

Third sector involvement in public education: The Israeli case

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Abstract

Purpose: This article addresses the involvement of third sector organizations in state public education in Israel, with emphasis on the decision-making processes affecting the geographic distribution of service provision.

Method: A collective case study approach was used to investigate non-governmental organization (NGO) procedures for the deployment of the educational services they provide. The study was based on semi-structured interviews with key personnel and on documents from four NGOs operating in the Israeli public education system.

Findings: The article illustrates the extent of third sector involvement in the Israeli public educational system, in most cases operated with significant governmental funding. The findings reveal two main factors in the NGOs' decision-making process that affect their operational deployment: the type of financing model they adopted and the nature of their relationship with the Ministry of Education.

Theoretical and practical implications: The study examines the increasing involvement of NGOs in state public education. As trends of privatization and democratization continue, the number of the NGOs operating in the public education system continues to rise, and their importance continues to increase. Our findings have led to several policy recommendations. We recommend that NGOs be more aware of their financing model and more critical in its appraisal. We also recommend that the state take into account the vision and financing model of NGOs and its own strategic responsibility for reaching nationwide social goals when selecting partners.

Keywords: Third Sector; Equity; Public Education; Partnership; Privatization; Funding

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1. Introduction

Third sector organizations operate in the social space outside the market and the state (Salamon and Anheier, 1992). In the last decades, with growing privatization and democratization trends, third sector organizations have become a central social power in western countries (Gidron, *et al.*, 2004). These organizations, known also as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are distinct from other public and private sector organizations (Salamon *et al.*, 1999). On one hand, they are not for profit and base their operation on public mobilization and resources, such as volunteering and donations; on the other hand, they are private and self-governed. Many NGOs target their operation to the education field (Salamon *et al.*, 1999).

In recent years, state and state schools have sought to improve their educational services by engaging various organizations outside the public sector (DeHavilland Associates, 2007; Shiffer *et al.*, 2010; Zimmer *et al.*, 2001). NGOs are a major player in these alliances. Many NGOs claim moral legitimacy based on their promotion of social justice and equity (Taylor and Warburton, 2003). In the educational system, the issue of equity is an important aspect of policy changes, such as redivision of functions and organizational restructuring (Nir and Miran, 2006). Because of their inherently social nature, schools are considered arenas of justice distribution, responsible for the advancement of the status, well-being, and life chances of disadvantaged pupils (Dar and Resh, 2003).

It is commonly argued that as social actors NGOs must reflect their core values in their organizational structure (Hudson, 2000), and to incorporate their values in their decision-making processes. Only in this manner can they meet their commitment to reach the marginalized populations in society (Taylor and Warburton, 2003). The aim of this study is to explore the decision-making processes affecting the service deployment of educational NGOs in the Israeli public education system.

2. Factors Influencing Third Sector Deployment

The term equity or equality refers to the "spatial distribution of income and resources" that affects "people's opportunities and quality of life" (Leck *et al.*, 2008, p. 154). The term is linked to the notion of social justice. Deployment may be associated not only with income but also with service provision (Portnov, 2002). The equal distribution of services in geographic space ensures equal access to quality services; it is known as spatial equity. The spatial distribution of population groups by socio-economic status

is often uneven because similar income groups cluster together (Portnov, 2002), creating patterns of geographic inequity.

When examining the services of the third sector, it is important to take into account the geographic aspects of these activities. In particular, special consideration should be given to the relationship of NGO decision-making and operating procedures with the activity patterns they form in the geographic space. Although no studies have been conducted on the deployment of NGOs in the educational domain, several studies have investigated the geographic aspects of NGOs and of voluntary programs aimed at the general welfare. For example, several studies on voluntary and NGO programs indicated that there is an unequal distribution of services, and that their deployment creates differential access to relevant services (Bielefeld and Murdoch, 2004; Joassart-Marcelli and Wolch, 2003; Milligan, 1998; Wolch and Geiger, 1986).

