

# The Profile of Estonian Civil Society

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE CIVICUS  
INDEX ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT IN ESTONIA

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# Part I

## Introduction

### The Role of Civil Society in Estonia

For Estonia, the past fifteen years have brought remarkable changes in the social, political and economic structures of the country. After being a subjugated province of the totalitarian USSR for over fifty years, the country re-established its independence in 1991 and has made much progress in the consolidation of its democratic political system. This development was made possible, in part, by the crises of the Soviet economic, political and military systems. Nevertheless, the final course of the revolutionary process in Estonia was, to a large extent determined by the activities of popular movements. Estonia's recent history is thus a convincing example of the potential importance of civil society and social movements in directing social change (e.g., Lagerspetz 1996:42; 52).

Civil society's ability to mobilise people for revolutionary action gives no guarantee, however, of its capacity to participate in the process of building and consolidating new democratic institutions. In other words, critical collective action – in this case a revolution – and the creation of a new social, political and economic order are tasks requiring different resources and abilities. Not unlike the developments in several other post-communist and post-authoritarian countries, newly independent Estonia experienced a rapid institutionalisation of political democracy and capitalism along with a demobilisation of social movements in the early 1990s (Lomax 1997:41).

Although there are many facets to civil society, this report focuses on the non-profit sector as its central component. The comparison of Estonian civil society with those of established democracies contained in this report draws an unexpected conclusion: In spite of civil society's important role in the recent past, it currently forms the weakest link in the Estonian democracy. This is not so much caused by the number or diversity of the existing organisations – in comparison with most of Central and Eastern Europe Estonia has a very high number of civil society organisations (CSOs) per capita – but by their insufficient resources and reluctance to participate in the development of Estonian society.

It seems that neither the general public, nor the state or CSOs themselves possess a clear vision about the role of the sector. According to the findings of a recent research project on mutual expectations of politicians, civil servants, businesspeople and non-governmental organisations (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann, 2001), the Estonian non-profit sector is seen to perform three major roles:

- organising free time activities
- delivering services contracted out by the state, and
- consulting political decision-makers.

Their rather limited fields of activity focus on culture, sport, charity, the rights of marginalised groups and the promotion of economic interests. Importantly, CSOs do not consider the delivery of

state services as one of their primary roles, believing that their most important function in society is to publicise the opinions of social groups and inform the public (MSI 1999a).

The non-profit sector as a whole does not constitute an influential actor in the democratic development of Estonian society (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann, 2001). The government has not created a space for CSOs in political decision-making and politicians and civil servants lack an understanding of the newly-emerged non-profit sector, since most CSOs have no clearly defined management structure, and lack advanced leadership and organisational skills (NENO 2000).

However, there are indications that attitudes towards civil society are beginning to transform. The formation of a Chamber of Co-operation between political parties and CSOs in Estonia in December 1999 represents one potentially important step. A UN-funded project involving an umbrella of Estonian NGOs has been involved in preparing a draft document called the *Estonian Civil Society Development Concept (EKAK)*, which eventually will form the basis for an official document to be adopted by the Estonian Parliament. EKAK intends to create a framework of values, principles and mutual obligations related to the relationship between public authorities and the non-profit sector. The document was handed over to the Parliament on 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2001.<sup>1</sup>

## The State of Civil Society Research in Estonia

Official statistics, research reports and articles have looked at several aspects of the Estonian non-profit sector. The Estonian Central Commercial Register collects general statistical information on registered CSOs, however information about fields of activity and the composition of membership is lacking and not all registered organisations are actually functioning. Moreover, not all organised activities have been officially registered. For these reasons, official statistics offer only a general framework for a more thorough examination of the sector. Several studies on participation in CSOs have been carried out by the Institute of International and Social Studies of the Pedagogical University of Tallinn, including a survey of CSO members and leaders, an evaluation of public awareness of CSOs and a study of CSOs and their international relations. (*Estonian Human Development Report 1998*).

In addition, this Institute conducted several surveys about participation in voluntary activities (Järve, 1996; Ruutsoo & Siisiäinen, 1996; Ruutsoo 1999). The Chancellery of the Estonian Parliament has recently commissioned two surveys on participation in voluntary activities, one focusing on the participants of a national forum of CSOs in November 1999 (MSI 1999a), and another comparing how mass attitudes and behaviour relate to voluntary activities in different regions of Estonia (MSI 1999b). A research group at the Estonian Institute of Humanities has produced two research reports on the non-profit sector. The first – *The Resources of Civil Society in Estonia* – was carried out in 1998 and examined the resources and activities of CSOs (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann 2000). The most recent, – *Strategies for Promoting Civil Society in Estonia: Problems and Perspectives* – was commissioned by the Chancellery of the Parliament and examined the relationship between the state and non-profit sector. In 1999 USAID presented the *NGO Sustainability Index 2000*, an assessment examining the Estonian non-profit sector and its problems (NENO 2000).

This was the first international survey focusing on civil society in which Estonia had participated and consequently there is still a lack of comprehensive data from which to draw international comparisons.

In short, research on Estonian CSOs has produced some valuable information on the volume and

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<sup>1</sup>For further information on the preparation process see Liiv 2001.

structure of the sector, on the popular attitudes towards it and on the levels of voluntary activity. Still, the existing research projects have used different definitions in their research and their results are mostly incomparable. The development of a comprehensive portrayal of civil society based on a variety of commensurate information sources remains a challenge.

The *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* will play an important role in Estonian civil society research. In particular, its focus on values and impact of CSOs has produced some new information. With a common cross-national framework as its basis, *The Index* is expected to be helpful in providing a picture of the sector as a whole, which can be compared to pictures emerging from other countries.

## The CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project

The main objectives of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* are:

- To increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of civil society through reflecting on and assessing the strength, health and impact of the sector;
- To empower civil society stakeholders through promoting dialogue, alliances and networks;
- To develop visions of mechanisms to achieve stronger civil society through providing an agenda and goal-setting tool to help foster positive behavioural change.

This report introduces the results of the pilot phase of the CIVICUS project in Estonia in 2000-2001, which was co-ordinated by the Open Estonia Foundation.

The research results are structured according to the four-dimensional approach of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond Tool* designed by Dr. Helmut Anheier.<sup>2</sup> These four dimensions are structure, space, values and impact of civil society. For each of these dimensions a variable set of indicators has been developed. The graphic mapping of the research findings form a diamond where each dimension presents the average score of the indicators used.

