DOUBLE PANEL PROPOSITION

Between democracy and governance:
participation, partnership and paradox

Panel I: Policy and Politics
Panel II: Representation and Contestation

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The operating environment of third sector organisations has been profoundly transformed since the turn of the century, but the literature shows little consensus regarding the direction of, and the issues associated with these changes. This lack of consensus may simply reflect different perspectives. But it may also reflect the paradoxical nature of civil society participation in the governance of society. The aim of this workshop/panel is to bring to the forefront these paradoxes of partnership and participation.

On the one hand, participation and partnership have become hallmarks of the new forms of network governance promoted by authorities the world over. The once invisible third sector (voluntary and community-based organizations) has become a sexy “new” actor in the policy cycle. Considerable theoretical and empirical work has been dedicated to these concepts, actors and transformations. Network governance, local partnership, deliberative and participative democracy occupy an increasing proportion of the recent literature in policy, public administration and political science journals. They are reputed to enhance the validity of policy-relevant knowledge, the legitimacy of policy decisions and design, the efficacy of policy implementation, and the capacity of civil society to take its destiny in hand. But outcomes are often shown to be less lofty than the stated goals.

On the other hand, participation and partnership are also hallmarks of the so-called neoliberal turn. In this light, they are characteristic of the hollowing out of the state, the downloading of responsibilities to local authorities and non-state actors, the reinforcement of regulation at a distance, and the incorporation and neutralization of organized civil society through increasing dependence on contractual relations with the state. These ideas do not simply represent a knee-jerk critical perspective, since many empirical studies have clearly demonstrated the perverse effects of what is almost inevitably asymmetrical participation and unequal partnership.

A starting point for the papers in this panel is the assumption that both these analyses are correct, and that instances of participation and partnership typically represent a balancing act between the two. Depending upon the organizational capacity and mutual agency of both civil society and government actors - as well as various other factors that remain to be revealed – the character of relations between organized civil society and the state may lean more towards the ideal of “progressive” governance, or towards that of “neo-liberal” governance. Both civil society and government actors may be more or less aware of this tension, and act more or less reflexively in light
of it. The outcome may result from a para-political struggle, or simply from path-dependent and uncontested institutional arrangements and relations, under a new, superficial guise.

The analyses in these papers make an attempt to show how both these tendencies of participation or partnership are present in the context of a given case study. They address the relation between them, and the paradoxes that this relation can potentially generate. They are also particularly concerned with the agency and interaction that ultimately “resolve” the relation in one direction or another. In short, the papers seek to assess the specific relation between structure and agency in each case.

The interest of this panel lies in taking us beyond current debates about participation and partnership, to examine how tendencies towards governance and democracy oppose each other, and interact to produce different results in different political, cultural, economic and institutional contexts. This is not only of theoretical interest, but also, of strategic interest to civil society organizations trying to combine pragmatism and activism within contemporary operating environments.

Bibliography


Howard, Joanna, Marilyn Taylor, Antaoneta Mateeva, Christopher Miller, Rumen Petrov, Mojgan Rahbari, Luis Serra (2006), Non-governmental actors and the political dimension: navigating the tensions in new governance spaces, paper presented at the meeting of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), Bangkok, Thailand, July 9-12.


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Panel II: Representation and Contestation

These papers focus on differences and dynamics within the third sector and on these organizations' relations with citizens. The construction of identities and meanings can help to create cohesion or can cause rifts between different movements of civil society organizations. How do organizations deal with tensions between their representation of members or citizens' interest on the one hand, and their collaboration with authorities on the other? To what extent, and under what conditions, do organizations begin to participate in control more than contestation?

The papers in this panel focus on experiences in Northern Ireland, Sweden, Argentina and Uruguay and Québec, Canada.

