


THIRD SECTOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of the third sector in the contemporary global landscape, highlighting its contributions, challenges, and potential in promoting fairer and more sustainable development. Composed of non-governmental organizations, non-profit associations, and philanthropic entities, the third sector fills gaps left by the public and private sectors in areas such as health, education, environment, and social inclusion. The general objective was to analyze its performance in the global context, highlighting its contributions to society, while the specific objectives investigated its main areas of action and the challenges faced in a scenario of increasing socioeconomic complexity. The methodology adopted was bibliographic research based on the analysis of books, scientific articles, and relevant reports, allowing an in-depth theoretical understanding of the subject. The survey prioritized reliable and academic sources, systematizing data to support a critical analysis of the role of the third sector, its interactions with other sectors, and its impact on society. However, challenges such as financial sustainability, governance, and co-optation by corporate or political interests compromise its effectiveness. Despite this, the sector has demonstrated a capacity for innovation and resilience, especially by

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mobilizing resources and establishing multi-sector partnerships. It is concluded that the third sector is an indispensable actor in facing global problems, but its strengthening depends on greater articulation with governments, companies, and civil society.

Keywords: Citizenship. Sustainable development. Governance. Multisectoral Partnerships. Third Sector.

INTRODUCTION

The third sector, composed of non-governmental organizations, non-profit associations, and philanthropic entities, has gained relevance in the contemporary global scenario due to its role in mitigating social, economic, and environmental problems. In a world marked by growing inequalities, climate change, and geopolitical challenges, these institutions have filled gaps left by the public and private sectors. This article seeks to explore the role of the third sector in the current context, highlighting its contributions, challenges, and potentialities in promoting a fairer and more sustainable development.

In Martins' (1998) analyses, the third sector is composed of various institutions, such as philanthropic entities, social movements, professional associations, and religious organizations, characterized as a private sector focused on the public interest and the production of goods and services for collective consumption on a non-profit basis. Reflecting the evolution of capitalist democratic societies, assuming a growing role in the representation of interests and in the formulation of social policies, especially in the midst of the institutional transformations of the contemporary State. The crisis of the State, which includes internal aspects such as inefficiency, bureaucratic dysfunctions, and fiscal overload, as well as external factors such as globalization and economic instabilities, highlighted the need for new institutional standards and ways of meeting social demands. Thus, the third sector emerges as a complementary space, adapting to changes and contributing to facing social and economic challenges.

Conducting a study on the theme of the third sector is of great relevance in contemporary times, as these organizations play a crucial role in facing issues such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. In addition, its performance fills important gaps left by the government and the market. Understanding their contributions, challenges, and interactions with other sectors is essential to strengthening these institutions and enhancing their impacts.

In a global scenario marked by economic crises, climate change, and political instability, the third sector emerges as a key player in the promotion of social justice and sustainability. However, its performance faces challenges such as a lack of resources, dependence on financiers, and difficulty in articulating with the public and private sectors. In view of this, the following question arises: How can the third sector consolidate itself as a transforming agent in the contemporary global context, facing the challenges imposed by this complex scenario?

Thus, we present as a general objective to analyze the role of the third sector in the contemporary global context, highlighting its contributions to society and the challenges faced in a scenario of increasing socioeconomic complexity. Specific objectives: to investigate the main areas of action of the third sector at the global level and to identify the challenges that third sector organizations face in the current context.

This study aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical deepening of the performance of the third sector on a global scale in contemporary times, offering an analysis that can help managers, researchers, and public policy makers in the construction of strategies that promote the strengthening of these organizations. In addition, it seeks to foster debate on the importance of intersectoral cooperation as a way to solve complex global problems.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted bibliographic research as a methodological approach, being developed from the survey, analysis, and interpretation of previously published materials, such as books, scientific articles, and periodicals. This methodology aims to allow an in-depth understanding of the investigated theme, providing theoretical subsidies for the critical and reflective analysis of the third sector in the contemporary global context.

The bibliographic research was chosen for its ability to offer a broad and diversified panorama of the object of study, enabling the researcher to identify knowledge gaps and establish connections between different theoretical perspectives. To ensure the quality and relevance of the data obtained, priority was given to consulting reliable sources, such as virtual libraries, academic databases, and indexed scientific journals. According to Sousa, Oliveira, and Alves (2021), scientific research is a methodical process of investigation aimed at answering questions, clarifying aspects of a theme, or deepening knowledge about phenomena. It is essential when there is a lack of organized information to respond to a problem. Among its modalities, bibliographic research stands out, which is based on the study of works already published and is widely used in the academic environment to improve and update knowledge (Sousa, Oliveira and Alves, 2021).

