

**DIFFERENTIATION WITHIN THE THIRD SECTOR:
ELABORATION OF DIMENSIONS AND TYPES**

A Draft Version

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1. Introduction

Particularly from the 1990's the research interests in the third sector have increased rapidly. The progress of research efforts has moved both in general theoretical and in more specific empirical directions. The research field has proceeded by approaching the third sector from different perspectives and frameworks related to several scientific disciplines and policy areas. While the importance and visibility of third sector organizations has grown rapidly, the third sector has become a quite diverse and diffuse field for studies (Anheier, Carlson and Kendall 2002). A result of these developments has been an increasing dispersion with cognitive gaps in the research area. Theoretical concepts and categories are not often used in empirical studies, neither are empirical dimensions connected to theoretical concepts.

Simultaneously with the ramifying research also the consciousness about the diversified and heterogeneous character of the third sector has become widely known (e.g. Siisiäinen 1999a, 1999b). This twofold differentiation of both the third sector and the research done on it implies difficulties to form comprehensive and integrative knowledge on the realities of the third sector. It seems to be that the research in this field is consisting of several independent and selective pieces depending on different research interests and perspectives. In that kind of situation, there is a need to take a look at the field with a more general glance.

The purpose of this paper is (1) to analyse the nature of the gap between theoretical and empirical approaches, and (2) to identify some important dimensions and types which could be used as bridging the cognitive gap. Both tasks are done in a tentative and limited way by using some examples of theoretical and empirical studies. One rationale for doing this kind of analysis is to elaborate frameworks and background support for comparative studies of the third sector.

Important incentives for this paper have been the articles by Martti Siisiäinen (1999a, 1999b) and Anna Vakil (1997). Siisiäinen has analysed the third sector on both theoretical and empirical bases. Vakil has done a quite systematic effort to create classificatory approaches in the studies of the third sector. This paper owes the gratitude to Siisiäinen's and Vakil's work. However, some further steps are worked out here. Particularly this paper gives more weight to contextual approaches and factors in the

study of the third sector. In recent studies, the third sector has been regarded and analysed as being at the crossroads of different societal sectors and institutions (Anheier, Carlson and Kendall 2002). This implies that the contextual approach is a quite relevant starting point for studies. A point of reference can be the contingency theory and approaches inspired by this theory in the analysis of organizations. Also within the third sector, non-governmental voluntary organizations can be studied from both external and internal perspectives. Contextual approaches underline the importance of external relations for the characteristics and development of organizations.

2. Theoretical and conceptual approaches to the third sector

There is no grand theory of voluntarism and voluntary organizations, instead, there are certain general trends of studies. Theoretical and conceptual orientations concentrate mainly on the third sector as a whole. This implies that the third sector is analysed in its general features and in relation to other societal main elements: the state, markets and civil society. In both theoretically and empirically oriented studies there have been efforts to identify some essential and defining features of the third sector. Certain general attributes have been presented either as definitions of the third sector or as an ideal type construction of this sector (Lewis 2001, 59). We may think that these general criteria could form a kind of orienting bridge between different types of studies.

Several different orientations have developed at the societal macro level of conceptualisation (Siisiäinen 1999a). Some research approaches tend to emphasize the relations between the third sector and the state (or government), while some others concentrate more on the third sector's position within the private sector, as a part of markets. Discussions on the relationship between the third sector and the civil society have been rich and manifold. These orientations tend to omit the analysis of diversity within the third sector. In empirical studies (e.g. de Hart and Dekker 1999, Selle 1999, Helander 1998), the internal diversity of the third sector has been much more at the front of studies.

2.1 General characteristics of the third sector

How the concept and the nature of the third sector has been regarded by researchers? What kind of social formations are included in the third sector? Usually voluntary associations are taken as the core but in addition also cooperatives, projects, movements and action groups have been counted in. The discussions on the contents of the third sector are related to considerations on the debated boundary line between the third sector and civil society. The difference between voluntary associations and other social groupings is that the former possess a more formal status and a defined position in the society. The latter tend to be more informal or more temporary units which can be seen more often as social networks rather than as formal organizations. The character of projects, movements and action groups is usually more fluid and their social status tends to be more unstable than that of formal organizations.

The main conclusion of several studies has evidently been (Salamon and Anheier 1992, Vakil 1997, Lewis 2001) that the third sector includes particularly the formal voluntary

organizations within the civil society. In that view, the social networks and informal groupings are another part of the civil society, just like families and neighbourhood groups. Walzer (1995, 7) states that the civil society is the space of voluntary human association and the set of relational networks on the base of families, faiths, interests and ideologies. Then, following this kind of conceptual orientation, the nature of the third sector is linked with the characteristics of formal voluntary organizations. It is however important to recognize that the origins of voluntary associations are often in informal social movements and that the boundary line between formal and informal social formations is changing and often also ambiguous.

From a functional societal view, voluntary associations are often seen as the key mechanism for promoting cooperation between citizens and civic engagement. Free association is also one basic element for effective democracy in society. 'Voluntary associations are still the most central means of mediation between civil society and the political system' (Siisiäinen 1999b, 140). In discussions about social capital (e.g. Putnam 1993) social interactions in voluntary associations can create trustworthy social environments and norms of reciprocation (social capital as a collective good). In sum, the third sector is capable of creating social spaces for action which supports the functioning of democratic and socially effective systems (e.g. Fukuyama 1995).

