

## SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Voluntary association as an institution for development recently appears to be an emerging topic for theoretical debates among sociologists. This study was addressed to examining previous theories of two main sociological perspectives—psychological and structural—on the role of voluntary associations in economic development and exploring the possibility of integrating the divergent theories. Based on the critical synthesis of the two sociological perspectives, we suggest a hypothetical model of economic development in which voluntary associations are supposed to play educational and/or institutional roles under the different development conditions of society.

### Introduction

For the last several decades it has been almost a trite argument to voice the importance of noneconomic factors in economic development. It is, however, also true that noneconomic approaches to development, in many instances, deal with interesting debates generally weaving abstractions of a pre-science character (Havens, 1971). Fortunately, a number of sociologists have advanced from the pre-scientific debates to a systematic effort for constructing integrated theories on development (Portes, 1976; Horowitz, 1970; Coleman, 1971).

Among the many non-economic factors related to economic development, voluntary association has recently emerged as an increasing concern in spite of its long history (Chapman, 1969). It has been discussed in the various forms of institutional or organizational approaches to economic development in a broader sense. On the other hand, it has been considered as structural mechanisms to extend social, economic or political participa-

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tion required for economic development. But previous discussions about voluntary associations have been largely confined to the analysis of the particular cases such as labor unions and cooperatives.

It is also noted that two main sociological perspectives on development, structural and psychological, have revealed many gaps in their arguments (Armer and Isaac, 1978) in spite of some emerging effort for comprehensive approaches (Portes, 1976; Handel, 1979). Such bipolar perspectives appear to have permeated the theories on the role of voluntary associations. We still lack a general knowledge based on integrated sociological theories about the role of voluntary association.

This paper primarily aims at reviewing the viewpoints of these two sociological perspectives and exploring the possibility of bridging the gaps between the two perspectives to construct an integrated theory of the role of voluntary association in economic development.<sup>1</sup>

### Definition of Voluntary Association

The concept of voluntary association has been frequently designated as "formal groups," "formal organizations," "formal associations," etc. by researchers (cf. Scott, 1957). Nevertheless, it still suffers from some ambiguity (Hyman and Wright, 1971). A number of studies on voluntary associations have used different empirical categories without clarifying definitions and failed to maintain comparability among the results which is essential for theoretical integration. We can yet find some salient characteristics of the definitions suggested by researchers.

Horton and Hunt (1972:227) define voluntary association as "formal organizations in which all or most of the members are spare-time volunteers, sometimes with a small core of paid full time professionals to handle the routines." Scott (1957:316) more so emphasizes the common goal orientation of voluntary association by defining: "A voluntary association is a group of persons relatively freely organized to pursue mutual and personal interests or to achieve common goals, usually non-profit in nature." Coleman et al (1960) focus on interest articulation under the rubric of associational interest groups. Their particular characteristics may be stated as "explicit representation of the interests of a particular group, orderly procedures for the formulation of interests and demands, and transmission of these demands to other particular structures such as political parties, legislatures, bureaucracies" (Coleman et al, 1960:34). Smith (1970:1), using the term of formal volunteer organization, defines as "formal organizations the majority of whose members are neither paid for participa-

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, economic development is conceived to be multi-dimensional especially covering economic growth and social distribution (cf. Kindleberger and Herrick, 1977; Portes, 1976.)

tion nor physically coerced into such participation.”

The above definitions do not show completely conflicting views but focus more on either the members' characteristics (Horton and Hunt's, and Smith's) or organizational functions (Coleman et al's and Scott's). Both components are considered to be complementary in defining voluntary association. Thus, it may be stated that voluntary associations are formal organizations in which members' participation is voluntary and not paid for pursuing common goals through collective procedures and means.

