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Epilogue: Relational Resource Constellations

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Two social facts that at first appear contradictory are universally accepted in studies of civil society. On one hand, individual participation in membership-based associations has been gradually declining for several decades in many countries (Skocpol, 2003; Tranvik & Selle, 2007). On the other hand, the number of civil society organizations, including membership-based associations, has increased (Casey, 2016). Earlier studies examined the first trend in light of the process of individualization of civil engagement or a strategic cultivation by liberalizing ideologies. The individualization thesis implies that traditional forms of organizing collective action do not align with contemporary reflexive rationality (van Deth & Maloney, 2012), while neoliberalization is blamed for eroding traditional conceptions of social solidarity and stimulating sporadic forms of engagement around specific issues, which does not translate into a sustained commitment to organizations (Grubb & Henriksen, 2019).

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The second trend, the significant growth in the number of organizations, has been seen as part of the overall increase in the role of highly qualified paid professionals, with increased bureaucracy and managerialism permeating civil society and, as I have argued elsewhere, dismantling the very institution of membership as a form of affiliation with organizations (Papakostas, 2011). Although such so-called memberless organizations are easier to create than their traditional counterparts, the nature of the resources required for their sustainability is substantially different: without the contributions of members, they generate resources externally. As a result, new boundaries of exclusion and hierarchies arise between organizations and their (now detached) social base.

This volume suggests approaching the complexity and dynamism of civil society, illustrated by but not limited to the trends outlined above, by capturing and conceptualizing how resources are accumulated by civil society organizations, what role they play, and how they intertwine with the constant changes (sometimes incremental, sometimes dramatic) taking place in organizational forms, activities, and norms. This epilogue[1] is inspired by the richly detailed empirical and theoretical chapters that precede it and offers a general reflection on their contribution to the existing literature as a collective effort.

The contributions that make up this volume map the landscape of civil society by combining theoretical and empirical insights drawn primarily from two research paradigms. The first is the resource mobilization perspective, often referenced in research on contemporary social movements and launched in a seminal work by American sociologists John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). These authors based their research primarily on developments in American civil society; their insights, however, influenced research in many countries, with hundreds of publications on the subject. Theirs was a sound sociological response to then-prevailing theories that sought to understand social movements as irrational responses stemming from participants' psychological motives. There were, according to adherents of the perspective, many facets of unjustness or deprivation in societies, but only a few were given expression and were transformed into social movement organizations. The availability of resources and the capacities of social movement actors to

use them were thus enabling factors that expanded the scope of, and the space available for, social movement organizations.

The other perspective is the resource dependency approach, which stems from organization theory and is one of the offspring of the organization–environment contingency theory in organization studies. It, too, was launched in the late 1970s, by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik in a book and several articles and book chapters (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The logic of the argument is, to some extent, similar to that used by proponents of resource mobilization theory: organizations in general (not only civil society organizations) that are effective in securing resources from their environments are the ones that survive. But, instead of being an enabling factor, resources create costs and pressures and set limitations as organizations become dependent on their environments. This external dependence becomes a constraint as no organization is self-contained; it is an organization's adjustment to its environment that allows it to survive. And as organizations do not control the resources in their environments, the environment (comprised mainly of other organizations such as states, donors, enterprises, etc.) becomes a key determinant of the activities of a given organization.

The realm of civil society organizations is too variegated, dynamic, and multilayered to be captured by such general theoretical perspectives. The processes described by the abovementioned perspectives treat the realm of civil society as if it were a rather homogenous field encompassing similar forms of mobilizing and organizing. I believe that both perspectives' shortcomings stem from the unsystematized typologizing of the sociological qualities of the resources involved and their relations to the organizational forms in civil society. Highlighting fragments of some of the rich empirical accounts in this volume, I will sketch some contours of how such relational typologies may be developed.[2]

While their work is informed by the two perspectives discussed here, the authors of this book have used the flows of resources through the realm of civil society in order to bypass the perspectives' theoretical limitations. The methodological device used in this book is to posit the movement of resources into, within, and out of civil society organizations, as well as interactions between them, as a contrast medium to demonstrate transformations of civil society in Poland, Russia, and Sweden. It has

enabled the authors to understand how the space of civil society action can be both expanding and shrinking as resources enable and constrain their capabilities, legitimacy, and identity, and as organizations use different constellations of resources, employ them for different purposes, and relate to different stakeholders.

