

Working paper

In this paper the three themes are described. The intention of this paper is to give some guidance before the deliberations during the conference, in workshops as well as in plenum.

Read this paper alongside the key note papers that discuss the three themes from an academic point of view.

NGOforum09 –
Cutting the Democratic Deficit through Civil Participation

Draft 1

Partner to the Conference



Supported by



Part of

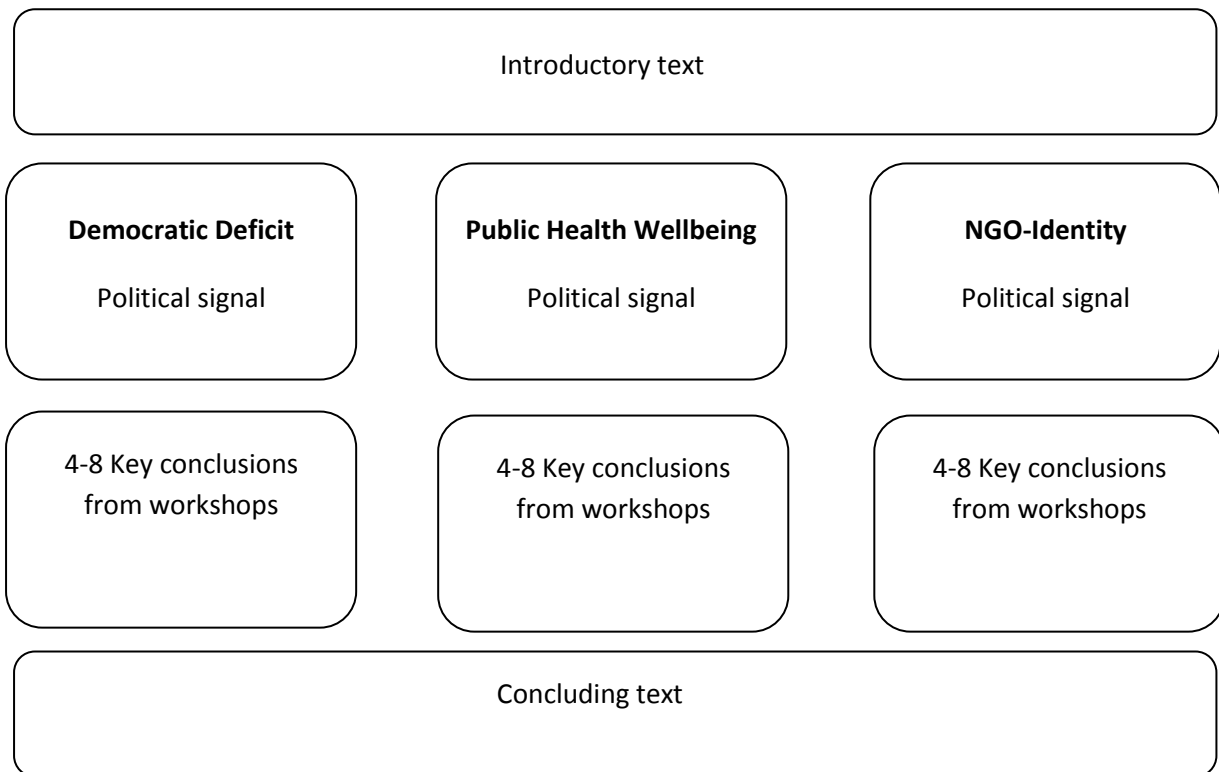


Introduction

In this document the Swedish Presidency 2009 conference NGOforum09 will describe the three themes; 1. Democratic Deficit, 2. Public Health and Well-being, 3. NGO-identity.

This document is sent out to all participants as a draft beforehand, to make deliberation before and during the conference possible. This document will be adjusted and amended during the conference, not least by practical recommendations from the workshops. The goal is that there will be a final draft of the document placed under the vote of the participants on the second day of the conference.

