Preface

It is my firm belief that social theory needs organizational theory more than organizational theory needs social theory. In a global world, it is people's social bonds to their various relationships that are crucial to their ability to act, and crucial for their living conditions. With this book, I want to demonstrate how organizational theory can contribute to the development of a relational social theory.

The idea of social bonds is not a new proposal for a micro–macro link, but it demonstrates the futility of trying to distinguish between the micro and the macro. Several sociologists and other social scientists have strayed into speculation about systems and structures. But to understand the individual's possibilities for action and, above all, the conditions for acting with others, a theory of social bonds and relationships is indispensable. All talk of collective action and various forms of democracy and influence become meaningless if one does not place them in context with the opportunities and limitations that exist in any form of organized action. How can people make joint decisions and how can they get these decisions implemented? Questions about inclusion, exclusion, or recognition are basically questions about organization and social bonds.

In the first chapter, I situate the book's ideas in the social science discussion of micro and macro. Relational sociology has made a key contribution by emphasizing the importance of relationships, but it has gotten itself stuck through its one-sided emphasis on processes and networks. I therefore suggest that we can start again by going back to Max Weber's and Georg Simmel's views on relationships.

In Chapter 2, I develop the theory of social bonds, and in Chapter 3, I discuss the importance of social relationships and examine variations in the construction of social bonds in different types of relationships. Chapter 4 is about organizations as a special kind of relationship, with an analysis of the specialness of a relational organizational theory and how the concepts of traditional organizational theory can be used to develop the idea of social bonds. In Chapter 5, I explain how social bonds give rise to bonded actions. The sixth and last chapter is about globalization and social change – how relationships expand and are held together and how change must be understood in an interplay between inertia and innovation, between old and new relationships.

Writing this book has been very lonely work due to the pandemic. But most of the ideas have been developed together with colleagues and co-authors in various types of relationships (for more details, I refer to the list of references) over many years. My affiliation to Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research (Score) has been decisive for the making of this book. The multidisciplinary research environment at Score is extremely fruitful and stimulating. Drafts of several of the chapters have been discussed at Score seminars. I am also grateful to Score for enabling a qualified language review of my script.

In recent years, I have maintained my contacts with sociology thanks to the participation in two long-running seminars; one with the overall title ‘Sociology’s current situation’ at the Department of Sociology at Uppsala University and the other a seminar series on sociological theory development based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

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