Thus, the methodological process included the stages of preliminary survey of relevant works, selection and filing of materials, and critical analysis of the information obtained. Each stage was conducted based on previously defined criteria, seeking to

ensure theoretical consistency and coherence between the data used and the objectives of the study (Sousa, Oliveira and Alves, 2021).

Finally, the information collected was organized and systematized in order to support the construction of an analysis of the role of the third sector in a globalized world, focusing on its contributions, challenges, and interactions with other sectors. This approach aims not only to understand the topic in depth but also to provide a solid theoretical basis for future academic investigations and professional practices.

THE THIRD SECTOR: ORIGIN AND ITS AREAS OF ACTIVITY

The third sector is a multifaceted space that encompasses several areas aimed at meeting social, environmental, and cultural demands that are not met by the public and private sectors. This chapter addresses the main fronts of action of these organizations, highlighting their contribution to sustainable development, the promotion of social equality, and the improvement of the quality of life in vulnerable communities.

According to Silva (2024), the practices of charity and philanthropy in the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome played a key role in meeting social needs and consolidating social cohesion, although they were deeply rooted in religious, cultural, and political contexts. In ancient Egypt, charity was a moral obligation attached to religious beliefs about divine justice, while in Greece, philanthropy, motivated by honor and recognition, was an essential civic practice, with wealthy citizens funding public works and social events. In Rome, philanthropy was influenced by both religion and politics, functioning as a tool of power and social control, with the rich offering support to the poor to reinforce hierarchies and maintain order. These practices, more focused on maintaining the status quo than pure altruism, were precursors of modern third sector organizations, as they created the basis for social welfare initiatives and community engagement.

However, Silva (2024) highlights that although they do not formalize a "third sector" as we know it today, these actions highlight the complexity and relevance of philanthropy for old social structures, being motivated by a combination of civic duty, religious aspirations, and political interests.

For Manãs and Medeiros (2012), the third sector emerged as a response to the challenges faced by communities deprived of resources, seeking to fill gaps that neither the public nor private sectors or society can solve. In underdeveloped and developing countries, such as Brazil, care for needy populations is complex, aggravated by disorderly

population growth and a lack of awareness about birth control. In Brazil, social marginalization is an old problem that has gained increasing attention since the 1970s. Studies indicate that, in the 1980s, the country had one of the highest rates of social inequality in the world, with a growing population of social dependents. Government measures, such as the creation of secretariats and philanthropic bodies, sought to mitigate poverty, but income-concentrating capitalism and the absence of education and awareness among the low-income classes aggravated the problem.

In Silva's (2024) analyses, in the 1980s, 64% of Brazilians were socially dependent, and the active workforce, even those employed, was unable to meet basic needs. Social marginalization was intensified by the lack of employment and income opportunities resulting from the professional qualification required by the market and technological advances, which reduced the demand for non-skilled labor. This context generated a cycle of poverty and violence that persists to this day. The social complexities faced by marginalized classes demand educational policies that promote awareness and cultural transformation, aiming at a sustainable improvement of living conditions.

Silva (2021) provides an analysis of the impact of the Brazilian redemocratization of the 1980s on the third sector, highlighting the growth of NGOs and social movements focused on influencing public policies and promoting social justice. He notes that political openness has increased the participation of these organizations in policymaking and government monitoring. However, the third sector faces challenges such as financial sustainability, governance, and the need for greater transparency. In addition, it needs to balance its social missions with the practical demands of management and fundraising.

Silva (2024) points out that the third sector in Brazil acts as a complement and counterpoint to the State, especially in areas such as health, education, and human rights, while interacting with the private sector through partnerships and financing. He concludes that the third sector plays a crucial role in society, not only as a service provider but also as a promoter of active citizenship and an agent for the construction of a more democratic and inclusive public space.

The origin and evolution of the third sector reflect the historical and social transformations from the first philanthropic and voluntary organizations to its consolidation as a fundamental pillar in the contemporary global context. Initially linked to religious and community practices, the third sector developed from charitable initiatives during the Middle Ages, led by religious orders that promoted assistance to the needy. With the

Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, these practices began to incorporate more rational and humanistic approaches, prioritizing education and work as ways to reduce poverty (Silva, 2024)

Silva (2024) highlights that during the Modern Era, the economic and social changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization drove the emergence of more structured organizations aimed at meeting gaps left by the State and the market. The twentieth century brought new challenges and opportunities, especially in the context of world wars and globalization, consolidating the role of the third sector as an essential actor in humanitarian actions, *advocacy*, and sustainable development.