Some findings indicate that third sector organizations may choose to position their activities in the periphery because of pragmatic considerations (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003a), but these considerations are often secondary to the economic considerations that dictate the priorities of NGOs (Bryson *et al.*, 2002). For example, organizations that raise funds from the public can operate more easily in middle-class areas than in poor areas, and therefore they tend to establish their base of operation in more affluent areas (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b). At times, the locations selected by the NGO for its activity are influenced by donor preferences, following the motto "he who has the money has the say" (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b). When funding and operation are determined primarily by considerations other than need, patterns of inclusion and exclusion emerge (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b). These findings reveal that, contrary to public perception, third sector activities may be ineffective in eliminating social gaps on a local or a national scale if these activities are not closely linked to need.

3. Organizational Decision Making and Third Sector Deployment

The above review explains why many of the stated aims of NGOs to minimize social gaps fail, at least partially, to be translated into reality. Insofar as NGO decisions are not consistent with their goals, these decisions cannot be considered rational. In a rational and deliberate decision-making process, objectives are translated into a decision-making strategy that enables the realization of the goals as part of the organization's activities (Tarter and Hoy, 1998).

NGO decision-making processes may therefore reflect intervening factors in decision making. First, findings suggest that because of cognitive limitations in addressing complex decisions (Jones, 1999), "bounded rationality" can sometimes explain the spatial deployment of NGOs. Educational debate is currently focused primarily on efficiency and effectiveness, creating difficulties for leaders who wish to focus on social justice issues (Zembylas, 2010). It is common knowledge that the leading criterion for selecting the best alternative is highly significant in decision making (Schwenk, 1990). Therefore, economic-organizational considerations can create a "focalism" bias. Focalism occurs when a player relies excessively on specific information or elements of the circumstance, which then prejudices the judgment of the decision maker (Kruger and Burrus, 2004). Such cognitive bias in decision making is associated with insensitivity to outcome probabilities (Das and Teng, 1999). Often after a decision has been made, commitment to that decision escalates (Staw, 1996) despite the fact that outcomes indicate a deflection of the goal. Thus, in some cases NGOs adopt "bounded rationality" that fails to take into account the NGO's agenda of social equity.

Second, donor preferences can also affect deployment (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b). This finding can be linked to claims that power is a central element in explaining decision-making processes (Salancik and Brindle, 1996). The political model describes organizational decisions as resulting from a desire to accumulate influence and resources (Tarter and Hoy, 1998). Outcomes are determined by the players' interests and by the limits on their power (Das and Teng, 1999). This theory views reality as being subjectively constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Because issues are framed and attended by players' interests (Das and Teng, 1999), pressures caused by the power of others can affect decision making (Lyles and Thomas, 1988). For instance, NGOs may compromise on their goals and bargain about them in order to create coalitions and obtain resources. Therefore, the donors' agenda can influence the NGOs' decision making and operation.

The problem with cognitive biases in NGO decision making is that they can distort beneficent intentions and even damage the needy party (Starbuck and Pant, 1996). Biases may divert the NGOs' commitment to equity, manifested in the spatial deployment of their operation. These issues regarding third sector educational programs are reviewed in the Israeli context.

4. Third Sector and Public Education in Israel

The State of Israel was founded on a welfare model that combined economic principles and a social justice agenda, so that the state was committed to providing social services to its citizens (Yonah *et al.*, 2008). In the mid-1970s, shortly after the neo-liberal state model emerged as an alternative to welfare state model, it was embraced by Israel. The Israeli transformation from the welfare model to the neo-liberal one has been gradual, and it includes the adoption of a "minimal state" and "free market" in state affairs (Yonah *et al.*, 2008). The neo-liberal policy has become especially dominant in the Israeli agenda since the 1990s, and it is manifested among others in an expanding process of privatization (Katan and Lowenstein, 2009). Currently, the relative size of the Israeli third sector is forth in the world (Gidron *et al.*, 2004).

