprofit concepts, the primary institutions of society were framed as being the state and the market. There was no room for families or religions—not to mention other possibilities like the army as in China and Turkey, or the party as in the former Soviet Union—as basic institutions of society. In this world of economics, the key question was whether nongovernmental corporations distributed their profits to their owners or to outsiders and whether organizations were formal, voluntary, and independent, or not.

The nonprofit concept has sometimes been used more recently as a synonym for other concepts, thus downplaying its original connotations. An example of this is the Johns Hopkins University's Comparative Civil Society Project (Salamon et al., 1999), in which civil society is effectively equated to the U.S. nonprofit sector. According to Salamon and Anheier (1992a; Salamon et al., 1999), the nonprofit sector is defined as a collection of organizations that are

- *formal*, that is, institutionalized to some extent;
- *private*, that is, institutionally separate from government;
- *non-profit-distributing*, that is, not returning profits to their owners or directors;
- *self-governing*, that is, equipped to control their own activities; and
- *voluntary*, that is, involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation.

A closer look at these characteristics reveals that many organizations that are central in the European civil society discussion are excluded by the Salamon and Anheier definition. There is no room for social movements, cooperatives, or self-help organizations. Moreover, the criteria leave much to debate. The formality criterion excludes informal groups such as Bible study clubs, which can be enduring. In the Finnish study,

which was part of the Johns Hopkins second round of studies, an estimated 30,000 informal groups were excluded because “their significance as employers remains insignificant” (Helander & Laaksonen, 1999, p. 23). For the purposes of the Johns Hopkins project, civil society was an economic, not a social, sphere.

Other criteria are equally debateable. The line between private and public, for example, is drawn in the water. If the criterion that nonprofits should not be “governed by boards dominated by government officials” (Salamon & Anheier, 1992a, p. 135) were taken seriously, Harvard University would be excluded because in the beginning “it was governed by boards composed of ministers of the state-established church and state officials sitting in ex-officio capacities” (Hall, 1987, p. 4). The nonprofit distribution criterion, similarly, would exclude associations that subsidize activities for their members using profits gained from other activities. The self-governing criterion would exclude all Catholic organizations because, in principle, being a Catholic organization requires subordination under the Church. The independence of organizations that take donations other than from their members can also be questioned. Finally, as Cnaan and his associates (1996) have shown, voluntarism is in practice on a continuum from duty to free will.

The French concept of *social economy* (*économie sociale*) includes many of the organizations excluded in the Salamon and Anheier nonprofit tradition, including associations that are central to the idea of a social economy (Archambault, 1990). It is not a clear-cut sector but shares some characteristics with the four sectors on its boundaries: the public sector, the local public sector, the private sector, and the trade union sector (Defourny, 1992). According to 6 (1994), sectoral interdependence is the norm in the European welfare mix.

The concept of social economy evolved, according to Defourny (1992), from the beginning of the 19th century and was rooted in four different French traditions or schools, namely, a Socialist school, a Social Christian school, a Liberal school, and a Solidary school. He notes that “it was in this melting pot that the first cooperatives and mutual benefit societies of the modern era were born” (p. 29). However, along with the parting of these movements, the importance of the concept diminished. It was adopted again in the 1970s when these movements again grew close to each other. By the next decade, it had been accepted by French state officials (Archambault, 1990; Defourny, 1992).

Within the European Union, the social economy concept challenges the U.S. concept of nonprofit sector and has been adopted as a central administrative concept. Moolaert and Ailenei (2005) note that, today, “the social economy represents a wide family of initiatives and organizational forms i.e. a hybridisation of market, nonmarket (redistribution) and non-monetary (reciprocity)” (p. 2044).

In Germany, concepts that have a similar meaning to social economy have been *public benefit organization* (*gemeinwirtschaftliche unternehmen*) and *communal enterprise* (*gemeinnützige organisationen*). The former concept covers economic enterprises that are neither capitalist nor socialist. Its background is the cooperative

spirit of the 19th century, which led to both cooperatives and mutual benefit organizations in banking and building. The background of the latter term also lies in the 19th century, when associations and foundations became involved with the huge social problems of the society. It refers to organizations that are seen to work for the benefit of the society. Today, the term is used mainly in tax legislation (Anheier & Seibel, 1993).

In the United States, the meaning of *public benefit* is different. There, for example, Smith (1993) makes a distinction between public benefit and member benefit organizations:

Public benefit nonprofit groups are voluntary groups whose principal aim is to benefit and serve nonmembers (the public) rather than members. Member benefit nonprofit groups are voluntary groups whose principal aim is to benefit and serve their members rather than outside nonmembers. (p. 53)

Here, again, we can see how the U.S. nonprofit concept colors other concepts. Smith's definition would exclude cooperatives (which, according to Anheier and Seibel, 1993, gave birth to the public benefit concept) as well as mutual and self-help organizations. Moreover, the distinction is only analytical: A small local YMCA that serves mainly its members is *de facto* a membership benefit organization but *de jure* a public benefit organization.

