



## Editorial

Dennis R. Young

# The First Decade of *Nonprofit Policy Forum*

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As this is my last issue as Editor-in-Chief of *Nonprofit Policy Forum (NPF)*, I want to take this opportunity to look back, and to gauge the progress this journal has made compared to our aspirations in 2010. I want also to consider how the world of nonprofits and public policy has changed since then and how the journal has adjusted. Further I want to recount some lessons we have learned about stewarding an applied, interdisciplinary academic journal in today's environment. My reference point is the article I wrote for the first issue, entitled "A Journal of Nonprofit Policy". Curious readers may wish to reread that paper for a sense of the historical perspective from which I proceed here (<https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/npf/1/1/npf.1.issue-1.xml>).

In 2010 we set out to publish definitive research about the intersection between the nonprofit sector or civil society, however manifested in different countries around the world, and public policy. Previously research in this area was thin, scattered and unfocused, spread among a variety of nonprofit studies and public policy and administration journals. As such, this was a neglected though very important niche in the landscape of nonprofit research. *Nonprofit Policy Forum* sought to bring attention to, and to encourage, high quality research in this field. We also hoped to engage nonprofit leaders and policy-makers, if not as authors of research articles, then as paper reviewers, authors of essays and policy briefs, book reviewers, and subjects of interviews and case studies. Though we have not yet succeeded in becoming the "New England Journal of Medicine for Nonprofit Policy", we have enjoyed modest success along these various lines, and I believe we have established the foundation for continued growth in prominence, reputation and quality of the journal. More on our progress and the bumps in the road along the way, later. First, I would like to consider how the field of nonprofit policy has evolved, and how the journal's content has adapted over the past decade.

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# 1 Now and Then

In 2010, citizens and scholars worldwide were concerned with a somewhat different set of policy-related issues than they are now. Economic instability was a global concern in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008–9 though it was manifest in diverse ways in different countries and regions. The United States was coping with high unemployment, Europe with internal tensions associated with austerity policies and sovereign debt of Southern European members, the Middle East and Russia with the declining price of oil, less developed countries with chronic poverty, and China and India with the challenges of modernization and growth, etc. An underlying theme was increasing globalization and interdependence of economies and societies around the world.

Climate change was a strong and growing concern, with pressure in the developed world to reduce carbon emissions, juxtaposed against the aspirations of fast growing economies in China and India and other parts of the developing world. Terrorism remained an important global problem with the growth of ISIS, and memories of 9/11 and other attacks still fresh in the minds of people in the U.S. and elsewhere. Nonetheless, democratic aspirations were also rising in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa, with the Arab Spring a prominent development in 2010.

In several ways, the world looks very different in 2021. Globalization seems to be stalling, reflected in populist regimes and policies enacted in the U.S., U.K. and elsewhere, tariffs wars between the U.S. and China, barriers to immigration established in the U.S. and the European Union, and of course Brexit, the consequences of which are yet to be felt. Democratic aspirations have been suppressed in much of the Middle East as well as Hong Kong, and autocracy is on the rise in countries in Eastern Europe including Hungary and Poland, in Turkey and India, and it has tightened its grip in Russia and China. The latter poses great challenges for nonprofit policy research. In 2010, a big question was how civil society works to democratize heretofore totalitarian regimes. In 2021, a bigger question is how civil society can function and even survive in increasingly autocratic circumstances.

Climate change has become an ever more urgent concern in 2021, calling for greater collaboration among governments and civil society worldwide. And indeed signs of hope are emerging with the election of Joseph R. Biden as U.S. President, with his progressive agenda of environmental policies and international collaboration, and his decision to rejoin the Paris Climate Accords. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only diverted attention from global cooperation but indeed has led many countries to erect barriers to international travel and immigration, if not commerce and communication more broadly. The implications for public policy affecting nonprofits in the pandemic constitutes a whole new

complex of concerns. This includes the ways civil society can help to address and ameliorate the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, and how public policy can help underwrite the very survival of many civil society organizations that have been badly damaged by the economic and political fallout.

Finally, the pandemic has magnified long term trends and concerns about social inequality, which erupted in 2020 with the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S. to address police brutality, and spread to embrace issues of racial and economic discrimination worldwide. In the pandemic, we have seen people of color suffer disproportionately in terms of both health-related and economic loss. And with the advent of vaccines we are now witnessing discriminatory patterns of distribution of this scarce resource, with wealthy countries able to outbid poor ones for the supplies they need. Civil society is integrally involved in the pandemic in a variety of ways across the globe but we are yet to fully understand how its role and efficacy affect, and are influenced by, developments in public policy.

## 2 Evolving with the Times

In my 2010 introductory essay, I delineated eight broad topical categories which I anticipated that research articles in the new journal would address and for which the journal welcomed contributions. These were based on prior content of nonprofit policy-related research published elsewhere, as well as a sense of what important issues were emerging as we launched the journal. These categories serve as a baseline from which to measure how well our expectations fit the reality of nonprofit policy research as it emerged over the last decade. As I did in 2010, I will consider (or reconsider) each category here, to convey a sense of how well expectations were met. I will also consider aspects of nonprofit policy research that emerged in the journal, that I failed to anticipate.

