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Development of French Civil Society: The View of a Statistician

Edith Archambault
Sorbonne Economic Centre of University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, Paris, France

The article highlights first the historical background: two long-term trends have most strongly influenced the development of the non-profit sector throughout its millennial history. An analysis of the French civil society nowadays is made on the basis of the System of national accounts concept using the most recent statistics on this sector ignored by the statistical system two decades ago. The number, size and human resources of civil society organizations (CSOs) are analysed first, then - their financial resources by public and private origin and their economic contribution and social impact .

The final part of the research deals with recent1 trends and issues. The evolution of the French non-profit sector during the Millennium decade is outlined. Then focuses on the impact of the financial, economic and social crisis on the French third sector is highlighted.

The sharing of educational, health and social services provision between the state, the local governments and the civil society obviously depends on functions that have been devolved to local governments as well as on the level of externalization or subcontracting which authorities consider to be relevant. Recourse to the non-profit sector makes it possible to reduce public employment, which is very high in France. Grassroots associations provide local services adapted to the local population through voluntary work. That is the reason why the central and local governments and social security affords an almost total financing to the welfare CSOs and a partial financing to the others while the public sector regulates the CSOs and guarantees universal access to the services provided as well as the equal treatment of all users.

The whole civil society sector - associations and foundations - is currently looking for its place in the public sphere, either in close partnership with public authorities or within the social and solidarity economy with the cooperatives and the mutual societies. Civil society organizations have demonstrated their ability to respond to the new needs of a more diverse population, and they have proved their resilience during less favourable times.

Keywords: non-profit sector, French civil society organizations, social services, associations, foundations, employment, voluntary work, local governments, donations.
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Развитие гражданского общества Франции: взгляд статистика

Эдит Аршамбо
Центр экономики Университета Париж 1 Пантеон-Сорбонна, г. Париж, Франция

В статье описаны две долгосрочные тенденции, оказавшие значительное влияние на развитие некоммерческих организаций (НКО) Франции на протяжении всей его тысячелетней истории. Анализируется современное состояние гражданского общества Франции с использованием методов системы национальных счетов и на основе последних статистических данных о НКО, которые еще два десятилетия назад не учитывались статистической системой. Исследуются численность, размер и человеческие ресурсы НКО, их финансовые ресурсы, а также их экономический вклад и воздействие на общество.

Заключительная часть статьи посвящена описанию современных тенденций и проблем в этой сфере. Представлен анализ эволюции французского некоммерческого сектора в течение последнего десятилетия. Выявлено влияние финансового, экономического и социального кризиса на НКО Франции.

Распределение предоставления образовательных, медицинских и социальных услуг домашним хозяйствам между государством, местными органами власти и гражданским обществом зависит от функций, которые были переданы местным органам власти, а также от уровня экстернализации или субподряда, которые власти считают актуальными. Привлечение некоммерческого сектора позволяет снизить уровень занятости в секторе государственного управления, который во Франции очень высок. Ассоциации, связанные с деятельностью общин, предоставляют свои услуги местному населению на общественных началах. По этой причине центральные и местные органы власти и органы социального обеспечения осуществляют почти полное финансирование социальных НКО и частичное финансирование других типов НКО, в то время как сектор государственного управления регулирует НКО и гарантирует всеобщий доступ к предоставляемым ими услугам, а также равный (справедливый) доступ к ним всех пользователей.

Весь сектор гражданского общества - ассоциации и фонды - в настоящее время ищет свое место в общественной сфере: либо вступая в тесное партнерство с органами государственного управления, либо в рамках социальной и солидарной экономики, объединяясь с кооперативами и другими видами ассоциаций. Организации гражданского общества продемонстрировали свою способность реагировать на новые потребности различных слоев населения и доказали свою устойчивость в не столь благоприятные времена.

Ключевые слова: некоммерческие организации (НКО), организации гражданского общества Франции, социальные службы, ассоциации, фонды, занятость, волонтерская работа, органы местного самоуправления, пожертвования.

