

Hybridity, Coproduction, and Third Sector Social Services in Europe

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Abstract

This article analyzes hybridity in third sector organizations (TSOs) in relation to the coproduction of public services. It begins by discussing hybridity in terms of the overlap between the third sector and other social institutions like the state, market, and community, illustrated by the welfare triangle. Then, it briefly introduces three different public administration regimes. It argues that changing from one area of overlap to another may place TSOs in an unfamiliar, or even alien, environment, resulting in increased hybridity and complexity. After it turns to coproduction and notes, it can refer to a variety of phenomena at various levels that contribute to the growing hybridity and complexity for TSOs and their leaders. It concludes that TSOs can orient themselves toward one of two main kinds of hybridity. A number of hypotheses are presented and some preliminary conclusions about the importance of coproduction for the governance of hybrid organizations are reached at the end of the article.

Keywords

hybridity, coproduction, third sector, social services

The academic debate on the future of third sector organizations (TSOs) on both sides of the Atlantic has repeatedly questioned their ability to combine the role of being an advocate for change with that of a service provider. The growth of one means a decline in the other, some have argued. This touches on the nature of organizations that pursue more than one goal at a time. The Centre for Social Investment (CSI) defines hybrid organizations as entities that straddle the border between the public and private, as

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well as between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, and they often combine the logics of the seemingly distinct spheres of the market, state, and civil society (Anheier, 2011). It therefore seeks answers to two important questions: (a) What are the effects of macro-level changes on the emergence of hybrid organizational forms and behaviors, and vice versa? And (b) what are the distinct problems of governance and leadership of hybrid organizations? In addition, this article argues that coproduction increases hybridity and complicates the governance and leadership of hybrid organizations.

The article begins with discussing hybridity in terms of the overlap between the third sector and major social institutions like the state, market, and community. It introduces New Public Governance (NPG) and argues that it is based on network governance and relies on greater citizen participation and new forms of democracy that include both coproduction and greater third sector provision of public financed social services. The coproduction of public services will then be considered in terms of its potential impact on the governance and leadership of hybrid organizations. It offers both new opportunities as well as challenges for collective solutions to growing problems with the public provision of social services in Europe. However, greater citizen participation in and more third sector provision of social services can face hurdles both from traditional public administration (PA) and New Public Management (NPM), each based on a separate logic of its own. Greater citizen participation and coproduction of public services nevertheless poses some leadership challenges for TSOs, but this also depends on the type of third sector provider. Thus, increased hybridity seems inevitable, but TSOs and their leaders can either orient themselves toward the type of hybridity represented by the overlap between the third sector and market, as seen in NPM or by the social values found in coproduction and NPG.

Hybridity of the Third Sector in the Welfare Triangle

Hybridity refers to heterogeneous arrangements, noted by mixtures of pure and incongruous characteristics, like “cultures,” “coordination mechanisms,” “rationalities,” or “action logics.” In recent years we have seen the growth of hybrid arrangements in the provision of public services, in particular in the fields of health care, elder care, public housing, education, etc., in Europe. They combine characteristics usually associated with the public sector and others generally associated with the market logic, often under the guise of NPM. Moreover, we can note the spread of partnerships or pacts between the public sector and third sector for providing social services. In fact, some argue that it is easier to find arrangements that are hybrid or “fuzzy” than those approximating ideal type notions (Brandsen, van der Donk, & Putters, 2003). Others maintain that all organizations are hybrids to a greater or lesser degree, as they all combine resources from different sectors and function according to different logics (Glänzel & Schmitz, 2012). Although this seems to question the validity of the concept hybridity itself, they nevertheless propose a complicated framework for studying different degrees of hybridity (Glänzel & Schmitz, 2012).