1. The Third Sector, Welfare Governance and the Struggle over Meaning: some implications of the case of Northern Ireland

2. Civil Dialogue Models in Sweden – A question of influence, cooperation and conflicts

3. Poverty, Participation and Governance

4. Third sector trajectories in the context of partnership: Comparing strategies and their outcomes
1. The Third Sector, Welfare Governance and the Struggle over Meaning: some implications of the case of Northern Ireland

In Western welfare states there has been a convergence in policy towards active rather than passive welfare and a stress on an enabling role for the state in response to the growth of flexible labour markets, the free movement of capital and the outsourcing of jobs to other jurisdictions, linked to an ageing population. These reforms have converged on a reconfiguration of welfare from a concern for social protection from market forces and a concomitant focus on social citizenship (Marshall, 1950, 2006) towards labour market activation and participation (Surender, 2004; Lewis, 2004), a process that has been described as a move from the welfare state to the ‘social investment state’ (Lister, 2004).

As is set out in the panel theme, for third sector organizations two contradictory tendencies are apparent. One the one hand there has been a trend towards networked governance where organizations are invited into a complex set of partnership and other arrangements to increase the problem-solving capacity of public administration. On the other hand, there has been a process whereby a transfer of the location of public services to third parties (including third sector organizations) has hollowed out the state and in which there has been a dispersal of government power and authority (Rhodes, 2000; Newman, 2005). Governance is best seen as a set of practices and procedures that create limits on what is considered appropriate, commonsensical or possible, both by policy actors and the consumers of policy (Carmel, 2005; Carmel and Harlock, 2008).

But this process is not clear-cut. One emergent theme in the literature is complexity. Conflicted discourses on the purposes of policy and the means of implementation, on the meaning and nature of participation in governance structures, and on the rights and responsibilities of citizens jostle between policy fields and often also within them (Levitas, 1998; Barnes et al, 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009).

These features of contemporary welfare governance regimes suggest that relations between third sector organizations and state bodies are complex and dynamic. The simultaneous requirement by the state to establish leading discourses on the nature of social problems and the most appropriate ways of addressing these and the lack of consistency in which these are applied suggest that the focus of analysis should turn to the struggles over meaning. To understand these it is necessary to both abandon explanations rooted in welfare regime typologies and approaches that consider the third or voluntary sector as a single dependent variable.

Rather it is argued that the third sector is better conceptualized as a site for contestation over meaning and influence that is at the same time influenced by and is influencing leading discourses on welfare regime reconstruction. The tension between participation and civic renewal on the one hand and sub-contractor to the state on the other in any particular case can be understood as an outcome of this contestation. Drawing on social movement scholarship, this paper argues that the dynamic is better understood in terms of the relationship between capacity to create counterpublics in civil society (Fraser, 1997) and the operation of discursive and political opportunity structures (Tarrow, 1998; Koopmans et al, 2005).

The paper explores the utility of this conceptual framework through an analytical account of the development of policies towards the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Although a relatively small region and an outlier of broader UK policy approaches, nevertheless features of its governance regime and recent history make it particularly relevant for the discussion (Acheson and Milofsky, 2008; Horgan, 2006; Birrell, 2009). The paper outlines evidence on the nature and reach of third sector organizations and outlines the main staging posts in the development of the policy framework within which the sector has operated since 1990, drawing on a range of primary and
secondary sources. The evidence is examined in the light of the conceptual framework offered and some implications of the analysis are examined.


Fraser, N. Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the post-socialist condition, New York: Routledge


2. Civil Dialogue Models in Sweden – A question of influence, cooperation and conflicts

Most national governments are currently searching for new ways of “doing politics”. Across Europe there is a great anxiety about decreasing participation in political elections and declining memberships in political parties. Academics as well as politicians express that representative democracy should be complemented with more ‘deliberative qualities’. At the same time, governments are worried that traditional and hierarchical ways of governing have lost their critical edge and tend to place their faith in horizontal and more egalitarian forms of governance. Civil dialogues and partnerships between governments and civil society organizations are increasingly defined as the way out of these difficulties.

These new ideas about political participation and governance constitute an emerging opportunity structure for civil society organizations, but many find themselves in a classical dilemma: one the one hand side, the need to cooperate with authorities (e.g. for the purpose of mobilizing resources) and on the other hand side, the need of keeping one’s independence (e.g. for the purpose of functioning as a critical voice for its members).

