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Civic Service Worldwide: Defining a Field, Building a Knowledge Base

Amanda Moore McBride

Michael Sherraden

Carlos Benítez

Elizabeth Johnson

Washington University in St. Louis

Civic service appears to be a global phenomenon. The growth of service may warrant a distinct field of study in which a comparative knowledge base could inform development and implementation of policies and programs. In this article, the authors summarize results of a global assessment of civic service. Searching by country and using information from organizational memberships, publications, and the Internet, 210 civic service programs were identified in 57 countries. This study has many limitations, raising more questions than it answers. Nonetheless, it is the first worldwide empirical glimpse of service, shedding light on several key questions: What are the current status and forms of civic service? What are its structures, goals, and effects? This introductory article of the special issue frames these questions for consideration by the authors, who identify historical and cultural determinants, forms, and mediators of civic service in different regions of the world.

Keywords: *civic service; volunteerism; comparative; international; development*

Service is a word that has many meanings. When descriptors are added, such as national service, service learning, and international service, the reference is more clear. Service in this context means contributing through a formal program for the intended benefit of individuals, a community, nation, or the world. Service may be considered a subset of volunteering, or it may be distinctly different. Volunteering in its more informal and occasional forms

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has been suggested as an emerging societal norm and behavior worldwide (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). Along this continuum of volunteer behavior, relatively little is known about formal, long-term, intensive volunteering or civic service, especially cross-nationally and comparatively (Clohesy, 1999; Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2000; M. Sherraden & Eberly, 1990).

In this article, we suggest that civic service may be a distinct field, yet to be specified. We present results from an empirical assessment of service that found global representation (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). Civic service may be characterized by “structural lead” (Freedman, 2001): Policy and program innovation appears to be decades ahead of knowledge about the forms and effects of civic service. A comparative knowledge base does not exist to inform the development and implementation of civic service programs and policies worldwide (McBride, Lombe, Tang, Sherraden, & Benítez, 2003). From our global assessment of civic service, we identify lines of inquiry that can contribute to defining the field and building foundational knowledge.

AN EMERGING FIELD OF STUDY?

Scientific bodies of knowledge develop around fields of inquiry and intervention. A field is defined by its concepts, theories, and research methods. Examples include biomedical engineering, computer science, economic development, marital relations, and organizational behavior. The development of fields may result from prevalence of the phenomenon, demands from stakeholders and funders, potential to advance human civilization and welfare, and institutionalization of knowledge-building initiatives and structures. Whether and to what extent civic service may become a field of inquiry and intervention is an open question.

The nonprofit and voluntary sector or third sector is by all accounts a field of intervention and inquiry, with knowledge still emerging in many parts of the world (Hodgkinson & Painter, 2003; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). The sector represents the arena of organized civic action where important public goods and services may be produced (McCarthy et al., 1992; Salamon, Hems, & Chinnock, 2000). There is much to be studied with regard to the sector’s role and status in society, as well as its effectiveness and efficiency (Dimaggio, Weiss, & Clotfelter, 2002; Hodgkinson, 1990; Jackson-Elmoore & Hula, 2001; Salamon, 1994). Contours and attributes continue to be defined and debated, but in large measure, the nonprofit and voluntary sector has been institutionalized as a field (Hodgkinson & Painter, 2003). There are common conceptions of the sector and its contents. Research projects like the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins University have developed foundational knowledge. Professional associations, academic departments, and

journals exist to advance the study and build the knowledge base of the non-profit and voluntary sector.

Does civic service warrant consideration as a field of intervention and inquiry? Civic service is believed to be increasing in many countries around the world (Clohesy, 1999; Ford Foundation, 2000; Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2000). The focus is often on the potential of service as a social and economic development intervention that may produce a wide range of positive effects (Ford Foundation, 2000; M. Sherraden, 2001b). In civic service, the individual is performing an action that is presumably of benefit to someone or some cause. The action is performed in the spirit of improving living conditions or general welfare (Menon, McBride, & Sherraden, 2003). In most cases, programs intend to affect both the served and the server (Aguirre International, 1999; Association of Voluntary Service Organizations, 2003; M. Sherraden & Eberly, 1982). The outcomes of service programs can range from peace and international understanding, to improved job skills and education, to sustained civic engagement (Hajdo, 1999; Omo-Abu, 1997; Perry & Katula, 2001; M. Sherraden, 2001b; M. Sherraden, Sherraden, & Eberly, 1990).

