

**A tool for charting out the relationships  
between government and third sector organisations  
in various national settings**

– applying social network analysis to national action plans to fight poverty

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## **I. Introduction**

### **Growing interest in the involvement of the third sector and the trouble with measurement**

The role of third sector organizations<sup>1</sup> in political systems has received growing attention over the last 15 to 20 years. In the realm of the 'political practitioners' mainly international organizations (the UNDP, the European Union (EU), the World Bank, the OECD, bilateral development agencies, etc.) – but also national political actors - have explicitly taken up the issue of cooperation between the organized civil society and governmental structures in public tasks. Involvement is encouraged regarding the decision-making and planning (policy input) as well as with respect to activities of service delivery for citizens (policy output). Diverse explanations are given for this growing interest and for the increase of respective policies and measures to support Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Generally, enhanced participation is considered as a positive turn in governance. It is supposed to help ease over-burdened governmental structures. Decentralization and delegation should improve the links between the state and the population and counter-act a certain 'fatigue' of citizens when it comes to conventional modes of participation in democratic institutions (e.g. declining voter turn out, declining trust in democracies and in political institutions). Thus, new forms of political participation might provide a new source of legitimacy for political structures or even restore a sense of community, which is believed to be declining and to be endangered in modern societies. From a more critical perspective, the 'instrumentalization' of third sector organizations is perceived as a cost-cutting exercise following a neo-liberal agenda, aiming at down-sizing the state, or it is seen as a means to increase control over the non-state actors, partly through contractual arrangements and through blurring the boundaries between the state and organized civil society. In the context of international cooperation, fostering active civic engagement is broadly seen as a step to strengthen and deepen democracy, especially for political systems in transition. It is also framed as a way of boosting development, by providing occasions for mutual learning, and as a means to work towards convergence of democratic standards. Again, depending on the point of view and the specific case, the phenomenon can be evaluated as a means of bypassing national governments, with an implicit positive connotation where authoritarian regimes are 'softened up', or as a circumvention of conventional, politically legitimized institutions.

In order to come to conclusions about the underlying reasons and the causal links, as well as the impacts related to support for organized civil society, a main obstacle lies in the difficulty of comparing situations in diverse national and cultural settings. Therefore, this paper addresses as its main question: How can the relationship between the third sector and the state be conceptualized in a way which allows for a comparison across national and cultural boundaries, and thus allows for a comparison across political systems?

This paper proposes a framework for comparative research based on the social network analysis. The methodology is applied in a qualitative way, which means that the process of data collection is analytically separable in two elements: Firstly, it gathers information, aiming to standardize and thus to reach as much objectivity as possible, enabling for comparable descriptions of situations. Secondly, the application in a flexible way, using semi-structured interviews, encouraging actors who have been directly involved to 'tell their stories'. These narratives serve as the base for a re-construction of causal links, based on the rich descriptions and contextualization 'from within'.

The paper starts with an elaboration on the research question, locating the chosen approach in the

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<sup>1</sup> Terms, such as 'civil society organization', 'non-(for-) profit organisation', 'non-governmental organization' (NGO), 'voluntary organization' as well as the respective sectors are used inter-changeably in this text. This has become common practice in most academic literature. However, due to the conceptual framework, which is taking into consideration the two sides of the policy cycle contemporaneously, that is the service delivery and the advocacy aspect, the term 'third sector' is preferred. The dichotomy 'non-state-actor' - 'state-actor' also fits well with the research approach, as it keeps the area of interest open for a wide variety of subjects. This is also the wording used by the European Union.

scientific context between the conventional paradigms of quantitative and qualitative strategies (chapter II). A brief reflection on the origins of the problems, which bases itself on the idea of societies in a process of continuous differentiation, rooted in political- and general systems theory (chapter III). This theoretical background leads to the methodology of social network analysis as the suitable approach, which is briefly introduced (chapter IV). The main section of this paper conceptualises the relationships between governmental structures and third sector organizations. To assemble a comprehensive framework, diverse perspectives on the relationships are reviewed, and specific aspects of the relationship are singled out (chapter V). General and ambiguous terms are thus de-constructed into single interactions. The specific combinations of these single interactions indicate the overall character of a relationship in a more objective manner (chapter VI). A few exemplary questions from the interview guideline follow (chapter VII). These methodological clarifications allow a reformulation of the research question in terms of the network analysis (chapter VIII), indicating what the expected results can look like. A few words on the National Action Plan on Inclusion and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in Germany and Italy - the cases where the framework is applied - are part of the final reflections on advantages, limits and perspectives for future applications of the 'research tool' (chapter IX).

## II. The research question on the background of conventional scientific paradigms

Involvement of citizens in collective affairs, also called civic engagement, and participation of 'everyday people' does and did exist in every society. It is manifest in diverse shapes. A collective engagement is visible where people take care of each other, for example in activities of charity, where social problems are addressed, and where social needs are satisfied, beyond the close ties of kinship. But civic involvement also comprises activities of people discussing the best way to respond to social needs, and which group of people or public institution should be responsible. Using the model of the policy process<sup>2</sup>, participation is located in two phases of a circular process: It is part of the policy output, or implementation of policies as well as of the policy input, or policy-making (that is the deciding on and planning of public activities). In more modern words, civic engagement is present in the two forms: service delivery and advocacy / lobbying.

The academic world has approached this issue from diverse angles. Different concepts have been used, such as civil society and social capital; some approaches have been inspired by economic paradigms, (for example: theory of market failure and theory of government failure), etc. On a methodological level, most research endeavours can be characterized as using either a quantifying method or a strategy of rich description of single cases (qualitative approach). Operating under the first paradigm, researchers use highly aggregated data, such as surveys, census data, tax records and key figures about national contexts, such as GDP, statistics from labour market, public expenditure, etc. With the concept of 'social capital' which generally uses the individual as the basic unit of analysis, scholars typically seek correlations between the membership of citizens in intermediary organizations and trust in fellow citizens (social trust), or trust in institutions (political trust)<sup>3</sup>. Or, they look for correlations between shared attitudes (e.g. satisfaction with the political system) and indicators for the development and stability of democracy. Taking, instead, the organization as the basic unit for the analysis, students picture the organizational landscapes confronting the expansion of the third sector as measured through the number of registered NGOs, their share in the production of the GDP, in the labour market and in

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<sup>2</sup> For an early formulation of this concept: Easton (1953), Almond (1960); further elaborated in Almond et. al (eds.)

'Comparative politics – a world view', various editions.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Kenneth Newton (1999).

public service delivery<sup>4</sup>, voluntarism compared to paid staff, etc. The alternative qualitative approaches provide 'thick descriptions' or rich contextualization of national situations, taking into consideration a greater number of factors and intervening variables, often reconstructing historical periods, sometimes focusing on single organizations<sup>5</sup>.

The contributions from each scientific camp provide valuable insights, but remain partial and limited. The first approaches, using quantification and aggregated data, are helpful for a general overview and comparison on a 'macro-level'. However, they say little about the 'internal' dynamics, about the finer shades of grey with respect to interactions between state and non-state actors. How voluntary organizations link up with governmental structures as well as how they connect among each other remains underexposed. This includes the formal and informal links which have been established, the 'more or less' developed structures of institutionalisation, and the interferences between diverse facets of relationships, such as financing and control. As a result, macro-scale analyses occasionally treat very diverse national contexts the same way, and assuming a similarity of diverse realities<sup>6</sup>. The highly contextualized (qualitative) studies instead raise issues of comparability and generalizability of findings. Even where several cases are compared, it remains unclear whether a specific outcome is due to the unique historical combination of factors, whether the identified mechanisms represent regularities and are able to describe the role of the third sector in very different situations, or whether the findings have some predictive power.