### 2.1 Sector Boundaries

The relative roles of the nonprofit, for-profit and governmental sectors have been a frequent focus of research and theory development since the beginning of the nonprofit studies field. Indeed, the basic economic theory that we commonly apply to understand the emergence of a third sector is based on concepts of market and government “failure”. The question of sector boundaries is a dynamic and critical issue with multiple policy implications for how and whether civil society organizations are permitted to participate in the political process, how and whether they can participate in markets, and how the responsibilities of government and

nonprofits coincide in the “new public management”. Various tax and regulatory policies police these boundaries including qualifications for tax exemption and rules governing distribution and taxation of profits. Moreover, scholars have noted over time that the sectors have become more and more interdependent and hybridized, and their boundaries increasingly blurred. Indeed, a whole new class of social enterprises has emerged through public policy, combining characteristics of nonprofit organizations, e.g., asset locks, limited profit distribution, public missions and tax benefits, with characteristics of for-profit firms, e.g. ownership, competition and profit sharing. At the same time, government and nonprofits have become more interconnected through contractual and partnership arrangements, co-production in the delivery of public services, and joint solving of public problems.

Given all this, we anticipated that research examining the boundaries of civil society and its interfaces with government and business would be a prominent theme in *Nonprofit Policy Forum*. Given the remit of the journal, it was almost inevitable that most papers would touch on boundary issues. After all, policy involves government and the journal focuses on nonprofits *and* policy. But even with a narrow interpretation of the sector boundary category, papers bearing on boundary issues were common throughout the first decade of the journal and remain present in almost every issue. Moreover, *NPF* featured four special issues coincident with this category, spanning the decade: a special issue on nonprofit-governmental compacts covering arrangements in four different countries (issue 3:2 in 2012); a special issue on Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) covering arrangements in five countries (issue 7:4; 2016); a special issue on nonprofits under the new public governance paradigm (issue 8:4, 2017); and most recently a special issue on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nonprofit-government relations, featuring papers on nine different countries (issue 12:1, 2021). Nonprofit-government relationships and boundaries are intrinsic to the study of nonprofit policy and no doubt will continue to be an important theme in future issues. However, the character of those relationships is changing and will continue to require study and scrutiny. The growth of autocracy and populism has added new wrinkles to this subject area, wrinkles that were barely visible when we started the journal in 2010.

## 2.2 Accountability Policies and Practices

Research on regulation and accountability policy governing the nonprofit sector necessarily overlaps with research on sector boundaries. After all, policing the boundaries is a basic part of regulation. However, much research on nonprofit regulation and accountability is more specific than that, and has threaded its way

continuously through the issues of the journal over the past decade. Much of this research is also country-specific given that countries each have their own laws. Nonetheless, cross-border regulation of philanthropy remains a cutting edge topic, especially in Europe where the European Union has grappled with the challenges of regulating and stimulating cross-border philanthropy (see issues 5:1 and 11:3), as is comparative, taxonomic research to classify the different kinds of regulatory regimes found across countries (see issue 9:4). Within countries, regulatory research focuses on a wide variety of issues including regulation of charitable solicitation and fundraising practices, lobbying and advocacy activity, public filing and reporting requirements, political activity, competition, treatment of foreign charities, labor law application to volunteering, and metrics for nonprofit performance and evaluation. Significant here was our special issue on governance and accountability in the wake of the Oxfam scandal (issue 10:4) which raised questions about nonprofits' organizational cultures, reputation management, and the need for more exacting standards of ethical behavior by nonprofit officials. The latter special issue reflected the times in which we now live, with heightened awareness of sexual harassment and gender equity. With this exception, the litany of regulatory policy issues was familiar in 2010 and continued as a moderate but constant drumbeat throughout the decade.

### 2.3 Contributing to Economic Well-Being

My essay in the first issue of *NPF* anticipated that the journal would attract research focused on the role nonprofits play in improving the economic wellbeing of society. Several channels of economic development were identified including job creation and economic impacts of major nonprofit institutions such as universities, hospitals or arts centers; the building of social capital; contributing to the growth of the service sector of the economy; developing human capital; addressing social pathologies such as crime and poverty; and mobilizing charitable and volunteer resources to address economic needs. Over the course of the decade, this theme was periodically visited in several ways. Some papers focused on economic development or poverty reduction, as a general matter, on the role of religious congregations, and in different world regions including Europe and the Caribbean. A few other papers examined the role of nonprofits in building social capital with presumed benefits for the economy. Much more attention, however, was paid to developing human capital, including the potential role of National Service in the U.S. in building the nonprofit workforce, policies to protect volunteer workers, and especially employing marginalized workers through social enterprises. As noted earlier, a special issue of *NPF* (7:4, 2016) was devoted to Work Integration Social

Enterprises (WISEs) in five countries in North America, Europe and Asia. More broadly, additional papers related to social enterprise throughout the first decade of publication bore on a growing interest in enlisting market forces to address social issues including economic wellbeing, through hybrid organizational means.

