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Civic Opportunities in Associations: Interpersonal Interaction, Governance Experience and Institutional Relationships

Matthew Baggetta, Harvard University

Following Tocqueville, many scholars consider associations “schools of democracy” because members can develop civic capacities within them. This article identifies the distribution of civic development opportunities across civic sectors (e.g., politics, service, recreation), focusing on understudied apolitical groups. New data is introduced on a set of often referenced, but rarely studied, associations: choral societies. Choruses are shown to offer numerous opportunities for interpersonal interaction, governance experience and institutional relationships. Data are compared to opportunities offered by associations in other civic sectors. Apolitical arts associations are found to provide as many or more opportunities for individual civic development than their politically- and service-oriented counterparts suggesting their potential for shrinking the political communication gap between naturally politically interested and disinterested citizens.

Since Tocqueville made his classic claims about voluntary associations as “large free schools” (2000[1835]:639) training citizens in the art of democracy, scholars have sought evidence that groups actually perform this role. Research on participants in associations suggests they are more politically and civically skilled (Brady et al. 1995; Verba et al. 1995), politically aware (Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990; Verba and Nie 1972), trusting of others (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Putnam 2000), and invested in their communities (Putnam 2000) than non-joiners. Some scholars, however, have recently questioned the assumption that all associations produce the same outcomes (Paxton 2002; Stolle 2001; Stolle and Rochon 1998) and have begun disaggregating associations and their possible effects.

Disaggregating associations into types is an important step toward identifying mechanisms driving civic learning in groups. To date, however, most work has focused on content-based typologies (political vs. community vs. cultural groups, and so on). This is problematic when examining civic effects because content is generally the reason why people choose to join particular groups, meaning differences in civic outcomes may not be caused by the association, but rather by selection effects. As Stolle (2001) demonstrates, more-civic people join political groups; less-civic people join bowling leagues.

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Content, however, is not the only dimension on which associations vary. As Skocpol and colleagues argue (Skocpol 2003; Skocpol et al. 2000) the internal organization and practices of associations—their civic forms—may be the real mechanisms behind the civic development of members. Verba and colleagues give individual-level evidence of this by showing that Protestant churches, with their less hierarchical/more participatory structures, lead to significantly more civic skill experiences among congregants than Catholic churches (Verba et al. 1995).

The potential for civic development through experiences of organizational structure and practice is critical for research in the Tocquevillean tradition. A long-standing hope among democratic theorists and civil society proponents is that people might become “better” democratic citizens almost accidentally (see Fung 2003). Individuals join groups they find interesting, but then develop civic skills, attitudes and behaviors as a by-product.

Because not all individuals join groups, and joiners do not all join the same groups, patterns of associational joining can create “gaps” in various civic outcomes between joiners and non-joiners and among joiners with different interests and experiences. Three types of “gaps” are relevant for this research (illustrated in Figure 1 using the example of policy communication outcomes). The first is the empirically established difference in civic behaviors between people who join voluntary associations and those who do not (Figure 1 – Gap 1). Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) find a consistent difference in political participation outcomes (e.g., voting, contacting officials) between joiners and non-joiners (see also Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). As such, government officials are more likely to hear from joiners than non-joiners. Similarly, Stolle and Rochon’s analysis of six different surveys in the United States, Germany and Sweden find substantial numbers of statistically significant differences between associational joiners and non-joiners on political contacting, political engagement, community and social participation, non-campaign political participation, community “credit slips,” generalized trust, political efficacy, trust in public officials and institutions, generalized optimism, tolerance of marginalized people, tolerance of outsiders and disapproval of free-riding (Stolle and Rochon 1998:53; see also Putnam 2000; Brehm and Rahn 1997). In sum, across many civic dimensions (political and otherwise), there is a primary, empirically-established “gap” between joiners and non-joiners on civic outcomes.

Not all joiners are the same, however. Many individuals join groups for political or economic reasons, but as Tocqueville observed, Americans form associations “of a thousand other kinds” as well (2000[1835]:628). The variation across the particular content of organizations—from recreation to religion to politics—may have important consequences for civic outcomes. As Verba and colleagues (1995) found for political outcomes, individuals are more likely to communicate their interests to government if they are joiners and they are more interested in politics. We might expect, then, to find a secondary gap in the politically relevant
communications from individuals to government between those individuals who choose to join political organizations and those who join explicitly non-political groups such as cultural associations (Figure 1 – Gap 2). Stolle (2001) indicates that in the United States, members of political associations are significantly more civically engaged (outside their political groups) and more likely to vote in local
elections than members of certain cultural or recreational associations. We might expect similar gaps in other civic outcomes (community engagement, generalized trust, etc.) based on particular associational content. Stolle and Rochon (1998) demonstrate that this kind of variation exists across associational content categories (politics, economics, group rights, community, cultural, personal interest or social), although the size and direction of the gaps may vary from outcome to outcome (i.e., political groups may not always provide a larger civic boost than other kinds of groups).

This article seeks to identify the possibility for a second mechanism at work in associations—regardless of content—that might affect this secondary civic gap: the possibility of differential access to opportunities for civic skills development. According to the skill development hypothesis, associations provide opportunities for individuals to have civically relevant experiences and practice civic skills in their organization (Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1995; Skocpol 2003). It is possible that these opportunities are more prevalent in certain kinds of groups. If experiences and opportunities are evenly distributed, then the only secondary civic gap is based on personal interest. If, however, opportunities are more prevalent in organizations already attracting those with outcome-enhancing interests, then skill development may accentuate the secondary gap. If skills opportunities are more prevalent in other types of organizations, skill development may attenuate the secondary gap. In the political communication example, if political groups offer more skill development opportunities than cultural groups, which we might expect given the objectives and institutional models for each sector (see DiMaggio 1986; Hansmann 1986; Skocpol 2003; Skocpol, Ganz and Munson 2000), then the policy communication gap between politically interested and politically uninterested joiners will expand (Figure 1 – Gap 3a). If, however, cultural organizations offer more civic opportunities than political groups, the gap between cultural joiners and political joiners will decrease (Figure 1 – Gap 3b). The nature of this third gap has not been empirically demonstrated because research has not compared the opportunities available in various types of associations (recreational, cultural, political, service, etc.).