The growing involvement of third sector organizations in service delivery (Katan and Lowenstein, 2009) is one of the consequences of the state's withdrawal from operating or funding social services. Many of the NGOs in the third sector engage in the provision of social services in the education field (Gidron *et al.*, 2004), with a primary focus on public schools managed and operated by the state. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that Israel was and remains to a great extent a social-democratic state (Ram, 2004), and equal opportunities and services are central issues in every public educational debate (see examples in Yonah, 2000; Eilam and Ben-Peretz, 2006). The Israeli educational programs for students, focusing largely on student achievement, curriculum enrichment, development of life skills, and values education (Weinheber *et al.*, 2008). One of the stated goals of 16% of the associations and of 25% of foundations is the reduction of social gaps (Weinheber *et al.*, 2008).

The Israeli education system is considered to be a highly centralized one (Nir and Inbar, 2003). The Israeli Ministry of Education determines the objectives of educational policy, determines the curriculum, trains personnel, and is in charge of operating and supervising the schools (Nir and Inbar, 2003). In recent years, however, third sector involvement in public education has become increasingly significant in the operation of educational projects, many of them in public schools. In 2008, approximately 75% of the national expenditure in education was from the government budget (CBS, 2009). Two thirds of total government expenditure on education consisted of budgetary transfers to other sectors (CBS, 2009). It is not surprising; therefore, that in 2008 the third sector was responsible for the

implementation of educational projects and programs totaling 41% of the national expenditure on education (CBS, 2009). Given the widespread partnerships between government and the third sector, it is in order to examine whether access to NGO-managed educational services is uniform across geographic areas and social groups.

5. Methodology

The present study aims to explore how decision-making processes of educational NGOs affect their operational deployment. A case study approach was selected because of the exploratory nature of the research, and because case studies are suitable for investigating unfamiliar or newly emerging phenomena, and ideal for "process tracing" (Blatter, 2008).

5.1 Study Site

This study analyzes a collection of representative cases of various types and compares their characteristics (Stake, 1995). The research aims to uncover the relationship between the particular cases selected and general trends, therefore selection criteria are important (Blatter, 2008). The first criterion for inclusion was that NGOs had operated programs in the Israeli educational system for at least 3 years. Additional criteria aimed to achieve a diversity of sampled NGOs in the areas of size (large, small), target population (students, teachers), and operational focus (curriculum enrichment, values education, teachers training, staff capacity building). Based on these criteria, five NGOs were asked to participate in the study. Four NGOs agreed to participate in the study (Table 1); the fifth asked to be omitted.

Table 1. Background information on participating NGOs

NGO	Target population	Operational focus	Number of participants	Education level	Equity as a goal [1]	Spatial deployment
"Albatross" foundation	Students	Curriculum enrichment	270,000 students	Primary	+++	National - periphery oriented
"Swan" association	Students	Values education	30,000 students	Secondary	+	National - core oriented
"Pelican" foundation - "Hummingbird" program	Students and teachers	Extra school support and staff capacity building	13 schools	Primary and secondary	+++	Regional - periphery oriented
"Sparrow" association - teachers' aid training program	Teacher's aids	Teachers' aid training	700 trainees	Primary and secondary	++	National - periphery oriented

Note: [1] Equity as a goal scale: + (to a small extent); ++ (to some extent); +++ (to a considerable extent)

The stated aim of the "Albatross" foundation is to reduce social gaps and to provide equal opportunities through the exposure of children to sources of enrichment not offered as part of their regular school program. The main program of the foundation reaches approximately 270,000 elementary public schools students nationwide (more than 40% of all elementary students in public schools) and operates in 750 elementary schools and 2,000 preschools. Every child in the program participates in three weekly hours of enrichment courses. The foundation's annual budget is reported to be about NIS 200 million (approximately \$50 million). The "Albatross" foundation has wide national deployment, especially in the periphery, operating in 38% of the schools in

the north and 23% of the schools in the south, as opposed to 25% in the geographical core of the country and 13% in Jerusalem.

