

Abstract

Legitimation and professionalization of a Romani NGO in the Czech Republic

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This PhD. thesis maps strategies of legitimation and survival of non-governmental organizations working with people that use to be categorized as “socially excluded” or “Roma”. It attempts to answer the question: “What NGOs do to be able to look successful, gain resources, and create organizational reputation?” This work does not treat organizations as “things”, but as processes and social networks influenced by state and European policies, funding mechanisms and internal competition. Despite the organizations being discursively divided into those preferring more ethnic or social definition of their clients, they have to cope with the same pressures in the shape of social services law, standards of quality or control systems that come with projects. Organizations are far from devoting their time to “work with clients”; they are also involved in enlarging social capital of their members and in production of “texts” that serve their legitimation claims towards control bodies, other organizations and public.

In order to research these publicly less visible processes, the authoress uses methods of organizational anthropology – fieldwork inside organization and at many places which are contextually linked to the functioning of an organization (e.g. government bodies and expert circles). Workings of organizational pressures are illustrated on a case study based on five-years-long research connected with volunteering for one organization that identifies itself as “a Romani one”. In this period, the small and largely volunteer-based organization had transformed to a “professional” institution employing several dozens of people. The author describes functioning of the organization in the early stages based on the interconnectedness of members. Although they were officially holding certain positions, they in fact compensated their incompetencies through close cooperation, mutual support, learning through experience and performing intensive mutual control. The first legitimation strategy was based on a unique family way of organizational functioning and on stressing the “Romaniness” of the organization – its specific methods and membership base. Although the “strategic Romaniness” was retained also in the following years, professionalization strategies gained importance together with the social services reform, their commercialization and constitution of social work as a profession. Together with these processes there is a tendency to speak about clients rather in terms of “social exclusion” than in terms of “Romaniness”.

The author uncovers professionalization as a process of “separating” – different positions and competencies inside organization, clients from organizational employees, the working hours from non-working, private time. The strongest impulse to professionalize was not so much the necessity to function according to the standards of quality of social services, as the pressure to “handle money” according to donors’ rules and the necessity to produce texts for the purpose of organizational control. The separation and professionalization was supported primarily by new, university educated employees that could get the most from their abilities to fulfil control requirements and get stronger positions through “writing grants”. Last but not least, the research illustrates the birth of the inner organizational inequalities, when the strategies of the less educated employees lose their convincingness. The presence of family members and “friends of the founder” are one of the factors that make the organizational legitimation more difficult. Surprisingly, not all the “private connections” are disqualifying. The arrival of new educated employees connected by friendship ties is not an exception, but the education seems to neutralize the “problematic” potential of the private links. Legitimation based on the organizational professionalism thus does not cancel the private links, just favours different

social networks. The author concludes by placing the described processes within the context of general changes in the organizational sphere.

Key words: non-governmental organizations, legitimation, professionalization, organizational anthropology, social networks, Roma, social services in the Czech Republic