Values as a distinguishing element in Nonprofit Organizations

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Licensed in Psychology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Until November, 2006, has worked on the Work Insertion Program of the Fundació Un Sol Món de l’Obra Social de Caixa Catalunya, giving technical and financial support to third sector organizations. Previously, also formed part of the Associació Casal dels Infants del Raval, working on a project directed at young people at risk of social exclusion. Has formed part of the Scientific Committee of the First Congress of the Social Third Sector of Cataluña where, from the Observatorio del Tercer Sector, she organized its contents. Amongst others, has participated in the line of research concerning transparency and accountability in non-profit organizations.

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By: Observatorio del Tercer Sector

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1. Introduction

In general terms, the values can be defined as the ideals and the beliefs that orient and guide the people through their actions and their attitudes. Nevertheless, it is a wide concept that has several considerations. When we talk about values we can refer to personal values, to those present in an organization or those of the society in general.

In this study, a reflection is done about the values expressed by the non profit organizations, those values that are present in the organization to achieve their mission and vision, and to transmit them to society.

The importance of the values in the organizations

The values are present in the core of the existence of non profit organizations, and are the base of the construction and management of the organizational culture. The whole of the values that are present in an organization both in the internal operation and in the activities all the organization carries out.

All the non profit organizations have values, regardless of their legal nature or their activity field or the fact the values are expressed or not. The presence and importance of the values constitute one of the elements that make the difference between non profit organizations and enterprises or public administrations.

The values, strongly related to the mission, are those who direct the activities of the organization, and are those who make them give priority to some type of activities. The values affect not only the type of activities the organization carries out but also how it carries them out: how the organization works. They are the instigators and the common element that composes the interventions, and at the same time they create commitments and expectations among their members. In this sense, internal communication is strategical in order to make the values acknowledged in the organization. The fact of knowing those values can promote the internal participation, and at the same time it builds a strong organizational culture for the social interventions. As a matter of fact, an organization where some well defined and expressed values exist, and where those values are not planned in a consistent way in their interventions outside the organization values cannot be understood.

The values in the strategic planning

The mission, vision and values are defined during the process of strategic reflection of the organization. A strategic plan helps to improve the organization, the understanding of the purposes and objectives and determines the priorities and the interventions and the courses of action.

Although the specification of the values of an organization is usually determined by the founders, the participation of the social base at the moment of the articulation is essential so that these values are shared by all the involved parts.
Visibility of the values

It is advisable that this definition process culminates in their visibility. Once the organizational values are specified and shared it is important to make them visible, making them present in the daily life of the organization.

There are several channels to make them visible:

− Public activities: those activities that gather associations and people linked to the organization (meetings, conferences, ...)
− Printed materials: strategic plan, leaflet, ethical codes, etc.
− Annual report: the report represents an opportunity to make the values visible at the moment of the annual outcome, helping the visibility of the coherence between values and activities.
− Web page: the technologies of information and communication (TIC) allow the web to be one of the most frequent channels for the spreading of information.

Both the definition and the visibilization of the values have to be clear and concise.

It is important there is a close-knit relation between what is expressed and the intervention and the public attitudes.
To share the values

The visibilization of the values makes sense as far as they are shared and present in the interventions made by the people of the organization. Sharing values is linked to how the definition process has developed. To be able to establish social commitments, it is advisable that the organizations first work on commitments with the people binded to it. In this way, there is consistency between what is expressed and the interventions inside and outside the organization.

For example, the presence of some particular values as the participation, the network or team work, questions a traditional management more hierarchical and focused on orders and tasks and favours the arising of a management culture based on objectives and responsibilities.

Graphic 1. The chain of commitment

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2. Research objectives

General objective

The main objective is to make visible the identity values that characterize the third sector.

Specific objectives

- To identify the values that are peculiar and characteristic of the third sector organizations.
- To reflect on the values that impel and motivate the organizations that form the third sector.
- To show how the presence of those values affects the way of working of those organizations.
- To analyse the role of the third sector organizations as transmitters of these values to the rest of society.
3. Methodology

Universe and sample

The universe consists of the Catalonia non profit organizations. We have made sure there was diversity in the activity fields (social, cooperation, environmental and cultural). Besides this sectorial diversity, the organizations are also heterogeneous regarding dimension, legal form and importance.

The sample includes 326 organizations.