## 2.4 Energy and the Environment

My essay in the first issue anticipated and encouraged research on how nonprofits influence environmental policy as well as how nonprofits themselves, as a significant fraction of the economy, can become more efficient in their energy and climate-related practices. A small handful of papers did explicitly address environmental issues over the decade, including the role and capacity of nonprofits to advocate for policy change, and charitable support for state parks.

## 2.5 Security and Human Rights

Terrorism was a salient worldwide concern in 2010. Thus my essay anticipated growing interest in knotty nonprofit-policy concerns raised by this issue, including reconciling the tensions between freedom of expression, religion, and human rights, on one side, and public safety and security, on the other. Churches and Islamic charities were particularly vulnerable at that time. Over the decade immigration policy became a major concern, reflected in a few papers published in *NPF* which focused on the role of nonprofits and foundations in immigration reform. Other papers examined nonprofits and terrorist financing, the impact of policy on the ability of Muslim charities to provide humanitarian aid, and the impact of government financing on charitable support of religious nonprofits in Pakistan.

Other papers focused more generally on the role of the nonprofit sector in promoting human rights. By mid-decade, concerns were growing that autocratic governments were working to suppress human rights and the civil society organizations that promoted and defended those rights. A special issue highlighted these concerns in central and eastern Europe (Issue 6:2, 2015), as did papers in a special issue on China (Issue 9:1, 2018) and the special issue on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on government-nonprofit relations in Asian and European countries (12:1, 2021). Additionally, several papers in the special issue on governance and accountability stemming from the Oxfam scandal, highlighted problems of organizational culture and gender discrimination in the context of NGO regulation (Issue 10:4, 2019).

## 2.6 Developing Civil Society

In my 2010 essay I described the variations in political and historical context in countries around the world as a “natural experiment” that could be studied to understand how civil society and the nonprofit sector have developed in different ways and forms. At that time, democracy still seemed ascendant and a key question was how different forms of government would affect the emergence and functionality of civil society organizations. Along these lines, papers in the earlier part of the decade explored the emergence of government-nonprofit compacts in various western countries, a new legal framework for charitable activity in the European Union, the growth of nonprofits in China, and hybridization of the sector to include social enterprises combining aspects of market and social mission orientation. Toward the end of the decade, however, a darker tone emerged in the scholarship published in *NPF*, with more emphasis on government suppression of civil society and the political side of nonprofit activity. By mid-decade, papers here addressed such issues in South Africa, several eastern and central European countries, Egypt, other countries in Africa and Latin America, China and Spain. Near the end of the decade (2018 on) this concern intensified in the pages of this journal, including papers focused on China, Austria and most recently, during the 2020 pandemic, in China, India, Turkey, Hungary and Israel. With the growth of populism worldwide this clearly remains an important area of policy scholarship for the foreseeable future. The question has become not only how civil society emerges and contributes to the development of democracy in places not heretofore democratic, but how the role of the sector itself can be preserved as a critical part of democracy even where democracy is the historical norm. No country seems immune to this issue now, and its scrutiny seems ever more important for nonprofit policy research.

## 2.7 Social Justice

In my introductory essay in 2010 I noted the varied roles that civil society organizations play in advocating for causes and aggrieved or underserved groups, and in resolving societal conflicts. I welcomed research to understand the processes by which the nonprofit sector carries out its advocacy, adversarial and conciliatory work to achieve policy goals associated with social justice. Various issues were salient at the time, including AIDS, discrimination against minorities and women, and gay rights. On the international level, nonprofits were active in trying to ameliorate conflict and injustice in various parts of the world, including the Middle East (Palestinians and Israelis) and in Northern Ireland (Catholics and Protestants).

While papers addressing various aspects of policy advocacy are found in the pages of *NPF* throughout the decade, relatively few papers are focused on specific causes or aggrieved groups. Most advocacy-related papers were concerned more with process than specific causes and with the politics and policy efficacy of nonprofit advocacy, as illustrated by several papers in the current issue. Nonetheless, some papers did address the interests of Native Americans and immigrants in the U.S., as well as human rights in Brazil, and poverty in the U.S. Women's issues were most prominently represented, especially in the special issue on the Oxfam scandal (10:4, 2019) and a special issue on philanthropy (11:2, 2020) in which one paper considered the impact of women's philanthropy on social change.

## 2.8 Achieving Social Change

My 2010 essay suggested that most nonprofits are designed to achieve social change of some kind, through various mechanisms including advocacy, service delivery, coalition building and collective action. Some of this activity entails explicit political engagement and some involves testing of new ideas about social change, such as using market-based strategies and social enterprises to improve the welfare of marginalized workers. More broadly I encouraged researchers to examine theories of social change as they related to nonprofits' engagement to solve major social problems in concert with, or by challenging, governments and public policy.

