



CEM Research Briefing N.4 - October, 2013

Research Project - Civil organizations: intermediation, State and underprivileged population, Prof. Dr. Adrian Lavalle

I. Introduction

In Latin America's specialized literature a common diagnostic portrays the evolution of the region's civil society as a tendency towards the displacement of popular actors and social movements from the 1970s and 1980s by middle class NGOs in subsequent decades, and accuses several deleterious effects of the "new civil society". The results from the project "Civil organizations: intermediation, State and underprivileged population" allow us to argue that the "NGOization" diagnosis is a misguided description for the evolution of civil society.

This project studied the composition (organizational ecology) of civil society, its organizations' mode of operation, and the political intermediation roles played out by them. The characterization of the functions carried out by different types of civil organizations, such as neighborhood associations, service non-profits, community associations, popular organizations, NGOs, forums and coordinating bodies, as well as the positions they occupy in the civil society networks, allowed us to comprehend the unequal capacities of these actors' operation, their functional differentiation, and the mediation roles played out by them in civil society networks and vis-à-vis several political institutions.

The research compared civil society networks from different Brazilian cities (São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Brasília) and Mexico (Mexico City and Xalapa). The results hereby reported draw on the comparison between São Paulo and Mexico City.

II. Methodology

The project used datasets with relational variables on ties among civil society associations. The data are the result of surveys carried out in each city, with specific batteries on ties. The relational variables were transformed into matrixes and submitted to network analysis standard routines by means of the Ucinet software. For the elaboration of the relational diagnoses, different measures were integrated: centrality, cohesion, network structure, as well as sociograms. The interpretation for the relational diagnoses lies in extensive reviews of local literature, and incorporates the criticisms and suggestions of specialized peers in the study of civil society within each context.

III. Main results

Instead of an "NGOization", there has been an expansion of organizational ecologies, modernization, and functional diversification in civil society in Mexico City and Sao Paulo. Moreover, a subset of civil society organizations (NGOs, coordinating bodies and forums) has specialized and developed a division of labor that improves its capacity to discuss the public agenda and to influence politics and public policies. 1. Civil society in both metropolises underwent an expansion of local organizational ecologies. The existent civil societies in these metropolises are not primarily made up of popular organizations or NGOs. Besides traditional civil organizations such as, for example, neighborhood associations or service non-profits, other actors have surfaced during the past three decades – pastorals, forums and coordinating bodies.



2. Organizational ecologies have also modernized themselves. The actors in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recent ones from the 1990s and 2000s, have occupied most central and most advantageous positions in civil society networks in São Paulo and the Mexican capital. There is not even one traditional type of actor who occupies central positions, not even in service non-profits, which have a long and well established tradition.

3. Civil society in both metropolises is now more functionally diversified than it used to be. Traditional actors coexist with newer ones. There is a wide array of roles played out by civil society: traditional, of which its legitimacy was seen as certain from at least since the XIX century – mutual self-help, philanthropy, assistance to the poor –, alongside new roles, some of which are not completely institutionalized and still raise suspicion as to their legitimacy – for example, policy formulation, and political representation, performed by NGOs or coordinating bodies.

4. A subset of civil society organizations belonging to newer cohorts (NGOs, coordinating bodies and forums) was able to develop a functional specialization aimed at influencing policy and shaping public agenda. Specialization here implies the complementary development of roles among types of civil organization, reinforcing the synergy in order to meet certain objectives.

IV. Implications towards public policies

In a democratic context, civil society organizations have an important role in monitoring the government's actions, informing public policies and, in some cases, executing or intermediating government projects towards target populations. Decision makers should take into account the characteristics of the several types of civil organizations in order to differentiate the regimes for resource concession or the juridical classification categories, according to the intermediation functions carried out by them. This study contributed to inform towards such heterogeneity.

V. Reference Publications

Gurza Lavalle, A., Bueno, N. S. Waves of Change Within Civil Society in Latin America: Mexico City and Sao Paulo. *Politics & Society*, v.39, p.415 - 450, 2011.

Gurza Lavalle, A., Bueno, N. S. "Sociedade civil e intermediação política - Associações de bairro e ONGs em duas metrópoles latino-americanas". In Marques, Eduardo (Org.). *Redes sociais no Brasil - Sociabilidade, organizações civis e políticas públicas*. 1a ed. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço e Centro de Estudos da Metrópole, 2012, p. 173-210.

Center for Metropolitan Studies - CEM
<http://www.fflch.usp.br/centrodametropole/en/>
www.centrodametropole.org.br