This research begins identifying the distribution of civic opportunities across sectors, focusing on the understudied apolitical end of the spectrum. While this study does not go so far as to establish the direction and size of an experience- and skills-produced gap on all civic outcomes, it does compare the opportunities to have civic experiences and practice civic skills in associations with different content, empirically establishing the potential for civic outcome accentuating and attenuating effects across civic sectors.

**Defining Civic Opportunities**

Tocqueville (2000[1835]:221) saw varied civic opportunities in American associations: “Men have the opportunity of seeing each other; means of execution are
more readily combined, and opinions are maintained with a degree of warmth and energy which written language cannot approach.” His observations point to both “hard” organizing skills (“means of execution”) and “soft” interpersonal relations (“warmth and energy”). Contemporary associations may offer all sorts of civic opportunities along this continuum. Before we can meaningfully compare sets of organizations on their potential for teaching civic lessons, we must ask: what opportunities for civic learning can associations offer? Building on Tocqueville’s insights, scholars offer three main answers to this question: opportunities for interpersonal interaction, governance experience and institutional relationships.

**Interpersonal Interaction**

A fundamental claim about associations is that they provide opportunities for people to interact with individuals from outside their primary social networks (family, close friends). There is some debate as to what effects face-to-face social interaction has on the attitudes of individuals. Putnam (1995a, 1995b, 2000; Putnam and Feldstein 2003) argues that card parties, sports leagues, citizens bands and myriad other associations provide chances for informal social interaction that breeds generalized trust. Berman, Kaufman and others (Berman 1997a, 1997b; Kaufman 1999, 2002; Kaufman and Weintraub 2004) highlight the role of face-to-face interactions in associations as a means of reinforcing boundaries between groups in society. Either way, the prevalence of face-to-face social interaction is seen as a key characteristic in determining the civic-effects potential of an organization.

Associations encourage interaction in several ways. Membership meetings commonly provide a time and place for people with shared interests to gather. Beyond meetings, some organizations hold social events for the express purpose of socializing. While these social events can vary from the largely informal (e.g., post-meeting pub outings) to the formally planned (e.g., annual holiday parties), they provide a wealth of chances for informal conversation and interpersonal connection.

**Governance Experience**

A second, often discussed set of civic learning opportunities can be grouped under the broad umbrella of governance experience. The practice of national and state politics is often quite distant from the daily lives of ordinary citizens, and while some people may have opportunities to engage in acts of governance as part of their occupations, many others may not. Civic associations may fill this experiential gap for many people by giving them opportunities to practice two separate dimensions of governance: management and representation.

Ensuring that an organization survives and achieves its goals takes practice. Because two-thirds of Americans are employed in non-managerial occupations (Fronczek and Johnson 2003), the opportunity to engage in executive decision-making and organizational management in work settings may be limited for most
people. Associations may provide opportunities for members to practice managerial skills on a smaller scale (Verba et al. 1995). Organizations that maintain nonprofit tax status must comply with laws regarding incorporation, fundraising and taxes, and the fiduciary responsibility that comes with running a nonprofit requires regular efforts to allocate funds in responsible ways. Many associations have staff, and many more have volunteers. These individuals and the tasks they complete must be designed, managed and assessed. For membership associations, the task of recruiting, informing and retaining members becomes a critical task requiring the constant attention of organizational leaders (Barakso 2004; Knoke 1990; Rothenberg 1992; Skocpol 2003). Such experience could make individuals more skilled managers and more aware of what goes into executive governance in politics.

The political connection is even stronger when we consider opportunities to practice representation. Modern democratic governance requires that some individuals act politically on behalf of constituents. Acts of formal representation are not necessarily common occurrences in much of daily life. Skocpol (2003:104) notes, however, “[c]apacities for representative, majoritarian leadership… were honed by voluntary federations.” Elected officer positions in associations offer opportunities for individuals to represent other members’ interests and, hence, for members to be represented—giving chances to hold one’s representatives accountable (Skocpol 2003). Associations often offer members the chance to influence decisions through informal conversations with leaders, attending open forums or other decision-making meetings (Verba et al. 1995) and member polls or surveys (McFarland 1984; Rothenberg 1992). Members also have opportunities to think about representation—and witness it at work—when choosing their representatives in organizational governance if groups include elections or other member-based leadership selection structures (McFarland 1984). Finally, associations offer the chance to directly practice the act of representation by becoming a leader, requiring individuals to consider the interests and wishes of their fellow members in intra-organizational leadership deliberations and in some cases representing the whole organization in discussions with representatives from other groups at industry conferences, federation conventions or coalition meetings (Skocpol 2003).