In previous research, resources are defined in rather simple descriptive terms: monetary, human, symbolic, etc. (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). This volume demonstrates that exploring the nature and the relational sociological qualities of the mobilized and used resources can provide some clues as to how to understand this dynamic field. Resources can make organizations dependent on their environments, but they also offer varying degrees of exchangeability. For instance, one sociological quality of resources is the relationship of the resource to its donor or to its bearer. It is not uncommon for civil society organizations to receive considerable amounts of resources from wills or donations from the general public. In such cases, the resource is separated from the donor and can be used by the organization with a certain degree of freedom as it can be stored or transformed into other types of resources. When a labor resource is provided by volunteers or organization members, however, the work is not separated physically from the donor and is consumed at the time it is delivered. It is bound to a specific person and cannot be stored or easily transformed into other types of resources, although it can be used to accumulate additional members or funds. In this case, the constraints are of another type than in the previous example.

From the historical perspective, as societies become more monetarized, financial resources become more available to civil society and are, to a degree, concentrated. At the same time, dense institutional structures become available and can be used as frames or platforms without restrictions or requirements on the part of the stakeholders. For instance, the Internet is a resource that can be used by any civil society organization at very low cost. Moreover, not all of the resources that organizations use must stem from the environment. They can even be mobilized within an organization; organizations can, for instance, request that members contribute their own work or pay extra fees. By mobilizing resources from inside the organization and its social base, as for instance in membership-based organizations, an organization can avoid environmental dependence as the institution of membership renders the social base an internal part

of the organization. It is striking how easily the organizations described in this volume can reorient strategies and activities. Reading the detailed chapters of the volume with care, one can observe that the notion of membership is absent. Informal participation, volunteering, professionals, avant-garde professionals, and networks are terms that describe the forms of engagement in most of the organizations studied. The correspondence between memberless organizations and the transformativity of the same organizations in civil society is rather apparent (Papakostas, 2011). This is more obvious in professional organizations as they seem to be able to adjust to changing funding opportunities with greater ease.

With reference to the relationship between the sources of mobilized resources and the organizational forms taken by civil society, I have developed a typology of the organizational space of civil society (Table 14.1). It suggests that membership-based organizations are not dependent on their environments as they mobilize their human resources and economic contributions from within the organization. The resources' inseparability from their physical bearers creates organizational stability. An organization thus gains autonomy from its environment, but the choices that can be made are dependent on the will, attitudes, or ideology of its members. Donation-gathering organizations, on the other hand, do not have this type of problem as they mobilize their resources primarily by means of small monetary contributions from the general public. And as small contributors are exchangeable and money can easily be transformed into

Table 14.1 Relational constellations of civil society resources

SOURCE OF RESOURCES

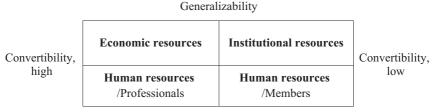|		Inside the organization	Outside the organization
DENSITY OF RESOURCES	Dispersed, many contributors or donors	**Membership**	**Donation-gathering**
	Concentrated, a few contributors or donors	**Cadre**	**Foundation**

Source: Adapted from Papakostas (2011)

other types of resources, these organizations are relatively independent of particular actors in their environment and have greater scope of action and possibilities to reorient their strategies and activities.

The typology can be seen as a first step toward understanding the polymorphous role played by the relational aspects of resources in accommodation, in contestation, and in the decisions civil society organizations take in the context of strategic orientation or adaptation. I elaborate the typology by introducing two additional dimensions: the *generalizability/specificity* of resources, that is, the degree to which they can be used in various organizational forms and activities, and the *convertibility* of resources, that is, the degree to which one resource can be exchanged for another (see Table 14.2). On the whole, the specificity of resources increases when resources are transformed for specific uses or purposes inside the organization.