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Introduction

The French and most of European civil society date back to the Middle Ages. The French Monarchy unified the nation by joining regions through wars and marriages to the early emerging centre. This is why France was, and still is, despite two Decentralization Acts (of 1983 and of 2003), a centralized state, while most European countries are decentralized, where most of the decisions on education, social and cultural fields are the local governments responsibility.

First, the article offers the historical background on two long-term trends that have most strongly «influenced the development of the non-profit sector[1] throughout its millennial history:

- the systematic restrictions on non-profit organizations imposed by a centralized and interventionist state during the 1791-1901 period;

- the early secularization of the non-profit sector in an old Catholic country» [1, p. 4].

Then, it outlines the evolution of civil society after World War II to match its position now.

Second part analyses the current state of the French civil society using the most recent statistics on this sector that was ignored by the statistical system two decades ago. First the author addresses the number, size and human resources of civil society organizations (CSOs), then - their financial resources by public and private origin and their economic contribution and social impact.

The third part deals with recent trends and issues. The evolution of the French non-profit sector during the Millennium decade is outlined. Then the impact of the financial, economic and social crisis on the French third sector is highlighted.

1. The Historical Background

1.1. The First Long-Term Trend: Statism, Centralization and the Non-Profit Sector

Statism - state control - is «no doubt the most important feature in French history» [1, p. 5]. For a millennium the central state has fought against any form of local power. The kings fought against feudal order and urban citizens' organizations during the Middle Ages; later they fought against regional governments and religious minorities such as Protestants and Jews during the 17th and 18th centuries. The French Revolution is the great break in the history of the non-profit sector. It suppressed the guilds and their social subsidiaries - the brotherhoods - as interfering with free enterprise and fair competition through the *Loi Le Chapelier* (1791) [2, p. 230] that stipulates «No one shall be allowed to arouse in any citizen any kind of intermediate interest and to separate him from the public weal through the medium of so-called common interests» [2, p. 231]. The struggle of the new Republic against the Church and its congregations had important consequences primarily on their charitable organizations, hospitals, and schools, which were either closed or nationalized while the Church's property and real estate was seized. During the 19th century, the successive monarchs and republics legalized some non-profit organizations, but they fought against the emerging labor movement, the Opposition's political clubs and the authorised organizations that were supposed to hide them.

The liberal laws at the end of the 19th put the end to these restrictions on the freedom of association that existed earlier in most European countries: labor unions were legalized in 1884, mutual societies in 1898

[1] In this article terms «civil society» and «non-profit sector» are used with the same meaning. They include all private organizations, with a free access and exit, non-distributing their profit (if any) and self-governing (SNA 2008).

and all types of associations in 1901. The 1901 Act[2] is the legal consecration of the freedom of association. It defines an association as a convention according to which two or more individuals permanently put in common knowledge or activity with another aim than sharing profit [3]. When it has been created, an association may declare itself, but it is not compulsory. Undeclared associations have no legal rights. Declared associations have only limited legal rights: they are not allowed to own real estate except for their operation, or to receive legacies. «State-approved» associations have full legal capacity and can own real estate and receive legacies. They have to be acknowledged by the *Conseil d'Etat*[3] after a rather long and restrictive procedure [4, p. 215].

The beginning of the 20th century marks a turning point: non-profit sector is no longer illegal. New social or economic concerns are becoming public interest. Corporatist social security inspired by the German pattern was established later, in the inter-war period, while a more extended welfare state emerged in France after World War II.

Since the 1960s, many previously established non-profit institutions delivering health or social services to the elderly, the disabled and the poor began to receive grants or third party payments from the state, local governments or social security. It was the beginning of a government/civil society partnership in contrast with the historical fight of the state against all intermediaries. «The trend is also to lessen state control, and pay more attention the tradition of decentralization of most European continental countries. The first Decentralization Act[4] (1983) is a way to strive toward a more European political structure; decentralization is recent, but it seems to have given a strong incentive to non-profit sector development. Reducing the prerogatives of the central government to the benefit of regions, departments and local communities, decentralization has opened the way to a new kind of partnership between non-profit organizations and local authorities» [5, p. 529].

