

Civil Society in the Age of Disruption

The Golem, a powerful yet potentially dangerous creature. A gentle, helpful being that may yet run amok at any moment.

Civil Society – conceived as a sphere of dynamic and responsive discourse between the state, the public sphere and the market (Janoski 1998) – is a realm in society inhabited by a specific set of organisations. Their existence is often explained by either failures of markets or of politics (Hansmann 1980), thus introducing CSOs as a kind of Golem to fill these gaps. Amidst market implosions, environmental crises, on-going transitions of traditional government and the jostling for position amongst developed and developing economies, CSOs are often yearningly expected as cure-all solutions in many fields of society. However, the external conditions for organising – the resources or bases of legitimacy as well as regulations – are transforming, perhaps irrevocably. This can effect the CSO methods, missions and management applied, and can also happen through a diversity of learning, copying, or translating processes (e.g., Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón 2005) within the CSOs as well as between different organisations and sectors.

In this subtheme we propose to gain an understanding of the relationship between on the one hand *how change is organised in CSOs* in response to altered external conditions, on the other hand *how societal changes are organised by CSOs* and we hope to do this by exploring the developments in a shifting *civil society* landscape. While we are looking for a diversity of papers in terms of theoretical as well as methodological approaches, in this stream we particularly welcome papers that delve into the following aspects of transitions, transformations and translations:

Theme 1. Arid lands for CSOs: What changes in the landscape can be seen?

In the 19th and 20th centuries mass movements emerged in many countries as strong collective forces that engineered social change, and that later turned into strong institutions with established relations both to the state and the field business, as well as to the general public. Faced with an on-going individualisation and other processes often associated with modernity, it seems that the importance of this type of firmly organized assemblies has been weakened. This raises the dual, partly inter-related and pertinent questions of (a) *how the position and role of these older organisations will change or re-assemble*, as well as (b) *which new types of assemblies will emerge and what roles these new kids on the block may play in shaping our societies*. These questions may also be treated on several levels. At the global level, it is argued that the rise of a global network society and the process of increasingly more fluid nation-state borders are both thoroughly changing communication patterns, scope and hierarchical relations within and between communities and organisations (Castells, 1996). At the local level, CSOs have earlier been conceived as integrative forces, that enhance social capital (Hooghe & Stolle, 2003; Putnam, 2001) and processes of democracy (Tocqueville, Kessler, & Grant 2000). Faced with more instrumental public policies, processes of individualisation and of increasingly heterogeneous European societies, it is important to note that the assembling capacity of CSOs has been seriously questioned (e.g., Putnam 2007). Furthermore, many CSOs are surviving today within a bleak resource environment. The multiple sources of support from which they draw are declining or disappearing in tandem with growth in demand for CSO advocacy and services. For organisations already in financial crisis, there are few options. In this theme, we therefore invite papers that document and analyse the changing resource and support context for CSOs and the effects of these changes in the current civil society landscape.

Theme 2. Guess who's coming to dinner tonight: Identity and boundary work.

Placed at the intersection between different sectors, societal aims and groups of stakeholders, it is reasonable to assume that many of our current CSOs are engaged in continuous boundary work and the (re-)construction of viable identities (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail 1994). Lately, concepts of pluralism and hybridity have gained force as analytical tools, both within organizational theory in general (Kraatz & Block 2008) and within studies of CSOs (Evers & Laville 2004). We argue that CSOs seem particularly apt for studying how diverging logics and multiple constituencies may be held together through organization, and the consequences of pluralism over time. Like many public sector organisations – as argued by Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson (2000) – CSOs may also be conceived as having particularly unclear boundaries towards their environment and a precarious autonomy. *We therefore invite papers that can shed light on internal organisational processes of maintenance and disruption within the context of changing external environments.*

We encourage analytical attempts to explore contemporary themes of CSO transition and change – for example dressed in the language of social entrepreneurship, new philanthropy, or social investments – but also found in different forms of organisational collaboration, reconfiguration, diversification and specialisation.

Theme 3. The Golem turning: Civil society and claims on legitimacy.