**Institutional Relationships**

A final set of civic opportunities that can be provided by associations extends beyond the boundaries of the groups themselves. Some groups offer the chance to interact with other institutions and organizations (Skocpol 2003; Skocpol et al. 2006). In Lichterman’s (2005) terms, these are chances for the “social spiral” to spin outward, connecting members of organizations in various ways to the institutions of community, business and government that provide them meeting space, funding and other resources as well as meaningful outlets for furthering their missions. These connections can “spiral” even further outward as groups form coalitional or federational ties with other similar organizations in other localities.
In sum, the literature identifies three key dimensions that might influence the “civicness” of individuals. Association members can have opportunities to meet people beyond their core social networks, to gain experience in governing through the practice of executive management and representative leadership and to connect with broader networks of institutions within and across communities. Given these varied mechanisms for civic growth, we must ask how many of these opportunities exist in associations. Furthermore, we might expect civic opportunities—especially those relevant to political experience and learning—to be more prevalent in associations that take some element of politics as their object of interest. But many associations are apolitical. Are civic learning opportunities available only to the select citizens already interested in politics? In essence, we must learn how civic the forms of apolitical groups are vs. their more political counterparts. What civic opportunities are available to members of each type of organization? Do apolitical associations provide the same civic training as political groups? To begin answering these questions, new data is presented on a set of common apolitical associations: choral societies.

Studying Civic Opportunities: Why Choral Societies?

Choral societies have been used as hallmark examples of associations that generate civic benefits since the publication of Putnam’s work on factors affecting the success of new government structures in Italy. Putnam identifies “civic community” as a key factor in explaining where new governmental forms produced desirable results. To measure “civic community,” Putnam (1993:91) develops a measure of associational “vibrancy” that includes “the number of amateur soccer clubs, choral societies, hiking clubs, bird-watching groups, literary circles, hunters associations, Lions Clubs and the like in each community and region of Italy.” These associational counts are combined with measures of patronage voting, referenda turnout and newspaper readership to create a “civic community index.” This measure reflects the variation in the prevalence of “civics” across Italy’s regions and is a significant predictor of regional government performance.

Despite the levels of aggregation between counts of arts organizations and the regression analyses, the “choral societies” example is often referenced in Putnam’s subsequent writings and the work of those that have responded to him (e.g., Berman 1997b:405; Fung 2003:516-7, 525-6; Putnam 1995a:66, 2000:345-6; Skocpol 2003:8). Beyond the Italian study, however, little empirical evidence appears in the literature supporting claims about the role of arts organizations in general, or choral societies in particular, in generating civic engagement (but see Eastis 1998). Nevertheless, following his later analysis of the United States, Putnam recommends encouraging participation in the arts as a mechanism for stimulating civic participation and the formation of social capital (Putnam 2000).
In addition to being a useful example, choral societies may be an ideal set of associations to study. Independent choral societies are self-governing membership associations that rehearse and perform vocal music. These are not school choruses or church choirs; they are independently constituted and run,\(^1\) creating an organizational context within which opportunities for individual civic participation may appear. Choral societies are also a substantial presence in U.S. civil society. In a recent national survey study commissioned by Chorus America, the number of choruses in the United States was estimated at approximately 250,000 including some 23.5 million adult singers (Chorus America 2003).\(^2\) Including an estimated 5 million youth singers, 18 percent of U.S. households had at least one person sing in a chorus in the year preceding the survey. Choruses are also the most common form of a broader set of artistic and cultural organizations found throughout the country. Citizens bands, community theater troupes, suburban city orchestras, folk dance groups and myriad other art associations face similar organizational concerns (finding space, attracting audiences, raising money, getting members) and are driven by a set of similar motives (the enjoyment of a particular collective artistic expression). Because people continuously join these associations for the love of the art, the groups could provide a substantial boost to the civic skills of Americans. Choir membership—like other forms of associational participation—is related to many civic outcomes. The Chorus America survey found that choristers have high rates of volunteering and community leadership, that they often donate to charities, service agencies and arts groups, and that they socialize more than the average American. Choral singers are more likely to be politically aware, to vote, to contribute to campaigns, to work for political parties and to run for office.\(^3\)

Of course, the presence of these civic patterns among choristers does not prove a causal influence of choral groups on singers. Some of these patterns are likely driven by individual demographic characteristics. Choristers in the Chorus America sample have, on average, more formal education, somewhat higher incomes and more regular religious participation than the general public—all of which are associated with civic skills and hence political and civic participation (Verba et al. 1995). But the possibility still exists for these individuals to further develop their civic attitudes and abilities through participation if opportunities for civic learning are actually provided. If choral societies offer no civic opportunities, then these candidates for civic growth could be de-mobilized by their participation in choirs as they spend limited time resources on fun but non-civic activities. Even if choral societies offer some opportunities, if they are drastically less common than the opportunities offered in other types of associations (e.g., volunteer service agencies, political interest groups), then members’ investments in civic growth (whether intentional or not) may provide more limited returns. A first step in determining what role apolitical arts associations might play in the development of a civically skilled and engaged public is to determine how many civic opportunities
are provided in these groups and how those opportunities compare to the chances for civic development available in other kinds of associations.

Data and Methods

Original data for this study come from the Boston Area Choral Societies Study. The greater Boston area has a rich tradition of choral music. The region boasts thousands of school and church choirs along with more than 70 independent choral societies, virtually all of whom are members of the Greater Boston Choral Consortium. The GBCC offers information and workshops on a variety of topics of interest to chorus leaders as well as a centralized listing of all the choruses in the region. This listing served as the population listing for the BACSS. Repeated efforts were made to recruit all the members of the consortium to participate in the study, including an in-person appeal at the GBCC’s annual membership meeting, a request letter sent out by the GBCC to its email list of chorus representatives and a letter sent to an official contact’s email address as compiled from each organization’s website and/or GBCC listing. Similar efforts were made to contact the handful of independent choral groups identified in the area that had never been or were no longer members of the GBCC. Twenty-six choruses eventually participated in the study, for a final response rate of 37 percent. Limited data are available from GBCC listings on nearly all groups in the population presenting an opportunity to assess the representativeness of respondents. Responding choruses range from 13 to 190 members vs. 8 to 240 for the full population. The median responding chorus has 51 members (mean = 62) while the population median is 60 (mean = 66). A difference of means test shows no significant difference between membership size of respondents and non-respondents (t = .39, p = .70). Auditions are held in 64 percent of choirs in the population and 69 percent of responding groups. Based on these indicators, responding choruses appear to accurately represent the Boston population. It is possible that despite the similarities in size and audition status that responding and non-responding groups differ in important ways on dimensions of civic form. While it is difficult to assess this with any degree of certainty, informal conversations with music directors, GBCC representatives and other knowledgeable individuals in the Boston choral community support the notion that the participating groups are a reasonable cross-section of choruses. In addition, the quantitative data do vary substantially across the sample of groups, giving some added confidence that a full range of organizational forms were included. Nevertheless, the relatively small N sample and the lack of comprehensive comparative data on non-responding groups suggest that final conclusions be made cautiously.