1.2. The Evolution of the French Civil Society Since World War II

Another long-term trend impacting civil society - the rivalry between State and the Catholic Church - was described by the author in «Historical roots of the non-profit sector in France» (2001).

After the 1945-1950 period of reconstruction, the non-profit sector was booming catching up his historical gap in the millennium decade. In the 1960s, this associative boom was represented mainly by a development of organizations born in the interwar period: the non-profits created in the interwar period to advocate for the rights of disabled civil persons to have the same benefits as the disabled by war, who became providers of the quasi-totality of health and welfare services and residential facilities. In the same way, «social tourism» associations who provide holidays establishments and camps for the working class, created when the first paid holidays were voted in 1936, which developed after World War II. During the 1960s other non-profits enhanced the democratization of sports and culture and were encouraged by the government to create multipurpose associations disseminating a popular culture to those who did not have an the opportunity to study at school because they started working early on: these *Maisons de la Culture, Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture* were promoted by André Malraux, a novelist who was the first Minister of Culture. Before and after the cultural break of 1968 with its criticism of «consumption society», new concerns emerged and gave rise to new areas of non-profit advocacy run by the baby-boom generation: feminism, birth control, environment defence, aid to Third world countries, Human Rights defence [6].

The 1980s and 1990s decades were earmarked by the growing and long-term unemployment rate. So many new Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) were created to cope with the major social issue of social exclusion and to give the unemployed an insertion through work. Other CSOs advocated against racism and all kinds of gender, sexual orientation or ethnic discrimination. During these decades many professions created «without border» associations oriented towards international emergency and development, following the pattern of *Médecins Sans Frontiures,* the famous «French doctors» awarded by the Peace Nobel Price [7].

At the beginning of 2000s, cultural and sports associations mushroomed, especially those focused on performing arts or music and other that sought the

[2] Loi du 1er juillet 1901 relative au contrat d'association. URL: https://www.associations.gouv.fr/la-loi-du-1er-juillet-1901-et-la-liberte-d-association.html.

[3] Conseil d'Etat is the highest court for public law conflicts.

[4] Loi no 83-663 du 22 juillet 1983 complétant la loi no 83-8 du 7 janvier 1983 relative a la répartition de compétences entre les communes, les départements, les régions et l'État. URL: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006068817&dateTexte=vig.

social integration of young dropouts or long-term unemployed through sports and culture. The aging of the population along with specific tax exemptions or subsidies gave rise to many home care services provided mainly by the non-profit sector. The Millennium decade ended with the Great Recession of 2008 that we will examine in the last part of this article.

2. The French Civil Society Nowadays

2.1. Number, Size and Human Resources of French Civil Society

The French non-profit sector is large and ever growing. It has covered up its historical gap and now ranks high among other European countries [8]. In 2017, there are 1.5 million civil society organizations, operating mainly in two unequal legal statuses: 1500000 associations and 2300 foundations. Most associations are grass-roots organizations run by volunteers and are active not only in the field of culture, sports and recreation, but advocacy and social services as well. Only 160000 associations are managed by a professional staff. 2000 associations have been granted by the government with the «*Reconnue d'Utilité Publique*» label, but many other associations are public interest without having this status [9]. Foundations are a very small part of the French non-profit sector but it has been growing quickly since a favourable law of 2003[5].

The French civil society is a major employer, with 8% of the total full-time equivalent employment (FTE)[6]. Of course, associations are far from being the principal employer: their 185000 establishments hire 1852000 employees (1600000 FTE), while the staff of the 2300 foundations is 86000 persons (78000 FTE). Non-profit employment is higher than employment in construction or transport. Most of CSOs are small-sized: more than half of them hire only one or two employees, and 70% hire less than five. However, 11% hire 20 employees or more and the largest organizations may have several establishments to cover many regions.