As an indication of the burgeoning interest in civic service, an affinity group of private funders in the United States, the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, was formed in 1993 to encourage information and investment in volunteering and service (Gibson, 2001). In 2000, the Grantmaker Forum released the report, *The State of Service-Related Research: Opportunities to Build a Field*. This report was the first systematic attempt to assess what is known about the effects of service, especially on civic engagement. In brief, service research was found to lack conceptualization, rigorous methods, or definitive assessments concerning effects. In 2001, the Ford Foundation funded the Center for Social Development (CSD) in St. Louis and Innovations in Civic Participation in Washington, D.C., to implement a global agenda in research and policy and program development known as the Global Service Institute (GSI). Through GSI, CSD has promoted development of foundational knowledge and innovative research as well as developed capacity for service research worldwide. This special issue is a product of the first international conference on civic service research, representing an initial attempt to develop comparative knowledge about the status of service worldwide.

Anecdotes, interest, and investment worldwide may be indicators of the growing importance of civic service, but developing a scientific body of knowledge on civic service will require definition, common terminology, analytical frameworks, and systematic research. The phenomenon has not been named worldwide and there is no common language about its forms, nature, and effects. Building on prior scholarship (Janowitz, 1991; Moskos, 1988) and recognizing that we must start somewhere, we offer a term and conception to be tested around the world. We conceive of civic service as a construct, defined 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" (M. Sherraden, 2001a, p. 5). We choose civic as the descriptor because it connotes the larger domain that may include such forms as national service and international service. Civic reflects action and effects in the public sphere. Strangers near and far and subsequent generations may benefit from civic service.

The concept of *volunteer* is widely contested, with stipended and compulsory forms of service commonly excluded (Brown, 1999; Carson, 1999; Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). This is why we use the term *service* instead of volunteering. In addition to token monetary awards to cover basic living expenses or to offset expenses incurred during service, service behavior may be rewarded with educational credit (Omo-Abu, 1997; M. S. Sherraden & Sherraden, 1990). Further distinguishing service from volunteerism is the fact that service is performed within a programmatic structure, where there is a distinct role for the server, and he or she is expected to serve on an intensive basis over an extended duration. In view of these characteristics, civic service can be considered a formal, programmatic intervention. Civic service program examples include the United States Peace Corps, national service programs in Ghana and Nigeria, and the European Voluntary Service.

What is known worldwide about the forms and nature of this phenomenon we refer to as civic service? Below, we present findings of a global assessment of civic service. We focus on key attributes, which may inform the development of service as a field of inquiry and intervention.

A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF CIVIC SERVICE: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF FORM AND NATURE

PURPOSE

During 2001-2002, CSD conducted a global assessment of civic service (McBride et al., 2003),¹ building on previous work that addresses the conceptualization, measurement, and study of volunteerism and service (Cnaan & Amroffell, 1994; Clotfelter, 1999; Dingle, Sokolowski, Saxon-Harrold, Smith, & Leigh, 2001; Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2001; Handy et al., 2000; Perry & Imperial, 2001; M. Sherraden & Eberly, 1990). The global assessment provides an empirical, operational description of civic service programs worldwide. We approached this research from a role-based, institutional perspective, which has been useful in our examination of other social and economic development interventions (Beverly & Sherraden, 1999; M. Sherraden, Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Rozario, 2001; M. Sherraden, Schreiner, & Beverly, 2003). An institution can be viewed as structuring the access, incentives, information, and facilitation for the service role (McBride et al., 2003; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Tang, McBride, & Sherraden, 2003). It is likely that the dimensions of service roles will differ across forms of service,

as well as across nations and cultures. These variable dimensions allow for assessment of differences and similarities.

METHODS

The unit of analysis was formal civic service programs that require intensive commitments of time on the part of the server.² Working in eight languages, every effort was made to track down leads on service programs over a 6-month period from July through December 2001. Searching by country and using information from organizational memberships, publications, and the Internet, 210 programs were identified.

A questionnaire was developed using the role-based, institutional perspective. It was completed during the first phase of the study for each identified program using published documents and Web sites. A Microsoft Access database was developed for data entry and management. All program information was entered into the electronic instrument in English for uniformity of analysis and understanding. To further improve data completeness and quality, in phase two, data were sent to the service programs via fax and e-mail for clarification and to fill in missing values. Sixty-six programs (32%) responded with confirmations, specifications, and/or corrections. Below are descriptive statistics of key variables. We are careful to note where data are missing. Results are presented as a percentage of all programs.