Fieldwork

Quantitative fieldwork:

Identification, register and analysis of the values of organizations gathered through the following methods:

- A check of the different printed materials of the organizations (documents, annual activities reports, information material, etc.).
- An overhaul of the webs of the organizations.

Qualitative fieldwork:

Interviews to people of the third sector in order to corroborate the data collected during the previous stage and study in depth the conception of the values and other associated aspects.

Variables of analysis

We have taken into account the several activity subsectors, the dimension and the the field of intervention (local, regional, autonomous, statal and international) of the organizations.

The organizations that compound this sample are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (*)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Comkmunity initiative associations, solidarity consumption, etc.

Graphic 2. Distribution of the analysed organizations on their intervention field
4. First results

How many organizations have expressed values?

From all the analysed organizations, we have identified that almost half of them have expressed values. Specifically, 142 out of the 326 organizations, have expressed values, the 44% of the whole.

Expressed values 44%
Not expressed values 56%
Data grid 1. Distribution of organizations analysed according to their activity field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Field</th>
<th>Expressed values</th>
<th>Not expressed values</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>núm. org.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>núm. org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>142</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most expressed values

This analysis has gathered more or less 180 different values mentioned. This total is the result of a rating of these started with a first identification. In other words, we have determined some general categories of values that include and unify other values that reach a more concrete point of specificity or that were synonyms. So, for example, “imparciality” is a category that includes all those organizations that have as values “neutrality”, being “apolitical”, etc. (see attached document I).

Data grid 2. The most frequently mentioned values by the organizations. Arranged list following order of frequency (from higher to lower)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% org.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non profit</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionality</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coexistence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical attitude</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An immediate reflection starting with such a high number of the mentioned values is really to get lost. In general, there is a low level of repetitions of the values among the organizations, although some tendencies can be determined.

At a general level, the values that appear most are those with an organizational character: independence and non profit.

There are values that have been represented in a lower frequency (once or twice) but on the other hand they are considered important both in nowadays society and in the way the non profit organizations are managed. For example, the value trust only appears as a value in three organizations-

Some organizations include as their own values some of the activities they carry out: awareness raising, education, political incidence, development, prevention, cooperation and formation.

Finally, we have found some values defined with the negative of another value. That would be the case no racism, non discrimination, no to exploitation, no to the globalization and non radical.

**According to activity field**

**Graphic 5. The most frequent values in the social field**

In the social field, the most mentioned values are non profit and participation, in a 37% and 32% of the organizations respectively. The values that also stand out are independence (19%) and solidarity (14%).
In the organizations of cooperation, *solidarity* is the most frequent value (in a 47% of the organizations), followed by *independence* (42%), *equality* (32%) and *respect* (16%).

In the environmental field, *independence* is also the most representative value (36%) and *sustainability* and *participation* are incorporated as identity values with the same level, in 29% of the organizations.

Finally, in the cultural field, the three most frequent values have been *independence* (47%), followed by *non profit* (27%), *participation* (20%) and *solidarity* with less mention (13%).

**Values typologies**

Taking the identification of the values mentioned by the organizations, an analysis that classifies them into 4 typologies has been made.

**Organizational:** those that describe the operation of the organization, and how the activity is structured.
Data grid 3. The most mentioned organizational values

Independence
Non profit
Volunteering
Social initiative
Impartiality
Representativity
...

The way they work: those values that guide the concrete interventions of the organization. They determine which has to be the way of working of the people that compound the organization. They also indicate the type of interaction among the individuals, both inside the organization, and with the reaches of the activity, partners, etc.

Data grid 4. The most mentioned values on the way of working

Participation
Accountability
Network
Quality
Coherence
Individual treatment
Professionality
Collaboration
Responsability
Innovation
Critical vision
Effectiveness
...

Social: they describe what is the vision of the society the organization works for. In other words, how they want to influence and transform society through the interventions and activities of the organization. The values that have collective characteristics are included in this typology.

Data grid 5. The most mentioned values with a social aspect

Solidarity
Equality
Sustainability
Pluralism
Transformation
Trust
Equity
Progress
Tolerance
Utopia

Democracy
Humanity
Coexistence
Freedom
Peace
Justice
...

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**Individual development:** they are linked to the personal development. They describe the way in which people relate and the organization develops itself.

