

The Complex Relationship Between Civil Society and Trust

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How to cite

Selle P., Wollebæk D. (2015), The Complex Relationship Between Civil Society and Trust,
[Italian Sociological Review, 5 (3), 273-291]

Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/isr.v5i3.110>

[DOI: 10.13136/isr.v5i3.110]

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3. Article accepted for publication

November 2015

Additional information about

Italian Sociological Review

can be found at:

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The Complex Relationship Between Civil Society and Trust

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Abstract

This article is about the importance of an institutional perspective of trust. The core argument is that the type, scope and organization of civil society play a crucial role for the high level of trust and social capital in the Scandinavian countries. We argue that both the legitimacy of public institutions and their ability to deliver over time depend on a vibrant organizational society in which the organizations have independent institutional significance in their own right. Similar to other key social institutions, their functions include shaping sets of values and reducing vulnerability and uncertainty. Furthermore, these organizations constitute an entirely necessary infrastructure for cooperation, which makes it possible for trust to be institutionalized, reinvested and converted into action, and which also demonstrates that cooperation is rational and yields results. The aftermath of the terror attacks in Norway in 2011 demonstrated the existence of a strong civil society and its crucial role for community resilience. It contributed to curtailing widespread fear, mobilizing for collective manifestations of grief and restoring a sense of normalcy. However, the key role of civil society is not a permanent given. Developments within organized civil society may change their direct role as institutions and their indirect role as premise-setters and critical-correctors, particular in relation to the public sector. This may weaken the function of these organizations as key carriers of social trust.

Keywords: civil society, voluntary organizations, institutionalism, terrorism, welfare state.

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1. Introduction

In this article, we argue for an institutional perspective of trust in which a strong civil society plays a core role. The basis of our argument is that the type of civil society that exists, along with its scope and organization, has played and continues to play a vital role for the high level of trust and social capital that is well documented in the Scandinavian countries. Our approach contains three vital elements. First, we believe that both the legitimacy of public institutions and their ability to deliver over time completely depend on a vibrant organizational society. Second, the organizations have independent institutional significance in their own right. Similar to other key social institutions, their functions include shaping sets of values and reducing vulnerability and uncertainty. Third, they constitute an entirely necessary infrastructure for cooperation, which makes it possible for trust to be institutionalized, reinvested and converted into action, and which also demonstrates that cooperation is rational and yields results.

We believe that this is not merely a productive approach to research on trust and social capital, but that it also helps explain some of what is unique to Scandinavia: the Scandinavian exceptionalism that is so apparent with regard to voluntarism, trust and social capital, and which is institutionally demonstrated through a unique regime of civil society and a distinctive model of the welfare state (Wollebæk & Selle 2008). The aftermath of the terror attacks in Norway in 2011 in our view demonstrated the existence of a strong civil society and its crucial role for community resilience (Norris et al. 2008) – it contributed to curtailing widespread fear, mobilizing for collective manifestations of grief and restoring a sense of normalcy. At the same time, we argue that the key role of civil society is not a permanent given. The developments we have seen within organized civil society over the past decades can change their direct role as institutions and their indirect role as premise-setters and critical-correctors, particularly in relation to the public sector. In turn, this may weaken its function as key carrier and institutionalization of social trust.

2. Civil society and trust

Our approach has developed throughout the last decade or so, first as a critique of the micro-oriented socialization perspective within research on trust and social capital in particular (Putnam 2000), but eventually also toward what we can call the state-centered and macro-oriented approach that links trust to the state's output, with specific emphasis on the degree of welfare

universalism and well-functioning institutions that regulate conflict (Rothstein & Stolle, 2003, 2008).

Robert Putnam revitalized trust as a central concept in political science through his important work on social capital, in which trust is a key component. Putnam has defended a viewpoint that it is primarily through active, face-to-face participation in voluntary organizations and partly through other social networks in the local community, that one learns through experience that others are to be trusted. In a more recent book, he argues for the significance of having extensive social networks with the accompanying face-to-face contact that surrounds organized religion in the United States (Putnam & Campbell, 2011). According to Putnam, trust then arises as a by-product of social interaction in civil society. We refer to this orientation as the socialization perspective below.