Research on the third sector has tried to identify general features of voluntary associations. While recognizing the diversity of the species, certain supposed general attributes of the third sector can be referred in short. Voluntary associations represent qualities like voluntary and solidary (Smith and Freeman 1972, 3). They are relatively egalitarian in comparison with other formal organizations. They represent social and cultural values, they take moral values as being primary - economic calculations are then secondary. Voluntary organizations introduce social involvement and prefer face-to-face contacts (Etzioni 1993). Somehow the characteristics of voluntary associations represent what can be called 'citizens' skills and values' which have been understood as different from professional cultures and their perspectives.

In trying to combine and integrate the main definitive characteristics of the third sector as voluntary associations being its core the following five attributes have been presented: the organized third sector is by character voluntary, self-governing, private, not-for-profit and formally organized (Salamon and Anheier 1992, Vakil 1997, Lewis 2001). This could be taken either as a substantial definition or as an ideal type construction of the third sector organizations. Already in 1972 (viii), Smith and Freeman have presented approximately the same list of attributes.

Salamon and Anheier (1992) have stated there can be three main types of definitions: legal (formal position), economic (resources), functional (activities). They think that all these definitions are too limited alone. Instead Salamon and Anheier propose the

structural/operational definition referred above as five definitive attributes.

In comparison with the other organizational sectors, the public sector and the market sector, voluntary associations, even as formal organizations, are more like social networks. They are not so strictly formally managed and regulated. They may often contribute for inter-sectoral problem solving and take a bridging role, e.g. combinations of popular and professional memberships (Smith and Freeman 1972, 3; Lewis 2001, 43). As to the managerial and organizational characteristics, the voluntary organizations may pose an alternative and a challenge to the mainstream doctrines and to the 'iron law of oligarchy'.

2.2. Contextual relations of the third sector

Notably there are tendencies that theoretically oriented research is treating the third sector primarily as one entity, like e.g. in broad analyses of relations between the state, the market and the voluntary sector. In these analyses, relations of voluntary associations to their environment as the context of their action is posed at the forefront. The definitions and attributes given to the third sector make impacts on how the third sector is seen in relation to societal power structures and democracy (political science), in relation to economy (economics) and in relation to social integration and cohesion (sociology). Siisiäinen (1999a) analyses theoretical orientations in the research of the third sector by using two basic dimensions of perspectives: structuralist vs. individualist and normative vs. analytical approaches. With these distinctions Siisiäinen introduces four different conceptual types of research orientation: normative communitarism, normative individualism, analytical structuralism and analytical individualism (in more detail, Siisiäinen 1999a, 21-30).

The focus of Siisiäinen's analysis seems to be in the conceptual elaboration of the research orientations which function as cognitive preferences and enactments of certain aspects of the third sector. Here the analysis of Siisiäinen is utilized as a starting point. However, the focus of the orientation is moved more towards a contextual approach, emphasizing the societal relations of the third sector. Instead of putting focus on research orientations as 'theoretical families', the focus here is set on the analysis of relations and networks of the third sector to the main societal elements.

What is the initial question for developing theoretical orientations to the third sector? Naturally, there will be several different possibilities to answer to this question. The alternative elaborated here in a modest way is to look the third sector within the society, in the triangle formed by the state, markets and civil society. Even while the third sector is often conceived as a part of civil society, it is reasonable to analyse the nature of its relations to all these main societal elements. The organizations of the third sector are not only combining individuals to collaborative efforts, they also create relations and networks which are crossing selectively between these societal elements. The rationale to analyse these relations and networks points also to the dynamic and changing character of

societal relations. Strictly 'structural' and strictly 'individual' may lose the proper nature of the 'social'.

The external relations of the third sector at the societal level can be analytically grouped into three main groups: relations to the state, relations to the markets and relations to the civil society. It is not necessary to bind this groupings to 'theoretical families', however, theoretical orientations can exemplify certain types of relations when they are conceptually focussing to some particular relations. Very broadly, it can be argued that structuralist orientations are focussing particularly on the relations between the state and the third sector, individualist orientations are focussing on the relations between the markets and the third sector, and communitarian orientations are focussing on the relations between the civil society and the third sector. It is evident that these characterizations are very relative and that there are different versions of these theoretical orientations. The tentative argument here is that these theoretical orientations imply certain typical cognitively selective preferences which are connected to their ways of seeing the position of the third sector in the society. These typical cognitive preferences can be supposed only relatively and by comparing the focussing sights of the orientations with each other.

The relations and networks between the different societal elements and the third sector can be treated here only in a short and condensed way. The purpose is to rise ahead some basic issues within theoretical discussions on the position of the third sector.

The relations between the state and the third sector have been often connected to the analysis of power relations within the society. The state is the central power-holding institution in the society. The power of the state is visible while it also has hidden dimensions. The nature of the state power is both concrete and symbolic, it has both political and administrative dimensions. Discussions on clientelism and corporatism have formulated relations between the state and the third sector. While voluntary organizations are formally self-governing and independent, they can 'voluntarily' search for close relations to the state power. The achieved status of a 'client of the state' may imply mutually supporting relations in terms of regular interaction and negotiations, supported projects and social networking.

