

BORDERS TO CROSS

Title:	
Name workshop:	Activism
Projects presented:	1. Goteo 2. Coalition of three organizations: Clubture Network, Operation City Network and Right to the City Zagreb
Workshop director(s):	Duncan Tree
Name rapporteur(s):	Brita Trapman
Date and time of workshop:	30 Oct, 2013 11:30

One of the challenges that was discussed during this workshop was how civil society organisations could create a positive narrative and how to give people agency in difficult times.

An interesting dilemma arose that civil society faces nowadays: in many European countries the state is retreating as a consequence of austerity policies. They leave gaps in service provision and in the financing of civil society. Civil society fills the service gaps and finds alternative sources for money. States consequently conclude that their retreatment was right. Is it justified that civil society is performing these state functions? How can they challenge the conclusion of the state? It gives rise to the question where civil society should collaborate with the state and where they should confront the state.

During this discussion civil society representatives shared dilemmas and possible solutions to these dilemmas with each other. One question that was raised was how movements could obtain the necessary tools to be a political actor. Activists dedicate their lives to some public cause but thereby often exploit themselves, at the end of the day they also just need an income. It was raised that civil society needs to negotiate with power about this economic point. Financing should for example become more flexible and faster. The Spanish NGO Goteo aims at meeting the difficulties that NGOs are confronted with as a consequence of the crisis. NGOs, according to the Goteo-representative should first of all provide their own data, in order to challenge dominant state-narratives about the economy. Secondly, NGOs should make greater use of crowd funding. In order to be successful in this however, they should increase their transparency and become more self-critical so that the public regains their trust in these organizations.

In answer to leading question two, this discussion shows how indeed NGOs can provide an alternative way of regulating society by filling the gap that the state leaves behind. However, this is not necessarily desirable for NGOs as their representatives struggle to make a living in difficult economic times. This discussion also illustrated how NGOs have difficulty to meet an important democratic value: transparency. Certain incentives drive NGOs to concealing failures and lack of impact, they need after all to convince donors to finance them again.

