

Do We Need and Believe in a Panacea?

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M. Freise, M. Pyykkönen, E. Vaidelytė (eds.). *A Panacea for All Seasons? Civil Society and Governance in Europe*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010. For those who are interested in civil society and governance issues we can recommend an anthology just published in Germany *A Panacea for All Seasons? Civil Society and Governance in Europe*. In contemporary Lithuanian academic discourse the topic of civil society was studied by various social scientists, meanwhile, the attempts to explore the topic in a broader public governance perspective are still rare.

The network society is not only a concept used by M. Castells, but a reality. The proof for this is prehistory of this book. Professors H. Anheier ir G. Donnelly-Cox in 2001 organized the first meeting of doctoral students, who had been studying civil society from different perspectives. Later it transformed into the constantly meeting group of scholars where the idea to write a book exploring phenomenon of civil society appeared. The rhetorical title of the book gives a possibility using the results of conducted surveys to provide further insights to study this social phenomenon.

In the introduction editors take the pink glasses from the readers away and say “*hopes and expectations concerning the role of civil society in modern times that are formulated by many feature writers and politicians are frequently unrealistic*” (p. 9). Most authors of the volume ask identical question in the beginning of their chapters but more often they conclude that it is too early to answer the question or the answer and reality is not so simple as the question. Besides the attempts to explore the concepts of civil society and governance from various perspectives a reader can find many examples of best practice how non-governmental organizations can contribute to solving social problems at local, state or international levels.

Anthology can be characterized as a interdisciplinary study. The reader interested in philosophy, political science, sociology, psychology, management, public administration can find many interesting ideas for consideration. Together with case studies from the Nordic social welfare states (Sweden, Finland, Norway), European old-timers

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(Germany, Holland, Belgium, Ireland), a few examples from the transitional societies (Hungary, Lithuania and Poland) are presented. Researchers or students can see how various research methods (case study, longitudinal study, participant observation, interviews, survey, historical study, etc.) can be used to analyze the chosen topic. Those who want to find out if the contributors share the same meaning of civil society concept, may be disappointed. The editors took charge to present the concepts of civil society and provide the broader perspective of the anthology.

Nearly each author starts with the question if X (public-private partnership, philanthropy, social capital, etc.) can be a panacea for all problems. After a short introduction on academic debate about this X, the authors proceed to case studies. The structure of the anthology is simple and consists of two parts. In the first part of the book authors focus on relationship between government and civil society, meanwhile the second part provides a new perspective towards current practices of third sector. The reader of this review forgives the author for not providing a comprehensive analysis of each chapter. But some questions or statements may intrigue and encourage to read it.

Does the ideas by Gramsci and Foucault on power and society may be relevant in contemporary life? (Miikka Pyykkönen)

Does the potential for organized civil society can be taken for granted? Does the institutional context influence it? What conclusions can be made studying the Dutch experience providing social housing? Does the relationship between those sectors is a static process? (Taco Brandsen)

Does the public-private partnership (PPP) implementing health care policy in Munster always has positive effects upon the civil society organizations? Do contractual obligations create a new danger or risks for those organizations? (Matthias Freise).

How the new forms of citizens' involvement change civil society and government relationship? How does the involvement of civil society in the process of local budget formation is judged by Stefano Stortone in the context of contemporary democratic theory?

Does the experience of post-communist Poland reflect the specifics of the whole region? Piotr Romaniuk distinguished features (the importance of mutual help and care is more evident in small villages, the moral imperative to help others in the situation of crises, the lack of social capital under the normal circumstances) of Polish civil society may give the Lithuanian reader an impression that this case study is based on the Lithuanian experience.

The Lithuanian case study on philanthropy phenomenon extends the topic of social policy started by T. Brandsen. Eglė Vaidelytė presenting both qualitative and quantitative data tries to find the answer to the question if a twenty years period is a sufficient time to understand whether philanthropy is the alternative social welfare model or the state partner to implement this policy in Lithuania?

Responsibility and accountability are terms often used to define the standards applicable and compulsory to governmental institutions and civil servants. May the accountability criteria be used to assess the activity of civil society organizations? Monika Molnar presents an integrated perspective of non-profit accountability explaining how it can be used.

Johan Hvenmark focuses on the membership perception. Does the changing context (increased commercialization, adoption of corporate ideas and behavior) of civil society organizations have any impact on their membership perception?

Can the historical perspective towards non-governmental organizations be helpful to understand the internal governance trends? Stefan Einarsson explores the Temperance movement in Sweden showing that the change of ideas, discourses or activities of an organization may lead to more basic changes inside the organization.

Is the spirit of entrepreneurship common exclusively among private sector employees or may it be observed in civil society organizations as well? A question whether activist entrepreneurship can contribute to the development of new practices inside civil society organizations is important to Malin Gawell.

Do traditional voluntary organizations have the answer to the question how to adapt to new changing settings when community spirit is often replaced by individualization? Interviews and observation by Kari Steen-Johnsen may give an answer based on the Norwegian gymnastics club case.

Can we draw the profile of a volunteer? Does this profile change due to a changing context? A positive response is provided by Lesley Hustinx who, after a comprehensive assessment, presents different styles of present-day volunteering, analyzes changes of the general profile. A short-term, episodic, noncommittal mode of involvement are the features of a contemporary volunteer and long-term, stable and strong organizational attachment is seen as a characteristic of the past.

Majority of readers are familiar with the concept of social capital. But such terms as the bonding, bridging and linking of social capital may sound as rather new ones. The debate about the role of social capital in civil society building is and probably will always be relevant. How this capital can advantage public policy implementation in Ireland at local level? Eileen Humphreys concludes that the characteristics of the people and conditions of the place influence overall social capital. The researcher is not so optimistic to think that citizens alone can create social capital without efforts from public institutions side.

Is it possible to analyze the civil society only from the state or the market perspective? Understanding that the individual may be lost in those above mentioned perspectives, Anna Domaradzka focuses on the individual, rather than on a more usual - systematic - level and analyses the case of Polish women's organizations. In this chapter we can find the answer about the meaning of civil society organization to each of their members.

After reading the book, the conclusion is simple and clear: civil society can be a panacea for those individuals whose social needs, need for cooperation, care for others, self-actualization is higher, who needs the source of identification in complex and constantly changing world. But another question is - for how long? Probably the final answer to similarly formulated questions in social sciences does not exist. Politics, economic, culture, technologies, social sphere are constantly changing so the bringing up the right question in right time may be important.