

FROM “THIRD SECTOR” TO “GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY”- THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINITIONS

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The definition of “Third sector” and “Globalization» is still an ongoing process. Recent debates about an emerging ‘Global Civil Society” add to the complexity of what is already a highly controversial field in terms of scientific analysis as well as political discourse. All three concepts address different aspects of present developments in the organization of the economy and new ways of governance, with great implications for the restructuring of social relations, particularly in welfare. They also share a common characteristic: they are reappraisals of historically known and recognizable trends, which are put forward with great intensity, as the articulation of unprecedented change already challenging established life strategies.

From the standpoint of social policy the implications are far-reaching and, most importantly, definitions become policy tools, at local, national and international level.

This paper discusses a number of key definitions of the third sector, linked to the recent comeback of civil society and present discussions about “global civil society”, while reflecting on the importance of such definitions for promoting and empowering social firms and social cooperatives.

I. Defining the Third Sector

In the nominal international study of John Hopkins university on the third sector, researchers were faced with the problem of definition. Different terms were used interchangeably in different countries: Non-governmental organizations, voluntary sector, non-profit sector, social economy, civil society, , independent sector, even informal sector, are all terms still used today in many contexts . The blurring and confusion which arises from the lack of clear definition has been witnessed by almost all those engaged in scientific analysis, research and even classification and data basis formation involving such organizations. (Salamon and Anheier 1998).

As these terms enter more forcefully the political arena, promoted by E.U. policy as well as neo-liberal scenarios of globalization , definition and classification are recognized as parts of the political process and important political tools, for they determine who is in and who is out of policy implementation.

This is also the case with recent developments in Greece, which involve increased awareness by the state of the presence and importance of a third sector. In the nineties , attempts to operate a National system of social care have stumbled against the need to define and establish criteria for NGO and voluntary organizations .

Similarly, legislation affecting the role of development and human aid NGOs and their relationship with the state had to grasp the nettle of definition, in the midst of heated debates involving a wide range of organizations claiming NGO and Voluntary status.

In VOLMED, a European project concerning the role of voluntary organizations in the European south, (supported by DG 23), participant organizations had to tackle issues of definition and appropriate criteria for enrolling in the pilot data base which was envisaged by the European Commission to serve as a policy tool. (Volmed 1997).

It is clear by now, that not only the state and the E.U, researchers and theoreticians of civil society, but, also, a wide range of organizations are involved in the search for definition, as it affects the possibility of their taking part in projects and policies, which means access to funds, information, networking and increased potential for goal achievement.

The term “Third Sector” is general, politically neutral and can encompass a wide range of organizational forms. In fact it mirrors the tendency in the nineties to encompass broader and more flexible definitions indicating wider social spaces. Salamon and Anheier offer a locational and relational definition to begin with, emphasizing the intermediate character of non-profit organizations, operating between the state and the market. (Salamon and Anheier 1998).

In a nominal article later on they add the importance of what has been termed “the social origins” of the third sector, arguing for the importance of socio-cultural and political specificity of third sector development in a historical context, and proceeding – along the lines of the influential paradigm introduced by Esping Andersen - to distinguish between different third sector regimes, in terms of two key dimensions: Government social welfare spending and the scale of the non-profit sector.:

- a. **The liberal**, where third sector provision acts as an important alternative to low government social spending.
- b. **the corporatist** where the state is forced, or induced to act in common with non-profits, seen as premodern mechanisms useful enough to maintain,
- c. **the social democratic**, with extensive state and limited third sector service provision, keeping more to an advocacy role, and
- d. **the statist** where both government and third sector provision remain limited.(Salamon and Anheier , Voluntas 1998).

Recent upsurge of interest in the revived concept of civil society has opened up new possibilities for defining the third sector , although the main focus seems to remain on the character and extent of relations with the state. References to the concept of “public space”, as employed by welfare pluralism, offer new possibilities which lead us beyond definitions emphasizing what non-profits and NGOs are not , rather than what they are, (prominent in earlier documents by the E.U.) (European Commission 1997).

II. The third sector as part of public space

From the standpoint of welfare pluralism the third sector” can be conceptualized as a specific dimension of public space in civil societies” (Evers, 1992 p.161), a space which is more of a” tension field” influenced by state institutions, the market economy, family and community, as they interrelate through ongoing shifts.

One important aspect of this systemic view is that it allows for different rationales to coexist and mix, exhibiting structural pluralism and diversity.It is the polyvalent and hybrid character of third sector organizations, which explains their willingness and ability to rely simultaneously on resources coming from different sectors as well as combining different rationales and developing multi-sectorial activities - a characteristic present in Greek voluntary organizations as observed by the Volmed project -(Volmed 1997).

The term “**conflictive cooperation**” is used to exemplify the dynamic relations between third sector organizations and other institutions in public space, which indicates, amongst other things, the changing nature of the private-public dichotomy, formal and informal worlds, as boundaries shift and become more permeable.(Evers 1992).

