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**Umbrella Organizations in Israel's Third Sector:**  
**A First Study towards a More Comprehensive Understanding**

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## **Introduction**

Changes in the size and scope of the third sector, the increase in its salience and the expansion of its political, social and political roles in recent decades, bring forth a need for developing the sector's infrastructure. This includes the development of institutions that can support the organizations in the sector in performing their various roles, enhance their capacity, develop proper standards for their management and operation, and increase their accountability and as a result curtailing attempts to increase government supervision scrutiny and supervision of their conduct. Umbrella organizations are key actors in the performance of such tasks. However, current wisdom on the situation of the third sector tells us that umbrella organizations in the Israeli third sector are few, membership in them is small, and their capacity is limited (see for example Katz, 2002; Yishay, 2003). Moreover, knowledge of these organizations that can help us promote their role and capacity in providing the necessary institutional infrastructure for the sector is limited. Umbrella organizations have been seriously understudied, in Israel, but also in other parts of the world. The study that is detailed below is an attempt to begin to enhance our understanding of umbrella organizations in Israel, their roles and their performance. It is the first attempt to study these organizations in Israel, and as such it is predominantly a pilot study, that should be followed by more extensive research into this important group of organizations. Only the initial stages of this study were implemented. The findings presented here are therefore only very preliminary and are presented primarily for purpose of promoting further discussion of the phenomenon and ideally stimulating future research efforts in this direction.

### **What are umbrella organizations?**

#### *Umbrella organizations, defined*

Although "umbrella" (or "roof") organizations have been a fairly conspicuous feature of the nonprofit sectors of most western societies, their representation in the scholarly literature is quite limited. This might actually be one of the reasons that the very term

is so lacking in analytical precision. In seeking to arrive at a workable definition of umbrella organizations, the most apparent defining characteristic is that of representation. Accordingly, they may be understood as "organizations...with other organizations as members, formed to represent the collective views of its members to government, to the community and to other bodies" (Melville, 2003).

There is general agreement that umbrella organizations represent member organizations, however examples abound of NGOs claiming to be umbrella bodies, whose membership consists not only of organizations but also individuals or, in a few cases, exclusively individual members. Pollack and Lampkin (2001) stipulate that (US based) umbrella associations are those with 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations as members and while they may also have government or individual members, nonprofit organizations must constitute a substantial portion of their membership.

In a comprehensive 2003 study of umbrella organizations in Australia (known as "peak bodies") a plausible working definition was advanced, through an inductive probing of peak bodies operating in the field. Accordingly, a "peak body" may be understood as follows:

*A non-government organization whose membership consists of smaller organizations of allied interests. The peak body thus offers a strong voice for the specific community sector in the areas of lobbying government, community education and information sharing between member groups and interested parties (Melville, 2003)*

This definition takes into consideration the intermediary position of umbrella bodies: lobbying government; interfacing regularly with their constituencies, and informing the public at large.

### *Coalitions*

Organizations that embody at least some of the features of umbrella organizations are "coalitions". Definitions offered for this organizational entity not surprisingly bear a

strong resemblance to those of umbrella organizations. Two such definitions are: "an organization of individuals representing diverse organizations, factions or constituencies who agree to work together in order to achieve a common goal" (Feighery and Rogers, 1989, p. 1, cited in Butterfoss et al, 1993, p. 316), and "an organization of diverse interest groups that combine their human and material resources to effect a specific change the members are unable to bring about independently" (Brown, 1984, p. 4, cited in Butterfoss et al, 1993, p. 316).

Although coalitions had typically been characterized in the literature as less formal, less durable and more limited in purpose than umbrella bodies, they are increasingly seen as more formal, multi-purpose and long-term. In certain cases, this is critical to its effective functioning, as in the case of public health for example, in which altering chronic conditions and their social causes are a long-term enterprise that requires normative change (Butterfoss et al, 1993).

Coalitions, often formed in response to either a perceived opportunity or threat, vary in terms of their membership and types of structures. Three types of coalitions based on membership are: 1) *Grassroots* coalitions are organized by volunteers in times of crisis to pressure policy makers to act; (2) *professional* coalitions, formed by professional organizations either in a time of crisis or as a long-term approach to increasing their power and influence; and (3) *Community-based* coalitions, consisting of professional and grassroots leaders and formed to influence more long-term health and welfare practices for their communities. The organizational structures of coalitions have been characterized as: (1) *Organization-set* coalitions that provide resources or services under an 'umbrella' organization; (2) *network coalitions*, subgroups of organizations within an organizational system that provides services to a particular client population; and (3) *action-set* coalitions that are issue specific and *ad hoc* in nature, bringing together organizations that may not previously have been in the same network to accomplish a specific purpose (Butterfoss et al, 1993).

The preceding treatment of coalitions demonstrates just how analytically indistinguishable they seem to be from umbrella organizations. And if the distinction between the two is somewhat obscure in theory, it is that much more unwieldy in

practice, when applied specifically to the third sector in Israel. For our purposes then, we will relate to the two as interchangeable – at least at this phase of the research.