The *informal sector* or *informal-economy sector* is, according to Abzug (1999), "the illicit production of private goods and services. This can be contrasted with the legal production of public goods or services in the nonprofit sector" (p. 132). According to her, it is both the legality of the production and delivery methods as well as the nature of the goods that define the sector. Gibson and Kelley (1994), in contrast, define the informal sector as "processes which will not return the average rate of profit" (p. 81). Thus, for them, it is a field where the unemployed try to survive. Abzug (1999) argues that there are four phenomena that characterize the informal economy: community/social ties, ethnicity/ethnic enclave, trust, and an attempt to avoid taxation.

Difference from the state is an idea included in several concepts. The concept of *nongovernmental organizations* (with all the subgroups of that concept) is used mainly in the international contexts of the United Nations and with a meaning close to the U.S. nonprofit organization (Gordenker & Weiss, 1995; Nerfin, 1986; Vakil, 1997). *Nonstatutory sector* is a loose concept that is used mainly in British social care and health care contexts. There is some wavering in the reports of the U.K. Department of Health about its meaning. It can mean either "voluntary, charitable and independent (private) organisations" (U.K. Department of Health, 2007, App. 7) or "voluntary, independent and private sector providers" (Mental Health Strategies, 2006, LIT Report 2). Again, *independent sector* is an "umbrella term for all non-statutory organisations delivering public care, including a wide range of private

companies, voluntary and community organisations” (North West Commissioning Roadmap, n.d.; cf. Ryan, 2006). Thus, these concepts appear to cover both commercial and nonprofit providers from whom the public sector buys statutory services. Even private sole traders belong within this definition.

Whereas most of the above concepts refer to some sort of organization, the concept of *social movement* refers to nonmaterial and noneconomic activity. The traditional difference between social movements and other forms of collective actors is that social movements are regarded more as processes than as “social things” (Della Porta & Diani, 1999; Melucci, 1992). The old assumption was that a social movement had a life span starting from unorganized activity and ending by becoming an institution when the movement ceases to exist as movement (Hopper, 1959). However, the American *resource mobilization approach* stressed that social movement organizations are essential parts of social movements and are resources for activity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In general, the social movement concept is unclear and includes extreme positions. On one hand, Touraine (1981) and Tilly (1978) include only political movements in the concept. On the other hand, McCarthy and Zald (1977) include many kinds of collective action including religious and cultural movements.

A Family of Concepts

As shown in the previous section of this article, there are numerous concepts in use in the scholarly field of civil society studies. I would suggest that the difficulties raised by the plurality of concepts are rooted in the scientific tradition of categorization. For example, like many other scholars, in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project, Salamon and Anheier (1992a, 1992b; Salamon et al., 1999) approached their research field using classic definitions. But their definitions, as shown above, leave out many organizations that are essential in European discussions of civil society.

Collier and Mahon (1993) provide alternatives for the classic form of categorization. One is what they call *radial categories* and the other is Wittgenstein’s *family resemblance*. They describe the radial categories with an example of the primary category “mother,” which has components A (female), B (provides 50% of genetic makeup), C (gives birth to a child), D (provides nurturance), and E (is married to father). Now, the secondary categories of “genetic mother,” “birth mother,” “nurturing mother,” and “stepmother” have only one character in common, namely, A. Genetic mother, in its extreme, can be just a donor of the egg and, thus, has only the components AB that make her a mother. Womb-hiring is possible and, thus, there is a combination of AC that justifies calling a woman a mother. Adopted children call their foster-mother mother (components AD), and a stepmother (components AE) is also called a mother. Applied to the case of organizations referred to in this article, this reasoning would mean that only one character would be needed in common for organizations to be included in the sector. If we apply this

idea to comparison between Salamon and Anheier's definition of nonprofit organizations and Melucci's definition of social movements as processes, it can be seen that the idea of being part of civil society is the only common element that nonprofits and social movements share. It seems that the tradition of making categorizations simply does not work in this field, but is there an alternative?

The Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblances, instead, does not require this sort of categorization. It is the idea that specific concepts can have something in common without having one single element that they all share. Wittgenstein (1953) writes,

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between the members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (p. 67)

When looking at a family picture, we see that one child has similar ears to his father's father and the same kind of mouth as his mother's mother. Yet, in the case of families, we cannot categorize the members of the family by the color of eyes or the form of nose. All the members are unique but have similar features. The important point is that these common features can only be seen in the family picture. If we apply Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblances to the case of civil society studies, we can see that there are different concepts (members of the family) that include organizational forms (features) in different ways. This metaphor enables us to see the actors in the field from their own understanding. In many ad hoc projects, we see this patchwork quilt in practice. Different kinds of organizations come together to work for a common goal even if they are different in form and tradition. This family metaphor also enables us to adopt new types of organizations in a similar way as a family can adopt new children.

