CO-OPERATION BETWEEN KVINNA TO KVINNA FOUNDATION AND WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS IN SERBIA

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Presented at
the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

Introduction

In this paper I will present some results from my ongoing research on the co-operation between Sida East (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation and women organizations in Belgrade, Serbia. While the war in former Yugoslavia, was going on full-scale in 1993, the organization Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation was established. It was some members from the organization “Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society” who reacted on the violations the women were exposed to. The organization chose at first to economically support the women organizations that already existed in the former Yugoslavia. In 2001 they opened their field office in Belgrade. At the same time in 1993, the Swedish government also acted by sending Sida East personnel to the same area. Sida’s East mission was to create strong national and local democratic organizations with Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation’s help.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the relations between the donors, Sida East and Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the receiver, four Women Organization’s in Belgrade, Serbia. What does the co-operation look like? Are all parties satisfied with the co-operation or is there a power relation between the donor and the receiver?

I think that the donors and the receiver’s relationship can be described as a power relation. Because in almost all affairs, co-operation, relationships and interactions, exists some kind of an power relation. This power relation can affect social path of events without that power is directed or visible. Power can be there even if no open conflict is shown (Korpi 1981). According to Michel Foucault (1987, 1980), power strategies is without a center. Therefore power is invisible and leaven all through the society, the organizations, the school, families, and sexual relation- ships. Power can be understood as a positive energy as well as something negative. Power does not always mean to prohibit it can also mean to finish things in an organization. All social relationships are not characterized by power relations, means Ahrne(2000). Ahrne also believes that some kind of power relationship exists in all relationships. The power is there implicit and taken for granted. The fundamental unit for a power relation is some type of dependence. Without dependence no power. All these reasoning can be compared to co-operation between the donors and the receivers.

Background

The cold war was an intensive period and risky era in world history. By the end of the 1980’s when the Berlin wall fell down and the cold war ended, the historical events got a new dimension and started to
accelerate again. The cold peace replaced the cold war conception. The 1980’s was thus a historical decade of and vital importance for democracy and democratic influence. In all countries in Eastern Europe communist regime fell. In 1990 it was the communist regime in Yugoslavia’s turn to fall. Yugoslavia, in opposition to other Eastern European countries, had a very dramatic and tragic evolution. The events in Bosnia-Herzegovina caused very strong feelings against the war that was characterized by violations against the civilian population.

When the war broke out in Yugoslavia in 1990 a strong need for all kinds of organizations in all part of the country became a fact. Especially strong was the need for women organizations because of systematic rapes and other outrages. Further more women suffered because the whole social network was damaged around them. The women organizations in Yugoslavia had no difficulties to organize themselves, because they had existed since 1864 (Bozinovic 1996). What they needed was a new structure, a new identity and new ideas about how to grown stronger and how to increase membership in order to help more women.

**The History of Women Organizations in Serbia from 1864-2002**

The first Serbian Women’s society was founded in Vojvodina 1864 and in 1875 in Belgrade. Its members were mostly the educated wives of prominent members of society and teachers from the Higher Woman’s School. The goal of the society was the education of women and helping poor women learn a trade. The society had its branches in the provinces. (Bozinovic 1996).

After the First World War a new country was formed on the Balkans: The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. At the initiative of the Serbian National Woman’s Alliance in Belgrade in 1919, and with delegates from all parts of the country presented the National Woman’s Alliance of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was founded and in a short time organized most women’s organizations in Yugoslavia. From 1929, it was known as: The Yugoslav Women’s Alliance. In 1919 the secretariat of women Social Democrats renewed their work in Serbia and it was at their initiative that the Secretariat for Women was founded at the Yugoslav Congress of the Socialist Worker’s Party. The organization lasted only for two years because the Communist Party, which was the third party in Parliament, was banned, and the work dealing with women was put somewhere else. The third important women’s organization, which was not connected to any of the parties, was the Society for the Education of Women and the protection of their Rights, which was also formed at that time. The organization changed their name to The Women’s Movement in 1923. In 1926 the organization was linked to the Alliance for Women’s Movement. It was a feminist organization and the main goal was to educate women, struggle for the rights to vote and equality of men and women in all sectors of social life (ibid).

