

The accountability of citizen associations

A contribution to the international debate on civil society responsibilities

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This publication is the fruit of a long journey that has been punctuated with milestones such as the Lille Charter on Human Responsibilities (2001) and the International NGO Accountability Charter of London (2006).

It is the result of workshops and interviews carried out all over Europe with representatives of associations between 2003 and 2007 by the Foundation for Future Generations (Belgium), in partnership with the Bernheim Foundation (Belgium), the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation (France/Switzerland) and CEDAC (Belgium).

The main lessons from this work have been drawn by Erik Rydberg, journalist and director of GRESEA (Belgium).

This publication should be considered as a contribution to the current international debate on the ethics and responsibilities of associations.

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0. Introduction

London, 6th June 2006. Eleven of the best-known and most influential international associations and non-governmental organisations – including Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Oxfam – sign and publish an “International NGO Accountability Charter”.

The central notion of this International NGO Accountability Charter is accountability, which is not exactly the same as responsibility.

It refers, in fact, to a collective commitment, which, without changing the face of the world, will have important consequences for all those who work to change it, deliberately or not. That is what we will try to explain in this brochure.

New York, 19th January 2007. The NGO liaison service of the United Nations organises a forum, once again on «NGO accountability». For the sake of clarity, one could also talk about the social responsibility of NGOs.

But does this actually make things clearer? What do we understand by responsibility, when talking about organisations? The ambassador of Indonesia, Rezland I. Jenie, opened the meeting, declaring that «due to the absence of international standards, NGOs with very poor legitimacy have been able to undermine the efficiency of credible NGOs.» This already limits the field to a certain extent. Being responsible obviously means moving in spheres where there are standards that decide whether one is legitimate and credible or not. In other words, standards that allow the wheat to be separated from the chaff.

There is a thread running from London to New York. It all remains very vague. That is the nature of this brochure. It hopes to clarify things without confining. The ethics and responsibilities of associations – big words, mind you – are recent concepts and still have to find their way.

Johannesburg, 18th May 2007. The correspondent of the news agency IPS in South Africa, Moyiga Nduru, files a dispatch indicating that among African associations, the debate is well under way. The discussion – as you may guess – is about the responsibility of associations. It is said to leave much to be desired. Nduru mentions the grievances, anonymous but apparently representative, of an Internet surfer: «Several NGOs are not practising what they preach.» In other words, NGOs that are not particularly responsible.

Well then, why not make them more responsible? It is not that easy. First and foremost because the definition of a social movement or a civil society organisation – the «subject» or «debtor» of responsibility – is strangely inaccurate. This leads us to another objective of this brochure. When it comes to the responsibility of associations, we want to contribute to knowing where we have come from in order to know where we are going. As clearly as possible.

BEING RESPONSIBLE:
A new theoretical domain that challenges associations

CIVIL SOCIETY IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

«The current definition of a CSO (civil society organisation) may include lobbies or interest groups. This poses several problems and creates the potential danger of too easily confusing civil society and associations. Civil society is a broad concept that has to be dealt with cautiously.»

Patrick De Buquois – European Council for Non-Profit Organisations, CEDAG

«Today BINGOs (Business Initiated NGOs) and «think tanks» constitute one of the major threats for civil dialogue and the consultation process.»

Matthias Duwe – Climate Action Network Europe



I. Where have we come from?

Nobody ever comes from nowhere.

The charter that was signed in London is the result of annual workshops with various distinguished representatives of international associations. The first took place in 2003.

Before that, the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World developed a charter of the same name, which was discussed in a global citizen assembly in Lille in 2001. The origin of this charter dates back at least ten years.

In its appendices, this charter indeed establishes its foundation at around the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, when, helped by the fall of the Berlin wall, the world went through «major social and political changes», which were particularly characterised by «the emergence of a new civil society at world level» that was different from «the old ideological models and the old methods of social and political organisation». This was a new situation, similar to a blank page. Everything seemed possible, and this freedom forced social movements and civil society organisations to reinvent themselves: nothing was set in advance; they had to carve their own way, to stand on their own feet and to lean on their own ethics. This is something we want to stress. Because it is exactly in that dimension – the ethical dimension – that they will seek a theoretical basis for their social commitment. In essence: to commit oneself to ethics is to commit to responsibility, to be defined. All this shows that the journey prior to the Charters of London and Lille had been long.

All this did not come out of the blue.

No more so than the International NGO Accountability Charter, which solemnly declares that the eleven international associations will try

- > only to distribute reliable information,
- > to be transparent in their structure, their accounts and their activities,
- > to apply principles of good governance to their operations,
- > to pay special attention to the chosen public,
- > to guard jealously their independence, their legitimacy and their credibility...

One could say that modern history is being constructed here, right before our eyes

At the heart of this history stand the notions of responsibility and accountability. Let us turn our attention to this for a moment.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS:

A dynamic born at the crossroads of a changing world.

The old world, with its «Berlin walls», no longer exists, and the new world is looking for ethical landmarks to its freedom of choice. That is a heavy responsibility.

THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

«We would like the concept of accountability to lead, increasingly and more effectively, to more rigorous corporate regulation. There will be very lively discussions. We will have to keep the pressure on companies that have every reason to enlarge the spectrum of responsibility. For example through corporate social responsibility (CSR). We must admit that the ICFTU is not happy at all with this enlargement. This is neither to the advantage of workers nor companies. There is the risk of a backfire in the future. The aspects of this struggle can already be distinguished. The favoured sections of population use topics that appear interesting against the interests of the public. In this context companies certainly feel very much relieved. It isn't lost.»

James Howard – International Confederation of Free Trade Unions ICFTU



2.

Do not say «responsibility», say «accountability»...

The notion of responsibility evokes a series of familiar situations. Every once in a while you can hear a politician say that he «will live up to his responsibilities». He has certain competencies; he performs acts and feels concerned about them. That would be the idea. Or think of a child that you raise. His competency is, for example, not to forget his school diary. That is pretty much the idea. Next there are people who are «responsible» for this or that, an umbrella term that is used more than necessary ... if you do not really know the position of the person you want to talk to. But terms that are used too frequently lose their edge.

Yet there is one situation that well defines the sphere. In crime trials neither children nor fools are judged – because they are, by definition, irresponsible. They do not know what they do; they are not capable of measuring the consequences of their acts. By contrast, however, this also means that all others are responsible. In the view of the criminal law, we are all responsible as adults, except for some rare exceptions. There is no means of avoiding this. So far we have merely set the scene. This is not quite the kind of responsibility we will be dealing with.

The NGO Charter is actually about a more diffuse, more ethical, more cyclical type of responsibility. Let us just have a quick look at its history. First step: NGOs criticize the scheming of multinational corporations in the Third World, denounced as not complying with international law, a term that should not create false hope, since such law does not exist. Hence a second step: a counter-attack from the multinationals trying to codify – put together in bits and pieces – a compilation of «ethical standards» which they promise to respect. This is like opening a second front, and in the depoliticised legal field preferred by most NGOs, a new zone of confrontation, which is gradually being called «corporate social responsibility», abbreviated to CSR.

