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The future of work and its end?

Remarks on the diagnosis > The Third Sector: Our last, greatest hope < from "The end of work and its future" by Jeremy Rifkin with a view to transatlantic transferability of the meant vision.

Introduction

In times of a continuous fragile employment market, the economic interest and the labour market-policy interest, quiet naturally, focuses on those segments within society, in which one sees the possibility in strengthening the employment market at large. Recently, viable means were credited to Rifkin’s solution concerning the Third Sector – a powerful segment between the market, government and the informal sector. Reference to this is given via numerous, globally conceived empirical as well as theoretical publications (among others Salamon 2001; Beck 2000; Rifkin 2004). This article intends to cross-read the diagnosis, that the Third Sector is our last, greatest hope with a view to the transatlantic transferability. My remarks on this diagnosis are based on the view of the crisis pertaining to two structures equally fundamental to our society - one identified as the crisis of the labour society and the other identified as the crisis of legitimacy and financing of the welfare states - a transforming and counterbalanced act can now be assumed by the Third Sector as it has been promoted in discourses since the 1990’s.

Thesis

Rifkin formulates in 1995 in his book “The End of Work”, that a “new social contract” is necessary in consideration of these known crisis, for which in the end, the Third Sector will craft the promising, organisational foundation. But one must be aware of the fact, that this vision originates from the US-American context and from the communitarian thinking tradition.

- Organised national welfare structures, are not attributed the relevance and responsibility, since they do not exist de facto to the extent and development as it is the case in most parts of Europe. I would like to remind of the welfare state classification of Esping-Andersen (1990) who differentiates between liberal, conservative and social democratic welfare regimes. In this classification the US-regime is part of the liberal states and Austria f.e. is part of the conservative ones.

- Solidarity in the US-communitarian sense refers to the community and is not to be seen on an equal footing with the solidarity of society, as it is always formulated in civil-social contexts in connection with the state responsibility, as it is typical for the conservative welfare states and the civil society in this states (cf. Böhnisch & Schröer 2002).

- The conceptual variance must be finally emphasised – the Third Sector means in US-American linguistic usage the “Voluntary sector”, which is based on honorary and voluntary work. A different working culture is meant here, f.e. the activity aside from existence-ensuring criteria. The Third Sector on the other hand is assumed to have Europe-wide an increasing gainful employment potential. This area showed a clearly stronger occupational growth in the first half of the 1990’s.
than the remaining economy according to the results of the Johns Hopkins Project (cf. Salamon 2001, p. 48).

Despite relevant differences in the concepts and in the socio-economic contexts between USA and Europe, the said communitarian way of thinking, portrait f.e. by Rifkin, has been accepted throughout many parts of Europe, especially since those noticeable crisis developed in the past years. The importance of social non-profit work is being increasingly recognised, and it is even referred to as the “Laboratory of the Future” (Sloterdijk 2003). On one hand the Third Sector constitutes a perfect fit when it comes to managing such a “Laboratory”, especially, since within the Third Sector numerous labour aspects find herein its unity, such as gainful employment, forms of (voluntary) work, including those leading up to the roots of (unpaid) reproduction work (f.i. in self-help groups). On the other hand the Third Sector underscores the occupational relevance, often stressed in Europe, that refers to the culture of gainful employment in those “hope-arousing” analyses. Key words like “Miracle drugs against the mass unemployment” (Betzelt & Bauer 2000), “Job machine” (Salomon et al. 1999), “Hope carriers” (Anheier 1997) refer to the importance of this sector concerning gainful employment in Europe.

To that regard it is utmost important to thoroughly evaluate, whether and to which extent the Third Sector can be considered as a subsidiary full-time occupation market, since the first (market) and second (public) sector are vulnerable to crisis, or to which extent it simply portraits a full time occupation ideology, just to conceal the end of the labour-society via social disciplining and moral armament and simultaneously justifying the welfare state legitimation crisis.

**Intention & Content**

Dealing with this topic has shown, that it is necessary – at first – to define the term and to characterise the Third Sector in its typical socio-economic context. As I already tried to point out, the American view and tradition is different to the one in most parts of Europe. Further it turned out to be important to focus on the “quality of work”, assessing under which structural conditions the Third Sector stimulates work and as to how the “quality from the act of work” is viewed by its workforce in this segment.

The results in this article are based on a current research project located in the socio-economic context of Vienna (A). Quantitative and qualitative data material were generated to find out basic structures and dynamics about the financial and employment situation there (cf. Anastasiadis, Essl, Riesenfelder, Schmid, Wetzel 2003). 630 Third-Sector-Organisations in Vienna were interviewed in a telephone survey and about 20 persons were interviewed in a detailed qualitative setting, among them external experts representing civil-, labour- and finance law and a group of twelve decision makers from the aforementioned organisations to get the view from the inside.

To better follow the content of the article is constituted along the axes of three main topics:

1. In the first part I’ll try to deliver a clear understanding of the Third Sector in Vienna.
2. The second part focuses on work in the Third Sector. I’ll evaluate the vision of the “Miracle drug against mass unemployment” by using empirically data along the criteria of work extend and work forms as well as work motivations.
3. The third part will concentrate on the identified problems and will show typical potentials and solutions.
References


Salamon, L M. 2001: The third sector in the international comparison – Compilation of results of Johns Hopkins Comparative Project; in: Priller, A. (Ed.): The third sector internationally. More market – less state?, Published by the Centre of Science Berlin for social research, Berlin, p. 29-56.