



Book Review

Michael Hoelscher, Regina A. List, Alexander Ruser, Stefan Toepler, (eds.), (2022), *Civil Society: Concepts, Challenges, Contexts. Essays in Honor of Helmut K. Anheier*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland, pp. 493.

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The book under review here is not a traditional “edited by” collection of essays, but it is neither a classic “in honour of” volume. Overall, it is “both”, but it is also much more. The publication holds 30 scientific papers elaborated on occasion of the festive celebration of Helmut K. Anheier’s 65th birthday and retirement from his chair at the Max Weber Institute of the University of Heidelberg, the 28th of September 2019, organised by the Centre for Social Investment of the same university.

The collection follows a clear and accessible structure. The contributions of scholars and researchers around the world are organised around three main sections: a) conceptual issues and theoretical considerations relating to civil society, nonprofits, and philanthropy; b) the key challenges that civil society is facing globally; and c) concepts and challenges in local contexts. The first part, “Developing Concepts and Theoretical Frames,” includes 10 chapters. The second part, “Charting Global Challenges,” encompasses eight chapters. The third part, “Changing Contexts: Local and Regional Case Studies,” comprises 10 chapters. The volume is enriched by an Appendix listing Helmut K. Anheier’s publications.

The three main sections of the book are preceded by two introductory chapters. The first introductory chapter, “Civil Society Concepts, Challenges, and Contexts,” written by the editors, is dedicated to illustrating the aim and rationale of the volume; to recalling the outstanding academic career of Anheier and his many achievements; and, finally, to offering an overview of the book’s structure. The second chapter, “Scholarship, Leadership, and Institution Building” by Steven Rathgeb Smith, is devoted to illustrating and commenting on three main fields of Anheier’s research: a) the comparative study of nonprofit organizations; b) governance and social innovation; and c) philanthropic foundations. Underlying this analysis is discussion of the key role played by Anheier in “a broad international effort to build an infrastructure for the (Third) sector” (p 24).

The volume also includes two forewords. The editors of Springer’s *Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies Series* highlight the role that Anheier had in starting and developing the series as founding editor in 1999–2011, during which 14 edited volumes were published. The other foreword by Paul DiMaggio introduces Anheier as a

sociology scholar beginning with their participation in Yale's interdisciplinary Program on Non-Profit Organizations in the early 1980s.

Anheier's scholarly career made him a crucial "bridge" between two academic worlds – the US and European nonprofit research communities – through his research roles and teaching duties on both sides of the Atlantic. After appointments as a sociology professor at Rutgers and simultaneously as the co-director of the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins, he worked at the London School of Economics, where he was the founding director of the *Centre for Civil Society* from 1998 until 2002. In 2006, he moved to the University of Heidelberg, where he cofounded the *Centre for Social Investment*, and where he remained until his retirement in 2019, with a shared appointment at the Hertie School Berlin. In between, he served as founding director of the Center for Civil Society at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) from 2002 to 2008. Growing academically both in the new world and on the old continent, he was able to combine the "analytic tradition" of the German sociological thought with the "pragmatic orientation" of US sociology.

Anheier is what we can define as an "academic entrepreneur"; during his career he has played the role of "institutional innovator". From this point of view, his contribution to building several academic infrastructures of the field of civil society studies around the world is astonishing and impressive. As the table below shows, in more than 30 years of activity he has been able to establish three research Centres, start three international scientific journals and initiate four scientific book series.

	Academic Research Centres	Scientific Journal	Scientific Series
1990s	Centre for Civil Society (London School of Economics)	<i>Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i> (1990 Springer)	<i>Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies: An International Multidisciplinary Series</i> (Springer Publishing, 1999)
2000s	Center for Civil Society (UCLA) Centre for Social Investment (University of Heidelberg)	<i>Journal of Civil Society</i> , (2005 Routledge)	<i>Global Civil Society Yearbook</i> (Oxford University Press, 2001–2003; Sage, 2004–2009; Palgrave MacMillan, 2011–2012)
Mid 2000s- Beginning 2010s			<i>Cultures and Globalization Yearbook</i> (Sage, 2007–2012)
2010s		<i>Global Perspectives</i> (2020) University of California Press	<i>Hertie School's Governance Report series</i> (Oxford University Press, 2013–2019)

The book being reviewed is a sort of “travel guide” that takes the reader on an amazing journey in time and space. The journey in time offers a deep immersion into more than 30 years of study and reflection around the relational fields of institutions, actors, and values, situated “in between” the market and state, that has been widely defined as a public sphere, civil society, the third sector, or nonprofit organizations. The journey in space includes reports on empirical research (Part III) offering insights into several national contexts, and presenting a substantial group of studies (Part II) dealing with what has been defined as “global civil society”, namely the changes and the challenges facing the “civic sphere” in a globalized world. The book brings the reader from the “higher mountain peak” of theoretical thought (Part I) to the “fertile valleys” of national and regional case studies (Part III), going through the “wide deserts” and the “deep oceans” of globalization (Part II). At the end of the journey, those who followed the directions suggested by the many “maps” included in the guide will have undertaken an enriching scientific exploration into the “middle land” of the civic, civil, and civility dimensions of social life.

