



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

GET THE PUBLIC BACK IN!

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THIRD SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE



THIRD
SECTOR
IMPACT

The beneficiaries of this Policy Brief are politicians at all levels of governance – local, regional, national and European – and public officials working in the areas of citizenship and participation, social policy, health, environment, civil protection, sports and leisure, arts and culture.

The third sector is a vital element of the European identity and a major productive field, but due to environmental pressures – economic and political barriers and scarce visibility – is at danger of losing its most distinctive qualities.

The Third Sector Impact research project proposes here two sets of Policy Recommendations that decision makers should endorse and put in practice – if Europe is not to lose the potential of its citizens to contribute to the political, social and economic cohesion of Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

How to sustain and further develop the unique contributions of third sector organizations to both the variety and cultural diversity of European societies and to the advancement of Europe as a social, political and economic community? Research conducted under the auspices of the Third Sector Impact project detected decisive challenges that, caused by environmental changes, currently jeopardize the sustainability of the third sector in Europe. Even more importantly, these increasingly endanger the civicness of third sector organizations (TSOs).

Civicness is that distinctive nature of third sector that bonds individual expressions of will of citizens into public action for shared interest or common good.

This Policy Brief proposes two sets of recommendations for public institutions: on infrastructural support necessary to increase the public awareness of the third sector and on practical mechanisms functional to sustainability of TSOs.

The Third Sector Impact project comparative research unraveled innovative approaches on how the third sector tackles, or accommodates, these challenges. In close cooperation with stakeholders representing numerous and varied networks of third sector organizations throughout Europe, we identified progressive approaches that aim at enhancing the capacity of TSOs to contribute to the socio-economic development of Europe. For sure, TSOs have currently to maneuver in difficult environments. Numerous obstacles impede the societal functions TSOs perform for the social cohesion of Europe. The majority of those are “external” and an outcome of significant changes in the economic and political settings; others are rather “internal” and inherent to certain types of third sector organizations.

All TSOs have to acknowledge that times are changing and that it is necessary to take advantage of new trends within society and economics. Backed by the outcomes of our research, we here provide a set of **Policy Recommendations** for public institutions and decision makers at local, national and European Union level. If put into practice, these would build a more beneficial environment for third sector organizations and citizens’ engagement throughout Europe.

Simultaneously, our Policy Recommendations also address TSOs with the goal of inviting them to make the most out of their potentials. The purpose of the Recommendations is therefore twofold: in the first place, to increase the awareness of just how much the third sector throughout Europe suffers blind or restrictive policy environments and, in the second place, they try to trigger mechanisms able to enhance the sustainability of third sector organizations.

A distinctive and the most significant characteristics of the third sector is its’ voice function: the third sector is an important transmitter of interests and needs of citizens. Its contribution to the well-being of European citizens in terms of social service provision and opportunities for leisure activities is remarkable. And yet, the third sector in Europe is still an unknown entity, almost invisible in the national statistics and hardly acknowledged by Eurostat. What is needed throughout Europe and on European Union level is to get the third sector out of the shadow and into the limelight of public awareness. The third sector and its organizations have to be appreciated as a vital element of Europe’s cultural heritage and diversity. The third sector’s impact as a growing economic force outdistancing most major European industries in the scale of its workforce must finally be acknowledged. The third sector’s political and communicative potentials, his voice function as well as his capacity to serve as an activator and incubator of citizens’ engagement and first and foremost volunteering have to be put up front. But how to get this done? How to increase the awareness for the achievements and potentials of the third sector and its organizations?

All over Europe, third sector organizations are struggling to make ends meet. The reasons why TSOs are facing a hard time are manifold. As the results of the Third Sector Impact project indicate, the acquisition of resources, finances and personnel has changed significantly for TSOs during the last decades. Partly this constitutes an outcome of modified TSO government relations that are highly influenced through the spirit of neo-liberalism, which translated into both the introduction of competitive markets for social services and instruments of new public management, such as competitive tendering or contract management. Also, the new culture of volunteering, which is far less milieu specific than it used to be and hence characterized through a high degree of volatility, significantly affects membership affiliation. The concept of membership organizations as such – the voluntary associations that used to be the nucleus and the core concept of European third sector - is undergoing a stress test. Indeed, there is a real danger that the third sector – within the contours it has developed in Europe in the past century – will not be capable of acting as a striving societal force. However, looking back to the “good old times”, as well as lamenting and yammering, is not helpful. Our research identified successful ways of being resilient. Nevertheless, also resilience needs an enhancing, supportive and even empathic context that enables TSOs to keep going and to contribute to Europe’s future.

Stepping into the Limelight: Increase the Public Awareness for the Third Sector

We put forward the following policy recommendations convinced that this set of infrastructural elements could enhance the visibility and the potential for impact of the third sector and its organizations all over Europe and on European level:

- **Improve the Third Sector's Knowledge Base**

Set a regular statistical system in place to generate systematic comparative data on central features of the scale, scope and impact of the third sector and of volunteering in Europe.