The "Swan" organization was established to promote dialogue between the religious and non-religious Jewish sectors of the population. In recent years, the vision of the NGO has changed and it is now focused on strengthening Jewish cultural identity, emphasizing the meaning and relevance of these values for the individual's life and for strengthening family and community circles. The activities of the "Swan" are typically one-day workshops and weekend seminars. The one-day workshop programs are delivered in the schools by "Swan" instructors, using instructional materials developed specifically for that purpose. Weekend seminars take place outside of school premises and hours, often at youth community centers, and bring together students from two schools, one secular and one religious. Activities reach 30,000 participants a year, two-thirds of whom are high-school students in grades 9-12. The "Swan" also operates in the northern and southern peripheral regions, but most of its activity is focused in the three major metropolitan areas of Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa.

The "Pelican" is a philanthropic foundation that operates an educational program called "Hummingbird", which operates as an independent organization. Funds are raised specifically for "Hummingbird" and transferred into the program budget, and the management of the program is separated from the rest of the foundation. In the present study, we refer only to the "Hummingbird" program of the "Pelican" foundation. The mission of the program is to improve achievement and self-image of students in neighborhoods with low socio-economic ranking who performed poorly on the national assessment test. The program operates in 13 schools in the center of the country (Pardes Katz, Holon, and Bat Yam): five primary schools and eight secondary schools, affecting indirectly about 8,000 students. The program operates at two levels: (1) school principals and staff receive personal training by organizational consultants; and (2) struggling students are granted additional teaching assistance, up to 8 hours a week per student. In each city in which it operates, the program has a local liaison officer who coordinates activities with the schools and the municipality.

The "Sparrow" aims to increase the students' social involvement and strengthen their Jewish identity. In recent years, it has been active in preparing youths for mandatory (military or community) national service. The NGO serves both poorer

and more affluent population groups. "Sparrow" operates several projects simultaneously, preparing and motivating 3,000 youths for the service. In the present study, we focused on the teachers' aid program, which trains youths, as part of their mandatory national service, to become teachers' aids in public schools. After winning the government's tender, the NGO became responsible for selecting and training 700 student teachers per year. The NGO receives specific priorities for the placement of teachers' aids from the Ministry of Education. Teachers' aids are assigned after the end of the training course, and the NGO supports its trainees nationwide by means of mentors.

5.2 Procedure

Between July and October 2008, interviews were conducted with key members (CEOs and operation managers) of five third sector organizations operating in the Israeli education system. Ten people were interviewed. As noted above, the fifth NGO was not included in the study at the request of its managers. The average age of the remaining eight interviewees (5 women and 3 men) was 42.5 ($SD = 12.75$). The interviews were semi-structured, which enabled detailed exploration of the experiences of key NGO personnel, and encouraged them to articulate their tacit knowledge of policy formulation that otherwise might have escaped notice.

The purpose of the interviews was to examine how the NGOs' decision-making and operating procedures affected the spatial patterns of their activities in the educational arena. Interviewees were asked to review the goals and the vision of their organizations, to share information about the deployment of their activities and their organizational structure, and to expose the logic behind their local partnership selection process. Specifically, they were asked to explain how decisions are reached about the initiation of new projects in a specific location, and to share information about the influence of funding availability on partner selection (the interview protocol is available upon request from the authors). Responses were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Official NGO publications and website data were collected and used as complementary data sources. In addition, the study utilized internal documents and reports obtained from interviewees to further understand each NGO's spatial deployment and the main factors affecting deployment. Data analysis was based on the interview transcripts and the additional documents.

Following Patton's (1990) guidelines, inductive analysis was used to extract themes emerging from the data. In each case, the analysis was conducted to achieve familiarity with the circumstances with a view toward uncovering trends that appear across the cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). Similarities and contrasts between the cases provided insight into the phenomena.

6. Findings

Analysis of the data suggested two central themes, described in detail in the following section, relating to the equality and geographic aspects of the NGOs' operation. Data were classified into two main categories: financing elements and partnership elements affecting the deployment of the NGOs. Each category was considered separately for each participating NGO.

Funding for the "Albatross" foundation is primarily public and combines budgets from the Ministry of Education, municipal authorities, and parental contributions. The "Albatross" foundation has an annual budget of approximately NIS 200 million (\$50 million), of which 80% is from the Ministry of Education, municipal authorities and parents' fees, and 20% from private contributions. The foundation's enrichment program depends largely on the willingness of municipal authorities to match funds with the foundation.