Third step: CSR will cause problems. Not only does it try to substitute for the truly existing law, thus trying to weaken it, but it is also based on a moral commitment for which the company is the only judge. It is «soft law», involving no constraint at all. Hence the development of a movement within the NGO world trying to hold multinationals to account. They no longer emphasise (self-proclaimed) responsibility, but «accountability». This is an old notion: it is also expressed, very clearly, towards the State in article 15 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen that the French Revolution adopted in 1789: «Society has the right to call all public servants to account about their administration.»¹ We have to clarify that responsibility and accountability in a certain sense are just two faces of one coin. If you

commit yourself (individually) to something, you may expect a (multi- or collective) demand for account to be given of it. You could say it is a small qualitative leap.

But let us just close the loop. Fourth step, with a reversal of the situation, the boomerang effect. If they keep contesting the reliability of multinationals, NGOs will run the natural risk of seeing the gun turned against them. Are NGOs responsible? Can international associations be held to account? Are they clean? That is quite a new situation, also illustrated by the NGO Charter in its long list of ethical commitments: after the CSR of the private sector, by imitation there is also now the social responsibility of the «sector» of associations. But this is just one – certainly simplifying – aspect of the situation. We will soon see that the situation can be expanded.

¹ *L'esprit de 1789 et des droits de l'homme - textes et documents (1725-1986)*, Centre national de documentation pédagogique et Larousse, 1989.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS.

First active factor: the boomerang effect. Having claimed pledges of virtuousness from multinational corporations, associations have, in return, been led to endorse the same kind of accountability.

THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY STIMULATES DEBATE

«Does the European Commission show an initiative of accountability if it never informs anybody about the reasons and conditions behind decisions taken or about the input of third parties?»

Simon Wilson – Social Platform



3.

Responsibility is (also) a form of democratic questioning

The occurrence of a debate on the ethics and responsibilities within and around non-governmental organisations and international associations undoubtedly also has a cyclical aspect. This is a door that we have already pushed half-open. It is a matter of getting tit for tat. NGOs annoy multinationals, saying «your social responsibility amounts to nothing!» The trick will obviously backfire on them: «and yours, is it worth anything?» Hence the Charter: yes, yes, we are innocent as a new-born babe. While this is not wrong, it is definitely simplistic.

It would actually not be possible to distinguish this debate on the ethics and responsibilities of associations from the rich debate on the function of civil society in society. We do not have to go back as far as Alexis de Tocqueville, who considered associations to be necessary to the functioning of democratic societies², but there is a permanent factor in all of this, a common theme: the maturity of democracy would be judged from the 'importance and the vitality of its associations. This is a cause for huge discussion. We sometimes call this the «democratic question». This question is at the heart of every discussion on the ethics and responsibilities in the world of associations.

In one and the same breath we could also quote Robert Putnam³, to whom we owe, in the context of 'social capital', an analysis of the links that may exist between citizenship (i.e., among other things, the world of associations), economic performance and democratic health. It is the same line of reasoning. The possibility of action by citizens is said to be a sign of a confident society and to have a positive economic, social and democratic impact. And vice versa. Economic and social decline is said to correlate with a decline of associations and a pernicious individualism⁴. Hence the re-questioning of the world of associations: if there is decline, are associations not one of the causes of that decline?

POSITIONS...

«Representativeness is one of those common criteria to be discussed, which in reality is taboo within the debate on associations in Europe. Many people defend accreditation by public bodies as a strong standard of representativeness: that is the beginning of the end of democracy. In a democracy you simply always have to say on behalf of whom you are speaking, either in your own name, in the name of thousands of followers or for a cause.»

Luca Jahier – European Economic and Social Committee

This is based on the idea that associations, just like the state, would have a role to defend and promote the public interest. That is in line with the definition of Eric Dacheux, who attributes to the world of associations the social objective of «defending a political, social, cultural or economic project of public interest»⁵. It also fits with the definition that the European Commission has chosen, after examination of the legal status of associations in the European Union with 15 member states: associations are «groups of persons who are set up in a non-profit-making spirit and with an objective of public interest»⁶. This implies a certain sense of responsibility. Once again the «democratic question». No doubt unsettled. If the representative (parliamentary) democracy tends to be replaced by a «participative democracy», we should carefully examine who advocates and who curbs substitution, who gives the permission to participate and who does not receive it. Before being participative, any responsibility should first establish its position. But by saying this, nothing has actually been said...

2 *De la démocratie en Amérique*, de Tocqueville, Folio histoire, vol. 2, p. 160; *Les ONG*, Philippe Ryfman, Editions La Découverte – Collection Repères, 2004.

3 See for example.: *Social Capital*, ISUMA Canadian Journal of Policy Research, vol. 2 n° 1, spring 2001 and particularly *Social Capital: measurement and consequences*, Robert Putnam, vol. 2 n° 1, spring 2001 and *Bowling alone : America's declining social capital*, Robert Putnam, Journal of Democracy, January 1995; www.bowlingalone.com.

4 *Global Civil Society 2002, 2003, 2004*, Kaldor, Anheier & Glasius, Editions Oxford University Press.

5 *Vaincre l'indifférence. Les associations dans l'espace public européen*, Eric Dacheux, CNRS Editions, 2000.

6 *Ibidem*.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS.

Second active factor: the role-play induced by the new democratic processes that, since they are not elective, impose a certain sense of responsibility on participation.



4.

The fourth dimension of responsibility...

The responsibility of civil society associations has given rise to a large number of studies, analyses, comments and charters. It is clearly a topical subject. It implies taking a position, whether we want it or not, preferably one that is enlightened and freely agreed upon.

This is undoubtedly what we are seeing at the moment. Eleven of the most important organisations signing a charter. This is a new social feat. But what does it mean?

The work started by the Foundation for Future Generations and its partners is intended to shed a little more light on the path ahead. It is rather well-placed to play the part of scout, by mere virtue of its name. Thinking and acting while taking into account the needs of future generations is what you might call the «fourth dimension» of responsibility, and certainly the most important.

Bearing the responsibility for the acts performed here and now is and has always been part of the ABC of any life in society. The notion of sustainable development, a universal concept since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, has led to a radical change in this view. We are no longer only responsible here and now, but also and maybe even first and foremost, responsible now, at any moment, for tomorrow. This is indeed a radical change: the notion has not yet completely brewed in our minds and is still far from being rooted there.

This changes everything for civil society organisations that pretend or want to be responsible. There is no longer a perspective of one or five years, the escape route has now moved into the distance, along side children who have not yet been born and their grandchildren.

This observation is a main theme of the «Charter of Lille» adopted by the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World. The charter reminds us of the fact that the world until now had been based upon two pillars, human rights as a support for human dignity (Universal Declaration, 1948) and the ambition of peace and development in the Charter of the United Nations (1945). Stockholm, 1972 and Rio de Janeiro, 1992 («the Earth Summit») have changed the deal: if the earth, with its biosphere, is to remain habitable for future generations, it needs a third pillar, a Charter of the Earth.

This shows that the reflection on the responsibility of associations is still in its infancy and that after having put on magnifying glasses, it will need binoculars and then a telescope. United? Certainly, but with whom? Responsible? Why not, but to whom? And for how long...

This opens new perspectives for responsibility. Because the fact of looking forward in time, and being conscious that one is constantly walking into the future, that one is already encroaching upon one's blank pages, will perhaps lead to a greater broadening of the sphere, but the other way round this time, to rediscover that one also has responsibility for the past, to parents and grandparents. A responsibility of memory, individually and collectively.

