

SOTIRIS PETROPOULOS

University of the Peloponnese, Greece

TOWARDS A RETRANSFORMATION OF THE ORGANIZED CIVIL SOCIETY: THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF AN "EVALUATION CULTURE"

Abstract:

During the past decades the world community has witnessed an unprecedented rise of civil society in general and of organized civil society in particular. Indisputably, civil society has been the new keyword in issues ranging from governance to economic development. Likewise, the state has expanded the use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) towards the provision of welfare policies, a trend already evident in the field of development assistance since the early 1980s. In essence, the collaboration of the state and the global community overall with the organized civil society had become short of a panacea for all sorts of problems and issues. Moreover, although there are many cases in which ambitious NGOs have called the offensive on private companies, during the past decade the two sides seem to have found a way to cooperate with each other. In general, NGOs would be asked to assist in the execution of welfare programs (by the state), the implementation of development assistance projects (by the donors' community) and the orchestration of private companies' corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR) in most cases just by submitting a simple application or after a meeting with their new counterparts. The financial crisis of 2007-8 much affected the world, especially as far as funding availability is concerned. Throughout the world liquidity was significantly decreased affecting not only financial institutions and corporations but also NGOs. Especially in Europe, the consequent debt crisis has tremendously restrained the ability of many (southern) EU member-states to fund the organized civil society. In essence, the period of cash-cows was partly terminated and this reinforced a trend already present since the 1990s, i.e. that of searching for effectiveness. Issues of value for money (VfM) and of impact evaluation already existed in the business world and had gradually expanded to public finance, at least in the anglo-saxon world. The fact that funding was scarcer than ever before created the need to evaluate what this funding achieves. The introduction of wealthy private foundations of successful businessmen like Soros, Buffet and Gates in the field of welfare provision certainly reinforced this tendency of enforcing evaluation and impact assessment to the NGOs sector. The various scandals related to NGOs fraud and corruption as well as reported failures to bring results has also pushed towards this direction. This paper explores the expansion of an "evaluation culture" in the global organized civil society and its relevant effect to the operations of NGOs throughout the world.

Keywords:

ngos, organized civil society, funding, financial crisis, evaluation culture