In the summer of 1941, an armed disturbance and uproar broke out in Yugoslavia, headed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia dealt through the Supreme Command of People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Since the beginning of the war, almost all women organizations took part in the preparations for an armed uprising. Women in the military forces and in the new civil government were accepted as equal participants from the beginning. Women could have positions in the regular army formations, but most women were in the medical corps. They also held political positions in the military headquarters or in education, culture or development of ethnic norms. Despite of all this, there were very few women with military ranks. After the war, a socialist system was established in Yugoslavia. All laws containing discriminatory norms against women were removed by the Interim Assembly and could no longer be applied. The reason was that the constitution applied in 1946 only confirmed economic, social and political equality. These three things had the women already won in the war (ibid).

In 1961 by decision of the Socialist Alliance of the Working people, The Alliance of Women Society was abolished, and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women was instead founded. The idea was that
the conference should co-ordinate the activities of Women’s Society, state organs and individual institutions dealing with problems concerning the position of women.

Along with the disappearance of women’s organizations, the intensive interest to change the relations between the sexes in the family and society died out. At his time fewer and fewer women did not know their legal rights and because of that they started to respect the renewed traditional habits and customs but unfortunately not the law (ibid).

In 1970, the new ideas on women’s liberation began to be accepted in Yugoslavia by a group of intellectuals, who along with feminists from Europe, presented “new” feminism at conference in Belgrade in 1979. Along with them various feminist studies and activist groups started to be active again (ibid).

In 1990 when the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina started, the patriarchal laws and traditions and the discontent position of women in the family and society were out in the open again. Feminists from all groups in former Yugoslavia managed despite the war to maintain feminist activities. Some feminist groups got support from feminist groups like for instance Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. These organizations were supported in a time when foreign NGO’s were forbidden. In public the government were forbidding the cooperation whit foreign organizations but in reality they were accepted. After nine years Kvinna to Kvinna opened their first office in Belgrade.

Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation

In 2001 Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation were able to open their first field office in Belgrade. They continued to support the four organizations, they earlier had established contact with, which are: AWIN (The association for Women’s Initiatives). The organization AWIN works to strengthen the women’s movement through Serbia. Their work generates more women’s organizations and greater co-operation between the groups. The organization also has an information center, which contains books and article on women’s issues. They also give seminars about women’s human rights and organizational development. ASTRA is a group within AWIN, which conducts campaign against sex trafficking. Their campaign “Open your eyes” is directed towards younger women at upper secondary school and colleges, to increase their awareness of trafficking and how it can be avoided. The second organization Kvinna to Kvinna support is Shelter for Women and Children Victims of Violence. They have since 1994 provided women and children from different ethnic groups with protection. In addition to food and lodging the women are offered psychological, medical and legal help. The third organization, the women’s section of the Trade Union “Nezavistnost” operates a telephone hotline for women who have experience of discrimination at the work place. The women’s section helps women to work against discrimination and harassment at the workplace. The fourth and last organization is Žene na delu. They are working to increase the independence of women through practical courses in areas such as plumbing, electricity installation and carpentry. The group also works to increase co-operation between women entrepreneurs (Verksamhetsberättelser 2001).

The co-operation between Kvinna to Kvinna and the local women’s organizations are characterized by that the local organizations define the problems and formulate proposals for measures to be taken. Afterwards, they all discuss together financing and working out final project proposal. The meaning with the co-operation is to educate, advise, support and encourage local women organizations to help other women to regain control over their lives and to take on the work of rebuilding a functioning society after nearly one decade of war and conflict. Kvinna till Kvinna personnel in the field are following the work of the women’s organizations very closely which means that they are acting as partners in discussions and therefore Kvinna till Kvinna are also a channel between the international community and the local organizations. This means that Kvinna till Kvinna can emphasize and stress the issues and skills that the women’s organizations represents (Annual Report 2000).
The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Sida is a governmental organization that is responsible for the biggest part of Swedish International development. Sida’s main function is to support development partner countries, because it is in the interest of the Swedish government to actively take part at the international political arena. The goal of Swedish International development co-operation with East Europe is to contribute to democratic development in society, raise the standard of living of poor people, development of the judicial system, development of state institutions, promoting gender equality and supporting activities directed towards the protection of fundamental political, civil, economic, social and cultural human rights. Sida’s task is therefore to create conditions for continual development that makes aid unneeded in the long term. The method Sida is working with is capacity- and institutional development where knowledge skills are the most important resource. Sida’s assignment is to construct strong national and local democratic institutions, gender equality, economic independence, promote participation of women in political life and other forms of development of democracy and supporting democratic activities of the citizen. Sida is an organization of knowledge, who stands for developing effective public administrations, active civil society and independent judicial system in partner countries, by planning and preparing the projects (Sidmas slutrapport 2000, 2001; Byman 2000; Human Rights and Democratic Governance 2000; Mainstreaming Gender Equality 2001).