This point of view has been challenged by more macro-oriented political scientists. Empirical studies have been referred to – including ours (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002b, 2007) – that point to the weak or nonexistent effects of active organizational participation on social capital. This was interpreted as proof that the role of voluntary organizations is greatly exaggerated in the literature on social capital (Rothstein & Stolle 2003, 2008). According to Rothstein and Stolle, political conditions should be given more emphasis, like the significance of essentially universal, just and well-functioning welfare systems, along with trust in institutions that regulate conflict. People draw conclusions from personal experiences with the front line of the welfare state, along with the police and legal system. If a person experiences unfair treatment, manipulation and corruption by these actors, this affects attitudes towards other people's inclination to cheat or exploit the system, and our own behavior adapts accordingly. To the extent that the institutions that regulate conflict (the police and the legal system) function in an impartial, efficient and just manner, we can feel secure that significant deviance will be sanctioned. It will thereby become easier to show trust in others. We refer to this position as the state-centered perspective below.

However, we believe that the role organizations play in the level of trust in a society is incorrectly specified in the first depiction, and underemphasized in the second (Wollebæk and Selle 2007). The socialization function of the organization is exaggerated in Putnam's framing, and the role of the organizations is rendered invisible through the strong emphasis on what and how public institutions deliver in Rothstein and Stolle's output-oriented framework. Where the socialization perspective becomes too micro-oriented and fails in its attempt to aggregate from a micro-level to the level of society, the state-centered output perspective is too macro-oriented and fails to grasp the importance of the linkages between the different levels. In this way, it also

fails to grasp the conditions necessary for the welfare regime to survive over time.

Our approach starts out from the organizational level (meso) and views the voluntary organizations primarily as institutions of society and structures for communication. However, what happens at the micro and macro levels is still very important – it is the relationships that exist across levels that are the main focus. Here, the organizations play a key role as intermediary structures. Being an intermediary is not mainly a theoretical construction in the Nordic countries as it is in much of the research on civil society and democracy otherwise, but rather a structural and empirical reality. Further, our perspective builds on a clear distinction between generating and maintaining or institutionalizing social capital. Despite the fact that these are two completely different processes, this distinction is barely mentioned in the literature, possibly as a result of the heavy emphasis on individual participation as a prerequisite for developing trust.

Below, we give a more detailed explanation of what we perceive as being problematic aspects, both from the socialization perspective, and the state-centered perspective. The socialization perspective encounters both theoretical and empirical problems; it is based on a normative enthusiasm for active participation that ought to be questioned, and the mechanisms it postulates have hardly any empirical support. The state-centered perspective is problematic because it primarily focuses on experiences with institutions within the public sector and attributes significant to these institutions. Too little attention is paid to other social institutions, especially within civil society. We do not learn much about how these public institutions are maintained, or how they change. We believe that this cannot be due to their own success alone, but also has something to do with expectations and pressure from other social actors. Finally, we summarize the basic structure of our alternative approach, which we consider to be a distinctive position in the literature on trust.

3. The limitations of participation

We are fundamentally skeptical to a basic assumption within large segments of the social capital theory, as well as in other key areas within modern, participant-oriented democracy theory: the idea that everything that is good comes from one's own active participation.

This “romanticization of participation” is something from which we have always kept a certain distance. The perspective is characterized both by paternalism, which we find normatively problematic, as well as a lack of empirical evidence. In our view, in a relative free society, as a matter of

principle one should be allowed to both withdraw and at the same time be a full member of society. The idea of volunteering as “the positive influence” that protected people against the harsh public sphere and the brutal labor market – which is strongly emphasized in the literature – is something we never bought into. According to our understanding, organizational life reflects society for better or for worse.

However, at the same time, organizations can be an important driving force for change. The potency of this capability of change has varied in different social fields, during different periods and in different societies. Still, few people would deny the importance of the people’s movements during the last half of the 1800s for the gradual democratization of Norway, or the importance of female-dominated organizations on how significant health and social fields ended up being for the development of the welfare state, as well as the impact of new social movements on debates on gender equality or on environmental and climate policies. Well-functioning public institutions have been, and continue to be, dependent on an active civil society that identifies and gives space to new areas of politics.