Structuralism as a research orientation is focussing to the perspective of structural power. The sources of the power are many (Pfeffer 1992, Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Strong social structures define the life worlds of individuals and groups. The state organization as the 'superpower' in society can reward and punish actors of the other societal elements. In addition, the state organizations can create symbolic environments and mental domination within the society. The implied main orientation of this structuralist analysis has been centralist at the national level, using examples like state aid clientelism in ministries, turning voluntary organizations as clients of the state by the financial power. Typical concrete examples can be found in several areas: social and health services, sport and leisure, culture and infrastructure. Clientelism can be found both at national and at local level. However, it

should be distinguished between the continuous basic support and the temporary project support. When 'market orientation' has been quite strongly introduced into the state organization, this has been leading to a more managerial relationship between the state and voluntary associations. Result management has been applied in voluntary organizations on the basis of national public policies. The term 'partnership' has become popular in describing mutual relations between the state units and voluntary organizations.

At the local level, the rise of contracting-out local public services has been the trend from the 1990s onwards. These relations can mix different units and develop into different combinations, e.g. the connections between national and local organizations in Northern Europe have been relatively strong. Voluntary associations can act as intermediate structures between citizens and the different levels of the public sector. Local associations have remained crucial for citizens but they are often connected with the national hierarchy; and local cooperation between local government and associations has been simultaneously increasing (Selle 1999, 153).

While analysing the relations between the state and voluntary organizations, it is natural that the attention tends to be focussing on those situations in which these relations are visible and relatively strong. E.g. in Finland, the number of voluntary organizations receiving state aid is very large. It should however be remembered that there are also many voluntary organizations which are really independent, in some cases even openly hostile, to the powers of the state. It should also be remembered that particularly from the 1990s onwards the external relations of voluntary organizations have become increasingly international, they are crossing over the borders of the states. Simultaneously the number of international voluntary organizations has grown rapidly (Kendall and Anheier 2002).

The relations between the third sector and markets have been less studied than the relations between the third sector and the state (Lewis 2001, 151). The interest to look at voluntary organizations in the context of markets has evidently been strongest on the research connected with liberal individualism. Liberal individualism takes the autonomy of the individual as the starting point underlining the concepts of individual freedom and liberties in society. Then, associations are depending on people's and individuals' free choices. Common individual interests may create associations. This kind of liberal individualism is connected to pluralism and competition of interests in political studies - sometimes looking at politics as markets. As markets are the space for the competition of interests, also voluntary associations are seen in relation to this competition - either in political or in economic terms. This orientation leads also to analyse voluntary organizations as connected with producer - consumer relations. In fact, the third sector is often studied as a service producer and compared with other ways of service production (e.g. Helander 1999). Also most classifications of voluntary organizations are based on this kind of functional perspective.

There are examples of voluntary associations turning into foundations (e.g. donor foundations,

associations of retired people) which drive business activities and establish and own private companies. Thus, a mix of voluntary and business organizations is a possibility even if it so far has been rare. Also companies may create and fund associations which then tend to support their interests. Business managers (as well as politicians and administrators) are also citizens who can be active members in voluntary organizations. Networking and partnerships between companies and associations have been in increase. Particularly at the local level these kind of partnerships have been important for compensating the scarceness of local resources. In developing countries, the systems of micro credits have combined local actors from business units and village organizations. Campaigning for 'fair trade' and 'fair business' is another example of relations between the business and voluntary associations. Today, voluntary associations have more and more taken the role of social conscience emphasizing and promoting the idea of the social responsibility of enterprises. The interaction between the 'social' and the 'economic' is a reality concretely seen in local communities. Already Karl Polanyi (1957) wrote about the social embeddedness of the markets.

Even by definition, the voluntary organizations have closer relations to the civil society than to the state and markets. Voluntary organizations are thought to be born within the civil society by decisions of members of this society. However, the position and relations of voluntary organizations to the whole of the civil society are worth of studying in a more detailed way. While the birth of voluntary associations is within the civil society, the background of this birth may vary. Some of voluntary organizations have a really internal background within a given society while some others may be imported or stimulated from external actors (Uudet ja vanhat liikkeet 1998). A typical case might be the diffusion of a social movement among different local communities. Then the origin is within the civil society but the diffusion process may be long in time and distance even crossing national borders. Also public officials may stimulate the establishment and the birth of voluntary associations as a precondition to get some public funding. This has been the case in certain village associations in Finland. Even business organizations may establish different associations and clubs for creating a stable client circle or a chain of supporting partners. These examples express the possible variety of relations between voluntary associations and the civil society.

Particularly communitarian approaches have seen voluntary associations as an integrating power in local communities. Focussing on the local level is typical when the importance of voluntary associations in the society is underlined. Local community and its empowerment by active civic engagement and citizens' associations is seen as the solution when single individuals, states and markets are insufficient for the well-functioning of the society. The hypothesis of the normative communitarianism is that by mutual human ties, responsibilities and respect, the third sector and voluntary associations strengthen human communities. The main orientation is integrative and local. The critiques remark that voluntary associations are not representative of the whole civil society. Rather, they are selective on the basis of their interest. Thus, the requirement of equality may work

within the association but it does not necessarily work in relation to the civil society. Voluntary organizations therefore may be often partially inclusive in relation to the local communities. The potential of relations between the voluntary associations and the civil society is widely dispersed, from broad, open, generally accepted 'flagship organizations' to isolating, closed and opposed 'islet organizations'. Smith and Freeman (1972,3) refer to 'majority associations' and to 'minority associations'.