Beyond local representativeness of the sample, we must also ask if the Boston population of choruses is representative of choruses nationally. Detailed data on a nationally representative sample of choral groups—like most voluntary associations—are not readily available. Chorus America does ask its member choirs for
some organizational information annually and publishes a report of aggregate statistics based on these data. Because responding to the call for information is voluntary for Chorus America members, it is possible the data collected reflect groups that are, on average, larger, wealthier and better run. Still, the data provide some basis for national comparison. According to the 2006 Chorus America report, the average volunteer chorus had 92 members (median = 80) vs. 66 in Boston (median = 60). The national report values are likely higher than the true population values for volunteer choruses because of the statistical influence of other, typically large chorus types included in the report (e.g., the average youth chorus has 187 members; Boston area youth choruses were not included in the BACSS) and the possible tendency for larger groups to send in their data. The audition rate for volunteer groups in the Chorus America report is 65 percent (compared with 64 percent of Boston groups). While the nature of the data dictate a cautious comparison, it would seem that Boston choruses may be somewhat smaller on average than the national sample (or may simply be more representative of the population of volunteer, non-youth choruses) and are quite similar in terms of their audition status.

Extensive data on BACSS participating choruses were collected via hour-long structured interviews (face-to-face or over the phone) with a leader from each group during the summer and fall of 2007. Interviews covered a variety of topics including performances and activities, rules and expectations, leadership and governance, organizational structure, external connections, new member engagement, social life, and business and budget, as well as basic details on organizational size, age, repertoire and rehearsals. A mix of closed and open-ended questions were used to elicit the most complete and accurate picture of the regular functioning of these organizations as possible. All interviewees were helpful participants who willingly answered the questions. Their responses provide a detailed look at the range of civic opportunities available in independent choral societies, allowing us to assess their viability as “schools of democracy” and to compare their “civicness” with groups from other sectors.

Results and Analysis

Opportunities for Civic Development

What opportunities for civic development do independent choruses offer? Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on the set of choral societies examined in the BACSS. As noted, a fundamental claim of civil society research is that associations provide opportunities for individuals to interact with others outside their primary social groups. Choral societies offer a wealth of opportunities for such interactions. Choruses almost by definition are made up of participating members; unlike many “tertiary” associations (Putnam 2000), members cannot have a dues-and-newsletter relationship with a chorus. One must show up to sing. As such, absolute levels
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Participating members</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Planned social events</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*In-rehearsal socializing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Pre/Post-rehearsal socializing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Governance Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Incorporated as nonprofits</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual budget (in dollars)</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>30,305</td>
<td>74,626</td>
<td>630,000</td>
<td>130,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Staff per group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Administrative staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Volunteers per group²</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Volunteers per group²</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Members per group¹</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Representation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Open forums per year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Members at open forums</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Open board meetings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*Members at board meetings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board meetings per year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Boards of directors elected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Directors who are members</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Standing committees</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-board committee members³</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Relationships</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Association/federation memberships</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.8</td>
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<tr>
<td># Delegate meetings (of 9 possible)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Within-sector collaborations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Out-of-sector collaborations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Total collaborations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Out-of-sector resource ties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured interviews with leaders of choruses (N = 26) in the Boston area in the summer and fall of 2007. Variables marked with stars (*) are dichotomous; mean values are the proportion of choruses possessing that characteristic.

Notes: ¹Member numbers are the same as participating members as these groups have no non-participatory forms of membership. ²Included in the count are non-member volunteers who help (e.g., sell tickets) at concerts. Groups with nearly full volunteering from members and a few non-member volunteers can exceed a 100% volunteer participation rate. ³Only groups with committees (N = 16).
of face-to-face participation are high. Every group in the sample rehearses weekly during their regular season (roughly 34 rehearsals per year per group). Clearly many chances exist for social interaction to take place.

The nature of choral singing may not necessarily facilitate extensive social interaction, despite the proximity of individuals. Focus is on the conductor for large stretches of rehearsals as choristers take instruction or sing. A closer look, however, shows that many groups further facilitate social interaction. More than 80 percent of choruses formally plan at least one non-rehearsal-based social event per year. Typical events include holiday parties or end-of-season celebrations. Other major events are relatively rare, so these may not offer lots of opportunity for building social connections. Socializing tied to regular rehearsals, however, offers many more chances, and this is very common. More than 90 percent of choruses take a 10-20 minute break in the middle of rehearsal, often with refreshments provided, to give members a chance to relax and chat. Beyond break-time, almost one-third of groups also have members who go out together before or after rehearsals at least twice a month. These pre- and post-rehearsal gatherings provide extended opportunities for conversation with people beyond one’s basic social network.