FINDINGS

Key features: Scope, form, and age. In this preliminary study, 210 civic service programs are identified in 57 countries. Thirty-three percent of the programs are based in North America, followed by 27% in Europe/Central Asia, 12% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 9% in Latin America/the Caribbean, 10% in East Asia/the Pacific, 5% in the Middle East/North Africa, and 4% in South Asia. In terms of specific country representation, the United States has the most identified programs with 51, followed by Canada with 14. Germany and Hungary are represented with 10 programs each; the United Kingdom with 8; Australia and India with 7; and South Africa with 6.

Programs can be classified by form and type of service. Service forms represent the scope and arrangement of the program. Transnational service programs span two or more nations, with servers exchanged across borders. International service programs are more unilateral, with servers sent to other countries. National service programs may or may not be government-sponsored but do allow citizens to participate. Of the 210 programs, 10% are transnational, 49% are international, 35% are national, and 6% are local, community-based programs. Across these forms of service, three types of service are identified: youth, senior, and faith-based service. Youth service programs are the most prevalent.

The service programs have been in existence from 1 year to 103 years. The average program age is 20.5 years, and the median age is 13.5 years. Age is unknown for 22 programs.

Service role: Time commitment and compulsory nature. Time commitment can be measured by intensity and duration. Intensity is defined as the number of hours the server is required to commit to the program in a given week. Eighty-one percent of the programs require servers to commit to the service experience on a full-time basis, which is equivalent to about 40 hours per week. Some programs are flexible and allow servers to select their choice of time commitment. The average amount of time that a participant serves is 7.3 months. The range is 1 week to 3.5 years. National service programs require the longest average time commitment at 10 months. Intensity is unknown for 8 programs, and duration is unknown for 80.

Programs can be characterized by the voluntary or compulsory nature of the service role. Across the 210 programs, 92% are voluntary, and 4% are compulsory. The compulsory programs are national youth service programs in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East/North Africa. For 4% of the programs, the voluntary or compulsory nature is unknown.

Servers, service areas, and goals. Seventy-seven percent of the programs engage youth as servers, and 10% involve children. Sixty-nine percent have adults who serve, and 34% have seniors who serve. Other server groups include people with physical disabilities, those of low income, and college students. Almost all programs accept both men and women as servers.

Across the 210 programs, most programs engage in multiple areas of work. More than 81% deliver human and social services, and 80% engage in educational activities (see Table 1). Community development is the next most frequent area of service at 77%, followed by personal development activities at 76%, environmental protection at 67%, cultural integration at 60%, and health activities at 59%.

The most prevalent program goal is "increasing the server's motivation to volunteer after the service experience," totaling 81% of all programs, followed by "increasing the server's skill acquisition" at 76% of all programs (see Table 2). "Increasing the server's social skills" is a goal of 68%, and "promoting cultural understanding" is a goal of 66% (especially transnational and international programs). Other goals include "creating or improving public facilities" at 55%, and affecting the environment or "promoting sustainable land use" at 50%.

Institutional dimensions: Access, incentives, information, and facilitation. The most common eligibility criterion for service is age. Seventy-four percent of the programs have a specific age requirement, which may be a minimum or a maximum age for participation. Thirty-one percent of the programs require the server to have specific skills to participate, and 28% of the programs

**Table 1. Global Assessment of Civic Service:
Areas of Service Across Programs (N = 210)**

<i>Areas of Service</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Unspecified^a</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Human and social services	171	81	25	12	14	7
Education	168	80	20	9	22	11
Community development	161	77	28	13	21	10
Personal development	159	76	28	13	23	11
Environmental protection	140	67	40	19	30	14
Cultural integration	125	60	39	18	46	22
Health services	124	59	51	24	35	17
Employment/economic development	106	51	60	28	44	21
Infrastructure development	105	50	60	29	45	21
Peace/human rights	94	45	54	26	62	29
Cultural heritage/arts	96	46	54	26	60	28
Emergency response	45	21	86	41	79	38

a. Unspecified includes programs for which information was missing or unknown.

**Table 2. Global Assessment of Civic Service:
Goals Across Programs (N = 210)**

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Unspecified^a</i>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Increase server's motivation to volunteer	170	81	8	4	32	15
Increase server's skill acquisition	160	76	23	11	27	13
Increase server's social skills	143	68	36	17	31	15
Promote cultural understanding	139	66	13	6	58	28
Increase server's confidence and self-esteem	130	62	26	12	54	26
Create/improve public facilities	115	55	41	20	54	26
Promote sustainable land use	104	50	52	25	54	26
Influence and expand server's career choices	98	47	43	20	69	33
Improve well-being and health	98	47	45	21	67	32
Increase employment rate	68	32	77	37	65	31

a. Unspecified includes programs for which information was missing or unknown.

require servers to be from specific geographical areas. Nineteen percent of programs require that participants be planning to enter, enrolled in, or completing school to participate. Eighteen percent of the programs require some level of language proficiency, which is connected primarily to transnational and international service programs. Income, organizational affiliation, religion, race, and gender are criteria for a small percentage of programs. Eleven programs have no stated eligibility criteria.