A few papers over the decade explicitly addressed the phenomenon of social change. These included articles on immigration reform, nonprofit charter schools, grass roots coalition building, foundation funding for causes such as human rights, governmental reform and policy agenda setting, the role of think tanks in tax reform, nonprofit engagement with elections and voter registration, and impacts of charitable giving on advocacy and social change. All of these contributions added modest new insights into our understanding of the role of nonprofits in social change, though none offered a comprehensive theory or overview.

## 2.9 Perspective

While my essay anticipated much of the content to be published in *Nonprofit Policy Forum* over the next 11 years, there were some surprises. One perhaps unforgivable blind spot was tax policy. While tax policy is part of a policy regime to police the boundaries of the nonprofit sector and civil society, this was a category deserving of its own attention. Throughout the decade, *NPF* published papers on a range of tax policy issues including tax exemption for hospitals, impact of the value-added

tax on the nonprofit sector (in Sweden), nonprofit property tax exemption, unrelated business income tax, disclosures of fiscal sponsorship on 990 tax forms, nonprofits' response to federal tax legislation, impact of tax policy reform on charitable giving, and reform of the charitable income tax deduction, in the U.S. While tax law differs from country to country and most of the published papers here address issues in the U.S., it is clear that tax policy is central to nonprofit-related public policy and will continue to draw researchers' and policymakers' attention for the foreseeable future.

Despite the U.S. orientation of tax policy papers, it is gratifying to look back more generally at the international diversity of research papers and authors published in *NPF* from the outset. Every continent (except Antarctica) and dozens of countries are represented in the papers published here. There is a bias of course, partly due to language barriers and perhaps the limited degree of interaction between civil society researchers in the West and other parts of the world. Latin America, Africa and India are not well represented, while North America, the U.K., Western Europe, Israel and China have received robust attention. Moreover, parts of the world that see their economies through a different lens than the three sector – public, business, nonprofit – model, may approach public policy differently than most of the scholarly community writing for *Nonprofit Policy Forum*. I am thinking particularly about French-speaking Canada and parts of Francophile Europe and Africa where the paradigm of the social economy and an emphasis on cooperatives rather than nonprofits, predominates. These parts of the world are by no means civil society/third sector deserts; they just do things differently. If *NPF* could stimulate greater dialogue with scholars in this tradition, I think we would all be the richer for it.

Finally, a very large proportion of nonprofit policy research is entangled with understanding the complex, multidimensional relations between the nonprofit sector and government. Moreover, as government changes over time – clearly becoming more autocratic and populist in many countries right now – it becomes necessary to rethink and expand our understanding of the nonprofit sector and government paradigm and what theories and empirical research we have available to understand such changes and where nonprofits fit into it. We have learned for example, that some autocracies choose to repress the third sector (as in Hungary or Egypt for example) while others co-opt it as an extension of governmental capacity while suppressing its independent voice. The latter helps explain, for example, why the nonprofit sector in China has grown so robustly to the surprise of many who may have viewed autocracies as highly centralized and homogeneous bureaucratic structures antithetical to nonprofits. Just as we have developed theory of the nonprofit sector in a democracy, we need better theory to understand its role in authoritarian countries.

### 3 Future Agenda

I hesitate to recommend a future agenda for the journal, as I have confidence that my successors will shape that agenda with their own insights and that they will discern future changes in the world that inevitably will impact the content of the journal over time. However, here are a few parting thoughts. Essentially, I believe that the future content of the journal will inevitably be shaped by what is happening in the world of public affairs at large. Right now this appears to signal increasing attention to the forces of populism, autocracy, the internal corrosion of democracy, climate change, social justice, and public health emergencies such as the current pandemic. In addition, major shifts in the character of the world's economy will help shape the policy issues that impact nonprofits and civil society.

A brief word on each of these developments. Populism has manifested itself of late largely in the form of right wing extremism in the U.S., parts of Europe, and elsewhere. What policies are appropriate for protecting society while preserving the rights of association and freedom of speech, and how do such policies impact the way we regulate civil society and nonprofit organizations? Autocracy has thrived on the shoulders of populism but also as an expression of people's desire for safety and economic security. How does civil society work in an autocratic regime? To what extent do civil society organizations serve to undermine autocracy, collaborate with it, or isolate from it? How can civil society organizations protect themselves from repression under autocracy while preserving their missions and purpose? Related to all this, what is the role of civil society in stemming, or in some cases abetting, the forces at work to undermine democratic process, including political extremism, voter suppression efforts, and the proliferation of lies and misinformation? What policies can address these problems and what is the role of nonprofits in policy solutions? How can public policy deal with "bad actors" in the nonprofit sector as well as enlist the sector in policy solutions?

Climate change is the long term existential issue for the world at large, and it has become ever more pressing since this journal began in 2010. I anticipate more research than we have seen to date on how civil society and nonprofit organizations can help address climate change by mobilizing collective efforts to achieve necessary policy changes to reduce carbon emissions, preserve the natural environment and achieve more sustainable ways of living and doing business. As well, we need to understand how nonprofits themselves will be affected by policy changes that require them to operate in more sustainable and environmentally friendly ways.