However, several European third sector scholars have adopted a different approach that focuses on the growing welfare mix and proposed a welfare triangle to better

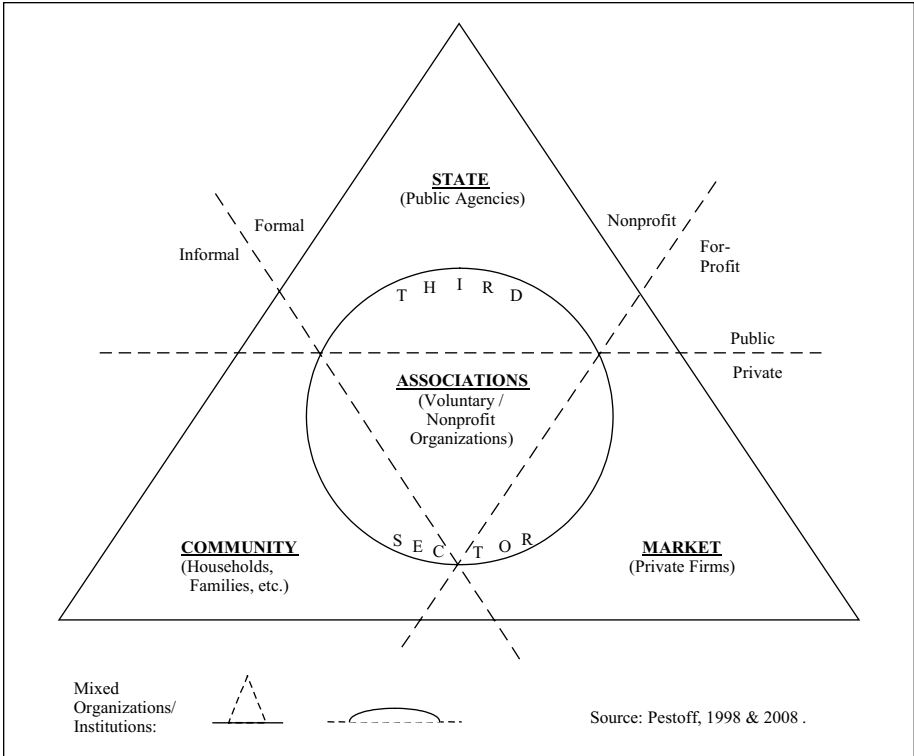


Figure 1. The third sector and the welfare triangle.

understand the relations between sectors (Evers, 1995; Evers & Laville, 2004; Laville, 1992, 1994; Pestoff, 1992, 1998, 2008). From a theoretical perspective, the idea of the welfare mix expresses variations in the importance attributed to the four major social institutions of community, market, state, and associations that govern society (Streeck & Schmitter, 1995). Note that the divisions between the sectors can shift considerably over time and vary significantly between countries. Thus, much of the debate in recent decades concerns the dividing line between the state and market or between the public and private sectors (see Figure 1).

At the empirical level, the welfare triangle helps to emphasize the shifting role played by various sectors in delivering social welfare (Evers, 1993) and how that contributes to the current blurring of the third sector's borders. Actors within the circle can express varying degrees of privateness/publicness, nonprofitness/for-profitness, and formality/informality, placing them closer to one or the other of the other three social sectors (Van Der Meer, Te Grotenhuis, & Scheelers, 2009). Moreover, we note that many TSOs also overlap with the other social institutions. Therefore, we should expect to find higher degrees of hybridity and clearer hybrid forms of organization in the parts of the third sector's circle that overlap with other social institutions. The overlap

between *the community* and *the third sector* provides numerous examples of hybrid organizations that operate with different logics, like self-help groups that provide mutual aid and comfort to their own members as well as support to others in the community, regardless of their formal membership status. For example, most HIV/AIDS groups serve both the interest of their members and of the community (Walden-Laing & Pestoff, 1997). In the next area of the circle, we find organizations in the overlap between *the state* and *the third sector* that comprise the increasingly important partnerships between TSOs and public authorities. This is seen in the growth of public–private partnerships (PPPs) in recent decades and third sector compacts in many European countries.

The final overlapping area between *the third sector* and *the market* suggests that some third sector enterprises operate on the market and seek a surplus, but they adopt rules not typical of capitalist companies—that is, shareholders only receive a limited return on their capital, and decision-making power can be distributed among members, often on the basis of one member, one vote. Consumer and agricultural cooperatives constitute one established component of this category, but they also illustrate the dangers inherent in such intermediary positioning. Cooperatives often face the challenge of goal displacement or organizational atrophy associated with pursuing multiple and sometimes conflicting goals (Pestoff, 1991). They clearly underline the benefits and risks of hybridity. Their leaders must learn to balance the various conflicting stakeholder demands in order to survive and remain true to their original purpose (Pestoff, 2011).