About Advocacy Silva (2024) states that it consists of a set of strategic and organized actions aimed at influencing public policies, legislation, social practices, or public opinion in favor of social or collective causes. Commonly carried out by NGOs, social movements, and advocacy groups, *advocacy* seeks to promote positive changes in society, influencing government decisions, public and private institutions, or raising awareness among the population. Advocacy actions can include awareness campaigns, *lobbying*, participation in public hearings, drafting policy proposals, forming alliances, demonstrations, using social media, and producing surveys. This set of strategies is essential to create impact and foster social, environmental, and legislative changes, becoming an essential tool in the third sector for the defense of rights and the construction of a fairer society.

In contemporary times, Silva (2024) brings that the third sector plays crucial roles in promoting social inclusion, defending human rights, and strengthening social cohesion, providing It positions itself as an agent of transformation in an interconnected world, facing challenges such as financial sustainability, governance, and technological adaptation, but also taking advantage of opportunities to collaborate with the public and private sectors in the search for innovative solutions to problems Global. This evolution demonstrates its capacity for resilience and adaptation, consolidating itself as an indispensable space for the construction of a fairer and more inclusive society.

THE ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

Third sector organizations work on different fronts, such as health, education, social assistance, environment, human rights, and culture. This section explores the specificities

of each of these areas, highlighting how the actions developed generate positive impacts and promote significant changes in contemporary societies.

For Silva (2024, p.79), Third Sector organizations play a fundamental role in promoting sustainable development, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation. Through advocacy campaigns, they influence public policies, pressure governments and companies to adopt sustainable practices, and act as "watchdogs" to ensure compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They actively participate in national and international forums, integrate the SDGs into public policies, and carry out effective local projects in areas such as education, health, sanitation, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. Working in partnership with local communities, they adapt their initiatives to specific contexts, promote capacity building, empowerment, and dissemination of knowledge in sustainable practices. In addition, they mobilize financial and human resources from diverse sources and facilitate multisectoral partnerships to address the challenges of sustainable development, which are essential for the success of the 2030 Agenda.

Lourenço and Santos (2011) analyze the role of the Third Sector in contemporary society, highlighting its function as an agent of social transformation and emancipation, in addition to its contribution to citizenship and the promotion of rights. Initially, it associates the emergence of the Third Sector with the crisis of the Welfare State and the consolidation of neoliberal ideals, presenting it as a response to the insufficiency of the State and the gaps in the market. Its performance is highlighted as an instrument to overcome welfare practices, promoting measures that prepare individuals for full citizenship.

For Lourenço and Santos (2011), the Third Sector is seen as a catalyst for social justice and citizen education, mobilizing efforts for the integration of collective and social interests. In addition, it plays an important role in the organization of work and human development, promoting training and initiatives such as the solidarity economy. Examples cited include cooperatives and educational programs that seek to empower individuals for a more dignified and autonomous life.

Lourenço and Santos (2011) suggest that, although there are initiatives with welfare purposes and political interests, the focus on the emancipatory character of the Third Sector can promote citizenship, freedom, and the overcoming of structural inequalities. Thus, it is described as a fundamental agent for social transformation, going beyond palliative actions to stimulate effective and lasting changes.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CONTEXT

The third sector faces a challenging scenario characterized by economic, political, and social changes that directly influence its ability to operate. At the same time, new opportunities arise with the advancement of globalization and technologies, allowing the expansion of the actions of these organizations. This chapter analyzes the main challenges faced, such as fundraising and sustainability, as well as opportunities for strengthening through innovation and intersectoral cooperation.

Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa (2015) address in their analyses the conception of Civil Society and its role in the State, considering different philosophical perspectives and its historical evolution. They describe Civil Society as something transcendent to the State but recognize that, for philosophers such as Hegel, it can be seen as a mediating sphere between individuals and the State, composed of independent associations. It should be noted that after the Brazilian military regime and the 1988 Constitution, Third Sector organizations, such as NGOs, emerged as vehicles of expression of Civil Society, although they carry ambiguities in their roles and terminologies.

The term "NGO", according to Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa (2015), emerged in the post-World War II period, with anti-government connotations, while "Third Sector", coined by Rockefeller in 1978, reflects the interests of the dominant classes and presents theoretical inconsistencies. The authors criticize the Third Sector, arguing that it perpetuates welfare actions and transfers responsibilities from the State to private organizations, promoting the flexibility of Social Policies to the detriment of the rights guaranteed by the government. On the other hand, they also show that the government maintains control of resources through partnerships, even delegating the execution of programs.

In a current view, Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa (2015) show that Civil Society is seen as the set of private organisms and ideological-cultural relations that reflect the hegemony exercised by the dominant group, representing a dynamic and transformative element in historical development.

Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa (2015) address the development of civil society organizations in Brazil, from their welfare and religious origins in the colonial period to the current scenario of the Third Sector. Initially, these entities, such as hospitals and nursing homes, complemented the responsibilities of the State, expanding due to urbanization, population growth, and the State's inability to serve essential areas such as health,

education, and social assistance. From the 1990s onwards, influences from American philanthropic foundations and corporate social investment popularized the term Third Sector in the country, reflecting an imported model that did not consider local cultural particularities.