Given the recent eruption of protests around social justice, including the Black Lives Matter movement, it will be interesting to see how this new awareness translates into future published research on the role of civil society in achieving

policy reform associated with policing, voter suppression and related concerns. More broadly, the growing fissures in the U.S. and other democracies call attention to the future role of civil society in trying to heal divisions fomented by populism, the legacies of racism and resistance to globalization and technological change.

The current pandemic may be a once in a hundred-year phenomenon but widespread public health and welfare emergencies are not, especially in light of climate change which precipitates storms, wild fires, and widespread human tragedies including famines and wars. Civil society organizations in many countries, as well as transnational nongovernmental organizations, have been key players in addressing emergencies even in advance of governmental response efforts. This role for nonprofits will only become more important in coming years. As such, we need to know how nonprofit efforts are helped or inhibited by governmental policies, which policies enhance their effectiveness, and the efficacy of nonprofit-governmental collaboration in this field.

In addition, underlying economic and technological factors will shape nonprofit-related public policy in the future. The digitization of the economy already influences basic nonprofit functions such as policy advocacy and fund raising. An important research question is how will nonprofits be affected by the march of technology and by regulatory policies to protect privacy and, perhaps more importantly, to ensure that the proliferation of misinformation does not continue to undermine democracy.

Further, the hybridization of the economy, combining the government, business and nonprofit sectors in various new corporate forms and partnership arrangements, will continue to influence how nonprofits do their work and how they are affected by policy. How will the new forms of social purpose organizations emerging around the world influence the sector's efficacy and affect the viability of traditional nonprofit organizations and associations? In addition, policies affecting competition and monopoly in the world economy will likely grow in importance as governments attempt to tame the various technological behemoths that increasingly dominate the world's economy. The stakes are very high in this field, and nonprofits have roles to play in advocating for policy change, in helping to curate information for its veracity and risk, or in some cases exacerbating the problems. I believe we will see more research on these questions in the coming years, in terms of how nonprofits will be affected by information and competition policies and how they might influence the development of those policies.

Finally issues of global trade and immigration will have wide implications for human welfare and the work of nonprofits. Nonprofits are already deeply involved in supporting immigrant populations and in helping people cope with economic dislocations stemming from international trade disputes. Furthermore, immigration and refugee issues are exacerbated by other nonprofit and policy concerns –

most prominently, climate change and consequent natural disasters and conflicts that cause affected populations to flee intolerable conditions. Future research can usefully address how nonprofits work and what roles they play in ameliorating the complex of problems associated with immigration and trade.

### 3.1 Methodologies

In addition to informing the substance of nonprofit policy research, I think that *NPF* can make some new contributions to the methodologies of policy research. This journal is interdisciplinary so it basically applies diverse methodologies rather than develop or advance new research methods. That said, it is obvious from the contents of the journal over its first decade that nonprofit policy research depends heavily on comparative research frameworks, especially at the international level. We cannot assess the efficacy of policies without comparisons across political jurisdictions. Within countries this is not always a major problem, so long as data is internally consistent. However, research addressing national policy often requires comparisons across countries which are likely to have different data systems and various definitional idiosyncrasies. International comparative research programs such as the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project and the Belgium-based ICSEM project on social enterprise have addressed these challenges over the years, but more progress is needed. As papers in this journal address national level policy issues, they can contribute to general understanding about how best to collect and refine data for making comparisons across countries. To date, this journal has published some important international comparative research, basically through qualitative comparisons of case studies. The nuance of comparative case studies analysis has much to recommend it but falls short of a gold standard of comparing apples to apples.

I think this journal can also make a contribution to the advancement of interdisciplinary research itself. Over the years we have drawn largely from the social sciences – mainly political science, economics, and sociology – with a dose of legal scholarship and a bit of history. We have drawn heavily from interdisciplinary fields deriving from the social sciences such as public administration, management science and nonprofit studies. Some of these fields have posed challenges for this journal. For example, lawyers tend to write long pieces with copious footnotes, and historians are length-challenged as well. Economists tend to favor technical analyses that can be inaccessible to broader audiences. But we have found many scholars from those fields willing to write for audiences outside their disciplines, such as our own mix of readers. Personally I have found the lawyers to be particularly good writers, historians as well, because writing is their

main tool of analysis and because policy questions are close to their hearts. In the future, I believe NPF would benefit from more contributions from these fields. It would also be interesting to attract scholars from underrepresented disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and indeed engineering and the physical and biological sciences, especially where their interests address critical societal issues such as climate change or public health or where their own organizational vehicles for influencing policy take the form of nonprofit organizations, social enterprises or associations.

Finally, consider the humanities – literature, religion, music, the fine arts, etc. Much of the nonprofit sector is rooted in values and seeks to improve the human experience. Policy needs to reflect those values and experiences. I'm not sure how creative writers would fit into this journal – perhaps by enlisting metaphors from the arts to help us understand the human condition and how it can be uplifted by inspired policy solutions and organizations dedicated to solving human problems. Or perhaps humanities scholars can help warn us of the pitfalls faced by nonprofits and policymakers as a result of human behavior. After all, Shakespeare wasn't always sanguine – consider Lear, Macbeth or Richard the Third – and he certainly alerted us to the dangers of flawed leadership in the context of governance. I never considered poetry or creative essays as possible features in *NPF*, but why not?