### *The functions of umbrella organizations*

Umbrella organizations, in their efforts to represent and/or shape a field or sector, play a number of roles. These may include any number of the following (Pollack and Lampkin, 2001):

1. *Technical assistance*, including individual organizational consulting and the development of guide books or other tools. Needless to say, this can also be provided by bodies that do not conform to the notion of umbrella organization. Shatil, The New Israel Fund's Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations in Israel that could be defined as a management support organization, would be an example of the latter.
2. *Forum* for informal networking, relationship-building, and the exchange of ideas through annual meetings, conferences, or committee work. The work of the Israeli Civic Leadership Association (ICLA: [www.icla.org.il](http://www.icla.org.il)) and Sheatufim - The Israel Center for Civil Society ([www.sheatufim.org.il](http://www.sheatufim.org.il)) is consistent with this function. Not surprisingly, to serve in the role as "convener" of other organizations in a similar field or sector requires a more representative or generalist stance, characteristic of the two organizations mentioned here. Interestingly, while ICLA defines itself as an umbrella organization, and would also fit the definitions mentioned above, Sheatufim doesn't see itself as an umbrella organization. Convening of third sector organizations or civil society organizations can be done, and it often is done, by academic centers, philanthropic foundations, government agencies and many other institutions that aren't even close to any of the definitions of umbrella organizations.
3. *Leadership*, such as educating members about outcome measurement, publicizing successful practices, or testing new technologies and methodologies for service or information delivery. This function too presupposes "representativeness" on the part of the organizations undertaking it.
4. *Lobbying and advocacy*, on issues of direct relevance to member organizations (government funding for example), and on issues affecting people served by member organizations. This function is also by no means limited to umbrella organizations.

5. *Research*, including descriptions of the discipline or sector and its environment, as well as policy and management-oriented.
6. *Public education and communications* targeted at policy-makers, the press, the general public, as well as members and nonmembers within a field.
7. *Accreditation and standard-setting*. An example of this function in Israel is the "Naot" nonprofit conduct standards initiative developed by the ICLA. Albeit, accreditation is often done by nonprofit organizations that aren't umbrella organizations (such as the nonprofit ranking initiative Midot in Israel – [www.midot.org.il](http://www.midot.org.il)) or even by business firms that provide accreditation services for profit.
8. *Support services and products*, such as group insurance or purchasing discounts.
9. *Direct services* to the population served by member organizations, such as information and referral services for an association of homeless shelters.

There is some disagreement around the issue of umbrella bodies engaged in direct service provision, for this is typically understood as part of the purview of the constituent member organizations represented by an umbrella organization. Umbrella bodies engaged in a significant degree of service provision would likely be perceived as competing with other organizations it purports to represent. This is expressed in how the Australian Industry Commission views the role of an umbrella organization:

*A representative organization that provides information dissemination services, membership support, coordination, advocacy and representation, and research and policy development services for its members and other interested parties...(though) it does not involve direct service delivery (cited in Melville 1999).*

### *Types of Nonprofit Umbrella organizations*

For the purposes of analysis, there are many ways of classifying nonprofit umbrella organizations. Those categories most relevant to our inquiry consist of the following:

- *Geographic focus*: Are they organized on a national level or are they more regionally focused?
- *Scope*: Do they address issues that are discipline-specific or issue-specific or are they concerned with issues that pertain to an entire sector?
- *Type of activity*: Do they focus primarily on relations with member organizations (services to “clients”) or on broader activities to represent, support or promote the sector at large?

Dennis Young's research on US umbrella nonprofits is perhaps the most comprehensive and illuminating. He identifies three forms of "organizational identities" of umbrella bodies, with important structural and operational implications. The first, *goals-seeking* umbrella bodies work in a coordinated fashion to achieve common system-wide goals, such as improving the lives of children, eliminating cancer, and maintaining ecological diversity. The second, *economies* umbrella bodies collectively pursue their economic needs in a more effective manner than they would achieve individually in the open market place. The third type is that of *polities*, umbrella bodies with similar interests but diverse approaches and priorities that use the association as a forum to articulate common strategies and programs. Accordingly, "polity" umbrella bodies tend to assume a federative organizational structure in which the central office has legitimacy and a degree of sovereignty (Young, 2001).

### *Umbrella Organizations in other Countries*

The structure, scope and activity of umbrella organizations are naturally impacted by the structural and cultural features of the polity (and third sectors) in which they operate. One rather coarse but telling indicator facilitating a comparative perspective is the percentage of registered nonprofits that belong in one way or another to an

umbrella organization. Nonprofits in the US and Canada for example are perceived as relatively independent and, as such, are less inclined to belong to umbrella bodies than their counterparts in Australia (Melville, 2003). Umbrella nonprofits in Britain, in sharp contrast, rely more heavily on government funding. Relative to the activist stance of umbrella bodies in certain other countries, those in Britain tend to focus more on accommodating their member organizations, rather than advocating on behalf of the wider sector beyond its own membership (Melville, 2003). As a rule, umbrella bodies in Britain are not only more dependent on government funding than their counterparts in the US, but are also more aligned with the state bureaucracy (Hunter, 1993). In our research, we expect to be able to compare, at least in a preliminary fashion, umbrella bodies in Israel with those in other countries, according to some of the parameters addressed in this review.

## **A Preliminary Study**

### *Our Criteria for "Umbrella Organization"*

For this study, it was necessary to delimit the boundaries of the research population. Since our focus is on the third sector, we initially determined that the research would incorporate only umbrella organizations whose members are third sector organizations themselves. This excludes such umbrella organizations whose members are private firms or other for-profit entities, such as the Association of Private Kindergartens or the Association of Industrialists. It also excludes associations of public agencies, that may be third sector organizations in themselves, but whose membership consists of, for example, cities, public services, etc. As well, organizations had to have been in existence for at least two years and possess certain basic features of formal organizations.