A large part of Sida’s support is channeled through Swedish non-governmental organizations, in this case Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation. Sida’s support is linked with support via Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation to civil society by allowing Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation to work with their own, specific methods. Kvinna to Kvinna is well suited for work with equality and gender questions because of their contacts between people since they often have access to groups and organizations. Governments in general do not have the same contact with the organizations at the grass root level, where this people are to be found. Therefore Kvinna till Kvinna can complement projects implemented by government organizations. This co-operation between the Swedish government and Kvinna to Kvinna creates societies by mixing together project design and implementation. Kvinna to Kvinna’s projects are based at grass root level and therefore complement bilateral programmes that tend to focus on governmental Issues (Voice: The Essential Role of NGOs in the Reconstruction of War-torn Countries: The case of former Yugoslavia Brussels 2000). Therefore Sida has a positive attitude towards co-operation between Kvinna till Kvinna’s Gender Equality projects at grass root level and government organizations (ibid).

Women’s organizations in Belgrade in Serbia were reproduced and reconstructed under special circumstances, where the collapse of the country and the war was the deciding fact. UN sanctions contributed, moreover to super inflation that led to an economic crash at the same time as the country became internationally isolated. Transformation from socialism to capitalism was also a contributing force, because the institutions collapsed, the need for organizations grew bigger (Blagojevic 1998). With Sida’s and Kvinna to Kvinna’s methodologically and financial help the process was speeding up to make women organization safer, stronger and bigger.

To be able to answer the questions that I wrote before in the text, about the co-operation and the relationship between the donor and the receiver, I have in this paper chose to enter more deeply into Pierre Bourdieu’s theories. I want to se if I can apply Pierre Bourdieu’s theories, which consist of different forms of capital and the conceptions habitus and field.

Theoretical Points of Departure

The reason that I have chosen to apply Pierre Bourdieu’s theories in this text is because of his interest in people’s everyday life, the relationship between different actors and institutions in the society, how and why social structure and cultural differences are shaped in society. Central in Bourdieu’s analysis is that he starts from three basic categories: social acting, social relations and social structures, when he transforms and changes the fields and categories in which he seeks understanding, knowledge, and opinion about. The themes are about power, social order, institutions and relationship between individual
and collectivism. To explain how these different themes and categories are relating to each other Bourdieu, uses conceptions like social stratification, organization, gender structure and economy (Bourdieu 1990, 1991; Broady 1990).

**Habitus**

Bourdieu’s theories are about social relations on group and individual level. These relations can be described with the help of the habitus concept. Habitus develops in different social environments within collective social fields. It is a “system of dispositions that allows people to act, think and orientate in the social world” (Broady 1990:225). These systems of dispositions are a result of social experiences, collective memories, and way to move and think. Every individual has a system of dispositions, which allows them from outside their experience and principle to act, think, interpret, apprehend and estimate. These systems of dispositions are a consequence of meetings between people’s habitus and their social relationships. Habitus shapes and contributes to maintain social relationships, which furthermore also effects the opposition between the actors and the structure. Habitus is, however, changeable and transforms through a struggle of social positions within a social competition field, which consists of various resources and symbolic assets.

**Field**

A social field occurs when a limited group of people and or institutions are struggling over something that is in common for the group. A field is a structured social room where every competitor has a position and placing. The field is a tool for compositions of systems of relations between positions who allow themes, which are characterized by dominant relationship with some degree of autonomy, irrespective of the fact that the positions remains of individuals, groups or institutions. According to Bourdieu, this has to do with the specific stakes in the game, especially about symbolic winnings. Most important here is that all the participants has something to win or lose. This means that the field owns the ability to interpret externally coming discourses, categories and problems. Because of that all fields are independent, which means that they have their own specific logic. This can function as a spotlight directed towards a system of relations between positions. The fields can also overlap each other and larger fields can contain smaller fields. Hence, groups, individuals, or institutions can belong to more than one field, depending on which kind of capital they own (Bourdieu 2000, Broady 1990)

**Capital**

A capital is an asset, which an individual has because of s/he social, economic, and cultural background. The things that characterize social capital is the different relations like kinship or friendship (Bourdieu 1996). Capital is an asset which according to Bourdieu, exists in the social world and helps the individual to shape its habitus.