A hypothetical example of the family resemblance idea is shown in Table 1. Different sector concepts from 1 to 5 (e.g., nonprofit, social economy, and others that I have discussed above) have different criteria from A to E for including or excluding particular organizations. These criteria can be applied to characteristics (like voluntarism, nonprofit restriction, formality, and other types of criteria discussed above) or to organization types (like associations, churches, and foundations). In the hypothetical example, no single sector concept includes all five criteria. Therefore, none of them can be taken as a main concept under which the other concepts could be put as subcategories and, thus, neither classic nor radial categorizations are possible. The important point is that in spite of the lack of a single common characteristic, the sector concepts share 80% of the same characteristics. They are part of the same family.

An attempt to move toward this kind of family metaphor thinking has been made by Hall (1987), who defined nonprofits according to their activities:

I define a nonprofit organisation as a body of individuals who associate for any of three purposes: (1) to perform public tasks that have been delegated to them by the state; (2)

Table 1
Organizational Family Resemblance

Sector Concept	Criteria for Inclusion				
Concept 1 includes characteristics	A	B	C	D	
Concept 2 includes characteristics	A	B	C		E
Concept 3 includes characteristics	A	B		D	E
Concept 4 includes characteristics	A		C	D	E
Concept 5 includes characteristics	B	C	D	E	

to perform public tasks for which there is a demand that neither the state nor for-profit organizations are willing to fulfil; or (3) to influence the direction of policy in the state, the for-profit sector, or other nonprofit organizations. (p. 3)

Hall's definition acknowledges that there are organizations that are semiofficial (e.g., compulsory student associations in Finland) as well as social movements, labor unions, and political parties. The problem with this definition, however, is that the emphasis is on state–nonprofit relations. Unless *public* is defined as all activities outside the family, this leaves out many private clubs and associations that focus on the interests of their members. However, the wording does include for-profit companies that have public duties delegated from the state (e.g., private car inspection companies and, if roads are seen as public goods, private toll-road companies) in a similar way to the British concept of the nonstatutory sector. Along with providing services to the public sector, some of these organizations are entitled to use public power as well (e.g., the aforementioned car inspection companies). Similar power is given to some nonprofits as well; for example, in many countries, voluntary fire brigades are entitled to have power over police and military personnel in the case of emergencies.

When we replace the hypothetical example of the Wittgenstein family perspective with real sector concepts as in Table 2, we can see that some of them cover the whole society whereas others only partly overlap. Thus, the table gives a different view of how different sector concepts include or exclude different types of organizations and institutions.

Because different sector concepts include and exclude organizations differently, how should we handle these definitional differences? There are two possibilities. We can take a minimal approach and try to find what different concepts have in common. In effect, and using Table 2, this leaves only associations and foundations as the core of the sector; we exclude the majority of the organizations that are studied in the broad civil society studies field. An alternative, maximal approach is to apply Wittgenstein's theory and to accept organizations that have some elements in common with the others. This seems to be the de facto policy of the International Society for Third Sector Research (n.d.). In the following closing section of this

Table 2
Organizational Inclusion or Exclusion of Various Sector Concepts

Sector Concept	Organization Type											
	State	Churches	Market	Families	Personal Networks	Associations	Foundation	Cooperatives	Mutual Organizations	Self-Help Organizations	Social Enterprises	Political Organizations
Civil society/classical	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Civil society/medieval	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Civil society/liberalistic	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Civil society/corporatist	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Philanthropy/Byzantine	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Voluntary sector/traditional	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Third sector	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nonprofit sector	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
Social economy	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Public benefit organizations	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nongovernmental organizations	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Intermediary organizations	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nonstatutory sector	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Informal sector	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Social movements	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Note: + = concept includes; - = concept excludes.

article, I suggest a way of thinking about the bundle of concepts and organizations that are included in our field if we take this maximal approach.

A Sphere Between Established Institutions

The classic nonprofit theories of Weisbrod (1977) and Hansmann (1980) argue that nonprofits emerge when the “pure” form of institutions fails to fulfill its function. For them, these pure institutions were *state* and *market*. Hegel, in similar fashion, spoke of how the family, as a basic institution, was not able to fulfill all the needs of the society, and civil society arose as an antithesis of the family. Salamon (1987a, 1987b), in turn, rejected Weisbrod’s and Hansmann’s theories and argued that provision of welfare services has historically been the task of the voluntary sector. Furthermore, because both voluntarism and philanthropy were for a long time almost monopolies of churches, we could speak of “church failure” as having given rise to numerous more or less secular organizations.

These observations suggest that we can see societies as having four main institutions: family (blood ties), state (coercive power), market (economic power), and religions (sacred). As a consequence, the sector we are talking about can be framed as an intermediate realm between these four established institutions. This sector or sphere is both a host of independent organizations and a field where the basic institutions of society interact. Organizations in this realm between the basic or established institutions are not clear-cut or similar. Some of them have characteristics similar to the market (e.g., cooperative banks), some, in turn, are closer to public organizations (e.g., private road cooperatives), some act like religions (missionary societies), some are like families (fraternities), and some are just informal networks.

If we see this *n*th sector research field in the Wittgensteinian way, it allows researchers from different traditions to “feel at home” in the field and this, in turn, facilitates the creation of common language for the field of civil society studies.

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