Anyway, it is important to study the different meanings of voluntary organizations at the local level. The World Values Study 1990-1993 tells that 40,7% of respondents identified first with their local community, while 29,4% selected the nation as the primary region with which they identified (Whiteley 1999). This implies that the 'home' of the civil society is still most often the local community, even if there is a weakening trend of local identities. There is still such a thing as 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983). One basis for internally in local communities born associations is the 'local common sense'. This common sense is based on shared concrete everyday experience, grown from the landscape, and having as its major qualities naturalness and practicalness, the local citizens' skills. For example, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the meaning of voluntary action in local development (Sen 1992, Lewis 2001, 42).

These short considerations imply remarkable potential divergencies in the contextual relations of the third sector. These divergencies cover the relations to all three societal elements: the state, the markets and the civil society. Voluntary organizations may have quite different profiles of contextual relations. In addition, these relations may be changing by the societal processes. For example, the traditional image that the organizations of the state and markets are more professional than those of the civil society may be changing when the ordinary citizen is becoming more and more educated. This trend implies also the rise of professional and semi-professional voluntarism (Selle 1999, 153).

In addition to the divergencies within the third sector, also the societal elements can be quite different in different societies. The structure of the state may be relatively centralized or relatively decentralized which probably makes influence on the potential development of voluntary organizations (e.g. de Vries 2001). Also the character and structure of markets varies according to the degree of centralization and according to the dominant branches of industries. Even the basic position of the third sector varies between different societies. E.g. de Hart & Dekker (1999) distinguish three different types of civil societies: active (high membership, high active participation, broad (high membership, less active participation) and elitist (low membership, small but active participation).

Siisiäinen (1999a) refers to the possibility that different theoretical and conceptual orientations may be related to different kind of third sector organizations and their different contextual relations. He discusses in short the implications of different levels of analysis - international, national, local - to the emphasized characteristics of the third sector. However,

he does not develop this perspective further. Instead he refers to the need of more empirical research.

3. Empirical analyses of the third sector

In contrast to theoretical studies, empirical analyses of the third sector primarily recognize the differentiation within it and produce analytic descriptions of the varieties between voluntary organizations.

For the purpose of this paper, a short summarizing review of the empirical research on voluntary organizations is sketched out as a general starting point and reference on the empirically important dimensions. Then, Vakil's analysis on the classification problem and on the central dimensions of the voluntary organizations are presented and discussed. On these bases, four alternative aspects are proposed as general ideas of important dimensions and types. These aspects are adding more contextual emphasis to the framework for the study of voluntary organizations.

In the previous chapter five definitive attributes were presented as the general characteristics of the third sector as voluntary organizations: voluntary, self-governing, private, not-for-profit and formally organized. When turning to the analysis of differences among the voluntary organizations, the opportunities to point out dimensions can be felt immense and endless. Here the selection of the dimensions and types is based on a limited reading of some earlier studies i.e. certain dimensions have been selected already by researchers in this area. At this point, the effort is just to comment and elaborate a bit on this issue.

There are certain complicating factors which cannot be taken promptly into account in this paper. The research interests and settings of the studies may vary greatly even if the studies are concerning the same topic: the third sector. Research interests, settings and materials used in the studies evidently are quite different. The intellectual context of the empirical studies naturally varies. In principle this situation would require a careful analysis. Here this diversity of research is taken as a richness of plurality and the different drops (dimensions) produced by the 'research rain' are identified as valuable materials for the development of research field. Another complicating factor is the changing and dynamic character of the third sector. Particularly, when using a contextual approach, the number of changing factors is quite large. The networking relations of voluntary organizations to their societal environment are often in a continuous movement. In this kind of situation, the selection of important dimensions could do better in concentrating on relatively more stable characteristics. Another device is to be strictly conscious about the dependencies of dimensions on time and place.

Examples of dimensions which have been referred in earlier studies to be important for understanding the diverse character of the third sector can be listed in short:

- active vs. passive voluntary organizations (de Hart and Dekker 1999)
- traditional vs. new voluntary organizations (Uudet ja vanhat liikkeet 1998)
- pluralist vs. corporatist (Micheletti 1995)
- horizontal vs. hierarchical (Putnam 1993)
- cooperative vs. competitive (Kettunen and Kiviniemi 2000)
- open - closed (Kettunen and Kiviniemi 2000)

These dimensions have been selected as examples from quite different types of studies. In many cases, the research in question has a much broader perspective than studying the dimensions of voluntary organizations. The studies published in the book *Uudet ja vanhat liikkeet* (1998, eds. Kaj Ilmonen and Martti Siisiäinen) is analysing the long-term development of social movements in Finland in the context of historical structural changes. In a bit parallel way Micheletti (1995) has studied the long-term development of the civil society in Sweden. In both cases, the position of voluntary associations is however quite central even while informal social movements also are included in the analyses. Also Putnam's well-known analysis of the Italian administrative reform has been done in a broad perspective of democracy and civil society, however, turning the focus clearly on the quality of voluntary organizations.

In a more detailed inspection, these six dimensions can be divided into several more operational sub-dimensions. This implies that the dimensions are integrating several factors into a set of 'broad' dimensions. The dimensions could also be interpreted in different ways depending on the focus of the study. For instance, the dimensions can be understood either as internal properties of voluntary organizations or as implying certain kind of external relations to societal elements. Active vs. passive can be defined in terms of internal activism vs. passivism or in terms of activism/passivism within the society. However, some of these dimensions emphasize the external perspective (open vs. closed), on the other hand some of them focus more on the internal perspective (horizontal vs. hierarchical) to analyse the voluntary organizations.

