

We Have a Journal (*Society & Natural Resources*), We Have a Meeting (ISSRM), Why Not a Professional Society? The International Association for Society and Resource Management (IASRM)

RABEL J. BURDGE

Department of Sociology
Huxley College of Environmental Studies
Western Washington University
Bellingham, Washington, USA

Elsewhere in this issue I summarized the history of *Society and Natural Resources* (Burdge 1999). The development of the journal was linked to and dependent upon the success of the biennial International Symposium for Society and Resource Management (ISSRM). At the 1998 symposium in Missouri, the question was raised- Why not a professional or academic society? After all, attendance has grown to over 600- it seems the next logical step. The venue of the Symposium has facilitated other new organizations- namely the Society for Human Dimensions in Wildlife- why not our own?

In this communication, I outline the benefits in forming a social science organization focused on natural resource issues. I follow with some cautions in starting a new association based on my experiences as editor and coeditor (and founder) of several journals, a term as treasurer (executive officer) of the Rural Sociological Society (RSS), and as President and Treasurer in the expansion years of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA).

Opportunities in the Formation of a New Professional/Academic Association

Most importantly, it would bring about a certain permanency and structure to the Symposium. Its continued success is due in large part to Don Field of the University of Wisconsin, who has the institutional resources and the personal energy to provide the continuity between the biennial symposia. In the between periods, he publishes *Keeping In Touch*, a newsletter to inform previous Symposia participants about upcoming meetings and issues with the Journal. A professional society, presumably with officers and committees, would be able to continue when Field's institutional connections are gone. Social movement theory tells us that organizations often die if a structure is not in place to carry on what the charismatic founding leader started.

Second, the new Association would provide a professional identity not only for agency people who do social science research, but for academics doing resource management research who are not in traditional social science departments. It would also be advantageous for social scientists in social science departments who seek peer support for their research.

Third, a new Association would provide scholarly and professional leadership opportunities for the present and former Associate Editors of the Journal. Most are young, under 50, have scholarly creditability, have demonstrated a commitment to natural resource research and would be ideal for leadership positions in the new professional association.

Furthermore, the IASRM would enhance individual accessibility to the journal *Society and Natural Resources*. As I pointed out in the history paper, the journal is not always in the hands of the persons who do the research and write for the journal. A subscription is very costly, therefore individual renewals have lagged. Presumably, the package of membership benefits would include an option to purchase the journal at reduced rates, thereby increasing the numbers of individual subscriptions.

The new Association would provide legitimacy for university-level interdisciplinary social science programs in natural resources. One example is the Human Dimensions of Environmental Systems interdisciplinary graduate program at the University of Illinois. Others include the Human Dimensions in Wildlife program at Colorado State University and the social science unit within the Department of Forest Resources at Utah State University, which has direct links to the natural resource program in sociology. At present, the symposium (ISSRM) is the major professional meeting for the students and faculty in these interdisciplinary graduate programs. The new Association would also provide faculty in these programs needed legitimacy within their home institutions.

A social science association in natural resource research could speak for the importance of research on natural resource issues to potential funding agencies. The problem for funding agencies is simply that if nobody or no organized group is doing it, how can it be important? And if the research issues are important, to which organization does a funding agency turn for peer review of proposals? If natural resource research takes on some legitimacy as a discipline (see my history paper and Patterson and Williams 1998), an Association could assist the consolidation and ordering of the findings.

Cautions About Forming a New Professional Society

First and foremost, who needs another meeting to attend or another place to send membership dues? In this era of tight travel funds, the IASRM might be a third or fourth professional association for potential members. The attendance at the Symposium has been good, but it is regional. Persons are more likely to attend in the year the Symposium is in their part of the country. Realistically, the question is, how many meetings can persons afford to attend on an annual or biennial basis?

International associations are difficult to organize, maintain, and operate. These voluntary scholarly organizations need reliable and stable mail and communication systems as well as tax laws which minimize the hassle of daily operations. The U.S. is one of the few countries which has favorable tax structures for academic associations.

It is very difficult to start-up and maintain a new professional society without large external subsidies. As such, most of the revenue for membership services would come from membership dues and registration fees from the biennial meeting (symposium). *Society and Natural Resources* is owned by Taylor and Francis, a commercial publisher. For a subscription to be included as a membership benefit, a charge of \$50 per volume year would be collected by the Association Office and paid to the publisher. An additional \$30 would be added for membership services, bringing annual dues for students to at least \$80. Contrast this amount with the \$25 student dues for membership in the Rural Sociological Society. The RSS owns and provides all the fulfillment activity for their journal- *Rural Sociology*. The institutional subscriptions provide each RSS member a \$50 subsidy for membership ser-

vices. All RSS members in essence get *Rural Sociology* free and a "profit" of \$50 each from institutional subscriptions to apply to other membership services.