The first field where non-profits are active in is social services with nearly half of non-profit employment and 60% of total employment of this activity (Table 1). For social services, according to the subsidiarity principle, government does not provide a service if an NPI nearer the beneficiary can provide it, but government affords the bulk of the NPI's income. Conversely, the non-profit sector provides a small percentage of health and education services (10% and 18%) because the largest share of these services is public. In the fields of culture, sports and recreation 40% of total employment is in the non-profit sector.

Table 1

Non-Profit Employment by Activity, 31/12/2015

Activity	Employees	FTE Employees	Persend of total FTE Salaried Employment
Health	160000	137000	9.6
Social services	950000	781000	60.2
Culture and recreation	124000	106000	40.1
Education, and research	341000	319000	18.5
Other	363000	0000	
TOTAL	**1869000**	**1533000**	8.0

Source: INSEE, Tableaux harmonisés de l' Economie sociale (2012). Available from: http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/detail.asp?ref_id=eco-sociale.

The majority of employees in the whole civil society sector are women (69%); that reflects the predominance of social, health and education services where women are the major part of the staff. The percentage of part-time, seasonal and other types of odds jobs is higher than elsewhere, and CSOs welcome the greatest share of the «helper jobs» created to cope with the high long-term unemployment of the youth. The level of qualification for non-profit employees is higher than that in the private business sector. Despite this fact the average monthly wage in non-profit sector is 1650 euros, that is 20% less than the average salary in the private sector. This lower wage is due to multiple factors:

- the relative weight of part-time employees and of women;
- the high share of social services in the non-profit sector, among the less paid industries, especially home care services,
- the fact that employees accept a lower wage in exchange for more flexible working hours and a job that makes sense to their lives, when the employee agrees with the aim of the non-profit institution.

Besides paid employment, volunteering is the main human resource for civil society. The official statistical system ran two specific population surveys on partici-

[5] URL: https://www.service-public.fr/.

[6] Part time jobs are more frequent in CSOs then in standard companies or public agencies. FTE employment, therefore, is used here for comparison.

pation and volunteering for or through associations, in 2002 and 2010 with the same questionnaire. Recently, in 2017, Lionel Prouteau conducted another survey using that same questionnaire [10, 11]. These comparable surveys show a rapid increase in volunteering in the last decades from 12 million in 2002 up to 22 million volunteers in 2017 (43% of the adult population). These 22 million volunteers work 2.1 billion hours, that is 1275000 FTE jobs, one fifth less than paid employees, but of the same order of magnitude. Volunteers play an important role as a workforce of the CSOs with staff, where the tasks of employees and volunteers are different, but complementary. They are a vital part the CSOs without staff workforce, since they disappear if volunteers no longer donate them their time. In France, as in most European countries, the main field of volunteering is - culture, sports and recreation (43% of volunteer time). Then come social services (28%), advocacy organizations (16%), education and training (5%).

The characteristics of volunteers are stable in the successive population surveys [12]. Table 2 shows the main results of the 2010 survey. Generally, in Europe men volunteer more often than women. Men volunteer mainly in sports and professional associations while women volunteer primarily in health sector, social services and education, highly professionalized fields. Table 2 demonstrates that nearly one half of adult population between 55 and 75 years volunteer; the number is lower for persons after 75 years for obvious health reasons. As for the familial status, single persons volunteer less, and if there are children over 3 years old in the household, it serves as a motivation to volunteer (volunteering in sports, parent-teacher, recreation, disabled children, social tourism CSOs).

Table 2

Main Results on Volunteering, Population Survey 2017

Characteristics of Volunteers	Volunteering Ratio
43% of the population of 18 and over	
Gender	Men: 45%; Women: 41.5%
Age	18-24: 43%; 25-34: 42%; 35-44: 43%; 45-54 :43%; 55-64: 48%; 65-74: 48%; 75 et plus: 34%
Personal situation	Single: 41%; Couple: 45%
Number and age of children less than 18	None: 43%; one or several children < 3: 37%; 1 child > 3: 42%; 2 children>3: 50%; At least 3 children >3 years: 48%
Level of education	None, VI or V: 36%; IV: 33%; III: 46%; II or I: 55%
Net income of the household	Lower quartile: 37%; 2d Q: 42%; 3d Q: 45%, Upper Q: 50%