As a part of this more overarching thought, we came to focus more on the organizational society’s role with regard to democracy, rather than social integration. The socialization perspective was greatly toned down, and from the end of the 1990s, the role of democracy within organizations that are not themselves democratically constructed, was discussed (Selle & Strømsnes 1997, 1998): Gradually we also became more focused on the external role of democracy (democracy in society), than the internal one (the organization as a democratic structure and schooling in organizational democracy).

A comprehensive study of Norwegian environmental organizations from the middle of the 1990s clarified to us the significance of the distinction between the internal and external role of democracy in organizations. Environmental organizations often had few active members, to the degree that it was questionable whether they were grounded in the membership model at all (Grendstad, Selle, Strømsnes, & Bortne, 2006). The new organizations that emerged during the second half of the 1980s were often not democratically constructed. The passive supporters (or checkbook supporters) received information, often in the form of a comprehensive membership newsletter, and supported the organizations financially, but that was generally the only contact they had with the organization as a meeting place. Thus, there was none of the sort of face-to-face socialization Putnam describes.

In various works, we discussed not only the crucial role these passive supporters have for the existence of these organizations (for example, for their financial conditions), but also the idea that these organizations in spite of their passive rank and file, still constitute important institutions within

democracy (Selle & Strømsnes, 1998). At the same time, the idea that the passive members and checkbook supporters have great significance in the organizational society and within the democracy gradually takes form. The generally high level of trust that we find among this group, which is not distinguishable from the activists, calls the initial conditions of the socialization perspective into question (Wollebæk & Selle 2002b). The questions that have been raised are as follows: Why is a person a member when s/he does not participate? Why is passive membership so common in Scandinavia in comparison with other places? Do passive members constitute their own type who distinguish themselves from the typical activists, but who still have a very important democratic role to play?

At the same time, the environmental project clarified something else that was important. The passive members were often members of many other environmental organizations (some were members in just about all of them), as well as other types of organizations where they also socialized with like-minded people, even if not in the context of an organization. The idea emerged that a passive membership could be an important resource, not just for the organizations, but also for the individual member, especially if we considered the extensive communication system one could be a part of through such a connection. The passive members did not appear as marginalized. On the contrary, they were more similar to the active members than those who stood on the outside of the organizational society. Passive members even appeared to be more concerned about political questions, especially with regard to national and international questions, than those who were very active (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002b; Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008)

Eventually, both our own and others' empirical research helped reinforce our skepticism. A significant number of studies concluded that there was hardly any connection between the individual's active participation in an organization and social trust (Claibourn & Martin, 2000; Dekker & van den Broek, 1998; Freitag, 2003; Hyggen, 2006; Mayer, 2003; Stolle, 2001; von Erlach, 2005; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002b, 2007; Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008). Recently, longitudinal panel studies have emerged that seem to once and for all refute any claims for a causal relationship between active organizational participation and trust (Bekkers 2011, Sturgis et al. 2012). Yet while repeated studies have demonstrated that the role of organizational life as a "socialization machine" is probably exaggerated, a robust relationship between trust and the breadth of organizational associations emerged – the number of different organizations a person is a member of – irrespective of the level of activity (Mutz 2002, Wollebæk og Selle 2002b). In other words, the number of connections to various organizations revealed itself to be more important for the level of trust than how active a person was.

This is an important characteristic of the organized civil societies in the Nordic countries, where, above everything else, participation is characterized by a high number of organizational memberships – as a passive member or an active participant (Wollebæk & Sivesind 2010). Such intersecting organizational networks can lead to increased tolerance and understanding for other people's arguments (Mutz 2002). If the tension is reduced between organizational members, it can perhaps also have a positive effect on those who stand on the outside. Overlapping and intersecting organizational networks generate knowledge about "the others" and cross-cutting pressure that can counteract escalating conflict between individuals and groups.