This paper therefore addresses what research on the third sector can look like, describing in more detail, how the relationships between the state and the third sector are shaped, going beyond the analysis of highly aggregated data on a macro-level and, at the same time, creating a more standardized empirical base, which allows for generalisations and direct comparison beyond a few cases. Before developing the refined conceptual framework, the next chapter briefly reflects on the conditions under which comparative research operates, building on the political and general systems theory.

### **III. Function, structure and differentiation: the origins of the puzzle and its conceptualization**

Comparative political science acknowledged the problems of doing research across cultural borders as early as the 1950s, and proposed a way to tackle its challenges. The key, which this approach offers, lies in the analytical separation of 'function' and 'structure'. Functions are tasks or challenges which inflict themselves equally on all societies. Structures are the concrete methods and institutions a specific society employs to respond to these challenges. Over time, while dealing with essentially the same challenges and filling the same functions, each society develops its own, specific structures. "In other words, in comparing political systems with one another, we have made only a beginning when we describe the specialized structures. Furthermore, we may be misled if we follow structural lines in our comparative efforts"<sup>7</sup>. The actual structures or institutional arrangements in a society are the result of a

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: publications of the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, Center for Civil Society Studies of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies, e.g. Salamon / Sokolowski / List (2003) and publications of the Center for Civil Society, London School of Economics.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Laird (2007); Kramer et al. (1993); Garvia (1992); Seibel (1992) and other contributions in the volume edited by Kuhnle and Selle (1992).

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Tusalem (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Almond (1960, 13). The functional approach in political science has its roots in comparative research on the differences between Western and non-Western societies. "...all the types of political structure which are to be found in the modern system are to be found in the non-Western and primitive ones... They may not be clearly visible, but to say that there are not structure would be to argue that the performance of the political function is random" (Almond, 1960, 8). However, the theoretical foundations are equally fruitful when comparing systems, which dispose of less obvious and striking diversities, and when comparing systems and societies, which appear to be 'closer' and more similar to each other. This broadening of the scope of the research, encompassing potentially political systems of all kinds, counter-balances the developmental rhetoric, which is due to the spirit of the times in period of the early formulations of the theory. A main merit of the

process of differentiation: social, economic, technical and other conditions change, and they keep generating new tasks and challenges for the society to address. A social institution, in the form of an organization, or an institution (in a large sense), 'takes over' and responds to an emerging challenge. Then, specific tasks are delegated to groups of actors, institutions, organizations, etc. Changes in context (the technical, demographic, cultural etc. environment) of a social system result in more specialized and differentiated structures. This increase in structuration or increase in complexity occurs in the diverse societies with different speed. It gradually produces "a continuum and not a dichotomous distinction" and therefore societies cannot be divided clearly into two clusters, such as 'differentiated' versus 'non-differentiated' societies, or 'developed' versus 'non-developed' ones. Differentiation does not mean that those institutions and organizations, which take over and thus form a 'sub-system, encapsulate and operate in isolation. They remain *interdependent* and related to each other, responding to each other<sup>8</sup>. The (sub-) systems remain 'loosely coupled': changes in one system trigger a process of co-evolution in others.

In their works, Almond and his colleagues list different kinds of structures which have evolved. They are thus spelling out diverse types and categories of political institutions. But, the more the structures are ordered in categories, the more the framework loses its ability to be applied generally. Thus the model of the policy process turns into a normative description, because the categories of structures which are proposed necessarily derive from specific experiences and historical trajectories, in this case common to most Western democracies<sup>9</sup>.

The general systems theory, as expressed by Willke<sup>10</sup>, who is strongly referring to Luhmann, remains on a more general level and therefore carries fewer normative connotations. The idea of differentiation is developed further: The entire social world consists of systems. Each system is 'operationally closed' or 'self-referential'. This means, in brief, two things. Firstly, a system perceives itself as serving a certain purpose, fulfilling a certain function, and thus it disposes of a self-identification and a self-

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approach then lies in the caveats for researchers, who embark on any kind of comparative studies: in each political (and societal) system basic common traits can be identified, but instead of comparing the structures 'at face value', the emphasis is laid on the 'slight' differences of the actual arrangements serving the same functions.

<sup>8</sup> A concrete illustration of this 'interdependence' of systems can be found in Almond's early work. He describes a process, which later has been labelled as isomorphism: "...the emergence of pressure groups in the present century produced certain changes in the party system and in the administrative and legislative process. The rapid expansion of executive bureaucracy was one of the factors that triggered off the development of legislative bureaucracy and pressure group bureaucracy."

Almond (1960, 13).

<sup>9</sup> The function, which is filled by political structures in general, is to "maintain internal and external order" and to "establish and maintain the contact between the polity and society" (Almond, 1960, 9). The following categories classify these structures (Almond, 1960, 45 ff.): The function of 'interest articulation' is done by 'institutional interest groups', 'non-associational interest groups', 'anomic interest groups' and 'associational interest groups'; the task of 'interest aggregation' is assigned to political parties, further qualified through the party system in which these parties find themselves: 'authoritarian', 'dominant non-authoritarian', 'competitive two party systems' and 'competitive multi-party system'. A special position is ascribed to the function of 'political communication': "An autonomous communication system 'regulates the regulators'..." being based on "the fact that in the modern political system differentiated media of communication have arisen which have developed a vocational ethics of 'neutral' or objective communication." In this elaboration on the framework Almond leaves the purely descriptive level and takes some normative stands. Certain types of structures and combinations of structures are preferred. The maintenance of boundaries between the various structures fulfilling their specific part during the various phases of the policy process obtains major importance. A political system is judged to work best, when none of the structures involved in one function interferes unduly with structures serving another function, for example: interest expression has to originate from interest groups and has to pass through the political parties to be integrated into a political program. Where interest groups by-pass the political parties interact directly with the executive branches, trying to influence public policies directly, the ideal democratic process is disturbed. Furthermore, the working of the political system is assumed to follow a linear process, beginning with interest expression, leading over interest aggregation, rule making, to the application of the rules and the surveillance (jurisdiction). Over time, this process is imagined as 'spiral' movement, producing and adjusting collective binding decisions, briefly labelled as the 'policy cycle'. The role of the political communication and a 'neutral' media is idealized. Thus, at least inherently - but at times also rather explicitly - political systems are measured against the Anglo Saxon model of democracy.

<sup>10</sup> Willke (1996, 1997).

description. Secondly, (and closely related to this self-identification) the elements, which make up the system, communicate among each other using their specific code or language. This language always refers to the specific 'purpose' or function of the system. Meaningful communication occurs exclusively among elements of the same system and thus among those who are using the same language / code. Everything happening 'outside of a specific system' appears as a stimulus (or a stress, a disturbance). These disturbances become relevant to the system only when they provoke some reaction, and this means when they cause some communication within the system<sup>11</sup>. Stimuli from the environment of an operationally closed system trigger some resonance within the internal procedures, or: the impulses from outside the system have to be translated into the system-specific, idiosyncratic language.

These very abstract conceptual frameworks are suited especially well for comparative research, because they allow separating a description of the structures from a normative evaluation. Building only on the code of interactions for distinguishing systems avoids the use of categories and typologies of structures, which – no matter how carefully these might be formulated – provide the scale against which to measure. With respect to the research design, on an operational level the language becomes the defining feature for the object (the sub-system) under examination. Those actors (in a large sense) constitute a system which communicate and work around the same issues, which use the common code, and which are referring to a collective purpose.