There is evidently no theory which could give plausible hypotheses about the possible correlations between these six dimensions. The interrelations between dimensions are more an empirical question. Anyway, at least intuitively the combination of so many dimensions would give much more rich and interesting knowledge than any of those alone. If a voluntary organizations can be described to be active, new, pluralist, horizontal, cooperative and open, while another case is described to be passive, traditional, corporatist, hierarchical, competitive and closed, these six-pack descriptions are capable of rising images a bit similar to ideal type constructions. So far, the potential of these dimensions (or some of resemblance) in real empirical studies has never been tested.

Anna Vakil (1997) argues that the uncertainty how to define and classify non-governmental

voluntary organizations is inhibiting the understanding and development of knowledge about the third sector. She sees at least three causes which make definition and classification of the third sector difficult: the multidimensional nature of the voluntary organizations, the interdisciplinary nature of the studies in this field and the multifaceted nature of the individual voluntary organizations making it difficult to identify a single voluntary organizations as belonging to a defined type of organizations. Vakil is addressing the classification problem by pulling together different strands of discussions on the issue, by proposing a descriptive framework for studying and classifying voluntary organizations and by presenting two main types of descriptors for classification: essential and contingent.

Vakil starts her analysis by arguing that it is more clear to classify voluntary organizations on the basis of attributes (or descriptors or dimensions) than on the basis of types. This is because dimensions are more operational and easy to identify empirically than types. Her distinction between essential and contingent descriptors can also be named to be a distinction between primary and secondary descriptors. The essential, primary descriptors should be capable of identifying units of analysis and sorting out of theoretical and empirical main issues (1997, 2062). The contingent, secondary descriptors then are dependent on particular theoretical, disciplinary or policy perspectives and they usually are relevant only for some sub-class of voluntary organizations.

Vakil proposes two essential descriptors: orientation and level of operation. The descriptor 'orientation' refers to the type of activities in which voluntary organizations are engaging themselves. Vakil suggests six categories of orientation: welfare, development, advocacy, education, networking and research. A voluntary organization may have several different orientations simultaneously. Organizations with welfare orientation include mainly the traditional charity organizations acting independently in response to disaster and catastrophe situations. Organizations with development orientation are producing services as intermediaries either to their members or to broader populations. These services may be free of payment or they may be sold without the purpose of getting profits. Organizations with advocacy orientation try to make influence on the policy- or decision-making. Educating orientation refers to educating citizens for getting them more capable of self-helping in defined circumstances. Organizations with networking orientation act as bridging channels between levels and regions of other organizations and mediate information between actors. Research-oriented voluntary organizations are acting to collect analytic knowledge particularly by using participatory approaches like action research.

The second primary descriptor 'level of operation' refers to a classification according to four different levels of activities. This descriptor identifies what is the main level at which the voluntary organization operates: international, national, regional or community level. The level of activities is observable e.g. in the main partnerships and network relations of the voluntary organization. Altogether, Vakil suggests that the two descriptors orientation and level of

operation can be primary bases for classifying the whole field of voluntary organizations.

In addition to the essential, primary descriptors Vakil proposes two contingent, secondary descriptors: sectoral focus and evaluative attributes. The sectoral focus refers to the particular policy field in which a voluntary organization operates. The policy field is considered to be an important attribute but it is secondary to the orientation and level of operation. This implies that the sectoral focus is more specific than the two primary attributes. Into the evaluative attributes Vakil includes a broad group of organizational criteria which have been used in evaluation analyses. Vakil says that this category is open in character and she does not mean to count in every possible evaluative attribute. However, she takes into her attention attributes like values, efficiency, accountability, resources, equality and participation. She clearly prefers a multidimensional approach to evaluative attributes and also discusses the sub-dimensions of these attributes.

Vakil's proposals on the classification problem are based on a thorough and systematic review of a quite large amount of earlier studies which are relevant for the problem. In comparison, most other studies have treated this issue in a more narrow fashion. Perhaps only Salamon and Anheier in the Comparative Non-profit Sector Project (1992) have had an equally broad basis for their analysis which is one of the main sources of Vakil's article. Most earlier studies have been considering only some particular aspects of the classification problem. Because Vakil's classificatory framework includes so many aspects it tends to be relatively heavy as an empirical research instrument. However, it can be used to define certain conceptual order in the planning of studies on the voluntary organizations. For instance, the primary attributes 'orientation' and 'level of operation' are not always discussed at all when locating a study in the field of studies. This is probably expressing the actual situation in which the studies of voluntary organization do not by orientation belong to the 'same family' of researches but are separate and belong to many different disciplines and intellectual environments.

Vakil's framework can be commented f.i. by using the distinction between the subject and the context. Vakil's first primary descriptor 'orientation' evidently focuses on the voluntary organization as the subject. The attribute identifies the orientation of the voluntary organization. The term 'orientation' is close to the 'mission' or 'purpose' of the organization. Even when Vakil writes that 'orientation' refers to the 'types of activities', the categorisation of the activities imply also some kind of purpose (welfare, development, education etc). However, the second primary descriptor 'level of operation' refers mainly to the context in which the 'orientation' is to be realized. Also the first secondary descriptor 'sectoral focus' is mainly referring to the context of the activities of the voluntary organization. The position of the second secondary descriptor 'evaluative attributes' is different from the other descriptors. 'Evaluative attributes' do neither refer to the subject nor to the context but to some selected dimensions or evaluative criteria which point mostly to the relation between the voluntary organization (the subject) and its

operating environment (the context). A problem with these evaluative attributes is that they are quite multidimensional, their exact object may vary (the whole organization, the management, the operations etc) and they are quite prone to change more rapidly than the other descriptors.