### *Model of the study*

This study initially intended to feature a multilevel analysis of umbrella organizations and their membership, involving macro and micro level analyses, mixing qualitative

and quantitative methods. However, midway through its implementation, it was decided to limit its scope to a macro-level analysis, based on data from a questionnaire distributed to a number of umbrella organizations as well as other existing data sources.

#### 1. Pilot survey of umbrella organizations in Israel

This phase of our study consisted of a survey of umbrella organizations in Israel. Such a survey required constructing a master list of such organizations, based on a variety of sources, including the Israeli Third Sector Database at the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, lists extracted from different studies, lists provided by major infrastructure organizations in the Israeli third sector (ICLA, Shatil, National Council for Volunteering, Itijaa), and a list generated from a host of informants using a "snowball" technique. This master list was then refined, i.e. organizations deemed inconsistent with our criteria for umbrella organizations were removed as were those for which contact information was no longer valid or up to date. The refined list, when completed, comprised 163 organizations.

Concurrently, a questionnaire was devised exploring six different dimensions of the phenomenon of umbrella organizations: (1) establishment of the organization, (2) organizational and funding variables, (3) membership and member relations, (4) government relations, (5) relations with other umbrella organizations, and (6) self evaluation. Regrettably, although the questionnaire was sent to all the organizations appearing on the final list, only 26 responded – even after attempts to contact a significant number of them via telephone. The low response rate inevitably limits the generalizability of the findings presented here.

#### 2. Analysis of membership in umbrella organizations

For this component of our study, an analysis of the data collected within the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research's "Observation to the Third Sector" project was conducted, analyzing "Observation" organizations' membership in umbrella organizations across various parameters, including size, formalization, funding patterns, and tendency to collaborate, among others.

## **Findings from the pilot survey of umbrella organizations in Israel**

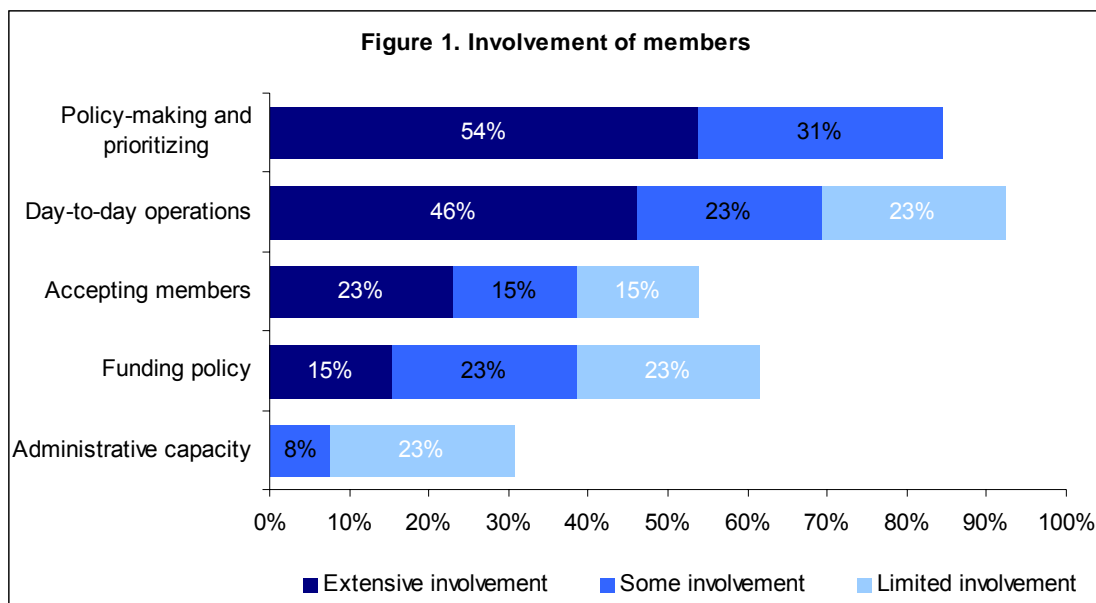
A few observations emerged during the initial stage of data collection. Firstly, it became clear that the conceptual distinctions or boundaries among umbrella organizations, coalitions, forums of various kinds and "networks are rather blurred. In some cases, organizations that conformed to the notional of "umbrella", as depicted in the literature, insisted they were in fact "coalitions" and vice versa. In other words, the self-definition of a number of these organizations (including a number of those which did not respond to the questionnaire) was inconsistent with the manner in which they were classified in certain data sets and with the way they were perceived by those undertaking this study. Secondly, the notional of organizational "membership" in virtually all those "umbrella" organizations probed was similarly quite nebulous.

Despite the conceptual and definitional ambiguity that emerged during the initial phase of this study, a number of preliminary findings were uncovered that nevertheless shed light on this phenomenon and could potentially inform and guide future, more comprehensive, research efforts.

It is important to note that umbrella organizations are a relatively recent phenomenon in Israel. Approximately half of the organizations that responded to our survey were established after 1995, and the vast majority of organizations were the first to operate in their respective field. Those organizations that responded were all established with the intention of unlimited duration, rather than for a pre-defined period of time.