In October 2000 the Open Estonia Foundation the project work began by compiling existing statistics, research findings and publications on civil society in Estonia. *This research culminated in* an overview of the state of Estonian civil society. The next project phase concerned the adaptation and implementation of the stakeholder survey. With the agreement of the CIVICUS Index co-ordination team, the Estonian study deviated from the original design in some important respects. The most significant difference was that instead of basing assessments on expert opinions of the sector as a whole, the organisations themselves were consulted directly.

There were several motives for this. First, most CSO representatives in Estonia probably lack reliable information on any larger group of organisations. Second, using a single organisation as the unit of measurement makes it possible to find regional and other differences within the sub-fields of civil society activity. In addition to the organisational survey, a small sample of expert stakeholders were questioned. These assessments will be analysed separately. A comparison between the organisational and stakeholder surveys may enhance the reliability of the next stages of the international research project.

The survey was conducted from the end of March until the beginning of May 2001. Nine non-governmental organisations representing different regions of Estonia helped conduct the survey. Each centre put together a sample of counties/towns and distributed questionnaires in their region. A total of 495 questionnaires were sent out and 296 completed questionnaires received back from CSO representatives, translating into a response rate of 60%.

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<sup>2</sup>The CIVICUS Diamond Tool and analytic framework was developed for CIVICUS by Dr. Helmut Anheier, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. For more information see Anheier, H. K. and Carlson, L., *Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue*, London: Earthscan, forthcoming.

Forty-four questionnaires were also sent to stakeholders who represent the business sector, government agencies, the non-profit sector, academics and the media. They were asked to evaluate the non-profit sector as a whole. Only 36% of these stakeholders responded – probably because they lacked sufficient knowledge to evaluate the sector as a whole. Respondents were asked to provide answers on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the most negative score and 5 indicating the most positive, while certain questions asked for actual numbers – membership of CSOs, paid employees, etc.

In July 2001 a workshop was held with members of the Representative Board of the Estonian Non-Profit Associations Roundtable, one of the main representative structures of the non-profit sector. The discussion focussed on actual issues in the non-profit sector's development: The role and aims of the Representative Board of the Non-Profit Associations Roundtable and the expected impact of EKAK on civil society. After a presentation of the Estonian version of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond*, based upon the results of the CSO and stakeholder surveys, members of the Representative Board were asked to evaluate and moderate these scores if necessary.

Eventually Board members developed a vision of the state of the non-profit sector in two years.<sup>3</sup>

## Outline

The report begins with an overview of the Estonian non-profit sector as depicted by the Civil Society Status Diamond, and proceeds to discuss the research findings according to the four dimensions of the Diamond: structure, space, values and impact. The second part discusses the Civil Society Vision Diamond followed by a summary of the research and project implementation.

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<sup>3</sup>See more about the implementation of the project in Appendix 2.

## Part II

### Civil Society in Estonia

#### The CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond

The four basic dimensions of the Diamond Tool used to evaluate Estonian civil society are:

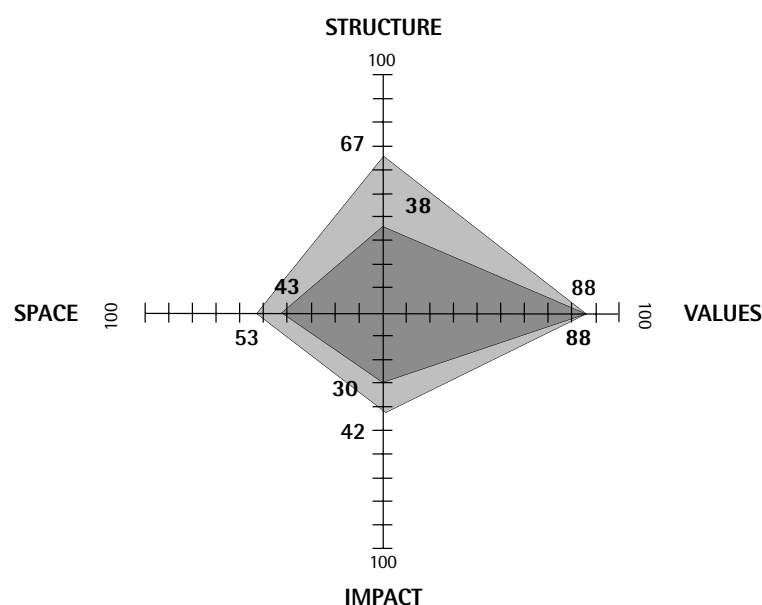
- **Structure** – The size of civil society in economic, social and organisational terms and the relationships among its component parts;
- **Space** – The legal, political, socio-cultural and regulatory environment in which civil society operates.
- **Values** – The values, norms and cultural expectations represented and advocated by civil society;
- **Impact** – The contributions of civil society to social well being and the public policy process.

#### Status Diamond

The larger of the following two diamonds (*see Figure 1*) represent the responses of 296 CSO and stakeholder survey respondents. This original diamond was then moderated by the members of the Representative Board of the Non-Profit Associations Roundtable, who in turn produced the smaller diamond.

It was concluded that the original CSO diamond was correct in its general proportions. The Board members felt although the average scores of the impact, space, and structure dimensions should be lower than those depicted in the original diamond they agreed that the score of the value dimension should remain as high as that of the original diamond. This is indicated in Figure 1.

Figure1. The Original Civil Society Diamond (large) with the Revised



The general picture shows that Estonian CSOs assign a high score to the **values** dimension of civil society (see the scores in Appendix 1), reflecting encouraging expectations towards the emerging non-profit sector.

The CSO survey suggests that the **structure** dimension of the non-profit sector is already fairly well developed. It was, however, recommended by workshop participants that financial criteria of the Diamond Tool be further developed to include the importance of all related sources of funding. Question tended to focus on dependence on public or foreign funding and participants felt that this should be expanded to include dependence on other sources of funding, such as membership fees. Whilst the original diamond produced a positive result showing that few CSOs were extensively dependent upon public or foreign funding, workshop participants took into account their reliance on other sources of funding and therefore produced a general picture that was not as favourable.

Workshop participants also felt that the average scores of the **space** and **impact** dimensions should be somewhat smaller than the scores, which emerged from the CSO survey.

The assessment of the **space** dimension was characterised by the deficient regulatory environment governing relations between the public and non-governmental sectors making it difficult for respondents to comment on tax exemption or access to public documents.

