

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft
Wintersemester 2015/16
Praktikumsbericht
Betreuer: Dr. Matthias Freise

Internship Report:

Analysis of Barriers and Facilitators for Third Sector Organizations on the European Level of Governance and Preparation of Supportive Activities for Start-Up Organizations in Advocacy and Lobbying

at Maison des Associations Internationales, Brussels
February 15th – April 15th 2016

Bearbeitet von:

Patrick Hoemke
Sophienstr. 17
48145 Münster

Tel.: 0176/81130126
patrick.hoemke@wwu.de

Matrikel: 365604
Studiengang: Master Politikwissenschaft,
neue Prüfungsordnung (2014)

1 Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Logistical Framework of the Internship and Application Procedure.....	2
2.1	Logistical Framework.....	2
2.2	Application Procedure.....	3
2.3	Erasmus+ Funding	3
2.4	Preparation of the Internship.....	3
3.	Presentation of the Receiving Organization.....	4
4.	Program of the Internship and Tasks of the Intern	4
4.1	Operational Processes and Work Organization	5
4.2	Working Environment and Supervision	5
5.	Knowledge, Skills and Comptences to be Acquired.....	6
6.	Assessment of the Internship	6
6.1	Assessment of the Internship Concerning Own Expectations	7
6.2	Connection Between University Studies and Internship	7
6.3	Effects on Personal Labor Market Orientation.....	7
7.	Scientific Report	7
7.1	Financing Brussels TSOs	8
7.2	Strategy and Structure.....	9
7.3	Barriers towards Impact Realization	11
7.4	Current Issues	13
7.5	Feedback Loop?.....	14
7.6	Conclusion: Difficult Times for TSOs.....	15
	References	17

1. Introduction

This paper presents a comprehensive report of my two month internship at Maison des Associations Internationales in Brussels from February 15 to April 15 2016. The internship was conducted within the framework of the University of Münster's institute of political science's master's program (module work placement) and was funded by the European Commission's Erasmus Plus program, executed by the sending institution's Career Service.

The report follows the structure suggested by the guidelines on internship reports by the Service- und Informationscenter Politikwissenschaft. Therefore, in its first part, the report describes the wider framework of the internship. It starts out with the logistical framework and application procedure, discusses the content-related and practical preparation of the internship, presents the receiving organization, goals, tasks and acquired skills of the internship and concludes in a critical assessment.

The scientific part of the report is connected to the tasks carried out during the internship and closely relates to the EU funded research project "Third Sector Impact" respectively its work package on Barriers and Facilitators for Third Sector Organizations on the European Level of Governance, coordinated by Prof. Annette Zimmer, Institute for Political Science.

2. Logistical Framework of the Internship and Application Procedure

The internship was conducted at the Maison des Associations Internationales at 40 Rue Washington, Brussels-Ixelles within the period from February 15 until April 15 2016.

2.1 Logistical Framework

For the nine weeks of the period specified above, the intern moved to Brussels and worked at the head office of the receiving organization on a full-time basis (40h per week). The executive director of the organization supervised the intern and offered intensive and continuous guidance and consultation. Other employees also supported the intern on a daily basis in organizing and preparing his tasks. A fellow intern was asked to continuously accompany the intern.

The internship was particularly chosen because of the close connection to the intern's previous work experience at Prof. Annette Zimmer's chair of German and European Social Policy within the TSI research project. The internship in Brussels was meant to further interconnect the research activities conducted within the research project with on-site experience at the practitioners' level in Brussels.

2.2 Application Procedure

The intern applied for the internship individually and by own initiative. This application was closely coordinated with Prof. Annette Zimmer who supported the idea and facilitated the successful application by sharing contacts from the TSI project and her wide research network. Thereby, the contact to the receiving organization was established.

The application was welcomed by the MAI's executive director who confirmed the internship for the period and tasks specified within this report after a telephone interview with the applicant.

2.3 Erasmus+ Funding

The intern did not receive a monetary gratification by the receiving institution but was financially supported by the European Commission within the framework of the Erasmus Plus program, executed by the University of Münster's Career Service. The participation within this program required an additional application and resulted in an average funding of EUR 360.- per month. The administrative procedures required certain efforts of language assessments and survey participation but are assessed as a very positive opportunity of receiving co-funding for not monetarily remunerated internship activities.

