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GLOBAL GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZED, INTERDISCIPLINARY, RESEARCH  
FIELD OF ALTRUISTICS (NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR STUDIES)

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ABSTRACT

This paper sketches the development of the organized, interdisciplinary, global field and emerging academic discipline of altruistics, focusing on academic journals and mainly on researcher associations founded since ARNOVA in 1971. About 55 similar interdisciplinary altruistics researcher associations have been founded worldwide (47 described here; including 9 defunct), most of them national in geographic scope, but some covering a world region or global. Over 80 academic journals on altruistics or its sub-topics have been published, with 71 active ones described here. The author estimates conservatively that there are at least 8,000 active altruistics researchers worldwide, and perhaps as many as 20,000.

The author devised the neologism “altruistics” to refer to all the phenomena of our field, individual and collective. Included are philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, third sector, voluntary sector, civil society (sector), social economy, volunteering, associations, and nonprofit organizations, among other topics. The term is similar to the term linguistics.

[MAIN TEXT]

This paper provides a brief overview of the development and present scope of the organized, interdisciplinary, global field and emerging academic discipline of altruistics, focusing mainly on researcher associations founded since ARNOVA in 1971. A table is also presented listing 71 altruistics academic journals now being published. The author recently

devised the neologism *altruistics* to refer to all the phenomena of our field, individual and collective. Included are philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, third sector, voluntary sector, civil society (sector), social economy, giving, volunteering, associations, and nonprofit organizations, among other topics. The term is similar to the term *linguistics*, referring to the academic discipline that studies all human languages. *Altruistics* refers to the emerging academic discipline that studies all forms of altruism, individual and collective, past and present, human and non-human (animal).

In the 40+ years since ARNOVA was founded (Smith 2003), the altruistics interdisciplinary field has spread worldwide to every continent. About 55 similar interdisciplinary altruistics researcher associations have been founded worldwide (47 described here; including 9 defunct), most of them national in geographic scope, but some covering a world region. A few more global researcher associations have been formed, the most important of which is the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR; [www.istr.org](http://www.istr.org)). Over 80 academic journals on altruistics or its sub-topics have been published, with 71 active ones described here. In the past 15 years approximately, the growth rate of both altruistics associations and of altruistics academic journals has become exponential.

### **Historical Background of Altruistics Research**

Published research on altruistics goes back three millennia. Historians wrote accounts of voluntary associations in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Greece, and Rome, among other places (Smith 1997). Social scientific research on nonprofit *associations* by sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists arose mainly in the early 20th century. Similar research on hospitals, universities and other nonprofit *agencies* became common mainly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Current Scope of Altruistics Research: RESEARCHER ASSOCIATIONS**

Altruistics first became organized when the author formed ARNOVA ([www.arnova.org](http://www.arnova.org)) in 1971 as an intentionally international and interdisciplinary association of individual researchers (Smith 2003). At the same time, the author founded the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)* as the first interdisciplinary academic journal on altruistics.

Since 1971, both ARNOVA and *NVSQ* have been “founding models” for many later interdisciplinary altruistics associations of researchers and for many generalist as well as specialist altruistics academic journals. As noted above, about 55 independent, interdisciplinary, altruistics researcher associations have been formed on all continents, most of these national rather than multi-national in geographic scope (see Table 1; to be updated periodically on [www.icsera.org](http://www.icsera.org), under Resources). Some have subsequently dissolved, but the vast majority of them still exist. Many of them publish their own academic journals, and nearly

all have their own newsletters for members. All have meetings, seminars, or conferences at least biennially, usually annually, but sometimes more often.

[Table 1 about here]

The *first national* altruistics researcher association was the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC; [www.arvac.org.uk](http://www.arvac.org.uk)), formed in the UK in 1978. Subsequently, two other national altruistics researcher associations were also formed in the UK: The Voluntary Action History Society in 1991, as the *second national* altruistics association (VAHS; [www.vahs.org.uk](http://www.vahs.org.uk)), and later the Voluntary Sector Studies Network in 1996 (VSSN; [www.vssn.org.uk](http://www.vssn.org.uk)) as the *fourth national* altruistics association. VSSN has published its own academic journal, the *Voluntary Sector Review*, since 2010.

