CIVIL SOCIETY –
A NEW SOLUTION BEYOND STATE AND MARKET?

CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR GERMANY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Civil Society Index (CSI) Project was conducted in Germany from 2003 to 2005. In order to record information on the approximately 70 indicators included in the project, an extensive secondary analysis, as well as a media analysis, were conducted. On the basis of a comprehensive report, the CSI indicators were discussed, evaluated and scored by two National Advisory Groups (NAGs) set up especially for the project. To determine if there were any potential effects of group composition or group dynamics on the indicator scoring exercise, two separate groups were established. However, no crucial differences were apparent between the two groups, in terms of their scoring results. Wherever differences became apparent, they were attributed to different interpretations of key terms or different perspectives. For example, one NAG had a more international perspective on the findings, and on average scored the indicators slightly more positively. The scores from both groups were then averaged for international comparison. The data, scores and assessments were included in an extensive German research report (Reimer 2005a). The assessment results can be depicted in the Civil Society Diamond as indicated below: (See figure 1 below.)

Figure 1: German Civil Society Diamond from NAG A and NAG B

On a scale of 0 to 3, a score of 1.6 was awarded for the structure of civil society, 2.3 for the environment, 2.2 for values and 2.5 for the impact dimension. Thus, one notices a striking difference between the relatively low score for structure and the relatively high score for the impact dimension.

Within the structure dimension for Germany, particularly negative ratings were awarded to the extent of volunteering, membership in associations, non-partisan political action and community action among the population. It is interesting to note that, if people get involved the number of
hours they invest is high. However, this does not apply to membership numbers or the share of personal income donated to charity. The low scores are in part attributable to the rules for assigning scores, or in some cases to the rather “American” approaches behind the features (for example: the “Collective Community Action” indicator). The financial and human resources available to civil society organisations (CSOs) are also rated as poor. Of particular note is the well-known division of German civil society into two sub-sectors: one sub-sector that is predominantly state-financed and one sub-sector that is mostly financed by service fees. On the other hand, the involvement of CSOs in umbrella associations and the communication and cooperation among them is rated positively, even if it does not tend to be cross-sectoral. This also applies to the extent and quality of civil society’s infrastructure.

The NAG evaluated the environment in which civil society exists in Germany as good to excellent. In particular political rights, party competition, confidence in the rule of law, decentralisation, the socio-economic environment and financial support to CSOs by the state are rated as excellent; and other indicators also achieve some very good evaluations. No individual feature was rated so poorly as to deem it an actual obstacle to the development of civil society.

Based on the evaluation by the NAG, the values practised and represented in German civil society largely correspond to the values upon which the CSI Project is based. However, the extent of corruption within civil society, the financial transparency of CSOs and efforts regarding equal opportunities for men and women were rated low.

The impact of civil society in Germany on broader society is rated as very high. For example, the social relevance of CSOs’ activities is regarded as high. This is extraordinary, when it is considered that, according to surveys conducted among the population, unemployment is seen as a very important issue, and CSOs cannot legally contribute directly towards promoting economic growth. However, the issue is addressed by some CSOs through advocacy activities. The social relevance of CSOs’ activities is also regarded as high: this includes activities regarding marginal groups or those requiring assistance.