### *Umbrella organizations' relations with their membership*

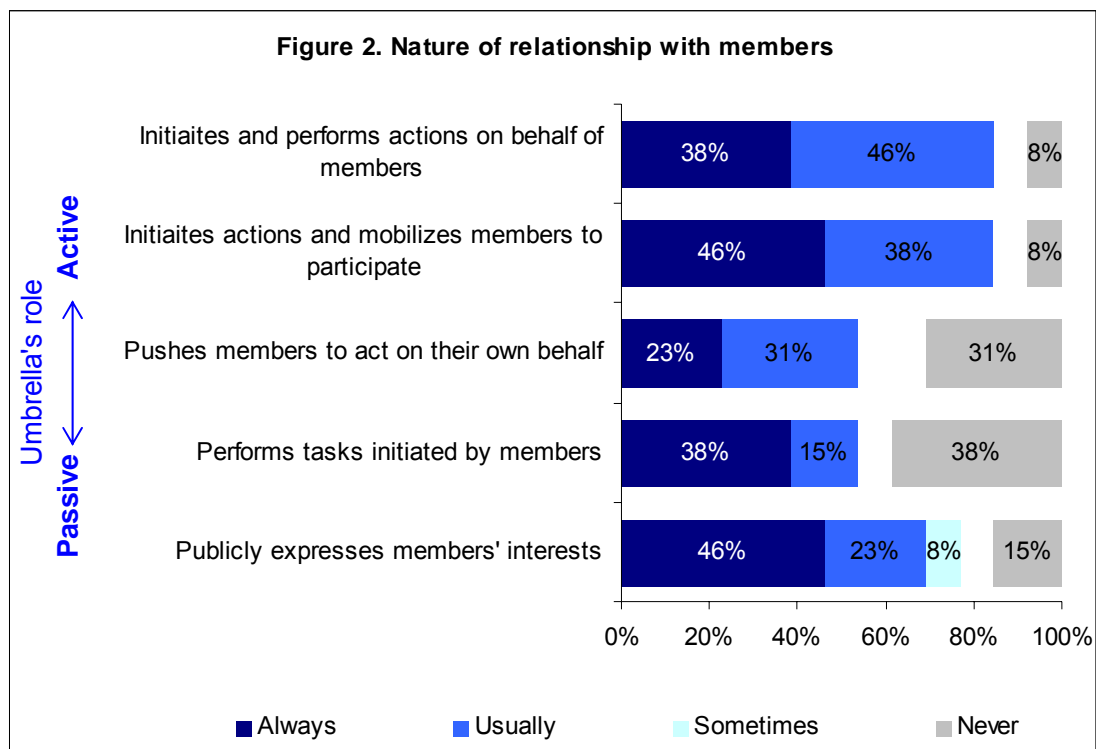
The umbrella organizations probed are predominantly autonomous entities, managed and operated by hired staff, and characterized by limited direct involvement of member organizations (however "membership" is defined) in their day to day management (figure 1).



In under half the umbrella organizations are members involved "extensively" in the day to day work, and in only marginally over half do members play a major role in setting the umbrella organization's agenda and priorities. Membership recruitment and acceptance too is something that the umbrella organizations often do without extensive involvement of members.

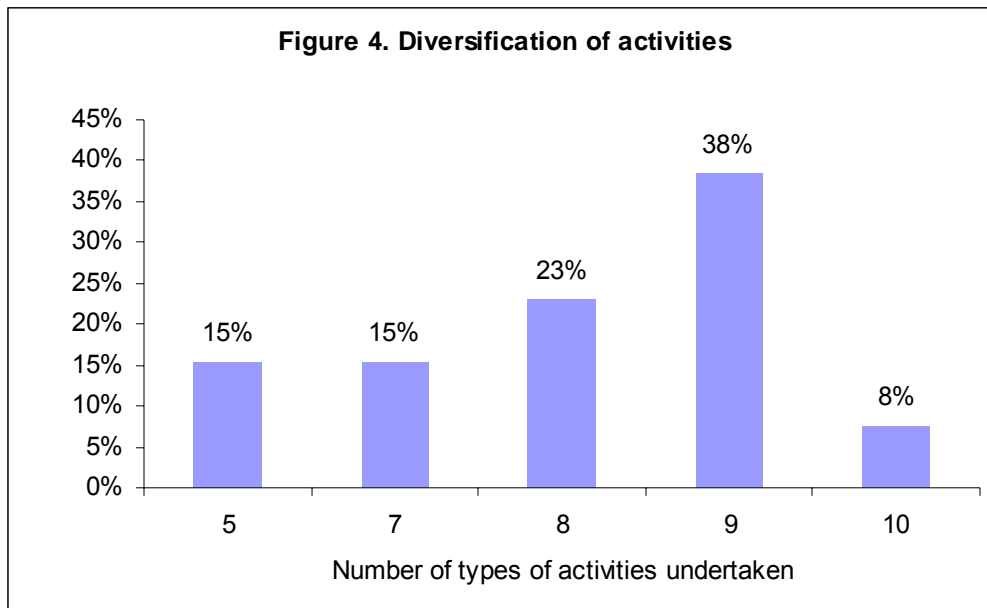
When we look at the nature of the relationship between umbrella organizations and their member organizations, a clear picture emerges: umbrella organizations tend to be proactive in their orientation, prodding member organizations into action, rather than the other way around (figure 2).

