

NGO sector In Serbia

Belgrade, 2005.

NGGO
SECTOR
in SERBIA

General observations

Before you is research which describes the situation in the NGO sector in Serbia at the beginning of 2005. Bearing in mind, on the one hand the huge results and involvement of the whole sector in the last 15 years, and on the other the vast difficulties the sector is confronted by in its work today, we considered it most important at this moment to establish the current state of the sector and the challenges it faces, so that the sector and those who support it might be able to react adequately. The aim is to maintain the capacity of non-governmental organizations, thanks to whom many people have been provided for, including refugee families, and children fleeing violence. Women have found refuge in shelters, the handicapped have come out of isolation, Roma and other minorities have started to achieve their civil rights, many business plans have been executed, high-school pupils and students have had the opportunity to meet their peers from abroad.....

Apart from being able to help all parties interested in formulating a strategy for the development and the work of the NGO sector, this research is intended to be used as a data reference source for future monitoring of civil society development. In fact, at this moment there is only one other piece of research to compare the present situation with-the research of the NGO Policy Group of 2001. Thus, one of the first conclusions forced upon us is the need for more frequent, relatively standardized research, if possible at regular three or five-year periods. It is significant that the research included donors, unfortunately, in smaller numbers than anticipated.

The absence of uniform evidence on NGOs was a serious problem confronted by «Strategic Marketing», as the agency which carried out the research. Various sources were used in defining the basic groups : organizations which submitted final accounts in 2003, the register of legal entities in Serbia registered in work (8476 legal entities and citizens' associations formed since 1991), the NGO directory - the basis for information of various resource centers such as the Civic' initiatives directory (1286 organizations). The absence of legal regulations resulted in lack of uniform evidence, but it was also clear that the resource centers' database was unreliable because the information had not been brought up to date, which is the responsibility of the NGO sector.

After cross-referencing and a detailed updating of the before mentioned database, we arrived at a basic group of 997 non-governmental organizations in existence, which were active in December 2004 when the research was carried out. Of this number, 371 organizations are members of FENS. During the research 14.9 % of NGOs dropped out of the sample as they were no longer active.

This must worry the small number of organizations who submitted their final accounts to the authorized institutions. This shows that NGOs do not have the basic knowledge of their responsibilities, such as the fact that organizations which have no turnover are still required to submit accounts, with turnover marked as zero.

The confusion in the division of authority and structure in NGOs is clear, especially with regard to the assembly and the managing boards, which in a large number of organizations carry out both the strategic and the operative business.

Looking at internet access, use of computers and the knowledge of English in the sector, it could be said that NGOs are far better equipped than in 2001. However, when the problems of locating resources are referred to, lack of information is given as the main reason. This tells us that, in spite of the internet, a passive approach is used rather than an active search for information. The situation is somewhat confusing because this information differs wildly from region to region. So on one side there is Belgrade and 51 municipalities covered by the Fund for the Support of Civil Society in Serbia, and on the other a significant number of small and active NGOs in other parts of Serbia who have almost nothing.

Workspace remains a restrictive factor in the work of NGOs, because only 6% of organizations own their own premises. Renting or using someone else's workspace are the most prevalent ways of overcoming this problem, while 22 % of NGOs have no work space at all. A worrying fact is that a total of only 29 % of organizations have secured workspace for a period of two or more years.

For us the overall results of the research were sobering. Therefore, in this introduction, before anything else, we point out the problems we noticed, not in order to criticize, but to focus attention on how they might be solved.

In many areas the situation in the NGO sector is worrying. The data tells us that the very survival of the sector has been seriously endangered, as up to 63 % of organizations have not secured resources for 2005. The diverse reasons for this situation have been thoroughly analyzed in this research but before everything it is worth pointing out the reduction of funds and the changes to the structure of financing from abroad which for a long time will not and cannot be replaced by financing from domestic sources. The prediction that donors will soon leave the region demands an urgent and all encompassing united strategy to maintain the sector in such a condition so as to

satisfy at least the basic needs of the society, and not to harm the process of democratization. It is interesting the decisions to leave Serbia were taken at the donor organizations' headquarters, while those working here on the ground think that their involvement is necessary for at least another 5 to 10 years.

