

# PART II

## THE CIVIC SOCIETY AND THE THIRD SECTOR

*In this part you will find information about the civic society and the third sector.*

### WHAT IT IS – AND THE IMPORTANCE OF IT

Today we divide a society into three sectors: the public sector, the commercial sector, and the third sector. And with the third sector we mean the whole strata, the network formed by the NGO:s, the non-governmental organisations, or more broadly all the social activities of the citizens, "the civic society".

Generally one can say that there is a "third sector" in every society, but the role and strength of it can differ widely. In some societies it can be almost non-existent, at least in regard to open public activities as most of its potential activities are forbidden by the state – the public sector. And in some it can have a very central role, regarding many social (including welfare-) and political activities in the running of common affairs.

But one thing is sure – any state, any society that does not have an active and openly functioning third sector is not a healthy society – or even a democratic state. The third sector and its vitality and continuity is a precondition for any society wanting to stay sound and healthy.

### A BASE FOR ALL DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC RIGHTS

So: the civic society and the third sector are the base for all democratic development, and for securing the rights of the citizens in a society, and the development of these rights.

That also means that any new bigger step in the development of the society has come from below, from the activity of the people. Throughout time civic activities form the base for all important changes. Any state that forgets that – or any elite that believes they are the "developers" the "progressors" of the society and can develop and govern the state without the civic society, the people, will lose its stability very fast. This is something we have seen – and unfortunately will see again and again – when a state elitism – political or economic or any other – develops – and will rapidly continue to develop into a dictatorship of the few. A dictatorship that will crumble one day, but often not until devastating violence and destruction has occurred.

The decisive role of the civic society can for example clearly be seen in the birth of what we

call the Nordic welfare state. All the central, political or social or economic rights that are the bases of this welfare state”have come about because of the activities and strength of the third sector, never as a ”gift” from above! It was the women’s movement, and the workers’ movement and other strong social organisations that were behind all this development.

But even in these states, with a good working democracy, the state-strata cannot and should not fall asleep into the illusion that they can act, alone, without the civic society and the cooperation existing within it.

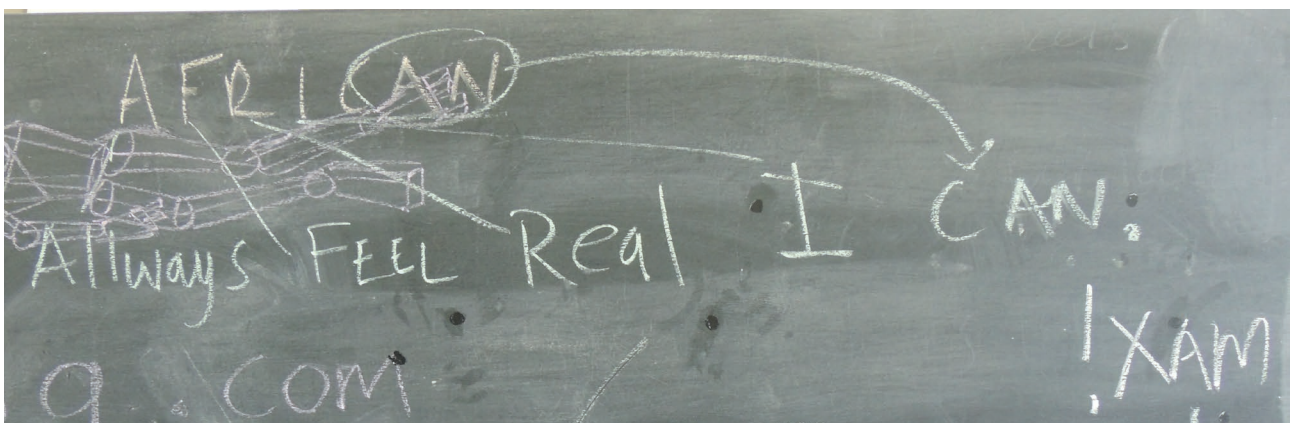
### A SAFEGUARD AGAINST CORRUPTION AND MISS-USE OF POWER