Keep that in mind. We are not yet that far. We are in the exploratory stage. And to explore, you first have to take a look round at what you have.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS.

Third active factor: the world, the earth does not belong to us, we just received it on loan (like the old wise men said) and we are responsible for it on a long-term basis...

THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY STIMULATES DEBATE

«The rise of the concept of responsibility is based upon a paradox that is curious to say the least. Strange, even. We lighten the social contributions and taxes of private corporations and at the same time we go down on our knees for them to take care of the labour factor.»

Jean-Marie Coen – Attac Wallonie-Brussels

5. A problem of too many associations?

We can be certain in our hypothesis that the degree of responsibility of the wine producers of the Belgian Gaume region only arouses fairly limited interest. There are not many of them. Likewise the foreign policy of the United States will draw more attention than that of Vanuatu (200,000 inhabitants). This largely explains why the responsibility of associations is under debate today. You have to see this in the context of them carrying increasing weight in the life of societies.

The figures are telling enough. According to Henderson⁷, the annual global turnover of associations and NGOs is said to amount to some 1,100 billion dollars (2000). At world level they are said to employ 19 million people and the aid they provide to the South exceeds that of the World Bank. The 39 countries of the European Union, Central, Southern and Baltic Europe are estimated to have between two and three million registered associations. More than 40,000 are active at an international level, 90% of which have been established over the last 30 years⁸.

Associations have acquired social political weight, but they also have high socio-economic importance. The John Hopkins University estimated that the work produced by voluntary associations represents 6% of the Gross National Product of the nine largest countries⁹. In the Europe of Fifteen as a whole, the third sector (mutual benefit societies, cooperatives or associations) employs some 9 million people on a full-time basis, which is nearly 8% of

TO BE OR NOT TO BE...

«The world of associations is defined by what it is not. It distinguishes itself using so-called privative logic. The NAME after the word NO (or any other negative term) gives a meaning to its purpose. The history of defining by means of a negative term is important and has a strong meaning, since it conveys the idea that there is no association that is 'slightly' profit-making or any organisation that is 'slightly' non-governmental. The aim is not to reject a positive definition, by way of result and as a sign of maturity, but rather to insist on the need for a strong identity, distinct from other entities. Thanks to its dynamism and creativity the world of associations is constantly deploying new concepts, originally defined in a negative way. Often there is a shift to the positive definition, through transitive steps in which the associations have to forge their own ethics.»

Philippe Laurent – Acodex

paid civil work¹⁰, and more than 70% of them work in associations. France has 1.1 million associations (this number grew by 15% between 1999 and 2005) and uses about 15 million volunteers¹¹.

Belgium is keeping up. One salaried worker out of ten works in the sector of associations (334,000 employees, nearly 10% of overall employment). There are 120,000 associations (2004) contributing 5% to the Gross Domestic Product, leading to an added value of nearly 12 billion euros¹². This inevitably raises some questions. For example about legitimacy. If an association has obtained the status of interlocutor, lobby or international network, it is playing with the big boys. But on whose behalf? And in accordance with which rules? Until now, all of this has been rather vague.

7 *Does Ethical Activism Lead to Firm Relocation?* Gilles Grolleau, Tarik Lakhali and Naoufel Mzoughi, Working Paper 2004/1, CESAER (Centre d'Economie et Sociologie appliquées à l'Agriculture et aux Espaces Ruraux).

8 Union of International Associations ; *The role of NGO self-regulation in increasing stakeholder accountability*, Robert Lloyd, July 2005, One World Trust.

9 Quoted by Giampiero Alhadheff, SOLIDAR.

10 *Le secteur à but non lucratif dans une économie en mutation (The non-profit sector in a changing economy)*, Helmut Anheier et al., OCDE 2003.

11 Les Echos, 30th May 2007.

12 *L'associatif dépourvu de stéréotypes*, La Libre Belgique, 6th December 2005.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS: CONTEXT OF A CONCEPT (I).

The weight of associations in the life of societies is proportionate to the degree of responsibility they bear in those societies, voluntarily or involuntarily.

6. The chicken and egg problem

It is agreed that associations have taken an important place in the social, economic and political life of nations. Not a week goes by without the media relaying a communiqué from some large NGO raising the alarm on an important matter. Not one summit meeting without the presence of an envoy from civil society. No social debate without making room for a spokesperson in favour of an ad-hoc issue, for which an association has been set up. At the international level, this is patently obvious. And instructive.

In his booklet on the debate about NGO responsibility¹³, Jem Bendell describes the explosive growth of «developmentalist» associations that have the whole world as their laboratory. He also points to what, in his view, is one of the major causes of this growth.

It is the fact that public development aid (the resources for cooperation with the countries of the South) is increasingly going to NGOs, transiting through them or directly benefiting them. Between 1975 and 1985, Bendell explains, there was a qualitative jump: governmental aid to NGOs increased by 1400%. Maybe it is worth lingering on this. For this development poses the question of the chicken and the egg. Is it because the associations have gradually achieved a critical mass that they have become the indispensable go-between of cooperation? Or is it, on the contrary, the choice of the states to delegate the implementation of their cooperation policies to private law associations that has allowed the latter to grow to a point that they have become indispensable?

IN THE BACKGROUND, A CRISIS OF REPRESENTATIVENESS, A BOOM IN THE POWER OF ASSOCIATIONS

«The lack of representativeness of NGOs is a topic introduced to parry this question. Still, what does representativeness mean in an era of political crisis? In countries where voting is not compulsory, only a minority of citizens take part in the elections.

In the US, Bush was elected with only slightly more than 30% of the votes.

What does representativeness mean under those circumstances?»

Daniel Spoel – European Forum for Civil Society

«Over the years, NGOs have acquired more influence and political power, and therefore also extensive human and financial resources. We make demands.

Of course this also entails responsibilities.»

Stan Cutzach – Transparency International

In his critical analysis, Bendell inclines towards the second scenario. «Western policies have influenced the context that has enabled NGOs to grow. The 'modernisation' of the welfare state and the privatisation of public services is in keeping with the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by the West and promoted everywhere in the world, including by the international financial institutions.»

The distinction between the chicken and the egg is not without interest. Thus, a large NGO that is rightly proud of the growth it has achieved on its own will happily claim to be responsible. If this importance is, however, due more to the discretion of the state, it would be more appropriate no longer to think in terms of responsibility (freely chosen), but control (imposed by the outside world, by «donors»). Two faces of the same coin, but gulfs apart...

Bendell explores this «emerging» terrain in a systematic way. We will walk part of the way with him. Is the debate on the responsibility of associations about the rise of a new paradigm or is it a fig leaf hiding new forms of control in the world of associations? It is a little bit of both, as we will see...

13 *Debating NGO Accountability*, Jem Bendell, UN-NGLS Development Dossiers (UNCTAD/NGLS/2006/1), Geneva, August 2006.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSOCIATIONS: CONTEXT OF A CONCEPT (2).

There is parallelism and there are ties between the role that is conferred on associations of being a delegate to the public service and the gradual withdrawal of states from their core missions, voluntarily or involuntarily.