We might expect community choruses to be relatively social. Do they also offer opportunities for experiencing governance? Looking at opportunities for practicing management, 92 percent of choruses are formally incorporated and registered as 501.c.3 nonprofits with the IRS. This means virtually all community choruses have to be familiar with the financial reporting legalities required for nonprofit status. This is no small task, even for small-budget groups, and chorus budgets are not necessarily small. The median chorus operates on more than $30,000 per year and the largest on more than $600,000. Costs for music directors and accompanists, rehearsal and performance space, sheet music and performance rights, and instrumental musicians for concerts are substantial, requiring extensive fundraising and sophisticated financial management—tasks almost always overseen by volunteer members. All groups have at least one “staff” person, but the first hire is always a music director and the second is almost always a rehearsal accompanist. Less than 20 percent of groups have any paid administrative staff (and these are usually parttime). This means that leaders in all groups have to do some “human resource” management—hiring, paying, overseeing and at times firing music staff. But with staff limited almost exclusively to musical efforts, most other organizational work is done by volunteers. The average chorus has 34 individuals who do at least some work for the group beyond rehearsing and performing. Volunteer participation varies substantially across groups: choruses with the lowest volunteering rate have 9 percent of their members doing organizational work while the average chorus has nearly half its members committing time. Despite the variation, all choruses depend in part on volunteer efforts to get work done. Overseeing such a substantial set of volunteers—and keeping them
motivated to fold programs, transport risers, catalogue sheet-music, manage email lists and many other tasks—is a sizeable managerial enterprise.

Additionally, membership in these groups is not a given. Each chorus must regularly and actively recruit new members, while continually engaging existing members, to maintain a suitable ensemble size and vocal balance. This is a substantial management task, especially for groups on the ends of the distribution. A group with 15 members that loses three tenors may suddenly lack that voice-part entirely. On the other end, a group that intends to perform major classical works with full orchestral accompaniment in a large venue must maintain its size in order to make all parts heard. Finding enough singers willing to pay to perform (almost all groups charge dues, although most waive dues for those who cannot pay) can be a serious challenge.

Clearly, many opportunities exist for individuals to witness and experience organizational management, and given the number and percentage of member-volunteers in many groups, lots of individuals are exposed to management lessons. But management could be learned elsewhere—managed bureaucratic hierarchies are the dominant form of organization in most workplaces. Representation, on the other hand, is an experience more uniquely prevalent in civic associations. What opportunities do choral societies provide for learning representation skills?

There are two common, structured ways that organizations include member input in decision making: holding open forums and inviting regular members to board of directors’ meetings. The typical chorus holds one annual open forum, although some do two or three per year. Attendance at these events is usually high, with the average group garnering 80 percent attendance at open forums. Board meetings also offer chances for member input, but only if they are open to members. About three-quarters of groups have open board meetings; about a fourth of groups have ordinary members who regularly attend. Nonetheless, the opportunity is available: the median chorus holds 11 board meetings per year. Between open board meetings and open forums, most chorus members will have at least one chance per year to offer input into governance decisions.

Beyond direct communication with leaders, many choral society members experience representation by selecting their leaders. More than three-fifths of choruses have members select all or part of the board of directors, typically through elections.\(^5\) The selection of representatives is a fundamental component of modern democracy, and the small-organization format allows for a close viewing of the election and representation process at work.

Of course, the most compelling representation lessons are likely learned not simply by influencing or selecting representatives, but by becoming one. The average Boston area chorus board of directors draws slightly less than a fifth of its members from outside the group (often former choristers, spouses/partners of current singers or, occasionally, wealthy patrons of the group) leaving more than 80 percent of directorships available for current members. In many choruses the
entire board is made up of current singers. Member-directors are particularly well-situated to regularly practice representation because they interact with so many members at rehearsal each week. The thoughts of members can be informally communicated to board members, who then take those ideas with them to board meetings. After the board makes a decision, member-directors must return to rehearsals with their fellow members, providing a setting for immediate accountability to those represented.

The board is not the only place where members can exercise representative leadership. The median choral society has two standing committees, almost always led and populated by members, and some groups have as many as seven active committees (not including ad-hoc committees). Committees plan events, design fundraisers, recruit and inform members, and do a host of other activities that require committee members to think and act on behalf of the broader membership of the group. The presence of a committee structure does not guarantee extensive participation in organizational governance by many members. Committees could be made up primarily (or even exclusively) of individuals on the board of directors, expanding the number of titles on the organization chart without meaningfully increasing the number of members engaged in governance. In the 10 choruses that do not have committee structures, most governance experience is gained by board members alone as a small cadre of leaders plan and coordinate most tasks. Among groups with committees (N = 16), however, 54 percent of the average chorus’ committee members are not members of the board of directors, effectively doubling the number of voices potentially engaged in structured governance. A fourth of those groups draw more than 80 percent of their committee members from outside the board, and only one group has committees exclusively populated by board members. The number of cases under consideration on this dimension is small and the data cannot tell us whether or not these non-board-member committee members engage in serious deliberations and planning or merely complete tasks assigned to them by a board-member committee chairperson. Nevertheless, it appears that in many groups the opportunity may exist for substantial participation in representative governance on committees.

While internal governance experience is important, civic learning may be enhanced if experiences reach beyond an organization’s boundaries. Interacting and negotiating with other institutions may provide additional governance experience and lead to “bridging” social capital. How many opportunities do choral societies provide for reaching out into the community?

Most choruses view themselves as part of a community of choral societies. They act on this by joining various regional and national choral associations. The typical group in this study is a member of two federations or associations. The most common are the Greater Boston Choral Consortium and Chorus America. Other groups are affiliated with local community arts councils or groups like GALA Choruses, an association of GLBT and allied choruses worldwide. While
direct participation in some of these federations is limited, others produce active
ties. The median responding chorus sends a representative to seven (of a possible
nine) GBCC meetings each year. GBCC meetings are highly participatory, with
group representatives sharing information on issues facing community choruses
and creating communication networks that span the region.