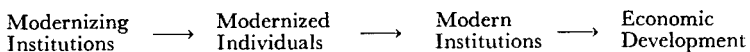
## Classical Theories on the Role of Voluntary Association in Economic Development

### Psychological Perspective

The psychological perspective on modernization is based on the fundamental postulate that “institutions, a nation's culture and history, and even economic factors, influence social processes mainly through man, what he thinks and does” (Kunkel, 1976:649). Spengler (1961) dealt with minds of a people (particularly elites) and Inkeles and Smith (1974) studied attitudes and values of modern man supposedly leading to the modernization of nations. Still other social scientists (Kahl, 1968; Chodak, 1973; Portes, 1976; Armer and Isaac, 1978) have tapped into the various dimensions of the “minds of modern man.” It is notable that many researchers in line with this perspective have been more concerned with measuring and explaining the sources of psychological modernity rather than testing causal processes linked to economic development (Armer and Isaac, 1978).

Recently, Inkeles and Smith (1974) have implied a comprehensive process in which psychological modernity and economic development are considered in a causal scheme, although their empirical study was primarily directed to measuring psychological modernity. Their implicit causal chain of modernization process may be presented as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 INKELES AND SMITH'S MODEL OF MODERNIZATION PROCESS (Delacroix and Ragin, 1978: 125)

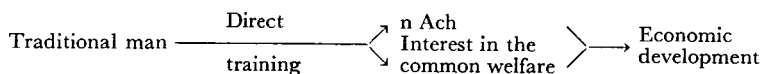


They emphasize the roles of education, mass media, factory and agricultural cooperatives as modernizing institutions which they argue create modern individuals. In this respect, they are primarily concerned with the role of voluntary associations as modernizing institutions. Based on the observation of the agricultural cooperatives, they (1975: 203) conclude:

“ . . . the cooperatives were a very powerful school in modernization.” Their implications may be further derived from a sequential argument that agricultural cooperatives can educate people into modernized individuals who can staff the modern institutions necessary for economic development.<sup>2</sup> However, they did not deal with two basic problems in the process of economic development: the conditions and mechanisms in which modernized individuals can staff the modern institutions; a different aspect of agricultural cooperatives<sup>3</sup> as modern institutions.

McClelland (1966) suggests that a certain type of “mental virus”, a so-called “need for Achievements” (n Ach), is an essential ingredient for modernization of a country. He (1966:31) wrote on the basis of his observation of the cases in India: “it was decided that if the n Ach virus was important for economic growth, one ought to try to infect a community with it to see if it would produce the effects so often described retrospectively after a take-off has begun.” However, he (1966:35) does not think that “n Ach automatically leads one into socially useful activities or projects.” He suggests an other psychological ingredient called the “concern for the common welfare of all.” The two psychological ingredients are considered to be directly responsible for accelerating the rate of economic growth (Fig. 2). To him, direct training was a major strategy to “infect the people who need it with both n Ach and a sense of public responsibility” (McClelland, 1966: 39). In this scheme, he implied voluntary association as an instrument of direct training. His studies in India well demonstrate that participation in voluntary association as an actor or a participant observer facilitates the restructuring of the self image of individuals in a developing country (McClelland, 1966: 31–36; Jonassen, 1974: 531). Thus, McClelland seems to deal with voluntary associations as a training institution to have the people infected with two key psychological ingredients.

FIGURE 2. McCLELLAND'S MODERNIZATION PROCESS



Jonassen (1974) argues that development requires the mobilization of actors in economic and civic affairs based on their new role definitions. Jonassen (1974: 531–532) suggests three possible roles of voluntary associations in reconstructing the self image of the people. First, voluntary associa-

<sup>2</sup> Rose (1954: 69) seems to be in a similar line. He suggests that association membership is important in a democratic society as a mechanism for creating an informed citizenry providing both factual knowledge and the understanding of the issues necessary for national decisions and effective action.