This paper analyses how civil society organisations have handled this dilemma and we use two cases of civil dialogue models from Sweden for this purpose. One of these models involves civil society organizations which work with social welfare issues and the other dialogue model involves civil society organizations which work with integration issues. The first mentioned cover broad-ranging issues on the role of civil society organizations in a changing welfare state, what principles that would guide the relationship between the welfare state and civil society organizations, how civil society organizations can support people excluded from society at large. The second process focuses more on practical questions that concern civil society organizations’ commitment to the integration policy at a local level and their cooperation with local authorities. Some organizations in the first dialogue model have extensive experience of lobbying and participation in political decision-making procedures, while many organizations in the second process have more limited experiencing of lobbying the government.

Based on this comparison, this paper analyses questions like: What are the premises of these dialogues? Which civil society organizations participate, which are kept outside and which decide not to participate, and why? How has the government designed these processes, considering their different stakeholders and objectives? What cross-cutting factors can we identify that influence civil society organizations’ possibilities to influence the processes? What kind of inter-organizational dynamics do these dialogue processes create, e.g. new forms of cooperation and/or conflicts patterns between civil society organizations?

The paper draws on the extensive literature on public-private partnerships, participatory governance and collaborative governance to analyse these new forms of policy making. Our theoretical approach is based on a model that has been developed by Ansell and Gash (2007). The authors define collaborative governance as “A government arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (544).

Based on this model, the paper analyses to what extent starting conditions (e.g. distribution of resources, status and power between different civil society organizations) affect the outcome of these dialogue models; how the institutional design of the process as such (e.g. meeting structure, timetable, selection of working groups) creates different possibilities for civil society
organizations to express their voice; and lastly the role of facilitative leadership (mediation to move collaboration forward) in building a process based on dialogue and deliberation between partners.

The research method we have used is case studies with a mixed-method approach. The data includes participated observations of formal meetings between the parts and informal gatherings of stakeholders. We have also got access to preparatory documents, drafts of the agreements from the different phases of the process, written comments to the drafts and the final agreement. We also have performed interviews with informants from civil society organizations and government. We also plan to do a survey study sending out a questionnaire to all invited civil society organizations.

A preliminary analysis of the data shows that during both processes some civil society organizations gain a more active role and participate directly to the process. Other organizations have small possibilities to influence the process and are only able to comment the drafts that are periodically sent out. In a way we could say that a parallel informal dialogue process is carried out inside the third sector where power struggles and positions become evident but in different ways depending on the type of organizations engaged in both processes.

All in all, the paper argues that these two civil dialogue models constitute a critical illustration of changes in the Swedish welfare state, generally known as being a universal welfare state mainly relying on public social policies and the involvement of third sector organizations or private solutions have been highly limited.

References:

3. Poverty, Participation and Governance

The proposed study will analyze whether members of organizations devoted to the very poor in two Latin American countries, are able to assume active participation in the management and leadership of these organizations, to counter dependency and promote democratic governance.

The nature of socioeconomic inequality and exclusion in Latin America creates problems of social cohesion and democratic governability. Therefore, we ask what role third sector organizations can play in promoting the social inclusion of sectors of the population living in poverty, in ways that also promote active citizenship and their participation in democratic governance.

Effective citizenship implies not only the right to vote (without coercion), but also, a certain relationship between the people and the State on the one hand, and on the other hand, amongst the people themselves (O'Donnell, 1999:84). Citizenship can thus be considered along two dimensions: social and republican.

1) Social concerns the distributional effects of social policies that reduce disparities in opportunities,

2) Republican concerns the willingness to participate in public affairs and that implies trust in the institutions and the willingness to participate in the processes of deliberation and collective projects.

One of the central focuses of this paper is to present a theoretical frame of reference to apply in contexts of poverty where the State tends to treat the poor as "dependent" without the opportunity to make decisions that affect their own lives. This situation is called "clientelismo" in Latin America. The problem is twofold: how to pass from situations of social exclusion to social inclusion in contexts of inequality by increasing participation; and how to pass from "dependency" to participation in democratic governance and the possibility of influencing institutional quality. This process could be understood as a progressive movement from social exclusion to social cohesion that would imply citizenship and participatory democracy.

