

Performance evaluation and legitimacy of the third sector: the case of the Belgian domiciliary care quasi-market

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During the last decade, public regulation of social policies in the field of domiciliary care has undergone a significant evolution (Laville and Nyssens: 2001). In many countries (United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, etc.), the introduction of a quasi-market regulation can be observed whose main characteristic consists of a separation of the roles of the state between that of financier and provider of main services (Legrand: 1991).

Our contribution deals with the “titre-service system”, a Belgian public policy, emblematic of the aforementioned evolution, which was introduced in 2001 into the field of domestic services. In order to support this measure, considered by the authorities as an instrument of employment creation (and a fight against the black labor market), the state decided to structure it by strongly financing the cost of the provided services (making the demand solvent), while making theoretically all types of operators eligible for this service provision (widening the offer). This measure can be considered as a quasi-market, since there is a market creation because of the competition between different types of organisations (belonging to the public sector, the for-profit and the nonprofit sector), but it is a regulated market (and this explains the prefix “quasi”), because of the fixed price for the provided services, the certification of providers, etc.

With more than forty thousand newly created jobs, the “titre-service system” has exceeded its objectives in terms of job creation. Consequently, more and more foreign observers are interested in this policy. Some questions concerning the performance evaluation nevertheless emerge from the “titre-service system”. The public evaluations of the “titre-service system” indeed focus on the volume of jobs created (which is the top priority of the state), on the cost of the measure, and on meeting minimum criteria concerning the quality of employment (work time, type of contract, etc.) established by the law. These evaluation reports also describe, often approximately, other dimensions of the employment quality (workers support, training, etc) crossed with the type of employers. However, this type of performance measurement does not aim to impose more constraining working conditions or to sanction unsatisfactory practices. In this context, the respect of more demanding performance criteria, in terms of employment and service quality, thus largely depend on the organization and, in particular, on its mission.

For these reasons, the existing evaluations measures are incomplete and require other developments. Some dimensions of the employment quality are indeed not sufficiently evaluated and the service quality is wrongly neglected (considering in particular the high percentage of old customers). Moreover, performance measurements do not focus enough on the mission of general interest followed by certain types of providers.

As a consequence of these weaknesses, we produced a multi-criteria grid of performance analysis, on the basis of practices adopted abroad. This grid of analysis tested among a sample of sixty organizations contributes to answer a fundamental stake, for the third sector in particular. It indeed stresses the “wide” performance of these providers, including their “social utility” via, for instance, a mission of professional and social insertion of precarious workers in the labour market. This analysis thus legitimates the access of third sector providers to additional public resources and contributes to reject the criticism over “over-

subsidizing” and over “unfair competition” addressed by their competitors. In the case of the “titre-service system”, a deep performance evaluation, complementary to the one conducted by the authorities, consequently seems to be an essential condition for the coexistence, on a quasi-market, of a diversity of providers, with different missions - and thus quite different resources - (Gadrey: 2004).

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