As a strong civic society is a precondition for the development of any healthy democratic society, it is also the only guarantee for securing that the use of power and a common economy stay in the interest of the citizens. And so it works against corruption and misuse of power for personal benefits. That is of course the main reason why any elite or group seeking power, or a potential dictator at an early stage, tries to weaken a sound and civilized civic society, especially those parts of it that are connected to information, to free discussion, to expressions of honest culture, and individual freedom. Because, with reason, they are afraid of it. And quite often, they instead quite cleverly will try

to initiate and support the development of populist movements and expressions, of often a mass-character, based on the lowest human notions, like extreme nationalism, racism, ethnic hatred etc. – and if needed, by creating some artificial conflict with some other race, or ethnic group, or nation, to develop those notions. We have many tragic examples of this, today as well.

Or the other way around: where there does not exist a healthy and active civic society or real citizen-led NGO:s, that empty space can very fast be filled with dictatorial forces and power-groups that take the field, almost totally. This could clearly be seen for example in the east-European societies, after the fall of socialism. As there was an almost complete lack of a real third sector, corruption, financial oligarchies, control of media and free discussion and even dictatorship could in many places develop. And this has also been seen in many of the so-called developing countries, after the fall of colonialism. If that colonialism was not dissolved by the people, but independence almost ”given” by the former masters they could then continue as new neo-colonial masters, as there was no real, national civic movement or force that could bring in a real democracy instead..

It is, however, at the same time important for the third sector, the NGO:s of the civic society to remember, that their role is not to be against the public sector, the state – or the commercial



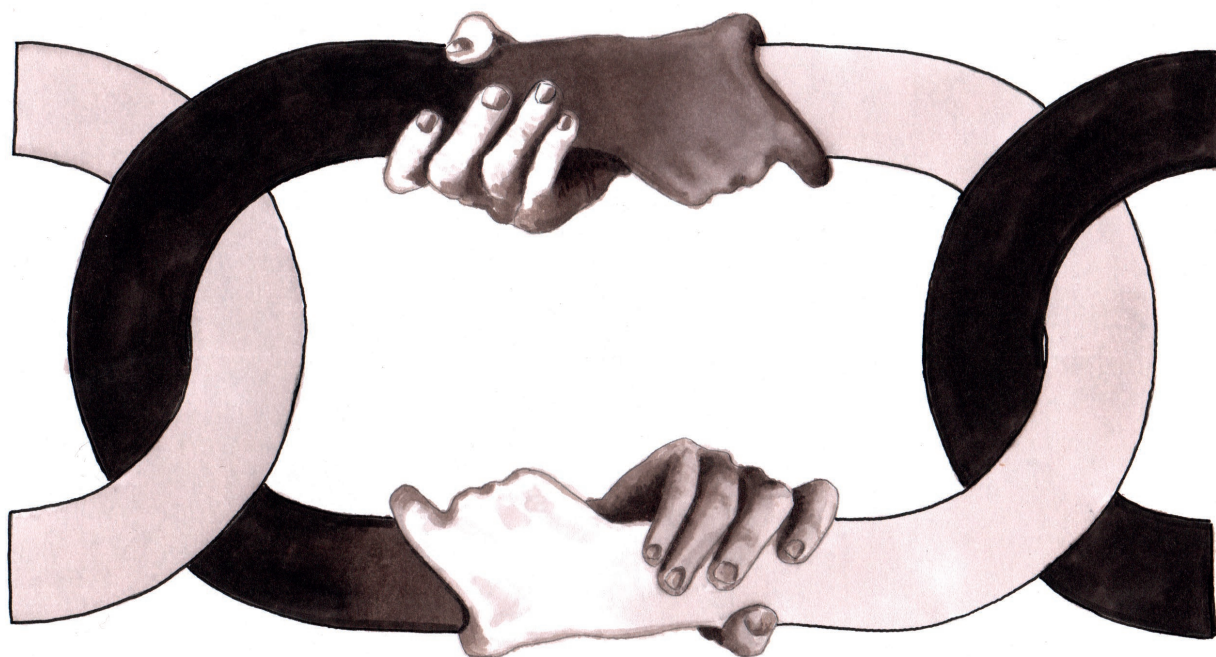
sector for that matter. “The state” is, or should be, a combination of all these sectors in cooperation, a “good state” is “we”, all together. And all should remember their role, and responsibility. All three sectors are needed, in balance. If any of them take over, the situation turns into an unhealthy one. As we have seen above, if “the public sector” or the “commercial sector” take over, we get political dictatorships, (where the first and biggest loser is culture and information) or “wild-west capitalism”, mafia power. But the same goes for the third sector, it should of course never “per se” feel that the state, the government, is its enemy. Then it itself falls into the trap of populism, it hampers any state, or government to try to do a sound work – and even develops anarchism. That can be as bad for the possibilities of democracy.