The *third, quasi-national*, altruistics, researcher association to be formed (in 1993) was the bi-national Australia New Zealand Third Sector Research (ANZTSR; [www.anztsr.org](http://www.anztsr.org)), publishing its own journal, *The Third Sector Review*, since 1995. The *fifth, national*, altruistics, researcher association to be formed (in 1999) was the Japan NPO Research Association (JANPORA; [www.janpora.org](http://www.janpora.org)). JANPORA has published its own journal, the *Nonprofit Sector Review*, since 2000.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, similar *national*, interdisciplinary, altruistics researcher associations have been formed in Canada (ANSER-ARES), France (ADDES; RIUESS), Ireland (AVARI), Italy (IRIS Network), Poland (KLON/Jawor), Czech Republic (SSNS), India (TSRGI), Mexico (RENAETS; REMISOC), South Korea (KANPOR; NPOKRA), Taiwan (TATSR), Finland, Israel, and the Netherlands, among other nations. Some 12 of these are still active, which makes a total of 17 known national associations at present.

Several nations are presently attempting to form national, altruistics, researcher associations, including China and the Russian Federation, where the author is assisting with this development. A few altruistics researcher associations have also been formed for sub-regions of nations (e.g., Western Network of Social and Solidarity Economy Researchers-France/RgoRESS), or for metropolitan areas (e.g., Greater Manchester Civil Society Researcher Network-UK).

Several independent, multi-national, altruistics, (world) *regional* associations have also been formed in the past decade or so and are active. Some examples are the “Network of Latin American Researchers on Social and Solidarity Economy” (in Spanish, Red de Investigadores Latinoamericanos de Economía Social y Solidaria; RILESS; [www.riless.org](http://www.riless.org)); the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP; [www.ernop.eu](http://www.ernop.eu)); the European Research Network-Social Economy Europe (EMES; [www.socialeconomy.eu.org](http://www.socialeconomy.eu.org)), and the Third Sector European Policy Network/TSEP

([www.kent.ac.uk/tsep](http://www.kent.ac.uk/tsep)). Other, independent, world region associations of altruistics researchers have been recently formed for the Islamic/Arab nations of the Middle East and North Africa and for the Nordic nations of Europe, but their details are lacking now.

At least 10 global, altruistics, interdisciplinary, associations of individual researchers have been formed, plus ICSERA as a global, altruistics, interdisciplinary association of researcher associations (federation; umbrella organization). Two *global*, altruistics, individual researcher associations were formed in the discipline of economics before ARNOVA---the Association for Social Economics/ASE in 1941, and the Association for the Study of Grants Economics/ASGE in 1968. Several, more interdisciplinary, global, altruistics researcher associations have been after ARNOVA (see Table 1). The two most important, broad focus, global, altruistics, researcher associations of individuals formed after ARNOVA were the following.

(a) The International Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organization Research Organization (with a parallel French name), IVAR-VOIR, was formed in 1978 by the author and colleagues from 15 nations as the *second global* association of altruistics researchers. IVAR-VOIR held its First World Congress in Bussels, Belgium, in 1980, but dissolved in 1983 for lack of financial resources.

(b) The International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR; [www.istr.org](http://www.istr.org)) was formed in 1992 as the *third global* association of individual altruistics researchers. ISTR has published its own journal, *Voluntas*, since 1990 (initially independent). ISTR has networks for several world regions that also hold conferences.

In 2010, the author formed the International Council of Voluntarism, Civil Society, and Social Economy Researcher Associations (ICSERA; [www.icsera.org](http://www.icsera.org)). With *organizational (collective) members only*, ICSERA seeks to become a global association of existing, national and regional, altruistics, researcher associations. ICSERA is a global, nonprofit, infrastructure and support organization for altruistics that is unique in its central purposes: (a) to gather and share relevant information on altruistics researcher associations, research centers, academic journals, departments, etc. (such as in Tables 1 and 2 here) through its website; (b) to foster new, independent, national and regional, altruistics, researcher associations and to strengthen existing ones everywhere; (c) to strengthen and help grow the global field of altruistics collaboratively by providing a discussion forum for leaders of interdisciplinary altruistics researcher associations; and (d) to collaborate with and help build the global membership of ARNOVA and ISTR as the principal global associations of individual altruistics researchers. ICSERA is the sponsor of the forthcoming, 62-chapter, *Palgrave Research Handbook of Volunteering and Nonprofit Associations* (Smith, Stebbins and Grotz 2014) and other multinational altruistics research books.

As part of the growing worldwide scholarly and professional attention to Altruistics, many national and also international professional associations for researchers, scholars, and practitioners now have developed *special sections (official sub-groups)* focused on some aspect of Altruistics. To give examples from the USA:

(1) The American Sociological Association (ASA) now has two different Sections relevant to the Altruistics field: There is a new Section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity (AMSS Section; over 300 members), and also an older Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements (CBSM; over 800 members).

