

Third Sector European Policy: a Research Network

Jeremy Kendall

In 2002, Jeremy Kendall, LSE-based research students Catherine Will and Isabel Crowhurst, and a team of research partners from eight other European countries secured funding under the European Commission's 5th Framework to initiate a network examining Third Sector European Policy (TSEP). Some of these countries have also been funded by the European Science Foundation's initiative for cooperative research in Europe, while the UK component is also benefiting from the support of Charities Aid Foundation. The network has functioned between 2003 and 2005, and has involved the building of a new body of knowledge within the research community, as well as the strengthening of links between research and policy by the convening of policy workshops across Europe (see www.lse.ac.uk/collections/TSEP/, which includes details of all national partner affiliations).

Aside from policy workshops, and partners' paper presentations at leading conferences – including sessions that the European ISTR conference in Paris in April 2005, and the ECPR conference in Budapest in September 2005 – the primary outputs of the network are a series of TSEP Working Papers. A first series examines the policy environment for each country using a common framework (see box 1). A second set of papers takes a close look at how a carefully selected number of 'policy cases', in which the third sector as a horizontal policy actor is theoretically implicated, have played out in the multi level process. Taken together, these cases capture the multiple potential and actual policy roles of the sector (agenda setting, design, implementation) as well as the multiple modes which characterise the EU policy process (including the Open Method of Coordination and the Community Method). To allow for comparison with Switzerland – as a non-EU member – the network has also examined the legacy of the United Nations Year of Volunteering (2001) for horizontal policy frameworks at the national level.

Partner countries

The partner countries in the EC 5th Framework-funded study are

- Czech Republic
- France
- Germany
- Italy*
- Netherlands*
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland*
- UK*

Those also with European Science Foundation funding are asterisked.

Box 1 TSEP working papers: coverage of country papers (available at www.lse.ac.uk/collections/TSEP/)

- The co-evolution of third sector policy with social welfare system development in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on how this can be related to the shared European problems of governance, social exclusion and unemployment;
- the currently contested nature of definitions and typologies;
- key facets of third sector specific horizontal architecture; current policy agenda content and priorities;
- implementation issues; and
- a synoptic discussion of factors explaining the diagnosed policy situation, grouped into three classes
 - stable factors
 - external shocks and spillovers; and
 - the motivating beliefs and resources of third sector policy actors, and their connection to policy entrepreneurship, including coalition building and consolidation

The network has also examined the potential and actual effects on third sector-specific policy of the EU's market compatibility agenda, including emergent policies on 'services of general interest'; and the effect on the third sector's policy environment at the sub-national level of the European Structural Fund aspect of regional and employment policy.