End of Table 2

Characteristics of Volunteers	Volunteering Ratio
Size of the residence city	Rural zone : 41% ; 2000-20.000 : 37% ; 20.000-100.000 : 39% ; more than 100.000 : 47%
Religious belonging and practice	Belonging and regular practice: 57% Belonging with no or irregular practice: 42% No religion, no practice: 41%
Parents influence	At least one parent was volunteer: 62% No parents was volunteer: 39%

Source: [11].

Conversely, children under the age of 3 are an obstacle to volunteering, especially for their mothers. Volunteering grows quickly with the highest level of diploma of the interviewed person; when French diplomas are classified according to the international levels of education. The income of the household is significant as well and correlated with education highest diploma: volunteering increases with the income of the household, but even in the lower quartile of income distribution it is not so far, the average ratio. Volunteering is obviously correlated with the sense of belonging to a religion - the main one, Catholicism, or the minority religions, by declining order: Islam, Protestantism or Judaism - and more with the degree of practice of this religion. Regular practice of religion is the most significant variable; it enhances not only volunteering for religious CSOs, but for any type of CSO. The example of their parents' volunteering influences teenagers as well, since volunteer work of the interviewed is nearly double when one parent at least was a volunteer when she/he was 18 years old. Finally, volunteering is more widespread in rural areas and large cities more than in small and middle-sized towns [13].

2.2. Resources, Economic Contribution and Social Impact of the French Non-Profit Sector

The resources of CSOs spent on employing a staff come firstly from public funding, up to 56%, while CSOs without staff are less dependent on public money (26% of their income). Public funding comes mainly from the state, the 101 departments, the 36000 municipalities, and Social security. However, this public funding, whatever its form - subsidies, contracts, competitive bids - is concentrated on education, health and social services, the industries near the welfare state [13]. Fees and dues afford 40% of the CSOs with staff, and more than half of total resources for the other industries compared to the three cited above. The income of grass-root CSOs without staff comes firstly

from fees and dues, but they receive some subsidies from local authorities. Giving (households donations and corporate grants) is a minor but symbolic resource for both types of CSOs, up to 5% of the total resource in average, but some large charities rely mainly on donations.

The average budget of CSOs with staff exceeds 400000 euros. The total output of the French non-profit sector is about 120 billion euros that is a contribution to GDP of 3.5%. The value added by the non-profit sector exceeds that of the hotels and restaurants (2.6%) and utilities sector (2.5%) and is at the same level as the sum of agriculture and manufacture of food products and beverages (3.4%).

The impact of CSOs on their members or beneficiaries and their environment is difficult to measure and partially non-measurable. However, CSOs provide nearly all residential facilities for emergency cases, three-quarters of the private residential care, with a quasi-monopoly for the disabled whom they also help to find a fitting job. Their share in residential care for the elderly is less, but they provide the bulk of home care services to this part of the population. They also run one hospital bed in ten and half-day day care for children under 3 years old[7]. CSOs provide one-fifth of primary and secondary education, mainly in Catholic schools and the main part of the post-school culture and sports activities, holidays and summer camps, nature classrooms. 250000 sports clubs, tens of thousands of social and affinity clubs, thousands of theatres, museums, concert halls, performing arts or music groups, ciné-clubs, libraries and multipurpose cultural facilities mushroomed in the last three decades and it is mainly through them that culture, sports and active recreation have been spread among the French population and became more democratic. CSOs also run tourist offices, transport services and social tourism facilities. They provide vocational training and reintegration and following-up of long-term unemployed and recent immigrants. The impact of the advocacy CSOs is difficult to seize but there is no doubt that a great part of the change in the mentality and society is partly due to them, this especially includes tolerant attitudes towards the disabled, sexual minorities and immigrants.