#### **IV. Social network analysis as the suitable methodology**

The conceptualization of the research problem outlined so far connects well with the methodology of social network analysis. This method models social situations using only two basic ingredients: actors and relationships<sup>12</sup>. The former corresponds to the elements which make up a system, and the latter represent the interactions among these elements. Taken together, the actors as elements and the interactions as relations among them make up the network / system. The main task remains to specify these two basic elements.

##### *Actors (and boundaries)*

For this research project, the definition of actors is deliberately kept open, with 'fuzzy borders'. Especially 'in-and-out-lists' are avoided. Including or excluding 'borderline-cases', for example hybrid organizations, quasi governmental organizations, associations of representatives from the business world, etc. usually serves to add precision to the definition of civil society (respectively, third sector, etc.). But defining the group of potential actors rigidly has also limiting and prescribing effects. For this research, instead, actors are specified only through two qualities: Firstly, the definition of actor involves corporate actors in the sense of 'legal persons', which are made up from single persons,

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<sup>11</sup> Also Almond's functional approach contains a preliminary concept of a system, which distinguishes itself from the surroundings through a specific language or code, though this concept refers exclusively to the political system. The text from the 1960's includes examples of activities, which illustrate, where the boundaries between the political system and the non-political environment lie: murmurs - a simple, everyday expression of public opinion - become part of the political system as an act of interest articulation, once they are translated into a claim entering the political arena, urging for a certain way to use "public authority"; or: conversations of a public servant enter the political sphere, once they are translated into a report, which may lead to bureaucratic action. These examples illustrate the process of translating system external stimuli in system internal communication.

<sup>12</sup> In the abstract language of mathematical graph theory the first are represented through 'points', 'vertices' or 'nodes' and the latter as 'lines' or 'edges' and 'arcs'.

groups and organizations<sup>13</sup>. Secondly, the actors belong either to the group of 'non-state-actors' or 'state-actors'. Even when applying this simple dichotomy, ambiguities cannot be excluded, for example: local authorities (by definition and constitution part of the governmental structures), which are forming associations (by definition non-state actors). In a technical sense, such entities are non-state actors (though they are composed of state actors). They are most often perceived by themselves and by others as statutory bodies. In the more detailed analysis several similar sub-groups and hybrid-cases might emerge, such as NGO-umbrella organisations, mixed-sector coordinating bodies, independent state agencies, etc. These ambiguities are not seen as a weakness of the theoretical framework. Instead, the appearance of these mixed forms, and the related questions of how to deal with these cases, how to understand their function and their basic character, feeds into the interpretation of diverse situations. The discussion of ambiguous cases and their specific role will be an essential part of the results. For the application of the methodology it is more decisive to assemble the list of actors who have been included in the communications around the issue. The clarification of their characteristics is part of the interpretation of results.<sup>14</sup>

A list of all – at least nominally - involved actors is based on documents, such as participants' lists and minutes from meetings (policy events). Additionally, 'name-generating-questions' ("Who did take part / who was present?") as part of the interviews check, whether an important party has to be added.<sup>15</sup>

### *Links*

At the outset of the research, there was a challenge defining the links between the actors within the system under examination. Therefore the next section of this paper is dedicated to a brief review of classifications of relationships between governmental structures and third sector organizations. Each work on organized civil society derives from a different national (and cultural) background and lays emphasis on specific features, which have turned out to be important in its respective social context. Bringing together diverse aspects counter-balance each single - necessarily biased - perspective. The review then examines and de-constructs the terms, which - seemingly referring to the same concept - remain ambiguous and unclear. For example words such as 'partnership', 'supplementary', 'complementary', 'substituting' and 'adversarial' relationships, and 'relationships based on contracts' have often been used, but with slightly different connotations. The synopsis of the diverse perspectives yields a scheme of interactions, and a list of 'possible ingredients', which add up to specific kinds of relationships. Diverse combinations of these single interactions then constitute the specific type of relationship.

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<sup>13</sup> In the context of this work the term 'corporate actor' is an antonym to single individual or 'natural person'. Therefore, in this context, 'corporate' does not refer to those organizations, which are populating the sector of 'for-profit-organizations', or the market. Firms and other entities from the business world fall under the heading of corporate non-state actors, just as voluntary organizations do.

<sup>14</sup> Relational data represents the specific feature of the methodology. It differs from attributive data (which is used for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis) mainly because it refers to a set of previously defined actors, when values are assigned to the actors, sub-groups of actors and the entire network. For the computation of these indices (potential) the actually established links to each other actor in the network are taken into consideration. Consequentially, each single element is not independent from the others. Variations in the size of the network often cause changes in the measurement and the values assigned to each single actor. For an introduction into the specific features of social network analysis see: Wassermann / Faust (1994), Scott (2000).

<sup>15</sup> The intention of the original research design was to extract the information mainly through analysis of documents (minutes, memos, documentations of communications). Unfortunately, the respective empirical material proved to be not accessible.

## V. Reviewing classifications of state-third sector relationships

During the last decade, scholars have taken up the more specific topic of describing the relationships between the organized civil society and governmental structures. In spite of dealing with similar issues, these efforts have taken place in separate fields. One strand of theorizing is located within the debate on the welfare state in the sphere of industrialized nations in Northern American and Western Europe (also labelled with the key word 'welfare mix'). This discussion was triggered by the global economic crisis of the 1970s after some decades of prosperous expansion of social service provisions. It revolved around the 'rethinking' of the most appropriate division of labour between the various sectors for generating social welfare: the state, the market, the voluntary sector - and less pronounced, but still important - a fourth sphere: the private household or family. The second strand of literature is situated in the field of development aid. Following the 'euphoric' use of the concept of civil society from the 1970s, a more critical assessment started towards the end of the 1990s<sup>16</sup>.

For reasons of space, this summary will only touch on the most frequently cited authors. *Jennifer Coston* (1998) proposes a scale comprising eight types of relationships<sup>17</sup>. The main dimension for building her categories is the government's readiness to accept 'institutional pluralism', respectively the resistance towards other than state agencies becoming publicly active. Her scale ranges from resistance, via neutrality or indifference, towards active support for a diversity of public-private institutions. Additionally, two aspects qualify the relationships: the 'degree of formalization' and the 'power distribution' between the two parties, ranging from an asymmetry with the governmental side enjoying an advantage, to the symmetrical situation with an equal distribution of power between NGOs and the state.

On a more practical level the types of relationships differ with respect to: 'information sharing' through 'informal inquiries', 'distributing reports', 'holding meetings, briefings and seminars', 'setting up liaison units' and 'forming committees'. A higher degree of collaboration is marked through the existence of umbrella organizations within the third sector. Coston further specifies the way of information sharing within networks and umbrella organizations: networks can either distribute technical information for mutual advantage, for example distribute information on tenders, capacity building measure, etc. or they can pool information as a resource of power, for example through doing research on clients and targeted groups or mobilizing members and clients. Thus the relationship between umbrella / network organizations can be a one-way-relation, fulfilling a technical function of managing cooperation in service delivery, or it can combine activities of implementation with advocacy work. The resources, which can be shared, consist of 'user fees', 'volunteer labor', 'loans', 'grants', 'budget allocations', 'contracts and agreements', 'personnel' or 'equipment'.

