



Working Paper

**Partnering with Civil Society Organizations.
The role of volunteers and not for profit organizations
in the provision of welfare services**

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CIRIEC No. 2019/10

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Partnering with Civil Society Organizations. The role of volunteers and not for profit organizations in the provision of welfare services*

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Working paper CIRIEC No. 2019/10

* Paper presented at the 7th *CIRIEC International Research Conference on Social Economy "Social and Solidarity Economy: Moving Towards a New Economic System"*, Bucharest (Romania), 6-9 June 2019.

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to make a distinctive contribution to the emergence of a new form of partnership between municipalities and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). These collaborations are articulated at the border between the public and the society as well as between the formal and the informal economy.

We revise the Esping-Andersen paradigm about the three main welfare regimes, where the welfare state, the family and the market are seen as three sources of managing social risks (Esping-Andersen, 1999), and we illustrate how the collaboration between CSOs and local administrations might improve the connection between the state and the citizens.

In the perspective of the Third Sector Reform, which is actually underway in Italy, the hybridization of different forms of organizations could bring innovative solutions to the new real social risks of the communities. Specifically, this form of collaboration between local public administrations and the CSOs is part of the theme of volunteering and social citizenship, which advocates citizens' empowerment in the production of social welfare and services of general interest. This area of collaboration is positioned between social rights and social obligations and provides a contribution that fosters the redistributive capacity of the public sphere through a participatory policy making

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations, active citizenship, family welfare

JEL Codes: I38, L31

1. Introduction

Do Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a role in the provision of welfare services? If yes, what should they do and how should they interact with public administrations? In this paper, we try to illustrate how these questions might have different answers depending on the socioeconomic and territorial framework, people's availability to participate in the third sector, and the level of entitlement accorded to SSE organizations (especially CSOs) by the public sector in contributing to the provision of public services.

Indeed, CSOs are a group of non-profit institutions characterized by extreme heterogeneity of purposes, resources and geographical scales of action; therefore, their global impact on a selected topic of interest might be rather unpredictable. Based on this, whether CSOs should play a role in the provision of welfare services or not is a reasonable question to ask and the answer is neither straightforward nor unique.

Second, even by recognizing the positive impact of a group of CSOs' action on a specific topic of interest, its magnitude remains unpredictable, as it mostly depends on the level of civic engagement that CSOs will be able to raise with the available resources, rather than on the scarce resources available. However, civic engagement primarily depends on people's willingness to cooperate (often at least partially voluntarily) in the achievement of a purpose of civic interest, and only secondarily on actions (i.e., communication campaigns, events, participative processes...) that the CSOs might implement.

Third, CSOs' involvement in the provision of welfare services often requires a public authorization to proceed - therefore the effectiveness of their actions is subordinated to the level of entitlement they receive from the public sector. There are also cases where CSOs intervene in the provision of welfare services mostly to compensate for a deficiency of the public administration and without requiring any authorization, but these circumstances go beyond the scope of this analysis that focuses instead on the opportunity to formally and substantially involve CSOs in the supply of welfare services within a legal framework established by the public sector.

Clearly, the "convenience" of allowing CSOs to participate in the provision of welfare services could be investigated empirically by assessing costs and benefits in selected cases of interest, but we believe that before performing this kind of analyses, more effort should be devoted to the sociological, political and theoretical implications of partnering with CSOs. Indeed, in our opinion, the rationale lying beyond this kind of interinstitutional cooperation needs further analysis to better identify the scopes (primary, secondary...) and

the baseline scenario that should be considered when estimating costs and benefits (direct and indirect).

Finally, there might be political and sociological reasons to foster (or not) CSOs' involvement in the provision of welfare services whose relevance might overcome the economic evaluation of costs and benefits, independently from the positive or negative response of the latter. Consider, as an example, considerations involving the effectiveness or the universality of a specific welfare activity (i.e., political representation, healthcare services, education, ecosystem services...).

Based on this, in the following paragraphs we discuss major theoretical issues related to CSOs' involvement in the provision of welfare services in local settings. Therefore, we present a case study related to the implementation of family policies in South Tyrol through a process of governance involving the local public administrations entitled to supply family services, households living in rural areas, and local associations. Finally, we conclude by proposing certain policy recommendations.

2. What do we mean by civil society?

According to Perez-Diaz (2014), the meaning of civil society, and therefore the groups of institutions that could be included under this umbrella, has a complex nature, and several milestones in its historical evolution should be considered before discussing its current meaning³.

