

Abstract for the Eighth International Conference of The International Society for Third Sector Research and Second EMES-ISTR European Conference in Partnership with the INEFOGO Network of Excellence, "The Third Sector and Sustainable Social Change: New Frontiers for Research" to be held at the University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, July 9-12, 2008.

Theme Area: **The Welfare State, liberalization, neo-liberal policies, and the Third Sector**

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Title: Capturing Positive State Support for the Third Sector as a Partner in Policy

Since the 1980s, the nature of the state in western democracies has changed from interventionist to facilitative (Kendall 2003). As the state has become increasingly hollowed out, it has come to rely on private and nonprofit organizations in all facets of the policy process (Craig, 2003; Boris and Stueuerle, 1999; Browne 2000). Consequently, government concern has arisen over the accountability and capacity of these policy partners (Gidron et al., 1992; Salamon 1995). These concerns are heightened by an explosion in the number of organizations serving citizens. Disillusioned with the state, citizens have turned to organizations to represent their interests and to provide services previously extended by governments. A key dilemma for the state is how to reinforce the accountability and capacity of the third sector without undermining its autonomy or vitality.

Three objectives are critical to this exercise. First, state action must support third sector organizations given the recorded fluctuations in voluntary activity and citizen engagement (Putnam 2000). Second, state actions supporting organizations should enhance their ability to promote engagement, belonging and democracy given the well-documented benefits of a vibrant civil society and citizen participation. Third, government must foster the capacity of organizations to serve as partners in policy in such a way that reflects the complexity of contemporary public policy and the changing and blurring roles of each sector (Harris & Rochester, 2001; Taylor 2003). This entails measures that include corporate actors (reinforcing social responsibility) and government departments, requiring both to be more transparent and accountable (Scott, 2002; Richmond & Shields, 2004).

This paper examines the means used by Canadian governments to invigorate and strengthen the capacity of third sector organizations to better serve citizens. The paper identifies three objectives critical to this exercise and then develops a continuum for charting the means that governments use to animate the sector ranging from enabling to enforcing. Using this framework, the paper assesses the state of relations between the state and organizations and the effectiveness of state support for the sector. At times coercive measures are misapplied and undermine the objectives of the government while at other times stronger state actions benefit citizens (O'Connor, 2005). The paper concludes with speculations on the appropriate criteria for determining when facilitative or coercive state action is necessary to ensure sector and citizen needs are well-served.

The paper has three objectives: 1. to contribute to current understanding of the multifaceted relationship between governments and third sector organizations; 2. to analyze effective state-sector collaboration given their redefined roles in a post-welfare society and economy; 3. to advance theories of public policy by providing a framework for assessing the effects of specific policies and programs on the social economy, social capital and building and sustaining a healthy democracy. These lessons resonate for the US, Britain and other countries as neo-liberal values have fundamentally altered the way they serve citizens.

Selected and Cited Sources only

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