The score of the **impact** dimension seemed to be closely related to the score of the **space** dimension – the less satisfactory the space in which CSOs operate, the smaller their impact.

In general, the differences between the CSO survey and the moderated assessments of the Roundtable Board members are because members of the Board evaluated the overall situation, while the CSOs were required to answer concrete questions. In both cases the Status Diamond leans strongly towards the **values** dimension. This depicts a situation where expectations towards civil society are high, but its work does not match up to these expectations yet.

## *Structure*

The following section examines the size of the non-profit sector in Estonia, the membership base of CSOs, the extent of networking within the non-profit sector, co-operation with the private sector and the financial resources that CSOs command.

### **General Data**

There are three types of CSOs in Estonia: non-profit associations, foundations and non-profit partnerships. Non-profit partnerships are informal associations, which do not have to be registered. As a result there is not much general information available about these partnerships.

A total of 13,666 non-profit associations and 371 foundations are currently registered in the Central Commercial Register (Statistikaamet 2001). About 4% of the working-age population are employed in CSOs (MSI 2000). According to the Estonian Enterprise Register, the major sub-sectors of the non-profit sector are real estate associations,<sup>4</sup> sport clubs, culture CSOs, professional and trade unions, hobby associations and faith-based CSOs (Siplane & Kasemets 2000).

A relatively large proportion of CSOs are located in the bigger cities, particularly the capital city. The per-capita distribution of CSOs is lowest in smaller towns (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann, 2000). Of the 296 CSOs surveyed, 77% act primarily at a local level, 19% on a national level and

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<sup>4</sup>The official number of CSOs is heightened by the fact that apartment, housing and garage associations have been included also. These forms of cooperative ownership have emerged due to legislation which obliges the apartment owners in a block of flats to form an association for the management of their commonly owned real estate. If these associations are not taken into account, the number of registered NGOs would be around 6,000.

5% on an international level. Slightly more than half of the CSOs acting on the international level and 63% of CSOs acting on the national level are located in the capital, Tallinn.

## Membership Base

Forty-two percent of CSOs<sup>5</sup> have a small membership – up to 30 members, while approximately 25% have more than 100 members. CSOs located in bigger towns or those acting on a national or international level also have more members in their organisation (*see Table 1*).

**Table 1. Membership base of CSOs according to the primary level of focus.**

Membership	Local		National		International		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Up to 10	33	15.2	4	7.4	2	13.3	39	13.7
11-30	68	31.3	11	20.4	2	13.3	81	28.5
31-50	35	16.1	9	16.7	1	6.7	45	15.8
51-100	30	13.8	5	9.3	1	6.7	36	12.7
101 and more	46	21.2	25	46.3	9	60.0	80	28.2
Do not know	5	2.3	0	0	0	0	5	1.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>

Most CSOs consider their membership active – 71% stated that ‘all’ or ‘almost all’ members had participated in the CSO’s activities over the past year. Stakeholders who evaluated the whole non-profit sector made a less positive judgement, asserting less than half of CSOs have an active membership base. Once again, this discrepancy may be explained by our sampling method: A majority of the responding organisations were involved with regional NGO support centres and it is likely that their average level of activity and resources is higher than that of CSOs in general.

More than half of the responding CSOs do not have paid employees in their organisation. Most of those who have a salaried labour force do not employ more than one to two people, although CSOs with more than 100 members do have more employees (*see Table 2*). Consequently, most of the work in the non-profit sector in Estonia is done on a voluntary basis.

<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the reported data is based on the survey among 296 CSOs conducted as part of the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society.

Table 2. Amount of paid employees in CSOs according to the membership base.

Paid employees	Membership						TOTAL
	Up to 10	11-30	31-50	51-100	101 and more	Do not know	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
None	56.4	65.1	66.7	62.2	44.0	60.0	57.7
1-2	20.5	22.9	20.0	16.2	25.0	20.0	21.8
3-5	10.3	6.0	8.9	10.8	23.8	0	12.6
6-12	10.3	2.4	0	8.1	4.8	0	4.4
13 and more	2.6	2.4	4.4	2.7	2.4	0	2.7
Do not know	0	1.2	0	0	0	20.0	0.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

## Networking

About a third of CSO respondents stated that there are no umbrella bodies in their field of activity and 43% indicate that there is one. Amongst the small organisations (up to 10 members) over half (54%) state that no umbrella organisation functions in their field of activity. It should be noted that CSOs were often in doubt as to whether an umbrella organisation exists in their sub-sector. The representatives of foundations, environmental and advocacy CSOs and student/youth associations were most inclined to deny the existence of an umbrella body in their field of activity. At the same time Andres Siplane and Aare Kasemets (2000) state in the overview of their short study *The Graphic and Statistical Picture of the Estonian Third Sector* that fields such as environment, leisure, science and developmental CSOs, do not have umbrella organisations. This demonstrates that CSOs and researchers lack shared definitions for fields of non-profit activity and for what constitutes an umbrella organisation. Thus, it seems that many respondents did not know exactly what was meant by 'umbrella organisation' and workshop participants confirmed this lack of understanding.

Nevertheless, roughly 53% of CSOs belong to umbrella organisations, approximately three quarters of them to one organisation only. Of CSOs with more than 100 members, three-quarters reported membership in an umbrella organisation. Organisations that are members of several different umbrella bodies at the same time, are most prevalent among CSOs acting primarily on the national or international level (see Table 3).

Table 3. CSOs belonging to umbrella organisations according to membership base.

Membership							
Belong to umbrella organisation	Up To 10	11–30	31–50	51–100	101 and more	Do not know	TOTAL
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
No	69.2	60.5	37.8	45.9	23.2	80.0	46.0
To one	23.1	27.2	46.7	37.8	56.1	0	38.8
To several	7.7	9.9	13.3	16.2	20.7	20.0	14.2
Do not know	0	2.5	2.2	0	0	0	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

A quarter of the CSOs questioned reported that the umbrella organisations they belong to actively encourage membership and participation, and are successful in representing the interests of their member organisations. CSOs with a larger membership base have a more positive view of the work of umbrella bodies – this is especially true for CSOs with more than 100 members. Approximately half of the CSOs provide neither a positive or negative assessment on this issue, i.e. they evaluate the work of umbrella bodies as not unsuccessful and not particularly successful either. The remaining quarter of CSOs were unable to evaluate the work of umbrella organisations. This suggests that while many CSOs belong to an umbrella organisation, they have quite weak links with it in practice. Workshop participants noted that umbrella bodies often fail to communicate effectively with their member organisations or make an effort to determine their interests and opinions.