The political situation is judged as bad and especially unfavorable for NGOs, primarily because of the state's (government's) lack of interest in cooperation. At the same time almost all the research has shown large expectations for support from state and local administrations. Therefore it is difficult to understand that 30 % of NGOs are not interested in taking part in discussions with the state about the necessary new laws and financial regulations concerning the NGO sector, and only 50 % think they should play an active role in the election process. The prevailing opinion is that it should all be done by someone else. Here we can see clear differences in the proactive attitude of the NGOs who are members of FENS, and those who are not.

The relationship with the business sector was not dealt with at all by the research in 2001, so that the information received about the minimal cooperation between NGOs and business, and that primarily at a local level, can be seen as a positive shift. If nothing else, the necessity of this type of cooperation shows itself as a new theme and already some organizations are taking it into consideration. The number of those employed full-time in the sector is slightly higher than in 2001 (34 % compared to 23 %), and the level of education among the employees is, as it was then, exceptionally high. The impression is that society, and not just the NGOs, does not yet understand the potential of the NGO sector in the field of employment, and in particular that it has no strategy for recruiting volunteers.

Nevertheless, the dominant impression forced upon us is the absence of objectivity in estimating their own capacity, quality, and the expertise of their work, the relationship with the media, and their position in the local community and regarding the public in general. The impression is reached that often the «desired» answers are given, resulting in a series of contradictions. For example, the general situation in the sector is reckoned to be worse than their own concrete situation. Thus the unsatisfactory experiences of the employees, and especially of the volunteers, is underlined, which contradicts the high level of satisfaction among the trained staff. Added to that, 20 % of NGOs have had no training at all, and in only 37 % of NGOs all members are trained (generally the leadership is trained). Almost 70 % of NGOs say they hold seminars and workshops, and later state that the sector is lacking in training, more exactly, professionalism. This seriously brings into question the quality of the training offered to beneficiaries, and is a clear sign of the necessity of introducing standards in this field.

The differences in perceptions of the sector are especially visible between the NGOs themselves and the donors, who see them as not professional enough. The disagreements related to problems regarding the project writing are dramatic. The NGOs feel that the demands of the donors are very complicated, and the donors think exactly the opposite, and cite this as the biggest problem in the applications process. The sector thinks it knows how to write projects, and the donors do not agree.

There is also an important difference in defining the priority of policies which NGOs should be pursuing, and an attempt to reconcile them and secure continuity of work has led to an unfocused performance. These differences are best seen in the areas of monitoring of laws and the work of institutions, in which the donors have shown incomparably more interest than the NGOs themselves.

The data shows that there are visible divisions in the sector whatever the parameters. On the one hand there are the «big» organizations, mostly from Belgrade and formed before 2000, and on the other-mostly «new», small, local organizations whose survival is particularly endangered. The differences between the groupings is to the advantage of the «big», noticeable in their capacities (in personnel and infrastructure), access to financial sources, and understanding of the necessity of cooperation and greater involvement in various networks and regional projects

When all this information is added to the financial stability of the organizations, the malicious could reach the worrying conclusion that investment in the NGO sector would be a mistake. However, FENS and the Civic Initiative see things from the opposite side. The results which the sector has achieved in spite of these complicated and unfavorable circumstances are a guarantee that the sector, with adequate support from donors, the state, and the business sector, is capable of overcoming the existing crisis, and contributing to the dynamic development of civil society, and thereby the development of Serbia into a modern, democratic, European state. We believe that this research is a significant contribution to the achievement of that aim.