*Jennifer Brinkerhoff* (2002) proposes a typology based on two dimensions: 'mutuality' and 'organizational identity'. The two parties involved either enjoy equal opportunities to influence decisions and none of them dominates the other ('real' partnership) or one party sets the objectives and the second party is free to choose to join in or to stay out ('contracting'). The relationship turns into an 'extension', when the weaker party figures merely as a secondary helper, with no possibility to choose and influence. Finally, the 'co-optation' also called 'gradual absorption', occurs where the stronger party interferes and changes the subordinated party to an extent which destroys its organizational identity.

Brinkerhoff states that "Partners have something unique to offer: resources, skills, relationships or consent". She distinguishes further between 'hard resources', that is, money and materials on the one side and 'soft resources', comprising 'managerial and technical skills', 'information', 'contacts', 'credibility / legitimacy' on the other. National governments command legal and institutional

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<sup>16</sup> See for example: Van Rooy (1994), Nuschler (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Coston's eight types of relationship are: 'repression', 'rivalry / competition', 'contracting', 'third party-government', 'cooperation', 'complementarities', and 'collaboration'.

frameworks, and provide financial and material resources. Nonprofits have an intermediary and social mobilization role. They offer 'flexibility', 'responsiveness', 'innovativeness', and the capacity to monitor the government. The private (for-profit) sector contributes 'financial, technical resources', including 'managerial resources'.

*Adil Najam* (2000) proposes a typology, built on two similar dimensions: accordance of goals (ends) and accordance of strategies (means). 'Cooperation' takes place where a consensus exists between NGOs and government agencies, regarding the common goals as well as the means. Two other types of relationships represent compromises: In a 'complementary' situation, the two parties share similar goals but prefer different strategies (activities) for their achievement. In a situation of 'co-optation', instead, the common ground lies in the strategies (or activities), while disagreement persists regarding the goals. The complementary relationship turns into the sub-category 'supplementary' when the third sector is financing its efforts independently. The fourth type of a relationship ('confrontation') means the disagreement of both: goals and strategies. The two parties turn to adversarial, explicitly non-cooperative activities. Hostility can range from 'talks around the negotiation table' to violent activities 'on the streets'. In the extreme scenario, government agents (mis-)use their coercive power, repressing or harassing the opposition. Civil society organizations pass to political action outside of the institutional arena, such as (international media) campaigning, demonstrating, striking, and potentially more aggressive acts.

The interactions are characterized as based on 'financial, political, coercion, and epistemic (knowledge, expertise) resources' as sources of power.

*Denis Young* (1999, 2000) describes the possible relationships between the state and the third sector using three 'lenses': 'supplementary', 'complementary' and 'adversarial'. All three characteristics can (and usually do) occur simultaneously. The relationships can be imagined as a 'scoring' on the three dimensions to varying degrees. The 'supplementary' service provision corresponds to a horizontal division of labor. The third sector covers areas which are not considered by the state, and it acts independently while doing so. The gaps between demand for public action and the state's activities open up, either because policies (and thus services) are oriented at the 'median voter', not catering for requests from smaller groups of voters (government failure) or because the state is generally abstaining from service delivery, for reasons of capacity or a liberal ideology. In a 'complementary' constellation, instead, the division of tasks is rather vertical. The satisfaction of social needs cannot be left to private, market-based self-regulation for reasons of non-excludability, non-rivalry (free-riding problem) and because for-profit actors are supposed to exploit information asymmetries to their advantage (market failure). A principal agent relationship is established with 'the state steering, third sector rowing'. The overall responsibility to secure public goods (services) remains with the state, expressed in the financing through the public budget. Rationales for this arrangement can be: cost-cutting or efficiency concerns, when comparing service delivery by third sector with services provided through government bureaucracies; better quality of services, when comparing third sector service delivery with private for profit services, as a consequence of the non-distributive constraint and the direct involvement of the beneficiaries (co-production). Finally, 'adversarial' relationships go beyond - and sometimes against - considerations of feasibility and efficiency. They occur when NGOs intend to build up pressure and to push for changes with respect to the activities of the government.

Young reflects on some issues on a practical level: Procedures of approval or licensing; accreditation of NGOs and their activities can indicate a fair and supportive environment for the third sector. However, the same measures can be misused for hindering independent, participative and critical activities. Public policies encouraging private voluntary activity, for example tax exemptions, laws favoring private donations, the funding of pilot projects, etc. are an indicator of a supportive policy framework of the government towards the third sector. This contrasts with the lack of action of a fiscally conservative government. In many cases, financial support for NGOs increasingly takes the form of contracts, substituting the transfer of grants. The reasons for this shift towards contracting out - and whether it means an expansion of governmental structures' control over the third sector - can be read

from the conditions, which are attached: contracts can define merely the output and focus on cost efficiency, building up pressure among third sector organizations, enforcing competition, and thus strengthening the lever of government officials. Alternatively, agreements can envisage the process of service production beyond the pure output, setting far reaching requirements for organizational development characteristics, such as reporting systems, professional standards, etc. Again, these measures can either serve as ensuring accountability within the sector, or they can provide the means for undue interference. Additionally, the delegation of public tasks in contracting-out arrangements incur some costs for the authorities, related to supervision and monitoring (contract enforcement costs), which are often neglected in theory as well as in practice. The way in which authorities handle these issues can shed light on the type of relationship between governmental agents and third sector organization: efforts spent on supervision and monitoring can indicate either a serious concern by authorities to protect the specific character of third sector organizations, or it may be a sign of their eagerness to extend control. In the same vein, services that have been provided independently by third sector organizations can be transformed or absorbed by the state either with the positive intent to recognize a public responsibility, or in order to exert control over an area of society, which acts 'too independently'. Similarly, governments can create NGOs either as stimulation for private initiatives, as a kind of controlled outsourcing and cost-cutting exercise or as an attempt to control the sector by dominating it with 'loyal cronies'. The coexistence of service delivery - complementary as well as supplementary - with an (adversarial) advocacy function can be secured through agreements. In this way, the adversarial elements of a relationship can be acknowledged and institutionalized, for example through assigning positions in consultative- or decision-making bodies and through establishing transparent consultation processes for planning and policy preparations.

*Stein Kuhnle and Per Selle* (1992) conceptualize the state - third sector relationships along the two dimensions of 'distance' between third sector organizations and governmental agents and '(in)dependence' ('autonomy') of the voluntary sector. The first dimension refers to the frequency and 'easiness' with which communication occurs. 'Nearness' does not necessarily equal an ideological affinity. Closeness between governmental structures and diverse third sector organizations rather indicates a 'state-friendly society'. A policing function of the state is respected across the organizations close to the diverse ideologies and at the same time, the state's officials cooperate with each actor, avoiding the undue favoring of specific ideas. The second dimension, 'control', usually is attached to financing agreements. An increase in financing through public funds does, however, not automatically equal control and leverage. The degree of autonomy, respectively control, differs within the additional arrangements for cooperation, defining the degree of interference and control (as also outlined by Young, see above). Within a scenario of the 'separate autonomy' little communication, no financial support and no control occur between the two sectors. Where there is 'separate dependence' NGOs are not financed, and yet, communication is one-sided, allowing for the state's control over the third sector. 'Integrated dependence' means that voluntary organizations receive more attention through financing, but they are also kept under control. Operating in a situation of 'integrated autonomy' third sector organizations receive considerable financial support from authorities without being subject to major influences.