Under the above scenario, the biennial International Symposium for Society and Resource Management (ISSRM) becomes the only profit center for the new Association (outside of external subsidies). The registration fee at recent Symposia has been around \$200 for regular and \$150 for students. Student scholarships have been available, reducing the cost to \$50. Prior to the 6th symposium at the Pennsylvania State University in 1996, all the profit (and losses) stayed with the host institution. For the 8th symposium, to be held at Western Washington University in June of 2000, a modest \$10 per registrant plus 25 percent of any profit will be returned to the symposium headquarters to defray between meeting costs and as start-up funds for future Symposia. To make up the difference between meeting costs and registration fees, the host institution is heavily involved in both internal and external fund raising. The incentive, of course, is that 75 percent of the profit (if any) is retained by the host institution for support of their natural resource related programs. The IASRM, as a professional society and legal tax entity, would keep all the profits from the biennial meeting. Under such a scenario, it would be difficult to attract both host institutions and external funding. The Association officers would then be responsible for putting on the biennial "symposium." As a result, the meeting could move to an urban convention facility and the registration fees could be increased to \$400 for regular attendees. For example, the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) has about 1,300 members with dues set at \$70 for active members to include a quarterly journal- *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* and a newsletter. However, because they have few institutional subscriptions to subsidize membership services, they charge \$470 for early bird registration, which is increased to \$588 three months before the meeting (IAIA '99 registration fees for Glasgow). Unlike the RSS and the proposed IASRM, IAIA has experienced difficulty in retaining student members.

Universities and research organizations within federal agencies have been the traditional source of help for new organizations. Support came in the form of office space, released time for officers and editors as well as subsidized travel. That support is now restricted to activities which provide direct benefit to the organization (Burdge 1998). Start-up foundation grants for new scholarly organizations are also possible. However, the time frame is often short and at some point grant funds must be replaced with either dues, meeting fees, or publication subscriptions.

Other than Don Field, the Symposium has no formal leadership structure, therefore all participants have an equal stake in its future success. From the new graduate student to the seasoned agency researcher, all are equal participants with equally creditable positions. Collective ownership has its strengths and the lack of a formal structure probably leads or at least enhances the flow of ideas between participants. It also helps to eliminate status differences which reduce the vitality of many professional organizations.

A Summary Recommendation

Some fourteen years ago, I advocated the formation of the North American Leisure Studies Association (Burdge 1985). For most of the reasons just outlined above, I argued that the field of leisure and recreation research would not advance unless a professional/academic society was formed independent of other professional organizations. At the time, the Society of Park and Recreation Educators (SPRE) was the

spokes unit for leisure and recreation research. SPRE itself was under the umbrella of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The movement to form a Leisure Studies Association failed mainly because the leadership within SPRE and NRPA did not want a separate professional organization founded outside their control. As a result, I do not think that leisure research in the U.S. has the scholarly creditability that it has in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Leisure researchers in these and other countries have since formed their respective Leisure Studies Associations (Burdge 1983).

Despite all the warnings listed above, I think we should form the International Association for Society and Resource Management (IASRM). Chances of success will diminish as time goes on. Some leaders will emerge who place individual agendas above those of the Association and others will look to the new organization as a source of rewards and recognition. But in the end, social science research on natural resource issues will have a better home and hopefully will be in position to actually influence natural resource management decisions. After all, that is the history of science and knowledge generation; it takes place at the edge of present disciplines.

References

- Burdge, R. J. 1983. Making leisure and recreation research a scholarly topic: Views of a journal editor. *Leisure Sciences* 6:99–126.
- Burdge, R. J. 1985. The Coming separation of leisure studies from parks and recreation education. *Journal of Leisure Research* 17:133–141.
- Burdge, R. J. 1998. Weaning the rural sociological society from College of Agriculture subsidies. *The Rural Sociologist* 18(2):1–2.
- Burdge, R. J. 1999. The making of a discipline: The historical evolution of *Society and Natural Resources* as a scholarly journal. *Society and Natural Resources* 12:179–187.
- Patterson, M. E., and D. R. Williams. 1998. Paradigms and problems: The practice of social science in natural resource management. *Society and Natural Resources* 11:279–296.