There are many good reasons why some associations of international scope want to proclaim ethical commitment. These reasons cannot be completely dissociated from the context in which this desire was born. Bendell roughly describes the sensational scandals linked to the international efforts to help the victims of the Asian tsunami in 2004. Abuse of humanitarian aid and corruption in Sri Lanka and Indonesia blackened an image already tarnished by the excessive salaries and per diems of some NGO directors. Isolated cases? The damage had been done, thus pushing the doors wide open to anti-NGO discourse. A telling fact was the establishment of «NGO Watch» by the American Enterprise Institute in 2003. This is a website that uses every possible means, in the purest neoconservative style, to denounce associations. Open fire on the pianist. As advertising people might say, it has become a key theme. As far as external pressure is concerned, these are the «godfathers».

On top of that you also have the «godmothers», the «maternal», institutional dimension. As we have seen, the association sector has continued to grow, in numbers, and in terms of their impact on political decisions and the financial resources they handle, very largely of public origin. Bendell presents a figure: the boom in the nineties can be fully attributed to the fact that in 2000 no less than a quarter of international NGOs had been created during the last ten years. In some countries one could ask who is actually driving this. NGOs active in Kenya owe 90% of their operational costs and their equipment to contributions from abroad – but then who do they speak for? For their own country or for the hand that feeds them?

Here we come to the essential question, which lies at the heart of the debate on responsibility as we consider it here. As Bendell points out, it can be summarised by four simple and clear questions.

- > Who should be responsible?
- > To whom?
- > What for?
- > And how?

That should be the starting point. The rest is indeed only literature.

Or nearly. For in his analysis of the question, Bendell is honest enough to point out that, for lack of space, he has left out what might be the most important aspect: the problem of power, of power relations, due to which some will have control over the determinants of NGO responsibility whereas others will be subject to them... *Obiter dictum*. Bendell points out that the responsibility of associations, understood as the degree to which they give an account of their activities, is not always such a good thing. In countries with authoritarian regimes some opaqueness would be quite useful. And not only there. Made suspicious by secular experience, many trade unions refuse to accept a legal status that would provide access to the indiscreet eyes or to the interference of the powers that be – or others. Friendly one day, they may turn against them the next. Prevention is better than cure...

Let us summarise. The debate on the responsibility of associations contains two aspects, closely connected but still to be distinguished. On the one hand there is an open philosophical debate, on the basis of the four keys mentioned by Bendell. This debate is, however, under double pressure from the «godfathers» and the «godmothers»: public opinion (often orchestrated) and donors. And donors are important. There are very few associations that would be able to survive without financial aid, which they know is conditional: they must use it in a ... responsible way and prove its use. Here we are no longer talking about the debate, but about a process, imposed by the outside world. Hence the risk, continuously illustrated by the facts, that the debate among associations will espouse the real or supposed requirements of donors, will anticipate them, trying to find the answer in a theoretical sphere they no longer control. Working from a basic challenge, we can then move on to technical sub-challenges. Let us have a closer look.

THE CHALLENGES OF ASSOCIATIVE RESPONSIBILITY.

On the one hand it is a thought.

On the other hand (and not to be confused?) it is a process.



8.

Associations, on your feet!

Associations are like companies. There is the «small corner shop» (with an unreadable turnover, it's all in the head) and there is the multinational corporation that is active in five continents, thirty-nine countries and present in nearly every supermarket all over the world. One¹⁴ can hardly apply the same requirements concerning responsibility to all of them, since the world of associations, with its philosophical diversity and its democratic plurality, is based upon an invincible heterogeneity – and on distinct cultural traditions. Some, therefore, make a distinction between four big historic «models».

First of all, there is the so-called Rhineland or corporate model of association, which is predominant in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. It is characterised by powerful, highly institutionalised and professional organisations, which are essentially financed by the State. (Partly due to this, there is a problem of plurality) Secondly, there is the Anglo-Saxon or liberal model (United Kingdom and Ireland). It is based upon organisations with both volunteers and salaried workers, often supported by self-managed, ethical mechanisms. These associations are independent and private and generally have more varied sources of funding than those of the Rhineland model, while they also receive contractual public funding, sometimes in competition with other non-profit organisations or with companies in the traditional sense. Donations are relatively high and they have multiple private receipts. Generally speaking, NGOs of this model are considered to be brimming with experts or consultants.

WHERE THEY TAKE CARE OF CASH FLOW AND OF PLURALITY...

«Within the world of associations, plurality is essential. The case of Belgium is the current example of a lack of plurality and omnipresence of old political pillars that curb dynamism. The compartmentalisation of political castes limits the margin of civil society.»

Carla Goffi – Christian Peace Movement

«Greenpeace does not accept any donations from businesses or public authorities in order to safeguard its independence.»

Peter De Smet – Greenpeace

Thirdly, there are the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark) where we can find the... Scandinavian model, also called the social-democratic model and also found in the Eastern and Central European countries where the non-profit sector dates back only recently: fairly low levels of public funding (from the eighties onward) compensated by large donations. The sector has created an identity of its own, completely autonomous, within a legal framework that is not particularly restrictive: common sense and simplicity reign supreme. Different works on the sector¹⁵ describe the nature of the relations with the public authorities (respect rather than instrumentalisation), the (important) role of volunteer work and the type of (mainly social) activities. Last but not least, there is the so-called Mediterranean or emerging model, found in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. The non-profit sector in these countries is not very well developed and only began recently. Volunteer work is scarce, as are donations. Have we explored the question now? Barely at all.

The reason for this is that until now, we have virtually not even mentioned money. The cash flow of associations. The sinews of war. If we look at the categories from this point of view, they tend to shatter into pieces...

14 *Le secteur sans but lucratif*, Edith Archambault, May 1999 ; *The third sector in Europe : Five theses*, Helmut Anheier, Civil Society Working Paper 12, February 2002 ; *European civil society or civil society in Europe? The sketch of a working paper for CIVICUS in Europe*, Andrew Crook, CIVICUS European Regional Office in Hungary, Budapest.

15 See especially the works of John Hopkins University, among which *Thematic Issue : The Third Sector in Scandinavia*, Vol. 7 Number 2, June 1996 in *International Journal for Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*.

SUB-CHALLENGE: WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?

From the small NGO to the large multinational association, will there be the same (uniformed) model of responsibility?

9. Your money or your life?

As the old journalist adage goes: in every case that is somewhat obscure, there is only one infallible way to disentangle the truth. It is to do what Tom Thumb did, to follow the trail of white stones... of bank statements. «Follow the money trail», as the Americans say. In general this clears up everything. The same is true for police matters, where the fundamental question is: who benefits from the crime? The same also holds true for associations. They do not live on thin air and stale bread...

Allowing for exceptions, associations on the whole are largely dependent on external resources. During this last decade they have certainly seen a diversification of funding, but this does not alter the fact that subsidies are still very important.¹⁶

In Western Europe especially, associations are still highly dependent on public resources.¹⁷ This dependence varies from 45 to 50% in Great Britain or Austria and may rise to over 70% in some cases in Ireland or in Belgium. Associations that have the majority of their own resources are mainly found outside Europe and often in Anglo-Saxon countries.

The pennies are spread fairly unequally. There is a concentration phenomenon that particularly seems to benefit the largest associations. An inventory drawn up by the OECD in 2000 confirms, on the basis of a European sample: 20% of international NGOs and associations (the largest organisations) that are active in the field of development cooperation absorb 83% of the resources allocated to the sector.¹⁸

A GORDIAN KNOT

«As to questions on funding and independence, one has to separate funding by the State and criticism of the State by the associations. In other words, you need to retain the right to denunciation and independence: the State has to pay to be criticised.»

