



"The Third Sector and Sustainable Social Change: New Frontiers for Research"

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Speech from the Opening Session of the 8th International Conference

Distinguished members of the presidium, authorities, special guests, fellow researchers, good afternoon, I am Jacqueline Butcher, president of the International Society for Third Sector Research, ISTR.

If you allow me, I will briefly switch in Spanish to give a special greeting and thank you to our Spanish hosts...Bona Tarda. Primero que nada una disculpa por no dirigirme a ustedes en catalán, pero por lo menos puedo comunicarme con ustedes en castellano. Quiero comenzar esta magna reunión agradeciendo todas las atenciones recibidas por la Universidad de Barcelona, sin las cuales, esta asamblea de investigadores hubiese sido imposible...a CIES, a nuestros copatrocinadores y patronos, a los apreciables amigos catalanes y españoles, decirles que estamos todos muy contentos de estar en su tierra. Agradecemos de parte del ISTR y nuestros socios en esta ocasión, CINEFOGO y EMES esta recepción en un ambiente de convivio académico para nuestro octavo encuentro mundial de investigación y la segunda europea, en donde esperamos que estos trabajos sean trascendentes en cuanto a la contribución que entre todos, como investigadores, podamos hacer al Tercer Sector en el mundo.

Thank you all for your patience, I will leave the rest of the translation to our experts here.

As you well know, our mission at ISTR it to increase, share and apply knowledge about the Third Sector in all countries of the world. It is to build a scholarly community with an international and comparative focus on civil society, the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. And, what a better setting for this to happen than with over 600 scholars and practitioners, our largest group ever at a conference, that have come here from over 60 countries from around the globe? These biannual conferences have become the required academic gathering for those of us engaged in Third Sector research.

As we initiate this Conference let me say that it is not by chance that other meetings around the world are exploring associative practices and citizen participation and how it will shape policies and practices that will affect us all into the future. In May, the Council on Foundations in Washington focused on issues of leadership, the European Foundation Centre meeting in Turkey talked about Fostering Creativity and the CIVICUS reunion last month in Glasgow spoke to the issues of People, Participants and Power. All of these gatherings suggest going forward into exploring new and creative ways to assure a better world for future generations through participation and sound decision making.

It is now our turn from the research perspective to look into these issues as well. The Third Sector and Sustainable Social Change: New Frontiers for Research, the theme and title of this Eighth International Conference and Second European Conference of the EMES research network came about as we revised our work and pondered over the

ever changing and difficult challenges that global civil society is facing and which all of us are experiencing in each and every one of our own contexts.

In setting our goals onto new frontiers of research we are saying that we must create new knowledge not only for policy making and its applications in and for our lives, but as leverage in strengthening the collective capacity to find solutions to development problems as well as the right building blocks of a better understanding that will hopefully provide a future of: less uncertainty, less discrimination, more equality and more opportunities in all societies.

I would like to merely address two points for reflection this afternoon: The first has to do with our role as researchers in reaching some form of “sustainable change.” The second has to do with the ever pending theme of bridging research and practice.

Sustainability and change are key words. Fowler, reminds us...that “the core task in sustainability is in creating conditions so that benefits endure under changing conditions...or put differently.. “ Sustainable impact is about creating a continuous ability to adapt.”

From the perspective of change, Edwards and Sen suggest that social systems rest on three bases: a set of values and principles, a set of processes of institutions that undergrid the system and our own personal views and that the interaction of these three bases of change determine how economic, social and political power are exercised in society. Social change requires a recognition, and a conscious integration of all three bases of change and each of these systems of power. When change in one area supports the change in another, there are more chances that the outcome will become sustainable.

We must now ask ourselves: How do we in our role as Third Sector researchers generate these conditions for change? What in our work provides this necessary adaptability? How does this fit into what we do and how to move forward?

One of the many possible answers to some of these questions pertain in how each of us pursues knowledge, let us say: “ as objectively as possible” many times from purely theoretical angles and on other occasions from a practitioners end. Based of Habermas´ we could say that, on the one hand, science´s stake in knowledge is the pursuit of theory stripped as much as possible of ideology and, on the other hand, practice oriented pursuit of knowledge is an understanding and justification of human interest: a verification of methodological approaches.

