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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL / NON-PROFIT SECTOR

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Grounding ideas and general aims

In the beginning of the 21st Century the social activity of the civil or non-profit organizations is becoming a current issue. There is a growing need for civil initiatives as the global problems and the unsolved issues of local societies emerge, and the troubles and difficulties of accelerated social and economic changes are also becoming widespread. Civil organizations are also important because the participation of public system in managing social and collective problems decrease. Civil organizations are capable of providing solutions for social problems in a reflective way.

The most effective organizations start off spontaneously as bottom-up initiatives based on local problems and necessities, integrating affected people on the basis of their common interest. Regarding the undertaken tasks, social participation, the amount of efforts and achievements of the civil or non-profit sector, as well as the extent of growth in the sector we can assert that the dynamism, development and flexibility of the civic sphere enables the multitude of these organisations to take over and handle effectively more and more essential activities, that previously have been performed by the public sphere with more or less success.

At present public organizations of national economies are forced to gradually reduce their involvement in social commitments, while social problems remain, or rather increase and change, partly because of lack of solutions. Consequently, decreasing participation of public entities entails the growing activity of the civil sector as the private sphere has fundamentally different interests.

In practice, institutions of civil or non-profit sector aim at assuming functions that are not provided sufficiently because of the unsatisfactory performance of public services and the differing interests of market-based services. The role of civil sphere is significant in creating and maintaining the conditions and terms of social self-organization and assertion of interest, facilitating non-profit oriented social innovation as well as exploring and implementing solutions for social problems. As a result, the civil sphere guarantees the creation and reproduction of common weals that facilitate social welfare and growth in collective goods of societies, communities, groups and individuals.

The values and operational methods of traditional governmental structure are bureaucratic, paternalistic and are characterized by centralized structure and mechanism. Because of its relative inflexibility it is unable to react rapidly and effectively enough to the challenges of the constantly changing environment. There is a need for a socially sensitive, less bureaucratic behaviour, customer- or consumer-oriented attitude instead of the support of general principles.

It is an important distinctive feature that non-profit organizations are not directly subordinate to governmental interests and they do not exercise power. They are granted certain extent of autonomy in the formation of their organizational and operational structure, it is their privilege to define their major activities and target groups. This sphere focuses on versatile, less formal social self-organizing and voluntariness as opposed to formal structure and bureaucratic operation of public sector. This feature is represented in the expression 'non-governmental organizations' (NGO's).



The task of the non-profit sector is to fill in the gap between public service and private companies. The goals and activities of non-profit organizations mirror and emphasize the multiple needs of individuals, groups and the whole society. As long as the necessities are constantly growing and changing there must be a sphere in the society that is able to accommodate reflectively to these expectations by innovative attitude and appropriate initiatives. This role needs to be undertaken by the non-profit sector since public bodies, as it follows from the previously mentioned characteristics, are becoming unable to perform these tasks.

Undertaken tasks, the structural and operational specifics of civil organizations, their target groups and problems all reflect the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the past decades and those of the contemporary Hungary, mirror the conditions that determine the individual and collective interest representation.

Non-profit sector and non-profit organizations are important elements of social and cultural life in European Union. The role of these organizations is essential in defence of human rights and strengthening social solidarity. Organizations that belong to non-profit sphere facilitate the development of democratic society and undertake effectively the interest representation of disadvantaged groups. The development of European civil consciousness, assuring the integration of citizens in the framework of the Union, providing and improving real contents for the concept of civil Europe are challenges that require civil participation. The role of civil sphere will be even more important in the future. In the EU these initiations are considered the basic institutions of democracy having an essential role in the dialogue between government and citizens and enhancing the effectivity of representative democracy.

The above described reflectiveness that is present in civil organizations provide appropriate basis for professionals to perform more reflective assistance and providing more effective solutions for the existing problems of individuals through constant learning and accommodation. This reflective view is necessary for the professional to become socially sensitive and properly react to social needs in order to reflect current social problems in everyday practice.

Reflective practice is the main principle of the course, as it is based on reflective research methods and the participants of the course are required to think critically and reflectively. The aim of the course is to furnish professionals with the capability of learning from their own experiences, since reflective view is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement.

Schedule of course

Week 1. – Lecture

Approaches, basic terms. Definition of the terms „civil” and „non-profit” and the introduction of relevant approaches.

Week 2. – Seminar

Survey and presentation: questionnaire among students: how much information they have on civil organizations.

Week 3. – Lecture

Chronological development. Changes of external environment. Development of non-profit sector in Hungary.

Week 4. – Seminar

Individual work: research of literature and browsing the internet on how the social and political changes determined the founding of non-governmental organizations.

Week 5. – Lecture

Major types of non-profit organizations. Lecture on the types of civil organizations in Europe and in Hungary.

Week 6. – Seminar

Survey on the distribution of civil organizations in different regions, carried out by participating students in their home town, city or region.

Week 7. – Lecture

Causes of founding non-profit organizations. Shortcomings of the governmental (social welfare) system, the necessity of responding to emerging social problems. Solution: non-profit organizations.

Week 8. – Seminar

Group discussion: the civil organization you would like to found: plan the possible financial background, choose target group, plan activities.

Week 9. – Lecture

The role of civil organizations. The judgement of non-profit organizations in the European Union and Hungary.

Week 10. – Seminar (Extra classroom work)

Individual work. Participation in civil activities: performing two hours of voluntary work in a chosen non-profit organization.

Week 11. – Lecture

Problems that civil organizations most often have to face: improper management, financial problems.

Week 12. – Seminar

Interview with a representative of a non-profit organization: exploring the organization's main financial resources, fundraising techniques, main activities and actions. Presentation of the findings.

Week 13. – Lecture

Intersectoral cooperations. Cooperation of non-profit sector and governmental organizations.

Week 14. – Seminar

Summary and conclusion. Term paper. Assessment of course.

Methodological implications

- designing, carrying out and analysing surveys and questionnaires
- performing personal interviews, outlining the main information received
- individual research of literature, printed and electronic media
- preparing and performing classroom presentations
- reflective techniques: analysis and synthesis of the received information, connecting theoretical knowledge to the practice
- guided group discussions promoting critical discourse
- emotional-reflective learning
- bohmian dialogue
- reflective team exercises



Competencies

- Identification with the social work profession and its core values through the exploration of civil organizations, their importance and actions. Identification with disadvantaged social groups: reflectivity including *self-reflection* and *self-correction*.
- Accepting and adhering to ethical principles (code of ethics, tolerating *ambiguity and cultural differences*).
- *Critical thinking*.
- Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment (Applying relevant conceptual frameworks to guide the process of assessment, intervention, and evaluation; *a systemic view on people and environment*. Engagement in policy practice to develop social and economic well-being by *improving social work services*).
- Respond to contexts that shape practice. (Providing *relevant social services in an ever-changing social environment*; taking leadership in *promoting constructive changes* and in the improvement of social services).
- *Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (empathy, respect for the client's own decisions, empowering attitude, selection of appropriate interventions strategies, work to achieve organizational goals, monitoring and evaluation of social work interventions*).
- *Ability to research literature individually, summarize the main points*.
- *Ability to perform interviews, carry out research by means of questionnaires*.
- *Presentation techniques*.

Assessment

- Evaluation of work carried out individually: research, interviews, questionnaires.
- Term paper.
- Group discussions and presentations.
- Assessment of voluntary work: certification of performed task required.