Another aspect where member input is found to be limited is that of the funding of the umbrella organizations. Not only are very few umbrella organizations characterized by extensive involvement of members in determining their funding policy (see figure 1), but also the funding of most of the organizations surveyed tends to rely much less on membership fees than what we expected. The most prominent source of funding for these organizations is donations from foundations and businesses. It seems logical to assume that reliance on membership fees would increase the control of members over the umbrella organization's management. Following the same logic, keeping membership fees at a low, even symbolic, level, may be seen as a way to buffer the umbrella organization from excessive pressures from its members.

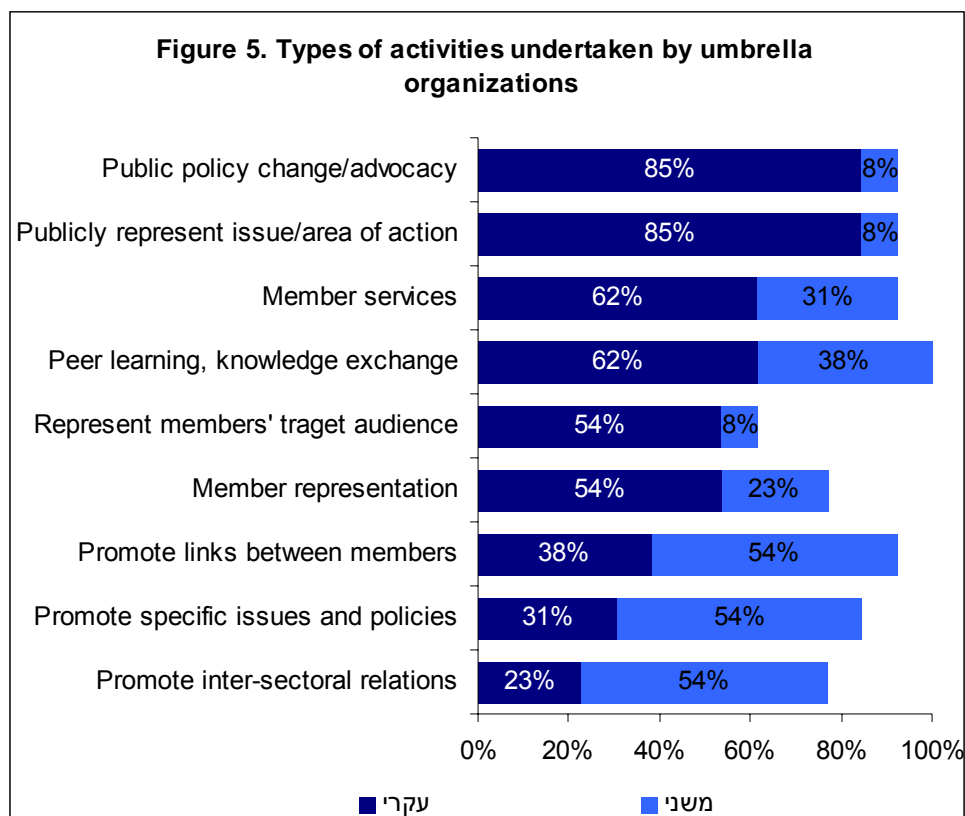


*What do umbrella organizations do?*

On the whole, umbrella organizations tend to be generalists (figure 4). The majority of organizations surveyed engaged in nearly all of the nine different types of activities that were listed in the questionnaire (a few even added more activities to this already long list). It can be said that in general, umbrella organizations in Israel do not focus on either services or policy work, but rather they normally 'do it all'. Whether this is limiting their capacity to become experts in specific modes of action is a question that lies beyond the scope of this study.



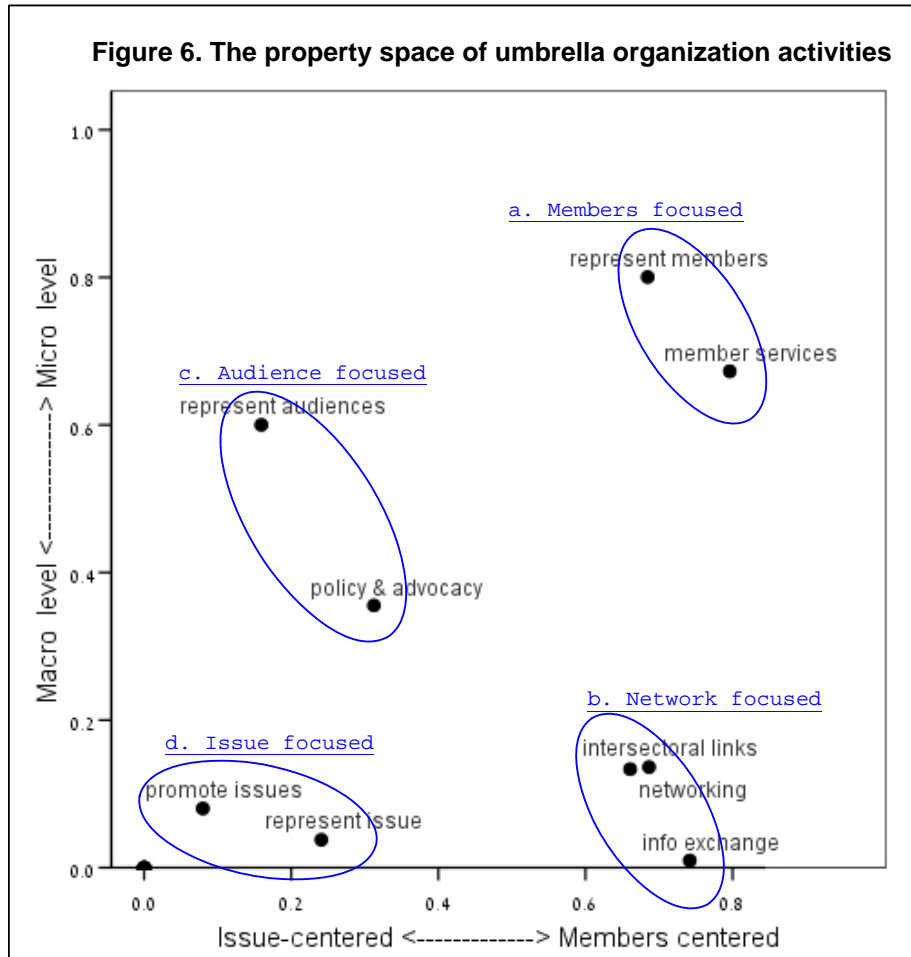
The most frequently declared types of activities are those pertaining to social change, and policy advocacy. Based on our admittedly limited data set for this study, a picture emerges according to which umbrella organizations in Israel tend to be more oriented toward social change and issue driven organizations, rather than membership-support or member-serving organizations (figure 5). However, when we look at the composition of the types of activities that our respondent organizations undertake, we find that a majority engage in service provision to member organizations as well in advocacy and policy work.