<sup>3</sup> Agricultural cooperatives are also considered as a modern institution in less developed countries.

tions provide a person with the opportunities of participation to learn that it is proper and effective for him to have opinions on a great variety of matters and for him to participate in decision making. Second, success in the achievement of goals of voluntary associations pursued according to rational, orderly, and scientific procedures can demonstrate the belief in the calculability of the world and confidence that man can master nature and the world which are required for development. In this circumstance, voluntary association is considered important as "transmission belts and demonstration units for scientific information." Third, it also demonstrates an other idea crucial for development—the belief that rewards will be given according to a member's competence and contribution not to ascribed positions or fate. Although implying the dysfunctional aspects of voluntary association to bring about the possibilities of intensified hostilities and political instability, Jonassen does not further elaborate the conditions of functional or dysfunctional roles.

Some other researchers emphasize adaptive functions of voluntary associations particularly in urban settings of less developed countries. Little (1957) suggests a function of voluntary association as an adaptive system in the urbanization process by substituting for the extended group of kinsmen a grouping based on common interest which is capable of serving many of the same needs as the traditional family and lineage. Bogdan (1969) also observes in a west Africa city that voluntary associations do facilitate the adjustment of youth to urban environment and act as socializing agents for adoption of modern roles.

As we have seen in the above, social scientists maintaining the psychological perspective unanimously assume a model of modern man contrasted to traditional man who is considered to be a major hindrance to economic development. This assumption is largely based on the observations of less developed countries. In this perspective, the role of voluntary associations is treated as an educational instrument to create "modern man" equipped with "an Ach and interest in the common welfare" (McClelland, 1966), "constructive self" (Lerner, 1958) or "individual modernity" (Inkeles and Smith, 1974).

#### **Structural Perspective**

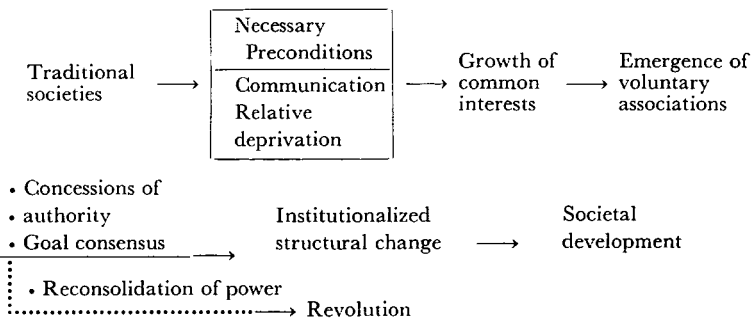
The structural perspective is based on an assumption that "it is the society's structural characteristics that make the difference, not only as to whether all members of the society are encouraged toward needed psychological tendencies but also as to how they could be channeled into the actual development process" (Kim, 1973: 466). Psychological modernity is considered to be a necessary or catalyzing factor for development. But the major changes in the rate of economic development, it is assumed, depend on the occurrence of fundamental changes in the social structure (Smelser and Lipset, 1966; Hoselitz, 1960; Galjart, 1971). The structural perspective

has provided some sociologists with theoretical grounds for exploring the roles of voluntary association in economic development.

According to Havens (1971), one of the major differences between traditional and modern societies is the presence of instrumental voluntary associations. He (1971: 89) presents a proposition: "development<sup>4</sup> is enhanced if the opportunity exists for members of a society to voluntarily affiliate with instrumental organizations." Two factors, that is, communication and relative deprivation, are viewed as necessary preconditions for the emergence of voluntary associations. "The communication contacts and feelings of relative deprivation allow for the growth of concern how to express the demands of the individual" (Havens, 1971: 85). Voluntary associations may emerge to attain their own interests collectively which would be barred from individual accomplishment (Warner, 1971: 96).

The response of the existing authority structure to the demands of the associations may be either concession or reconsolidation of power. When concessions are granted from the authority structure and the demands are consistent with the broad goal of development, voluntary associations may achieve their instrumental goals. Hence, structural changes are institutionalized by the creation of new positions and behavior which will lead ultimately to more stable governments with less intense conflicts. This social process brings out the high probability of attaining the goal of societal development. However, if a reconsolidation of power occurs, the demands of the voluntary associations are not legitimated and accomplished, bearing the probability of revolutionary beginning. Havens' theoretical scheme may be illustrated as shown in Figure 3. In this scheme, the roles of voluntary association may be summarized from Havens' three related propositions (1971: 89).

