Employment in the third sector: the case of Porto University graduates in Administration, Humanities and Social Sciences

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The professional integration of graduates in the third sector is the central theme of this paper. The approach to this topic starts off from the perspective of the underlying problematics of the general re-emergence of a new third sector, particularly in Europe, as a means of overcoming the limitations of the Social State. Since the 1970s/80s the exhausted growth models of the Western world and the crisis of the Social State contributed to the emergence of a number of both new and reformed organizations within the third sector. In 1997, a study promoted by the European Commission DGV, Pilot Action The Third System, Employment and Local Development, identified Portugal as part of a group of European countries where the third sector was a reality on the rise (CIRIEC, 2000). So, in a second part, we provide a brief overview of the third sector in Portugal, which is characterized by growth dynamics both in the number of organizations and jobs created. The principles and values that ideally guide third sector organizations are discussed, namely the principles of democratic and participatory management, and the primacy of the person and work over profit. This reflection provides the groundwork for discussion of the empirical results regarding the labour relationship that characterizes graduates from Porto University who are professionally integrated in these organizations.

The key questions at the basis of the analysis were the following: on the one hand, an attempt was made to ascertain whether the growth of this sector in terms of employment numbers has a qualitative correspondence in the labour relationship, in order to classify it (or not) as coherent with the principles that govern it; on the other hand, we sought to respond to what extent this sector is (or not) an alternative and differentiated sector with regard to its people management practices and comparing, whenever possible, the characteristics of professional integration in this sector and those of the public and private sectors.

The data will present was collected between June and October 2006, using an online survey, with a sample of 3490 out of the 7557 Porto University students who graduated between 1996/97 and 2003/04 in the following courses: administration (Economics and Business Administration graduates from the Porto University Faculty of Economics); humanities (Modern Languages and Literature, European Studies and Philosophy graduates); social sciences (in Geography, History and History of Art, Archeology and Sociology graduates from the Porto University Faculty of Humanities and Psychology graduates from the Porto University Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences).

Out of the 921 graduates who answered the survey regarding professional insertion, 111 (12%) were working in the third sector in the final semester of 2006. The analysis will be focused on these 111 graduates. The approach follows two main lines: the demographic and academic profile of the graduates working in the third sector, and the specificities of their professional integration, examining organizational characteristics and the labour relationship in its objective and subjective dimensions.

References