To try and distinguish between groups of organizations based on types of activities undertaken we conducted a Correspondence Analysis<sup>1</sup> of the organizations' activities. The analysis allows us to find out which activities 'go together', or in other words, whether different activities can be grouped by the fact that umbrella organizations engage in more than one activity. The results of the analysis reveal that umbrella organizations' activities can be grouped into four groups that pertain to four main functions of umbrella organizations in the Israeli context, and that can be described using two axes – macro-micro level of engagement, and issue- or member-focused activities (figure 6). A members-focus can be at the individual member level – providing member services or representing member vis-à-vis the authorities (a), and it can aim beyond the individual, towards network building, by creating network links and acting as broker for exchange of information (b). An issue-focus can aim at addressing the needs of the specific audiences served by member organizations

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence analysis is an exploratory technique related to principal components analysis which finds a multidimensional representation of the association between the row and column categories of a contingency table. It allows for factoring categorical variables and displaying them in a property space which maps their association in two or more dimensions (for more details see Clausen, 1998). The property space is a multidimensional representation of a set of the variables' attributes by a vector or set of coordinates.

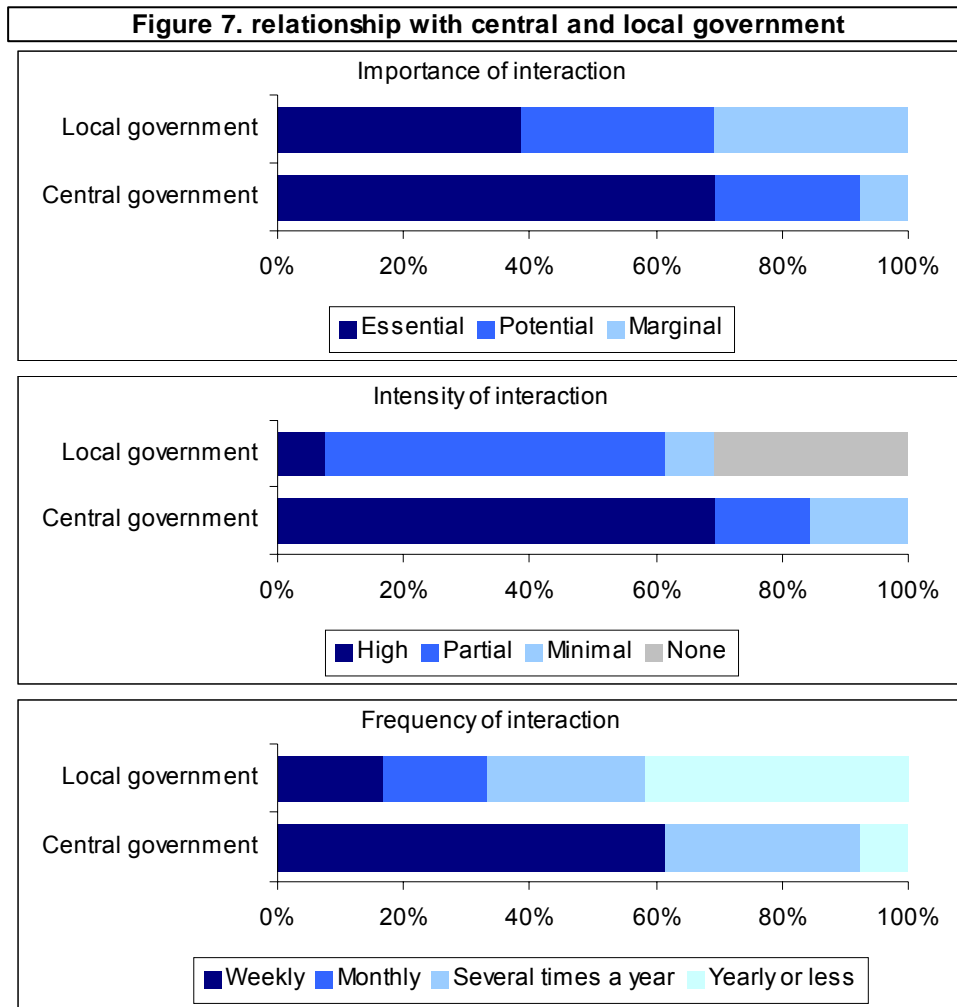
through advocacy work (c), and it can entail activities that are broadly issue-focused, and involve promotion and representation of issues (d).