In the previous chapter, the profiles of societal relations of voluntary organizations were seen as a theoretically interesting objective for studies. For bringing this starting point to the empirical sphere of studies means that the different empirical dimensions and descriptors referred above should be related to this theoretically sketched main orientation. This could be done by focussing more on the contextual aspects of voluntary associations. The purpose here is to build a link or a bridge between theoretical and empirical approaches. This task can be done only in a tentative way.

The contextual approach aims to identify the relations of the voluntary organizations to the state, markets and civil society. In empirical studies, these relations should be made more concrete and observable. Then, it is reasonable to understand the relations to the state broadly as different relations to the public sector at different levels. More concretely, the relations to political programmes, public policies and governmental structures can be included within the contextual framework of voluntary organizations. This means the descriptors 'level of operation' and 'sectoral focus' introduced by Vakil are close to the relations between the voluntary organizations and the state. For the purposes of this paper, there is no need to distinct primary and secondary dimensions. Both governmental level and governmental sector or policy might well be primary categories in the relations and interactions of the third sector.

The relations of voluntary organizations to markets can be concretely understood as functional relations in different branches of economic activities. Voluntary organizations have been very often studied as service producers in 'marketised' functional domains. Today, the boundary between public and private sectors has been almost abandoned in many areas of service production by service agreements, contracting out and increased purchasing opportunities (Kendall and Anheier 2002).

The relationships between the voluntary organizations and the civil society can be understood either through the external relations or through the internal formation of the voluntary organization. Dimensions like open vs. closed, cooperative vs. competitive and pluralist vs. corporatist describe the character of the external relations of the voluntary organization to the civil society. Dimensions like horizontal vs. hierarchical and internally active vs. passive describe how the relation to the civil society manifests itself within the voluntary organization. The main factors connected to these relations are the networking and productive capacity in relation to its contextual civil society. The coverage of networks within the civil society reflects the degree of plurality in the relations between the voluntary organization and the civil society. The productive capacity reflects the results of the

voluntary organization within the civil society.

The question here is: can empirically relevant dimensions be derived from these broad aspects of the voluntary sector? Theoretical formulations seem to suggest that the societal relations of the voluntary organizations are of a primary interest for research in this area. The general purpose can be formulated as to find out the societal profiles of voluntary organizations. In principle this could be done by empirical network analyses - even Siisiäinen (1999a) refers to this kind of possibility. The whole of societal relations is a quite complicated research object. Probably only some aspects of these relations can be analysed in a limited research project.

To put these considerations a step further, a tentative exemplification of the elaboration of a framework for studying the societal profiles is sketched out next. This elaboration can be taken as an example of the application of the contextual approach, recognising simultaneously that there surely are several alternative ways to study the relations of voluntary organizations to their environment. In this application the contexts refer to political programmes, public policies, governmental structures and levels, functional domains (markets, sectors) and networking and productive capacities within the environment of the voluntary organizations. Four different contextual aspects can be separated:

- 1) The relation of the voluntary organizations to political programmes and public policies. Analytically political programmes and public policies can be separated from each other, and this separation could be done in an empirical research. However, in this framework the purpose is to identify broader aspects of societal profiles. Then the whole of political programmes, public policies and even remarkable projects connected with programmes and policies are to be considered as one larger pattern. A basic dimension of the relations to this 'policy whole' is varying between 'pro' and 'contra' in relation to the aims of the government. As there is usually a political support and a political opposition in a democratic country, there are also potential supporters and adversaries in the field of voluntary organizations. Lewis (2001) refers to two poles of voluntary organizations: liberal vs. radical voluntary organizations. The former include different integrative and cooperative organizations in their relations to the state. Traditional charity organizations and more recent 'for good governance' organizations belong to this big group of 'liberal voluntary organizations'. The latter category includes different critical and opposing voluntary organizations whose orientation is more competitive than cooperative in relation to the state and its policies. Strong radical voices from the third sector may be rare in consensual societies, while they may be quite vital in the cases of political rivalry and conflicts, and in politically divided societies. In reality, the relations of voluntary organizations are usually focussing on some defined political programme and public policy according to the other aspects of their societal relations.

It is possible also to use the dimension close vs. distant to describe the relations of voluntary organizations to the political programmes and public policies. This is a more neutral formulation of the dimension since it conceals the dimension 'pro' vs. 'contra'. The closeness however implies an integrative and cooperative relation, while the distance implies either a competitive or a detached attitude to the programme and policy. It can be also observed that this dimension could be turned towards the 'advocacy' category within Vakil's 'orientation' descriptor. This is possible when 'advocacy' is understood to be supporting ('pro') the programme and policy, or alternatively to be 'advocating' a different, competitive political direction or solution.

2) The relation of the voluntary organization to the governmental level. This aspect of relations can be formed according to the geographic levels of the whole governmental sector. Then, the levels include international, national, regional and local governmental levels. The profile of the voluntary organization at this aspect tells the focus of the voluntary organization in terms of closeness vs. distance to different levels. It is evident that most of the voluntary organizations act mainly at one governmental level. Some voluntary organizations may promote national integration by complementing the activities of the national public administration. Some are working mainly in villages and local communities. Still others may have an international focus. However, some of them focus at two or more levels being intermediaries between different levels (Lewis 2001). Also Vakil regards this 'level of operation' as a basic essential descriptor of the voluntary organizations.