### A FRAME FOR FREE EXPRESSION AND CULTURAL LIFE

A strong third sector is also a guarantee to secure a free expression in society, and a cultural expression that can realize itself without

censorship; it is in a way the same thing, it “comes with the territory”, and an active third sector is almost automatically an active free information and culture-sector. At the same time the third sector, and its numerous NGO:s and other similar collectives, the network and the members, give a powerful and rich channel for all these expressions. This sector can organise and provide the physical needs that an active cultural life and informative activities have; localities, stages, galleries and workshops, IT contacts, often financial support, and personnel networks. The social media, “SoMe” has opened up an almost limitless sky for a part of the information and discussion, and also cultural work and intercommunications. But again, it is the real civic society that can give a base, also for that media or channel to have a real meaning, or impact.

The so called Arab spring is a good – or rather tragic – example of this. It was much through the SoMe the activists in the democratic uprisings could find each other, and mobilise each other to the squares and the mass-actions. But as there was almost no real, new, democratic



third sector to take over and organise the peoples uprising – the fruits of them very mostly very fast lost.,

For anyone who wants so start and develop one's own new idea or dream, or realize a plan, of cultural expression, the third sector can give the needed base, form and channel for it. It is where one should go for that needed support and a supportive frame.

### A RICH RESOURCE AND AN EMPLOYER

The third sector can also mean practically unlimited rich resources – too often not used to its full potential. It is a resource that can be seen from an economic point of view, both nationally and locally, but also from a mental and human point of view. This concerns all channels and premises, but also people, the human resources – finding people to cooperate with, and people that have skills that are needed in your idea or your plan. Because often these resources within the third sector can come for free, or with very little financial input.

And it is also a question of your own resources, of finding them and using them. When you succeed in this, it will strengthen your self-esteem so much more, and the pride and belief in yourself and your abilities. And this will set free new resources inside yourself.

Finally, the third sector also opens up a completely new economic resource – a commercial sector of your own – quite different from the old traditional capitalist one. We talk of new “social companies”, of small enterprises. These are based on the realizing of an idea or a product, often of a cultural kind, that can have an economic value, give an income to its founder – and after a time even employ new people, give jobs to the unemployed. These small enterprises are in many ways one of the most important solu-

tions to employment and unemployment in the world today.

The big firms and the multinational companies will never solve the problems of unemployment, rampant all over the world. It is of course a “solution” to move the business to “low wages countries” – but that is just a “solution” for some people, it concerns only some countries. And at the same time with increasing automatization the benefits of “low-wage” employment will cease to function.

