

Contents

- Acknowledgements • 9
- Prologue: Aligning practice with the ideal • 13
1. Introduction: A problem looking for a solution • 16
- Generating more questions than answers — a pilot study* • 17
 - The official rationale for organizational development* • 19
 - Civil society as a vital component of the good society • 19
 - Organizational development as a magic bullet • 22
 - Questioning the rationale for organizational development* • 24
 - The ontology of civil society and its organizations • 24
 - A Western ontology* • 24
 - A rational ontology* • 26
 - A convergence of civil societies and organizations • 28
 - A bias towards Western-style organizations* • 29
 - A move to an instrumental orientation of civil society* • 31
 - Convergence detrimental to civil society's primary functions* • 34
 - Amidst the tensions: Objective of the study* • 36
 - Key concepts* • 37
 - Civil society as a contested space • 38
 - The multitude of civil society organizations • 41
 - Merely semiotics? Organizational development or change? • 43
2. Research and theory: Organizational reforms and change • 45
- Previous research: Organizational change in civil society* • 45
 - A previously ignored field of research • 46
 - Still small, but growing subfield in organizational studies • 47
 - Organizational change in civil society* • 47
 - The role of organizational reforms* • 50

- Infused in part by a rational perspective on organizations • 52
 - The rationality norm in organizational studies* • 53
 - Are organizations really rational?* • 54
 - The rational model challenged: The case of managerialism • 55
 - Defining managerialism* • 56
 - The impact on organizations* • 57
 - Theoretical perspective: Scandinavian institutionalism* • 59
 - New ways of studying organizations and their environment • 59
 - Homogenization, organizational fields and isomorphism* • 60
 - A Scandinavian focus on heterogeneity* • 61
 - Organizational structures, reforms, and change • 62
 - The legitimacy of formal structures questioned* • 63
 - Structure and processes loosely coupled* • 65
 - Organizational reforms for legitimacy* • 66
 - Organizational change as translation* • 67
 - Standards as advice and a form for coordination* • 68
 - Previous research revisited* • 71
- 3. Methodology: An explorative and interpretative approach • 74
 - A contemporary model of hermeneutics* • 74
 - Alternative and better interpretations • 77
 - Consequences for the empirical material • 79
 - Empirical background* • 81
 - The Swedish international development context • 82
 - The prevalence of organizational development • 83
 - Constructing the policy discourse • 85
 - Selecting the projects • 86
 - Strengthening an organization of people with disabilities* • 87
 - Supporting and independent, democratic trade union* • 88
 - Empowering a Christian youth organization* • 89
 - Data collection in Nicaragua • 90
 - Methods and empirical material* • 91
 - Participant observation • 92
 - Interviews • 93
 - Documents • 94
 - Ethical considerations* • 95
- 4. Empirical explorations: Organizational development in civil society • 98
 - Competing origins of organizational development* • 99
 - The origin and history according to the state • 99
 - When organizational development came to town • 103
 - A contrast: “Always the *raison d’être*” • 105
 - Attempting formalization* • 107

- From conceptualizing to setting requirements • 107
- Early attempts: Influences from everywhere • 112
 - Struggling to conceptualize definitions, ideas, and methods* • 113
 - Numerous references and influences* • 116
- Another contrast: Is distinctiveness required? • 117
- The state promotes organizational development* • 119
 - An instrument for societal progress • 120
 - The importance of democracy and ideologies • 121
 - The Octagon and other methods • 124
- Responding to state requirements* • 128
 - Accepting parts of the requirements • 128
 - Limiting the influences • 131
 - Distinctiveness revisited: The role of religion • 135
- Inherent tensions in the policy discourse* • 139
 - Abundant and incoherent influences • 140
 - Influences from the Swedish civil society tradition* • 140
 - Influences from other civil society traditions* • 142
 - Influences from experience* • 143
 - Other influences* • 145
 - The distinctiveness of diverse civil society organizations • 147
 - Organizations as universal phenomena* • 148
 - Civil society organizations different* • 149
 - Civil society organizations in other civil societies different* • 150
 - Organizational development as unique processes* • 152
- A policy discourse in Nicaragua* • 153
 - Organizations as collective, democratic, and transparent • 153
 - Aligning existing organizations to the ideal • 157
 - Ideas and methods promoted in the policy discourse • 159
 - The concept of the ideal organization* • 160
 - Methods for organizational development* • 165
 - Influences mainly from the people participating • 167
- From the policy to the project level* • 168
 - Strengthening an organization of people with disabilities • 169
 - Un caballo muerto* • 169
 - Workshops for the periphery* • 174
 - A transparency level of 79%* • 176
 - Supporting an independent, democratic labor organization • 182
 - A weak organization in need of more members* • 182
 - Differences between Sweden and Nicaragua* • 184
 - Similarities between the policy discourse and project?* • 187
 - A transfer of money for institutional support?* • 190
 - “Without the support, the organization would have been dead”* • 193
 - Empowering a Christian youth organization • 195
 - Organizational development not a the forefront* • 195
 - None of the ideas transferred* • 198
 - The importance of informal influences* • 203

