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Title: Cooperation in Society: Fostering Community Action and Civic Participation

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### Editors' Introduction

The 21st century can be expected to see some major challenges to the stability and functioning of societies worldwide. The growing globalization of local economies is likely to lead to a breakdown of traditional states and communities, and it is not at all clear what institutions will replace them (Kaul, Grunberg & Stern, 1999). Furthermore, due to climatic and demographic changes, there will be intense pressures on the world's natural resource reservoirs, such as land, water, forestry and fisheries (OECD, 1997).

These developments may bring fundamental changes in the way individuals, communities, and societies interact and how they shape their social and political institutions. For us, as social scientists, these trends may also inspire exciting new areas of research in which we will have opportunities to address basic questions about human motivation and interaction. A key question in such endeavors concerns the impact of these trends on the ability of individuals to organize themselves and find cooperative solutions to the collective problems they face, for example, with regard to preservation of the natural environment.

The emergence of such forms of cooperation is the underlying theme of this special issue, entitled "Cooperation in society: Fostering community action and civic participation." In a truly collaborative enterprise between two social science fields, we

have invited both political scientists and social psychologists to present their views on the emergence of cooperation in light of these global developments, using theory and research from their disciplinary background.

Rather than focusing on one specific topic, this special issue addresses a broad range of cooperative challenges to modern society, from natural resource management to volunteer service, political action and the support for government welfare programs. All these problems have two features in common. First, they require the cooperative efforts of relatively large numbers of citizens in order to be solved, and, second, they involve some personal sacrifice from citizens themselves. Depending on the scientific discipline, these cooperative problems have been referred to as problems of collective action, public goods, mixed-motive conflicts, social traps, social dilemmas, and prisoner's dilemmas.

There are essentially two classes of cooperative problems, those involving the distribution of scarce resources and those involving the provision of public goods (Komorita & Parks, 1994). Resource dilemmas require citizens to exercise personal restraint, for example, water conservation (Schlager and Van Vugt, this issue). Conversely, public goods such as volunteer service (Omoto & Snyder, this issue) and government welfare programs (Rothstein, this issue) require that enough citizens make an active contribution. The psychological differences between these two types of problems are discussed in the first article by Tyler.

Research and theorizing about cooperative problems has been influenced heavily by economic decision-making models, such as game theory and rational choice theory (Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Olson, 1965). Following these theoretical models, individuals are seen as primarily driven by their economic self-interests. This notion has led various

theorists to conclude that collective threats to society can only be managed by means of a strong central authority system that restricts people's self-interest and personal freedom. For example, in his well-known analysis of the 'Tragedy of the Commons', Hardin (1968; p. 1244) concludes that "mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon" is really the only viable solution to societal problems.

From the papers in this issue emerges a rather different, more nuanced, and decidedly more optimistic picture of the capacity of humans to tackle societal problems. Inspired by theories of social capital (Sullivan et al., this issue), common pool resources (Schlager, this issue), negotiation (Hoffman et al., this issue), individual and social motivation (Omoto & Snyder, this issue), social dilemmas (Van Vugt, this issue), and social identity (Tyler, this issue), the contributors to this issue demonstrate convincingly that cooperation develops relatively easily between members of a community when confronted with a collective threat such as a health scare (Omoto & Snyder, this issue) or environmental crisis (Hoffman et al., Schlager, Van Vugt, this issue).

The key theme underlying all of the contributions to this issue is that, complementary to economic self-interest, our activities are shaped to a great extent by community-driven motives, such as having positive community exchanges, trust, community pride, and a shared identity. For example, Omoto & Snyder's contribution argues that the decision to become a volunteer, and the activities of volunteers themselves, may be shaped by a strong sense of community feeling. Similarly, Van Vugt's paper reveals that community identification processes facilitate personal restraint during a water shortage. Also, in his analysis of political protests in the Netherlands and South-Africa, Klandermans demonstrates that a strong social identity is a better predictor

of political action than the expected individual benefits. On an aggregate level, Schlager's paper reveals that user communities often do better in managing local resources than external government programs. Moreover, Sullivan et al. show that a community electronic network programs foster political activities within local communities. Finally, Rothstein argues that one reason why universal state welfare programs, like health insurance and pensions, work is because they create a strong solidarity between members of a community as everyone is essentially “in the same boat.”

Although each of the contributions in this special issue stresses the importance of community networks in developing solutions to societal problems, none of them ignores the role of authority and rule systems as supporting vehicles. For example, Tyler argues that authorities can foster a community identity through the transparency and impartiality of their decision-making procedures. Furthermore, Schlager argues persuasively that communities can only effectively manage resources if they develop their own rule and sanctioning systems. Finally, Hoffman et al. reason that cooperative solutions to environmental problems can only emerge from the negotiated collaborations between private citizens, industry, and local and national authorities.

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue offer some exciting new insights into the ways that societies world wide can deal with natural resource pressures and globalization of local economies. Communities (physical and virtual) play an essential role in fostering the development of cooperation between people to maintain valuable public goods and preserve local communal resources. And, authorities have a facilitating role in enhancing and sustaining feelings of community. Finally, this

collection of papers clearly demonstrates the virtues of crossing the boundaries of two scientific communities, political science and social psychology. The political science papers pay more attention to the social-structural factors determining community membership, whereas the social-psychology papers concentrate more on the psychological underpinnings of community membership. In conjunction, they provide a greater, more complete picture of the role of the community as the vehicle for collective action and political participation than a monodisciplinary effort could possibly do.

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