Between and within the fields a constant struggle is taking place. A struggle about power and influence and if an individual or institution is to be successful s/he must follow specific rules, defined by the field’s major actors.

Almost all organization that act in the world, are surrounded by other actors and are in varying degrees depended on co-operation with other organizations to ensure their survival. If the organizations are going to reach the desired result, which is very useful for all involved parties, it is necessary to create relations through networks, coalitions and alliance. The conditions for the relationships can vary outside the context, as can the reasons for the co-operation. The most common for all organizations is that the co-operation is functioning like an instrument in order to reach an appropriate goal (Jacobsen, Thorsvik 1999).
There are various causes for co-operation between organizations. One of the reason can be that one organization wants to have access to the other organizations resources, or that one organization are more or less forced by government decision, or that the organizations have common interests. The co-operation between Sida East, Kvinna to Kvinna and the women organizations in Belgrade has various reasons. The determining factor was the need for women organizations during the war because of the systematic rapes and outrages and after the war. The most important is that these organizations are feminist organizations, where women are helping other women to get their life back.

**Method**

To be able to understand, explain and make clear the relation between Sida, Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation and women organizations I have chose qualitative analysis like method. I have made interviews with academics from the Sociology department at the University in Belgrade, all four women organizations, described above, and other women organizations which does not receive help from NGO’s. I have also interviewed the responsible personnel for the Balkan region at Sida East in Stockholm as well in Belgrade and Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation at the headquarters in Stockholm and in Belgrade.

**Applying Bourdie’s Theories on the Co-operation between the Organizations**

According to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1994), a very important aspect that must be taken under consideration is that women in Eastern Europe are relatively highly educated. That creates good precondition for the women to affect and participate in the economic and political developed process. By giving aid through Sida and Kvinna to Kvinna, to women entrepreneurs and different sorts of education they are providing “help to self-help”.

In all aid it always occurs some form of condition that has to be fulfilled by the receiver if the resources are going to be at the receiver’s disposal. No donor is giving away something without control on how the aid is being used by the receiver. That is the reason why there is a contract, which contains rules that, has to be followed by the receiver. If the receiver do not follow the rules the aid can be stopped at once. Even if the receiver has some conditions, which is normal, does these not count as much as the givers, but the partner’s interests will coincide in this common field (Edgren 1983).

When organizations enter into co-operation like women organizations, Kvinna till Kvinna and Sida there must be some expectations for the donor’s rules and the control. Sida and Kvinna till Kvinna have access to some resources, like for instance economic capital and symbolic capital, which the receiver organization, are dependent on. Because they want to build up strong and democratic organizations, they have to accept that the donor demands that the work must be done in a certain way and that way includes rules and control. As one member from one organization said:

> Yes, in the beginning it was a little hard to accept their bureaucratic rules, we all felt like small children, but we knew about them of course from the beginning. They did not hide them in any way. And of course rules are the only way if we want to have democratic organizations in our country.

Another informant said the same thing:

> All this control and rules was hard in the beginning because we were not use to these things. We had no control before. Nobody cared before. We never followed the regulations.

According to Ahrne (1994), control can be a source of conflict between organizations. The conflict can be described as an unspoken power relation, where the donor is in an unavoidable power relation and the receiver is inferior. The power structure n this case is based on the donor’s economic and symbolic capital
they have received through education, they have lived and worked in a democracy. The donor is a part of a functioning civil society and of course the main fact, they have access to the economic capital, the resources.

The members of the women organizations have often been active feminists in different movements since the late 1960s, and can feel powerless or submissive in some parts of the co-operation. This can depend on that they do not have the education or the symbolic capital when they are working with the questions that deals with organization development. The members in the women’s organizations do not have the symbolic and cultural capital because the institutions in Serbia have lost their status that they once had. These women can feel that their habitus has been rejected in the co-operation with the donors. The receiver understands that they do not own the same symbolic and cultural capital. At the same time they believe that their social experience should be taken into consideration because they know their social structure, the system and the old organizationally structures which can be useful when the new structures is established.