Based on Perez-Diaz's analysis, by CSOs, we mean a wide array of institutions with heterogeneous aims and scopes that cannot be considered neither market nor state institutions. According to Coraggio (2015), CSOs should be placed within a set of SSE institutions operating at the borders between the public and popular economy, therefore within an area of overlapping public and socioeconomic interests. This perspective is close to the third sector's agenda illustrated by Perez-Diaz (CS3). However, most CSOs pursue goals of non-profit (or at least, not-for-profit) nature, and contribute to animate a debate on ethics and moral concerns that should inspire social (formal and informal) norms. Therefore, in our view, civil society includes also some topics included in the second and fourth definitions (CS4). Finally, we consider the role of CSOs within a western model of society and we emphasize CSOs' institutional capability of fostering the process of socioeconomic integration and effective democratization (CS1 and CS2).

³ The table in Appendix summarizes Peres-Diaz' findings on civil society's complex and multifaceted nature (Perez-Diaz, 2014).

Consistent literature on CSOs focused on the role played by the latter in democratizing global governance, i.e., on their relevance within the public sphere (consider, as an example, Fukuyama, 2000; Scholte, 2002; Lister and Carbone, 2006; Castells, 2008; Bernauer and Betzold, 2012). Without overlooking the important lessons drawn, we shift the focus of the analysis toward recent literature that sheds light on how CSOs and, more in general, the institutions of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) might contribute to democratize local contexts by empowering marginalized people, fostering the accumulation of social capital and contributing to improve local welfare in partnership with local administrations (Utting, 2018; Salustri and Viganò, 2018). While these issues might seem more distant from the intrinsic political nature of CSOs, it is worth mentioning that in marginalized contexts a legal democracy, rather than being a starting point, constitutes an end, and its achievement should be supported by a preliminary action aimed at achieving some practical needs, i.e., a decent level of local welfare, market accessibility and people's well-being.

This issue is also relevant in all those national settings characterized by a shirking welfare state due to occurred unsustainability of public debt. In all those cases, governments forced to achieve primary surpluses might find it extremely convenient to involve a third sector in the provision of public services (within a normative framework and under a constant monitoring process) in order to avoid collateral effects of spending cuts. By contributing to the widespread availability of welfare services, the third sector might indirectly foster a process of socioeconomic integration and a higher level of democracy. Finally, it is worth mentioning that CSOs and, more in general, SSE institutions might foster a process of identification and exploitation of the territorial capital within the economic process (public and private), therefore achieving a higher level of effectiveness and factor productivity of local, regional and national economies, independently from the initial level of territorial and social development.

3. The Esping-Andersen paradigm revisited

Based on this, we contribute to revisiting the Esping-Andersen paradigm by extending its field of analysis, i.e., by considering also non-Pareto optimal settings, such as peripheral territorial and social contexts at risk of marginalization and exclusion. Indeed, in his seminal contribution, Esping-Andersen (1999) proposed a comparison among three models of welfare: the Scandinavian model, the Anglo-Saxon model and the European Continental model. In the same year, he also presented a short contribution illustrating the

Pareto-optimality of reforms aimed at achieving a “comprehensive welfare state (with or without an extensive third sector)” (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

While agreeing on the Pareto-optimality of a comprehensive welfare state, we cast some doubts on its implementation in countries, such as Italy, affected by a high and unsustainable public debt, low or even negative GDP growth rates and stagnant labour productivity. Within this discouraging scenario, the Pareto-optimal scenarios are too far to be achieved in the short run. Rather, the trade-off is between “getting some fresh air” (i.e., a higher level of current public welfare) at a cost of a higher public deficit and debt, and the empowerment of CSOs and, more generally, third sector’s institutions to foster civic engagement and identify and exploit untapped human and territorial resources.

Both measures aim at raising the current level of welfare, but while the former, in a context of low GDP growth and stagnant productivity, raises public debt and interests to be paid in the future at the cost of lower public welfare, the latter provides an opportunity to move toward the welfare-efficiency Pareto-optimal frontier by cutting public expenditure (achieving sound public finances) and/or by reducing taxes (fostering economic growth). Therefore, our claim is that, when the welfare-efficiency frontier is too far to be reached, rather than extending the public provision of welfare services, the public sector should arrange partnerships with CSOs to increase the supply of welfare services with an intensity that is inversely proportional to the distance of the economy from frontier. This claim might integrate the Esping-Andersen paradigm and its conclusions concerning the best welfare regime given a Pareto-optimal scenario. Indeed, in less developed economies, or in advanced economies facing a protracted stagnation, public finance constraints, underdeveloped markets, corruption and other distance costs might consistently reduce the effectiveness and the efficiency of the public sector. Consequently, CSOs might achieve at least a comparative advantage with respect to the public sector in providing welfare services in local settings due to their proximity to local needs, and therefore their lower exposure to the previously mentioned limiting factors.