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Description of research

Research objective

Assessing the situation of NGO sector in Serbia

Specification of goals

In order to thoroughly achieve the main goal of assessing the overall position of non-governmental sector in Serbia, we defined areas that we thought will best offer an objective picture of the sector. With this research we hoped to include both opinions of people from the NGO sector and opinions of those working in different donor organizations. Although some topics were common for both groups, in order to have two different angles on a certain area of interest, most topics were specific and important for certain types of organizations (donors' and non-governmental). We thought that it was most significant to hear out the opinions of people from NGO sector about the following topics:

- A. General questions - basic information and NGO working conditions
- B. Mission, NGO field of work and activities
- C. Legal/fiscal regulations on NGO
- D. Political context
- E. Structure of NGOs
- F. Cooperation of NGOs - networking
- G. NGO cooperation with the state
- H. NGO cooperation with the business sector
- I. NGO cooperation with the media
- J. Staff and volunteers in NGOs
- K. Attitude of public towards NGOs
- L. Diversity within the NGO sector
- M. Financial stability of NGO - financial resources
- N. Community and users' involvement in NGO work
- O. Quality of service
- P. NGO staff qualification
- Q. Cooperation of NGOs in the wider region
- R. Most important problems in NGO sustainability
- S. Conclusion

Also, one of the main aims of this research was to separately establish the position of NGOs which are FENS network members.

We were particularly interested in donors' opinions about the following topics:

- A. General questions- basic information on donor organizations
- B. Local NGOs' projects application, competition conditions and monitoring the realization
- C. Cooperation within the sector and with other sectors (other donors and state institutions)
- D. Perception of NGO situation in Serbia
- E. Diversity within the sector
- F. Fields of NGO education
- G. Problems

It should also be stressed that a smaller number of donor organizations (which were included in the sample) do not perceive their organization as donors of the NGO sector in the strict term of the word. (They do not have project

announcements and do not award grants), but establish a partner relationship with NGOs in realization of the projects. That is why representatives of such organizations could not give answers to most questions from the questionnaire (the questionnaire mostly looks into the field of awarding grants and conditions of project competition).

Sample

The planned sample was to include 500 NGOs and 50 donors operating on the territory of Serbia. During the research 516 NGOs and 41 donors were interviewed.

A. NGO sample

The basic group included all NGOs registered in Serbia. Since there is no uniform evidence data on all registered NGOs on the territory of Serbia, in defining the main sample we used different sources:

- a) Organizations which submitted final account for the year 2003 (1681 Organizations).
- b) The register of legal entities in Serbia (8476 legal entities and organizations - Citizens' associations formed after 1991) registered in work
- c) NGO directories - the data base from various resource centers
- d) Civic Initiatives directory (1286 organizations, out of which 371 are FENS members)

After detailed updating of the database, we arrived at a basic group of 997 non-governmental organizations in existence, which were active in December 2004 when the research was carried out. Of this number, 371 organizations are members of FENS.

The sample included 516 NGOs. The sample was stratified in three strata. The strata and realization of sample by each stratum was the following:

- 1. FENS members- 243 organizations.
- 2. Organizations which are not FENS members- 256 organizations.
- 3. Important organizations (which are not members of FENS) 17 organizations.

These organizations were included in the sample on purpose, because we thought they had and still have significant influence not only on the sector itself but on the public life in general.

We think that the sample offers a clear picture of the current state of the NGO sector in Serbia. Since the distribution has shifted in favor of FENS network members, the results are shown separately for FENS members and organizations which are not members, in all questions that showed difference in results in comparison to members or in cases where we thought this variable could be significant.

During the research, 8.72% of NGOs from the sample refused to participate in it. Apart from that, 14.92% of organization included in the sample 516 were replaced by other organizations from the basic group because these NGOs were no longer active.

B. Donor sample

Out of the planned 50 donors' sample, 41 were interviewed. This was due to the fact that with many international donors, one person is in charge of

addressing this type of questions. Since our time for field work was limited (from December 20th 2004 to February 1st 2005) we did not manage to reach some of our potential respondents. The problem was that in some organizations (such as Embassies) the procedure for their representatives to take part in the research at all was quite long. Some organizations refused participation due to other engagements, while some organizations were in the midst of closing down programs and leaving the region.