Links between different CSOs are, however, well-established: Almost half of the CSOs (46%) report active or very active co-operation with other CSOs besides the umbrella bodies, and only 7% of the respondents do not co-operate with other CSOs at all. The co-operation between different CSOs mostly relates to the exchange of information, organisation of common activities and discussion of future plans.

On the other hand, 44% of CSOs are almost completely void of cooperative relations with the private sector, but in many cases where co-operation does exist (33%), it is very active. CSOs focusing on a national or international level co-operate with the private sector more often than those acting at a local level do. It is obvious that those with better organisational capacities have also better possibilities for creating contacts with the private sector.

## Financing Sources

There are several financing sources that are important for a certain sub-set of organisations, but lack importance for other sub-sets. This is true with regards to support from the state, local administrations and Estonian foundations. Also, the importance of membership fees varies greatly. Altogether, membership fees, public support and financial resources from domestic foundations are the most important sources of financing, and their importance is greatest for the organisations acting primarily on the local and national levels. Organisations with smaller membership bases depend more upon Estonian foundations as financing sources.

The survey showed that support from local companies and individuals as well as income from

collections, charitable events, selling of goods, etc., are not deemed as an important financing source by the majority of CSOs.

On a positive note, the findings indicated that only a few CSOs are dependent on support from one source only, and most enjoy three or more sources of financing.

Here an important discrepancy emerged between assessments by stakeholders and those of the CSOs themselves. The stakeholders tended to overestimate the importance of foreign funding (see Table 4). This again points to the impact of the method chosen for collecting the data.

**Table 4. Importance of the financing source on a scale from 1 to 5 according to the evaluations of CSOs and stakeholders.**

Financing source	CSOs		Stakeholders	
	Mean	No.	Mean	No.
Membership fees	2.85	286	2.5	16
Charitable events, selling of goods, etc.	2.27	275	2.87	15
State	2.98	275	3.38	16
Local administration	3.05	282	3.47	15
Estonian enterprises	2.26	265	2.5	16
Estonian foundations	2.93	276	3.38	16
Individuals living in Estonia	1.99	269	2.13	16
Foreign support	2.59	263	3.63	16

The difference between stakeholder and organisational survey respondents could be a consequence of the influence of the media and academic discourses upon the stakeholders. These tend to stress the financial vulnerability of the CSOs in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Hellam & Aru 1997, Proos 1998, Kuti 1999). Additionally, although foreign aid may be relatively large in volume, it only reaches a rather small portion of active organisations. In conclusion, this aspect of the structure dimension seems to be strongly affected by the research design.

## Space

The following section examines the laws and policies, which influence the work of civil society organisations, and the socio-cultural space in which Estonian CSOs operate.

### Legal Framework

There are two main laws dealing with CSOs in Estonia, the Non-Profit Associations Act and the Foundations Act. In the *Overview of the Status of Human Rights in Estonia in 1999*, the authors state that the provisions and the implementation of the Non-Profit Associations Act prescribe bureaucratic and restrictive requirements on the registration and activities of CSOs, which many associations are incapable of fulfilling (EIHR 1999). However, only a fifth of the surveyed CSOs regard the registration process as being complicated. The main difficulty seems to arise from a lack of information available on the appropriate proceedings.

According to the Estonian Income Tax Act, non-profit associations and foundations are not required to pay any taxes on their income. Corporate bodies and individuals can make tax-exempt gifts and donations to public-interest CSOs listed by the government provided they do not exceed 2% of the total amount subject to social tax (excluding fringe benefits). It has been argued that the abolition of the enterprises' income tax in January 2000 has inhibited businesses from donating money to CSOs. The maximum amount of tax-free donations has decreased several times, since it is linked to the wage system instead of the income percentage (Ojakivi, 2001).

Almost half of the CSOs (45%) feel that the tax exemption system is unfavourable to donors. Importantly, about a quarter of the CSOs could not answer the question on tax exemptions, indicating that many representatives of CSOs are poorly informed about the provisions of the Income Tax Act. This suggests that the reliability of this indicator might not be very high.

### Access to Information

CSOs evaluate their access to information of the state and local administration differently. About a third consider it difficult, a quarter easy and another quarter neither easy nor difficult. The mean score of CSOs' evaluations still indicates a negative assessment.

The other stakeholders surveyed provided a more positive evaluation, with about half reporting that the documents of the state and local administrations are easy for CSOs to access. Their assessment might be based on the enforcement of the new Law on Public Information which, in principle, guarantees access to information needed for realising personal rights and freedoms, and increases the transparency of public sector activities. Here, two alternate interpretations of the differing assessments of CSO representatives and other stakeholders are possible: Either the new law has not yet been sufficiently enforced at a local level, or organisations have not yet acquainted themselves with the new opportunities it provides.

### Other Factors Influencing the Activity of CSOs

Nine percent of CSOs reported that their leaders have been pressured to join political groupings. Most respondents (69%) have not experienced any pressure from political groupings at all. The other stakeholders estimated that a bigger proportion of CSOs have been subjected to pressure from political groupings. Also the workshop participants noted that while political parties do try to recruit socially active persons the organisations as a whole are not necessarily influenced by party ideologies.

Slightly more than a third of CSO representatives (37%) do not regard the organisation of project tenders and the grant support mechanisms of donors as understandable and just. Larger organisations who are more familiar with the project funding process, offer a more negative assessment than smaller organisations. At the same time they are more confident about the importance of their own activities. The rather balanced distribution of answers among different answer categories shows that respondents are likely to have evaluated the experiences of their own organisation, instead of the whole field of activity they represent. The workshop participants indicated that, in practice, there is no unitary system for organising tenders in the non-profit sector at all.

## *Impact*

This section describes the public image of the non-profit sector, and the relations between CSOs and the public sector.

### **CSOs and the Public**

A majority of the CSOs (61%) believe that their organisation has an impact upon a variety of social groups extending beyond its own membership. However, a quarter of the CSOs seem to be membership-centred.

While the mean of CSOs' evaluations on this question is 3.53 on the five-point scale, the mean of the evaluations of the other stakeholders is only 2.94.