FIGURE 3 HAVENS' MODEL OF SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT



<sup>4</sup> Havens (1971) uses the term "societal development" instead of "economic development" conventionally conceived as economic growth. Recently, a number of economists (Kindleberger and Herrick, 1977; Adelman and Morris 1973) have used the concept of "economic development" as including social, cultural, and political aspects, hence converging on the term of "societal development."

1. Through instrumental voluntary associations, political participation on the part of all members of a society is enhanced.
2. This enhancement is in terms of access to various positions of authority, on the one hand, and the ability to influence policymaking and decisions on the other.
3. Through instrumental voluntary associations, the potential exists for the mutual enhancement of effort on the part of all members of society.

In addition, if the societal values are consistent with a democracy, effective voluntary associations may serve as a check on government power and may lend stability to a less developed country. Thus, the voluntary association is viewed as a major instrument of structural changes and stability which are essential for societal development.

Kim (1973) posits a structural perspective in exploring the development process, mostly in line with Havens' argument. Based on a conflict model, he proposes a general concept of "structural flexibility"<sup>5</sup> which embraces all the structural variables related to conflict structural change. To Kim structural flexibility is an essential condition for the emergence and goal attainment of voluntary associations and ultimately enhancing the possibility of development. Voluntary associations are the means by which the relatively deprived demand their share of a society's resources. Thus, voluntary associations may be an effective instrument for increasing structural flexibility.<sup>6</sup>

However, Kim does not suggest that voluntary associations are sufficient for societal development. Instead, Kim (1973: 471) argues: "Society also needs institutional agencies to incorporate the demands put forward by these organizations and carry them out." He emphasizes the importance of political leadership for the coordination of demands and policies for distribution. This argument seems to bring forth the possibility of political manipulation over the voluntary associations (Sills, 1959). In this respect, Havens (1971: 76) reveals a more optimistic view: "Even though authority is vested in the hands of minority, as long as those excluded from authority may form groups to place demands on the holders of authority, society is dynamic, changing and personal liberties are attainable."

## A New Perspective Towards an Integrated Theory

The discussions on national development have been mainly centered on

- <sup>5</sup> Structural flexibility means "the degree to which the structure of society allows the deprived and alienated majority not only to demand their just share of resources but also to actually obtain such goals" (Kim, 1973: 468).
- <sup>6</sup> Parsons (1964:355) also shows a similar view that democratic associations, as the last generalized universal, provide "flexibility of the organization of power" being necessary for a complex society to operate effectively.

the debates between psychological and structural perspective (Armer and Isaac, 1978). Although some researchers (Horowitz, 1970; Coleman, 1971) have explored the interaction of both aspects, there is still much schism between their theoretical orientations.

Inkeles and Smith (1974) recognize the relations between both structural and attitudinal aspects in the process of development. But their final resolution is that the major focus of modernization has been much more readily linked to changes in psychological components of individuals rather than in the social structure by arguing (1974: 313):

we are not unaware that a modern psychology can not alone make a nation modern. . . . we recognize full well that they may be structural obstacles to such development stemming not only from nature, but from social, political, and economic causes as well. . . . Nevertheless. . . our experience leads us to agree with many of the intellectual leaders of the third world who argue that, in good part, underdevelopment is a state of mind.

Their emphasis on the educational or adaptive roles of voluntary associations seems to well represent their theoretical orientations to individual development for modern man who is assumed to be the prime force in the development process.

The psychological perspective has been, however, criticized due to its ignorance of the Weberian treatment of historicostructural issues (Portes, 1976: 69). Kim (1973) criticizes the psychological perspective in terms of two theoretical flaws: Western intellectuals' cultural bias and its neglect of structural features and institutional arrangements. Although Kim does not completely refute the psychological aspect, he (1973: 466) still argues the primacy of the structural perspective.