## 4 Challenges, Successes and Bumps in the Road

I would now like to briefly offer some parting thoughts about the process of creating and developing a multidisciplinary research journal aimed at producing useful practical knowledge in the present day context of higher education, philanthropy, and the marketplace.

*Nonprofit Policy Forum* is the second professional journal for which I have served as founding editor-in-chief. In 1990 I became founding editor of *Nonprofit Management & Leadership (NML)* and served in that position for 10 years. I mention this because the experience of establishing *NPF* was substantially different from my experience with *NML* despite the fact that both journals are academically based publications designed to fill important niches in a landscape of expanding research on the nonprofit sector. However, the context of 2010 was different from that of 1990 in several relevant respects. In 1990, the nonprofit journal field was sparse and wide open, inviting more specialized journals to supplement the few established publications. Indeed, the only specifically nonprofit-focused research journal at that time was *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)* which had just changed its name from the *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* and was itself just beginning to expand and differentiate its

content to catch up with a burgeoning and diversifying field of research. A pressing need for more capacity to publish research about nonprofit management underwrote *NML*'s creation, just as a demand for more internationally-oriented nonprofit sector research led to the establishment of *Voluntas*, also in 1990, as a house journal of the new International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR).

Both *NVSQ*, as the house journal of the Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), and *Voluntas* had the advantage of support by memberships in major professional associations. *NML* did not, but at the time I was director of the Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Case Western Reserve University charged with a mission of leading development of the field of nonprofit management studies. I had the center's resources to work with, a willing publisher in Jossey-Bass Publishers, and also an international partner at the London School of Economics, David Billis, who directed LSE's voluntary sector program at that time. In other words, it was a clear field with adequate resources to undertake the venture.

With *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, there were some similarities but also important differences. In 2005, I joined the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University to help develop its Nonprofit Studies Program (NSP). Within the context of a policy school, establishing a new journal was a logical way to promote the mission and visibility of my program, in a research niche that was underserved. And, with my wife Linda Serra who had been managing editor of *NML*, we had the experience and knowledge to establish and administer a new journal. But the landscape for establishing *NPF* was quite different. I was now in a policy school with relatively few faculty and students who had nonprofit-related interests. So there was a lot of convincing to do. Who would publish it? How would it be supported? Would it be competitive with other nonprofit and policy journals, etc.? I didn't have my own dedicated resources for such a venture, as I did at the Mandel Center, and the competitive environment was more complicated than it was in 1990.

Still, the idea made clear sense and I knew it was of interest to professional colleagues in the U.S. and around the world. ARNOVA turned out to be a productive forum for interested scholars to discuss the idea and help push it forward. A small group of those scholars met at ARNOVA conferences to develop the concept and strategy for *NPF*, some of whom became, and are still, members of our editorial board. The demand for the journal derived from three key insights: (1) existing nonprofit policy research was sprinkled throughout existing journals but there was no particular focus or critical mass in one place to attract scholars and bring attention to its content; (2) the subfield of nonprofits and public policy was growing in importance, given the expansion of the third sector worldwide, and significant policy questions were being raised and debated, such as those considered earlier in this essay, without an adequate grounding in research; and

(3) the capacity of existing nonprofit journals lagged the demand to publish in the expanding academic field of nonprofit studies.

Despite the merit of the concept and the apparent sources of demand, the landscape in the first decade of the new millennium presented new challenges. Was there an obvious publisher or a commercial market outside of affiliation with a professional association? Would philanthropy support the effort? Indeed, would nonprofit scholars choose to submit their work to a new journal not yet established in terms of academic reputation and quality standards? Would scholars, nonprofit leaders and policymakers subscribe to a new journal outside their primary fields of study or practice? Could the nonprofit studies or policy studies fields support another journal at their intersection?

These challenges shaped the development of *NPF* as it evolved over its first decade. Since I had an academic position which accommodated this project, and we had some consensus among professional colleagues in the U.S. and Europe, we could float a proposal with prospective commercial publishers. It quickly became apparent that the economics of journal publishing had changed from the old days and that online journals were the fashion and the future. As an old-schooler, I found this a bit disconcerting but also promising. In fairly short order we found Berkeley Electronic Press (Bepress) whose mission seemed compatible with our interests, and we moved ahead with them toward establishing *NPF* as an online journal. At the same time, we explored possible philanthropic support to help with expenses and support some staff capacity. This too was a significant challenge. As I had done at Case Western Reserve University in connection with *NML*, I positioned the project as a way to achieve greater prominence and visibility for the Andrew Young School's Nonprofit Studies Program (NSP). Eventually a generous member of NSP's advisory board asked me what my number one priority would be for achieving national recognition for the program, and I unequivocally (and perhaps rashly) suggested that the journal would serve that purpose. On the basis of this discussion, Michael Kay made a multiyear pledge for us to get started.