2.4 Preparation of the Internship

The preparation of the internship started after the final approval by the executive director. The expected tasks of the intern had been prepared in several telephone calls within the weeks before the start of the internship. Further concrete preparations had been made in close contact with a fellow intern and future colleague supposed to work on the same tasks within the internship period in close collaboration. This intern also assisted in practical preparations.

The intern spent the four weeks between final approval and departure to Brussels on thematic preparations as research and a literature review on lobbying, advocacy and the role of third sector organizations in Brussels. Additionally, textbooks and journal articles related to the EU's legislative process and the role of EU institutions had been consulted in the perspective of third sector integration. Further logistical preparation had not been necessary, as accommodation was easily found through advice of the fellow intern.

3. Presentation of the Receiving Organization

Founded in 1982, the Maison des Associations Internationales understands itself as a full-fledged support centre for international associations present in Brussels and third sector organizations in general. Their services comprise logistical support – e.g. office space, conference and meeting venues and reception/information facilities – at preferential rates. The MAI's policy aims at offering a warm welcome to organizations establishing in Brussels. A second pillar of activities aims at offering consultancy and thematic support to organizations newly establishing on EU level or desiring to significantly expand their activities. This second part of activities constituted the reason why the internship at MAI was aspired, all activities of the internship took place within this field of activity.

4. Program of the Internship and Tasks of the Intern

In a first part of the internship, the intern intensively reviewed existing literature, empirical data and further research results (e.g. qualitative and quantitative studies) to assess barriers and facilitators impeding or promoting the impact of third sector organizations on the EU level of governance. He drafted a report based on the outcomes of these analyses and double-checked the results by attending relevant conferences, workshops and dissemination events. Additionally he accompanied the supervisor in his networking activities within EU level third sector networks and organizations.

Secondly, the intern contributed to the implementation of a support program for start-up organizations preparing their advocacy activities on EU level. This included both his assistance in setting up the necessary infrastructure at MAI and in formulating the necessary conceptions in order to set up the program. In a second

phase, his tasks were extended to the implementation and support of first support activities:

In detail, the intern's tasks concerning the support program were as follows:

- Collection of funding guides, directories etc.
- Preparation of a public affairs directory
- Collection of information concerning similar supportive structures already existing
- Intensive research on conceptual components for the support activities and the training course
- Analysis of possible funding sources for the program
- Analysis of possible connections to higher education institutions
- Conception of marketing activities.

4.1 Operational Processes and Work Organization

For the nine weeks internship period, the intern followed the regular operational processes at the receiving organization between Mondays and Fridays. The working hours of 40 per week were handled with kind flexibility so that overtime hours during phases of high workload, e.g. before deadlines, could easily be balanced.

All necessary equipment was provided by the receiving organization. A monetary gratification was not paid, but the internship was funded within the EU's Erasmus+ framework. For the entire period, long-term project commitment dominated the intern's work. This positively contributed to his identification with the receiving organization and milestones and successes of the project period. Several days per month the intern spend at conferences and events as described above, which also contributed to the attractiveness of the internship.

4.2 Working Environment and Supervision

The intern was introduced into the local team of logistic and policy staff. He was quickly integrated as a full team member and took part in regular staff meetings. He worked in a fully equipped office and could always contact other staff members for support and in case of questions. Additionally, the intern's work has been monitored by weekly meetings with the supervisor and mentor. Further office staff continuously provided instructions and guidance to the intern. The internship period

was continuously evaluated by the supervisor: The weekly meetings steadily evaluated the quality of the single tasks and deliverables specified above. Their continuity allowed to adjust single tasks and evaluation procedures regularly. A detailed mid-term and final evaluation was conducted by the supervisor in consultation with other staff members who guided and instructed the intern. Based on an assessment of the intern's work outcomes a final certificate and letter of recommendation was issued.

5. Knowledge, Skills and Competences to be Acquired

The intern gained further insight into EU policy making processes and the role of organized civil society and third sector networks. The internship helped broadening the scientific horizon of the intern and provided him with further knowledge concerning the role, barriers and opportunities of third sector organizations on the European level. This also covered an assessment of the impacts and contributions of third sector organizations to a) European policy making efficiency, b) the connection between EU institutions and European societies and c) transnational interest aggregation. This part of the traineeship covered scientific competences to be used by the intern for his further university studies and was strongly related to communicative and foreign language skills in contact with partner organizations.