The structural perspective has been also never immune to criticisms from the inside or the outside. Rather, a wide assortment of bipolar theories (for example, Lerner, 1958) and evolutionary notions (recently, Parsons, 1964; Buck and Jacobson, 1968) have become major targets of sociological criticisms. Even among the structural circles, conflict theorists stand in the forefront of the attacks on the evolutionary views. Many sociologists in line with the structural perspective have couched upon the conflict model in the discussion of development (Havens, 1971; Kim, 1973). Voluntary associations are, to conflict theorists, major instruments for changes of social structure which lead to societal development with maximized resolution of social conflict even though the conflict never disappears. However, this position frequently does not take into account the people's qualities which are also essential for development.

Reviewed in the above, the two perspectives on the role of voluntary associations are not completely contradictory to each other. In many cases, they present rather supplementary views which emphasize different aspects of the role. The more important fact is that the role of voluntary as-



sociation can not be examined without the consideration of the particular historical-social context in which they exist (Sills, 1959: 21).

The psychological perspective tends to view voluntary associations mainly in terms of modernizing institutions emphasizing educational functions. In other words, voluntary associations may function to socialize traditional people to participate in modern society (Anderson, 1970: 249). Moreover, many researchers (Inkeles and Smith, 1974; McClelland, 1966) in this perspective have their primary concerns with the people of less developed countries relatively in the early stage of the development process. In such circumstances, people's participation is induced largely by government or public institutions. Nevertheless, as far as the organizational activities are operated on a voluntary basis not by administrative machinery they may belong to the category of voluntary associations.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, some other researchers (Parsons, 1964; Havens, 1971) in the structural perspective emphasize that voluntary associations are the complex organizational forms primarily prevalent in more developed societies. In such respects, voluntary associations are considered to be rather modern institutions, to borrow Inkeles and Smith's term. Thus, the forms and functions of voluntary associations are characterized largely by the circumstances of society in which voluntary associations are located. The organizational traits of voluntary associations as modernizing and modern institutions may be described as shown in Table 1.

The level of development is never homogeneous even in a society. Both or mixed types of institutions, therefore, coexist in any society. In a

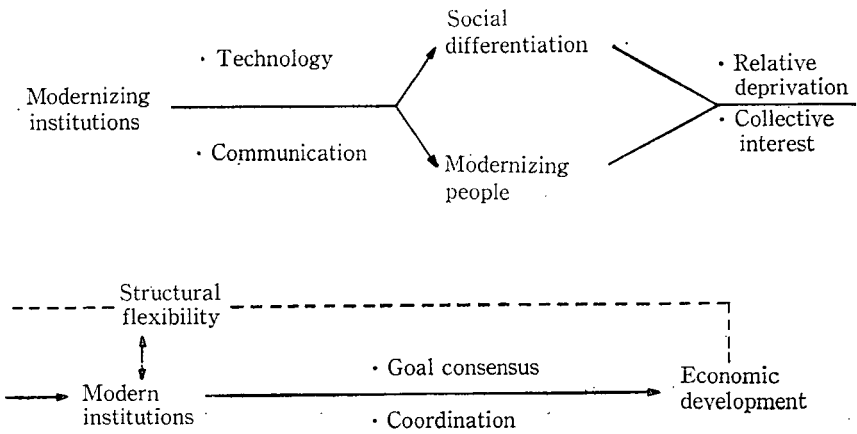
TABLE 1 ORGANIZATIONAL TRAITS OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AS MODERNIZING AND MODERN INSTITUTIONS