Philippe Laurent – Acodev

This taints the situation. When asking about the responsibility of associations, the page is no longer completely blank. And there is a strong temptation to apply the formula: tell me who is paying you and I will tell you whom you are really responsible to...

It also taints – to raise a related topic – how the legitimacy of an association is assessed. That is of course a strong word, which often arises when talking about civil society associations. The terms of their funding are not too far removed from that. Here too, the money trail is a good trail to follow...

16 *Argent et organisations de solidarité internationale 2000/2001*, Commission Coopération Développement, France, December 2003 ; *Le secteur sans but lucratif*, Edith Archambault, May 1999 (within the John Hopkins University programme of non-lucrative sector international comparison).

17 Data from the John Hopkins University programme, from Salamon and Anheier (1998), *passim*, from *Global Civil Society 2003*.

18 *ONG européennes actives dans le domaine du développement : état des lieux*, Adèle Woods, OCDE, 2000.

SUB-CHALLENGE: BEING RESPONSIBLE TO WHOM?

The question generally has two dimensions, either determined by the origin of the money or by its destination.

Many international NGOs and associations are confronted with some kind of knot. A double knot, to be precise. On the one hand they actually depend largely on public funding. And on the other hand they increasingly endorse a public function : being a force of pro-activity, denunciation, interpellation. The evolution that can be noticed since the eighties, as Bendell¹⁹ describes, has driven international associations to apply themselves to what they call «advocacy», a term that is obviously more flattering than lobbying, though the latter is more precise.

This is the reason for the knot. Advocating a cause supposes that, for lack of any representation (and trade unions will certainly underline this, quite rightly), you have a certain legitimacy. And the double knot arises, since donors will tend to ask the same question, but from a financial administrator's point of view: «you want to be subsidised to promote this or that, that's all well and good, but who are you to aspire that role, how can you prove yourself?»

This is certainly one of the most flagrant examples of the large gap between the two dimensions of associations' responsibility, which sometimes takes the form of an introspective critical reflection and sometimes the form of an externally-imposed process. There is no mistaking that the question of legitimacy (or representation) of civil society associations is at the core of how they view their responsibility and their ethics. It is an essential question, since it concerns the way in which associations fit into the operation of society and, *mutatis mutandis*, the way in which society incorporates the life of associations into the way it functions.

REPRESENTATION AND LEGITIMACY: WAYS OF VIEWING IT

«Representation might be assessed according to the services that NGOs render to the population. Only some associations/NGOs have this kind of real representation, meaning that they allow for their emancipation and become more responsible. Here we should apply maieutics: extract values from people they weren't believed to have. Many NGOs exist today to do good, but to be truly representative is to let the people who you represent have their emancipation»

G rard Fonteneau – Social Alert

«Amnesty draws its legitimacy mainly from two things: its membership and its transparency, particularly in relation to its members.»

Philippe Hensmans – Amnesty International Belgium

This is a basic question and it is important to be clear about our ideas on the subject. We are living at a time which is characterised by States withdrawing and the crumbling of traditional structures supposed to found systems of democratic representation, which are replaced, shrouded in terminology that, on the surface, remains respectful of this heritage, through decision-making mechanisms which fuse together technocratic management and citizens' active participation in exploring them. So far our considerations are rich and necessary, even.

But at the same time there is also a process. The process and its legal and administrative procedures are altogether different and must not be confused. They produce a restricted legitimacy. Therefore we opt to talk about legal or formal legitimacy, granted by public institutions at all power or decision-making levels, perhaps even in recognition of sponsors' expertise who are sometimes public and at other times private. It is a subordinate legitimacy, with criteria one has to conform to – otherwise the demand for subsidies will be rejected... Transparency criteria, good governance criteria, professional ability criteria, etc. The link with legitimacy becomes ever more tenuous. We could say that it all has become a little bit too bureaucratic...

19 Which (*op.cit.*), refers to *Too close for comfort ? The impact of official aid on non-governmental organisations*, M. Edwards and D. Hulme, 1996, in *World Development*, vol. 24, n°6.

**SUB-CHALLENGE:
BE RESPONSIBLE,
OF COURSE, BUT WHAT FOR?**

The question mainly concerns the problem of legitimacy.



II.

Did you fill in the form?

The criteria put forward by Alison Van Rooy²⁰ is a good example of the approach that requires the «right boxes of the form» to be filled in to have some claim to legitimacy. She explains that any «non-state actor should at least meet one of these five basic criteria in order to participate legitimately in political discussions».

This arouses a degree of curiosity. It means that there is a gateway to legitimacy. Everybody can take the test. Do I pass or not?

First criteria: have the people at the receiving end of a message or an action from an association had the opportunity to express themselves in advance? Have they been consulted? Second criteria: the quality of the association's experience in its domain. What does its curriculum vitae look like, so to speak? If it has been participating in deliberative processes for years, that can only be a good thing. Amateurs would do best to stay away.

Third criteria: the association's expertise. Its know-how, its research capacities, its methodology. You don't have to be a Harvard or Grenoble graduate, but if you are, it helps. Brains as well as brawn. Moreover, the fourth criteria relate to the relevance of the content. And fifthly, the innovative character of what the association proposes.

None of those criteria are unreasonable, nor are they out of place. They may serve as the first step in a fruitful process of questioning an association's practices, put them to the test through examination and undergo self-criticism that is as stimulating as it is doubtlessly profitable. Learning never stops. There is nothing worse than slipping into the inevitable, necessary routine. But obviously this «criteria approach» will favour large associations that

SELF-CONTROL TO AVOID BEING CONTROLLED?

«The world of associations would do well to get ahead of any heavy and devastating imposition by law by anticipating and developing its self-regulation.»

Alex Parisel – Médecins sans frontière

«Professionalisation is necessary, but a bird never flew on one wing, so you must also keep contact with the populations you represent. Moreover participation is too often forgotten, you have to involve the citizens.»

Stefaan Declercq – Oxfam Solidarity Belgium

are well-equipped to meet the conditions, to the detriment of smaller and less professional associations. Here the plurality of civil society might well be endangered.

There is also another minor problem. These interpretations may very well be similar to «theoretical views», but they are often also first and foremost... admission criteria, opening the gateway to public funding, to a certain institutional respectability. From their presentation, this appears to go even further, in the words of Van Rooy. The «non-state actors» involved correspond to an institutional jargon, to an administrative codification that might paralyse the reflection. We can make the same observation about the reference to «political deliberations», which obviously do not refer to the traditional bodies of democratic decision making, but to panels, «task forces» and other consultative fora that their insidious reform offers by way of replacement. This is particularly the case for the European Union where the institutions, which are more administrative than elective, have resulted in a whole host of literature on the «proceduralisation» of public action.²¹ This involves an element of risk. We can't see the wood for the trees. The debate will focus on the manageability or on the equity of the criteria, because they have been imposed by the European Union or another donor and not on their significance. It might be important to bear that in mind.