### *Umbrella organization - Government relations*

In light of the finding that umbrella organizations in Israel tend to be more oriented toward social change and issue driven organizations, it isn't surprising to find that the interface with central government plays an important role in the work of Israeli umbrella organizations. Most of the organizations have frequent (even weekly) contacts with government, they assess these as key to their missions, and they define them as high-intensity (figure 7). A small minority of the organizations reported having a conflictual relationship with government, claiming to keep contacts with government to an absolute minimum. Notably, the perceived importance, the intensity

and the frequency of relationships with local government are considerably less pronounced. This is indicative of the relatively minor role that local authorities play in the determination of economic and social policy in Israel. It also indicates that on the whole, Israeli umbrella organizations tend (or at least try) to operate on a national level.



### Findings from the analysis of membership in umbrella organizations

The following is an analysis of data obtained in the "Observation to the Third Sector" project of the Israeli Center for Third-sector Research at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. The "Observation" project is a longitudinal panel study of a sample of Israeli nonprofit organizations based on a *listening posts* approach (CCSS, 2006), and it is aimed at improving the understanding of policy makers, the general public and

third sector organizations themselves, as to the challenges sector organizations face, the pressures they withstand, the resources available to them, and the novel ways they develop to face all those. The project includes 100 nonprofit organizations representing all fields of practice addressed by the nonprofit sector (except labor unions and professional associations, see figure 8).



As part of the project, in-depth interviews were conducted with the executive directors of all participating organizations, which included, among a host of other topics, questions concerning membership in umbrella organizations. They were asked whether their organization was a member of an umbrella organization (or organizations), and if not what was the reason. From those that are members of umbrella organizations we asked the name of the umbrella organization. The following is an analysis of 'Observation' project participants' responses to these questions, across a few key organizational variables.

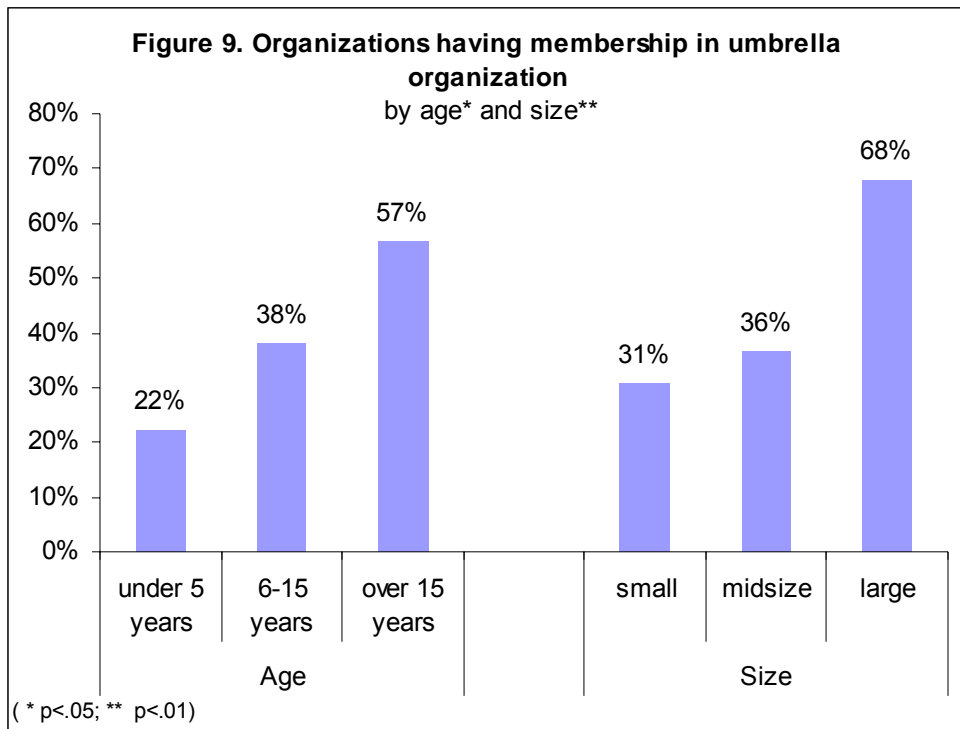
Firstly, less than half the organizations in the project were members of an umbrella organization at the time of the study (table 1). Of these just above one-third were members in more than one umbrella organization. It is noteworthy that the vast

majority of organizations that are members in umbrella organizations have joined a field-specific umbrella organization, such as the umbrella organization of the environmental movement – Life and Environment, or the umbrella organization of disease and syndrome related groups – ZVI (Israel Health Consumers). Membership in generic umbrella organizations such as the National Council of Volunteers or the Israeli Civic Leadership Association (ICLA), that defines itself and is often known as *the* umbrella organization of the entire third sector, is at about one-third of participating organizations.