Additionally, the internship broadened practical skills and competences. The intern's assistance in setting up the necessary infrastructure for the support program specified above helped him to further acquire organizational skills, complemented by skills in mobility and adaptation to an international organizational background. His overall tasks further developed communicative and teamwork skills. Other tasks of rather conceptual nature contributed to the further development of personal initiative and strategic skills.

6. Assessment of the Internship

The assessment of the internship was fully positive from both sides – the intern's as well as the receiving organization's. The supervisor stated full satisfaction with the intern's contribution, academic and practical skills in the traineeship certificate and issued an additional letter of recommendation. The intern's experiences will be shortly assessed concerning the following aspects:

6.1 Assessment of the Internship Concerning Own Expectations

The tasks, work organization and operational processes fully met the intern's expectations. The intern was able to gain insights and to fulfill responsible tasks in attractive fields of activity. To ensure a high level of satisfaction, the phone calls and comprehensive consultations and agreements during the preparation of the internship were very helpful.

6.2 Connection Between University Studies and Internship

As described above, the whole program of the internship and especially the tasks in its first phase were closely connected to civil society and third sector research which constitute the focus of the intern's university studies within the Institute for political science's master program at the University of Münster. Therefore, the internship was closely connected to the intern's scientific studies.

6.3 Effects on Personal Labor Market Orientation

Especially the practical tasks fulfilled within the second phase of the internship and the close contacts to third sector and policy practitioners at numerous events helped the intern's personal labor market orientation. The intern learnt about the work in third sector organizations specialized on advocacy and lobbying and gained the opportunity to assess the advantages and challenges of a professional career abroad and in international context.

7. Scientific Report

Certainly, the Brussels third sector organizations' (TSO) universe serves as an interesting topic for research and is looked at from different perspectives. Currently, the research focus has shifted towards an analysis of the TSO community itself. Increasingly, Brussels' professionalized TSO community is looked upon as a rather homogeneous "organizational field" which stands out for its distinctive habitus and its inward-bounded activities (Sanchez-Salgado 2014; Cullen 2015). As outlined above, one important task of the internship was the analysis of barriers and facilitators third sector organizations are facing. This scientific part of the internship report provides a comprehensive analysis of the information gathered within six qualitative semi-structured interviews and five focus groups conducted within the

framework of the EU funded research project “Third Sector Impact” (for details see reference list).

7.1 Financing Brussels TSOs

For TSOs operating in Brussels, it has to be highlighted that the European Commission plays a very important role in terms of funding. Certainly, funding opportunities are related to certain topics dealt with by different DGs; furthermore funding opportunities differ widely depending on the policy field and within policy fields. Despite the fact that EU funding is crucial for many TSOs, the organizations by and large refer to a mix of funding sources, amongst those members’ contributions and donations, funding by foundations or corporations and of course EU-funding (Interview 4, p. 9). In terms of EU funds, many TSOs are working with generally supportive operational or infrastructure funds, granted by the relevant Commission’s DGs in their fields of expertise. The same TSOs sometimes also participate in EU projects for which they receive specific and earmarked EU-funding. However, it is not possible that single organizations collect several operational funds from different EU sources at the same time. Through funding of TSOs the Commission sets the agenda and simultaneously tries to balance corporate and civil society interests within processes of policy development (Interview 5, p. 2 / Interview 6, p. 2). However, TSO experts indicated that overall cuts in the budgetary framework 2014-2020 had a significant impact on TSOs working in Brussels. Hence, similar to the situation in the member states, funding has developed into a central barrier for the TSOs community in Brussels (Interview 6, p. 1 / Interview 4, p. 10).

The outcome of the interviews and focus groups with EU level TSO representatives indicates that a strong dependency on EU funding is widely perceived to constrain TSOs in two ways: From a structural point of view, procedures of applying, implementing and reporting are seen as very complex and time consuming. Additionally, delayed approval of grants translates into significant financial uncertainties for TSOs. Although funds are granted on a four years basis, TSOs sometimes have to re-apply every year. Also many EU grants require seeking matched funding. This is perceived as very challenging because in many cases additional funds are not easily available (Interview 4, p. 10 / Interview 5, p. 2). Additionally, interviewed TSO representatives are critical that funds are granted without tracking TSO’s prior activities and records. Also membership based TSOs obliged to consult their constituencies in the member states are faced with disadvantages when they have to compete with Brussels based think tanks for EU funding as their decision making

procedures are more costly and time consuming (Interview 4, p. 10). Similar to the situation in the member states, increased bureaucratization and competition turns out to be a major obstacle that hinders TSOs working in Brussels to live up to their expectations and potentials.