Within this context (interpretation and criteria) we would like to refer to the recent «Global Reporting Initiative» (GRI), an international «multi-stakeholders» organisation, known for its company standards that draw up societal reports. GRI is currently developing a guidebook, concerning reporting on sustainable development, adapted to NGOs wanting – or compelled by their stakeholders – to communicate on the merits of their actions. A standard framework that is recognised at international level could help to answer the questions concerning guaranteed effective implementation of the International NGO Accountability Charter. There are no doubts about that. But: is this a vector of reflection or a cast? Is it a tool for dialogue or comparative advantage in the competitive search to obtain subsidies? To be continued...

**SUB-CHALLENGE:
HOW TO BE
RESPONSIBLE?**

Answer: consider the
criteria...

20 *The Global Legitimacy Game : Civil Society, Globalization and Protest*, Alison Van Rooy, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, quoted by Jem Bendell 2006 (*op.cit.*, page 37-41).

21 Cfr *La gouvernance dans l'Union européenne*, edited by Olivier De Schutter, Notis Lebessis and John Paterson, Les Cahiers de la cellule de prospective, Commission européenne, 2001.

The terminological environment surrounding the discussion on associations' responsibility deserves more attention. It is full of traps, even as far as the NGO label is concerned. Non-governmental organisation is the name, and this emits a certain aura of independence. In Belgium for example, this designation is however reserved for organisations that produce evidence of lasting financing by... the government. The paradox is not anecdotal, and seems to explain that the philosophical questioning of associations so often rests on problems of approving their financing. And this is what leads to a particular mental cast.

The same phenomenon can be found in the philosophy of «stakeholders», a term imported from the world of managers and from America, that gives some impulse to debates, not only on associations' responsibility, but also on their legitimacy, their eligibility for public funding.

«Actually the practice of social responsibility leads to the rupture of public regulations to substitute them with voluntary rules. Codes of conduct have the quality to replace the existing standards of compulsory law.»

Jean-Marie Coen – Attac Wallonie Brussels

«The concept of associations' responsibility turned out to be due to a double pressure. First of all, companies that were in the line of sight of NGOs have taken it very badly that they were held accountable while this was not the case for NGOs. Secondly there is a shift to all kinds of bodies to be withdrawn. The aim of this operation is very clear: to try to weaken the impact of responsibility by mitigating the impact of the company. This practice should be countered, because as trade union organisations we are on an equal footing as NGOs. Another collateral effect is that this evolution could lead to a minimisation of trade unions in the process of finalising codes of conduct. This is not without risk.»

Evelyne Pichenot – European Economic and Social Committee

«There lies a potential danger in these forms of objective evaluation of associations: strategic five year plans, annual reviews, large administrative costs. The danger consists in confining «imagination» to regulations and hence seeing a decline in the spirit of initiative and dynamism.

Didier Beaufort – COTA

«Stakeholder» is a neologism that is formed according to the word «shareholder», meaning owner of shares or stocks, which is hardly innocent. Please note that this is connected to market analysis.

This management theory explains that companies have a responsibility towards their shareholders who hold the deeds of the registered capital, but also towards others who «hold interests», and who are called «stakeholders», so-called «involved» parties in the societal capital of the company, such as workers, consumers, etc. Transposed – propelled – into the public sphere and, more specifically, to the process of certification of associations, this cast carries important consequences for the evolution of the world of associations, of which it is not yet fully aware.

All of this still takes place in the form of accidental encounters. One association would be amazed to be asked to justify its actions not only vis-à-vis the public it addresses, but also vis-à-vis all the other «stakeholders»: Have you been considerate towards them? Have they been consulted? Did they have the opportunity to participate in the drafting of the project? Another association, also a little taken aback, will be asked to follow a code of conduct. For lack of distance, for lack of overall view, there will be an adjustment process for all of those small isolated renunciations of sovereignty, an adaptation process. The world is changing and we adapt, without really knowing what we are adapting to.

DISCUSSION: WHO DETERMINES THE CONDITIONS?

Can associations' responsibility coexist with a prefabricated mental mould?

The European context is, without a doubt, increasingly determining Member States' sphere of activity and that of their associations too. The formal interaction between these associations and the European institutions has, against the background of their legitimacy, nourished the debate on responsibility. Let us look in closer detail at two aspects of this.

First of all, the emergence of the notion of «civil dialogue», copied by analogy with the existing mechanism of «social dialogue» between trade unions, employers and public authorities, is already well-established and marked out in many Member States. When applied to the world of associations, this dialogue refers to the structured (rather than selective) consultation process with the «European citizens» through the medium of organisations and civil society associations.²² There is no general agreement on these mechanisms and they are criticised by trade unions and companies : on behalf of what and whom would associations participate in the European decision-making process? Here a problem arises. This poses the question of the definition of civil society and of «participative democracy», for which there are not yet any codified, clear and secure rules and procedures.

The theme of civil dialogue is on everyone's lips because it combines and juxtaposes all of the other problems with regards to the world of associations. Thus, public governance and the interaction with a certain number of key players requires a base of operations and a certain legitimacy to be effective, also in terms of capacity and associations' willingness to negotiate and also of legitimacy and representation of their intentions. As one may imagine, the latter is a delicate subject, both technically and politically: critics of trade unions, companies and also public authorities will confirm this.²³

DIFFICULTIES OF EUROPEAN NATURALISATION

«A civil dialogue with an organised civil society is an utopian dream, unattainable considering the diversity of associations.»

Antoine Madelin – Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme FIDH

«The influence of the European Commission on associations' agendas is a real problem of purpose. It is an eternal question in the world of associations that tends to bring its agenda into line with that of the institutions (nowadays more and more at a European level), a situation that is never very far from instrumentalisation!»

Patrick De Bucquois – European Council for Non-Profit Organisations CEDAG

The second aspect is closely linked to the previous one: the project of creating a statute of European associations to support the relations of associations with the European authorities, as donors and sometimes also as coordinators of the agenda of civil society. It is important to recall that the European Union comprises some two million associations.²⁴ Moreover, the idea is not a new one : it already appeared in the context of the Single European Act in 1986, defining the European association as a structure in which the members share knowledge or activities, either with the objective of general interest or in order to promote sector-based or professional interests.²⁵ This poses the question of the autonomy of the world of associations in view of the risk of bureaucratisation of their activities. Here, we are confronted with two philosophies. On the one hand, the so-called federal vision, advocating a single statute of European associations and on the other hand, the intergovernmental vision, which is rather pushing towards a mutual recognition of national statutes. Several States believe that the project is useless or dangerous and think that obviously the process of development of a European association is not ready for approval. Last but not least, these questions also entail a mirroring effect that also merits debate. The problem of legitimacy of associations actually echoes that of the European institutions²⁶; with the risk that the first will serve as a democratic alibi for the latter and vice versa. This is something we should bear in mind.

22 Minimal norms for consultations processes, COM (2002) 704.

23 See e.a. studies from Active Citizenship Network, *Participation in Policy Making : Criteria for the Selection of Civic NGOs – Assessing and reviewing the criteria of representativeness of Civic NGOs project*, September 2004.

24 *Vaincre l'indifférence. Les associations dans l'espace public européen*, Eric Dacheux, CNRS Editions, 2000.

25 *Les associations sans but lucratif*, Pierre Blaise, Dossier du CRISP, n°62, December 2004. See also: *Statut d'association européenne : État des lieux*, Conférence Permanente des Coordinations Associatives, synthesis by CEDAG, October 2003.

26 Cfr *The think-tanks that miss the target*, The Economist, 9 June 2007, noting the will of European Commission to finance pan-european think-tanks to encourage, *sui generis*, the missing debates.

