

# Meeting between researchers and stakeholders from the third sector

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*Institute for Social Research, Oslo*

## *Short summary*

Eleven Norwegian umbrella organisations, large national associations and key informants participated in the first of national stakeholders' meetings intended to bring valuable input and direction to the research on Third Sector Impacts. Ranging from health and welfare to culture, leisure and sports sectors, including the perspectives of volunteers, fund-raisers, employers and employees, the Norwegian networks' representatives engaged in a constructive discussion on the range of impacts that third sector activities produce in five dimensions: 1) Well-being and quality of life, 2) Innovation, 3) Civic engagement, empowerment, advocacy, community building, 4) Economic impacts, 5) Human resources.

Several participants expressed a strong concern for the intrinsic value and distinctiveness of the activities of third sector organizations and resentment towards another layer of measurement and documentation. This can be seen as a reaction to the strong focus on documentation and accountability that came with New Public Management. Participation in third sector organizations can be associated with well-being and joy that can be hard to define, but is easy to recognize for example among youth and children active in sports or trekking, or among old men crawling around restoring an old ship. The third sector also provides a space for doing things in different ways, to be dynamic and innovative, in itself a significant quality to society, but difficult to measure as specific impacts. Among the aspects more typically assumed impacts were economic impacts, such as redistributive effects of volunteering generating income for the Third Sector Organizations and thereby reducing the economic thresholds for participation. On the negative side, there was concern with new flows of economic resources that enabled strong pressure groups to push other, more disadvantaged actors to the side.

Through different phases of the meeting, from the brain-storming exercises to more convergent focus on a short list of the most significant impacts, a clear willingness emerged to engage with other stakeholders and with the TSI-project through collaboration with the academic partner. ISF researchers Karl Henrik Sivesind and Signe Bock Seggaard competently led the discussion to bring out more concrete examples and controversial facets of impacts. The outcomes will be shared in English with the TSI community shortly, thus representing a first step to building a mosaic of input from stakeholders across nine TSI target countries, designed to provide focus on the most important Impacts.

**The shortlist of impacts is as follows:**

- Social networks/structures / Social Capital
- Innovation, space for doing things in other ways
- Joy/personal benefit/well-being/Quality of life
- Engagement (opposite to passivity) Being active
- Economic impacts. Redistributive effect of volunteering and organizations as collective goods
- Strong pressure groups push other actors to the side (negative impact)

**Key words – list of social, economic, and cultural impacts regarding**

- *Well-being and quality of life*
- *Innovation*
- *Civic participation, development of local society, support and rights*
- *Economic impacts*
- *Human Resources*
  - *Influence society at central and local level?*
  - *Influence individuals: volunteers, employees, participants, donors, clients and users?*
  - *Positive and negative impacts?*

**How researchers should prioritize when focusing on possible impacts of activities of the organizations. Suggestions from the third sector participants:**

- Social capital
- Transfer and raise funds for a good causes
- Improve the general health of the nation
- New forms of collaboration
- Network between people - higher degree of trust, social equalization, and contract across=integration
- Education and democracy
- Activism and demonstrations
- Innovation – space for innovation within voluntariness. Innovations in the third sector may have big impact
- Democracy building
- Influence the public agenda
- Voluntary communal work (dugnad) – maintain the activity and the spirit
- The value of voluntariness (vs the market)
- Service production – deliver services
- Distinctive character of the third sector

- Inequalities between organized and non-organized stakeholders/individuals
- Gain political influence through collaboration between actors of the third sector
- Create joy and happiness with the members. Motivation for participation
- Create joy and happiness with third parts