Respondents

Respondents participating in this research (both for NGOs and donors) were people in high positions within organizations, those who were familiar with its functioning and able to provide all the necessary information-those whose opinions are relevant in decision - making process within their organization.

Research period

Research was conducted from December 20th 2004 to February 1st 2005.

Methodology

Interviewers set interviews with respondents. The interviews were conducted on organizations' premises in the form of structured interviews. Both questionnaires (for NGOs and Donors) included mostly closed- type questions with smaller number of open-ended questions. (NGO Questionnaire and Donor Questionnaire can be found at www.gradjanske.org).

Each field (given in Specification of goals) was represented with a set of questions in the questionnaire. The NGO questionnaire was more comprehensive and the interviews lasted approximately for 1 hour. Donor Questionnaire was significantly shorter, and the interviews lasted on average about 20 minutes.

Data analysis

Data analyses obtained based on questions from NGO Questionnaire

All questions from the questionnaire were cross-referenced by few basic variables. Every question was represented in the form of table which shows the total and cross-references by these variables:

- a. the year of foundation
- b. field of work
- c. size of organization
- d. FENS membership
- e. region where the headquarters are

The year when organization was founded is a variable with two categories: those founded before the year 2000 and those founded in the year 2000 and later. We were of the opinion that the year 2000 was a turning point due to the fall of Milosevic's regime, and thus it has led to changes in the environment in which NGOs operate. We supposed that it was to be expected that organizations founded before 2000 were more experienced, better positioned and had greater credibility and less problems in organizations' work.

Field of work - The questionnaire itself offered respondents to choose from the 18 given fields of work of their organizations (with a possibility of adding their field of work to the list, if it were not mentioned.) When cross-referencing these 18 fields, they were condensed in 5 categories, since many fields were not represented with adequate number of organizations. Only with some questions, where it was

important to have an insight into each separate field, we gave cross-references with all fields, but with a note that fields where the base of organization is less than 60, results can be taken as indicators only and should be further investigated.

Table 1: NGOs field of work*

	Culture, education and ecology	Socio-humanitarian Work	Young population, economy, and professional associations	Development of civil society	Protection of human rights	Total
1. Culture and art	30					30
2. Education and research	66					66
3. Ecology and environment protection	26					26
4. Humanitarian and social work, healthcare		79				79
5. Young population, students			62			62
6. Development of local community				41		41
8. Protection of human rights					42	42
9. Legislation, advocacy and public policy				10		10
10. Peace work				9		9
11. Women's rights					46	46
12. Help for refugees and displaced persons		13				13
13. International cooperation				9		9
14. Economic development			16			16
15. Children's rights					24	24
16. Roma population					14	14
18. Protection of ethnic minority rights					11	11
96. Other			4	7	7	18
Total	122	92	82	76	144	516

The **size of organization** was defined based on the total number of active personnel in the organization. This number included members of the managing board, coordinators, employees and part-time workers, but not volunteers. This number was divided in 3 categories up to 15 people-small organizations, from 15-30 people-medium-sized organizations, from 30+ people-big organizations.

FENS membership enables us to establish the situation in the sector both within this network and outside it. As we said before, the sample itself favored organizations which are members of this network. This was done in order to have a large enough base within the network so that conclusions on the situation of the sector could be drawn. In all the questions showing significant difference in this variable, we presented separate results for members and non-members of FENS network.

Region - the region was established based on the municipality where the seat of the organization is. In the analyses we used the division in three basic regions with their socioeconomic peculiarities: Belgrade, Vojvodina and Central Serbia.

Analysis of data obtained from Donors' questionnaire

Since a total number of donors in the sample was 41, it is clear that the only valid results are those obtained from the whole sample and that any type of cross-referencing could not provide reliable results. The picture obtained from 41 donors can be more of an indicator of donors' attitudes and help in clearer insight into certain problems in the non-governmental sector.

