Under Pressure: Organizational Responses in the Changing Civic Space of Hungary

Existing research on civil societies in restricted environments predominantly focuses on advocacy organizations. Thus, we know very little about how service-providing organizations respond to the restrictions, despite growing recognition of their democratizing potential. This paper explores how different levels of government affect organizational response in an environment where pressure is more informal than formal. Building on Oliver’s (1991) framework, and utilizing a qualitative research design, this study examines how three types of service-providing nonprofits that operate in the politically sensitive fields related to immigrants, LGBTQ or drug affected populations maneuver the restrictions in Hungary. I argue that local mayors can be effective in both mitigating and adding to the pressure. The presence of a supranational actor – the European Union – is beneficial, especially when it provides direct funding. Importantly, this sample shows that organizations less dependent on the government turn towards the riskier path of advocacy, changing even their organizational profile.

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