Government use of nonprofit organizations to build social capital
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The premise of this research is that policy objectives not obtainable as a result of direct action by government may be reached by the creation of social capital by associations. However, a conscious attempt to develop social capital by government places government officials in the delicate position of nurturing a public good which government does not provide directly. Voluntary and charitable associations can provide a channel for government in fostering social capital. In this discussion, social capital is conceptualized as a web of association which helps individuals succeed and decreases the need for state social welfare support or likelihood of state intervention in social conflicts. The sensitive relationship between citizens, government, and the nonprofit sector is well illustrated by the experience of Spain in its application of social capital concepts to issues surrounding immigrants. Although the nonprofit sector has been regarded as an independent sector in both the European and the North American context, the relative youth of the nonprofit sector in a wide variety of countries has meant that public policies to foment the growth and development of third sector or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become relatively widespread. The existence of policies that seek to create nongovernmental organizations suggests that the third sector is not equally autonomous across all regions.

A public policy to incorporate immigrants of Third World origin into civil society in Spain provides insight into the latitude government has in encouraging the development of an independent nonprofit sector, and subsequently, to what degree non-profits help immigrants to develop social capital to help themselves. The preponderance of state funding, that is an absence of autonomous funding, calls into question the existence of an independent nonprofit sector. In the US there is a much clearer expectation of benefits flowing from the independence of the nonprofit sector from government than in Europe. While North American scholars of the third sector and nonprofit organizations evaluate funding source as a measure of institutional independence, the evolution of immigrant associations and nongovernmental
organizations with immigrants as clients suggests that state funding is not incompatible with an independent advocacy agenda.

The non-profits of European countries have been studied especially in the service-delivery context. An important stream of the nonprofit literature treats nongovernmental organizations as alternate providers of social services, beginning with Pestoff’s (1991) notable review of Swedish cooperatives, with a focus on the product and service outputs of nongovernmental organizations. In some ways similar to the use of non-profits as service providers, non-profits associated with immigrants are serving as a communication channel between governmental agencies and immigrants, both legal and illegal, in Spain. Nonprofit immigrant associations and more formal non-governmental organizations are being recruited to help with both the well-defined and the fuzzy policy goals. There are trade-offs to using non-profits as a communication channel between immigrants and a host government. Although non-profits may mediate conflicts between immigrants and the government, they may lose independence or fail to develop an independent agenda.

An increase in immigration and settlement of immigrants in Spain since the 1986 entry into the European Community has pushed immigration policy onto the public agenda. Spain has created programs to improve administrative control of immigration and continues to develop policies to promote the social integration of immigrants (Huntoon, 1998a). The call for policy development is partly in response to xenophobic behaviors observed across Europe in response to immigrants (Informe Ford, 1990). Nonprofit organizations have emerged in the immigration community in Spain with a self-described mission of improving the social outcomes of immigrants. As these organizations developed, a public policy evolved which would take conscious advantage of the mediating effects of nonprofit organizations and use them as a communication channel between immigrants and the host country government. The policy goal was to improve the social and political outcomes associated with immigration from the government’s perspective (Dirección General de Migraciones, 1995) by reducing conflict between immigrants and society at large and immigrants and the Spanish state.

A broad characterization of the universe of non-profit associations, which work with immigrants in Spain includes four important subcategories of non-profits within a typology of non-profits concerned with immigration. The first category is universal benefit organizations, which treat immigrants as clients. This category is divided into faith based and non-sectarian subcategories. These organizations predate the immigration wave and have added immigrants as a type of clientele. Notable examples in this category are the Spanish Red Cross and Catholic charities. The second category is mutual benefit organizations with ascriptive memberships. Examples of this type are largely immigrant associations. Both categories have varying geographical foci, which are limited to specific regions of Spain and/or regions of origin. Typically, immigrant associations are associated with one nationality and members are predominately male or female. Among mutual benefit organization of immigrants are several which are relatively more other-directed as the organizers were largely settled, professionally successful immigrants to Spain prior to organizing to help co-nationals of a lower socio-economic class.

After defining a typology of non-profits, it is useful to note that the Spanish policy is designed within both a Spanish and European context, and the policy attempts to fulfill both
European and Spanish objectives. Reported elsewhere are the theoretical bases by which one may interpret this policy as well as theoretical expectations about immigrant association behavior provided by the literature on non-profits and political behavior. Based on interviews with key informants the effect of policy on the nonprofit sector and the effect of the sector itself on policy are discussed by using three organizations as case histories (Huntoon, 1998b).

Field research was conducted in Spain during 1994, 1996, and 1997. Interviews with government officials were used in which officials were asked to define stated policy, identify how this policy was in the course of being implemented, and to describe their agency’s perception of outcomes to date. Immigrant association members and staff were asked in interviews to define association objectives, identify how their association has responded to the policy, and describe their association’s perception of outcomes.

From the interviews, it is clear that immigrant associations have welcomed state funding and formal participation in Spanish policy deliberations. The three associations profiled have expanded their activities over the time period of the study. For all three organizations, the top three activities are similar. These are legal clinics to help establish residency and work permits, employment counseling and job listings, and social events. These activities fit very neatly within a generalized goal of increasing individual’s social capital.

The findings concerning agency independence suggest few changes due to increases in government funding. Generally, mandates remain unchanged, although due to increased funding and based on opportunities to request funding, NGO activities have broadened to incorporate more immigrant member/clients and a more diverse range of activities. Funding also brought an increase in paid staff for mutual benefit associations. As a result, proactive lobbying increased, as board members and founders had more time to focus on the big picture while relying on staff to offer services in a more structured, reliable manner. Competition among organizations for state funding has increased and expressed itself particularly in terms of membership drives to demonstrate capacity for service.

The sponsorship of nonprofit associations by the state has increased the social capital of the organizational leaders personally and the organizations as representatives of individuals. Findings concerning development of social capital by individuals and positive benefits, which may accrue to individuals can be deduced from the improvements reported by organizations but are not observed directly. From the perspective of individual migrants it is unclear which type of association is more effective in increasing personal social capital. Theoretically, mutual benefit organizations offer more opportunities for leadership and self-actualization. Spanish-led associations, however, may provide access to Spanish systems more efficiently.

Concerning the likely path of future behaviors, Spanish policy has brought more awareness among immigrant associations of each other and more awareness of themselves as a sector. Although universal benefit organizations are functionally similar to the two immigrant associations, there are wider suggestions of conflict between these two types as Spanish NGOs believe they now compete with smaller less formal non-Spanish groups for funds. The two types of organizations remain differentiated essentially by the ascriptive basis of membership for immigrant associations and the lack of non-Spanish executives in immigrant-oriented NGOs. Notably, the immigrant associations are becoming more like NGOs in one important aspect. They now engage in more lobbying of Spanish politicians. This
lobbying behavior is a direct result of government funding and is changing the Spanish perspective on immigration in policy circles.

References