Despite Mr. Kay's generosity, the start-up was difficult, largely because it proved tougher than we anticipated to generate a robust stream of submitted papers or a substantial level of subscriptions. University libraries were cutting back and readers were not buying second or third journal subscriptions outside their disciplines, nor was *NPF* a benefit of membership in any professional or scholarly association. We were committed to high quality academic standards and a rigorous peer review process but not yet certified to compete with established journals, where faculty seeking promotion and tenure were advised (even instructed) to publish.

The slow start was a factor in eventually formulating a new business model for *NPF*. Sale of Bepress's journal operations to DeGruyter in September of 2011 launched a new phase of development in which we began to reconsider how things

really worked in this new era of publication. We needed readers who weren't necessarily going to be subscribers, or members of institutions with subscriptions. And we needed prospective authors who could become aware of the journal's contents without having been subscribers or regular readers. And we needed a source of income independent of sales or the whims of philanthropy. The concept of open access publication was growing in popularity and seemed to contain the seeds of a solution. Open access would make the journal universally accessible to readers everywhere and of every ilk – researchers, students, nonprofit leaders and policymakers, and it would increase the awareness of prospective authors to the opportunity of publishing in *NPF*.

DeGruyter's management was willing to entertain the concept of open access publication, but this required that we somehow replace the subscription revenues it received (mostly from libraries) for *NPF* to support its production costs (The revenue we obtained from royalties was trivial and not a factor in our decision making). Open access publication can be achieved in a variety of ways, including asking authors to pay for publishing their papers. Some open access journals do operate that way, but this idea was dead-on-arrival for us because our goal was to increase opportunities for authors to publish, not erect barriers for them. So we again needed to find an angel and a long term solution for sustaining the journal. Philanthropy proved to be a short-term solution. Nick Deychakiwsky, a program officer of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, with whom I had served as a board member of the National Council of Nonprofits and who was also an ARNOVA colleague, worked with me to secure a three year grant to transition the journal to open access publication. The Mott gift was based on the proposition that in the long term we could obtain ongoing support from institutional sponsors from the academic and research community. Thus began our quest for institutional sponsors who believed in the journal and viewed it as consistent with their own missions in nonprofit studies and policy research.

Seeking sponsors was not easy and continues to be the journal's challenge. We were very fortunate to have enlisted the stalwart support of the Urban Institute and the Humphrey School early on. Georgia State was a sponsor until I retired from that school in 2015. Cleveland State University (CSU) became a sponsor when I joined its Levin College for two years thereafter. After my stint at CSU, that institution dropped its sponsorship (and fiscal administration) of *NPF*. In 2018, I re-engaged with the Mandel School at Case Western Reserve University, which had been the host for *NML* but moved its support to *NPF* when Jossey-Bass discontinued its hosting arrangement. (Can you follow all the moves without a program? They attest to the frequent instability of university-based arrangements, especially interdisciplinary initiatives). Meanwhile, ARNOVA became a sponsor of *NPF* as well, and also became our fiscal administrator after I left Cleveland State. For a

period of time, the Center for Civil Society Studies of Stockholm University of Economics, was also able to join us as a sponsor, at the behest of two of our editorial board members, Filip Wijkstrom and Marta Reuter. Clearly personal connections have helped underwrite the sponsorship system and we continue to be hopeful of expanding the sponsorship base to include other universities and institutes with strong intellectual interests in nonprofits and policy.

The development of *NPF* over time is revealed in the tables of contents listed on our website. We didn't attain our capacity to publish quarterly until volume 7 (2016) largely because we could not generate a sufficient volume of high quality papers until then. In part this reflects the increasing rigidity of the academic systems of promotion and tenure, which insist that faculty publish in highly rated disciplinary journals and fail to give credit for publishing in new journals or interdisciplinary journals outside the narrow bounds of a given field, no matter the intrinsic quality. While our progress with *NPF* reflects the fact that we have achieved considerable recognition and inclusion in multiple citation indices, our pace was slowed. It was much easier (at least in retrospect through my nostalgia-tinged glasses) to ramp up *NML* than it has been for *NPF*. In the former case, we were able to launch with a mix of real world stars from practice (e.g., Peter Drucker, Richard Cyert, Brian O'Connell) as well as respected academics (e.g., Anne Preston, Michael Krashinsky, David Billis) without fear that we would be hindered by promotion and tenure committees and policies. The field of nonprofit studies was more flexible then and yet to become as rigid as the rest of the academic establishment has now become (including most schools that house nonprofit studies programs). In the process, something has been lost as well as gained. In the journal field we have gained respect but perhaps at the expense of innovation and flexibility. Policy makers and nonprofit leaders don't generally read academic journals, and specialized (popular, non-peer reviewed) publications such as *Nonprofit Quarterly* have emerged to split the market between researchers and practitioners. At *NPF* we are still trying to bridge the divide through devices such as interviews, case studies, special forums and a sub-categorization of articles that includes formal research papers, policy briefs and commentaries. But the basic challenge remains. *NPF*, like its sister field journals, is fundamentally a scholarly journal that must toe the academic line in order to sustain a stream of high quality papers by leading researchers.