However, the interviewees also indicated the danger of a “mission drift”. In order to safeguard funding, TSOs tend to mainstream their mission and vision with the goal of getting close to the Commission’s agenda. It was also indicated that TSOs in Brussels engage in “name and term dropping” in order to comply with both the Commission’s agenda and the current “EU machinery culture” (Interview 4, p. 11). Increased competition between TSOs was reported in our interviews against the background that who refers to the “Brussels machinery” best will most likely get funding. There is a tendency among the members of the TSO community in Brussels to shift the agenda to topics and issues, considered politically important by the Commission or the Parliament (Interview 3, p. 6-9 / Focus Group 3, p. 6). With respect to the impact of current EU funding policies on the TSOs community, experts highlight a trend towards concentration. Working together in “platforms” seems to be a promising approach to working effectively in Brussels (Interview 2, p. 3-4) for TSOs.

7.2 Strategy and Structure

According to the interviewees, TSO’s governance impinges on their chances of successful advocacy with European institutions. As a rule of thumb, well-established and institutionalized platforms as well as organizations with a strong backing in the member states are more likely to be recognized as possible partners by EU institutions. In particular, the major platforms, such as the Social Platform are deliberately included into standardized policy making procedures. But, there are also smaller topic related formal and informal coalitions (or networks) enjoying access to specific policy initiatives. However, there is no overall or general platform representing the third sector (Focus Group 4, p. 6). By and large, alliances or coalitions exist on an ad hoc basis and are issue or topic specific (Interview 3, p. 4-6).

Moreover, according to the interviews and focus groups, those TSOs that have been in close contact with their constituencies in the member states enjoy a higher degree of legitimacy as interlocutors and lobbyists compared to TSOs without membership embeddedness (Interview 6, p. 11-12). Also policy recommendations of membership based TSOs with close linkages to grassroots constituencies are

perceived to be more trustworthy and hence also enjoy higher credibility (Interview 5, p. 4-5 / Interview 3, p. 5). Where TSOs have been very active in Brussels and well engaged with the relevant platforms and umbrellas, their lobbying positions can be further strengthened (Interview 3, p. 18). At the same time, representation of the needs of the membership has to be underlined by policy expertise (Interview 5, p. 5). Some interviewees referred to an ongoing process of professionalization. Increasingly, lawyers and also communication experts have taken over roles and functions of TSOs in Brussels. Specifically these actors enjoy easy access to parliamentary hearings. Against this background, a strong membership base and the obligation to keep in close contact with the organization's constituency might also be a disadvantage to the specific TSO because processes of consultation are time consuming and might cause delays as well as additional costs.

Finally, our interviewees underlined that alliances among TSOs are the silver bullet for successful advocacy. At the same time coalition building is very time consuming. Co-operation is judged nevertheless to be a cost-effective way of networking and lobbying. Often one platform coordinates activities that are joined by further networks contributing to a common issue. However, there also exists a danger of competition among horizontal platforms and specific advocacy coalitions. This is in particular the case if leadership is not assigned to a single TSO. Again, opportunities for alliances differ from policy field to policy field (Focus Group 3, p. 8 / Interview 4, p. 3 / Interview 3, p. 28).

To conclude, with respect to alliance building, the interviewees referred to a number of challenges: Firstly, it was believed that cooperation had to be based at equal level in order to avoid stronger partners dominating the initiative or campaign. Secondly, TSOs, it was argued, should refrain from both becoming excessively bureaucratic organizations and from focusing too much on only getting access to authorities. The first approach might endanger organizational cultures and their specificities as TSOs; while the second would render the TSO as unreconstructed lobbyists, potentially implying inappropriate exclusivity, and a loss of orientation towards and rootedness in their proper constituencies. Thirdly, it was also thought that it had become increasingly difficult for TSOs to follow authentic advocacy agendas, with heightened pressure to align goals very explicitly in accordance with the priorities of the Commission.