3. Recent Trends and Issues

3.1. The Evolution of the French Non-Profit Sector During the Millennium Decade

The period from 1997 to 2007 was a time of slow economic growth with growing income inequalities and high level of unemployment (between 8% and 10%). These inequalities were attenuated by the redistribution of income through the large system of social protection and targeted public policies often using CSOs as providers of social services according to the subsidiarity principle. During this period, there was a tendency to contract out health and social services to CSOs or for-profit companies, through tenders. Therefore, competition among CSOs and standard companies was increasing [14].

Table 3 shows that during this decade and after the number of associations mushroomed. Even if half of these new associations die during the first five years, the other half survive, thus increasing the number of associations and the competition for getting public money and attracting volunteers [15]. The foundations that have been historically rare in France have had a new trend since 2003, when a law dramatically increased the tax incentives to donations[8]: there are still few foundations created by the rich , however, since 2003 corporate foundations have multiplied, as have three new forms of foundations initiated by this Law (scientific cooperation, university and community foundations).

Table 3

Annual Creations of Associations

Year	Number of Associations
2000	60808
2005	67854
2006	67297
2007	69647
2008	71556
2009	69486
2010	64971
2011	65829
2012	65408
2013	66413
2014	72734
2015	71031

[7] After the age of three all French children are at school (*école maternelle* from 3 to 6). These *écoles maternelles*, are free of charge and are mainly public. Few of them are private kindergartens.

[8] 50% of donations to CSOs in 1996, then 60% in 2003 and 66% in 2006 were deducible from tax (and not from taxable income as it was the case before this date), with a cap that increased from 1.25% in 1996 to 20% of taxable income in 2003. The donation over the cap can be reported on the following 5 years. For corporations and other companies, the tax deduction increased in 2003 from 33% up to 66%.

End of Table 3

Year	Number of Associations
2016	71068
2017	70721

Source: Ministére de l'Intérieur; Annonces et comptes des associations. Journal officiel. Available from: http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/association/index.php.

During this Millennium decade employment in the non-profit sector continues to grow twice as fast as in the public and business sector. Employment progressed especially in social services, culture and advocacy CSOs. Volunteering went up continuously: Table 4 shows that the number of volunteers doubled within 20 years and more hereafter.

Table 4

The Evolution of Volunteering in France

	1990	1993	1996	2002	2010	2017
Volunteers, million	7.9	9.0	10.4	12.0	16.1	22.0
Volunteers / adult population, percent	19	21	23	26	32	43

Source: France - 3 Surveys LES/ISL/JHCNP for 1990, 1993 and 1996; INSEE 2002; DREES-BVA for 2010; CRA/BVA 2017. INSEE Premиre. Neuf Associations Sur Dix Fonctionnent Sans Salariés. No. 1587, Mars 2016; INSEE Résultats. Observatoire de la Fondation de France. Etude fonds et fondations 2015. Available from: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2106164?sommaire=2106166.

So, the increase of wage-earners did not crowd out volunteers and both became more professional. Young volunteers prefer new associations where they have more power than in the older ones. Therefore, the largest CSOs have some difficulties in replacing their board members and, in a lesser degree, their operational volunteers. Competition for attracting and retaining volunteers coupled with a competition for public grants and contracts. The partnerships with public powers have multiplied as well as the bidding competition. The share of public funding in non-profit sector resources has increased slowly during the first part of the decade and was stagnating at the end of the period with a shift from central to local governments. Membership dues, fees and other commercial resources increased while individual and corporate giving stayed at the same level despite the generous tax incentives.

3.2. The Impact of the Financial, Economic and Social Crisis on the French Third Sector

«The financial crisis, of course, began in early 2008 in the USA, and its destroying effects, especially on employment, stretched out over the years 2008 and 2009. France, along with the whole of Europe followed six months later. The crisis has created numbers of new poor because of job cuts unseen at such levels since World War II» [9]. However, the high level of social protection in France played a role of a security net for most of them. The residual new poor are lengthening lines in front of *Restaurants du Cœur* and other free meals providers. CSOs dealing directly with these problems, as well as many others are facing a scissor effect in coping with such new issues: resources are decreasing because raising fees is not a solution when faced with insolvent people. The cut of European provision of food surpluses to these CSOs in 2010 provoked a strong reaction, and the European Community went backward. Competition among CSOs to attract donations is becoming more intense with the increasing costs and decreasing returns of fund-raising. For the French civil society, the most difficult part of the crisis is no doubt due to the retrenchment of public money owing to its high level of dependence on this resource. The local communities are no longer compensating the reduction of subsidies and contracts paid by the state, because most of them also have deficit.