The foundation promotes partnership in financing. Its budgetary model employs a sliding scale on which the municipality's share is determined by its socio-economic status. In a city considered to be of a low socio-economic status, the foundation increases its share of funding to a maximum of 60%, with the remainder of program costs being borne by the municipality and by the parents' participation fees. In wealthier cities, such as Kfar Shmaryahu and Rehovot, the municipalities finance the full cost of the program as well as the foundation's management fees, amounting to approximately 110% of program costs. If the municipality and the parents' participation fees together cover at least 40% of the cost of program, the foundation does not offer a program in that location. Parents' participation fees also vary according to their individual socio-economical status and range from NIS 100 (\$25) to NIS 380 (\$95) per year.

The foundation regards the Ministry of Education as a partner and policy leader. Because of the significant financial support it receives from the state

government, and the fact that the program is operated within the formal education system and during school hours, the foundation cultivates highly cooperative relationships with the Ministry of Education. In addition, the foundation has established local committees tasked with adjusting the program to the needs of each municipality.

The "Swan" foundation employs a different financing model and funds its one-day workshops and weekend seminars according to a semi-commercial model. Each school pays for the NGO's activities from its self-managed cultural budget. Schools book the activity from the Ministry's preapproved activity list. The school chooses the topic of the workshop from among the options that appear in marketing brochures of the NGO. The cost of the programs for the schools is subsidized through private contributions raised by the NGO. Although the actual cost of activities in the peripheral regions is higher than in central Israel, it was decided that: "The cost will be fixed, meaning a school in the periphery will pay the same price as a school located in the center."

The "Hummingbird" program does not operate under any formal contract with the Ministry of Education and does not receive financial support from the state. Nevertheless, it coordinates its activities with state government. Although the program is unregulated, it chooses to submit its budgetary reports to the municipalities with which it works as well as to the Ministry of Education. School principals must persuade the program management to work with them. The program prefers long-term working relationships with schools, but it also has fixed exit points.

The teachers' aid project of the "Sparrow" NGO operates under a contract with the Ministry of Education, which pays the full operating costs of the project. The Ministry also exercises budgetary monitoring and content supervision over the project. The NGO reports having cooperative relations with the Ministry of Education, which gives it a "free hand" in "all matters related to selecting teachers... but if there are any unplanned expenses, we need to report them and have them approved." Weekly meetings are held with Ministry of Education officials. The assignment of teachers' aid to specific schools is determined by the Ministry, which

directs support to needy areas. This implicitly determines the NGO's effective spatial deployment.

7. Discussion

The findings raise several points for discussion. First, participating NGOs formed with the explicit purpose of promoting equality and reducing socio-economic gaps show comparatively greater deployment in needy regions. Second, some aspects of financing models adopted by participating NGOs lead in practice to the exclusion of certain population groups and lower-income municipalities. Third, partnerships between NGOs and the Ministry of Education, especially when transfers of public funds and government regulation are involved, appear to make service deployment more uniform across disparate geographic regions.

It appears that the centrality of social-economic goals in the NGO's vision is related to its deployment. All participating NGOs declared that reducing social gaps is one of their objectives. Declarations notwithstanding, NGOs can be divided into two categories based on the centrality of this goal to their vision.

The first category includes NGOs for which the reduction of social gaps is a main component of their vision. These organizations endeavor to operate in needy areas. For example, data about the "Albatross" foundation indicates the organization operates more in the periphery than in the geographic core of the country. The same is true about the "Hummingbird" program, which directs its activities exclusively to poorer neighborhoods in cities in central Israel in order to support and empower groups of lower socio-economic status.