This is not a new insight. The idea of overlapping cleavages and the value of belonging to "cross-cutting" networks occupies a crucial place within classic, pluralistically-oriented political science, in which Stein Rokkan (1967) also greatly emphasizes the significance this has had for the extent of social mobility in the Scandinavian countries in comparison with other societies. However, this comprehensive and relevant literature is seldom drawn into analyses of how trust and social capital at the present time is created, preserved or destroyed.

In summary, the empirical support for the socialization perspective is quite weak. It does not seem to be intensive participation that generates trust. Membership, active as well as passive, in political organizations and the breadth of membership appear to be more important, and the distinction between active and passive members is much smaller than between passive members and non-members.

4. Voluntary organizations as institutions

Yet if the individual effects of one's own activity within an organization are weak, the effect of everyone else's organizational participation, manifested in a powerful organizational society, is strong (Wollebæk og Sivesind 2010). There is namely a tremendously close connection between trust and the organizational society's strength at an aggregated level. In a study of 141 European regions, there was an almost perfect correlation (.87) between the average number of organizational memberships in the region and the degree of generalized social trust (Wollebæk & Selle, 2007). There is little to indicate that this is a spurious effect of other factors, such as level of wealth, trust in conflict-regulating institutions, ethnic homogeneity or social equality. The connection between the organizational society's strength and the level of trust in a society is hardly weakened, even if all of these factors are taken into consideration.

The Nordic regions scored by far the highest both with regard to organizational participation and social trust. This tells us that there is a unique constellation in the Nordic countries that must be explained, and that the individual-based explanations about socialization are insufficient to explain this variation. We believe that the state-centered perspective does have something to offer in explaining these variations. However, it places a rather heavy burden of explanation on a relatively new political model. Several other important, shared historical characteristics of the societies with high levels of trust in the Nordic region date many centuries back, like a high degree of homogeneity, a strong culture of community volunteering and collaboration, low levels of illiteracy, which is an important consequence of the Reformation and, in connection with this, extensive voluntary organizing. Still, the most important limitation of the state-centered perspective is that it is assumed that all of the important social institutions reside in the public sector. In our opinion, this is an unrealistic and quite unfortunate limitation.

On the contrary, we believe that the differences between societies that contain organized civil societies of varying strength support the idea that voluntary organizations are vital institutions when it comes to explaining the extent of trust and social capital in a more general way. Our basic argument is that voluntary organizations preserve trust by virtue of their institutional role, rather than generating it through socialization (or being irrelevant). This implies that they also affect people who are not linked to the organizational society at all. It is more important for the degree of trust that the individual belong to a community with strong organizations than for the individual him/herself to be greatly involved in organizations.

In our empirical study, this was supported by the fact that those who stood entirely on the outside of organizational life in the Nordic countries had a much higher level of trust than those who were very active in most of Europe otherwise. How could this be the case? We attempted to answer this with the help of a third question: “Do you think that voluntary organizations are an effective way to influence decisions in society” (Wollebæk and Selle 2007)? It appeared that positive answers were sufficiently linked to social trust; those who either held many memberships (active or passive) or had great faith in the organization’s ability to get things accomplished, whether they were members or not, were the most trusting. Those who stood entirely on the outside and in addition viewed organizations as less useful expressed the least amount of trust toward others. Thus, having faith in what the organizations could accomplish was a closer correlate of to trust than personal experiences from face-to-face meetings with other active members.

In our view, these findings underline the need for shifting the perspective away from regarding organizational society as comprised by agents of

socialization towards regarding them as an infrastructure - as institutions that affect the opportunity and space for collective action (both in shape and content).

This role can be compared with other types of infrastructure in society. The benefit of having a road is not limited to those driving at any given time; the benefit of telephone lines is not limited to those who currently engage in telephone conversation. In the same way, voluntary organizations have a latent beneficial value, even for those who are not members. In a strong organizational society, non-members are also aware of the possibility of getting involved in organizational activities to promote the issues they are concerned about, or to ask for help or support from the organization according to need.

The fact that this infrastructure has been especially important in Scandinavia is not only due to the sector's high and cross-cutting membership figures. Another important condition is its unique form of organization. Most organizations have had local and (usually) regional branches tied together by a national superstructure, with strong institutional ties between the levels (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a). The principal rule in the voluntary sector in many other countries, is that what is local is local and what is national is national (Torpe & Ferrer-Fons, 2007, Skocpol 2003). This structure has in Norway also coincided with and been strengthened by the way the municipalities and counties have been integrated into the national system of governing. This has to do with having a unique mix of strong centralization with a simultaneous emphasis on local and regional autonomy (Tranvik and Selle 2005).

