Preface

The influences for this *Handbook* extend back almost 20 years. In 2005, in the ‘Leadership, Boards and Governance’ track at the 34th annual meeting of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Alan Hough, Myles McGregor-Lowndes and Christine Ryan postulated that ‘a multi-theory and multi-disciplinary perspective is needed if research on governance of non-profit organisations is to be complete in scope, rich in content, and relevant’. While these authors and the majority of nonprofit governance scholars at that time were predominantly occupied with the board and its role in the governance of the nonprofit organization, this universalist statement signalled fundamental concerns with the limitations of the field.

In September 2009, some of those concerns were addressed when many of the contributors to this *Handbook* met in Paris to discuss the governance of civil society organizations (CSOs). Invited by Philippe Eynaud, Jean-Louis Laville and Dennis R. Young to Cnam (the Conservatoire national des arts et métier), we elaborated core questions of nonprofit governance: how should full voice be given to actors as varied as members, employees, service users and clients, volunteers, activists and donors? How can decision-making processes be organized to create social ties between internal and external actors and to support network collaboration? How should multistakeholder relations in CSOs be organized? How can partnerships and alliances among CSOs be built? How do CSOs deal with new forms of state regulation? What kind of shared governance model can redefine ‘public interest’ and introduce new socioeconomic dynamics into world territories? As we considered these questions, we agreed that, given the colour and heterogeneity of organized civil society, nonprofit governance does not fit into a Procrustean bed.

In 2011, a special issue of *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, published by the International Society for Third-Sector Research, resulted from these fruitful and inspiring conversations. It presented a view of nonprofit governance extending beyond governing boards. Later, in 2015, Jean-Louis Laville, Dennis R. Young and Philippe Eynaud published an edited volume based on the Paris meeting that confirmed this broader sphere of governance (*Civil Society, the Third Sector and Social Enterprise: Governance and Democracy*). By not only opening up to civil society as the wider frame of analysis but also recognizing different forms of associations and social movement organizations in this sphere of society, the previous dominance of board research in unitary nonprofit organizations was finally broken.

In July 2013, the EGOS (European Group of Organization Studies) meeting in Montreal focused on ‘bridging continents, cultures and worldviews’. Scholars of civil society, nonprofit and voluntary organizations all gathered in a subtheme

convened by Florentine Maier, John M. Amis and Filip Wijkström to discuss issues of blurring boundaries both in society and within organizations and changing civil society governance. Henry Mintzberg and Steven Rathgeb Smith reflected on new perspectives, and Mintzberg introduced his proposition that the third sector as the plural sector should be paragon for the whole society. By this time, we were committed to presenting a richer, wider and more complete perspective on nonprofit governance, but the vehicle for elaborating it had not yet been identified.

In 2017, two opportunities arrived to help us move forward with this agenda. First, we were approached by Helmut K. Anheier and Theodor Baums to prepare a definitive contribution on nonprofit governance for their Oxford handbook *Advances in Corporate Governance*. This gave us the opportunity to elaborate on the distinctiveness of nonprofit organizations and the ways in which this distinction impacts nonprofit governance. In our chapter, we scope out the field, point to the developments that we had been considering for the previous decade and identify lacunae that persist.

Shortly after we commenced that project, the three of us were invited by Francine O'Sullivan from Edward Elgar to edit a research handbook on nonprofit governance. The brief was for a handbook that would provide readers with a pathway through the governance research field, with a focus on nonprofit, voluntary or civil society actors. To serve as guides and navigators for our prospective readers, we sought to engage a range of scholars, both the veteran and well established and the new and up-and-coming. We were gratified by the excellent response from a variety of scholarly environments, academic disciplines and country contexts. Our contributing partners brought a cross-disciplinary and combined effort to bear, with contributors reviewing and critiquing each other's drafts.