TSOs operating in these overlapping areas are subject to more hybridity than those not doing so. However, in the long run, these overlap areas can become their “comfort zone,” as they learn to adjust and accommodate themselves to this hybridity. However, if they leave one area of overlap for whatever reason and move to another, they will expose themselves to a new type of hybridity and new tensions stemming from such change.

Hypothesis 1: The greater the “distance” (in terms of dominant logics of action) crossed by a TSO when it moves from one overlapping area in the welfare triangle to another, the greater the hybridity and associated tensions in coping with such changes.

Three Different PA Regimes

Anheier (2005) argues that the overlap between the third sector and market is an important source of the growing phenomenon of hybridity that poses challenges to TSOs and their leaders. Accordingly, hybrid organizations readily combine business and nonprofit elements in relation to their objectives, orientation, outputs, etc. (Anheier, 2005, p. 184). Building on this, Glänzel and Schmitz (2012) propose that the two most important forces promoting hybridity are sustainability plus efficiency and professionalization. The former has the greatest impact on for-profit actors, whereas nonprofit sectors are most clearly subject to the latter “pushes” (Glänzel & Schmitz,

2012, p. 19). This implies processes of mutual harmonization in play that may eventually bring the for-profit and nonprofit sectors closer to each other. Hybridity could soon become the “new normal,” so we need to develop the means to systematically study and measure it, they argue.

Another important source of hybridity stems from major social changes in Europe since the end of World War II, particularly the growth of the welfare state. Here the very state that citizens interact with has changed significantly. In the immediate post-World War II period, they faced a rapidly expanding yet basically traditional PA, with its hierarchical chain of command, where citizens were primarily viewed as passive clients of mostly public services. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the spread of NPM, they were expected to become active consumers and exercise more choice between various providers of public financed services, be they public, private, for-profit, or nonprofit. Here the market replaced the state as the main governing mechanism for the expression of citizens’ preferences. More recently, the spread of network society (Hartley, 2005) or NPG (Osborne, 2006, 2010) implies a more plural and pluralist model of governance and provision of welfare services. It is based on public-private networks, where citizens play a more active role as coproducers of some of the services they expect, demand, or even depend upon in their daily life.

We need, therefore, to inquire how do changes in the nature of the public sector itself and different PA and management regimes impact on the relationship between the third sector and public sector in general and on the hybridity and complexity facing the third sector as a provider of social services? Hartley (2005) identified and analyzed three approaches to the public sector in the postwar period, whereas Osborne (2006, 2010) maintains that there are three phases in the development of PA, where NPM can be conceived as a transitory stage in the evolution from traditional PA to NPG.

Although each paradigm or PA regime may be linked to a particular ideology and historical period, they can also be seen as competing to a certain degree, as they coexist as “layered realities” both for politicians and managers, in the academic and public discourse (Hartley, 2005, p. 29), and for TSOs and their leaders. However, it is far from certain whether the introduction of a new layer of administration will augment or diminish the challenges facing TSOs.

Hypothesis 2: Initially, the increased complexity of the public sector associated with NPG will increase hybridity and the demands made on the leaders of TSOs that operate as public service providers. However, they may diminish over time.

Moving Out of Their “Comfort Zone”

A new perspective can be found when the growing hybridity is put into a political context. Rapid change brought on by shifts in the macrolevel political discourse can impact the possibility structures for TSOs and their leaders, opening new ones and constraining or closing old ones. This can be illustrated by a situation where TSOs that usually operate in one area of overlap in the welfare triangle, for example with the state, must shift rapidly or substantially to another area of overlap, like with the

market. However, they may be unprepared to cope with the challenges and demands of their new environment and the new “rules of the game.” This can expose TSOs to increasing hybridity, and the uncertainty it implies. Thus, with the introduction of NPM across Europe, many TSOs lost their previously cosy relations with public authorities that recognized their inherent social value added and therefore financed their activities through public grants. Once governments began to privatize public services and competition and efficiency became the principal criterion for distributing funds, this cosy relationship ended. They have to adapt to and operate in a new, highly competitive, and insecure environment, where many of their earlier partners or collaborators are now their competitors, along with many new entries in the form of private-for-profit firms, including multinational companies and venture capitalists.