DISCUSSION:

Are the European «civil dialogue» and the European legalisation of associations part of the problem of responsibility or of its solution?

There is a new trend in the globalisation of the economic landscape. Companies dance to the beat of mergers and acquisitions, of consolidations and takeover bids. Associations do not escape this phenomenon. Increase in the number of supranational platforms and networks, among other things to respond to the consultation mechanisms of «civil society» set up by the international institutions, like the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, The Council of Europe or the European Union.²⁷ In the context of the latter, a contact group has been established between civil society and the European Union institutions, the «EU Civil Society Contact Group» in which platforms and networks speak on behalf of thousands of associations from six various sectors (human rights, development, social issues, women, arts and culture and environment). In addition to this structure there are also ten federations that receive structural funding from the Commission, including Social Platform, CONCORD, Green 10 and Human Rights Defence Network. Moreover, various departments of the Commission have developed programmes to support networks like the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC), the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) or the European Womens' Lobby. In other words, big is beautiful.

But, if you focus on the big you might well lose sight of the smaller ones. The economic jargon is relevant here too. Consolidation goes hand in hand with economic expansion but

SOME SAFEGUARDS...

«Small NGOs are in a deadlock situation and intermediaries will certainly be needed to share resources. This is not the task of platforms and networks, which are sources of conflicting interests anyway.»

Simon Wilson – Social platform

«The competition between NGOs is a reality we cannot deny. It is a good incentive for the performance of associations obliged to reposition themselves continuously, provided it does not destroy the potential between NGOs. It allows the social objective to be questioned and sometimes even leads one to rethink the communication with the outside world.»

Philippe Hensmans – Amnesty International Belgium

«The professionalisation poses a big threat if the NGOs work closely together with public institutions, because it dissociates them from their rank and file: the agenda will leave more room for compromise and for political desiderata.»

Peter Frankenthal – Amnesty International UK

also with risks of abusing dominant positions and with (unfair?) competition. Could we equally talk about associations' responsibility here too? Is there still room for plurality in a world of associations that is increasingly dominated by competition (for funding, for approval, for «legitimacy»)? There is wide-ranging discussion and controversy surrounding this topic. How best to reconcile the search for critical mass at European level with the equally necessary willingness to preserve the democratic expression of its societal foundations? Some think competition would be an indispensable incentive to initiatives, progress and reflections on the world of associations. Others take the view that this world should be a model of cooperation and they see competition as destructive for values and significance.

In the background, this debate also confronts two views of society, the liberal model against the corporate model. The first corresponds by and large to the contemporary model, stemming from the Enlightenment, and brings together State and market in a domain where the organised civil society would express the public opinion (within the space that the State has set aside for it, i.e. the Constitution) and guarantees the proper functioning of democracy. The corporate model, theorised among others by Habermas, views society as a consensual whole composed of intermediate socio-professional bodies: these are the «bodies» that link up society and State, no separation of powers at all, everybody works together²⁸ – or participates (these two extreme and contradictory forms, nota bene, are the fascist system and the participative democracy). In this model, you might obviously see how circles of professional experts create an additional «gap» between civil society. In a nutshell, you could say that it comes down to professionalism against militancy. Barbara Stocking, the new Director General of Oxfam United Kingdom, made a symptomatic comment²⁹ about this topic, asserting loudly and strongly that the ideological discussion of the nineties about the question of whether associations could be more professional and better managers without «killing» the passion, is outdated. As a matter of fact, the term «militant» only seldom appears on websites, in leaflets and annual reports of associations. Is the absence of militancy and the depoliticisation (already begun on a large scale³⁰) a positive evolution?

DISCUSSION:

will only the large professional associations be able to survive?

27 COM (2001), 428, *Livre blanc sur la gouvernance de la Commission européenne*. See also *The European Parliament and European Civil Society 2004-2009, a guide for partnership*.

28 *Vers un statut de la société civile dans l'ordre international*, Benoît Frydman, *Revue Droits Fondamentaux*, n° 1 2001, p. 151-158.

29 *Where the money is*, *Newsweek*, 5 September 2005.

30 *D'une vérité à l'autre, les politiques de la Banque mondiale*, Nicolas Guilhot, *Monde diplomatique*, September 2000.

Provisional conclusions for a responsibility under construction

All considerations always require going back to basics and to wonder about the definition of the terms used in the discussion in order to be able to continue. First of all there is the notion of civil society association. At the very moment that associations are having a certain importance in many spheres of society, it is up to them, for example, to define themselves vis-à-vis the other public key players, of the market as well as others. One should think here of the new actors with controversial identities like lobbies, think tanks and other hybrid organisations.

They have to define themselves vis-à-vis the others (mainly a matter of legitimacy and representativeness) and also towards themselves. If an association promotes democracy in Third World countries and acts as a teacher, it is not too exaggerated to ask if it is implementing those lessons in its own activities. On this point one may call the association to be accountable; it should be responsible for its actions.

Here too some definition work has to be done. Responsibility is a legal concept that is traditionally attached to the individual person. Just like companies, associations are «legal entities» and just like the incrimination of an offence committed by a company presupposes the identification of the individual responsibility or responsibilities within the latter, associations run the risk of appearing evasive nebulae if their responsibility is to be perceived as collective. Unless, that is, we consider it from a philosophical point of view. This might be a promising angle of approach.

A BUILDING BRICK

«The growing interdependency among individuals, among societies and between human beings and nature heightens the impact of individual or collective human actions on their social and natural environment, nearby or far away. This situation opens up new possibilities for each of us to play a role in the new challenges that humankind is facing: every human being has the capacity to assume responsibilities; even those who feel powerless can still join together with others to forge a collective strength. (...) Responsibilities are not merely attached to present and future actions, but also to past actions.»

Charter of Human Responsibilities
Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

In this case the notion of responsibility takes on different shades of meaning. A political shade to the extent that the freely consented responsibility – «social» responsibility for companies – fits within a dynamism that exempts it from the traditional dimension of legal obligation: people will be more responsible if nothing compels them to do so, save the blind necessities of the market. And there is also a historic shade, since the ideology of responsibility shares along with all the others the property of being born thanks to specific historic conditions that explain the grounds for its existence: how is it possible that today – not yesterday or tomorrow – responsibility emerges as a social value calling for a broad support? And finally there is a prospective shade, since the responsibility towards future generations within a finite biosphere – not inexhaustible! – brings with it a whole new sphere of reflection, which is searching for identity, which still has to get the theoretical measure of its richness. That is what this brochure invites you to, as a first step in the right direction.

It is also necessary to walk this way because broadly speaking, the world of associations does not think about itself any longer, nor does anyone else do this any more. The essential reflections on the purpose of associations are conspicuously absent in the initiatives of associations, as if their survival would exceed their purpose, as if the engine was freewheeling. The reflection on the ethics and responsibilities of associations is one of the possible ways to get out of the deadlock. That is what this brochure also wants to contribute to.

UNFINISHED DISCUSSION:

it is certainly interesting to question the responsibility of associations and even more interesting to question the emergence of this questioning

Appendix I - List of participants and interviewees

Participants to the individual meetings, workshops and interviews that have been conducted from 2003 to 2007 and have provided the materials for this publication.