While federation is a meaningful and regularly occurring form of institutional
relationship, it can be relatively low in intensity. One or two delegates attend
meetings and track federation activities. On occasion an entire chorus might
tavel to a federation convention to perform, but such actions are rare. A more
intensive, but still relatively common, form of institutional relationship is col-
laboration with other local organizations. Choruses collaborate within the music
sector with solo vocalists and instrumentalists, local orchestras and instrumental
ensembles, youth choruses and other adult choral societies to put on combined
concerts. Choruses collaborate outside the music sector with various charities,
hospitals, shelters, schools, businesses, municipal governments and other local
organizations. For example, one chorus in the sample puts on an annual benefit
concert for a regional veterans association. The chorus works extensively with
the veterans group to arrange fundraising channels and establish ticket deals. In
2008 the group brought in a full youth chorus as a performance collaborator and
several individual musicians to supplement the “in-house” musical talent. The
event was performed in a large university concert hall and raised a substantial
amount of money for the charity. Within-sector collaborations are quite com-
mon; the median group engages in three musical collaborations per year. Out of
sector collaborations are less common, but still prevalent. The typical group does
one out-of-sector collaboration per year, though some groups do as many as nine.
Overall, a typical choral society will have some collaborative relationship with four
to five other organizations or institutions per year. This does not count resource
ties such as rehearsal or performance space rented from churches, libraries or com-
munity centers. These negotiated relationships—almost all of which force choral
groups to reach outside the music sector—have the typical chorus interacting with
an additional three institutions per year.

In summation, it appears that choral societies on average offer their members
a substantial number of opportunities for civic development. They have many
face-to-face meeting opportunities, punctuated with time explicitly for social-
izing. Choruses are relatively complex managerial undertakings, with substantial
budgets, limited staff presence and significant amounts of volunteer labor. They
provide exposure to representation via direct access to decision makers at board
meetings and open forums, and through the election of board candidates—most
of whom are group members themselves. Choruses provide several opportunities
to reach beyond their boundaries as well, with most groups joining federations
or associations, and at times sending delegates to meetings, as well as regularly
collaborating with other individuals, groups and institutions. While it might be
tempting to think of choral societies as recreational activities where members simply show up, sing and go home, the reality seems more in line with classic views of associationalism. Choral societies provide many opportunities for their members to learn civic lessons.

Relative Prevalence of Civic Opportunities

Choruses may offer civic opportunities, but how many do they offer relative to other kinds of associations? To answer this question, I turn to the literature on nonprofits and associations. Surprisingly limited data exist about civic opportunities in associations. Many case studies of associations, nonprofits and social movement organizations exist (e.g., Barakso 2004; McAdam 1988; McFarland 1984; Rothenberg 1992; Warren 2001; Wood 2002), but these cannot indicate the average civic opportunities available in a civic field. Several quantitative studies of populations of associations are available (e.g., Minkoff 1995; Skocpol 2003), but these are limited by the relatively little detail available in organizational records or secondary sources. Even studies that engage in original survey research (e.g., Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998; Gronbjerg and Borntrager 2005; Gronbjerg and Child 2003; Knoke 1990; Knoke and Wood 1981; McPherson and Rotolo 1996) are guided by research questions leading to survey items about organizational characteristics other than civic opportunities.

Fortunately several studies (whether intentionally or not) have collected more detailed data directly relevant to civic learning opportunities. In this research, I draw comparative data from studies of anti-drunk-driving organizations (McCarthy and Wolfson 1996), Sierra Club local groups (Andrews et al. forthcoming), North Carolina environmental groups (Andrews and Edwards 2005), and peace movement groups (Edwards and Foley 2002). These organizational populations provide interesting comparison points to choral societies because they are almost all membership associations and they cover a wide range of goals, from service provision to political influence. The anti-drunk-driving groups, while somewhat active politically, tend to focus on serving victims, making them representatives of the service-oriented sector of civic associationalism. Local Sierra Club groups and other environmental associations represent a blend of service provision (cleaning parks, leading hikes), education and policy influence efforts. Peace movement groups are primarily political.

Overall, the comparative populations focus on what might be considered more “civic” purposes of service and politics vs. choral societies’ recreational and artistic missions. As such, we might expect them all to provide more civic opportunities than their choral counterparts. By comparing key values across populations, we can assess whether arts groups such as choral societies provide civic opportunities in line with other sectors. It should be noted that baseline membership levels in associations vary substantially, a pattern intensified by non-participatory, “check-writing members” in some associations. Because of this, comparisons across
Table 2: Comparing the Civic Opportunities Offered by Various Sets of Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent Choruses</th>
<th>MADD Chapters</th>
<th>RID Chapters</th>
<th>Sierra Club Groups</th>
<th>Environmental Groups</th>
<th>Peace Groups Small Budget</th>
<th>Peace Groups Large Budget</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Median # of participating members</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean # of member meetings per year¹</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<td>Median attendance at recent meeting</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governance Experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Practicing management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Incorporated as nonprofits</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median annual budget (in 2006 dollars)</td>
<td>30,305</td>
<td>2,807</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>2,708</td>
<td>69,659</td>
<td>4,277</td>
<td>128,310</td>
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<td>% Groups with staff</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Median # staff per group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Median # members per group</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1050</td>
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<td>Practicing Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean board meetings per year</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Boards elected</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean # standing committees</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<td><strong>Institutional Relationships</strong></td>
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<td>Mean # collaborations per year</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Organizations (study N)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>134</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Notes: ¹Chorus meetings are derived from the typical number of in-season weeks per group.
groups are not made on the proportion of active members. Rather, I compare absolute numbers of opportunities offered.