In brief, without neglecting the fact that in Pareto-optimal contexts characterized by the absence of constraints on government action public welfare is the best option to choose, we notice that the third sector (and within it, civil society) is the most resilient and, therefore, most suitable option to face marginalization and exclusion at least in peripheral settings. This consideration, however, does not exclude the role that CSOs might play in providing welfare services also in central places, but we believe that in those cases their

contribution might shift toward involvement in the public sphere, with the public sector supplying the highest share of welfare services.

Finally, even if these situations usually go beyond the scope of our analysis, it is worth noting that, rather than a complementary, CSOs may play an alternative role with respect to the public sector. This may occur when the government refuses to supply specific welfare services that are legitimately demanded by one or more groups of citizens. In this case, CSOs, by directly supplying the welfare services demanded, may provide a contribution that is both economic and political, and they may also foster an effective process of democratization while raising the wellbeing of citizens.

Our analysis, however, is mainly focused on those cases in which, by overcoming the diffidence in loyal cooperation between CSOs and public administrations, it becomes possible to foster the implementation of joint actions, merging the component of grassroots welfare production (the activism of CSOs) with the public intervention of the municipalities, i.e., the public institutions that are most capable of satisfying the real needs of families and citizens in terms of specific services due to their proximity to the beneficiaries.

4. Volunteering and social citizenship

The analysis of the forms of collaboration between the public sector and CSOs is part of the theme of volunteering and social citizenship, as it implicitly assumes the existence of active citizens that, if mobilized, might contribute to the provision of welfare services, raising the level of wellbeing of the beneficiaries. This area of collaboration really is a voluntary space positioned between social rights and social obligations, which provides a contribution to the improvement of the redistributive capacity and effectiveness of the public sector through a participatory policy making that at the same time extends the borders of the public sphere.

Traditionally, volunteering has been considered as an additional source of economic value for the labour market (Salamon et al., 2011). In the standard perspective, therefore, volunteering is assumed to be a peculiar category of labour with a considerable number of divergent rules and dynamics compared to the standard labour patterns, but still able to provide goods and services to the community as all other categories of labour. Indeed, in most of our previous researches (Viganò and Salustri, 2015; Salustri and Viganò, 2017; Salustri and Viganò, 2018), we also considered volunteering and the third sector as instruments to achieve goals of economic interest. Specifically, we defined the third sector as a capability-enhancing workplace, i.e., a social

environment able to improve the conversion factors that allow individuals to turn goods and services into functionings (Kuklys, 2005; Kuklys and Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns, 2005). Furthermore, we illustrated how the third sector might provide alternative sources of employment in marginalized places and during crises based on its informal nature and flexible management system to reduce costs of endowments and improve adaptive strategies. Finally, we explained how the empowerment of the third sector might help to reduce the public burden of the provision of collective services, contributing to a spending review process and redirecting the private sector toward more sophisticated and innovative economic activities.

However, volunteering, while being exploited in the production of goods and services to the community, also contributes to the accumulation of social capital by intensifying the relations among individuals and provides a contribution to the amplification of the public sphere. Indeed, a flexible working place where people are highly involved in deliberation and decision processes offers to the individuals the opportunity to experience an entrepreneurial activity and promotes the recognition of multiple perspectives, inducing people to improve their competences and their level of agency. Finally, in the perspective of the implementation of the Third Sector Reform, which is underway in Italy, the hybridization of different forms of non-profit organizations could bring innovative solutions to tackle the new real social risks of the communities.

In brief, even when the provision of welfare services is placed before the extension of the public sphere, it is worth noting that volunteering implies an intrinsic motivation of the individuals that at least indirectly fosters social integration and a process of democratization. In other words, even when volunteering is valued only for its secondary value (i.e., its economic value), its real value is higher and primarily related to the extension of the public sphere that is achieved, if not directly, at least as a by-product.

