

Conference

ARE WE ON THE RIGHT TRACK? PARADIGM REVIEW BY CSOs AS DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

Prague, Czech Republic, 14th – 16th May 2008
Thursday 15th May 2008

Responses from European NGOs to the challenges
pointed out by CSOs from the South and the East

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The East Differences

- **New Member States (NMS) Differences:** I cannot claim representativity, but can give you a flavour of some of the central issues, factors and consequences in this little-debated and -understood difference. Of course there is number of further differences that need to be taken into account (and don't really allow for generalization)
 - differences inside NMS (many are politically polarised societies – Hungary, Czech Republic)
 - differences among NMS (size, religion, transformation benefits, more and less neoliberal success stories)
 - differentiated relationship vis a vis Old Member States (OMS), pro-AngloSaxon (many US ally, but also close to Britain, Scandinavia, but many have similar (capacity) problems as other smaller and poorer OMS like Greece or Portugal)
 - in some ways not so far from needs of the further East and South (e.g. watchdog, advocacy and policy work still in cradle)
 - **similarities:** just as many in East and South, our societies seem on average to be somewhat rougher, more competitive, motivated to gain more wealth because deprived for a long time of opportunities, totalitarian experience (but quite different interpretations of this experience as opposed to Latin American CSOs)

NGOs/civil society/society differences: why development is not considered a power issue (surprising in countries which far too often in their history fell prey to big power politics) because „Easterners“ are:

in part immature (although similar to other East and West NGOs):

- too **narrow focus** on own, sectoral issues: development project (education or awareness raising) implementation as opposed to trying to understand wider political context of development cooperation (due to easier funding, lack of analysis, capacities to missing tradition and education)
- **aversion to politics** (not realizing that being apolitical is also a political stance) and **distrust to State** (underestimating its critical development role and the degree to which a good state reflects good civil society)

in part historically/culturally different:

- **anti-leftist sentiments** (historical pendulum, globalization success story, discredited Marxism but largely also World Social Forum/WSF or trade unions), or outright right-wing positions (buying into conservative national security and/or neoliberal economic interests discourse) ..
- but also, there is more of a **genuine liberalism** in a number of, not all, NMS societies (e.g. average tariff were lower before EU accession, higher tolerance for sexual minorities, more

open government culture) resulting in 1) higher acceptance of competition and inequalities (as positive forces for development), but also 2) flexibility and influenceability of NMS politics, 3) diversity to give more fertile ground for innovations and higher freedom for alternatives (fresh energy)

Government differences: from prejudice to real political tensions and challenges between NMS and OMS

- **focus on the East, Southeast** (yes, NMS might colonize these countries in a similar way through development cooperation, conditionality, investment and trade agreements, plus anti-Russian sentiment and security concern, but also transformation know how, which also supports
- **focus on good governance** vs. systemic problems
- focus on effectiveness of European Development Fund/EDF (more genuine development interest vs. instrument of pursuing old colonial interests by other means, vs. efforts to avoid increasing ODA volumes)
- **focus on political and civil rights** vs. economic and social rights (reflect both quick fix transformation whereby political liberalism was gradually overtaken by economic liberalism, but also awareness of some intrinsic dilemmas of the Asian type that without radical reengineering of the societies and economies countries can realistically effort these rights only at certain economic level and that they might thus contravene sustainable development)
- **focus on injustice inside EU** – double standards inside EU, complacency about discrimination in agri, foreign, cohesion policy, the power play happens in the EU house just as much as outside, on the other hand we often ask for differentiated treatment

Conclusions:

1. our debates here show how many, quite deep differences exist among us. Instead of ignoring them or trying to mitigate, these should be exposed, debated and **creatively explored** among NGOs as much as among governments and other institutions: well-reflected, instrumentalized differences can take us further than false unity
2. externally, the differences should be used as **argument in our development debates**, diversity of situations in Europe should foster respect for diversity of situations and policy tools needed for development outside EU (but also raises the question for our friends in the global South whether it is not time to admit the silent, but increasing differentiation among the developing countries in blocs such G-90, or G-77)
3. **internally, positive politicisation of CSOs:** capacity-building, political understanding, sensitization, support for advocacy and policy work, research (e.g. to show that and why some policies like neoliberal policies can only succeed in specific conditions, which conditions)
4. NMS, Eastern Europe is a **testing ground** for Western Europe's true capacity for partnerships, equality, fair-play, cooperation and approaches to differences (in culture, mentality, history or politics), but we are quickly losing much of the big political alternatives in the NMS.. can the alternatives still be found further East?
5. there is certain trade-off between material and spiritual wealth, it is a transitional cost. East and South are increasingly becoming places to easier recreate ourselves morally and spiritually, places where we realize how far we have gotten in some respects such as unsustainable consumption and excessive commercialization, which has little to do with our real human (development) needs, East and South are our global **spiritual heritage** we must not lose. They provide islands of positive deviation, or rather normality, that remind us of past or innovative ways of individual and social life that are perhaps less efficient and productive, less easy and sexy, but valuable in other important regards, valuable in other development paradigms.

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