SNAPSHOT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN FINLAND

QUESTIONNAIRE TO MEMBERS OF THE AFFINITY GROUP OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (AGNA)

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AGNA

Who We Are

The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) brings together national associations from around the world. Created in 2004, it aims at strengthening national umbrella organisations, fostering greater co-operation across national and regional boundaries to pursue mutual interests.

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THE CONDITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN FINLAND

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

In 2014, the new Money Collection Act brought together actors from various sectors. The process was eventually not completed but put on hold and left for the next government to be formed later in 2015. This act, which will limit CSO ability to work, has not been revised systematically in consultation with the civil society. Despite, it is important to note that CSOs do not share a common view vis-a-vis this act.

WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ACHIEVED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

One significant milestone was the result of a citizen initiative in favour of same-sex marriage or equal rights for marriage (tasa-arvoinen avioliittolaki). Campaigning was fully realised by volunteer efforts and with small self-funding. This initiative led to a law being passed in November 2014, in favour of equal rights for all married couples.

WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY OR CHALLENGE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY THAT YOU FORESEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

There is positive action for better enabling voluntary work. Obstacles for and challenges in volunteering have recently been mapped and the Ministry of Finance has formed a working group to develop the status of voluntary work within the society.

At the same time, difficulties in financing CSO activities have augmented. There is constant pressure for increased self-financing and in addition there are attempts to break the Finnish gambling monopoly, which has to date been a significant contributor to CS activity financing.

There is also a strong sense of quasi-consultation of CSOs in important processes including but not limited to corporate responsibility and the formation of the new government. Where CSOs have access to the processes their views are discarded in documentations. A recent example of this kind of rubber stamping is the Working group on the national implementation of UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Right within the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. In 2011, Kepa and other expertise CSOs were invited to give their views in the government negotiations four years ago. This
time three parties forming the government have denied access practically from other stakeholders including trade unions, CSOs, universities, churches etc. It may be too early to draw any too far-reaching conclusions of possible changes in the CSO engagement in the dialogue with the government of Finland on a longer run. However, the question of how the future government continues to involve CSOs in consultations will be on the critical issues in the next years to come.

**THE SITUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY’S RESOURCING**

**ARE RESOURCING CONDITIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?**

No significant changes to CS resourcing conditions are to be expected. However, it is likely that there are variations between different sectors and funders. Also the view that CSOs should be less dependent on public money and more active in self-financing has gained foot notably. For now, the average level of funding from all ministries has been constant, with increases from one source being offset by decreases from another.

**IS CIVIL SOCIETY EXPLORING NEW STRATEGIES TO DIVERSIFY RESOURCING AND ARE ANY OF THESE PROVING SUCCESSFUL?**

Collaboration with the private sector is increasingly prominent within the development work discourse, partially due to companies being seen as a good source of resources. However, this trend has also brought about new challenges and ambiguity regarding the roles of various societal actors. Fund raising has also become more professional and varied. Especially larger NGOs have developed new forms of collecting money, some very innovative. There is also increased free fund raising activity ongoing for example within the social media. The other end of the spectrum is commercial activity conducted by CSOs. It is clear that many CSOs spend an increasing amount of resources, monetary and personnel, in fund raising activities at the expense of their core activities. At the same time there is a risk of blurring CSO roles.

**ARE YOU SEEING A MOVE AWAY FROM GRANT FUNDING (AS PROVIDED BY DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS) TO OTHER METHODS OF SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY?**

Traditionally government and other public institutions’ funding have been very important in Finland and there has been little desire to move away from this practice. At the local level there are opportunities for CSOs to use for example meeting spaces free of charge or with a minimal fee and events have been organised jointly by different segments of the society. Despite this, support outside of funding remains marginal.
Snapshot of civil society in Finland: Questionnaire to AGNA members
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