The second category includes NGOs for which reducing social gaps is not central to their agenda. For instance, the "Swan" NGO does not consider reducing gaps as one of its main goals because it regards itself primarily as an educational organization. "Swan" reported that its primary aim is to strengthen Jewish identity, and that it chooses to work specifically with secular population groups. These groups are concentrated mainly in urban population centers, and for the most part belong to the middle class living in the geographic center of Israel. These findings support previous ones indicating that at times the choice of location is affected by the spatial agenda of the NGO (Fyre and Milligan, 2003a), and show that organizational vision has a significant effect on focusing organizational activity (Yoeli and Berkovich, 2010).

Note that these differences in deployment are not only the result of different goals, but can also be affected by the type of financing model used by the NGOs. In-depth examination reveals that some population groups do not enjoy the benefits of the NGOs' activities despite their eligibility by geographic location and social needs because occasionally the economic priorities of the NGOs take precedence over the needs on the ground (Milligan and Fyfe, 2004). At times, these considerations lead to the exclusion of certain groups, which are denied the benefits of the programs. Independently of amounts that they raise from contributors, many NGOs employ a funding model based on joint financing by matching school or public funds. That is why municipal authorities usually participate in funding the programs together with the parents. Some municipal authorities do not participate in the funding of programs because of budgetary deficit or internal policy considerations. The NGOs usually do not operate in these municipalities.

A different financing model is employed by "Swan". "Swan" markets its activities directly to schools, using a somewhat commercial model and relying on the schools' self-managed cultural budgets. Its working relationships are not influenced by national or systematic considerations, and therefore its deployment tends to be more uneven. For instance, "Swan" markets relatively high-cost activities such as weekend seminars, which are generally purchased by schools serving a wealthier population.

A third financing model guides the "Hummingbird", which finances its activities entirely through private contributions. This financing model grants "Hummingbird" a great degree of freedom in pursuing its own goals and working only in areas it considers to be needy. Financing models, based on matching funds or commercial acquisition, make it difficult for poor municipal governments and schools to enjoy the NGOs' activities. These models contribute to the uneven deployment of the NGOs' educational services in the intra-urban and inter-urban space, similarly to that of third sector organizations operating in the welfare area (Bielefeld and Murdoch, 2004; Joassart-Marcelli and Wolch, 2003; Milligan, 1998; Wolch and Geiger, 1986).

Ministry of Education funding is essential and central to the decision-making process for three of the four NGOs participating in the study. These findings support other evidence pointing to the fact that the Israeli government has integrated NGOs into the provision of public education (CBS, 2009). According to our findings, a large

part of the interface between the government and the NGOs is structured according to a formal contract that follows a bidding procedure or a partnership agreement. It has been argued that these contractual relationships enable the government to increase the effectiveness of public services and offer a new service that the public sector cannot provide itself (Austin, 2003). Formal arrangements are in effect when public funds are used to finance NGO activities and the NGO serves as a sub-contractor to the Ministry of Education. For example, the "Albatross" foundation raises 80% of its budget from the Ministry of Education, municipal authorities, and parents' fees. The relationship, between the Ministry of Education and the foundation, is considered to be a partnership. Thus, one of the largest private foundations operating in the field of education in Israel finances its educational activities primarily through public funding. To a great extent this foundation can be seen as hybrid governmental foundation (Anheier, 2001) and as another branch employed to carry out the government's educational policy. The study supports claims about the growing importance of cross-sectorial partnerships in public services provision (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2004).

Alliances of this type represent contractual or partnership interactions (Savas, 2000). Whereas a contractual agreement is based on exchange, partnership is based on trust and goal congruence (Jap, 2000). Developing partnerships enables the education system and NGOs to benefit from the unique advantages of each sector, and enables them to gain access to assets that were inaccessible to the individual organization, such as economic resources, new knowledge, flexibility in service provision, and increased legitimacy (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2004). But government-NGO interactions are also known to affect the NGOs' goals and procedures (Ramanath, 2009).

Some of the contractual relationships between the government and the NGOs are subjected to government monitoring. This regulation is required because the state must ensure the proper use of its funds. In light of the significant public funds, the Ministry of Education and municipal authorities bestow on educational NGOs, the Ministry seeks to monitor the activities they budget. For example, this type of Ministry regulation oversees the "Albatross" foundation and the "Sparrow" NGO. We conclude that contract terms reflecting a general and systematic policy that prioritizes the educational requirements of needy populations result in a more even deployment.