<b>Table 1. "Observation" organizations: Membership in umbrella organizations</b>	
Organization is member of umbrella organization(s)	47%
of which	
is member of more than one umbrella organization	38%
is member of field-specific umbrella organization	82%
is member of generic umbrella organization	36%
is member of overseas umbrella organization	15%

When asked why they do not belong to an umbrella organization, most participants had no specific reason. Among the few that did specify a reason, the most common response was that there was no umbrella organization that is relevant to their mission. This is interesting point, since it indicates that many of the organizations do not consider the generic umbrella organizations to be relevant to them. This finding provides a partial explanation to why the rate of organizations that are members in the sector's generic umbrella organizations is relatively low. It may also mean that the generic umbrella organizations in Israel haven't been successful in communicating their relevance and the value of membership to potential members. This conclusion finds support in the other reasons for not joining umbrella organizations that the participants listed, which included disenchantment with the effectiveness of existing umbrella organizations or reservations concerning the value of membership.

Membership in umbrella organizations has some interesting correlations with organizational variables. Firstly, it is significantly and positively correlated with the age and size of the organizations in question. Older and larger organizations are significantly more likely to be members of umbrella organizations (see figure 9).



The correlation between organizational size and umbrella membership is even more pronounced when we examine membership in generic umbrella organizations. Larger organizations are markedly more involved in generic umbrella organizations, those whose target audience are all the third sector's organizations than are smaller organizations. While 43% of the large organizations are members in generic umbrella organizations, only 3.5% of the small and mid-sized organizations are (difference is statistically significant at  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, organizations that predominantly employ waged staff are more prone to join generic umbrella organizations (27.6% are members in generic umbrella organizations) than are organizations where work is done predominantly by volunteers (6.7% are members in generic umbrella organizations, and the difference is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ ).

As well, organizations that involve advocacy and policy work in their repertoire of programs and activities also tend to be substantially more prone to join umbrella organizations: 65% of organizations involved in advocacy and policy work are members of umbrella organizations, compared to only 35% of organizations not engaged in such activities (difference is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ ). This finding corresponds with the findings mentioned above that pointed to the high involvement of umbrella organizations in policy and advocacy work.

## Discussion

This report presents the first analysis of umbrella organizations ever conducted in Israel. However preliminary, the analysis allows us to reach some conclusions on the nature of this phenomenon in Israel, and make a few recommendations for research and practice.

Firstly, it can be argued that umbrella organizations are generally underdeveloped in Israel. Our data show that many third sector organizations do not consider umbrella membership a relevant option at all. This holds true particularly for the generic umbrella organizations, those that try to address the issues affecting third sector organizations more generally, regardless of their mission, size or function. Many third sector organizations do not think that umbrella organization membership can be beneficial to them. This, it can be said, is a major task that umbrella organizations need to undertake – they need to devise ways to better convey the benefits that they offer to prospective members, especially among smaller and younger ones, and among volunteer organizations and those that provide services.

The fact that so many of the umbrella organizations appear to be "generalists" in terms of their activities suggests a low level of institutionalization of this group of organizations in Israel. This is characteristic of emergent systems that do not yet feature a discernable functional differentiation (Luhmann, 1982).

Similarly, the attempt to perform so many functions simultaneously may affect the ability of organizations to specialize, develop areas of expertise, and perform each of these roles in an effective manner. Obviously, this suspicion that umbrella organizations are in many cases 'spread too thin' requires further investigation.

It emerges from these findings that umbrella organizations in Israel can be characterized by and large as social change rather than member-serving organizations. Accordingly, we note that the interface with government represents a prominent part of their action repertoire. However, while advocacy organizations are commonly regarded as embodying a confrontational or antagonistic posture vis-à-vis government, and are consequently perceived by government as such, Israeli umbrella organizations appear to maintain relatively cordial and collaborative relations with government. Such a finding is congruent with accounts that argue that Israeli civil

society organizations generally do not attempt to challenge the existing social order, but rather try to maneuver within it and win small concessions for their constituents (Ben Eliezer, 1999; Yishay, 2003). This finding is consistent with the experience of umbrella organizations in the UK (Hunter, 1993). Interestingly however, Israeli umbrella organizations tend to be considerably less financially dependent on government than their British counterparts.

We find that the field of umbrella organizations', as seen from the relations with their membership, is more top-down than bottom-up. Umbrella organizations predominantly take a dominant role vis-à-vis their members, and members play a relatively small part in their operations, priority setting, policy making and even funding. It should be noted that we have data only on one side of the umbrella-member relations picture, since our information on is based only on a survey of the umbrella organizations. Further research that will collect data from both umbrella organizations and their members is required if further understanding of this relationship is sought.

The findings also served to reinforce the impression alluded to previously with respect to the blurry distinction between coalitions and umbrella organizations. Indeed, even the modest field research conducted in the context of this study underscored the highly problematic nature of definitions when exploring this phenomenon. In our data, no systematic functional or organizational differences were revealed among those organizations defining themselves as coalitions and those defining themselves as umbrella organizations. It would seem then, that the term "umbrella organization" is of dubious analytic value. Other terms, such as "infrastructural organizations", might in fact offer greater possibilities for empirical research into this phenomenon.

As we have already said, further research on umbrella organizations is needed if we wish to understand their character and their relationship with members more fully. One such research could be a series of case studies of umbrella organizations, that will include an in depth analysis of the umbrella organization, but also will go one step further to analyze mutual perceptions between umbrella organizations and their members, links between members, and explore issues of member satisfaction, goal attainment and more.

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