- **Standardize European Statutes for TSOs**

Define standard legal stipulations for associations, foundations and social enterprises so TSOs can be effective throughout Europe.

- **Support mechanisms of interest representation**

Acknowledge and fund third sector umbrella and infrastructural organizations; Establish Third Sector Ombuds(wo)men in key institutions at all levels of the European multi-level governance arrangement.

- **Help TSOs to Modernize Themselves**

Support TSOs to show in public that they are doing the right thing: invest in digital competences and communication skills of TSOs.

- **Provide Space for Third Sector Activities**

Provide financially accessible spaces and facilities for TSO activities, especially for sports for all and cultural activities

Investing into the Future of Europe: Sustainability for TSOs

Third Sector Impact project has identified several approaches of how to change the modes of conduct and how to invest directly as well as indirectly into the third sector, with the aim of supporting the sustainability of third sector organizations.

- **Get the Structural Funds Back In**

Go back to the basics: public institutions should support TSOs in pursuing their core mission. Re-introduce structural and core funding.

- **Lift Up the Burden of Procurement Procedures**

Decrease administrative burdens for TSOs by adapting procurement and reporting procedures to the specificities and capabilities of the sector.

- **Facilitate Access to Capital Markets and to Alternative Sources of Financing**

Support TSOs in getting access to capital markets and to alternative sources of funding: back them for credibility and liability.

- **Increase the Attractiveness of TSOs:**

- **As Employers**

Safeguard good money for valuable work: guarantee decent contracts and adequate pay, in particular through public procurement procedures.

- **For Volunteers**

Enhance the infrastructure for volunteers and potential volunteers in TSOs and within the sector.

- **For Honorary Board Members**

Build up infrastructural support and provide training opportunities for incoming honorary board members.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

TSI's objectives are to:

- clarify the concept and the major components of the third sector in its European manifestations;
- identify the impacts of the third sector and its activities on economic development, innovation, citizen well-being, civic engagement and human development;
- advance statistical measurement of the third sector, its components and its impacts;
- identify internal and external barriers for third sector organizations;
- recommend policy initiatives and infrastructural tools that contribute to creating a favorable environment for the third sector development.

- forge a partnership between the research community and European third sector practitioners.

Interdisciplinary quantitative and qualitative empirical research integrates in the whole research process different stakeholder groups: third sector networks, statistical agencies and public institutions. The aim is to transform the research results into sources and tools immediately applicable in advocacy and in policy making.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME The impact of the third sector on socio-economic development in Europe - Third Sector Impact (TSI)

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FURTHER READING**TSI POLICY BRIEFS AND REPORTS ON BARRIERS ON NATIONAL LEVEL****Austria - National Report**

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no-3-third-sector-barriers-in-austria/TSI-National-Barriers-report-No-3-Austria1.pdf>

Austria - Policy Brief

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-on-removing-third-sector-barriers-in-austria/TSI-Policy-Brief-5-Barriers-Austria.pdf>

Croatia - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no-5-identifying-external-internal-barriers-third-sector-development-croatia/TSI-National-Barriers-ReportNo.-5-Croatia.pdf>

Croatia - Policy Brief

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-no-6-croatian-third-sector-2015-barriers-way-forward/TSI-Policy-Brief-6_Croatia-.pdf

France - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-on-challenges-for-the-third-sector-in-france/TSI-National-Barriers-Report-No.-4-France.pdf>

France - Policy Brief (in English)

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-no-4-on-third-sector-barriers-in-france/TSI-Policy-brief-4-Barriers-France-.pdf>

France - Policy Brief (en Français)

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-no-4-on-third-sector-barriers-in-france/TSI-Policy-brief-4-France_francais.pdf

Germany - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no/TSI-National-Barriers-Report-No.-6-Germany.pdf>

Germany - Policy Brief

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/removing-barriers-third-sector-development-policy-recommendations-germany/TSI-Policy-Brief-7_Germany.pdf

the Netherlands - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no-2-barriers-to-third-sector-development-in-the-netherlands/TSI-National-Barriers-report-No-2-NL.pdf>

the Netherlands - Policy Brief

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-no-8-third-sector-netherlands/TSI-Policy-Brief-8_Netherlands.pdf

Poland - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no-7-third-sector-barriers-poland/TSI-National-Barriers-Report-No-7-Poland-.pdf>

Poland - Policy Brief

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-polish-third-sector-policy/TSI-Policy-Brief-No.9_Poland.pdf

Spain – National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-national-report-no-8-third-sector-barriers-in-spain/TSI-National-Barriers-report-No-8-Spain-.pdf>

Spain – Policy Brief

http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-policy-brief-no-10-supporting-the-third-sector-in-spain/TSI-Policy-brief-10_Spain.pdf

United Kingdom - National Report

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-barriers-briefing-no-2-towards-a-more-nuanced-understanding-of-barriers-and-constraints/TSI-National-Barriers-Report-No11.pdf>

United Kingdom - Policy Brief

<http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/site/assets/uploads/documentations/tsi-barriers-briefing-no-1-english-third-sector-policy-in-2015/TSI-Policy-Brief-No3.pdf>