Associations’ leaders in France: origin, profile and trajectory

Muriel Tabariés

Paris1 University and CNRS Centre d’économie de la Sorbonne, Paris, France

The aims of the paper

In France, associations employ more than one million people and have an annual budget of € 60 billion (Tchernonog, 2007). They have significant economic importance and represent the bulk of the non profit sector. Despite this recent knowledge elements, the world of these organisations is not well known. If research carried on members and volunteers motivations is expanding (Markham and alii, 2001, Prouteau and Wolff, 2004), the one relative to the associative leaders, and particularly to their trajectories along their associative life, is much more limited (Iecovitch, 2005). The leaders, because of their animation functions, play a very important role in the dynamism and the renewal of associations, in the definition of their logic of action, and in the types of social demand considered. In addition to their origin and profile, it is useful to explore the characteristics of their associative trajectory, allowing to know partly the formation mode of social “elites”, and specially socio-political ones. Indeed, the associative responsibilities are often considered as “footboard” of local elective positions. It will also make possible the better comprehension of some barriers to equal access to associative leader positions.

Following the previous works undertaken by the CES, the aim of this paper is first to describe the leaders’ profile, in comparison with the French population, regarding the entire sector but also according to the three main, “tested” types of non-profit organisations: organisations whose mission is linked to public policy, organisations which militate for a cause, and lastly, membership organisations. This profile will be compared to this obtained in our previous inquiries. After the leaders’ profile, in order to have a better knowledge of its structure and its chances of evolution, it seems useful to deal with the origin and the associative trajectory of the leaders, along to their professional and political life. The goal is to build trajectory-types according to the precocity, the duration, the type and accumulation or succession of responsibilities, and the relationship with politics. Furthermore, profile and trajectory analysis will be replaced in the action context of the associations (type, size, sector, age, type of governance etc…).

The previous results have shown that associative leaders differ notably from French population. Nevertheless, the differences (more male, aged, with high diploma and higher social status leaders etc…) diminish for organisations created more recently. First results of a qualitative analysis on some presidents’ trajectories show that they have often begun their involvement very young, either in a youth movement, or in a political party (or a trade union), or in sports. Many of them have taken responsibilities early, which is logical if we take in consideration the fact that scouting encourages to take responsibilities. Many have accumulated associative experiences in several sectors, even if some have remained in the same sector all their life (Tabariés, 2009). The quantitative analysis will allow the results’verification and their extension.

Methodology
The contribution will use a new data base which construction is still in progress, meaning a new enquiry conducted at the end of 2009 by the CES beside associations’ presidents. It concerns more than 600 associations, selected from the INSEE files, among all categories of associations (the data will be redressed according to the known structure of the sector). The data collected – more than one hundred variables – deal with numerous aspects of presidents’ profile and trajectory, and with associations’ profile and governance. The questions enable us to know who the presidents are (gender, age, matrimonial status, number of children, family origin, professional status, diploma, activity status etc...), but also to evaluate their involvement’s course in the associative life (beginning of their membership, involvement and responsibilities, their cumulative or successive responsibilities, their political responsibilities etc...). They give also indications on the profile of the association and the functioning of the decision-making bodies.

References


Tchemonog V. (2007), Le paysage associatif français. Mesures et évolutions, Dalloz-Juris associations

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