TSOs’ continued funding depends on winning a tender for providing services, but in order to succeed in this competitive environment, they must become more professional, as their very survival in the competitive NPM environment demands greater professionalization. This, in turn, may introduce a new stakeholder into the management of a TSO—that is, the professional staff. They can develop separate and sometimes different interests than the board and/or the clients of a TSO. Moreover, the new “rules of the game” are often very complex and demanding, subjecting TSOs to new and sometimes contradictory logics, thus increasing their hybridity. This more political perspective would, therefore, emphasize the potential status inconsistencies of a TSO leaving its “comfort zone” and shifting its operations to new and uncharted waters. Here, a high degree of hybridity might imply more challenges and hurdles to overcome, diverting attention from the TSO’s original mission and could have an impact on its ability to survive in a highly competitive environment.

Recent developments in Europe and the United States suggest that TSOs often lose out to private for-profit actors that have more resources to promote their interests and understand the rules of the competitive game better. In fact, the preliminary data paint a bleak picture concerning ability of the third sector as a whole to adapt and adjust to this new competitive environment as providers of public-funded social services. In Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and the United States, two trends are notable in the past decade: first, the dramatic growth of private for-profit providers of welfare services, often international venture capitalists, and second, the marginalization of the third sector (Henriksen, Smith, & Zimmer, 2012; Shekarabi, 2012; Statistiska Meddelanden, 2012). This, in turn, reflects to a large extent the growing complexity of the bidding processes adopted by most NPM regimes, along with the heavy emphasis on competition and efficiency. Here large actors, often international venture capitalists, appear to have a competitive advantage, particularly when strict financial criteria are applied to the bidding process and little, if any, consideration is given to social criteria and service quality (Shekarabi, 2012). Some might argue that TSOs must become more “business-like” and make more professional bids in order to be more competitive. However, this may come into conflict with their social goals. Thus, the increasing overlap between the third sector and market logics will result in greater hybridity, complexity, and both internal and external tensions with which many if not most TSOs find difficult to cope.

Hypothesis 3: In general NPG strategies in TSOs with a clear social profile will produce less hybridity and fewer tensions in/with their internal/external environments in the long run than NPM strategies.

Coproduction and Levels of Analysis

The concept of coproduction was originally developed by Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues in the 1970s to describe and delimit the involvement of ordinary citizens in the production of public services (Ostrom, 1999). This research led them to realize that the production of services, in contrast to goods, was difficult without the active participation of those persons receiving the service (Ostrom, 1999). Thus, they developed the term *coproduction* to describe the potential relationship that could exist between the “regular producer” (street-level police officers, schoolteachers, or health workers) and their clients who wanted to be transformed by the service into safer, better educated, or healthier persons (see Parks et al., 1981). Coproduction is, therefore, noted by the mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals or “regular producers,” whereas “citizen production” is based on voluntary efforts of individuals or groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of services they receive (Parks et al., 1981).

This concept gained renewed interest during the first decade of the new century, as seen in the growing number of academic conferences and publications devoted to this subject (Alford, 2002, 2009; Bovaird, 2007; Martin, 2011; Pestoff, 2008; Pestoff & Brandsen, 2006; Pestoff, Brandsen, & Verscheure, 2012). Studies of coproduction have expanded rapidly among different disciplines, especially those with a focus on public services and/or the third sector. For example, it has been used to analyze the role of voluntary and community organizations (VCOs) in the provision of public services in the United Kingdom. However, coproduction can be contrasted with comanagement or formalized coordination between the public, private, and third sector actors providing public services, and also with cogovernance or third sector participation in public policymaking (Osborne & McLaughlin, 2004).

Such a multilevel perspective provides a more nuanced understanding than a singular focus on coproduction at the individual level or using the same term for various phenomena at such different levels. This multifaceted approach encourages a more comprehensive view of the different roles the third sector may have within the complex structure of public service provision. Also it promotes comparisons of the role of the third sector across the entire policy cycle, not just on advocacy or service provision, but on both the input and output sides of the political system (Easton, 1965). It should, however, be noted that although these three concepts are not mutually exclusive, there are some potential tradeoffs between coproduction, comanagement, and cogovernance (Pestoff, Brandsen, & Osborne, 2006) that may contribute to greater hybridity.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between individual and collective coproduction (Pestoff, 2012), which is clearly evident in the development of health care in the United Kingdom. Hudson (2012) sketches three phases in the shift from mass production to mass collaboration or participatory health care in the National Health