Kuhnle and Selle's approach rejects some kind of 'golden age' of perfect independence and cohabitation between the sectors, as well as the assumption that the relationships between the two sectors are necessarily competitive or conflicting. Drawing on historical / sociological institutionalism, their understanding contradicts the 'permanent failure theories' (as mentioned in the passage on Young's model above): Political and economic strategies, such as addressing the mean voter, and counteracting market failure, do not suffice to explain the variations of the third sector landscape. A specific pattern of relationships between the third sector and government structures derives from normative decisions which were taken in historical steps, and thus result from the historical paths of establishing institutions.

*Kramer et. al.* (1993) present a typology, which is constructed around the separation of 'financial provision' and 'service production'. In the 'government dominant' constellation, both funding and service provision is provided by the state. 'Third sector dominance' appears where funding and service provision are left to the non-state sector. When both sectors are engaged equally with funding and delivering services, a 'dual relationship' exists. In cases where government caters for the financial resources while delegating the service provision to the third sector, a 'collaborative relationship' prevails. 'Supplementing' and 'complementing' relationships both describe situations of an extension of public activities in a positive partnership, in the first case offering services, which are similar to the governmental ones and in the latter case adding services of a different kind. Both constellations are also referred to as 'substituting' governmental activities in the form of contracts, relying more on volunteers as well as self-help and existing alongside with joint operations. 'Adversarial relationships', instead, represent an alternative to government action.

Interactions can be of a 'fiscal, regulatory, service delivery and political (advocacy) type' and fall under the heading of 'planning', 'coordinating', and 'legal and political relationships'. Most valuable reflections of the work by Kramer et. al. deal with features internal to the third sector. Cooperation among organized civil society is generally perceived as low ('considerable inertia'). It does occur more often where older, larger, and more complex multipurpose, national-level organizations are in place. At the same time, the larger, multiple service providers demonstrate a tendency to develop monopolies, occupying prominent positions in the relations with governments. Where the third sector is more spontaneous, fragmented and less institutionalized and / or where smaller organizations stand in the shadow of a few bigger organizations, such as trade unions or political parties, the third sector remains weak and defensive. Competition among third sector organizations is mainly present when it comes to access to financial resources from the state, and where market models for service delivery have been promoted. Under these conditions, smaller organizations usually find themselves in a position of disadvantage for a lack of staff, experience and know-how. Concurrence is stronger among younger and more specialized agencies, while they are seeking to establish contractual relationships. Therefore specialization of organizations has an inhibiting effect on cooperation. Yet, "there was a general reluctance among the voluntary organizations - except in the Netherlands - to acknowledge the existence of competition among them"<sup>18</sup>. A stronger centralization of government is correlated to larger and more powerful voluntary organizations. Decentralization has mixed effects, due to structural, geographical and historical factors, linked to heterogeneity of the society and the respective ideology of subsidiarity. In some cases, it enhances the competition between the smaller entities. In other cases, where clear policies are absent and regions regulate respective affairs autonomously, it allows for more discretion for the local authorities. "Selection criteria, accountability and public controls are usually outweighed by 'cosy relations' and personal ties". In general, roof- and umbrella-organizations or peak associations have gained importance over time, comprising both: voluntary associations as well as service providing organizations acting on behalf of beneficiaries. They can be classified as either remaining passive, merely passing on information, and mainly aiming at improving the service program (similarly to Coston's characterization of umbrella organizations above). Or, they take up more active roles, such as lobbying to secure government funding, influence legislation, and to obtain special benefits for clients. Activities of this kind also serve to enhance the coalition's own legitimacy. Umbrella organizations, networks etc. usually have no authority over members and therefore their success depends on the capacity to mediate ideological differences of their members.

Additionally to the works reviewed here, the Civil Society Index project, run by the NGO 'CIVICUS – World alliance for citizens' participation' provides a rich collection of single aspects from very diverse situations around the world, touching on the state-third sector relationships. Valuable insights are contained in around 50 country reports<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Kramer (1993, 164).

<sup>19</sup> Mid 2008 about 50 country reports were accessible via Internet. Some countries where still engaged in the participatory

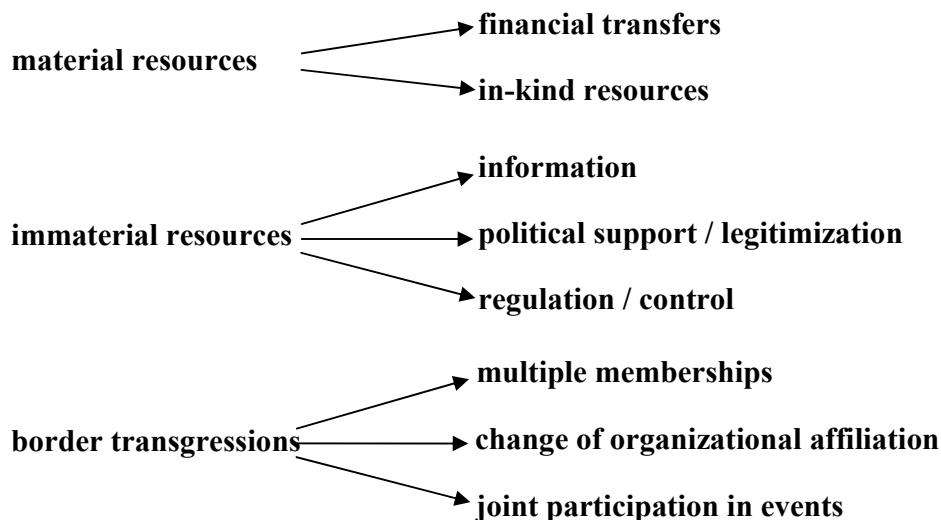
## VI. Operationalizing relationships - a scheme of interactions

The following section brings together the diverse aspects of relationships from the review above. Building on the literature regarding methodological aspects of social network analysis,<sup>20</sup> a scheme is assembled which orders various aspects of the state-third sector relationship in a list of possible interactions with the help of two criteria: content and form<sup>21</sup>.

### *Content of interactions*

The first criterion (content) provides the definition of the interaction: interactions are either of a material kind or an immaterial kind. The flow of material resources is further specified in two types of transactions: firstly, the transfer of financial resources, taking the form of grants, contracts, donations, etc. and secondly, transfers in the form of in-kind transactions, for example the use of facilities such as office space, transport, free (technical) services, such as trainings, free equipment, etc. (For an overview of possible interactions see figure 1 below)

Immaterial interactions are subdivided into three groups: firstly, the transfer of information, such as expertise or base-line information, as well as information about access to resources (for example announcements of call for tenders); secondly, political support or legitimization, expressed through different, often diffuse forms of mobilization and rather rarely in occasions of formal voting in decision-making bodies; and thirdly, regulatory and control activities (for example procedures of reporting, inspections, and evaluations), which can be combined with some form of sanctions.



**Figure 1: types of inter-organizational interactions**

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research process. For the country reports see the CIVICUS web-site, and for an overview of the findings see the volume on comparative perspectives (CIVICUS, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Knoke / Kulinski (1982).

<sup>21</sup> At his point the notion of common language or common code, which is used among the elements of the sub-system, and which is essential for the circumscription of the object under study, is extended beyond a strict understanding of communication, encompassing diverse kinds of material and immaterial transfers between the actors.