**Data grid 6. The most mentioned values with an individual aspect**

| Commitment | Respect | Dignity | Critical attitude | Help | Defence of Human Rights | Integration | Learning | Understanding | Prominence | ...
|-------------|---------|---------|-------------------|------|-------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|------------|-------|

**5. Description of the main expressed values**

With the consulted materials as a starting point, an approximation to how these expressed values are understood and defined has been done.

**Independence**

For non profit organizations, one of the main values that are highlighted is *independence*. However, this value can be seen from different points of view, according to what is emphasized.

On one hand, the organizational independence is underlined, this one understood as the capacity to act depending on oneself principles, the mission and the organization values.

This organizational independence includes independence of thinking and opinion, moral, political or financial.

The value that is also stressed is the value to have at one’s disposal enough economic funds to ensure a continued activity, without depending on public funds or only one source of income.

**Non profit**

The essential specificity of the third sector organizations lies in its own definition as non profit organizations.

The third sector organizations are characterized by an altruistic and voluntary participation in the achievement of the organizational aims without obtaining economical benefits in their participation.

Despite the fact that profit can be conceived as the fact of receiving a revenue as the result of a contract, a contribution or a donation, profit does
not include to the revenue that is applied to the aims fulfilling of the organization.

**Solidarity**

Solidarity can be shown in many fields of a person’s or organization’s life. The fact of feeling responsible for the situation of a vulnerable group moves you to act in order to put an end to unfair situations and to defend people’s dignity. Solidarity links different members of a community, either if it is an intimate relationship or a distant one, with a feeling of belonging and a conscience of some values, responsibilities and common interests.

**Participation**

Participation is understood as the involvement of the members of an organization and the society in general, in the activities of the organization, in the groups that work for the same objectives and from different intervention and mobilization platforms.

This participation can have different degrees of intensity, from the participation or economical contribution or attending meetings, to an essencial involvement with the policy of the organization.

Non profit organizations work to transform society and one of the ways to do so is favouring this citizenship participation.

Thus, strategies and techniques are promoted to stimulate this social implication, promoting the active participation of the social base and of the citizenship.

**Accountability**

Accountability is a value that has been incorporated recently into the organizations and it is related to transparency. It refers to a clear management both of the resources that lead the organizations and the activities and the results of the different projects that are held.

It is important that the information related to the operation and activities of the organizations is at hand for the members of the organization itself but also for any person interested in knowing it. This fact affects the credibility of the organizations and the trust they generate.

**Networking**

Networking is a more and more present value in non profit organizations since the fact of working in collaboration with other organizations is a more and more usual practice.

Networking promotes the exchange of experiences and the fluid relation between organizations to get the best of resources, increase efficiency taking advantage of the synergies that have been created and strengthening the answer capacity in front of social demands.
Respect

Respect is a value that refers to the regard and the recognition of the qualities and characteristics of the individuals and the society. It is an important value, above all in the organizations that do interventions in a direct way with beneficiaries so as to avoid causing offence to the population to whom it goes taking into account the cultural characteristics, gender issues, etc.

It also refers to the people that work in the organization.

Equality

Equality is a value that is more and more important in the present-day society although there are still limitations.

With equality we defend the fact that people have the same opportunities or rights independently from their gender, race or origins. There are different types of equality depending on people and the particular social situation.

Commitment

Commitment is understood as the responsibility the organization assumes with a view to beneficiaries, from the starting point of the awareness of the impact of the actions and its constancy and continuity. It also refers to the responsibility to maintain and carry out its mission.

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Mission

Observatorio del Tercer Sector is an independent and non-profit research centre specialized in the third sector. Its aim is to increase and extend the knowledge on the sector and to work for the improvement of the non-profit organizations management.

Fields of work

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The Observatorio del Tercer Sector was born with the creation of the *White Book of the civil-social third sector*. This study led to a search for the exact structure of the Catalonian social third sector.

This type of research has continued in order to know and understand the working reality of non-profit organizations, as found both in an overall framework and within the various sub sectors of a specific activity.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS WORK

Non-profit organizations have their own specific requirements due to their goals, values and method of organising.

For this reason, it is necessary to analyze and understand the way they operate with other agencies in order to propose new ideas and improvements in different areas and activities.

FIELDS OF INTEREST IN THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector is multi-faceted and its areas of interest and activity are connected to many key topics for society.

The Observatorio del Tercer Sector, working together with various third sector organisations, carries out research in the following fields: youth, cooperation for development, ethical banking, the environment, society and culture.