This result might be explained by a comment made by a participant of the workshop: "Many Estonian CSOs do not put much effort in developing their public image or in influencing social processes through publicity – their main concern is practical work." Most of the CSOs inform the public about their activity through their members, friends, relatives or acquaintances (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann 1998), and the larger public remains uninformed of the activities of many CSOs.

This is partly due to the media's lack of interest in covering issues related to the non-profit sector. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents note that the work of CSOs in their field of activity is almost not covered at all by the media, and merely a quarter reported any significant media interest. Of the organisations acting primarily on the international level, 57% state that the work of CSOs in their field of activity is extensively portrayed in media. Some participants found that the mean of the question is not realistic (2.38), because media coverage of CSO activities is predominantly negative and does not reflect the regular activities of the non-profit sector. Others argued that in comparison to nation-wide media, local and regional papers tend focus more positively on local associations. A special newspaper *Forum – The Herald of Civil Society*, highlighting the events of non-profit sector, has been published since May 1999 as a monthly supplement of a leading national daily (with the support of the Baltic-American Partnership Programme).

### **Relations with the Government Sector**

While slightly more than a third of CSOs experienced successful communication with the local administration or public servants, 25% stated the opposite. It has been argued in other research (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann 2001), that relations between the public and non-profit sectors are characterised by a lack of trust or willingness to co-operate on both sides.

Public administration representatives are not sure which organisation can be trusted and CSOs feel that the public sector undervalues the importance of their contribution. There are also no formal channels of communication between the non-profit sector and the various state ministries. This lack of communication probably explains the many middle-ground responses produced by this indicator.

Stakeholders and workshop participants argued that the CSO survey scores depicted an overly optimistic picture and workshop participants noted that the most active communication between the public and non-profit sector could be found on the local level of administration.

More than a third of the respondents stated that CSOs in their field of activity are not invited to participate in the development of legislation and other political discussions at all. A fifth of the respondents reported that organisations in their field of activity play an important role in political discussions. CSOs acting on the national level are more actively involved in political discussions than those acting primarily on the local or international level (*see Table 5*).

Table 5. CSOs involvement in political discussions according to the primary level of focus.

Participate in political discussions	Primary level of focus			
	Local	National	International	TOTAL
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	37.3	28.3	35.7	35.8
2	19.8	11.3	28.6	18.8
3	15.7	30.2	14.3	18.1
4	13.4	17.0	7.1	13.8
To a very high degree	5.5	13.2	14.3	7.1
Do not know	8.3	0	0	6.4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Despite the fact that dialogue between the non-profit sector and government institutions has become more open in recent years, it is typically the larger, more well-known and competent CSOs that the government, the Parliament and political parties are willing to recognise as partners (Siplane & Kasemets, 2000).

At the same time, most of the CSOs (52%) do not actively seek contact with members of political parties themselves to represent of their interests in the political decision-making process. Only among organisations with more than 100 members did a notable share (28%) of respondents actively seek this kind of co-operation.

More than half of the respondents (58%) are convinced that the work of CSOs in their field of activity is not valued as much as the comparative work of the public and business sector. Workshop participants also found the average score of this question (2.2) too high arguing that CSO members might think that their work is valued to some extent, but business or public sector would rate the same work with a score of “something like 0.5.” This point is supported by an analysis of the data from the stakeholder survey where all respondents reported a negative result (*see Table 6*).

Table 6. Evaluations of CSOs' work according to the assessments of CSOs and stakeholders.

Is the work of CSOs valued?	CSOs		Stakeholders	
	No.	%	No.	%
No at all	94	33.0	6	37.5
2	75	26.3	10	62.5
3	51	17.9	0	0
4	30	10.5	0	0
To a very high degree	9	3.2	0	0
Do not know	26	9.1	0	0
TOTAL	285	100	16	100

## Values

The following part of the country report will analyse the extent to which Estonian CSOs support different democratic values and attitudes in their understandings.

The answers to the questions concerning the values dimension show the willingness of most respondents to support the value principles put forward in the survey. The CSOs felt that civil society should support mutual understanding between different people and groups in society (82% of the respondents find it 'very important' or 'important'), and that different social groups should have an opportunity to express their interests and demands through CSOs (91%). For the respondents it is 'very important' that CSOs stand for human rights (89%), that information about the activities of CSOs is publicly available (93%), and that the standpoints of all members are taken into account in the planning of CSO activities (87%). CSOs should come to common agreements with other organisations acting in the same field of activity (89%) and the third sector should form a united whole in society (81%). Only 1–4% of the respondents considered these values 'totally unimportant' or 'unimportant', although it should be noted that verbal support of a value does not always correspond with action. It is also possible that practising one value, e.g. forming a united whole of the third sector, might logically require suppression of another value, e.g. that different social groups find representation through civil society. In any case, the answers reflect the organisations' willingness to accept democratic and consensual values as bases for their activity.

Additionally, other stakeholders questioned evaluated the importance of most of the values very highly. Some differences can be seen when examining the means of the evaluations. The stakeholders are not as enthusiastic as the CSOs themselves in supporting the idea that organisations should take the standpoints of all its members into account when planning its activities. The same holds true for the questions concerning encouraging common agreements between organisations in the same field of activity and having a united non-profit sector. Here the other stakeholders seem to be more aware of the logical incompatibilities referred to above (*see Table 7*).

**Table 7. The answers of CSOs and stakeholders to the Values dimension questions on a scale of 1 to 5.**

Question	CSOs		Stakeholders	
	Mean	No.	Mean	No.
How important it is that...				
CSOs support mutual understanding between people with different political, cultural and religious views or ethnic background?	4.5	271	4.5	15
CSOs stand for human rights?	4.6	284	4.4	16
All groups in society have a possibility to express their interests and demands through CSOs?	4.7	285	4.8	16
CSOs observe gender equity within its own ranks?	3.9	277	3.6	15
CSOs support gender equity within society, economic life and public sphere?	4.1	292	4.6	16
Information about the activities of CSOs is publicly available?	4.7	292	4.6	16
The standpoints of all members are taken into account in planning of CSOs' activities?	4.4	291	3.9	16
CSOs come to common agreements with other organisations acting in the same field of activity?	4.5	289	3.8	16
The non-profit sector forms a united whole in society?	4.5	272	3.2	15
<b>The mean of the values dimension</b>	<b>4.5</b>		<b>4.1</b>	

Despite the fact that CSOs evaluate the importance of general values very highly, it can be said that many of them do not practice all of these values. Consider, for example, the availability of information on CSOs' activities – Many organisations show little concern for democratic formalities. Research results from 1998 (Lagerspetz, Ruutsoo & Rikmann 2000) show that a quarter of CSOs do not provide their members with any written information on their activities, and that some of them do not provide any information to public authorities either. In most CSOs the General Assembly as the highest governing body gathers only once a year.