3) The relation of the voluntary organizations to the functional branches and sectors. Since the first two aspects of relations are mainly political and administrative, this third aspect could be better understood in economic terms. This way of thinking, however, requires that both public and private economy are considered as a whole which is organized (at least in some technical terms) into branches and sectors. When a bigger and bigger part of economies in developed countries is comprising of different collective and individual services, also a mix of public and private is quite often an economic reality ('mixed economies', 'service economies'). Again the dimension close vs. distant might be possible in describing the relations of voluntary organizations to different branches and sectors. The closeness vs. distance might be empirically defined in terms of two sub-dimensions: activities and resources (funding).

Also Vakil takes the 'sectoral focus' as one of her classificatory categories. In empirical studies this aspect has been the most usual base of classifications (often service production at focus).

4) The relation of the voluntary organizations to the civil society. This aspect refers to the networking and producing capacity of the voluntary organizations within the civil society. The definition should underline the relations to the whole civil society. The basic dimension may be again the close vs. distant relation of voluntary organisations. It might sound paradoxical to say that a voluntary organization is distant from the civil society

since voluntary organizations are a part of civil society. The closeness should be in this case understood as a potential inclusiveness, openness and broad coverage of relations within the civil society. Some voluntary organizations may be quite closed, partial and even distancing in their relations to the whole civil society. Some others are open, relatively close and covering within their community. Even within the civil society, some voluntary organizations are more cooperative, some others more competitive. The networking capacity of the voluntary organization underlines its interaction and relatedness to the whole community. The productive capacity refers to its performance in relation to the community.

This aspect can be studied empirically both in terms of external relationships to the civil society and in terms of the internal features of the voluntary organization. The latter refers to the characteristics like the structure, members, management, resources and capacities in relation to the civil society.

In sum, it can be concluded that the four aspects of the contextual relations of the voluntary organizations could be analysed in the most simplest way by using the dimension close vs. distant as the starting point. Then the profile of the societal relations could be described and analysed according to closeness vs. distance to political programmes and policies, to governmental levels, to functional branches and sectors as well as to the civil society. The dimension could be further divided into the two aspects of activities and resources i.e. the closeness may be in terms of either activities or resources or both. This specification of closeness to four different aspects can be of interest particularly in empirical studies, meaning that the specific units (programme, policy, level, branch, socio-economic category in the civil society) of closeness should be analysed in more detail. Probably the most integrated and close relations often include closeness in both activities and resources, as is the case mostly in partnerships and in long-term contracts.

Presenting societal profiles of voluntary organizations would tell how much and in which way they have integrated themselves within the societal elements. The extremes would be either cases of a full integration (close to every four aspects of relations) or a full detachment (distant in every four aspects of relations).

The six dimensions collected from earlier studies as examples of important differentiating aspects, are seemingly overlapping with the idea of societal profiles in terms of closeness vs. distance. The dimension active vs. passive as used by de Hart and Dekker primarily concerns the relations between the voluntary organizations and the civil society without considering the relations to the state and markets. Also the dimension horizontal vs. hierarchical as used by Putnam implies differences in the relations of voluntary organizations to the civil society. The distinction between pluralist vs. corporatist includes both the relations to the state and civil society but not to the markets. The dimensions open vs. closed and cooperative vs. competitive come more near to the dimensions of societal profiles. Openness and cooperativeness imply tendencies of closeness to societal elements, while closedness and

competitiveness imply tendencies to distances. The studies in the book *Uudet ja vanhat liikkeet* use a quite broad contextual approach which analyses the social movements and voluntary organizations in relation to the state and politics, to the economy and markets and to the civil society.

4. Discussion

This exercise to elaborate dimensions for the analysis of the third sector and voluntary organizations has had as its rationale the aim to diminish the gap between theoretical and empirical approaches. The starting point were theoretical orientations in studying the third sector. Generally these studies lead the study of the third sector to the analysis of its societal position and relations to other societal elements. This kind of orientation seems to be prominent also in some recent overviews of the third sector developments (Anheier, Carlson and Kendall 2002). This starting point led the exercise to focus on a contextual approach. Applying this kind of approach raised the study of the societal relations of the third sector and its organizations at the front. Going into this direction produced the general idea to introduce the profile of societal relations which was then condensed into four different aspects. The relations of the third sector to political programmes and public policies, to governmental levels, to functional branches and sectors and to the civil society correspond broadly to the relations within the societal triangle: the state, markets and civil society. The aspect of governmental levels can be regarded as an additional fourth orientation in the analysis. The national state has been the implicit contextual focus in the most analyses of the third sector. This focussing evidently is prone to lead into neglecting the relations to other governmental levels in theoretical studies. The meaning of international, regional and local levels as contexts of the voluntary organizations has been anyway remarked by several researchers (Siisiäinen 1999a, Anheier, Carlson and Kendall 2002, Kendall and Anheier 2002).

The main dimension under the four aspects is suggested to be closeness vs. distance. This can be made more concrete by dividing the main dimension into two sub-dimensions: activities and resources. The idea is that closeness in activities and closeness in resources do not necessarily coincide, even if their might be some correlation between them.

The fourfold set of contextual relations being the main contribution of this exercise, some considerations about its relevance and usability are needed. First it is necessary to state that this resulted framework is still relatively open for further discussions and possible modifications. It can be seen as a heuristic device in orienting future research efforts. Next, some comparisons with Vakil's classification scheme are presented in short. Then, some possibly difficult points in the application of this societal profiles - approach are pointed out.