(2) The American Anthropological Association has a Special Interest Group on NGOs and Nonprofits, which is now the largest SIG, with over 1,000 members.

(3) In the discipline of economics, the Association for the Study of the Grants Economy (ASGE) is a relevant independent association that is affiliated with the Allied Social Sciences Association in the USA (about 100 “members” on mailing list recently).

(4) The American Accounting Association has a Section on Government & Nonprofit accounting, with well over 500 members (432 in 2008).

The various sections/groups of national academic discipline associations above total over 2700 members. This is more than the combined memberships of ISTR and ARNOVA as the two main global interdisciplinary altruistics associations of individual researchers, without eliminating overlapping memberships. Other American social science discipline associations have still more members in altruistics-relevant sections.

Considering *professional* associations rather than academic discipline associations:

(1) The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) has a new Section on Nonprofit Policy, Practice and Partnerships, just now recruiting members.

(2) The Academy of Management, a US-based but international association of management researchers, has a Public and Nonprofit Division with 814 members at present, of which 726 are active academics or Ph.D. students.

(3) Other professional associations in America also have similar sections related to altruistics. All these and the two above will likely total well over 1000 members, perhaps 2000 members.

There are some similar sections/sub-groups, formal or informal, of social science discipline associations in other nations (e.g., France, Spain, Germany). Most of these are small groups (less than 50 members), but the relevant research on such associations has not yet been done systematically.

### **Current Scope of Altruistics Research: ACADEMIC JOURNALS**

There are now over 70 academic journals being published in various languages on altruistics in general, or on special topics of the field, such as management/leadership, law, policy, education, marketing, social economy, and accounting (see [www.icsera.org](http://www.icsera.org), under Resources).

[Table 2 about here]

### **Current Scope of Altruistics Research: OTHER ELEMENTS**

In addition to associations of researchers and academic journals, the altruistics field globally has developed:

- over 200 research and information centers/institutes;
- college- and university-based courses, certificates, and degree programs at hundreds of institutions;
- a handful of university departments, and also some college/schools within universities, focused on all or part of the altruistics field;
- thousands of published books and tens of thousands of journal articles on altruistics research;
- thousands of books, pamphlets, and articles with usable knowledge for practitioners and policy-makers.

### **Conclusion**

Although research on altruistics goes back at least three millennia, the *organized* field of altruistics began in 1971 with the formation of ARNOVA. Since then, the original form of ARNOVA as an interdisciplinary association of individual altruistics researchers has spread to all continents. Table 1 lists and describes 47 such associations, and at least an additional eight have existed as well. This total of 55 is doubtless an underestimate. Finding **all** such groups is difficult, even with the best of intentions. For instance, the ISTR website ([www.istr.org](http://www.istr.org)) only lists nine associations in the present Table 1. This spread of the ARNOVA-form as a social innovation can be largely attributed to *institutional isomorphism* and *mimesis*, as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have discussed these general organizational diffusion processes.

By summing the membership totals of independent altruistics associations and then adding the similar numbers of members of sections within other academic discipline or professional associations, **I derive an estimate of at least 8,000 academics active in independent altruistics researcher associations or in sections on aspects of altruistics within professional associations worldwide.** If we further add academics who have ever

published in an altruistics academic journal (see Table 2) or on an altruistics topic in other academic journals, the estimate of total "active" altruistics academics worldwide may be upwards of 20,000, and growing rapidly as the number of journals and associations grows quickly. Adding presenters, let alone attendees, at any conference of an altruistics association or section presentation/meeting would probably add still more active altruistics researchers.

**The altruistics research field has been growing exponentially in the past decade or so.** Plotting the founding dates of both associations and academic journals in Tables 1 and 2 shows this. This exponential growth is more striking when the founding dates are plotted for the *primary* set of journals, rather than all journals in Table 2. Journals in this set have relevant words like *nonprofit*, *third sector*, *civil society*, *social economy*, etc. in their names. Data not reported in detail here on founding dates of altruistics research centers and for other indicators of the growth of the field further support very rapid recent global growth of altruistics research. This is likely to continue.

### Endnote

1 This paper summarizes a longer paper that is Chapter 1 in Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz (2014). Lacking space here, full references are given there. The author gratefully acknowledges the research assistance of Jurgen Grotz, Chao Guo, and Carolyn Piano. John McNutt constructed both tables in a very timely and excellent manner, using raw data supplied by the author. Many altruistics journal editors and researcher association leaders also supplied information not available on the relevant websites.

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