

Abstract

This thesis, *When the Public and the Voluntary Sector Work Together*, is inspired by the current political interest in the voluntary sector. The year 2011 is appointed by the European Commission to be the *European Year of Volunteering*. For that reason, Denmark has seen increased attention to cooperation between the public and the voluntary sector which is expressed in the report, *A National Strategy for the Civic Society*, published by the Danish government in fall 2010.

The report lays out a strategy for a more planned and systematic involvement of the voluntary sector in regards to solving social issues in society. Local municipalities are important players in the implementation of the strategy given the fact that the state and the citizens most often interact at the local level. Furthermore, it is also in the local communities that people get involved as volunteers.

Danish society has a long tradition for cooperation between the state and non-profit organisations, however, as interest in the partnership between the public and the voluntary sector increases, new types of organisations, *hybrid organisations*, have emerged. These hybrid organisations function as a link between the municipalities and the non-profit organisations. Therefore this master thesis asks the question:

Which role do hybrid organisations play in an intensified partnership between the public sector and the voluntary sector concerning social work in a local context?

The analysis takes its starting point in two hypotheses. According to the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Robert Putnam, which are included in the paper, these hypotheses are phrased as a thesis of conflict and a thesis of consensus, respectively.

Thesis of conflict: Long-term cooperation and the establishment of hybrid organisations have resulted in a colonisation of the non-profit organisations by the municipality. Consequently, financial reasoning has dominated the partnership and thereby also the non-profit organisations. The seemingly well-functioning collaboration is therefore an expression of the non-profit organisations adapting to the terms and conditions of the municipality.

Thesis of consensus: The non-profit organisations foster and are exponents of social capital. The partnership with the municipality has underpinned this matter in a way which has allowed

the non-profit organisations to keep their individual identity and qualities. This has been strengthened by the establishment of hybrid organisations.

The analysis suggests that the *thesis of conflict* cannot be substantiated. Circumstances in regards to the financial relations and also the demands of documentation and evaluation can give rise to concerns about colonization. These circumstances are not significant in the cooperation between the municipality and the voluntary organisations. On the contrary, there seems to be room for manoeuvre and agreement on the importance of fundamental boundaries between the public and the voluntary sector. Hybrid organisations play an important role in preventing colonization of the non-profit organisations. They function as a platform for the partnership based on mutual knowledge and trust, and such a platform diminishes the demand for control. The hybrid organisations also support the non-profit organisations and help them strengthen their identity. Subsequently, the hybrid organisations function as a “buffer” between the non-profit organisations and the municipality.

According to the *thesis of consensus*, the analysis suggests that the non-profit organisations play an important role in building and sustaining social capital in society. This role is underpinned by the ways by which they cooperate with the municipality – and the municipality has an equally important role in creating the right setting for the non-profit organisations. The establishment of hybrid organisations has been a means to creating this setting and also to enhancing the internal network between the non-profit organisations, resulting in greater achievements. The hybrid organisations are thus important players in building and sustaining social capital in society.

Only during the last two decades, the voluntary sector has been subject for comprehensive research. Yet the research mainly focuses on either the public or the voluntary sector, or the formal relations between these. The hybrid organisations have not yet been thoroughly investigated according to their role in a local context. This paper is a contribution to this ongoing area of research. *The National Strategy for the Civic Society* points out that new types of organisations and ways of working together are essential in this matter. It is therefore interesting to study and learn from existing experiences on hybrid organisations in a local context. The experiences from Aalborg have shown to be successful and should be taken into account when aiming for a strategic and systematic involvement of the voluntary sector in regards to solving social issues in society.