Service (NHS). First, in mass production, professionals design and deliver services to their patients who are passive recipients of health care. This corresponds with the traditional view of PA. Then, in today's mass customization and personalization of services, professionals and patients jointly design the services, but professionals take a clear lead in the implementation. Patients can become individual coproducers of such customized and personalized services, which results in a patient–consumer model that fits well with an NPM perspective. Similar developments can be noted for Sweden (Tholstrup, 2012), however there is little role for TSOs in this phase. By contrast, in mass collaboration and participatory health care patients, TSOs and communities are central both to the design and delivery of health services, which comes closer to ideas related to NPG. Here issues of hybridity become evident.

Furthermore, cogovernance can be seen as a core element for modernizing public services, as it provides a means to bring the views of TSOs and public service users into the design, management, and delivery of welfare services. A recent study of the challenges faced by one major TSO in the United Kingdom in facilitating user influence in the NHS pilot program illustrates the tensions this created with its advocacy role (Martin, 2011), particularly under an NPM regime. TSOs may sooner or later discover that traditional management concerns outweigh those of newer participants in such public service networks. Rather than giving weight to TSO's and user's views, their participation in governance networks may do more to co-opt them (Martin, 2011). TSOs may experience a conflict of interest between increasing their own influence in a current project (comanagement), securing their role as a service provider in the next round of funding (coproduction), and/or promoting the development of institutions for greater user participation and influence (cogovernance). Thus, TSOs often find their values marginalized when governments compile lists of standard service providers that compete with each other for funding (Martin, 2011) according to the managerial and economic criteria of NPM.

These three levels of TSO participation in delivering public services—coproduction, comanagement, and cogovernance—may result in competing expectations about their role and what their distinctive contribution should be, both internally and externally. The professional staff may therefore argue for toning down traditional values while emphasizing their professionalism as service providers in order to gain continued funding. Such competing expectations and stakeholder conflicts need to be understood and balanced by the leaders of TSOs. Thus, participation in competitive tenders and market-like arrangements will result in greater hybridity for TSOs and their leaders. Moreover, TSO participation in various aspects of coproduction can augment such developments, leading to increased hybridity and conflict.

Hypothesis 4: The more a TSO engages in coproduction at any level, micro, meso, or macro, the greater its hybridity and the associated tensions stemming from such activities.

Hypothesis 5: The hybridity and tensions from coproduction can, however, be augmented or diminished by a TSO's social profile and its internal governance structures, in particular by democratic decision-making structures.

Two Types of Hybridity?

Two recent comparative studies of parent participation in preschool services in Europe provide further insights into how coproduction works in different countries and with different providers, allowing for a comparison of the third sector providers with those in other sectors. The first study is the TSFEPS Project¹ that examined the relationship between parent participation in the provision and governance of preschool services in eight European Union (EU) countries (Pestoff, 2006, 2008). The second is a study of the Swedish welfare state and focuses on parent participation and service quality in preschool services (Vamstad, 2007, 2012). It compared parent and worker co-ops, municipal services, and small for-profit firms providing preschool services in Östersund and Stockholm.

The results of these studies have been presented elsewhere and will not be repeated here. However, it is important to note that both of them illustrate the coexistence of several different layers of PA regimes in the same sector and country, as Hartley suggested. In Sweden, for example, most preschool services are provided by municipalities in a traditional top-down public administrative fashion, whereas private for-profit preschool services seem inspired by ideas of greater consumer choice related to NPM. However, social co-op providers clearly illustrate some elements of NPG, like a work obligation for parents who also manage these facilities. This suggests that different PA regimes produce different ideas of hybridity and a different mix of logics. Thus, a higher degree of citizen participation and coproduction in third sector services appears more acceptable to NPG than NPM or traditional PA.

Furthermore, not all third sector providers are able to facilitate greater client and/or staff participation to the same extent. Some allow a more corporate vision and/or governance structures to guide their activities. Whether they do or not depends in part on the degree of democracy in their own decision making. Basically, those TSOs that are membership organizations and practice democratic decision making will probably facilitate and encourage greater participation and more coproduction. By contrast, those TSOs that are not membership-based organizations may face clear difficulties facilitating participation and promoting coproduction. They may have to introduce new, often foreign structures in their organization. This can result in new challenges and will take time and effort. Moreover, the benefits of such changes may appear vague or illusive. Thus, whether or not NPG implies clear advantages for TSO service providers depends in part on the values and internal structures of the concerned TSOs.