In this theme, we look for contributions that explore shifting attitudes to CSOs and the evolving negative tendency within the public discourse to be based on perceptions of low accountability, inefficiency and duplication of activities. In the face of economic shock and core legitimacy challenges, are the CSOs now increasingly being understood as becoming more introvert or even dangerous for society? As leaders focus on the survival of their own organisations, what are the implications for the advocacy and service delivery they are understood to provide? We would also like to explore CSOs as drivers of change, creators of disturbances and proponents of shock in various fields of the organisational landscape. We invite papers that specifically explore the role of *CSOs as agents, facilitators or provocateurs of a changing or even disrupted societal landscape*. In a similar vein and under this theme of societal disruption we also invite contributions that address *CSO organising modes with impact on organisational practices in the public or for profit sector*.

Theme 4. Reassembling Research: Organisations, so what?

The study of civil society is a truly interdisciplinary field, which assembles political scientists, historians, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, as well as scholars in management. The above reflections on how CSOs participate in the processes of assembling, disrupting and re-assembling society, beg the question of which role theories on civil society organizing may contribute to the wider theorisation of civil society as a whole. *We therefore would like to invite reflections upon the consequences of existing scholarly constructions of CSOs, their roles and functions, for the research field more broadly defined*. Does it matter which understanding of organisation we apply – for example either as bounded or as a permeable entity? How apt are our concepts of organisation to handle and integrate heterogeneity, either in terms of diverse institutional logics (e.g. professionalism vs volunteerism) or ethnic pluralism? What is the possible impact of CSO research and theorising to research on broader topics such as integration, community building, the shaping of global policies and the reproduction of social capital? In this final theme we also want to reconnect with the CSO subtheme sessions held in Vienna and Amsterdam. In these sessions, presenters documented the move to sectoral borderlands, in which some of the most interesting organisational and interorganisational practices could be observed at the overlap of public, private and CSO sectors. In this theme, we invite exploration of the perils and opportunities of the borderlands. *What are the implications when CSOs become less distinctive in form and practice from public and private counterparts, i.e. when our Golem becomes more and more human-like?*

References

- Brunsson, N., & Sahlin-Andersson, K. 2000. Constructing Organizations: Public Sector Reform. *Organization Studies*, 21(4): 721-746.
- Castells, M. 1996. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol. 1. The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford Blackwell.
- Czarniawska, B., & Sevón, G. 2005. *Global ideas. How ideas, objects and practices travel in the global economy*. Malmö: Liber.
- Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. 1994. Organizational Images and Member Identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2): 239-263.
- Evers, A., & Laville, J.-L. 2004. Social services by social enterprises: on the possible contributions of hybrid organizations and a civil society. In A. Evers, & J.-L. Laville (Eds.), *The Third Sector in Europe*: 237-255. Celtenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Hooghe, M., & Stolle, D. 2003. *Generating Social Capital. Civil Society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Janoski, T. 1998. *Citizenship and civil society : a framework of rights and obligations in liberal, traditional, and social democratic regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kraatz, M. S., & Block, E. S. 2008. Organizational Implications of Institutional Pluralism. In R. Suddaby, R. Greenwood, & K. Sahlin (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*: 243-275. New York: Sage.
- Putnam, R. D. 2001. *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Putnam, R. D. 2007. *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2): 137-174.
- Tocqueville, A. d., Kessler, S., & Grant, S. D. 2000. *Democracy in America*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers.

About the convenors:

Gemma Donnelly-Cox (IE) is a Lecturer in Organisation Theory and Academic Director of the Centre for Nonprofit Management, School of Business, Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Her current research interests include nonprofit management, organisation growth and development, managerial leadership across sectors and cultures, institutionalisation.

Michael Meyer (AT) is Professor at the Department of Management at the WU Wien. Currently he is head of the Research Institute for NPOs at the WU Wien. Areas of specialization and current research: managerialism in NPOs, functions and participation in CSOs, social systems theory, social networks and social capital, career research.

Kari Steen-Johnsen (NO) is senior research fellow at the Institute for Social Research, Oslo and active at the Centre for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector. Her research deals with organizational change in voluntary organizations. Current research: effects of the network society on voluntary agencies with regard to social participation, civic engagement, social communities and ways of organising activities.

Filip Wijkström (SE) is Associate Professor and Director of the Economic Research Institute at the Stockholm School of Economics. His research deals with various types of organisations in civil society and comparisons of the nonprofit sector in different national contexts. Most recent work deals with the distinctiveness of CSOs and how they work strategically with these features.