

## **Tackling Food Poverty: logic multiplicity in the third sector**

### **Topic**

This paper investigates the ways in which third sector hybrid organizations tackle the grand challenge of food poverty in the UK. It evidences a multiplicity of organizational structures drawing on a broader range of logics than documented in previous third sector research.

### **Applicability to the conference theme – ‘New Approaches to Raising Entrepreneurial Opportunity: Reshaping inclusive Enterprise, Policy and Practice Post-Pandemic’**

This paper provides empirical support for the benefits of a multiplicity of institutional approaches to tackling food poverty in addition to the much discussed social enterprise model. This evidence of a wider range of available logics means that a heterogenous collection of organizations are attracted to and have a space in the response to this grand challenge. Further, by extending the unit of analysis to include typical social enterprise models and non-profit charity models the paper also identifies multiple logics that can coexist relatively harmoniously in third sector organizations, to a greater extent than might be expected from current scholarship.

### **Aim**

This paper seeks to understand the work of third sector hybrid organizations in tackling the grand challenge of poverty and in particular associated food insecurity in the UK. Whilst the social enterprise model has gained some traction in the sector it is not the right fit for many (Tonner et al., 2019) nor the only institutional form in the sector. This paper responds to calls to broaden the unit of analysis from social enterprises to include other types of organizational forms (Mair and Rathert, 2020; White et al., 2021).

This paper focuses on the institutional logics that underpin these organizations (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012) informing their structures and the practices they engage in. Its specific focus is asking the questions:

*How are institutional logics being used by the third sector in responding to food poverty? Can a broader view of organizational forms extend understandings of logic multiplicity?*

### **Methodology**

This research used a ‘quasi-ethnographic’ approach from June 2018 to March 2019 involving immersion in the sector and data collection from 16 community food providers and 5 meso level organizations (Murtagh, 2007). The heart of this data collection from the community food providers was semi-structured interviews with the managers (Gioia et al., 2012). This was complemented by observations of organizations activities, tours of premises, ad hoc. conversations, and reviews of secondary data such as organization websites, social media postings and annual reports.

As is common in qualitative studies an iterative model of analysis was adopted (Gioia et al., 2012). Transcripts and field notes were read in their entirety several times, and general impressions formed at this phase were noted, as memos, in the margins of printed copies of the transcripts (Creswell, 2007). These memos identified evidence of different institutional logics and were used as the first coding framework to which all data was coded. Re-reading the transcripts for coding purposes also led to additional codes being established. Upon completion of this analysis of the grassroots organizations, the transcripts of the meso-level organizations were reviewed. Analysis among the

research team was a fully recursive process of writing, discussing, and drafting. This facilitated the process of moving on from description to interpretation, requiring the researchers to continuously 'step back' and form larger meanings about what is going on (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Throughout, we regularly returned to both the coded raw data and full transcripts.

### **Contribution**

To the best of our knowledge ours is the first study to apply the lens of hybridity and institutional logics to community food providers.

It evidences a multiplicity of organizational structures drawing on a broader range of logics than documented in previous third sector research. In particular, it identifies the key role played by logics of the family and religion order in these organizations, orders not yet widely evidenced in existing third sector literature. This evidence of a wider range of available logics means that a heterogenous collection of organizations are attracted to and have a space in the response to this grand challenge. Further, by extending the unit of analysis to include typical social enterprise models and non-profit charity models the paper also identifies multiple logics that can coexist relatively harmoniously in third sector organizations, to a greater extent than might be expected from current scholarship.

The paper has also contributed by identifying the role of logics of the family and religion order, largely omitted from current third sector scholarship. This omission may be reflective of limited attention given to these orders in wider organizational scholarship (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Salvato et al., 2019; Tracey, 2012). In this study, the identification of family and religion shows how the provision of care is a key factor in the organizational heterogeneity we see operating in the space of food insecurity. We suggest the logics of the family order have been particularly relevant to our context due to the inherent connection of food with familial care (Charles and Kerr, 1988). We show the logics of the religion order are instantiated by some of the community food providers and suggest that these reflect faith-based provision, offered on an unconditional, secular basis (Cloke et al., 2012; Jayne and Williams, 2020).

### **Implications for policy, if applicable**

Given these contributions we argue that policy directives should focus on a broader perspective on logic multiplicity and the potential this gives for different types of organisations beyond the oft-considered social enterprise model. More nuanced understanding of organizational multiplicity is essential in addressing the grand challenges inherent in today's society.

Our research highlights that organizations operating without logics of the market can be equally legitimate in what they do. This is a counterfactual to discourse that suggests social enterprise is the panacea and that charities are keenly embracing this model in the UK (Cornelius and Wallace, 2013; Seanor, 2013). Even when third sector organization see others operating in their field successfully and peacefully balancing multiple logics, including those of the market order, which they have done so deliberately and strategically from inception (Billis, 2010; Doherty et al., 2014), this does not necessarily provide an impetus for them to do the same. This is important as it highlights a need for nuanced approaches to understanding, supporting, and promoting organizational forms. It also highlights that a range of factors can influence organizational decisions regarding becoming more enterprising.

### **Implications for practice, if applicable**

Our findings highlight that third sector organizations can choose from a range of available logics that are simultaneously available and legitimate (Kraatz and Block, 2017). We also find evidence that the logics of the different orders are interconnected (Friedland and Alford, 1991) and that the logics of different orders can be leveraged from and mutually reinforce each other. The interplay between the logics of the different orders effectively strengthens organizations agency to firstly deliver their service, but also to respond to food poverty.