Money cannot buy everything, but it is probably the resource that can be most easily converted to other resources: to purchase organizational material base, to hire staff and invest in their training, to transmit values through information campaigns, or to engage lobbyists. Economic resources can be a source of freedom for civil society organizations: as a generalizable resource, money is used universally by most types of organizations with different missions, beneficiaries, and target groups, and the abundance of other resources can often be conducive to accumulating funding. Conversion and substitution can often occur simultaneously; money enables an organization to adopt a more professional or institutional stance and marginalize the voice of the members. The case of the Swedish rural movement described by Anette Forsberg is illustrative here. As the European Structural Funds became available, a growth discourse evolved that marginalized the contesting nature and holistic discourse of

Table 14.2 The sociological aspects of resources

	Generalizability	
Convertibility, high	**Economic resources**	**Institutional resources**
	Human resources /Professionals	**Human resources** /Members	Convertibility, low
	Specificity	

local community development (Chap. 5). A similar process is described by Lisa Kings in her account linking the transformation of Save the Children Sweden to the availability of specific funding and highlighting its development from a membership-based popular movement into an organization based on avant-garde professionalism (Chap. 8).

Transformation and adaptation are among the principal mechanisms by means of which money can impact civil society organizations; a third important mechanism, described by organization population sociologists as "niche selection" (Scott, 2004), takes place through institutional regulation and is thus environmental. The generalizability of institutional norms is reflected in their influence on organizational fields, transcending organizational forms and missions. However, when institutional norms and an organization's commitment to its mission clash, the limitations of the convertibility of commitment as a symbolic resource reveal themselves (cf. Chap. 4). When states become major financing sources of civil society organizations, packages of requirements, scrutiny, and/or surveillance accompany the funding. Such packages, formulated as soft governance steering in liberal democracies or as arbitrary laws in the case of authoritarian states, are suitable for organizations with certain characteristics, but they exclude others. Selection creates stratification among organizations in each country's civil society and fragmentation within individual organizations. The case of equmenia in Sweden and the decrees and laws associated with the Presidential Grants in Russia exemplify the point (see Chaps. 1 and 3).

On the other hand, the low convertibility of some resources can be compensated for, as least partially, by the greater convertibility of others. Organizations can choose to mobilize resources from other sources or other types of resources, sometimes adjusting a part of the organization to the requirements of the environment and continuing other everyday activities as usual (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Civil society organizations are complex and multilayered organizations and not monoliths; their ability to partially adjust to their environments (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017) is obvious in the case of *Hesed Avramah*, one of the organizations studied by Zhanna Kravchenko (see Chap. 11). Reacting to state pressures, the organization handed over its advocacy activities to other organizations and de-emphasized its original Jewish identity. Beyond that, by using mixes of local and state resources, the organization expanded its

core care activities into several groups outside the narrow Jewish community.

Several of the cases included in this volume illustrate that the abundance of resources and their sources creates spaces of choice for civil society organizations, even if they offer very specific rather than general applicability. The European Solidarity Center in Gdańsk, described in Chap. 1 of this volume, substituted the source of resources by appealing to the general public as the state announced financial cuts. A similar shift is described by Lisa Kings in the case of Save the Children Sweden, which started cooperations with firms as it endeavored to secure long-term and more stable resources (Chap. 8). As Katarzyna Jezierska describes in Chap. 2, some money "stinks," so to speak, and think tanks use the strategies of diversification and avoidance of specific donors in order to create and maintain an image of independence.