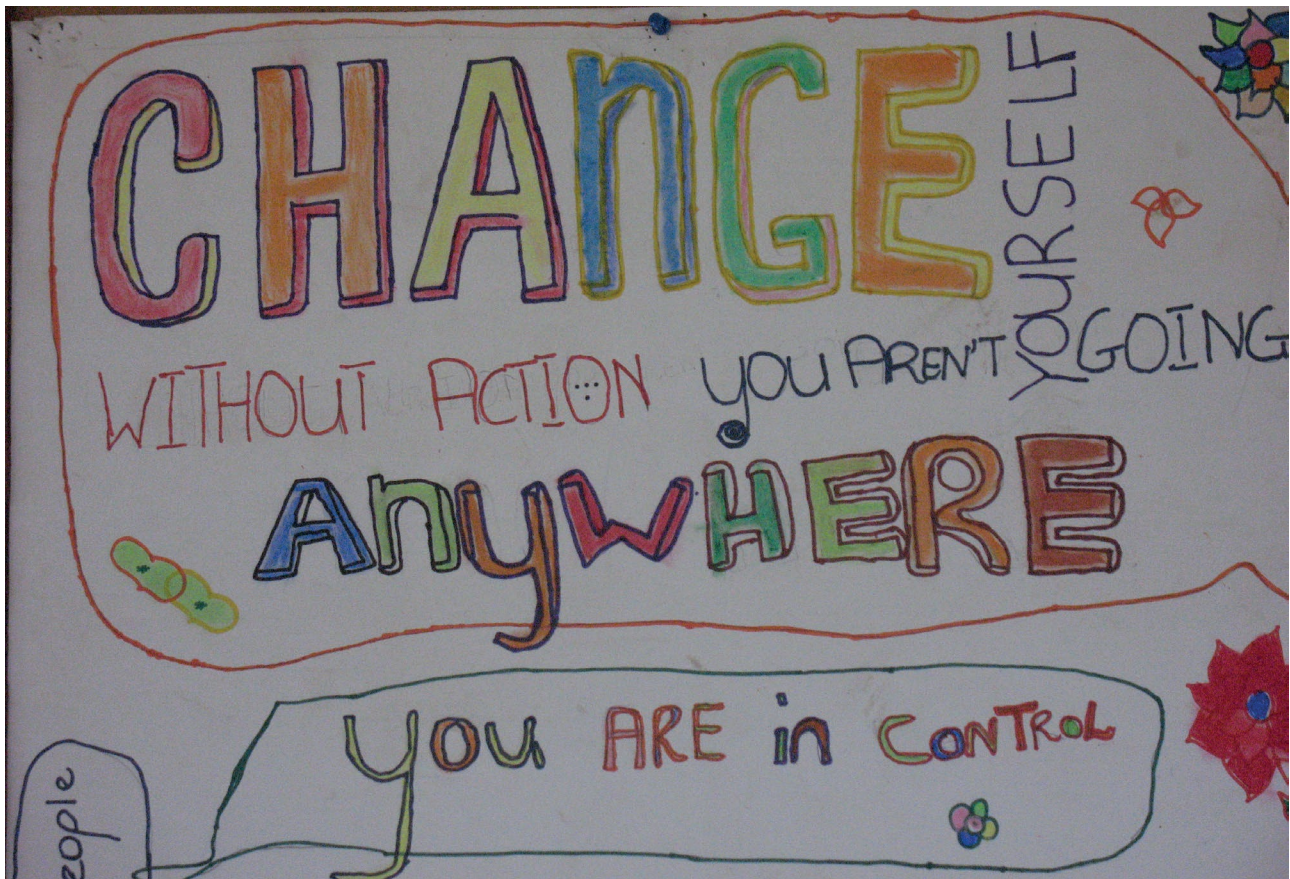
New, smaller enterprises create jobs, they need human beings to realize the small production that mostly is handicraft, in different forms. It can never be automatized.

And the better the innovation you have, the better the idea you have, the more work and benefits you can offer others.

### SUPPORTING HEALTHY IDEALISM

The third sector and the culture activities within it, is also always a sort of activity that is taking a stand for the rights of people to take responsibility for their own actions. These activities are most often done for the sake of the cultural standpoint or the activity in itself, or even with some very clear ideological aims – as a clear contrast and alternative to the activities done just for commercial reasons, and for making a material profit. It will counteract the commercialisation of human life and instead support activities that are based on cooperation, on functioning within a community, on supporting “us”, together. Or just for the right of culture to live, just for the sake of culture. This is one of the most important aims of and reasons for cultural work within the third sector today – in our ever-more commercialized world.





### THE LINE IN THE WATER

It is extremely important that the third sector and cultural activities manage to get support from the official society – and that will of course always be something to strive for. And to work in contact, and cooperation with it – when it is possible. It is also in itself important to get the state to support free cultural expression.

But at the same time it is as important to keep one's independence and be careful not to be

"sucked" into the official or private sponsorship, or to be influenced by it. Or even to streamline one's own cultural production in a form or a way one hopes will be liked by powers – political and commercial. It is important to have the consciousness and awareness to see the "line in the water" and manage to still stay in the third sector, even if (financial) contacts exist to the official or private sector.