Organizational traits	Voluntary Assoc. as modernizing institutions	Voluntary Assoc. as modern institutions
Major function	Educational or expressive functions for group members	Instrumental functions for social change
Direct goal	Diffusion of modern attitudes and information	Change of resource distribution
Primacy of group relations	Internal group relations	External or inter-group relations
Necessary conditions	Innovative elite group Native institutions	Structural flexibility Relative deprivation Collective interest
Sufficient conditions	Technology Communication	Goal consensus Coordination
Major social process	Adjustment or adaptation	Conflict or competition
Motives of participation	Induced participation	Autonomous participation
Period of prevalence	Early stage of development	Later stage of development

<sup>7</sup> See, Pennock and Chapman's (1969, ix) argument that "voluntariness is becoming more a matter of degree."

less developed society, we may see the prevalence of voluntary associations as modernizing institutions. But as the development process moves forward, institutions of modernizing forms accordingly change into more complex and modern forms of voluntary associations which may have more instrumental functions<sup>8</sup> for social change. The functional process of both forms of voluntary associations may be well explained in a causal scheme which is primarily based on the revision of Inkeles and Smith's modernization model (see, Figure 4).

FIGURE 4 INTEGRATED MODEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Modernizing institutions may be assumed to bring about social differentiation (Smelser, 1966; Havens, 1971) as well as modernizing people (Inkeles and Smith, 1974) through technological advancement and communication flow. Social differentiation and modernizing people tend to appear hand in hand, although a rapidly changing society shows discrepancy between them. An active interaction between the two social phenomena provides the possibility for the occurrence of modern institutions (instrumental voluntary associations) along with strong stimulation of relative deprivation and collective interests of the people. The formation and functions of modern voluntary associations are, however, substantially dependent upon structural flexibility. In a flexible society, voluntary associations may function as instrumental agents for structural change, hence more accelerating economic development as well as social differentiation. On the other hand, in a rigid society the formation and functions of the associations are highly restricted, lessening the possibility of econ-

<sup>8</sup> Not all the modern forms of voluntary associations are addressed to instrumental functions such as social change or economic development. Some of them are exclusively concerned with expressive functions. See, Gordon and Babchuk (1959), Jacoby and Babchuk (1963).

omic development with less intense conflict. Even in a flexible society, modern voluntary associations contribute more effectively to economic development by attaining instrumental goals consistent with national development (Havens, 1971: 86) and coordination of various associational demands (Kim, 1973: 471). In this respect, as Smelser (1968: 138) points out, development proceeds to a contrapuntal interplay between differentiation and integration.

This theoretical scheme does exclude neither the psychological nor the structural perspective in the process of economic development. It is apparent that we may have more far-reaching insight on the role of voluntary associations in the development process through the theoretical integration of both perspectives.

### Summary and Conclusion

It has been widely accepted that institutional building is one of the most important noneconomic variables assumed to be parameters in economic development (Havens, 1971: 78). Voluntary association, in particular, as an institution for development recently appears to be an emerging topic for theoretical debates among sociologists. This study was addressed to examining previous theories of two main sociological perspectives—the psychological and structural—on the role of voluntary associations in economic development and exploring the possibility to integrate the divergent theories based on a critical review.

The psychological perspective, led by McClelland, Inkeles and Smith, tends to more so emphasize the educational functions of voluntary associations, primarily based on empirical evidences in less developed countries. On the other hand, the structural perspective more concerned with instrumental functions of structural change, more frequently referring to differentiated and modernized society. It is, however, not desirable to pay exclusive attention to either perspective to fully understand the various forms of voluntary associations existing in various historicosocial circumstances. Instead, it is argued that well-integrated theories should be constructed to clarify the complex factors related to the role of voluntary associations in economic development. Theoretical integration appears to be possible in that both perspectives have been primarily addressed to different forms and functions of voluntary associations. Their divergent arguments are, thus, supplementary in establishing an integrated theoretical model of economic development. We suggest a hypothetical model of economic development in which voluntary associations are supposed to play educational and instrumental roles as well under the different development conditions of society. The model seems to be helpful in showing a direction which should be taken into account in the future theoretical and empirical studies on

the role of voluntary association.

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