This hierarchical organizational structure reflects the fact that our organizational society has been political and externally oriented from the beginning. The popular movements that dominated organizational life in the Scandinavian countries emerged parallel to the democratization of the political system. Just about every organization selected organizational models that imitated those of the parties and administrative structure, with local, regional and national sections. The local section was integrated into the central one, and vice versa (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a).

An organizational structure in which the local and national are linked together, creates a greater potential space for collective, politically-oriented action, than a bipartite local and national organizational life, which to a much greater degree limits the potential for influence to one level. Still, the organizational societies of several Nordic countries have started to move in this direction in recent decades (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a; Wollebæk, Siisiäinen, & Ibsen, 2010). Local community organizing, and the subsequent ability to affect and resolve local and generally everyday challenges, is of course not unimportant, but it is still an insufficient measure of real citizen

power. One must also be able to have an effect (political input) where the higher political resolutions are passed. Since democratic governance in practice is multi-level in character, this presupposes that large segments of the organizational society also must be vertically or hierarchically constructed in order to preserve its important role as an actual intermediate structure between the individual and society in general.

This is why the organizational connections reaching out of the local community are so important. Despite this, dominant theories in the field put very little emphasis on the structure of an organization, or the way in which to organize. Such ideas are to a large extent absent in Putnam's socialization perspective about the development of trust and social capital, in which the most important thing seems to be that the organizations are as "horizontal" as possible, and free of power, dominance and conflict. An important exception is Skocpol's works on the American organizational society's development and change, which shows that hierarchical organizations that linked the local and national level together also have been very important in the American democracy (Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000, Skocpol 2003). However, these structures are disintegrating, as they are in Norway, though this is happening to a much greater degree within American organizations of this nature.

We argue that neither dense local communities with a great deal of face-to-face contact, nor faith in the idea that a friendly state provides services in an efficient way (to the extent this is possible in a society without powerful voluntary organizations), is sufficient for preserving a trusting society over time. It is vital that there is also an institutional level with both comprehensive knowledge of and critical distance to government institutions, in order to supervise, and, if necessary, be a counterforce to the state and its structures. Such structures are by no means constant and can be strengthened or weakened over time, and they certainly cannot be found in every society, at least not to the same extent. In other words, taking the organizations' role as institutions in society seriously means that they are understood as being something that goes beyond and is far more important than just being arenas of leisure where people meet face-to-face.

This has entirely different implications for which voluntary organizations are emphasized than in the socialization perspective. While there has been a great deal of concern that members are becoming increasingly passive, because it is face-to-face social contact that is assumed to create trust, our perspective points toward visibility in society as being the most crucial factor, rather than the level of activity. The organizations must be publicly visible. Organizations that withdraw, do their own thing and do not really try to change or influence their surroundings at all will not have the same effect on people's view of cooperation as being something rational, meaningful and

accessible in the same way that the more external oriented and visible organizations have.

Further, the same mechanisms described by the state-centered perspective on public institutions might also be relevant to voluntary organizations. Experiences with how such organizations function, whether mediated or personally experienced, can influence our perspective on other people's willingness and ability to cooperate. Visible, externally-oriented organizations that achieve results are ongoing proof of rationality, normality, and the benefit of cooperating with others. Thus, this is about something much greater than the individual person's encounter with what public institutions have to offer, where the instrumental and more expressive factors are interwoven in complex ways. Organizations that come across as ineffective, including committing fraud when it comes to financial support, or lying and manipulating have the opposite effect, making us more skeptical when it comes to making financial contributions and giving numerical support to an organization at the next crossroad.