Table 2 compares choral societies to other service- and politically-oriented associations on a reduced set of indicators for which data are available. Each study collected data via a mail or telephone survey with an organizational leader. All studies did not collect the same information or report the same statistics, leaving us with a limited selection of reasonably comparable variables. Given the limited information available, several reasonable comparisons can be made across sectors. Starting with interpersonal interaction, we see significant variation in the number of active members. Choristers are all active participants by virtue of the in-person nature of choral singing. The median chorus has 50 participants, which compares well with the median environmental group from the North Carolina study (60 participants). The median Sierra Club Group, however, draws only 24 participants and the typical small-budget peace group has merely five individuals meeting face-to-face. Active participation may be a high threshold. Membership meetings may be a better indicator of broader social interaction potential. The typical choral society meets (rehearses) an estimated 34 times annually. Service-oriented groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Remove Intoxicated Drivers meet five to seven times per year, and environmental groups typically meet fewer than four times. The relative infrequency of service- and political-group membership meetings could be offset by major turnout for such events, but this does not appear to be the case. Data on meeting attendance are only available for environmental associations and Sierra Club groups, but the median meeting attendance for these groups is roughly in line with that of choral groups. The median chorus had 17 more members at a recent rehearsal than the median Sierra Club Group had at a recent membership meeting, and three fewer members than the median North Carolina environmental association. In sum, choral societies appear to have at least as many, and often many more, active participants, who attend more meetings in equal or greater numbers than their service and political counterparts.

Of course, rehearsals are a core component of performing arts groups. Membership meetings, while important, may be less central to the missions of other organizations. Politically- and service-oriented groups likely focus more effort on public activities, ranging from victim services and public education for anti-drunk-driving groups to river clean-ups and nature hikes for environmental groups to street protests and public vigils for peace groups. These activities, like the concerts produced by choral societies, provide additional venues for social interaction. The contexts are likely more transient and less member-centric than the more regular and internally focused socializing opportunities presented by membership meetings. Nevertheless, public events bring members together as leaders, organizers and/or participants, as well as connecting members with the public. Boston area choral groups do one to six concerts a year, some of which are followed by receptions for patrons that provide further interaction opportuni-
ties, and the median chorus brings in 325 audience members per program. The comparative studies do not indicate the frequency of public activities or the typical level of public participation in them. Given the sheer number of kinds of events described in the publications presenting data on the comparison populations, we might tentatively assume that the average service- or politically-oriented association offers more unique opportunities annually for event-based social interaction than the average choral society. Choral societies, then, appear to rest at the high end of the distribution of opportunities for social interaction among members in internal meetings, but may potentially offer fewer chances for social interaction with group members and community members via public events.

Moving to governance experience, there are consistently high levels of nonprofit incorporation across all sectors. This is unsurprising given the financial benefits to nonprofit incorporation for organizations and contributors, but it means that virtually all of these groups must become financially savvy enough to deal with the legal filings required to attain and retain nonprofit status. Budgets, however, vary widely. The median environmental association operates with a nearly $70,000-a-year budget, and large-budget peace groups work with well over $100,000 annually. MADD and RID chapters and Sierra Club groups function on a few thousand dollars per year. Choral societies fall in the middle of this management dimension; the median chorus spends about $30,000 annually. While financial management is somewhat more limited in choruses, staff management is much more common. All choral groups have some staff. Other sectors range in staff presence from none (by rule Sierra Club groups cannot have staff) to 90 percent of large-budget peace groups. Environmental associations, given their similar budget size, may be the best comparison point for choral groups on the staff dimension. Some 59 percent of environmental groups have staff (vs. 100 percent for choruses), and they typically have one staff person (vs. two for choruses). Membership in choruses, however, is comparatively low, meaning the membership management component may be less demanding (although choruses are always recruiting participants, not uninvolved “checkbook” members). For management experience opportunities, then, choral societies fall in the middle range. They have moderate budgets, more staff and fewer members than groups in other sectors.

Representation opportunities are harder to assess as few studies explicitly look for these chances. Three dimensions of comparison are available. Board meetings are relatively frequent across sectors, ranging from seven to nine meetings per year. If many of these meetings are open to members (perhaps a tenuous assumption), then there may be relatively similar opportunities to offer input to representatives through board meetings across sectors. Elected boards are a better indicator of representation. Sierra Club boards are, by rule, all elected. Among other associations, however, the prevalence of elections varies substantially. Somewhat more than 40 percent of peace groups have elected boards. About half of environmental groups elect their leaders. More than 60 percent of choral societies do so. The number of standing committees
also varies. RID chapters have fewer than two on average; environmental groups have almost five. Choral societies fall in between with an average of 2.5 active committees per chorus. Choral societies seem to offer more experiences of electoral representation than other groups as well as more potential for input into board decisions, but a middling level of standing-committee opportunities.

Only one consistent indicator of institutional relationships is available, but it is telling. Sierra Club groups are very active collaborators, engaging in more than 10 collaborations per year. Choral societies and large-budget peace groups each collaborate about five times per year. Small-budget peace groups collaborate less than four times annually on average, and environmental associations do so less than 1.5 times. Somewhat surprisingly, choral groups offer more opportunities to connect with other institutions than many other service- and politically-oriented groups, especially when considering the differences in the collaboration context for each sector. Groups affiliated with major federations such as the Sierra Club and MADD have both a social expectation that they should collaborate and the benefit of a national “brand name” to help garner positive responses from potential collaborators. Choral groups can successfully perform music without partnering to raise money for charities. Because they can succeed on their own, there is little expectation that they must reach beyond themselves. When they do reach out, they likely do so as a relative unknown. Given these circumstances, it is surprising that choral groups collaborate as much as they do.