5. Analysis: Distancing organizational development • 206

Organizing after Babel • 206

Abundance of influences • 206

Searching for the perfect organization • 207

Limited coherence in the policy discourse • 208

Influences from everywhere • 210

Distinctiveness of civil societies, organizations, and organizational development • 211

Ideas untraveled • 213

No transfer of ideas and models • 213

What did travel instead? • 215

A focus on workshops in the periphery • 217

Limited structural impacts • 218

A conflict of interpretations • 219

Different civil society traditions • 220

Exporting Swedish ideas or fostering local initiatives? • 221

Formalizing best practices or requirements? • 223

The importance of informal influence • 225

Standardizing civil society discourse • 227

Neither diffusion nor translation • 227

Ideas and actions decoupled • 229

Organizational development but one way to change organizations • 229

The mechanisms of decoupling • 231

A particular management style • 236

Standardizing the discourse • 238

Never meant to be practice • 239

Converging civil society discourse? • 241

For coordination and governance • 242

Contributions to research and theory • 245

Theoretical implications • 246

An alternative position on organizational change • 248

6. Conclusions: Appropriating organizational development
in civil society • 253

Protecting prevailing practice • 254

In the tension between instrumentalism and expressivism • 256

Epilogue: Aligning discourse with the ideal • 262

References • 264

Introduction: A problem looking for a solution

This book focuses on the empirical phenomenon of organizational development in civil society. It seems that organizational development is introduced as a magical bullet to solve numerous problems in civil society. More and better organizing will not only improve project and organizational performance, it is believed, but will also promote desirable qualities inherent in civil society and therefore the development of ‘the good society’. However, could the rational and technical instrument of organizational development fulfill such expectations without endangering the primary functions of civil society?

Evelia Ramirez took a sip from her coffee and said: “Organizational development is a solution looking for a problem.”¹ We were at Casa del Café in Los Robles, Managua; a coffee place in which a café latte cost more than the average Nicaraguan made a day. Evelia, a charismatic Nicaraguan with a revolutionary past, had worked with civil society organizations from other countries even before the day dictator Somoza was overthrown. I had specifically asked for her opinions on the empirical phenomenon of organizational development of civil society organizations. While sipping her ordinary, but in the context excessively expensive coffee, Evelia argued that although organizational development did not originate from a specific problem, it was being offered — and applied — as a generic solution to nearly each and every kind of problem facing

1 Ramirez, 2008. Fictitious name to protect the informant.

civil society organizations in Nicaragua. From the perspective of Nicaraguan organizations, “organizational development is also a flexible funding opportunity,” she commented, even “more flexible than delivering services to the community.”²

This particular, yet noteworthy and problematic, point of view of the empirical phenomenon of organizational development raises a number of questions. What is meant by the phenomenon of organizational development in the empirical context of civil society organizations? Why is organizational development being promoted? How is the phenomenon being used by different actors and organizations? In addition, how can we interpret statements that organizational development is a solution looking for a problem or that it is also a flexible funding opportunity? From a rational perspective, the particular accounts of organizational development as presented by Evelia seem to almost overturn the world of organizing.

Generating more questions than answers — a pilot study

The types of statements and objections to the empirical phenomenon of organizational development of civil society organizations voiced above were not novel to me at the time of the interview. For the purpose of gathering empirical material for this text, I had spent nearly a year in Nicaragua during 2008. Before that, however, I had also had the opportunity to carry out a preliminary study of the phenomenon of organizational development in collaboration between Swedish and Costa Rican organizations during a shorter period in Sweden and a brief visit to San José and Costa Rica in 2006.

I had stumbled upon the fact that, since the mid 1990s, government officials and practitioners had explicitly come to focus on the role of the phenomenon of organizational development in directly building up and strengthening a vibrant and democratic civil society. Even though organizational development, in what seemed a long time to me and others, appeared to have been a tacit

2 *Ibid.*

part of projects of development — pursued in partnership by civil society organizations across societal and geographical borders — it was argued that it was not until the mid 1990s that organizational development was first made explicit. It was made explicit in policies, training seminars, handbooks, and projects, at approximately the same time as objectives were being formalized for the support of civil societies and civil society organizations. I was therefore offered the opportunity to study this phenomenon in some detail and decided to travel to Costa Rica to explore the issue in greater detail.

However, in accordance with the statements made by Evelia, interviews carried out with government officials, and practitioners in Sweden and Costa Rica, the indication seemed to be that there was an ambiguity as to what the phenomenon of organizational development was and should be, and how it best should be brought about. Moreover, various models for organizational development, such as the Swedish Mission Council's Network and Sida's Octagon, were being promoted. Ideas and influences on organizational development could also be traced to policy organizations in Great Britain and South Africa. Uncertainty persisted as to whether organizational development should be considered as a development goal, a method to reach other goals, or an analytical concept, among other things. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, there seemed to be not only a disparity but also a disconnection between ideas and implementation of organizational development in practice.