Fifty-three percent of the programs provide support for housing. Transportation stipends and assistance are offered by 32% of the programs. Twenty-nine percent of the programs pay for health care or other insurance. Twenty-

eight percent of the programs provide the server with a stipend or living allowance, which is most prevalent among national service programs. Twenty-two percent give the participant some type of award, certificate, or community recognition. Twelve percent offer academic credit in exchange for service participation, and 8% offer scholarships. Seven percent offer grants and other types of monetary awards. Sixty-six percent of the programs provide training to the participants, 70% offer supervision, 49% offer reflection sessions, and 41% offer some form of mentoring.

Program administration. Of the 210 programs, 75% are administered by non-profit or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and 22% by government agencies. Ninety-five percent of the transnational service programs and 92% of the international service programs are administered by NGOs, whereas 52% of the national service programs are administered and implemented by government agencies. Some programs evidence collaborative arrangements between multiple entities (see McBride, Benítez, & Danso, 2003).

BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE

Development of a comparative knowledge base on civic service depends on basic knowledge of the status of civic service within as well as across nations and cultures. The global assessment is a first step toward operationalizing the service concept and identifying possible trends worldwide, but it has many limitations and presents only a cursory appraisal. In this section, we reflect on the findings of the global assessment with an eye toward better specifying the status of service. We suggest key questions that, if answered, may chart the contours of this phenomenon including its prevalence, forms, nature, and effects.

TRULY GLOBAL?

More civic service programs in this preliminary study are found in North America and Europe/Central Asia than in other regions of the world. This finding could be due to bias in our research methods. We were constrained to searching in only eight languages, and we relied on technological and published sources to identify programs and information about them. These are substantial limitations. But the differences in prevalence by region may reflect actual differences that are related to historical, cultural, and institutional factors.

Research suggests that volunteerism may be positively associated with the status of the nonprofit or voluntary sector as well as level of economic development (Anheier & Salamon, 1999). Civic service may not be prevalent in regions that rely on mutual aid or do not have an established nonprofit sector. In some countries, the functions that service programs tend to play may be

met by other societal institutions and structures (e.g., government or welfare programs). Service is emerging in many countries, but we do not know if civic service is truly global or what forms of service are more prevalent in different regions and countries around the world.

SERVICE FORMS

The empirical identification of service forms is an important contribution of this study. However, our methods and analysis may have overlooked important, legitimate forms of service. The emphasis on long-term, intensive service programs obviated consideration of more short-term activities, which may be "service" in some parts of the world. In excluding service learning through universities, emerging civic service developments were missed. Moreover, local service programs are not prevalent among the programs identified. This may be due to research bias in that local service programs are not marketed and widely heralded, or it may be that long-term, intensive service roles are less likely to be defined and implemented at the local level. Although a typology of service programs emerged from this study, the identified forms lack clear conceptual and operational boundaries. We have more to learn about the distinguishing features of transnational, international, national, and local service programs, so as to better specify service forms and their likely differing effects.

The presence of different forms of civic service programs may be attributable to different political regimes and the status of democracy, as well as to variations in cultural norms. For national service programs, a democratic government may be more likely to encourage efforts that organize citizens in support of the country. Democracy may also be positively associated with economic development (Sen, 1999). The age of the democracy and the productivity of the economy may translate into more resources available to organize service opportunities and more citizens who find service roles accessible. Transnational service may be prevalent where political-geographic boundaries are blurring due to globalizing economies and transnational policies (M. S. Sherraden, 2001). Cultural norms and mores may promote international service. The status of institutionalized religion and the religiosity of people in a given country may support the development and implementation of specific forms of volunteerism and service (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2001). Very little is known about these possibilities.

THE SERVICE ROLE: VOLUNTARY, INTENSIVE, AND LONG-TERM

For the programs examined in this study, the service role is primarily voluntary. Few mandatory programs are identified, and all of these are national service programs. Very likely, this finding will hold up in future studies. Although the compulsory nature of service has been an issue of debate, this

assessment suggests that compulsion may play a limited role in service. With this said, however, service-learning programs are not captured in this assessment, and they are often mandatory.