Historically, legal frameworks such as the Civil Code of 1916 and subsequent legislation recognized and regulated non-profit entities, allowing tax benefits and social security exemption. In the context of redemocratization and the face of problems such as poverty and inequalities exacerbated by the military dictatorship, social movements emerged, such as the Citizenship Action Movement, as well as initiatives such as the National Council for Food Security (CONSEA) and the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG), which promote democracy and combat discrimination (Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa, 2015).

Also in the 1990s, in the analyses of Oliveira and Godói-De-Sousa (2015), corporate citizenship efforts emerged, such as GIFE, which brings together private organizations to invest in social and environmental projects, and the Solidarity Community Program, which articulated government, companies, and civil society in the fight against poverty. These movements fostered debates on the need for an updated legal framework and strengthened networks such as RITS, which shares information and technical resources to support the Third Sector. Thus, civil society organizations have evolved to play significant roles in social articulation, resource mobilization, and sustainable development.

Silva (2024) highlights the essential role of the Third Sector in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting initiatives in areas such as education, health, environment, gender equality, and social justice. These organizations implement local projects tailored to the needs of communities, provide capacity building and technical support, and mobilize financial and human resources diversely and sustainably. They also facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships, connecting governments, the private sector, and civil society to tackle global challenges collaboratively.

The performance of the Third Sector, for Silva (2024), includes social and technological innovation, the use of monitoring systems to evaluate public policies and projects, in addition to contributing to the promotion of sustainable practices, environmental conservation, and community empowerment. Despite this, global progress towards the SDGs faces significant challenges, including setbacks due to the pandemic, climate change, and geopolitical conflicts, with progress limited to around 17% of the targets so far.

Collaboration between the Third Sector and other actors is essential to accelerate efforts and ensure that development is inclusive and sustainable by 2030.

Silva (2024) also brings into his analyses different perspectives on the Third Sector, highlighting its relevance and criticality in contemporary society. On the one hand, it is recognized for promoting social inclusion, citizenship, and sustainable development, complementing public policies, and contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. On the other hand, critics point out that their actions can perpetuate the status quo, offering palliative solutions that do not address the structural causes of inequalities. In addition, there are concerns that the Third Sector functions as a tool of the neoliberal system, masking injustices and diverting the focus from deep reforms.

However, Silva (2024) reinforces that while defenders highlight the need to strengthen the Third Sector as a mediator between the State and society, with professional management and transparency, critics warn about the risk of co-opting these organizations for corporate and political interests. Thus, it is suggested that, in order to be effective, the sector must be combative, committed to social and environmental justice, and integrated with the efforts of the State and the private sector. In a globalized scenario, the Third Sector is seen as a relevant actor in the search for human rights, peace, and sustainability but faces challenges to ensure its autonomy and transformative impact.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study demonstrates the multifaceted and indispensable role of the third sector in contemporary society, serving as a mediator between the State and civil society while also collaborating with the private sector to address global and local challenges. From the authors' analysis, we understand that it not only complements government actions in essential areas such as health, education, and the environment but also fosters community empowerment and promotes cultural and social transformations. Through advocacy campaigns, multisectoral partnerships, and technological innovation, these organizations offer solutions that contribute to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the mitigation of structural problems.

However, despite these achievements, the third sector faces significant challenges. Financial sustainability remains an obstacle, with many organizations relying on grants and funding that can be unstable. In addition, the governance of these institutions must be constantly improved to ensure transparency and efficiency in their actions. Another concern

is the risk of co-optation by corporate or political interests, which can divert the focus from their social missions to meet demands that are alien to public interests.

The contemporary global context, marked by climate crises, growing inequalities, and political instability, requires the third sector to assume an even more combative and transformative role. Its ability to articulate with other sectors to create innovative and sustainable solutions is essential to achieving the SDGs by 2030. However, progress toward these goals has been slow, especially on issues such as poverty eradication and reduction of inequalities, often exacerbated by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts.

In this sense, to consolidate its relevance, the third sector must continue to promote training practices, social inclusion, and sustainable development while adopting a critical and proactive stance in the face of structural inequalities. It is necessary to expand its performance as a space for active citizenship, seeking to influence public policies and strengthen ties with local communities.

Finally, strengthening the third sector requires not only investments in management and innovation but also solid intersectoral cooperation involving governments, companies, and civil society. This integration will be crucial to maximizing the impact of actions and ensuring the construction of a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable future for all. Thus, the third sector reaffirms its role as an essential actor in social transformation, proving to be not only a complement but a catalyst for profound and lasting changes in global society.

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