5. A case study: implementation of family policies in South Tyrol's rural areas

Based on the aforementioned, we will now illustrate a case study concerning the implementation of family policies in South Tyrol regulated by the Provincial Law n.8/2013 on family development and support. The case of South Tyrol is of particular interest as the Provincial administration is implementing a network involving citizens, families, municipalities and other local administrations animated by a decentralized process of governance and monitored by a public agency, with the aim of identifying specific family needs especially in rural

areas characterized by lack of family services. Indeed, South Tyrolean rural areas are often marginalized places, i.e., small mountain villages often lacking public transport services to urban centres.

The social partnerships implemented in South Tyrol at the municipal scale create new connections among the local administrations and South Tyrolean families, and therefore represent an attempt to overcome the marketization of welfare by means of new forms of co-development and co-determination of welfare policies key objectives at the municipal scale. The emphasis on the provision of basic welfare services implicitly includes an extension of the political sphere fostered and coordinated by the municipalities. The latter, however, compared to provincial and other local administrations, are more effective in targeting families' needs by supplying *ad hoc* services, as new needs are easily identified by coordinating a system of households' representatives (*Familien Referenten*), and *ad hoc* projects can be quickly implemented.

It is worth noting that the South Tyrolean public sector has been facing over the past years a period of expansion and recalibration rather than a phase of retrenchment. Therefore, the Provincial administration is effectively pursuing the design of need-based family policies when partnering with CSOs at municipal level, rather than sustainability of public finances. It is clear that in cases of retrenchment, the additional goal of sound local public finances might add to the intrinsic motivation of fostering a better work-life balance.

In both cases, the success of the initiative passes by a higher degree of municipalities' managerial independence, but what really matters is the institution of the system of households' representatives and private organizations (CSOs) to foster households' political representation and process knowledge sharing, co-design of new ideas and resource pooling (*Ideenbörse*).

Finally, the measures activated in support of South Tyrolean families aim at achieving a balanced family development by means of preventive actions directed towards reinforcing relational, educational and parental competences.

The programmed actions are directly implemented by interested citizens under the supervision of the municipality. The areas of intervention are selected according to identified local needs concerning households' work-life balance and training activities for young people at risk of abandoning the peripheral territories in which they live. The implemented actions range from the supply of a direct subsidy, to the co-production of programmed actions with interested citizens, while the interface between the municipality and the residents is provided by a dense network of associations and volunteers.

6. The results of the explorative analysis

Taking into account these considerations, this paragraph illustrates the results of an explorative analysis involving two Municipalities in South Tyrolean rural mountain areas. A recognition of the implemented actions has been conducted using the standard tools of the explorative method (an interview plan involving the majors and interested assessors of the two municipalities and the *Familien Referenten* and a desk analysis). It is worth noting that the two municipalities (Salorno and Trodena inhabitants - 3,829 and 1,026 respectively) are both characterized by a high risk of depopulation (especially the young feel strong impulses to migrate), low population density, little or none services of general interest, lack of direct connection to the closest urban centres. Therefore, in both municipalities, social and territorial risks tend to overlap according to a multiplicative model, raising the need of welfare policies aimed at supporting household's quality of life and work-life balance.

Table 1 illustrates the actions implemented that we were able to survey. It is worth noting that only few actions were implemented in both municipalities and only in few cases the Province was directly involved. Secondly, the family policies targeted several classes of beneficiaries, generating direct and indirect benefits for an ample share of local dwellers (i.e., the family policies were considered both as an end and a means to foster local development). Thirdly, it is worth noting the wide array of activities implemented, and, in most cases, their multipurpose and hybrid nature, probably due to the plurality of actors involved in the governance process and their proximity to local needs, suggesting the existence of economies of scope that might be difficult to detect at higher scales of analysis.

7. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we explored several arguments suggesting that the involvement of CSOs in the provision of welfare services might improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of public policies targeting social and/or territorial inequalities. Indeed, CSOs create an interface between local administrations and active citizens, therefore playing a role that is both of economic and of political nature. In a third sector perspective, CSOs contribute directly to the provision of welfare services, while in a sociological perspective they facilitate the extension of the public sphere and contribute to the accumulation of social capital. In all these connotations, CSOs play a peculiar role that could be hardly transferred to market and/or public institutions. Therefore, even if they could be placed in an area of overlapping public and social interests, CSOs have a specific identity within the Social and Solidarity

Economy (SSE) that might reveal to be of the utmost importance to foster a process of effective democratization, socioeconomic integration and economic development.

