

Expanded abstract

Relational hybridization of Third Sector of Social Action in the last decade. Between mobilization and neighborhood-community networks

The third sector of social action (hereinafter TSAS) is, from a theoretical perspective, an elusive and fluid concept, especially in the European sphere. Debates and consensus definitions have been numerous to build a measurable, shared, comprehensive and comparable concept. These efforts have yielded remarkable results in the development and analysis of the TSAS. Now, the dynamism of social reality in the last 10 years has produced innovative and alternative responses from civil society that have impacted on the shared worldview of the conceptual frameworks, functions and actions of the TSAS.

The TSAS has been configured as a hybrid relational space that develops in dynamic tension between citizen mobilization, social entrepreneurship, the social economy and community support networks. This tension, which produces multiple meanings and perspectives for analysis, is only understandable from the analysis of the plural responses promoted by civil society. The purpose of this article is to analyse this process in the 10-year period between the Great Recession (2009-2012) and the Great Lockdown (2020) produced by Covid-19. We must understand this hybrid relationship from the intensification of the care pressure that both crises have meant for all social organizations. This tension has spun from the dynamism of social movements in the Great Recession and the rise of neighbourhood-community networks during the pandemic.

Throughout the following pages, we will discuss the impact of these neighborhood-community networks that achieved a high level of social legitimacy as a result of their efforts to develop support and resilience building initiatives.

The topic will be addressed through a review of recent and specialized bibliography and seven interviews to people who hold different positions in the social field. These interviews have sought to reflect some territorial diversity: three have been carried out in cities with a population of 50,000 to 350,000 inhabitants and four in large cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants).

The role played by the TSAS during this period has not necessarily changed, but it has gained some new attributes. This is evolving to fit hybrid organizational forms characterised by open models that embrace diverse organizational cultures and flexible structures. In this process of hybridization, four essential intermediary fields can be differentiated: social economy, social entrepreneurship, social movements and new forms of community resilience. Strengthening

these fields in a productive and innovative way will be a fundamental axis in the deployment of the TSAS in the coming years.

The TSAS in the Great Recession was developed in tension with emerging social mobilizations. These had a clear political profile compared to the TSAS care physiognomy. This profile has been shared among Southern European countries. However, during the Covid-19 crisis, the TSAS has maintained its care-oriented profile by sharing that space with the Community Neighborhood Networks created with a more social orientation. This type of community resilience, as shown by the first studies, seems to have been common in neighboring countries. In this sense, the TSAS lives with tension its lack of proximity and social base, as studies have shown for years in Spain.

This raises challenges that, depending on how they are addressed, may have an effect on their orientation, development and even on its organization:

- In relation to the care role, the TSAS needs to find alternative ways approaches that do not undermine the dignity of the people who request its help.
- In addition, the TSAS must develop its capacity to involve other agents (donors, companies, Public Administration...) in its evaluation processes and in relation to the search for solutions. This will entail “educational” processes in accordance with the orientations and objectives pursued by the TSAS (e.g., delivery of purse cards vs. delivery of food bags).
- The TSAS must develop its innovative capacity, which, unlike the public organisations (much more limited), will allow it to implement actions in different areas and in direct relationship with civil society and with neighborhood-community networks.
- But, in addition, it is necessary that the TSAS does not lose its political dimension (in a broad sense of the term) and that it delves into the roots and causes of the problems it addresses.
- This dimension affects its relationship with the Public Administration in two aspects, the first, in terms of political incidence (and even the complaint) directed at those who finance part of their activity; and the second, because the search for resources for this type of task usually requires a greater effort for the entities.

Finally, it should be noted that the TSAS daily presence in the various territories is a key element for the configuration of their relationships with other stakeholders. An important part of the recognition and potential alliances will depend on the continuity of this presence beyond periods of crisis. If one of the fundamental objectives of the TSAS is to promote the participation of those who are frequently excluded from various participation spheres (social, economic, political, cultural ...), their roots and links with the community (users, donors, volunteers, companies, Public Administration...) will be fundamental aspects for achieving this. For this, the TSAS should open up to engage with more open forms of governance, promoting the empowerment of affected people and communities and breaking the gap between professionals and participants.