Hypothesis 6: The greater the discrepancy between the TSO's internal strategy and its external policy context (NPM vs. NPG), the greater its hybridity and associated tensions in pursuing its strategy.

Hypothesis 7: The greater the multitude of and discrepancy between strategies (NPM vs. NPG) in diverse service areas where a TSO operates, the greater its hybridity and associated tensions in reconciling these diverse strategies and areas.

Summary and Conclusions

At the outset of this article, a growing diversity of forms in the welfare triangle resulting in a growing welfare mix and hybridity in organizational forms related to providing public financed social services in Europe was noted. Trends in the public sector that promote greater citizen involvement in the provision of public services include coproduction, comanagement, and cogovernance. But promoting coproduction and new governance techniques can also challenge the management of hybrid organizations, as they expose themselves to additional institutional and organizational forces and face risks of failing to balance multiple goals and/or the interests of various stakeholders.

Thus, from the perspective of TSOs and their leaders, hybridity is not just about a mix of the principles of different sectors or governing institutions, nor merely the blurring of their differences and distinctions. Rather, it is about three related things: (a) how to mobilize and balance different and distinct stakeholders' interests to achieve the organization's common goals; (b) how to achieve a mix of different and distinct goals in a balanced fashion, so as not to lose the support from any major stakeholder(s); and (c) how to achieve a synergy through the stakeholders' individual and collective contribution to the organization's common goals.

New and innovative methods should, therefore, be developed to guarantee the stability of social enterprises, social co-ops, and other TSOs in order to sustain them as hybrid organizations that deliver good quality, public financed social services. Such methods include developing multistakeholder governance structures for internal decision making that include and involve all major stakeholders (see Pestoff, 1998, chapter 5 for more details) and conducting a regular social accounting and audit to highlight the organization's social goals, alongside its financial performance (see Pestoff, 1998, chapter 6 for more details). Nonmembership TSOs will, of course, face other challenges when attempting to deal with demands for greater citizen participation and influence.

Hybridity seems inevitable and it will probably increase as the public sector becomes more pluralistic and fragmented and as the difference between NPM and NPG develops. Clearly, TSOs can choose to some extent in which type of hybridity they want to operate and survive. Those TSOs that orient themselves toward greater market competition and NPM will have to learn to navigate both the pull and push from the overlapping and sometimes competing logics of the third sector and the market. In order to cope with this type of hybridity, they will need to increase their professionalization, promote their competitive advantage(s), and improve their efficiency. By contrast, those TSOs that want to retain more of their traditional social values and distinctiveness may opt to pursue a NPG vision by participating in service networks that emphasize coproduction, comanagement, and cogovernance. Although this may promote a different kind of hybridity, one with greater overlap with the public sector, it also carries certain risks. In particular, these new roles imply other challenges, particularly under an NPM-dominated regime and/or service sector, as noted earlier. It can also prove challenging for TSOs, particularly for those

that lack well-developed participatory institutions for democratic decision making that provide them with legitimacy to embrace greater citizen participation or coproduction of public services.

This article has discussed internal as well as external conditions of coproduction and in particular their reciprocity in influencing hybridity and the associated governance tensions. It therefore has pointed out relevant conditions for the future investigation of the subject of hybridity.

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1. The TSFEPS Project, "Changing Family Structures & Social Policy: Childcare Services as Sources of Social Cohesion," took place in eight European countries between 2002 and 2004. They were Belgium, Bulgaria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden. See www.emes.net for more details and the country reports.

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Victor Pestoff earned his PhD in political science at Stockholm University, later became Professor at Mid-Sweden University in Östersund and now is Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Civil Society Studies, Ersta Sköndal University College in Stockholm. He published many articles and books on consumer organizations, cooperative movements, co-production, the third sector and welfare state. His three most recent books are *A Democratic Architecture for the Welfare State* (Routledge, 2009), *New Public Governance, the Third Sector and Co-Production* (Routledge, 2012) and *Social Enterprise & the Third Sector: Changing European Landscapes in a Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, 2014). For more information contact: www.esh.se or www.emes.net.