The questions about supporting gender equity produce slightly less positive results. 63% of the CSOs considered it 'important' or 'very important' for CSOs to observe gender equity within their own ranks, and 69% found that CSOs should support gender equity within society, economic life and the public sphere. One participant of the workshop noted that the scores for the questions about gender equity do not coincide with the score given to the question about the importance of standing for human rights. This discrepancy might be because respondents did not consider the questions thoroughly, as gender equity should not be seen as an issue separate from human rights in general.

In the space for comments at the end of the questionnaire, commentators discussing the two gender equity questions insisted that gender equity is not a problematic issue in Estonia,

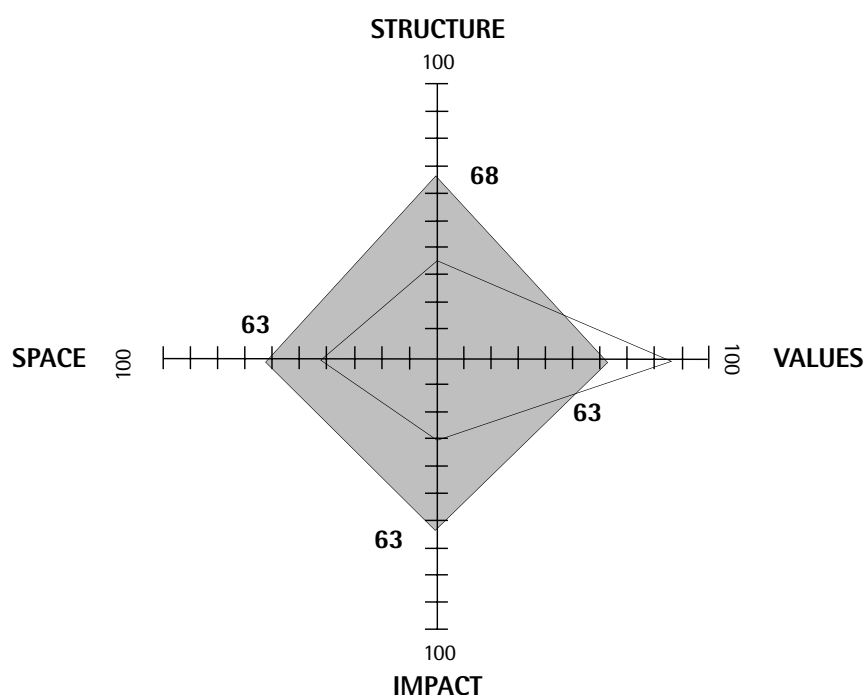
commenting that, “The problem has been exaggerated a bit”, and “Gender discrimination is not an important problem in Estonia.” At the same time, it is accepted that, for example, women’s salaries are on average 25% lower than the salary of men in Estonia (Lees 2000).

Some respondents interpreted the statement regarding gender equity within an organisation as having an equal share of male and female staff. Such an understanding of gender equity, along with a general lack of knowledge about the position of women in society can account for the slightly lower evaluations of gender equity as a value. A tendency to return to conservative gender roles has been observed in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At least in Estonia, this value change can be seen in two ways. First, as a reaction to the lip service that the previous regime paid to gender equality (by compulsive equalising of all citizens of the Soviet Union), and second, as a functional answer to the prevalingly neo-liberal policies of the state, which have emphasised the role of families and private citizens in taking care of tasks that previously belonged to the sphere of public social policy.

## Vision Diamond

The Vision Diamond was developed by the members of the Representative Board of the Estonian Non-profit Associations Roundtable in the workshop on 5th of July 2001, and is presented with the Revised Diamond also set by the workshop participants (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Civil Society Vision Diamond (large) with the Revised Diamond (small)



In developing a vision of how the non-profit sector should look in two years, workshop participants proceeded from the Revised Diamond. Accordingly, very positive developments are expected in the near future. The high expectations are obviously related to several important events that have recently taken place in the field of non-profit activities. One of them is the work done in preparing a draft for a document called the *Estonian Civil Society Development Concept* (EKAK), and its

<sup>6</sup>An English translation of the concept is available in the homepage of the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organisations: <http://ngo.ee/est/conceptenglish.html>

handing over to the Estonian Parliament on 23rd of April 2001.<sup>6</sup> EKAK is a statement of the mutual devotion of the public—and the non-profit sector in supporting and promoting the non-profit activities of inhabitants, increasing the social capital in Estonia and raising the efficiency and legitimacy of public policy (*Estonian Civil Society Development Concept 2000*).

Another important step was the organising of the first Estonian Non-Profit Associations Roundtable on 3rd of February 2001. The Estonian NPAs Roundtable is meant to be a regular forum open to all CSOs in Estonia. Its main aim is to formulate common standpoints of CSOs on questions concerning the whole non-profit sector. The work of the Roundtable is organised in the form of assemblies that gather at least once a year. Between assemblies, a Representative Board represents the Roundtable. Neither the Roundtable nor the Representative Board are formally registered legal entities; they are informal co-ordinating networks.

Members of the Representative Board, who formed the participants of our workshop, find that their main functions and aims today are connected with:

- Formulating common visions of the non-profit sector and its role in society;
- Developing co-operative relations with state structures;
- Creating a framework for a financing system of CSOs;
- Continuing the work with the EKAK;
- Publicising the activities, interests and aims of CSOs in wider society;
- Protecting the common interests of the whole third sector;
- Collecting, synthesising and spreading information among CSOs and outside the non-profit sector.

The members of the Representative Board participating in the workshop put high hopes on the EKAK, since it forces the public authorities to deal with the subject of the non-profit sector and to acknowledge the importance of the issue. Accordingly, the expected improvements in the space and impact dimension should result from the approval of the EKAK by Parliament and from carrying it out in practice. The workshop participants stated that some positive effects of the EKAK can already be seen: The work inside organisations has become more effective, information and ideas have started to spread among CSOs more efficiently, a common objective for different CSOs has been formulated.