Data concerning the intensity and duration of the service experience suggest that service is different from occasional volunteering. Expectations concerning commitment are greater. Across these programs, the service experience is mostly full-time and of a sustained duration. The long-term, intensive nature raises a number of questions with regard to who is serving and how. Are only privileged, able-bodied individuals serving, only those who have the ability to leave the labor market for a defined period? Do programs provide access and incentives to individuals who are disadvantaged? Answers to these questions would have important implications for service as an inclusive, social, and economic development intervention.

INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS: ACCESS, INCENTIVES, AND PARTICIPATION

Eligibility requirements suggest that there is a particular target population or type of person sought by most programs to fill the service role. Extensive eligibility requirements of skills or abilities may undermine the potential for positive benefits to accrue to individuals who may have the most to gain from the service experience. Skills or language training is offered to servers in some programs, but the extent of skill requirements—especially among transnational and international service programs—requires thoughtful consideration. Another consideration is stipends. Stipends may allow individuals to leave the labor market, but in transnational or international service programs, the award of stipends may be a social justice issue. In some program host countries, minimal stipends may be equivalent to or more than what some citizens in those countries earn through the labor market.

Youth appear to be the primary targets for the service role. Life cycle patterns suggest that service roles may be more accessible to youth and older adults. Given the aging demographics of the world's population, it is curious that more programs do not have senior servers. Older adults are often experienced and skilled individuals who have retired from paid work; they may have much to contribute via service. The creation of service roles with elders in mind is a possible area of development (Freedman, 2001; Hoodless, 2003; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Sherraden, 2001; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003). What incentives and supports would make the service role more accessible to elders, and how might the capacity of sponsoring organizations be increased to effectively recruit, manage, and support older servers?

ROLE OF THE STATE

In contrast to most military service, civic service is generally not organized and carried out by the state.³ Across all forms of service, NGOs are implement-

ing most programs. This is an important finding, likely to hold up over time because state-sponsored service programs are not easily overlooked. It is probable that state interests in civic service are very different from state interests in military service. A valuable study would identify these different interests over time and across nations.

ADMINISTRATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The nonprofit sector or third sector is driving civic service programming and administration. Further examination of the global assessment data reveals complex collaborative roles and arrangements between NGOs for the development and implementation of some programs (e.g., sending and hosting organizations in international service; McBride et al., 2003). Beyond interorganizational collaboration, there are some public-private partnerships, where government is a primary funder of the service programs implemented by NGOs. More research is warranted with regard to the administration of civic service programs, from the efficiency and effectiveness of the collaborative partnerships to the relationships between NGOs and the state. What theories can inform the nature and effects of these partnerships and relationships?

CONCLUSION

Social scientists are trailing behind policy and practice in understanding what service is, and whether intended or unintended outcomes are being achieved. A wide range of research on social, cultural, economic, and political influences on service development, implementation, and outcomes should be developed. This would help to define civic service as an international field of study and create an informational foundation for comparative study.

Notes

1. Content for this article is based in part on McBride, Benítez, and Sherraden (2003).
2. Service-learning programs were excluded from the global assessment because the time commitment varies substantially and their prevalence was beyond the scope of this study.
3. Governments may be more directly involved in the administration of national youth service programs, specifically. Eberly and Gal (2003) assess the evolution of national youth service from military service, providing a glimpse into possible determinants and functions of service from a state perspective.

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Amanda Moore McBride, Ph.D., is the research director of the Center for Social Development (CSD) and an assistant professor at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis. She is a coprincipal investigator for CSD's Global Service Institute research agenda. Her scholarship focuses on the forms and effects of civic service worldwide and the civic effects of asset development.

Michael Sherraden, Ph.D., is the director of the Center for Social Development (CSD) and the Benjamin E. Youngdahl Professor of Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis. He is a principal investigator for CSD's Global Service Institute research agenda. He is known as the originator of the concept of asset-based, antipoverty policy, which has influenced policies and programs worldwide, and his scholarship on civic service spans several decades.

Carlos Benítez, M.S.W., is the data and communications coordinator at the Center for Social Development (CSD), Washington University in St. Louis. A former Fulbright scholar, he manages a small research grants program at CSD and leads data collection on key projects, most recently a study assessing the transnational, North American Community Service pilot program.

Elizabeth Johnson, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., is a project director at the Center for Social Development (CSD), Washington University in St. Louis. She led the development of a management information system for a nationwide asset-building project and is currently leading the development of a global Web-based information network on civic service and a study of youth volunteerism and service in Latin America and the Caribbean.