

Expanded abstract

Collaboration dynamics in third sector social action organizations in Spain

Context and Objectives

The evolution and positioning of the Third Sector as a civic actor is linked to the nature and morphology of its networks and to the spaces of connection-collaboration around which Third Sector organisations weave their webs. This study analyses the relational dimension of the sector.

The development and expansion of Third Sector organisations in Spain (hereafter referred to as TSOs) has been conditioned by the (late) process of adaptation to a *model of welfare capitalism* in which a market economy coexists with a state that has the capacity to guarantee and provide a part of social goods and a space that is open to civic participation. The Spanish Third Sector has evolved within this context. In this process, different initiatives and dynamics of internal collaboration (between organisations) and external collaboration (with other actors) have been generated. On the other hand, the adoption of a state model of Autonomous Communities following the democratic transition and the fact that competencies for the majority of social policies have been transferred to the regions have brought elements of territorial differentiation into the overall process.

In this study, we analyse the overall influence of the forms of collaboration adopted by Third Sector organisations, exploring the effect they have had on the formation of the sector itself, as well as their social and political impact.

The approach of the study is based on two research questions. On the one hand, we are interested in identifying the relational logics and the purposes and effects sought in the sector's collaboration processes. We start from the hypothesis that, although the dynamics of collaboration are marked by the aforementioned scenario, the effects of these collaborations among TSOs are diverse and have to do with their overall institutional positioning, with the generation of discourses that affect society and public policies, and with their role as sources of social capital and participation. On the other hand, the importance of the regional factor forces us to take a comparative look at different territorial processes. In this sense, our work raises some questions: do different logics exist with respect to the processes of collaboration in the autonomous regions, and if so, do they condition the formation of different regional welfare models?

Theoretical aspects and methodology

In relation to the theoretical aspects, it is necessary to begin by identifying the predominant conception of the Third Sector for the case study. Ángel Zurdo (2007) differentiates between two approaches or macro-conceptions: in the first, referred to as the *Anglo-Saxon* or *non-profit*

approach, the solidarity and non-profit nature predominates above all else as the articulating factor of the entities, normally concretised in organisational terms through associations or foundations. The second approach, referred to by Zurdo as the *continental approach*, resorts to a broader idea of the sector, contemplating within it all forms of social economy, cooperative economy and alternative economy to traditional market logics. In the Spanish case, the identification of the sector with the non-profit approach has predominated. Within this field, a distinction is also made between organisations operating in the field of social services, known as Third Sector of Social Action Organisations (TSSAOs), and those operating in such fields as culture and the environment.

With respect to the forms of collaboration between TSSAOs, the predominant idea is that these relationships focus on the search for positioning in the context of a service market (Ruíz de Olabuénaga, 2006). However, our starting point here is a broader vision, understanding the sector as an actor that generates different types of responses to collective problems in a changing environment (Astley & Fombrun, 1983), thus contemplating other sources of collaboration in terms of *advocacy* functions (Beaton, Macindoe & Wang, 2021) as well as social participation and social capital (Saz-Gil et al., 2016).

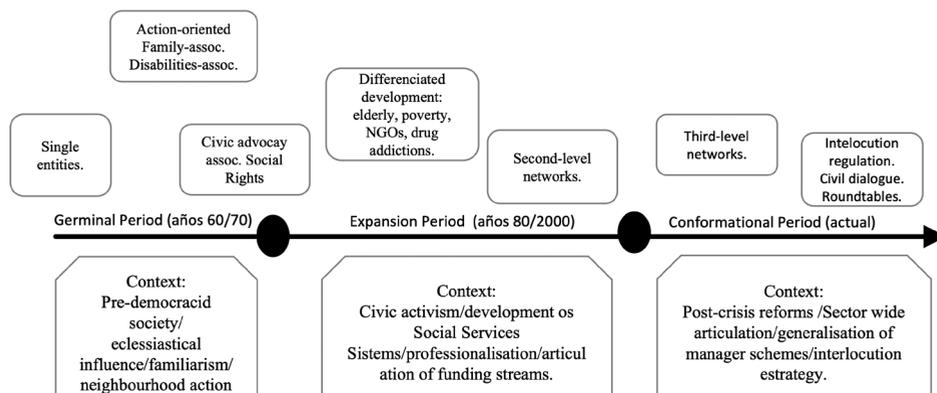
The last of the theoretical elements guiding the research is related to the types of collaboration brought into play by the TSSAOs. To this end, we delve into the contributions of various authors such as Agranoff and McGuire (2003), who differentiate between collaboration and partnership, the former taking a more hierarchical form, while the latter tends to be more mutualistic; or Iglesias and Carrera (2013), who distinguish between tactical and strategic collaboration, and point out three types of the latter: *strategic alliances* around a common objective, *institutional integrations* and *networks or platforms*.