The workshop participants mentioned some general activities that are needed in order to reach the present aims:

- When the EKAK is approved of by the Parliament, CSOs should formulate an implementation plan of the concept and begin carrying putting it into practice.
- CSOs should also strengthen their internal activities, strengthen their organisational structure, develop co-operation within the non-profit sector and make themselves ready to become respected partners of the public sector.
- The activity of smaller CSOs should be supported and the representation of CSOs at the county level organised better (now it is mostly concentrated in cities).
- The conscious entering to the non-profit sector should be supported, since today a career in the non-profit sector is mostly not purposefully chosen.

When CSOs begin putting more effort on strengthening the structure of their own organisations and on networking, the score of the structure dimension is expected to increase. Whereas the workshop participants found the CSO survey diamond too optimistic with regard to the real state of the non-profit sector's structure today, they considered an elevation of the structure dimension to

that level as a realistic future aim.

Discussion over the values dimension of the Vision Diamond yielded some unexpected results. According to the views of workshop participants, the score for the values dimension may rather decrease than stay the same or increase in the near future. They argued that the very high score for values in the Status Diamond is an expression not of the realities, but of the ambitions and dreams of the young non-profit sector in Estonia. If these high expectations fail to be fulfilled, the support for those values is bound to decrease. Both future disappointments and the realism fostered by practice would accordingly moderate the present ambitions that are reflected by answers to the values questions. Eventually, CSOs will come to look at their values more realistically and evaluate them from the point of view of practice. However, it must be mentioned that participants of the workshop were not completely unanimous in this prediction.

## Part III

### Conclusion

The reported findings of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Estonia are based on research made using two different methods. Most of the findings reported here are the results of the CSO survey, but these have been supplemented by assessments of other stakeholders and by observations made by the workshop participants. The Civil Society Diamonds, resulting from this research, offer a rich material for interpretation.

There is little doubt that the Estonian non-profit sector is presently facing many difficulties. Partnership relations with the state and local government have not been regulated yet; financing of activities is problematic for many CSOs; and the very idea of civil society is still largely unknown for the wider public. Nevertheless, the average scores of answers given by CSOs are relatively high for all the four dimensions of the Status Diamond. Considering the many challenges facing the sector today, such a positive evaluation does not seem an accurate reflection of reality and forces us to think critically about the methodology used. The workshop participants were of the opinion that the aggregate scores of the structure, space and impact dimensions should rather be below the middle point of the scale, if they are to describe the realities of the whole non-profit sector. However, in estimating the values dimension, the workshop participants were no less positive in their judgement of the sector than the survey respondents. That result demonstrates the ambitions of the non-profit activists and the expectations of the whole sector today. It is reasonable to think, that the answers of the survey respondents are not reflective of the 'objective' situation only, but also of the prevailing mood within the sector.

The latest developments, e.g. handing over EKAK to the Parliament, organising the first Estonian Non-profit Associations Roundtable and the optimistic disposition towards the near future are strongly reflected in the Vision Diamond. The most important subjects on the agenda of the further development of Estonian civil society are the expected approval of the EKAK by the Parliament and the drawing up of an implementation plan for carrying the concept out in practice.<sup>7</sup> The concept will open up new possibilities of active involvement in the shaping and implementation of public policies for individuals and their associations (*Estonian Civil Society Development Concept 2000*).

The highpoint of the research process was the workshop. The presently growing awareness, activity and positive excitement of the non-profit sector could clearly be seen during the workshop. The members of the Estonian NPAs' Roundtable's Representative Board had a generally positive attitude towards the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project. They stressed the need for this kind of extensive research, but made some constructive criticism on how to develop the research methodology further, bringing it more into accordance with the specifics of the Estonian non-profit sector.

In conclusion, from the project work, it can be said that the major contribution of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Estonia has been the creation of new ideas for further research on

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<sup>7</sup>The parliamentary discussion of the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept is scheduled for fall, 2001.

civil society. The present research findings offer one comprehensive picture of the present state of civil society in Estonia. Experiences from the workshop gave evidence that the picture generally corresponds to the participants' own perceptions, and that it may serve as a fruitful starting point for discussion. When developing the research methodology further, the relationship between objective circumstances and subjective evaluations by the respondents should, however, be given more consideration. Of course, civic initiative is a phenomenon that in the end depends on the motivation and enthusiasm of participants; inevitably, their subjective perceptions are also 'real' in their circumstances. However, a cross-national comparison might require a methodology that allows us to make an explicit division between the *perception* and the *prevalence* of a strong civil society.

# Appendix 1

## Mean Scores of the Dimensions

Means given by the CSOs to the questions that form the content of the four dimensions of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond* in Estonia.

### STRUCTURE

	Mean
There exists at least one umbrella organisation of the sub-sector	3.5
Umbrella organisations encourage membership and participation	3.3
Umbrella organisations are successful in representing the interests of their members	3.2
CSOs co-operate with other CSOs (besides umbrella organisations)	3.5
CSOs co-operate with the private sector	2.8
CSOs have an active membership base	4.0
CSOs are dependent on public funding only	4.7
CSOs are dependent on foreign funding only	4.8
<b>Mean of the STRUCTURE dimension</b>	<b>3.7</b>

### SPACE

	Mean
Difficulty of the registration of CSOs	3.2
Favourability of the tax exemptions	2.6
CSO's access to the documents of the state or local administration	2.8
Pressure on the leaders of CSOs to join political groupings	4.4
The comprehensibility and justness of project-tenders and allocation of financial support to CSOs	2.8
<b>Mean of the SPACE dimension</b>	<b>3.1</b>

**IMPACT**

	Mean
Success in communicating with public servants	3.1
Establishing contacts with political parties to represent CSOs' interests	2.0
CSO involvement in political discussions	2.3
Valuation of CSOs' activities compared with the public- and private sector	2.2
Portrayal of CSOs' work in the media	2.8
Representation of a broader interest group beyond the members of CSO	3.5
<b>Mean of the IMPACT dimension</b>	<b>2.7</b>

**VALUES**

	Mean
CSOs should support mutual understanding between people with different political, cultural and religious views or ethnic background	4.5
CSOs should stand for human rights	4.6
All groups in society should have an opportunity to express their interests through CSOs	4.7
CSOs should observe gender equity within their own ranks	3.9
CSOs should support gender equity within society, economic life and the public sphere	4.1
Information about the activities of CSOs should be publicly available	4.7
Standpoints of all members should be taken into account in planning of CSO activities	4.4
CSOs should come to common agreements with other organisations in the same field of activity	4.5
The third sector should form a united whole in society	4.5
<b>Mean of the VALUES dimension</b>	<b>4.5</b>