The ambiguity of the phenomenon of organizational development, along with the increased focus and the introduction of formal methods, made me formulate several questions of a more analytical nature: Which ideas influenced the content and function of organizational development in the setting of civil society? Would it be possible to identify influences from Swedish organizational ideas, such as the popular mass movement tradition? To what degree was it possible to implement these ideas in organizational development projects in other countries and geographical areas? What were the effects of these ideas on primarily the development of civil society organizations? The combination of the findings from the preliminary study in Costa Rica as well as the particular statements made by Evelia seemed to plead for more detailed studies and elaborated interpretations.

The official rationale for organizational development

One way to begin answering questions such as the ones posed by the statements made by Evelia in the introduction to this text, as well as by the pilot study, could be by introducing what could be labeled as the official, policy view of and rationale for organizational development. The beginning of this text and its particular view of organizational development, I would argue, do not provide the ultimate answer to the questions. Rather, this opening serves to quickly introduce one, particular, and admittedly significant perspective on the issue at hand. As such, it also represents a highly problematic point of view — full of dilemmas and unanswered questions — thereby serving as a motivating force for the thesis. Throughout this short introduction, questions will thus be raised and dilemmas highlighted regarding the phenomenon, setting the stage for following sections of a more analytical nature, and for presenting the main objective of this thesis.

Civil society as a vital component of the good society

In order to present the official point of view of organizational development of civil society organizations, I believe that it firstly needs to be situated within the perspective of how these external agents perceive the concept of civil society. Accordingly, among a specific set of policy actors there seems today to be an almost “universal consensus that civil society is a vital component of a good society” and that “the stronger and more developed it is”, the better for all.³ Even though these actors agree that it is difficult to permanently define the term civil society, they oftentimes uphold minor variations of a singular, popular, and persistent definition; a definition that could be essentially summarized as civil society being an arena between the market and the public sphere, populated by mainly formal organizations of a certain kind.⁴ The definition promoted by the development state agency of Sweden could serve as an illustration here:

3 Parekh, 2004: 15.

4 For example Sida, 2004.

For [the Swedish state], civil society is an arena, separate from the state, the market, and the individual household, in which people organise themselves and act together to promote their common interests.⁵

Even though the Swedish state has a multifaceted view of civil society, which includes the notion that it is neither good nor bad, and therefore that not all civil society organizations should be supported by state funding; civil society is nevertheless deemed to have importance for “economic growth and poverty reduction”, “democracy”, “preventing armed conflicts and building peace”, and “as a global arena”.⁶ In other words, it could be argued that from the official, policy view, civil society is believed to be the origin of a considerable number of impressive things, including social capital, democracy, welfare, and societal avantgardism. Hence, if countries seek to achieve similar development as the Western world (supposedly vibrant, free, democratic, economically strong, among other things), the logic seems to be that they need to foster stronger and more developed civil societies.⁷ Institutions, mainly seemingly well-meaning international agencies, therefore devote resources and money to promote the development of civil societies in various ways.⁸

Interestingly, even though this perspective on the role of civil society seems quite established, and at times is taken for granted by specific actors, it appears to me to be a rather recent perspective.⁹ Granted, civil society has arguably always been part of, sometimes instrumental in, and even a prerequisite for a change in society overall. As such, it has received support from external as well as internal sources for particular projects of change.¹⁰ This being said, I would argue that it is not until recently that this function of civil society has officially been acknowledged, policies have been developed, and resources made available for

5 *Ibid.*: 9.

6 *Ibid.*: 11 pp.

7 See for example Sampson, 1996.

8 The promotion of civil society has been described as a benevolent colonialism, see for example Sampson, 2002. In the words of the author: “We are trying to export and implant our own system because we believe it is the best. And then, presumably, we will ‘exit’” (Sampson, 2002: 38).

9 See for example Lewis, 2010, Odin, 2006, Stillhof Sörensen, 2009.

10 For example Lewis, 2008, Odin, 2006.

the promotion of civil society in general as opposed to specific, particular projects within particular civil societies.¹¹ Civil society and its organizations have, in other words, been discovered during the last two decades as flexible, creative non-state actors, with an assumed range of comparative advantages over government agencies.¹²

What is more, not everyone seems to agree on the importance of civil society for society in general. As it appears, only a limited set of governments and policy actors around the world, powerful and resourceful as they may be, share and promote this perspective. In sharp contrast, most policy actors, be it in the form of governments or international institutions such as the multi-faceted World Bank, do generally in fact consider civil society in a much more negative sense, and try at times to counter it to every degree possible.

Positioning civil society as a promotable and vital component of a good society assumes that external forces have a role in doing so, and that these exercises should target the primary functions of civil societies – whatever they may be. Moreover, it depends to a great extent on how the concept of civil society is defined and interpreted, and if it is possible to talk about one, singular civil society across geographical and cultural borders. Before addressing these concerns from a more analytical perspective, I would like to also outline in the following a short introduction to the phenomenon of organizational development. This is to again reiterate the motivating force of the thesis as well as being for the benefit of the reader. Similar to the introduction to the concept of civil society, this introduction of the phenomenon of organizational development of civil society organizations is described from a more official, supply driven policy perspective.

11 Stilhoff Sørensen, 2006.

12 Lewis, 2010