In addition to these types of interactions a special kind of link can be found in networks which are composed of corporate actors: 'organizational overlaps' transgress the borders of the corporate actors. This happens when individuals change their organizational affiliation, for example moving to another organisations as a step in their career path, in 'multiple memberships', when a person belongs to more than one organisation, for example being member of the governing board of an organization different from the one he or she is working for, or in joint projects, for example when staff is temporarily pooled in a team or is working in a seconded position. Another border-transgressing relationship occurs when representatives of different corporate actors jointly participate in the same event. These kinds of 'interactions' differ from the ones above, as there is no exchange of resources involved, either material or immaterial<sup>22</sup>. Strictly speaking, border transgressions only indicate an enhanced probability of interactions to take place, such as accessing and passing on of information, executing control, etc. Nevertheless, border transgressions are often highly significant in a network.

### *Form of interactions*

The form is the second criterion used for the definition of interactions. This dimension indicates how an interaction can be further qualified and especially how it can be measured (assigning values), for example through the application of scales of intensity as well as through the specification of the direction of an interaction. The measurement of the first group of interactions (material resources) is usually comparatively easy due to the monetary character or the possibility of an immediate translation of in-kind support into equivalent financial values. Instead, the measurement of immaterial resources (information, political support / legitimization, regulation) is more complicated. Generally, activities have to be operationalized through quantities, such as, frequency and duration of (time spent on) communications, number of letters and emails, phone calls, meetings, reports, inspection-visits, etc. Votes in decision-making bodies - operationalizing political support - are a rare example for a directly measurable expression of immaterial support and legitimization. In many cases diverse intensities of interactions have to be gathered with the help of ordinal scales and relative rankings, based on the personal perceptions of the representatives of corporate actors.

In the context of this research project, the form of a relationship can additionally be associated with the two basic functions in the political process: with the output or implementation of public policies and, with the input into decision-making on public policies. The combination of these characteristics yields the following types of interactions (For the second, more precise overview of types of interactions, see table 1 below):

- ◆ Transfer of *material, financial* resources for the *implementation* of public policies (policy-output): Money can be transferred to third sector organizations in the form of grants, contracts, donations for the activities of policy implementation / service delivery.
- ◆ Transfer of *material, financial* resources for the *interest expression* and *advocacy work* (policy input): Grants, contracts and donations support activities, such as research, pilot projects, networking, and events enhancing the consultations in the policy process.

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<sup>22</sup> Several network studies build on a paradigm of rational / institutional choice combined with exchange theories in the strict sense (for example: Galaskiewicz / Bielefeld / Dowell, 2006). Here, instead, the term 'exchange' is not understood as a 'quid-pro-quo' or 'this-for-that' exchange but rather in the sense of a transfer, which does not need to have a somewhat direct or indirect compensation.

		<b>f o r m</b>		
			output function of the policy cycle:  implementation of public policies / service delivery  ↓	input function of the policy cycle:  advocacy and interest expression  ↑
<b>c o n t e n t</b>	material resources	financial support	grants, contracts, donations for activities of policy implementation /service delivery	support for advocacy work, (e.g. financing research, pilot projects); support for networking structures
		in – kind support	use of facilities and (partially) free services (e.g. training, consultancy / support from experts)	organizing processes for consultation; e.g. public consultations, hearings, fora; entertaining liaison offices
	immaterial resources	information	information on procedures for NGO involvement, e.g. tenders, including necessary requirements (eligibility) and conditions	essential information on social situations, social needs, and expressed demands (‘from the grassroots’)
		regulations / control	regulations regarding the implementation of projects, e.g. reporting, minimum standards	scrutiny of public activities, e.g. independent reports
		political support	recognition of organisations and legitimation as interlocutors with public agencies	campaigning; mobilising public support / protest; voting in decision making bodies
	border transgression	multiple membership	- -	- -
		change of organisational affiliation	- -	- -
		joint participation in events	- -	- -

**Table 1: precise overview of types of interactions**

- ◆ Transfer of *material, in-kind* resources for the *implementation* of public policies (policy output):  
Service delivery is supported through the (partially) free use of facilities, such as office space, and services, (partially) free trainings, etc.
- ◆ Transfer of *material, in-kind* resources for the *interest expression* and *advocacy work* (policy input):  
Activities of interest expression, lobbying and campaigning, are supported through free provision of facilities, trainings and other services (“capacity-building measures”).
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *information* linked to the *implementation* of public policies (policy output):  
Information is passed on regarding the possibilities and occasions for third sector involvement, regarding the access to grants, tenders, including eligibility, requirements, etc.
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *information* linked to the *interest expression* and *advocacy work* (policy input):  
Information on social needs, for example results from research, and expression of requests 'from below' are made available for the policy process.
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *regulations and control* linked to the *implementation* of public policies:  
Authorities carry out activities controlling the implementation of services by NGOs, for example through required reporting, monitoring and evaluation, inspections, etc.
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *regulations and control* linked to the *interest expression* and *advocacy work* (policy input):  
NGOs scrutinize public authorities, for example through issuing independent reports on specific topics.
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *political support / legitimization* linked to the *implementation* of public policies:  
Authorities recognize organizations and establish some of them as legitimate or preferred interlocutors and stable partners.
- ◆ Transfer of *immaterial* resources in the form of *political support / legitimization* linked to the *interest expression* and *advocacy work* (policy input):  
Third sector organizations mobilize their constituencies or the general public, influencing elections and public activities.
- ◆ *Border transgressing relationships* (multiple memberships, persons changing organizational affiliation, joint participation in events) can hardly be specified according to the criteria ‘form’ and ‘policy input’ ‘policy output’. (Therefore, the respective cells in the table for the overview on relationships remain empty.)

## VII. Operationalization of relationships: combining the single types of interactions

A specific relationship between the third sector and the governmental structures emerges from the combination of the diverse interactions, from their absence or presence, and from their intensity. For example, an adversarial / confrontational relationship would be composed of mobilization for the policy input process, under absence of legitimization through governmental structures and the absence of any kind of material flows for policy input. Or, relationships of the kind of ‘integrated autonomy’ or ‘real partnership’ would be characterized by material flows for service delivery and advocacy work simultaneously, for example financing research and pilot projects, combined with the third sector’s presence in policy-making and planning processes.

The scheme of possible interactions provides the framework for the guidelines of semi-structured interviews, looking into the actual occurrence of combinations of interactions in a specific situation. The interview is designed in three parts: the first group of questions aims at an overall picture of the

situation, looking at the importance dedicated to the specific policy-event under study or to networking activities in general. This first part also checks on the list of actors to be included in the study (name-generating questions). The second and main part of the interview asks in detail about the actual interactions that have taken place (or habitually take place). A final section invites a general evaluation of the process, including participation in general, as well as suggestions regarding the future of state-third sector relationships. For illustration, some sample questions from the first and second part of the interview are as follows:

- ⇒ How was your organization / institution involved in ... (the concrete policy event)?
- ⇒ What do activities look like, which are connected with this policy event / or generally with the aim of getting involved with other actors?
- ⇒ How much effort / energy / resources are invested in getting involved with other actors?
- ⇒ Which actors are involved - who appears – in specific occasions or on the national / regional / local scene?
- ⇒ Are there actors who should have been included, and which, instead, have been left out – if so: for what reasons?
- ⇒ How are the participating actors selected?
  - ⇒ Have there been requests / exclusions of actors which would have liked to participate?
- ⇒ Which actors are perceived as important / not important, central / marginal, active / passive, influential?
- ⇒ Are there actors who typically take positions, which oppose the opinions of your organization or institution – Are there actors with whom some kind of tension prevails?
- ⇒ Have there been significant changes over time regarding number, importance, roles, and typical alliances of actors?
- ⇒ Of the actors mentioned so far, with whom does your organization interact?
  - ⇒ Through what kind of interactions: transfer of financial or in-kind resources, information, etc.
    - ⇒ on which occasions and for what purpose do interactions occur?
    - ⇒ on a more formal or informal basis?
  - ⇒ What does the communication look like?
    - ⇒ what kind of information is exchanged?
    - ⇒ through which channels (personal talks, phone calls, meetings, via email, etc.) and how often?
  - ⇒ Do activities of control occur, such as submitting reports, inspections, and publication of independent reports?
  - ⇒ Do organizational overlaps with those actors listed above occur, for example multiple memberships of persons, joint projects and ‘seconded’ personal, contemporaneous participation in events?