## Appendix 2

### Project Implementation

The research group of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Estonia consisted of three core members: Mikko Lagerspetz and Erle Rikmann from the Estonian Institute of Humanities, and Aire Trummal from the Open Estonia Foundation (project co-ordinator). Tarmo Tuisk from the Institute of International and Social Studies of the Pedagogical University of Tallinn gave statistical consultation. Several sociology students of the Estonian Institute of Humanities assisted in coding and inserting the survey questionnaires and transcribing the discussions of the workshop. The research group was also able to consult an Advisory Board consisting of Mikko Lagerspetz, Rein Ruutsoo from the University of Tartu, Mall Hellam and Katrin Enno from the Open Estonia Foundation, and the project co-ordinator. The practical work was done in the premises of the Open Estonia Foundation and financed partly by the CIVICUS and partly by the Open Estonia Foundation.

The work on the project was started at the end of October 2000 by compiling together the existing material – statistics, research findings, publications – on civil society in Estonia. Information was structured along the four dimensions of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond* (structure, space, values and impact), giving a general overview of the present state of the Estonian civil society. The overview report was first presented to CIVICUS in November, and was finalised along with the country report.

The next part of the project work included preparations of the survey questionnaire. Communication with leading organisations in other countries demonstrated that not all practical problems could be solved from a distance, as the state of civil society is very different in participating countries. Therefore, the Estonian Advisory Board of the project suggested that a regional workshop be organised in Tallinn between the research groups of the participating European countries in order to find a common approach. The global co-ordination office in Germany approved that suggestion and expanded it. As a result, a global workshop was organised in mid- February 2001 in Mainz Germany for all NGOs participating in *The Index Project's* pilot phase. During the workshop, several changes were made to the original draft of the survey. The most important change for the Estonian research group was the decision that as it is a pilot phase of the project, we would try to develop our methodological approach independently. Whereas the original project design suggested a survey of stakeholders expected to be able to evaluate the whole non-profit sector, we decided not to ask for external evaluations of CSOs, but to survey the CSOs themselves about their own activities. Due to that difference in approach, our questionnaire became formulated somewhat differently from the original model.

After the global workshop in February we continued with preparations for the survey: we worked out the questionnaire and started to put the sample together. In order to get a sample which would include representatives of all regions and all civil society sub-sectors, we used the help of nine Non-profit Organisations' Support Centres, which are spread all over Estonia. They distributed the questionnaires in their respective regions, starting in the end of March. The survey of the capital Tallinn and its surrounding Harju County was carried out by Open Estonia Foundation. Beside the CSOs, we also sent a number of questionnaires to other stakeholders, in order to get comparative material for an assessment of the impact of our methodological approach. The survey was finished by the beginning of May.

A total of 495 questionnaires were sent out and 296 received back from CSOs, which gives a response rate of 60%. The responding CSOs represent 15 different sub-sectors.

Sub-sector	No	%
1. Faith-based organisations	8	2.7
2. Trade unions	13	4.4
3. Grant-making foundations	7	2.4
4. Real estate associations	14	4.7
5. CSOs active in education, research & training	20	6.8
6. Environmental CSOs	17	5.8
7. Advocacy CSOs	11	3.7
8. Women's associations	15	5.1
9. Students and youth associations	9	3.1
10. Social service and health associations	44	14.9
11. Ethnic organisations	15	5.1
12. Cultural and art associations	39	13.2
13. Recreational organisations and sports clubs	27	9.2
14. Professional associations	22	7.5
15. Community-based and informal associations	11	3.7
16. Others	24	8.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>100</b>

It should be stressed, that the distribution of the respondents between civil society sub-sectors is not in correspondence to the relative weight of those sub-sectors in the total population of CSOs. For example, the real estate associations form by far the largest sub-sector of Estonian non-governmental organisations registered. Our sample was targeted in order to include all regions and even the numerically weak sub-sectors.

For the other stakeholders, 44 questionnaires were mailed and 16 received back, which gives the response rate of 36%. The lower response rate suggests that there probably are not many stakeholders who would feel confident in commenting the state of the whole non-profit sector. Such an approach might give better results in countries where the CSOs have been visible and worked in a stable environment for a longer period, but is problematic in Estonian context. The stakeholders questioned represent:

	No
Academic circle	6
Government agencies	4
Media	3
Non-profit sector	2
Business sector	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>

The survey was mostly administered by mail, some questionnaires were also sent by fax or filled on the spot, in the case of stakeholders many questionnaires were also sent by E-mail.

After conducting the survey, coding and inserting of the questionnaires was started by students of sociology at the Estonian Institute of Humanities. For the statistical analyses we received assistance from an expert of the Institute of International and Social Studies of the Pedagogical University of Tallinn. In addition to the distributions, average scores and dimension indexes, we cross-tabulated the answers by civil society sub-sectors, examined the correlations between different items of the dimension indexes, and tested the differences between the CSO and other stakeholder surveys.

The next stage of the project work was to organise a workshop to discuss the research results and to develop a Vision Diamond. The original project design suggested having a large national workshop, which could also have functioned as a major meeting ground for civil society stakeholders and relevant partners from other sectors. As several large-scale events promoting the activities and the development of the non-profit sector already have taken place in Estonia (the most recent of them in April 2001 – The VI Open Society Forum), we decided to choose a different approach. The workshop was carried out with members of the Representative Board of the Estonian Non-profit Associations Roundtable, defined as the main representative structure of the non-profit sector in EKAK.

The workshop took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July and consisted of two parts. In the first part the 13 participants were divided into two groups. The discussion focussed on actual issues in Estonian non-profit sector's development: The role and aims of the Representative Board of the Non-profit Associations Roundtable and the expected impact of the EKAK on the further development of civil society. The second part of the workshop concentrated on the Estonian *CIVICUS Civil Society* Diamond. The participants convened together and were asked to evaluate the scores calculated on the basis of the answers given by CSOs. After this the participants developed a Vision Diamond of how the state of Estonian non-profit sector should look in two years. The total duration of the workshop was about three hours.

This version of the Estonian research report was written during the two first weeks of July, 2001.

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