



THE ROLE OF THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS IN THE CHANGING WELFARE SYSTEMS OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION¹

Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) find themselves in a situation of being ‘welfare states in transition’ and where the welfare mix notion in terms of incorporating third sector organisations, besides other, especially market actors, into the production of welfare services has become part of social policy innovation. What is important is that, due to the influence of their historical paths, third sector organisations in CEECs share similar characteristics that simultaneously distinguish them from third sector organisations in other societies. These inward similarities and outward differences can be explained in the context of the state-socialist type of welfare system that prevailed in these societies for almost half a century. There has been a ‘boom’ in the development of third sector organisations since the system change, although the third sector in these countries is still heavily ambiguous. As a result, the third sector in these countries has been often labelled an ambiguous sector. However, a pattern of development can already be seen of the role of third sector organisations in the changing welfare systems of the examined countries, especially in terms of the prevailing principle: complementarity or supplementarity to the public sector. Hence, despite the general similarities there are some striking differences in the development level and characteristics of third sector organisations that have emerged in a relatively short period in the mentioned societies. This is particularly in terms of the development of service providing organisations and how they are becoming integrated into the changing welfare systems.

As the basic and potentially guiding research framework of the thematic section we introduce socio-political discourses/strategies that are commonly employed by national actors across Europe to plan and implement reforms. In this way we were able to limit the ‘endless’ plurality of emerging welfare systems and trends in third sector development. The mentioned discourses/strategies (more is written about them in the first contribution by Zinka Kolarič) are defined as concepts and as practices/strategies which include the priorities of certain actors and their coalitions with which they legitimise their struggle for power (Evers, 2008: 2). The implementation of these strategies or their individual elements determines the character of the

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changing/emerging welfare systems and thereby the third sector's importance and role as an important structural element of them. One should not forget that within individual systems different strategies or even elements of strategies were applied in different socio-political fields, thereby creating the impression of ad-hoc solutions that are becoming institutionalised.

Our primary aim was therefore to search for and explain the interdependence among changes in entire welfare systems and changes in the importance, character and role of third sector organisations in Central and Eastern European societies. We have sought to accomplish this goal by tackling the following or similar questions: Which strategies or their individual elements form the basis of socio-political reforms/changes in individual fields? Which social actors are the initiators and creators of the reforms/changes? How have the actors changed over the last 15 years? To what extent has the proportion changed between third sector organisations which are primarily service providers and those which operate for the common good of its members (i.e. expressive organisations) in the last 15 years? What is the position of third sector organisations in the hierarchy of sectors that provide individual types of services? What is the character of third sector organisations (is it determined by the organisations' operating principles and the instruments that are applied)? What is the role of third sector organisations in the overall welfare system and regarding the relationship with users/citizens?

The first contribution in the thematic section by Kolarič discusses in detail the theoretical issues concerning third sector research in CEECs and exposes the main paths of possible future activity in the field. The theoretical and methodological considerations of the first contribution are followed by an analysis of the third sector's characteristics in Slovenia and its role in the Slovenian welfare system. The authors, Črnak-Meglič and Rakar, also attempt to understand the third sector's position within the Slovenian welfare system through a comparative analysis of that sector's characteristics and its role in other post-socialist and other European countries. The section continues by explaining the third sector's role in Serbia's changing welfare system, whereby Kolin explains the role of civil society and non-governmental organisations during the period of social and economic transition. In a similar fashion, Ba{i} discusses the transition of the welfare system in Bosnia and Herzegovina by focusing on the main faces of the transition and pinpointing the unique features of the Bosnian experience. Somewhat differently, Deželan seeks to identify key the characteristics of the third sector's role in CEECs by analysing Slovenian policy on illicit drugs. The author focuses on the nature of specific civil society organisations in order to determine the drawbacks of public funding in the field. The section concludes with explanations of differences and similarities in the development of denominational schools in the special environment of post-socialist countries. Rakar clari-

fies that different state policies regarding the segment of third sector organisations can influence their development, but warns against making generalisations from the findings of comparative third sector research since numerous factors can play an important role in third sector realm, as with the case of denominational schools. All things considered, we hope we have contributed to third sector research in CEECs and most of all raised awareness about the sector's importance and fragility.

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