To these we would add the changing balance-particularly felt in social welfare- in the private collective dichotomy. In fact present trends are away from dichotomies and for interpreting synergetic mixes. This, also, indicates a shift away from state monopoly of the collective form in present day welfare regimes to sharing this role with third sector actors, especially NGOs and voluntary organizations.

The approach of welfare pluralism offers the possibility to take a closer look inside the third sector and to locate it within civil society, thus raising questions about politics and power distribution. We are also able to move away from previous attempts to define the sector in a negative way –what it is not – using the language of capital and state form of social relations – social capital, social economy, non-profit, non-governmental and others). Moreover, it includes relations with domestic space and the family, thus broadening up the private realm, and taking

into account recent gendered approaches to civil society - unlike the Hegelian, Marxist and Neo-Marxist approaches - (Stassinopoulou 1997).

Although discussion and research as regards the sector's relating to state institutions and the market is growing, we still know comparatively little about it internally. How are relations between different actors to be understood, which are the processes involved in the emergence, diverse development, disappearance or transformation of agencies within this universe? What affects choices for different types of management and power distribution mechanisms? We know little about third sector organizations as spaces where power is exercised. How do they succeed and fail in their goal attainment, or in their social mission?

There is even skepticism about the usefulness of the term "sector" when referring to such a multiplicity of diverse actors (Kramer 2000), as well as criticism of the tendency to explain third sector development in terms of state, or market failure. What about third sector failure in service provision, rights support or management and representation of interests? How do non-profit organizations behave as employers? What prospects and problems arise from combining commodified and non-commodified work in the present climate of restructuring the labour process? At any rate, we should avoid the trap of good non-profits versus bad state and market, and try to understand their rise in prominence in the light of actual research data and overall societal trends. (Salamon and Anheier 2000, the Global Transformations Reader 2000, Stassinopoulou 1997).

The shift of definition and analysis to the concept of civil society, by locating the neutral and rather obscure concept of third sector within public space broadens up our vision, only to introduce the problem at a different level.

III. The re-emergence of civil society

The concept of civil society made a dramatic come back with special reference to the changes in central and Eastern Europe regimes, linked to the proliferation of third sector organizations in these countries as part of societal change. Civil society re-emerged as the locus of democracy and an important defense mechanism against the creation of totalitarian movements and parties "which tend to emerge under conditions when broad masses of population enter political life in the absence of a developed civil society" (Keane 1998, 20).

In relation to the experience of Poland and Czechoslovakia, civil society has been associated with resistance against the Soviet Regime and totalitarian states. By now, we have interesting accounts of the upsurge of NGOs and voluntary agencies in Eastern Europe, raising important questions about the nature of the third sector in these countries, in the light of influence from a number of INGOs acting globally.

Another source of important questions, is the recent revival of civil society beyond the boundaries of Europe, which is considered to be the birthplace of the concept, grounded in the spirit of the Enlightenment and specific forms of secularized democracy. How can we account for the rise of civil society in Africa, Asia and Latin America? Or how can we define it in relation to the Islamic world? In Japan and Korea the search for an appropriate, equivalent term has been the center of heated anthropological debates, while according to recent analysis the East Asian "economic miracle" depends also on a host of social processes in the realm of civil society, including Trade Unions and various social movements, as well as religion and ethical values, moral and aesthetic reactions to modernity. (Keane 1998). In the Muslim world, especially Turkey, the emergence of an Islamist civil society from within is seen as the expression of opposition to secularization state policies. The Eurocentric approach to defining civil society is challenged, through references to the rise of a "post-secular civil society" which is endogenous to these countries and not planted in or imported. (Keane 1998, p. 28-31).

The distinction, it is argued, lies between tradition-bound societies, where belonging is very different from that characterizing civil society, which is seen as "a community of actors whose legally inscribed patterns of association are voluntary, and its members are equipped with the power to re-interpret and to transform the social and political structures within which they interact" (Keane 1998). This, of course, can be true of secular and post-secular societies alike,

raising interesting questions in countries like Greece, with the recent dynamic presence of the Orthodox church in civil society, in post –secular terms.

Attempts to interpret civil society display a wide range of definition, some remembering classics like Hegelian and Marxist accounts and others moving along modified tracks (e.g. neo-Gramscian approaches) which view civil society against the market.

Increasingly, the trend to redefine the third sector from the angle of civil society has been so prominent in the last decade, that we can speak of a shift of emphasis in civil society definition as well, as is apparent in Keane's influential work, where it is envisaged as "an ideal-typical category (in the sense of Max Weber) that both describes and envisages a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the State institutions that frame, constrict and enable their activities" (Keane 1998, p. 6).

The state, the economy and even domestic space are not fully separated from civil society, but their relation is mediated each time in specific historical and socio-cultural terms.

Civil society cannot exist and flourish without a state, and a free market, and, feminist thought argues, without understanding its relation to domestic space.

The language of civil society is expanding rapidly, used by different actors across the globe, while there is an impressive rise in NGOs at the international level (100 in 1900, 10.000 at the end of the nineties). Similarly, we are witnessing the increased networking between them across national borders and with international bodies (e.g. IMF, the World Bank). A new global humanitarianism with a language of its own moves beyond state boundaries with new meaning.

