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QUALIFICATION AND QUALITY IN THE THIRD SECTOR: EXPERIENCES IN TWO PORTUGUESE REGIONS

Abstract:

In most industrialized countries the 3rd sector has shown a significant growth, both in the number of organisations, and in the number and diversity of its intervention areas, which has allowed a greater visibility of the activities and services that it provides. In Portugal, there is a lack of national data on the way the organisations of this sector operate due to its heterogeneity in terms of juridical forms and organisational structures. The reality of the Portuguese third sector is characterized by a diversity of organisational models. There is a set of problems linked to the management and internal functioning of the organisations that form the third sector, which reduces the efficiency and the provision of quality services. The weaknesses of the sector may be tackled with a qualification support programme that promotes the development of skills in the third sector organisations, improving their performance quality and contributing to its sustainability.

The Project "Qualifying the 3rd sector" (Q3) is an intervention methodology for organizations in this sector, which seeks to develop individual skills, improving the quality of its provision and management effectiveness through participated and supported consulting and training processes. This project acts in the North, Centre, Alentejo and Algarve regions, involving 96 entities in the 3rd sector.

The aim of this study is to present the results of the project assessment in the intervened institutions in two regions of Portugal (North and Alentejo). A mixed approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods was used. In-depth interviews were conducted with regional consultants teams (two project coordinators and 13 consultants), and a questionnaire survey was applied to board members and technical staff of the 47 intervened organizations in the two regions.

The results are varied in relation to the parameters in evaluation. The intervened institutions recognize the unquestionable contribution of this programme to the qualification of their human capital. The programme left relevant prints in the intervened organisations such as, the provision of management support tools, the rethinking of attitudes and behaviours, a greater accountability and an increase of knowledge as well as a higher efficiency and efficacy in the provision of services thus increasing their quality. Some reflections, although not intended to be generalized to all organizations in the sector, may be useful for a better understanding of their functioning and to establish itself as a tool to support a more professional and thus a more competitive management, are identified.

Keywords:

Qualification; Quality; Management; Third sector