7.3 Barriers towards Impact Realization

The broad TSI project has focused upon the barriers which hinder TSOs fulfilling their potential. The interviews and focus groups in Brussels shed light on barriers TSOs believe themselves to be confronted with at the European level of governance, especially in the following five areas: financing mechanisms, accessibility of EU institutions, representation of constituencies, “market entry” and sector coordination.

Financing mechanisms: According to the judgment of TSO experts and representatives interviewed in Brussels financing mechanisms both for EU level TSOs and for TSOs in the member states have tended to be too complicated and fragmented. TSOs in the member states are confronted with severe difficulties finding out which funds are available. In this respect, TSOs in Brussels seem not to have functioned as basic transmission belts for information and advice. The following example might highlight the complexity: In the field of youth and culture under the “Youth in Action/Erasmus+” framework, funds could in theory be accessed directly from the relevant DG of the European Commission. However, funds could also be made accessible via member state authorities serving as a proxy and consequently handing out EU funds, in turn matched with additional national or regional support for projects enacted in the member states. This is for example the case in the field of work integration and employability. Here, TSOs did not need to contact EU institutions directly. But, also at EU level, fund applications were believed to be too complicated, especially for smaller organizations. A further barrier constitutes the obligation of seeking co-funding (Focus Group 1, p. 11 / Interview 4, p. 10). Sometimes available funds could not be accessed simply because there is a lack of co-funding. All in all, small budgets and limited funding further worsens the structural disadvantage of TSOs compared to corporate advocacy (Interview 5, p. 1).

Accessibility: The personal attitude of decision makers towards the Third Sector appears to be among the decisive factors for access to policy making processes (Interview 4, p. 16). Although TSOs have developed into established counterparts of business interests, their influence declines when the policy process shifts from the phase of formulating general goals to the elaboration of detailed measures. Additionally, many interactions and consultation processes between EU institutions and TSOs have become highly formalized. Furthermore, consultations are often scheduled in time slots – e.g. summer or Christmas holidays - that are not favorable for membership based organizations (Interview 3, p. 12). Referring to online consultations, focus group members also reported a lack of transparency: By and large

summaries of positions were in most parts generalized and did not consider whether contributions were made by individuals, think tanks or umbrella organizations representing a large number of members (Interview 3, p. 12). Finally, time and again members of focus groups mentioned that under “the new Commission” chaired by President Juncker, an additional level of hierarchy has been installed by strengthening the role of the European Commission’s vice presidents that impedes easy access of TSOs to Brussels policy machinery. A shift of portfolios between the DGs that takes place on a regular basis further complicates lobby activities for TSOs (Interview 4, p. 4-5). As some interviewees reported, quite often EU officials simply do not understand what the third sector is and how TSOs work (Focus Group 1, p. 2). Finally, the highly fragmented EU policy terrain makes it also very difficult for TSOs to address the “right person”. This is in particular the case for cross cutting issues like volunteering (Interview 4, p. 4-6). According to some of the TSO representatives working in Brussels, there is a need for an interlocutor and a specific framework facilitating the EU dialogue with the third sector (Focus Group 4, p. 3).

Representation: Stakeholders reported that they experienced it as challenging to keep a defensible balance between the representation of members’ or citizens’ interests and generating policy influence. In membership organizations a significant distance from the grass roots to the European level has to be managed that requires a lot of coordination, while attempting to ensure sustained communication (Interview 4, p. 13-14). It was also observed that national or local level member organizations could be supportive of the ideals and goals of the TSOs operating in Brussels, but that such members tended not to closely follow daily activities of the TSO in Brussels (Interview 3, p. 18). Also membership patterns were argued to differ significantly from Member State to Member State, making it hard to calibrate a symmetrically informed common European position on relevant issues. So, there are countries with very active third sectors encompassing numerous organizations and many followers and members. But there are also other countries, particularly in Eastern Europe or in the Mediterranean, where civic engagement in terms of membership is less common. Accordingly, the interviewees referred to a divide between western and eastern member states (Focus Group 2, p. 2). Since some TSOs had to wait for feedback from their “mother organizations” in the member states, they were not in a position to respond quickly to policy inquiries. Therefore, compared to TSOs, think tanks and business lobbyists have sometimes comparative advantages. Also, some policy makers do not understand why TSOs are sometimes not able to react on the spot and their responses are prolonged (Focus Group

4, p. 3). Due to a lack of resources, it is difficult to keep the membership informed and simultaneously react quickly: The TSO representatives saw themselves as often overburdened by working up information for their constituencies “at home”. This could be additionally difficult as information is often only available in English and uses obscure EU jargon.