Finally, permit me some perhaps controversial observations on the question of journal "ownership". By ownership I mean the arrangements through which a journal is ultimately controlled and sometimes bought and sold. As chief editor I have had a variety of experiences with both *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* and *Nonprofit Policy Forum*. In both cases, the journals are privately owned by business corporations, as compared with other field journals such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* and *Voluntas*, owned by scholarly associations,

ARNOVA and ISTR respectively. The difference between *NML* and *NPF* was that the publisher of *NML* contracted with the Mandel Center at Case Western Reserve University as an institution, while the publisher of *NPF* contracted with me personally as editor. To evaluate such alternative arrangements, I believe one needs to consider two preconditions to a successful academic journal. The first is having a product champion who will promote the journal responsibly, with energy, vision and dedication. The second is to be imbedded in an institution that will provide sympathetic and supportive stewardship and look out for the best interests of the journal.

I believe that I served responsibly as the product champion of both journals, although the experiences were different. In the case of *NML* I had to vigorously advocate for the interests of the journal when I parted ways with the governing board of the Mandel Center. Ultimately a search and transition process was negotiated that resulted in a strong editor-in-chief to follow me. But the history of *NML* demonstrates clearly that having a strong product champion is insufficient when the governing institution loses its way. Unfortunately, years after I left Case Western Reserve, the Mandel Center closed and the journal was allocated to the School of Management, which appointed an editor without an external search, under whose watch the journal did not do well. Ultimately, publisher Jossey-Bass intervened and put the editorship out to bid. Ironically, the bid was won by the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve, which was an original partner in the Mandel Center. That worked for a while because the school took its stewardship of the journal to heart, but eventually the publisher withdrew from that arrangement in favor of contracting directly with an editor-in-chief.

Having learned my lesson about allowing a school or academic center to “own” the journal, I was clear-eyed about contracting directly with the publisher of *NPF*. I had a different problem here, however. I needed commitment of the Andrew Young School to support the journal and that came only reluctantly given the school’s competing priorities. Once I secured external funding, we made considerable progress, but the burden was on me to prove *NPF*’s worth and to secure adequate funding. The support of the Andrew Young School and the philanthropic community in Atlanta was tenuous. Nonetheless, there was no struggle for control, and when I retired from Georgia State I took the journal with me. But still, I did not have an institution behind me that believed strongly in the mission of the journal. Ultimately, we decided to support the journal through a series of institutional sponsorships as explained above.

As noted, both *NPF* and *NML* are legally owned by business corporations. What are the implications of that compared to professional associations? I have no major complaints about Jossey-Bass in the case of *NML* or BePress and DeGruyter in the case of *NPF*. But it is hard to ignore that the profit motive and market

imperatives dominate these arrangements. *NML* was established with the help of a visionary company president (Lynn Luckow) who identified nonprofits as a growing market for publications around 1990. And the niche of nonprofits and policy seemed to excite the management of BePress in 2010. However, my long run experience with these publishers was basically that for them it was fundamentally a business proposition. As long as revenues were sufficient and circulation could be built, they were happy. They provided the machinery for processing manuscripts and publishing issues, but not a great deal of help in editorial assistance or even marketing; certainly not guidance. And the market prevailed. BePress sold *NPF* to DeGruyter, without consulting us, requiring a whole retooling of our manuscript tracking and management system. And continual staff turnover at DeGruyter has made it challenging, despite the fact that we have worked with some very good people in the company along the way.

I cannot generalize from my limited number of experiences, but my instinct is that a stable, mission-oriented institutional setting works best for a research journal. With all its idiosyncrasies as a democratically governed association, ARNOVA is a good home for *NVSQ* because its members care about it, and similarly ISTR is a good home for *Voluntas*. And there are many other examples of professional and scholarly associations that successfully support their research journals because of the journals' centrality to mission and base in membership support. With *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, perhaps we are now on a path to stable institutional grounding, with our dedicated financial sponsors from the academic and research world, and an increasingly close relationship with ARNOVA. I hope so.

## 5 Closing Comment

The success of *NPF* to date is reflected in the fact that we have attracted a top team of nonprofit policy scholars to succeed me as editors-in-chief, that we have maintained a crucial core of support from our institutional sponsors, and that we have maintained the loyalty and dedication of a distinguished editorial board. The number of submitted articles, as well as their quality, continues to grow and leading scholars frequently come to us with ideas for special issues they are willing to organize and oversee. Indeed, special issues are part of the special sauce that has allowed *NPF* to prosper. Linda Serra and I are eternally grateful to our friends and colleagues who have contributed to this venture over the years and we will miss interacting with them day to day over e-mail. We also do appreciate the logistical support we have received over the years from staff and management at DeGruyter. We look forward with parental pride to watching from the sidelines as

our project grows to adulthood from its present stage as a teenager ready to take on the world.

Dennis R. Young, March 2021

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