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## Toward a Global Research Agenda on Civic Service: Editors' Introduction to This Special Issue

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In this special issue of *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, we begin to explore a research agenda on civic service, which we define as “an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (Sherraden, 2001a, p. 5). In this definition, we refer to formal service, organized in policies and programs, with distinct service roles and expectations, similar in this way to labor market positions. We distinguish civic service from less formal, less defined, and less intensive volunteerism. Civic service might be viewed as a subset of volunteerism, toward the more formal end of a continuum, or civic service might be viewed as a separate phenomenon. In the next article, we suggest that service might become a new field of study, just as military service is a distinct field of study, but this is yet to be decided.

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Why the word *service*? Naming a social phenomenon always presents problems. There is never a perfect word, never an agreed-on meaning or measures (Carson, 1999; Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Dingle, Sokolowski, Saxon-Harrold, Smith, & Leigh, 2001). The word *service* has widely different meanings in different languages and cultures (Menon, McBride, & Sherraden, 2003). To give our personal examples of usage of this word as we are familiar with it in the Midwestern United States, the noun *service* has commercial connotations; it is what a good business provides. *The service* refers to military

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service. *Services* are what governments provide to people. And the verb *to service* refers to animal husbandry. These meanings will be somewhat different in different areas of the United States and far different in other languages (excellent examples are in Tapia, 2003). There is no ideal word to select. Every existing word carries historical and cultural baggage. That is the glory of language! Sometimes we think that it might be possible to avoid this baggage if we created an entirely new word. One candidate is *servus*, which is not a word in any language that we know of and has the potential of a double entendre in English (service and serve us). *Servus* also sounds Latinate, weighty, timeless. Perhaps it would be a good choice. But introducing an entirely new word into the world is a challenge. For the time being, we stick with the word *service*.

Why the word *civic*? Civic distinguishes civic service from military service. This distinction is fundamental because military service and civic service have very different goals. One is defensive, protective, and forceful; whereas the other is proactive, developmental, and peaceful. As we document in the next article, the state has very different relationships with military and civic service. The term *civic service* implicitly makes the point that there is more than one way to serve. Our ideological stance is that different forms of service to a nation-state should be created so that individuals have choices in how to serve. We select the word *civic* in part because it has social and political connotations, as in civic engagement (Galston, 2003; Janowitz, 1983; Moskos, 1988; Perry & Katula, 2001). It connotes connections to a broader polity and society. We do not use the alternative word *civil* because civil service already has a widely understood meaning; civil service refers to civilian employees of government. Civic is not an ideal word. Again, there are huge differences in cultural meanings. But it appears to be the best choice, unless a new word is eventually created.

Why study civic service? Civic service appears to be an emerging phenomenon in many countries around the world (possibly related to the emergence of nonprofit organizations; see Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). Organized military service arose thousands of years ago, but civic service, as we define it in this special issue, is largely a creation of the 20th century. We view civic service as an emerging social institution, purposefully constructed to enhance personal, societal, and economic development and environmental protection (Sherraden, 2001b). In this view, civic service is about social control in the sociological sense; it is an effort toward self-regulation by society (Janowitz, 1974, 1983). Although the term may have negative connotations in popular discourse, social control for a society is desirable and necessary. By way of analogy, just as individuals must learn self-control, societies must learn how to regulate themselves to attain positive outcomes for individuals and society as a whole.

The numbers of civic service policies, programs, and participants have grown in the last decades of the 20th century, at a time when military service

was shrinking in many countries. Although the total number of participants in military service still far exceeds the number in civic service, this pattern appears to be gradually changing. It could be that civic service is an emerging institution that may one day be as prominent as military service, public education, social services, public health, and other major social institutions. With aging populations in many countries, elder service could one day become as or more prominent than youth service (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Sherraden, 2001). In anticipation of these possibilities, it makes sense to study civic service during this period as it is emerging.

Why a global perspective? As we document in the next chapter, civic service exists today in more than 50 countries (McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden, 2003), and there is widespread international interest (Ford Foundation, 2001). Civic service is not exclusively a U.S. idea, nor a North American idea, nor a Western idea. Although most programs identified in this preliminary research are in the United States and Western Europe, civic service is also well represented in Africa and Latin America and, to some extent, occurs in every region of the world. Although the emergence pattern is uneven, it may be that civic service is becoming global. Under these circumstances, a global perspective is likely to be the most informative and productive approach. When we can get to the stage of comparative studies across nations and regions, we are likely to learn a great deal about civic service (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990; Hodgkinson & Painter, 2003; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001).

#### THE GLOBAL SERVICE INSTITUTE

In 2001, the Ford Foundation initiated a program of research, information, and policy and program development known as the Global Service Institute (GSI). GSI is conceived as an ever-growing set of interconnected individuals and organizations, a network of scholars, technical experts, policy makers, and practitioners around the world. The research and information agendas of GSI are facilitated by the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University in St. Louis. CSD works in partnership with Innovations in Civic Participation in Washington, which facilitates the policy and program agendas, as well as with many other organizations. The Ford Foundation has been a long-time supporter of service. This steady commitment is evident across the organization, from President Susan Berresford to vice presidents and program officers in all three major divisions of the foundation, especially Cynthia M. Duncan and Loren Harris. The impetus for creating GSI was a sense that service is developing globally, but the knowledge base is very limited. The view is that increasing the quality and depth of knowledge, and sharing this information worldwide, can help to inform and undergird policy and program development in civic service.

### FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

As part of the mission of GSI, CSD planned and hosted an international conference to inform the development of a global research agenda on civic service, held in Buenos Aires in September 2002. This was perhaps the first international conference on civic service to focus on the state of knowledge and questions for research. The aims of the conference were to assess the history and status of civic service in eight regions of the world, review the civic service knowledge base in each, and identify questions for future research. This special issue of *NVSQ* presents revised articles from the conference.

We are grateful to all of the authors of the articles in this volume: Maggie Bar-Tura, Edna Co, Nicole Fleischer, Amani Kandil, Éva Kuti, Leila Patel, James Perry, Justin Davis Smith, Maria Nieves Tapia, and Gautam Yadama. They applied their expertise in volunteerism, citizenship, and civil society, producing thoughtful and thorough assessments of civic service. We appreciate their willingness to embark on a course that in large measure is not yet charted. A special thanks is due to Virginia Hodgkinson for serving as conference rapporteur. As a renowned leader worldwide in the development of research on the nonprofit and voluntary sector, her insights are extremely valuable for informing the development of a global research agenda on civic service. We are also grateful to all of the conference participants, who added considerably to the discussion in Buenos Aires and to the quality of the resulting articles. And we are especially grateful to Steven Rathgab Smith, editor of *NVSQ*, and the *NVSQ* staff, for their work in bringing this special issue to press.

### TOWARD A GLOBAL RESEARCH AGENDA IN CIVIC SERVICE

We hope this special issue will begin to build an empirical foundation for studying civic service worldwide. Eventually, this emerging field of study may lead to systematic data sets (Dimaggio, Weiss, & Clotfelter, 2002) and to comparative analyses. That is our long-term goal. The purpose is not solely knowledge for greater understanding of civic service (although this too is important) but also knowledge to guide policy and program development. We hope and intend that this special issue is a first step in building a stronger body of knowledge on civic service, in partnership with scholars and practitioners around the world.

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