In comparison to Vakil's analysis, the societal profiles - approach is more contextual and it moves the focus of the analysis to the external relations of the third sector. Also Vakil's scheme includes two contextual descriptors: 'level of operation' as a primary descriptor and

‘sectoral focus’ as a secondary descriptor. The two other descriptors presented by Vakil - ‘orientation’ and ‘evaluative attributes’ are not contextual as such. The descriptor ‘orientation’ refers to the type of activities by the voluntary organization. This descriptor comes near to the sub-dimension of activities in this contextual approach, even if the idea here is the closeness of activities between a voluntary organization and some societal aspect (political programme, public policy, governmental level, functional sector, civil society). The descriptor ‘evaluative attributes’ can be seen as being of a quite different type since it does not clearly belong to contextual factors as such. Since the subject and the exact object of evaluations may vary, this descriptor seems to be too vague to join to the contextual perspectives. Evaluative research could be done within the contextual approach by focussing the evaluation just on the relations of the voluntary organization. In evaluations, several subjects and criteria are often needed to understand the situation of the relation from different angles.

It is clear that potential uses of the societal profiles - approach need more analysis before applications. Here three points are referred which all require further elaboration and analysis. These points are: the proceeding towards empirical studies and the recognition of differences in both time and place. In forthcoming studies the research interest evidently will be the primary factor to make solutions at these points.

When thinking about possible empirical studies as applications of societal profiles approach, the first direction of thoughts is the use of inter-organizational network analysis. Because the perspective of this approach is focussing on the relations between voluntary organizations and other organizations (governmental units, enterprises, business associations, other voluntary organizations), the methods of network analysis would be one possible way forwards. It is to be recognised that there has been a rapid development in the possibilities of network analysis. Nowadays there are alternative ways to apply these methods (e.g. Kilduff and Tsai 2003).

The time dimension is also of primary importance. When developing a conceptual or dimensional framework, the questions of time and change are still without answer. The framework as such does not point to any choice between longitudinal vs. cross-sectional studies. Anyway in the long- term development both kind of research are needed. Questions about the changes in the third sector seem to be very much at the front of discussions. Then, the problem of explaining changes by finding causes and reasons of changes is a challenge which cannot be replied with this kind of analytical framework alone. Even when certain quantities and qualities of changes could be found out by the societal profiles - approach, some additional theoretical input is needed for constructing a set of societal explanations. These explanations probably consist of major political, economic and cultural changes in the broad environment of voluntary organizations and other societal elements. In short, when a change in a societal relation has been observed, the nearest possible cause is evidently some change of related parties: the voluntary organization and its related partner.

Usually, this kind of reasoning is too narrow, and the causes of changes go back to more broad trends in the environment of both related parties. This way of thinking suggests that the primary causes of changes in relations of the voluntary organizations and even of the changes in the organizations themselves are usually found in their environment and in external factors. It is very difficult to develop a plausible theory or model of changes basing only on an internal 'life cycle' approach (Ilmonen 1998).

Connected with changes in time are simultaneous differences between different places, e.g. countries. For example, when a sample of countries would be studied and compared in their societal relations of voluntary organizations, probably some differences could be found between countries. Again, the societal profiles - approach cannot alone explain differences between countries, additional explaining factors should be found out by broader societal dynamics. The countries have differences in their political, economic and cultural aspects. The national states are not at all identical as societal partners, neither are local governments, enterprises or civic associations similar in different countries.

While there are limitations and open questions in the application and use of the societal profiles - approach, also some possible merits could be counted in. The first possible merit is purely ideational: this elaboration can give stimuli to additional elaborations, it can perhaps put the theoretical and empirical thoughts moving ahead. A second possible merit is that the limitations notwithstanding a common framework is an important asset in comparative studies. It gives possibilities to more reliable conclusions than more loose comparisons with dissimilar frameworks. A third potentially useful advantage of this societal relations - approach is within intensive case studies with a more limited scope but with a more rich inclusion of research materials. In case studies, it is easier to add more sub-dimensions and factors into the material and also advance in the elaboration of the four aspects of this framework.

5. Conclusions

In the introductory part of this paper the notion of the gap between theoretical and empirical approaches in the studies of the third sector was a starting point. Observations connected with this gap included that the conceptual context of theoretical and empirical studies tends to be different e.g. in terms of macro vs. micro level concepts. Theoretical studies focus more on the macro level of the society generally, while empirical studies more often analyse either specific parts of the third sector or give more space and attention to the micro level. Theoretical studies seem to orient themselves implicitly around the category of the nation state, while empirical studies more often are sectoral or local in their orientation. An additional difference seems to be that theoretical studies analyse the third sector as one entity in relation to societal factors, while empirical studies have focussed more on the heterogeneity of the third sector.

After identifying these typical features of the gap, an exercise was done to find out some factors or dimensions which could be used to bridge this gap. This exercise was based on a contextual approach to the third sector. The result was the societal profiles - approach including four different aspects. The societal profiles are suggested to be an analytical device to study the third sector and voluntary organizations as societal actors in networks and interaction. The approach could be used in both theoretically and empirically orienting research.

This exercise has been done in a limited and tentative way by using some examples of the research done in this area. This kind of effort can be worth of doing in a more comprehensive way and by taking into account a bigger part the relevant research in a systematic fashion.

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