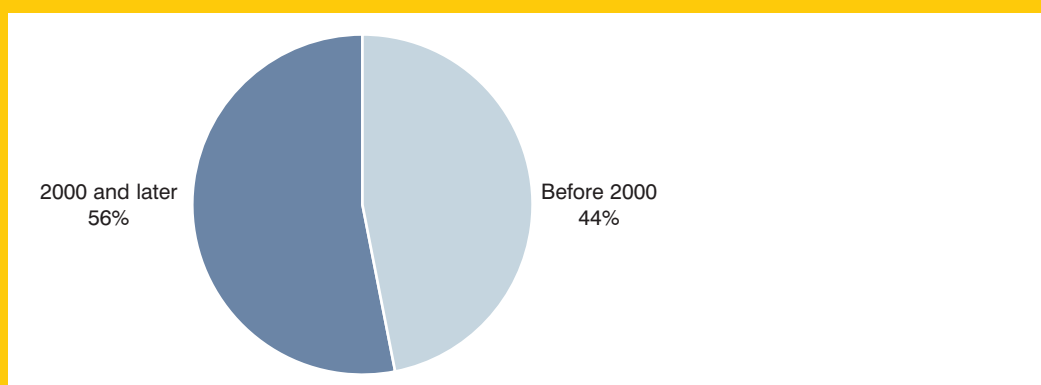
*Field 7. "Special and professional associations and 17."LGBT-"sexual minorities" were not given in the table because the answer to priority field of work showed zero %.

Key findings on NGO sector

A. General questions - basic information and working conditions

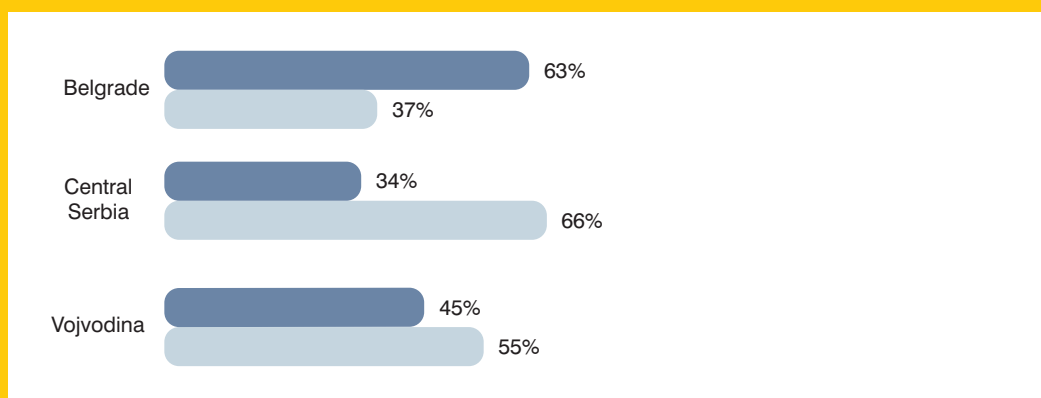
44% of NGOs were founded before 2000, while 56% were founded later. There are no differences in field of work and FENS membership, but significant differences appear in terms of organization size and the region. Larger organizations are mainly the ones founded earlier, so in Belgrade there is a much larger percent of organizations founded before 2000 than in other two regions. As the results will show this characteristic, that organizations from Belgrade are to a higher percent larger and founded earlier, will have an impact on clear regional differences in certain questions.

Graph 1: The year when organization was founded



Base: All respondents 100% (516 NGOs)

Graph 2: The year when organization was founded - by region



Base: All respondents 100% (516 NGOs)

Organizations' equipment - premises and technical equipment

Only 6% of respondents state that their organization own the premises, while as many as 22% of NGOs do not have any kind of premises. The remaining 72% of NGOs either rent the premises or work in premises which were offered to them free of charge. Out of this number, almost half (48%) have secured funds for premises rental for a period shorter than one year.