In reality, the more we understand what works for whom, the diverse stakes that both researchers and practitioners have as they pursue the epistemology of “knowledge”, the better chances we have of creating bridges between these two very valid perspectives. Encountering overlapping points or joint spaces between them could be part of the clue of working together and encountering combined contents and combined solutions, since academics and practitioners have different views on “knowledge sharing.” The first relay on peer review, documentation and comprehensive analysis and is accredited to the individual while the latter rests on action-based and empirical evidence which is meant to be shared through a series of different and diverse methodologies.

Whichever the case may be, when we refer in the main theme of our conference about establishing “new frontiers of research”, we must note that the bridges between knowledge creation, availability, interpretation and applicability are still missing, and to advance to a common future, there is a need for them to be crafted into in place. The amount of work pending for all of us, as well as the opportunities of research in the future, become endless.

Knowledge creation not only represents a large amount of power, especially in information, it also poses a great responsibility. Knowledge, plus the right situation, and balance of this power, are the key factors in change for development, John Gaventa from ODI reminds us. We are well aware that decisions must be based on facts, not intentions. As a whole, in our collective intellectual capital, we create a strong initial basis on which others: public policy experts, governments, organized civil society at local and at international levels, and even social and grass roots movements, will probably make decisions and look up on to our findings for guidelines. It is on most of our

considerations, both theoretical and practical, on our discussions and elucidations about trends and social climates in different parts of the world that many institutions and foundations provide resources for sustainability.

As we trespass onto new frontiers, our creativity will be challenged. Just this past May, at the EFC closing session in Istanbul, Avila Kilmurray, Director of a Community Foundation in Northern Ireland delivered an eloquent speech on the importance of creativity... she said... "there is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it is going to be a butterfly, although to see it, it is necessary to be creative in the breadth of our perception and imagination..." This is the task before us... to understand the complexity of the caterpillar and to believe in the viability of the butterfly.

Our perceptions must be sharp, our imaginations, open. It has been our life's work to ponder, to formulate the adequate questions, to create hypothesis, to experiment with ideas and realities, to craft the correct methodologies and to pose whatever counter-arguments deemed necessary. To compare, evaluate, reach out, be critical in our judgments. This is our training... this is what we do well... And we must continue to do so. Ultimately, our responsibility lies in the artistry of our craft, in these carefully acquired skills, in our curiosity of what lies ahead and in never forgetting the ultimate goal: change, creativity and knowledge for and about the sector. Quite a combination, and quite a challenge.

In closing, I would like to share with you a quote of a great Mexican poet, a Nobel laureate in literature, Octavio Paz. I think that his words bring forth a reminder of the importance of this sector in modern society. In a simple way, it keeps our utopia alive... I will read it both in English and in Spanish...

..." faltan muchas cosas sin las cuales la vida no es digna de ser vivida. (There are many things without which life is not worth living) Si pensamos en aquella tríada con la que comienza el mundo moderno: libertad, igualdad y fraternidad,(if we think about the triad with which the modern world began: liberty, equality and fraternity) vemos que la libertad tiende a convertirse en tiranía sobre los otros: por lo tanto tiene que tener un límite, (we can see that liberty tends to create tyranny over others, and it should be limited) la igualdad por su parte, es un ideal inalcanzable a no ser que se aplique por la fuerza, lo que implica despotismo.(Equality is an imposible dream, unless it is applied by force, and this implies despotism) El puente entre ambas es la fraternidad, la gran ausente en las sociedades democráticas capitalistas. (The bridge between both of these two is fraternity, the great absentee in capitalist democratic societies). La fraternidad es el valor que nos hace falta, el eje de una sociedad mejor" (Fraternity is the value that we are missing, the axis of a better society).

I challenge all of us in ISTR, to our colleagues in CINEFOGO and in EMES and all those gathered here to explore together new possibilities as these next three days result in the sharing of ideas and projects. I invite you to stay true the to the combination of wonder, challenge and creativity in the area of inquiry that each of us have chosen with the reminder and the spirit of fraternity as our guiding light in this task

Thank you all!

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