Our *Handbook* illustrates that in the years since 2005, nonprofit governance has become a multidisciplinary and multifaceted area of research that embraces the individual, group, organizational, field and societal level. The topics covered encompass the governance of nonprofit or third-sector entities, stakeholder influence on their governance and the engagement of nonprofit and voluntary actors in broader societal governance. In 2021, while we may be moving toward an encompassing perspective and a more holistic approach, we do not have a unified, theoretically grounded nonprofit governance concept that captures that breadth. Given the character of the organizations involved, the moral and ethical issues addressed by them, and the many fields covered, we may never be able to find a common theoretical framework (though Dennis R. Young explores possibilities in the *Handbook*).

We do, however, have a shifting governance landscape. Institutional frameworks, organizational practices and conceptualizations of the third or nonprofit sector have all changed in ways that affect governance practices and processes—and that bound ahead of theory. Drivers include reactions to global security and cross-border movement challenges, as well as the imposition of regulatory regimes, the development of self-regulation frameworks or codes of conduct and changing practices within various nonprofit 'industries'. In this *Handbook*, we have a collection of scholarly contributions that address the dynamic context and the enduring challenges and

conundrums of contemporary governance scholarship. We have assembled a multi-theory, multiperspective collection that enriches and broadens our knowledge and understanding of *nonprofit* governance.

A new research handbook on nonprofit governance offers an opportunity to take stock of how the field is evolving. Novel organizing forms and a re-embracing of long-out-of-fashion organizing modes alter the organizational context and offer opportunities to 'reimagine' governance. Profound sectoral changes, such as marketization of the third sector and the blurring of nonprofit sectoral boundaries, have governance implications, as do statutory adjustments, both those driving and those responding to these changes.

This *Handbook* responds to these changes and to the ongoing governance challenges that we face. The contributors build their work on classical notions and definitions before pushing and extending the boundaries of contemporary governance scholarship. The *Handbook* is therefore able to offer the reader a primer on the 'basics', which include nonprofit governance definitions, mapping of the nonprofit governance landscape for the organizational forms about and within which nonprofit governance resides, and levels of governance. The contributions also explore the activities and occurrences that shape the governance field. What is going on in governance and where is it coming from? Do these changes make nonprofit governance more like corporate or public governance, or more distinctive? How does nonprofit governance relate with and contribute to overall societal governance? As expected, the contributions to this *Handbook* will not present the final answer, but rather establish an arena for further discussion and future research.

Editing a research handbook turned out to be a school of complexity management and a longer process than we anticipated. Scholars do have tight schedules packed with teaching, research and third-mission activities, and when it comes to writing, scholarly articles in academic journals are today far better rewarded than book chapters. Though less beneficial for academic careers, contributing to a handbook is highly relevant for the development of a research field. Therefore, we first and foremost owe our gratitude to all our colleagues who have set time aside and offered their energy and expertise to contribute to this *Handbook*. Not only did they write solid and inspiring chapters themselves and review and comment upon each other's contributions, they also patiently and constructively integrated suggestions from both peer and editorial reviewing. Many of them even delivered everything on time.

Editing this *Handbook* was significantly accelerated and facilitated when Regina List joined the editorial team as our managing editor at the end of 2019. It was her governance capabilities and kind but firm guidance that made this *Handbook* possible. We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Martha Schöberl from WU Vienna for her vital administrative support.

Though we are grateful to all the authors for their engagement in reviewing, we reserve special recognition for Fredrik O. Andersson, Florentine Maier and Dennis R. Young for their extraordinary engagement throughout the process. We thank Karin Kreutzer for stepping in during the latter stages to provide external review. Francine O'Sullivan has been an empathetic and thoughtful publisher.

All that remains now is for you, the reader, to pick up this *Handbook* and engage with the world of nonprofit governance we have mapped out. Whether you are an established scholar seeking new perspectives, a teacher in one of the many existing courses on nonprofit matters, or an undergraduate student wishing to be tutored in the basics, this *Handbook* will inform, engage and substantially enrich your understanding of nonprofit governance. We invite you to start with the introductory chapter and then take the path through the work that best meets your specific requirements.

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