6. Civil society change and the future of trust

The organized civil society is constantly changing. We have previously documented a shift in the primary focus of the organizational society: from society-based to member-based objectives, from a conflict orientation toward a consensus orientation, and from connections between the local and national level to a bifurcation of the organizational society (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002a). Increasingly, organizational life is primarily an arena in which Norwegians carry out their leisure activities. Entirely new data from the local organizational level indicate that this development has unabatingly continued in more or less the same direction during the recent decade, with the exception of a reorientation towards the local community rather than their own members (Christensen, Strømsnes og Wollebæk 2011). At the same time, new data from the individual level demonstrate a clear sign of lethargy in Norwegians' willingness to allocate their time toward active organizational participation (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010).

How should one interpret this development from a perspective of trust? From the state-centered perspective of trust formation, it is of no consequence. As long as both the front line of the welfare state and the conflict-regulating institutions function in a fair and predictable way, people will trust each other to a greater degree here than in other places. The degree to which this will continue to be the case is certainly an entirely different question. The point here is that the direction civil society is developing has almost no importance within this way of thinking. The question of whether

the welfare state and public institutions can continue to be impartial, efficient and just in the context of a depoliticized and privatized organized civil society is not really thematized. It is the output aspect of politics (what gets done in what way), not input (the influence of direction and content), that receives focus.

There is a dual challenge here. The institutional focus is too limited, while at the same time there has been a lack of interest in who actually influences the conditions and ensures that they are present for the same public institutions to be able to reasonably deliver as promised over time. This has to do with both how such a system could develop in the first place, and what the conditions are for them to be maintained.

As shown above, Putnam has the diametrically opposite perspective: political institutions play secondary roles in relation to individual face-to-face socialization. Putnam establishes an individual-centered (and consensus-oriented) perspective on the role of the organizations, in which conflict - and everything vertical - often gets described as a threat to trust and integration. Here, voluntary organizations are primarily important as arenas for horizontal (that is, power neutral) interaction that in turn create trust (Putnam, 2000). Thus, in this perspective, the developments of recent decades in Norwegian organizational life are partly positive, at least until the arrows began to point downwards in terms of the amount of volunteering and active participation (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010). The growing types of organizations represent more of the apolitical and horizontal social interactions, which Putnam and others view as being the most productive sources of trust .

In other words, we believe that both of these influential approaches miss the mark- where one trivializes something that is important, the other exaggerates the wrong aspects. Two premises make up our point of departure: the fact that social institutions influence (and are influenced by) the value patterns of the population and that voluntary organizations are important social institutions. Yet if this is to be properly understood, it involves an entirely different way of viewing voluntary organizations within the jigsaw puzzle of trust than that which has dominated large sections of the literature about social capital. The amount of activity that takes place within the framework of the organizations of civil society is not the only factor that should be taken seriously, but also what they are doing, and particularly how they are structured, because this greatly affects what they can do and how they want to do it. Their role, the changes within it and the consequences of such changes, must be comprehended more holistically, in which all of the important dimensions are included. Here, according to our perspective, the relationships and interactions that the organizations of civil society have with the other main sectors in the society (state and market) are absolutely crucial.

The development from conflict to consensus and from hierarchical structure to bifurcated organizational communities in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia makes the organizations less visible in the public sphere. The organizations cannot in the same way constitute a real democratic infrastructure or counterbalance to dominance from the state and market. This may contract organizational life and weaken both its breadth and depth. It would be of no big surprise if such a development can affect its trust-preserving function over time.

The end of innocence? Norway in a post-terrorism environment

The processes of change we have described so far are incremental and slow. At other times, societies may change abruptly due to external shocks. One such shock occurred on July 22nd 2011, when 77 people were killed in the first large scale act of terrorism in peace time in Norway.

The events and their aftermath present an opportunity for reflection on the resilience of civil society and trust structures in Norwegian society. As a peaceful, relatively homogeneous country at the outskirts of Europe, one may have feared that the shock of exposure to violent terrorism could have had particularly detrimental effects; it could have disrupted trust structures and heralded a new era of fear and distrust. This did not happen. In the weeks following the attacks, both interpersonal and institutional trust increased from already high levels (Wollebæk et al. 2012a). Moreover, widespread fear did not set in. People showed comparatively little concern for the possibility of new attacks, largely due to their strong belief in the government's ability to protect and their high generalized trust, the seemingly unwavering belief of Norwegians in the good intentions of others (Wollebæk et al. 2013).