The analytical grid and the guidelines for the interviews are meant to provide orientation. The complete list of possible questions need not be applied necessarily in all occasions. Instead, depending on the situation, it might be advisable to skip some parts. How specific the questions can be depends on the accessibility of information through knowledgeable actors and documents. Formulating questions in an open way, inviting the interviewees to share their experiences and to elaborate on their points of view, allows for only a limited number of qualitative questions to be dealt with in a time-frame, which is usually limited. Furthermore, the analyses of the narratives, which are generated in this mode, need additional resource-intensive processing during the analysis.

### **VIII. Reformulation of the research questions - adding precision**

Based on the theoretical foundations and the methodologies outlined so far, the research question can

be refined, indicating more precisely which kind of result can be expected. The relationships between the governmental structures and the third sector which have emerged around the policy event in different national contexts differ with respect to overall qualities of the networks. For example:

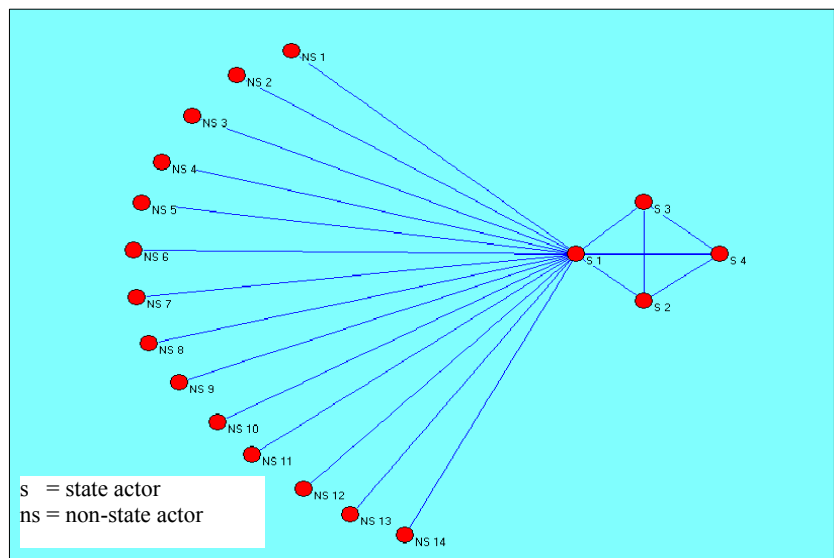
- ◆ the size (the number of involved actors);
- ◆ the connectedness, indicating diverse sub-groups of actors with elevated intensities of interaction, collaboration, control, and the presence of relatively isolated actors;
- ◆ the diverse degrees of centralization of the networks, and
- ◆ patterns of diverse types interactions and co-occurrence of diverse interactions (e.g. financing and control).

When distinguishing between types of actors (NGOs, governmental positions, peak associations / umbrella- or spoke organisations, hybrid organizations, etc.) corporate actors, which belonging to one kind, might show regularities with respect to the flow of material and immaterial resources.

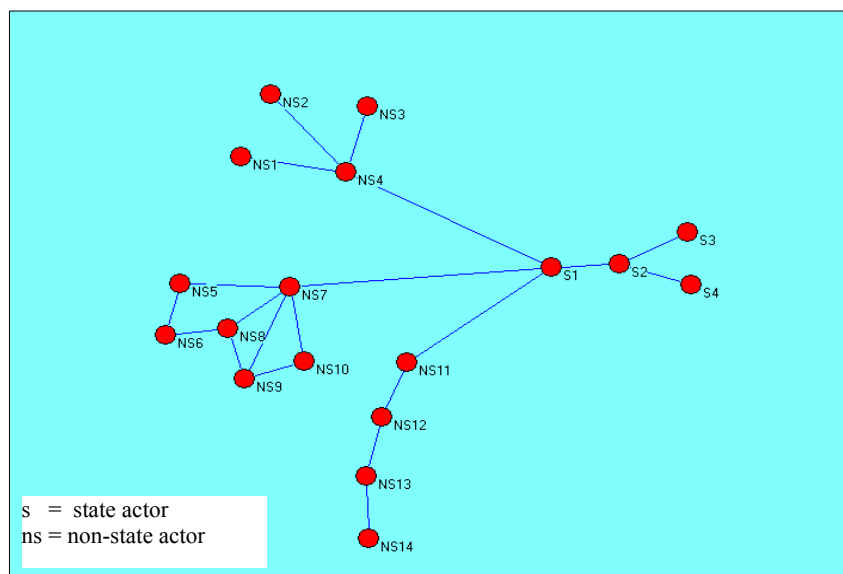
Correlations and interferences between the diverse types of interactions highlight the structural similarities (regular equivalence) of actors in different networks, which occupy similar positions in the network. Thus it is possible to find out, for example:

- ◆ whether governmental agents in diverse national settings interact in the same way - or at least in similar ways - with third sector organisations, or with the same number and / or with the same type of organisations;
- ◆ whether umbrella- or peak associations in diverse national settings take similar positions with respect to the distribution of information, in other words: up-loading - that is influencing and lobbying; as well as down-loading - that is inviting, informing and involving third sector organisations;

◆ whether third sector internal structures are similar in diverse national contexts, for example with respect to the density of interactions, a stronger or weaker focus around one or more central actors; whether single actors emerge with considerably higher degrees of 'betweenness', occupying broker-positions and bridges, which hint at considerable power in the flow of communication, and possibly



**Figure 2:**  
first example of a network – resembling the Italian case



**Figure 3:**  
second example of a network – resembling the German case

increasing network-vulnerability, or transaction-cost efficiency;

- ◆ whether the third sector and the cooperation among non-profit actors are sub-divided, along lines of organisational characteristics, such as ideological orientation, organisational size, predominantly service providing NGOs versus organisations, mainly doing advocacy work, etc.

Significant for the purpose of comparative research is the possibility to express the characteristics of single actors as well as characteristics of the entire network in a standardized form of indices, such as

- ◆ the overall density of interactions and sub-groups of actors, identifiable through pockets of relatively higher density of interactions,

- ◆ centralization of a network, with respect to information flow, understood as the reachability of actors,

- ◆ centralization with respect to potential domination of exchange relationships (betweenness).

Software, which has been developed for social network analysis<sup>23</sup> allows for a presentation of the findings in graphical form (for two imaginary examples see figure 2 and 3<sup>24</sup>).