Table 1. Results of the explorative analysis: action surveyed in Salorno and Trodena

Beneficiaries	Activity	Salorno	Trodena	Province
Adults, Families	Work-life balance improvement in local enterprises	Yes	Yes	Family and profession Audit
Elderly	Social gardens,	Yes	No	
	Vigilant grandparents,	Yes	No	
	Food distribution at low tariffs,	Yes	Yes	
	Blood sampling mobile spot	Yes	No	
	Mehrgenerationenwohnen, elderly house with intergenerational activities	No	Yes	
Kids, local farmers	School canteen with local food (zero km) and menù shared with the local health unit.	Yes	No	
Children, Kids	Summer recreational activities with surveillance	Yes	No	
	Social integration activities (work with local craftsmen and retailers, school-work activities) paid with a credit to be spent locally.	Yes	No	Subsidies
	Volunteering activities with the neighbouring municipalities (social services, caregiving activities)	Yes	No	
	Youth Municipal Council	No	Yes	
	Sport activities	No	Yes	
	Recreational associations (chorus, soccer, sky, climbing)	No	Yes	
	Safe roads	No	Yes	
	Vigilant volunteers for kids at schools	No	Yes	
All citizens	“Coffee of ideas”: open invitation to the local population in a club for brainstorming and audit	No	Yes	
	Volunteering activities (associations award)	No	Yes	
	Time bank	No	Yes	

Source: our elaboration on the data surveyed.

Notwithstanding their peculiar nature, CSOs might also contribute instrumentally to pursuing goals of different nature, i.e., by mitigating negative effects of restrictive fiscal policy aimed at making public finance more sustainable, offering a capability-enhancing workplace to the unemployed, and

by contributing to narrow territorial and social imbalances. Finally, CSOs might empower active citizens to contribute to the achievement of goals of public interest, by disseminating information and by implementing projects able to improve the efficient use of resources at the local scale by means of identification of economies of scope.

In the two cases surveyed, we recognized most of the issues discussed at the conceptual level. Specifically, we noticed a high degree of variety of implemented actions and, in many cases, their hybrid nature aimed at achieving economies of scope. Clearly, after having recognized the territorial and social needs, a selection of the most effective and efficient alternatives of development among the numerous activities implemented might foster the achievement of economies of scale in the implementation phase without losing the benefits of economies of scope initially identified. To conclude, the implementation of family policies in South Tyrol seems to be a best practice that might deserve further analysis in order to draw useful inferences on the role of CSOs in the provision of welfare services in partnership with the public sector, and on their capability to foster and enhance volunteering as a means of extending the public sphere, fostering social integration and promoting socioeconomic development.

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Appendix A. Multiple meanings of civil society

	Brief definition	Historical meaning	Current use
CS1	Limited government, markets, a public sphere and voluntary associations	A framework of practices and institutions that brings together, in a systemic whole, a polity defined by limited government, accountable to a representative body and to public opinion, under the rule of law, and “commercial and polite society”: a market economy and a society where voluntary associations play an important role.	A western model of society that blended liberal democracy, markets, a welfare system and a plural society (a web of associations)
CS2	Market and associations	Markets were assumed to create interdependencies, prosperity and a peaceful compromise among conflicting interests. A myriad of associations was expected to foster a sense of community. They were part of a public sphere, shared with politicians. At the same time, they attended local constituencies, nurtured religious experiences and enmeshed in networks of friends and families to find resources, incentives and opportunities for expressing their identity, solving problems and developing their own voice, later to be heard in the public domain.	A return of civil society creates the conditions for democratic transition and consolidation, since habits and institutions shaped by the experience of markets and associations are basic preconditions for democracy to come about and succeed in the long run.
CS3	Associations and social networks of any kind	Markets cannot increase society’s collective knowledge by means of either the dispersed, practical knowledge fostered by Hayekians or the technical and socio-political expertise revered by Keynesians. Instead, modern social theory emphasizes the integrative potential of associations.	Three research agendas, on social capital, the third sector and the public sphere, have developed, which highlight the public dimension of voluntary associations.
CS4	A subset of associations that convey a moral message connected with the value of civility	The way associations and institutional contexts work depends, on the micro level, on people’s culture, i.e., on their making a commitment to a set of values and translating these into a way of life. Individuals are invited to take part in a normative debate and choose their side.	A subset of civil associations pursuing a virtuous, good society as defined by the ideals of civility, of a society of (meta) reflective individuals, and of a deliberative society.

Source: our elaboration on Perez-Diaz (2014).

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ISSN 2070-8289
ISBN 978-2-931051-09-2
EAN 9782931051092
<http://doi.org/10.25518/ciriec.wp201910>
D/2019/1406/10-d

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