In sum, choral groups appear to offer substantially more opportunities for social interaction than service- or politically-oriented groups. Choruses are about average in terms of offering management experience opportunities, but may offer more exposure to representation. Finally, choral societies have a comparatively broad reach of institutional ties to the community.

Conclusions and Implications

Are choral societies merely easily-envisioned examples of civic activity or do they actually provide opportunities for civic development to members? Eastis (1998:76) summarizing her ethnographic observations of one independent choral society, argues that “[t]he chorus does develop a broad social network, explicitly creating a setting in which to meet new people of many backgrounds… Also, the organizational needs of the chorus offer participants the chance to develop civic skills for other purposes.” Data presented here from a new study of choral societies in the greater Boston area suggest that those observations apply across the population of choruses. While choral groups vary on many dimensions, as a set they live up to much of their civic billing, offering opportunities to interact with others, experience governance and connect with community institutions. While none of these choruses are intentionally designed to create civic opportunities—their missions are generally to provide opportunities for people to hear and sing particular music—they nevertheless give ordinary citizens the chance to experience a host of civic activities as a by-product.
Beyond evidence that choruses offer many of the opportunities expected of associations, data comparing choruses to other associational populations indicate that they do so as well, or even better, than their service- and politically-oriented counterparts. The variables we can compare show choruses offering similar opportunities to learn management skills, above-average chances to connect with other community institutions, and many more chances to interact socially and practice certain forms of representation. The implications of these findings are substantial. Few people join associations for the explicit purpose of developing civic attitudes and skills. Rather, they join associations out of an interest in the activities and issues of concern for those groups. While some people are naturally inclined toward politics and service, these fields do not necessarily capture the attentions of many Americans. Choral singing—and other kinds of cultural and artistic activity—have broad appeal. As nearly one in five U.S. households includes a choral singer (Chorus America 2003), if most choral societies provide even basic civic learning opportunities, they may be helping to shrink the political communication gap between naturally politically interested and disinterested citizens and generating other civic outcomes as well.

These findings extend beyond the arts. While cultural groups may offer many opportunities for practicing civic skills, there is no reason why the service and political sectors of civil society could not incorporate more opportunities into their organizational forms as well. In this way choruses, and arts organizations more broadly, are examples of the even broader set of local, participatory, nonprofit civic associations that have been offering opportunities for civic growth in American communities throughout U.S. history (Schlesinger 1944).

Of course, offering opportunities is only a first step. Future research must address the question of whether individuals are availing themselves of these opportunities and if they are learning from them. While much scholarly effort has gone into establishing the correlations between associational participation, the development of civic skills and eventual attitudes, behaviors and outcomes (e.g., McAdam 1988; Scott 1957; Skocpol 2003; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Walker 2008), questions of causality still trouble the field. Research built around the collection of data on associations and the members embedded within them may allow for stronger causal claims and clearer articulation of the organizational mechanisms that produce individual civic outcomes.

A final implication of this work is the need for more detailed data collection on civic opportunities in populations of associations. While many studies have taken civic engagement as their focus, they have either collected data at only individual levels or they have focused their organizational data gathering on questions of externally-focused activities, service provision, internal finances, membership size or organizational survival. Future studies must collect data on the internal structures, practices and functioning of associations in a variety of civic sectors to provide a better understanding of the real opportunities for civic development.
available throughout civil society. Data on organizational activity should reach beyond types of actions to also determine levels of social interaction both internally and with members of the general public. And research should examine the interactions of individual-level experiences within particular organizational contexts. For example, do governing boards or committees function as interdependent teams collectively producing outputs or as assemblages of individual volunteers working alone to accomplish tasks (see Hackman 2002)? What implications would these alternate experiences have for the actual civic learning achieved by volunteers? Associations may be “schools of democracy,” but it is becoming increasingly clear that not all these “schools” teach the same “lessons”—even “schools” in the same field. Research strategies must address this variation to develop a better understanding of the role of associations in modern democratic society.

Notes

1. This does not exclude choirs that sing religious music or have professional relationships with religious institutions (e.g., renting performance space); the important distinction is independent leadership and governance.

2. Most choruses are church choirs, but a consequential minority is independent.

3. Despite higher levels of civic involvement, choristers do not join choruses to pursue these ends. As the Chorus America report highlights, “The primary reason for joining a chorus is the music… It is the choral repertoire, the scale of choral singing, and the grandness of the sound that provide choristers with the satisfaction and exhilaration that keep them committed.” (Chorus America 2003:15)

4. Opportunities for input once a year may seem limited, akin to voting. Open forums are often held in addition to elections, however, creating multiple input formats. More importantly, open forums are information-rich contexts where members voice interests in detail and discuss competing ideas. While infrequent, the amount of input provided during such events can be substantial.

5. While many groups hold elections, few have multiple candidates per post. Commonly, a slate of officers is presented to members who vote for or against the slate. Despite the non-competitive context, most groups hold tightly to the election process, including independent nominating committees to identify candidates. Leaders interviewed felt that a slate including individuals that members did not find acceptable would be voted down. The candidate selection process, however, typically weeds out such candidates, making elections largely non-contentious. A few groups have at times had competitive, contentious elections.


7. The Sierra Club is a federated association with national, state and local units. Here, data come from local level units only.

8. Peace group data are presented in small and large budget categories following Edwards and Foley (2002).

9. The North Carolina associations’ data, from a multi-organization cross-sectional study, have few constraints on possible civic structure variation, but are limited to
one state. The Sierra Club study offers national variation, although the national federation may restrict the range of structures. Using both comparative data sets provides a more complete picture of environmentalist civic opportunity.

10. While not reported in the study, MADD and RID groups are likely also nonprofits.

References