This trend is particularly relevant for the development and support of social cooperatives and social firms beyond the traditional confines of nation states. However, a word of caution is necessary here and it has to do with defining civil society itself:

Are we to replace the myth of a society without conflict and exclusions under the leading role of a welfare state with another myth of a civil society bringing changes from below and creating a new ethos of equality and inclusion? Apart from the ambiguity and confusion which still exists in relation to definitions, a closer look at the third sector itself reveals a much more complex reality, where inequality and exclusion are as present as equality and inclusion. Keane points out the dangers of birth and rebirth of civil society, because "it gives freedom to despots and democrats alike" (Keane 1998, p. 45). Pluralization of power within civil societies alongside the existence of strong, accountable state institutions and market autonomy seems to be a better guarantee for democracy. The message is clear: Civil society to become or remain "civil" needs political ordering, because it is riddled with conflict and inherent contradictions.

Such issues acquire new meaning and impetus when moving on to the global level. Current debates evolve around attempts to define and interpret an emerging Global Civil Society.

IV. Towards a "Global Civil Society" ?

The term Global Civil Society (GCS) has been in use for almost a decade, referring to a large extent to the growth of international NGOs and social movements, with emphasis on their presence in large protests against the negative effects of globalization in the neo-liberal style, under the power of the USA. Numbers are impressive: 25.540 INGOs in 2002, from only 6000 in 1990 (Taylor 2002) Seattle, Genoa, Porto Allegre have become milestones in the advent of GCS, This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg, if one tries to identify and analyze the kaleidoscopic terrain of cooperation, networking and intermeshing of third sector actors beyond frontiers, whose influential presence is already felt and acknowledged by established international organizations and national governments alike.

Many of those involved in the study of third sector and civil society have taken on the task of definition. The influential welfare mix approach is widened to encompass the global dimension, while keeping its main structural and systemic character, where GCS is defined as “the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks and individuals located between the family, the state and the market and operating beyond the confines of national societies, politics and economies” (Anheier et al. 2002).

Needless to say that the definition of GCS is influenced by the way globalization is conceptualized. A narrow economic, or ideological view does not take us very far, while a broader approach, which takes into account its spatio-temporal dimensions defines it as “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power” (Held et al 2002, p.55).

However, there are problems with the definition mentioned above as well, as it is value-neutral and moves along the lines of established discourse, silently accepting dominant social relations of power distribution and inequality according to gender, race and ethnic differences, culture, disability. Moreover, the human person as active agent is missing, while there is more talk of structures and forces than experience and feelings, otherness and alternative modes of (self) organization. (Taylor 2002). Along these lines, one of the challenges introduced by GCS is the rejection of dominant eurocentric and westernized views of society and more specifically civil society (as we have already mentioned).

The study of what is actually happening and the use of a different language, takes us beyond dominant discourses, while relating to positive and negative aspects of globalization experienced by different actors in diverse socio-cultural settings. Perhaps the most interesting examples are the ones where networking between third sector actors, social movements and traditional communities is prominent. Examples are WIEGO (Women in the Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing, or SDI (Slum / Shack Dwellers International. The empowered stance they take, alongside a mass, grassroots base, combined with extensive cooperation with international experts, academics and influential institutions at the national and international level has granted them recognition as agents to be taken seriously at the global level.

They know how to make good use of research and official data, challenging public policies and offering viable solutions to problems. Most significantly, they change definitions and affect dominant discourses and relationships between specialists and activists.

A number of important issues arise from such networking, especially relating to power distribution within GCS. One of the strongest expression of what this new field may mean is put by Sundaramma, a Baghdad woman activist, addressed to academic researchers and specialists :

“In the beginning you may walk in front of us. After a while, as we grow stronger you must walk beside us. But finally, you must learn to walk behind us “ (Batliwala 2002).

V. Concluding Remarks

It is apparent, even from a sketchy discussion as the above, that definition of the third sector is very important and that it is still an ongoing venture. Putting together some of the key approaches to it we can conceptualize it as:

“A dynamic and controversial part of civil society, embedded in public space, and open to historically specific interpenetrations between public and private, individual and collective articulations of the social sphere. It encompasses specific gendered, ethnic, secularist or post - secularist and post-disability rationales and a wide spectrum of objectives, ranging from service provision to advocacy and social activism. “

The social construction of exclusion rests on the acceptance of the public-private dichotomy in societies which are based on commodified work as a major inroad to social inclusion. New approaches to the third sector, civil society and global civil society may

challenge mainstream ideas, as they offer new openings for inclusion and change in established power relations.

Social cooperatives are specific forms of organization at the fringes of the third sector, where it is intersected by the market. State policies are important, for their legitimacy and institutional viability. Going global presents new opportunities and challenges in the effort to demand and create a new role for these people in civic space. Seen from another angle, it is a way of appropriating public space, beyond, but not necessarily against state policy. The choice of definitions is an important part in this process.

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