Third Sector Organizations Facing Turbulent Environments: Culture, Sports and Social Services in Five European Countries

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Abstract:

The contributions of the panel specifically address the topic of change. How do third sector organizations in Europe in the policy fields of culture, sports and social services cope with increasingly turbulent environments? How do they get along with the blurring of boundaries between the realms of the state, the market and the community? How do they survive against the background of changing state regulations, new forms of governance and an increasing trend towards commercialisation? Due to the attuned relevance of these tendencies the contributions of the panel will specifically highlight the question of what will remain of the traditional roles, concepts, and modes of embeddedness of third sector organizations active in the aforementioned fields.

The contributions of the panel draw heavily on the results of a joint-venture investigation, funded by the EU-Network of Excellence “Citizenship and new Forms of Governance” (CINEFOGO). Challenges, potentials and recent trends of third sector organizations in three policy fields – culture, sports and social services – and in five European countries – Italy, U.K., Germany, Poland, and Sweden – were analyzed by using a neo-institutionalist approach. The countries and policy fields were chosen for good reasons: The countries represent particular traditions of third sector – government relationships. Each of the policy fields, standing for a different area of third sector activity is of utmost importance for the multifaceted role of the sector in modern societies. Doubtlessly, sport is the most popular arena for civic engagement in Europe with millions of sport club members. Compared to sport, third sector organizations in the area of culture look back upon a very long history. According to Jürgen Habermas, third sector organizations active in culture used to constitute the core of the public sphere by providing arenas for discussion, communication and public debates. Third sector organizations in the field of social services used to be the most important element of a “private culture of welfare”. In many European countries alongside with the blossoming of the modern welfare state, these third organizations were step by step thoroughly integrated into the welfare state. Today in each of the countries, the conventional embeddedness of third sector organizations is highly contested. The introduction of new public management techniques has had a significant impact on traditional third sector – government relationships. No matter which policy field is investigated, third sector organizations active in sports, culture or social services are increasingly forced towards the market. Particularly against this background, the project highlights an important common trend: The world of third sector organizations is confronted with a growing dichotomy of numerous small voluntary organizations, which are community based on the one hand, and large service providers on the other hand, which managed by professionals are standing out for their high degree of market integration.

References:

Third Sector Organizations on their Way towards a Polarized Future?

The contribution of the panel organisers outlines the research approach by highlighting the choice of countries, policy fields, and the methodology. The contribution paves the way for the following presentations. Moreover, the panel organisers will draw attention to both communalities and differences between the countries under study.

Between Voluntarism and Big Money: the Case of Sports

With a special focus on Italy, the contribution of this author provides an overview of the current state of the art of third sector organizations in the area of sports. Doubtlessly, the current sport sector is marked by a polarization between voluntary sports organizations based on amateurs and highly performing professional and commercial enterprises, which are involved in a truly international “big business” of sports.

There is no Business like Show Business

Globalisation constitutes also the key-concept of the contribution outlining the state of the art with respect to third sector organizations engaged in cultural activities. Global wealth, particularly philanthropic funding from major donors, including multi-national companies has had a major impact on the industry of culture, which has grown significantly during the last decades. However with a special focus on the U.K., the author argues convincingly: All that glitters is not gold. The new focus on business activities of cultural third sector organizations challenges their traditional role of working on behalf of social change, empowerment and advocacy.

Third Sector Organizations at a Crossroad: The Case of Social Services

Due to the neo-liberal consensus, which used to be the dominant trend of the last decades, the service industry has successfully made inroads into the core welfare domain in many European countries. From a neo-institutional point of view, the authors address in their contribution the question: Are there any exceptions of the overwhelming tendency towards a highly competitive new economy of social service production? With a special focus on Sweden, their contribution reflects current developments of third sector social service provision. Unfortunately, also in this particular field of third sector activity, the future seems to be less promising for the sector than we might expect.

Americanization of Third Sector Organizations in Europe?

The contribution of this author rounds up the panel by taking a critical view from the U.S at the third sector in Europe. By commenting on the contributions of the panel, the following issues will be addressed: Do third sector organizations in Europe follow the “American Way” by becoming increasingly more business-like? And, moreover, do these recent trends just reflect ongoing societal changes within Europe that step by step develops into an economic “super-power”, thus leaving traditional norms, values and milieus behind?