When the members of the women organization habitus have been rejected, their experience from that time when they were not an inferior position is being denied. These women’s habitus that should guide them and make the build up of the new organizations easier can be characterized by powerlessness and insecurity in seeking after a new position in this fairy unknown new structure.

Together with Kvinna to Kvinna, we are building up our women organizations. This is a period where we are learners but in the future we will have the knowledge how to build large, strong democratic organizations, like they have in Sweden. At the same time we must learn to be less dependent on Kvinna to Kvinna, but this is a very nice co-operation.

Another informant who is not a member of any women organization has the opposite opinion.

Serbia like the other transformation counties has been exposed to NGO intervention. They are coming and going and I think that many people are looking forward to the day they are going back so we can start building our own organizational structure.

The informant continues by saying that she does not want to sound traditional but the donors has underestimated this countries organizational knowledge skill.

They have described us like we belonged to the third world. That is a big mistake. Because we have knowledge, we have had women’s movement in this town from 1875, we have a history. But the women who are involved in the cooperation with NGO’s do not agree with me because they are dependent, they receive aid.

The capital and the symbolic values that regulates the power structure between the donors and the receivers can be compared with a field, where the actors in the different organizations outwards in society, have a position which concerns position and status. The field is characterized by that all the organizations, that includes Sida and Kvinna till Kvinna and women organization, have constructed a system of relations which is based upon agreements and rules. Outside this the different positions and actors can unite, co-operate and act inside the field. The cultural and the symbolic capital that characterize the field which is common for all organizations (all the members in the organizations is educated but they all belong to different schools), is struggling about power and influence within the common field, because they all have something to win or lose, because they all belong to more than one field. Sida East and Kvinna till Kvinna is depended on the Swedish government who owns the economic capital (the resources, i.e. the money) and therefore they must show that the goals formulated by the Swedish government is followed by the women organizations in Serbia. If the Swedish government is not satisfied with the work done by the local personnel, they can stop the aid and instead give the grants to another organization or even re-directed the aid to another country.
It is about the taxpayers money. This is money from all the Swedish people that the government has given to us for a good thing and we have to show that things are happening and not standing still.

That also implies that Kvinna till Kvinna is competing, with other organizations in Sweden about the grants. The women organisations in Serbia are also competing but with each other about how many grants they are going to have. At the same time they have to show that the work is going in the right direction. Their own society, as well as other organizations that are not financed by Kvinna to Kvinna, and of course the donors demands that. The competition or struggle about the resources is taking place in the autonomy field, which means that the field is independent and self-sufficient with its own rules, systems and regulations. The autonomy filed can also be seen as a market were problems keeping with the times. When for example the Swedish government through Sida East or Kvinna to Kvinna foundation have carried out the goals with the women organizations, they will stop to give aid in form of recourses. “Yes in the future when we are thinking that Serbia is ready to stand on their own, we will stop giving aid and instead offer them credits.”

The resources or the capital will be transferred to other more needing organizations or to another country. These changes vary depending on time, social context and environment and on the organizations.

My conclusion is that there is a power relation between the donor and the receiver. At the same time the parties seem quite satisfied with the co-operation. I also think that the power relations between the donors and receiver can be described as a temporary power relation. It is temporary because one day the Swedish government will decide, together with Kvinna to Kvinna Foundation and Sida, to stop giving aid. Instead they will offer them credit loans, as one of my informants said – after which they ideally should no longer be in need of aid or credit loans. Then their relationship will not be the same because there are different relationships and co-operations when a country receives aid and when it receives loans. However, Sida’s and Kvinna to Kvinna’s ideas concerning organizational development will keep affecting the women organizations when these are reorganizing, expanding or stopping. At the same time all women organizations in Serbia are aware of that they have had women organizations since 1846 and a feminist movement in the 1960 like the rest of the Europe and therefore they did not started from nothing. As one informant concluded:

When the donors came we did no forget that we had a history of women’s movement before they came, which means that we were not blank. We knew what we wanted with our women organizations but we needed organizational and economic help to become stronger and to reach more women. It was a time when nothing worked, as it should. All our women rights were put aside, the society did not care and yes, we had rights before the war.

I
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