Resources generated by some organizations, such as states, firms, or other civil society organizations, may be borrowed or used by other organizations. For instance, in Sweden, civil society organizations have historically used schools, cafés, and churches as meeting places, reserved sports halls for events, borrowed offices from municipal organizations, and received equipment loans from other organizations. During the last decades, the development of the Internet and associated software programs have also been of paramount importance. The availability of a shared pool of highly generalizable resources, such as Internet technology and social media platforms, allows organizations to use facilities with little effort and thus reduces the costs and the organizational structure necessary for their mobilization and maintenance (see, for example, Johansson and Scaramuzzino, Chap. 12). Freed of such organizational burdens, organizations can appear as less formal and more independent partial organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). The sometimes limited convertibility of the resources thus acquired may, however, require the establishment of more formal organizational structures to enable the accumulation of further resources. In her account of the rather informal urban movements emerging in the Polish context, Anna Domaradzka concludes that during the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in digital forms of participation employing different Internet tools, among them participatory budgeting. Furthermore, in comparing

collective action before and after the availability of the Internet, Domaradzka illustrates the point quite clearly:

> [W]ebsites, blogs, and social media profiles have become a significant tool for managing the activities of neighborhood groups as well as wider networks of urban activists in Poland. It is through the Internet that residents obtain information, local activists try to mobilize their communities to act, and coordinators announce various types of local activities and events. On the grassroots level, the Internet helps to maintain relations between the involved neighbors and to build a common identity related to a given place. (Chapter 6, p. xx)

When organizations decide whether or not to use particular types of resources, they create new relations with actors and shareholders. This is demonstrated by Vsevolod Bederson and Andrei Semenov in their analysis of choices made by civil society organizations in the Russian context, the requirements associated with the introduction of state funds into civil society, and the strict regulations ("foreign agents" law) associated with them (Chap. 7). According to the authors, Russian civil society organizations seem to understand the tradeoff between loyalty and autonomy. When it comes from the state, funding, as a highly generalizable resource, is accompanied by such strict norms and regulations that its convertibility is reduced, which increases dependency. Thus, organizations that value autonomy minimize contact with the state and tend to rely more on informal participation, while organizations that choose to comply with the requirements of the state engage in extensive interaction with the state and rely on professional staff.

Building on the contributions to this book, I reflect on my earlier research with Göran Ahrne on organizational landscapes (Ahrne & Papakostas, 2014). I suggest approaching civil society as a landscape that is being gradually reshaped, a constellation of various organizations that happen to exist in the same place at the same time, but with different origins, futures, and interdependencies. These constellations are not simple aggregations; rather, they consist of dynamic webs of interrelations, including collaboration and conflict around fundraisingFundraising or the framing of core issues. In this sense, any given constellation will always comprise power relations and hierarchies. Moreover, these

constellations are dynamic, shaping a civil society landscape that is constantly shifting, closing, and opening spaces that a broad variety of organizational forms and missions can inhabit.

This volume captures dynamic constellations of organizations as well as the conditions shaping their existence, such as legal regulations, political opportunity structures, economic circumstances, and normative contexts. From the authors' vantage points, resources are a tool for understanding the topography of civil society landscapes and the shifts in tectonic plates that fundamentally affect the shape of the terrain. Resources not only create the conditions but also provide ways of handling changes that occur in the landscape. Just as with tectonic plates, the changes observable on the surface (of national landscapes) result from pressures and movements that are deeply interconnected beyond the confines of a specific landscape (global and international trends). Although each contribution in this volume is focused on one national context, together they look beyond the traditional nation-state and enhance our understanding of domestic embeddedness and the interrelations between the supranational level and the local context. In sum, the coexisting trends of expanding and closing spaces in civil society development yield an organizational landscape that is becoming increasingly differentiated based on location, group, form, and content. The differentiation is intimately linked to polarization and contradictions between civil society organizations in their different constellations, and it is best revealed through the analysis of resources in which it is embedded.

It is said that good books resemble airport terminals: they offer trips to many destinations. This is a theoretically and empirically rich book with many nuances, and the points of departure I have chosen to highlight in this short epilogue represent only a few of the possibilities.

Notes

1. This work was financed by the Swedish National Research Council, Grant 2014-1557.
2. For more elaborate treatments of relational sociology from an organizational point of view, see Ahrne and Papakostas (2014) and Ahrne (2021).

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