

PhD. Dissertation thesis The Conformity of the Managerial and Democratic Imperatives of Governance in Non-governmental Organizations by Dina Abdelhafez (FSV UK 2021)

The thesis explores the way managerial and democratic imperatives of governance are implemented in selected NGOs in Berlin, Cairo and Prague and how this is influenced by internal organizational and external environmental factors. The concept of governance has been often employed in the literature and in policies to describe the way of governing a *state* where NGOs have been part of managing the state, besides other organizations, media etc.; in this PhD. thesis the concept is applied to non-governmental organizations themselves, which is interesting. Non-governmental organizations are increasingly under pressure to be accountable and prove their organizational effectiveness and in general to comply with managerial ideals. Democratic principles – theoretically often associated with civil society and civil society organizations (including NGOs) - are then set aside or in tension with the managerial logic. It is therefore both theoretically and practically relevant that the thesis sets to explore this theme.

In the first part, a theoretical framework is built where the student uses agent-principal, stewardship and stakeholder theories to construct a set of managerial imperatives and participatory and representative democracy theories to construct a set of democratic imperatives. To assess the extent to which these imperatives are implemented and to explore the way managerial and democratic imperatives interact inside nonprofits, the student carried out exploratory qualitative research in three cities – Prague, Berlin and Cairo – and interviewed altogether 36 representatives of service-providing NGOs in these cities. The selection of the sites for study was purposeful; the aim was to obtain three different organizational environments: supportive of NGOs in Berlin, highly restrictive in Cairo and semi-supportive in Prague. Results of the research suggest that the implementation of managerial and democratic imperatives in NGO governance is overall mutually supportive. The exception are large organizations where participation of all employees is difficult to accomplish. Concerning the external environment, the study found that NGOs in Prague and Cairo face legitimacy problems and are more constrained by the external environment.

The study addresses a very relevant research problem and develops a good theoretical conceptual framework. The empirical part builds only on interview data (there is no systematic document analysis) which has been analyzed using thematic analysis. The usefulness of its results, however, is rather limited because of two major methodological problems:

1. Sample of NGOs: The qualitative research is very sensitive to context and the problem here is that we know nothing of the studied organizations apart from the fact that they were service-providing

nonprofits in Prague, Cairo and Berlin. The study aims to investigate the influence of organizational factors, such as **size, age and professionalization** of staff, yet we learn nothing about the studied NGOs in this respect. In my opinion, they should have been sampled purposefully along these theoretically relevant criteria; and if not sampled in this way, then we at least need to know their characteristics. Secondly, it is obvious that implementation of several of the imperatives depends to an extent on the **legal form of the organization** and ensuing legal requirements (e.g. differences between a foundation, o.p.s. and an association in the Czech law concerning internal governance, public accountability etc.). We therefore need to know the legal form of the NGOs sampled. Finally, although service provision is a distinctive **field of NGO activity**, it is not a homogeneous field and there are differences between the types of services (e.g. the provision of social services is governed by a specific law in the Czech Republic; health care is highly regulated too etc.) Again, we need to know what type of services the studied NGOs provided. Without a systematic description of the studied organizations, the results have very limited relevance.

2. Analysis of data: Qualitative data require qualitative analysis. The student describes her method of data analysis (thematic analysis) in one sentence with no reference to the literature (p. 89) and the text does not show that an in-depth thematic analysis was carried out. The problem is that the student presents her results in a descriptive way as the results of a quantitative survey (“only one organization...”; “only three organizations...”; “most of the sample...”; “all organizations...”, “none of NGOs...” etc.) This is underlined by presenting the data in the form of graphs in the appendix and expressing the presence or absence of certain qualities as a percentage, which is not appropriate for a qualitative in-depth study. Since the sample was not representative (11 organizations selected by convenience in each city), it is not relevant if all or “only” one organization implemented certain procedure. We would need to know what makes the experiences of organizations similar or different, what various meanings they attach to the procedures associated theoretically with the imperatives, etc.

I recommend the thesis for a thesis defense but at the same time express concerns about the methodological quality of the research presented in the thesis.

In Prague, 5. 9. 2021

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