First name, NAME	Function	Organisation	Level
Giampiero ALHADEFF	General Secretary and Director	Solidar	E.U.
Dominique BE	Deputy Head of Unit - Head of Unit - «ESF Coordination» acting	European Commission - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities - ESF Coordination - European social fund	E.U.
Didier BEAUFORT	Researcher - Consultant	COTA - Collectif pour des Technologies appropriées	Belgium
Bruno BOISSIÈRE	General Secretary	Union of European Federalists	E.U.
Jean-Benoît BURRION	Directeur	Handicap International Belgium	Belgium
Jean-Marie COEN	Coordinator	Attac Wallonia-Brussels	Belgium
Stan CUTZACH	Senior Governance Coordinator	Transparency International	E.U.
Virgilio DASTOLI	Spokesperson	European Forum for Civil Society	E.U.
Patrick DE BUCQUOIS	Vice-President	CEDAG - European Council for Non-Profit Organisations	E.U.
Bertrand DE LA CHAPPELLE	Assistant of the director	IFRI - French Institute for International Relations	France
Peter DE SMET	Directeur	Greenpeace Belgium	Belgium
Philippe DE WOOT	Professor emeritus	IAG-Louvain School of Management - Louvain University	Belgium
Stefaan DECLERCQ	General Secretary / Board member	Oxfam-Solidarité Belgium / International	Belgium
Geoffrey DENNIS	Chief Executive	CARE International UK	United Kingdom
Matthias DUWE	Director	CAN-Europe - Climate Action Network	E.U.

First name, NAME	Function	Organisation	Level
Elodie FAZI	Coordinator	EU CSCG - EU Civil Society Contact Group	E.U.
G�rard FONTENEAU	Chairman	Social Alert International	E.U.
Vincent FOREST	Information Officer	EAPN - European Anti Poverty Network	E.U.
Peter FRANKENTHAL	Business and Human Rights Manager	Amnesty International UK	United Kingdom
Carla GOFFI	President	MCP	Belgium
Michel GOFFIN	Administration and Finances Director (and former member of the High Council for Permanent Education)	ITECO	Belgium
Michel HANSENNE	Honorary General Director	ILO - International Labour Organisation	World level
Philippe HENSMANS	Director	Amnesty International Belgium	Belgium
John HONTELEZ	Secretary General	EEB - European Environmental Bureau	E.U.
James HOWARD	Director Employment and International Labour Standards	ICFTU - International Confederation of Free Trade Unions	World level
Luca JAHIER	Vice-president	EESC - European Economic and Social Committee - Employment, Social Policies and Citizenship Section	E.U.
Dirk JARRE	Vice-President (and Vice-President of Social Platform)	Council of Europe - Liaison Committee of NGOs having a consultative status	E.U.
Thierry KESTELOOT	Head of Campaign	Oxfam-Solidarit� Belgium	Belgium
Pawel KRZECZUNOWICZ	Director	Polish NGO Office in Brussels	E.U.
Philippe LAURENT	President	Acodev	Belgium
Tony LONG	Director	WWF European Policy Office	E.U.
Antoine MADELIN	Director Relations with Inter-Governmental Organisations and Permanent delegate to the EU	FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights	World level

Prénom, NOM	Position	Organisation	Niveau d'implication
Sophie MALINOWSKI	Board member	AEDE - European Association of Teachers	E.U.
Jean-Paul MARTHOZ	European press director	HRW - Human Rights Watch	World level
Mary MC PHAIL	General Secretary	EWL - European Women Lobby	E.U.
Roland MOREAU	General Director Environment (and former General Director at Greenpeace Belgium)	Belgian Federal Public Service Public Health, Food Security and Environment	Belgium
Aude NIFFLE	Professor	HEC - Management School - University of Liège	Belgium
Alex PARISEL	Vice-President	Médecins sans frontières (B)	Belgium
Evelyne PICHENOT	Member of the Bureau (group III)	EESC - European Economic and Social Committee	E.U.
Rune RASMUSSEN	EU Policy Officer	Transparency International	World level
Daniel SPOEL	Board member	European Forum for Civil Society	E.U.
Nikita STAMPA	Evaluation Officer	European Commission - DG Internal Market and services - Better regulation cycle : Impact assessment and evaluation	E.U.
Dan VAN RAEMDONCK	Vice-president	FIDH - International Federation of Human Rights	World level
Tony VENABLES	Director	ECAS - European Citizen Action Service	E.U.
Christiana WEIDEL	Présidente	The World of NGOs	Austria
Simon WILSON	Director	Social Platform	E.U.
Peter WOLLAERT	Director	Kauri	Belgium



Appendix 2 - Useful links

› Resources for further reading

International NGO Accountability Charter

www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org

Charter of Human Responsibilities

<http://allies.alliance21.org/charter>

UN - United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service – website to provide interested parties with direction to further resources on the topic of NGO accountability

www.un-ngls.org/site/article.php3?id_article=212

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) – Non Profit Sector Supplement

www.globalreporting.org/ReportingFramework/SectorSupplements/NGO/NonProfitSectorSupplement.htm

› Partners in research and publication

Foundation for Future Generations

www.FoundationFutureGenerations.org

Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for Human Progress

www.fph.ch

Bernheim Foundation

www.fondationbernheim.be

GRESEA – Research Group for an Alternative Economic Strategy

www.gresea.be

CEDAC - Centre for Study and Action for Social Cohesion

www.cedac.be

The accountability of citizen associations

A contribution to the international debate on civil society responsibilities

The question of the ethics and responsibilities of associations dates back only recently and is yet to find its way. This publication aims to provide the reader with a series of reference points with regard to this topic, starting from a number of questions: when and in which context have these concerns on the ethics and responsibilities of associations started to emerge? What new vistas do these issues open up for citizen associations?

The notions of responsibility and accountability are at the heart of any ethical commitment. This publication questions these notions, taking into account the International NGO Accountability Charter (London 2006). After having claimed pledges of virtuousness from multinational corporations, the associations found themselves obliged to endorse the same kind of accountability.

The philosophical considerations on the responsibility of associations, following that of the private sector, pose four key questions. Who should be responsible? To whom? What for? How? But we need to raise other questions to go deeper into the discussion. Who defines the terms of this discussion? Can the responsibility of associations coexist with a mental prefabricated cast? Are the European «civil dialogue» and the European legalisation of associations part of the problem of responsibility or of its solution? Will large professional associations be able to survive? Is there still room for plurality in a landscape of associations that is increasingly dominated by competition?

This critical reflection, carried out by the associations, is under a double external pressure: from public opinion and from donors. Consequently, there is a risk that it might embrace the real or supposed requirements of donors.

The conclusions are necessarily provisional, since the debate is still in progress. This reflection on the ethics and responsibilities of associations is a promising way to keep exploring their purpose.

This publication is the fruit of a long journey that has been punctuated with milestones such as the Lille Charter on Human Responsibilities (2001) and the International NGO Accountability Charter of London (2006).

It is the result of workshops and interviews carried out all over Europe with representatives of associations between 2003 and 2007 by the Foundation for Future Generations (Belgium), in partnership with the Bernheim Foundation (Belgium), the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation (France/Switzerland) and CEDAC (Belgium). The main lessons from this work have been drawn by Erik Rydberg, journalist and director of GRESEA (Belgium).

This publication should be considered as a contribution to the current international debate on the ethics and responsibilities of associations.