Most of the participating NGOs indicated the existence of a partnership with the Ministry of Education, even when they were bound by formal contract rather than

informal relations. Partnerships between government and NGOs are based on agreed goals and a division of labor between the partners (Brinkernoft, 2002). When the relationship is reciprocal, it balances autonomy and synergy between the partners and promotes shared decision-making (Brinkernoft, 2002). Interviewees from the "Albatross" foundation and the "Sparrow" NGO noted that although operating under contractual terms, the relationship between their organizations and the Ministry includes joint planning and shared decision making.

NGOs that had no formal contract with the Ministry of Education stated that they aim to maintain a dialogue and partnership with it. The desire on the part of NGOs to partner with the Ministry seems to indicate the centrality of the Ministry in the provision of educational services in Israel, and a need on the part of NGOs to muster legitimacy (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2004) and funding through partnership (Luksetich, 2008).

8. Conclusions and Limitations

To date, research has neglected the involvement of NGOs in state public education. The present study innovates by shedding light on this phenomenon and on the decision-making and operational processes affecting the NGOs' geographic distribution of service provision. The findings are highly relevant for improving the NGOs' operation in the educational field and maintaining their moral legitimacy as social actors.

The study revealed several main factors in the NGOs' operational and decision-making procedures that affect their operational deployment, including their organizational vision, financing model, and the nature of their relationship with the Ministry of Education. Naturally, these factors are linked to some extent, as the goals of the NGO often dictate procedures such as the financing model, operational deployment, and interaction with the state. In other cases, operational procedures may unintentionally cause an NGO to stray from its officially formulated social goals. Organizational "bounded rationality", as indicated in these findings, prevents NGOs from fulfilling their stated goals of promoting equity. This is not to say that the sole legitimate goal of NGOs is the promotion of social equity or that they should deploy only in needy areas or evenly across the national map. NGOs should, however, carefully examine their operational procedures, especially their financial model, and try to fully understand its implications. Our interpretation of the findings is that NGOs

should be aware of the way in which their decision-making and operational procedures affect their deployment. Similar recommendations were made by Simon (1982) when addressing the problem of "bounded rationality". Simon suggested creating a mechanism for generating alternatives and acquiring facts about the environment in order to draw relevant inferences from the data.

Perhaps even more important is that the state assumes responsibility for weighing competing needs and integrating all players. In recent decades, many countries have moved from government system to a governance-based system (Bode, 2006). In this new constellation, the government and the third sector create a mixture that tends to be disorganized and unstable, requiring coordination in order to deal with its sporadic and fluid nature (Bode, 2006). To cope with a new reality in which NGO involvement is increasing, it is necessary that the state form a clear educational vision and engage in a continuing dialogue with NGOs, to maintain a systematic policy (Peters, 1998). Such government-NGO interaction has the power to influence the NGOs' processes and operations (Ramanath, 2009). Although the state transfers some of the functional accountability for particular services to NGOs, it is imperative that it continue in all cases to bear sole accountability for the long-term strategic effect of all educational programs in the public system (Ebrahim, 2003), in order to shape a more socially just society and achieve other collective goals.

The research methodology employed in the present study has several weaknesses. First, the ability to generalize the findings from the four participating NGOs and reach conclusions regarding all NGOs operating in the educational arena is limited. Second, some of the interviewees, representing their organization, might not always have felt at liberty to disclose all the data about their activities, deployment, and decision-making criteria.

Despite these weaknesses, the study has several methodological strengths. First, the research method enabled a better understanding of the criteria guiding the decision-making processes of the NGOs' key personnel with regard to deployment. Second, in order to represent the wide variety of NGOs operating in the field of education, the cases selected included both large foundations operating nationwide programs and small NGOs operating programs in only a few localities. This enabled us to examine the similarities and differences between the various programs and the NGOs operating them. For a better understanding of the NGOs' growing involvement in state public education and its implications further research is necessary.

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