We have planned for a document with the following structure:



We hope also that this document will reflect the main conclusions from earlier presidency conferences on Civil Society issues. We want to take the legacy from earlier conferences onwards. We believe that one conference does not change the course of events, but a persistent dialogue could.

Theme one: Democratic deficit

In the Lisbon Treaty, which now seems closer than ever to ratification, there are some crucial statements on citizen rights to participate in the decision making process, and on the duty of the EU-institutions to be transparent and in dialogue with Civil Society.

This raises many questions, for instance, are the Civil Society Organisations and the EU-institutions interested and equipped for this dialogue? Is there any road map from the democracy of today towards a new perception of democracy which builds on a balance between representative and participatory democracy? Or do we need to draw that map?

These issues are also the focus of a key note paper written by Emeritus Professor Marilyn Taylor of University of the West of England, specifically for this conference.

An argument could be made that the main rationale for an active democratic role in the European Union for Non Governmental Organisations is that Civil Society constitutes the basis of Democracy.

An argument could be made that the main Democratic role for the Non Governmental Organisations is not to replace the mandate given by the peoples of the European Union in general elections.

An argument could be made that the Non Governmental Organisations of the European Union can and should play an important role in the democratic decision-making process.

An argument could be made for an active role for the Non Governmental Organisations is necessary to make the democratic ambitions expressed in the Lisbon Treaty a reality.

Should these arguments or something to this effect be a part of the political signal regarding the Democratic Deficit, from the NGOforum09?

Partner to the Conference



Supported by



Part of



Theme two: Public Health and Wellbeing

In recent years the European Union has taken some important decisions based in the growing insight that the climate impact or ecological foot print of our societies must be reduced. We must move from depleting finite natural resources to a sustainable development. But political decisions are not enough. Conscious choices made by millions of citizens are also needed. New and better ways of involving people in these choices are essential.

The narrative of what is considered progress is our guide. What are the essentials of the current narrative? Larger incomes? Larger houses? More expensive vacations in distant places? A perfect body and face? We need to change these essentials of the narrative. We need to change the way in which we measure progress.

These issues are discussed in a key note paper, written by Mr. Saamah Abdallah from the New Economics Foundation.

An argument could be made for the need to change the paradigm of measurement of progress, where more indicators than today becomes a part of the national accounting.

An argument could be made that NGO:s often work with soft goals that are hard to fit into classical evaluation models, and that NGO:s could gain from the shift to national account of well-being.

An argument could be made that society as a whole, and people, would gain from this change of focus in evaluation and national accounting.

Should these arguments or something to this effect be a part of the political signal regarding the Public Health and Well-being, from the NGOforum09?

Partner to the Conference



Supported by



Part of



Theme three: NGO Identity

The Civil Society is diverse, which is a necessity. Any attempt to streamline and mold Civil Society organisations into copies of each other or copies of private enterprises, for instance by way of best practice or administrative decisions, are bound to fail.

Each and every organisation must take responsibility for their strategic development.

Some organisations choose to be exclusively political in their mind set and actions, advocating rights of people, affecting public opinion, taking part in consultation processes, in line with the organisations value base.

Some organisations will choose to be exclusively focused on service provision. The mission then is to bring to the market a set of good services based in the values of the organisation, giving an added value to the user. This is in many cases done also through the way in which the work is done. Cooperative societies that create opportunities for social inclusion are an important part of this process. Some organisations will focus on establishing social networks between people, creating trust and social capital in the community and aggregated also in society as a whole. Some organisations will choose to try and combine these three roles in different ways.

Professor Helmuth K. Anheier of the CSI - Centre for Social Investment, Universität Heidelberg describes these different roles and the tradeoffs between them in a key note paper.

An argument could be made that the choices outlined above that are made by the individual organisations are what put together create the civil society and must be respected as such.

An argument could be made that although there is a strong societal focus on service delivery from the Non Governmental Organisations, there must be a fundamental respect for the Democratic and Political Identity of the organisations.

Should these arguments or something to this effect be a part of the political signal regarding the NGO-Identity, from the NGOforum09?

Partner to the Conference



Supported by



Part of