Methodologically, the research results were obtained, in their descriptive part, from the analysis of the literature and of secondary sources (reports of the different networks, content analysis of web pages, corporate information). For the analysis of perceptions, a total of 48 in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants (managers, technical staff, volunteers, stakeholders) and 14 focus groups (two in each region). Qualified sampling procedures were used in both cases. For the study of similarities and differences between regions, we selected seven cases based on significance criteria: Andalusia, Castile and Leon, Catalonia, Community of Madrid, Community of Valencia, Basque Country and Region of Murcia. The implementation of both methods was similar in each region.

Results

As a first contribution in the results section, the research shows how the Spanish Third Sector has developed a specific relational architecture in a relatively short period of time.

Figure 1. TSSAOs cross-linking process



Source: Own elaboration.

In this formative process, the initial priority for TSSAOs has been their grouping into second-level networks or platforms, predominantly of a thematic nature. This thematization of the networks has had a double effect: on the one hand, it has consolidated and improved the visibility of different areas of intervention (disability, drug addiction, the fight against poverty, development cooperation, etc.), but at the same time it has led to the differentiation and dispersion of the sector. Recently, especially after the 2008 crisis, the TSSAOs have consolidated a broad third-level collaborative space, which has developed rapidly both at the national level and in most regions. This new phase has facilitated a greater concentration of the sector around common interests, essentially based on the search for a space of its own and differentiated from other social actors (trade unions, social economy, social movements...), although it is a relatively recent process.

In the informants' testimonies, there is a predominance of positive views on the achievement of the TSSAOs in articulating themselves as a unique and differentiated actor with respect to other social actors (social economy, trade union movement, etc.), although there is also a view among a large number of informants that this achievement is insufficient, advocating a refocusing of this strategy towards an *internal enrichment* of the sector linked to: 1) its positioning in spaces of social innovation at the local level, 2) the capacity to achieve compatibility in the adoption of its own position, and 3) its connection with other social actors.

The second of the aspects to be investigated has had to do with the existence or not of differentiated relational models between regions. In this sense, we have been able to identify, firstly, that the origins of the sector were influenced by the role of the Church and that of families (especially relevant in the field of disability), as promoters and drivers of the first layer of TSSAOs as well as of collaboration processes, across all the territories. Links with the civic-neighbourhood movement have also been common, albeit in different forms. A second

set of conditioning factors are regionally differentiated, with a greater weight in: Catalonia (associative tradition...), the Basque Country (community culture and close relationship with the administration) and Madrid (connection with advocacy neighbourhood movements). We have termed the third type of conditioning factors contextual factors, which refer to the global and European trend towards convergence in the sector due to the generalisation of formulas for the co-production or co-creation of services among different actors.

Contributions

By bringing the three types of factors into a dialogue, we can conclude that there are territorial differences in the development of collaboration strategies: some have developed more of a civic-participatory culture, others have developed open governance and coordination with the public sphere, while still others have fostered a dense relational fabric and the formation of interest groups. These differences give specific identities to different communities; however, when considered as a whole, they do not form differentiated models of collaboration, but rather, there is currently a predominance of dynamics of homologation in which, in addition to the context, the existence of a federal relational culture that has facilitated the permeability of initiatives between territories has also been influential. This tendency towards convergence in collaboration processes has also been influenced by the permeability and capacity to transfer initiatives between territories.