*“Market” Entry*¹: Stakeholders reported that organizations and grass-root initiatives were increasingly facing challenges when attempting to initiate new activities in Brussels. This was perceived as a barrier for the further development of the third sector community in Brussels: On the one hand, start-up grants were no longer easily available. On the other hand, the entry into the Brussels TSO community requires financial and other resources. If a TSO strives for acknowledgement within the TSO community and by the European Institutions, it is said to need knowledge, skills and good contacts. Certainly, lobbying is very difficult without having an office in Brussels (Focus Group 4, p. 1).

Sector Coordination: TSOs representatives reported a lack of coordination at the policy level. This refers both to EU institutions and civil society self-organization (Interview 4, p. 1-2). The formation of alliances within the sector seems to have become more difficult. This is due to an increasing polarization and competition among TSOs. Furthermore, there is a blurring of boundaries between business and third sector advocacy because professional think-tanks and communication experts are increasingly also representing the interests of TSOs in Brussels (Focus Group 2, p. 2)

7.4 Current Issues

Our interviews and focus groups indicate that there are issues of specific importance for the further advancement of the TSO community in Brussels:

Our stakeholders often referred to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union². This article provides the legal basis for civic participation at EU level. Although the legal framework is considered being appropriate, integration of TSOs and hence the procedures of consultation were perceived as being insufficient (Focus Group 1, p. 8). Stakeholders specifically referred to the development of the Europe 2020

¹ Result of background discussions in Brussels, February 2016

² OJ C 326 (2012): “1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action. 2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.”

strategy (Focus Group 1, p. 6-7). In particular, they claimed that the strategy's stakeholder involvement objective is not sufficiently realized.

Another central topic is the emergence and practice of the European Citizen Initiative. Stakeholders acknowledged that the ECI will be further developed by the European institutions. In its recent stages however, it seems neither to facilitate direct citizens' participation nor function as an instrument to voice interests of organized civil society (Focus Group 1, p. 4-8).

Interviewees and focus groups participants stressed the growing importance of the European Council. They highlighted a lack of transparency and accessibility of the policy process which was increasingly dominated by the Council. They feared that particular interests would monopolize discussions on third sector issues. Therefore, they suggested that TSOs should have a better chance to participate in involvement with relevant issues (Focus Group 1, p. 4-6). Against the background of the existent North/South and East/West divide in TSO representation, a further strengthening of the European Council would translate into another scenario: TSOs could reinforce their advocacy activities at home with national governments. But, this could result in a loss of significance for TSOs from smaller member states. Consequently, only TSOs from large member states would be able to make their voice heard in the future.

The austerity measures are another prominent issue highlighted in interviews and focus groups. One interviewee boldly asserted that they are believed to be having a negative impact on both the formulation and implementation of social and environmental policies (Interview 6, p. 6). As another consequence, genuine third sector policy concerns might have to be reframed in terms of employability and economic growth. This trend can already be traced in the area of volunteering, which is now highlighted either as a proxy for gainful employment or as an avenue into the labor market. Traditionally volunteering was linked to notions of intercultural learning in the sense of solidarity, shared values and European integration (Interview 4, p. 5). TSOs are forced to prove that the third sector is adding value to the concept of sustainable growth, instead of putting civil society topics on the agenda.

7.5 Feedback Loop?

Does the TSO community in Brussels help TSOs in the member states to overcome barriers and hurdles which impede their potentials at home? Overall, it has to be concluded that the impact of the TSO community in Brussels seems to have

been rather modest. Interviews and focus groups suggest that to a certain extent this has been due to the growing importance of the European Council in current times of crisis management. According to this, third sector interests are only narrowly represented in the European Council. This could result in a lack of tools for constructive dialogue. It could become more efficient and more appropriate to increasingly address national governments. According to the judgment of our interviewees, the Commission is losing the initiative and appears to operate more and more under the instruction of the Council. This development would probably restrict the Commission's openness to third sector issues and it would also diminish the interest of TSOs in active engagement.