During the early stages of the crisis, public grants or reimbursements were delayed and sometimes suppressed, provoking at best cash flow difficulties, and at worst bankruptcies along with the dismissal of employees. It has been the case for some home care services and culture CSOs [2]. Some associations have merged with other organizations working in the same field or area, or are pooling their infrastructure, equipment or human resources. There is no doubt that the French CSOs are too small and too numerous, and will have to consolidate in the near future. A 2014 law on social and solidarity economy gives them some support for merging and changing the legal status. The more counter-cyclical nature of French CSOs, along with the lag with which France is responding to the crisis explains why employment in the non-profit sector continued to grow during 2008 and 2009, while it was decreasing in the rest of the economy. However, for the first time since it has been measured, employment in the non-profit sector was slightly decreasing in 2010 and, since this date, it has been increasing but slower than during the three preceding decades.

Structural differences remain and make sense. There are still about 2300 foundations in France, even if they have multiplied since the 2003 Law, and if the new legal status of «endowment fund» (created in 2008) may

make a difference in the future, as it has been successful so far. However, the assets of French foundations are low comparing to their European counterparts, and associations have restrictions on their capacity to own interest-bearing capital, except those associations that are *Reconnues d'Utilité Publique* - there are only 2000 of them, but the they are the largest ones. This limited legal capacity prevents the bulk of CSOs from smoothing their financial difficulties by selling a part of their assets. Foundations have to be more selective in the choice of the projects they fund if they are grant-making. Foundations and associations have to merge, compress their overhead costs and reduce or suppress their programs if they are providing services to the less privileged part of the population. If their services are intended for the general population (culture, sports, social tourism, training, environment) they can raise their fees, but this way they become more middle-class oriented and lose their capacity to mix all categories of the society by eliminating the population with less purchasing power. This way they lose a part of their *raison d'être*.

Conclusion

The sharing of educational, health and social services provision between the state, the local governments and the civil society obviously depends on functions that have been devolved to local governments as well as on the level of externalization or subcontracting which authorities consider to be relevant. Recourse to the non-profit sector makes it possible to reduce public employment, which is very high in France. Grass-roots associations provide local services to the local population through voluntary work. That is the reason why the central and local governments and social security provide almost full financing to the welfare CSOs and partial financing to the others while the public sector regulates the CSOs and guarantees universal access to the services provided along with the equal treatment of all users.

Now associations in France are dynamic institutions and are much appreciated by the public, whereas political institutions, unions and religious organizations are subject to mistrust or indifference. Foundations are less popular and have been discredited for a long time, but they have experienced a spectacular growth since 2003. The whole civil society sector is currently looking for its place in the public sphere - either in close partnership with public authorities or within the social and solidarity economy with the cooperatives and the mutual societies. Civil society organizations have demonstrated their ability to respond to the new needs of a more diverse population, and they have proved their resilience during less favourable times.

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About the author

Edith Archambault - Dr Sci. (Econ.), Centre d'économie de la Sorbonne, University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne. Maison des Sciences Économiques, 106-112 bd de l'Hôpital, 75642, Paris Cedex 13. E-mail: edith.archambault@univ-paris1.fr. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3311-8526.

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Информация об авторе

Аршамбо Эдит - д-р экон. наук, почетный профессор Центра экономики Сорбонны, Университет Париж 1 Пантеон-Сорбонна. 75642, г. Париж, Госпитальный бульвар, 106-112. E-mail: edith.archambault@univ-paris1.fr. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3311-8526.