## IX. Concluding thoughts

Currently, the theoretical framework, which has been outlined in this paper, is applied to the analysis of a concrete policy event: the “National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion” (National Action Plan on Inclusion - NAPIncl)<sup>25</sup> in two European member states (Italy and Germany) for the planning-period 2006 to 2008. The NAPIncl can be taken as a European version of a national action plan to fight poverty, occurring under the rather specific circumstances of European integration. The social area constitutes a policy field in which member states of the EU are reluctant to transfer sovereignty and decision-making power away from the national governments to the supranational level. Therefore, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)<sup>26</sup> was introduced at the end of the 1990s as a new policy instrument. This method is supposed to enhance the convergence of diverse social policy regimes, without creating ‘hard laws’, and in spite of the lack of formal competences being transferred to the European level in this field (and in other fields). The OMC establishes a process of benchmarking and continuous peer-reviewing. Differences with respect to social policies across the European Union should thus gradually disappear or, at least, become manageable. As one basic element in this process, each member state has to draw up a strategic paper, the Strategic Report (the former NAP on Inclusion) every two years (since 2001). Following general objectives and guidelines, and using common indicators, these documents describe the present situations, evaluate changes with respect to the previous years, and outline strategies for the future. One of the four overarching goals of this process calls for the mobilization of all relevant actors. This objective is broadly understood as enhanced consultation with non-state actors. Due to the ‘soft’ and ‘non-prescriptive’ character of the method, the policy event of the NAPIncl provides a quasi-experimental situation, which lends itself especially well to comparative research. Member states are obliged to present a plan, but the way in which these documents are produced is left entirely to the national governments. This situation can be described as an impulse, which is sent out, and which resonates differently under the diverse conditions in the member states. Therefore, on the one hand, the processes, which have been triggered on the

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<sup>23</sup> This project uses the software package ‘Pajek’ for explorative network analysis, which is free software and can be downloaded from internet (<http://vlado.fmf.uni-lj.si/pub/networks/pajek/>).

<sup>24</sup> Although these representations are not based on the actual empirical results, the two exemplary networks are inspired by the preliminary findings from the fieldwork. The more centralized, star-like graph resembles the Italian case and the more branched graph recalls the German situation.

<sup>25</sup> From 2006 onwards, the NAPIncl has become part of the streamlined “National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion”, which consists of three parts: one for pensions, one for health / long-term care and one for social inclusion. The term NAPIncl is used here and in the following in spite of this change in order to underline, that only the specific part on social inclusion is the subject of examination.

<sup>26</sup> For a review of the method see Pochet and Zeitlin (2005), Höchstetter (2007).

national level, bring out pre-existing habits of cooperation and consultation between state and non-state actors in each national setting. This allows for studying how far third sector organizations have been traditionally involved in each case. Similarly, one can examine whether the push for enhanced participation, originating from the supra-national level, does actually change the position of third sector organizations, whether civil society is able to take up the opportunities and - more generally - which factors hinder or help an increase of involvement.

Regarding the comparison of the networks that have emerged around the event in Germany and Italy, only one of the preliminary findings is mentioned here, which offers a point of departure for more general reflections. From a first inspection of the data, it seems that Italian NGOs are focused on and revolving around one coordinating state actor. This central actor is located in the ministry for social affairs. The Italian non-state actors themselves deplore the absence of cooperation within the nonprofit-sector. Instead, the German landscape of organized civil society in the social field is dominated by a few umbrella- or spoke-organizations. Here, the preparation of the strategic plan was rapidly integrated in pre-existing processes. In the Italian case, each time the incumbents of the political positions change, and as a consequence, the central coordinating actor changes, a new modus of consultation has to be set up. Consequently, a primary difference between the two cases lies in the volatility of the relationship between state and non-state structures. The presence of stable cooperation of non-state actors among themselves as given in the German case counterbalances political changes and guarantees some continuity with respect to the policies. Each new, incoming political leadership is bound to on-going processes, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it can rely on expertise and existing arrangements.

NGOs are generally eager to engage with opportunities to influence decision-making. Government structures, instead, invite the non-state actors into the management of public business to a varying extend. Mahoney (2004) examining lobby activities in the European Union, uses the concept of 'push' and 'pull' factors - or supply- and demand-factors, to describe these two sides of the same coin. Her perspective on the phenomenon highlights how the consultative habits and structures do not only depend on the attitudes and institutional arrangements on the governmental side. Participation depends also - and possibly not to a lesser extent - on the capacities of the third sector to deal with the task of coordinating and participating. As already said, the well-established structures within the third sector do not only mediate the diverse interests of non-state actors but they also have the capacity to stabilize the political system as a whole. A normative question arises when this third sector's *internal* structural development and its capacity for mediation are weak, or even lacking. Whose task should it be to foster the third sector internal structuration? Is it legitimate and feasible for the governmental actors to interfere - or is the supranational level of governance the right locus for preparing change?

A presentation and substantive discussion of findings is not within the scope of this paper. Here the methodological side has been addressed, aiming to provide a tool to gather the empirical information, from which further theoretical and normative debate can depart. Therefore, the final reflections deal with the methodology. The 'research tool' proposed in this paper - the inter-organizational social network analysis - de-constructs the relationships between the corporate actors analytically into single elements of interactions. The resulting methodology adds precision when describing the phenomenon of consultation and cooperation. The approach thus avoids unconscious bias, which easily 'sneaks in', where assumptions about the ideal arrangement of civil society and political actors remain latent and unexpressed, transported in the basic definitions, such as Nonprofit-, voluntary-, third sector. The framework enables descriptions, which avoid ambiguous terms ('partnership', 'supplementary', 'adversarial', etc). Thus a main intention of the approach is to separate the descriptive part of comparative research from interpretations and evaluations. The latter constitute a distinct, second phase in the research process. Additionally, the approach aims at quantifying diverse situations, through a translation into indices, which allows for a condensed comparison of diverse realities. At the same time, the research follows a qualitative paradigm with respect to two points: firstly, the process of data-collection is designed in an open way. The pieces of information from the interviews are translated into standardized form as part of the analysis. The second distinctively qualitative characteristic of the

research design lies in its logic of validity. The generalizability of findings is based on an informed case selection<sup>27</sup>. Instead of relying on statistical procedures, like sampling and inferential interpretations, typical events are identified, which are supposed to represent the general situation in a holistic way. This approach indicates how to address the problem of charting out an overall, national context. Researchers have repeatedly pointed at the difficulties of coming to valid conclusions about the state-third sector relations *within the same* national setting. Habits and practices of consultation differ across policy sectors within the same political system. To obtain the national picture, it would therefore be necessary to pick a number of representative policy events from diverse fields and combine the results, building on an ‘intelligent’ case selection. The research would observe not only the processes of consultation in the field of social affairs, but for example also the involvement of organized civil society in the budgetary process, in the policies regulating industrial relations and the labour market, their involvement in environment- and consumer-protection, etc. Additionally, a finer-grained and more encompassing research agenda would then follow up on the different levels of governance. Furthermore, a number of scenarios for a future application of the methodology as a ‘heuristic tool’ of an inter-organizational network analysis for charting out the institutional landscape of participative structures seems promising: future research could check for variations of state – third sector relationships with respect to the delegation of competences in more or less decentralized structures, highlighting the connections between local, regional and national networks. A comparison of national contexts not only within the European Union but across more diverse (cultural) settings would explore whether patterns of participation emerge in different political systems. Studies on democratic transition and consolidation could examine the effects of efforts spent on civil society support, effects of recent historical events, economic development, the interferences and roles of international actors etc. and whether these factors contribute to the formation of specific and similar networks during a successful process of democratization.

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<sup>27</sup> This contrasts with large-scale, statistical studies, which are based on aggregated data (‘head-counts’ of organizations, surveys) and built on statistical models as well as on assumptions on the significance of the presence and functioning of intermediary organizations.

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