Anyway, policy proposals made by TSOs in Brussels are recommendations for the European level of governance. Consequently, they rather promote general European policies instead of initiatives earmarked for national implementation. Furthermore, the lack of a pan European media hinders TSOs' public resonance in the member states: Attention can only be generated via national media. However, European TSOs are often not able to link their issues to topics of national importance; they therefore fail in successfully communicating their issues (Focus Group 4, p. 4). Also, TSOs operating exclusively in Brussels and hence in cases where outreach to members is underdeveloped, TSOs are primarily engaging in campaigning and strategic activities in Brussels. Consequently it is difficult to illustrate the practical relevance for European citizens. Certainly, dialogue and outreach beyond the Brussels environment are necessary. However, again outreaching activities are time consuming and cost intensive and therefore very difficult to realize for TSOs suffering from a lack of both resources and public awareness (Interview 5, p. 8).

7.6 Conclusion: Difficult Times for TSOs

It is increasingly called into question whether the TSO world in Brussels is sufficiently connected to its various constituencies in the member states or if mere organizational survival in Brussels has become the central driving force of many TSOs at the EU level. Furthermore, there are also many inequalities within the TSO community. Those who are "big players" in the member states are also very present and influential in Brussels. Therefore, TSOs from Eastern Europe and also from the South are not as equally represented as those coming from the "big member states", the UK, Germany or France. There is also an issue of independence. As in particular the platforms are financed through EU money, it is sometimes difficult to follow a very critical route. And there is finally the problem of insiders and

newcomers, since the “dialogue” between the EU institutions and the TSO community is currently highly formalized. This means that “newcomers” as well as representatives from social movements are facing a difficult time in Brussels when they try to make themselves heard. Last but not least under the current presidency of Juncker, also due to the difficult political environment with which the EU is currently confronted, the European Council as the forum of the heads of government of the member states has again developed into the most decisive, powerful and determining institution of the EU. This however leads to a situation in which Brussels TSOs community is less powerful because what happens at home in the member states is more important than the outcome of advocacy activities in Brussels.

References

Cullen, Pauline (2015): From Coalition to Community: Collective Identity Formation in the Social Platform, in: Johansson, Hakan/Kalm, Sara (Eds.): EU Civil Society: Pattern of Cooperation, Competition and Conflict, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan: 81-97.

Johansson, Hakan/Kalm, Sara (Eds.)(2015): EU Civil Society: Pattern of Cooperation, Competition and Conflict, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Sanchez-Salgado, Rosa (2014): Europeanizing Civil Society. How the EU Shapes Civil Society Organizations, Houndsmill: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Interviews and Focus Groups:

Interview 1: Representative of institutional contact group, Brussels,

Interview 2: Representative of individual EU level TSO, Brussels,

Interview 3: Representative of individual EU level TSO, Brussels, 21.10.2014

Interview 4: Representative of individual EU level TSO, Brussels, 23.09.2014

Interview 5: Representative of individual EU level TSO, Brussels, 21.10.2014

Interview 6: Representative of EU level TSO platform, Brussels, 26.09.2014

Focus Group 1: "Barriers and Opportunities for TSOs at the European level of governance", 14 representatives of individual EU level TSOs and EU level TSO platforms, Brussels, 15.10.2014

Focus Group 2: "Third Sector Policy Participation: Fragmentation or Consolidation. Vertical and Horizontal Interaction", 6 representatives of individual EU level TSOs, Brussels, 13.10.2015

Focus Group 3: "Third Sector Policy Participation: Fragmentation or Consolidation. Vertical and Horizontal Interaction", 6 representatives of individual EU level TSOs, Brussels, 13.10.2015

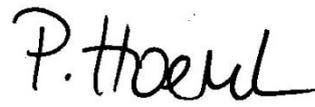
Focus Group 4: “Third Sector Policy Participation: Fragmentation or Consolidation. Interest Representation”, 9 representatives of individual EU level TSOs and EU level TSO platforms, Brussels, 13.10.2015

Focus Group 5: “Third Sector Policy Participation: Fragmentation or Consolidation. Interest Representation”, 5 representatives of individual EU level TSOs, Brussels, 13.10.2015

Erklärungen

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich diese Arbeit ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und nur die im Literaturverzeichnis angeführten Quellen und Hilfsmittel benützt habe.

Münster, den 06.05.2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hoemke'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

Patrick Hoemke