In the following months, the muted critique of the actions of the police and other core institutions gradually became more vocal, culminating with the damning report of the July 22nd Commission, published in August 2012. In the aftermath of the report, the population professed much less trust in the government's ability to protect against terror. Still, general questions concerning trust in institutions and other people showed that, with the exception of weakened trust in the police, which not only received the most damning critique from the commission, but had exonerated themselves in their own internal evaluations, levels had not dropped further, but normalized to pre-22nd July levels.

The main narrative of the year following July 22nd is one of community resilience (Norris et al. 2008). Community resilience describes a society's ability to return to normalcy after an external shock. There is no doubt that the strength of civil society proved a crucial resource in this process; in mobilizing a sense of togetherness and organizing national manifestations of grief. As the main victim of the organization was a voluntary association – the

youth wing of the Labor Party – the events seem to have led to something of an awakening among youths previously unconcerned with organized political activity.

However, the main test for civil society and the maintenance trust structures is yet to come. The 22nd July Commission Report identifies systemic failures in the public sector in how it has dealt with terrorism. Rectifying these mistakes is not something that can be achieved by political decisions alone. Preparedness against external threats such as terror is a so-called wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Wicked problems are, in contrast to “tame problems”, unstructured, dynamic and complex. They are characterized by a multitude of stakeholders with varying understandings of the problem, absence of simple solutions, and great uncertainty with regard to cause and consequences of the problem. Quick fixes, such as increased surveillance, are unlikely to yield much more than a false sense of security.

The situation in Norway post July 22nd speaks to the limitations of public sector institutions in maintaining trust. The extent to which a sense of security, upon which an open, trusting society is fully dependent, can be fully restored, will largely hinge on the strength of the structures we have discussed and described above, and the successful interplay between civil society and the public sector.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have made the case for a third position between a micro-oriented socialization perspective and a macro-oriented state-centered perspective. We believe the socialization perspective is correct in regarding voluntary organizations as important with respect to trust, but that the mechanisms in the theory are incorrectly specified. We also agree with the state-centered perspective that institutions play an entirely central role with regard to social trust. However, we criticize its failure to adequately identify the significance of the organizations of civil society. First of all, we are convinced that the institutions of civil society influence our norms and our view about the sensibility and accessibility of cooperating with other people. Second, we believe that it is insufficient to focus exclusively on the output aspect of politics, without systematically including the input aspect, not to mention the interaction between the input and output aspects of politics. What is it that creates trust, provides the social system with legitimacy and gives politics their content? Our view is that a strong civil society, organized and socially directed, has vital significance here.

The main elements in our approach can be summarized in five points:

- Institutions are significant for trust – the reasons for trust cannot be localized exclusively at the micro level.
- The organized civil society constitutes important social institutions – the welfare state’s front line, police and legal system are not the only institutions that shape the basic set of values.
- A strongly organized civil society directly affects the level of trust in a society, both among those who actively participate and those who stand on the outside. They constitute the space of possibility and an infrastructure for collective and democracy-related action, and they demonstrate that cooperation is rational and may lead to results.
- A powerfully organized civil society has an indirect effect on the level of trust. Without a powerful civil society (input), we believe public institutions will have great problems with both legitimacy and efficiency over time (output).
- The function of civil society depends on both time and context. The third and fourth points presuppose visible organizations that provide actual input into democracy, administration, and politics.

In other words, according to our perspective, it is vital that the organizational society has sufficient visibility, breadth and constitutes actual intermediate structures to be able to fulfil the functions outlined above.

The organizational society can institutionalize and preserve trust. Yet it is not the case that all institutions, regardless of what they do or how they are structured, have the same effect in institutionalizing trust. We have stressed a unique Norwegian and Scandinavian structure that links the local and national together, an orientation toward society rather than just the individuals who are linked to the organizations, and an ambition to influence or change society. In recent decades, the organizational society has started to go in the opposite direction. This development can diminish the organizational society’s ability to institutionalize and preserve trust over time, and thereby change our society and democracy in a more fundamental way than it might initially seem.

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