It is not possible in the space of a review to give even a short overview of the richness of topics and approaches presented by the 30 chapters of the book. Therefore, I opted for discussion of a selection of three chapters – one from each part of the volume – that, in my opinion, can point out to the reader the trajectory of Anheier’s scientific path. The three chapters are by Paul Dekker on “Dealing with Civility: Citizenship, Real Citizens, and the Science of Civil Society”; by Mary Kaldor and Sabine Selchow on “Planetary Politics: Reviving the Spirit of the Concept ‘Global Civil Society’”; and by Jeremy Kendall on “Policy Controversies and Challenges for Organized Civil Society: The Case of England Before the COVID-19 Crisis.”

In his chapter, Paul Dekker deals with the analysis of three elements that constitute the core of the academic debate around civil society: civility, civicness, and voluntary associations/organizations. The intertwining of these concepts delineates an epistemological space along two dimensions: substantive definition versus formal definition of civility on the vertical axis; and the sphere of social interaction versus the political sphere on the horizontal axis. This is the space of civil society. The declination of the civility concept can be described along a continuum going from “politeness” (on the bottom left quadrant of the diagram) to “civicness” (on the upper right quadrant). In his highly insightful paper, Dekker analyzes a broad spectrum of scientific literature starting with Anheier’s definition of civility (2007, 2010); across the foundational work of Shils (1997); through the studies of Eliasoph (2011) and Rucht (2011) concerning the role of voluntary organisations in promoting civility and the historical evolution of the concept of civility in western societies; until the wide theoretical perspective of Jeffrey Alexander who re-defines the idea of civil society as “civil sphere”, following a sociology of culture approach. Dekker recognises that conservatives and progressives, and communitarians and liberals, will take different

positions on the complex relationship between civility and civil society, and that there are shifts over time in the boundaries between “civil” and “uncivil” society. Finally, the author underlines a difference between his conception of civility as “cultural orientation” toward the promotion of certain values and Anheier’s notion as a more descriptive, “structural element” of civil society.

In their paper, Mary Kaldor and Sabine Selchow analyse the concept of “global civil society”, presenting a short history of its genesis, development, and crisis. Their paper draws on the research program that was founded by Anheier at the London School of Economics and which produced ten *Global Civil Society Yearbooks* (2001–2011). The original program had three main purposes: a) to make visible a new reality of political activism, social relations, and social organization as part of and a reaction to “globalization”; b) to put forward for debate and promote a distinct, “activist” idea of “civil society,” holding and promoting the principle of deliberation, as opposed to coercion, at its core; and c) to trigger a shift away from the deeply embedded assumption of methodological nationalism, that is to say, the assumption that society equals national society and how this “natural” and invisible inscription is used to symbolically order the world. The authors argue that the concept of “global civil society” played an important role in the symbolic and scholarly construction of social reality after the end of the Cold War. It represented a critique of conventional state-centric perceptions of politics by focussing on the significance of non-party politics and activism across borders; the study of global civil society was viewed as a way to supplant the study of international relations that refers to relations between states.

In the final section of the chapter, the authors affirm that in recent years the rise of new right-wing populist and authoritarian movements and the recognition that the global spread of democratic procedures has failed to enhance meaningful democratic possibilities suggest the opportunity to abandon the notion of “global civil society” in favour of the concept of “planetary politics”. The latter is more suited to consider the reality of the finiteness of natural resources, the essential interrelation between humans and life-supporting ecosystems, as well as the profound impact of past and future human developments on these systems. All of this to highlight the “practices of externalization” that characterize our “cosmopolitan condition” and to let emerge a “planetary subject” able to contrast and eventually to overcome them.

Jeremy Kendall’s very perceptive chapter shows the intertwining effects of the institutional environment (political and media system) on the creation of an enabling or hindering eco-system for civil society organizations on a country level. The chapter analyses the discrepancies between the rhetoric of several policy orientations and programs towards civil society (such as “The Compact” under the New Labour administration, “The Big Society” under the Coalition government, and the “Shared Society” under the Conservative administration), and the reality of the

negative effects they had on the UK charitable sector. Then, in the second decade of the century, two other events/phenomena hit the UK civil society: an aggressive campaign from the media and the result of the Brexit referendum, that changed the policy discourse and the public attitude towards the sector. Even if the study focuses strictly on a national case (UK), the reflections developed and elaborated are very useful and can be applied in the majority of western democracies.

As readers will have realized at this point of the review, I like metaphoric thinking (Gareth Morgan), since I think that it is a very useful, heuristic tool to enhance the production of knowledge, in particular in social sciences. Therefore, in conclusion we can say that the institution-building activity and the scientific work of Anheier act as a “catalyst” bridging together different schools of thought, academic traditions, multidisciplinary languages all over the world, around the origins, roles, and functions of the private space with public purpose named as “civil society”. The work of Anheier, deeply rooted in the sociological traditions, has been inspired by the “sociological imagination” (Charles Wright Mills) avoiding the trap of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Robert K. Merton) with the consciousness of the “critic role” of social sciences (Pierre Bourdieu) and the “reflexivity function” of the sociological discipline (Edgar Morin), adopting a macro look towards the interweaving relational networks, systems, and mechanisms (Niklas Luhmann) that shape social life in a globalized world.

The chapters included in this book offer several points of view to look at the scientific path of Anheier and in so doing give a remarkable contribution to the advancement of social sciences in the study of the democratic foundations of a healthy global civil society. Members of the scientific community (scholars, researchers, and PhD students) can find many insights for their own theoretical and empirical research programs; practitioners in both the private and third sector and public officials can find ideas in the case studies to improve the management of their own organizations. The book is particularly useful for Masters and PhD students as it offers an up-to-date overview of the field’s main theoretical approaches and empirical research.

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