This frame of reference will be used to analyze different third sector organizations in Argentina and Uruguay. These countries have different political cultures and the third sector plays a different role in each one. The empirical work will follow the development of a religious organization (Caritas) devoted to the very poor in each country. It will examine whether these organizations address the governance capacity of their members, by carrying out a content analysis of public documents and by conducting interviews with key informants of Caritas, other third sector organizations, companies and the State. The analysis will attempt to show a process of emerging participatory citizenship of people living in deep poverty, to learn if participation can generate better governance, involving a balance between government, civil society and the market economy. Figure 1 presents the elements of our analytic frame of reference.

Figure 1

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Figure 1
Social Dimension
Population without minimum resources
“Dependents”
Independence for access to basic resources
Membership in social organizations
Solidarity Welfare State

Republican Dimension
Inhabitants/ “Clientelismo”
Responsible inhabitants
Trust Social Capital
Community participation
Governability Governance

References


4. Third sector trajectories in the context of partnership:

Comparing discursive strategies and their outcomes

This research is concerned with relations between community-based organizations and governments in a context where participation and partnership are prioritized. In particular, it is interested in power relations, since this has often been held up as the Achilles heel of collaborative relations. The inevitably asymmetrical relation between community organisations and governments organisations places the former in a subordinate position, having to work within government’s definitions of social problems and their solutions, as well as government’s funding and accountability regulations. This may involve (1) a significant loss of autonomy in defining and responding to problems; and (2) a distancing from the concerns of local services users and a drawing closer to the concerns of public agencies. On the other hand, it may also - as intended - allow for greater influence on governments’ ways of conceiving problems and solutions, and increase government support for community organizations’ objectives and efforts. This paper asks what actions or strategies are likely to either prevent or promote organizations’ autonomy, sensitivity to users, and effective influence on government.

To approach this subject, we combine a discursive institutionalist approach with theories related to network governance. Case studies almost unfailingly reveal that the process and outcome of network governance is disappointing for the weaker or marginal participants. It seems almost impossible for local social actors to get beyond the structured relations of domination that favour authorities who have positional resources, both material and organisational, on their side. Participants in weaker positions are subject to manipulation, subordination, instrumentalization or, at the very best, are relegated to resistance. Their alternative ideas are thus kept in their place, that is, either integrated in some altered and benign form into the dominant discourse, or simply kept at the margins of legitimate discourse. But is this outcome inevitable? What strategies appear to be more effective for preventing subordination, integration or marginalization of community groups?

If the institutional dominance network governance is overwhelming, then community organizations need to rely more on strategy than positional or organisational resources to ensure their autonomy and push forward their agenda. In this arena, community organizations may dominate government through discourse, or their communicational logic. Indeed, our hypothesis is that it is possible for organizations to create discursive asymmetry in their favour, and in this way, to effectively counter the positional, organizational and material asymmetry that generally works in favour of government. The literature suggests that the most successful strategies are those that use the discourse of the dominant actors, but to alternative ends. However, our research suggests that this rather holds the potential for negative outcomes in terms of community organizations’ autonomy and influence.

The paper reports on a comparative case study of two different community-based, discursive strategies for managing community-government relations. It takes advantage of different trajectories, in Quebec, Canada, of community action groups on the one hand, and social economy groups on the other. Each are represented by associations that carry out considerable political work by setting the tone and the terms of relations between local organizations and government. Community action groups work mainly in the social arena, and social economic groups, in the economic arena. The first use an antagonistic discourse with respect to government, while still receiving most of their funding from government. The second use a partnership discourse, and seek to diversify their funding sources. Their trajectories with respect to their relations with government have been quite different, as have their outcomes. But studying these trajectories, we hope to be able to develop hypotheses about the strong and weak points of different discursive strategies in working with government.
Initial bibliography


Howard, Joanna, Marilyn Taylor, Antaoneta Mateeva, Christopher Miller, Rumen Petrov, Mojgan Rahbari, Luis Serra (2006), Non-governmental actors and the political dimension: navigating the tensions in new governance spaces, paper presented at the meeting of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), Bangkok, Thailand, July 9-12.


